

SETTING THE STAGE



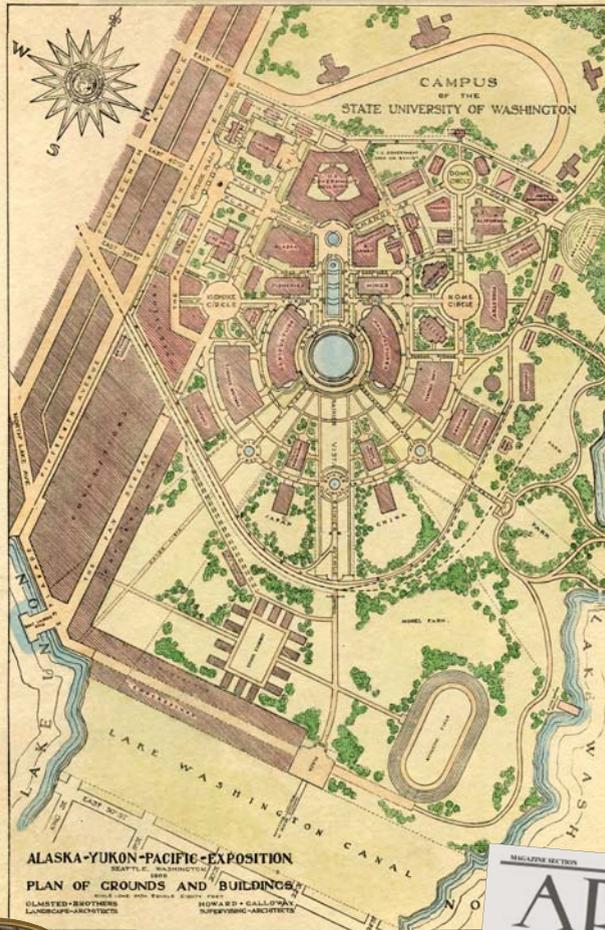
"The magnificent views of Mt. Rainier and other mountains and of Lake Union will, however, be by far the greatest features of the exposition and will be vividly remembered by most visitors when the best efforts of architects and landscape gardeners have been forgotten."

John C. Olmsted
John Charles Olmsted
Alaska-Yukon Magazine - November 1906

OLMSTED'S VISION: At the urgent request of the organizing committee, John Charles Olmsted, principal partner of the renowned Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm, returned to Seattle in October 1906 to create a plan for the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition. Local anticipation for the exposition was so great that he wrote to his wife that he "was interrupted ... by visitors. There is naturally a good deal of interest in the plan of the exposition, especially on the part of local real estate speculators."

Olmsted organized the grounds around several axes, three of which relied on distant landscape features for their focus, a design principle now called "borrowed scenery." Rainier Vista began at Cascade Court and drew visitors' gazes to Mount Rainier in the distance. The Lake Washington and Lake Union vistas featured views of the lakes framed by Douglas firs.

Olmsted reserved a 100-acre tract in the southeast corner of the grounds for the Park, a forest with five miles of trails and rustic benches and a place of respite from the excitement and noise of the exposition.



Courtesy of National Park Service Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site - Job #2739

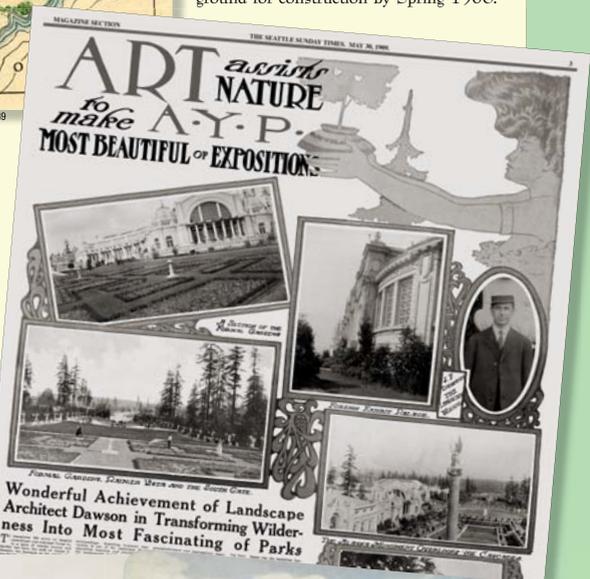
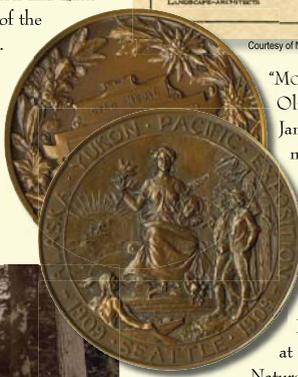
"MOST BEAUTIFUL OF EXPOSITIONS": Olmsted relied on his associate partner, James Frederick Dawson, to manage much of the firm's work in Seattle. The landscape that the Olmsted Brothers firm produced for the A-Y-P was extraordinary in its volume, variety, and innovation, using over 2,000,000 plants. The newspapers proclaimed its beauty, saying "Most Beautiful Landscape Garden Effects at the A.Y.P. Fair" and "Art Assists Nature to make A-Y-P Most Beautiful of Expositions." One hundred years later Olmsted's lasting legacy is still found in the framework and beauty of the University of Washington campus.



THE PLANTING OF THE FAIR: Olmsted began planning immediately for the landscape of the fair. He was charmed by the native northwest vegetation, writing "The climate is so damp that everything grows luxuriantly." Unlike his stepfather, Frederick Law Olmsted, who designed the 1893 Columbia Exposition, John C. Olmsted chose to use bright flowering perennials to contrast with rugged native northwest vegetation, writing in a letter to his wife in April 1907:

"I want to raise a lot of bright flowering perennial plants for the exhibition because they bloom, many of them, much later than shrubs. They will give brilliancy of detail to the plantations."

The first task of site clearing and grading proved daunting and started as soon as the Regents approved Olmsted's plan in May 1907. With the help of dynamite, teams of horses pulling plows graded the compacted glacial hardpan and prepared the ground for construction by Spring 1908.



CLOCKWISE TOP: Cascade Court & Rainier Vista; Birds Eye View of Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition; 3 views at Geyser Basin (one with Lake Washington Vista); **CLOCKWISE BOTTOM:** The Seattle Sunday Times May 30, 1909 (reconstructed); 3 views of Formal Gardens; natural park; A-Y-P Gold Medal.

Birds Eye View poster, gold medal, and photos courtesy of National Park Service Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. Postcards courtesy of Dana Whitford and Arbes/Knight - Quotes from letters to Olmsted's wife courtesy of Frances Loeb Library, Harvard School of Design



For more information on the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition go to www.historylink.org the Online History. To find events, organizations, and conversations on the A-Y-P Exposition centennial celebration, go to www.aype.org, the A-Y-P Exposition Community.

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