

# OLMSTED 200

Mike Houck

## The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. and John Charles Olmsted

Mike Houck, Director Emeritus, Urban Greenspaces Institute  
Laurence Cotton, Public Historian, Olmsted Scholar  
Jim Sjulín, 40-Mile Loop Land Trust

Considered by many the “Father of Landscape Architecture”, **Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.** was born in 1822, April 26<sup>th</sup>. Park, trail and natural resource advocates, planners, park professionals and millions of people who have enjoyed the Olmsted legacy of parks, formal and informal, for the past two-hundred years will mark the anniversary with events across the United States throughout 2022. The national celebration is coordinated by the National Association of Olmsted Parks (<https://olmsted200.org/>).

Here in Portland, Olmsted admirers are assembling numerous lectures, events, and field excursions that will focus on the works of Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. (FLO) and his son John Charles Olmsted, who carried forward the landscape philosophy established by Olmsted senior, including the public spaces of multiple cities in the Pacific Northwest.



*Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.*

Olmsted senior, prominent social reformer, influential writer, and ardent abolitionist, was co-creator of **New York City’s Central Park, Prospect Park, and Boston’s Emerald Necklace**. He is also revered for his commitment to equitable access to parks and nature, particularly for the urban poor who lacked the means to travel outside the then polluted city for physical and mental refreshment. His equity-oriented philosophy was embodied in this observation regarding Central Park: “It is one great purpose of the Park to supply to the hundreds of thousands of tired workers, who have no opportunity to spend their summers in the country...inexpensively, what a month or two in the White Mountains or the Adirondacks is, at great cost, to those in easier circumstances.”

## John Charles Olmsted

In 1903, his adopted son John Charles Olmsted came to the Pacific Northwest at the invitation of the cities of Portland, Seattle, and Spokane. In Portland, JCO (as he is known by his admirers) responded to a request by Portland's volunteer park board to develop a master plan for Portland's parks. JCO toured the Portland landscape rapidly and with great intensity! He was squired around by Colonel L. L. Hawkins in his carriage the "Tally Ho Jupiter!" JCO's Report to the Park Board was delivered in late December 1903. It outlined in great detail a citywide system of parks that capitalized on the City's greatest natural assets: its forested backdrop on the west, its viewpoints, its rivers and sloughs, and the escarpments and buttes on the east. His work truly articulated a vision for public open spaces and set the City in motion toward the creation of the park system that continues to develop today.



*John Charles Olmsted*

JCO shared his father's philosophy regarding the democratizing value of parks, their contribution to mental and physical health of urban dwellers. In his 1903 Report to the Park Board he also embraced the role of natural landscapes as what is commonly referred to as Green Infrastructure.

His report called for the creation of a comprehensive, interconnected system of parks and natural landscapes in Portland. In addition to more traditional neighborhood parks, parkways, and boulevards JCO's "green armature" for Portland's future park system, without using words like ecology, ecosystem, or biodiversity, recognized the importance of wildlife corridors, streams and rivers, and other elements of Portland's natural landscape. Today many refer to his focus on natural parks such as Forest Park, Ross Island, and Smith and Bybee Lakes as "natural green infrastructure", and as essential elements of a truly comprehensive and interconnected park system.

For example, JCO wrote: "Marked economy in municipal development may also be effected by laying out parkways and parks...so as to embrace streams that carry at times more water than can be taken care of by drain pipes of ordinary size. Thus brooks or little rivers which would otherwise become nuisances that would someday have to be put in large underground conduits at enormous expense, may be made the occasion for delightful local pleasure grounds or attractive parkways."

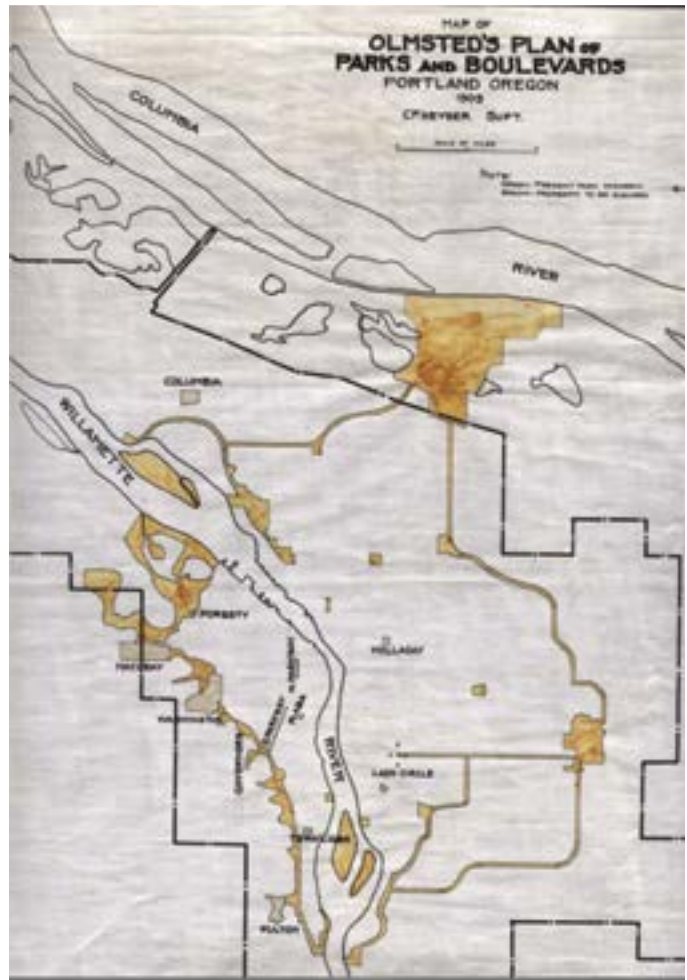
*Balch Creek in Forest Park.*



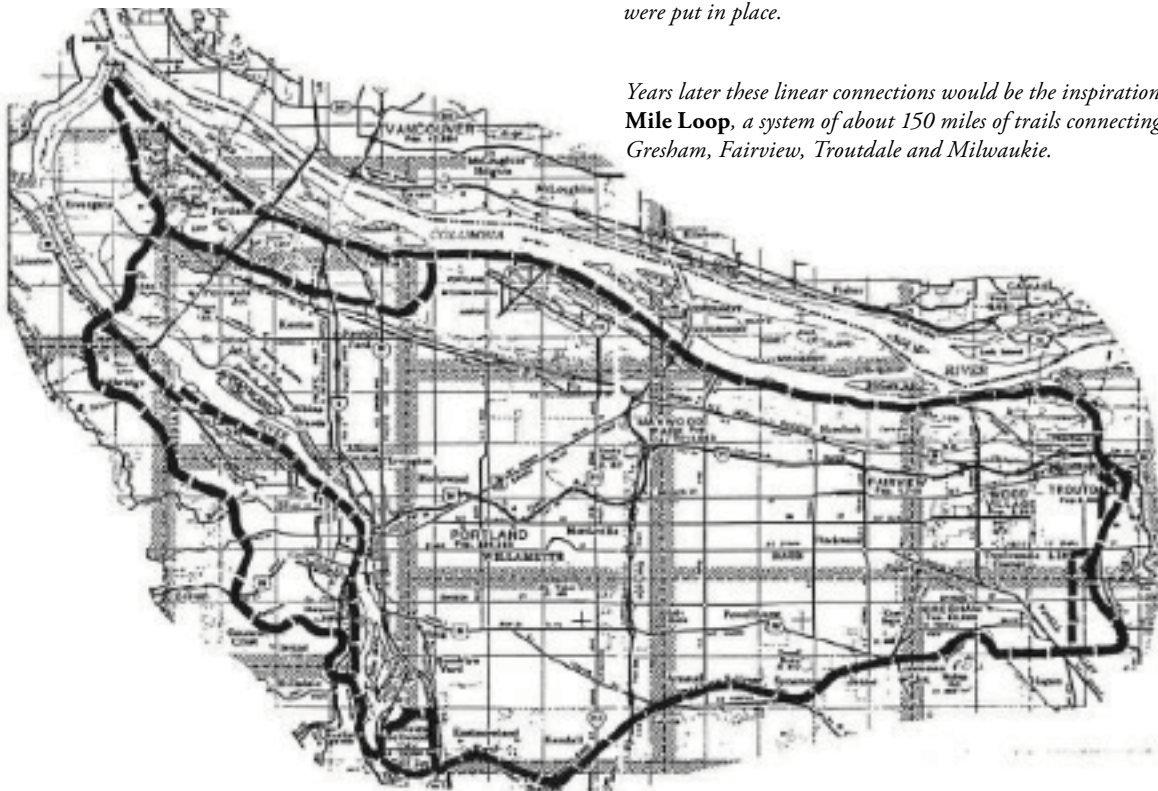
Mike Houck

## JCO and the 40-Mile Loop

JCO argued that not only should a park system be comprehensive, meaning a broad spectrum of neighborhood parks, recreational grounds, and natural landscapes but, that they be interconnected by boulevards and parkways. Much as his “green infrastructure” concepts inspired natural area advocates, bicycle and pedestrian advocates were inspired in the early 1980s to create the 40-Mile Loop Land Trust which expanded the Olmstedian concept of an interconnected system of parkways and boulevards for carriages into a contemporary bicycle and pedestrian “loop” that would encircle the entire city and beyond. What was in Olmsted’s era a forty-mile circuit within the city’s much smaller early twentieth century footprint is now a nearly 150-mile system of paved and unpaved paths reaching from Portland’s Forest Park east to Gresham, Fairview, and Troutdale. The Loop, now just over 70% completed, is one of JCO’s legacies that the 40-Mile Loop Land Trust, Urban Greenspaces Institute, The Intertwine Alliance’s partner organizations, other nonprofits and park providers will celebrate throughout 2022.



*Linear connections between parks were envisioned by Olmsted as landscaped parkways and totaled about 40 miles. Only fragments were put in place.*



*Years later these linear connections would be the inspiration for the **40 Mile Loop**, a system of about 150 miles of trails connecting Portland, Gresham, Fairview, Troutdale and Milwaukie.*

# Olmsted200 Event Calendar\*

**March 7  
6 pm**

**Portland Parks Foundation Green Dreams Series Lecture:**

## **From the Cotton Kingdom: Frederick Law Olmsted, Abolition and Park Design**

As Frederick Law Olmsted was submitting his entry to design Central Park in the 1850s, the *New York Times* sent him on a research trip throughout the American South. The country stood on the precipice of civil war. Olmsted, a budding landscape designer, but also a gifted observer and writer wrote about the practices of slavery--and about the slaves themselves. His writings helped crystalize the northern states' opposition to slavery.

In the summer of 2019, landscape architect **Sara Zewde** embarked on a road trip of her own, retracing Olmsted's steps to understand how his travels and observations led to the formation of landscape architecture as we know it today, and how her nascent practice fits into it.

Zewde, is the founder of Studio Zewde, a landscape architecture, urban design, and public art practice based in Harlem, New York City. Named a 2021 Emerging Voice by the Architectural League of New York, the studio's work is lauded for its design methodology that syncs site interpretation and narrative with a dedication to the craft of construction. She is an assistant professor at the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, and is working on a book on Olmsted and the Cotton Kingdom.

For more information go to Portland Parks Foundation website:

<http://www.portlandpf.org/200th-olmsted-anniversary-events>

**March 8  
10 am**

## **Radio Interview**

KEX Radio 1190 AM, **Paul Linnman** former television news reporter and anchor in Portland will interview **Mike Houck**, Director Emeritus of the Urban Greenspaces Institute for background on Olmsted200.

\* **Events will be added throughout the Olmsted200 Bi-Centennial**

March 9  
7 pm

Friends of Columbia Park

**An Evening with William J. Hawkins, author  
*The Legacy of Olmsted Brothers in Portland, Oregon***

Hawkins, a renowned architectural historian and author, will talk about the Olmsted park and landscape design footprint in Portland and the history of the Portland Park system, the topic of his book *The Legacy of Olmsted Brothers in Portland, Oregon*. His beautifully illustrated book traces the development of Portland's system of parks and parkways and the Olmsted Brothers' lasting influence on our neighborhood greenspaces. For more information and to register (in person or via Zoom) go to their website:

<https://www.focp.org/olmsted-2022-speaker-series.html>



March 14  
6 pm

Portland Parks Foundation Green Dreams Series Lecture

**Parks and Consequences—Hidden Histories  
of Olmsted Parks Tradition, from New York to Portland**

**Catherine McNeur**, professor of history, PSU, and author of *Taming Manhattan: Environmental Battles in the Antebellum City*, will probe the beginnings of Central Park and how its development influence our attitudes and practices with parks today.

**Carl Abbott**, emeritus professor of urban studies and planning, PSU, and author of *Portland in Three Centuries* and many other books about Portland, will reflect on how the Olmsted firm's work in Portland shaped the city in both good and questionable ways. Location TBD.

<http://www.portlandpf.org/200th-olmsted-anniversary-events>

*“The remaining  
great landscape  
feature of the  
city is that of the  
Columbia Sloughs.”*  
– John Charles  
Olmsted



Mike Houck

**March 28**  
**6 pm**

**Portland Parks Foundation Green Dreams Series Lecture**

**Beyond Recreation:  
Climate, Social Justice, and the Urban Landscape Ahead**

**Vivek Shandas**, associate professor in the Nohad A. Toulan School of Urban Studies and founder of the newly established Sustaining Urban Places Research Lab Sustaining Urban Places, PSU, and member of Portland's, Urban Forestry Commission and CNE Corbin, assistant professor Urban Political Ecology, PSU, discuss how our outlook on parks and parks programming can adapt to better serve the goals of social justice and the critical needs wrought by climate change.

<http://www.portlandpf.org/200th-olmsted-anniversary-events>

**April 4**  
**10 am**

**KBOO Radio**

**Locus Focus, Radio Program**

**Barbara Bernstein**, long-time creator and host of *Locus Focus* will interview **Mike Houck**, former Urban Naturalist for Audubon Society of Portland and Director Emeritus of the Urban Greenspaces Institute and **Jim Sjulín**, former Natural Resource Program Manager for Portland Parks and Recreation and current board member of the 40-Mile



Mike Houck

*“Another landscape of considerable importance to the city, the value of which is realized by few people, is Ross Island and adjoining islands. If these islands can be obtained...their acquisition will unquestionably prove in the long run a very profitable investment.”* – John Charles Olmsted

Loop Land Trust. Houck and Sjulín will discuss John Charles Olmsted's 1903 master plan for Portland parks with a focus on natural resources and creation and expansion of the 40-Mile Loop, a nearly 150-mile bicycle and pedestrian loop around Portland and beyond. Locus Focus is a weekly conversation about our place on the planet, has been airing for 31 years on KBOO.

[www.KBOO.org](http://www.KBOO.org)

**April 5  
7 pm**

**Oregon Historical Society**

### **Frederick Law Olmsted: Bringing Nature into the City**

**Laurence Cotton**, historian, filmmaker and Olmsted historian. April 26, 2022, marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Frederick Law Olmsted, the master designer of public parks and a founder of the field of landscape architecture. Join historian and filmmaker Laurence Cotton for a deep dive into the remarkable life and career of Renaissance-man Olmsted — writer, philosopher, social reformer, advocate for the preservation of natural scenery, and creator of some of the most beautiful public and private parks and gardens in North America. In his presentation, Cotton will talk about the design traditions, aesthetics, and philosophies that influenced Olmsted — including English garden design, the Hudson River School, and Transcendentalism. He will emphasize Olmsted's remarkable career as a writer and the worldwide influence of his publications on the antebellum South and the institution of slavery. Finally, Cotton will give a visual tour of representative landscapes across North America designed by Olmsted, his two sons, and the Olmsted Bros. landscape architecture firm, with a focus on the West Coast and particularly John Charles Olmsted's legacy in the Pacific Northwest.

Presenter Laurence Cotton was the originator, principal researcher, and consulting producer for the nationally broadcast PBS film, *Frederick Law Olmsted: Designing America*. He has presented the film many times across the country since it was first broadcast in 2014. This year he is making additional appearances across the United States, delivering his new PowerPoint presentation about the Olmsted legacy as part of the National Association for Olmsted Parks' Olmsted200 commemoration.

For more information and to register go to:

<http://www.ohs.org/events/frederick-law-olmsted.cfm>

**April 26  
TBD**

**Portland Parks Foundation Green Dreams Series Lecture**

### **Indigenous Landscapes: Past, Present, Future**

**Jose Leal** will gather local thinkers and activists who are building one of the country's most important Indigenous restorative landscape clusters in the country. Details coming soon.

<https://www.portlandpf.org/200th-olmsted-anniversary-events>

[See more events](#) . . . . . ►

**April 26**

**Portland Garden Club**

### **John Charles Olmsted's Portland Legacy**

Speakers: **William Hawkins III**, JCO in Portland; **Mike Houck**, Director Emeritus, Urban Greenspaces Institute, JCO and Green Portland's Natural Landscapes; **Jim Sjulín**, 40-Mile Loop Land Trust, Evolution of the 40-Mile Loop. Time and location TBD

For information:

<https://www.theportlandgardenclub.org/monthly-speakers/>

**April 26  
4 pm**

**Lucky Labrador Brewing Company**

### **Frederick Law Olmsted 200th Birthday Celebration**

Frederick Law Olmsted 200th Birthday Celebration and launch of the Friends of John Charles Olmsted, In 2003 The Lab brewed a special Olmsted Ale to commemorate John Charles Olmsted's 1903 *Report to the Portland Park Board* that set the stage for creation of one of the nation's great park systems. Join us in hoisting a pint to FLO and JCO with an updated **Olmsted Ale**.

Lucky Labrador Brewing Company, 915 SE Hawthorne Boulevard, Portland.



Mike Houck

*"The investment of a comparatively modest sum....(would allow the poor)...a visit to these woods (that) would afford more pleasure and satisfaction than a visit to any other sort of park."* – John Charles Olmsted

**More events will be added throughout the Olmsted200 Bi-Centennial**