Designing the Late Nineteenth Century Suburban Landscape: The Cincinnati Zoological Garden

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Suburbanization played a key role during the nineteenth century not only in city building, but in the development of American civilization. Suburban landscape design proved one of the most important dimensions in the larger suburban movement, a movement that extended well beyond the development of planned suburban subdivisions or villages. Recent work on the history of cemeteries and institutions of moral and social reform has demonstrated that suburban landscape designers engaged a broader list of topics under the rubric of the suburban, or “middle landscape”. We might add to that nineteenth century list university campuses and zoological gardens as well as municipal parks of the sort proposed in Cincinnati in George Kessler’s formal 1907 Park Plan. Indeed, one might argue that many contemporaries regarded all designed suburban landscapes as parks, places of healthful and morally and socially uplifting resort for both residents of cities and the tourists that they might attract.

In the early history of the Cincinnati Zoological Gardens this point figures prominently as one of the recurring themes in the discourse about the old walking city and suburban development as an alternative urban design. Support for the development of this institution in the 1870s followed directly from a general agreement that Cincinnati needed more public landscapes, and additional means of attracting favorable national attention. Through the late 1860s, Cincinnati mayors spoke of the urgent need to construct city parks to serve as “safety valves” and “bulwarks of public virtue,” as civilizing forces in the urban landscape and in the lives of city residents. They warned as well that “our rival cities, Chicago and St. Louis, are moving ahead in the matter of parks,” and urged that the city move ahead with the development of a large “suburban park.” The city responded with the formation of a Board of Park Commissioners in 1871, to take charge of the “City Parks,” Lincoln, Washington, Eighth Street, and Hopkins, and of the grounds surrounding the reservoir at Eden Park. Although in this decade Cincinnati acquired the property for Burnet Woods Park, city leaders acknowledged that to transform it and Eden Park to meet their purposes would require a great deal of effort and expense. Late nineteenth century commentators spoke not of setting green space aside, but of creating public park landscapes for their aesthetic appeal to city residents and visitors. They took as their standard not the untouched forest or woods, but the controlled beauty of the English garden, “made aesthetically and instructionally superior to the wild by man’s imposition of order.”

In this context, the Zoological Society of Cincinnati suggested the novel idea of the creation of a Zoological Garden as a spectacular substitute for an important civic amenity lacking in Cincinnati: a dramatic, large-scaled, well-landscaped municipal park. Before the 1870s the United States had seen circuses and menageries, and even small animal collections in such park settings as New York’s Central Park, and Chicago’s Lincoln Park, but it was only in this decade that Americans opened formal zoological gardens, systematically displaying representatives of the animal kingdom, labelled according to scientific schemes within carefully landscaped and manicured grounds.

For the first half of the nineteenth century, Cincinnati, like its counterparts throughout the nation, remained largely a walking city, a compact, densely populated area. Within its boundaries, the grid arrangement of its streets embodied the imposition of order that a city represented and seemed to require. Cincinnati’s few public parks consisted of open squares on that grid. Alternative landscapes appeared beyond the city boundaries in suburban railroad villages, country estates, and farms. By the early 1840s, residents of once-bucolic suburban areas followed the pattern of the major eastern cities and established a Horticultural Society, which took the lead in cre-
ating the Spring Grove Cemetery. Andrew Jackson Downing, a prominent American landscape spokesman of the day noted that by 1849 there was “scarcely a city of any note in the whole country that has not its rural cemetery.”\(^7\) The Queen City deservedly counted itself among the ranks of such cities. Like its counterparts, Spring Grove followed the model of the first American rural cemetery, Boston’s Mount Auburn, and soon became a popular destination for visitors providing an inviting, cultivated, outdoor amenity.\(^8\) It emphasized curvilinear lines and picturesque, often exotic, landscaping which contrasted dramatically with the straight, paved streets and compact rows of buildings of the city center.

At the same time, mid-nineteenth century American cities, including Cincinnati, began to change from their traditional role as agents for the encouragement and regulation of commerce to a new role as agents for promoting the welfare of urban society through the provision of services to residents. The modern American municipal corporation took shape in the 1850s as an explicitly public, governmental body, providing a series of regular, ongoing services, to a diverse city population on a daily basis, supported largely by taxation and bond issues and administered by a salaried bureaucracy.\(^9\) Mid-nineteenth century American cities created their first full-time, paid fire and police departments. Cincinnati’s government enlarged on existing services in the 1860s, built its first city sewers, formed a permanent Health Department, took responsibility for a free public library, participated in planning a municipal university, and created a Park Commission.\(^10\) Like their counterparts in other places, city leaders anticipated continued physical growth, and commensurate expansion of the municipal corporation’s boundaries through the device of annexation. In the last third of the nineteenth century, Cincinnati began to take on the physical configuration of the new city, with a specialized central business district at its core and concentric circles of differentiating land use moving outward toward elite residential hilltop suburbs.

While Cincinnati expanded outward, its rate of growth did not keep pace with that of the fastest growing places, including its long-time rival, St. Louis, or the new western presence, Chicago. With each decennial census report, Cincinnati leaders recognized the decline in their city’s place in the urban hierarchy of population and commercial standing.\(^11\) Acknowledging Cincinnati’s relative decline in the national urban sweepstakes, one Cincinnati newspaper asked “Are Great Cities Desirable?” and responded with a redefinition of the terms of civic greatness. This view deemphasized mere size and commercial productivity and argued instead that the availability of decent, inexpensive family living and “the opportunities for education, refinement, and enjoyment” should be used “to measure the advantages of life in any city.”\(^12\) Even as Cincinnati civic leaders continued to emphasize the necessity of developing transportation lines to new markets — most dramatically with the municipally owned Southern Railway — and of promoting industrial expansion, they saw institutions of high culture as an additional means of boosting the city, and in a direction appropriate to the era and its new view of the city as a social system. Contemporaries contended active, public support of institutions could demonstrate a city’s commitment to fostering the progress of civilization while these institutions exercised their “civilizing influence” on all orders of the city’s population. Even if Cincinnati could no longer expect to be the nation’s largest or richest city, it still seemed possible to shore up its position, and retain its measure of national standing, through conspicuous devotion to cultural pursuits. Music Hall, proposed in 1873,
would serve as auditorium and exhibition space, so that “for the first time we shall realize the full value of our geographical situation, . . . [as] the city of National Conventions and the social center and musical metropolis of America.”13 Indeed, New York’s failure to outpace Boston as a national cultural center until the 1880s gave hope to the grandest dreams of Cincinnati’s urban potential.14 Accordingly, civic boosters in Cincinnati built their institutions of high culture with a special urgency, amid widespread, vigorous local support.

In what has been called this “golden age of public benefaction,” Cincinnatians launched a campaign of local institution building in the 1870s which produced the Tyler Davidson Fountain, the May Festival, Music Hall, the College of Music, the School of Design, the University of Cincinnati, and the Zoological Garden and prepared the way for the Art Museum. Through these new institutions of culture, supporters aspired to “cultivate a taste” for music, the visual arts, and science in Cincinnati, and at the same time, to demonstrate to the world the city’s level of sophistication.15 The boosters planned both to uplift the newly recognized “masses” by exposing them to the enlightening effects of aesthetics and so to make them better citizens, and to offer the upper classes the metropolitan advantages and occasions for civic pride and national recognition.

In this spirit in the summer of 1873, at the urging of member Andrew Erkenbrecher, a wealthy German immigrant manufacturer, Cincinnati’s Society for the Acclimatization of Birds directed inquiries to Berlin zoologist Dr. A.E. Brehm regarding the practicality of opening a zoological garden in Cincinnati.16 Dr. Brehm responded with great enthusiasm and specific suggestions for getting the enterprise underway. Brehm wrote of the popularity of European, and especially German zoos, and described most of them as financially “self-sustaining, while some of them yield the stockholders a handsome revenue.” While gate receipts and memberships provided most of their revenue, Brehm advised that nearly all of these institutions had some government, usually municipal, support, and he based his projections for Cincinnati on the assumption that the city would provide, at the very minimum, land for the zoo site. Brehm thought the proposed capitalization of $60,000, insufficient for creating an institution of any scale or merit, but advised proceeding nonetheless on the assumption that “a zoological garden becomes so soon a necessity that further means will not fail to be forthcoming.” As the most economical means of starting zoo operations, he recommended that his American correspondents take advantage of available European models, suggesting that “the future manager, who must be possessed of two qualities — love of and interest in animals, and good taste — should study at least three months in a zoological garden.”17

Encouraged by the Brehm’s response, the Acclimatization Society published the text of the letter in the Commercial and announced a general meeting for citizens to consider moving ahead with plans for establishing a zoological garden.18 The local newspapers responded enthusiastically to proposals for establishing a zoo in Cincinnati. The German dailies offered some of the most enthusiastic support, while the English language papers published translations as well as their own arguments for approval. The Volksfreund characterized a well-organized botanical garden as “an academy of the physical sciences in itself,” and posited that the addition of scientifically arranged exhibits of unfamiliar animals within the grounds would work to foster “the nourishment of physical science” which had, in America, “been neglected [sic] [in] an almost criminal manner.”19 Proponents of the project speculated that a broad collection of animals would attract even those simple entertainment seekers who visited menageries and circuses, and that, once in the garden’s beautiful, tranquil setting, they could hardly help but be uplifted. As the Volksblatt put it, such exposure might “convince the masses, if they had neither time nor inclination to put their noses into books, by a simple demonstratus ad oculos that there are other beauties of Nature besides lager beer and bretzels.”20 Accordingly, the Volksfreund counseled that the zoological garden explicitly place itself as a family institution “opened just on those days to the public when the laborers have the leisure to visit public places with wives and children.” Such a garden would be “a permanent ornament of the Queen City of the West” demonstrating the city’s attention to science and to self-improvement.21

The Commercial carried the most extensive, supportive coverage of the institution-building of the 1870s, including the progress of the Zoological Society. Indeed, the Commercial editor predicted that a zoological garden should prove to be “a place of never-ceasing interest, that would not only be well-patronized by citizens, but draw to the city thousands of visitors” as one of “a network of attractions.” He cautioned that in order to serve these purposes, the garden must be “a grand one, one that would reflect as much credit upon our city as Central Park
does upon New York, the proportions considered.”
He too emphasized that the zoo attend to its responsibilities to all of the city’s people, but as a private rather than a municipal enterprise. For, city ownership could lead to great expense and waste as “we should straight-away have contractors jobbing to put up palatial residences for the lions and tigers and seven-story palaces for the elephants and camels.”

The *Enquirer* discussed consideration of any potential site in terms of its accessibility to public and private transportation, the availability of adequate shade trees and attractive scenery, and acquisition cost. Indeed, expressed opinions generally agreed that it seemed appropriate for the City of Cincinnati to donate land on which a separate organization would build a zoological garden.

Accordingly, business and civic leaders, many of whom served on the boards of the city’s other cultural institutions, including Erkenbrecher, Charles P. Taft, and the Society’s first president, Julius Dexter, incorporated the Cincinnati Zoological Society in July 1873, to be capitalized at $300,000 sold in 6000 shares of fifty dollars each. Dexter expressed their intent “to establish a garden which will be a profit to the stockholders, a credit to the city, and a continual source of improvement to its visitors.”

Within five days, $30,000 worth of stock sold, in sales ranging from purchases of one share to sixty.

Sales lagged after this initial activity, but the Directors continued with their plans, buoyed by the early sales and the favorable course of public debate on the desirability of creating such an institution. By 1874 when the first formal Zoological Garden in the United States opened in Philadelphia, Cincinnati’s Zoological Society had formulated plans for a garden twice its size, and sent a representative abroad to choose an appropriate model from among the German zoos.

The advice of German consultants and the favorable comments of city leaders prompted the Society to ask the city to provide a site for a nominal rent. The directors considered Eden Park, but deemed its grounds too undeveloped and lacking in shade trees for their purposes.

With the support of the Park Commission, the
Board of Aldermen and the City Council passed legislation which provided for renting a forty-six acre area in the southern portion of newly acquired Burnet Woods Park. Mayor G.W.C. Johnston, however, vetoed the bill, though he did so “with great reluctance” because he was “most ardently desiring that a zoological garden be organized.” The mayor declared the establishment of a zoological garden complementary to the city’s park development, but judged it inappropriate to grant the use of municipal land for a commercial enterprise.  

Johnston expressed an additional concern that Cincinnati avoid restricting its own use of park land whose future value and importance would increase with the expansion of the city.

At a meeting with Zoological Society Directors, council suggested that the mayor might find the lease acceptable if the city could appoint members to the Society’s Board. Society President Julius Dexter absolutely refused to agree to the appointment of a Director from outside the Society, so long as a rent charge remained. He rejected with equal vehemence any provision that the city retain for a later date “the privilege of purchasing the Society’s improvements on the grounds.” Finding the arrangement “neither reasonable nor prudent to accept,” the Society decided to acquire its site privately.

City council disagreed with the mayor, and answered his veto message with a resolution that he should reconsider the issue because “the success of the project contemplated by the Zoological Society would not only be an attractive feature, but would also greatly lessen the expense necessary to keep up and improve Burnet Woods Park.” Despite its commercial basis, council reiterated the potential role for the Zoological Garden in a city defined as a cultural center, in which “the interests of the people demand a proper attention to the necessary embellishments and ornaments that make up a metropolitan city.”

The search for an alternative suburban site ended with the Zoological Society’s lease, with options to purchase after ten or twenty years, of 66.04 acres of hilly, wooded property known as Blakely Woods just beyond the city limits in the fashionable suburb of Avondale. These grounds met the key requirement of being “well-suited, naturally for the purpose,” and adaptable to picturesque enhancement. Recognizing the fundamental importance to the enterprise of creating an appropriate garden setting,
the Society first hired engineers and landscape architects to lay out the grounds. The Commercial described Theodore Findeisen, "the engineer in charge [sic] of the work — laying off of grounds, construction of roads, lakes, houses, &c" as displaying "great Capacity" consistent with his "large experience in similar work in Europe." If the grounds were well planned from the beginning, they could immediately become a pleasant attraction, to which animals could be added over time. The Directors believed the second step of acquiring an animal collection would be easier to execute than the first, expecting to purchase animals inexpensively, and to receive gifts of domestic and exotic animals.

The plan called for developing the Zoological Garden on forty-four acres of the leased site. The local press greeted it as a "masterpiece of modern landscape gardening, [with] all avenues, roads, and walks laid out with regard to the natural disposition of the land," which capitalized on the potential of the space, and human ingenuity and vision. Adolph Strauch brought his experience in planting Cincinnati estates, Spring Grove Cemetery, and city parks, granting advice and gifts of trees, and ornamental birds — swans — to the fledgling institution. Following such principles as those enunciated by Frederick Law Olmsted in his plans for Central Park and other writings on the subject of landscape architecture, zoo designers employed variations in scenery including meandering paths and streams and slightly rolling hills "to promote tranquility and rest to the mind" and a retreat from the activity of the city, which they carefully controlled to "guard against the occurrence of opportunities and temptations to shabbiness, disorder, indecorum, and indecency." Pathways were cut through the grounds to direct visitors so that, surrounded by the beauties of nature, they could appreciate them in comfort and convenience. A grand lake formed the focal point of the park, encircled by foot paths so that its collection of waterfowl and aquatic plants could be viewed from all sides. A "large cascade" crossed by a "rustic bridge" separated the lake from smaller ponds, and streams crossed the grounds at several points, all in the interest of making the grounds more picturesque.

The Zoological Society's European consultants had advised that in the best and most attractive zoos, "parks are arranged in which animals can be observed by visitors in all directions, while, at the same time, the arrangement is such as to serve for scientific observations." Any conscientious visitor to the zoo should be capable of studying the animals, and appreciating their variety and the wondrousness of nature. To facilitate viewing, and in keeping with the atmosphere of the grounds, the builders converted ravines into ponds for beaver, otter, and water fowl, and fenced unbroken stretches of land to make pasture runs for the grazing animals. A cage large enough to permit flight housed Andrew Erkenbrecher's gift of his songbird collection. Placement of the exhibits and winding paths allowed for multiple views of the animals within the tranquil, domestic setting of the park. The buffalo house exhibited a log cabin style intended to evoke the American pioneer, just as the tentlike camel house referred to desert life. Prominent Cincinnati architect James McLaughlin designed a series of buildings, working with the Directors and their Superintendent, Dr. H. Dorner, the Scientific-Secretary of the Hamburg Zoological Garden. Enclosures planned to provide the animals with room to move about with "the largest possible liberty" included bear pits, carnivora, monkey house, aviary, and deer house.

Ideally, a zoological garden provided examples of as many of the world's animals as possible within one place to permit their comparison and a comprehension of their variety. Their placement in this domestic setting promoted the scientific as well as the aesthetic goals of the planners, for, as one spokesman explained, "however unlike the lion and tiger in the wild jungles of Africa and Asia" these animals in the garden might appear, they were available for observation, fully catalogued and identified by their scientific names. While the animals were not arranged to show evolutionary development from the simplest organism to the most complex, this visible symbol of human mastery over even the most ferocious beasts offered reassurance of the human species' rank at the top of the orders of the animal kingdom. Like the grounds and the city people who visited them, the animals too could be civilized by the actions of man, the superior intelligence. The Zoological Garden then functioned as a museum of the living world of nature, both zoological and botanical, and like other suburban places, as a park, a place of retreat. Indeed, the mayor who vetoed the establishment of the zoo in Burnet Woods Park, reported in 1875 the city's gratitude to the Zoological Society for establishing "that which will really be a Park."
and rabbits. Although many of the animals remained in transportation crates because of pressure to hold the opening at as early a date as possible, the zoo also boasted an African elephant, monkeys and baboons, lions, tigers, a puma and a leopard, eleven bears, four llamas, a camel, a kangaroo, and two wallabies. The plan succeeded, then, in offering a wide range of animals representing every continent and many species. Over the years, the zoological collections grew through purchases, donations, and breeding. By 1900, the Cincinnati Zoo had displayed sea lions, a rhinoceros, a hippopotamus, and trained chimpanzees.

From the beginning, the zoo planners spoke of three groups of patrons: the well-to-do, the masses, and out of town guests. While the “better classes” would consciously appreciate the garden’s beauty and recognize its educational and artistic value, the masses were expected as well, preferably in family units, so that culture might be spirited into their lives for their own benefit and for that of the citizens with whom they shared their residence in Cincinnati. It seemed most likely that these people would come to the zoo for the sake of their children, but once in the garden, they would be exposed to the civilizing influences of nature, the family unit would be strengthened through the shared experience, and the grog shops, at least temporarily, would lose some of their clientele. The Zoological Garden, according to one characterization, functioned as “a medium to advance the knowledge of natural science, and to give to the great masses a place for genial amusement combined with elevating observation of the animal and vegetable kingdoms.”

Although Zoo Directors encouraged the working men to visit the zoo for their own advantage and for that of the larger community which would benefit by their moral uplift, they charged relatively high admissions of twenty-five cents for adults and fifteen, later lowered to ten cents, for children. Transportation to the grounds, outside the city limits in the suburbs, involved leaving one line of street railway tracks for another under different ownership, and significant expense. In 1889 when partial consolidation of Cincinnati street railways provided transfers without cost, the zoo inaugurated a policy which had been discussed for some dozen years, of holding “CHEAP” days on Saturdays, with admission reduced to fifteen cents for adults and five cents for children. Attendance increased significantly, and the Zoological Society officers attributed the gain to the “cheap days” and “the increasingly favored movement of giving to the laboring people the Saturday half-holiday.” The characteristically late nineteenth century concern with the “masses” manifested by the Zoo Directors reflected the new sense that there were in republican America distinct and disparate social classes.

While the zoo patronized the masses, it offered not a privilege but an opportunity for, in the parlance of the day, the “best people,” who patronized the garden through their attendance and their participation in the corporation as stockholders. For their peers, the Zoological Directors hoped to provide a pleasant stopping place at the end of an afternoon carriage drive or on the way home from work in the city, and a grand attraction of which they could be proud when comparing Cincinnati to other cities. The two-storied Italianate restaurant, graced with two verandas and a grand staircase, one of the largest of the early zoo buildings, opened in 1877 in a central position across from the lake. “Prompt and polite attention to the wants of the inner man will contribute largely to the wants of the visitors,” the Zoo Directors said. The well-appointed restaurant in this garden spot in the eastern suburbs suggests aspects of another institution which first appeared in 1889, a kind of “country club” where the elite could gather in yet another suburban landscape.

By the end of the century, however, as a wide variety of new places of resort opened, the Zoological Garden suffered from their competition. At the same time, other major cities created their own Zoological Gardens, often under municipal auspices, challenging the novelty of Cincinnati’s institution. The Zoological Garden never succeeded in making a profit for its stockholders, or even in overcoming the debts incurred in the early years of construction and operation. Indeed, the Directors determined that their Society’s commercial basis inhibited some potential contributors from lending their support, and the other cultural institutions that developed immediately after the Garden operated on a not-for-profit basis. In 1884 when the option arose to buy the land which the Zoological Society rented, John Hauck and two associates purchased the property and leased it back to the Society.

Still, the Society continued in debt, and two years later, in 1886, addressed its financial predicament in a manner appropriate to the metropolitan suburb of the new city. Using a characteristic late nineteenth century device, twenty associates organized as a Zoological Land Syndicate to purchase some twenty-one acres of the zoo site and adjoining acreage to develop as residential, suburban, city house lots for sale for profit. Zoo Directors assured their stockholders that the avenue the Zoological Land Syndicate proposed through the tract would complete “the

Zoo directors wanted to attract the masses as well as the well-to-do. They felt that families would come to the zoo for the sake of their children, but once inside they would be exposed to the civilizing influences of nature and the family unit would be strengthened. (CHS Photograph Collection)
last necessary link in the chain of beautiful carriage drives, radiating from the garden gates, and extending westward to Clifton, Spring Grove, and all the Millcreek Valley, and southward and eastward, through Avondale, Mt. Auburn, and West and East Walnut Hills.” The land developers and the zoo then petitioned for annexation of the zoo and syndicate lands to the City of Cincinnati, in the interest of providing the full range of municipal services, including city streets and better traction service. In fact, the configuration of Cincinnati itself changed with the suburban expansion that took off in the 1870s. When Cincinnati annexed the adjacent suburbs of Avondale and Clifton seven years later, in 1896, it placed the Zoological Garden well within the city limits rather than on its metropolitan outskirts. At the same time, Cincinnati paid new attention to its park responsibilities, developing existing park lands and acquiring new parks in suburban annexations, eliminating the need for the Zoological Garden to play that role. In an era of specialization that included new leisure activities, city leaders several times expressed a willingness to take over the zoo, not as a park substitute but as a related, distinctive institution.

The Zoological Society formally surrendered any hopes of making a profit with the organization in 1899 of the non-profit Cincinnati Zoological Society. After liquidation of the investor’s interest, explained a 1900 zoo guide, the new administration raised enough money by subscription to cover the liabilities and preserve the institution. The donors “were not looking to their own financial advantage,” the pamphlet explained, “but to the main object of preserving the Zoological Garden, making it one of the city’s chief attractions, and a pride to all Cincinnatians.” In 1901 controlling interest in the Zoological Company passed to the Cincinnati Traction Company which had just gained control of all of the city’s diverse street railways. As in other cities, the Traction Company used the zoo as an off-hours traffic builder, and it advertised the zoo on its cars, ran three lines to its gates by 1905, and added two more in 1910. Otherwise, the Traction Company preserved the character of the institution, with the indefatigable Superintendent Sol A. Stephan remaining at its helm. By 1914 the zoo had built its first parking facilities for automobiles, and the next year the Traction Company expressed its readiness to give up its commission. Once more the City of Cincinnati took an interest, and appointed a committee of citizens to consider purchasing the garden. Two prominent local philanthropists, Anna Sinton Taft and Mary E. Emery, pledged $125,000 each if a third matching fund could be raised from smaller contributions to cover the $375,000 the Traction Company asked for its property. Faced with this offer, the Traction accepted their pledge of $250,000 for the property and allotted any additional funds raised to grounds improvement. In 1917 a third society, the Cincinnati Park Association, incorporated and operated the zoo, with Mrs. Taft and Mrs. Emery covering annual oper-
ating deficits. After Mrs. Emery's death in 1928, Mrs. Taft sought the commitment of the city to purchase the Zoological Garden. The Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce issued a report in 1929, hailing the institution as "an unfailing source of most favorable publicity" for Cincinnati and local commerce. After studying other Zoological Gardens in the United States, noting their founding dates and sources of funding, the report recommended that the city proceed with the purchase. The city took over the zoo in the early 1930s, and placed it under the supervision of the Board of Park Commissioners to be operated by a newly incorporated, not-for-profit Zoological Society of Cincinnati which continues today.55

By the second quarter of the twentieth century, major components of the designed suburban landscape of the nineteenth century, including the rural cemetery of Spring Grove, the suburban village of Clifton, and the Cincinnati Zoological Garden, had found what seemed to be their proper place, as annexations placed them literally within the legal boundaries of the metropolitan city. As in the case of the nation's first rural cemetery, Mount Auburn, this pathbreaking Zoological Garden lost its singularity as other cities followed its example.56 The creation of other Zoological Gardens nonetheless afforded the opportunity for animal trading, and for the emergence of a network of zoo professionals and expertise, as well as the acceptance of this kind of institution as a desirable amenity for a city of any repute, and an appropriate subject for municipal trusteeship. The elaboration of a network of Cincinnati parks, and particularly the development of George Kessler's Park Plan of 1907 obviated the need for the zoo to act as a park substitute, but allowed for a distinctive place for the institution within a park system.57 In 1987 the Zoological Garden reasserted the importance of its role as a public landscape and changed its official name to "Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden." Basic elements of the first landscaping plan remain, hearkening back to a Zoological Garden which came from nineteenth century concepts of science and beauty, from changing definitions of the city and society, and from the response of Cincinnati city boosters to relative commercial decline.

1. David Schuyler, The New Urban Landscape. The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America (Baltimore and London, 1986); Kenneth T. Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States (New York, 1985); Blanche Linden-Ward, Silent City on a Hill: Landscapes of Memory and Boston's Mount Auburn Cemetery (Columbus, Ohio, 1989). Leo Marx identified the "cultural symbolism" of a "middle landscape," a "pastoral ideal...located in a middle ground somewhere 'between,'" yet in a transcendent relation to, the opposing forces of civilization and nature," The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (New York, 1964), 23, and Howard P. Segal, "Leo Marx's 'Middle Landscape': A Critique, a Revision, and an Appreciation" Reviews in American History, March 1977.

2. Cincinnati Park Commission, A Park System for the City of Cincinnati (Cincinnati, 1907).


5. Carl E. Schorske, "The Transformation of the Garden: Ideal and Society in Austrian Literature" American Historical Review 72 (1967): 129. Schorske's reference to Vienna points to this concept's acceptance in contemporary western civilization, of which America was a part. Mid-century Americans noted the opening of royal parks to the public in Europe, and expressed embarrassment that the cities of their republican nation did not offer similar amenities to all of their people. Visitors to the Crystal Palace exhibition in 1851 in London's Hyde Park remarked particularly on this point.

6. The call for public parks included railing against the grid pattern as "unnatural," in contradiction to the desired naturalism of the picturesque, landscaped park. New York commentators particularly bemoaned the grid pattern that the Plan of 1811 extended far north of the line of Manhattan settlement. On Cincinnati's spatial development, see Zane L. Miller, Boss Cox's Cincinnati: Urban Politics in the Progressive Era (New York, 1968). For the story of one Cincinnati's important suburbs and its transformation from country estates, see Henry D. Shapiro and Zane L. Miller, Clifton: Neighborhood and Community in an Urban Setting (Cincinnati, 1976).

7. See Blanche Linden-Ward, pp. 20-39, this issue.

8. Richard C. Wade, The Urban Frontier: The Rise of Western Cities, 1790-1830 (Cambridge, Mass., 1959) explicates the "urban sweepstakes" rivalry, and Cincinnati's triumphant position among western cities at 1830. Blanche Linden-Ward, Silent City Upon a Hill, 12-13, 320-332; Downing credited the example of Mount Auburn such that "at the present moment the United States, while they have no public parks, are acknowledged to possess the finest rural cemeteries in the world," 12.


Cincinnati moved from a rank of thirteenth among the nation's cities at the Census of 1820 to seventh in 1830, and sixth in both 1840 and 1850, then fell back to seventh place in 1860.  

12. "Are Great Cities Desirable?" Cincinnati Commercial, February 21, 1875, 4; see also "Cincinnati, the Athens of America?" Cincinnati Commercial March 28, 1874, 6; Stevens and Co., The Queen City: a Handbook of Cincinnati (Cincinnati, 1872), a pamphlet advertising the advantages of doing business in Cincinnati, emphasized the city's natural beauty and the steps its citizens had taken towards singling out the aesthetic side of the city's qualities. See also Robert C. Vitz, The Queen and the Arts: Cultural Life in Nineteenth Century Cincinnati (Kent, Ohio, 1989).


16. The Society for the Acclimatization of Birds, dedicated to the human care of birds, had imported a lot of European songbirds to eat the caterpillars that were becoming a problem as the city increased its park acreage and its residents moved out to suburban sites, only to have insects infest their trees. In taking this step, the Cincinnati Society acted in good company: the Smithsonian Institute imported sparrows from Europe in 1867 to deal with a similar infestation of Washington trees. Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institute for 1867 (Washington, D.C.: 1868) 51, 121. Generally, the orientation of the Society seems to have been cultural and civic.

17. Cincinnati Commercial June 20, 1873, 5-6. The Cincinnati group chose the Frankfurth Zoological Garden as its model, taking account of other, especially German, zoos as well, the Philadelphia Zoological Society, chartered in 1859, based the garden it opened in 1874 most directly on London's Regent's Park Zoo, widely regarded as the first modern zoological garden. The common thread was to look abroad, to Europe, for models. German-American civic leaders, including Andrew (Andreas) Erkenbrecher, led in the establishment of the Cincinnati Zoological Garden, and in financing and directing it, along with Julius Dexter and Charles P. Taft. They relied on the advice of German experts, and began a special relationship with innovative Hamburg animal trader and zoo creator Carl Hagenbeck. Cincinnati Zoo Superintendent Sol Stephan became Hagenbeck's American agent for animal sales for several decades, and adopted his early plans for bareless animal enclosures. This relationship proved particularly important through the late nineteenth century when the number and size of American zoos remained small. Hagenbeck sold his animals to circuses as well, serving as P. T. Barnum's sole animal source. The early purchases of the Cincinnati group included a sale of animals from Barnum's Hippodrome. See David Ehrlinger, Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden: A Portrait, forthcoming.

18. Calls for park creation in American cities from the 1850s had included discussions of zoological gardens; Olmsted considered them, like buildings and athletic fields, intrusive on naturalistic park landscapes.

19. Transl., Cincinnati Commercial June 24, 1873, 3.
Queen City Heritage

ment on Zoological Garden developments, including a detail of the plan (illustration included). Zoological Society President Dexter directed stockholders interested in the progress of the landscaping to that source, Annual Report, 1874.

32. Commercial supplement, 1.
33. Annual Report for 1876; for Strauch, see Blanche Linden-Ward, and Henry D. Shapiro and Zane L. Miller, Clifton. Frederick Law Olmsted, from “Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns,” 1870; see also Laura Wood Roper, FLO: A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted (Baltimore, 1973) and David Schuyler, New Urban Landscape.
34. Commercial supplement.
35. Commercial January 5, 1875 printed much of the 1874 Annual Report; see also July 8, 1874.
36. See also, letter to stockholders, July...1875 on the progress of the project, and refinancing plans, in CHS Zoo papers.
37. Commercial supplement, and June 27, 1875.
38. Henry D. Shapiro, in his University of Cincinnati Bicentennial Lecture Series, pointed out that the nineteenth century Zoological Garden can be viewed as a model for that century, offering to the present a glimpse of a vision of reality different from our own. I do not see in the Cincinnati Zoological Garden of this era the movement towards imperialism that was evident in the Zoos of colonial European nations, although the Directors did expect to display animals from the relatively exotic American West. A nationalistic view of the collections appears later, in the 1890s, in Cincinnati, as it did in new Zoological Gardens in Washington and New York.
39. Annual Reports of the City of Cincinnati 1875.
40. Cincinnati Enquirer September 19, 1875, 1; Cincinnati Commercial September 19, 1875, 1.
41. Annual Reports of the Zoological Society, 1875-1899. The Zoo published several guidebooks, in 1876, revised 1877, 1893, 1899, 1900 and 1907. See also David Ehringer, The Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden, and Spraul-Schmidt, “The Late Nineteenth Century City,” especially 45-55.
42. Commercial September 23, 1875.
43. The only convenient access to the garden at its opening was by private carriage or on foot. Omnibus lines changed over these years, and steam railways supplemented them. For most of its first two decades, the Directors concerned themselves with connections from the center of the city. By century’s end, their concern extended to connections from the zoo to the other suburbs; Spraul-Schmidt, “Late Nineteenth Century City,” 72-80.
44. Annual Reports of the Zoological Society, 1887, 8.
45. Annual Report for 1877, 8; Commercial December 11, 1874, 8.
46. In Brookline, Massachusetts, named, appropriately enough, The

A pair of chimpanzees known as "Mr. and Mrs. Rooney" attracted most attention from visitors. (Illustrated Guide to Cincinnati, CHS Printed Works Collection)
Country Club, Kenneth T. Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, 97-99; many of the zoo stockholders and directors joined the new downtown, city clubs, such as the Queen City, Commercial, and University Clubs; most lived either downtown or in the new eastern suburbs accessible to the Zoological Garden by carriage; City Directories, and Cincinnati's first Blue Book, Graphic Blue Book and Family Directory of Cincinnati (Cincinnati, 1886).

47. Annual Report for the year 1874, President's Report, 8; see also Annual Report for 1885 for a discussion of the stockholders rejection of a proposal to move to non-profit status and surrender their dividends, even after a dozen years had passed without profits. The Directors made the case to their membership that surrender of stockholders' rights to potential—but unlikely—dividends would "appeal to the public," encouraging new investment in the zoo through the purchase of annual and life memberships. "Why then," they concluded, "should we hesitate to place the Society in a position that will deprive it of its private character, and make it, substantially, a public institution, like the May Musical Festival Association, the College of Music, and the Art Museum?" Annual Report for 1885, 6.

48. Annual Report for the year 1884, 5; Hauck's associates, unnamed in the Annual Reports, were Andrew Erkenbrecher and Florence Marmet, each of whom held a one-quarter share to Hauck's one-half. They purchased as well the $11,000 in outstanding bonds. After Erkenbrecher's death early in 1885, his estate sold his interest in the property to Hauck. John Hauck papers, Cincinnati Historical Society, ms. sheet on Erkenbrecher Co. stationery, dated November 12, 1884, and handwritten sheet dated "1885, 5/13, Cincinnati, Ohio."

49. Annual Report for the year 1886, 12, the Society's profit of $90,000 was diminished by a payment to Hauck of $40,000 and larger than expected expenses for rerouting fences and correcting drainage problems; formal annexation proceedings were completed on May 21, 1889: Annexation proceedings, Hamilton County, Ohio, Board of County Commissioners, Minutes of the Meetings, 1887 Book 18, September 5, 1887, and passim to 1888; Ordinances of the City of Cincinnati, December 7, 1888; Commercial Gazette, December 8, 1888, 13. The Land Syndicate negotiated with the Mt. Auburn Cable Railway Co. for extension of its tracks through the subdivision in early 1889, John Hauck papers, Cincinnati Historical Society, typescript, four pages, March 1889, signed John Hauck, Albert Erkenbrecher, Mr. Auburn Cable Ry. Co., Henry Martin, Pres.


51. S.A. Stephan, ed., C.L. Williams, comp., Studies in Zoology: The Cincinnati Zoological Garden, (Cincinnati, 1900). In 1892 the Society consolidated its debt through a $125,000 loan from Julius Dexter, Annual Report for 1892, 10-11; in 1895 the Directors, faced with the refusal of the local banks to carry their loans, once more asked stockholders to give up their commercial status and request that the city take over to keep the zoo operating, but personal loan endorsements once more averted financial crisis, Annual Report for 1895, 5. In 1896 an agreement with the School Board allowed for every child in the public schools to visit the zoo twice each year. At the same time, the Directors renewed their commitment to other goals. "Times and conditions since the Zoological Gardens were started are different," the Directors explained, "and while maintaining the present high character of the garden as an educational institution, we must conduct it on modern lines, continuing it as an up-to-date summer resort of amusement." Annual Report for 1896, 15. In the same year, the society presented a small model of a reservation with 100 Sioux, on the premise that "the presentation of wild people is in line with zooology." 10. As the Zoological Society faced bankruptcy in 1899, passed an ordinance placing a referendum on the city's purchase of the zoo on the ballot; although the vote was 27,926 for and 11,840 against, the authorization was not exercised. See General Ordinances for Cincinnati, 1897-1904, Ordinance 270, February 13, 1899.


54. Cincinnati Enquirer May 1, 1917.

55. Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce Report, 1939, Cincinnati Zoological Garden; City of Cincinnati, Municipal Activities for the Year 1932, 11, 36; Guide Book to the Cincinnati Zoo, compiled by Workers of the Writers' Program of the Works Progress Administration in the State of Ohio, (Cincinnati: 1942), 5, gives a competent history of the zoo, as well as the least rhetorical, best written guide to the animals and grounds.

56. Blanche Linden-Ward, Silent City on a Hill: Landscapes of Memory and Boston's Mount Auburn Cemetery (Columbus, 1989), 328-330 describes the proliferation of "funerary landscapes created with explicit reference and comparison to Boston's prototype" between 1830 and 1860, in metropolitan Boston as well as in other cities, including Cincinnati's Spring Grove; See also Blanche Linden-Ward, below.

57. Zoological Society of Cincinnati Quarterly, I:1 (April, 1934), "Purpose of the Zoological Society," and "From the Director's Office." Most twentieth century zoos were established under municipal or park district auspices, defining their place within, or alongside, the new park systems.