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Landmarks Preservation Commission
January 22, 1980
LP-2000

# RIVERSIDE PARK AND RIVERSIDE DRIVE
West 72nd Street to St. Clair Place
Manhattan

Landmark Site: Tax Map Block 1187, Lots 1, 3 in part extending to the U.S. Bulkhead Line, and 4: Tax Map Block 1254, Lots 1 and 10 in part extending to the U.S. Bulkhead Line: Tax Map Block 1897, Lots 1, 19 in part extending to the U.S. Bulkhead Line, and 100; and the property bounded by the southern curb line of West 72nd Street, the eastern curb line of Riverside Drive, the southern curb line of St. Clair Place, and the western curb line of Riverside Drive.

## BOUNDARIES

The proposed Riverside Park and Riverside Drive Scenic Landmark consists of the property bounded by the southern curb line of West 72nd Street, the eastern curb line of Riverside Drive, the southern curb line of St. Clair Place, and the U.S. Bulkhead Line at the western edge of Riverside Park, to a line extending from the southern curb line of West 72nd Street, excluding the road bed of the Henry Hudson Parkway.

## TESTIMONY AT THE PUBLIC HEARING

On September 11, 1979, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of Riverside Park and Riverside Drive as a Scenic Landmark and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No.16). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Twelve witnesses, including Ruth Messinger, Council Member from the 4th District, Manhattan, Joseph Bresnan, Director of Historic Parks, and Sally Goodgold of Community Board 7, among others, spoke in support of the designation. There were no speakers in opposition to the designation. The witnesses favoring designation clearly indicate that there is widespread community support for the designation of this Scenic Landmark. The commission also received letters and other expressions of support for this designation.

# DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Riverside Park and Riverside Drive begin at 72nd Street and continue north to St. Clair Place, approximately 129th Street, where they are effectively terminated by the viaduct and the Manhattanville fault. Although there is a later portion which resumes at 135th Street, meeting Fort Washington Park at 158th Street, that portion is not included in the current designation. As they exist today, Riverside Park constitutes a long, linear park varying in width from 100 to 500 feet. It is organized in four registers, or levels. Each register has particular activities associated with it, and these are repeated along its length. The Drive is on the highest level. Like the park, it varies in width as it runs through the parkland or forms its eastern border. Where it forms the border it is lined by apartment buildings and smaller residences, as well as several religious and educational institutions. The building facades parallel the Drive, following its curves and creating a serpentine wall which can be seen from a great distance. The wide paved promenade, to the west of the Drive, is lined with trees, and benches are provided in front of the retaining wall that marks the boundary between the Drive and the next register.

The second register is the steep, sloping hill planted with grass and trees which one descends by steps, ramps and meandering walks. This area serves as a picnic ground, amphitheatre and place for sledding. Until the 1930s this was the extend of Riverside Park, which was separated from the water by the tracks of the New York Central Railroad.

At the bottom of the step slope is the third register, a plateau created when the tracks of the railroad were roofed over in the 1930s. The character of the plateau depends upon the contours of the adjacent slope, but even at its narrowest points it accomodates a broad tree-lined promenade for pedestrians and bicyclists. In wider places there is frequently a playground. The plateau also provides a viewing platform from which one is intended to have an unobstructed view of the Hudson River and the New Jersey Palisades.

One descends to the level of the tracks themselves to reach the final register, where massive arches incorporating ramps and stairs provide access for people and ventilation for the railroad. The parapet formed by the railroad wall also provides additional areas for recreational facilities. Handball courts, tennis backboards, basketball hoops, and the like occur periodically along it. Thus the railroad roof and wall create a strong spine which continues virtually uninterrupted along the whole length of the park. Beyond the railroad tracks is the flood plain of the Hudson River. This is all filled land created in the 1930s. Here can be found the marina, baseball fields, and other areas for active recreation. Here too is located the Henry Hudson Parkway, a limited access highway. The final element is an intermittent walkway at the river edge. The internal organization of the park helps to make the park comprehensible, while its proximity to the river denies its narrowness, since the river and the Palisades on the far side are visually perceived as being part of the park. This, in effect, makes Riverside Park one of the city's most spacious parks.

## Historic Background of the Park and Drive

Like Central Park and Prospect Park, Riverside Park and Riverside Drive are a product of the mid-19th century parks movement in the United States. This "movement" brought together disparate men whose articles and speeches spread their ideas concerning the need for open space and green grass within the increasingly urbanized and industrialized city. Men such as the journalist William Cullen Bryant and the landscape gardener Andrew Jackson Downing had seen parks in England, which ultimately served as the inspiration for a series of public parks initiated in many cities in the East and Mid West during the post - Civil War years. It was out of this atmosphere that the suburban park, the landscaped suburb, and the national park system grew.

The origin of the parks movement can be found in the tradition of landscape gardening practiced by such men as "Capability" Brown, Humphrey Repton, John Loudon, and Joseph Paxton. Rather than using the geometrical forms of the continental garden, exemplified by the work of the Frenchman LeNôtre, they created landscapes which, while manmade, appeared to be an extension of the countryside. The earlier conception of the garden as a walled plot gave way to designs which dealt with the entire landscape surrounding an estate, suggesting that there were no boundaries to the garden at all.

In its early form the landscaped park seems to have been designed to suggest the paintings of Claude and Poussin. Later in the 18th century the taste for the dramatic led to wild scenery, rough, blasted and stormy. The inclusion of architectural elements--first classical temples, later Gothic ruins and grottos--were reflections of the elegiac or mysterious aspect of the painted landscape.

By 1800 landscape gardeners were relying upon nature itself rather than its painted image to create intricate designs. The designs depended on both the plant material and the personal participation of the viewer for their impact. Man was to be uplifted by the contemplation of natural beauty, sublime scenery, and picturesque ruins.

The intended audience for the gardens is an important consideration, for there were two distinct English audiences in the 18th and early 19th century. The lands[illegible] park was the personal preserve of the wealthy patron, created for [illegible] enjoyment and edification. Meanwhile, the rest of the population frequented pleasure gardens, which bore some resemblance to the modern amusement park, with fireworks, tableaux, theatricals, and refreshments. As tastes changed, these pleasure gardens began to include more of the natural world, as well as flower displays, water works, and botanical exhibits.

As it became clear that urbanization and industrialization were having a deleterious effect on the English working classes, reformers began to insist on the establishment of completely democratic public walks and public parks. There was an underlying conviction that exposure to nature and the good example of the upper classes would improve the morals as well as the health of those who frequented them.

The potential of the English garden in urban planning was being tested during the 1850s and 1860s by Parisian designers under Baron Haussmann.[1] Like the English, the French hoped that parks such as the Bois de Boulogne and the Bois de Vincennes, which were converted from 17th century style forest preserves to 19th century English gardens with Reptonian plantings, would improve the health and morals of the French working classes. Under the auspices of the Emperor Napoleon III, Haussmann, ably assisted by Adolph Alphand, achieved that rarely realized goal of subsequent planners: a park system.

In America the ideas developed in England and to a lesser extent in France and Germany were transformed by Andrew Jackson Downing, Frederick Law Olmsted, George Perkins Marsh, Horace Cleveland, and others into a form which seemed suitable to the democratic nature of the mid-19th century. Not suprisingly it was in the most densely populated areas of the Northeast that the parks movement took hold. It can be seen as part of the attempt by the mid-19th century generation to create "a superior public enviornment."[2] This social ideal proposed the development of museums, institutions of learning, and parks, emphasizing their aesthetic and educational aspects. It was, declares Albert Fein, this vision of the ideal city that "remains America's most significant contribution to nineteenth century urban design."[3]

In earlier years the development of open green space in New York City had been slow, since it was felt by many that so small a city, surrounded by so much rural land, had no need of parks. In fact, the only public park, as we understand the term, in Manhattan before mid-century was the Battery. Even here the city fathers had been slow to act: the Battery had been officially proposed as a park in 1785 but it was not actually designated as such until 1826. A map of 1838 indicated a total of sixteen parks in New York City, including Bowling Green, which had been formalized as open public space in 1732-33, but they were for the most part small squares designed to serve only the population in the immediate vicinity.

By 1850 the situation had changed: population had been swelled by immigration, industry darkened the air with smoke, commerce created a deafening din in the narrow cobblestone streets. It became clear that some respite from such chaos was essential. Cities needed breathing space, places where men and women could walk with their children and contemplate nature in rural serenity--in short, New York needed parks. But parks cost money, and therefore required justification. Men began to speak of parks as the lungs of the city, providing needed fresh air for congested areas. Trees, it was asserted, cleaned the air of impurities, and statistics were gathered showing a decrease in disease proportional to the increase in the trees and grass. Trees also helped drain off water which if left standing created "bad air." Mental health was to be improved, since the pressures of late 19th-century business were said to be wearing on the brain, causing early retirement and even collapse. Parks were seen as a corrective to these pressures. It was believed that walking an hour or two in the park would keep the harried businessman's nerves in tune.

Nature could heal the troubled soul. It was also advocated as a deterrent to crime and socialism. As more active forms of recreation became popular, the health gained by vigorous outdoor activities was added to the benefits derived from parks.

The educational function of parks was not overlooked--witness the development of botanic gardens, arboretums, the display of exotic plants and animals, but it was as a showcase for democracy that parks were believed to be most important. If America was to be truly democratic, the classes must not be separated from one another, but must mingle so that their fears of one another might be dispelled. For this reason it was important that parks be established in locations which made them easily available to all. It was also important that they be protected from encroachments. Parks, it was repeated over and over again, were for all the people and must not be given over to the use of any special interest group to the exclusion of other users.

One must not imagine that apologists for the parks neglected the economic aspects. They were quick to point out the increase in real estate values on adjoining properties, with the accompanying increase in tax revenue to the city. Additionally, it was true that some land was topographically unsuited to building lots. By setting this seemingly unusuable land aside for parks, rather than allowing it to be filled with squatter's huts, dumps, and other nuisances, empty land was declared open, but controlled. It became an asset.

The advocates for parks used all of the foregoing arguments to bolster their campaign, which began in New York in the 1840s when William Cullen Bryant, editor of the New York Evening Post, and Walt Whitman, then editor of the Brooklyn Eagle, wrote repeatedly of the need for parks in their respective cities. Bryant's plan called for the establishment of a park at Jones' Wood, which lay along the East River between 68th and 77th Streets, extending west to Third Avenue. This picturesque area was one of the few remaining undeveloped tracts along the shore line, a fact that was not lost on real estate developers. A few years later an alternate site was suggested by Andrew Jackson Downing, who believed that a larger space was needed. In The Horticulturalist of August 1851 he advocated the creation of a "central" park of at least 500 acres surrounding the receiving reservoir of the Croton Water Works. Today the Great Lawn of Central Park occupies the site.

In 1853 the New York State legislature had enacted a bill authorizing the acquisition of a sizable piece of land for a public park some four miles from "town." The park land was Jones' Wood; however, in the face of extensive opposition, the more expansive tract of land from 59th to 106th Streets between Fifth and Eighth Avenues was chosen. In 1859 the park was extended to 110th Street. Work on Central Park, a designated New York City Scenic Landmark, was begun in 1857 under the direction of Chief Engineer Egbert L. Viele. 4

Frederick Law Olmsted was appointed Park Superintendent on September 11, 1857. In October of that year the Park Commission announced a public competition to produce a design for the park. By this time Andrew Jackson Downing was dead in a steamboat accident on the Hudson River near his home in Newburgh, New York, or the commission for the design would surely have gone to him. His young, British-trained associate, Calvert Vaux, had moved to New York City, where he was in practice as an architect. Vaux approached Olmsted, suggesting that they submit a design together. Olmsted, having determined that Viele would not object to his participating in the competition, joined Vaux in submitting the winning design, "Greensward." They were then appointed Architect-in-Chief and Assistant to the Architect-in-Chief of Central k, positions which they held intermittently for years to come. ork on the Olmsted-Vaux design was begun in 1858.

Frederick Law Olmsted was born in Hartford, Connecticut, on April 26, 1822. As a young boy he was introduced to the beauties of rural scenery during trips through New England with his family. He was also greatly influenced at an early age by the writings of two English landscape theorists: Sir Uvedale Price and William Gilpin. He had a background in engineering, having studied for two-and-a-half years with Frederick A. Barton. Through his involvement in scientific farming at Owego, New York, and on his own farms in Connecticut and on Staten Island, he acquired a grounding in practical matters concerning drainage, soil management, plant materials, habits of growth, etc. At the same time, his interest in the major forces in American intellectual life led him to believe with many of his contemporaries in the salutary effect of Nature on man; that is, that the future health of society and of our cities depended on the spiritual health of the people which could be insured by re-establishing their link with Nature that had been broken by the rapid growth and industrialization of urban centers. He was an accurate observer of his surroundings, publishing books and articles on agriculture and his travels abroad, as well as a series of justifiably famous reports in the *New York Daily Times* concerning social conditions in the ante-bellum south. In 1857 when the Superintendancy of the Central Park was available Olmsted was primarily known in New York City as a literary figure, but his travels and writings on parks in England combined with his farming recommended him to the Commissioners, who appointed him. The work on Central Park was interrupted in 1861 by the outbreak of the Civil War. Olmsted requested a leave of absence from his duties to become Secretary to the United States Sanitary Commission, the forerunner of the American Red Cross, leaving Vaux to continue the work. Typically Olmsted maintained a gruelling schedule, travelling to the front, supervising the care of the sick and wounded, while making occassional visits to New York to observe progress on the park. By 1863 he had exhausted himself. Political interference in the development of the park caused him to resign his position, a step frequently taken and recinded over the next years, and he gave up his position at the Sanitary Commission as well. This left him free to accept a position as superintendent of the Mariposa Mining Company property in California, where he remained for two years. During that time he produced plans for Stanford University, and a "classic report on Yosemite Valley, a document still regarded as the best available comprehensive statement on the use of large natural scenic areas."[5]

Vaux wrote to Olmsted in 1865 asking him to return. They had been reappointed as architects of Central Park, and were being asked to design a large park for Brooklyn, then a separate city. He returned, continuing in partnership with Vaux until 1872. During the years 1865 to 1883, when he finally moved his offices to Brookline, Massachusetts, Olmsted worked for and with the Parks Department on Central Park, Morningside Park, and Riverside Park, among others, and became well-known around the country as a park-maker and landscape architect, his career culminating in the landscape plan for the Chicago World's Columbian Exhibition (1893). He died in 1903.

Calvert Vaux, whose work on Riverside Park and Riverside Drive appear to have been minimal, was nevertheless an important contributor to the work that Olmsted did in New York. At the end of the 19th century, it was probably Vaux, in his capacity as Architect for the Park Department, who laid the path system in the older section of Riverside Park. He was born in 1824 in England, where he received professional training in architecture while apprenticed to architects Lewis Nockalls Cottingham and George Truefitt. Truefitt developed Vaux's interest in landscape by taking him on walks in the English countryside and encouraging him to capture his observations in a sketch book. In 1850 Vaux came to the United States at the invitation of Downing, who needed an architectural collaborator in his extensive landscape gardening practice. Among their joint commissions were the landscaping of the grounds of the Smithsonian Institution and the Capitol in Washington, D.C. After Downing's death in 1852,Vaux remained in Newburgh to complete the firm's work. He moved to New York City in 1857. In that year, as previously mentioned, he joined with Frederick Law Olmsted, whom he had met through Downing, to design the "Greensward" plan for Central Park. In contrast with Olmsted, little is known of Calvert Vaux. There is no question that he was a full member of the Olmsted-Vaux team, but his contribution has been obscured. He was especially concerned with developing the profession of landscape architecture in America and was responsible for coining the term. His most successful enterprises were taken in partnership with others; however, as the architect of the original Metropolitan Museum of Art and the American Museum of Natural History, he was hardly an unknown to 19th century New York. Although his relationship with Olmsted remained amicable, one cannot help feeling that he must have believed himself overshadowed and finally neglected. He died in 1895.

By 1865 the residential development of New York City's East Side was quite advanced. Transportation facilities, in the form of trolley lines, were in place on the east and west borders of Central Park, the cross streets on the east side had been paved and considerable building had begun. The park was, as predicted, an attraction to settlers in this previously outlying area of the city, and the real estate taxes generated helped pay for the very improvements that attracted yet more residents.

In contrast, the West Side from Central Park to the Hudson River lagged behind. There were only a few houses located on the largely undeveloped acreage that had been farmland. Few crosstown streets were graded or paved. Only 76th and 80th Streets were completely opened. As late as 1880s this area remained in the minds of many city residents "the Dakota Territory." It was to spur development that the Park Commissioners conceived plans for a riverside park. Such a park, they believed, would initiate the flowering of the West Side, drawing residents to the area, enhancing the city's tax base, while encouraging further real estate development and the extension of the rapid transit lines.

While urbanistic development along the bluffs overlooking the Hudson River was slow in the mid-19th century, it should not be imagined that the land was in a natural state. From the 17th century on farms had been established on the river, although much of the land indeed remained as forest. The Bloomingdale Road, which approximated the route of present day Broadway, ran from the site of Madison Square to the village of Manhattanville, just below 124th Street. It was shaded by trees and lined with stone fences, which were overgrown with lilacs and wild roses. Just off the Bloomingdale Road at the edge of the bluffs were the estates of many notable families: the Van Den Heuvels, Livingstons, DeLanceys, Strykers, to name a few.[6] The "Cleremont" belonged to this group, being the residence of a Dr. Post in the early 19th century. It was here that Joseph Bonaparte, the deposed king of Spain, stayed in 1815. The "Cleremont" underwent a series of changes from country seat to Parks Department restaurant. It remained a Parks Department property until the 1950s when it was demolished following a fire. As can be imagined from the photograph of the "Cleremont" the land around these houses was carefully landscaped, planted with gardens and orchards or used as farm land. (Photo A) As Frederick Law Olmsted wrote in 1873, the area

> ....presented great advantages as a park because the river bank had been for a century occupied as the lawns and ornamental gardens in front of the country seats along its banks. Its foliage was fine, and its views magnificent. 7

In the 19th century, however, this quiet backwater was being abandoned by its former residents, who were replaced by squatters and their goats. (Photo B)

The first proposal for converting the riverside precipice into an ornamental park was contained in a pamphlet written by William R. Martin, a Park Commissioner, in 1865.[8] In the same year the Central Park Commissioners were asked to establish streets on the northern end of the island. This area had been platted in 1811, but without reference to the topography of the land. At that time Eleventh Avenue was the farthest west, approximately on a line with West End Avenue. In 1837 two more avenues were mapped: Twelfth Avenue, on the railroad right of way, and Thirteenth Avenue, which was entirely hypothetical being west of the low water line and therefore completely underwater. Now the Commissioners had to impose the grid pattern on the area or find a resolution outside the 1811 Plan. They were also requested to provide a scenic carraige drive running north from Central Park to the top of the island and then south in a loop along the Hudson shore, exploiting in so far as possible the real estate potential of the picturesque shoreline for villas and making these sites more accessible to the developed downtown areas of the city.

Park Commissioner Andrew H. Green introduced a bill to the legislature in 1866 for the purchase of the park site. It was approved the same year.[9] In his report he discussed both the park and the drive, giving a sense of the anticipated development of the area:

> The part of the city west of the (Central) park through which this drive is to pass will probably be built with dwellings of a costly character, and these, after having served their day and generation will give way, as in other locations, to the pressure of business.[10]

The report mentions that the lack of parkland was beginning to be felt, and that no parkland along the river had been reserved except for the Battery. It then goes on:

> The exceeding picturesqueness of the ground along the Hudson River, both above and below 155th Street, much of which is well grown with fine park trees, affords an opportunity to supply what will shortly be a want in a part of the city against which it cannot be urged that sufficient space has already been taken for parks. This ground need not be very extensive.[11]

Green suggested the promontory above the railroad cut as an appropriate site for the park and drive. The cut contained the two tracks of the Hudson River Railroad, later the New York Central Railroad, which had been laid along the river edge in 1846, during a period of time when the railroad was seen as sumbolic of a wonderful new technology rather than an obnoxious nuisance. Even after the Civil War, developers, of the West Side envisioned mansions in place of the squatters shacks despite the presence of the railroad. By the later part of the century attitudes had changed, as will be further discussed. Meanwhile, Green saw no difficulty, since, as he said, a spacious park was not required when what was needed was a place from which one could take advantage of the unsurpassed view and from which swimming schools, boating, and other aquatic sports could be launched.

By 1870 a series of articles in the New York Herald had attracted the attention of William "Boss" Tweed and his henchman, Peter B. Sweeney. They purchased several lots in the area, which all supposed provided the impetus for the remapping of the area proposed for the drive. The Drive was laid out between Eleventh Avenue and Twelfth Avenue. Under the Laws of 1867, Riverside Avenue, as it was called until 1908, was to be a straight road 100 feet wide along its length. At the same time the Park Board was given the right to establish streets and bulkhead lines, to condemn piers and wharves along the waterfront, and to undertake those things which would "render the park secure from commercial encroachment to the end of time."[12]

The 1867 legislation was confirmed in 1872: however, practical reality intervened at this point, for in 1873 the Park Department was given authorization to re-establish the grade of Riverside Avenue. The revision of the plans for the park and the drive were then undertaken by Frederick Law Olmsted.

Olmsted's success in Central Park had made him famous throughout the eastern seaboard as the principle landscape architect of his time, and one whose sensitivity to each landscape's basic character made his design appear to be natural rather than contrivances of human invention. Olmsted began by examining the existing maps of Riverside Avenue and comparing them with the contour maps of the area. It was immediately obvious that to carry out the original plan the site would require extensive leveling, with a retaining wall so high that practical access to the park land would be impossible. Clearly the terrain called for something different. Olmsted's idea was simple and elegant. He combined the land purchased for the avenue and that purchased for the park. He considered the existing grades and contours, the existing plantings and views, and designed a winding drive that would be comfortable for horses and pleasure driving, provide shaded walks for pedestrians, and yet would give easy access to real estate bordering it on the east. If one thinks of the Olmstedian concept of parks joined together by ribbons of green, or parkways, then Riverside Park and Drive is a hybrid: a parkway which winds through and along the edge of a park.

As reported in the City Record of February 13, 1874, the Landscape Architect's proposal included: a main highway from 72nd to 123rd Streets, which would then continue northward as far as was practicable, with grades no steeper than 1 in 27. If the grade exceeded that stipulated, the road was to deviate to achieve the desired grade. Where deviations were necessary, a branch road was to be formed, the eastern edge of which would follow the original line of the avenue, having the same grade requirements as the avenue. Part of the main highway, specifically that portion between 104th and 123rd Streets, was to be arranged as a public promenade to command views over the Hudson and to be shaded in all its parts. North of 123rd Street, in the area of the "Claremont", the park and the drive were to be arranged to allow a resting and turning place for carriages from which the view up the river was to be kept as open as possible. There were to be crossings at 79th Street and at 96th Street, allowing access to a future public landing place. The remainder of the park was to be treated simply, at a cost not to exceed $100,000.00. [13]

During the next seven years Riverside Avenue was gradually graded, curbed, paved and planted with trees. (Photo C) The retaining wall was built with occasional ramps and stairs giving access to the park land between the wall and the railroad cut. In 1875 a bridle path was introduced between 104th and 120th Streets. [14]The following year the Landscape Architect was instructed to prepare plans which regraded Riverside Avenue as a country road. [15]Ultimately, of course, it was paved. Bids for the work on the Drive were accepted in the fall of 1876, the contract being awarded to Decker and Quintard for $516,161.25.

By the fall of 1879, the Quarterly Report indicated that between 72nd and 85th Streets all work was complete: between 85th and 89th Streets all work was complete except for the driveway and parapet wall; at 88th-89th Street the side street required grading; between 99th and 113th Streets the roadbed needed gravel and a short piece of wall was incomplete; work on grading, drainage and the sidewalk was required between 124th and 130th Streets; while between 91st and 95th Streets and 124th and 130th Streets extensive work was needed. Riverside Avenue was opened to the public in 1880, and immediately became an extremely popular spot for driving, bicycling and promenading, but sections of it remained incomplete until 1900-1902 when the viaduct at 96th Street was built.

Meanwhile parallel developments were taking place in real estate and transporation. In 1868, the year plans for the Riverside area were first proposed, most residents of New York City still lived below 23rd Street. While row houses were being built on speculation along Fifth Avenue and Madison Avenue as far north as 85th Street and on the cross streets between Lexington and Eighth Avenue, little housing was being built farther west. The Boulevard, which followed the line of the Bloomingdale Road and later was renamed Broadway, had just been laid out. There were other projects existing on paper, but not yet built, including St. Nicholas Avenue, Columbus Circle, Riverside Park, and Morningside Park. These proposed improvements were enough, however, to attract speculators. Prices along the Boulevard, Central Park West, Ninth and Tenth Avenues doubled and quadrupled in the years between 1868 and 1873. The financial panic of 1873 brought an end to this and during the next few years prices dropped. In 1876 and 1877 several large estates along the river were sold at auction, presumably for residential development. The impetus for development on the West Side was spurred on by the opening in December 1879 of the Eighth Avenue rapid transit line, which had stations at 72nd, 81st, 93rd and 104th Streets along Ninth Avenue, and by the fact that by this time the East Side was filling up. Nevertheless, until the end of the century building was spotty. Despite promotional brochures such as *West End Avenue: Riverside Park in the City of New York* prepared by The West End Association in 1888, which proclaimed the beauty, the healthfulness, and the historical associations of the area, the wealthy continued to ignore the West Side.[17] At the same time, the area was priced beyond the reach of the middle class because of the belief that Riverside Avenue would become the home of the rich. Gradually this dream became a partial reality as is indicated by the fact that whereas before 1882-1883, Phillips Elite Directory, a 19th century register of the socially elite, did not have a single listing on Riverside Avenue, by 1887 there were eighteen families included.[18] That number continued to rise through the 1890s and into the 20th century as new houses, such as the Rice Mansion, still standing at 89th Street, and the Schnasi Mansion at 107th Street, were built. The Schwab Mansion, now demolished, was another example of this type of developement on the Drive. It stood on the former site of the Orphans Asylum, commanding the entire block between 73rd and 74th Streets. Built in 1904, it was in the French Renaissance style.

Palatial mansions were not the only type of housing being constructed on the Drive. (Photo D) Ornate row houses were being built for the emerging well-to-do middle class, but apartment buildings were also being constructed. The appearance of the apartment building is of interest, since it represented the wave of the future throughout the city. It was not that multi-family dwellings had not existed in New York before this time, but that they had been the tenements of the poor. Now, following the French example, apartments were seen as an alternative to owning and maintaining one's own house. In 1910 Riverside Drive had twenty-seven apartment buildings. Now, of course, virtually all the small buildings on the Drive have been replaced by a wall of apartment towers.

Two Architectural monuments were constructed on Riverside Avenue during this period of development: Grant's Tomb and the Soldiers and Sailors Monument. Grant's Tomb is situated at the upper end of the Drive, just south of the former site of the "Cleremont." It was on this hill that General George Washington fought the Battle of Harlem in 1776. Designed by John Duncan in the Neo-Classical style, it was begun in 1892 and opened to the public in 1897. At the turn of the century no trip to New York was considered complete without a visit to this national shrine. It is a New York City Landmark.[19] The Soldiers and Sailors Monument, designed by Paul Duboy and Stoughton & Stoughton in 1902, is a cylindrical building set on an oblong terrace, modeled after the ancient Greek Lysicratic Monument. The terrace provides the north-south orientation, while the cylinder shape is visually non-directional. From the south, the monument can be seen on axis with the Drive, which curves east just as the monument is reached. From the north, it appears to be on axis with the promenade, which also bends before reaching the stairs leading from the park floor to the terrace. Looking west along 89th Street, the monument is just out of sight to the north, although the entrance to the terrace and the commemorative tablets are visible. Although not part of the Olmsted plan, the Soldiers and Sailors Monument has an important position on Riverside Drive. It is also a New York City Landmark.[20]

There are other monuments along the Drive and in the park, among them: the Hamilton Fountain, by Warren & Wetmore, 1906, at Riverside and 76th Street; the Joan of Arc Memorial, by Anna Hyatt, 1915, at Riverside and 93rd Street; the Fireman's Memorial, Attilio Piccirilli and Harold Magonigle, 1913, at 100th Street, just east of the Drive; the equestrain statue of Franz Sigel, by Karl Bitter, 1907, at Riverside and 106th Street; a statue of Samuel J. Tilden executed by William Ordway Partridge in 1926 at Riverside and 112th Street; the monument to Louis Kossuth, by John Horvay, 1928, at Riverside and 115th Street; the stele with fountain of the Women's Health Protective Association, by Bruno L. Zimm, 1910, at Riverside and 116th Street; and the poignant 'Memorial to an Amiable Child" at Riverside and 124th Street.[21] Many of these works are, like both Grant's Tomb and the Soldiers and Sailors Monument, sensitively sited to provide a focal point for a view toward the park from the side streets.

Recalling that in Olmsted's design the western boundary of Riverside Park was the line of Twelfth Avenue, which coincided with the railroad tracks, it is not surprising that the land that did exist west of the tracks was the locus of trash dumps, storage bins, small docks and railroad-related structures. Photographs of the area at the end of the century show it to have been an unsavory area. Although residents had long expressed concern about the commercial usurption of the river front, it was not until 1894 that the State Legislature changed the boundaries of Riverside Park to include all the land west of the tracks, prohibiting commercial development from expanding northward. At that moment, the railroad, which had been previously tolerated, became an undesirable and unsightly intrusion. Residents began discussing a West Side improvement plan. In the meantime, the New York Central Railroad quickly expanded its facilities from two tracks to six to accommodate increased rail traffic from the north. The West Side residents were enraged. It would be possible to discuss in some detail the conflict between the New York Central and the citizens of the West Side, but suffice it to say that in 1913, after lengthy negotiations, the railroad presented plans at the Board of Estimate which provided for roofing over the tracks from 72nd Street to 129th Street. The roof could be treated either as landscaped park land or as a waterfront esplanade. It was claimed that after the completion of the work, "It will be practically impossible...to trace any substantial portion of the railroad right of way from an observation of surface conditions."22

The West Side Improvement, as it was called, included not only the roofing over of the railroad tracks, but the removal of grade crossings, the clean-up of railroad-related facilities, and the reworking of the Riverside Park and Drive complex. The project was hopelessly mired in a political and financial morass until passage of the "Kaufman Law" in 1924 required that all trains within the city run on electric power. This proved impossible to do at grade level, and talk of a West Side Improvement was revived.

Several plans were considered. The Miller Highway was being built from lower Manhattan to 72nd Street to carry cars and trucks north. It seemed logical to extend it to the Harlem River and into the Bronx on the ready-made roadbed which would be created by the roofing over of the railroad tracks. Alternate plans placed the highway at the edge of the river, with playgrounds on the track roof. Various committees were established to review the situation, but all the plans remained on paper until 1930 when the firm of McKim, Mead & White was retained. The architects conceived of the railroad roof and wall as a platform or podium for the entire west side of the city. From the water edge, the river or the New Jersey side of the Hudson, the city would appear to rest upon this podium. They therefore determined that it should be especially solid and substantial in appearance, and derived their design from the model of the Roman aqueduct. They used a granite arcade of five or six arches, given rhythm by a rusticated pier every 100 feet, and topped by a balustrade protecting the edge of the highway intended for the roof.

The 50-foot high arches would allow ventilation and light to reach the railroad tracks enclosed behind the wall. Entrance and exit ramps for the highway, resting and viewing points for pedestrians, doors, flag poles, and light standards in classical forms would have made an imposing late example of the City Beautiful style. Photographs of McKim, Mead & White's model and many of their drawings are preserved at the New York Historical Society.

At the end of 1930 the firm was at work on the 96th Street grade crossing. They had in hand plans for improvements to the existing marina at 86th Street, tennis courts, playgrounds and parking between 72nd and 86th Street, and a portion of the podium wall between 72nd and 79th Streets was under construction.

In 1934 Robert Moses became Commissioner of Parks. His previous experience was in regional planning, and he preferred to direct these large scale operations from a centralized and hierarchical directorship; consequently, his first act as Commissioner of Parks was to consolidate the departments of the five boroughs under one administration.

He then began an intensive campaign to complete the West Side Improvement. He ruthlessly discarded the McKim, Mead & White plan, categorizing it as a "visionary scheme."[23] His solution was a return to the idea of a highway at the water edge, built on land fill. Admittedly, the priority was the highway, but, in point of fact, the extent of Riverside Park today is the result of his work. He added over 132 acres of land to the park, 140,000 lineal feet of foot paths, eight full playgrounds, baseball diamonds, tennis handball and basketball courts.

The plans implemented by Moses were indeed based on the previous plans, although no mention of that fact was made or credit given to McKim, Mead & White. The railroad wall remained the visual base of the West Side, a concrete construction with a tripartite arched opening at intervals. It remains unfortumate that Moses did not carry out the earlier plan, for the wall of the railroad is extremely visible from the highway and the lower register of the park. Its present deterioration is no doubt due at least in part to the lack of aesthetic concern in 1934, which substituted concrete for granite; economy prevailed over long range planning. When, however, in October 1937 the West Side Improvement was completed, all four levels of the park were in use. (Photo E)

The development of Riverside Park and Drive has not been dramatic since the completion of the West Side Improvement. Now there are changes under consideration which center on the need for a new highway to replace the disintegrated Miller Highway. Residents of the West Side fear the impact of such plans on the park and their neighborhood. On June 10, 1979, several hundred proponents of Riverside Park joined in a conference sponsored by Ruth Messinger, Council Member in the 4th District in Manhattan, and the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, and co-sponsored by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission and a host of other park supporters.

## Footnotes

1. See Howard Saalman, Haussmann: Paris Transformed, (New York: George Braziller 1971), for Parisian park development.

2. Albert Fein, in The Rise of An American Architecture, Edgar Kaufman, ed., (New York: Praeger 1970) p.51

3. Fein, p.51.

4. Landmarks Preservation Commission, Central Park Designation Report, (LP-08517), April 16, 1974.

5. Norman T. Newton, "Olmsted's Work in Boston, "Franklin Park Coalition Bulletin, No.6, (Feb. 1979),p.2.

6. From a lecture by Fred Fried at the Riverside Park Conference, June 10, 1979. Mr. Fried is an acknowledged expert and great proponent of Riverside Park.

7. Landscape Architects Report, Document #70, Parks Department 1875, p.5.

8. William R. Martin pamphlet referred to in brochure by Clarence True, architect, entitled Riverside Drive, published in New York in 1899.

9. The original properties taken for Riverside Park and Drive were made public on a map filed March 7, 1868, under provisions of Chap. 697 of the Laws of 1867. Title of the land was vested in the City after approval of purchase in 1872.

10. Andrew H. Green, Communication to the Commissioners of the Central Park. (New York: Central Park Board of Commissioners, 1866)

11. Green ,p.67.

12. Clarence True, unpaginated.

13. *City Record*, February 13, 1874.

14. *City Record*, 1875, p.525.

15. *City Record*, 1876, p.768.

16. *City Record*, September 30, 1879.

17. The West End Avenue Association, *West End Avenue: Riverside Park in the City of New York*, (New York: The West End Avenue Association, 1888)

18. Phillips Elite Directory, yearly visiting guide to socially prominent families listed by street, N.Y., 1882-3 and later years.

19. Landmarks Preservation Commission, General Grant National Memorial Designation Report, (LP-0900), November 25, 1975.

20. ______________________, *Soldiers and Sailors Monument Designation Report*, (LP-0932), September 14, 1976.

21. For additional information refer to Lewis Sharp, *New York City Public Sculpture by 19th Century American Artists*, (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1974); and J. Sanford Saltus and Walter E. Tisne, *Statues of New York*, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1923)

22. Quoted in William Prendergast, *The West Side Improvement: Editorials from Representative New York Newspapers*, (New York: 1917), p.77.

23. Robert Moses, *Memorandum to the Mayor on Park Department Revised Plan for West Side Improvement in Riverside Park*, June 10, 1935, typescript.

## Conclusion

Since the beginning of the parks movement, it has been a tenet of both theorists and designers that parks must be for all the people, and not for any special interest groups. The greatest benefit of a park it has been said is its openness to all members of the society. If the theorists were occasionally patronizing, the effect has nevertheless been to ensure democratic usage of the parks and prevent the appropriation of portions of park land. The designation of Riverside Park and Drive as a New York City Scenic Landmark will help to ensure that it remains the kind of open space its designers intended.

Report prepared by -

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Administrator, with research by
Elizabeth Cromley.

# FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, natural features, landscaping, architectural and other elements of this park the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that Riverside Park and Drive have a special character, special history and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, Riverside Park and Riverside Drive were laid out according to a carefully prepared plan; that this plan provided the City of New York with recreational space for walking, cycling, horseback riding and driving, not only for the residents of the West Side but for the citizens at large; that its creation was guided by the prominent Landscape Architect Frederick Law Olmsted, in association with Calvert Vaux, and others; that it was substantially enlarged and improved by Robert Moses, during his tenure as Commissioner of Parks; that the park is unique in New York City for its integration of park and parkway; that the serpentine wall of apartments and residences along the Drive effectively defines the area of the park on the east, while the river extends the boundaries of the park on the west; that the park is noted for its cohesive organization both along its length and breadth; that within the four registers of the park there are incorporated facilities for recreation; that the walls and the promenade are an integral part of the landscape of the park, that the park and Drive are enhanced by monuments and sculpture, including Grant's Tomb and the Soldiers and Sailors Monument; that Riverside Park is the first of a series of parks lining the west side of Manhattan, which provide a respite from the blocks of buildings to the east, and provide access to the river; and that it continues, after 100 years, to be enjoyed by millions of New Yorkers annually.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 63 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Scenic Landmark, Riverside Park and Riverside Drive, which consists of the property bounded by the southern curb line of West 72nd Street, the eastern curb line of Riverside Drive, the southern curb line of St. Clair Place, and the U.S. Bulkhead Line at the Western edge of Riverside Park, to a line extending from the southern curb line of West 72nd Street, excluding the road bed of the Henry Hudson Parkway, and designates as its Landmark Site Borough of Manhattan - Tax Map Block 1187, Lots 1, 3 in part extending to the U.S. Bulkhead Line, and 4: Tax Map Block 1254, Lots 1 and 10 in part extending to the U.S. Bulkhead Line; Tax Map Block 1897, Lots 1, 19 in part extending to the U.S. Bulkhead Line, and 100; and the property bounded by the southern curb line of West 72nd Street, the eastern curb line of Riverside Drive, the southern curb line of St. Clair Place, and the western curb line of Riverside Drive.

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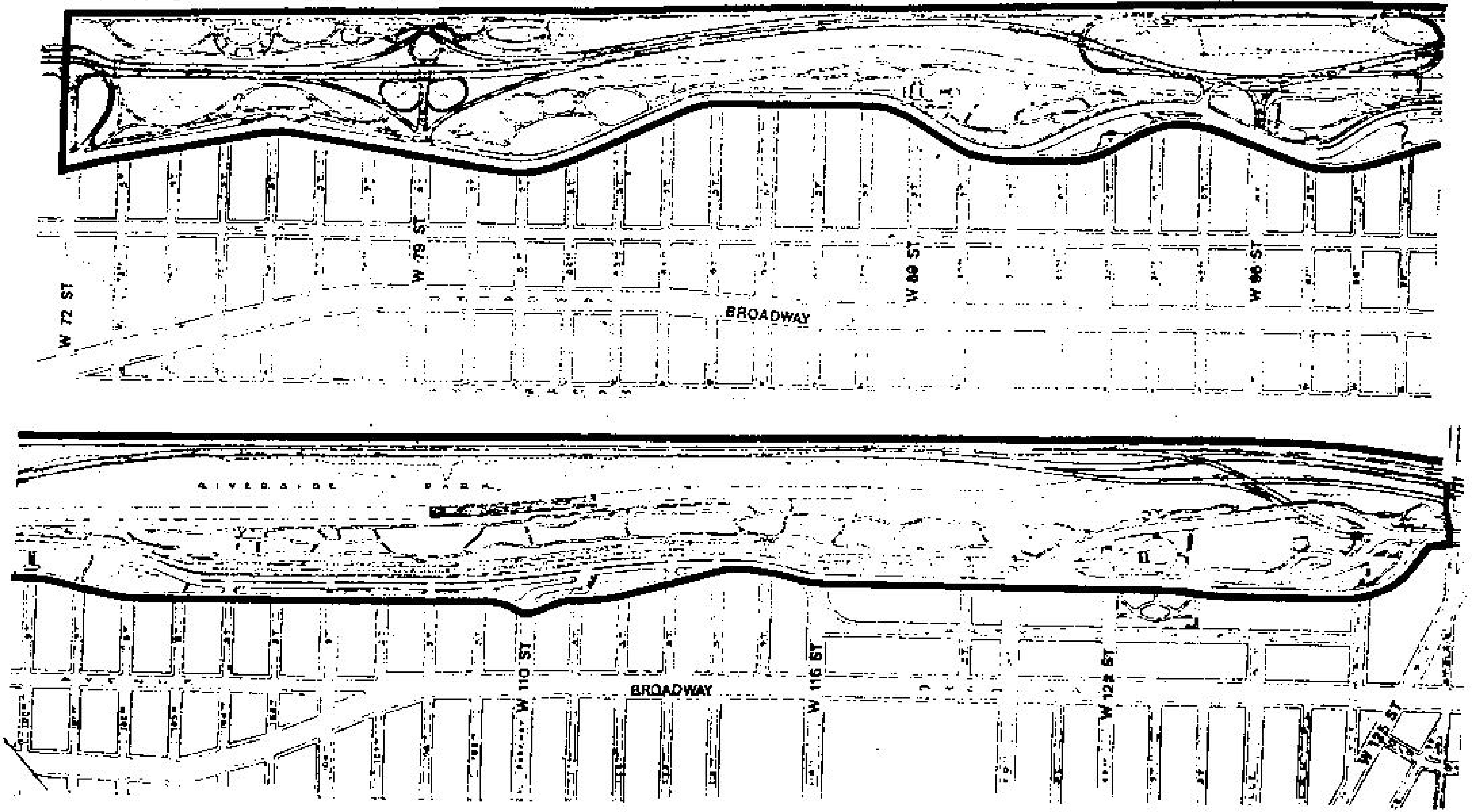
# RIVERSIDE PARK AND DRIVE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RIVERSIDE PARK
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# PHOTOGRAPHS

A. Cleremont Inn, c. 1855. On Riverside Drive near 125th Street. (Tradition has it that the painting was made by a tramp artist in return for hospitality.) Museum of the City of New York.

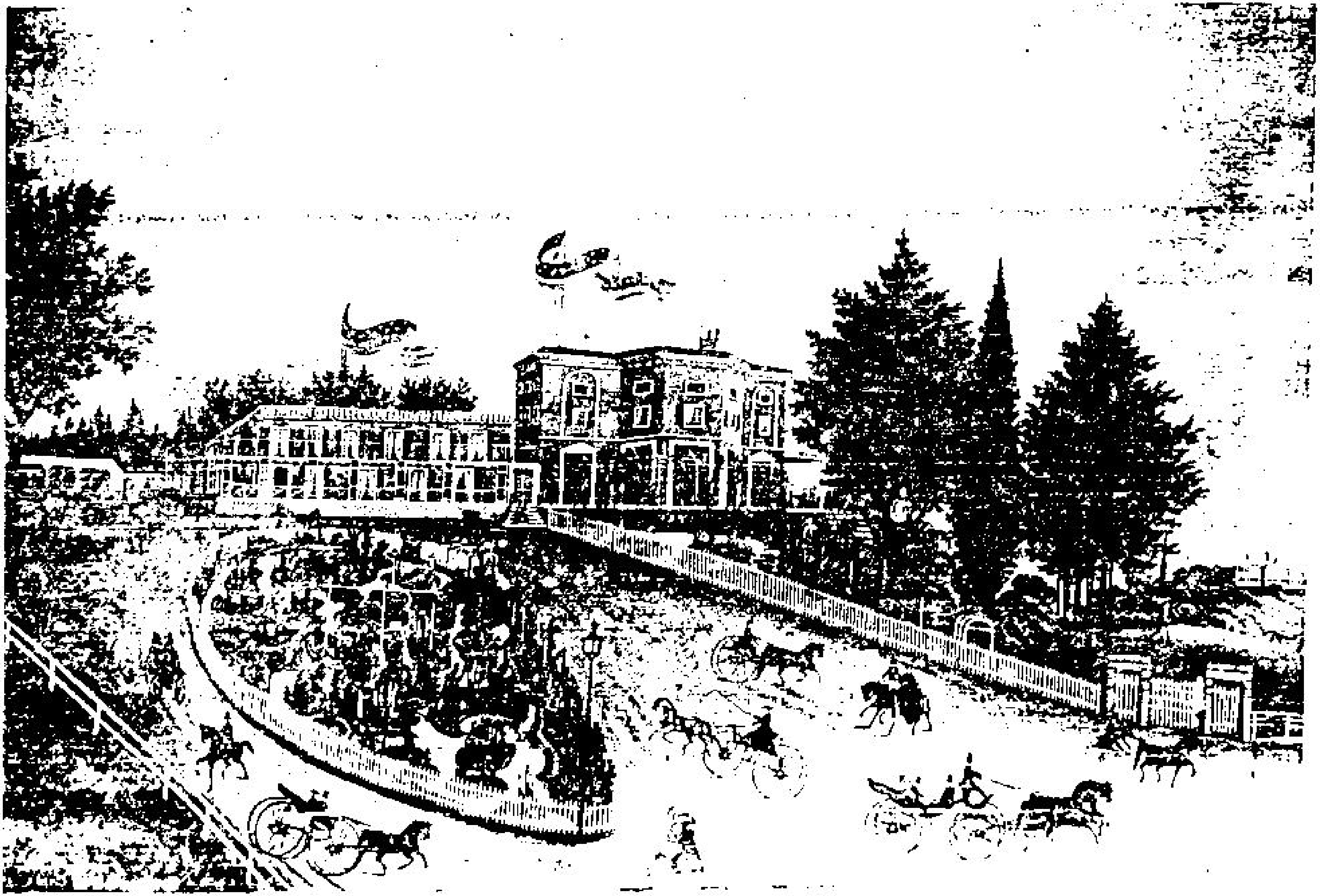
B. "Riverside Drive near 90 or 91st Street," drawing by T. R. Manley, after 1892. Berry-Hill Gallery, NYC.

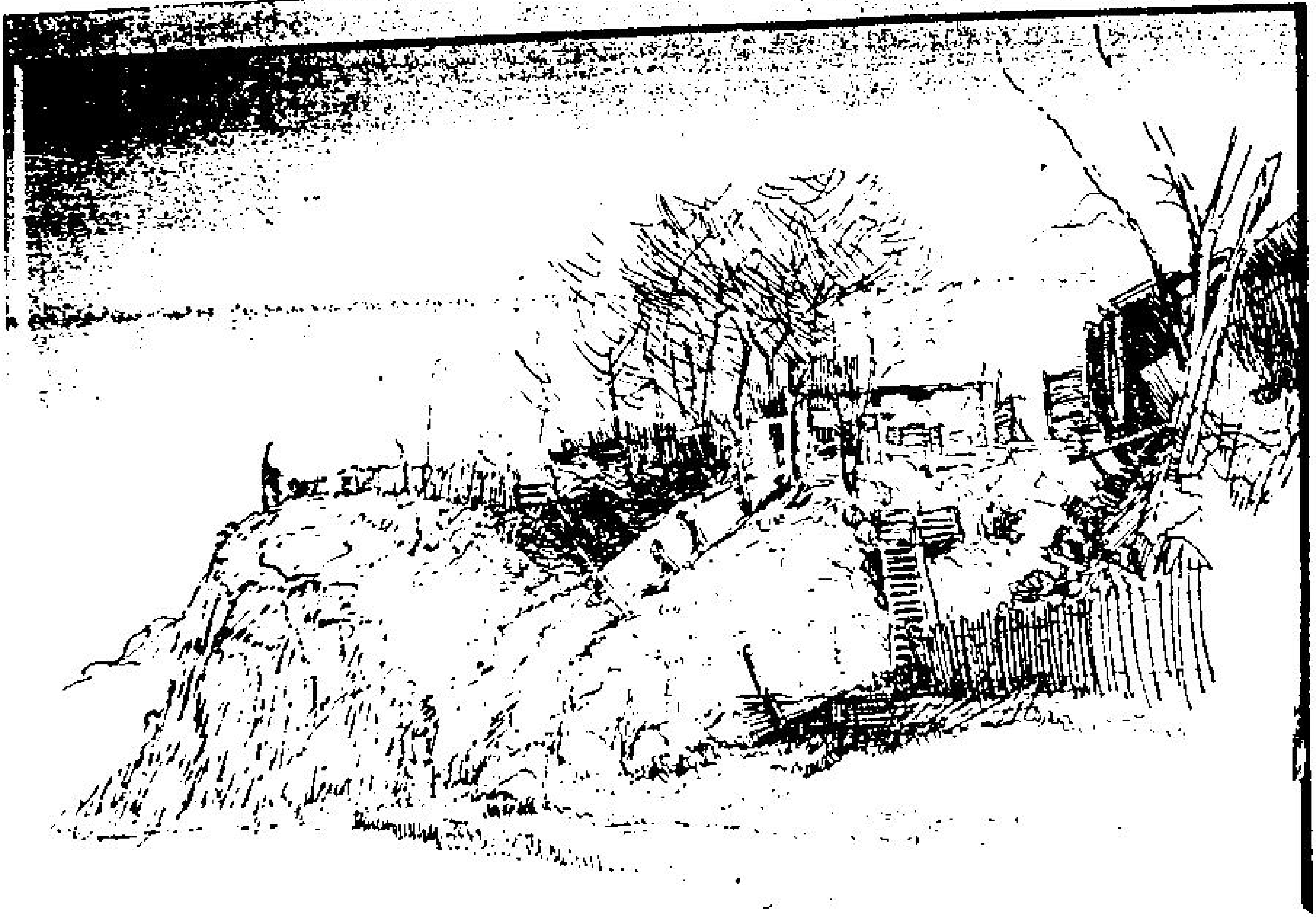
C. Riverside Drive and 94th Street, c. 1889-90. Museum of the City of New York.

D. Parade on Riverside Drive, 1918. Museum of the City of New York.

E. Riverside Drive, 1908. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. Although this photograph dates from 1908, it clearly indicates the changes in level experienced in Riverside Park.

F. Riverside Park, 1901. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. While not included in the text, this photograph indicates the changes of level in the park. It also clearly shows the relationship between the park, the railroad and the river, and confirms that by the turn of the century the area around Grant's Tomb had a path system of some complexity, as well as landscaping.





Riverside Drive near [illegible]