The Critique Became the Counter-Narrative: Planning Manhattan North of the Street Grid

Gail K. Addiss

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

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The Critique Became the Counter-Narrative: Planning Manhattan North of the Street Grid

Gail K. Addiss
THE CRITIQUE BECAME THE COUNTER-NARRATIVE: PLANNING MANHATTAN NORTH OF THE STREET GRID

by

GAIL KATHERINE ADDISS, R.A.

A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2019
The Critique Became the Counter-Narrative: Planning Manhattan North of the Street Grid

by

Gail Katherine Addiss

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

Date

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Thesis Advisor

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ABSTRACT

The Critique Became the Counter-Narrative: Planning Manhattan North of the Street Grid

by

Gail Katherine Addiss

Advisor: Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis

Northern Manhattan has a rich, complex history; this thesis focuses on key figures who discovered, documented, and sought to preserve it. These central figures created maps that documented the site’s many histories, as well as planned new streets and parks that shaped its future development. Starting with Andrew Haswell Green’s initial 1865 plan for the area north of the 155th Street terminus of the 1811 street grid, this paper analyzes the intertwined actions of civic leaders, preservationists, social reformers, archeologists, philanthropists, and an art historian who shaped the area’s design in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Green’s plan supported incremental development over time, as opposed to an immediately realized grid plan, and thus supported both the later integration of new connections from the island to the mainland, and the preservation of areas along the waterfronts as parkland. This later became the planning model for Greater New York.

This paper argues that through subsequent planning and preservation actions, the area north of the 1811 street grid realized a unique sense of place unattainable within the grid plan’s imposed orthogonal system. It discusses the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society (ASHPS), founded by Green in 1895. This Society sought to strengthen the sense of place through preserving historic hilltop Revolutionary War fortifications and their associated aesthetic views. The paper introduces Reginald Pelham Bolton, who became a leader of the ASHPS after Green’s 1903 death. Bolton, an engineer, and a group of archeologists, without formal training, began to investigate, and document both Revolutionary War and Native American artifacts being lost in the rapidly developing neighborhood. In 1904 he presciently proposed to preserve the Native
American archeological sites in what would later become Inwood Hill Park at the north end of the island as a bold act of land preservation within the expanded metropolis of Greater New York.

In a similar act of land preservation in 1911, Julia Isham Taylor and her aunt Flora Isham donated a public park with purchased land and from the family’s hilltop estate, with the stipulation that the city would preserve the view to the Hudson and the Palisades for the public. The new park thus introduced an aesthetic directive into the city’s design vocabulary. Progressive Era Borough President George McAneny, who worked with the Ishams to redesign the streets to preserve the view, employed the new park to create a new residential neighborhood close to parks and to public transportation. This type of integrated design became a foundational narrative for the Progressive City Planning Movement.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper is dedicated to Justine Price, Cindy Lobel, and Sid Horenstein all of whom passed during its writing.

There are too many people to thank for their kind help. I'm grateful to my patient and thoughtful advisor, Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis for her insights and encouragement. I thank my husband, Jim Addiss for many things particularly his close readings. William Parry generously offered his insights and archeological scholarship. Don Rice and Cole Thompson shared enthusiasm and wisdom. Libby Howland, Margaret Ryan and Geoff Wisner read this paper with gracious forbearance. My colleagues in the George McAneny Study Group, especially Katherine Ciganovic, Jon Ritter, Charles Starks, Brad Vogel, John Werner, and Anthony Wood continue to find new surprises in the work of our beloved GMA. Scholars Lee Gray, Michael Miscione, and Reuben Rose-Redwood freely shared their hard-won knowledge with a neophyte.

Later than most, I entered the inter-disciplinary MALS program to learn New York’s history. I am grateful that I was rewarded by the teachings of Stephen Brier, Thomas Kessner, Cindy Lobel, Eric Lott, Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis, Katherine Manthorne, Anthony Picciano, Michael Rawson, and Robert Singer. I’m grateful to Nicole Elden, Erin Garrow and Christopher Schmidt for their help to understand the writing process.

I’m grateful to the kind and smart librarians who assisted me at CUNY, Donna Davies and Roxanne Shirazi, in particular; and those at Columbia, Cornell, New York Historical Society, NYPL, and Princeton.
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Chapter One

Introduction

This then is where I am, and as I settle into work, I find I have to resolve, step by step, experiences and questions that once moved like light. The life of country and city is moving and present: moving in time, through the history of a family and a people; moving in feeling and ideas, through a network of relationships and decisions.¹

Raymond Williams

*The Country and the City*

1800 acres of very rugged & beautiful ground—impracticable to be brought into the square street & avenue system of the rest of the island.²

Frederick Law Olmsted describing the land of Manhattan north of the grid

This paper examines the design process that shaped the development of Manhattan Island north of 155th Street as a radical departure from the 1811 gridded city plan to its south (Figure 1-1). It examines, in Williams’s words, who and what constituted the “network of relationships and decisions”³ that proposed a design solution which not only left the land undisturbed to be later preserved in large areas as parks and protected historic sites, but also presciently anticipated the city’s growth beyond the island. The 1811 Commissioners’ Street Grid Plan abruptly and arbitrarily ended at 155th Street. In 1865 Andrew Haswell Green (1820-1903), in his role as Comptroller of the Central Park Commission, initiated a plan for the area to the north of the grid, then the rest of New York City as the next phase of the expansion of the growing metropolis.

³ Williams, *The Country and the City*, 7.
Unlike the grid, this plan would prepare for the city’s growth by allowing for incremental development over time as newer needs developed. Green proposed a street design using criteria more nuanced, far-sighted, and site-specific than those of the better-known grid plan (Figure 1-2). Prior to drawing plans, he wrote an extensive essay on city planning citing the need to study the area being designed which could, “only be fully comprehended after a thorough examination of the subject and all its bearings.”4 The earlier grid plan relegated existing topography to a position distinctly secondary to its geometry (See Figure 1-1). Green’s plan, on the other hand, responded to the topography rather than obliterating it. The plan acknowledged and preserved existing and historic places along with adjacent open spaces; it also preserved many of the existing streets, including Broadway, the main south-north thoroughfare, that followed topographically determined earlier Native roads (Figures 1-3 and 1-4). By continuing Green’s planning process, the present waterfront became a nearly continuous series of steeply hilled and forested parks. Even such incidents as large stones—glacial erratics and outcroppings of native schist and marble—are visible presences in the parks and even among the buildings, and a Native American rock shelter has been preserved.

Figure 1-1. William Bridges. “The map of the city of New York and island of Manhattan, as laid out by the commissioners appointed by the legislature, April 3d, 1807 is respectfully dedicated to the mayor, aldermen and commonality thereof.” Issued: New York, 1811. Source: Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C.

4 Andrew H. Green, Communication to the Commissioners of the Central Park relative to the Laying Out of the Island above 155th Street; The Drive from 59th St. To 155th St., and Other Subjects, Central Park Commission Tenth Annual Report for the Year Ending December 1867, published 1868. 113. Green’s essay on pages 101-148 is dated December 1865.
This paper presents the intertwined actions of overlapping groups of civic leaders, preservationists, social reformers, archeologists, philanthropists, and an art historian, all of whom shaped the design of northern Manhattan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It argues that this process began an important new development in city planning in two ways. It was informed by site-specific conditions, and it introduced a newer and more nuanced analysis of the city's needs not addressed by the grid plan. The newer plan added careful observation of the land, including its archeology, as an essential element of the argument for land preservation into the
agenda of later Progressive Era urban planning. This paper proposes that rather than seeing this area as an unplanned “non-grid,” the historic planners of Northern Manhattan had evolving motives for both preservation and development. Protagonists acted to conserve existing landscapes, protect aesthetic views beyond the land, create new types of urban neighborhoods, and preserve both Revolutionary War and newly discovered Native American sites. In addition, the process that started in 1865 led to the later plan to expand the city onto the mainland and adjacent islands. Although not as well-known than the grid’s familiar narrative, this planning practice resonates with methods and goals that are now an accepted norm.

Planning Northern Manhattan as Part of a National Discussion

In 1901, at a ceremony to unveil a Revolutionary War monument, Green used the opportunity to argue for the creation of a large park in northern Manhattan. He described the land:

It is the highest, boldest, and most diversified section of our ancient city, and it commands a combined view of land and water, of city and country, unsurpassed in the United States. It is the only portion of Manhattan Island where the shore-line of our American Rhine has been left in its native picturesqueness, and the only portion where any trace of its pristine beauty remains undecorated and unraised by the leveling march of so-called ‘public improvements.’

Green’s derision of the phrase ‘public improvements’ was his critique of the then accepted term of art for land manipulation. In planning this small area—only 1800 acres—he restated a debate between two fundamental national concepts of land use: manipulation for short-term economic benefit and Green’s newer concept of land preservation to support longer-term benefits. Green and the Central Park Commission had not only critiqued the local grid to its south, but also the dominant

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national agenda of land transformation for economic development—a directive shaping America’s westward expansion, and its new cities where grid plans became a norm.\(^6\)

Green’s argument for land preservation was contrary to a national precedent of altering natural land formations for new construction that began early in the republic. George Washington (1732-1799), who had been a land surveyor prior to his presidency (1789-1797), understood the positive future economic benefits to the new country that land manipulation could bring.\(^7\) Although the desire to save old buildings had also begun early in the United States, land preservation was not yet included. Historian Charles Hosmer cites the *Pocket Diary* of architect Benjamin Latrobe (1764-1820), who wrote on August 3, 1796, of his sadness at the destruction of an old Virginia house that was in the way of a larger plan: “Green Spring, The antiquity of the old house… ought to plead in [behalf of] the project, but its inconvenience and deformity are more powerful advocates of its destruction. In it the oldest inhabited house in North America will disappear.”\(^8\) Latrobe’s architectural designs demonstrated that he valued historic buildings. One of the first professionally trained architects to practice in America, he helped to shape the new country’s image of democracy through such historically referenced and classically detailed public buildings as the U. S. Capitol. If Hosmer had cited a passage a few pages further into Latrobe’s journal, however, he could have read both Latrobe’s, and more importantly, President Washington’s differing view of preservation as it applied to land. As he approached Mount Vernon on Sunday, July 16, 1797, Latrobe wrote a richly detailed description of the site:

> I travelled through a bold, and broken country to Colchester. … Towards the east Nature had lavished magnificence, nor had art interfered with her advantages. Before the portico a lawn extends on each hand from the front of the house and a grove of locust trees on each


side to the edge of the bank. Down the steep slope of trees and shrubs are thickly planted. They are kept so low as not to interrupt the view, but merely to furnish an agreeable border to the extensive prospect beyond [the president's hilltop house].

He then offered an account of his conversation with the president; whose extensive knowledge of the land became evident:

The conversation then turned upon the rivers of Virginia. He gave me a very minute account of all their directions, their natural advantages, and what he conceived might be done for their improvement by art. He then inquired whether I had seen the Dismal Swamp, and seemed particularly desirous of being informed upon the subject of the canal going forward there.

In these three journal entries, Latrobe identified a fundamental incongruence between building and land conservation. He acknowledged the historic or culturally accepted aesthetic reasons for building preservation. Yet both he and Washington, while clearly appreciating its beauty, saw land as malleable, to be manipulated as needed for development. Land was a raw material to be transformed for economic growth, or as Washington had called development: “improvement by art.”

Green, while fully supporting economic growth, objected to the land in northern Manhattan being “improved by art,” or “public improvement,” as he called it at the time when these ‘improvements’ were becoming codified into a foundational part of American self-definition. In a now-famous presentation at the convention of the American Historical Society in 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner restated Washington’s belief in land manipulation’s value as underlying the American character. His frontier thesis offered the concept of land transformation in the westward expansion as integral to forging democracy. The triumph of the nation was followed by a new era of Western

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development. “The national forces projected themselves across the prairies and plains. Railroads, fostered by government loans and land grants, opened the way for settlement.”

To challenge this view and to further reinforce his belief in land preservation, in 1895, two years after Turner’s speech, Green founded the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society (ASHPS). This organization began with very broad and evolving definitions of what both Scenic and Historic preservation were. It supported a variety of causes, and through its political agency acted to preserve large areas such as the Palisades Interstate Park, and it responded to a wide range of civic causes. Both Reginald Pelham Bolton (1856-1942) and George McAneny (1869-1953), who took leading roles in later planning northern Manhattan, were active ASHPS members, and as a result each of their separate planning initiatives reflected ASHPS goals.

Methodology: Physical Observation, Newspapers, Maps, and Archives

My research began when I was a municipal architect, through observation of buildings and roads that were unique to this area. Carefully detailed and specifically sited, these elements implied that they were parts of an intentional plan, one that was not readily apparent to me at the time. In 1988 the Department of Transportation had ordered the demolition of a small viewing pavilion on the Henry Hudson Parkway as a blighted roadway obstruction. With minimal funding, we at the Parks Department stepped in to restore it. The pavilion, built as a respite for motorists to enjoy the scenic panorama on the new roadway, had become a makeshift homeless shelter (Figure 1-5).

An intentionally set fire damaged the coffered wooden ceiling and tiled roof, causing them to collapse into the Doric columns. This fallen-down classically detailed pavilion, overlooking a river, elsewhere could have appeared as a romantically sited ruin. Here, however, with its view obscured by

15 The pavilion was a scaled-down design from an earlier Arnold W. Brunner and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. 1913 plan for extension of Riverside Drive.
overgrown trees, it was an isolated symbol of urban problems. Its details and siting stimulated the insight that it had been part of a larger planning vision that was no longer evident.

Figure 1-5. Inspiration Point Pavilion. Source: Municipal Archive, undated early photograph.

Later, in 1992, as Supervising Architect for the New York Police Department’s Safe Streets/Safe City Community Policing Program, I came to the neighborhood again, this time to site a new Police Precinct building. At that time, all of Manhattan north of 155th Street had only one police precinct to patrol the extensive, hilly, and densely populated area. That precinct, the Thirty-Fourth, then had the city’s highest murder rate.16 Washington Heights had become one of many centers of drug trafficking in the citywide crack-cocaine epidemic. In July 1992, after a nearly weeklong civil disturbance broke out in a forty-square-block area, Mayor Dinkins and Police Commissioner Brown directed that the area be divided into two precincts and a new precinct house built—quickly.17 The maps of the area showed that the numerically ordered streets stopped at 155th Street; the streets to the north with names like Audubon, Fairview, and Laurel Hill followed an alternate, yet not readily discernible plan. To locate the new police building, we drove on these steeply inclined curved streets adjacent to large parks named for forts. Although the area appeared to be the result of a considered design, a plan that addressed the existing terrain and acknowledged historic sites, it did not offer the

grid’s organizational clarity. It did, however, appear to be an appealing neighborhood, with many parks, views to the rivers, and two subways.

I moved to Inwood in 2003. In the winter of 2003-4, my neighbor Elisa van der Linde and I walked into Isham Park, a small hillock park in northern Manhattan. Park Terrace West, the short residential street on which we lived, ran through the park. In winter this street had an extended view of the Hudson River, Spuyten Duyvil, and the Palisades beyond. Adjacent apartment buildings had been integrated into a unified design. Crafted ashlar exedra benches indicated this was an older park. These stone benches were arranged around a circular low seating wall. An unassuming plaque on the wall provided a chronology of the series of the Isham family’s land gifts from 1911 through 1917. The park appeared to be part of the same sophisticated plan as the streets and pavilion I had seen earlier. They all might be part of a newer city planned as an alternate to the grid. As we sat on the curved benches, we decided to research the park’s history and its place in the neighborhood’s planning.

An online search of the New York Times’s archive provided the two articles that significantly informed all of our later research. On May 26, 1911, the newspaper published a letter from Julia Isham Taylor (1866-1939) to then Borough President George McAneny. In the letter, she offered six acres of her family’s land as a public park if the city agreed to revise the proposed street arrangement to provide a more cohesive park and ensure that the public would have “a beautiful view of the Hudson across Spuyten Duyvil Creek.” The letter exhibited the clarity of her family’s design intent and her skill in negotiating. It also showed McAneny’s willingness and ability to adapt the plan to locate streets to accommodate an aesthetic priority into this new part of the city’s plan. The letter and later the revised maps showed that preserving the view to the river and the Palisades beyond was a paramount criterion that shaped the park’s design. This was one of many contacts

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between the family and government officials as they gave more land, while the Borough President’s office revised its maps to ensure the protection of the views to the river. This map, showing street arrangements to protect the views, was then unique in public planning.

A large, nearly full-page illustrated article in the March 24, 1912 *New York Times* Sunday Supplement described the gift of Isham Park as a significant contribution to historic and natural elements of the city. The unnamed author placed the park in a larger context, beyond simply transferring a few acres of trees and lawn from private to public hands. Isham Park appeared to be a catalyst to create a larger adjacent park, as well as the residential construction adjacent to them. The recently opened elevated rapid transit system had begun to stimulate new residential building. Isham Park became part of a rich and complex network of interconnected agendas among planners and preservationists.

The author introduced and interviewed those still alive as the key figures in planning northern Manhattan: Borough President George McAneny, who had been both an innovative transportation planner and preservationist; inventor/writer/archeologist Reginald Pelham Bolton; Parks Department Commissioner Charles Stover (1861-1922); and author/artist/historian Samuel Isham (1855-1914). These principal figures, discussed in later chapters, supported site-specific planning and preservation informed by their unique responses to the approaching urbanization. Despite Isham Park’s small size, it played a large role in this early vision for northern Manhattan. The article’s headline stated that the park would “Revive the Unfulfilled Dream of Andrew H. Green for Acquiring Inwood Hill so the City Would have a Park on Each end of the Island.” Learning the details of Green’s vision became my priority in researching the Central Park Commission’s records.

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21 Charles Stover founded the Neighborhood Guild, an early settlement house, and along with Lillian Wald in 1886 founded the Outdoor Recreation League (ORL) to advocate for outdoor active play areas for the city’s children. Department of Parks and Recreation website.
and the series of maps beginning in 1865 that became the masterplan for the area above 155th Street. This research expanded into the archives of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society (ASHPS) and Green’s papers. 23

These people—Green, Bolton, McAneny and Isham family members, Samuel Isham, his sister Julia Isham Taylor, as well as their aunt Flora Isham (1832-1932)—had overlapping visions for the area’s future. Collectively they viewed land preservation as a donnée, an understood and accepted presence on which they based their creative narratives of the past and the future city. They all acknowledged the rapidly approaching future city, yet acted as agents to alter the coming changes in ways that would preserve what each valued about the land. To do this work they created maps. The maps selectively included fragments of the past and the geography they each proposed to keep in the future city. Each of the maps they created provided a fundamental insight into the planned future city based on an expansive vision of preservation and future design.

This paper is an account of their actions as they described their vision through the maps that they made to document the history of the land and to design its future. The poet Margaret Ryan provides an analogy that is useful to understand mapmaking: the writer describes only what she wants the reader to see, and offers the example of walking with her friend, Iris, who is blind. During the walk, Margaret describes details of buildings and parts of the natural environment or chooses not to. Iris sees only what Margaret describes. 24 This clarity of choosing and excluding information is integral to successful map making. Each of the following chapters is informed by the protagonists’ mapping the future of northern Manhattan.

23 Green’s papers at the NYPL and the NYHS are extensive. The Central Park Commission minutes and Annual Reports demonstrated Green’s actions to expand the Commission’s role in city planning. The ASHPS documents detail the wide-ranging interests of the members and their broad concepts of preservation. The ASHPS papers also show the interconnections among Green, Bolton, McAneny, and Julia Isham Taylor.

24 Margaret Ryan in conversation in New York, November 16, 2017.
Chapter Two: The New York City Street Grid Plan Obliterated the Past and Impeded the Future—Central Park to the Rescue

This chapter begins with a brief review of scholarly research on the 1811 Commissioners’ Grid Plan. It then concentrates on mid-nineteenth-century criticism of the grid’s omissions that became apparent as its construction moved northward. Many vocal critics, such as William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878) and Henry W. Bellows (1814-1882), wrote of the plan’s failure to meet the changing city’s needs. Their criticism led to inserting the Central Park into the grid plan. The chapter discusses the newly formed Central Park Commission’s role both in constructing the park and then expanding this role to modify the grid plan by adding McGowan’s Pass to Central Park: an early act of historic preservation.

Chapter Three: The Central Park Commission Becomes a City Planning Agency and Presents a New Vision of the City North of the Grid

This chapter discusses the Commission’s expansion of its purview to plan areas beyond the park. It became an early city planning agency that reinserted Broadway and created additional parks. The chapter focuses on how the Central Park Commissioners, who had not yet completed the park’s construction, began to plan streets in the rugged land of farms and estates in rural northern Manhattan, beyond the also-incomplete grid plan. Andrew Haswell Green’s extensive 1865 essay on city planning for upper Manhattan will introduce his uniquely specific, local plan as it informed his vision for planning greater New York beyond Manhattan.

Chapter Four: The Strategic View becomes the Aesthetic View—Preserving Historic Sites and Their Views

During the Revolutionary War, military leaders strategically sited many fortifications on northern Manhattan’s high ground to survey the rivers below. This chapter begins with the loss of
one of those sites to street grid construction. It discusses subsequent preservation efforts for sites further north. The ASHPS worked with historians and newly-formed heritage groups to mobilize preservation efforts in northern Manhattan, starting in 1901 with Fort Washington. Through the ASHPS efforts, these historic strategic views became parts of large public parks that provided extended scenic public views of the river that Green called “America’s Rhine.”

Chapter Five: Preserving the Past of the Other—Archeological Investigations of Native American Sites and Artifacts

Northern Manhattan had been an important site of early Native American culture. This chapter discusses the work of a group of self-trained archeologists. Bolton, along with William Calver, Alexander Chenoweth, Edward Hall, and Allanson Skinner discovered the extent of the Native settlements and worked to document and preserve them in the face of new construction. After Green’s sudden 1903 death, Bolton took a leading role in ASHPS affairs and focused its work in northern Manhattan. Increasingly, he saw the importance of documenting Native American history being lost as the city moved north. In 1904, at Bolton’s request, the ASHPS called for the preservation of Inwood Hill Park as an important Native American site. This bold act of land preservation to protect Native sites and remains, in a large and growing city, predated the national Antiquities Act of 1906. These archeologists promoted public knowledge of the earlier Native presence through exhibits and many publications.

Chapter Six: Isham Park—The Privileged View Becomes the Pedestrian View

This chapter discusses Isham Park as a compression of the larger ideas into a small portion of the whole. This private-to-public land transfer began with an agreement to alter a proposed street map to create a public view of the Hudson from a new sidewalk. Samuel Isham, in his History of American Painting, had championed the paintings of the Hudson River School as foundational to larger meanings in American culture. The view his family acted to preserve referenced the associative
meanings in those paintings. Julia Isham Taylor and Flora Isham had the power to preserve a beautiful public view when many in the city did not. Borough President George McAneny, who was ubiquitous in Progressive causes throughout his career, supported their efforts for Isham Park and for the later preservation of adjacent Inwood Hill Park. These were part of a larger agenda of Progressive Era planning initiatives that included linking newer parts of the city by public transportation and integrating parks into residential design.

This park fused the aesthetic value of the Hudson River School of paintings, championed by Samuel Isham, and the loosely defined Progressive city planning initiatives.

**Chapter Seven: Conclusion**

This chapter discusses Bolton’s unique multilayered maps that attempted to depict the city as a work-in-progress that simultaneously showed many pasts, the present and planned future construction. Green, Bolton, the Ishams, McAneny all saw that urbanization was approaching this unique place, and acted as agents to alter the coming changes in ways that would preserve what each had valued about the land. They accommodated the changes to come by creating maps that showed a deep understanding and respect for the land and its past that the grid plan to the south did not.
Chapter Two

The 1811 Street Grid Obliterated the Past and Impeded the Future—The Central Park to the Rescue

I started back, choosing unfamiliar streets. They turned out to be no different from the ones I knew.¹

The New York City 1811 street grid is now a celebrated phenomenon of urban design. Hillary Ballon described it as the city’s first great civic enterprise that speaks to the city’s optimism about its future and courage to do big things.² Seen in this present context, as the zoned central business district of a larger metropolis with many added parks and the diagonal Broadway reestablished, the grid’s success as a part of Greater New York is rarely disputed.

This chapter, however, discusses this grid not in the present, but as an untested proposal of the later nineteenth century, a time when many questioned if the proposed plan would adequately address the expanding city’s newer needs. The grid that promised Cartesian clarity and order in fact would disrupt much of the city’s existing landscape without offering any alternate amenities or open spaces. Eventually, after extensive criticism of the grid’s paucity of open space, the city altered the plan to insert a large well-designed park.

A Plan for a Larger City Not Unlike the Existing One

The historical origins of the 1811 street grid are well known.³ In 1807, during his first term as mayor, DeWitt Clinton (1769-1828), formed a Commission to plan the city’s northward expansion (Figure 2-1). He cited the 1686 Dongan Charter that gave the small colonial outpost at the southern end of the island...

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jurisdiction over the entire island for his enterprising action. Clinton was, in his time, the major political and intellectual presence in both the city and state, serving as a U.S. Senator, twice as governor, and three times as mayor. He believed in building public infrastructure to support economic growth, as shown by his two most enduring projects: the New York City street grid and the Erie Canal. The canal that connected the new nation’s interior through the Great Lakes and the Hudson River to New York City placed both the state and city as central to shaping national policy and led to the city becoming the country’s economic center. The canal attested to his vision of planning in a time of industrial growth and technological innovations: the street grid plan that more than quadrupled city’s area, however, did not prepare an adequate and differentiated infrastructure for the city’s large-scale urban transformation, stimulated by the opening of the canal in 1825.

Figure 2-1. John Wesley Jarvis, Portrait of DeWitt Clinton, oil on canvas circa 1816 (detail) National Portrait Gallery, Washington D. C.

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4 “New Amsterdam” became “New York” on September 8, 1664, when the Dutch West India Company transferred the colony to become part of the British Empire. This agreement was finalized in the 1667 Treaty of Breda, in which several European powers agreed to colonial land redistribution (The Dutch kept Sumatra). In the Charter, Lieutenant Governor and Vice Admiral Thomas Dongan documented that King James the Second had given clear authority over the entire island of Manhattan to the City of New York.


Clinton appointed three men as Commissioners: Gouverneur Morris (1752-1816); New York State Surveyor General, Simeon De Witt (1756-1839); and John Rutherfurd (1760-1840). Within four years, they would plan the small city’s enormous expansion. At the same time, however, both Morris and De Witt spent much time upstate engaged in siting and designing the canal. John Randel, Jr. (1787-1865) a young surveyor, later joined the project to carry out the largest part of the work. His extensive and detailed farm maps and his hand-drawn grid plan indicate his knowledge of the physical landscape well beyond the newly imposed geometry (Figure 2-2). As the 1811 deadline loomed, the Commissioners hastily produced a large paper plan showing a rectilinear street grid of narrow east–west streets and broader north-south avenues, with over two thousand long and narrow blocks each 200 by 800 feet. Their plan for the large street grid rotated its axis to 29° east of true north. This orientation paralleled the proposed grid to the island’s axis. It showed streets proceeding northward to an abrupt and arbitrary termination at faraway and hypothetical 155th Street.

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8 Koeppel, *City on a Grid*, 2015. These three men had extensive public lives beyond the task of designing the city. Gouverneur Morris had been instrumental in writing the Articles of Confederation. After serving as ambassador to France, and later a U.S. Senator, he became the Chairman of the Erie Canal Commission. This was concurrent with their city planning work. Simeon De Witt had served as surveyor during the Revolution and planned the city of Albany. Evan Cornog credits Morris as a “real” author of the Erie Canal as early as 1792. In *The Birth of Empire DeWitt Clinton and the American Experience, 1769-1828*, 106, he stated that Morris had a “vision of a canal system” that he discussed in 1777 with George Washington at the Saratoga campaign.


10 William Bridges, Remarks of the Commissioners. “To some it may be a matter of surprise that the whole island has not been laid out as a city. To others it may be a subject of merriment that the Commissioners have provided space for a greater population than is collected at any spot on this side of China.” Remarks of the Commissioners for laying out streets and roads in the City of New York, under the act of April 3, 1807. William Bridges, *Map of the City of New York and Island of Manhattan With Explanatory Remarks and References* (New York: William Bridges), 1811. The Columbia University’s Weatherhead East Asia Institute estimated China’s population in 1811 at 358,610,000. “Rapid increases occurred especially between 1749 and 1811 during the Qing dynasty when the country’s population doubled from 177,495,000 to 358,610,000. Issues and Trends in China’s Demographic History. Asia for Educators.
The grid extended the proposed city into the country and farmland well beyond the existing one, with minimal suggestions for future use and without acknowledging or accommodating existing site conditions. With no articulation of proposed infrastructure—water, sewerage, or surface drainage—and no attempt to differentiate uses within the plan, it became clear, as grid scholar Reuben Rose-Redwood stated, that “its chosen objective, was to construct a coherent landscape using standardized city blocks and an establishing spatial order.” The plan’s limited goal was to create a larger civic entity rather than a comprehensively planned urban community. The Commissioners proposed a greatly expanded city in which land became a commodity more than a place. City Engineer William Bridges’ short essay that accompanied the 1811 described the street layout as planned for uniformly constructed small buildings, and explained that the economics of the plan had a great influence on the design:

In considering that subject they could not but bear in mind that a city is to be composed principally of the habitations of men, and that straight-sided and right-angled houses are the most cheap to build and the most convenient to live in.

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12 William Bridges, Remarks of the Commissioners for Laying out Streets and Roads in the City of New York, Under the Act of April 3, 1807. Bridges was aware of the omissions and defended them in his essay: “To show the obstacles which frustrated every effort can be of no use. It will perhaps be more satisfactory to each person who may feel aggrieved to ask himself whether his sensations would not have been still more unpleasant had his favorite plans been sacrificed to preserve those of a more fortunate neighbor.”

13 Rose-Redwood, Rationalizing the Landscape, 48. Rose-Redwood has written extensively on street grids. His most recent book is Grids: An Urban Anthology (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2018).

14 William Bridges, Remarks of the Commissioners for Laying out Streets and Roads in the City of New York, Under the Act of April 3, 1807.

15 Bridges, Remarks
When, therefore, from the same causes the prices of land are so uncommonly great, it seems proper to admit the principles of economy to greater influence than might, under circumstances of a different kind, have consisted with the dictates of prudence and the sense of duty.\textsuperscript{16}

Bridges contended that the island as surrounded by water is a justification for the paucity of proposed squares and open spaces, yet the grid plan, unlike the older localized plans that were oriented towards the waterfront, did not address the port or piers, or even propose a connection with the waterfront (Figure 2-3).\textsuperscript{17} Bridges’ phrase, “principles of economy,” informed the Commissioners’ decision to choose the most basic type of rectilinear grid plan, which had been a standard element of city planning design from early times. In his survey of the history of early grid plans, geographer Dan Stanislawski summed up the historic benefits attributed to early grid planning that closely parallel Bridges’ 1811 justification: “Perhaps its greatest single virtue is the fact that as a generic plan for disparate sites it is eminently serviceable, and if an equitable distribution of property is desirable, there is hardly any other plan conceivable.”\textsuperscript{18}

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\textsuperscript{16} Bridges, \textit{Remarks}.

\textsuperscript{17} Kurt C. Schlichting, \textit{Waterfront Manhattan: From Henry Hudson to the High Line} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkin University Press, 2018). The street grid did not address existing or proposed waterfront interface. The 1725 Montgomery Charter, which permitted private ownership of land adjacent to the piers, led to the development of “water lots” that expanded the land; this had essentially privatized the waterfront. In the same volume that contains the “Remarks of the Commissioners,” Bridges cites an earlier, April 3, 1801, law that regulated wharves and slips. 15.

The Commissioners envisioned their expanded city as being much like the one they inhabited in 1811, composed of small, separate, purpose-built workshops and houses. William Chappel’s series of memory paintings, although done in the 1870s, recalled the city of the artist’s youth and provided closely observed details of the life of that city in the early nineteenth century, the type of city that the Commissioners knew well and expected to continue (Figure 2-4).19 This image depicts a group of ten men constructing a detached wood-framed house between two similar houses. The unpaved road (Grand Street) at the edge of the growing city entered the rolling countryside just beyond the last small house. This image encapsulates the Commissioners’ vision of the city’s expansion as the street grid construction would slowly progress into the unbuilt part of the island over the course of many years.

![Figure 2-4. William P. Chappel (American, 1802-1878) “House Raising” 1870. Oil on slate paper. Dimensions: 6 1/8 x 9 1/4 in. (15.6 x 23.5 cm). Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art.](image)

Bridges’ dismissal of the plan’s lack of “circles, ovals and stars, which certainly embellish a plan,” implied that there were no existing or planned buildings that would require them.20 Other than widening the north-south avenues and some of the crosstown streets, the plan proposed no hierarchy of design. The

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20 Bridges, Remarks.
Commissioners were familiar with both Christopher Wren’s 1758 Plan to rebuild London and L’Enfant’s 1791 plan for the new Federal Capitol City-Washington D.C (Figure 2-5). Both had stars and ovals to accommodate grand civic structures. Although New York was no longer the center of national government, by building the canal Clinton positioned the city to become a commercial center that would support large cultural institutions. As Frederick Law Olmsted later noted, the grid made no accommodations for these public aspirations:

If a proposed cathedral, military depot, great manufacturing enterprise, house of religious seclusion or seat of learning needs a space of ground more than sixty-six yards in extent from north to south; the system forbids that it shall be built in New York. On the other hand, it equally forbids a museum, library, theatre, exchange, post office or hotel, unless of great breadth, to be lighted or to open upon streets from opposite sides.


A Fixed Grid in a Changing City—A Lot Happened in the Nineteenth Century

21 Clinton supported many New York cultural institutions. He was a founding member of the New-York Historical Society in 1804.
22 Frederick Law Olmsted and James Croes, Preliminary Report of the Landscape Architect and the Civil and Topographical Engineer, Upon the Laying out of the Twenty-Third and Twenty-Fourth Wards, New York City Board of the Department of Public Parks, December 20, 1876. The Twenty-Third and Twenty-Fourth Wards were in the newly (1875) annexed part of New York City in what would become the Bronx. The Botanical Garden, the Zoological Park, Van Cortland Park, and New York University were located in the new annexed area.
The city that the 1811 street grid plan anticipated—two thousand rectangular blocks of small, uniformly constructed, low-scale residences—was not the city that came into being as the nineteenth century progressed. Shortly after the Common Council ratified the plan, the envisioned city began to disappear with the appearance of taller buildings, new systems of transportation, and increased population. Wealth, invention, industry, and migration altered every aspect of the predicted city. Fifty years after the proposed plan for “the habitation of men,” New York City, first through its well-established, large Atlantic port, then Clinton’s 1825 Erie Canal and the later industry supporting the Civil War, became the national center of industrial capitalism, where tall speculatively built buildings replaced small purpose-built ones. In this brief fifty years, every aspect of the city—cultural, economic, and physical—changed. The city became radically different from what the 1811 plan had envisioned and was on a trajectory to diverge further from the earlier model. A growing workforce, enlarged by immigration, created a new compressed urban mixture. From 1842 a reliable supply of clean water improved living conditions; the streets then also became used as utility conduits for the new water system. New expanded transportation methods followed the new streets to enlarge the inhabited city in uniform rectilinear blocks. This emerging hybrid city, as informed by the newer building types and industries, all sited within the grid system, initially appeared to function well into the mid-nineteenth century, when the grid’s omissions led to criticisms of many aspects of the city’s growth for which the grid plan was faulted.

Artists, Writers, and Ministers Critique the Grid's Failures, Document the City's Losses, and Center Their Hopes on Creating a Large Park

23 William Bridges, Remarks.
25 Edward K. Spann, and Gerard Koeppel speculated that two of the commissioners, along with Clinton, were away from New York City planning the Erie Canal, and gave more thought to siting it than to the city plan.
The grid’s northward construction encroached upon the existing nineteenth-century landscape of houses and farms that had been sited specifically in that landscape, and that the grid construction destroyed. This new and seemingly rational landscape, devoid of topography, nature, and as Marshall Berman has suggested, history, replaced places of meaning and memory with new, anonymous, and speculative construction for a yet unknown population. The 1854 map of New York (before Central Park, yet after the Croton Reservoir) provides a view of both the grid progressing and the existing farms and inhabited communities being eradicated (Figure 2-6). As Rose-Redwood described this process, “The grid, in other words, was not inscribed into a virgin wilderness but rather superimposed upon a pre-existing social order of property relations and small-scale environmental manipulation.”

Figure 2-6. “Topographical map of New York City, County and vicinity: showing old farm lines.” 1854. Source: NYPL Digital Collections.

28 Rose-Redwood, Rationalizing the Landscape, 51.
In the later nineteenth century, artist Eliza Pratt Greatorex and her sister, the writer Matilda Pratt Despard, provided a “pen-in-hand” record of old houses being lost to the new street plan. Calling themselves, “preservationists,” they began an ambitious and intrepid project to draw older buildings and landscapes, particularly the old trees being lost to the new street construction that accelerated after the Civil War. In a unique book of etchings, *Old New York, From Battery to Bloomingdale*, she created “a pictorial inventory of disappearing buildings [from 1865 to 1875] that was animated with the voices of present and past inhabitants, retrieved through material culture and oral history.” Moving northward from the southern tip at the Battery to northern Manhattan, she drew *en plein air* houses and landscapes as the grid’s construction altered the landscape (Figures 2-7 and 2-8).

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29 Greatorex, an American artist was born in Manorhamilton, Ireland in 1819/20 and died in Paris in 1897. She was a noted *en plein air* painter, among the few women in the Hudson River School. In 1868, she was the second woman elected to the National Academy of Design. When she began this project, she was a middle-aged widow who supported four children through sales of her art. These prints were later exhibited in the 1876 Centennial Exhibit in Philadelphia.  
31 Bridges, *Remarks*. Bridges noted that the Common Council amended the 1807 law in 1809 to permit removing trees for the new street construction.  
33 Katherine Manthorne, “The Lady with the Pen: The Graphic Art of Eliza Greatorex,” *Newington-Cropsey Cultural Studies Center*, Fall 2012. 7.
She had a direct view of the changes from her studio on Union Square that overlooked James Renwick’s (1818-1895) Church of the Puritans (Figure 2-9). The church, built in 1847, was less than twenty years old when it was demolished for a newer building for Tiffany Jewelers (Figure 2-10). Church steeples traditionally had been the tallest structures in the city but were then being replaced or overshadowed by taller commercial buildings. Her drawing showed the church as carefully sited on a hill in a wooded landscape. Tiffany’s replaced it by flattening the land, removing the trees, and filling the entire building lot. Although both buildings had historically referenced details, their forms and siting revealed the physical and symbolic changes in the new city. Renwick’s church was Ruskinian Gothic, designed to reestablish moral presence in the increasingly secular city. The Tiffany building used the newer cast-iron façade material patented by James Bogardus (1800-1874), which could replicate arbitrarily chosen architectural styles (without any Ruskin-

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34 Greatorex described Union Square as a “new and remote part of the city,” when the church was begun in 1844. 71.
35 John Ruskin (1819-1900), art critic and social philosopher, wrote the influential The Seven Lamps of Architecture in 1849. In it he proposed infusing moral traits—sacrifice, truth, power, beauty, life, memory and obedience—into the built form. His later works, particularly The Stones of Venice, critiqued industrial capitalism.
implied morality) in easily assembled parts in inexpensive, industrial façades.\textsuperscript{36} Although presently a well-respected\textsuperscript{37} precursor to skyscrapers, at the time, critics disparaged the buildings. Critic Christopher Gray wrote, “An unidentified reviewer for The Real Estate Record & Guide scrupulously remarked that the completed building was a ‘fine specimen of workmanship’ but painting the cast iron to resemble stone deceived no one and contributed to the building’s ‘utter poverty of design.’ ”\textsuperscript{38}

To many nineteenth century residents who lived in a violently changing city, the grid construction both created a large new city with an unknown future and disrupted established buildings that had been carefully sited in a landscape also destroyed. Marguerite Holloway, citing Martha Lamb’s \textit{History of the City of New York},

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} Anthony W. Robins, historian and former Landmarks Preservation Commission Survey Director, wrote: [It] “began as a mid-nineteenth-century cheap imitation of stone, in which the glories of the world’s past could be offered in modern times in mass-produced, ready-to-build versions. But cast-iron soon developed into a remarkable technology expressive of the industrial revolution, capable of entirely new architectural effects.” Municipal Art Society Website:
\item \textsuperscript{37} “The SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District” became the first historic district in Manhattan, designated August 14, 1973. The nineteenth-century industrial buildings, then perceived as tall, are now a modestly scaled enclave.
\end{itemize}
described how surveyor John Randel and his men were pelted with vegetables, attacked by dogs, and arrested for trespassing, “At the approach of engineers, with their measuring instruments, and chain-bearers, dogs were brought into service, and whole families sometimes united in driving them out of their lots.”

While recording the churches, homes, and trees being lost, Greatorex and Despard derided the characterless new buildings replacing them: “Going down a new street, on one side of which a row of the usual modern dwellings had just been finished, we saw on the opposite side an abrupt and steep hill. A gate at what had been the foot of the long garden admitted us to a walk quiet, cool and thickly-shaded.” They mourned the loss of places of meaning: “The house of our picture, the Woolley House, called the Murray House, stood opposite to the beautiful villa of Coventry Waddell, which was untouched till about twenty years ago, when the hill on which it was built, was cut down, and the so-called Murray House was left to overlook in solitary and faded disdain the encroachments of the parvenu Fifth Avenue.” Because they had clear memories of places no longer there, they simultaneously remembered them as they saw new construction: “We can forget the hard pavements and the weary rows of new houses on the other side, and think, as we see around us the fields, the trees, and the broad peaceful river.”

In the middle of the nineteenth century, many prominent writers, and civic and religious leaders voiced dissatisfaction with the new city’s shortcomings. Greatorex and Despard noted the changes to the larger civic culture: “So many people knew each other, so frequent were the cheery salutation and warm hand clasp, that no one had the lost feeling which even an old inhabitant experiences now, in the ever-changing, unfamiliar crowds which fill the streets.” The construction of the new street grid had come to represent something other than a profitable spatial organization: a loss of humanity to material industrialism. Public

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41 Greatorex and Despard, *Old New York, From Battery to bloomingdale*, 95-96.
42 Greatorex and Despard, *Old New York, From Battery to Bloomingdale*, 146.
43 Greatorex and Despard, *Old New York, From Battery to Bloomingdale*, 45.
reactions to cholera epidemics in 1832 and 1849, and serious civil unrest in 1849, advanced the arguments for changes to large-scale planning. The city was unhealthy, and its residents were unhappy.

Henry Whitney Bellows (1814-1882) minister of the First Congregational Church of New York City (now the Unitarian Church of All Souls), worked along with congregants like Peter Cooper and William Cullen Bryant to improve the physical city as part of his religious work. In his essay in the April 1861 Atlantic Monthly, “Cities and Parks: With special Reference to the New York Central Park,” Bellows began with a sharply critical observation of the physical shortcomings of cities in general; he later described cities as the principal locations for fostering democratic civic engagement. He argued that the city’s physicality needed remediation to support its philosophical purpose:

The first murderer was the first city builder; and a good deal of murdering has been carried on in the interest of city-building ever since Cain’s day. Narrow and crooked streets, want of proper sewerage and ventilation, the absence of forethought in providing open space for the recreation of the people, the allowance of intermural burials, and of fetid nuisances, such as slaughter-houses and manufactories of offensive stuffs, have converted cities into pestilential inclosures. It is a great misfortune, that our commercial metropolis, the predestined home of five million people, should not have a single street worthy of the population, the wealth, the architectural ambition ready to fill and adorn it. But this rage for cities in America is prophetic . . . As cities have been the nurses of democratic institutions and ideas, democratic nations, for very obvious reasons, tend to produce them.

Bellows was one of many who argued for the physical improvements in cities because he understood their new importance. The United States was quickly following Europe’s earlier population shift from small towns and farms into cities. The Industrial Revolution, begun in England, introduced, "the idea of a new social order based on major industrial change." This rapid change relocated the economic base and

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44 Mark Evens, Dictionary of Unitarian & Universalist Biography, Henry Whitney Bellows June 4, 2004. He is most well-known for creating the United States Sanitary Commission to care for wounded soldiers during the Civil War.
population into unprepared larger cities. European city planners had begun to address these new urban needs; in America the planning was still on the early critical phase.

William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878), a poet noted for his close observations of nature, also had strong feelings about the city’s development. He wrote a brief introduction to Greatorex’s book, in which he decried the loss of historic buildings. Later Isaac Newton Phelps Stokes condensed one of Bryant’s frequent Evening Post editorials on the city’s failures into a short, pointed rant:

New York is the most inconveniently arranged commercial city in the world. Its wharfs are badly built, unsafe, and without shelter; its streets are badly paved, dirty, and necessarily overcrowded; its ware-houses are at a distance from the ships, and for the most part without proper labor-saving machinery . . . its railroad depots have no proper relations to the shipping or to the warehouses, . . . Its laborers are badly lodged, . . . the means of going from one part of the city to the other are so badly contrived that a considerable part of the working population . . . spend a sixth part of their working days on the street cars or omni-buses.

While these reformists cited many specific and concrete problems in the new city, they also voiced multiple reasons for the city to create a large natural area. After saying that the park would humanize and democratize the city as well as provide a natural open space, Bryant campaigned for the large urban park to place New York among the world’s major cities: “All large cities have their extensive public ground and gardens, Madrid, and Mexico their Alamedas, London its Regent’s Park, Paris its Champs Elysées, and Vienna its Prater. There are none of them, we believe, which have the same natural advantages of the picturesque and beautiful which belong to this spot…” He reflected the new public concept that the city’s place in the world

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48 *The Evening Post*, March 20, 1867.
49 Kurt Schlichting, *Waterfront Manhattan*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2018). The street grid’s failure to coordinate its interface with the port and pier system was not resolved until late in the nineteenth century. The Dongal Charter that had given the outpost at the island’s southern tip control of the entire island defined “land” to include the area between high to low tides. Later, the 1730 Montgomery Charter allowing private development along the rivers and to create water lots that extended the land into the water. Neither Bridges essay nor the map address specific conditions at the waterfront.
51 William Cullen Bryant, “A New Public Park.”
had changed. It had become the economic and cultural capitol that Clinton envisioned the Erie Canal would create. Progressive civic leaders joined the writers and artists in support of the large park.

On July 21, 1853, the New York State Legislature authorized 750 acres within the grid for the construction of “The Central Park.” In 1855 the city began to acquire the land between 59th Street and 106th Streets and Fifth and Eighth Avenues; it then held a design competition in 1857. In 1858, Greensward, designed by Fredrick Law Olmsted (1822-1903) and Calvert Vaux, (1824-1895), became the first significant critique of the street grid system by inserting a very large carefully designed/choreographed/constructed open natural area into the rigidly small scale of the 1811 grid.

A City Less Ordinary—A Heavy Burden on the New Central Park

On Saturday, May 1, 1858, The New York Times printed the plan of the proposed park on its front page in an expansive story about the park’s design (Figure 2-11). This plan included the numbered streets around the park to indicate the scale the park in terms familiar to New Yorkers who conceptualized the city’s size through the city blocks (most not yet built). The grid, despite its shortfalls, formed the public consciousness of the city’s geography by means of an ordered and easily accessible grasp of distances. The reader could comprehend the new park’s very large size as a transformational element being introduced into the city.

54 Central Park Website.
55 The annual reports of the Central Park Commission documented that construction continued throughout the Civil War (1862-1865). It was substantially completed in 1873.
56 “The Central Park.; Map and Description of the Plan which took the $2,000 Prize for the Central Park.” The New York Times May 1, 1858, 1, 2.
The plan, a column-wide hard-edged black and white etching, was not the beautifully rendered water-colored eight-foot-long competition rendering that Olmsted and Vaux had submitted. Yet, it began a public debate about a new topic—nature in the city. Blackmar and Rosenzweig describe this civic conversation, “The sheer number of newspapers and the willingness of editors to take up crusades both in support of and in opposition to the Greensward plan did introduce, as Vaux had suggested, a certain vitality to the process by which New Yorkers formed and expressed their own conceptions of a public park.”

In the *Times*, Olmsted introduced the plan: “As it is very difficult to derive any very precise conception of such a work upon a mere [verbal] description, we have had engraved and present to our readers the following plan of the Central Park.” He then wrote a narrative of the park’s artificial constructed spatial sequence for arguably the most significant work of art in New York in the nineteenth century.

Because of its size and scope, while understanding it to be man-made, for most residents it represented a form of nature in the city. In 1906 the artist and art historian Samuel Isham described Central Park’s role in New York’s civic culture: “It is almost the only beautiful thing for which the bulk of the people care.”

Central Park was a radical insertion into the grid’s predictive and previously uncontested urban order. In contrast to the repetitive uniformity of the grid, the very large park was a structured series of widely varied

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57 Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*, 147.
58 “The Central Park.; Map and Description of the Plan which took the $2,000 Prize for the Central Park.” *The New York Times* May 1, 1858, 1, 2.
settings. It introduced new spatial and aesthetic experiences that welcomed public participation. The park’s design intentionally negated the grid. By planting a double row of trees at the perimeter, the design attempted to screen views from the interior to the city beyond. The park therefore became a separate precinct with no reference to the grid for those within it.

The park’s design further separated it from city traffic by subordinating east-west traffic below the park level using a few east-west transverse roads that did not interrupt the pedestrian flow (Figure 2-12).

Lewis Mumford described Central Park as a successful innovation in urban design: “In its system of circulation, Olmsted and Vaux’s Central Park was superior to any conventional two-dimensional city plan; for by using overpasses and underpasses wherever possible, it provided independent traffic networks: footway for pedestrians, bridle paths for horseback riders, carriage drives for wheeled vehicles, and crosstown transverses for city traffic. In its provisions for unhampered circulation and safe crossings, this scheme made a unique contribution to city planning.”

Figure 2-12. “Longitudinal and Transverse Sections of the Transverse Roads,” The Central Park Commission Fifth Annual Report. 82.

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Park entrances led to curvilinear paths and constructed changes in terrain that immediately informed visitors they had left the street grid. In the mid-nineteenth century most of the city was to the park’s south. At the main southern entrance at 59th Street and Fifth Avenue after a short winding walk, Olmsted and Vaux inserted into the design a long, wide straight path with arching elms at fixed intervals. Now generally called the Mall, it led to the park’s major design element, the Terrace.

The Mall and Terrace offered a spatial counter-narrative to the grid by presenting a directional hierarchy absent from the street plan’s uniformity. The 1,100-foot-long Mall aligned with true north, as noted in a pavement detail, rather than to the constructed north of the grid plan’s avenues. By orienting the park’s central feature to true north, Olmsted and Vaux presented an alternate ordinal direction that predated the city’s street grid construction. The Mall led into “the center of the park” at the Terrace (Figure 2-13). The designed view north included nature seen at a distance beyond a lake constructed to appear infinite with unobstructed sky beyond it (Figure 2-14). This composition placed the park within the context of other contemporary artworks with multiple meanings of similar views: the paintings of the Hudson River School. In them the void, which represented the infinite sublime, became the true subject matter of the work. This unexpected element altered the city by its insertion of an aesthetic view beyond the city’s limited plan.

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61 The Central Park Commission Fifth Annual Report. 1859. Describes the Terrace as the “Center of the park.” 63.
Andrew Haswell Green—Comptroller of Central Park

Green did a hundred times more work than the rest of the commission together.\(^6^2\)

— Frederick Law Olmsted

This large new park, informed by Olmsted’s transcendental writings and Vaux’s design mastery, was mainly a significant and costly public work project, requiring massive infrastructure construction, procurement, and labor at a time when New York City was rife with *laissez-faire* market practices and political corruption (Figure 2-15). Strict fiscal oversight and rigorous accounting practices would be required for its construction to succeed. For this task, the State Legislature created the Central Park Commission and appointed men with honest reputations to run it, a political tactic by the Republican-led State Legislature that opposed the Democratic Tammany Hall.

Andrew Haswell Green (1820-1903) an anti-Tammany Democrat, came to the Central Park Commission in 1857 and led it until 1870 (Figure 2-16). He arrived in New York from his family home ‘Green Hill’ overlooking Worcester, Massachusetts as a very young man. He began his life in the city in the mercantile trade, but left briefly to work in the Caribbean. He came back to apprentice under attorney Samuel J. Tilden, who would later become governor, and who became his life-long friend and mentor. Green was appointed to the New York City school board in 1854 and quickly rose to become its president in 1855. At the Central Park Commission, he found a project that suited his skills and ambition, as Mayor Seth Low describes at a celebration for the 1899 Consolidation of Greater New York:

In 1857 he first became identified with Central Park by an appointment by the State as one of its first Commissioners when that section of the City was yet unformed, and his labors have left their impress upon almost every beautiful natural feature that has been preserved on the island north of Fifty-ninth street. First as Commissioner, then as Treasurer, then as President of the Park Board, and finally as Comptroller of the Park—an office created specially to give greater scope to his abilities, and never held by any other person—he bestowed for years more solicitous care upon the creation, development and extension of the City's thoroughfares and pleasure grounds than any other individual citizen.63

His dedication to and success overseeing Central Park then made him a momentous presence in New York. “Andrew H. Green played an extraordinary series of public roles in nineteenth-century New York.”64 Central Park established him as having the ability to complete extensive and transformational projects with fiscal acumen and visionary scope. He later became the City’s Comptroller who brought down the notorious Tweed Ring of corrupt government officials and contractors. His lengthy essays transformed and ultimately expanded the city.

Central Park Grows to 110th Street: An Act of Natural and Historic Preservation Prescient of Northern Manhattan’s Planning

As early as 1862, maps of Central Park showed the park extending north to 110th Street, rather than the announced 106th Street terminus. Green had wanted this area to be part of the park for a myriad of reasons both historic and aesthetic. It was the site of McGowan’s Pass, an early road through an opening between large stone outcroppings that allowed access north of the city (Figure 2-18). Forts built on the high rock outcroppings had extended views to Long Island Sound and the Hudson (Figures 2-19 and 2-20). That area also had a distinctive natural beauty that William Grant, the Park’s Supervising Engineer, who succeeded Olmsted, described to Green in a letter:

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65 Owners of adjacent properties who had had opposed the acquisition took legal action; the court supported the Central Park Commission’s plan to extend the park in a ruling by Judge Ingraham on April 22, 1863.
66 Diana diZerega Wall and Nan A. Rothschild. (2011) ”The Seneca Village Archaeological Excavations, Summer 2011,” *African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter* Volume 14, no. 3: Article 4. As noted in this article, the Central Park Commission did not preserve an archeological site within Central Park below 106th Street.
Having been entrusted with the exercise of a liberal discretion in the execution of this part of the work, since the retirement of Mr. F. L. Olmsted from its general direction, I trust the result is not inharmonious with the work at large. This district of the Park—from the boldness and ruggedness of its natural features, its masses of rock and prominent elevations commanding extended interior and exterior views, its deep indentations and depressions, occupied in their lowest parts by pools of water, running brooks, cascades and other accessories—presents an enlivening and picturesque contrast to the adjacent grounds that was much needed, giving variety to the general landscape, and keeping up the interest to visitors throughout the entire extent of the work.\(^67\)

Greatorex had included the natural masses of rock and prominent elevations commanding extended interior and exterior views,” which offered aesthetic interest within the park, and the site of a fortification. Her etching also showed the view, no longer present, from the fort to the coast (Figure 2-19).\(^68\)

On the brow of the broken and precipitous hills, now a part of the Park, that bound the Harlem plains on the south, may still be seen the remains of military fortifications, consisting of breastworks of earth about three feet in height. These works formed a part of a chain of fortifications of the war of 1812 that extended from the Harlem to the Hudson river, passing across the Park to a point a little west of what is now the Eighth avenue, and extending along the rocky eminence on the west of the plains to Manhattanville. The stone structure still standing on the rocky bluff overlooking the Harlem plains formed a portion of this line. . . In making some earth excavations on the northerly slope of the Great Hill, about two feet below the surface, the remains of a military encampment were found. . . There is sufficient known of the history of this property to warrant the belief that it was passed over, and perhaps occupied during the year 1776 by the British and Hessian troops shortly after their landing on the island.\(^69\)

Central Park transformed the city by inserting Olmsted and Vaux's designed narrative into the urban street grid. They had replaced a large section of the proposed grid with a constructed and compressed experience of landscaped nature. The park introduced a wider alternative for spatial planning within the city. It also established the Central Park Commission as fiscally astute planners with a vision for the city’s future.

\(^{67}\) From Office of Wm. H. Grant Superintending Engineer, January 1st, 1866. To Andrew H. Green, Esq., Comptroller of the Park, *The Central Park Commission Ninth Annual Report*, 107.

\(^{68}\) From Office of Wm. H. Grant Superintending Engineer, January 1st, 1866. To Andrew H. Green, Esq. 108.

\(^{69}\) *The Central Park Commission Eighth Annual Report*, 1865, 8.
Green’s northern addition to the park, after Olmsted’s departure, was an act of preservation within the grid system that presciently foretold of his later work both in northern Manhattan. The McGowan Pass addition preserved the pass as a place of historic significance to the city’s land before the grid. It preserved a historic building and expanded the park’s role into land and historic preservation that that designed area to the south had not (Figures 2-19 and 2-20).70

Figure 2-17. John Randel, “Composite of Farm Maps, 1818-1820.” McGowan’s Pass as the naturally occurring opening in the rocks through which Kingsbridge Road passed. It also shows the fortifications built for the 1812 war. Source: Museum of the City of New York.

Figure 2-18. Eliza Greatorex, “Central Park, old powder magazine of 1812.” 1875. The image shows the extended view from the fort. Source: NYPL Digital Collections.

70 Edward Hagaman Hall, McGowan’s Pass and Vicinity: A Sketch of the Most Interesting Scenic and Historic Section of Central Park in the City of New York. (New York: American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, 1905). Hall provided research that McGown’s Pass had been a battle site in the Revolutionary War. Earlier sources spelled the place name as “McGowan,” while ASHPS spelled it “McGown.”
Figure 2-19. Major and Knapp engravers, “Fort Fish on the Northside of Central Park.” 1965. Source: NYPL Digital Collection.

Figure 2-20. Edward Hagaman Hall, “Map of McGown’s Pass and Vicinity in 1776, with location of some modern sites.” McGown’s Pass and Vicinity: A Sketch of the Most Interesting Scenic and Historic Section of Central Park in the City of New York. (New York: American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, 1905), after 16.
Chapter Three

The Central Park Commission Becomes a City Planning Agency and Presents a New Vision of the City North of the Grid

This chapter discusses the Central Park Commission’s expanded role to reshape the city beyond Central Park. While the park was still being built, the Commissioners, led by Green, began an incremental program to construct new parks and keep older streets (like Broadway) within the street grid. They also ambitiously began to plan Manhattan north of the grid. Prior to this undertaking, in 1865 Green wrote an essay about the broad criteria needed for such a plan. The Commission produced a series of maps that subsequently showed the sequential planning of northern Manhattan based on Green’s essay. This series of maps outlined the hierarchical road building that prioritized connections beyond the island and preserved open space. Green’s 1865 essay proposed many ideas he later broadened in his 1868 essay that advance the concept of forming a Greater New York.

Expanding the Park’s Role in the City

Throughout the Civil War, the city prospered. Thanks to industries associated with the war, it became larger and wealthier, with expanded aspirations. Under Green’s direction, Central Park’s construction moved forward, despite the war’s depletion of the labor force. The Park became an integral part of the city for residents and a destination for visitors. The new park became the cynosure of desirable newly-built residential developments along its periphery. By all measures it was a successful enterprise, as the Central Park Commissioners were happy to document.

Both the State Legislature and Common Council required that the Central Park Commissioners (CPC) report annually to account for funds and document the construction’s progress. Influenced by Green’s advocacy to promote an expansive understanding of the park’s role in his vision for the city, the

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1 Clarence Cook, *A Description of the New York Central Park* (New York: F. J. Huntington, 1869). This illustrated guidebook to the park was a popular with visitors and residents.
Commissioners greatly enlarged their reports beyond simply accounting for funds to the penny and pages of tabulations for the costs of labor, mulch, and drainage pipes. These reports demonstrated that the park was directed by fiscally responsible men with a vision for the city’s welfare that had been missing from the 1811 plan. The leather-bound volumes provided wide-ranging overviews of the park’s use and its influence in the city. Within the park they tabulated and quantified many metrics associated with the park’s use: numbers of daily visitors; music concerts presented; meteors observed; quantity of wool sold from the sheep. They listed, using both Latin and English names of the animals, birds, plants and trees in the park. Strategically, the reports also charted the increased property value of the land around the park to document that its presence added to city’s wealth as well as the well-being of its steadily increasing population (Figure 3-1).

Figure 3-1. “The Assessed Value of the Wards surrounding the Park, for ten years.” Central Park Commission Ninth Annual Report, 1866, 15. Each annual report included a similar chart that showed the park as a financial asset to the city.
Plans, etchings, and later photographs of construction details and larger park views richly illustrated each volume (Figure 3-2). The yearly books included essays on the importance of observing nature and listening to music at public concerts. They placed the park as central to contributing to the effort to enhance citizens’ well-being. Art critic Clarence Cook characterized the image they hoped to project, “the Commissioners of the Central Park have given our citizens all the proof that is needed that it is still possible to perform great public trusts with true economy, with unimpeachable honesty, and with a single, constant eye to the public good.”

With similar public endorsements and legislative approval, in 1865 the CPC began to reinvent the larger city outside the park on design principles already initiated within the park. The Eighth Annual Report (for the year ending December 1864, published 1865) listed work beyond the park that included its new jurisdiction over Manhattan Square, the future site of the American Museum of Natural History, as well as

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grading and widening Seventh Avenue north from the Park to the Harlem River. The description of the
Seventh Avenue widening offered insight into Green’s larger plans for the area north of the grid:

... to connect the Park with the large improvements contemplated at the north end of the island;
which, if carried into execution, will, by the opening of agreeable avenues for travel, more fully
develop the highly picturesque features of the island scenery, give access to the magnificent public
and private edifices that are located in the more rural part of the city, and render this metropolis far
in advance of any city on either continent in the extent and interest of its varied suburban drives.

In the same paragraph, describing some relatively small urban alterations, Green broadly alluded to
large-scale plans relevant to his visionary Greater New York. He argued for anticipatory interconnected
planning for future growth, “Generally, the public works that have heretofore been carried out on this island,
and in the State and Nation, have been conceived on too limited and narrow a scale. Wealth and population
have always outstripped and demonstrated the inadequacy of the improvements intended for their
accommodation.” The CPC thus began to incrementally alter the predicted city plan through design
insertions beyond the park. They modified the grid plan by keeping Broadway in the street plan.

In 1865, the CPC modified the park’s south-west entrance to include the intersection with Broadway
along with Eight Avenue and 59th Street (Figure 3-3). The new plan rounded the park’s corner to an arc
section of a new traffic circle, enlarged the park’s entrance, and widened Broadway. The 1811 grid designers
stated they had no need for “Stars and Ovals,” but by inserting the large park and keeping Broadway the CPC
created the need for a plan with an expansive circular plaza, at the south west entrance to the park. This new
Grand Circle was later renamed Columbus Circle in 1892 for the new statue erected there. This plan allowed

3 Central Park Commission Eighth Annual Report. (New York: W. C. Bryant Publishers, 1865), Pages 14 to 16 describe the
work beyond the park. The Appendix starting on page 63 provided full copies of the laws that authorized them to
expand their work.
6 “Report Accompanying the Plan Adopted for the West Side of the City from 55th Street to 155th Street.” Central Park
Commission Eleventh Annual Report (1868), 161-162. Green wrote a brief history of reinserting the well-established diagonal
path Broadway/Kingsbridge Road/Bloomingdale Road back into the grid plan. The 1811 Plan had kept Broadway in
their plan north to 23rd Street. Laws passed in 1838, 1847, and 1851 extended it to 45th, 71st, and 86th Streets
respectively. Green offered this history to support his plan to continue the road northward.

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easier traffic flow and an extensive view deep into the park. It also proposed to extend the park onto the streets by adding street trees to the circle and adjacent streets.

Figure 3-3. “Central Park. Plan showing entrance at 8th Ave. & 59th Street as proposed to be re-arranged in accordance with the Altered Boundary Lines.” *Central Park Commission Ninth Annual Report, 1866.* After page 14.

Less than ten years after Central Park’s inception the Commissioners had begun to transform the rest of the city, then defined by the street grid. This elite group of men, with no formal design training, took on the task of reshaping the city well before the park was finished. Through Green’s influence with the State Legislature, they negotiated new laws that gave them authority to build streets and new parks distant from the park. The CPC then began a program to preserve existing streets, created streets unrelated to the grid and

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7 The NYPL Archive of Green’s papers contain several small pocket appointment calendars, in which he made detailed notes about meetings in New York City; on frequent trips to the capitol he would simply write the word “Albany” over several calendar days (NYPL Manuscripts & Archives Mss. Col 1232 box 1).
widened existing ones that connected to the park. Through these new streets and parks as well as reestablishing the older, pre-grid, diagonal Broadway back into the street plan they remediated some of the grid’s omissions, and thereby redesigned the earlier planned city.

The Terrain Gets Interesting—The Grid Be Damned—The Central Park Commission Plans

Northern Manhattan

The CPC Ninth Annual Report added a section titled, ‘Works under the jurisdiction of the Board beyond the limits of the Park.’8 This section included commissioning a survey to investigate a proposed street layout of the streets for the entire area north of the island beyond the grid plan’s terminus, an area more than twice the size of the park.9 As the CPC prepared for this large project beyond the grid, they reestablished existing roads and constructed new parks into the area within the yet unbuilt grid plan to the north and west of Central Park.

The land north of Central Park is very rugged, with large rock outcroppings. Early paths of convenience like Harlem Lane, through naturally formed breaks in the rock outcroppings, like McGowan’s Pass, had provided established routes northward since Colonial times.10 The CPC reinserted the well-established “Harlem Lane” into the street plan, renamed it Avenue St. Nicholas, and proposed it to be a broad tree-lined boulevard. “In compliance with the provisions of the act, the Commissioners of the Park have laid out and established the Avenue St. Nicholas, from One Hundred and Tenth street to One Hundred and Fifty-fifth street; at the latter point it opens directly into the Kingsbridge road, thereby providing an easterly route to Kingsbridge that will likely to be a great public convenience.”11 By incorporating these two existing roads back into the city plan, the CPC transformed the abstractly designed street grid to reestablish roads based on existing terrain as a significant planning principle for their future work.

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8 Central Park Commission Ninth Annual Report (New York: W. C. Bryant, Publishers, 1866), 47.
9 “The Laying out of the Island Above One-Hundred and Fifty-Fifth Street.” Central Park Commission Ninth Annual Report, 52. The report states that the State Legislature approved the act on April 24, 1865. The Appendix list the survey’s cost at $1,283.29. 59.
10 See Figure 2-18, Randel Composite Farm Map.
The Eleventh Annual Report documented the full scope of the CPC’s planning initiatives north and west of Central Park within the grid. In the section titled “Report Accompanying the Plan Adopted for the West Side of the City from 55th Street to 155th Street,” Green proposed a comprehensive redesign of the large area west of the grid plan starting below Central Park and extending to 155th Street. The 1811 plan has not addressed the significant grade changes and rock outcroppings. The CPC created two linear parks, Morningside and St. Nicholas Parks, at these large rock outcroppings and grade changes and designed new streets along the parks. Along with continuing Broadway they created a Public Drive from Fifty-Ninth Street to One Hundred and Fifty-Fifth Street that would later be called Riverside Drive. The CPC plan showed the older Broadway, and the new Avenue St. Nicholas, the former Harlem Lane, that met Central Park now extended to 110th Street to include McGowan’s Pass through which the older Harlem Lane had traversed.

Figure 3-4. William Bridges. Portion of “Map of the city of New York and island of Manhattan as laid out by the Commissioners appointed by the Legislature, April 3, 1807” 1811. Source: NYPL Digital Collections.

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12 Central Park Commission Eleventh Annual Report (New York: W. C. Bryant, Publishers, 1868), The New York State Legislature entrusted the Commissioners of Central Park with laying out the west side of Manhattan Chapter 097 of the Laws of the State of New York, 1867.

Figures 3-5. “Map Showing the Progress Made by the Commissioners of the Central Park in laying out Streets, Roads, Public Squares and Places and New Piers and Bulkhead Lines within the district shown thereon.” January 1, 1868. Detail. Eleventh Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, 1867, after page 156.

Figure 3-6. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux. Morningside Park Plan” (1887). Source: New York City Dept. of Parks.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission’s report for Morningside Park characterized the grid’s failure to consider the site’s geological condition: “[it had] hypothetically continued the city’s grid in this vicinity, regardless of the actual topography.”14 While fully recognizing the economic unfeasible of grading the area to conform to the grid, Green, in contrast extolled the beauty of its rugged and varied landscape as a

primary reason to construct the park. In 1916 Edward Hagerman Hall wrote of Green’s role in creating Morningside Park modeled on Central Park economic success as plan for the newer parts of the city (Figure 3-6). These new parks created large open areas that negated the grid. Later, as the grid construction moved north into difficult terrain other larger complexes—churches, hospitals and schools—followed with campuses sited to address their spatial needs not within the street plan.

Green writes a “Thorough Examination” of City Planning Beyond the Grid

In December 1865 Green wrote an extensive essay, to the other Commissioners printed in the Tenth Annual CPC Report. Titled Communication to the Commissioners of the Central Park relative to the Laying Out of the Island above 155th Street; The Drive from 59th St. To 155th St., and Other Subjects, he articulated his vision for an expanded future city based on incremental planning, acceptance of technical innovations, preserving historic precedents, connections to other municipalities, and preservation of the beauty of the natural world. This essay is an extraordinary document that is a difficult read, as he struggled with a range of both broad concepts and small details in his effort to articulate a type of planning not before envisioned.

When the fifteen-year-old Andrew Green first arrived in New York, he wrote home to Worcester, “Dear Father, I hope you will have patience to read all my letters, though it will take the patience of Job to do it.” This teenage self-reflexive request is useful to understand Green’s own appreciation of the scope and complexity of his own thought process that became evident in his writings on city planning. His essay

16 Edward Hagaman Hall, “A Brief History of Morningside Park and Vicinity (Appendix C),” American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society (ASHPS), Twenty First Annual Report (1916), 539-562. Hall had been Green’s friend and supporter. After events associated with Green’s death had tarnished his reputation, as secretary of the ASHPS he wrote essays that described Green’s works within the city.
17 The Department of Park archive has copy of the communication both as part of the Tenth Annual Report and as an independent document published by William C. Bryant, Printers 41 Nassau Street, New York, 1866.
compressed ideas from many disciplines into one relatively short work. At the start, he acknowledged the difficulty of the task, and noted that he tried to include everything that he felt relevant to plan a city. He stated that the planning process, “involves difficulties and responsibilities that can only be fully comprehended after a thorough examination of the subject and all its bearings.” He proposed that his careful planning of northern Manhattan would require study many far-reaching and discreet areas of the emerging discipline of city planning. He noted:

The laying out of the ground for and the planning of a city is, if done with any large degree of foresight, a work of great responsibility, involving liberal consideration of questions of defense, of approaches, of climate, including temperature, snow and rain fall, and prevailing winds, of the means of the daily supply of water and food, of the vocations of its inhabitants, and of sanitary regulations, including modes of cleansing and purification of the city, of interment, and of the means of movement and circulation of its population and property, animate and inanimate.

Throughout the essay he bluntly critiqued the grid, from significant details, the plan should have had alleys. to sweeping condemnations, “We need not go off the Island to see lamentable results of the want of largeness of ideas in the attempts that have been made to provide for the growing wants of a great people.” He continued his censure by stating that the grid would impede the city’s expansion, “These Commissioners, in making a plan for the island, appear to have done no more work than to indicate on paper (for they did no actual work on the ground) the lines of certain avenues, streets and squares; and it is not too much to say, that to the surface of the ground on the lower part of the city, less irregular and less rocky than

19 Andrew Haswell Green, Communication to the Commissioners of the Central Park relative to the Laying Out of the Island above 155th Street, The Drive from 59th St. To 155th St., and Other Subjects. Central Park Commission Tenth Annual Report (New York: W. C. Bryant, Publishers, 1867), 113.
20 These areas of study Green listed presently would be differentiated into separated sections of study in a Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP).
21 Green, Central Park Commission Tenth Annual Report, 126.
22 Green, Central Park Commission Tenth Annual Report, 123.
23 Green, Central Park Commission Tenth Annual Report, 127.
the upper part…. It may be said without exaggeration that the features of this plan which had so little of the merit of design, has been the means of retarding seriously the growth of the city.”

Yet, his vision of planning went well beyond finding fault with the grid to create, in the opinion of historian David Hammack, a “most remarkable” essay on planning that was “extraordinarily comprehensive.” Green found and applied connections that would have, in a less engaged and encyclopedic mind, remained separate. His writings are both peculiar to their time and unique to a man with a strong, evolving vision of New York City’s future. Through his interest in history, preservation, along with his exceptional perception of an expanded future city, he worked to integrate many histories—physical and narrative—into the structure of his envisioned city. This presaged his later role in creating a significantly larger, economically viable and extensively interconnected city, which, while preserving aesthetic public views framed by large parklands, presented a city plan that critiqued the grid as an impediment. This comprehensive vision began with his role in planning northern Manhattan, as he cited in the opening paragraph of his essay that argued for the creation of Greater New York:

In the progress of laying out the north end of the Island the general suggestions, made in a previous communication to the Board concerning the relations of the southerly part of Westchester County with the City, have come to be practically important, and call for distinct notice and specific consideration before proceeding to complete the plans upon which the Board is now engaged.

He was aware of the fragility of the process that he proposed: “The tract, of which I have presented a very imperfect chorography, is that which the Board has now to do.” After first noting the difficulty of his task, he began by carefully describing the land: “its whole surface is exceedingly varied, irregular and

24 Green, *Central Park Commission Tenth Annual Report*, 123.
27 Green, *Central Park Commission Tenth Annual Report*, 118.
picturesque…and it rises to a high degree of craggy wilderness.”

He named the trees—oaks, chestnut—“forming forests and groves of great extent and beauty,” as well as the minerals that formed the rock outcropping—gneiss-mica, schist, marble. The essay demonstrates a deep knowledge and affection for the land and its, respectfully noting and locating the sites of Revolutionary War—Forts Washington, Cock’s Hill, and Fort George. Unlike the grid, this plan included planning the nine miles of tidal shoreline to create public open space there and to later provide commercial access across Spuyten Duyvil. Green advocated for the preservation of waterfront notes that:

No public pleasure ground of the city, except the Battery, lies adjacent to the river. The exceeding picturesqueness of the ground along the Hudson River, both above and below 155th Street, much of which being well grown with fine park trees, affords an opportunity to supply what will shortly be in want in a part of the city, against which it cannot be urged that sufficient space has already been taken for parks.

His plan included both Fort Washington Point on the Hudson and the area around the Highbridge as parks (Figure 3-7).

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30 Green, *Central Park Commission Tenth Annual Report*, 116. The State Legislature gave the Central Park Commission jurisdiction over the piers and bulkheads of northern Manhattan. New Pier and Bulkhead lines under Chap. 697 of Laws of 1867. Green proposed to enlarge the water passage around the top of the island and with the Harlem River Canal Company to extend access to Long Island Sound. “The canal will, doubtless, within a few years, be the means of establish depots on the line of the Harlem River for coal, lumber, building materials, and other supplies for the north part of the city and the adjacent settlements of Westchester County.”
31 Green, *Central Park Commission Tenth Annual Report*, 144.
32 The Highbridge Aqueduct and Reservoir complex were built in 1848, before the CPC planning. The CPC plan added 24 acres of parkland designed around it as the first designated park in the area.
He saw New York City’s new place in the world by referencing historic cities—ancient Athens and Rome, as well as Baroque Paris—in both extensive descriptions of their history and references to their pavement details. He understood that technological innovations would shape the future city and that historic sites with areas of open space and extended views needed to be preserved within the economic structure of the city:

It would be easy to write an essay that would stimulate and encourage the imagination with visions of parks, groves, terraces, fountains, statuary and palatial residences; we have, however, to deal with practical things and not excite unattainable expectations. Money will be needed, and it should, as far as is possible, be required at such times, and in such amounts as will not be burdensome, and so applied as to give no just occasion for criticism. While sufficient time should be taken to thoroughly mature a plan, it is to be remembered that delays are prejudicial to the interests of proprietors as well as to the convenience of the public; until the lines and grades of the streets and avenues are determined, improvements will be retarded.\(^33\)

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\(^{33}\) Green, *Central Park Commission Tenth Annual Report*, 147.
Green’s essay introduced many newer planning principles not addressed in the grid plan. Streets had become more complex since the grid plan; they had become conveyors of underground utilities—water, sewerage, and gas. He wrote at a time when both horses and trolley cars shared streets. His plan accommodated both but planned for the new public transportation to carry larger numbers of people. Unlike the 1811 binary plan for street widths (uniform widths of one hundred feet for avenues and sixty feet for cross streets), Green proposed a hierarchy for streets based on use and location, “Heaviest business traffic will naturally seek the most accessible and level roads.” He proposed to vary their widths to accommodate traffic, plant street trees and create tree-lined medians in some new streets. In siting the road that would become Riverside Drive he included the aesthetic pleasures of viewing the Hudson as a valid planning principle. The 1811 plan had not addressed the aesthetic character of any streets. When discussing this lengthy roadway, he noted that it would require many local site-specific decisions for its success. His combination of large-scale planning with localized details became an essential component of his design strategy.

Incremental Planning Progress Shown on Maps and Described in the Reports

The following series of maps show the plan’s development as a work-in-progress of hierarchical and incremental development. The CPC had carefully studied the area. The maps reflect their understanding of the seriousness of their work, “Much time has been given to the consideration of this subject, and to a detailed examination of the ground, with the view of gaining the information necessary to proceed intelligently with the work as early as practicable.” They then carefully and efficiently designed and constructed new roads to permit both expansion of the city and the preservation of existing properties and open spaces. It documented progress on the maps and in successive annual reports. Its plans included interfaces with both the waterfront, as the grid plan had not, and with the existing Croton Water System.

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pipes, and reservoir. Its process led to a fully realized city plan rather than the grid’s abstract exercise in land acquisition.

Unlike the 1811 plan that laid out streets that extended well beyond the city’s requirements, the CPC plan prioritized street construction as the city progressed northward. Green observed that

The chief work that the board has to do is to make a plan of this area that will, when executed, accommodate the future necessities of this portion of the city. . . By the law the Commissioners are not required to complete the laying out of all the streets, roads, public squares and places before filing maps and plans of a portion thereof.36

Furthermore, he remarked that “In presenting a plan for this part of the city, it by no means follows that all the streets laid down on the plan, are to be worked immediately. There are over a hundred miles of streets now the plan of the city that have not been worked and should not until population requires them for use.”37 This planning process left large open areas unbuilt, many were later left as parkland or the future building sites or bridge landings. In 1860, the land was mostly open farmland, with some unpaved roads (Figure 3-8).

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36 Green, Central Park Commission Tenth Annual Report, 126.
37 Green, Central Park Commission Tenth Annual Report, 135.
Green proposed to build infrastructure by prioritizing the most economically useful streets and understood that connecting the area, by the waterways, would be his first principle street, asserting this: “A street should at once be laid out from Tubby Hook to the exterior street on the Harlem River. The opening in the hills at this point must continue to be of growing importance; it affords the only good opportunity for a street of traffic between Manhattenville and Spuyten Duyvil.” This street, now called Dyckman Street, is clearly drawn in red from the west to the east coasts across the island on his 1865 map (Figure 3-9). Early Dutch settlers had used Tubby Hook, a natural boat landing on an outcropping on the Hudson; by the late nineteenth century it became a heavily trafficked ferry dock, with a new railroad station constructed there specifically to connect with the existing dock. Together they formed an early transportation hub that linked water and rail with local transportation. Green proposed that this first new street should extend this important nexus across the island to the Harlem River and north on Kingsbridge Road into then Westchester County. While the grid plan had been self-contained; Green understood the need to design a network with adjacent municipalities as part of the infrastructure planning. He had reestablished Broadway and Avenue St. Nicholas within the grid and continued north to later become integral in that area street network.

The next published version of the map, in 1868, presented a clear alternative to the grid and departed from it in almost every aspect of planning (Figure 3-10). It shows Broadway (Kingsbridge Road), extended the length of the island; and when the terrain required it, streets followed the contours of the land, with new straight streets in flat areas. Primarily much of the land was left open. Although this map shows a few east/west at the southern continuing the street grid, most of the newer streets fit to the contours of the existing land, with many of the existing unpaved roads becoming paved.

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38 Green, Central Park Commission Tenth Annual Report, 133.
39 The summary of the Treasurer’s Accounts in unnumbered pages at the report’s end notes: $6948.15 for surveys and showed the cost of “Stationary, printing, and drawing materials,” the map as $581.28. On the same page above map the report notes an earlier entry for the Museum of Natural History, “Restoring extinct animals” dinosaurs at $6985.59. Approximately the same cost.
Figure 3-9. “Map of the City of New York north of 155th Street.” The Red Lines show streets and roads laid out by the Commissioners of the Central Park. December 1865. Source: NYPL Digital Collections.

Figure 3-10. “Map of the City of New York north of 155th Street: showing the progress made in laying out streets, roads, public squares and places by the Commissioners of Central Park under chap. 565 of the Laws of 1865.” Central Park Commission Annual Report Eleventh Annual Report, January 1868 After Page 70. Source: Biodiversity Library.

Figure 3-11. “Map of the City of New York north of 155th Street: showing the progress made in laying out streets, roads, public squares and places by the Commissioners of Central Park under chap. 565 of the Laws of 1865 and new Pier and Bulkhead Lines, under Chapter 697 of Laws of 1867.” Printed January 1870. Source: Geographicus Maps.
The map showed most of the area left unplanned, either to continue as open space, or for future development to be later determined as the city expanded through new public transportation. It first located two large areas of proposed park land on the Hudson and Harlem Rivers (see Figure 3-7). The CPC made the area around the Croton Highbridge Aqueduct, and Reservoir on the Harlem River the area’s first designated park, by surrounding it with twenty-four acres of parkland. Later, the Fort Washington Point area was both
preserved as the historic site of Fort Washington and still later supported the roadways connecting to the George Washington Bridge.

The next map, printed in 1870, shows a fuller development of areas within the center, while leaving the rugged land along perimeter open (Figure 3-11). The phase of the planning created two localized grids at differing elevations. On the high ground to the east an area now called ‘Washington Heights’ is bound by the steep slope of Fort George Hill. A small skewed grid that aligns with the Dyckman Street at a lower elevation. The plan clearly indicates the land’s topography and that the streets were built around the existing formations.

Since the creation of Central Park, many political elements within the city strongly argued for a large Military Parade Ground. The CPC would not agree. The arguments began again for one in the open areas of northern Manhattan. After the 1870 ‘Home Rule’ Charter Revision abolished the CPC, the new Park Commission, however, began to plan one in the north (Figure 3-12). The proposed Military Parade (green rectangle in the lower right) became a source of political friction and was never constructed.

As shown on a Department of Parks aerial photo taken in 2013, the present plan of the area is not dissimilar to Green’s initial planning as shown on the earlier plans (Figure 3-13). Dyckman Street, Broadway, and numerous waterfront parks are located according to the CPC plans. The land includes a high ratio of parkland that were later preserved as Revolutionary War sites. Sherman Creek, that had extended from the Harlem River to Broadway has been filled, the ferry and railroad station no longer function. Spuyten Duyvil creek was widened and relocate to become the Harlem Shipping Canal in 1895. In his 1865 essay, Green discussed widening the waterway, but did not have time or financing to develop any planning proposals.

Planning Beyond the Island–Greater New York

Green understood that for New York City to prosper, it would need to plan an expansion onto the mainland, and to coordinate planning with adjacent municipalities. He also clearly understood how challenging an exercise this was, “So difficult is it, even for men of recognized experience and observation of
public affairs, to forecast the details of the prospective wants of a growing city.” He first discussed this problem in the 1868 CPC report about locating bridges in northern Manhattan to connect to Westchester County (now the Bronx) without knowing of those local governments’ plans. “In the part of this district committed to the care of the Board by the law of 1865, which extends along the Harlem river from One Hundred and Fifty-fifth street nearly to the High Bridge, and in the part from Fort George Hill through the Harlem river and Spuyten Duyvil creek to the North river, the location of but few streets has been determined, inasmuch as the subject of connections with the County of Westchester by tunnels or bridges, and of the streets or roads leading to on both sides of the river, is involved. The proper location of bridges and the approaches to them is of importance to the interests of both counties and can only be intelligently considered upon full information with respect to both, as no general plan of roads in Westchester County leading towards this city has yet been made. The future requirements of both counties in this regard cannot be adequately provided for without a careful examination of the Westchester side, which the Board has no authority to make.” In considering these connections Green anticipated a form of Regional Planning, and later offered to make the plans himself.

Green is best known as “The Father of Greater New York.” This act of consolidation transformed over nine hundred separate municipalities on three landmasses into one large metropolis. He first proposed this undertaking in an essay in the 1868 Report to the CPC that cited his earlier 1865 essay on planning northern Manhattan in its first sentence and then referenced it throughout. In 1868, in fourteen short pages, he proposed a sweeping plan to design a new city based on principles he initiated for 1700 acres in northern Manhattan. This planned city emerged at a time when the nation’s population was becoming more urban than agrarian. The United States had no fully formed policy to model a new industrial, urban society forming from the earlier rural one. Ideas Green first envisioned for planning northern Manhattan, developed into a new model for the larger city. Progressive Era city planning later integrated these innovative models incorporated comprehensive design initiatives with localized design decisions, careful study of the existing site’s history’s—

40 Green, Central Park Commission Tenth Annual Report, 122.
particularly of land formations, and of aesthetically chosen preservation of open spaces views to water and beyond—into the emerging discipline of City Planning.
Chapter Four

The Strategic View Became the Aesthetic View

During the Revolutionary War, forts and redoubts on strategically sited high ground in Northern Manhattan had extended and unobstructed views of the rivers below defended the city to the south. This chapter begins with the loss of a battle site to street grid construction that fostered historic preservation effort at the site of Fort Washington further north. These preservation efforts for the forts and their sites led to the creation of the nearly continuous parklands along the rivers in northern Manhattan.

While the 1811 city plan noted few historic sites within the grid, the map located several sites of historic importance north of 155th Street. Rather than render the land as a blank terra incognita, the mapmakers included roads, like King’s Bridge Road (an extension of Broadway), which ran through the island’s central valley to the 1693 bridge over Spuyten Duyvil, as well as the stone mile markers along it, later installed in 1769, which measured the northward distance from city hall along that road (Figure 4-1).1 Using large letters, the 1811 plan prominently located historically significant Revolutionary War sites: the Jeumell Mansion that had been Washington’s headquarters, and the forts—Fort Washington, Fort George, Fort Tryon, and Fort Prince (Figure 4-1-A). The one hundred and fifty-mile-long Hudson River had been the longest battlefield of the Revolution.2 In 1775, the Second Continental Congress directed the New York State Legislature to construct fortifications on the high ground along the river. The hilltops were tactically well-sited for warfare at that time, as shown on the British Headquarters Map (Figure 4-2).

These forts became part in the country’s foundational narrative. Along with their associated battles, they held important places in the newly established national history. In 1811, the Revolution, fought less than

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thirty years earlier, was in the memories of many still living as well as the Commissioners themselves. By noting the forts on their plan, the Commissioners documented their historic presence and importance. Throughout the nineteenth century maps routinely located them, although there were no significant efforts to preserve their sites. By the late nineteenth century, however, newly formed civic groups, concerned that the city would soon encroach on these historically important sites, organized to protect them. Their preservation efforts began with the celebration a Harlem Heights, then a year later to commemorate the site of a significant loss at Fort Washington. The efforts were not uniformly successful, however, their efforts established monuments to the area’s historic significance in large waterfront parks that bore the names of the forts and provided expansive public views of the Hudson and Harlem Rivers.

The Battle of Harlem Heights—A Ceremonially Installed Plaque at a Battle Site Lost to the Grid

On Saturday, October 16, 1897, the Empire State Society of the Sons of the American Revolution unveiled a bronze bas-relief plaque to commemorate the location of the Revolutionary War Battle of Harlem Heights fought in the open fields of northern Manhattan on September 16, 1776. This small plaque, located on the Boulevard (now Broadway) and 123rd Street, on the ashlar plinth of the recently built Columbia University Engineering Building in Morningside Heights, was at the center of a grand civic event (Figure 4-3, and details A, B, and C). According to The New York Times, “a large and distinguished assemblage joined in the patriotic exercise that marked the undraping of the tablet.” Prior to the afternoon’s extensive parade, the Sons (as they called themselves) had invited Mayor William Strong along with five hundred guests to lunch on

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3 Gouverneur Morris signed both the Articles of Confederation and the United States Constitution. During the Revolution he worked with Washington on financial matters. Simeon De Witt, Surveyor General of the Continental Army throughout the Revolutionary War, worked closely with Washington.

4 Throughout the nineteenth century, maps of Manhattan noted the forts’ locations. See “City & county map of New-York, Brooklyn, Williamsburg, Jersey City & the adjacent waters.” Colton and Johnson. Published 1849.


a steamboat excursion up the Hudson. The group viewed the many Revolutionary War sites—Fort Lee, Fort Washington, and Fort Tryon (Forest Hill Redoubt)—as far north as the site of Wayne’s July 16, 1779 victory at Stony Point, about thirty miles north, then turned back to dock at the 129th Street Pier.7

Large crowds gathered for the parade’s three o’clock start. American and Revolutionary War flags flew from windows of the new apartment buildings along its route. Honored guests included descendants of men who had fought in the battle and delegations from civic and historic societies. Henry Phelps Johnston (1842-1926), a professor at City College, and a noted military historian, chaired the celebration committee. Johnston’s most recent book, *The Battle of Harlem Heights, September 16, 1776: With a Review of the Events of the Campaign*, published earlier in the year, offered new insights into the battle’s troop movements over the plains, ridges, and fields. He had collected an extensive Appendix titled “Authorities—American, British and Hessian” containing primary source documents with firsthand descriptions of the events that supported Johnston’s new chronology and mapping.

Johnston had described the Harlem Heights battle as a “stirring open field affair.”8 With no fixed objective, the soldiers took cover behind fences and ridges as the fighting moved through the buckwheat fields that are now the site of the Barnard campus. This minor battle had been a limited success; the troops held their ground until the British retreated.9 After a difficult period, it seemed like a much-needed victory, although it was short-lived. The battle took place on Monday, September 16; the “Great Fire” that destroyed a large part of the city far to the south and interrupted the local fighting began on the following Friday, September 20. Within two months, on November 16, a resounding British victory at Fort Washington led to

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7 The ASPHPS minutes chronicle that group’s long efforts to preserve the rocky peninsula from the railroad’s incursion. See E. H. Hall, “Stony Point battle-field; a sketch of its revolutionary history, and particularly of the surprise of Stony Point” New York, The American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, 1902.
8 Johnston, *The Battle of Harlem Heights, September 16, 1776* (New York: Macmillan for Columbia University Press, 1897), IV.
9 Johnston, *The Battle of Harlem Heights, September 16, 1776*, 87. This includes Washington’s November 17, 1776 dispatch to the troops to thank them (see 87); for the full text of the letter, see 162.
the British taking control of both the city to the south and the fortification to the north of the island from early 1777 to the war’s end in 1783.

This victory cost the lives of two beloved Revolutionary War heroes who had fought bravely at Bunker Hill: Thomas Knowlton10 (November 22, 1740 to September 16, 1776) and Major Andrew Leitch (1747 to October 1, 1776).11 Although unnamed, these two men became the central figures of the bronze bas-relief tablet being unveiled (Figure 4-3). Thomas Knowlton, an intelligence officer dressed in civilian clothing, lay mortally wounded on the rocks (Figure 4-4-B), and Major Andrew Leitch, the central uniformed figure atop the ridge led the attack with sword raised. He later died of his wounds (Figure 4-3 B).12 Sculptor James Kelly (1855-1933), known for his realism and verve in depicting battle scenes, chose a pivotal moment in the heat of battle—heroic figures frozen in time atop a stone ridge. The plaque’s inscription contained no narrative of the battle, only stating that it had been a victory and listing the donors’ names: “To Commemorate the Battle of Harlem Heights, won by Washington’s Troops on this site, September 16, 1776. Erected by the Sons of the Revolution in the State of New York.” Leitch strategically used the opportunely sited ridge’s high ground and craggy rocks for military advantage: “our brave fellows mounted up the rocks and attacked them—they then ran in turn.”13 This ridge, clearly shown on the tablet (Figure 4-4-C), was central to the battle’s success.

10 Knowlton had been a heroic figure in both the French and Indian War and the earlier battle of Bunker Hill. He was beloved by both Washington and the soldiers he led. George Washington had chosen him to lead a newly created small band of intelligence officers to specifically engage in reconnaissance missions. Nathan Hale, the hanged spy, had served under him. On the plaque Lieut. Col. Knowlton of the Twentieth Continental Infantry is dressed in the rough civilian clothes of a farmer rather than in a military uniform.

11 John Fitzpatrick, editor. The writings of George Washington from the original manuscript sources 1745-1799; prepared under the direction of the United States George Washington Bicentennial Commission and published by authority Library of Congress (Washington, D.C: United States Government Printing Office, 1876), 64-65. George Washington wrote in his General Orders of the retreat from New York “In numbers our loss was very inconsiderable, but in the fall of Lieut. Col. Knowlton, I consider it great, being a brave and good officer, and it may be increased by the death of Major Leitch, of the Virginia Regiment who unfortunately received three balls thro’ his side.”

12 Johnston, The Battle of Harlem Heights, September, 16, 1776. Johnston noted that Knowlton and Leitch’s deaths had elevated the minor battle’s place in history.

13 Johnston, The Battle of Harlem Heights, September, 16, 1776, 77. Johnston quoted Colonel Reed’s account of the attack.
This ridge, however, no longer existed—it had been cut through for the new street grid. This grand ceremony took place to honor a site that was no longer a presence in the city. In his book, Johnston provided a carefully framed photograph of the site that showed the continuous mass of hard Manhattan Schist sliced through for a new street (Figure 4-4). An automobile parked within the cut acts as a scale figure to show the rock’s height and mass. In the distance, President Ulysses S. Grant’s newly constructed mausoleum appears as an almost dream-like image. This classical, historically referenced white marble temple-like edifice was arguably the most well-known building in the city. It had opened to the public just six months earlier, on April 27, in a ceremony that attracted over a million people, including President McKinley. In the months after it opened, the Grant monument became a popular destination for visitors and a place of patriotic pilgrimage for Civil War veterans.

Johnston, who served in the Union Army throughout that Civil War, composed the photo to include both wars: the new Civil War monument and the lost site of the Battle of Harlem Heights. Through his personal experience in war and his academic research, he knew the physicality of war and the consequences history places on it. It is not difficult to conclude that he structured the image to emphasize the site’s destruction. Lives were lost there; it was a place, not unlike the Gettysburg battlefield, which later became a cemetery. The photo evoked an awareness of its loss to an arbitrary geometric order that negated its history.

15 *Yale University Obituary Record*, No. 22, 1923, 627-29. Shortly after graduating from Yale in 1862, he enlisted in the 15th Connecticut Volunteers in the Union Army and fought in the Battle of Fredericksburg in 1862 and the 1863 siege of Suffolk. He began teaching history at the City College of New York in 1879, became head of the department in 1883, and retired as a beloved professor emeritus in 1916, having written six books of military history, mostly on the Revolutionary War.
Knowing the whole site would soon be lost to new buildings and streets, in his book’s introduction he invited the reader to walk the open fields where the battle took place.

Revolutionary War history became, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a vehicle to stimulate a sense of a national unity after the Civil War (“Let Us Have Peace”), and to introduce a new national heritage unfamiliar to the many immigrants arriving from Europe. These well-attended and publicly financed civic ceremonies at Grant’s Memorial and the Harlem Heights monument clearly indicated that venerating these sites served a broad political agenda to instill a sense of patriotism in the new urban masses. The loss of this site indicated that the remaining sites to its north were vulnerable, valued places that needed protection.

**Fort Washington—A Guide Towards Future Preservation**

General Washington and Col. Rufus Putnam had sited Fort Washington on the highest promontory on the island and staffed it with well-armed troops to defend the city to the south. Its fall was a devastating and well-remembered loss. As writer and historian Edward Hagaman Hall (1858-1939) described, “after their gallant and desperate resistance of an enemy outnumbering them more than five to one, and having sustained a loss behind their works of 150 killed and wounded, while inflicting a loss of 500 killed and wounded upon

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17. Johnston, *The Battle of Harlem Heights, September, 16, 1776*, V.
19. Interest began with the 1876 Centennial celebrations throughout the country, that included a major Centennial International Exhibition in Philadelphia. In 1889 events to commemorate the centennial of Washington’s inauguration as the first president further renewed interest.
20. Later excavations in 1929 discovered a deeply dug ammunition storage vault that still contained powder. William Calvert papers NYHS Box 1, Folder 12 (sectional diagram).
their adversaries, the Americans yielded to an overwhelming force, and surrendered 3,000 prisoners of war to languish in British dungeons or perish on British prison-ships.”

The Sons of the American Revolution would not let Fort Washington’s site be lost to history. In 1890 it was a newly formed “lineage organization open to those who can prove themselves direct descendants of individuals who provided qualifying service to the United States of America during the Revolutionary War.” It was one of a growing number of hastily formed groups meant to reestablish a continuous national history in the face of the many newly arriving immigrants. The Sons, as they called themselves, along with the separate Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), created a powerful political infrastructure to foster patriotism through the veneration of Revolutionary War history and sites.

Within a month after the October 16, 1897 events at Harlem Heights, the Empire Society of the Sons of the American Revolution again met. On November 15, 1897, it began planning a more ambitious project: to preserve the site of Fort Washington and to install a monument to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the battle in 1901. It planned a course of action that included municipal participation, public education, and fundraising. At their meeting, the Sons voted to petition the mayor and Municipal Assembly to preserve the site of the fort, began work on a publication about the fort’s historic importance in the war, and planned actions to preserve it Hall, who contributed an essay, maps and drawings, stated their aim to document and preserve the site:

21 Edward Hagaman Hall, Fort Washington, November 16th, 1776: a memorial from the Empire State Society of the Sons of the American Revolution to the honorable mayor and municipal assembly of the city of New York, praying for the erection of a suitable monument to mark the site of Fort Washington; presented to the municipal authorities May 3, 1898 (Sons of the American Revolution: New York, 1898), 6. The number of soldiers captured has been disputed by other scholars.

22 Sons of the American Revolution Empire State Society Records, 1890-1992, New York State Library Manuscripts and Special CollectionsSC22749. “The Sons of the American Revolution Empire State Society was organized on February 11, 1890 and legally incorporated in early 1895. The national Sons of the American Revolution (S.A.R.) was officially established as a union of existing state societies on April 20, 1889, the 100th anniversary of George Washington’s inauguration as the first president.” The Daughters of the American Revolution formed in 1890, as did the Society of Colonial Dames in 1890. The Society of the Cincinnati formed in 1783 while the war was being fought.
The object of this brief sketch is to indicate with exactness the site of Fort Washington, on Manhattan Island, and to rescue from threatened oblivion the location of the spot made memorable by the gallant defense of the Americans, November 16, 1776.23

The publication included George Washington’s description of the battle, and a proposal for a monument (Figures 4-5). Importantly, it included Hall’s essay “Fort Washington and Its Related Fortifications,” which along with Hall’s maps that presented Fort Washington as central to a network of fortifications on the island and the mainland (4-6, 4-7). Through Hall’s rigorous historic research and mapmaking skills, he carefully located and discussed the adjacent forts and their roles in the war. By presenting the forts as a group, he argued for further preservation of those additional sites.24 The petition ended with a warning that the site would be lost to development if not preserved. “The Fort Washington Road, in conjunction with the Boulevard Lafayette [Broadway], is destined to become one of the most popular and picturesque pleasure drives in the city; and in the near future thousands instead of hundreds will daily pass in ignorance of the spot most deeply stained with the blood of our patriotic ancestors on the Island of Manhattan and the spot which ought most reverently to be cherished in the hearts of our liberty-loving people.”25

The publication outlined the groups’ new and more-structured preservation efforts; the loss of the Harlem Heights site and the temporary loss of Fort George Hill had reinvigorated their determination. They mobilized allies in government, approached the site’s owners, and raised public awareness of the battle’s importance.26 They had new support from Andrew Haswell Green, who more than thirty years earlier had

23 Hall, Fort Washington, 9.
24 Hall, Fort Washington, 12. “Fort Washington was the citadel of an extensive series of fortifications lying north of the battle-field of Harlem Heights, some of which were merely redoubts or breastworks, and other sufficiently important to be dignified with the name of Forts.”
26 Their book proved to be so popular that the Sons printed a second edition.
written of Fort Washington in his 1865 CPC essay planning northern Manhattan. In 1865, while broadly laying out the area’s development, Green had recommended that the fort’s site along with the surrounding land be preserved as a park. Green had recently formed a new organization to reinvigorate preservation in northern Manhattan.

Andrew Haswell Green—The American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society

After their years of planning, on November 16, 1901, the Sons of the American Revolution dedicated the monument (Figure 4-8). As the New York Times reported, the day was ideal, the sky being almost cloudless, and the air still and warm. The dedication began with a Memorial Service at nearby Holyrood Church, followed by a military procession to the monument for the ceremony and speeches. Participants, some of whom wore uniforms from the Civil War, were able to trace the battle’s actions, on board planks carefully placed in the open landscape for a mile around the fortification.

Andrew Haswell Green, then eighty-one years old, introduced himself as the president of a new organization and stated its unique program: “In the [dedication for the monument to] Battle of Fort Washington, we have a conspicuous illustration of the close alliance between the scenic and the historic elements which form the two-fold character of the society for which I have the honor to speak.” He then

27 A. H. Green. Tenth Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park. 115
28 Earlier Green had worked with the former owner James Gordon Bennett to preserve the site. When Bennett, Sr. died his son, James G. Bennett, Jr. permitted the monument in 1901 and promised land as a park. The younger Bennett died in 1918 without including that in his will. Consequently, the property was divided for sale, while honoring the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society request to preserve the portion of the land where Fort Washington once stood. In 1928 the City of New York acquired the site of the fort and additional land and assigned the property to the Parks Department.
29 Rather than the earlier design for a triumphal arch that would have commemorated a victory, the Sons chose a marble and granite stеле set into the rock face of the eastern perimeter as a more appropriate memorial to those lost in the battle. Charles R. Lamb, who had designed the Admiral Dewey Arch, designed the stèle. Their records indicate it was also less costly.
began his brief but rousing address by describing the land, then recalling his earlier work to preserve it. Being Green, he also pushed to expand the parks to continue his earlier efforts:

The territory over which the Battle of Fort Washington was fought 125 years ago, some three or four square miles in extent, comprises the most picturesque portion of The City of New York. It is the highest, boldest, and most diversified section of our ancient city, and it commands a combined view of land and water, of city and country, unsurpassed in the United States. It is the only portion of Manhattan Island where the shore-line of our beautiful American Rhine has been left in its native picturesqueness, and it is the only portion where any trace of its pristine beauty remains undesecrated and unrazed by the levelling march of so-called ‘public improvements.’

Thirty-six years ago, impressed with the commanding beauty of this section I urged upon the authorities the creation here of a great park which should preserve for future generations those inestimable endowments of beauty with which Nature blessed this island and since then about forty-one acres have been set aside and reserved as Fort Washington Park on the western side of Boulevard Lafayette. But the half of what should be done has not yet been done.32

In 1895, in the face of rapid unbridled industrialization, and with no similar groups to advocate for scenic or historic protection, Green created a new organization to advocate for the preservation of historic sites and places of scenic beauty. Its name evolved. An earlier version was “The American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society: A National Society for the Protection of Natural Scenery, The Preservation of Historic Landmarks and the Improvement of Cities.” The New York State legislature incorporated the organization as “The American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, The Trustees of Historic Places and Objects” (ASHPS).33 The State Legislature authorized the society to “make recommendations to any

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33 The Laws of the State of New York, Chapter 166 of 1895.
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icipality in the State of New York, or its proper officers, respecting improvements in the scenic or
material conditions thereof.”

By founding the ASHPS, Green created a state-authorized infrastructure to advocate for broadly defined preservation efforts.

The Society’s first project was not small: to oppose the proposed hydroelectric power plants at Niagara Falls—a place of meaning for him since his youth. In 1849, the twenty-eight-year-old Green, on one of his many trips to Albany for legislative matters, ventured further north, first to Utica for the State Democratic Convention and then on to Niagara Falls. In a letter to his father, he wrote of his complete rapture on seeing the falls: “To Niagara Falls where I spent Sunday and a share of Monday. No language can convey the impression of this grandest of all nature’s sublimity—the more one gazes the more its vastness grows upon one. Here I went the usual rounds the suspension bridge, the ferry, [unreadable], the staircase but these are all mere conveniences to aid in viewing the great wonder.”

Green was later known for his financial acumen as a powerful real estate attorney, with a successful career within New York’s capitalist economic system based on his fiscal prowess and parsimony. Yet, his compelling duty to preserve scenic wonders and historic places remained unshaken throughout a life working within a system that favored short-term expansionary economic gains over preservation. His plans for northern Manhattan and Greater New York supported long-term economic development that included scenic and historic preservation. By founding the ASHPS after his successes at the Central Park Commission, and in creating Greater New York, he expanded his vision to save historically significant places that would otherwise

34 The Laws of the State of New York, Chapter 166 of 1895, as quoted by Green in the Eighth Annual Report of the ASHPS, 44.
35 The ASHPS official seal shows Columbia, the female allegorical figure who represents America, standing in front of the cascading falls.
36 Letter to his father September 27, 1849. New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives Division, Box 1, Folder 2.
be lost to industrial growth. As he had earlier in Central Park, he argued that preserving natural beauty would, in the long term, increase the value of adjacent properties and enhance the lives of all who visited. No one else of his generation more successfully navigated natural and historic preservation along with support of civic economic growth. Through his efforts the ASHPS formed coalitions with groups to further common goals that established the ASHPS as a significant force for preservation.

**Reginald Pelham Bolton Fills a Sudden Opening in the ASHPS**

Following their earlier success, the Sons published an account of the monument’s dedication. This 1902 book included an expansive essay on the battle by Reginald Pelham Bolton (Kilburn, U.K 1856, New York: 1942), with his name appearing on the book’s cover. Bolton, who lived at 638 West 158th Street, was an energetic and skilled engineer; he was also politically active, an alderman, and a member of the Washington Heights Taxpayers Association, a group of local property owners who wanted to shape the neighborhood’s future. As an engineer, Bolton had an exceptional ability to understand the critical importance of interconnected components within the larger complexity of the new skyscraper larger systems. He quickly began to patent inventions required in the complex engineering of the new tall buildings being built downtown. As engineering historian Lee Gray noted: “Bolton could justify be called the father of modern passenger elevating.” He became a public figure—writing books and newspaper articles about elevator machinery and skyscraper design, as well as historic preservation uptown in Washington Heights.

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39. Lee Gray. “A Biography of Reginald Pelham Bolton,” Part 2. *Elevator World Magazine*, May 2017. 56 “Twenty buildings, built between 1895 and 1910, have been identified as projects for which Bolton was engaged as a consulting engineer.”

Green died suddenly in 1903.\textsuperscript{43} Reginald Pelham Bolton then took a leadership role in the ASHPS work in northern Manhattan.\textsuperscript{44} Bolton, as the Chair of the ASHPS Committee on Sites and Inscriptions, designed many of the plaques and monuments that the society installed.\textsuperscript{45} In 1910 the ASHPS minutes indicated that he spent considerable time and effort on the design of a small stone marker for the site of a redoubt that overlooked the Hudson in Fort Washington Park. As Green had done earlier, Bolton determinedly took charge of both large and small projects with an overall objective to preserve sites and increase awareness of their importance. The redoubt had been part of the extended Fort Washington battlefield. The dedication ceremony for the small redoubt took place on November 16, 1910, nine years after the extensive 1901 events for the monument to the fort (Figures 4-10 and 4-11).\textsuperscript{46} Despite a nearly inaccessible site at the edge of the steep embankment, a large ceremony with bands and speeches commemorated the event. Bolton was unable to attend the event (jury duty). His friend Edward Hagaman Hall read his prepared remarks in which he noted that the proposed Riverside Drive threatened to cut off a large slice of the park, but then local preservationists had appealed to state officials to have it rerouted to preserve the battle site. Bolton shared Green’s understanding of the complexity of site planning and belief that the land has multiple meanings. When Green had proposed the design of Riverside Drive, he indicated the road’s location, but stated that final location would be determined by many local decisions. By erecting the monument and raising awareness of the site’s importance, Bolton made one of the many local decisions

\textsuperscript{43} “A. H. Green Murdered by Negro.” \textit{New York Times}. November 14, 1903, 1, 2. Green died after being shot. The shooter, Cornelius M. Williams, had misidentified Green as another man and shot him in the head near Green’s home at 91 Park Avenue. Williams thought him to be a rival for the affection of Hannah Elias. Williams’ mistake was corrected in the course of the long trial, clearing Green’s name. The initial sensationalized accounts, however, had tarnished his reputation.

\textsuperscript{44} ASHPS Minutes Oct. 25, 1904 listed Bolton as a trustee. Beginning in 1904, Bolton sought to preserve the site of the James Audubon house and land from a new railroad. He took care of the cannon at the Fort Washington monument (he wrote to the police to have officers stationed there). He initiated a monument at Forest Hill Redoubt (Fort Tryon). The minutes record Bolton’s attentive efforts to direct projects and assume tasks. ASHPS Minutes, NYPL Manuscript and Archive Collection, Box 5, Book 8.

\textsuperscript{45} The ASHPS worked with many groups for the 1909 Hudson-Fulton celebration. The DAR, and the City History Club helped to install plaques and monuments to commemorate places of historic significance.

within the larger plan. As Green had done earlier, he intended to preserve both a historic site and a portion of
the park. At that time no commercial interests competed for the land, however, other places had been lost.

**An Extended Battle Over Preserving a Battleground**

Hall’s 1898 map indicated the many known historic sites in northern Manhattan. At the turn of the
century, as new public transportation opened the area, new threats to Green’s 1865 plan began to appear.

Fort George Hill suddenly became an amusement park. In 1895 a group of entrepreneurs proposed to build a
large amusement park at the terminus of the new Third Avenue Trolley (Figure 4-15).47 This was the site of
the Laurel Hill redoubt (called Fort George by the British).48 Their proposal was concurrent with the loss to
the Harlem Heights ridge to the street grid that spurred preservation efforts for Fort Washington. The
ASHPS kept a watchful eye on the park; its minutes reflected its dogged determination to restore the historic
site without an amusement park.49

In 1896 Green learned of the plans to build the amusement park. He was only partially successful in
garnering support for a law to protect the site as parkland.50 In his 1898 essay on Fort Washington, Hall
described Laurel Hill’s loss, citing both Green’s earlier Central Park Commission essay and his more recent
ASHPS work:

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47 Victoria Martens. “Stories: Behind-the-Scenes, Streetscapes Fort George Amusement Park Museum of the City of
48 The forts in northern Manhattan had both British and American names. The British had renamed Laurel Hill Redoubt
as Fort George; and Forest Hill Redoubt as Fort Tryon. During the occupation the site of Fort Washington had been
renamed Fort Knyphausen, for Hessian Lieutenant General Wilhelm von Knyphausen, who had captured the fort.
49 The Meeting Minutes for April 23, 1906 recorded that Bolton submitted a “clipping from the NYT April 2, 1906 that
Thompson and Dundy, owners of the Hippodrome and Luna Park will obtain a twenty-year lease of the property at Fort
George with the view of establishing an immense amusement enterprise there. In as much as the Society had long
desired that this property should be taken by the City for a Public Park, the announcement was a cause of much regret.”
Box 7, Book 9, 11. NYPL Archives and Manuscripts Division.
50 “State of New York No. 433 Intro. 397. In Senate February 5, 1896. Land acquisition for park at Ft. George 190th &
Amsterdam through eminent domain.”
On the eastern side of the Island, about opposite Fort Tryon, on the bluff overlooking the Harlem between the termini of the present Tenth and Eleventh Avenues, then called Laurel Hill, was a strong fortified position subsequently named Fort George by the British. The earthenworks were extant in 1890 but were subsequently razed to make way for a proprietary pleasure resort called Fort George Park. In 1896, the Hon. Andrew H. Green secured the passage by the legislature of a bill for the conversion of this spot into a public park, but the bill failed to become a law for lack of the Governor's signature. 51 . . This point, with adjacent land (in all about 25 acres) is now under the jurisdiction of the Park Department of the City. The acquisition of the Point for a park was first suggested by Hon. Andrew H. Green in 1865. 52

When it was built, the amusement park was an isolated hill; but the trolley line, as intended, quickly brought new residential construction. This newly formed community then complained of the amusement park’s undesirability in their neighborhood. When a series of suspicious fires burned the attractions, the residents, the Park Department, and the ASHPS began to reclaim the site as parkland and the site for a large new high school for the growing neighborhood. In a ceremony coordinated with President Washington’s birthday and broadcast on WNYC radio, on February 23, 1925 pupils in Colonial Costumes opened the new George Washington High School at the site of Fort George (Figure 4-16) The New York Times described the building as an adaptation of Federal Hall and the White House (despite few similarities to either). 53 The DAR followed in the spring to install a small monument to mark the site of the battle. 54 The large bawdy

51 State of New York No. 433, Int. 397 In Senate February 5, 1896 Introduced by Mr. Ford Important land acquisition for park at Ft George 190th and Amsterdam eminent domain.
52 Edward Hagaman Hall, Fort Washington, 13.
53 “City Dedicates Finest High School, the George Washington on the Site of the old Fort George, a $3,500,000 Structure.” New York Times, February 24, 1925, 21.
54 “Tablet at Fort George, DAR Will Mark the Neglected Site of the Battle in which Col. William Baxter Sacrificed His Life.” New York Times, May 24, 1925, 196.
amusement park has been a temporary setback to their attentive efforts to continue preserving the high
ground as parks and securing selectively chosen preservation sites.

Conclusion

In the Revolutionary War military leaders sited fortifications on the forested high ground along the
rivers for strategic reason—to see great distances on the rivers below. In the late nineteenth century these
same qualities, particularly the views made them ideal sites for Green’s later efforts to preserve both scenic
and historic places. Opportunely, patriotic groups began to value these places and preserved them through
timely actions. Through Hall and Bolton’s inquisitive explorations, skills as mapmakers, and tenacity the sites
had become well known. Green’s 1865 plan for the area north of the grid prioritized preservation as an
accepted practice. It also allowed for flexibility within the planning process that supported localized planning
decisions. With this planning structure in place, Bolton could preserve a minor redoubt and relocate a road to
ultimately increase waterfront parkland.

The grid plan had presented an almost fatalistic sense of inevitability as it moved northward. In 1811
the Commissioners presented it as a complete entity that showed no quarter to history or nature in its path.
Although Eliza Greatorex described herself as a “preservationist” for recording old houses and landscapes,
only two of the buildings that she drew within the street grid physically still remained—the Powder House
that Green had preserved within Central Park and Archibald Gracie’s house which later became the Mayor’s
official home. As she drew them, she knew that the buildings that she documented would be lost and that her
drawing would be their legacy. That was not the case north of the grid. Preservation became an accepted
practice for planning northern Manhattan because of Green’s 1865 essay. The ASHPS, the DAR and the
other groups adaptively reused the Roger Morris home, first as Washington’s Headquarters and now Jumel
Mansion. Alexander Hamilton’s country home “The Grange” was moved twice in acts of preservation;
despite financial difficulties there was never a question of its demolition. This acceptance preservation
broadened to later include Native American sites and public views.
Figure 4-1. Detail Section of the Commissioner's Plan 1811 showing the area north of the Grid Plan.

Figure 4-1-A. Detail Section of the 1811 Commissioners’ Plan showing the locations of Fort Washington and Fort George in the area north of the street grid. Source: Museum of the City of New York.
Figure 4-2. The British Headquarters Map. Source: David Rumsey Map Collection.
Figure 4-3 James Kelly, “Monument to Commemorate the Battle of Harlem Heights, won by Washington’s Troops on this site, September 16, 1776 Erected by the Sons of the Revolution in the State of New York.”

Detail A: Major Andrew Leitch (in uniform atop the ridge). Detail B Thomas Knowlton (in civilian clothing) lying mortally wounded Detail C: The rocky outcrop. Note Kelly’s signature and date in the lower right corner of Detail C.
Figure 4-4. The Site of Knowlton’s Flank Attack. Source: Henry Phelps Johnston, *The Battle of Harlem Heights, September 16, 1776: With a Review of the Events of the Campaign*.

Figure 4-5. Suggestion for Arch Over Fort Washington Avenue at the Site of Fort Washington. Source: Sons of the American Revolution. Empire State Society, Walter Romeyn Benjamin, and Edward Hagaman Hall. May 3, 1898.
Figure 4-6. Edward Hagaman Map showing the site of Fort Washington1898.

Figure 4-7. Edward Hagaman Hall “Fort Washington and Related Fortifications.” The numbers indicated historic sites: No14 Fort Washington, No13 Fort Tryon (called Forest Hill Redoubt) No12 Fort George Laurel Hill; Mc Gown’s Pass, No24 within the outline of Central Park. 1898.
Figure 4-8. The Dedication of the Fort Washington Monument. November 16, 1901.

Source: *Fort Washington: An Account of the Identification of the Site of Fort Washington, New York City, and the Erection and Dedication of a Monument thereon November 16, 1901* The site is now in Bennett Park on Fort Washington Avenue. Note: Several participants wore their Civil War uniforms.

Figure 4-9. Bennett Park Playground on the site of Fort Washington, adjacent to the Fort Washington monument. The Park redesign emphasized the location of the old fort’s outline perimeter wall in paving stones and set in text suggested by Bolton and William Calver.\(^{55}\) (GA)

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\(^{55}\) Bolton, later joined by his friend William Calver, developed a long-term interest in the park. A 1930 letter from Gilmore Clark, the landscape architect who redesigned the playground under Commissioner Robert Moses had suggested the park include a double row of stones to indicate the Fort’s wall’s location and shape. Clark wrote to Calver and Bolton for suggestions for the inscription that would be. William Calver’s papers at the NYHS Box 1, Folder 6.
Figure 4-10. Robert L. Bracklow. American Redoubt Marker, Fort Park, New York City. Source: Bracklow Collection, New York Historical Society. Undated.

Figure 4-11 “Fort George and Harlem River.” Ca. 1900. Source: Museum of the City of New York.
Figure 4-12. “George Washington High School, general exterior.” Source: Museum of the City of New York, Wurts Brothers193rd Street and Audubon Avenue (6/10/1925).
Chapter Five: Discovering the Pasts of Others—Archeological Investigations of Native Sites and Artifacts

While unearthing many Native American artifacts, but without having a full understanding of their culture, chronology, or functions, a small group of archeologists, with no formal training, recognized the urgency to preserve them and to record their locations in the open fields being lost to new construction in the early twentieth century. This chapter places these local efforts within the nascent academic disciplines of archeology and anthropology. It traces the events that led the ASHPS to propose in 1904 that a large section of northern Manhattan be preserved as a Native American archeological site. Although many sites and artifacts were lost, caves and shell middens in what is now Inwood Hill Park were preserved through the ASHPS’s initial agency.

Interspersed Artifacts of Overlaid Histories

“Archeologists do not always find what they look for; they find what they find.”

Northern Manhattan’s rugged physicality and its distance from downtown allowed it to remain minimally disturbed well into the late nineteenth century when, through new means of transportation—trolleys in 1900 and an elevated subway in 1905—it became eligible for new residential construction (Figure 5-1). The land had been an extensive network of Revolutionary War military encampments. As Edward Hagaman Hall carefully mapped (see chapter 4), the entire area was an extensive archeological site for artifacts associated with that war. While intentionally looking for war-related artifacts or unintentionally discovering them through new construction, substantial evidence of earlier Native American cultures began to appear in excavations throughout the area. Through a succession of these excavations, it soon became evident that Native American cultures had inhabited northern Manhattan for a long time and

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1 Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis, in conversation 2018.
2 James K. Finch, “Aboriginal Remains on Manhattan Island,” 65. Finch states that the earliest recorded local excavation of Native artifacts was in 1855: “a deposit of Indian arrow points [were] found in Harlem during excavation for a cellar on Avenue A between 120th and 121st Streets.”
left significant remains and artifacts. The emerging fields of archeology and anthropology had begun to preserve sites like these in open, uninhabited areas of western states; these sites, however, were within a growing metropolitan area and at risk.

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Figure 5-1. Elevated 207th Street train station under construction. Bronx NYU campus beyond. Source: Inwood Hills window.

Figure 5-2. Eliza Gready (1819-1897) “Cross Keys Tavern.” Old New York From Battery to Bloomingdale. 1870-73. NYPL Digital Collections.

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5 Alanson Skinner, “Archeological Investigations of Manhattan Island, New York City,” Indian Notes and Monographs, Vol. 2, No. 6, 1920.129-135. He called the shell heap at the west end of Dyckman Street at Tubby Hook “Archaic.” As he dug through the layers, he described the historical development of some of the stone tools found in the historically stratified layers.
Before any archeological exploration began, local farmers and estate owners knew of the presence of these earlier cultures, not only through the physical evidence of artifacts found in the fields, but through family oral histories and recorded land transactions. Greatorex’s final stop at the northern end of her journey through Manhattan was near the Cross Keys Tavern (Figure 5-2). Her 1870 etching shows the roadside tavern in country beyond the grid, densely surrounded by trees. Near there she met an elderly farmwoman who described her family’s direct knowledge of events in a continuum from the time of Revolutionary War:

We turned again into King's Bridge Road and stopping at a pretty house on the right a venerable lady came to the door to speak to us, “I have not left this place for nigh seventy-five years,” she said, “and my children and grandchildren were born here. My mother used to tell me about the wounded men she saw carried into the Cross Keys and the Blue Bell taverns, and into the neighbors’ houses, to be nursed; and over in yonder field a whole company of Hessians are buried. I never dreamed that such wars to be gone through again till my youngest son and eldest grandson went off to the dreadful fighting fourteen years ago: they came back all safe though, and my son is here and will show you some of the old relics we have picked up on those roads and fields…”

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5 Frank Bergen Kelly. Historical Guide to the City of New York City, New York History Club (New York: Stokes Publishing, 1909), 153. Kelly located the tavern, which had been demolished at the time of publication, near 165th Street and Albany Post Road. The Cross Keys and the Blue Bell were rural roadside taverns in continuous use since before the Revolutionary War. Wounded soldiers were brought there for care during the Battles of Harlem Heights and Fort Washington.

6 Greatorex and Despard, Old New York, 247. The farmwoman described an unrecorded and unmarked Revolutionary War burial site. These were not uncommon in the area. Johnston stated that neither Knowlton’s nor Laith’s, the heroes who died in the Battle of Harlem Heights, graves had been found. The discovery of unmarked graves continued into the twentieth century. Bolton mapped newly discovered war-related burial locations in a New York Times article dated June 22, 1902. The 1903 ASHPS Annual Report, in a section titled “The Unknown Dead” described unearthing of “many human skeletons” at 212th Street and Tenth Avenue, 40-41. The ASHPS advocated for appropriate reinternments for all human remains unearthed during construction. Burial sites of Native Americans, enslaved peoples, colonists, and Revolutionary War combatants were all unearthed in the course of the early twentieth century building and infrastructure excavation.
The son brought us an Indian arrow-head, a small exploded shell, a handcuff, a rusty knife: the only evidence to us, this bright summer morning, of the deadly work, which went on here a hundred years ago, save one....

The son’s findings, “an Indian arrow-head, a small exploded shell, a handcuff, a rusty knife,” typified the rich yet undifferentiated nature of the archeological past that confronted a group of self-taught explorers who began their work by looking for Revolutionary War artifacts and simultaneously found Native American objects. The woman’s description of finding and keeping old things in the land was consistent with the initial undertaking of archeology in northern Manhattan. Although these artifacts were spatially adjacent and distributed within a compressed area, they were from disparate cultures placed there over an extended time period, which was not fully comprehended at the time.

The Urgency to Document Artifacts Associated with the Revolution Came to Include Native Sites

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were the periods of rapid development in northern Manhattan, when its previously little disturbed ground began to be systematically disrupted for new building construction. It was also the time of renewed interest in the Revolutionary War’s history that attracted amateur collectors to search for artifacts associated with the war’s sites. Edward Hagaman Hall described these concurrent developments in his 1898 book for the Sons of the American Revolution on Fort Washington, in a section titled, “Revolutionary War Relics.” He first despaired of the large number

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7 Greatorex and Despard, *Old New York*, 246-247.
11 James K. Finch, *Aboriginal Remains on Manhattan Island*, 65. Finch cited William Calver’s journal, “In the autumn of the year 1889, while exploring the heights of Bloomingdale for any relics that might have remained from the Battle of Harlem, Calver discovered one arrow point at 118th street east of Ninth Avenue, and immediately afterwards a circular hammer stone.”
12 Walter Romeyn Benjamin and Edward Hagaman Hall. *Fort Washington, November 16th, 1776: A Memorial from the Empire State Society of the Sons of the American Revolution to the Honorable Mayor and Municipal Assembly of the City of New York, Praying*
artifacts being unearthed during new construction without archeological documentation: “As the settlement of the northern end of the island progresses, the grading of streets and excavations for sewers, water and gas mains and foundations reveal more and more relics of the Revolutionary period.”13 He then introduced Alexander Crawford Chenoweth (1849-1922) and William Louis Calver (1859-1940) as having amassed extensive collections of Revolutionary War objects unearthed in northern Manhattan. Hall described their work beyond simply collecting objects to include scholarly research into the battle and encampment locations associated with artifacts. He noted that Chenoweth had documented skirmishes along King’s Bridge Road between the fort at Laurel Hill and Fort Washington.14

These men, Chenoweth and Calver, later joined by Hall himself, Bolton, Mrs. Bolton (née Ethelind Huyck), and Hall’s daughter Edwina, began to systematically explore sites and record findings first in notebooks and maps, later in books and exhibitions. Neither Hall nor Calver were trained archeologists: Hall had been a newspaper reporter and Calver worked as a transit engineer from 1883 until he retired in 1930, although his true calling was the archeological exploration that he began in15 as a boy, Calver started his archeological investigations in Garrison, NY.16 Although he was not formally trained, he became sufficiently skilled in all aspects of the work–excavation, mapping, recording and categorizing objects–to later assume leadership roles in museum-funded expeditions. He carefully recounted the narrative of finding artifacts and

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13 Benjamin and Hall, Ibid, 27. Hall described Mr. C.C. Simpson’s (the general superintendent of mains for Consolidated Gas Co.) growing collection of artifacts found while installing underground pipes in land near battle sites. In this essay, Hall limited his discussion to Revolutionary War artifacts, with no discussion of Native ones. He ended with a plea to readers who have themselves found relics to have them recorded in the Sons of the American Revolution’s archive.


16 In the Revolutionary War each state provided the uniforms for units sent to fight. The buttons were embossed to indicate the state, unit, and rank of the wearer. Rather than treating the objects as curiosities, Calver researched manuscript sources to create a systematic record that he later referenced for scholarly exhibits.
recorded their locations and descriptions in his notebooks. He published findings in scholarly journals as early as 1895.\(^{17}\)

Chenoweth was an engineer and an inventor, who held patents for reinforced concrete construction. He began his interest in archeology while working in South America.\(^{18}\) Later scholars credited him as initiating the exploration of Native American sites in the area when he was the resident Engineer-in-Charge for the Croton Aqueduct at Highbridge from 1889 to 1895.\(^{19}\) He did not publish his work in journals, but his discoveries appeared in a series of illustrated newspaper stories, some with sensationalized headlines that reported dubious findings.\(^{20}\) In an eight-page typed manuscript, however, he recorded his April 1890 excavation of a knoll on Dyckman Street and Sherman Avenue east of his home on Kingsbridge Road.\(^{21}\) He described the now lost site as a habitation with three round and oblong fireplaces, yet he noted eleven human burials on the hand-drawn map he attached to the essay (Figure 5-3). He found many tools and pot sherds that he had reassembled and photographed (Figure 5-4).\(^{22}\) Although Chenoweth described the knoll as a


\(^{18}\) The Ninth Annual Report of the ASHPS (1904), 49. “One of the first to explore this interesting field was Mr. Alexander Crawford Chenoweth, a civil engineer and archeologist of wide experience. While pursuing his profession in Panama ... he made studies, under the direction of the late Prof. S. F. Baird, of the Smithsonian Institution, of aboriginal remains, more particularly with reference to their bearing on the range of the Algonquins. In 1885 he became attached to the engineering staff of the Croton aqueduct. In 1886 and 1887 Captain Cortwright, of the New York police force, called his attention to the shell heaps and revolutionary remains at the northern end of Manhattan Island, and when, in 1890, Mr. Chenoweth took up his residence at Dyckman street and Kingsbridge road (now Broadway) as resident engineer of the Croton aqueduct he devoted his spare time to archeological investigations in cooperation with Prof. F. W. Putnam, curator of the Peabody Museum at Harvard University.”


\(^{20}\) “Indian Relics of Our Own, Mounds Full of Strapping Skeletons on Manhattan Island. Bones of Aboriginal Goliath waiting in Mr. Chenoweth’s Barn at Inwood to be Examined by Archeological Expert,” The New York Sun, April 12, 1890, 5.

\(^{21}\) Alexander Chenoweth, “Indian Remains Found in New York City. The Examination of a knoll at the intersection of Dyckman St. And Sherman Ave. April, 1890.” Signed and Dated November 24, 1894. Division of Anthropology Archives American Museum of Natural History.

\(^{22}\) Chenoweth, “Indian Remains Found in New York City.” He described one pot as different from others in the knoll or those found near Cold Spring. He speculated “This peculiarity was so marked as to distinguish the people as being of a different character, either antedating them in time of occupation or as having come from the interior of the continent” (2). This sentence implied that he has explored other sites as noted in the Annual Report of the Regents without
“natural formation,” newspaper reports described it as a mound and associated it with the then well-known ancient Mound Builder cultures.

Figure 5-3. Alexander Chenoweth. “Inwood, N.Y. City: Plan Showing Knoll with locations of interments, also fireplaces and shell heaps.” Division of Anthropological Archives, American Museum of Natural History.

recording the findings. By saying he thought the pot had come from an earlier or non-local culture, he may have implied he was aware of findings from other archeological sites.

Chenoweth, American Museum of Natural History Archive. 1.

In November of the same year, 1890, Chenoweth made a major discovery that became a focus of intense archeological exploration and future preservation efforts. He unearthed rock shelters formed by the large erratic glacial stones in a hilly area west of the knoll in a two-hundred-foot-tall bluff near the Hudson
River (Figure 5-5).\textsuperscript{25} The large stones had been part of the moraine pushed to their present locations more than 17,000 years ago by the force of the Wisconsin Glacier.\textsuperscript{26} The stones were then overgrown and appeared to be part of the bluff. “Mr. Chenoweth dug away the dirt until he found an easy entrance to a chamber in which a man in stooping posture might crawl about with some difficulty. The chamber was dry, and the dirt on the floor was soft. Mr. Chenoweth began turning it with his trowel. Many pieces of pottery, some as large as a man's hand, a few as large as a man's two hands, lay in little pockets of the sediment. After six hours of digging Mr. Chenoweth had all the fragments of six pots of curious forms and unique manufacture.”\textsuperscript{27} The article then chronicled his excavation as he found a series of interior spaces that contained tools, artifacts, animal remains and pottery. Along with his earlier discoveries at the knoll, these shelters, the nearby middens and spring provided convincing evidence that earlier cultures had inhabited the area well before Europeans arrived. Later Alanson Skinner recognized the site’s significance as part of a larger still unknown settlement that Bolton would later map (Figure 5-6).\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{25} “From the Inwood Cavern, Knives and Ornamented Jugs of Early Indian Make.” \textit{The New York Sun}, Friday, Nov. 28, 1890, 7. The article included drawings of the large stones, tools and pottery fragments. Alanson Skinner later quoted this in \textit{Archaeological Investigations on Manhattan Island, New York City} (1920). 159-163. Clark Wissler in \textit{Indians of Greater New York} stated an earlier date, “Attention to local rock-shelters was first due to Mr. Alexander Chenoweth’s discovery of a small cave among some fallen rocks at Cold Spring near the extreme northern end of Manhattan Island during the year 1894. About and in the cave, itself were evidences of former Indian occupation.”


\textsuperscript{27} “From the Inwood Cavern. Knives and Ornamented Jugs of Early Indian Make.” \textit{The New York Sun}, Nov. 28, 1890, 7.

Bolton Acts to Preserve Inwood Hill as a Site of Native Culture

Through his efforts with the ASHPS and the Washington Heights Tax-Payers Association, Bolton had established himself as a leading public figure in northern Manhattan. He advocated for preservation and wrote newspaper articles to foster public knowledge of the area’s relevance in the national historic narrative (Figure 5-7).29 His profitable work as an engineer designing elevators and other mechanical equipment integral to the construction of new tall buildings downtown, as well as his family’s close ties within the Episcopalian Church hierarchy, had positioned him to center his research to further support the established study of early American colonial history.30 He, along with Edward Hagaman Hall, joined Calver in his field research in northern Manhattan for artifacts related to the Revolutionary War.31

31 Notes in the ASHPS minutes and letters in the N-YHS files date meetings as early as 1901. Letters from 1903 in the Calver Papers at the N-YHS archive indicated a life-long cordial working relationship.
This preponderance of evidence that they quickly unearthed motivated them to preserve and document Native artifacts with the same prudence as their earlier and ongoing work to preserve the Revolutionary War sites. Arriving at this conclusion altered the course of Bolton’s intellectual life as he began to center his studies on Native Americans. In 1904, along with Hall and Chenoweth (Calver was not an ASHPS member) he wrote a letter from the ASHPS to local officials asking to preserve the cave and midden site:

The undersigned, citizens and taxpayers of the city of New York respectfully petition you to “initiate proceedings,” in accordance with section 428 of the Greater New York Charter, “to acquire title to land for” a public park at the extreme northern end of Manhattan Island bordering upon Spuyten Duyvil Creek, for the purpose of preserving the natural scenery and the archeological remains of that section. We recommend that the first consideration be given to an area about 12 acres at Cold Spring with a frontage of about 800 feet on Spuyten Duyvil Creek, which we tentatively entitled Indian Park, upon Map No. I (Figure 5-8). This area embraces not only some of the boldest and

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32 Green had structured the Greater New York Charter similarly, to allow for local decision making, like creating parks.
most picturesque cliffs and woodlands of the Island, but also some great shell-heaps of the aborigines and at least one rock habitation of the primitive Manhattanite.\textsuperscript{33}

Bolton, Hall and Chenoweth proposed to preserve the land as an archeological site; they cited the evidence of early habitation of glacial-formed rock shelters as well as the demonstrated long-time cultural presence of the shell heaps—middens that were within the boundaries of their proposed park. In the same volume of minutes, Bolton added an appendix, “The Amerindians of Manhattan Island,” a seventeen-page essay on the history of local Native American culture, in support of the letter to create a site of Native

\textsuperscript{33} Recorded by Edward Hagaman Hall as Secretary of the ASHPS. Letter to the Board of Local Improvement of the Washington Heights District, City of New York from Bolton, Hall, and Chenoweth. ASHPS minutes, May 24, 1904. Book for 1904 pages 47, 48. Manuscript and Archive Division NYPL.

\textsuperscript{34} The plan initially structured the park to allow visitors to observe a variety of Native cultures. Both the 1893 World Columbian Exposition in Chicago and the later 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, held in St. Louis, included Native peoples in exhibits. After the Chicago exposition closed, a major portion of the artifacts displayed at the fair remained in Chicago to form the foundation of the Field Columbian Museum.
American cultural heritage. This expansive essay described the beauty of the site and its importance to the earlier cultures. He strongly argued for its preservation within an expanding city. “It is truly a fortunate preservation which enables a vast metropolis now to acquire, protect and pass on to future generations, an actual dwelling place, as well as many actual personal relics of the aboriginal inhabitants of part of its area.”

Unlike the Revolutionary War histories composed from recorded archives that could document the found artifacts, Bolton’s essay on the Native Americans presented a conjectural history of cultures that were not yet researched, yet he argued for their preservation with as much vigor as he, Green, and Hall had to preserve the Revolutionary War sites. He referred to Green’s 1865 Central Park Commission essay to create the park for its beauty and for its location as a base for a bridge over Spuyten Duyvil. Bolton followed Green’s planning principle of having multiple uses for sites: “The efforts being made by the Society to secure the creation of a public park at Inwood for the preservation of the most interesting native vestiges on the island; for the protection of a portion of the beautiful scenery of Inwood; and for the provision of a proper terminal for the proposed Hudson Memorial Bridge, have aroused fresh interest in the aboriginal history of the island.” Bolton’s map for the park located the new bridge to circumvent the rock shelters and middens. The ASHPS and Bolton, through his writings and public speeches, continued to argue for the site’s preservation, stressing its unique place within the city and its uncommon historic context:

The earliest history of the City of New York is especially associated with the northern portion of the Island of Manhattan, and it is a remarkable fact that the long-retarded development of the locality has preserved to this late date many of the actual evidences of

aboriginal life, of which, in the lower and middle parts of the island, all traces were long since swept away [1909].

The hill [Inwood Hill] possesses not only the last remains of the wild woodlands which once covered Manhattan Island; but within them are hidden the actual rock shelters which once formed the abodes of original Manhattanites from which were taken only a few years ago, unmistakable evidence of Indian habitation, and around which may to-day be seen immense mounds of oyster and clam shells which formed the kitchen middens of primeval man [1912].

Bolton, Calver, and Hall Unearth and Record Artifacts in Anticipation of the Impending City

While engaged in civic efforts to preserve the park, Calver and Bolton began a more physically demanding project: archeologically excavating and mapping sites to document and preserve artifacts in areas that would soon be lost to new construction. While the new streets were being graded, from 1906 to 1909 they catalogued 258 artifacts found mostly in northern Manhattan. They numbered each artifact and recorded its location, using the new streets as coordinates in double-page entries in a field journal (Figure 5-9). They included a column for “Material” that they often left blank. The Native American artifacts listed in their journals, are presently in the American Museum of Natural History, maintained as a group in two drawers (Figures 5-10 and 5-10-A). Bolton and Calver also each had private collections and shared finds with other

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41 The artifacts have both Bolton and Calver’s original numbers and newer numbers within the museum’s system. The index cards that list the artifacts also have both sets of numbers. The museum archive has copies of letters between Bolton and the curator, Harlan I. Smith, about the acquisition.
institutions. While they did not fully comprehend the age or uses of the artifacts that they discovered, they appreciated their importance and knew that since the sites would be lost, they needed to record their finds.

Figure 5-9. A typical double page from Bolton’s notebook listing objects and locations. Source: Cornell University, Olin Library.
Edward Hagaman Hall, who continued to write about and map the Revolutionary sites, joined Bolton and Calver in their Native American research. In a letter to his friend Reginald Bolton, he expressed respect and affection for the culture, as well as perplexity about the meaning of the small shell-pocket they had recently discovered (Figure 5-11):\footnote{Both Calver and Hall had extensively researched Revolutionary War artifacts that could be classified based on written documentation. They attempted to apply a similar discipline to the Native American artifacts.}

I have been cudgeling my brain in regards to the meaning of these small shell-pockets which we find and I think we should make a minute inventory of everything we find in each one of them before we get at the bottom of the matter. . . The finding of remains of fish, turtles, and broken pottery is very suggestive of refuse heaps and yet I cannot believe that the Indians would carefully dig holes in the ground to make a refuse dump. . . I have been searching for literature in regard to shell deposits and can find nothing in regard to small shell heaps like ours. All the published literature seems to refer to the great masses of shells such as we find in Inwood, etc. Hence, I am most anxious to find out every
detail in regard to the shell-pockets and I think we ought to examine them more in detail than we have heretofore.\textsuperscript{43}

Figure 5-11 "An Indian Shell-pit," Reginald Pelham Bolton Album. Edward Hagaman Hall (L) and William Calver (R). Photo: I. Wenzel. Dyckman Farmhouse Museum Collection, courtesy of Don Rice.

Some of these shell-pits were small personal ritual places and located close together in what was the site of some of Bolton, Calver, and Hall’s richest discoveries that they called, ‘the village site,’ (Figure 5-12). Here, they collaborated on the excavations and measurements to create a map as a living document on which they recorded findings. The map changed, with new information added. Although the map was dated 1907, that may be the date of its inception because it includes a burial that they unearthed in March 1908. Bolton described the circumstances of the discovery (Figure 5-13):

Sunday March 22 being the first day in the field for exploration for the season of 1908. W. L. Calver and R. P. Bolton met at Seaman Avenue and Hawthorne St. Manhattan to discuss plans to further explorations, on the village site cut by the avenue. The rains of the winter had washed the west bank where the layer of oyster shells and black dirt lay along the hill, and R.P.B. noticed a red patch which

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44 Diana diZerega Wall and Anne-Marie Cantwell, *Touring Gotham’s Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 84. This book printed one of several versions of the map.
in digging out disclosed a fireplace evidently of the period of the Revolution, having some large burnt stones, ashes, wood charcoal, brick broken rum bottles, a wineglass nearly complete, a large open knife with bone handle, a hoop-rim pot hook, various forged head nails, and a curious folding corkscrew. At the south part of this fireplace we came upon a pocket of oyster shells evidently Indian, though shallow, about 1 1/2, to 2 feet deep—and some had the good fortune to uncover a human thigh bone.45

Hall’s letter describing his earnest desire to understand the artifacts, and Bolton’s description of finding the double burial under the Revolutionary–period fireplace clearly showed the seriousness of purpose they brought to discover the richness of the many layers of history in the area.

Figure 5-13. “The Curious Double Burial at Shorekappok Seaman Avenue.”

Alanson Skinner and Amos OneRoad Place the Artifacts in an Expanded Discourse

Alanson Skinner (1885-1925) was the first formally trained archeologist to investigate the Native American sites in northern Manhattan (Figure 5-14). He had studied at Columbia and Harvard and worked at both the American Museum of Natural History and the Heye Foundation. Skinner began his work in Inwood after many years of extensive archeological work throughout North America and Canada. His descriptions of the sites and artifacts that he found in Inwood were informed by the breadth of his academic training and his extensive field research with his longtime friend Amos Enos OneRoad (1885-1934), a member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota people and the first Native American trained in archeology/anthropology. Skinner’s *Archeological Investigations on Manhattan Island, New York City, “Indian Notes and Monographs, Vol II No. 6”* (1920), acknowledged Chenoweth’s and Calver’s work begun twenty years earlier, and included Bolton’s maps. By the time of its publication, research into the chronology of the sites and had artifacts documented the presence of cultures much earlier than the Woodland Algonkian people who lived in Inwood when Europeans first arrived.

Skinner began by noting a loss of a significant site; the shell midden on the Hudson at Dyckman Street, Tubby Hook, that had contained Archaic artifacts. It had been destroyed by the widening of the tracks for the Hudson River Railroad (Figure 5-15). George Heye, founder of the Heye Foundation, described the importance of Skinner’s analysis of this shell-heaps at Tubby Hook: “Mr. Skinner has found only one site remaining on Manhattan Island which may be ascribed to the ancient local culture.” Skinner’s descriptions of the artifacts were informed by his previous research. He analyzed the objects’ forms, shaping techniques,
and materials in order to place them in a historic context. These descriptive categories were beginning to be basis of the normative discourse in his emerging field, but were not part of Bolton, Hall, or Calver’s analysis.

In their field notebook Bolton and Calver infrequently included the artifact’s materials, but Skinner described them in detail, citing possible origins: “there is an unusual variety in material and in quality of workmanship, facts not altogether to be unexpected, for the position of Manhattan Island made it readily accessible to Indian travelers by water from the land to the north and west, or those skirting the coast from the south and east. It is not astonishing, therefore, that objects of quartz, flint, and jasper from central and western New York, New England, Long Island, New Jersey, and the region far to the south, were added to the native materials.” He located artifacts both in local and archeological context: “Plate VIII, a-d, represent four large blades of a smooth grayish flint, which, in form as well as in material, suggest a southern origin. These were found years ago by Mr. William Isham in his garden on West 215th street and were presented by Mrs. Taylor [Julia Isham Taylor] (Figure 5-16).” His writings on northern Manhattan placed the site within the new national awareness of the early Native American sites and within the emerging academic discipline of archeology.

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49 Skinner later criticized Chenoweth’s reassembly of the pots to include bases. See Figure 5-4: “Chenoweth errs in ascribing this last feature to any vessel of the sub-Iroquois type as described here. None of the vessels which he restored, which are now in the American Museum of Natural History, possesses such a base. The pointed-bottom jar was a distinct type.” Skinner, “Archeological Investigations on Manhattan Island.” 217-218.


52 Archeologists Diana diZerega Wall and Anne-Marie Cantwell continued to expand the cultural understanding of artifacts discovered by Bolton, Hall, and Calver. Both Unearthing Gotham (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) and Touring Gotham’s Archaeological Past (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) offered interpretations of artifacts in the context of rituals. In 2016 Dr. William Parry, during a presentation in Inwood Hill Park, offered a possible new chronology of artifacts found in Inwood based on newer studies of tool making.
Figure 5-14. “Alanson B. Skinner as a young man.” Photograph courtesy of Department of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History. Negative Number 125304. Source: *Journal of the New York State Archeological Association*, No. 113, 1997.

Figure 5-15. Alanson Skinner, “The Shellheap at Tubby Hook, Foot of Dyckman Street, from a Survey by Reginald Pelham Bolton.” from “Notes on Inwood Station Shellheap-Foot of Dyckman St.”
A National Decision to Preserve Places of Memory for Cultures No Longer Present: The 1906 Antiquities Act

In 1890, when Chenoweth excavated the knoll on Dyckman Street and Sherman Avenue, he reported that he contacted Frederic W. Putnam (1839-1915) of Harvard University to describe his findings and to ask advice on how to proceed.53 In each of the subsequent newspaper stories about his finds, Chenoweth cited his correspondence with the noted scholar, who had studied mounds, notably preserving the Ohio Serpent Mound.54 While he did not follow Putnam’s advice to carefully document his findings, Chenoweth had made...
one of the founders of the new academic discipline aware of the site. Putnam, along with Franz Boas had just begun to study indigenous cultures that predated European settlements. Both were scientists in the emergent field of anthropological archeology. Their work, which included Native American cultural and artifact presentations at the 1893 World Columbian Exposition in Chicago, led to the public awareness that fostered the Antiquities Act of 1906. This federal law became the foundation to preserving the sites of very early Native cultures west of the Mississippi in still undisturbed land.

Green had not known of the Native American sites in his earlier writings on Inwood Hill or Tubby Hook, but he had valued the area’s preservation for its scenic beauty. After Bolton and Hall had begun their research into Native American sites, the ASHPS invited Professor Edgar L. Hewett of the National Museum, Washington, D. C. to speak at its January 3, 1905 meeting. His topic was “Anthropites of the Southwest and Their Preservation: Importance of Preserving Uninterpreted Records,” in which he discussed preserving archeological sites like Chaco Canyon and Mesa Verde. Bolton’s 1904 local effort to preserve what would become Inwood Hill Park paralleled the national one to preserve these western sites. The Tenth Annual Report of the ASHPS printed the text of Hewett’s talk along with his images of western archeological sites as Appendix A. In the same volume, as Appendix C, it published Bolton’s essay, “The Amerindians of the Upper Part of the Island of Manhattan.” Hewett’s presentation, although limited to the southwest, raised awareness of the value of pre-Columbian cultures’ values; Bolton’s article presented a similar argument and placed his local efforts to preserve northern Manhattan within the context of a national effort.
The 1909 Hudson-Fulton Celebration: An Exhibit and a Guidebook

The Hudson-Fulton Celebration of 1909 celebrated both the three hundredth anniversary of Henry Hudson’s sailing into the New York harbor, and the one hundredth of Robert J. Fulton’s invention of the steamboat. With parades of ships and on land, it was a grand, well-funded, three-month-long civic event in which many museums and civic institutions participated. The ASHPS worked with the Hudson-Fulton Celebration to promote educating the public about the city’s history, and its local archeology.\textsuperscript{59}

The American Museum of Natural History presented an extensive exhibition of Native American artifacts found in New York City in recent years. Although Skinner did not publish his first academic paper on northern Manhattan until 1920, earlier he curated this exhibit that included a now-lost model of the Inwood rock shelter. He wrote the guide to this exhibit that also provided directions to the native sites in northern Manhattan for the public to visit them.\textsuperscript{60} While most of the artifacts were differentiated into classified groups, the Bolton and Calver Collection was exhibited as a single group of artifacts.

This well-funded celebration published \textit{The Historical Guide to the City of New York}, by City History Club, an extensive listing of the city’s historic sites arranged in walking tours from public transportation. It had five tours of northern Manhattan with map by both Hall and Bolton locating the Native American, and Revolutionary War sites.\textsuperscript{61} Through these efforts to inform the public, they became part of the city’s accepted history. In 1972, at a Community Board meeting to prepare a Master Plan for northern Manhattan, the board’s Landmarks committee recommended that the rock shelters be designated as landmarks.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{59} The memberships overlapped. Edward Hagaman Hall was secretary for both groups and Bolton created maps and listings for the guidebook.
\textsuperscript{61} Kelly, Frank Bergen, compiler. Reginald Pelham Bolton and Edward Hagaman Hall, editors, \textit{Historical guide to the city of New York, City History Club of New York}. (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, Co, 1909). The guidebook also included the sites of the many new plaques that the ASHPS worked with the Hudson-Fulton to locate. The book listed Martha J. Lamb’s \textit{History of the City of New York} as its principal source.
The dense carpet of intermixed and undifferentiated artifacts that the farmwoman had described to Greatorex in 1870, by 1920, became classified and separated into cultural grouping: Bolton and Calver’s Native American artifacts remained at the American Museum of Natural History. The Colonial and Revolutionary War objects were first displayed in the Jumel Mansion, then called Washington’s Headquarters and uses as a Revolutionary War Museum, and were later transferred to the New-York Historical Society.65

Bolton continued Green’s efforts to preserve Inwood Hill, but concluded that the newly discovered Native American sites had enriched it further: “The leveling advance of public improvement will soon reach this section, which as yet retains almost its primeval form; and it should be preserved not only for the delight and comfort of the dense population soon to crowd the upper end of Manhattan, but as a specimen of the primitive beauty of the Island and an object lesson of great historical interest.”64 These preservation efforts led to both a deeper knowledge of northern Manhattan’s history and to extensive land preservation efforts acknowledged its many earlier pasts. Green had designed a street plan to circumscribe the existing rock formations and to allow large areas to remain undisturbed. This planning, although not for this stated intention, allowed a significant site of Native American culture to remain in place for later research, while most to the south were lost. Calver, Chenoweth, Bolton and Hall had diligently preserved artifacts and recorded their original sites that were then lost.

The city did begin to acquire the parkland until 1916. Inwood Hill Park finally had a formal opening in May 1926.65 It was through the creation of the smaller adjacent Isham Park that renewed interest in preserving the larger, Inwood Hill finally came to fruition.

63 The New-York Historical Society Field Exploration Committee officially existed from 1917 to 1938. This group, led by William Calver, researched Revolutionary War sites within New York State. The N-YHS’s Quarterly Bulletin published many illustrated articles written by William L. Calver and Reginald P. Bolton that recorded the earlier work as well as their later explorations.
64 Reginald Pelham Bolton, American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society minutes, 1904, 47. NYPL. Archive Rare Books and Manuscripts.
65 Creating Inwood Hill Park was a difficult, time-consuming process affected by shifts in political will and real estate values. Several proposals for bridge designs through the park slowed the process, as did legal actions by landowners who wanted greater compensation. The city began the process of acquiring the land in 1915, and a portion of the park opened on May 8, 1926. The park administers the portion of Isham Park west of Seaman Avenue. Construction of the Harlem Shipping Canal altered the shoreline. Robert Moses, as Parks Commissioner later made modifications that also altered the shoreline.
Chapter Six

The Privileged View Became the Public View: Isham Park and Progressive Era Planning

Isham Park’s small size belies its important role in northern Manhattan and in Progressive Era planning. This chapter discusses the park’s creation and its place in the larger context. Although the park was created in 1912, almost a decade after Andrew Haswell Green’s death, it exemplifies Green’s ideas for city planning. The park donors, Julia Isham Taylor and her aunt Flora Isham, had a forthright objective: to create a park which included an unobstructed public view of the Hudson River, Spuyten Duyvil, and Palisades (Figure 6-1). They then worked with Borough President George McAneny, a noted Progressive Era city planner, to accomplish this goal. This particular view had acquired layers of meaning for the family, especially for the art historian Samuel Isham. The family continued to expand the park over time through a series of land transfers from the estate and through supplemental purchases specifically chosen to maintain this important view to the water.

Borough President George McAneny, acting for the city, altered the locations of proposed streets expressly to preserve the river view for the public (Figure 6-2). McAneny had earlier designed the elevated train system and constructed street steps to link new housing to both parks and public transportation. He valued the view and saw the park as part of his larger effort to improve the quality of urban life in newer parts of the city. His later actions to preserve what would become Inwood Hill Park began with his efforts to create Isham Park.
Figure 6-1. “The View from Isham Park.” Cover Image of the Civic Ceremony Opening Day Program. Source: DPR Archive.

Figure 6-2. “Proposed Alteration of Lines of West 214th Street.” Source: Manhattan Borough President’s Map Archive.
The Isham Family Generously Welcomes the City’s “Steady Approach”

Andrew Haswell Green, in his 1865 essay on planning the area north of 155th Street, advocated for its development while protecting significant parts of the landscape’s unique beauty. His essay also described the concerns of property owners as about changes to the area as the city encroached into their Arcadia:

The exceeding picturesqueness of this part of the Island, the varied scenery comprehended within its wide horizon, and the unrestricted movements of healthful currents of air over adjacent waters, are among the characteristics that have, during the past century, rendered it a favorite resort of much of the wealth and intelligence of the city; the occupants of the beautiful retreats that now adorn it are watching with interest the steady approach of improvements that are pushing towards, and will soon surround them.¹

¹ Andrew Haswell Green, “Communication of the Comptroller of the Central Park, Relative to work outside of the Park.” Central Park Commission Tenth Annual Report for the Year ending December 31, 1866 (New York: W. M. Bryant, 1867), 117.
William Bradley Isham (1827-1909) and his family were, by all definitions, members of the “wealth and intelligence of the city” that Green had described.\(^2\) While pursuing a successful career as a leather merchant who had produced fine-quality leather goods during the Civil War, he had become a banker and a philanthropist. Among other activities, as a founding member of the “Ladies and Gentlemen’s Society,” he purchased artworks for the new Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1864 he bought the hilltop house and its extensive property as a small farm and a summer residence.\(^3\) He and his wife Julia Burhan Isham with their young and growing family then spent many happy summers enjoying “its wide horizon, and the unrestricted movements of healthful currents of air over adjacent waters” (Figure 6-3).\(^4\) The family clearly valued the land and its history.\(^5\) Acts of preservation and generosity appeared to be common among them. William’s son Samuel reported: “One relic we got from the operation [paving Broadway] the old milestone twelve miles from the City Hall had stood some hundred feet below our gate and when it was thrown into the rubbish heap by the workmen, my father got it from the foreman and had it built into the wall by our gate post” (Figure 6-4).\(^6\)

After his death in 1909, rather than solely capitalize on the increased values of the land that the subway had brought, William B. Isham’s heirs chose to donate part of their land to the city as a public park for the newly arriving residents. Importantly, they wanted to preserve their land’s extensive view of the Hudson River at the point where it met Spuyten Duyvil and then beyond to the distant Palisades. Led by two strong-willed and intelligent women—Julia Isham Taylor, the wife of historian Henry Osborn Taylor, and her

\(^2\) Green, *Central Park Commission*, 117.
\(^3\) The Isham and Burhans (Mrs. Julia Burhans Isham) families have long and well-documented histories. Two sources are Homer Worthington Brainard, *A Survey of the Ishams in England and America; eight hundred and fifty years of history and genealogy*, (Rutland, VT: The Tuttle Publishing Company, 1938) and Cole Thompson’s *MyInwood Website page* on the history of Isham Park.
\(^4\) Green, *Central Park Commission*, 117.
\(^5\) Alanson Skinner, “Archaeological Investigations on Manhattan Island, New York City,” *Indian Notes and Monographs, v. 2, no. 6.* (New York: Museum of the American Indian/Heye Foundation, 1920), 165-166 and Plate VIII. Archeologist Alanson Skinner (as discussed in Chapter Five) described Julia Isham Taylor having given him Native American artifacts that her father had found: “four large blades of a smooth grayish flint.… These were found years ago by Mr. William Isham in his garden on West 215th street and were presented by Mrs. Taylor.”
aunt Flora Isham, William’s sister—they began to negotiate with the city officials to transfer the land and preserve that view.  

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**Carefully Worded Letters and a Land Purchase to Protect the View**

The first publication of the words “Isham Park” were in Julia Isham Taylor’s letter to Borough President McAneny, printed in full in the *New York Times* in May 1911. Her letter offered her portion of the country estate in upper Manhattan to the city as a public park to be called Isham Park in her father’s memory,  

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7 “Mrs. H. O. Taylor, City’s Benefactor Wife of Historian and Donor of Isham Park,” *New York Times*, March 7, 1939. Julia Isham Taylor had been active in many civic and philanthropic groups. A member of the board of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Municipal Art Society, she was a member of the Garden Club of America and the Cosmopolitan Club.  

if he agreed to change the proposed street layouts on specific maps. In her letter she made requests that the streets not yet constructed be designed to accommodate the view of the Hudson: “The proposed park would include the entrance gardener’s lodge, driveway shaded by elms, and the residence, lawns and gardens of the estate. It commands a beautiful view of the Hudson across the Spuyten Duyvil Creek and to the east the valley of the Harlem with University Heights beyond and Fort George Hill.” She directed that the proposed 214th Street be realigned to allow a continuous view to the river.

The Seventeenth Annual Report of the ASHPS also later printed that letter in full, in an article called “Isham Park, New York City: Generous Gifts by Two Women.” Importantly, it added that Flora Isham had purchased an additional 2.3 acres of land for the park: “In order that the charming vista from Isham Park towards Spuyten Duyvil Creek, the Hudson River and the Palisades, might not be cut off by the erection of buildings, Miss Isham bought this additional property and gave it to the city.”

Flora Isham’s notarized letter of land transfer (also sent to George McAneny) stated, “These parcels have been acquired by Miss Flora E. Isham in order that there be preserved for Isham Park a suitable outlook to the Hudson River and also to furnish access for the public to the water.” Through this letter, she emphatically stated the family’s intention to ensure the view’s protection. By including this letter in the Board of Estimate’s minutes of the acquisition, the city contractually agreed to her terms, as part of the contract to create a park with a clear and unobstructed view of the Hudson River.

The Ishams’ initial and subsequent gifts of land over the next several years placed the small park in the then ongoing movement to effectuate a Progressive urban design for Manhattan north of 155th Street which would include the program for public land preservation that Green began in 1865. Julia Isham Taylor

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11 American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society Seventeen Annual Report, 134.
12 Minutes of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment of the City of New York, for March 21, 1912, 676. The minutes recorded that Reginald Pelham Bolton of the ASHPS had been the only speaker at the Board of Estimate’s public hearing on the matter. He supported the transfer.
13 The Board of Estimate was a citywide governmental body formed after the 1899 municipal consolidation comprising the Mayor, the five Borough Presidents, the Comptroller, and the President of the Board of Aldermen. It acted as a citywide infrastructure planning agency.
continued to actively add to the park throughout her life. In 1932, working with architect William Platt and landscape architect Ferruccio Vitale, she donated a memorial seating area, circular in plan, near the site of their former home. The curved ashlar benches faced a low parapet wall. Area where a small plaque chronicled her family’s gifts without interrupting the view (Figure 6-5).14

Figure 6-5. Isham Park Memorial Plaque. Source: G A photo.

Large-scale changes in the expanded city had, by the early twentieth century, overshadowed Green’s earlier planning program.15 Through Isham Park, The ASHPS wanted to renew public support for Green’s earlier plan for parkland. The ASHPS Report followed the section on Isham Park with “Inwood Hill Park: A Neglected Opportunity.” This section began, “The gifts of Mrs. Taylor and Miss Isham stand out in brilliant contrast with the backwardness of the City in acquiring property on the adjacent Inwood Hill for a public park.”16 It then restated the chronology of past appeals by the ASHPS to create Inwood Hill Park in a tract of land threatened by private development and the anticipated new bridge across Spuyten Duyvil. The report

15 “Big City Improvements; New Parks and Thoroughfares and Many Street Extensions.” New York Times, May 12, 1901. Several of the street extensions would have affected the area, including a perimeter road around the island between the Isham land and the river.
16 American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society Seventeen Annual Report, 134.
then presented a plan that followed Green’s earlier one of having the land serve as both a park and a bridge support: “We have petitioned the City Government to take about fifty to seventy-five acres of the north end of the hill for a public park and a suitable approach to the Hudson Memorial Bridge.”17 By supporting Isham Park, the ASHPS thus also renewed its advocacy to create Inwood Hill Park.

Isham Park Is Announced with Anticipation

The family’s decision to give the new park through donated and purchased land received an extraordinary amount of attention for a small park at the north end of the island. A nearly full-page illustrated story appeared in the New York Times on Sunday, March 24, 1912 with the headline, “Park Planned for North End of Manhattan Island: Gift of Mrs. [Miss] Flora E. Isham Revives the Unfulfilled Dream of Andrew H. Green for Acquiring Inwood Hill So the City Would Have a Park at Each End of the Island.”18 It included

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17 American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society Seventeen Annual Report, 135.
photographs of the house and the preserved view of the Hudson. A large map showed both the new Isham Park and the proposed Inwood Hill Park. Although it was unsigned, the map resembled Reginald Pelham Bolton’s map for Inwood Park in the ASHPS minutes (see Figure 5-8). The article’s first sentence cited the Board of Estimate’s meeting that had occurred two days earlier: “The generous gift by Miss Flora E. Isham of several acres of valuable land for the extension of Isham Park, near Kingsbridge, which the Board of Estimate accepted on Thursday, has brought into public notice one of the almost forgotten and still unfulfilled dreams of the late Andrew H. Green, known as the “Father of Greater New York.””

This large news story announcing both parks was clearly the work of the ASHPS to promote Inwood Hill Park. As a former newspaperman, McAneny (later an ASHPS member who would become its president) understood the power of the press, and Bolton had worked closely with the Times throughout his career. The article reintroduced Green as a visionary, and quoted Bolton, Park Commissioner Charles Stover, and Borough President George McAneny. These men were major figures in New York’s Progressive political movement, who realized the important role the small park could play in promoting their agendas for a better city and took the opportunity to restate their larger planning goals in a public forum. McAneny spoke of the park’s role in the new community that he had anticipated by extending the transit system: “As the population crowds around the park in commercial and residential buildings, this breathing space of exceptional beauty, with its varied topography, will be more and more appreciated and remain a constant reminder of the generosity of the donors and the wisdom of the city officials in accepting and preserving such a noble gift for the benefit of the people of the City of New York… On account of the high elevation of the park, there are uninterrupted views looking in nearly every direction.” Julia’s brother, Samuel Isham, a well-known art historian, provided his family’s history of living there. He had been a young boy of nine or ten and

20 Parks Commissioner Charles B. Stover (1861–1929) was trained as a Presbyterian minister. In 1898 Stover and Lillian Wald (1867–1940), director of the nearby Henry Street Settlement, founded the Outdoor Recreation League (ORL), whose mission was to provide play spaces for the children of the densely populated Lower East Side. The ORL opened nine privately sponsored playgrounds and advocated that the City itself build and operate playgrounds. In 1902 the City assumed the operation of the ORL playgrounds. Stover was appointed Manhattan Parks Commissioner in 1910.
his sister Julia was about two when they came. Through his childhood memories, he described his father’s farm with affection and in detail. The city officials thanked the two women, although neither were quoted.

The park opened with a large well-attended public ceremony on September 28, although Julia Isham Taylor and Flora Isham were not there.22 Park Commissioner Stover and McAneny again used the event as an opportunity to speak of the need to create more parks, Inwood Hill Park in particular.23 The Commissioner spoke of his plans for additional parks that echoed Green’s initial plan: “I want this park to be a link in a great parkway. I want to see this park a link between Central Park and lower Riverside Drive to the foot of Inwood Hill and Spuyten Duyvil.”24 McAneny also stressed the urgency of saving Inwood Hill as a public park as development moved closer: “It would be a crying shame,” he said, “if now, when the land is undeveloped and real estate is within reach, the City loses all this natural park ground.25 It is my desire that we gain more land to the west of this park.”26

Isham Park fused two of George McAneny’s innovative city planning concepts. He pioneered the urban planning concept to integrate newly created residential neighborhoods with access to both parks and public transportation.27 Earlier he had built the elevated subway, and in anticipation of future development constructed well-designed street-steps illuminated with electric lights, and planted beds between the two sets of steps (Figure 6-6; Figure 6-5 shows the steps in plan at the upper right corner.)

22 Both Julia Isham Taylor and Flora Isham wrote to McAneny to ask that the ceremony’s date be changed to accommodate their planned trip to Europe. He made efforts to reschedule it to October but failed. George McAneny Papers, Princeton University Archive. Letters dated June 12, 1912.
23 “Turn Isham Park Over to the City; Borough President and Park Commissioner Want It to be Part of a Chain of Playgrounds.” New York Times, Sunday, September 29, 1912.
25 “Apartment Demand in Dyckman Section Shows Northward Trend of Population.” New York Times, October 27, 1912. A month after the park’s opening ceremony the Times reported on the rapid increase in apartment construction in the neighborhood.
27 He supported enlarging the city through extending subway lines and planning housing centered on park space. A neighborhood in which the residents could walk to a subway and to a park had been called a “McAneny Neighborhood.”
George McAneny was a ubiquitous presence in the Progressive circles of early twentieth century New York City. Carl Schutz first recognized his ability to organize and marshal disparate factions of civic life, when he asked him to join the sweeping anti-corruption efforts of the Civil Service Reform League. Isaac Newton Phelps Stokes reached out to him, as a friend, to move the façade of Martin E. Thompson’s Branch Bank of the United States, which was being demolished, to the new Metropolitan Museum of Art as an act of architectural preservation. As a planner and city administrator, he strove to provide aesthetically pleasing public places within the city in keeping with the new City Beautiful Movement and by preserving such older buildings, as City Hall and St. John’s Church.\(^{28}\) He promoted the design of the new Courthouse Civic Center as an expansive plaza from which to see the surrounding grand civic buildings.\(^{29}\) Using infrastructure design, he created public amenities to enhance the city as a new normative model.\(^{30}\) At Isham Park he altered the map to create an aesthetically framed public view. The view is structured to be seen from a public sidewalk.

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\(^{28}\) In 1913 he was awarded a medal from the Society of French Architects for his efforts in the designs of new subway, the preservation of City Hall, the design of the new Civic Center, and the reduction of public advertisements. When presented with the medal he was described as “a person who has demonstrated that public office and civic beauty are not incompatible, and that ugliness and economy are not synonymous. . . . The practical, the artistic and the aesthetic welfare of the city is in good hands” (“French Society to Award Medal to Borough President.” *Journal of the American Institute of Architects*, Volume One. No. 7. (Washington D.C.: Octagon, 1913), 312).


(see Figure 6-2). This was an important detail in understanding that Progressive aesthetic design principles attempted to broaden the city’s enjoyment to all residents.

This viewshed from the public sidewalk transformed the earlier concept of designing views to be seen only from a privileged perspective. Within the discipline of landscape architecture, the historical precedent for this concept was exemplified by André Le Nôtre’s (1613-1700) 1641 Château of Vaux-le-Vicomte and his more famous 1680 garden design for the Château of Versailles. There, the major axis of the extensive garden’s design was placed to be seen from King Louis XIV’s chamber: a concept that continued though design history. For Isham Park, however, the view was not from the privileged position of the still extant mansion, or even from the crest of the hill, but from a public, pedestrian viewpoint on the new sidewalk. This small design gesture placed the new park well within the larger urban aesthetic context that George McAneny worked towards in his many larger projects.

The View—Samuel Isham and the Hudson River School

Samuel Isham was a painter and a scholar. Yale educated, he graduated at age twenty with a BFA degree. After Yale he went to Paris to study under Jacquesson de la Chevreuse, and upon his return to New York he worked in law for several years. He then made the major decision of his life: to return to Paris where he studied at the Academie Julien. He began writing about art in France and contributed essays for the Metropolitan Museum’s journals. In 1905 he published History of American Painting. The book was a critical and popular success that remained a standard text for many years. Samuel Isham’s early childhood at his family’s country home in northern Manhattan informed his paintings and his writings on art, specifically his lengthy and laudatory discussion of the Hudson River School in his 1905 survey. In turn, his writings and

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31 The book was both a textbook and popular history. John Van Dyke, the editor, had planned the book as part of a series by artists about works in their fields. After Isham’s death in 1914 the book was reissued in October 1927 with additions by Royal Cortissoz (1869-1948). Julia Isham Taylor copyrighted a new edition in 1933.

32 Virgil Barker, American Painting: History and Interpretation. (New York: Bonanza Books/MacMillan, 1950). Barker’s book was the first published to include the newer American Art. He began its preface, “Samuel Isham’s History of American Painting is a permanent landmark in its field; it was the first book on the subject to combine an orderly time sequence, logical groupings, and a consistently applied standard of criticism.” (p).
insights about that group of painters informed the family’s preservation of the specific view when they donated the park.

He described his father as having created the view that the family then preserved: “My father,” he said, “leased the Kingsbridge place for the summer of 1862. The next year we went to Newburg, but in 1864, he bought the place. It was then very rough, much of it a tangled thicket of red cedars, but the lawns about the house had been carefully kept up. He cleared it, moved the stable from the top of the hill to its present place, regraded the whole hill from top to bottom, planted nearly all of the trees that now remain, and in fact remade the place into about what it is now.”

His father had created a view like those depicted in paintings of the mid-nineteenth century Hudson River School (Figure 6-7). In American Painting he described these works as the first American form of painting and defined the Hudson River School as “a combination of traditions and method, a technique, a particular feeling in design, a particular sense of color also, all united together to express a common ideal followed by the artists of a given nation at a given time.” His interest and attention to these painters as important to the national culture came at a time when these paintings were being eclipsed by newer art. His

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insights into the paintings’ value to describe the new country’s vision acknowledged their artistic merit and cultural significance.

The Isham family’s tenacity to preserve the view may have been inspired by the view’s fragility in the face of the only recently ended industrial destruction of the Palisades. This same knowledge of the landscape’s vulnerability informed the paintings of the Hudson River School’s founder, Thomas Cole (1801-1848). Angela Miller, a later art historian, described Thomas Cole’s art as demonstrating his knowledge of threats to the scenery that he painted: “the larger thrust of his art was cautionary, not celebratory.” Cole had seen the beginnings of the industrial transformation in English cities before coming to America in 1818. In America he questioned the concept of exceptionalism and the westward expansion, yet saw the beauty in the American land, and through his writings and paintings made clear that landscape has meanings beyond itself. The Ishams knew that the abstract beauty of the dark stone face of the Palisades could have been lost, because members of their family had worked to save it.

Figure 6-9. Mining Activity at the Palisades, 1900. Source: American Sublime.

New Jersey Women, The ASHPS, and the Hudson Fulton Celebration Preserve the Palisades

The view to the Palisades that the Ishams worked so hard to preserve would have been lost if not for the work begun by the ASHPS and the New Jersey State Federation of Women’s Clubs as early as 1899. In the late nineteenth century, mining operations had begun to destroy the Palisades for building materials for the growing metropolis across the river (Figure 6-8).36 At more than seventeen locations along the Hudson, they excavated the five-hundred-foot-tall up thrust igneous rock formation of dark columnar basalt (diabase) for construction and particularly its use in “Macadam,” to pave New York’s many new streets.

Beginning in 1899, the ASHPS minutes noted with caution the systematic efforts to destroy the stone: “Quarries are worked night and day to supply the demand in a course of time the Palisades will be gone. . . Blasting with high explosives quickly take away the face of the rock. This destroys its time-mellowed surface. The trees are crushed with the fall of the rocks, and the destruction of beauty is accomplished as effectively as can be done by months of subsequent work.”37 The ASHPS then worked diligently to both stop the mining operations and to create an interstate park.

In his chronology of the events that led to the Palisades’ preservation, Edward Hagaman Hall fully credited the New Jersey Women’s Clubs as initiating the effort.38 The two groups joined forces to form the Palisades Interstate Park Commission to create the park. They worked with the governors of each state and amassed private funding to have the mining stopped and purchase land for the park. In an act of generosity financier and railroad magnate J. P. Morgan, the honorary president of the ASHPS, paid a large sum to have mining practices stopped. Hall chronicled the dramatic timing of the event:

George W. Perkins, President of the [Interstate Park] Commission, laid this proposition before J. Pierpont Morgan with such address that Mr. Morgan was deeply impressed with its practical

37 Minutes of the American Scenic and Historic Society, 1900. NYPL Archive.
character and subscribed the whole of the $122,500 himself on condition that the means should be
found for saving the remainder of the Palisades. With Mr. Morgan’s generous gift behind them, the
Commissioners paid the $10,000 for an option on the Carpenter quarry until June 1, 1901, and on
Christmas eve, 1900, blasting was stopped—never to be resumed, as events proved.”39

That done, the groups worked to create the park to ensure the land’s lasting preservation. New York
governor Theodore Roosevelt, an environmentalist, was an old friend of Green’s and had supported the work
of the ASHPS—he affectionately called it the “Scenic Society.”40 Roosevelt appointed members of ASHPS as
commissioners on the Palisades Interstate Park Commission and he moved legislation forward to acquire the
land. The ASHPS had actively begun raising funds for the park; Morgan, himself, later gave an additional
$500,000.41

The 1909 Hudson Fulton Celebration, with many ASHPS members in key positions, then took up
the park’s cause. Members of the Isham family had been active in the civic groups that had locally supported
the preservation efforts for the Palisades. Minturn Post Collins, Julia’s sister Flora’s husband, had been on the
local committee that advocated for Inwood Hill Park and created the Henry Hudson Park in the Bronx. The
Hudson Fulton Celebration held a grand civic ceremony on September 27, 1909 as the highlight of their
festival. Both governors sailed up the Hudson to sign the act to create the Palisades Interstate Park that
preserved over 100,000 acres of parkland. This was an act not unlike Lincoln’s 1864 preservation of
Yosemite, and one that prefigured Roosevelt’s 1906 National Parks Act. The Palisades Interstate Park became
the Hudson Fulton Celebration’s lasting monument.

Isham Park was opened almost exactly three years after the 1909 Hudson Fulton Celebration. The
view to the river and beyond seemed to be safe, but adjacent lands, however, were threatened. The large
expanse of Inwood Hill had been the site of private country homes, like the Isham’s. Although it had been
Green’s earliest envisioned park, it had become the site of much speculation.

40 Hall, “Palisades,” 201.
George McAneny in Northern Manhattan—What He Did Not Build

McAneny followed through with Green’s plan to continue Riverside Drive (Figure 6-10). Green had anticipated that the road would eventually lead to a bridge to connect the island northward. Over the years, there had been many plans for this bridge, including the Hudson-Fulton Celebration’s ornate reinforced concrete dual-level bridge that included four train lines and wide pedestrian walkways (Figure 6-11). The more modest Henry Hudson Bridge was not built until Robert Moses’s tenure in 1935.
For many years, Inwood Hill had been a coveted site for a private enclave of secluded homes with spectacular views. While designing Central Park, Frederic Law Olmsted Sr. had sketched a proposed residential development with streets named for American writers. In 1913, McAneny had requested a proposal from the well–known City Beautiful landscape architect Fredrick Law Olmsted, Jr. and architect Arnold Brunning for the last extension of Riverside Drive and a new bridge. They proposed an expansion of the bridge terminal on Inwood Hill as a new City Beautiful building complex (Figure 6-12). This was a “massive complex of neoclassical buildings that would have obliterated the crest of Inwood Hill.”42 Although it was similar in form to the Columbia University’s Low Library to it south, and New York University campus across the East River, its large scale and inappropriate siting eliminated the site as a park (Figure 6-13). The ASHPS, led by Bolton, mounted a strong campaign against it. McAneny stopped the plan for uncertain reasons: perhaps the strong local resistance or lack of funds as World War I began. Brunning and Olmsted’s plan had also included a viewing pavilion along the Hudson. A reduced version of that pavilion was built after the war (Figure 1-5). Inwood Hill started to become a park in 1916; a formal dedication ceremony in 1926 preserved the land.

Figure 6-12. Frederick Law Olmsted and Arnold Brunning. Riverside Drive Extension: Study for Treatment of Concourse at North End of Inwood Hill. June 1913. Source: NYPL.

Two women with agency and vision had worked to create a small park. This park, Isham Park, in northern Manhattan, presents itself in as a deceptively simple place of natural beauty. This belies the complex aggregate of ideas and concepts of design and interwoven narratives that created it. It revived Andrew
Haswell Green’s master plan, inserted an aesthetic view informed by the paintings of the Hudson River school, and eventually preserved the much larger Inwood Hill Park.
Chapter Seven

Conclusion

While planning the area in 1865, Andrew Green created a protocol to preserve both existing land and historic sites while expanding the city northward. He later integrated this concept into the planning process for the even larger metropolis that he envisioned as Greater New York. In northern Manhattan, this process allowed for the preservation of places of meaning, while the grid plan to the south made no accommodations. From commemorating the site of Fort Washington, a cherished place in the national narrative to drawing a map to skew a street to preserve a view, these actions transformed the physical composition of the area. They embedded the presence of the past into the landscape of the growing city.

The writer Paul Bowles described a distant city as having “the past and the present exist simultaneously in proportionate degrees.”  

His understanding of the nuanced influence the proximity of the past played in Tangiers states the goals of preservation efforts in northern Manhattan in the early twentieth century. Each of the principal figures in this paper understood the area’s rich history and recognized that it would be lost if no actions were taken. Each, in his and her way, took direct action to preserve a portion of it. Through their actions, large parks with extended views, a Dutch Farmhouse, stately mansions, and Hessian Huts, are all present within New York City.

Reginald Bolton, better that most, understood the complexity of the site’s history. After documenting Revolutionary War sites with extensive written histories, he, Edward Hall and William Calver then discovered older relics with no recorded history. These extensive Native American encampments, burials and habitation informed the preservation of a large land area in a major city that would become Inwood Hill Park. In a radical act of preservation, these amateur archeologists knew what they found had significant, yet unrecorded histories. In 1907 Bolton began to make maps that attempted to show the many overlays histories on one sheet (Figure 7-1). The maps located archeological finding he had excavated of the many Colonial, Revolution War and Native American sites. He also included the new streets and the elevated train station

to place the ancient places in the modern context (Figure 7-1-A). He worked on these maps for over five years to document the discoveries being made while the streets were being graded.

The maps documented not what had been preserved, but what had been lost (Figure 7-1-B). The graves of colonial settlers, enslaved peoples and Native Americas were all disrupted by the construction. They were not preserved; their histories have been lost.

This paper was an attempt to understand the history of a place first understood through fragments—a park, a pavilion, and a bench. I was richly rewarded by learning of the works of Andrew Green, the archeologists—Bolton, Hall and Calver, the Ishams and George McAneny. The physical evidence of their efforts is visible in the parks, monuments and historic houses. But as Bolton’s map shows, many of the histories have been lost. Bowel had suggested that the past and present can exist simultaneously, in one place. Bolton’s maps suggest that without vigilance and agency the past is fragile and will be lost.

Figure 7-1 Reginald Bolton, “Manhattan New York, 1912”. Source: University of Wisconsin Milwaukee Campus, American Geographic Society Collection.
Figure 7-1-A Detail showing new elevated subway station and Revolutionary War encampment. Reginald Bolton, “Manhattan New York, 1912.”
Source: University of Wisconsin Milwaukee Campus, American Geographic Society Collection.
Figure 7-1-B Detail showing “Colonial Burying Ground,” “Slaves Burying Place,” and “Indian Ceremonial Pits.” Reginald Bolton, “Manhattan New York, 1912.” Source: University of Wisconsin Milwaukee Campus American Geographic Society Collection.
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- Skinner’s field notebook that started with Inwood but had many other sites, Clauson’s Point and Jefferson County.  
- A scrapbook that included photos that were reproduced in Bolton’s books and some drawings.  
- Correspondence and map file. This includes a letter from Hall to Bolton that Bolton in turn forwarded to Calver.  

The American Museum of Natural History holdings:  

The late Sid Horenstein, a noted geologist at the AMNH, arranged to view of Bolton’s collection at the museum. He confirmed that the Bolton and Calver collection of Native American artifacts is intact (in two drawers) with both Bolton’s and the museum’s numbering system on each item. Documentation transferring the artifacts listed in the notebooks to the museum. The human remains are not accessible without permissions. The AMNH had additional drawings and maps.
• The Native American artifacts that Bolton and Calver recorded in the notebooks now at Cornell.
  Each artifact has Bolton and Calver’s number and an additional number from the Museum. Index.
  Cards with the information from Bolton and Calver’s notebooks transferred.
• The handwritten and transcribed typed accounts of the “Double Burial” and “Double Dog Burial”

Dyckman Farmhouse Museum Holdings:

• Bolton’s scrapbook, similar to the one in Cornell with photos and maps excavations.
• Native American, Dutch, Revolutionary War artifacts. Bolton’s maps.