

“One of the most essential landscape features of Woodland Park is the woodland from which it derives its name. To the dwellers in the city, the woodland landscape is one of the most interesting and refreshing sorts as it forms a very complete contrast to all the ordinary city streets and squares and parks. As a matter of practical utility woodlands are very rarely created in public parks and if they exist on lands taken for public parks in the midst of a city, they are almost invariably revolutionized into a very smooth and somewhat unnatural and artificial appearing open grove of trees. In many cases where large numbers of visitors have to be accommodated on a small area, such a treatment of natural woods is entirely reasonable but in cases where the land is very rough and steep, the woods should be left in a more nearly wild condition, that is to say, with the natural undergrowth of shrubbery and wild flowers to be viewed from drives and walks upon which the public may pass without injury to the body of the woods. If visitors are to be allowed to range freely through a wild wood without regard to drives and paths, they will soon destroy most of the ground covering verdure and gradually injure, if not ruin the growth of the trees by trampling the earth bare and hard. I call attention to this matter thus briefly because it is not generally well understood why wild woods, although very beautiful are not commonly to be found in public parks in the midst of cities. There are very few persons having the slightest cultivation of taste in the direction of enjoyment of landscape, who do not appreciate and enjoy a beautiful natural woodland. All park designers appreciating this sort of natural beauty are anxious to preserve it in parks where they find it existing if the practical requirements of the case are found to warrant it.

In the case of Woodland Park, the wild beauty of the woods is very remarkable and every effort should be made to preserve it while making it conveniently accessible.”

Letter from John Charles Olmsted to the Board of Park Commissioners, January 8, 1908, Reel 96, 2694 Woodland Park, Olmsted Associates Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Woodland Park and the University grounds have the only fir woods in sight in that large district and the trees being about 200' high more or less they show up remarkably. When I was waiting for the car I saw Mt. Rainier very distinctly particularly with my “Feldschecker” - field glass. It is tremendous and being covered with snow looks at first like a cloud, on a clear day like today, with the sun low in the west striking it. It certainly is a grand sight. I wish I could have seen it yesterday from the center of the Exposition Grounds.

Field Notes, October 21, 1906, Olmsted Brothers Records, 0170-001, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, Washington

Olmsted Documents

“My work here agrees with me better than my work at home. I do some office work every morning and spend the afternoon poking around in the woods or streets which suits me to a dot.

The Mountain Ash is in full bloom and so is the Madrona. Its bark is very smooth when the old part falls off something as the sycamore does, & is a pale greenish scarlet verging toward salmon color. How’s that for a color? ... I must remember to send you some bark.”

John Charles Olmsted to Sophie Olmsted, May 16, 1903, John C. Charles Papers, Frances Loeb Library, Harvard Design School, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

“I dictated all the morning again on the Portland report and was out all the afternoon north of the city this time with Jones. I got a glimpse of one end of Ravenna Park brook. It was lovely and dark and mossy banked. I took a snap of Jones on a log foot bridge. One of the posts supporting the hand rail was a live branch that had grown up into a tree.”

John Charles Olmsted to Sophie Olmsted, May 22, 1903, John C. Charles Papers, Frances Loeb Library, Harvard Design School, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

The mountains came out and the woods were perfectly delightful. I wished you were here with me to see such beauties of nature.

... Such a beautiful day in the woods! I can think of nothing else.

John Charles Olmsted to Sophie Olmsted, May 31, 1909, John C. Charles Papers, Frances Loeb Library, Harvard Design School, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

I have had an enjoyable break in my routine of indoor work. I went out, by carriage, to the Country Club today with Mr. Dawson and Mr. Lancaster. We started at 7.40 & left about 2. It was a fine day – one of the finest we have had and we enjoyed the mountain views very much. Even Rainier was in full view & Mt. Baker – too. The woods were beautiful especially on a property that has been added to the club since I made my plan. Coming back we visited the Exposition Grounds and the mountain views there were very fine.

John Charles Olmsted to Sophie Olmsted, January 23, 1908, John C. Charles Papers, Frances Loeb Library, Harvard Design School, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

“The scenic advantages of having a pleasure drive on the shore are probably greater at this portion of the parkway than at any other, because owing to the general trend of the shore being somewhat to the west of south, Mt. Rainier will be more continuously in view than will be the case from most of the Lake Washington Parkway north of Bailey Peninsula. Another great advantage of keeping the parkway on the shore is that it will afford continuous frontage upon the lake where residents of the city, especially those within convenient walking distance may promenade or rest, or picnic, or take boats with the fullest enjoyment of the lake and mountain scenery”

John C. Olmsted to J.M. Frink, January 8, 1909, Folder 8, Box 53, 5801-01, Sherwood Parks History Collection, Seattle Municipal Archives

“In designing a system of parks and parkways, the primary aim should be to secure and preserve for the use of the people as much as possible of these advantages of water and mountain views and of woodlands, well distributed and conveniently located. An ideal system would involve taking all the borders of the different bodies of water, except such as are needed or are likely to be needed hereafter for commerce, and to enlarge these fringes at convenient and suitable points, so as to include considerable bodies of woodland, as well as some fairly level land, which can be cleared and covered with grass for field sports and for the enjoyment of meadow scenery.”

“Report of the Olmsted Brothers” in *Park Playgrounds and Boulevards of Seattle, Washington* (Seattle: The Pacific Press, 1909)

“The best things [about the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition grounds], from an artistic point of view, are the Olympic mountains, the Cascades, Mount Rainier and the two beautiful lakes. These are things that can not be matched anywhere else in the country. If the landscaping at the exposition has made the most of the natural beauties at hand, then it may be considered a success.”

“John C. Olmsted Visits the Fair,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, May 29, 1909