

ABSTRACT

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 GARDENS IN AMERICA

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“Cultivated Landscapes: British Gardens in America” analyzes six American gardens (Monticello, Mount Vernon, Westover, the Woodlands, Middleton Place, and the Paca house in Annapolis) for the presence of the English landscape style garden. I argue that the presence of English landscape style characteristics proves that the British cultural legacy had maintained a strong grip on American culture and aesthetics in the post-Revolution period.

CULTIVATED LANDSCAPES: BRITISH GARDENS IN AMERICA

By

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INTRODUCTION

Frederick Law Olmsted's plan for the park of New York City's Central Park features wide expanses of lawn, artful clumpings of trees, a carefully dammed water feature, and meandering paths that encourage a leisurely and reflective stroll through the grounds. These elements, these "naturalistic" artificialities are the epitome of the English Landscape style of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Olmsted himself described his style as pastoral: "It consists of combinations of trees, standing singly or in groups, and casting their shadows over broad stretches of turf, or repeating their beauty by reflection upon the calm surface of pools, and the predominant associations are in the highest degree tranquilizing and grateful, as expressed by the Hebrew poet: 'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside still waters.'"¹ His description perfectly captures the landscapes of William Kent and Capability Brown – two masters of the English landscape style in

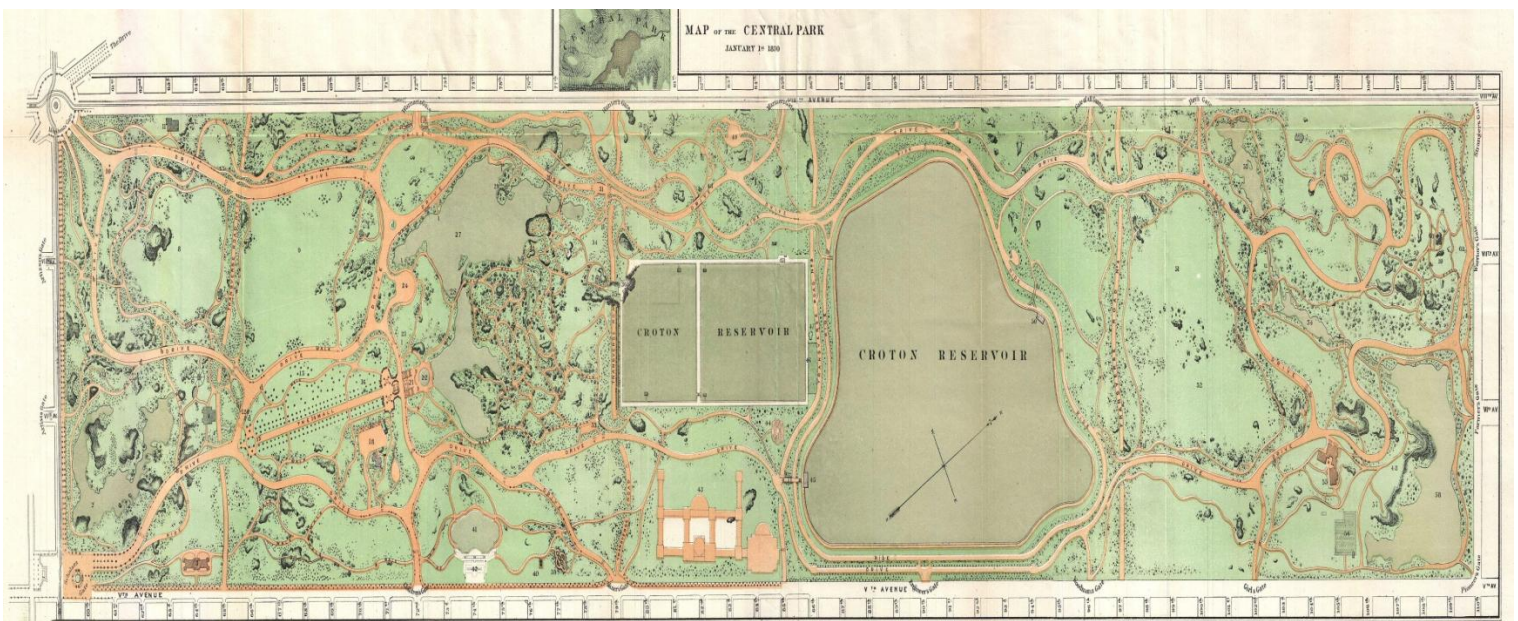


Figure 4: Vaux and Olmsted Map of Central Park, *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of Central Park*, 1870, *Graphicus Rare Antique Maps Landscape* (New York: Rizzoli, 2005), 37.

the nineteenth century. But Olmsted was considered the father of *American* landscape architecture. He was praised as a unique voice in the nineteenth century cultural world.

The crucial distinction here is that Olmsted created American gardens that referenced English styles - he did not create English gardens in America. This change, although seemingly only semantic, is important because it reflects the dramatic shift in American landscape history that evolved in the Early National period – instead of being described as a reference to other countries’ traditions, Americans stood on their own cultural identity. Without estates like Monticello, the Woodlands, or Westover, there would not have been Central Park or the Biltmore estate or Moraine Farms. The “father of American landscape architecture” would not have had numerous examples of modified English style from which to create a purely American approach to gardens.

Gardens are, perhaps, an unexpected subject for a thesis about the culture of post-Revolutionary War America. Long considered a sort of stepchild to architectural history, the history of landscape architecture is not a preeminent theme in studies of American history. But in the Early National period, which is here defined as 1783 to 1820, gardens are an exceptional place to study American cultural preferences and behaviors. Gardens represent a conscious manipulation of physical space. Even gardens that have been crafted to look natural are essentially artificial creations. In no other facet of culture is the actual landscape of a place, the physical natural landscape, being modified to suit the tastes and needs of a landowner. This is especially interesting at a period of history when cultural identity was in flux and when any

definitive decisions about aesthetic priorities reflect a young nation's attempt to establish itself.

There are some fundamental challenges with gardens that must be overcome. Gardens, after all, are ephemeral and subject to changing tastes and to the manipulation of natural forces. To understand and visualize the gardens of the Early National period, the scope of sources is wide. This paper will rely upon both physical evidence, like sketches and formal plans, and literary evidence (i.e. correspondence, written descriptions, visitor reports, popular literature of the period.²) But although they prove challenging as historical evidence, gardens are invaluable sources of information about the period in question.

As Charles Quest-Ritson explained in *The English Garden*, "Too much garden history has been concerned with when gardens were made, what they looked like, who made them and how they changed. More interesting by far is what the makers expected from the gardens...the story of gardens and gardening is a tale of aspirations and self-fulfilment."³ This paper aspires to continue the tradition of *The English Garden: A Social History* and *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States*⁴ - pieces of research that are valuable not only for their representation of a garden or gardens but also for their insight into the historical relevance of those gardens. I believe that the gardens of men like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, William Byrd, Henry Middleton, William Paca, and

² The collections at Dumbarton Oaks, the National Gallery of Art, and the University of Maryland have provided both the primary and secondary sources necessary to support this thesis.

³ Quest-Ritson, *The English Garden*, 1.

⁴ Charles Quest-Ritson, *The English Garden: A Social History*. (London: Viking, 2001) and Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

William Hamilton can offer invaluable historical information about the cultural values of the Early National period. These gardens are pieces of evidence that explain the extent of British influence in the period and the evolution of an American cultural identity.

The influence of the English style on Monticello and Mount Vernon is well documented. This paper will include those gardens but also many other examples from across the new United States of America. A broader sampling of estates is necessary to understand how widely British trends were implemented. In a period of great cultural flux, when the American identity was an undefined thing, understanding how one part of culture, a part so long associated with England and Englishness, reflected the influences of other nations is immensely helpful. I chose those gardens that were well-documented or which had influential owners or both - I tried to pinpoint the gardens that would be the most helpful and about whom the most was known. This paper will examine Middleton Place (South Carolina), Westover (Virginia), Mount Vernon (Virginia), Monticello (Virginia), the Paca estate (Annapolis), and the Woodlands (Philadelphia.)

The estates were chosen intentionally. Middleton Place and Westover represent families who were long established and who owned estates that were considered the epitome of grace and taste in the pre-Revolutionary period. They also had owners whose fortunes fluctuated dramatically over the course of the Revolutionary War. Mount Vernon and Monticello were the estates of two of the Revolution's staunchest patriots – George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. The estates represented each man's attempt to define a personal identity as their identity

changed from wealthy Virginian to American leader. And the Woodlands and the Paca estate represent how English style manifested in more urban areas within estates owned by men with personal wealth and social influence who wanted to prove themselves as gentlemen. The cross section of identities should be helpful in understanding how broadly the English trends appeared in American culture and what precisely those trends looked like.

CHAPTER ONE: GARDENS AS CULTURAL SIGNALS

Gardens are a very specific expression of cultural priorities. Understanding the cultural landscape of the post-Revolution period necessitates understanding the influences at play, both in the United States and those coming from England. In addition to American leaders attempting to define what America was and what it had been, there was a great deal of literature from London about a very particular trend in gardening and how it reflected the ideals of the English world. The authors of this literature crafted a persuasive argument, one that would have great influence with leaders like Washington and Jefferson. Men like Jefferson, Washington, Middleton, Byrd, Paca, and Hamilton were concerned about expressing their taste, the right taste, and one of the mediums they chose was the garden.

The Power of Culture and Taste

In her book, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation*, Kariann Yokota opens with Jefferson's Monticello and its contradictory identity. Though it was the home of one of the American Revolution's heroes, Monticello was home to goods, books, and pieces of art that had been imported from Europe, many from England.⁵ According to Yokota, this collection of imported things was supposed to indicate that Jefferson, and by extension Americans, were "capable of civility."⁶ American elites, like those of many postcolonial nations, "adopt[ed] elements of European culture as a way of establishing their own legitimacy."⁷ Maintaining or improving the national reputation of civility was a

⁵ Kariann Yokota, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 4.

⁶ Yokota, *Unbecoming*, 6.

⁷ Yokota, *Unbecoming*, 9.

popular justification by leaders regarding the importation of luxury and home goods from Europe.⁸

Conscious consumption and manipulation of the physical, aesthetic environment are ways that taste and civility (and therefore power) could be demonstrated. Houses were, according to Richard Bushman in *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*, “outward signs of what the inhabitants would hoped would be an inward grace.”⁹ Dwellings, both the house and the surrounding gardens, were symbolic statements of the taste and civility of the owner. The majority of homes in eighteenth century America were not grand affairs and their gardens would have been focused on subsistence.¹⁰ But from the mid-eighteenth century onward, for the genteel class (and those aspiring to gentility) a pleasure garden was a standard piece of proof of civility.¹¹ When the colonists began building grand mansions, which Bushman places in the mid eighteenth century, gardens almost immediately became necessary accessories and “gentlemen” were expected to be as expert connoisseurs of gardens as they were of other habits of wealth such as architecture and furniture.

Bushman and Yokota struck upon an interesting tension in the newly independent nation: why, when a nation had rushed to embrace republicanism, were the habits of gentility and civility still completely reflective of the British landed

⁸ Yokota, *Unbecoming*, 86.

⁹ Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*. (New York: Knopf, 1992), xii.

¹⁰ For example, in 1785 in Halifax County, VA, eighty percent of houses had less than 400 square feet on the ground floor. (Bushman, *Refinement*, 111.)

¹¹ Bushman, *Refinement*, 129

gentry?¹² Americans were, as Bushman wrote, “preoccupied with an aristocratic past at the same time as they were rushing into a democratic and capitalistic future.”¹³

Other writings on culture and taste provide insight into the lasting power that the English way had over the new American nation.

Barbara Jenkins’ article “The Low Politics of High Art” explains the role played by culture in establishing and maintaining a power base. Art, Jenkins argues, provides a “clear, material expression of ideas,”¹⁴ and because of its ability to relate a message it can also signal power. Although she is primarily concerned with power on the international scale, her points are equally valid when applied to social power: “Once we step out of the realm of the state in explaining power relations, more amorphous influences such as religion, education, and yes, even art, become important considerations in understanding the complexity of accumulating and consolidating power.”¹⁵ Equally important as a person’s professional standing (their social placement as doctor, lawyer, statesmen) was the ability to wield cultural power. Since landscape architecture is a fundamentally aesthetic discipline, it functioned as a tool of that power.

Simply having a pleasure garden signaled wealth, a certain amount of spare time devoted to aesthetic pursuits, and status.¹⁶ But it also signaled “taste,” an elusive

¹² Bushman’s phrasing was too elegant to omit: “How could Americans reconcile their commitment to aristocratic gentility with their devotion to republican equality? At the very period when the nation broke with England and embraced republican government, gentility was extending its reach deeper and deeper into the American middle class.” (Bushman, *Refinement*, xvi.)

¹³ Bushman, *Refinement*, xix

¹⁴ Jenkins, “The Low Politics of High Art,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 24:2 (1999): 194.

¹⁵ Jenkins 1999, 193.

¹⁶ Frank Horsfall, Jr., “Horticulture in Eighteenth-Century America,” *Agricultural History* 43:1 (Jan., 1969): 162-163

but critical quality that demonstrates cultural and aesthetic priorities. Bourdieu explains that possessing “taste” is not random - it is “the product of upbringing and education.”¹⁷ The men who owned estates like Middleton Place and Westover generally came of the same class - one well-educated in the cultural rights and wrongs of elite society. According to Bourdieu, taste is the product of a set of explicit and implicit values:

Consumption is, in this case, a stage in a process of communication, that is, an act of deciphering decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code. In a sense, one can say that the capacity to see (voir) is a function of the knowledge (savoir), or concepts, that is, the words, that are available to name visible things, and which are, as it were, programmes for perception. A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded.¹⁸

Bourdieu explains that taste is manifested by consumption and is the result of training in a particular set of values. Post-revolution taste was informed by centuries of British association that had left an indelible mark on the American elites. Their taste was demonstrated by their built environments – they consciously chose styles that were either those favored by the British in the pre-Revolution period (the formal garden) or the new English landscape style. What Bourdieu calls taste, Bushman calls gentility – they amount to the same thing within the context of American gardens at the turn of the nineteenth century. Men and women demonstrated their taste, their gentility by adopting English styles. Cultural products have power, according to Bourdieu and Jenkins, and what are gardens but the ultimate example of an aesthetic product? The peculiarly political power of an already culturally powerful object – the English landscape garden – was magnified because it was the chosen cipher of taste of the

¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, (London: Routledge, 1986), 1.

¹⁸ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 2

British *and* American elite. With the historian's privileged viewpoint, gardens become examples of the emerging standards of civility set by the American elite – standards that are irrefutably British in origin.

To understand American aesthetic priorities, it is necessary to consider only the spaces that were primarily and definitely aesthetic exercises. Consequently, this paper is limited to the estates of men and women of means who could afford to use land for pleasure and not for sustenance. Another paper about rich white people in the American Revolution runs counter to the recent trends in American historical scholarship concerned with Americans less visible than Jefferson or Washington. But given that the men and women who ran these large estates represent the educated, wealthy elite who were generally held up as “tastemakers,” focusing on their gardens is logical in a paper attempting to define cultural identity. “Political landscape” is a phrase popular with today's pundits, but this essay strives to reconfigure the term to mean not the landscape of politics in general but to argue that landscapes in themselves are political.¹⁹

¹⁹ The phrase “political landscape” has a controversial history. Although it first appeared in the German *Kunstblatt* in March of 1849, the phrase entered 20th century discourse through Joseph Goebbels' review of Veidt Harlan's film *Kolberg*. He said that the film “did not fit into the political landscape.” I find the original context of the phrase more relevant to my paper and use it as a reference for a definition of the phrase. Ernst Forster used it in his review of a landscape painting by Bernhard Stange: “One of the most interesting pictures we have recently seen at the *Kunstverein* is a political landscape by Bernhard Stange. A political landscape! Yes, so far has the spirit of the age advanced!...It is a celebration of German unity, anticipated by art and soon, let us hope, to be matched by reality...” Martin Warnke, *Political Landscape: The Art History of Nature*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995) 7.

Why gardens?

Within the context of general historiography, the formal study of garden history is a recent specialty. The field represents an interdisciplinary approach involving history, art history, horticulture, and architecture - all with the cumulative aim of visualizing, understanding, and contextualizing precise moments in the life of a garden. Gardens are helpful historical tools precisely because of their ephemerality. They were regularly and easily changed to reflect the tastes of a time and the means of their owner. They also represented a very literal intervention of man into his environment and a conscious attempt to shape his physical space. John Dixon Hunt explains in *Perspectives on Garden Histories* “gardens exist as a direct result of human intention and deliberate manipulation of the organic and inorganic world...gardens constitute, in both their making and their consumption, a significant and in many respects unique human action. And so they deserve their own history, every bit as much as religion, furniture, sport and science.”²⁰ Gardens represent society’s “take” on both the cultural and natural world - a garden “offers historians the opportunity to track the role of both nature and culture, a prime dualism in the human condition.”²¹

For the purposes of this paper, a “garden” is a consciously planned and planted space that functions primarily as an aesthetic statement. Hunt’s definition of landscape architecture in *Greater Perfection: the Practice of Garden Theory* as

²⁰ John Dixon Hunt, “Approaches (New and Old) to Garden History,” in *Perspectives on Garden History*, ed. Michael Conan (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1999), 77.

²¹ Hunt 1999, 90.

“exterior place-making” is helpful, but too inclusive.²² This paper is not concerned about vegetable, kitchen, hot house, or botanic gardens. The first example of gardens that were not purely utilitarian evolved in the eleventh century and by the fourteenth century something resembling horticulture began to appear in northern and central Italy.²³ Referencing the writings of Pliny and Petrarch, who advocated that gardens function as an extension of a house, European landowners began to devote conscious effort to their pleasure gardens.

Gardens functioned as spaces for social intercourse both among the family and with guests and represented the taste of the owner.²⁴ In her book *The Language of Landscape*, Anne Whiston Spirn explains that gardens functioned then and now as tools of power: “Powerful patrons have long employed the authority of nature, of the past, of function and expedience, and of art in landscapes to demonstrate and legitimize their claims. They have also used landscape to display their dominance and wealth: through the construction of lavish gardens, parks, palaces, and temples to which they control entry; through the erection of monuments of superhuman scale that make an ordinary person seem insignificant and powerless, or powerful only as a member of a group; through the foreclosure of private property or enclosure of common ground for private purpose.”²⁵ Gardens are also a highly visible component of many cultural narratives: “think of how widely different cultural systems have invoked gardens in their sustaining narratives; how these myths of garden creation

²² John Dixon Hunt, *Greater Perfection: the Practice of Garden Theory*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 1.

²³ Edward Hyams, *Capability Brown & Humphry Repton*, (New York: Scribner, 1971), 1.

²⁴ Hyams, *Brown & Repton*, 2.

²⁵ Anne Whiston Spirn, *The Language of Landscape*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 257.

and garden consumption have proliferated in human experience - they can be tracked so easily...through the arts of painting and poetry.”²⁶ Hunt argued that it is necessary for historians to “argue more vigorously and rigorously for gardens as a central, essential expression of cultural and social life and therefore not a theme to be left to those who see them as peripheral...to some other activity.”²⁷

Gardens are designed to be experienced. They rely both on an object and a subject. The place, the place-maker, and the place-user are all equal participants in the garden experience.²⁸ This reality is the basic underpinning of this paper - gardens were made to be experienced, to be felt. The visitor to a garden brings a unique combination of tastes, opinions, “cultural, social, and historical determinants,” and biases that affect their experience within a garden. If my argument about the effect of British cultural norms on the American identity is accurate, then a visitor to a garden in the Early National period would have brought with him or her the baggage of British cultural preferences. Therefore the effect of a garden like Middleton Place or the Woodlands would have been either a support or a repudiation of what was believed to be good taste (aka British taste.) Which leads to the essential question of this paper: did these gardens support the existing cultural hierarchy or did they challenge it?

To prove the thesis of this paper, that the gardens of the Early National period tell us a great deal about the cultural identity of the American nation, I acknowledge that it is necessary and helpful to explain just how gardens can be used as evidence.

²⁶ Hunt 1999, 78-9

²⁷ Hunt 1999, 78-9.

²⁸ I borrowed the terms “place-maker” and “place-user” from John Dixon Hunt’s *Greater Perfection* (8.)

Michael Conan offers a brief summary of the historiographical approach to garden history in *Perspectives on Garden Histories*, a publication of the Dumbarton Oaks Library in Washington, DC.²⁹ According to Conan, “gardens are to be studied as complex works of art.” Studying gardens depends on gathering an extensive array of primary sources that “allow the reconstruction in an authenticated manner of successive stages of the garden at well-known dates, and documentation of the historical context as well as of the figurative, discursive, and ideological sources of the works intended and produced.”³⁰ American garden historians have held, long after their counterparts in other countries, the notion that gardens should be studied simply for what they were. Within the recent past, scholars have been “confronting all other social sciences in attempts at putting their research into an anthropological perspective.”³¹ This paper will attempt to follow the latter approach and understand not only what a garden was, but what it meant in the socio-historical cultural context. To do this, the paper will rely not only on sketches and plans but on the written reactions of the garden owner and visitors. Key to this paper is how men and women *reacted to* and *described* the landscaped space - more important than what the garden actually was is how it was defined and seen by others.

In his contribution to *Perspectives on Garden Histories*, Michael Leslie argues that politics had an enormous influence on the gardens of the eighteenth centuries- “Gardens are not inconsequential objects indulged by wealthy patrons that

²⁹ Dumbarton Oaks, it should be noted, has one of the most extensive collections of works on landscape architecture in North America and a number of the fields most prominent practitioners like Conan and John Dixon Hunt have served as the chair of the Landscape Studies department.

³⁰ Michael Conan, “Introduction” in *Perspectives on Garden History*, ed. Michael Conan (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1999), 3.

³¹ Conan 1999, 3.

can be studied in and for themselves as a mere luxury item. On the contrary, they turn out to be battlegrounds where elite factions confront one another in their attempts to establish a symbolic language conveying what they consider the most appropriate ideology to the lower and middle classes.”³² Like architecture and art, gardens contain and perpetuate “deeply political messages regarding gender and racial roles and imperialist superiority.” Gardens are an old, old tool in establishing and maintaining social and political dominance³³

Therefore examining the gardens of the Early National period will help us understand the extent of British cultural power in the period. If we accept that gardens represent political and cultural ideologies, then the influence of Britain over American gardens will contribute to the emerging narrative about post-Revolution culture. We will be able to see if the changes that were taking place within the new American government had a counterpart in gardens and how those changes, if they exist, represent the American cultural identity as a whole.

³² Conan 1999, 3-4.

³³ Jenkins 1999, 199.

CHAPTER TWO: POLITICAL GARDENS

The post- American Revolution period straddles one of the most interesting moments in landscape history. The English Landscape style had achieved dominance in the Western world as the supreme form of gardening, the most perfect perfection of nature. This dominance is due largely to the writings of Joseph Addison, William Mason, Horace Walpole, and Thomas Whately. Addison founded *The Spectator*, a popular London paper, in 1711. Although his writings are earlier than the focus of this paper, Addison bears a great deal of responsibility for popularizing the English Landscape style. Whately wrote one of the most popular books on gardening in the eighteenth century. Thomas Jefferson took a copy with him on his tour of English gardens in 1786. Whately's book, *Observations on Modern Gardening*, provided precise descriptions of English estates and their landscape architecture. There were no pictures but the descriptions provided a how-to manual for the creation of a prototypical English estate.³⁴ Writers like Addison, Mason, Walpole, and Whately represented a large theme in British writing at the time: they were blatantly patriotic and obvious in their attempt to define the landscape style (which in reality has a diverse historical background) as the English Landscape style.³⁵ By using words like

³⁴ Strangely enough, Whately also directly influenced the increasingly fractious relationship between the colonies and the British government. Whately was an assistant to Prime Minister George Grenville and was in correspondence with Massachusetts Lt. Governor Thomas Hutchinson and his secretary Andrew Oliver. Hutchinson wrote a series of letters explaining the situation of the colonies. Benjamin Franklin obtained the letters after Whately's death in 1772 and sent them back to the colonies where they were published in several newspapers over the course of 1773. The letters proved to be incendiary. Hutchinson held the view that greater control was needed over the colonies, arguing that "there must be an abridgment of what are called English liberties." T.C. Leonard, "News for a Revolution: the Expose in America, 1768-1773," *Journal of American History*, 67:1 (1980): 35.

³⁵ Stephen Bending, "Horace Walpole and Eighteenth-Century Garden History," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 57 (1994): 210.

liberty and freedom, Whately, Mason, Addison, and Walpole were attempting to channel the symbolic power of the landed gentry (and their emulators across the Atlantic) in a very specific direction.

Joseph Addison and Richard Steele founded *The Spectator* in 1711 and it ran, with great success and popularity, until 1714.³⁶ Many of Addison's essay contributions to the paper were concerned with the glory of nature and the preference of natural landscapes over manmade art.³⁷ His series, "Speculations on Nature," was a concentrated effort to push the topic of gardening (particularly naturalistic or picturesque gardening) to the forefront of Enlightenment-era culture.³⁸ His June 25, 1712 essay is a clear example of his preference for the landscape style and demonstrates his "lucid prose" and "down to earth ideas" that made his essays so popular, and justifies why his essays initiated the revolution against the formal garden style.³⁹ He wrote:

There is something more bold and masterly in the rough careless Strokes of Nature, than in the nice Touches and Embellishments of Art. The Beauties of the most stately Garden or Palace lie in a narrow Compass, the Imagination immediately runs them over, and requires something else to gratifie her; but in the wide Fields of Nature, the Sight wanders up and down without Confinement, and is fed with an infinite variety of Images, without any certain Stint or Number.⁴⁰

³⁶ It is estimated that roughly 3,000 people read *The Spectator* every day, with about ten people reading each copy. Mavis Batey, "The Pleasures of the Imagination: Joseph Addison's Influence on Early Landscape Gardens," *Garden History*, 33:2 (2005): 193.]

³⁷ It should be noted that Addison's point of view was formed by a combination of innate aesthetic preferences and by the influence of ancient and contemporary Italy. Virgil's *Georgics* was enormously influential - he described it as a "Collection of the most delightful Landskips that can be made." He was also impressed by a tour of Italy in roughly 1700 where he saw an abundance "poetick fields." (Batey 2005, 193)

³⁸ Batey 2005, 189.

³⁹ Batey 2005, 189.

⁴⁰ Joseph Addison, "No. 414." *The Spectator*, Wednesday June 25, 1712. (London)

Addison's essay closes with an admonishment to English gardeners. He claims that visitors to China reported that Chinese gardeners laughed at the "Rule and Line" of European gardeners and were much more successful at concealing their "Art" in gardens. Addison criticizes English gardeners who deviate from Nature "as much as possible." While Addison would like to see a tree "in all its Luxuriancy and Diffusion of Boughs and Branches," the English gardener would rather tear up or trim down the tree to "contrive a Plan that may most turn to their own Profit."⁴¹

Addison's essays include examples of what he feels a garden should be. An essay from July 16, 1711, described a visit to a fictitious estate of one of Mr. Spectator's friends: "This agreeable seat is surrounded with so many pleasing walks, which are struck out of a wood, in the midst of which a house stands, that one can hardly ever be weary of wandering from one labyrinth of delight to another."⁴² He also recommends a "Marsh overgrown with willows, or a Mountain shaded with Oaks."⁴³ Although *The Spectator* was short-lived, 1711-1714, Addison's essays indicated a sea change in English thinking about gardening. His essays were enormously influential on British dialog about culture - and his audience was not limited to England. In his autobiography, Benjamin Franklin notes that he found some old copies of *The Spectator*, read them, held them as a model, and even published portions of them in his own newspaper.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Joseph Addison, "No. 414." *The Spectator*, Wednesday June 25, 1712. (London)

⁴² Joseph Addison, "No. 118." *The Spectator*, Monday, July 16, 1711. (London)

⁴³ Joseph Addison, "No. 414." *The Spectator*, Wednesday June 25, 1712. (London)

⁴⁴ Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1888), 22, 119

William Mason referred to his poem, *The English Garden*, (written in 1771) as “an episodico-didactico-pathetico-politico farrago.”⁴⁵ Mason views the English Landscape style as a “culling” of the best parts of nature into a more beautiful new whole:

If yet thy art dubious how to treat
Nature’s neglected features, turn thy eye
To those, the masters of correct design,
Who, from her vast variety, have cull’d
The loveliest, boldest parts, and new arrang’d;
Yet, as herself approv’d, herself inspir’d.
In their immortal works thou ne’er shalt find
Dull uniformity, contrivance quaint,
Or labour’d littleness; but contrasts broad,
And careless lines, whose undulating forms
Play thro’ the varied canvass; these transplant
Again on Nature; take thy plastic spade,
It is thy pencil; take thy feeds, thy plants,
They are they colours; and by these repay
With interest every charm she lent thy art.⁴⁶

Mason advocates “taste inspired by truth”⁴⁷ and argues throughout the poem that the naturalism advocated by the English Landscape style is the truest and most faithful (both faithful to nature itself and to God’s plan for the world.)⁴⁸ For Mason, naturalism is next to Godliness. The message in *The English Garden* is twofold: one, that landscape architecture should reference and be inspired by nature’s natural tendencies and two, that obviously constructed, unnatural landscapes are dishonest and ungodly:

O how unlike the scene my fancy forms,
Did Folly, heretofore, with Wealth conspire
to plan that formal, dull, disjointed scene,
Which once was call’d a Garden. Britain still

⁴⁵ Mavis Batey, “William Mason, English Gardener,” *Garden History*, 1:2 (1973), 12.

⁴⁶ William Mason, *The English Garden*, (London: A.Ward, 1783) Book 1, ll. 264-278.

⁴⁷ Mason, *The English Garden*, Book 2, ll. 18

⁴⁸ Mason, *The English Garden*, Commentary and Notes, 124.

Bears on her breast full many a hideous wound
Given by the cruel pair, when, borrowing aid
From geometric skill, they vainly strove
By line, by plummet, and unfeeling sheers,
To form with verdure what the builder form'd
with stone.⁴⁹

The bias of *The English Garden* is obvious. Mason speaks with adoration about Surrey and Dover and Southcote. He only references the gardens of other nations when he refers to ancient Rome and Athens. His narrative paints the English Landscape style as unquestionably English and unquestionably right. The poem begins with a call to arms of the British people:

Begin the Song! and ye of Albion's sons
Attend; Ye freeborn, ye ingenious few,
Who heirs of competence, if not of wealth,
Preserve that vestal purity of soul
Whence genuine taste proceeds.⁵⁰

The formal garden, which was typically associated with France,⁵¹ was for Mason “egregious madness” and the result of a fixation with science and fashion, not with the truth of nature. Mason’s opinions might not have mattered, except that he was friends with many of the intellectual and cultural leaders of the day - including Horace Walpole - and his opinions both reflected and perpetuated the popular ideas of the time.

Horace Walpole was a Whig, a Member of Parliament, and a writer on many subjects. His book *On Modern Gardening* was published in 1780 and has become one

⁴⁹ Mason, *The English Garden*, Book 1, ll. 386-395.

⁵⁰ Mason, *The English Garden*, Book 1, ll. 50-54.

⁵¹ The “formal garden” was starkly different than the English Landscape garden. Architectural rules of rectilinearity area applied to outdoor spaces: water is forced into “rectilinear canals,” shrubs are forced into carefully trimmed hedges, trees are planted in very straight lines, all within a strict geometric pattern. Although often associated with France because of the work of André Le Nôtre (1613-1700) - designer of Versailles, Vaux-le-Vicomte, and the Tuileries - the style was popular throughout Western Europe, particularly in Italy and Holland.

of the seminal texts in garden history. Walpole's point of view is obvious. He discusses the Babylonian Hanging Gardens, a Wonder of the World, as "trifling" and "of no extent." They were the same as other sumptuous gardens from other ages - a "wanton instance of expence [sic] and labour." The gardens of his time, in contrast, were the pinnacle of beauty.⁵² According to Walpole, the English landscape garden is a "reflection both of Britain's cultural disposition and of correct - natural - government, for if regular gardens represent despotic interests, the 'rational' landscape garden is a reflection of a variegated - constitutional - regime."⁵³ Even though the English landscape tradition became popular throughout Europe and the United States, Walpole claims that other nation's adopted the landscape style only in name: "In France they retain the name, but nothing is more different in compass and disposition. Their parks are usually square or oblong inclosures [sic], regularly planted with walks of chestnuts or limes."⁵⁴

Not only does Walpole claim that the English landscape style reflects liberty, he argues that it is divine. Only the landscape style represents the vision of the Creator: the "mistaken and fantastic ornaments" that characterized previous gardens were "unworthy of the almighty hand that planted the delights of Paradise."⁵⁵ He criticizes the overwrought and ornamented gardens as "the impotent displays of false wealth" and "preposterous inconveniences."⁵⁶ To justify his strong opinions, Walpole references Milton, Homer, and Pliny in his descriptions of the ancestors of

⁵² Horace Walpole, 'On Modern Gardening', in his *Anecdotes of Painting in England... To which is added The History of The Modern Taste in Gardening*. (London, 1782,) 253.

⁵³ Bending 1994, 216

⁵⁴ Walpole, *Essay*, 27.

⁵⁵ Walpole, *Essay*, 29.

⁵⁶ Walpole, *Essay*, 21.

⁵⁷ Walpole, *Essay*, 25.

modern gardening, firmly establishing the English style as historically-oriented (and establishing Walpole as a peer of documenters like Homer and Pliny.) Walpole gives Kent the credit for breaking free from the formal styles, firmly establishing the landscape style as English, despite evidence that proved the influence of other European cultures.

Thomas Whately's influential book, *Observations on Modern Gardening*, begins dramatically: "Gardening, the perfection to which it has been lately brought in England, is entitled to a place of considerable rank among the liberal arts,"⁵⁸ His first sentence establishes not only a point of view about the superiority of English gardens, but also demands that gardens be considered as equal to history and art as a cultural production. Whately's book was published in 1770 and considered a more "cerebral" defense of the landscape style, devoid of pictures and heavy with description.⁵⁹ For example, Whately's description of how trees should be placed:

The distances therefore should be strikingly different: the trees should gather into groupes, or stand in various irregular lines, and describe several figures: the intervals between them should be contrasted both in shape and in dimensions: a large space should in some places be quite open: in others the trees should be so close together, as hardly to leave a passage between them: and in others as far apart as the connexion will allow. In the forms and the varieties of these groupes, these lines, and these openings, principally consists the interior beauty of a grove.⁶⁰

To Whately, the chief function of a landscaped space was to provide variety and pleasure: the best landscape "captivates the eye at a distance, invites approach, and is

⁵⁸ Thomas Whately, *Observations on Modern Gardening and Laying Out Pleasure-Grounds, Parks, Farms, Ridings, &c*, (London: West and Hughes, 1801), 1.

⁵⁹ Therese O'Malley, "Appropriation and Adaptation: Early Gardening Literature in America," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 55:3 (1992), 409

⁶⁰ Whately, *Observations*, 28

delightful when near.”⁶¹In addition to recommendations about how to create an English landscape style garden, Whately describes the gardens in England that he feels best represent the Brownian ideal. His descriptions were so accurate that Thomas Jefferson, who carried Whately’s book with him on his tour of English estates in 1786, wrote that Whately’s descriptions were “models of perfect elegance and classical correctness, they are as remarkable for their exactness. I always walked over the gardens with his book in my hand...”⁶² Jefferson even presented at least one copy of the book as a present to some French friends in Paris,⁶³ a telling example that despite his Francophilia, Jefferson still approved of the English garden plan above all others.

Jefferson’s approval of Whately’s *Observations on Modern Gardening* is well documented and is a piece of evidence that American men of means had access to the latest publications of London. To prove that the horticultural rhetoric of men like Whately had an influence on Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton, Paca, Middleton, and Byrd, it must be demonstrated that they had access to those writers. The research of Therese O’Malley of the National Gallery of Art is unique in the extent to which she has focused on the presence of gardening literature in Early America. In the article “Appropriation and Adaptation: Early Gardening Literature in America,” she has manifold examples of English literature that found its way into American libraries. According to O’Malley, domestic American production of garden literature was limited to brochures and newspaper essays and the majority of garden-related

⁶¹ Whately, *Observations*, 36.

⁶² Thomas Jefferson, ‘Memorandum Made on a Tour to Some of the Gardens in England,’ 1786

⁶³ Denise Broutin, Letter to Thomas Jefferson, 18 July 1789, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), Vol. 9, 278.

publications were imported from England.⁶⁴ This is not to say that European-published gardening literature was widely available in the United States. The greatest concentration seems to be in Boston and Philadelphia. But inventories of the libraries of Washington and Jefferson prove that they owned many such volumes, and gardening literature was a part of many colonial and postcolonial lending library systems.⁶⁵ And it is important to remember that gardens like Monticello were heavily visited and would have been the inspiration points for other gardens, even if their owners did not have access to Whately and Walpole.⁶⁶

The writings matter because they were the product of some of England's most popular intellectual leaders in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They were shaping the definition of horticultural good taste and their ideas were immensely popular in England. There is proof that American libraries held copies of these writings, but the spread of the style despite the limited access to the source material suggests the power that respectful emulation had in the new American nation. Washington and Jefferson were thought leaders, following the example of other thought leaders, and thereby influencing men and women of "taste" in America.

The English writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly Walpole and Mason, understood that the historiography of garden landscape was an effective political tool - they crafted a story of English gardens that fabricated an English historical dominance and that controlled (and still controls) the narrative of gardening literature. Their writings appeared in a "highly charged context of competing ideas and ideologies, in which the definition of the nation, the nation's

⁶⁴ O'Malley 1992, 407.

⁶⁵ O'Malley 1992, 408.

⁶⁶ O'Malley 1992, 408.

origins, and an emerging national art form, clustered at the heart of a power struggle, ultimately less over the past than over the present and the future,⁶⁷ Because of writings like *The English Garden* that represented the English Landscape style as a sign of liberty and Godliness, the style had a peculiarly strong power. That power was underlined by the adoption of the style by visible and powerful English noblemen, who also believed the English Landscape style had symbolic importance:

British Whigs, such as Lord Cobham, requested landscape designs that exhibited the British love of liberty. Wild and unruly as opposed to rigid and contained, the English landscape park did away with fences and parterres, sweeping the lawn directly to the doors of the manor and focusing the viewer's eye on broad vistas of unending hills and meadows. 'Like architecture, gardens are held to reflect the whole political system, tyrannical in France, free in England. The English garden, at least that belonging to the liberal thinkers, eschews the strong control of the house, leaving the walker to make his own discoveries at his own pace'⁶⁸

There was a conscious, determined move by men like Addison, Walpole, Mason, and Whately to define the naturalist landscape style as *English*. And the Americans of the period, still influenced by the impression of British superiority, embraced it. Thus if and when they created landscapes that mimicked the English Landscape style, they were consciously adopting a definitely British aesthetic - and all the implications about national identity that accompanied it.

⁶⁷ Jenkins 1999, 95.

⁶⁸ Jenkins 1999, 198.

CHAPTER THREE: ENGLISH LANDSCAPE GARDENS IN AMERICA

The style that Walpole and Whately were talking about was revolutionary because it broke the existing model of formal gardens that demanded right angles and carefully trimmed hedges. There were specific hallmarks, and once those are identified, the gardens of the post-Revolution period can be examined to see how widespread the style was in the United States. Therefore in addition to the history of the style in England, the American estates Westover, Middleton Place, Monticello, Mount Vernon, the Paca estate, and the Woodlands will serve as examples of the period.

The Governor's Palace in Williamsburg, Virginia functions as a reference point for American gardens in the first half of the eighteenth century. When the excavations of Williamsburg began in 1930, the teamwork of a landscape architect and archaeologist were able to recreate the gardens that had existed under the term of Governor Spotswood (1710-1722.)⁶⁹ The landscape architect is unknown. But the gardens present today reflect the foundations discovered during the excavation and are excellent examples of formal hedges and parterres. The style has French and Dutch origins but it was adopted by the British as wholeheartedly as they would later adopt the English landscape style. The formal style was the standard of

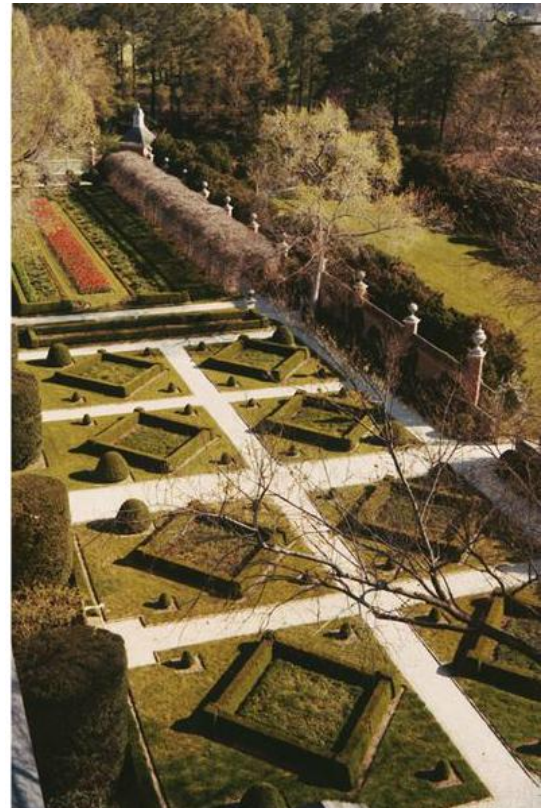


Figure 5: Governor's Palace Restoration Garden - Ballroom, University of California San Diego Collection.

⁶⁹ Wertenbaker, Thomas J. "The Archaeology of Colonial Williamsburg," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 97:1, (1953): 46.

British taste until the theories of William Kent, Capability Brown, and Humphry Repton gained popularity in England and the American colonies.

Hallmarks of the English Landscape Style

The English landscape style has a dual history. One is the history previously discussed - the history of politics and narrative manipulation by men like Walpole,



Figure 6: Blenheim Palace, Woodstock, Oxfordshire England. Copyright Blenheim Palace, 2010. Designed by Capability Brown, the grounds of Blenheim Palace are described in Thomas Whately's *Observations on Modern Gardening as excellent examples of the English landscape*

Whately, and Addison. The other is the history of the form's evolution into the dominant horticultural style of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, a form whose popularity stretched from England to

America, to Russia, to Norway, to Italy, and beyond. This history is concerned with the pioneering talents and savvy of men like William Kent, Capability

Brown, and Humphry Repton. The English Landscape style was not a pure, organically English creation. It was heavily influenced by Italian and Chinese horticultural practices. Until relatively recently, the trajectory of the English Landscape style in England was straightforward: the writings of Addison and Alexander Pope and the landscape architecture of William Kent established the style

in the first half of the eighteenth century. Because of sources that suggest greater international influence and a chronology revised by recent works of scholars, that theory has been largely debunked.⁷⁰

The English Landscape style is known by a variety of names: picturesque, natural, informal, or rococo. It is, essentially, a mimesis of nature and is the result of careful, methodical intervention into the existing landscape of a place. The key characteristics of an English Landscape garden were planned irregularity, a variety of natural (or natural seeming) materials, the scattering of rocks and clumps of trees, and streams adjusted (or dug from scratch) to meander through a property and pool into carefully placed lakes. The purpose of the English Landscape style was to be an “emotionally and aesthetically pleasing” experience that would encourage the viewer to look at the foreground, middle ground, and distant horizon and experience a comprehensive, idealistic representation of nature’s potential.⁷¹ Lowenthal and Prince’s article “English Landscape Tastes” sums it up nicely: “What is considered

⁷⁰ Bending 1994: 210; This bias was present in a number of the works consulted for this paper. A particularly demonstrative example comes from *Capability Brown & Humphry Repton* by Edward Hyams. Its publication in 1971 proves how recently the historiography of English landscape history adopted its current narrative. Hyams asserts that “In the European culture, the English were the first people to conceive a love of ‘nature,’” - a statement that boldly ignores entire movements of Italian and Dutch landscape design (pg. 5.) A historical survey of gardening presented the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1782 also ignores the influence of other pre-Kentian factors: “In this garden therefore at Nonsuch we find many such ornaments of old English gardening, as prevailed till the modern taste was introduced by Kent.” John Dixon Hunt criticizes that analysis for forgetting “the influence of Italian, French and Dutch gardens that intervened before Kent, as well as contributions to the ‘modern taste’ prior to Kent’s.” John Dixon Hunt, *Genius of the Place: The English Landscape Garden, 1620-1820*, (Boston: MIT Press, 1975), 6.

⁷¹ John Dixon Hunt, *The Picturesque Garden in Europe*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 8.

‘essentially English’ is a calm and peaceful deer park, with slow-moving streams and wide-expanses of meadowland studded with fine trees”⁷²

There are three men associated with the English Landscape style’s physical development: William Kent (1685 - 1748), Lancelot “Capability” Brown (1716 - 1783), and Humphry Repton (1752 - 1818.) Unfortunately, Kent’s work has largely been erased and few of his architectural or landscape plans survive today. His chief contribution was embracing a painterly point of view while designing landscapes. Kent was an unsuccessful painter who had greater success translating his vision using plants and trees. Referencing the works of Claude Lorrain, Nicolas Poussin, and Salvator Rosa, Kent created landscapes that extended sightlines and treated a garden’s visitor as if they were considering a landscape painting instead of a landscape.⁷³ His work is also one of the first examples of landscape architecture in England to consciously reject the French formalism⁷⁴ and choose “variety and busyness of natural forms” over “excessively manipulated architectural elements.”⁷⁵

Although Kent was the forerunner, Capability Brown is the most recognizable name associated with the English Landscape style. Brown, whose given name was Lancelot, described his landscape architecture as merely a process of “improving”

⁷² David Lowenthal and Hugh C. Prince, “English Landscape Tastes,” *Geographical Review* 55:2 (1965), 192.

⁷³ Hunt, *Picturesque*, 29-30, and Hyams, *Brown & Repton*, 4

⁷⁴ Versailles, designed by Andre Le Notre, is the prototypical French garden of the seventeenth century: a “dominant palace, axial and radial avenues and its vistas forming the skeleton of the plan. Within this framework were intricate parterres, canals, bosquets, statuary, domes, triumphal arches and treillage.” Hunt, *Genius of the Place*, 7.

⁷⁵ Hunt, *Genius*, 30

what was already there.⁷⁶ Even though he followed Kent and adopted many of the same principles, Brown was a radical in landscape design. Kent had often constructed “ruins,” temples, and statues to lend his gardens a picturesque quality. Brown refused to use anything but the most basic of natural elements.⁷⁷ Although his work is often criticized as formulaic (he used a “simple formula of encircling trees, irregular clump plantings, serpentine rivers, and undulating lawns”⁷⁸), Brown achieved great success, designing 170 gardens and often charging £10,000 or more for his work.⁷⁹ And the somewhat standardized landscape designs are a boon to modern historians - it was then and is still easy to recognize a Brown or Brown-influenced landscape by these features.

Humphry Repton took up the mantle of landscape guru after Brown’s retirement. Interestingly, he put back in a great deal of what Brown had taken out, but still remained well within the bounds of the beloved naturalist style. Repton reintroduced regular, architectural forms: “terraces, raised flowerbeds, trelliswork, conservatories” that were intended for human use, not pure aesthetics.⁸⁰ Repton also engaged in the raging national debate over the merits of the picturesque style, becoming a far more visible figure than Brown or Kent. Repton’s letter to the art critic Uvedale Price, published in the London papers, became a classic defense of the English landscape style (and fed into the nationalistic discussion led by Walpole):

⁷⁶ Joan Bassin. “The English Landscape Garden in the Eighteenth Century: The Cultural Importance of an English Institution.” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 11:1 (1979), 22.

⁷⁷ Hunt, *Genius*, 31.

⁷⁸ Bassin 1979, 32

⁷⁹ National Parks, “Capability Brown,” National Parks, http://www.nationalparks.gov.uk/ch_pd_historical (accessed April 12, 2013), and Bassin 1979, 24.

⁸⁰ Hunt, *Genius*, 31

“The neatness, simplicity, and elegance of English gardening, have acquired the approbation of the present century, as the happy medium betwixt the wildness of nature and stiffness of art; in the same manner as the English constitution is the happy medium betwixt the liberty of savages and the restraint of despotic government.”⁸¹

But despite the added architectural elements, Repton still relied on the sweeping lawns, serpentine paths and carefully created water features of his predecessors - traits that defined the evolved English landscape style at the end of the eighteenth century.

The characteristics are remarkably unremarkable. Brown, Repton, and Kent created highly manipulated spaces that were convincingly natural. Unlike the Le Notre gardens at Versailles, the intervention by a landscape architect is not obvious. Therefore analyzing gardens for these traits can be challenging. Which is why the two histories of English Landscape gardens have to be considered as one - without the forceful support from Walpole, Whately, Mason, and Addison, the work of Brown, Kent, and Repton would be viewed as an almost facile, too simplistic mimicry of nature that lacked the obvious technicality of the French style. But because the English Landscape style was branded as modern, natural, as a representation of personal liberty and of national superiority, it was championed as true and spread across the world as *the* horticultural preference of the wealthy and the cultured.

Americans had embraced previous horticultural trends from Europe before. At the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth, they had adopted the formal style that was popular in both France and England. There is a consistent narrative throughout the eighteenth century of American elites choosing to follow the

⁸¹ Humphry Repton, *Letter To Uvedale Price*, (London: G. Nicol, 1794),9.

trends that were popular with their British counterparts, whether it was the formal style or the natural landscape style. But the choice goes beyond aesthetics. In the Early National period, when America was choosing friends and determining an identity, it is not surprising that they would identify more with the English landscape style and its accompanying rhetoric. Walpole, Addison, Whately, and Mason made it clear that the English landscape style represented personal liberty within the confines of a just government. Given the political tumult of France in the same period, the familiar and reliable England provided an amenable aesthetic and a comforting underlying narrative.



Figure 7: Stowe, Buckinghamshire, (1712-1725), landscape designed by Capability Brown (1741-1751), Google Earth View 2013

The American Gardens

The initial proposal for this paper included the intention to study gardens of Philadelphia and the James River valley in Virginia, but that proposal was revised. To begin with, the very English notion of a landed gentry is much more apparent in the southern states than in New England.⁸² Although this paper has two examples from northern, urban areas – the Woodlands and the Paca house – the majority are large Southern estates. There were simply more examples of large Southern landscaped spaces from that period. The increased prevalence in the South could be attributed to varying religious heritages - Peter Hugill argued in the *Geographical Review* that Puritanism and its accompanying social structure did not encourage developing sprawling grounds devoted to pleasure gardening.⁸³ Also important is that the northern economy was more reliant on a thriving merchant class, and metropolises were the seats of wealth, not the country. In short, new America represented the new England: land-rich, country-based aristocracy contrasted with the rising, money-rich and city-dwelling middle class of London, Birmingham, and Leeds.

As previously mentioned, the fundamental challenge of researching gardens is their ephemerality. Some, like Middleton Plantation, have been carefully and thoughtfully restored. Many others bare no trace of resemblance to their 18th or 19th century iterations. And material about these gardens also varies. Men like Washington and Jefferson, whose lives have been documented and whose correspondence is easily available, are easier to contextualize and information about their estates is easier to find. Not every estate was as well documented and some the

⁸² Peter J. Hugill, "English Landscape Tastes in the United States," *Geographical Review*, 76:4 (1986), 409.

⁸³ Hugill 1986, 409.

following analysis relies on contemporaneous personal experiences or archaeological scholarship.

Middleton Place

The examples begin with Henry Middleton's Middleton Place in South Carolina. Of the estates discussed in this paper, Middleton Place is one of the earliest to be constructed. It reflects the tension that reigned in the middle to late part of the eighteenth century: the desire to hold onto cultural markers that had previously indicated taste, like the formal parterres, and the new trends of open spaces and natural growth. Middleton Place offers a starting point by which to judge the estates that came later – it is an example of what Brown was pushing against and stands in contrast to the freer landscapes of Monticello, Mount Vernon, the Woodlands, and Westover. And the biography of the owner is so central to the American Revolution and the internal tension of personal identity that to omit Middleton Place is to ignore a viewpoint that varies interestingly from men like Jefferson and Washington.

Henry Middleton was born in South Carolina in 1717. He was educated in England before returning home to inherit the family's South Carolina estate as well as properties in England and Barbados. It is estimated that he controlled 50,000 acres and 800 slaves.⁸⁴ Middleton served in the British colonial government as a justice of the peace from 1742-1780, member of the provincial house of commons from 1742-1755, a commissioned officer of the horse in 1743, and a member of the King's

⁸⁴ "Middleton of South Carolina," *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, 1:3 (1900), 240.

Provincial Council from 1755-1770.⁸⁵ The *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* describes Middleton's transition to the patriot cause thus: "A churchman and conservative, with social and political position and fortune at stake, he resigned his seat in the [King's Provincial Council], in Sept. 1770, to maintain the rights of his Country."⁸⁶ Middleton held a number of positions in the new revolutionary governments:

- Member of the First Continental Congress (1774-1775)
- President of the First Continental Congress (October 1774 - May 1775)
- Member of the Council of Safety (1775 and 1776)
- Member of the Provincial Congress of South Carolina (1775 and 1776)
- Member of the committee to prepare a form of government (1776)
- Member of the legislative council under the transition government (1776-1778)
- Member of the South Carolina State Senate (1778-1780)

But when Charleston was captured by the British in 1780, Middleton reclaimed his British citizenship and gave up his positions in the American government. Middleton died in 1784

Middleton became the owner of what would become Middleton Place in 1741 when he married Mary Williams. The original house was completed in the same year

⁸⁵ "Henry Middleton (1717-1784)," *Biographical Dictionary of the United States Congress*, United States Congress, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=M000698> (accessed April 12, 2013).

⁸⁶ *Genealogical Magazine* 1900, 240

with editions in 1755 of two free-standing wings.⁸⁷ The development of the gardens of Middleton Place took place earlier than Monticello or Mount Vernon but it ran concurrent to the development of the gardens at Stowe and Blenheim Palace in England – two of Capability Brown’s most famous clients. In fact, English horticulture had a more direct interaction with Middleton Place than with the other

⁸⁷ “History,” Middleton Place Foundation, <https://www.middletonplace.org/history.html>, (accessed April 12, 2013).



Figure 5: Middleton Place Butterfly lakes, Middleton Place Foundation, 2012



Figure 6: Lake at Middleton Place, Middleton Place Foundation, 2012

estates in this prospectus: Middleton hired a British landscape architect to design the grounds.⁸⁸ The name of the architect has been lost, but his influence is well-documented.

Gentlemen's Magazine, a London publication, wrote in July of 1758 that the Middletons “have superb seats have that would make a good figure in England.”⁸⁹ Middleton Place does not resemble the landscapes of Kent, Brown, or Repton. The naturally-growing Spanish Moss and live oak framed the wide lawn approach. The layout features rigid right angles and precisely shaped flower beds. But a few elements reflect the changing trends in landscape design: There was no direct route to the house; the road formed a figure-eight pattern with offshoots to side buildings. And Middleton created two false lakes behind the house (Figure 4). The result is more symmetric than Brown would have implemented but the technique of manipulating the water source for aesthetic effect is a technique that Brown perfected. Middleton’s plan also created “carefully plotted pathways [that] would reveal new vistas,”⁹⁰ another technique favored by Brown. Middleton Place is not an English landscape garden; it predates the high point of the trend’s popularity. But it is the result of an English landscape architect, the estate of a man who was well-versed in “good taste,” and a definitive statement of cultural power. Middleton Place reflects that even before the popularity of the English landscape style, England still wielded control over landscape architecture in the American colonies.

⁸⁸ Elise Pinckney. “‘Still Mindful of the English Way:’ 250 Years of Middleton Place on the Ashley.” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 92:3 (1991), 153.

⁸⁹ *Genealogical Magazine* 1990, 239.

⁹⁰ Pinckney 1991, 156.

Westover

The Byrd family of Westover plantation was one of the most prominent and influential families of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. William Byrd I purchased the land for the Westover plantation in 1688, but the Georgian mansion that still stands today was not built until 1750 by his grandson, William Byrd III. William Byrd II was considered a founder of Richmond and owned the largest private library in Virginia, with 4,000 volumes. Byrd II died in 1744 and Westover passed into the hands of William Byrd III.⁹¹ Byrd I had a reputation as respected amateur botanist and was a member of the Royal Society. He maintained a correspondence, and exchange of seeds, with Jacob Bobart, the keeper of the Physic Garden at Oxford University.⁹² Byrd II continued the tradition of careful horticultural guardianship. Unfortunately, the historical challenge to Westover is that the exact timeline of the gardens is somewhat unclear. Although Byrd I and Byrd II were known botanists, little is known about Byrd III because he was not as dedicated a journalist or letter writer as his father or grandfather. Additionally, Byrd III committed suicide in 1777 and the estate was turned over to the control of his wife.

But there are still numerous clues available to the historian to put together a picture of what Westover looked like at the turn of the nineteenth century. There are the firsthand accounts of visitors, and there are visual representations of the estate from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Francois-Jean de Chastellux, who served in the American Revolutionary War under General Rochambeau, published his

⁹¹ "James River Plantations: Westover," National Park Service, <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/jamesriver/wes.htm> (Accessed April 12, 2013).

⁹² Peter Martin, *The Pleasure Gardens of Virginia: From Jamestown to Jefferson*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 18.

observations of America in 1789. Westover was a stop on his extensive tour of Virginia plantations. He referred to the James River valley, where Westover is located, as “the garden of Virginia,” and praised the numerous examples of the *jardin anglais* that he saw there.⁹³ Westover surpassed the other plantations he visited in “the magnificence of the buildings, the beauty of its situation, and the pleasures of society.”⁹⁴ He also found Mrs. Byrd very charming saying she had an “agreeable countenance” and “great sense.”⁹⁵ He described Westover as a “terrace on the bank of the river,” a description that matches the 1811 rendering of Westover (Figure 6.)

Thomas Lee Shippen visited Westover in 1783 and described his experience in a letter to his parents. He claimed the walk along the James River was “the most enchanting walk in the world,” adding “nor are the prettiest trees wanting to compleat the beauty of the Scene.”⁹⁶ Shippen describes the approach to the main house: first, one passed through “a most charming Wood” and into “the improved grounds” (cultivated fields.) The road had a ha-ha on either side, separating it from “fine meadows whose extent is greater than the eye can reach.” The road, planted on either side with trees, crosses an irrigation canal a few times as the canal weaves across the property before arcing in front of the house.⁹⁷ Shippen provides us with a sketch of the approach of the main house at Westover (Figure 7.) Baron Ludwig von Close, who visited in the early 1780s, described Westover’s gardens as “prettily

⁹³ Martin, *Pleasure Gardens*, 77 and 102.

⁹⁴ Francois-Jean de Chastellux, *Travels in North America in the Years 1780-81-82* (New York: 1828), 162-163

⁹⁵ Chastellux, *Travels*, 164.

⁹⁶ Martin, *Pleasure Gardens*, 75.

⁹⁷ Martin, *Pleasure Gardens*, 76-7.

arranged...art and natural beauty are delightfully combined there.”⁹⁸ Collectively these representations, in addition to the Shippen plan and the artistic representations, suggest the following landscape elements at Westover: an indirect, curvilinear approach to the house, carefully manipulated water features that lend an appearance of naturalism (the irrigation canals), large expanses of lawn that run up to the house, and artful groupings of trees on the approach to the James River.

Westover is problematic because the exact dates of the landscape architecture are unknown. All that is certain are that certain elements were in place by the early 1780s that are suggestive of the English landscape style. But given the proclivity of the Byrd family for English horticultural customs and given the elements that are present, it is highly likely that the estate was reminiscent of the English landscape style, if not as perfect an example as Monticello and the Woodlands.

⁹⁸ C. Allan Brown, “Eighteenth-Century Virginia Plantation Gardens: Translating an Ancient Idyll,” in *Regional Garden Design in the United States*, (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 137

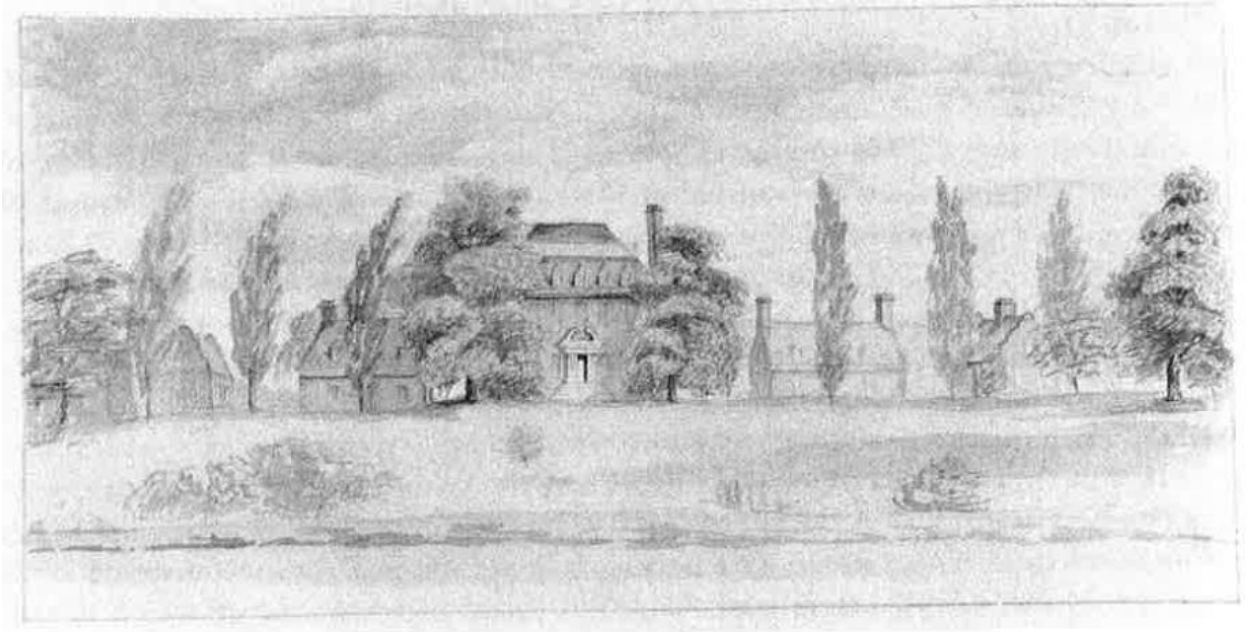


Figure 7: View of Westover from the James River, 1811 (from the Andre Coppet Collection at Princeton University)

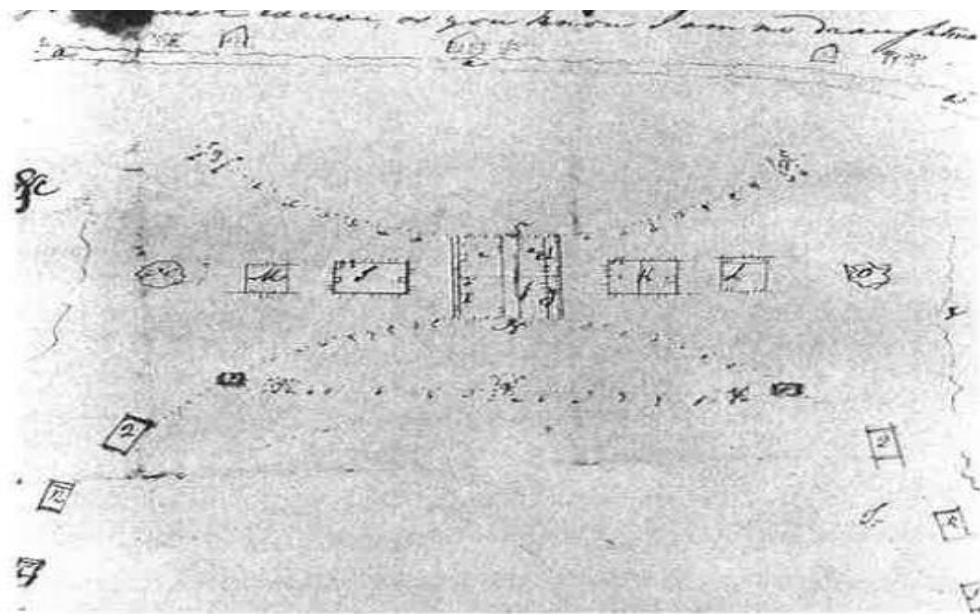


Figure 8: Sketch plan of Westover, Thomas Lee Shippen, 1783, (Shippen Family Papers, Library of Congress)

Monticello

Of all the estates covered in this thesis, Monticello is perhaps the most obviously influenced by the English Landscape style. Jefferson's letter of May 1786 and his veneration of Whately are evidence of his preference for the English style, but the grounds of Monticello prove that admiration. More contemporaneous visual evidence of Monticello exists today than of any of the other estates discussed in this paper. Jefferson, an avid gardener and botanist, made careful notes of his plans for the estate, including multiple sketched maps that lay out his vision. In addition to sketches and plans from 1787, 1804, and 1806, contemporary aerial photos and artist representations from various periods will be used to analyze Monticello for elements of the English landscape style.

Varying levels of drives circle the estate (a function of the placement on top of a leveled hill) and culminate in a circle drive that surrounds a wide expanse of uninterrupted lawn. A letter from 1784 from Jefferson while he was in Paris includes his plan for a serpentine path (Figure 8).⁹⁹ The approach forces the visitor to experience a carefully curated set of views of the house. The house is fronted by a wide expanse of uninterrupted lawn that runs right up to the house, similar to Blenheim Palace (Figure 9.) Marks on the circle drive indicate the placement of belts of trees, although the aerial view of Monticello (Figure 10) is



Figure 9: Thomas Jefferson, Plan for roundabout, ca. 1804, (Huntington Library)

⁹⁹ O'Malley 1992, 415.



Figure 10: View of Monticello from Lawn



Figure 11: Aerial view of Monticello, Google Earth, 2012

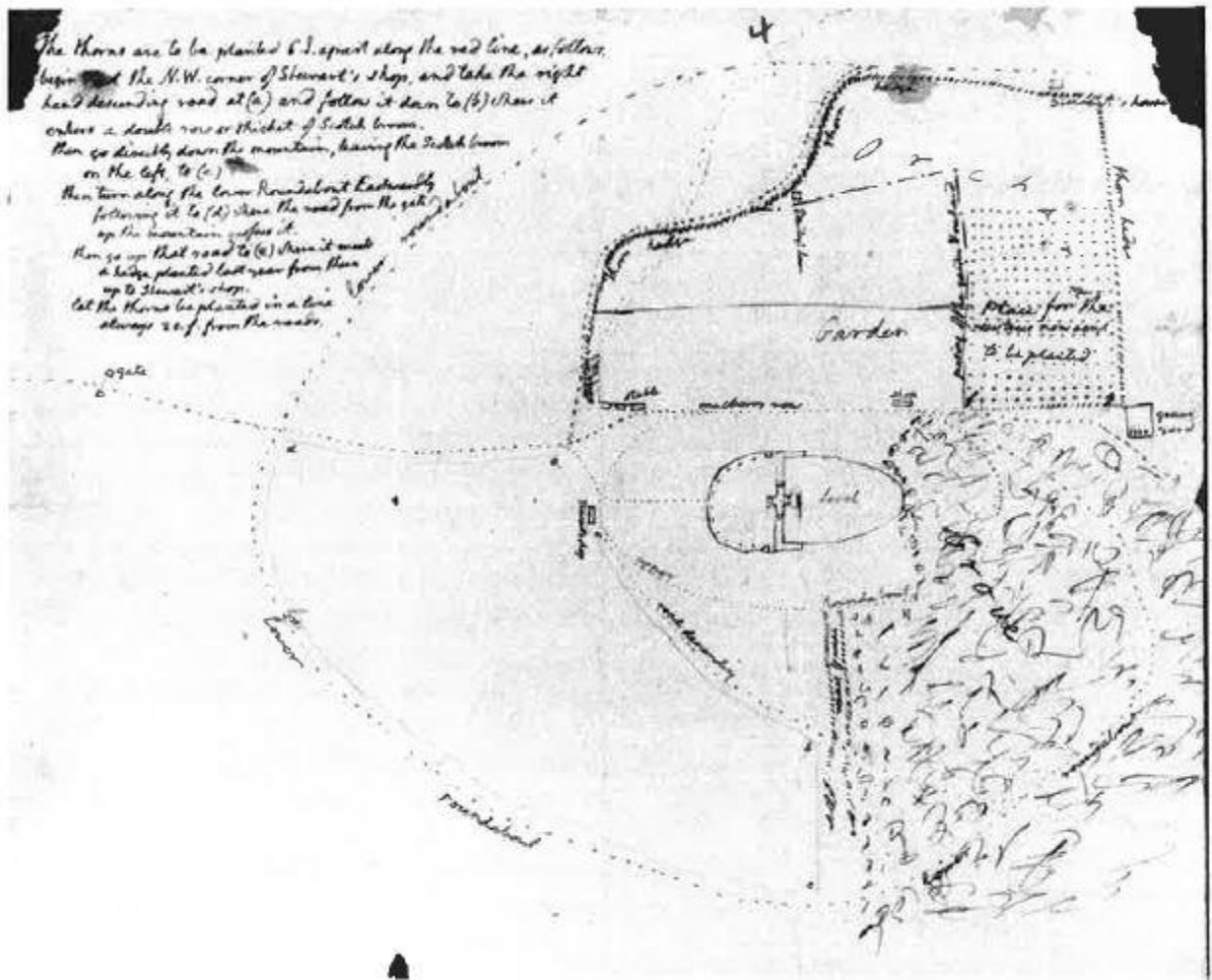


Figure 12: Thomas Jefferson, drawing of Monticello, sent to J.H. Freeman on February 26, 1806.

preferable for understanding the layout of plants and trees. Besides the lawn, there are clumps and belts of trees scattered throughout the property.

Jefferson also embraced the “clumps” championed by Brown. Although the 1787 Drawing (Figure 11) is problematic because it does not include every tree that would have been present in Jefferson’s time, it still suggests that Jefferson had adopted clumping to facilitate the growth of new trees. In the upper right-hand quadrant, Jefferson drew a series of dots and labeled the area “place for the new trees now sent to be planted.” Although it was not in artful, aesthetically pleasing groupings, the grouping of new trees reflected the reasoning found in a letter written

by landscape architect Humphry Repton: a clump was not only a way to break up the view but also as “a more certain expedient for producing future beauties, than young trees, which very seldom grow when exposed singly to the wind and sun.”¹⁰⁰ But looking at the contemporary image of Monticello, it is clear that clumps of the more traditional kind were also implemented. Besides the belts of trees lining the drives, groupings of trees are present in the spaces between the roundabout drives (designed by Jefferson) that encircled the estate as they descended down the hill.

Jefferson incorporated belts of trees - a favorite technique of Brown and Repton. The contemporary satellite image shows the trees that line the drives around the house. The lawn directly in front of the house was a distinct space from the neighboring gardens and from the more wooded area behind the house. Although the trees of the belt were not as dense as many found on English estates, they did play the role of boundary-marker and delineated the lawn and pleasure grounds from the fields, extensive grove of trees, and vegetable gardens of the Monticello estate.

The dots are easy to connect with Monticello: a stated preference for the English Landscape style, an owner with first-hand experience visiting the style’s best examples, ownership of and admiration for the seminal written work on the style, and an estate that embraces nearly all of Capability Brown’s favorite techniques. Jefferson, writer of the Declaration of Independence and champion of the American cause, built a markedly, inescapably English estate on his mountain in Virginia.

¹⁰⁰ Humphry Repton, *Letter To Uvedale Price*, (London: G. Nicol, 1794), 11. Repton published his letter to Price in an effort to publicly defend his and Brown’s work against the strident criticism of Uvedale Price, a popular art critic of the period.

Mount Vernon

When George Washington took over Mount Vernon in 1761 after the death of his half-brother Lawrence, the estate had existing structures and landscaped spaces (unlike Monticello.) But he rebuilt the mansion twice, doubling its size with each edition. In planning his garden, Washington relied on two English texts: Batty Langley's *New Principles of Gardening* (1728) and Philip Miller's *Gardener's Dictionary* (1731.) Both reflected an earlier version of the English landscape style; one that retained some elements of the formal garden but also embraced the naturalness that dominated the style's later years.¹⁰¹ Like Jefferson, Washington was the chief designer of the grounds' landscaped spaces, and, like Monticello, the result was very English. Mount Vernon was considered an "English style" estate and had all the "usual features of an early eighteenth-century English estate," including "a deer park, mount, two wildernesses, two groves, shrubberies, serpentine drives, bowling green, symmetrical vegetable and flower gardens, a botanic garden, parterre, and ha-ha."¹⁰²¹⁰³ Trees were planted "without any order or irregularity... as if they had receiv'd their station from Nature itself."¹⁰⁴

A map of the estate drawn by Samuel Vaughan, an English merchant visiting Mount Vernon in 1787 (Figure 12), proves the existence of several English landscape style elements. There is the large, uninterrupted lawn, a serpentine and circuitous drive, and the more formal side gardens that appear in the earlier versions of English

¹⁰¹ O'Malley 1992, 421.

¹⁰² A ha-ha is popular garden element, although the term itself is outdated. A ha-ha is a sunken ditch or barrier that prevents livestock from moving between fields without impeding the view. The sudden drop off keeps animals from climbing up onto another section of lawn but the ha-ha is not noticeable when viewed from a distance.

¹⁰³ O'Malley 1992, 421.

¹⁰⁴ O'Malley 1992, 407.

landscape style. A contemporary aerial photo confirms that those features are still present in the estate's current landscape (Figure 13.) The 1787 rendering depicts a heavy allotment of trees around the lawn, but nowhere else on the grounds near the house. Undoubtedly, the grouping at the edge of the lawn served the same dual aesthetic and practical purpose as Brownian clumping, but Washington adapted the style to fit his aesthetic. Washington's tree placement is more reminiscent of the "wilderness." The wilderness, carefully built to appear wild and unplanned was championed in Miller's *Dictionary* and by William Kent's earliest versions of the English landscape style as an element that epitomized the new, picturesque style.¹⁰⁵

Because of Washington's social and political importance, Mount Vernon was a popular stop on many foreigners' tours of America. A visitor in 1798 praised Washington's taste: "The whole plantation, the garden, and the rest prove well that a man born with natural taste may guess a beauty without having seen its model. The General has never left America, but when one sees his house and his home and his garden it seems as if he had copied the best samples of the grand old homestead of England."¹⁰⁶ But when Benjamin Henry Latrobe visited Mount Vernon in 1796, he complained about some of the old-fashioned elements that remained: "For the first time since I left Germany, I saw here a parterre, clipped and trimmed with infinite care into the form of a richly flourished Fleur de lis: The expiring groans I hope of our Grandfather's pedantry."¹⁰⁷ The 1787 Vaughan plan does indicate formal rows of garden plots, but it is unclear if they are parterres or vegetable gardens. Neither the

¹⁰⁵ O'Malley 1992, 421

¹⁰⁶ Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, *Under Their Vine and Fig Tree: Travels Through America in 1797-1799* (Grassmann Publishing Co., 1965), 29-30.

¹⁰⁷ O'Malley 1992, 423.

plans of the period nor the artistic renditions include a parterre, so the word of Latrobe has to be trusted. Given that Washington was relying on books from earlier in the eighteenth century, before Brown's ascent as gardening superstar, it is not surprising that they would have advocated the presence of some formal spaces.

Mount Vernon is not as purely landscape style as Monticello or the Woodlands, but it is still English. Washington relied on English texts, both old and new, to create a space that reflected his personal taste. And the inclusion of the large lawn, serpentine paths, and scattered trees indicates that he was paying attention to the latest landscape developments, despite his tenacious grip on the old-fashioned formal spaces.



Figure 13: Aerial view of Mount Vernon, Google Earth, 2013

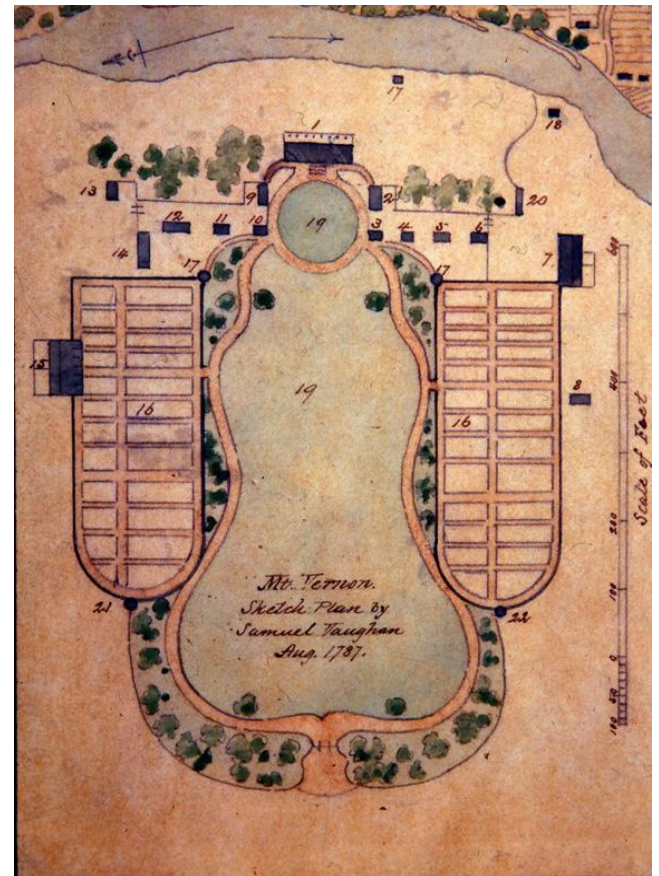


Figure 14: Samuel Vaughan, Gardens of Monticello, 1787 (Mount Vernon Ladies Association)

The Woodlands

William Hamilton, born in 1745, took control of the 300-acre Woodlands estate in 1766 at the age of twenty-one. His father, Andrew Hamilton, had established the family's place in the new Philadelphian "proprietary gentry" – group that was more comfortable with luxury and conspicuous consumption than their Quaker counterparts. Hamilton was described as a "man of refined taste" by a peer in 1808, and his house reflected both his vast personal means and his finely tuned sense of good taste.¹⁰⁸ The Woodlands functioned primarily as a "complicated aesthetic, intellectual, and social exercise, and the location where Hamilton merged personal interests and inclinations with broader trends related to refinement."¹⁰⁹ Hamilton epitomized the wealthy American elite – his only vocation was the planning and maintenance of the Woodlands. He spent four decades and an unaccounted amount of money crafting his version of architectural and horticultural perfection.¹¹⁰ Additionally, his studies at the University of Pennsylvania included horticulture and botany, contributing to a lifelong passion for the subjects and implies that he was well aware of current trends.¹¹¹ As of the mid 1780s, Hamilton owned sixty books on botany, in addition to the regular loans he received from elite friends.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ James A. Jacobs, "William Hamilton and the Woodlands: A Construction of Refinement in Philadelphia," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 130:2 (2006):181

¹⁰⁹ Jacobs 2006, 183.

¹¹⁰ Jacobs 2006, 182.

¹¹¹ Jacobs 2006, 188.

¹¹² National Park Service, "Woodlands Cemetery (HALS PA-5)," *Historic American Landscape Survey*, (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior,) 85.

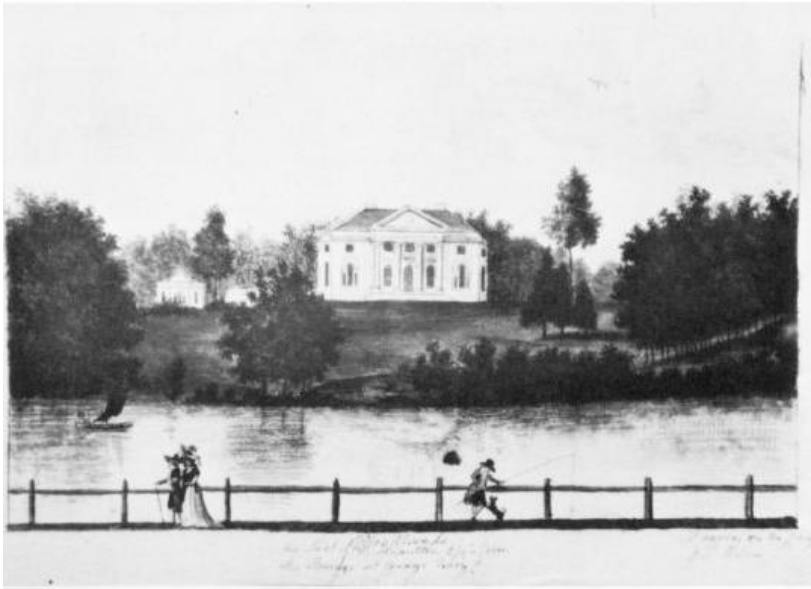


Figure 15: William Groombridge, *Woodlands, the Seat of William Hamilton*, 1793

Hamilton had no interest in the Revolutionary cause, writing in 1779 that “Politicks seem to take up every Body’s attention, & I believe, there never was a greater variety of sentiments on any Topic...I keep myself for the most part out of the way, not only for my dislike to the

subject as at present handled, but

because I have other Fish to fry.”¹¹³ Despite his ambivalence about the Revolutionary cause, Hamilton found a fan in Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson sent a grandson to the Woodlands to learn about botany; he described Hamilton’s estate as “the chastest model of gardening which I have ever seen out of England.”¹¹⁴

The Woodlands is located on the bank of Schuylkill River in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Unfortunately, the original footprint of the Woodlands has been radically altered since it was the property of Hamilton - the land was converted in 1840 to a cemetery. The house built by Hamilton in 1770 still stands but his landscaped spaces, which expressed Hamilton’s preference for the English style, do not.¹¹⁵ Because of the cemetery, it is impossible to trace the remnants of the eighteenth century in today’s gardens. But eighteenth and nineteenth century artists

¹¹³ William Hamilton, Letter to William Tighman, Jr., April 1779, manuscript, Historical Society of Pennsylvania Collection.

¹¹⁴ Thomas Jefferson to William Hamilton, [n.d.] July 1806, in Thomas Jefferson's Garden Book 1766-1824, ed. Edwin Morris Betts (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1944), 323.

¹¹⁵ Jacobs 2006, 188.

captured the Woodlands, and we have the account of visitors to the estate from which the influence of English gardens can be determined. In June of 1788, a woman named “L.G.” wrote a letter to her sister Eliza. She describes visiting The Woodlands and getting a tour of the grounds from Hamilton: “he took us round his walks” which were bordered by a variety of trees and shrubs. The grounds, according to “L.G.,” had “clumps of large trees” and featured “quite a natural walk which takes the form of the grounds entirely shaded with trees” and a wide, expansive lawn.¹¹⁶

Paintings by James Peller Malcom and William Groombridge from the 1790s provide visual evidence of Hamilton’s plans (Figures 14 and 15.) Both depictions feature lawns, clumps of trees, and a considerable lake – all elements of the English Landscape style. With the



Figure 16: James Peller Malcom, *The Woodlands from the Bridge at Gray's Ferry*, ca. 1792.

Woodlands, the proof of the English horticultural influence is less straightforward. But with what is known about Hamilton’s preference for the style, the descriptions of the estate, and the paintings by Malcom and Groombridge, it becomes clear that the grounds heavily referenced the English style.

Hamilton’s English education and conscious acquisition of luxury goods suggests what his estate confirms: he aspired to emulate the English gentry, believing that class to be the epitome of good taste. The grounds of the Woodlands, as is made

¹¹⁶ Richard J. Betts, “The Woodlands.” *Winthertur Portfolio*, 14:3 (1979): 217.

clear by artist representations and personal experiences, reflected the latest in English style, a trend that Hamilton would have been well aware of given his large personal collection of botanical and horticultural texts. More explicit about his intentions than Washington, Middleton, or Jefferson, Hamilton aspired to be an English gentleman in America, and the Woodlands was his beloved version of a gentleman's country seat.

Paca House

William Paca was born in Maryland in 1740 and eventually graduated from Philadelphia College before studying law in Annapolis and London. He returned to Annapolis after being admitted to the bar in 1764. He served as a member of the Continental Congress from 1774-1779 and was a signer of the Declaration of Independence. During the Revolutionary War, he served as chief judge of the Maryland Superior Court and Governor of Maryland from 1782-1785. President Washington appointed him as a judge of the United States Court of Maryland, a position he held until his death in 1799.¹¹⁷ Paca's career was illustrious and he died a wealthy man, but his fortune came from his wife – growing up his family fortune had fluctuated and it was not until the death of his first wife's brother in 1770



Figure 17: Charles Wilson Peale, *William Paca*, 1772, Maryland State Art Collection

did his personal fortune become anything remarkable.¹¹⁸ Paca and his first wife, Mary Chew, built the Paca Annapolis house between 1763 and 1765. Although not a

¹¹⁷ "William Paca (1740-1799), *Biographical Dictionary of the United States Congress*, United States Congress <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=P000001> (accessed April 12, 2013).

¹¹⁸ Joseph Manca, "Cicero in America," *American Art*, 17:1 (2003): 68, and Mark P. Leone "Interpreting Ideology in historical archaeology: using the rules of perspective in the William Paca Garden in Annapolis, Maryland" in *Ideology, Power, and Prehistory*, ed. Daniel Miller, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 33.

perfect example of the type, the house was the first Palladian-inspired villa to be built in an urban setting in America. Paca's architectural and horticultural taste was influenced by his time in England, particularly by the new emphasis there on Palladian architecture and "picturesque" gardens. The five-part Palladian model was popular in American country homes, but "Paca used it as a town home, thus connoting rural ease and tranquility in the city," and the style was quickly adopted by his Annapolis neighbors.¹¹⁹

The garden at the Paca house is fascinating because it is a clear example of the tension of American landscape design in the period. The garden is typically divided into thirds by scholars; the first two-thirds are formal gardens with parterres and right-angled paths, and the final third is a "wilderness." It is believed to be the only "wilderness" to exist in pre-Revolutionary America.¹²⁰ The term "wilderness" was a synonym for a part of a garden that was landscaped in the picturesque or naturalistic style, and followed the same guidelines of Brownian and Reptonian gardens. The garden was terraced, forcing an adjusted perspective and guiding the viewer's eye through the formal gardens to the "wilderness" at the bottom of the walled garden space.¹²¹ The Paca "wilderness" included a Chinese style bridge, a "meadow-like lawn," "meandering paths, scattered clumps of bushes, trees, and small half-hidden buildings."¹²² Until Paca introduced the "wilderness" into his urban, walled garden, town gardens had followed the trend set by the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg:

¹¹⁹ Manca 2003, 69.

¹²⁰ Leone in *Ideology*, 34.

¹²¹ Leone in *Ideology*, 32.

¹²² Leone in *Ideology*, 34, and Gunda Grotans Luss, "Georgian and Federal Neoclassical Architecture – the English Landscape Garden," in *Creating a Period Garden: The American Front and Side Yard – from Colonial to Contemporary, for a Zone 4 garden*, University of Minnesota, 2008.

completely formal and carefully manicured flower beds and hedgerows. Even though the “wilderness” was just as artificial as the formal spaces, it was a break from the existing trends in urban gardens and reflected the influence of Brown and Kent’s notions of natural landscapes.

A portrait of Paca painted by Charles Wilson Peale featured Paca against a background of his Annapolis estate, information that has been used to recreate the gardens (Figure 16). The portrait shows the “wilderness” area, complete with footbridge, stream, and summerhouse, creating the sense of *rus en urbe* that the estate as a whole attempted to achieve.¹²³ The garden was destroyed in the early twentieth century to make room for a hotel, but when the hotel was torn down in 1968, an extensive archaeological dig took place to recreate the garden as it existed while Paca lived there. A pond and canal were found in the bottom third, the “wilderness,” in addition to the foundations of a bridge, summerhouse, and a central pavilion, confirming the representation in Peale’s portrait.¹²⁴

Paca’s estate in Annapolis reflects the attempt of a man who had dramatically adjusted his personal circumstances, both through money and political power, and needed an estate that reflected his place as leader and tastemaker. The Paca house is Georgian, the first of its kind in Annapolis and the direct result of his time spent in London studying law. His garden also challenged accepted norms by adopting the “wilderness” trend before his peers but still holding fast to the previously accepted standards of taste. The Paca estate was a power play and it is telling that Paca used

¹²³ Manca 2003, 72.

¹²⁴ Robert L. Kelly and David Hurst Thomas, *Archaeology*, (Stamford: Cengage Learning, 2012), 351.

both the new English style and the existing standards, the British-approved formal garden, to make his social and political stand.

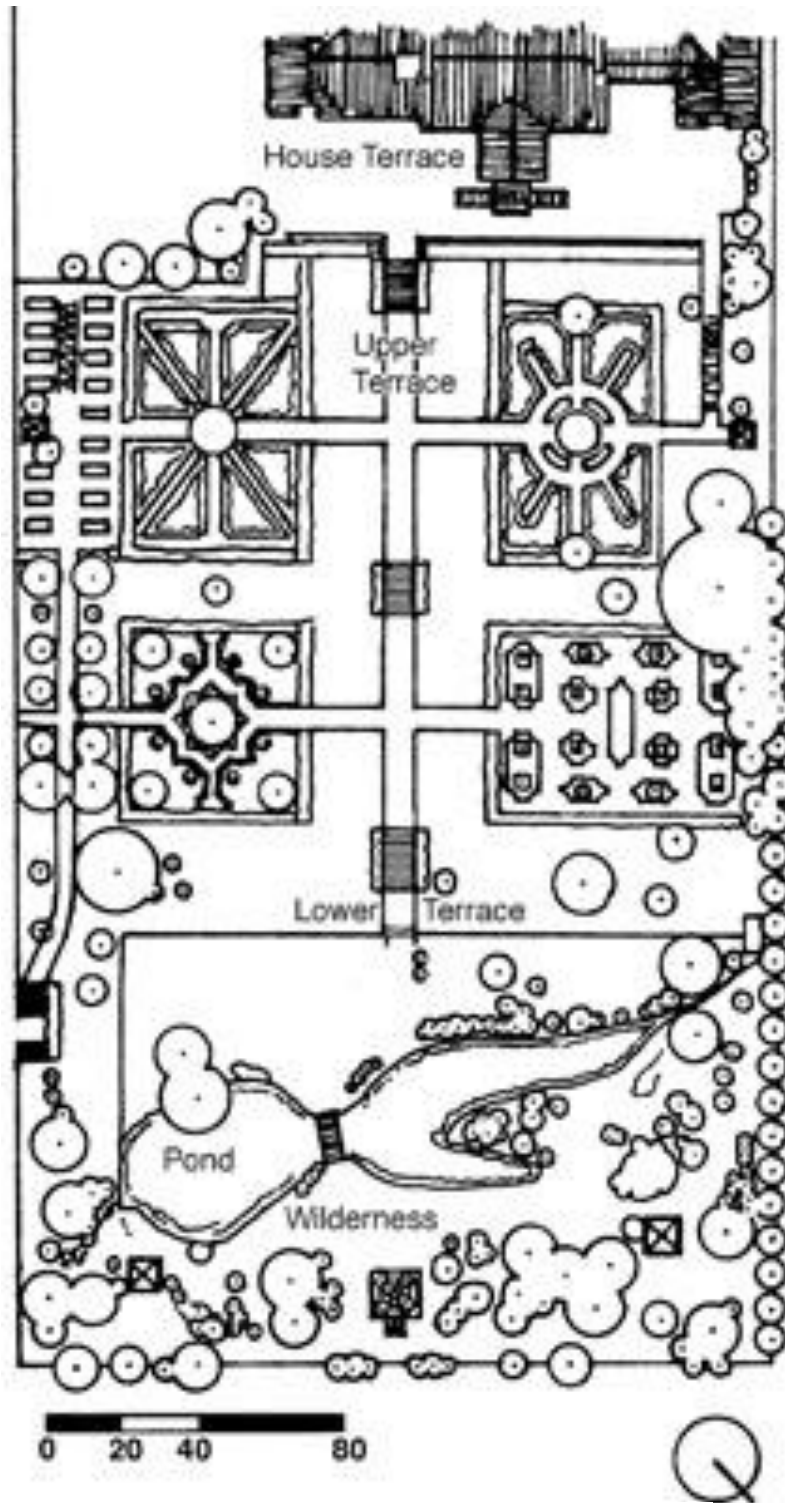


Figure 18: Paca Garden, Gunda Grotans Luss, 2008

CONCLUSION

Bourdieu and Jenkins explain why men like Washington, Madison, Middleton, and Byrd had cultural influence and were able to hold and use symbolic power in the newly-formed United States of America. Reading Walpole, Addison, Whately, and Mason demonstrates the influence the former motherland was attempting to wield over those culture-influencing landowners. But it is the estates of these men, their personal aesthetic legacies, which can prove how influential England's Englishness actually was. Americans had won a war of political independence and were determined to sever all ties, lose all resemblance to the country they had rebelled against. But as Jenkins has explained, cultural power, aesthetic power, artistic power - these are just as telling signs of influence as economics or politics.

Estates like Middleton Place, Westover, Monticello, Mount Vernon, Paca estate, and the Woodlands demonstrate the extent of British influence in the Early National period. Middleton Place and Westover maintained the trend of formal spaces while adopting precursors to the English landscape style like wide, clear lawns and uninterrupted views of the water. These estates were owned by generations of the same families that had established reputations as horticultural enthusiasts and they had been built to reflect the prevailing taste of the period. Even though that taste was not the style of Brown and Kent, it did reflect the English trends that had come before. Earlier Middletons and Byrds had proved their taste by adopting those older standards.

Monticello and Mount Vernon reflected the tension of building estates that proved their owners were in tune with the latest trends in gardening (and therefore with the most recent iteration of taste from England) but that were also true to the demands of the estate and farmlands. Mount Vernon and Monticello represent comparatively pure examples of the English landscape style: serpentine paths, clumps and groups of trees, and wide lawns. Their estates were admired for the trueness to the landscape style, even though they also maintained the previous trends like small formal spaces, particularly at Mount Vernon. And their efforts were met with success – both Mount Vernon and Monticello were praised for their beauty and their faithfulness to the English model. The same Chastellux who visited Westover praised Monticello and its owner: “Mr. Jefferson is the first American who has consulted the fine arts to know how he should shelter himself from the weather.”¹²⁵

The Woodlands of Philadelphia and the Paca estate in Annapolis serve as examples of the English landscape style within urban spaces. Their owners, both educated in England, crafted garden spaces that both reflect their taste and offer proof that they meet the standards of English country gentlemen. The Paca estate retained formal spaces, suggesting that no matter how popular the English landscape style had become, abandoning the earlier iterations of acceptable taste would prove challenging.

Across the six estates, the influence of England is strongly felt. Either estates preserved the styles that had been the previous example of high taste, the formal hedge gardens, or reflected the transition into the English landscape style of Brown, Kent, and Repton. But England was consistently the model for American gardens.

¹²⁵ Chastellux, *Travels*, 227.

During and after the American Revolution, these gardens either remained the same or were molded into the emerging English style. There was no uniquely American point of view within the sphere of gardens. In the post-Revolution America, there was so much turmoil, politically and culturally, but gardens remained a constant of Englishness. The rhetoric coming out of the London press was adamant about the relationship between liberty and the English style – but liberty within a government. Compared to the anarchy of France at the end of the nineteenth century, the order of England appealed to the already tumultuous post-Revolution American culture.

Thomas Jefferson, the avid Francophile and ambassador to France, praised English gardens while on his tour of England and made notes about implementing the elements at his own estate in Virginia. It is a suggestive example, one that proves that within the realms of gardens, England maintained its superiority throughout the nineteenth century, even as the United States relationship with other nations changed throughout the 1780s and 1790s. There was not an American landscape style but the reliance on England for trends negated any need for one. For the most part, the English influence was not acknowledged. Jefferson was vocal about his approval but most gardeners did not express their preference so explicitly. Their gardens reflected English style out of habit, out of unconscious emulation. But by the end of the nineteenth century, the American identity had been established and the adjective “American” could be applied to gardens, without referencing a national influence.

When Olmsted died in 1903, his obituary in *The New York Times* offered insight into public opinion about the man and his work: “It was he, indeed, who may be said to have created the title of landscape architect...Manhattan should choose

some more striking and personal way of recalling to posterity the master of a very grand art.”¹²⁶ Daniel Burnham, when being feted for his work with 1893 Columbian Exhibition, praised Olmsted instead of taking credit: “Each of you knows the name and genius of him who stands first in the heart and confidence of American artists, the creator of your own parks and many other city parks...An artist, he paints with lakes and wooded slopes; with lawns and banks and forest-covered hills; with mountain sides and ocean views.”¹²⁷ Olmsted was an American lion – praised for his vision of landscaped spaces that felt natural, even though they had been heavily manipulated. He was praised for the same reasons, and in some of the same words, as Kent, Brown, and Repton. But he was an American who designed American landscapes in American spaces.

The private estates designed by Olmsted bear a striking similarity to the English landscape-influenced estates discussed in this paper. Moraine Farm in

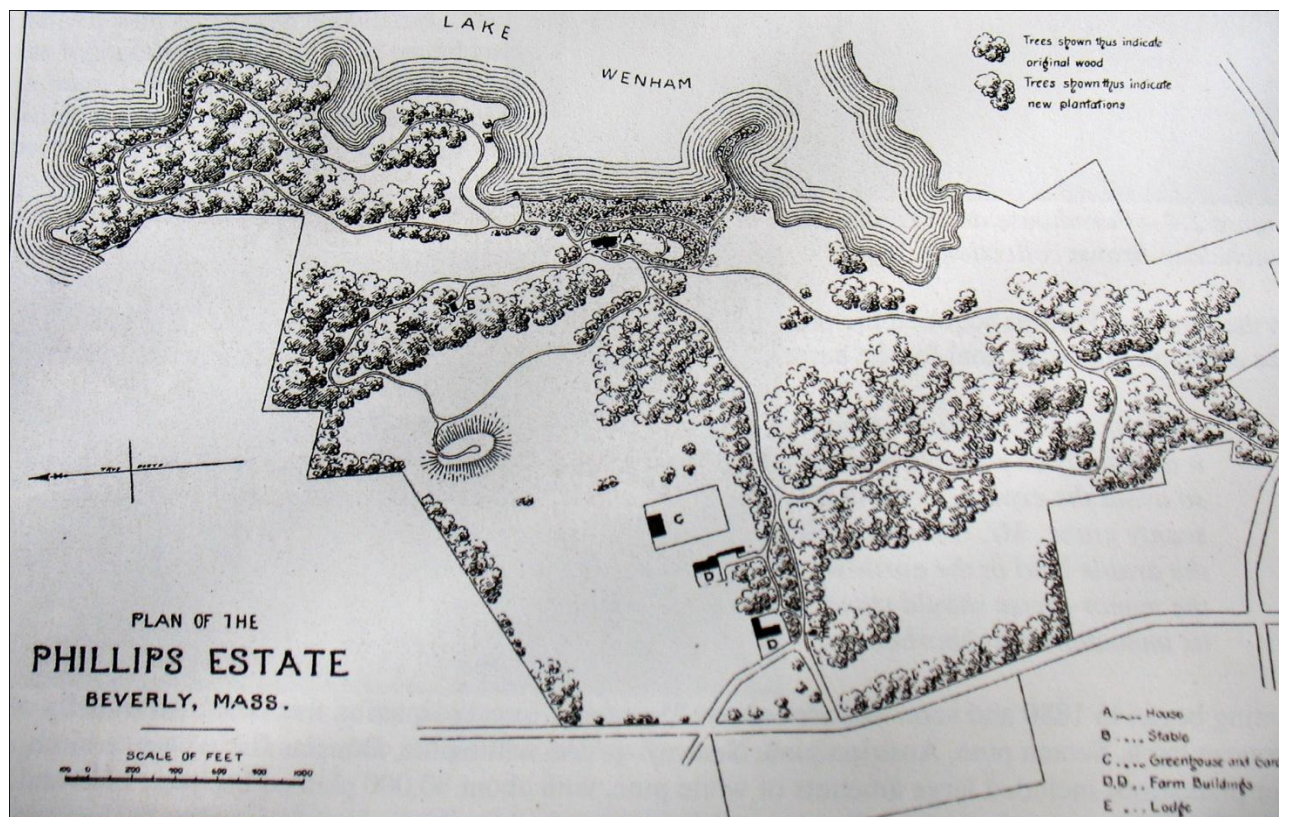


Figure 19: Moraine Farm, Olmsted, Olmsted, & Eliot, 1880

Massachusetts and the Biltmore estate in North Carolina are examples of Olmsted's private residences. The gardens of both estates share common elements, and they are also interestingly similar to the estates previously discussed in this paper. Olmsted's philosophy about private estates is summed up in his advice to George Vanderbilt: "My advice would be to make a small park into which to look from your house; make a small pleasure ground and garden, farm your river bottom chiefly to keep and fatten live stock with view to manure; and make the rest a forest, improving the existing woods and planting old fields."¹²⁸ Like his predecessors, Olmsted was concerned with creating a naturalistic landscape that made the most effective use of an estate's capabilities.

Moraine Farm was built as a summer home in 1880 by John Charles Phillips, a shipping merchant from Boston. The estate comprised about 275 acres on Wenham Lake in Beverly, Massachusetts, and Phillips hired Olmsted when he purchased the land. The estate was also a working farm and Olmsted employed natural barriers, namely belts of trees and circular drives, to camouflage the agricultural areas from the pleasure grounds. Unfortunately, the landscape of the estate has changed so much since the turn of the twentieth century that the contemporary aerial view does not offer any insight about Olmsted's plan. But the original plan from 1886 (Figure 18) includes wide lawns, clumps and belts of trees, and serpentine paths that lead to the house and to Lake Wenham are circuitous. Olmsted also adjusted the drainage of about forty acres, allowing previously worn-out land to be used for agriculture.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Bill Alexander, "The Biltmore Nursery: A Botanical Legacy," *The History Press*, 2007, 17.

¹²⁹ "History," Moraine Farm, <http://morainefarmbeverly.org/index/history/> (Accessed April 12, 2013)

The Vanderbilt family moved into Biltmore in 1895 after six years of construction. George Vanderbilt envisioned Biltmore to be a country retreat – the result was a 250-room mansion (four acres of floor space and 43 bathrooms) and 125,000-acre estate.¹³⁰ The house is still privately owned by the family, although both the house and grounds are open to the public. The estate has become a tourism powerhouse drawing over a million visitors each year.¹³¹ The plans for the Biltmore estate reflect a more formalized lay out than Moraine Farms. In addition to swaths of grass and belts of trees, formal tree-lined allées and parterres are used to divide the gardens in a decidedly geometric pattern (Figure 19).

Biltmore and Moraine Farms are cited as exemplary examples of Olmsted's work with private estates. Both Vanderbilt's and Phillips' financial success was due to industry – these were not the landed gentry of Virginia and South Carolina, but they understood the prestige associated with a country estate and emulated the examples of their American forbearers. Moraine embraced an aesthetic that reflects Olmsted's famous public spaces like Central Park and the New York Insane Asylum: gently rolling lawns, carefully considered groupings of trees, water features that meander instead of rush, and roads that allow for full consideration of the grounds, instead of a direct route to the main buildings. Biltmore, although it includes some of those same features, relies more heavily on the drama of carefully manicured flower beds and straight pathways. What is significant is that the works of Olmsted, despite the fact that they embrace styles previously considered French or English, are instead

¹³⁰ "Our Story," Biltmore Estate, http://www.biltmore.com/our_story/our_history/default.asp (Accessed April 12, 2013).

¹³¹ "Our Story," Biltmore Estate, http://www.biltmore.com/our_story/our_history/default.asp (Accessed April 12, 2013).

described as “Olmstedian.” By the end of the nineteenth century, American landscape architecture had progressed to a point when the Englishness or nonEnglishness of a landscape was irrelevant. The ownership of a country estate was now the mark of cultural power, the precise origin of the aesthetic was secondary to the overall grandeur of the home. What mattered was its beauty, its functionality within the owner’s life, and the stamp of approval by the master of natural beauty – Frederick Law Olmsted.

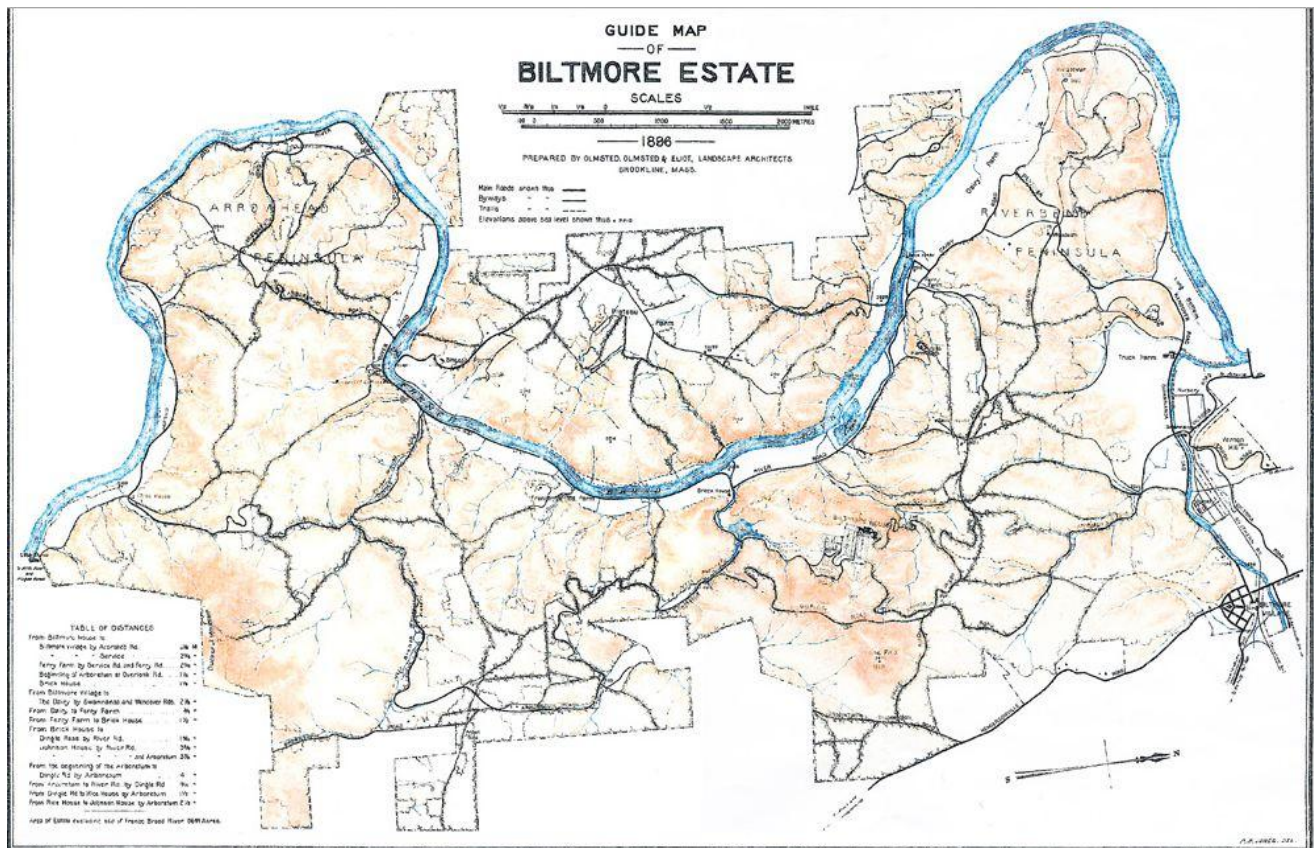


Figure 20: Biltmore Estate map, Olmsted, Olmsted & Eliot, 1886

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