



3 - Aspects Of England

The geometry and symmetry of French and Dutch gardens, with their classical sculpture and fountains, had fallen out of favor in England by the mid-eighteenth century. Romanticism influenced not only art and literature, but also garden design. Over the course of roughly fifty years, the English abandoned all architectural concepts and elements in their gardens. Designers now preferred naturalistic, idyllic landscapes of rolling pastures, serpentine rivers, and meandering pathways. Trees planted in clumps grew in natural forms, and flowers in the landscape were restricted to fields of daffodils and other naturalizing bulbs. The ha-ha wall, a retaining wall invisible from the house, allowed an unobstructed view of sheep and cattle grazing on undulating hillsides. Gothic ruins and classical temples placed on hilltops or around lakes, called follies, created scenes reminiscent of romantic landscape paintings. This purely landscaped style became known as the English Landscape school of design. Later, during the Victorian era (1837-1901), landscape gardeners began to reintroduce classical elements, cutting flowerbeds into lawns to display colorful exotic plant material, and transforming landscape gardens into something more “gardenesque.” This age of scientific discoveries, new technologies, forays into exotic lands in search of plants, and grand hothouses and conservatories, saw renewed attention to gardening as English taste in garden design spread throughout the world. Landscape architects and aficionados consider the Victorian era as one of the great ages of gardening.

During this period, when gardening became popular among the masses, immigration from New York and New England had a major impact on landscape gardening in Michigan as the population of Michigan, particularly Detroit, expanded rapidly. A great many of the emigrants from New York and New England were well-educated, interested in garden design, and aware of garden books describing English Landscape



ABOVE: Natural idyllic landscapes, Stowe, England. Photo by Michael Hodges.

OPPOSITE: Recalling the english countryside at Grand Hotel, Mackinac Island

BELOW: Front lawn of manor house at Stourhead, showing the ha ha wall.



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traditions. Horticultural and agricultural societies sprang up across the state, and the Michigan Agricultural College was created for the purpose of teaching agriculture and landscape gardening.

Horticultural books by English garden authors were based on the history, topography, and climate of England, and thus their validity in America was sometimes questioned. One of the most influential British garden authors was Humphry Repton. His book, *Sketches and Hints on Landscape Gardening*, first published in 1795, outlined the perfect landscape garden by stating four points: The landscape should display natural forms and hide natural defects; it should be open, giving the appearance of “extent and freedom;” it should be designed in a naturalistic style, as if it were a “production of nature only;” “and all aspects of the landscape should be pleasing, and if not they should be concealed.” This naturalistic theme was a constant, used by all English garden writers of the time. Repton compromised the idea of a strictly natural landscape, leading the way for later writers to propose the placement of more formal and exotic plants and architectural elements, into the landscape. As this trend continued, gardens became jumbles of flowerbeds full of ornamental pieces from around the world, a gardenesque variation of the English Landscape school. Ornaments, plants, and flowers dominated the garden obscuring the simple, smooth-flowing characteristic of the purely landscape style. Nurserymen promoted gardenesque landscape design in Michigan and elsewhere through books and journals.

Andrew Jackson Downing, a New York nurseryman and horticulturist, rephrased Repton’s ideas in his book, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening as Adapted to North America* (1841). He was also the editor of the popular magazine, *The Horticulturist*, which promoted the “embellishment” of rural and suburban land.” Downing simplified and codified contemporary gardening ideals into guidelines for creating well-designed gardens. He believed that the nature and location of the site itself should determine the choice of either “the beautiful” or the “picturesque” architectural or landscape style. Both styles were borrowed from English writers, and referred to naturalistic landscapes. The “beautiful” landscape was smooth and regular and included classical architecture, while the “picturesque” was dramatic, irregular, and punctuated by gothic architecture. Downing was also an eloquent spokesman for

Illustration of gardenesque in a public park in Bath, England.



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LEFT: Classical “Beautiful” style, Detroit Zoo.

ABOVE: Irregular planting and gothic architecture, Belle Isle, Michigan.

BELOW: Gothic “Picturesque” style at Woodmere Cemetery.

the movement to create public parks and beautiful cities. At the time of his accidental death from drowning, he was designing an ambitious plan for the grounds of the U. S. Capitol, the White House, and the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C.

Throughout Downing’s career, he lauded horticulture’s positive influence on society. In 1847 he wrote, “horticultural and its kindred arts, tend strongly to fix the habits, and elevate the character, of our whole rural population.” Based on this belief, Downing supported the establishment of garden-like cemeteries to promote “moral elevation.” The so-called “garden cemetery” movement began in the 1830s with the establishment of Mount Auburn cemetery outside of Boston, Laurel Hill in Philadelphia, and Greenwood in Brooklyn. Naturally beautiful sites along rivers or on wooded hillsides were purchased on the outskirts of growing urban areas. Such site selection became a distinguishing feature of cemeteries. The cemetery was further enhanced with carefully selected trees and shrubs planted along winding paths. Ornamental tombstones and monuments served as focal points, just as statues and temples graced the English landscape gardens. Designers often collaborated with local horticultural societies to develop arboretums in conjunction with cemeteries. The park-like atmosphere lured city-dwellers into these public spaces for picnics and relaxation.

The first city cemetery in Detroit, located between Gratiot and Clinton Street,





ABOVE: Ornamental tombstones, Elmwood Cemetery, Detroit.

BELOW: Gently rolling hills, Elmwood Cemetery, Detroit.



and extending a little east of St. Antoine Street, was purchased in 1827. It soon became a favorite Sunday resort. Silas Farmer, in *A History of Detroit and Wayne County and Early Michigan*, wrote, “being within easy walking distance, scores and hundreds of children and grown people, on pleasant Sabbaths, wandered about the grounds, reading and comparing tombstone inscriptions.” In 1846, the cemetery was moved outside the city to a new site along Parent’s Creek, formerly known as Bloody Run. Here in Elmwood Cemetery, the creek winding gracefully through the grounds provided a beautiful setting in gently rolling hills. Mature trees dotted the landscape, with other trees added in a random pattern. Gravestones and monuments completed the scene. A picturesque stone gate fronting Elmwood Avenue came later. Elmwood cemetery was the epitome of a graceful English Landscape park, rivaling New York’s Central Park in the

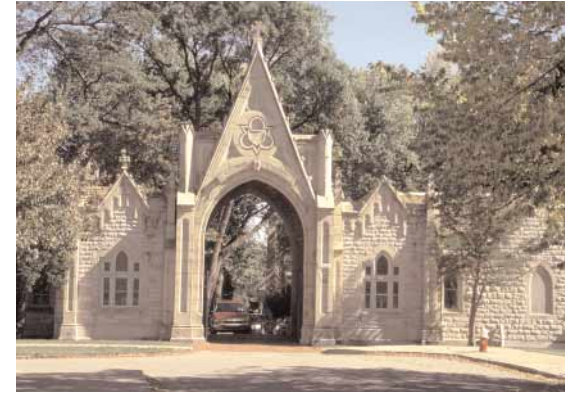
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beauty of its composition, in part because Central Park's designer, Frederick Law Olmsted, consulted on the project.

Olmsted was a leading landscape architect on the East Coast. He is acknowledged as the father of American landscape architecture, and his firm dominated the profession for over fifty years. He created parks to be available to all people, and he had high expectations for the visual and psychological effects of his designs. Olmsted believed that pastoral park scenery, like the English Landscape parks he had seen on his British travels, was a powerful antidote to the stress and artificiality of urban life. He drew inspiration for his designs from his travels, American natural scenery, and the writings of Downing and the English Landscape authors. Olmsted's reputation paved the way for his invitation to Michigan to advise on a plan for Belle Isle in the Detroit River. The public had used this island for recreation as early as 1845, when "the ladies" began to frequent it for picnics on Sundays. Olmsted sketched a romantic plan that used lagoons, meadows, and open space to enhance the natural landscape.

Almost all of the older communities in Michigan have cemeteries that were designed during the Victorian era. Gracefully laid out with mature trees, elaborate headstones, mausoleums, and entry gates, their similar names reflect the landscape chosen for their location. Evergreen, Mt. Hope, Woodmere, Oak Glen, Maple Dale, Beech Grove, Oak Hill, Greenwood, and Deepdale are virtual arboretums of majestic trees divided by serpentine pathways and decorative headstones. We think of parks as gently rolling landscapes with broad swaths of lawn and scattered trees, in large part because outdoor recreation and picnics took place in cemeteries before the public parks movement provided alternative grounds. Many parks all over the state reflect this pastoral heritage, whether recently built or maintained over the years. Belle Isle in Detroit, Ella Sharp Park in Jackson, Francis Park in Lansing, and Presque Isle Park in Marquette are just a few of these lovely spaces in the English Landscape style.

Another park-like setting with a debt to English design is the rolling, open green space at the heart of Michigan State University's East Lansing campus. The evolution of this space involved a great many people who shared



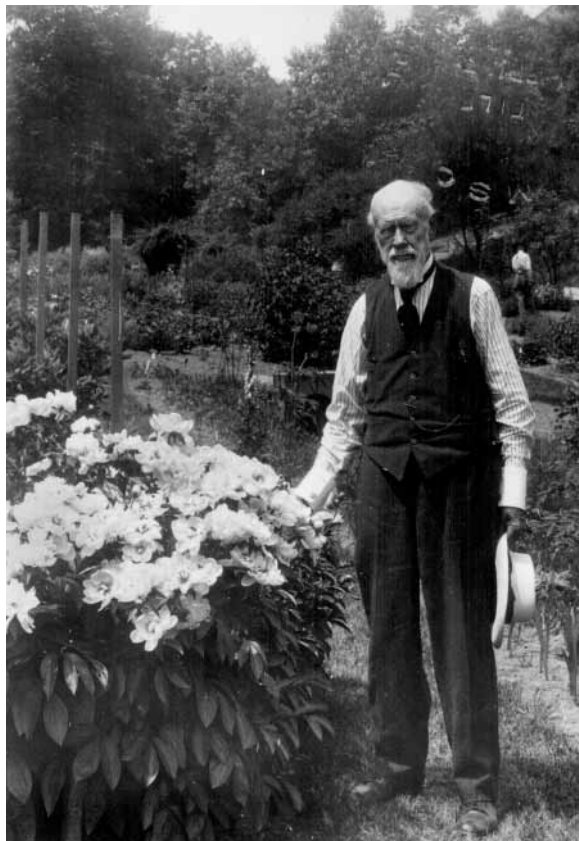
ABOVE: Picturesque stone gate, Elmwood Cemetery, Detroit.

BELOW: Olmsted's rolling landscape in Central Park, New York City.

BOTTOM: Naturalistic Landscape, Belle Isle.



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ABOVE: Beal in the Garden, Michigan State University.

OPPOSITE: The campus of Michigan State University.

a love of landscape horticulture and garden design. The early founders of the Michigan Agricultural College set the original landscape style, which the north campus has followed to the present day. Gentleman farmer Bela Hubbard, originally from upstate New York, founded Michigan's first agricultural society in 1837. He wrote and delivered an address before the Michigan legislature in 1850 to encourage the formation of a state agricultural college. Titled "Memorial for a State Agricultural College in Michigan" this address stated that engineering, architecture, and landscape gardening should be taught and practiced in addition to agriculture. This is the first mention of teaching landscape gardening as a subject in an institute of higher education in the United States. The Michigan Agricultural College was founded five years later, and a course in landscape gardening was taught as early as 1863.

John Holmes, Secretary of the Michigan State Agricultural Society, and professor of botany and horticulture at the college, was the moving force behind the selection of the property for the campus, a heavily wooded tract bordering the Red Cedar River. His appointment required him to inventory the trees, map the topographic features, and site the buildings for the early campus. Holmes placed the first college building near an oak opening on high ground, with native trees scattered picturesquely around the hall. The college's board minutes of 1857 resolved that "the grounds around the college premises be properly laid out and tastefully arranged." In the five years Holmes worked on campus, he did much to beautify the grounds and to give shape to the character of the campus. Asa Gray, from Arnold Arboretum at Harvard University, donated a large box of perennial herbs from the botanical garden in Cambridge, and florists and nurserymen of New York donated hardy plants, bulbs, and trees, which Holmes planted on the new campus.

Holmes was followed as professor of botany and horticulture and superintendent of the gardens by one of his students, Albert N. Prentiss. Prentiss was an alumnus of the college and taught the first required course in landscape gardening. He assigned the garden design books and articles written by Downing as well as a textbook by Edward Kemp, an English author: *How to Lay Out a Garden, Intended as a General Guide in Choosing, Forming, or Improving an Estate, with Reference to Both Design and Execution*. He also required students to draw plans in detail for areas of the campus,