

**Enduring Complexity:
A History of Brooklyn's Parkways**

by

Elizabeth Suzanne Macdonald

B.A. (University of California, Berkeley) 1981
M.C.P. (University of California, Berkeley) 1995
M.L.A. (University of California, Berkeley) 1995

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Committee in charge:

Professor Michael Southworth, Chair
Professor Peter Bosselmann
Professor Elizabeth Deakin
Professor Michael Johns

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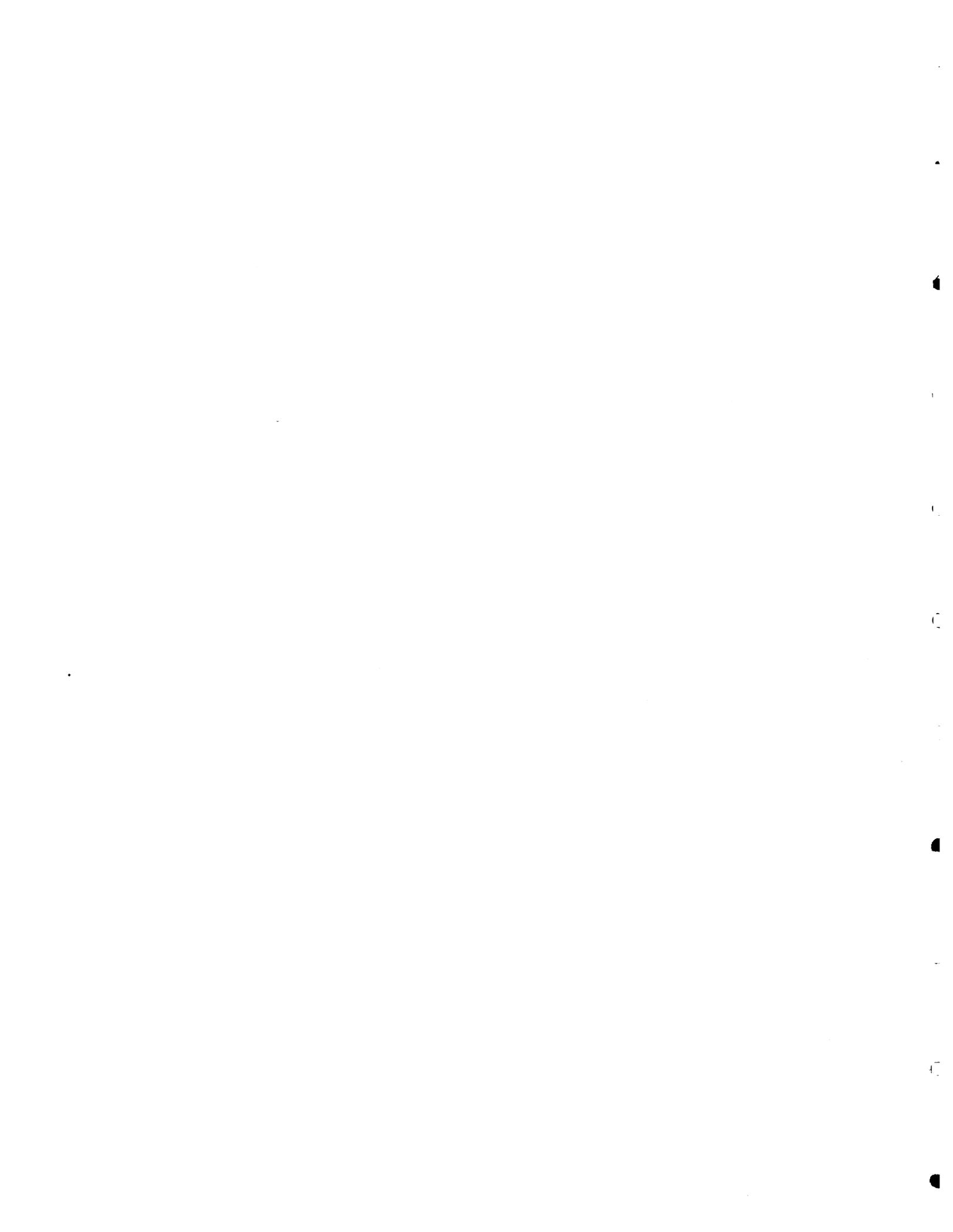
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

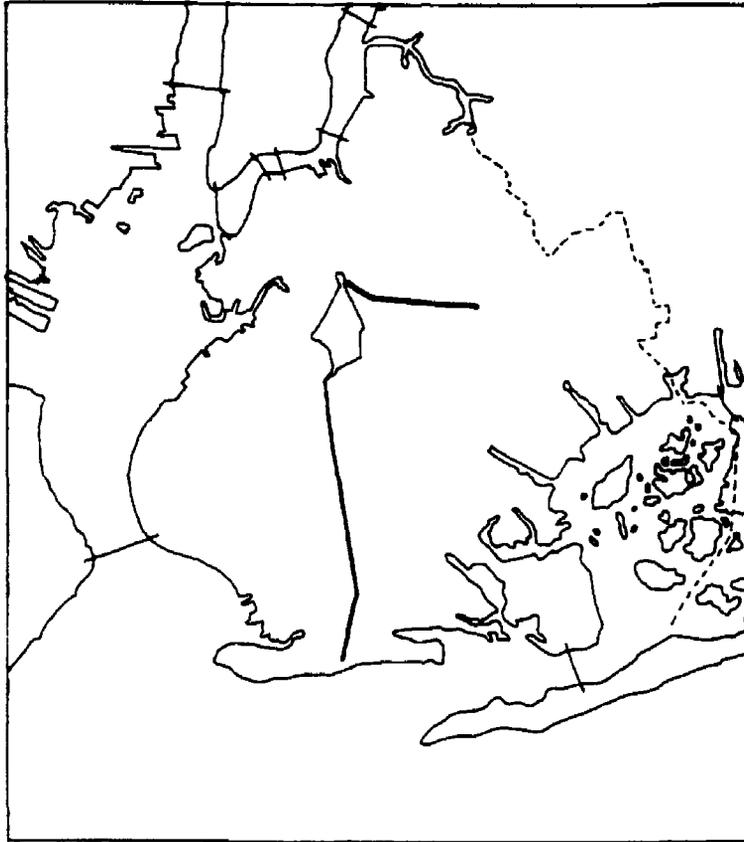
Preface		iv
Acknowledgments		xi
INTRODUCTION		1
PART ONE		17
THE PARKWAY PLAN		
Chapter 1	The Parkway Plan and Its Implementation	18
Chapter 2	Context and Form	73
PART TWO		104
HISTORICAL EVOLUTION		
Chapter 3	The Formation of a Complex Public Open Space Character	105
Chapter 4	Catalysts for the Development of Urban Form	188
Chapter 5	Focal Lines for Public Life and Neighborhood Identity	264
References		306

PREFACE

In which the author introduces the streets that are the subject of this study, and seeks to convey their unique and special nature and why they are compelling to know about.

*Under the seeming disorder of the old city, wherever the old city is working successfully, is a marvelous order for maintaining the safety of the streets and the freedom of the city. It is a complex order. Its essence is intricacy of sidewalk use, bringing with it a constant succession of eyes. This order is all composed of movement and change, and although it is life, not art, we may fancifully call it the art form of the city and liken it to the dance.....
(Jane Jacobs, 1961)*

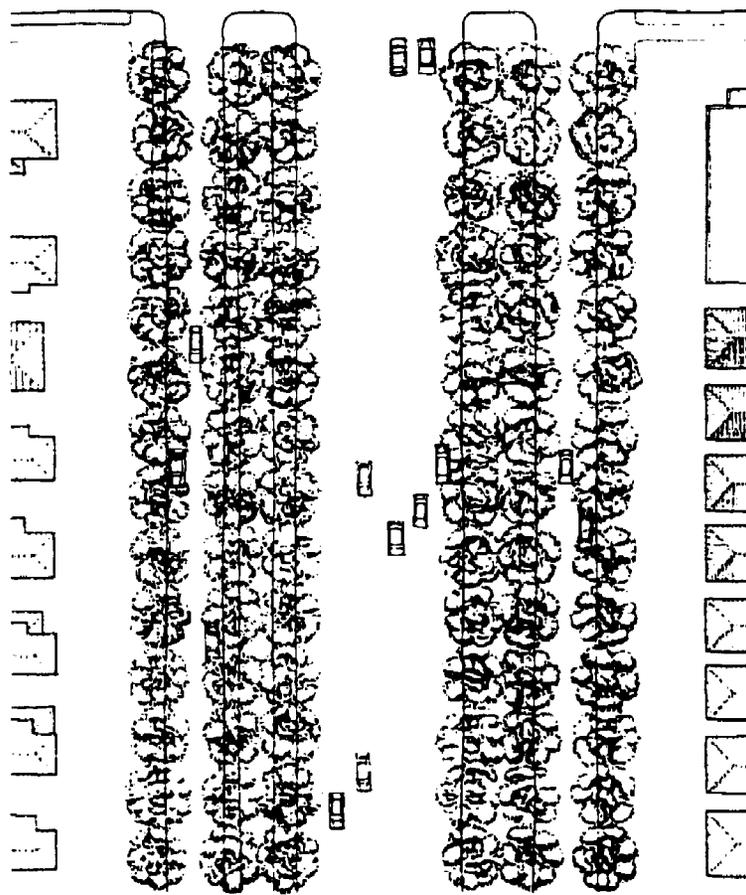
Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway are major streets in Brooklyn, radiating from opposite ends of Prospect Park. Eastern Parkway starts at Grand Army Plaza, at the northern entrance to the park, and runs east for two and a half miles into the old Brownsville district. Ocean Parkway starts at the southwest corner of the park and runs south for five and a half miles to the beach at Coney Island. They are the widest streets in the city. With a 210' right-of-way, they are as big as the grand boulevards of Paris and Barcelona, and their form is reminiscent of those boulevards. They have three roadways: a wide roadway in the center, flanked by two narrow roadways along each side. Wide malls separate the roadways. What are most impressive are the six rows of mature, closely spaced trees that continue the whole length of the streets with barely a break at intersections. A row of trees lines each sidewalk edge, and two rows line each of the malls. On Ocean Parkway they are a dense, low-canopy mix of elms,



The Brooklyn Parkways

maples, oaks and sycamores of many varieties. On Eastern Parkway they are stately American Elms, mixed with some Japanese Zelkova trees.

The tree-lined malls are not just roadway dividers, they are also places for pedestrians. On Ocean Parkway, the two malls are each 30 feet wide and are lined along the inner edge with an almost unbroken line of concrete and wood-slat benches, each over 20 feet long, facing toward the center. A continuous walkway runs down the middle of each mall. On the western mall the walkway is divided by a low rail that designates half as a bicycle path. On Eastern Parkway, the malls are a little wider and have newer, more widely spaced benches facing alternately toward the center then the side, wide flagged walks, and closely spaced ornamental antique-style lampposts. A number of the trees



Plan of a block of Ocean Parkway as it exists today.

appear newly planted. These improvements are associated with Eastern Parkway's recent designation as an historic landscape. The malls also carry several entrances to the subway that runs under the western part of the street.

The parkways function as arterial streets in the city and carry large volumes of fast moving, through traffic. But forget the traffic, at least for a moment, and look at the people. Both streets are truly wonderful, human, community affairs. People use them. On Ocean Parkway people stroll, women in groups push baby carriages, old men and women sit on the benches watching the

action pass by. People jog singly and in pairs, and bicyclists ride at a leisurely pace along the western mall. At the northern end of the street, groups of older men gather daily and play cards at fixed tables set up near the benches. Many pass long hours this way.

On Eastern Parkway, people sit alone or in groups on the benches, and throughout the day there is a constant flow of people walking along the malls to and from the subway entrances. On warm days, people congregate on the malls and on the sidewalks and in front yards. Strangers are usually greeted with a nod.

Unlike European boulevards, which are more often than not commercial streets, lined with cafés, Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway are almost entirely residential. Ocean Parkway passes through a series of well-kept moderate income and well-to-do neighborhoods. Many Italian and Jewish families live in these neighborhoods, which carry names like Bensonhurst and Midwood. A stretch of tall apartment buildings at the park end of the street quickly gives way to neat two-story duplexes and, further south, large single family homes. Nearing Coney Island, the apartment buildings begin again, taller and more closely packed and oriented toward the ocean views. Along the length of Ocean Parkway, there are a number of Jewish community centers and religious schools. Several of these are large and recently built. Other than this, there are only residences on the parkway. The apartment buildings at either end of the street seem to be relative newcomers, perhaps associated with the dislocation and redevelopment that would have accompanied Robert Moses' freeway building. In the 1950's, the Prospect Expressway was built in central Brooklyn and designed to feed traffic directly onto the north end of Ocean Parkway.

Eastern Parkway has a very different feel and look than Ocean Parkway. It is more densely built, lined for the most part with tightly packed brownstone rowhouses, three and four stories tall, most of which have stately stairs leading to second floor main entrances. On inspection, one finds that some of the rowhouses have been converted into offices, but most are divided into three or four residential flats. There are some large apartment buildings, mostly congregated near the park, and, at several major street intersections, a few small stores and a medical offices. There is also a large Jewish community center and several churches. The Prospect Park end of Eastern Parkway is home to two important cultural institutions, the Brooklyn Museum and the Main Branch of the Brooklyn Public Library.

The people who live along Eastern Parkway are different than those who live along Ocean Parkway. Eastern Parkway runs through Crown Heights, which since the 1960's has been home to a vibrant and thriving West Indian community. Surrounding residential streets look like those in any other well-kept neighborhood, but an ethnic flavor pervades the colorful commercial cross streets where one can buy West Indian newspapers and broiled goat. On warm Spring and summer days, entrepreneurs sell syrupy shaved ice drinks from pushcarts set up along the parkway malls.

Between 50,000 and 70,000 vehicles travel on the center lanes of each parkway every day, but the streets handle these volumes gracefully. In spite of the constant blur and noise of fast traffic, there is a laziness to the parkways that is noticeable. Even the rush of southbound traffic hurtling onto Ocean Parkway from the gaping underground mouth of the Prospect Expressway gets absorbed into a gentler ambiance within one or two blocks. On both streets, the tree-lined malls and the side roads are slow-moving places. People stroll or linger on the malls and often walk down the middle of the access roads. Drivers on the access

rows proceed slowly, hemmed in by the parked cars on both sides and forced to stop at every intersection by stop signs. Often, cars creep along behind pedestrians who are undeterred by their presence in this strongly pedestrian realm. Delivery vehicles and double-parked cars often block passage. Not many drivers drive along the access roads for more than a block or two.

At a few places along both streets, parking restrictions along one side of the access road are locally changing the pedestrian character of the side roads. On Ocean Parkway, the restrictions occur in an area of single family houses and are intended to deter parking by non-residents. On Eastern Parkway, the restrictions occur during daytime hours and are intended to reserve space for police vehicles. In these areas, drivers on the access road often drive faster than in other areas, because the roadway is more open. Here the pedestrian realm is not so friendly. One worries that someone in charge does not understand the special character of the access roads, and that it may be eroding.

Traffic in the center realm of both parkways is controlled by traffic lights. On Ocean Parkway the center has three through lanes in each direction, with left turn lanes inserted at intersections. Eastern Parkway has three lanes running east and two in the other direction, and center turn lanes. All movements are allowed at intersections. Drivers in the center can go straight or turn into a cross street or slip into the access road on either side. Drivers on the access roads can go straight, make a right into the cross street or turn out into the center. Cross street traffic can turn into the side or into the center. When stopped by a signal, cross traffic stops at limit lines drawn at the sidewalk edge. If a driver wants to make a right hand turn, she or he is then free to pull out into the space protected by the medians and wait for an opening in the traffic. Linear travel by pedestrians and bicyclists along the medians is given de facto priority, most continue straight across the intersection from median to median in what have become informal

crosswalks. Amazingly, this complex choreography of movement all happens with ease.

Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway both have the sense of being neighborhood focal points, albeit lineal focal points if that is not too much of a contradiction in terms. The wide public spaces on these streets give a place where the public life of the community can and does occur.

Ocean Parkway and Eastern Parkway are remarkable streets. They are remarkable because they have retained their complex form in spite of the fact that for years they have been major traffic carriers, classified as arterial streets by city traffic engineers. They are remarkable because they are highly valued streets on which to live and spend time, in spite of the heavy traffic. These are not bucolic, meandering parkways, nor are they settings for the display of wealthy people's homes and gardens. They are working streets that carry a lot of traffic and at the same time provide gracious foci for local life. They structure their local communities at the same time they give structure to a large part of Brooklyn. They are streets for everyone.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people have helped and supported me throughout this project. Michael Southworth shepherded me through the dissertation process with an encouraging and enthusiastic hand, and counseled me wisely on the research and my findings. Peter Bosselmann provided intellectual support, constant good advice, and countless insightful discussions about street design. Elizabeth Deakin provided the insights of a traffic planner, lent great moral support, and worked hard to keep me honest. Michael Johns was a great source of intellectual enthusiasm and support. Conversations with Michael were crucial in developing the conceptual structure of this dissertation, and in giving me confidence in the value of the historical approach taken in the study.

I owe the greatest personal and inspirational debt to Allan B. Jacobs, for whom I worked as a student researcher for several years while I was a Master's student, and with whom I have since gone on to collaborate with on professional urban design projects. It was Jake who introduced me to multi-way boulevards in the first place, and it was with him that I first discovered Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway in the course of a research project investigating boulevard safety. The absorbing urban design research work I have engaged in with Jake, and our many conversations about design and the importance of doing research that is useful to practitioners, have helped form me as an urban designer. Although he wasn't so sure, initially, about the wisdom of a designer like myself leaving practice to pursue academic research, he nonetheless supported the endeavor and lent me his insights and encouragement along the way.

To my colleague Yodan Rofé, a fellow researcher on the earliest boulevard studies, I owe thanks for accepting me into what was at first his project. The

design insights and conversations he has shared with me, as well as his caring, have been a great help along the way. Many other friends, colleagues, family members, and fellow doctoral students have provided crucial emotional and intellectual support over the years, for which I am more grateful than I will probably ever be able to express.

Kaye Bock provided unending support and guidance throughout the project, and encouraging hugs at just the right moments. Departmental staff John Banks and Nancy Keita helped in countless large and small ways over the years.

During my doctoral studies, I was assisted by fellowships from the Department of City and Regional Planning and from the University of California Transportation Center. I was supported in the dissertation writing by a generous dissertation research grant from the University of California Transportation Center, and by a Vice-Chancellor for Research Grant.

In the course of the research, I was helped by amiable assistance of the staff at the New York City Public Library Map Division, the Brooklyn Historical Collection at the Brooklyn Public Library, and the New York City Reference and Research Center. Donald Glassman, photo archivist for the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation was a major help as well, and I am grateful for his enthusiasm and assistance in helping me find and obtain copies of early photographs of the parkways.

Finally, I would never have been able to undertake this project without the constant support, encouragement, and example of my mother, Edy Macdonald, who has never stopped believing that I can do anything I want to do, and do it well.

INTRODUCTION

There is a magic to great streets. We are attracted to the best of them not because we have to go there but because we want to be there. The best are as joyful as they are utilitarian. They are entertaining and they are open to all. They permit anonymity at the same time as individual recognition. They are symbols of a community and of its history; they represent a public memory.
(Allan B. Jacobs, 1993)

This study concerns the design and historical evolution of Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway, two streets that were designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux and built in Brooklyn in the 1870's. These streets are of interest for historical reasons alone, because of their association with Olmsted and Vaux, but for urban designers they are of particular interest because they are examples of the multi-way boulevard street type. This once celebrated, now seldom built, street type may offer a model for livable, high-traffic streets in cities today because it has a physical form which allows heavy traffic to co-exist alongside a pedestrian-friendly environment. This historical study contributes to a body of recent research, which is seeking to investigate many aspects of the potential modern-day usefulness of multi-way boulevards. Its purpose is to explore how multi-way boulevards were introduced and have existed in an American context over time: how they were built, how they have been socially used and publicly managed, what impact they have had on the development of surrounding urban form, and how they have adapted to change.

The research focuses on Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway because they are exemplars of the American version of the multi-way boulevard street type.

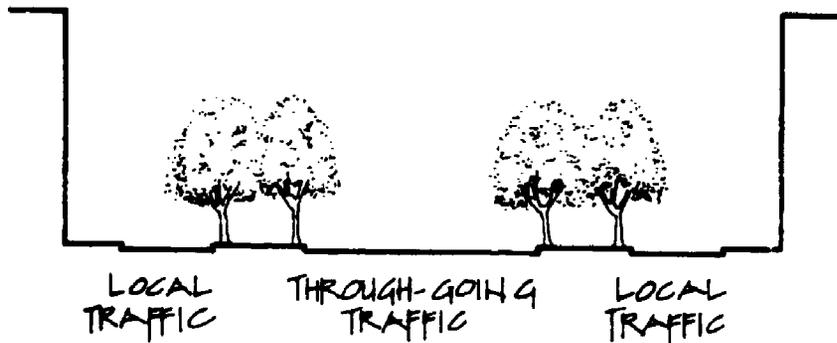
They were the first significant multi-way boulevards built in the United States and represent Olmsted and Vaux's initial re-interpretation of the classic European boulevard form into an American context. They were built as part of a proposed boulevard system of an unprecedented scale. Their cross-sectional form was modeled on some of the most impressive contemporary European boulevards, but certain features were emphasized to make them more park-like. Olmsted and Vaux thought of them as park extensions rather than urban streets and so gave them the new name of "parkway."

This research study focuses on the Brooklyn parkways for another reason: because they are great streets, in Allan Jacobs's sense of the term.¹ They are highly memorable, aesthetically pleasing, extremely pleasant to spend time on, and full of public life.

Multi-Way Boulevards: Reasons for their Decline, Hopes for their Future

The multi-way boulevard street type is unusual by modern standards because it accommodates diverse traffic types and a range of uses and activities in close proximity to each other, all within the same right-of-way. It carries fast moving through traffic on a wide center roadway, slow-moving local traffic and parking on narrow side roadways, and pedestrian activities on tree-lined malls separating the roadways. The tree-lined malls are a particular distinguishing feature of the street type. In the classic form, buildings front directly onto the side access roads.

Streets of this type were built in many European, American, and colonial cities from the mid-nineteenth century until well into the early twentieth century, often associated with large-scale city planning efforts. In many cities where they were built, such as Paris, Barcelona, Rome, and Melbourne, they remain today

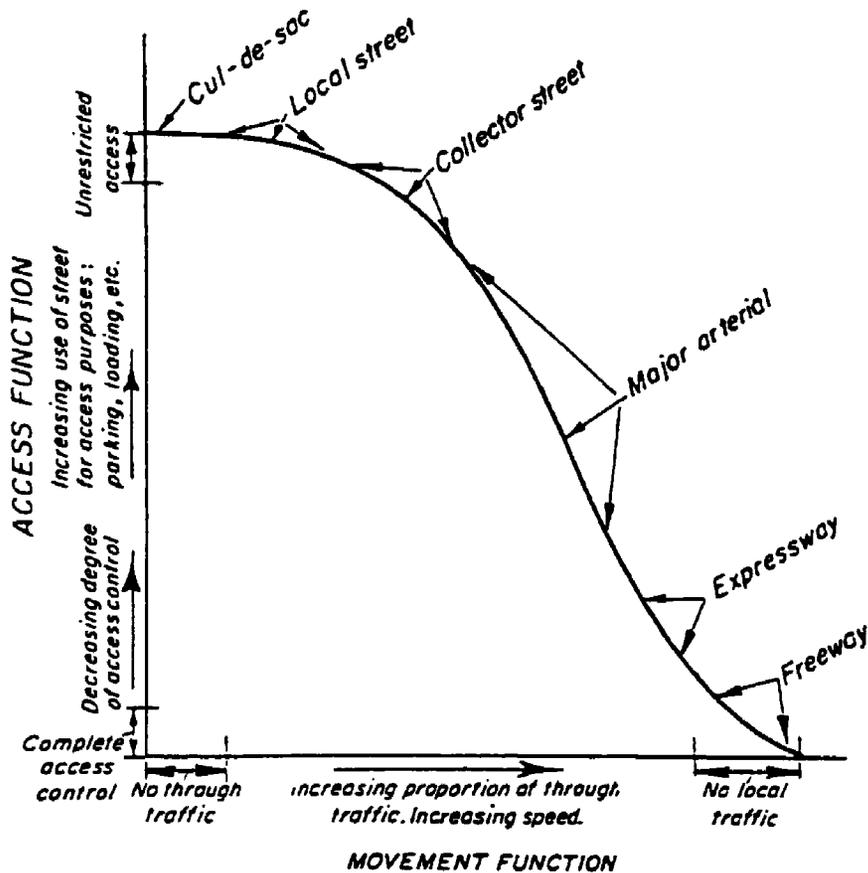


Section of a typical multi-way boulevard

important, viable, and integrated parts of the urban street system. Few multi-way boulevards have been built in the United States since about the 1920's. This is primarily because traffic engineers have come to consider them to be unsafe due to their complex form and multiple uses.²

Since the 1930's, when the traffic engineering profession was established and engineers became the principal designers of streets, American streets have been designed according to strict ideas of functionalism: their purpose is to provide for traffic movement and for access to adjacent property, but access is often restricted to increase traffic flow. Streets are organized into a system called Functional Classification, in which specific movement and access functions are assigned to different street types, with the two functions inversely correlated. In other words, streets can have either a high access function, or a high movement function, not both.³ The multi-way boulevard street type, which provides both, does not fit into the logic of the system and has no place.

The Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, the Institute of Transportation Engineers, and similar professional organizations, have



The Functional Classification System curve sets up a professional mind-set in which it is impossible to have streets that have both a high movement and a high access function. From *Fundamentals of Traffic Engineering*

developed standards for street design that support the Functional Classification system. These standards prescribe such things as appropriate lane widths, turning radii, traffic controls, street tree limitations, and intersection design. They have been widely adopted by cities and counties throughout the United States, and they hold sway because they have the weight of professional authority behind them.⁴

Engineering street design standards have come under scrutiny in recent years, however, by urban designers and others, due to increasing dissatisfaction with the limitations of the standardized street types in terms of both the lack of

consideration of broad environmental impacts and resulting neighborhood forms, and an overall reaction against the modernist principles of strict functionality which underlie the standards.⁵ Designers began questioning standards for local streets in the 1970's, after research showed that standards meant to facilitate traffic movement on residential streets had a negative impact on livability.⁶ Concerns regarding livability, as well as connectivity, have recently been enlarged to include major traffic-carrying streets as well.⁷

In the Functional Classification system, major traffic-carrying streets, called arterials, are supposed to provide for fast and through-going vehicle movement but only restricted access to abutting property. In order to cut down on traffic flow disruption, prevalent standards encourage designers to provide no immediate access off of arterial streets whatsoever and only infrequent intersections.⁸ This means that no buildings face onto these streets, instead arterials streets are lined with uninterrupted backyard walls. Such single-purpose streets create sharp dividing lines between places in a community. They are difficult and often dangerous for people to cross, and daunting for any pedestrian to try and walk along not only because of the intense traffic focus but also because often no sidewalks are provided.

The multi-way boulevard street type may offer a more livable alternative to standard arterial streets. It is a street form that can handle large amounts of through traffic movement without creating sharp dividing lines between places because it also provides for local access and pedestrian uses.

Recent Research on Multi-Way Boulevards

Two recent research projects, which I have been involved in, have sought to investigate different aspects of the potential usefulness of multi-way boulevards as a modern street type. One study looked at safety. Using techniques that

combined statistical analysis of traffic and accident data and field observations, it investigated a number of existing multi-way boulevards in the United States and Europe and found that, in general, they were not less safe than normally configured streets carrying similar amounts of traffic.⁹ Another study looked at livability. Using techniques that combined environmental quality measurements and resident surveys, it investigated three case studies and found that residential multi-way boulevards carrying very high traffic volumes were deemed by residents to be more livable than normally configured streets carrying medium levels of traffic.¹⁰

Such research provides a basis for reconsidering the multi-way boulevard as a modern street type. However, the issue of how multiple roadway boulevards have existed in an American city over time has not been addressed. This study addresses this broad question.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to understand how exemplary multi-way boulevards have fit into and functioned in an American urban context over time, how they have influenced urban form, how they have been socially used and publicly managed, and, especially, how they have adapted to change. The two Brooklyn boulevards, Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway, are the focus of the research for the reasons outlined previously, and also because they have substantially retained their original physical form throughout their history and up to the present day. Many other American multi-way boulevards have been rebuilt to conform to, or approximate, modern street design standards, which has meant the loss or substantial erosion of the separated roadways or lines of trees,

such as has occurred on the Grand Concourse in the Bronx, and K Street in Washington D. C. Some, such as the Humbolt Parkway in Buffalo, New York, have been entirely reconstructed into limited access expressways. Because they have retained their original physical form, Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway provide a rare opportunity to study how streets of a multi-way boulevard type have existed in a major American city over the course of the last 130 years.

This study is at once a planning history, a cultural history, and a built-form history. It is a history of two particular public places, places that happen to be, at the same time, both significant public places in the city in which they exist and local streets in their immediate neighborhoods. Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway originated as purposefully designed landscapes. They were important parts of a large planning vision for the city of Brooklyn, implemented at a time when the city was about to embark on a large urban expansion. They were the conscious design of two visionary landscape architects who were concerned at the same time with landscape aesthetics and with influencing social values. They were implemented by a visionary park commissioner who sought to steer the course of Brooklyn in an appropriately dignified direction. They were initially promoted by businessmen and civic leaders intent on city growth and attracting a sturdy, middle-class population, and also by real estate speculators intent on development profits. At the same time, they were controversial: at first, because of issues over who would pay to have them built and who would benefit from them, later because of issues over how they could be used, and by whom.

As time passed, as the city grew in many directions, as Brooklyn became absorbed into a greater New York City around the turn of the century and lost its status as a separate city, as the structure and purpose of the park commission changed, Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway became less prominent as civic

public spaces. As residential development occurred around them, they became more prominent as local streets.

Once built, Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway evolved as physical public spaces in the context of an evolving American urban culture, an evolving city, and evolving local neighborhoods: the physical, cultural, and social histories of these streets are intricately intertwined. This is the complex story that I seek to tell.

Few scholars have focused on combined physical, social, and cultural histories of specific public places over a long period of time. Spiro Kostof and Mark Girouard, both architectural historians, have situated the analysis of historical spatial forms, including street types, within cultural and social contexts, but haven't focused on individual streets.¹¹ A number of historians working in the field of material culture studies have researched common vernacular places, but again this work generally has not focused on individual public places over the long term. Clay McShane has studied the history of American streets, particularly the transformation of streets that occurred since the introduction of the automobile, and relates changes in their physical form and social use to cultural changes, but his research is of a broad, survey nature and generally hasn't focused on specific streets.¹²

Recent work by Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar comes closest to my own intentions. They have studied the history of Central Park, in New York City, from design conception through to the early 1990's. Their approach conceives of the park as both a physical public space and a social institution and seeks to tell the story of the park from the point of the people who built it, who disputed it, who operated it, and who have, for generations, used it as a public space.¹³ They use sources that include public agency documents, biographies, literature, and newspaper and journal articles. The result is a complex and rich

history. To some extent, however, it privileges the social history over the physical form history. There isn't as much in the way of specific detail about the physical environment as might be hoped for.

My research approach, like that of Rosenzweig and Blackmar, recognizes the Brooklyn parkways as both physical public spaces and social institutions, but also pays close attention to physical form, which derives from my background as an architect and also my intention that this study should be useful for urban designers contemplating real physical design issues. I use methods and sources similar to those of Rosenzweig and Blackmar, but also methods of direct observation and morphological analysis. Mapping and diagramming, at different scales, is an essential part of the research.

Sources

Primary Historical Sources

The primary historical sources used in this research are many and varied. They include Olmsted and Vaux's professional writings, public agency documents, legal acts, newspaper articles, professional journal articles, literature, biographies, and historic photographs and maps of many kinds.

Particularly useful primary sources have been the *Annual Reports of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners* for the years of 1860 through 1886, the *Annual Reports of the Brooklyn Department of Parks* for the years of 1887 through 1897, and the *Annual Reports of the New York City Department of Parks, Brooklyn Borough*, for the years of 1902 through 1920. Early reports, those for the years of 1864 through 1873, include within them Olmsted and Vaux's professional reports covering their work as landscape architects for the Brooklyn Park Commissioners. The reports include detailed information about physical form

changes of the parkways over the years, as well as information about appropriations and parkway use, and provide insight into evolving public agency attitudes towards the parkways.

Other public documents have also been a primary source. The actual texts of the many laws enacted regarding the parkways, as well as the texts of citizen initiated petitions regarding them, have helped illuminate both physical form chronology issues and political struggles and confrontations. I have also made use of zoning resolutions and other city planning documents, including regional transportation plans of the 1920's and 1930's. I was fortunate to find a file on each of the parkways at the Parklands Division of the City of New York Parks and Recreation Department. These files contained copies of many of the legal acts associated with the parkways, as well as legal and department correspondence regarding them.

I have relied heavily on historic maps and photographs to analyze changing urban form conditions. Map sources used include a range of street platting maps, from the 1850's to the present day, and maps showing development patterns. Most useful have been the *Robinson* maps of 1886 and 1890, the *Hyde* maps of 1929, and the *Sanborn* maps of 1998.

I have also relied on historic photographs to help me visualize more concretely the conditions of earlier times. Many early photographs of Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway were published in the various annual reports of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners and the later parks departments, and quite a few of these are held in the New York City Parks Department Photo Archives.

Newspaper and Journal Articles

Another particularly useful source has been newspaper articles and editorials, particularly those from the *Brooklyn Eagle*, which was Brooklyn's main

newspaper from the mid-nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century. Newspaper articles and editorials chronicle events and points of view. They reflect, often, the voices of the powerful, but also, sometimes, the voices of the less powerful. They highlight community concerns and community attitudes and changing political and social values.

Professional journal articles have been another important source, providing insight into evolving professional attitudes toward street design. For my purposes, early issues of the journals *American City* and *Landscape Architecture* have been the most useful.

Literature Sources

I have also relied on literature as a source for the research, in order to gain the poetic and experiential insight of others. I am fortunate that several excellent writers have touched upon the Brooklyn parkways as part of their subject matter, some in biographical writings and others in novels and plays. I have made particular use of *Fires in the Mirror*, by Anna Deavere Smith, a play which chronicles community conflicts on Eastern Parkway in the early 1990s; *Walker in the City*, by Alfred Kazin, which chronicles the author's experiences growing up near Eastern Parkway in the 1930's and 1940's; *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, by Paule Marshall, a novel which tells the story of a West Indian family living near Eastern Parkway in the 1960's; and *Crossing Ocean Parkway*, by Marianna De Marco Torgovnik, a compilation of biographical essays which tell the author's experiences growing up near Ocean Parkway in the 1950's and 1960's.

Direct Observation

Another important source for the research has been my own field observations. This observation has been both systematic and casual. The

systematic observations were conducted as part of the two previous research studies I have been involved in, mentioned earlier, that included research on Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway. These observations included, among other things, traffic counts, diagramming of pedestrian and vehicle movements, environmental measures such as noise levels and traffic speed, systematic videotaping of pedestrian and vehicle movements and interactions for use in the preparation of a video, and detailed observations of the physical elements of selected blocks, used to draw scaled plans and sections. Casual observations were conducted on numerous occasions over the last several years during the course of this research. This included many hours spent on each of the parkways, on different days of the week and during different seasons, watching and noting activities.

Other methods of observation could tell other things. In future research, I would like to pursue more systematic observation of activities on the parkways as well as systematic interviews with parkway residents and parkway users.

RELATED RESEARCH

Little published scholarly work has been done concerning the Brooklyn parkways directly. They are mentioned in a number of general histories of Brooklyn, and in urban studies of specific Brooklyn communities, but generally only in passing. A wealth of research has focused on Olmsted and his works. His biographical details, his writings on parks, and his design philosophy are well known. A number of texts have been written on his designed landscapes, particularly his famous picturesque parks and suburbs. His designs for streets, however, have received less attention. The Brooklyn parkways are discussed

briefly in some texts, but no published work has focused on them exclusively. Until recently, the most extensive description of Olmsted's parkway plan was included in Irving D. Fisher's *Frederick Law Olmsted and the City Planning Movement in the United States* (1986), which discussed it in relation to early American city planning strategies. In the last few years, Johns Hopkins Press has begun publishing *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, in serial volumes. In the volume that focuses on Olmsted's writings on parks and parkways, the editor, Charles E. Beveridge, summarizes and provides context for the writings, including a lengthy description of Olmsted's plan for the Brooklyn parkways. The analysis does not, however, extend beyond the initial design and its immediate implementation.

Recent scholarly research has focused broadly on the subject of American parkways. Glenn Orlin's dissertation looks at the evolution of the American urban parkway over a hundred-year period, from 1850 to 1950.¹⁴ Orlin views this evolution as the creation of successive generations of designers, including landscape architects, planners, and engineers, and identifies how these designers intended their parkway designs to influence urban form. He categorizes American urban parkway form into three design eras. The First Era, from 1850 to 1910, consisted of parkways built as boulevards and park drives. Their primary purpose was for recreation, but they were also intended to foster fine and stable residential neighborhoods. The Second Era, from 1910 to 1930, consisted of parkways built along stream valleys and around the edges of cities. They were for both recreational and transportation purposes and were intended to foster urban decentralization. The Third Era, from 1930 to 1950, consisted of parkways that were grade-separated and had limited access. Their only purpose was traffic movement, and they were intended to accelerate urban decentralization. Although Orlin's approach is limited to analyzing professional intentions, rather

than actual built places, his categorization has been a useful reference for my research, because it provides a general structure for understanding how evolving professional thought, and evolving parkway design, corresponded at any given time to what was happening with the Brooklyn parkways.

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

This study is divided into two parts. Part One is concerned with Olmsted and Vaux's parkway plan and issues of context and form; Part Two is concerned with the physical and social history of Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway from the time they were built up until the present day.

Part One is composed of two chapters. Chapter One describes and analyzes Olmsted's plan, its implementation, and the physical and social context into which it was inserted. Chapter Two explores the physical form models that influenced the plan.

Part Two is composed of three thematic chapters. The first, Chapter Three, explores how the complex public open space character of the parkways was formed. I argue that this character evolved over time on two intertwined levels: that of meaning and that of use. The cultural understanding of their character was worked out over time as meanings associated with the term "parkway" and related terms changed through debates in many arenas: in the streets, in the newspapers, in the professional journals of landscape architects and traffic engineers, in the professional reports of involved public agencies, and in literature. Their actual daily use character was worked out on the ground, evolving over time as changing social norms and public regulations determined who could do what, where, and how and under what conditions of control. I

argue that in spite of enormous cultural changes, the complex public open space character of these streets remained highly valued by the local community, and that community-led activism has helped preserve this character in the face of a shift toward a less holistic view on the part of the various public agencies responsible for these streets.

Chapter Four explores the role that the parkways played as catalysts for urban form. Here I argue that the parkways did have some effect on the development of surrounding built form, although the development that occurred around them was different than originally envisioned by Olmsted and Vaux. Important physical design characteristics, implementation strategies, and management policies associated with the parkways are identified and analyzed in terms of their influence on shaping the surrounding spatial structure.

Chapter Five, the concluding chapter, explores how the parkways have served as focal lines for community aspirations and identity. I argue that the linear parkway spines had the capacity to order things and so became orienting devices for neighborhood identity. They created a distinct neighborhood form and shaped a particular kind of urban experience. Their special spatial qualities influenced community life, and the living of daily lives. As in all American cities, there were successive waves of settlements in the neighborhoods surrounding the parkways as different immigrant groups moved in and then moved on. I argue that for each successive community there has been some continuity of experience attributable to physical form.

¹Allan B. Jacobs (1993), 8.

²Jacobs, Rofé, Macdonald (1994).

³Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, 1990.

⁴Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, 1990.

⁵Duany and Plater-Zyberk (1991); Calthorpe (1993); Polyzoides (1997).

⁶Appleyard and Lintell, 1972.

⁷Greenberg (1997).

⁸Institute of Transportation Engineers (1984).

⁹Jacobs, Rofé, Macdonald (1994).

¹⁰Bosselmann and Macdonald (1999).

¹¹Kostof (1991, 1992); Girouard (1985).

¹²McShane (1994).

¹³Rosenzweig and Blackmar (1992).

¹⁴Orlin (1992).

PART ONE: THE PARKWAY PLAN

CHAPTER ONE

THE PARKWAY PLAN AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

It may turn out, then, that going back can be a way to go forward: that remembering the modernisms of the nineteenth century can give us the vision and courage to create the modernisms of the twenty-first. This act of remembering can help us bring modernism back to its roots, so that it can nourish and renew itself, to confront the adventures and dangers that lie ahead. To appropriate the modernities of yesterday can be at once a critique of the modernities of today and an act of faith in the modernities—and in the modern men and women—of tomorrow and the day after tomorrow.

(Berman, 1982)

In the mid-1860's, the rapidly growing city of Brooklyn built a large public park and implemented the beginnings of an associated plan that was intended to order significant areas of undeveloped land both within the existing city limits and in outlying rural areas. The central feature of the larger plan was a new type of street, called a parkway. As the name implies, parkways were to have both park-like and street-like qualities. The plan called for a series of them to be built, interweaving throughout Brooklyn and the surrounding countryside, connecting the large park with other public open spaces yet to be built, and serving as structural lines around which single-family suburbs would develop. It was a large plan. The area the parkways were intended to cover was over eighty square miles.

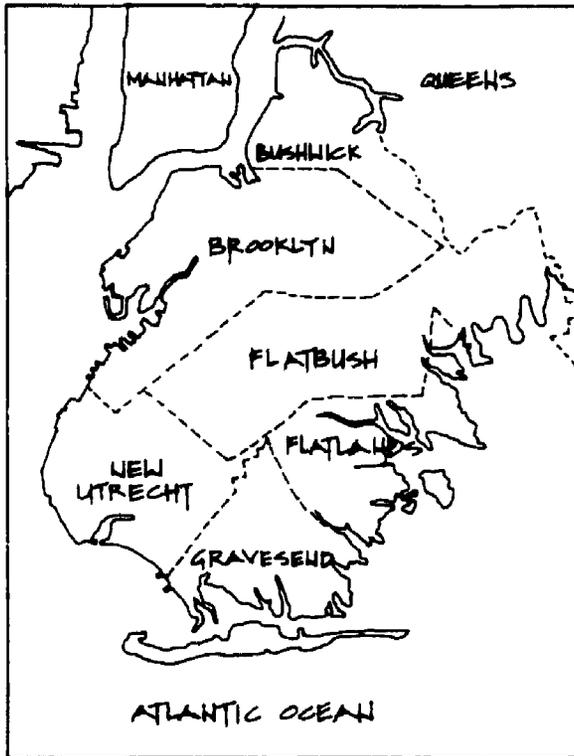
The parkway plan, and its implementation, was the collaborative undertaking of two visionary landscape architects, Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, a forward thinking Park Commissioner, James S. T. Stranahan, and a diverse community of citizens and local politicians, some of whom were supportive and some of whom were at odds with the plan. Only the beginnings of the plan were implemented, but these beginnings were in themselves of large scale. Two long parkways were built, Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway, with a combined length of about eight miles. Eastern Parkway was built within the city limits and Ocean Parkway was built outside. They were wholly built within the space of just a few years, at great expense, and evoked both a great deal of controversy and satisfaction.

What follows is the story of the parkway plan, its design and its implementation. We begin with the urban context into which the plan was inserted.

URBAN CONTEXT

In mid-1860's, when the Parkway Plan was conceived, the city of Brooklyn was the third largest city in the United States (after New York and Philadelphia), with a population approaching 300,000.¹ From its sleepy origins as a small agricultural town across the river from Manhattan Island, it began urbanizing in the 1810's, and since then had experienced rapid and ever-accelerating growth.²

In colonial times, the southwestern end of Long Island, the area which makes up modern-day Brooklyn, was divided into six separate towns. Brooklyn (Breuckelen), Flatlands (New Amersfoort), Flatbush (Vlacke Bosch), New Utrecht, and Bushwick (Boswick) had been founded by Dutch settlers, who came



The six original Kings County towns

under the auspices of the Dutch West India Company, between 1646 and 1666, and Gravesend, at the southern tip of the island, had been founded by English settlers in 1648. In 1683 the six towns were united under the jurisdiction of Kings County of the English Colony of New York. They were agricultural towns, with most residents living on isolated farms. In 1790 the combined population of the towns was about 4,500. Then Brooklyn began to grow. By the 1890's, the other towns were annexed and absorbed into the larger city. In 1898, Brooklyn itself was absorbed into the even larger city across the river, New York City.³

The urbanization of Brooklyn began first along the section of its East River waterfront opposite Manhattan's downtown wharves. Small factories clustered there, along with housing for workers. In 1814, when regular ferry service to Manhattan was established, merchants and manufacturers began setting up in

Brooklyn, where land was more plentiful. Residents also came, compelled by the cheaper land and healthful country atmosphere. Many of the newcomers were New Englanders.⁴

Hezekiah B. Pierpoint was one such newcomer. Originally from New Haven, Connecticut, he had prospered in financial and commercial enterprises in New York City, and in foreign shipping. He began buying up farmland in the early 1800's and put together a large estate in the area that would become Brooklyn Heights—a plateau on top of a steep escarpment facing the upper New York Bay, just to the east of Brooklyn's downtown. Pierpoint moved into a large villa on his property and, as one of Brooklyn's wealthiest citizens, soon became an influential businessman and civic leader.⁵

In 1816, the urbanized part of the town was incorporated as the Village of Brooklyn, and streets were formally mapped and laid out. The rapid growth of the village in the 1820's prompted residential development on the outskirts of the village. The village streets were extended into the surrounding farm land. Close-in farms were bought and sold, and then re-sold, as speculation developed. Many farms were surveyed, mapped with rectangular street grids, and subdivided into city lots, usually 25' wide by 100' deep. The large estates in Brooklyn Heights, with their commanding views of Manhattan, were similarly subdivided into lots and sold off.⁶

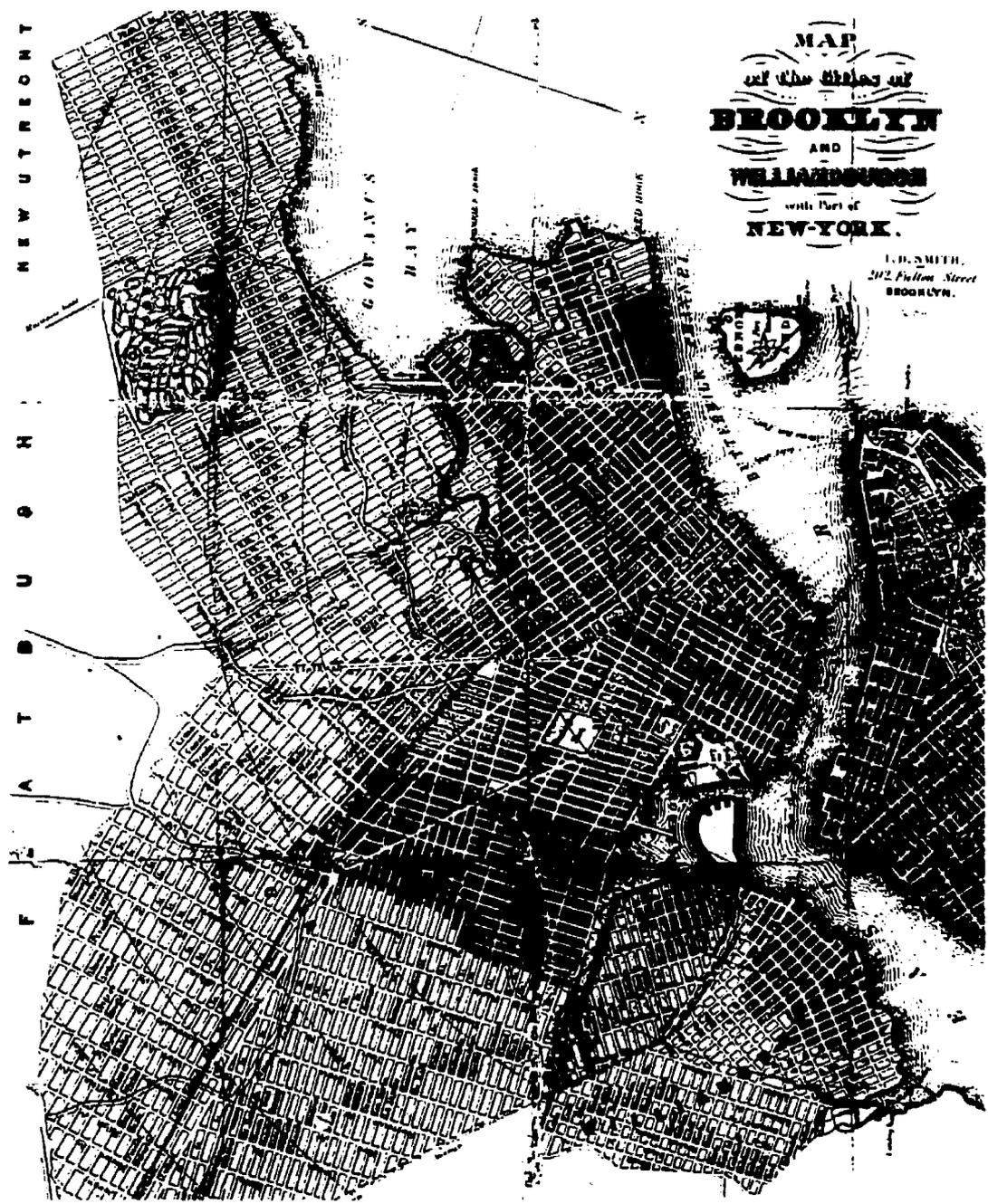
As the village grew, different cultural groups were concentrated geographically. People living near the waterfront and the downtown were mostly Protestant New Englanders, whereas descendants of the original Dutch settlers still largely owned and lived on outlying rural farms. Following the abolition of slavery in the state of New York in 1827, two small but distinct communities of free African Americans were established in an area of rural woodlots on the eastern outskirts of the village.⁷

Brooklyn was incorporated as a city in 1834, and divided into twelve political wards. The following year the state legislature appointed a commission to lay out "streets, avenues, and public squares" in the areas of the city not platted on the village street map. The official plan, adopted in 1839, formalized and extended the various street grid patterns of the original village plan and the subsequent individual subdivisions. It consisted of a several differently oriented rectangular street grids, aligning with different sections of the irregular shoreline, coming together at major streets, including several diagonal avenues. The plan also located eleven small public greens, distributed throughout the city. Many of the platted streets remained on paper for a long time. Only four of the platted greens actually ended up as public open spaces.⁹

The national financial panic of 1837 slowed Brooklyn's development, but by 1840 its population stood at over 36,000. By contrast, the population of the neighboring town of Flatbush was 1,537, and the population of Flatlands was only 800.⁹ The recession ended in the mid 1840's and development resumed even faster than before.

In the 1840's and 50's, Brooklyn experienced a massive wave of European immigration, mostly from northern countries. Many Irish came, settling near the downtown as well as in the outlying, rural towns, and also Germans, who settled in an eastern area of the city that became known as East New York. Horsecar lines began operation in Brooklyn in 1854, leading to the rapid growth in both eastern and western outlying areas. The eastern district of Bedford developed into a fashionable neighborhood.

In 1855, Brooklyn annexed the Town of Bushwick and the City of Williamsburgh, swelling its population and land area. The new areas were divided into seven political wards, becoming wards thirteen through eighteen of the City of Brooklyn.



This map shows the street and block layout of Brooklyn platted in the official plan of 1939, as well as that of the neighboring city of Williamsburgh
Map of the cities of Brooklyn and Williamsburgh, 1851, T.D. Smith

Many land speculators, both large and small, arrived in Brooklyn during the 1850's. Edwin Clark Litchfield was a particularly successful land entrepreneur. He had made his fortune in Midwest railroad promotion. He began land purchases in outlying areas of Brooklyn in 1852 and assembled a tract which included much of what is now central Park Slope, including the area which would later be taken by the city for its park. He built a country villa on the estate, to live in, but his long-range plan was to subdivide his property for residential development.¹⁰

By 1860, Brooklyn was well established as a suburb for commuters to New York City. It had many residential neighborhoods, fine neighborhoods containing large villas and graceful brownstone rowhouses and lesser neighborhoods of wooden tenements, as well as many churches. The city was known as both "The City of Homes" and "The City of Churches."¹¹ But Brooklyn had also become a major urban center in its own right. Many citizens saw the city as a potential rival to New York. It had a sizable and rapidly expanding downtown, with a city hall and a growing financial center. Members of Brooklyn's social elite were organizing to develop downtown cultural institutions: the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Art Association, the Mercantile Library, various theaters, and an historical society.¹²

At the same time, most of the immense land area of western Long Island remained quiet and rural. It was a place of independent villages and self-sufficient farmers, where the seasons, rather than grand ambitions, held sway. Flatlands, at the edge of the Jamaica bay marshlands, contained only a handful of modest Dutch colonial houses, a few small shops and manufactories, and a church, situated around a central village triangle. Most town residents, descendants of the original Dutch settlers, lived on large surrounding farms and led a close community life revolving around the church.¹³

Wrapping around the western shore, the Town of New Utrecht consisted of a five small villages—New Utrecht, Bath, Fort Hamilton, Bay Ridge, and Unionville—where residents were chiefly engaged in farming and fishing activities. Old homesteads and stately new summer homes of wealthy New Yorkers and Brooklynites spread along the picturesque shore road, along with a series of popular summer resorts: Hamilton House at Fort Hamilton, the Bath Hotel in Bath, Pope’s Hotel near Bay Ridge, and Cropsey’s in New Utrecht.¹⁴

The isolated Town of Gravesend, in the south, contained just one small village, surrounded by farmlots. Its beaches, on Coney Island, were just starting to develop into a popular summer resort area. There was one hotel and one bathing pavilion on the island.¹⁵

Only a few through highways crossed the countryside. The western shore road ran between Bay Ridge and Fort Hamilton. King’s Highway, a narrow, crooked road built in the early 1700’s, ran between Gravesend and Flatlands and then on into eastern Long Island. Flatbush Avenue, which began in Brooklyn’s downtown, had only recently been extended into Flatlands. Gravesend Avenue ran from Greenwood Cemetery, in southwestern Brooklyn, through the town of Gravesend and on to Coney Island, carrying the tracks of the recently open Brooklyn, Bath and Coney Island Railroad. The Coney Island Plankroad, a toll-road, had just recently been built, running from Flatlands, through Gravesend, to Coney Island.

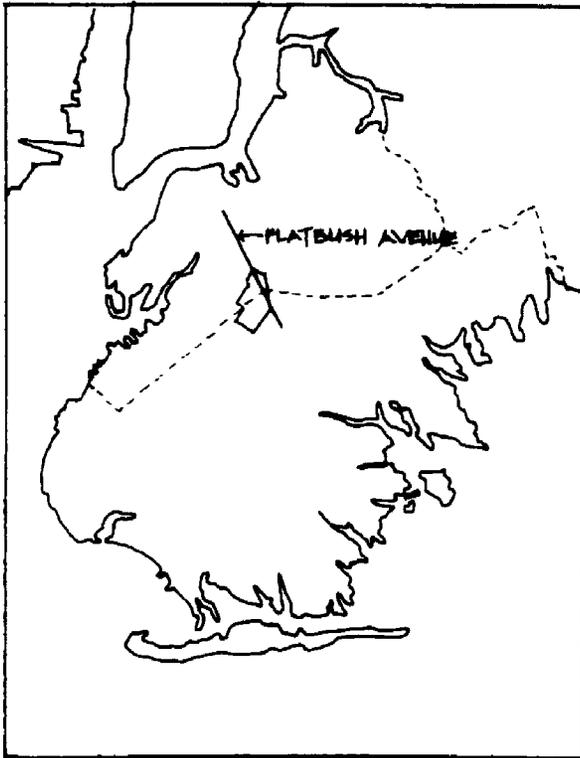
This, then, was the lay of the land when a group of wealthy citizens and influential businessmen, spurred by the success of the recently built Central Park in New York City, decided that Brooklyn should have its own large public park.

In April, 1859, the state legislature passed an act appointing a special commission to select ground for a public park. The park commissioners considered a number of different proposals for the park, put forward by citizens

as well as professional engineers. One of the plans seriously considered was a scheme proposed by Mr. T. W. Field, which recommended creating a 300 acre park around the Mt. Prospect reservoir, at the southern edge of the city, and a similarly sized park around the Ridgewood reservoir, at the far eastern edge of the city, and connecting the two parks with a broad strip of parkland, five to seven hundred feet in width, containing a winding road.¹⁶ In the end, the commissioners settled on an eight-park plan, intended to satisfy the divergent interests of property owners throughout the city. Three were large parks, one located in each of the central, eastern, and southern districts of the city, and five were small parks, distributed throughout the city. This plan was considered unwieldy, however, and it was soon abandoned in favor of creating one large park.¹⁷ According to Styrett, one grand park was preferred by real estate dealers, because they thought it would add prestige to the city.¹⁸

In April 1860, the state legislature appointed a new Park Commission, disbanding the first one, and passed an act authorizing it to create a single large park at the southern edge of the city around the Mount Prospect reservoir. The city took title to an irregularly shaped piece of land, which was bisected by Flatbush Avenue, a main street running from downtown Brooklyn and extending south into the town of Flatbush.¹⁹

The site was selected because it was centrally located, at the edge of the already platted area of the city, and also because the rugged topography of much of it meant it would be expensive to built upon. M. M. Graff provided the following description of the site: "The upper end of the tract lies along the ridge of the Harbor Hill Moraine which marks the farthest advance of the glacier that formed the western end and northern fork of Long Island. It was a formidable rampart of steep irregular hills broken by gullies and swampy hollows. The barrier, shaped like a boomerang with its elbow to the north, formed the



Original Prospect Park site

southern boundary of the City of Brooklyn and to a great extent isolated it from the Township of Flatbush and its neighbors on the gently sloping outwash plain."²⁰

The act authorizing the creation of Prospect Park stipulated that it would be financed through city bonds, issued by the Park Commission. The commission was authorized to spend \$500,000 annually, through 1873, to complete the park, and \$100,000 annually for its maintenance.²¹ The bonds would be paid off through taxes levied on the first twelve wards of the city. In addition, the Park Commission could assess a special tax on property immediately around the park.

²² Park assessments were only laid on the first twelve wards of the city because of controversy surrounding the fact that no park would be created in the area of the city known as the Eastern District, the district containing Wards Thirteen through Eighteen which had been the former City of Williamsburgh and Town of

Bushwick, and Ward Nine, which was a large, predominantly rural district lying just east of Prospect Park and extending to the eastern city line.²³ The idea of a park in the Eastern District would linger for a long time, and the frustration of Eastern District citizens over the fact that it was not built, combined with the fact that the original boundary of Prospect Park itself was later modified to exclude the part to the east of Flatbush Avenue, became a political issue often used against the Park Commission.²⁴

The Park Commission hired an engineer, Egbert Viele, to prepare a park plan for the site.²⁵ Shortly thereafter, with the onset of the Civil War in 1861, work on the park stopped. It didn't resume until after the war ended in 1865. By then, the President of the Park Commission, James S. T. Stranahan, was contemplating enlarging the park, and consulted Calvert Vaux's advice on the matter. Vaux, an architect, had designed Central Park along with his partner Frederick Law Olmsted. Vaux submitted a report objecting to the bisection of the park by Flatbush Avenue and suggesting not using the land east of the street for park purposes, recommending instead extending the park to the south and the west.²⁶

Vaux shared his ideas for the park with Olmsted—who was in California at the time, working as Superintendent of the Mariposa Mining Estates in Yosemite—and urged him to return to New York to collaborate on the design.²⁷ Olmsted thought that Vaux's preliminary ideas were "excellent."²⁸ Stranahan also liked the plan and included Vaux's report as an appendix to the Annual Report issued by the Brooklyn Park Commissioners in January 1865.²⁹

DESIGNING AND BUILDING PROSPECT PARK AND THE PARKWAYS

Stranahan wanted to hire Vaux and Olmsted to design Prospect Park and in 1865, after much coaxing from Vaux,³⁰ Olmsted agreed to return to New York to

collaborate on the project. The two designers established the firm of Olmsted, Vaux and Company. They were first hired as consultants, and then in May, 1866, were appointed Landscape Architects and Superintendents of Prospect Park. They retained this post for eight years, until 1874.

Olmsted and Vaux

So much has been written about Olmsted and Vaux that it would be redundant, and not very useful, to offer more than a brief summary here. Calvert Vaux was born in England and trained as an architect. He came to America in 1850, when he was twenty-six, to work in Andrew Jackson Downing's landscape gardening firm. His role was to design the picturesque villas and cottage houses that complemented the rural scenery of Downing's landscape designs.³¹ After Downing was killed in a boating accident in 1852, Vaux continued the architectural practice.

Frederick Law Olmsted came to the design profession more informally. Born in Hartford, Connecticut, in a prominent family, his education ended when he was eighteen and he then spent years looking for a calling. In his twenties, he took up gentleman farming. With his father's financial backing, he bought a property on Staten Island with the idea of turning it into a model farm. His enthusiasm was greater than his practical abilities, however, and he soon abandoned farming for journalism. In 1850, he took a five-month walking tour around England, visiting parks as he went, and wrote a book containing his observations. He then traveled in the American south, and wrote a series of articles for the New York Times, which formed the basis for three books containing his observations on the conditions of slavery.³² In 1857, at the urging of a family friend who was a New York City park commissioner, and on the

strength of the knowledge gained through his visits to English parks and his efforts at overseeing a farm, Olmsted applied for the position of park superintendent for Central Park in New York City, and won the post.³³

In late 1857, the commissioners of Central Park held a competition for the design of the park. Vaux, who had suggested the competition, collaborated with Olmsted on a design. Their *Greenward Plan* won the competition. The design, and the aesthetic and social ideas that lay behind it, are well-known and so bear only brief summary here. (The subject is revisited in greater detail in Chapter Two.) Both designers had strong ideas about the purpose of public parks and the natural aesthetic that would support that purpose. They shared a belief in the moral superiority of a natural aesthetic. "For Olmsted, the power of natural beauty lay in its social influence as well as aesthetic pleasure."³⁴ They felt that an artistically designed, naturally-landscaped city park would serve as an antidote to the debilitating conditions of a business economy. It would help improve the conditions of the working class by giving them somewhere to go where they could breathe fresh air and look at open vistas rather than hemmed-in city views. As a democratic public institution, open to all citizens, it would help give a sense of community to city inhabitants and thereby help integrate diverse populations.³⁵

To fit these beliefs, Central Park was designed as a pastoral landscape, insulated from the city and its traffic. A major innovation of the design was how roadways were treated. The several city streets that crossed the park were lowered to remove them from view and separate them from the pedestrian walks, horse trails, and drives for pleasure carriages in the park proper.

Olmsted was appointed Architect in Chief for Central Park in 1858, with Vaux serving first as his assistant and later as a consulting architect. The public debate over their design and its implementation was long, brutal, and highly

political. The designers were often at odds with the Park Commissioners, who sometimes acted on their own to change aspects of the design.³⁶ In 1861, after the Civil War started, Olmsted, in a discouraged state of mind, resigned his post in order to serve on the U. S. Sanitary Commission (the parent of the American Red Cross). In 1863, he resigned from this and moved to California to become Superintendent of the Mariposa Mines in Yosemite. Meanwhile, Vaux continued consulting on Central Park, and working at his design practice.

Opportunities in Brooklyn and the Political Context

With the commission to design Prospect Park, Olmsted and Vaux were able to put their park design theories into practice more fully than they had been able to do for Central Park. The irregular configuration and varied topography of the Brooklyn site offered better conditions for a naturalistic park than had the rectangularly shaped and relatively flat New York site, and the working relationship with the Brooklyn Park Commissioners, especially Stranahan, was more congenial and supportive than it had been with the New York Park Commissioners.³⁷

The Commission Form of Government

At this point, a word needs to be said about Brooklyn's political structure and how the Park Commission fit within it. In the mid-1860's, cities in the state of New York did not enjoy complete home rule, rather they were subject to a state-empowered commission form of government. According to Styrett, Brooklyn voters "....did not enjoy the privilege of governing themselves. The seat of Brooklyn's government, like that of every other city in New York, was not the city hall, but the legislative chambers in Albany."³⁸ The Brooklyn Park

Commission was one of the many commissions created by the state legislature during the 1860's, whose purpose was to accomplish specified municipal improvements.³⁹ By 1865, a state-empowered commission controlled Brooklyn's police department, and numerous small commissions controlled such things as the opening and paving of individual streets, street lighting, and the laying of sewers.

The commission form of government was created by the Republican dominated state government as a means of controlling the Democratic dominated cities of New York and Brooklyn. According to Styrett: "The pretense for their creation was that, with the city government in the hands of scheming politicians, the necessary work could be accomplished only by boards appointed by the state. A more realistic explanation was that Brooklyn and New York were dominated by the Democratic Party, while the legislature was ruled by Republicans from the rural districts."⁴⁰

The Brooklyn Park Commission was made up of twelve members, eight of whom, including Stranahan, were Republican.⁴¹ "Perhaps no creation of the legislature rankled more in the hearts of Brooklyn officials than the Prospect Park commission. Its apparent immortality, magnificent independence, and the magnitude of the sums which it expended all contributed to its unpopularity."⁴²

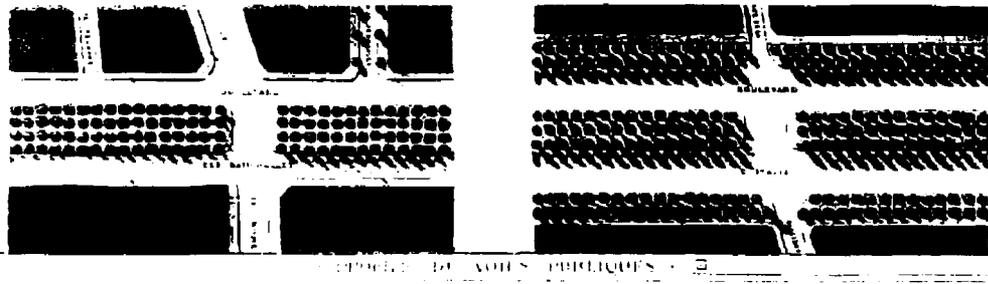
The commission form of government was dismantled between 1869 and 1882.⁴³ Many commissions were abolished in 1870, but the state-empowered Park Commission remained intact until 1882, with Stranahan at its head.⁴⁴

Between 1868 and 1875, Brooklyn's mayors, pursuing the Democratic agenda of local government reform and administrative efficiency, continually attacked and opposed the Park Commission, because it was responsible for large increases of the city debt through its bond issues, and often ridiculed Stranahan, because they were frustrated by his autonomy and longevity on the commission.

Particularly harsh were criticisms levied by Martin Kalbfleisch, who was mayor from 1868 through 1871, and John W. Hunter, who was mayor from 1874 through 1875.⁴⁵ The *Brooklyn Eagle*, which had begun its life as a Democratic campaign sheet in 1841, participated in this vendetta with editorials that were often vicious.⁴⁶

Throughout this time, Stranahan maintained absolute control over the Park Commission. He a powerful and highly respected man, in Brooklyn and in the state legislature. A prosperous farmer, he had moved to Brooklyn in 1844 and in 1854 was elected to the House of Representatives, where he served with distinction. From 1857 to 1860, he served as a member of the Metropolitan Police Commission, which was the police authority for New York and Brooklyn.⁴⁷ His remarkable persona, and the way he pursued his work on the Park Commission, was summed up in a *Brooklyn Eagle* editorial of 1871: "The sole visible tools with which [Stranahan] works are: a tireless patience; an inflexible will; a marvelous plausibility of statement, and inexhaustible ingenuity of excuse and explanation; an imperturbable temper, coolness and invariable presence of mind; an inability to be ever surprised, or disconcerted, or taken unawares; a foresight which nothing escapes, and which provides for all possible contingencies a practicable alternative; forgetting nothing, fearing nothing, hesitating never, deflecting often, but always advancing; like a sailing vessel upon the ocean, obliged frequently to tack, yet always returning to the same course, and reaching eventually the designed port."⁴⁸

Olmsted and Vaux's dealings with Stranahan were congenial and collaborative. He respected and promoted their ideas, and stood by them in the face of criticism. This supportive relationship was no doubt in large part responsible for the designers being able to move beyond park design, into the realm of city planning. Importantly as well, between the time he had helped



Examples of Adolphe Alphand's boulevard designs, from *Les Promenades de Paris*

design Central Park and the time he started work in Brooklyn, Olmsted had undertaken a trip through Europe. In 1859 he spent two months abroad "studying park design and management on the continent and in England."⁴⁹ He visited the great new public parks being built in London and Paris, and also saw the new Paris boulevards, as well as older examples of the boulevard street form in other European cities, like Berlin. In Paris, he met Jean Adolphe Alphand, the French civil engineer and landscape architect working under Haussmann who was responsible for the detailed design of the new parks and boulevards. Alphand's design work and writings were printed in *Les Promenades de Paris* in 1867, a book replete with beautifully drawn dimensioned plans and sections, which Olmsted would later refer to as an invaluable resource.⁵⁰ Through observing what was being done in European cities, Olmsted developed a larger vision of the role of a landscape architect, that of city planner as well, and brought this vision to his work in Brooklyn.

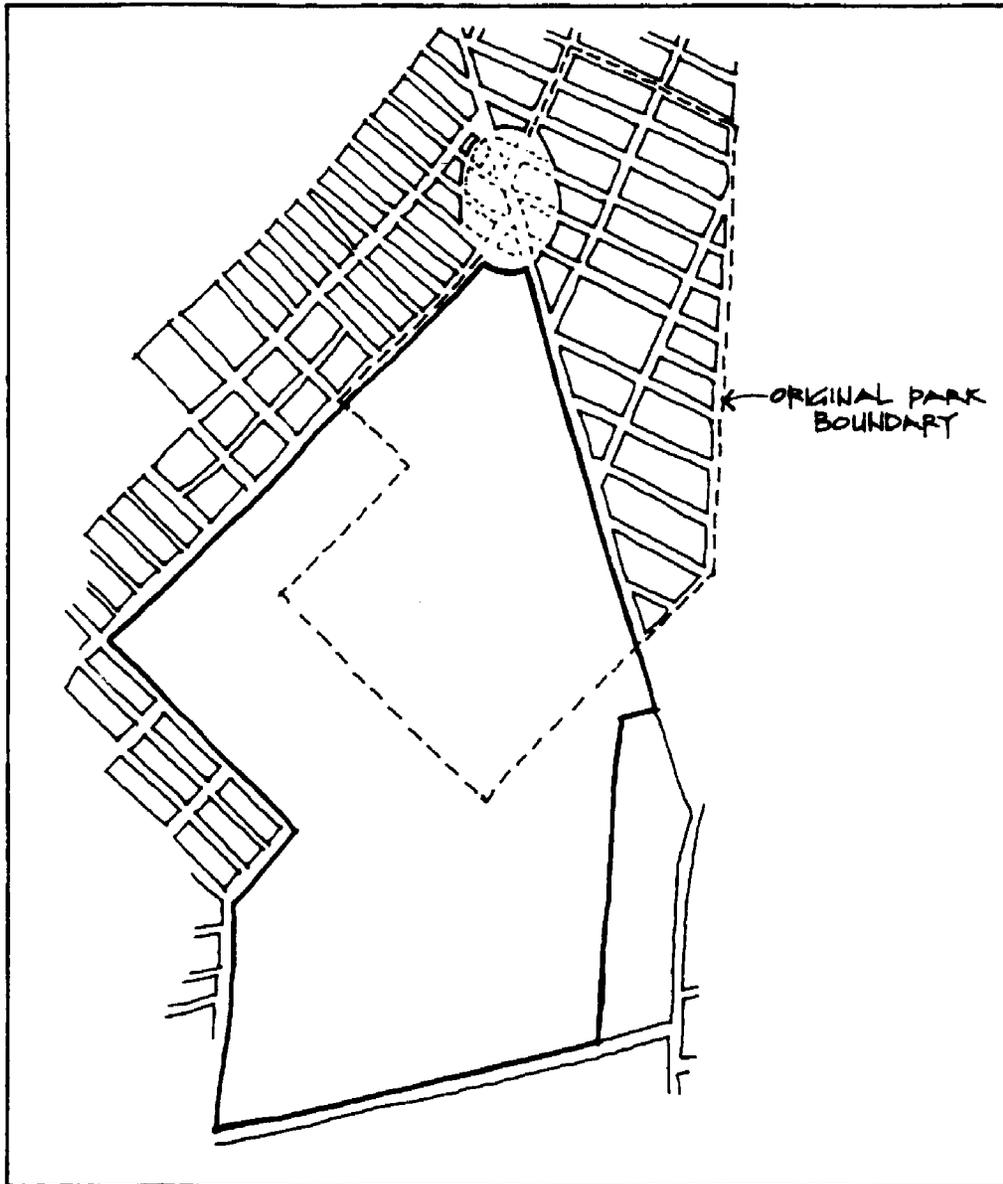
Initial Planning: Prospect Park and Park Approaches

During the first years of their work in Brooklyn, Olmsted and Vaux were primarily occupied with developing and promoting their design for Prospect

Park, which involved enlarging the park and changing its boundaries. They brought forward the idea of designing street approaches to the park, but didn't press this strongly until 1868. The progress of their work can be traced in the Annual Reports they prepared for the Park Commission.

Olmsted and Vaux's first annual report for the Brooklyn Park Commissioners was published in January, 1866. In it, they concentrated on presenting and explaining their design for Prospect Park, which was basically a refinement of Vaux's preliminary design. They reiterated their objection to the bisection of the park site by Flatbush Avenue, a street heavily used for "ordinary" travel, and again recommended abandoning for park purposes the part of the site east of Flatbush Avenue. They also pressed for increasing the size of the park, to the south and west, to include areas of varied topography and scenery which they felt would increase a general impression of "undefined limit" within the park. This was important, they argued, because the pleasure found in city parks ".....results from the feeling of relief experienced by those entering them, on escaping from the cramped, confined and controlling circumstances of the streets of the town; in other words, *a sense of enlarged freedom* is to all, at all times, the most certain and the most valuable gratification afforded by a park." The revised park boundaries they proposed were designed to shut out inharmonious views, both of the city and of the surrounding working farms.⁵¹

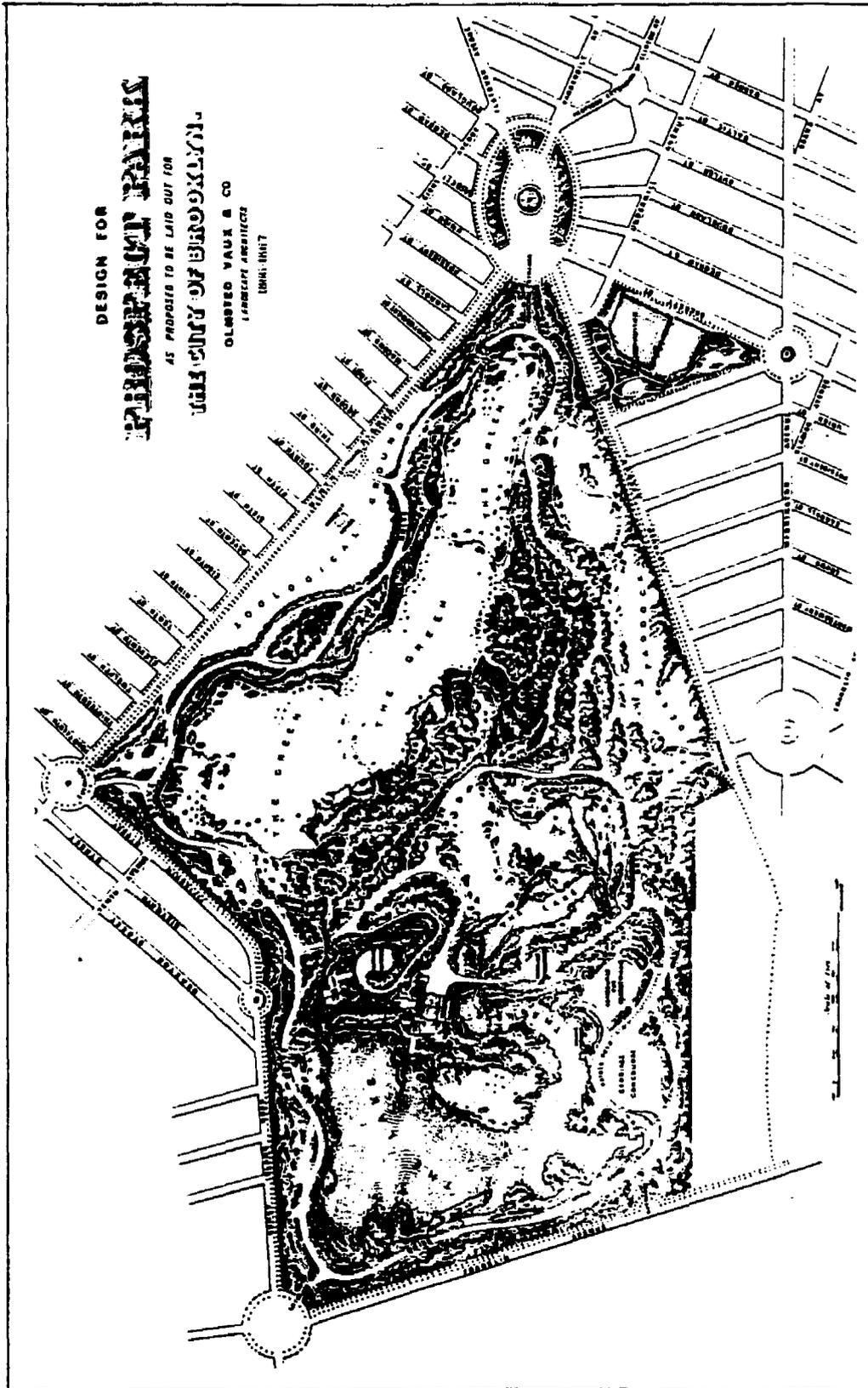
Olmsted and Vaux's design for Prospect Park was more pastoral, even, than their design for Central Park. Their arguments for a naturalistic design again revolved around the social usefulness of such a park, as well as the economic benefits. The recuperative qualities of a natural park would increase people's ability to labor by allowing an "unbending of the faculties." The requirements for recuperation were scenery and the opportunity for people to come together for the single purpose of enjoyment. A naturally designed city park would add to



Olmsted and Vaux's revised boundaries for Prospect Park

the health, strength, and morality of Brooklyn's citizens, resulting in increased material wealth.⁵²

The park design included places for both rest and congregation, sylvan places and areas of open meadow. As in Central Park, carriage drives, horse trails, and pedestrian walks were separated from each other. However, since no



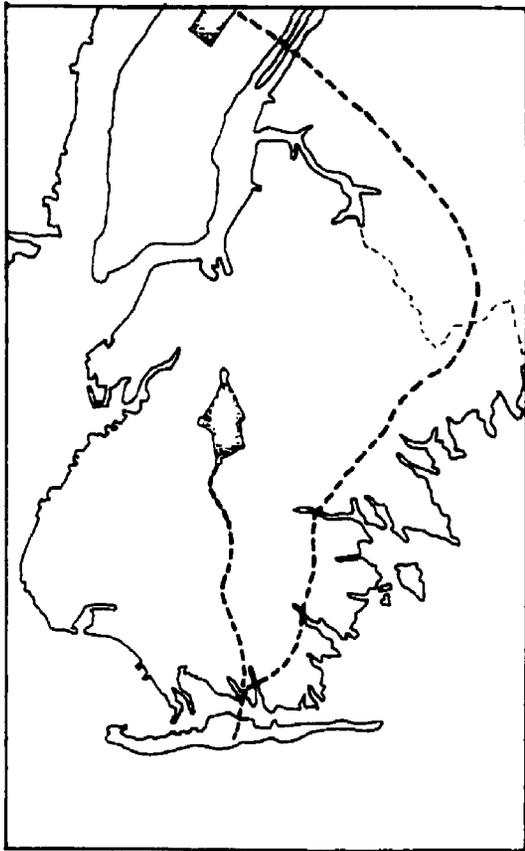
Olmsted and Vaux's plan for Prospect Park
 From the Annual Report of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners for the year of 1865.

city streets crossed the park, the grade-separation scheme used in Central Park was not repeated.

The design also included a public promenade around the park perimeter. The plan called for widening the public streets surrounding the park to 100 feet and building a 30-foot-wide sidewalk along the park side, planted with double rows of trees, and lit with gas-lamps. The intent was to provide a lighted promenade in the immediate vicinity of the park for public use when the park was closed at night.⁵³

In their first report, Olmsted and Vaux made it clear that they conceived of Prospect Park as part of a metropolitan-wide park system, rather than an isolated area of greenery. "We regard Brooklyn as an integral part of what to-day is the metropolis of the nation, and in the future will be the centre of exchanges for the world, and the park in Brooklyn, as part of a system of grounds, of which Central Park is a single feature, designed for the recreation of the whole people of the metropolis and their customers and guests from all parts of the world for centuries to come."⁵⁴ With a park system in mind, they suggested building connections to the park, and offered a conceptual plan. They proposed extending a picturesque, shaded pleasure drive, that would be "neither very straight or level," out of the southern entrance of the park, going first to the ocean beach and then either terminating or turning northeast to run through the back country and turning again toward the East River near Ravenswood, connecting across to New York City by ferry or bridge, and then leading into Central Park. This circuit drive would be an extension of the park, "a grand municipal promenade," free from commercial embarrassments.⁵⁵ (The report did not include any drawings showing the locations of the suggested parkways, only a verbal description.)

The following year, in their annual report submitted in January, 1867, Olmsted and Vaux expanded on their idea for pleasure drive approaches to the

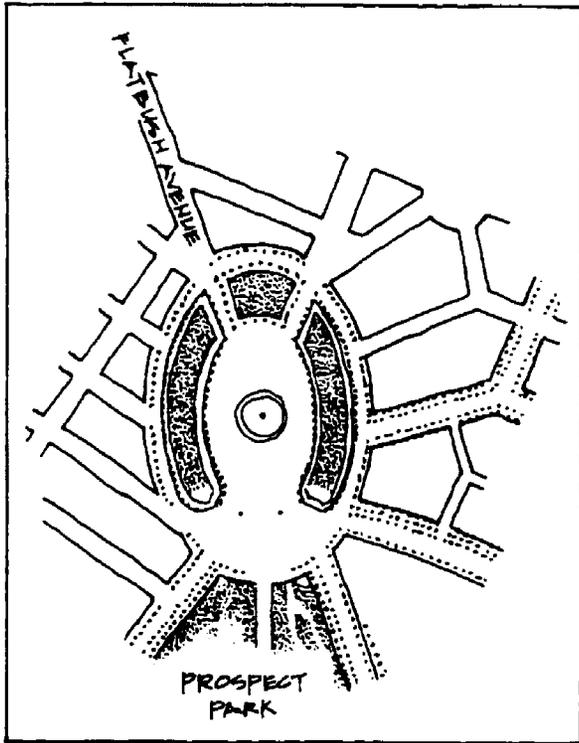


Olmsted and Vaux's 1866 parkway concept



Olmsted and Vaux's 1867 parkway concept

park, including economic justifications. "It would undoubtedly add much to the value of the Park if it could be reached, by citizens living at a distance, through liberally conceived approaches which were, in all their extent, convenient and pleasant to walk, ride, or drive in."⁵⁶ Since costs prohibited building new drives through the built-up areas to the north and west of the park, Olmsted and Vaux concentrated on proposals for outlying, undeveloped areas. They reiterated the idea of constructing a drive from the southwest park entry to the ocean, either at Ft. Hamilton or Coney Island, and suggested a second drive running from the eastern park gate to the Ridgewood reservoir at the edge of Williamsburgh. They expressed the opinion that the later location would be particularly agreeable because of the numerous grade changes in the area, requiring the drive to have frequent curves and thereby ensuring it would be used only for pleasure travel.



Olmsted and Vaux's design for the Plaza at the main northern entrance to Prospect Park

The concept, and the description of the drive, is reminiscent of the previously mentioned plan that had been proposed by T. W. Field when the park planning process first began. Olmsted and Vaux argued for Eastern District drive on the grounds that it would connect the park with areas where people were building expensive villas on large lots, and encourage more wealthy people to build homes there. The designers referred to the drive as a "broad boulevard."⁵⁷

In the report, Olmsted and Vaux also summarized the work done over the previous year on the part of the park contained within the original site boundaries, and continued to urge enlarging the park to the west and south. They devoted much of the report to discussing street approaches into the Plaza, the large oval space their design had located at the main north entrance to the park. The Plaza was intended to provide a grand entry into the park. Its practical purpose, as well, was to resolve the awkward intersection of three different street

grids. The designers proposed street approach changes to make the Plaza more symmetrical, and also countered proposals put forth by others regarding various street widenings in the vicinity of the Plaza which were at odds with the intentions of their design.

The Parkway Plan

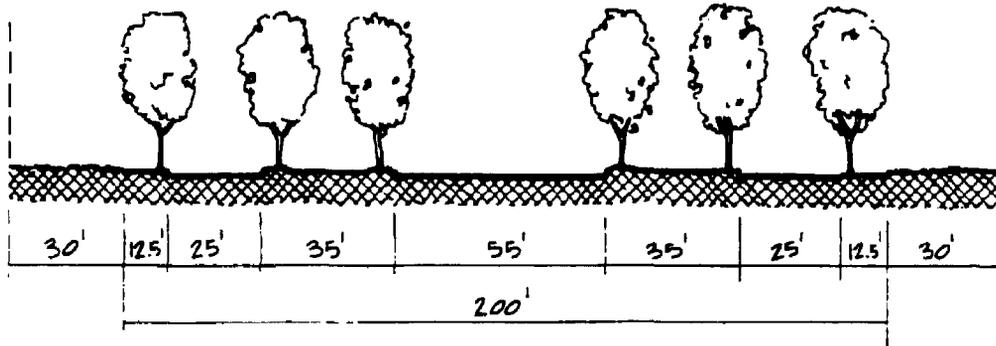
During 1867, Olmsted and Vaux were instructed by the Park Commission to perform a topographical survey of lands east of the park, in the city's Ninth Ward, in order to ascertain an appropriate route for a park approach. The designers and the commissioners agreed it was expedient to deal with this approach first because the eastern part of the city was developing rapidly, and it was important to secure a right-of-way before land became too costly or was developed. Landowners in the Ninth District were also amenable, because they believed a parkway would enhance development prospects.⁵⁸ The Ninth Ward was a large tract of sparsely populated, rural land which lay east of the Prospect Park site, between Atlantic Avenue and the city line. Since the mid-1850's, land speculators had been promoting it as the "garden of Brooklyn," and ideal spot for suburban residences.⁵⁹

Olmsted and Vaux's lengthy annual report submitted in January, 1868, was almost entirely devoted to the issue of park approaches and suburban connections. In it, they presented their Parkway Plan, which included a plan for the location of the drive in the Eastern District and its detailed design, as well as a plan for a surrounding neighborhood and proposals for other drives in other areas.

They introduced the plan by saying that it assumed "an enlargement of the city of Brooklyn" and an increase in the "wealth, taste, and refinement of its

citizens."⁶⁰ They argued that the existing street system of Brooklyn, like other American cities, had serious defects. The common system of building standard width streets in a regular grid pattern made sense only because it was easy to draw, understand, and stake out. Brooklyn had the opportunity to do something more forward-looking.

Then, to support the plan, they presented a theory of the advance of civilization based on street layouts. The theory is long and convoluted, and includes no graphics; the following is my simplified interpretation. The theory described five stages of street patterns: Stage One consisted of narrow pedestrian streets in walled towns; Stage Two consisted of filthy, congested, narrow streets in which wagons and pedestrians fought for space; Stage Three, beginning around 1750, consisted of streets having separate, raised and curbed sidewalks for pedestrians on either side of a central roadway for horses and carriages, and gutters and sewers controlling filth; Stage Four consisted of streets in which the central roadway was divided by a landscaped mall for pedestrians, like many of the new European boulevards; Stage Five—the advance that Brooklyn was in the position to embark upon—would consist of parkways, in which the central landscaped mall was itself divided in two by a roadway for pleasure riding and driving.⁶¹ Parkway would serve for: "... giving access for the purposes of ordinary traffic to all the houses that front upon it, offering a special road for driving and riding without turning commercial vehicles from the right of way, and furnishing ample public walks, with room for seats, and with borders of turf in which trees may grow of the most stately character."⁶² From this description, it is clear that Olmsted and Vaux conceived of parkways as all-inclusive streets, where diverse activities would occur within the same right-of-way, in a layered fashion, restricted to specially designed channels. With their stately trees, parkways would also be linear parks.



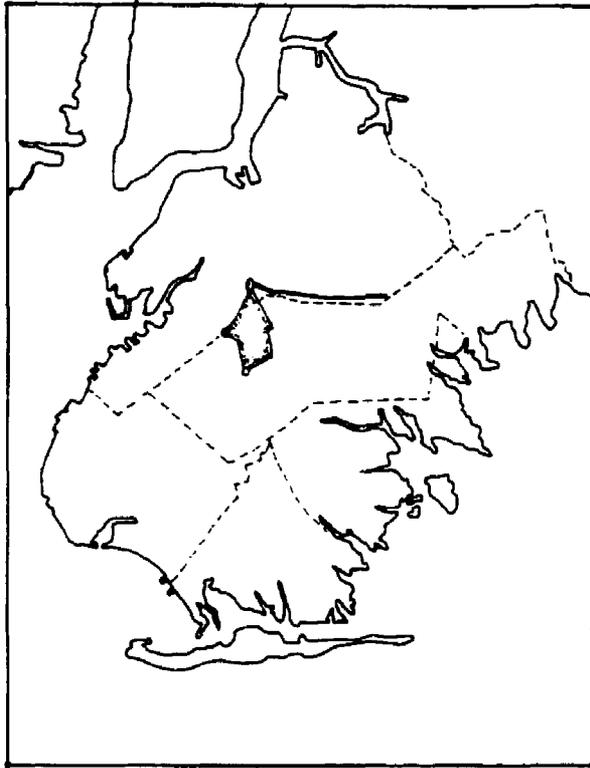
Section of Eastern Parkway as originally designed by Olmsted and Vaux

The parkway design Olmsted and Vaux presented was a 200-foot-wide street containing six rows of trees. A drawing describing the detailed arrangement of the street showed a 55-foot-wide central roadway, bounded successively on either side by 35-foot-wide malls, 25-foot-wide side roadways, and 12 1/2-foot-wide sidewalks.⁶³ One row of trees lined each sidewalk, and two rows of trees lined each mall.

The location they proposed for the parkway in the Eastern District was the line of Sackett Street, an unbuilt street platted on the city map, which ran between the Plaza, at the entrance to Prospect Park, to the eastern city line—a distance of about two and a half miles.

They envisioned the parkway as the center of "a continuous neighborhood of residences of a more than usually open, elegant, and healthy character"⁶⁴ and offered a plan for achieving this.

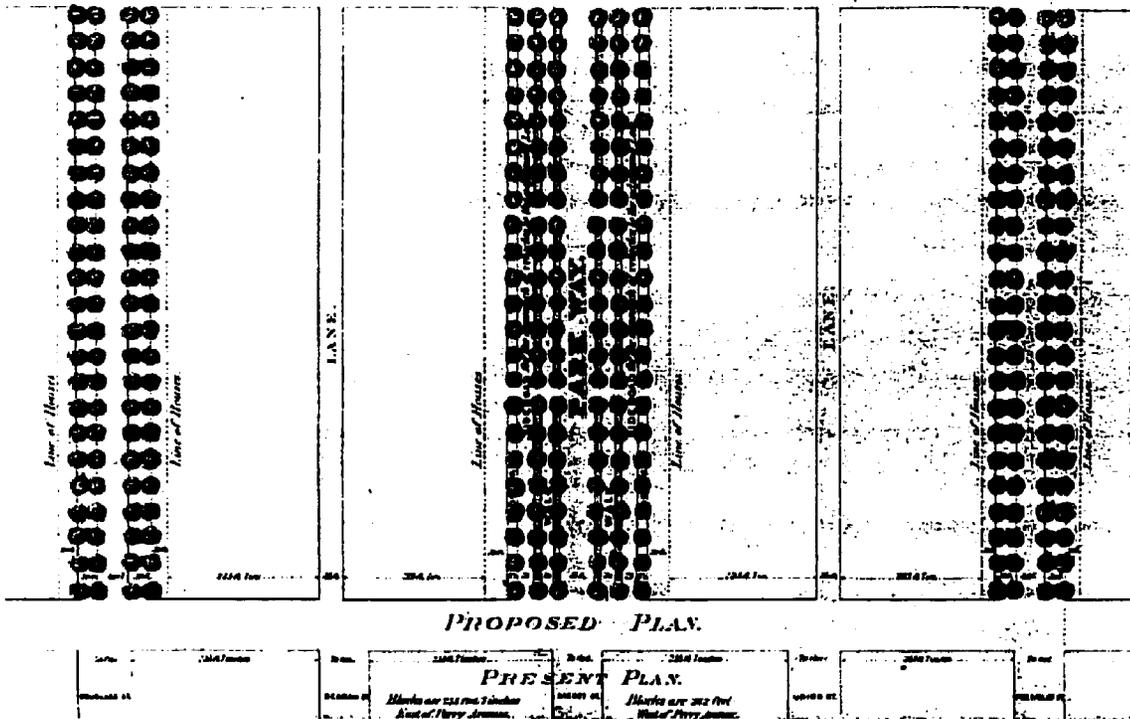
The Ninth Ward had been platted with uniform 70-foot-wide streets in a rectangular street grid pattern. The design called for reconfiguring the platting of Sackett Street and two adjacent parallel streets on either side. Sackett Street would be widened into the 200-foot-wide parkway and the outer streets would



The alignment of Eastern Parkway

be widened into 100-foot-wide "boulevards," which would have wider than normal sidewalks planted with double rows of trees. The streets between the parkway and the flanking boulevards would be narrowed into 35-foot-wide service alleys, giving access to stables. Within this revised platting, lots along the parkway and the boulevards would be divided into "...a series of lots adapted to be occupied by detached villas each in the midst of a small private garden."⁶⁵ The service alleys would run along the rear of these lots, giving access to backyard stables and greenhouses. Building lines would be held back from the right-of-way, 30 feet on the parkway and 20 feet on the boulevards, and the resulting front courtyards would be planted with greenery, increasing the park-like quality of the street. (The layout of the parkway neighborhood is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.)

CITY OF BROOKLYN.
PLAN OF A PORTION OF PARK WAY AS PROPOSED TO BE LAID OUT
FROM THE EASTERN PART OF THE CITY
TO
THE PLAZA.

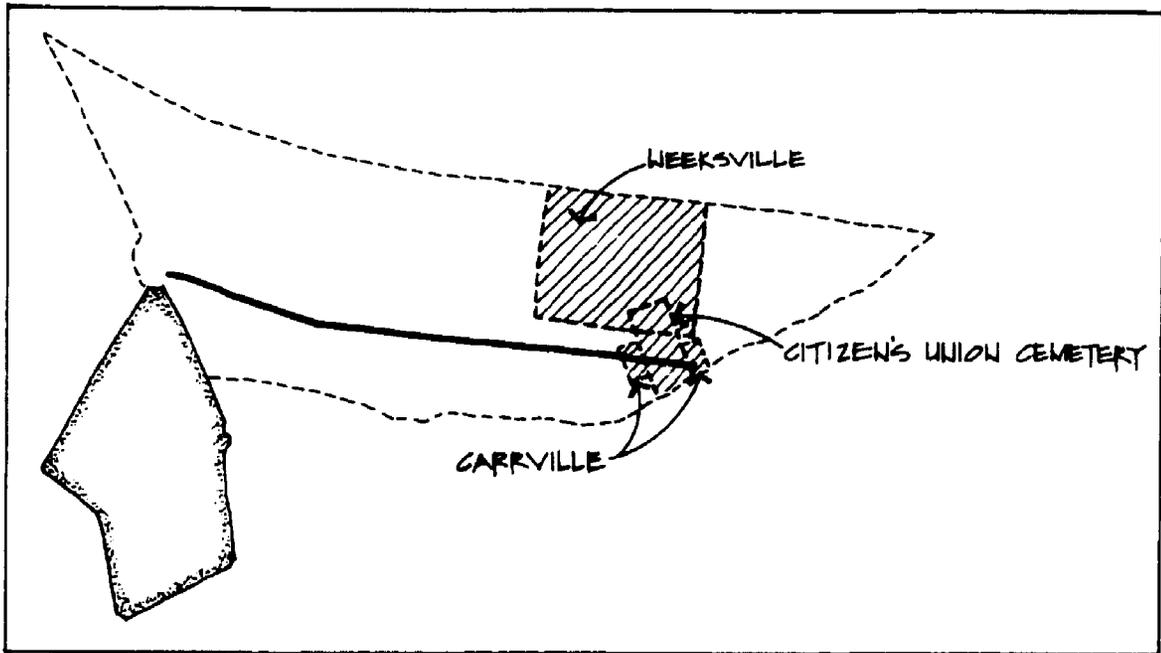


Olmsted and Vaux's plan for the Eastern Parkway neighborhood
 From the Annual Reports of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners for the year of 1867

Olmsted and Vaux emphasized their conviction that a parkway neighborhood, so designed and restricted, would attract a prosperous class of people, particularly "city-bred country boys."⁶⁶ Having a plan secured for the whole area would also allow purchasers to pick any lot, rather than lots in regular succession, because they could be assured that a good surrounding neighborhood would be built. How far the parkway neighborhood would extend to either side of the parkway could be determined by property owners based on their anticipation of the demand for large lots.

Choosing the already platted line of Sackett Street as the location for the eastern parkway was a compromise from Olmsted and Vaux's original vision for park approaches: instead of having numerous, picturesque turns, this parkway would run straight, in alignment with the platted grid. The only real topographical change was at its beginning. From the Plaza, the parkway would rise sharply in a gentle curve past the existing reservoir. At the top of the rise, it would then lead straight for several blocks, turn slightly, and head directly to the city line. The picturesqueness of the parkway would come from its position along a high ridge, which offered views north toward downtown Brooklyn, west and south toward the ocean, and east toward the rural expanse of Long Island.

Choosing the line of Sackett Street had other implications. This street was platted to run right through the small black community of Carrville, and just to the south of the small black community of Weeksville. Near Carrville, it also ran right through the middle of the Citizen's Union Cemetery, at the time the only cemetery in Brooklyn where black people could be buried.⁸⁷ These communities were small and not formally incorporated, but they were not insubstantial. They were populated by the upper-class of former slave society, teachers and tradesmen, and contained several black institutions such as an orphans home and a home for the elderly.⁸⁸ First established by free blacks, they had been in existence since the 1830's. In the 1860's, Weeksville and Carrville contained the highest concentration of blacks in Brooklyn, the population having increased substantially after the draft riots of 1863 drove blacks out of downtown New York and downtown Brooklyn, compelling them to seek shelter in these communities.⁸⁹ No mention of these communities was made in Olmsted and Vaux's report, let alone any discussion of the impact building the parkway and its associated neighborhood might have on them. Neither were they mentioned



The locations of Weeksville, Carrville and the Citizen's Union Cemetery relative to Eastern Parkway.

in newspaper accounts reporting on the proposed parkway plan.⁷⁰ (We will return to these communities in Chapter Four.)

In addition to parkway in the Eastern District, Olmsted and Vaux proposed locations for other parkways and parkway neighborhoods. They specifically proposed three other main parkways: one extending towards Ft. Hamilton, one towards Coney Island, and ones towards Ravenswood. Others could be built wherever residential areas were likely to be formed distant enough from one of the main parkways that access to the park from it would be inconvenient.

At the end of their report, the designers addressed public concerns that a scheme underway to build boulevards into New York would interfere with the success of any scheme to build boulevards in Brooklyn. They took pains to differentiate their proposal as something very different, and stressed that New York seemed unlikely to build boulevards anyway, because politicians there felt

that wide streets with trees were inexpedient for a commercial city.⁷¹ Prior to this time, Olmsted and Vaux had spoken in terms of suburban connections and park approaches. Naming their proposed streets "parkways" no doubt was at least partially motivated by the desire to differentiate them from the New York boulevards.

The *Brooklyn Eagle's* response to the proposal to build a parkway in the Eastern District was positive: "The effect will be to enhance the desirability and value of the two strips of private land [on either side of the parkway] to an incalculable amount, making them beyond comparison the most desirable situation in the city for private residences, since they will be practically surrounded by and incorporated in the Park; they will enjoy every advantage of city life, gas, water, &c. (sic), and yet be isolated from city traffic, surrounded by luxuriant foliage and enjoy all the pleasures and felicities of rural retirement. They will be in short, a perfect *rus in urbe*."

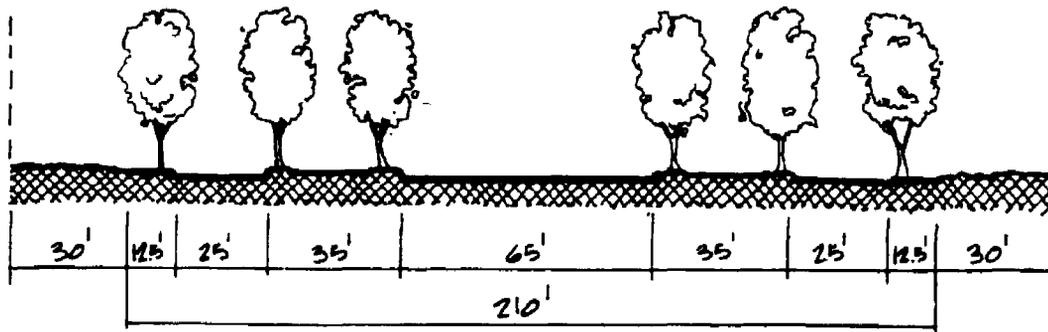
The same article emphasized that the Park Commission was merely sponsoring the plan and not building it: the parkway would not be paid for by city bonds. "The Park Commissioners accept a sponsorial relation to this project by employing their own architects, Messrs. Olmstead (sic) and Vaux, to survey and lay out the plans for the contemplated series of Boulevards. We are assured, however, that the Ninth Ward property owners, through whose land the proposed Boulevards are to pass, do not seek to saddle any of the cost of the scheme upon the city, or even to invoke the credit of the city in the issue of bonds to pay for the improvement; but that the expense is to be defrayed by the property benefited, in the same way as in every ordinary street opening or grading, the only difference being that, to insure harmony of plan, the Park Commissioners are to carry out the work, instead of the Common Council."⁷²

The only reservation that the *Brooklyn Eagle* expressed regarding the proposed parkway was that it would not be as good as the plan proposed earlier by T. W. Field. Field's proposal to establish a five to seven hundred foot wide swath of parkland through the Ninth Ward, with a winding road built within it, would have given views all around which would never be obstructed by buildings because of the width of the protected swath. "All these advantages are sacrificed in the scheme now offered by the Ninth Ward property owners for straight avenues, bounded closely by trees and buildings...."⁷³

Implementing the Parkway Plan

Within a few months after Olmsted and Vaux presented their Parkway Plan, the state legislature passed an act authorizing widening Sackett Street to 210 feet (ten feet wider than the original plan, see Chapter Four) from Washington Avenue to the city line, and putting it under the jurisdiction of the Park Commissioners. Because of difficulty associated with building near the reservoir, the section of the parkway from the Plaza to Washington Avenue would be narrower than the rest. The act also authorized widening the flanking boulevards and narrowing the service alleys, established the set-backs on the parkway and boulevards, and enacted nuisance use restrictions for the whole neighborhood, defined as any "manufactory, trade, business, or calling, which may be in any wise dangerous, noxious, or offensive, to the neighboring inhabitants."⁷⁴ This was one of the first examples of nuisance restrictions applied to a large, undeveloped area in an American city. (See Chapter Four for further discussion of the street platting and nuisance restrictions.)

The act authorizing the Eastern Parkway stipulated that the cost of opening and improving the roadway would be paid for by assessments on adjacent

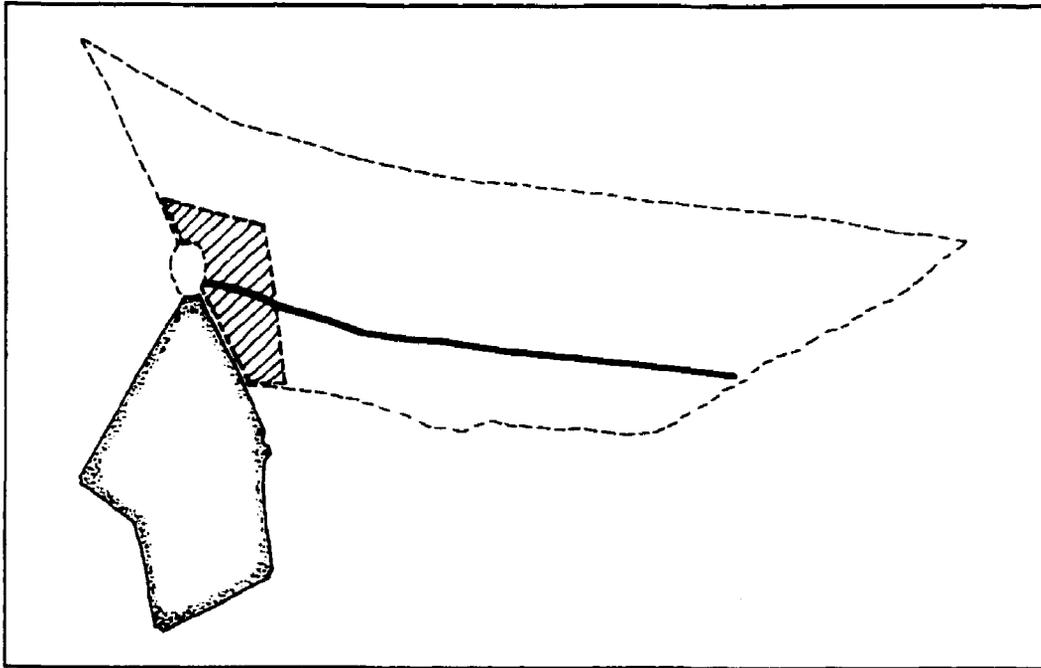


Section of Eastern Parkway as built

properties. Commissioner Stranahan later described the circumstances surrounding the passage of the act. "The very extensive area of property intended to be benefited by the construction of this road, was owned in large parcels by a few gentlemen who were principally instrumental in procuring the enactment of the law [.....] and they otherwise cleared the way for an early completion of the work which it was agreed should be prosecuted at the expense of the property benefited."⁷⁵ But the issue of assessments was in fact controversial. Stranahan also made the following statement: ".....through defects in the law or ambiguity in its interpretation as to the manner of raising money for its construction, the work suffered from a considerable delay....."⁷⁶

Construction of the parkway would not begin for another three years, until 1871.

The parkway plan was again the main focus of Olmsted and Vaux's annual report of January 1869. They strenuously emphasized the economic benefits of the scheme, arguing that the city couldn't expect to get due returns on its park expenditures unless its influence was extended by increasing its accessibility. They expressed exasperation at the "jealous and antagonistic interests" that were delaying the construction of the eastern parkway, as well as a sense of urgency



The location of the East Side Lands relative to Eastern Parkway

about securing ground for other parkways.⁷⁷ Their tactic turned to emphasizing the need to establish development focal points, selected based on the anticipated future demand for housing, which parkways would be built to serve: "Certain central or focal points of improvement are proposed to fixed upon without delay."⁷⁸ They suggested five possible focal points: Fort Hamilton, Bay Ridge, a central point in the Eastern District, East New York or Ridgewood, and a point near the head of the proposed bridge across the East River at Blackwell's Island.

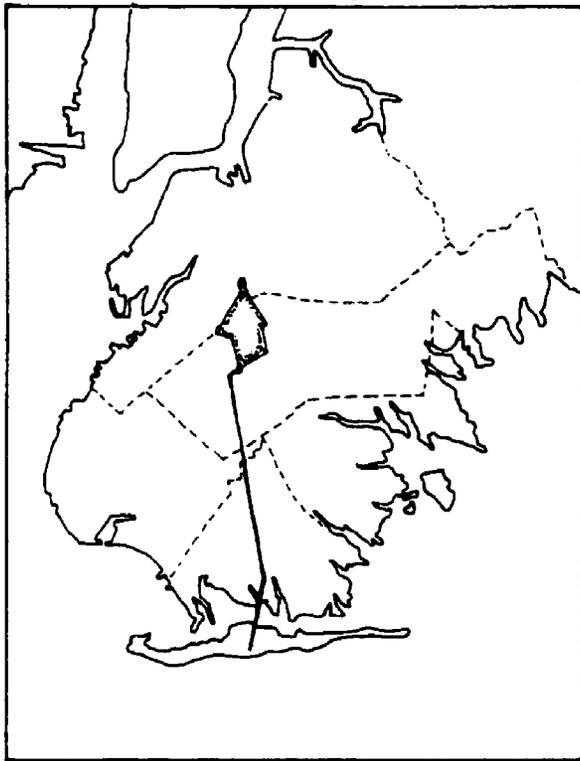
The plan for the Eastern Parkway was coming under scrutiny from many directions. Editors of the *Brooklyn Eagle*, were pressing for a different route.⁷⁹ Some of the smaller property owners along the line of the parkway were complaining that the assessments levied on their land amounted to confiscation.⁸⁰

Secondarily, the report also dealt with the difficult issue of what to do with the East Side Lands, the part of the original park site on the eastern side of Flatbush Avenue that had been eliminated from the park proper in Olmsted and

Vaux's design. Others wanted the East Side lands to be park-like in some way. Olmsted and Vaux felt that such an approach would dilute the integrity of the park, as well as divert funds from it. They argued for residential development on these lands instead, and urged the park commissioners to re-plot the area with streets at right angles to the park, to improve approaches, and lay out the resulting blocks with large lots appropriate for fine residences. They also advocated saving a few choice lots fronting on the park for future cultural facilities.

Resolution of the fate of the East Side Lands was to be a long way off because a lengthy legal battle would ensue over what rights the commission had regarding the use or disposal of these lands originally taken for park purposes.³¹ This had major implications for development in the Eastern area of the city, because development went elsewhere. (See Chapter Four.)

In the summer of 1869, the state legislature passed an act authorizing the Park Commission to lay out a second parkway with the same basic form as the Eastern Parkway, one running from Prospect Park towards Coney Island. The parkway would be placed under the jurisdiction of the Park Commission, but its exact location was subject to the approval of a majority of the residents of the Town of Gravesend, through which the parkway would pass. The act stipulated that the cost of opening and improving the parkway would be paid by landowners whose properties lay within 1,050 feet to either side of it, and that the communities through which it passed would share in maintenance costs. It placed front yard setbacks and use restrictions on the parkway, similar to what had been put in place on Eastern Parkway. No provisions were made, however, for laying out a surrounding neighborhood street pattern like the one around Eastern Parkway.



Alignment of Ocean Parkway

According to Stranahan: "This avenue will form another grand approach to the park, and is to be laid out under the liberal auspices of the owners of the land through which it passes, at their own expense, and has been placed under the control and management of the park commissioners."⁸²

Any route the parkway took to get to the ocean would be completely outside Brooklyn's city limits, passing through farmland. Some people living in the area would later assert that the act authorizing the parkway was passed without their knowledge.⁸³

The route selected by the commissioners ran straight from the southwest park entrance to Coney Island, parallel with Gravesend Avenue. It ran first through Flatbush, then New Utrecht, and then Gravesend. The route immediately met with opposition: "The farmers on the line were opposed to its

being opened, it being favored only by a few individuals who had purchased land on the line on speculation, and who were a minority of the owners."⁶⁴

Olmsted and Vaux's annual report to the Brooklyn Park Commissioners submitted on January, 1870, was very short. It summarized the work done in the park over the previous year, and noted the increase in public use of the park by families, church groups, and neighborhood organizations. It also lamented the unsettled state of the East Side Lands, claiming the issue was having a negative impact on the development of the park.

In February, serious opposition was raised against Ocean Parkway in the form of a petition filed by taxpayers in the Towns of Flatbush, New Utrecht, and Gravesend. It claimed that a majority of owners would not sign in favor of the proposed parkway. ".....the route of this avenue [.....] is through a farming district, and through property owned mostly by persons occupying the same, and of limited means, who never asked for, expected, or desired any such avenue....."⁶⁵ The petitioners claimed that while the park commissioners claimed they had gotten the required signatures of approval, it had only been accomplished through nominal conveyances, violating the spirit of the law.⁶⁶ They claimed that the assessment for opening and improving the parkway, estimated at \$1,500 per acre of assessed land, amounted to confiscation of property. They asserted that the 210 foot wide parkway was unnecessary because another act, also passed in 1869, had authorized widening the Coney Island Plankroad to 100 feet from Brooklyn to the ocean. The parkway would also fit discordantly into the plan under development by Kings County commissioners that was laying out street connections between the rural towns.

The opposition to Ocean Parkway halted its construction as the matter was debated, in the legislature and in the newspapers. Debate over assessments for the Eastern Parkway continued as well.

Olmsted and Vaux came under personal attack in the newspapers because of the costs associated with Prospect Park and the two parkways. A *Brooklyn Eagle* editorial expressed the opinion that: "Like the great canal engineer who said that rivers were only made to feed canals with, Mr. Olmsted believes that cities are only made to lay out parks and boulevards in, and that money is earned by peoples' hard work, only to be paid in taxes for local improvements."⁸⁷ The editorial ended with the observation that: "The millions of public money Mr. Olmsted has been the means of spending amount already to the entire valuation of a good sized city; the total cost of executing the projects which his fertile brain is continually devising [...] would bankrupt any State; not to say city."⁸⁸

In their annual report of January, 1871, Olmsted and Vaux focused on responding to criticisms and concerns that had developed over the previous year regarding the naturalistic design of Prospect Park. Some citizen groups were advocating more formal promenade areas and places for large assemblages in the park. They were concerned that the park didn't measure up to foreign public pleasure grounds because it lacked stateliness and grandeur, and complained about the time and expense it was taking to build a natural-looking park.⁸⁹

While arguing for the superiority of their park design, Olmsted and Vaux acknowledged that while the park was being built, "new habits and tastes had developed." The amount of pleasure driving had greatly increased in five years and some people involved in this were "more concerned with seeing and being seen than with scenery."⁹⁰ They argued that they had in fact anticipated the increased demand for pleasure driving and that it was well accommodated already. The park was designed to have two distinctly different areas, one exclusively for rural recreation and the other for promenades and large gatherings. The main promenade district, at the southern end of the park, contained a long drive, which, for a 250 foot stretch in its middle was 180 feet

wide with covered galleries along each side. The park also contained an area for promenade concerts, places where people in carriages or on foot could gather to hear music. Moreover, they had anticipated the growth in public demand for "joining gay assemblages" by designing a series of "stately avenues" outside the park: the wide streets surrounding the periphery of the park, and the parkways. These streets, as yet unbuilt, would provide for formal promenades between rows of trees on regular, defined, and well-lighted walks. They had the advantage of being usable after dark, unlike the park which was closed at night. The Plaza was also designed for gatherings, and illuminated for night effects. These arguments, as well as Commissioner Stranahan's continued firm support, quelled the most vocal opposition against the park's design.

The previous year, however, Stranahan had been unable to implement expanding the parkway plan. The legislature had failed to give the Park Commission the authority to lay out a third parkway, from Prospect Park to Fort Hamilton.⁹¹ No doubt the outpouring of local opposition against Ocean Parkway was a factor in this decision.

Immediately after the contents of the Annual Report were published in the *Brooklyn Eagle*, a flurry of criticism erupted over the Park Commission's projects and expenditures. A *Brooklyn Eagle* editorial advised: "Better pay as we go, build parks and open streets a little slower."⁹²

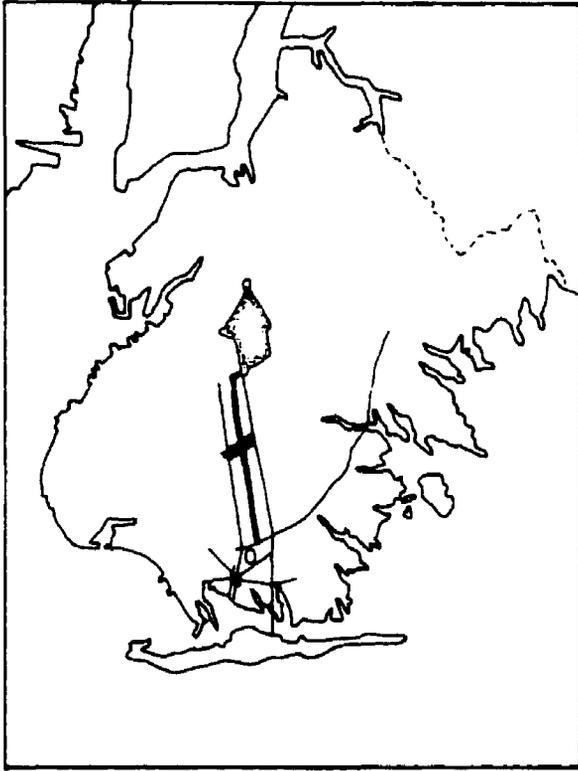
Olmsted and Vaux's continued employment as landscape architects for the Park Commission was questioned. A *Brooklyn Eagle* editorial viciously attacked them. "For years Olmstead (sic) & Vaux, whose business it was assumed to be to furnish a plan for the Park, have been retained in the service of the Commissioners at a salary of eight thousand dollars per annum. Not merely the plans, but the park itself is supposed to be approaching completion, but the eight thousand dollars "architects" step up to the commissioners' office for their big

salary as gaily as the first month after they were set to work. [...] It can not be said that Mr. Stranahan and his associates have resolved to defy public opinion. In commencing an era of economy they must begin somewhere. Let them begin by dismissing Messrs. Olmstead (sic) and Vaux, who will, if not interfered with, furnish employment for themselves up to the end of their natural lives, and drain the life blood of our city."⁹³

Stranahan came under intense criticism as well. *Brooklyn Eagle* editorials called him both a "Shylock" and "the Great Magician."⁹⁴ One editorial expressed extreme frustration over his unending ability to push forward with his projects: "How on earth can a single man be stronger than parties, stronger than laws, stronger than the almost universal will of a whole city; how can he be silently, gently, yet undisputedly despotic, alike in successive Legislatures where he has no seat, and among associate Commissioners of equal position and first-class reputation both for wealth and personal ability; how, in short, can he have his own way all the time, in spite of all possible odds against him?"⁹⁵

During 1871, continuing opposition to Ocean Parkway kept the Park Commission from laying out the roadway. However, the issues with Eastern Parkway were resolved and its construction began in the summer. It proceeded very slowly, because grading was very difficult near the reservoir. Among other things, the construction crew had to lower the force main serving the reservoir by over eighteen feet.⁹⁶

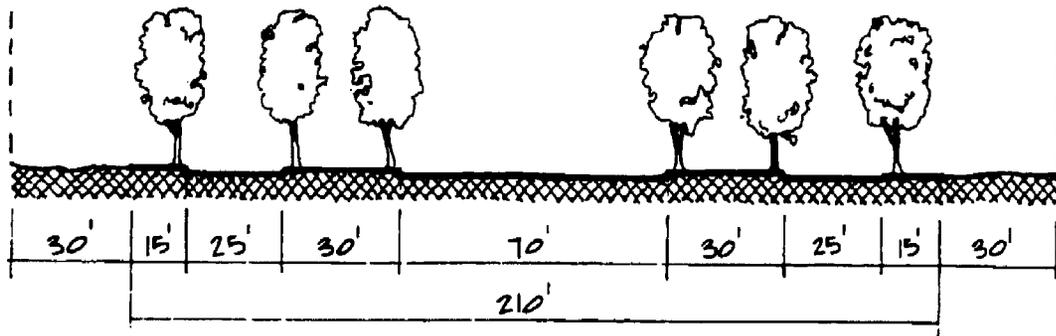
Olmsted and Vaux's annual report submitted in 1872 was very short. It summarized work completed on the park and noted that the park was gaining in popularity: more people were coming and they were staying longer. The parkways were only mentioned in passing. Perhaps because of the political controversy, and the *Brooklyn Eagle's* attacks against them, Olmsted and Vaux had decided to remove themselves from actively promoting the parkway plan,



Extent of the first authorized northern part of Ocean Parkway

although there is no documentation to confirm this speculation. This task was left to Stranahan, who in his report of the same year spoke about the parkways at length, advocating their importance. "Next to the construction and care of the parks, the works of most importance to the city with which the park commissioners have been entrusted by the legislature, are the Eastern Parkway, with the special street system of which it is the center, and the Ocean Parkway leading from Prospect Park towards the Coney Island Beach."⁹⁷

In 1872, the state legislature amended the act authoring Ocean Parkway. The revised act relieved the Park Commission of the need to get the approval of a majority of the land owners along the parkway route and authorized laying out the parkway from the park to the grounds of the Prospect Park Fair Grounds Association, at Kings Highway in Gravesend. Members of the Association had been some of the most vocal opponents against the parkway.



Section of Ocean Parkway

The Prospect Park Fair Grounds Association was a fashionable private club, owned by 15 gentlemen. The eighty acre grounds, which included a mile long driving course for horses, a large clubhouses, a grandstand, a public restaurant, and stables, were open to subscribers who paid \$250 for five years use. Plans were underway to erect a fine hotel on the grounds, and a large hall for concerts.⁹⁸

A popular recounting of events surrounding passage of the 1872 amendment claimed that Stranahan had: ".....devised a bill and procured its passage through the Legislature, which conferred on him and his associates ample power to override the wishes of unreasonable antagonists....."⁹⁹

The configuration of Ocean Parkway was basically the same as Eastern Parkway, although the dimensions of the constituent parts of the roadway varied slightly. Like Eastern Parkway, the overall right-of-way was 210 feet. However, the center driveway, at 70 feet, was slightly wider and the malls, at 30 feet each, were slightly narrower. The side drives were 25 feet wide, the same as on Eastern Parkway, while the sidewalks, at 15 feet, were slightly wider. The roadway was planted with the same six rows of trees, a combination of American Elms,

English Elms, Kentucky Coffee Trees, Norway Maples, Sycamore Maples, Sugar Maples, and Scarlet Maples, with Golden Willows planted at the southern end of the parkway where it was affected by salt air.¹⁰⁰

The Park Commission's willingness to compromise and only build part of Ocean Parkway was a temporary measure, to get things started. The commissioners still intended to construct the parkway all the way to Coney Island, and continued to press for this. Once the act passed, things happened quickly. Construction contracts to build the first part of the roadway were awarded before the end of the year.

Olmsted and Vaux's annual report to the Brooklyn Park Commissioners of January 1874 was their last report. It was short and spoke not at all about the parkways. Their work in Brooklyn was ending. A severe business depression had begun and appropriations for construction work in the park had ceased at the end of 1873. Work had come to a virtual standstill, and there was no longer money to pay for landscape architecture services. No annual reports at all were published by the Brooklyn Park Commissioners for the next five years.

By the end of 1873, Brooklyn's total municipal debt was \$37.5 million dollars. Of this debt, a little over \$9 million was in the form of city bonds issued for Prospect Park, and \$667,000 was in the form of city bonds issued for Ocean Parkway.¹⁰¹

Brooklyn elected a new Mayor in 1874, John W. Hunter, who was an outspoken critic of Stranahan. The parkway building work of the Park Commission came under renewed criticism. Mayor Hunter spoke against it in his first Mayor's Message: "The construction of boulevards, which are not to be needed for many years to come, and the grading and paving of streets in the outskirts of the city, while so much of space and vacant ground remain unoccupied near at hand should be deferred for the present."¹⁰²

The mayor's protests didn't have much effect, however, and work continued on the two parkways. Eastern Parkway was completed in 1874 and people began to use it as a pleasure drive, especially the section between fashionable Bedford Avenue and the park. Real estate promoters, trying to overcome the drop in real estate development that came with the business depression, advertised the advantages of the Eastern Parkway neighborhood. They emphasized both its beauty and its exclusiveness: "The Eastern Parkway and Boulevards will be over-arched by a canopy of dense, luxuriant foliage, and therefore will be a bower of beauty and delicious refuge from the blazing rays of the midsummer sun. Thousands and tens of thousands of the people;—men, women, and children will seek this leafy tunnel, with its fresh cool breezes, and kaleidoscopic display of dress, character and fashion."¹⁰³ [...] The supreme law of the State protects this whole district from the possibility of any nuisance. Even the mere semblance to an offense can be crushed and annihilated [...]."¹⁰⁴

In 1874, construction began on Ocean Parkway, and it was completed from Prospect Park to Kings Highway one year later. While the first segment was under construction, an act was passed by the legislature authorizing its extension to Coney Island. Construction of the southern section, from Kings Highway to Coney Island, began in 1876 and was completed later that same year. The total length of the parkway was five and a half miles. Stranahan later stated that once the northern section of the drive was opened, and its value had become apparent, local opposition was withdrawn.¹⁰⁵ The final route of the parkway was in fact laid out to skirt the main grounds of the Prospect Park Fair Grounds Association. The Association later moved its clubhouse onto Ocean Parkway, from its original location near Gravesend Avenue.¹⁰⁶

Ocean Parkway was opened on November 18, 1876. An article in the Brooklyn Eagle announcing its opening stated that: "...the moment the grand

highway [...] was thrown open to public travel, it became the popular and most fashionable drive for those of our citizens who keep their own equipages and drive fast horses." The same article ridiculed the short-sightedness of "The conservative men of Gravesend, the farmers, who dread the hand of progress...." They were likened to sleeping Rip Van Winkles.¹⁰⁷ The article was perhaps referring to members of the Board of Supervisors of Kings County who in 1878, in a resolution against the Park Commissioners pending bill asking for control of Coney Island, had referred to the ".....well known extravagance and reckless expenditure of Mr. Stranahan under the name of improvement....."¹⁰⁸

The controversy over Ocean Parkway did not end after it was built, the method of paying for it became the big issue. The parkway was very expensive to open and improve. A resident of Gravesend spoke for many when he stated that: "The cost of this boulevard is something startling, especially to those who are compelled to bear the larger part of it."¹⁰⁹ Opening the first segment, from the park to Kings Highway, had cost a little over \$265,000, and improving that segment cost \$295,525. The improvement funds came from 10-year County Bonds with 7% annual interest, so, including interest, the first segment cost over \$768,000. The second segment, from Kings Highway to Coney Island was less expensive because it was shorter, and because, being farther from Brooklyn, land was less expensive. It cost \$100,000 to open, and \$75,000 to improve. Including interest on the latter, the whole cost of the parkway approached \$1 million.¹¹⁰

In 1878, a bill was introduced in the legislature to charge all of Kings County with the assessment for improving the roadway. The Board of Commissioners of Estimate and Assessment for the Opening and Improvement of Ocean Parkway supported the bill, giving five reasons: the road had been constructed as a drive for the people of the city of Brooklyn and of the whole county; it was of extraordinary width; it was built in opposition to the wishes of property owners

and at the request of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners; the property owners had already paid for the expense of the opening assessment; and a further assessment for improvement of the roadway amounted to a confiscation of the area assessed, which consisted mostly of land in cultivation for farming. One of the commissioners, Tunis G. Bergen, argued that: "I have in no case in my varied experience, for over forty years a surveyor, found a case where any thing over a width of 100 feet has added any thing to the value of the adjoining property."¹¹¹ The bill failed.

The following year, a petition was introduced in the legislature bringing up the matter again. Along with restating the same arguments as before, this petition claimed relief for the property owners because of the established principle that a city or county should pay for great public works, even if they benefited a locality.¹¹²

The Ocean Parkway assessment controversy took three more years to resolve. In 1882, the state legislature passed an act reallocating costs for improving the parkway. It placed two-thirds of the cost on Kings County taxpayers as a whole, with one-third remaining the responsibility of adjacent property owners. According to an historical account written two years later: "This gave general satisfaction, and the people, glad to be freed from this overshadowing burden, gladly paid the one-third cost which was levied upon them." This account also stated that: "Notwithstanding its great width and three drives, it is hardly too wide to accommodate the vast number of carriages that throng it every pleasant summer after noon. The common verdict is, that no finer drive of its length can be found in this country."¹¹³

By the beginning of 1879, the worst of the business crisis was over and Stranahan submitted the first *Annual Report of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners* since 1874. During the hiatus, the structure of the Park Commission had been the

focus of a great deal of local political maneuvering. In 1875, Mayor Hunter proposed putting the existing unsalaried Park Commission, which Stranahan controlled, in charge of parkway building only, and putting a new salaried Park Commission, receiving \$9,000 per annum, in charge of the completed park. A *Brooklyn Eagle* editorial came out against this proposal, urging the Common Council to refuse to appoint the new commission, thereby preventing Mayor Hunter "...from carrying out his pique against Stranahan, at a cost of nine thousand dollars per annum to the taxpayers..."¹⁴ The proposal failed. One year later, in 1876, a proposal was put forth to eliminate the Park Commission and put all parks, plazas, squares and public places in the City of Brooklyn under the control of the Department of City Works, subject to the direction of the Common Council.¹⁵ This proposal failed as well.

In the report, Stranahan summarized the work done on the park and parkways since 1874, and pleaded for an increased budget to improve park maintenance. He also admonished property owners along Eastern Parkway to remember that neither the city or the park commissioners were responsible for the change in the real estate climate that had come with the depression.¹⁶ Property owners were getting anxious because development was failing to occur in the parkway neighborhood.

A substantial portion of Stranahan's report was devoted to the issue of Coney Island, where the park commissioners had been able to secure a 70 acre piece of land and build a concourse and two open shelters. Stranahan wanted all of Coney Island placed under the "wise" supervision of the park commissioners, in order to preserve the beach for the free use of the public for healthful recreation. He was concerned that if the island was not put under the care of the park commissioners, before long it would ".....become a vast and anomalous seaside conglomeration of hotels, pavilions and meretricious exhibitions, and

shows, presenting a straggling, incongruous and most undesirable appearance, and, in large measure, disappointing if not destroying the public expectations."¹¹⁷

Stranahan argued the cause by stressing its forward-looking stance. "The parks, the suburban improvements, such as the Ocean Parkway, the Concourse and other works at Coney Island, were projected by the Commissioners with reference to the demands of the future. They foresaw to a large extent what would follow, and their plans, which then looked so formidable, are already recognized as not exceeding the demand for them. They were plans not for a season but for coming years, and this is an element in all the undertakings of the Commissioners to the consideration of which, our citizens have not always given proper weight."¹¹⁸ This statement also reflects a shift in thinking about the two built parkways. The park commission, and Brooklyn citizens at large, had come to think of Ocean Parkway as by far the more important.

For the next three years, Stranahan continued to push for control over Coney Island and more money to maintain the park and parkways, but neither were forthcoming. Stranahan retired from the park commission in 1882, after more than 22 years as its president, a post he had served in without compensation. He left amid some controversy, because when the new board was installed it conducted an audit of the park commission's books and found a \$10,000 error. When this was brought to Stranahan's attention, he immediately wrote a check for this amount out of his own pocket.¹¹⁹

Stranahan was held to be the brains and the force behind the parkway plan.¹²⁰ A popular recounting of the time held that: "He was the father of the splendid system of boulevards, the Ocean Parkway and Eastern Parkway, which give to Brooklyn a system of drives unsurpassed by any in the world."¹²¹ Those who had opposed him disparaged him by saying: "Mr. Stranahan is the Baron Haussmann of Brooklyn." Or alternately: "Baron Haussmann is the Stranahan of

Paris."¹²² In the popular Brooklyn press, Olmsted and Vaux's names were rarely mentioned after they stopped working for the Park Commission.

According to Styrett: "That James Stranahan ever finished his task was a tribute to perseverance in the face of public hostility and dissatisfaction. He had to deal with Martin Kalbfleisch, who refused to approve the appropriations ordered by the legislature until he was forced to act by a court order. Mayor Hunter, who spent a disproportionate share of his administration quarreling with Stranahan, was, according to the Republican diagnosis, suffering from an obscure malady known as "Stranahanic mania." The *Eagle* attacked the commissioners for neglecting the smaller parks, one of which was termed "a barren burlesque of a pleasure spot." Property holders assessed for the construction of Prospect Park, held indignation meetings; and residents of Flatbush had their assessments removed by the courts. Through all this sniping and opposition Stranahan proceeded with an imperturbable determination that was a marvel to his admirers and an annoyance to his critics."¹²³

Stranahan left Brooklyn with a large public park and over eight miles of parkways. Both Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway had become popular pleasure drives, although Ocean Parkway was by far the more popular. Ocean Parkway led through picturesque open countryside, and ended at the beach on Coney Island, which was rapidly turning into a popular summer resort. Several riding clubs, a number of hotels, and some large homes had been built along its length. ¹²⁴

Eastern Parkway, on the other hand, ran through a less pristine area and had no public attraction at its end. From the park, it led past the East Side Lands, whose fate was still unresolved, through a long area of partially graded and subdivided properties that remained for the most part unbuilt, and ended unceremoniously in "a stone heap,"¹²⁵ a steep hillside down which a narrow,

winding path led towards the immigrant German-Jewish community of East New York.¹²⁶ Development along the parkway and in the surrounding platted neighborhood still hadn't occurred to any great extent. The flanking boulevards and alleys were only partially laid out, and just a few houses had been built.

Blacks remained living in the area near the end of Eastern Parkway, although Weeksville and Carrville had been disrupted, and were no longer distinct black communities, because white speculators had bought property in the area and subdivided it for sale, forcing many blacks out. Many of the community's dwellings were demolished because they were askew of the new rectangular property lines. The Citizen's Union Cemetery was abandoned.¹²⁷

Although Eastern Parkway was heavily used as a pleasure drive between Bedford Avenue and the park, its outer reaches were much less used. Because not many people lived in the vicinity, the far end of the parkway was poorly supervised. The annual report of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners of 1882, issued by the board that replaced Stranahan, complained that many trees near the end of the parkway had needed replacement during the previous year, because they had either died or been destroyed by "malicious persons." Property was "frequently wantonly destroyed" and cattle, goats, and swine were allowed to run free on the parkway.¹²⁸

With Stranahan no longer on the park commission, the parkway plan languished. The concept would linger, but it would be poorly interpreted and poorly implemented. Later commissioners would build lesser "green" streets and call them parkways.

In the 1880's and 1890's, commissioners used the term "parkway" very loosely and designated ordinary city streets as parkways in order to have them put under the control of the park commissioners, with the hopes of impacting real estate development in certain areas. In the mid-1890's various Park

Commissioners added new parks, built monuments in Prospect Park and cultural institutions along Eastern Parkway, and sought to extend the parkway system. Eastern Parkway was extended northward to a new public park at Ridgewood, but the extension had a different form than the original parkway--much narrower and without the tree-lined malls--and never really became a part of it. After the city of Brooklyn consolidated with the city of New York in 1898, and the Brooklyn Park Commissioner became just one of a three-member park board responsible for parks throughout the entire consolidated New York metropolitan area, Brooklyn's parkway plan lost its prominence and ceased to be promoted. In the 1940's, Robert Moses, in his role as New York City Park Commissioner, revived the idea of a regional metropolitan parkway system, but he conceived of the purpose of parkways differently than Olmsted and Vaux had, and the parkways he built had a very different form than Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway. (We will return to this in Chapter Three.)

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The Parkway Plan for Brooklyn was conceived and implemented during a short period of time when a confluence of factors made it possible. The existence of a strong, stable, and autonomous Park Commission in Brooklyn, not subject to the shifting whims of local politics because it was empowered by the state, was a crucial factor. The existence of a strong and unwavering advocate for the plan on the Park Commission, a man who had a formidable personality and indomitable will, was also an important factor.

The scale of the plan, and the relative swiftness with which it was implemented, are impressive. The completeness of the implementation is also

impressive. When Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway were built, they were built in their entirety. Although the parkway plan implemented was a compromise from Olmsted and Vaux's initial design concept—the initial concept was for curvilinear parkways, responding to the topography—once the parkway design had been settled on, it was built substantially as designed. The design was not diluted or compromised during implementation.

The parkway plan was a collaborative undertaking. The design idea was articulated by Olmsted and Vaux, but the force behind its implementation was Stranahan. The idea of broad streets connecting parks was not original to Olmsted and Vaux. A similar idea had been proposed earlier for Brooklyn—T. W. Field's plan of 1860—and well-know examples existed in European cities. What Olmsted and Vaux did was to take the idea of streets connecting parks and give distinctive physical form to it, and to develop theoretical arguments for that form. They used these theoretical arguments to support the idea of a large-scale plan for Brooklyn, based on the street form they designed. The street form and the arguments used to support it, were not wholly new. Streets with a similar form existed in European cities, and were known to the designers. The theoretical arguments they developed derived from aesthetic theories that had been developed by Andrew Jackson Downing and others. However, Olmsted and Vaux made these things their own by articulately connecting aesthetic concerns with street design, by giving the street form they designed the new name of "parkway," and by envisioning a new scale at which streets connecting parks could be laid out to structure future city development. We sill explore these things further in the following chapter.

¹Styrett, 40.

²Snyder-Grenier, 5; Ment (1979), 29.

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- ¹Snyder-Grenier, 3, 276-278.
- ²Snyder-Grenier.
- ³Ment (1979), 30
- ⁴Ment (1979), 31.
- ⁵Snyder-Grenier; Ment; Landmarks Preservation Commission, 18 August 1970, No. 8.
- ⁶Stiles (1867-70), 615.
- ⁷Stiles (1884), 230.
- ⁸Ment (1979), 67.
- ⁹Stiles(1867-70), 635-820; Ment (1979, 6).
- ¹⁰Stiles (1867-70), Ment (1979).
- ¹¹Ment (1979), 13.
- ¹²Stiles (1884), 265-266.
- ¹³Stiles (1884), 194.
- ¹⁴BE 29 January 1868
- ¹⁵Stiles (1867-70), 618.
- ¹⁶Styrett, 141.
- ¹⁷Stiles (1867-70), 619.
- ¹⁸Graff, 107.
- ¹⁹BE 1 February 1871.
- ²⁰Stiles (1867-70), 619; BE 8 February 1870.
- ²¹Later, after the eleventh ward was split into two districts, the assessments were extended to include the newly created twentieth ward as well. The seventh district was also split into two districts, but the more northeasterly new nineteenth district was not included in the revised assessment area. BE 29 January 1868.
- ²²This is chronicled in many newspaper articles of the time, particularly: BE 29 January 1868; BE 10 March 1870; BE 26 February 1875.
- ²³Viele was the same engineer who had prepared the original plan for Central Park which was later discarded in favor of Olmsted and Vaux's design.
- ²⁴PoFLO: VI, 19; Addendum by Calvert Vaux included in the Annual Report of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners for the year of 1864; AR64, 80.
- ²⁵Olmsted and Kimball, 10-11. During his stay in California, Olmsted also worked on a design for Mountain View Cemetery in Oakland, a design for the College of California in Berkeley, and advised on the design of a public park in San Francisco.
- ²⁶Olmsted, letter, March 12, 1865 (quoted in Graff, 117).
- ²⁷AR64,
- ²⁸Apparently this coaxing took the form of both cajoling and berating. Graff, 117-120.
- ²⁹Rosenzweig and Blackmar, 124
- ³⁰Olmsted's three books were: *Seaboard Slave States*, *Journey in Texas*, and *Back Country*.
- ³¹PoFLO: SSI; Rosenzweig and Blackmar.
- ³²Rosenzweig and Blackmar, 131.
- ³³Rosenzweig and Blackmar; Fein.
- ³⁴Rosenzweig and Blackmar, 142-49.
- ³⁵Graff, 55-62.
- ³⁶Styrett, 41.
- ³⁷Styrett, 46.
- ³⁸Styrett, 42
- ³⁹Styrett, 49, 50.
- ⁴⁰Styrett, 48
- ⁴¹The process began in earnest in 1870, when both branches of the state legislature were for a short time controlled by Democrats. Styrett, 51.
- ⁴²Styrett, 52, 91.

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- ⁴⁵Styrett, 142; BE 4 January 1871; BE 5 January 1874; BE 4 January 1875.
- ⁴⁶Styrett, 20.
- ⁴⁷Stiles (1884), 598; Styrett, 44; BE 8 March 1871.
- ⁴⁸BE 8 March 1871.
- ⁴⁹McLaughlin, 40.
- ⁵⁰This sentiment was expressed in a letter date Oct. 5, 1871 to William Hammond Hall, a young engineer and landscape architect. From the PoFLO: VI, 468.
- ⁵¹AR65, 93-111; (PoFLO: SSI, 81, 83, 101).
- ⁵²AR65, 94-96; (PoFLO: SSI, 86-87).
- ⁵³AR65, 112; (PoFLO: SSI, 102).
- ⁵⁴AR65, 94; (PoFLO: SSI, 83).
- ⁵⁵AR65, 116 -117; (PoFLO: SSI, 105-106).
- ⁵⁶AR66, 141; (PoFLO: VI, 157).
- ⁵⁷AR66, 142; (PoFLO: VI, 157).
- ⁵⁸BE 29 January, 1868; The East Parkway and Boulevards in the City of Brooklyn.
- ⁵⁹Connolly, 42.
- ⁶⁰AR67, 176. (PoFLO: SSI, 115).
- ⁶¹AR67, 178-179; (PoFLO: SSI, 116-137).
- ⁶²AR67, 197; (PoFLO: SSI, 134).
- ⁶³There is some ambiguity regarding the original designed width of Eastern Parkway, because written and drawn descriptions are slightly at odds with each other and there are dimensioning errors in Olmsted and Vaux's drawn plan of Eastern Parkway. The main ambiguity concerns the overall street width and the related width of the central roadway. The written description included in Olmsted and Vaux's Annual Report to the Brooklyn Park Commissioners of 1868 implies a 200 foot wide parkway and their associated drawing of the parkway plan, which indicates alignments with existing street platting elements, only makes sense with a 200 foot wide parkway having a 55 foot wide central roadway, even though the dimensions shown on the drawing indicate a 65 foot center roadway, and give no overall dimension for the parkway. I have chosen to conclude that the original design intended the parkway to be 200 feet wide. Eastern Parkway was actually built 210 feet wide, with a different block platting configuration than shown in Olmsted and Vaux's drawn plan. This is described in detail in Chapter Four.
- ⁶⁴AR67, 198; (PoFLO: SSI, 138).
- ⁶⁵AR67, 199; (PoFLO: SSI, 139).
- ⁶⁶Successful businessmen who had grown up in the country.
- ⁶⁷Stiles (1867-70), 633.
- ⁶⁸Landmarks Preservation Commission report of 18 August 1970.
- ⁶⁹Connolly, 8.
- ⁷⁰BE 29 January 1868.
- ⁷¹AR67, 200; (PoFLO: SSI, 140-141).
- ⁷²BE 29 January 1868.
- ⁷³BE 29 January 1868
- ⁷⁴New York State Laws of 1868, Chapter 631.
- ⁷⁵AR70, 43.
- ⁷⁶AR74-79, 42.
- ⁷⁷AR68, 272.
- ⁷⁸AR 68, 272.
- ⁷⁹Probably the route originally proposed by T. W. Field; noted in the PoFLO: VI, p. 335.
- ⁸⁰Bergen, 7.
- ⁸¹BE 21 February 1870; BE 25 February 1870; BE 26 February 1870; BE 10 March 1870; BE 21 March 1871; BE 29 March 1871; BE 30 March 1871; AR87.
- ⁸²AR68, 312.

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- ¹¹Petition from the residents of Gravesend to the Legislature of the State of New York, 1879.
- ¹²Bergen, 4.
- ¹³Petition to the Legislature of the State of New York, 18 February, 1870.
- ¹⁴Petition from the residents of Gravesend to the Legislature of the State of New York, 1879.
- ¹⁵BE 3 March 1870.
- ¹⁶BE 3 March 1870.
- ¹⁷AR70.
- ¹⁸Since the 1850's there had been a proliferation of light, spring-suspension carriages.
- ¹⁹AR71, Commissioner's Report.
- ²⁰BE 29 March 1871.
- ²¹BE 1 February 1871.
- ²²BE 29 March 1871; BE 8 March 1871.
- ²³BE 8 March 1871.
- ²⁴AR72, Commissioners Report.
- ²⁵AR72, 528.
- ²⁶Stiles (1884), 924.
- ²⁷Brooklyn Eagle, 18 November 1876.
- ²⁸AR73; AR74-79.
- ²⁹These statistics are quoted in the Mayor's Message of 1874,. BE 5 January 1874.
- ³⁰BE 5 January 1874.
- ³¹The East Parkway and Boulevards in the City of Brooklyn, 9.
- ³²The East Parkway and Boulevards in the City of Brooklyn, 10.
- ³³AR74-79, 44.
- ³⁴Stiles (1884), 186.
- ³⁵Brooklyn Eagle, 18 March 1876.
- ³⁶Resolution passed on 28 February, 1878, by the Board of Supervisors of the County of Kings, quoted in Bergen, 7.
- ³⁷Stiles (1884), 172.
- ³⁸Stiles (1884), 172.
- ³⁹Bergen, 3-4.
- ⁴⁰Petition from the residents of Gravesend to the Legislature of the State of New York, 1879.
- ⁴¹Stiles (1884), 172.
- ⁴²BE 4 January 1875.
- ⁴³BE 5 January 1876.
- ⁴⁴AR74-79, 43.
- ⁴⁵AR74-79, 55.
- ⁴⁶AR74-79, 54.
- ⁴⁷The Reverend Stockwell, in Stiles (1884), 172-173.
- ⁴⁸The Reverend Stockwell, in Stiles (1884), 172.
- ⁴⁹Stiles (1884), 598.
- ⁵⁰From an unidentified daily paper, quoted in Stiles (1884), 598.
- ⁵¹Styrett, 142.
- ⁵²Stiles (1884), 186; Brooklyn Eagle, 18 March 1876.
- ⁵³Brooklyn Eagle, 5 September 1895.
- ⁵⁴Brooklyn Eagle, 21 March 1897.
- ⁵⁵New Muse Community Museum of Brooklyn; The Robinson maps of 1886 show the former grounds of the Citizen's Union Cemetery platted with streets and blocks.
- ⁵⁶AR82, 38.

CHAPTER TWO

CONTEXT AND FORM

The whole nineteenth-century world flocked to Paris to enjoy the banquet; it was Paris [...] which was looked to as the epitome of all the modern city had to offer.

(Mark Girouard, 1985)

...the new Parisian boulevard was the most spectacular urban innovation of the nineteenth century, and the decisive breakthrough in the modernization of the traditional city.

(Marshall Berman, 1982)

Olmsted and Vaux developed their Parkway Plan for Brooklyn during a time of immense and widespread urban change, and they were very aware of it. They lived in the midst of the unprecedented growth occurring in New York City, and they knew enough of the world to know that similar growth was occurring in other American and European cities. They recognized that the changes they were experiencing in their daily lives were only the beginnings of an urbanization process that would continue and would accelerate. They spoke of this process in bucolic terms as a "townward drift," but they understood that cities were about to become very big, far bigger than cities had ever been before.¹

Olmsted and Vaux's feelings about big cities were mixed. They correlated increased urbanization with positive, progressive things like political liberty, advances in education, the invention of labor saving devices such as railroads and telegraphs, and the growing influence of women on the progress of

civilization.² They recognized and were excited by the cultural and social advantages of city life. But they also perceived city life to have disadvantages in the form of "evils" associated with density, which affected people's health and morals.³ Over all, however, they were hopeful about the potential for large cities. They believed it was possible to build cities in a way that would allow the advantages of town life but counteract the evils. Their goal as designers was to develop the physical design solutions that would help achieve this.

This chapter is about design form. While understanding that design forms emerge in social and political contexts and are mediated by them, the concern here is primarily with the physical. The intent is to offer analysis useful to urban designers concerned with tangible physical issues.

What follows is an analysis of the designed physical elements of the Parkway Plan. First, I summarize the design program for the plan, the combination of Olmsted and Vaux's aesthetic and social concerns and the pragmatic and political constraints they were working under. Second, I discuss the built forms that the designers looked to as models for design solutions to meet this program, as well as those they reacted against. Third, I compare the physical elements of the Parkway Plan with those of the main design models and analyze what was new and different about them.

OLMSTED AND VAUX'S DESIGN PROGRAM

The social and aesthetic concerns that Olmsted and Vaux brought to their work in Brooklyn are articulated in their writings of the time, including their reports to the Brooklyn Park Commissioners, various essays prepared for public

address or publication, and personal and business letters. They attributed the problems associated with large towns to too much density, and to its relentlessness. Because of density, city air was polluted and unhealthful. Because of density, people were forced into constant contact with strangers on the street, and this face-to-face and yet emotionally distanced contact was both wearing and unnerving to the mind. These conditions contributed to the degeneration and demoralization of urban populations, leading to shorter lives, disease, vice, and crime.⁴

Olmsted and Vaux's design concerns, meant to address these issues, focused on three spatial forms: urban parks, suburbs, and parkways.

Parks

Olmsted and Vaux believed that a large, naturally designed public park in a city was the starting point for counteracting the debilitating aspects of density and improving the conditions of urban life. It was the new urban spatial element that would serve as an antidote to density because it would be an opposite environment to the business city: open rather than enclosed; natural rather than architectural. In a natural park, people could find relief from the stresses they encountered in the city's streets and regain physical and mental health. They would also gain instruction toward their cultural refinement.⁵

In the simplest terms, a natural park would improve city people's physical health because it would have open spaces, filled with trees, sunlight, and fresh air.⁶ City air would be "disinfected by sunlight and foliage."⁷ But a properly designed natural park would do more. A park carefully designed to have secluded pastoral landscapes, offering views of meadows, pastures, and still waters, would be conducive to calm contemplation and so give mental

recuperation to park visitors—as opposed to rugged landscapes which would bring to mind effort. Mental recuperation would give people the ability “.....to maintain a temperate, good-natured and healthy state of mind...”⁸ and strengthen them for productive labor.⁹ A properly designed natural park would also educate rough people of the lower classes to have more refined tastes and a higher standard of morals. It would exercise “.....a distinctly harmonizing and refining influence upon the most unfortunate and most lawless classes of the city,—an influence favorable to courtesy, self-control, and temperance.”¹⁰

Olmsted and Vaux believed that parks should have landscapes which “..... suggested to an observer an easy gratification of a great variety of the elementary human impulses.....”¹¹ They should offer a succession of simple natural pleasures that could be gained through easy movement.¹² In other words, park visitors were seen primarily as viewers and park landscapes primarily as elements for visual consumption. Aesthetic leisure might be a good term to describe the activities Olmsted and Vaux envisioned taking place in parks. Their own description was at times more technical. They spoke in terms of recreation, and distinguished between two types: exertive and receptive. The former were those requiring physical or mental exertion, such as sports games or chess. The latter were those which people could engage in without conscious effort, such as music and art. This is the type of recreation that was supposed to take place in parks, and the only kind.¹³ Sports activities could be provided for in small public places distributed around the city, and Olmsted and Vaux were not interested in designing these primarily functional recreational spaces. They were certainly not interested in even considering the idea that parks might provide for such activities. Parks also had no purpose providing for vernacular entertainments or commercial amusements. Olmsted and Vaux didn’t consider these possible

purposes of parks significant enough to even argue against. They were interested in designing public spaces that would express a unified aesthetic vision.

Essentially, Olmsted and Vaux believed parks should provide an experience akin to the experience of art: "...we must study to secure a combination of elements which shall invite and stimulate the simplest, purest and most primeval action of the poetic element of human nature..."¹⁴ Their linking of pastoral landscapes with artistic experience, well-being and strong moral character followed English romantic landscape design traditions that had been popularized among the American upper classes through the influential, popular writings of Andrew Jackson Downing.¹⁵

The aesthetic of romantic pastoralism was embraced by many upper class New Yorkers, but not all. As they made arguments for their desired park aesthetics Olmsted and Vaux were at times forced to answer critics who thought parks should be designed more formally to provide for another type of activity, namely large, gay, gatherings of crowds.¹⁶ Those advocating this looked to the formal traditions of French landscape design, which provided public spaces of more civic grandeur. To respond, Olmsted and Vaux distinguished between two types of receptive recreation: neighborly and gregarious. They acknowledged the value of both and embraced the need to provide for both, but they advocated separate urban spaces for each. Parks would provide for neighborly forms of receptive recreation, small groups of family or friends engaged in simple, contemplative activities. Special promenade spaces outside parks, or within parks but on the periphery, would provide for gregarious forms of receptive recreation involving large crowds.¹⁷

Once embraced, the argument for building public spaces for gregarious recreation was sometimes hard to make. In an address given to a Boston audience in 1870, Olmsted remarked: "Purely gregarious recreation seems to be

generally looked upon in New England society as childish and savage, because, I suppose, there is so little of what we call intellectual gratification in it. We are inclined to engage in it indirectly, furtively, and with complication."¹⁸

Suburbs

Olmsted and Vaux's aesthetic convictions encouraged them to think in terms of urban spatial differentiation, and they applied this concept to the city as a whole. They believed, and advocated, that business areas and residential areas should be separate from each other and have different physical forms. They conceded that the spatial form of business areas would, of necessity, be determined by the needs of commerce, and so they would be densely built and have narrow, straight streets allowing efficient and direct travel and communication.¹⁹ But they felt that dwelling areas should be more open. "We may admit that commerce requires that in some parts of a town there shall be an arrangement of buildings, and a character of streets and of traffic in them which will establish conditions of corruption and of irritation, physical and mental. But commerce does not require the same conditions to be maintained in all parts of a town."²⁰ In residential areas, blocks could be developed with wide spaces between homes, and streets could be tree-lined and follow the natural topography.

In other words, dwelling areas could be suburban middle landscapes, with physical characteristics between those of the natural park and the urban city. English romantic landscape design traditions had been used in the design of private gardens for the American upper class since the 1830's, but Olmsted and Vaux's idea was to apply these same aesthetics to the living quarters of the American middle class as well. The idea embraced traditions of suburbia that

had been developing in England since the 1750's. It embodied the complex and compelling vision of the modern family freed from the corruption of the city, and restored to harmony with nature.²¹

Parkways

Olmsted and Vaux brought their aesthetic concerns to street design with the Parkway Plan for Brooklyn. Functionally, parkways would link parks with suburbs. But the conceptual idea behind parkways was that they would be the new urban spatial element that would extend the park's aesthetic benefits beyond the park. Pragmatic considerations and political realities meant that in America large parks would be built at a distance from the city center, because putting a park in the center would be very costly and would obstruct the flow of business, and Olmsted and Vaux were respectful of this reality.²² Therefore, getting to a park would involve a journey and the aesthetic experience of this journey was an important design consideration. Parkway were intended to provide a path that people could use to get to parks without the journey being either too fatiguing or discordant with park purposes. Importantly, parkways would also give everyday and incidental measures of park benefits, because people would encounter them in their daily routines and use them even if they weren't traveling to a park. This was important because: ".....we cannot expect [...] that all the inhabitants of a large town would go so far as the Park every day, or so often as it is desirable [...]."²³ For ease of encounter, Olmsted and Vaux conceptualized the parkways as thoroughly integrated in the domestic street system. The American Cyclopaedia entry for "park," which Olmsted wrote in 1875, describes their idea and also reveals the importance the designers placed on parkways: "....the most important improvement made of late in the general

plan of cities has been the introduction or increase in number and breadth of parkways which, if judiciously laid out, become principal channels or trunk lines of common traffic, to which the ordinary streets serve as feeders, so that a man wishing to go to a considerable distance shall find it a saving of time and trouble to take one of them on his way."²⁴

The linear nature of the parkways made them ideal places for promenade activities, in carriages and on foot. The designers conceived of the parkways foremost as pleasure drives. "They should be so planned and constructed as never to be noisy and seldom crowded, and so that the straight-forward movement of pleasure carriages need never be obstructed, unless at absolutely necessary crossings, by slow-going heavy vehicles used for commercial purposes."²⁵ However, since they wanted parkways to be integrated with the domestic street system, they recognized that they must be designed to accommodate normal domestic functions: ".....we cannot say that the transportation of merchandise should be altogether interdicted in the domestic quarters of a town, as it is in a park [.....]. On the contrary it is evidently desirable that every dwelling house would be accessible by means of suitable paved streets to heavy wheeled vehicles."²⁶ Combined aesthetic and functional concerns led Olmsted and Vaux to design the parkways with specialized linear channels for different types of traffic: a wide center roadway for pleasure carriages, wide tree-lined malls for promenades on foot, and narrow roadways along each side for slower commercial traffic and to give access to houses. The separation of traffic types they had first employed in their design for Central Park was here re-interpreted as designed horizontal spatial differentiation within a single, wide street right-of-way.

Pragmatic and Political Constraints and Opportunities in Brooklyn

Olmsted and Vaux were working under a particular set of pragmatic and political constraints and opportunities in Brooklyn. In general, the success of Central Park in New York gave them considerable cultural authority as public space designers. Nonetheless, public space design in a democratic society is a public process. As the plan for Brooklyn evolved, Olmsted and Vaux modified their design ideas in order to satisfy the Brooklyn Park Commissioners and to meet public criticism, just as they had modified their original ideas for Central Park.²⁷ The designers had to meet the cultural and political expectations of their employers (the park commissioners) and their employers' constituents (the public).

To satisfy the public, Olmsted and Vaux had to make pragmatic arguments for building the parkways. They had to sell the parkway idea to Brooklyn citizens, and many of the most influential citizens were involved in real estate speculation. Accordingly, Olmsted and Vaux enlarged their definition of what constituted park benefits to include economic benefits as well as aesthetic benefits. They argued that the parkways would increase property values in their vicinity, citing evidence from Paris, and also improve the attraction of the city to visitors who would come and spend money. For pragmatic American businessmen, public works had to be justified on economic grounds as well as social grounds. Olmsted and Vaux also had to make pragmatic compromises, the largest being laying out the parkways on a grid street pattern.

In terms of implementing the parkways, Stranahan was the key to overriding local political opposition that surfaced against the parkways. The park commission was appointed by an act of the state legislature and during Stranahan's tenure they served under the state's auspices. Through Stranahan's

connections in the state legislature, and with the support of wealthy Brooklyn landowners, he was able to push legislation through at the state level rather than battling every issue out at the municipal or county level. Politically, however, it was impossible to cut new parkways through the heavily urbanized areas of the city, although Stranahan and Olmsted and Vaux might have liked to have done so in order to achieve full realization of their ideal urban parkway plan.

Democratic political realities, and the constraints of a democratic municipal pocketbook, would not allow such possibilities.

BUILT FORM MODELS

When Olmsted and Vaux presented their Parkway Plan for Brooklyn they said that they knew of that no perfect models for suburban park approaches of the type they envisioned, but in their presentation, and in subsequent writings, they acknowledged certain built forms that influenced their design.

American Streets: the Negative Model

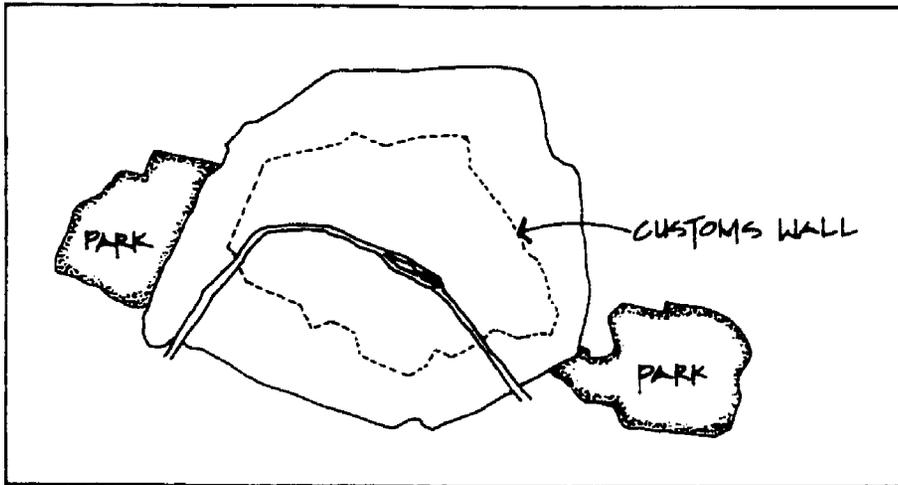
They very much disliked the sameness of American urban streets and the ubiquitous grid. "Each of the thoroughfares of this system consists of a way in the center, which is paved with reference solely to sustaining the transportation upon wheels of the heaviest merchandise, of a gutter on each side of this wheel-way, having occasional communication with underground channels or carrying off water, and a curb which restricts the passage of wheels from a raised way for the travel of persons on foot, the surface of which, to avoid their sinking in the mud, is commonly covered with flags or brick."²⁸ There was nothing aesthetic

about mid-nineteenth century American urban streets. City streets were messy and chaotic. They presented a whirl of commercial activity and a jumble of different ethnic aesthetics. Olmsted and Vaux wanted to impose a unified naturalistic aesthetic on some city streets instead. As they had for park design, they again looked to European landscape design traditions for models.

Parisian Boulevards: The Positive Model

The city building work going on in Second Empire Paris was unquestionably the main model for the parkway plan, and for the specifics of the parkway design. In Paris, Baron Georges Haussmann was undertaking a huge reconstruction of the city, under the auspices of the Emperor Napoleon III. The project was covered in the American press and so was well known, and Olmsted had personal experience of it. The work had begun about 1850, shortly after the Emperor came into power. At the time, the center of Paris was crowded and densely built, with outward physical growth constrained by an encircling customs wall that restricted the flow of goods in and out of the city. Most city streets were narrow, winding, and without trees. The reconstruction included tearing down the customs wall and expanding the city to encompass the surrounding suburbs (fauborgs). It also involved building a new park system and street network. Several large public parks were being built on the outskirts of the city and many smaller ones within the city were being renovated.

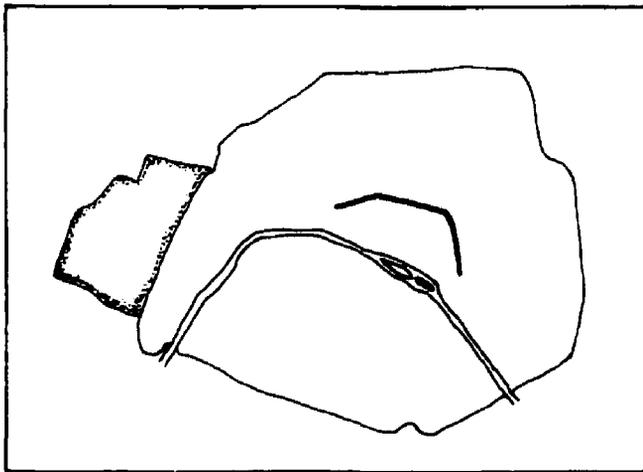
New streets were being cut through the dense city center, to open the city up (for both sanitary and political reasons) and to connect railroad stations with each other and with the center. Old buildings lying in the path of these streets were being torn down and replaced by six-story apartments buildings with regularized facades, to ensure their impressiveness, and ground floor cafes,



Haussmann's Expansion of Paris

restaurants and shops. New streets were also being built extending outward from the city center into the mostly rural suburbs, in order to spur new development. Collectively, these new streets were known as boulevards, although they were named both boulevards and avenues. They were wide and straight, and had generous sidewalks lined with trees. Below ground, they carried the city's new drainage and sewer infrastructure. The reconstruction of Paris was done at great social cost: many people, mostly the poor, were displaced from their inner city neighborhoods and relocated on the outskirts of the city.²⁹

This reconstruction is often referred to as the "Haussmannization of Paris."³⁰ It was compelled by the desire to stimulate economic activity and solidify political power. Napoleon III had come to power in the midst of a major economic recession. His authoritarian government was warily supported by a conservative national population and certain local bourgeoisie interests who feared the Paris-based workers socialist movement, which had won political gains in the revolution of 1848.³¹ As Napoleon's Prefect, Haussmann was charged with modernizing the city. Critics have argued that his goal was strategic

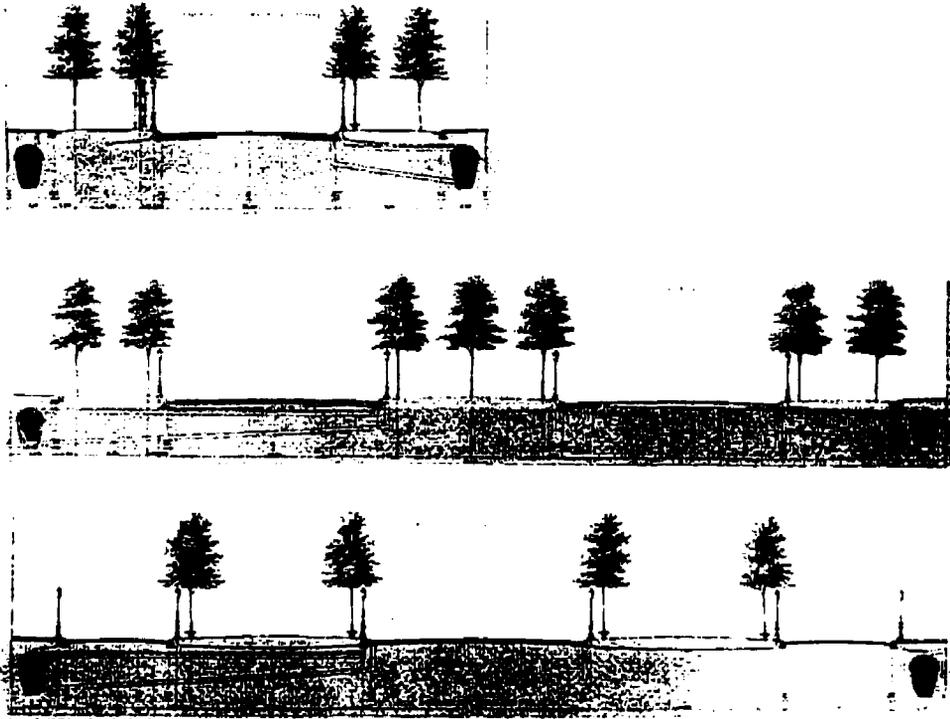


The Grands Boulevards

beautification: "The true goal of Haussmann's works was the securing of the city against civil war [...]. The width of the avenues was to prohibit the erection [of street barricades], and new streets were to provide the shortest routes between the barracks and the working-class sections."³² Haussmann himself acknowledged that a purpose of the new boulevards was to facilitate artillery fire and the movement of troops.³³

The social conditions and social impacts of Haussmann's work in Paris are well documented elsewhere.³⁴ Here, I will concentrate only on the physical aspects of the new boulevards.

Haussmann's boulevards were new, but they were not an entirely new street type. They were modeled on the Grands Boulevards, the eleven connected tree-lined streets that had been built as pleasure promenades on the raised ramparts of the abandoned city walls in the late Seventeenth century.³⁵ Initially urban fringe elements, by the 1850's these promenades had been well incorporated into the city's fabric and formed a three and a half mile long, 100 to 125 foot wide (they varied in width because the ramparts had varied in width), semi-circular,

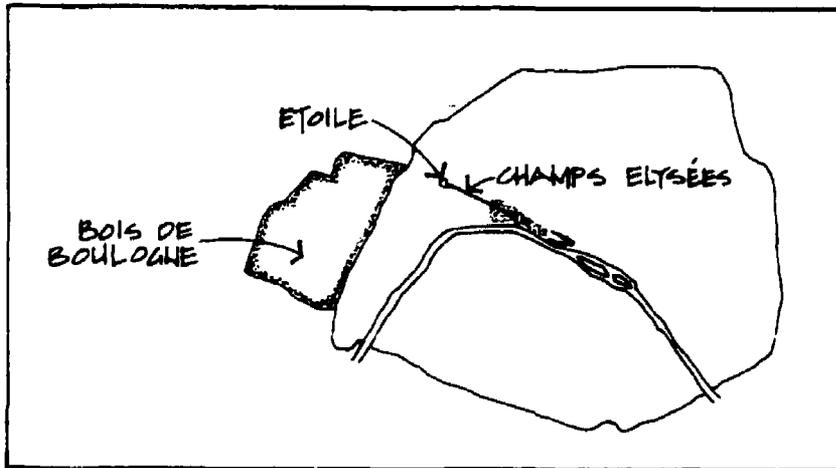


Adolphe Alphand's three boulevard types, from *Les Promenades de Paris*

tree-lined route through the northern part of the city. Haussmann's boulevards were modernized and formalized versions of these early boulevards.

Under Adolphe Alphand, Haussmann's chief landscape architect, three distinctly different boulevard forms were developed.³⁶ While they were not given formal names, they may descriptively be called boulevard streets, center median boulevards, and multi-way boulevards. The Boulevard Street was simply a wide street with exceptionally generous tree-lined sidewalks. The center median boulevard had two roadways, separated by a wide central mall planted with trees and landscaping, and tree-lined sidewalks. The Multi-way Boulevard had three roadways, a wide one in the center and two narrower ones along each side, separated by wide tree-lined malls.³⁷

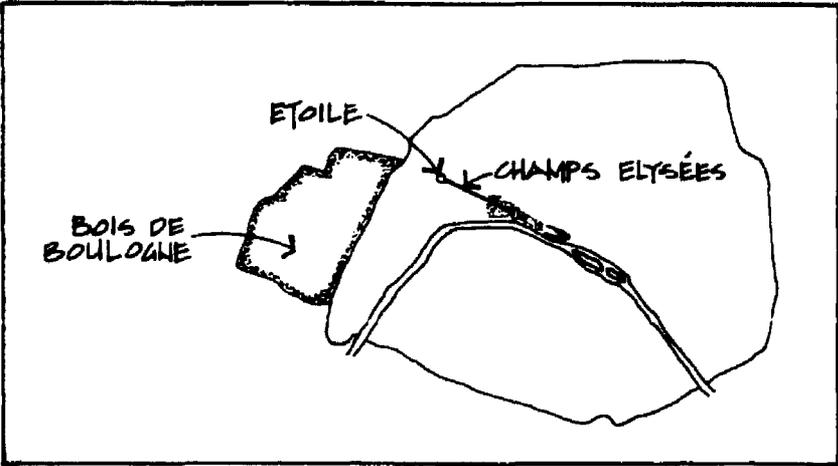
Olmsted and Vaux's parkway design directly derived from the new Paris boulevards, not the commercial boulevards being pushed through the old city

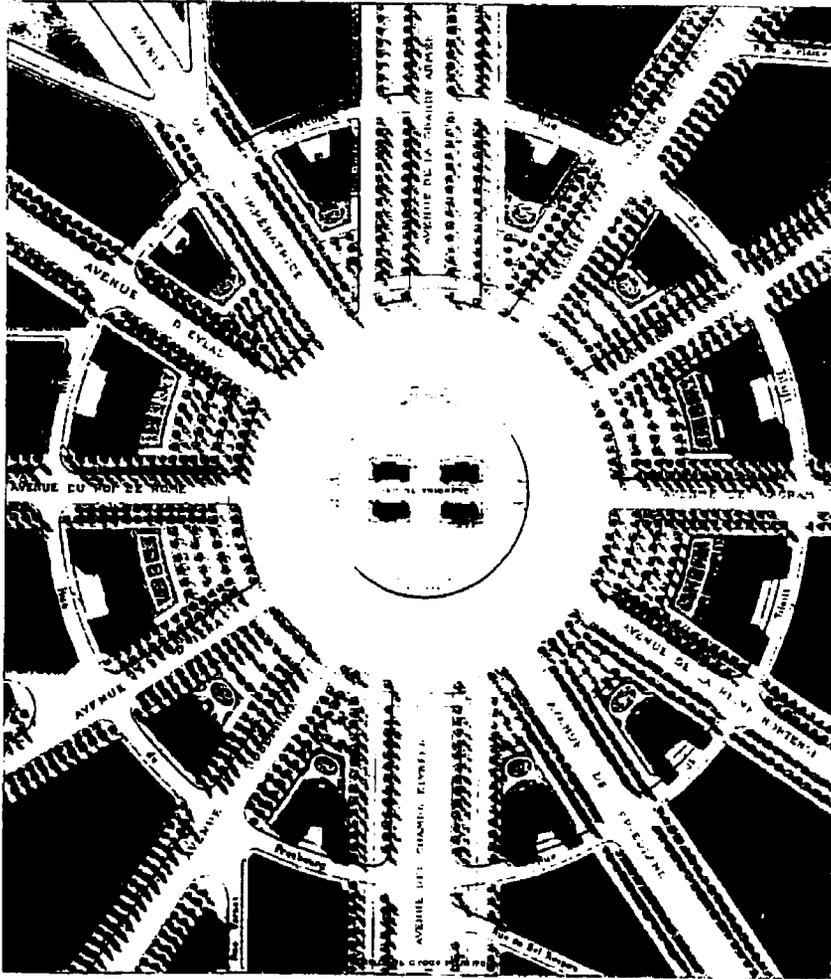


Northwestern Paris: conditions before the new multi-way boulevards

center, which were primarily of the "boulevard street" type, but the less intensively developed boulevards being built in suburban areas, which were primarily of the "multi-way" type. Most of these edge boulevards were being built in the northwest part of the city, in an area that contained some mansions on large estates but mostly open, rural land. The Champs Elysées was the main built feature in the landscape. It was a wide, tree-lined avenue that had been laid out in the Seventeenth century as the visual extension of the axis of the central allée of the royal Tuileries Garden. It was a mile and a quarter long and lined for about half of its length by the open park space of the Champs du Mars. It ended at a high point of land called the Etoile, beyond which ran a narrow road leading to the suburb of Neuilly.

By the 1850's the Champs Elysées had become a fashionable public promenade. A large triumphal arch, the Arc de Triomphe, had been built on the Etoile in 1806 to honor the victories of the first Napoleon's army.³⁸ Haussmann was building boulevards in this area in order to link the city center with the Bois de Boulogne, a former royal wood and hunting ground on the western

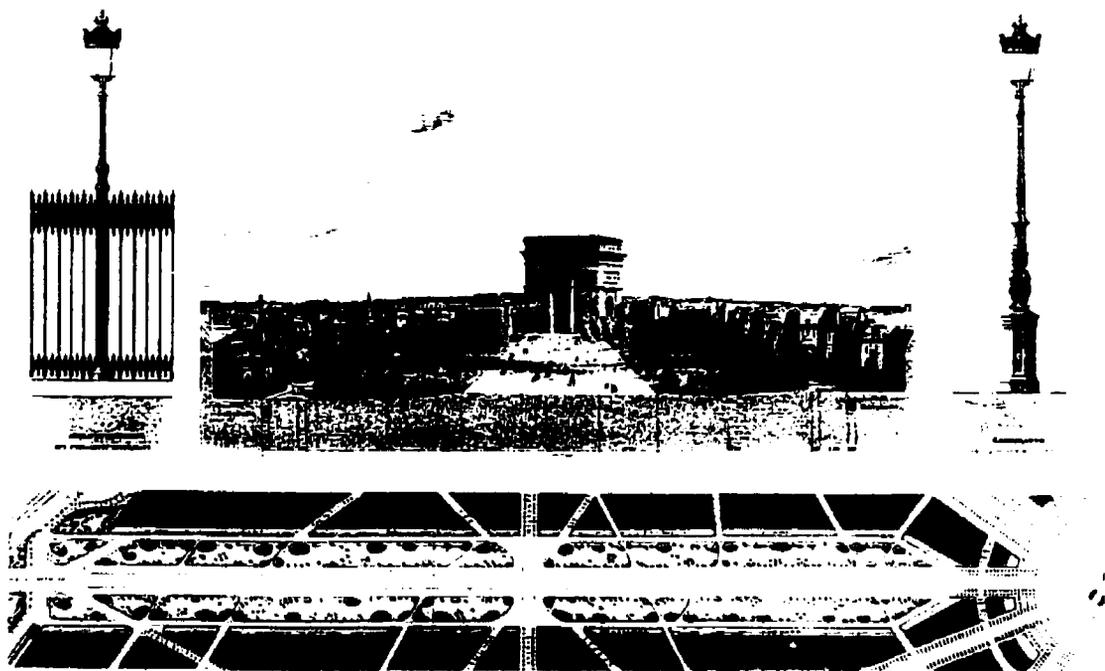




Plan of the Etoile, from Adolphe Alphand's *Les Promenades de Paris*

outskirts of that city that was being turned into a public park, and also to encourage fashionable development.³⁹ The centerpiece of Haussmann's plan for the area was a redesigned Etoile. It was formalized into a large tree-lined circle from which twelve streets radiated symmetrically, the Champs Elysées and eleven new boulevards.

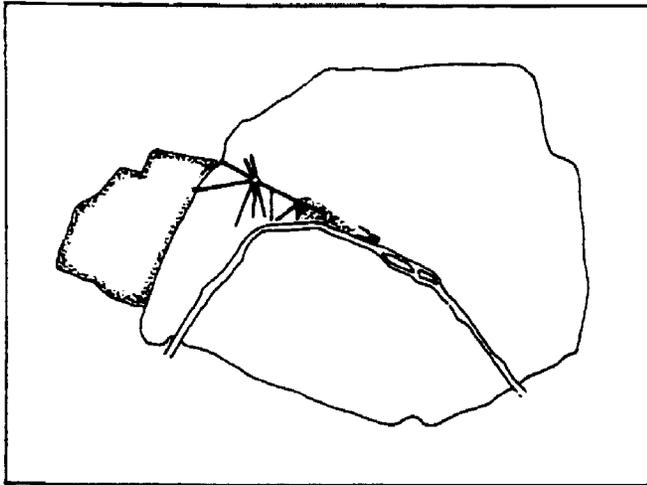
The Avenue de l'Impératrice, built in 1854, was the first of the new Etoile boulevards actually built. It was designed to be particularly wide and impressive because it led from the Etoile to the main entrance of the Bois de Boulogne. It was



The Avenue de l'Imperatrice, from Adolphe Alphand's *Les Promenades de Paris*

three-fourths of a mile long and almost 390 feet wide. It was designed with a wide central roadway (52 feet wide) bordered on both sides by wide raised pathways (39 feet wide). The center way was reserved for carriages and the paths were reserved one for pedestrians and the other for people on horseback. On the outside of the paths were broad park strips (102 feet wide) planted with dense clusters of trees and shrubs. On the outside of each park space was a narrow roadway, lined with sidewalks, on which freestanding villas fronted. Special building regulations required the houses to be set back about 32 feet from the sidewalk edge, behind landscaped yards, with a uniform cast-iron, ornamental fence at the sidewalk edge.⁴⁰

Olmsted had traveled to Paris in 1859 and had seen the Avenue de l'Imperatrice and was impressed by it. He noted that lots facing onto it were



The Etoile Boulevards

more valuable than those facing onto the Bois de Boulogne.⁴¹ Olmsted was also impressed by the Champs Elysées, especially his experience of the daily promenade crowds that gathered there. In his 1870 address to the American Social Science Association at the Lowell Institute, in Boston, he spoke of the Champs Elysées in terms of the gregarious activities he had witnessed there: "If I ask myself where I have experienced the most complete gratification of this instinct [gregarious recreations] in public and out of doors, among trees, I find that it has been in the promenade of the Champs Elysées."⁴²

The Champs Elysées was about 320 feet wide. At the time Olmsted would have seen it, it was divided into two differently designed sections. The eastern section, from the city center to the Rond Point, was configured as a boulevard of the boulevard street type. The western section, from the Rond Point to the Etoile, was configured as a multi-way boulevard, with especially wide malls containing multiple rows of trees.

Olmsted would likely have also seen some of the other multi-way boulevards being built around the Etoile: the Avenue du Roi de Rome, the

Avenue D'Iena, Avenue Josephine, Avenue Montaigne, and others. These boulevards ranged from a half mile to three-fourths of a mile long and averaged between 120 and 135 feet wide. They had narrower center roadways than the Champs Elysées, and malls only wide enough for a single row of trees.

Other Physical Design Models

Olmsted was also familiar with boulevards and promenade streets in other European cities. In his writings, he specifically mentioned the Unter Den Linden, in Berlin, and the alamedas of Spain and Portugal as positive design models.⁴³

The Unter Den Linden was mentioned in Olmsted and Vaux's 1868 Annual Report to the Brooklyn Park Commissioners, cited along with the Avenue de l'Imperatrice as an example of the fourth stage of street arrangements that preceded the fifth stage of street arrangements which was the parkway plan. The Unter Den Linden was a wide street, with a landscaped center mall, that led from the royal palace in the center of Berlin to the Brandenburg gate and a large public park, the Tiergarten, formerly a royal hunting ground, beyond. Although like the Champs Elysées it connected the city center with a park, it had a much more urban and architectural character. It led through a built-up part of the city and was lined with fine residences, hotels, and grand public buildings.⁴⁴

Olmsted referred to the alamedas of Spain and Portugal, briefly, in an address he made in 1870 to the American Social Science Association at the Lowell Institute, in Boston.⁴⁵ He spoke about them in terms of their promenade uses, but did not discuss particulars of their physical form.

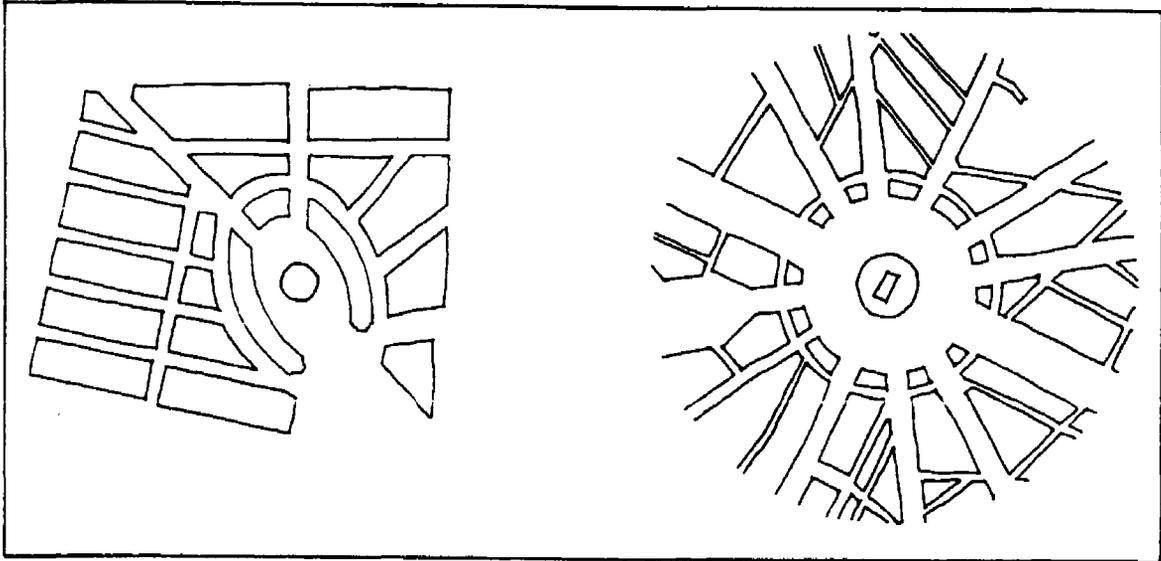
Alamedas were the tree-lined streets in Spanish cities on which the traditional evening stroll would take place. They were also called *paseo*, which

means promenade.⁴⁶ They took different physical forms, but they were generally long and wide streets, and always contained tree-shaded malls. The classic form was exemplified by the Ramblas, in Barcelona. It had been built around 1780 on the site of a filled-over creek and former city wall, taken down after a new wall was built further west to encompass outlying houses. The Ramblas connected the port with city gate and was laid out with a straight, 100-foot wide right-of-way, but the actual built-form of the street was irregular, with several jogs and widenings, because of how the urban fabric had built up around it. It had a wide center mall, 42 to 46 feet wide, lined by two rows of trees.⁴⁷

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PHYSICAL FORM

Olmsted and Vaux's parkways derived aspects of their physical form directly from the new Paris boulevards, and more incidentally from the boulevard type streets in other cities. Their writings most often refer to the Paris forms. On inspection, it is clear that there were many similarities between Olmsted and Vaux's parkways and the Haussmann's boulevards, but also big differences.

Olmsted and Vaux's conceptual plan for the Brooklyn parkways called for them to be laid out in a radial fashion, like the Etoile boulevards, but much less formally so. Ideally, the parkways would have radiated irregularly from Prospect Park and be neither very straight nor very level, whereas in Paris the boulevards radiated from the Etoile in perfect symmetry. In the final say, Olmsted and Vaux had to accept a compromise from their ideal: the Brooklyn parkways were laid out straight to align with a regular grid pattern. Eastern Parkway was laid out to conform to a grid that had already been platted, and



These diagrams show the different spatial layouts of the Plaza and the Etoile

Ocean Parkway was laid out to conform to a grid that was in the process of being platted over rural Kings County.

The Parkway Plan did incorporate some aspects of Etoile formality in that formal spatial forms were used to mark the juncture of the parkways with Prospect Park: a perfect oval and a perfect circle. These, however, were less architecturally articulated. The Etoile was designed with uniform, grand buildings fronting on to it and spatially enclosing it. The large oval space at the Eastern Parkway juncture (the Plaza), was conceptualized as a transition space between the city and the park.⁴⁸ It was designed with both natural and architectural elements. Designed as two concentric ovals, the inner oval was planted with tall mounds that shut out views of the buildings lining the outer oval. Instead of a grand triumphal arch, the center of the oval contained a fountain and a public gathering place. The smaller circular space designed for the Ocean Parkway juncture with the park was only formal in terms of its perfect shape; buildings on the circle were not regulated in any way, nor were any special architectural elements built within the space. (Later, at the turn of the

century, both these space became more architecturally marked. Heroic statuary was erected in both spaces at the park entries, and a triumphal arch, similar to the Arc de Triomphe, was built within the center of the Plaza.)

Although both the Etoile boulevards and the Brooklyn parkways were built as mechanisms for city expansion, and so were elements of the city laid onto rural land, the conceptual orientation of the Brooklyn parkways was distinctly different than that of the Paris Etoile boulevards. Olmsted and Vaux believed that Prospect Park would become a new center of the city and they designed the parkways to orient to it. In Paris, on the other hand, the Bois de Boulogne was not conceived as a new center. The conceptual purpose of the Avenue de l'Imperatrice was to link the city center with the new park. It was designed as an extension of the Champs Elysées, the ceremonial street that for centuries had led out of the city into the rural countryside. The other Etoile boulevards were designed as further extensions of the Champs Elysées: they radiated from it and not from the park. In Olmsted and Vaux's plan for Brooklyn, no attempt was made to build a parkway connecting with the center. Instead, a normally configured business street, Flatbush Avenue, led from the center to the Park entrance, mediated by the part-city, part-park transition space of the Plaza.

In Paris, boulevards were used as both a re-development tool, in the center, and a development tool, on the edge. In Brooklyn, they were used mostly as edge development tools. However, Eastern Parkway was built through the one area in Brooklyn in which black people had built a small community of homes. A desire to redevelop this area may be read as implicit in the parkway plan, although such a motive was never expressly stated.

Marshall Berman has described the new boulevards built through the center of Paris as the most modern of modern streets, calling them: "the spectacular urban innovation of the nineteenth century."⁴⁹ This is because they showcased

the contradictions of modern life. Their construction opened the city up, made it public, put it on display, and dramatized it, but at the same time exposed unpleasant things about the city that had previously been hidden. The whirlwind and glitter of the wide, new, cafe-lined boulevards was directly juxtaposed against the poverty and misery of inner city neighborhoods. According to Berman, class distinctions became manifest on the boulevards, and caused people to consider them. The Brooklyn parkways never created juxtapositions as striking as the Paris urban boulevards. They were designed to blend easily into the rural landscape through which they were built, although in their straight form they created more of a juxtaposition than originally envisioned. In social terms, however, like the Paris boulevards, the parkways put different social groups into contact with each other in new public spaces in ways they had not been before. The social elite, the upper and middle classes, used the center roadways of the parkways for promenades in carriages. Poorer rural truck farmers used the side roadways as transportation corridors to bring their produce to market. These different activities caused conflicts, and the conflicts spurred regulations directed at imposing certain types of behavior. (These conflicts and regulations are discussed in Chapter Three.)

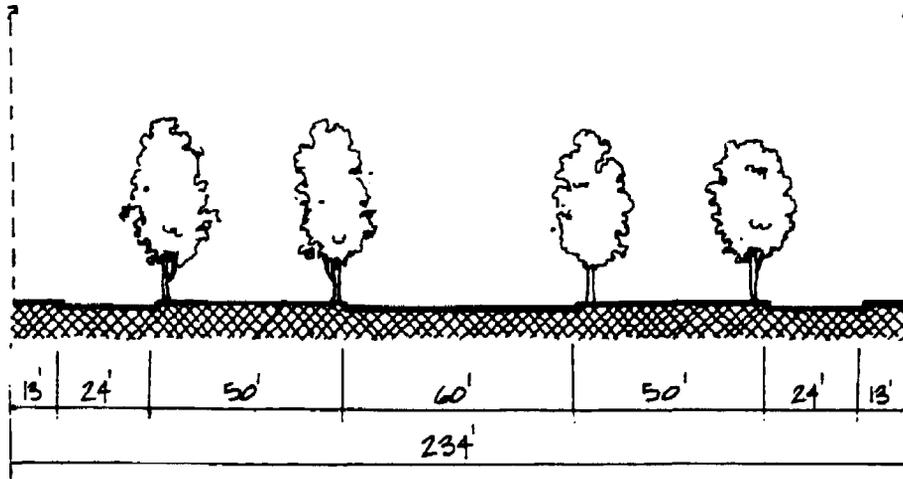
Like the Paris boulevards, the Brooklyn parkways were places where traffic types were juxtaposed: new fast traffic alongside traditional, slower forms. Unlike the chaos produced by the more urban Paris boulevards with their introduction of fast traffic into the city center,⁵⁰ the Brooklyn parkways introduced fast-moving traffic into the slow-moving countryside in an orderly manner. Parkway were designed so that the juxtaposition of traffic types would specifically not be chaotic. Each traffic type had its own specially designed channel for efficient linear movement: the pleasurable movement of carriages and pedestrians, and the slower movement of commercial wagons. The slow-

moving channels were a bow to practicality. Olmsted and Vaux no doubt needed to include roadways for commercial traffic on the parkways in order to sell the parkways to the rural communities through which they would pass. The design emphasis, however, was on shielding the pleasure-oriented traffic on the center roadway and the malls from the work-a-day nature of the side roadways, and this was accomplished with dense rows of trees. Similar to parks, only certain pleasure activities were supposed to occur in the center of the boulevard. For instance, horse-racing was not supposed to take place there, because it was an activity requiring too much effort and eliciting too much excitement, and also tended to bring with it commercial embarrassments.⁵¹

Although mass transportation technologies were rapidly advancing at the time, neither the Champs Elysées nor the Avenue de l'Imperatrice nor the Brooklyn parkways were designed to carry street railroads. The aesthetics of street railroads were at odds with the designed nature of these public streets. The Brooklyn parkways, although perceived by the designers as democratic public spaces, were in fact no more accessible to the entire public than the Parisian promenade streets. Olmsted and Vaux wanted the parkways to be accessible and convenient, but they held a middle class vision of convenience: using the parkways required access to carriages.

In terms of street form, the combined suburban character and formal promenade character of the Brooklyn parkways represents a blending of the physical characteristics of the two Parisian suburban boulevards Olmsted had seen and most admired: the Avenue de l'Imperatrice and the Champs Elysées. The parkways expressed aspects of both the civic grandeur of the Champs Elysées and the pastoralism of the Avenue de l'Imperatrice.

In width, the Brooklyn parkways were designed to be narrower than either the Avenue de l'Imperatrice or the Champs Elysées, but wider than all of the



Section of the Avenue Grand Armée, from Adolphe Alphand's *Les Promenades de Paris*

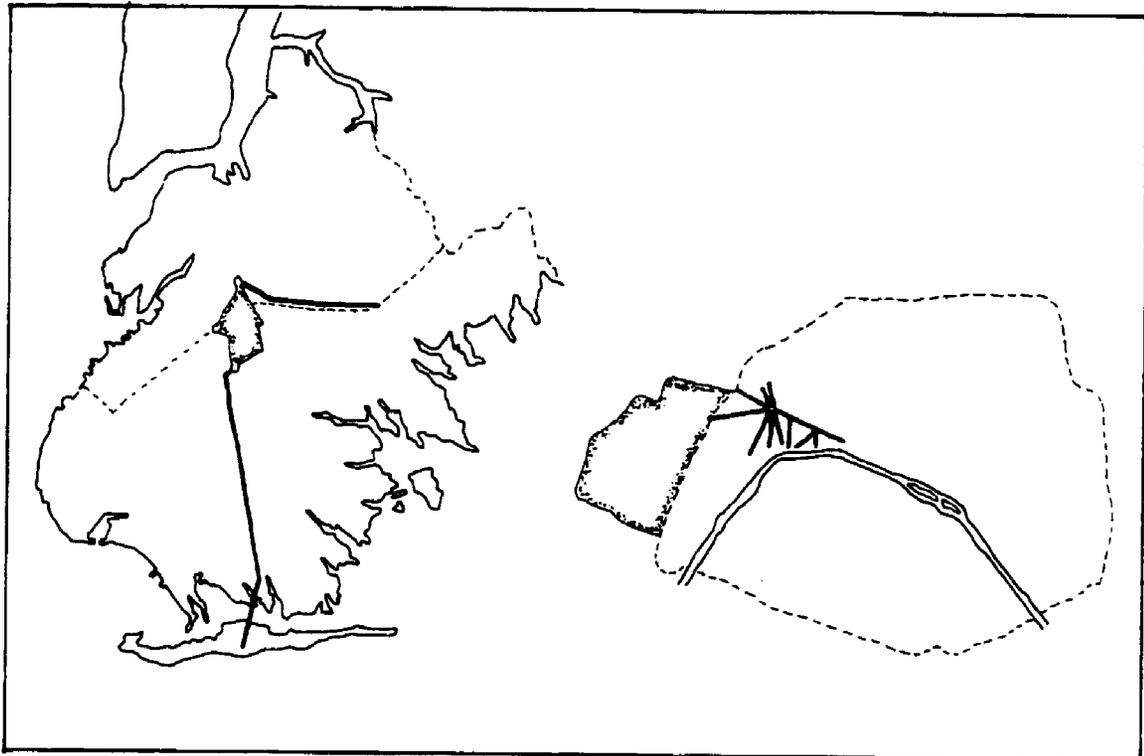
other Etoile boulevards except one. They were designed to be about the same width as the Avenue de la Grande Armée, the boulevard Haussmann built to extend the line of the Champs Elysées beyond the Etoile. The parkways were also the most similar in cross-sectional configuration to this street. The Grande Armée was about 234 feet wide and configured with a 60-foot-wide center roadway, bounded by 50-foot-wide malls lined with two rows of trees, 24-foot-wide side roadways, and 13-foot-wide sidewalks without trees. The Brooklyn parkways were designed to be approximately 24 feet narrower overall, with narrower malls. Eastern Parkway had the same width center roadway, Ocean Parkway's center roadway was 10 feet wider. The Brooklyn parkways also had additional rows of trees on each sidewalk, six rows of trees in all. It is not clear if Olmsted actually saw the Grande Armée in person when he visited Paris in 1859, but he certainly saw plan and cross-section drawings of it because these were included in Alphand's *Les Promenades de Paris*, which Olmsted was very familiar with.⁵²

The parkway design relied on its luxurious planting of trees to give a semblance of park effects. The regular lay-out of the trees along the malls and

sidewalks, instead of the picturesque planting used on the Avenue de l'Imperatrice, may have originated from functional ideas of convenience, because the malls and sidewalks were conceptualized as linear movement spaces for pedestrians. Then again, once it was clear that the parkways would be laid out straight, conforming to a grid, regular lineal tree planting made design sense as well.

In terms of land use and street enclosure, the parkway design very much took its cue from the Avenue de l'Imperatrice and not from the formal, commercial boulevards being built in the center of Paris. Like the Avenue de l'Imperatrice, the buildings along the parkways were to be freestanding single-family houses and setback from the street, an almost identical distance, behind landscaped front yards. Unlike the Avenue de l'Imperatrice, however, the formal element of a regular, decorative fence at the property line was not required. At the time when Olmsted would have seen the Champs Elysées, it was not developed along its edges. It had park spaces along both sides for part of its length, and passed through open land for the rest. Later, the western section, from the Rond Point to the Etoile, was built with the same six-story buildings as were built on the more centrally located boulevards. The other Etoile boulevards, with the exception of the regulated Avenue de l'Imperatrice, were also eventually developed in an enclosed manner.

In terms of integration with the general street system, the design for the Brooklyn parkways took its cue more from the Champs Elysées than the Avenue



These diagrams, drawn to the same scale, show the comparative scale of the Brooklyn parkways and the Etoile boulevards.

de l'Imperatrice. This is because the designers specifically wanted the parkways to be a place that people would encounter and use on a daily basis as part of their regular daily routine. In his experience of the Avenue de l'Imperatrice, Olmsted felt it was so wide that it was really more of an intermediate pleasure ground than a part of the general street system.⁵³

In terms of length, the original design concept for Brooklyn called for a parkway that started at the southern end of Prospect Park, ran to the Ocean, doubled back to circle through the countryside, crossed a bridge over the East River, ran through northeast New York City, and ended at Central Park—a distance of more than twenty miles. Most of the new Paris suburban boulevards

were one half to three-fourths of a mile long, with the exception of the Champs Elysées which was one and a quarter mile long. If the Champs Elysées and its extension, the Grand Armée, are considered as one street, their combined length is about two miles. As actually built, both of the Brooklyn parkways were longer than any of the Paris suburban boulevards, much longer in the case of Ocean Parkway. Eastern Parkway was built two and a half miles long, and was intended to eventually extend at least another mile and a half (to Ridgewood). Ocean Parkway was built five and a half miles long. It is clear that both the original design concept, and the actual laying out of Ocean Parkway and its complete construction in just two years, represented something altogether new.

The impetus behind long parkways in Olmsted and Vaux's plan is clear. First, the designers anticipated that Brooklyn would grow to its greatest possible extent, which meant that it would fill up all of southeast Long Island. Second, the designers believed that growth would be very rapid and the city would benefit from securing land for the whole anticipated length of the parkway in advance because they would be able to get the land much more inexpensively before development began. Third, they were interested in providing a public structure to the developing city. They recognized, in other words, that they were living in a speculative economy, in which land prices ran up quickly following, or anticipating, public works improvements.

Olmsted and Vaux's plan differed considerably from what was going on in Paris in its inclusion of a design for a linear residential neighborhood

surrounding Eastern Parkway. The design was an effort to layer a horizontal hierarchy of boulevard types, and provide long-term protection for the desired residential character along the parkway. No such boulevard layering scheme or neighborhood protection scheme was attempted in Paris. The Brooklyn parkways were designed to be laid out in advance of development. As it turned out, they were in fact well in advance. Development around Eastern Parkway, especially, wasn't as rapid as expected, because of an economic depression, and the parkway neighborhood plan was ultimately abandoned (see Chapter Four). However, the planning for a parkway neighborhood went beyond the type of planning Haussmann was doing in Paris: Haussmann didn't design any boulevard neighborhoods, just the boulevards themselves.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Ultimately, what stands out is that Olmsted and Vaux took the basic physical cross-section form of the Parisian multi-way boulevards and adapted it to a new set of concerns. This speaks to the fact that the multi-way boulevard street form was uniquely suited to the conditions of the mid-nineteenth century. The mid-nineteenth century was a time of diverse and rapidly changing traffic conditions. There were more wheeled vehicles on the streets than ever before, and newer, faster carriages were constantly being developed. At the same time, horse-drawn commercial wagons moved very slowly, many people rode on horseback, and walking was still the only form of transportation for most people. The multi-way

boulevard street form, with its separated vehicle roadways designated for different types of vehicles, and its generous pedestrian spaces, was wonderfully suited to handle this complex amalgam of traffic. It was a very modern street because it provided unencumbered space for traffic movement.

Another thing that stands out from the comparison is that Olmsted and Vaux's parkway plan, developed for an American context, incorporated an expansive vision of future urban growth.

¹This term was used by Olmsted a number of times, most notably in an address made in 1870 to the American Social Science Association at the Lowell Institute in Boston, entitled *Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns*. PoFLO: SSI, 174.

²Olmsted felt that the tastes of women were becoming more potent in shaping the course of civilized progress and that they were particularly susceptible to the "townward drift," because the urban organization of labor made household tasks easier. For more on this, see *Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns*, in PoFLO: SSI, 171.

³Detailed discussions of these things are included in both *Public Parks and Enlargement of Towns* (PoFLO: SSI, 171), and in Olmsted and Vaux's annual report to the Brooklyn Park Commissioners of January, 1868, where they presented arguments for the Parkway Plan.

⁴Olmsted (1870). PoFLO: SSI, 179.

⁵Olmsted expressed this view in several of his writings, notably in a letter to William Edward Dorsheimer, written on 1 October 1868. PoFLO: SSI, 160.

⁶The idea of a designed natural park was not an original idea. Humphrey Repton and John Nash were early leaders in the Romantic Movement, which espoused this idea. See Broadbent, 109.

⁷Olmsted (1870). PoFLO: SSI, 182.

⁸PoFLO: SSI, 184.

⁹AR65, 95.

¹⁰PoFLO: SSI, 198.

¹¹PoFLO: SSI, 151.

¹²This goal was expressed most clearly in an address Olmsted made to the Prospect Park Scientific Association in 1868. PoFLO: SSI, 147, 152.

¹³PoFLO: SSI, 184.

¹⁴PoFLO: SSI, 152.

¹⁵Rosenzweig and Blackmar, 107.

¹⁶AR70, 429.

¹⁷AR70,435.

¹⁸Olmsted (1870). PoFLO: SSI, 185.

¹⁹AR67, 190.

²⁰Olmsted (1870). PoFLO: SSI, 182.

²¹Fishman (1987).

²²PoFLO: SSI, 161.

²³PoFLO: SSI, 190.

²⁴PoFLO: SSI, 314.

²⁵PoFLO: SSI, 190.

²⁶PoFLO: SSI, 130.

²⁷Rosenzweig and Blackmar, 122.

²⁸PoFLO: SSI, 116.

²⁹There are many accountings of the social transformation of Paris during this period. One text that interweaves spatial and social changes in a very evocative way is David Harvey's *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*.

³⁰Kostof (1992), 266; Girouard, 285.

³¹Harvey, (1985).

³²Buck-Morss, 90.

³³Pinkney.

³⁴Kostof (1991, 1992); Girouard; Harvey (1985).

³⁵The promenades were first called *cours*, then *ramparts*, and finally *boulevards*, in reference to a particularly large bastion on the ramparts called the *Grand Boulevart*. Girouard, p. 176.

³⁶These forms are shown in beautifully rendered drawings contained in Alphand's book, *Les Promenades de Paris*.

³⁷In Paris, the side roads of the multi-way boulevard type were called *contre-allées*.

³⁸These spaces, and their history, are described in the *Dictionnaire Historique des Rues de Paris*, by Jacques Hillairet.

³⁹Pinkney, 29.

⁴⁰The Avenue de l'Imperatrice was also sometimes originally referred to as the Avenue Bois de Boulogne or the Avenue of the Empress, and is now called the Avenue Foch. Its design is well-documented in plan and section in Alphand's *Les Promenades de Paris*.

⁴¹AR67.

⁴²PoFLO: SSI, 185.

⁴³PoFLO: SSI, 134, 186.

⁴⁴PoFLO: SSI, 134.

⁴⁵PoFLO: SSI, 186.

⁴⁶Kostof (1992), 229.

⁴⁷Bosselmann, 26.

⁴⁸AR73, 27.

⁴⁹Berman, 150.

⁵⁰Berman, 158.

⁵¹PoFLO: SSI, 190.

⁵²Olmsted refers to *Les Promenades de Paris* in a letter to William Hammond Hall, a young engineer and landscape architect, dated Oct. 5, 1871 (PoFLO: VI, 468); and also in his 1875 entry for *Park* in the *American Cyclopedia* (PoFLO: SSI, 318).

⁵³AR67.

PART TWO: HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

CHAPTER THREE

THE FORMATION OF A COMPLEX PUBLIC OPEN SPACE CHARACTER

The greater and more plentiful the range of all legitimate interests (in the strictly legal sense) that city streets and their enterprises can satisfy, the better for the streets and for the safety and civilization of the city.
(Jane Jacobs, 1961)

The *Encyclopedia of Urban Planning* entry for "parkway" is: "a scenic highway for non-commercial traffic with full or partial control of access and usually within a park or ribbon of park-like development." This definition reflects the current professional understanding of what parkways are supposed to be. It refers to the kind of parkways built in the twentieth century and not to the parkways designed by Olmsted and Vaux for Brooklyn. The modern definition evokes some sense of Olmsted and Vaux's original design, but brings to mind a more simplified image.

Olmsted and Vaux's concept of what parkways would be was highly complex. They designed the Brooklyn parkways, their first parkways, to accommodate the complex mix of traffic, which was the norm in the mid-nineteenth century. They were trying to accommodate this mix in an orderly way. Although today Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway seem to us to be very complicated streets because of their multiple roadways and the mix of uses they carry—unusual in our experience—when they were built they were perceived as more orderly than normally configured streets, because of the separation of uses.

Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway today have essentially the same physical form as when they were built, though development conditions along their edges and in surrounding areas have changed substantially. Originally built through open countryside, land along them and all around them is now intensively developed. Although enclosure is different, the public space within the right-of-way, the cross-section, remains essentially as originally designed. The three separate roadways remain. The wide malls remain. The six rows of closely spaced trees remain. Surfaces on the roadways and malls are different, they are harder now than when first built, and there are now traffic controls at intersections where at first there were none. While the physical form has endured, use of the parkways has changed over time—it has changed, but it has always been complex. Complex use patterns have adhered to the complex design form.

This chapter explores the historical formation and evolution of the complex public open space character of the parkways. This complex character evolved at two intertwined levels: one involving meaning and one involving use. The cultural understanding of these public spaces was worked out over time as the meaning of the terms "parkway" and "boulevard" and later "arterial" were worked out. The meanings associated with these terms changed over time through discussions and debates in many arenas: on the street, in the newspapers, in the legislature and courts, in the professional journals of landscape architects and traffic engineers, in the local public agencies charged with authority over the parkways, and in literature. The immediate social character of the parkways, however, was formed through patterns of daily use—patterns that were influenced by debates over meaning but which were not directly parallel with them at all times. Use occurred locally, while debates over

meaning occurred at local, regional, and national levels. At times these things ran separate courses, at other times they intersected in dramatic ways.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section, entitled *Sorting Things Out on the Ground*, provides an analysis of the changing on-the-ground use of the parkways from the time they were built through the 1930's, the period during which their complex public open space character was strongly established.

The second section, *Professional Redefinition's of the Parkway Idea*, provides an analysis of where the parkway idea went after the Brooklyn parkways, both in terms of the evolution of the parkway form, as expressed in later built parkways, and the evolution of professional debates about what parkways were and resulting professional redefinition's of the term. This section takes the discussion away from the Brooklyn parkways, in order to give insight into the larger forces at work that would come to bear on them. It points to the vulnerability of the physical form of Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway after the 1920's, because their physical form no longer conformed to professional notions of how parkways should be configured.

The third section, *Regional Plans, Highway Projects, and Preservation Efforts*, brings things back to the Brooklyn parkways. It provides an analysis of how the larger professional debates were manifested, after the later 1920's, in regional highway plans for the New York City metropolitan area, which redefined the role and purpose of the Brooklyn parkways themselves. It also describes highway construction projects of the 1950's through 1970's which altered the physical form of the parkways, or which threatened to do so, as well as preservation and planning efforts of the 1970's through 1990's which have worked, and are working, to save their physical form.

SORTING THINGS OUT ON THE GROUND

The Designed Public Open Space Character and Initial Uses

Originally, Olmsted and Vaux were very clear about the character the parkways would have: they were to be park-like, but very different in character from Prospect Park. The park was designed to imitate nature and intended for quiet pleasure uses and the contemplative enjoyment of natural landscape. The parkways were designed more formally, with linear rows of trees, and were intended as places for promenades and "gay assemblages."

Public expectations regarding use of the parkways were initially established by Olmsted and Vaux through their promotion of them primarily as pleasure drives. This foremost purpose of the parkways was also promoted by the Brooklyn Park Commissioners in their annual reports, and they were described as pleasure drives in the newspaper articles that reported on them.¹ Patterns of use were first established by expectations rather than by law. The public generally adopted the official understanding of the main purpose of these new public spaces, and the parkways were first used primarily as drives for pleasure carriages and rides for horses.

However, Olmsted and Vaux designed the parkways to function as more than just pleasure drives. They designed them to also accommodate gatherings of people on foot and travel by slow service vehicles, and they promoted these uses as well. People generally understood that the malls on parkways, as well as sidewalks, were for the use of pedestrians. But expectations for use of the side roadways was more ambiguous. Olmsted and Vaux conceived of the side roadways as spaces that would provide access for wagons servicing the private dwellings they envisioned lining the parkways. But, when the parkways were

first built there were no houses along them and it turned out to be some time before many were constructed, so the side roadways weren't at first needed for their intended function. At the same time, the side roadways provided straight, direct and well-surfaced paths through rural areas into the center of Brooklyn, and pleasure drive expectations were not attached to them. Rural farmers near Ocean Parkway and persons engaged in commercial and farming activities near Eastern Parkway expected to use the parkways to transport their goods into Brooklyn. Their expectations were founded on the promoted purpose of the side roadways as service roads, but were not confined to these spaces. In the beginning, farmers also claimed the right to at times drive their wagons on the center roadway.³

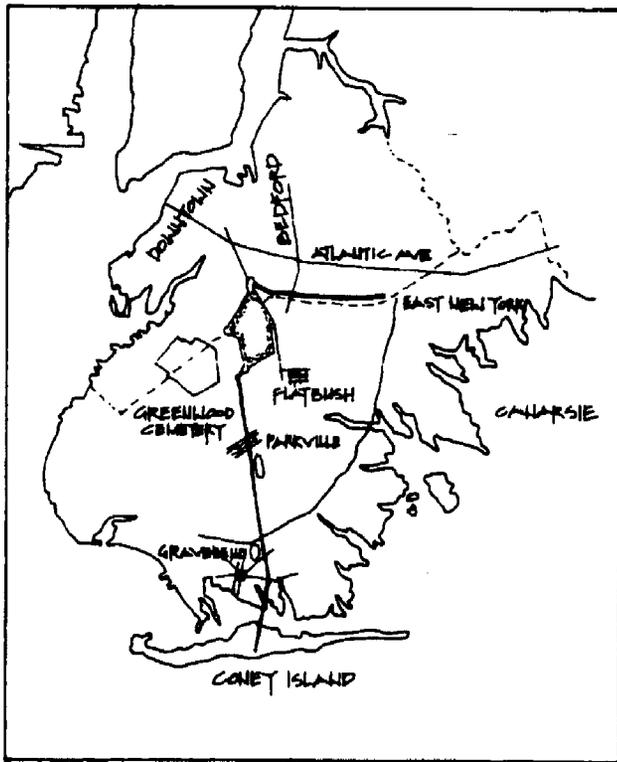
As time passed, certain members of the public made new demands for use of the public space of the parkways. When new demands were asserted, they often competed with existing uses and vigorous debates ensued. Successive Brooklyn Park Commissioners responded by acquiring rights to regulate parkway use, bestowed by acts of the state legislature, and then putting in place regulations establishing public rights and controlling public behavior. After Stranahan's tenure as park commissioner, subsequent park commissioners generally held the position for only a few years, or less. The tenure of some was marked by more regulation making than that of others. The right of the commissioners to establish regulations was itself an issue of some debate, although this right was early on affirmed by the state legislature. Over time, a series of laws were enacted giving the park commissioners increasing authority to establish and enforce rules of conduct on the parkways. Issues involved what types of uses could occur, the spatial location of different uses, and what restrictions different uses were subject to. As new rules were established, their appropriateness was usually debated at length in the newspapers.³

Some members of the public claimed access to the parkways, while others did not. Structural constraints, such as how far people lived from the parkways, the amount of free time they had, their income, and their access to forms of transportation that could get them to the parkways, determined who did or did not have the means to make use of these new public spaces. The regulations put in place by the park commissioners over the years, in conjunction with informal rules and codes of conduct, also influenced who claimed access. Generally, the wealthy and the middle classes, those with some amount of leisure time and some disposable income, claimed the parkways as their territory. The very poor generally did not press claims, at least not very successfully or for very long. These aspects will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Differences Between the Two Parkways

Once the parkways were built, Ocean Parkway immediately emerged as the more important of the two. It was more heavily used and so debates over use generally began in relation to it. Regulations developed for Ocean Parkway were often also applied to Eastern Parkway in exact or slightly altered form.

That Ocean Parkway became the more important parkway had to do with the character of the area it ran through and what lay at its end. Although Eastern Parkway had a seemingly more favorable geographic position in scenic terms, situated as it was on a high ridge offering long views all around while Ocean Parkway was situated on a flat plain offering only close-up views of farmland, Ocean Parkway had a more favorable location in terms of association. Ocean Parkway passed through Gravesend, home to the fashionable Prospect Park Fairgrounds Association that set the tone for the area. At its end lay the pristine ocean beaches of Coney Island and the fashionable new resorts being built there. Eastern Parkway, on the other hand, ran through an area long associated with



Ocean Parkway and Eastern Parkway and their locales

the black communities of Weeksville and Carrville, and it led to no great destination but ended in a "stone heap."⁴ The views it offered at its end were toward the emerging ethnic enclave of East New York and the ocean beyond, but the ocean of the Canarsie tidal flats and not the open ocean. Far from pristine, Canarsie was developing into Brooklyn's refuse dump.⁵

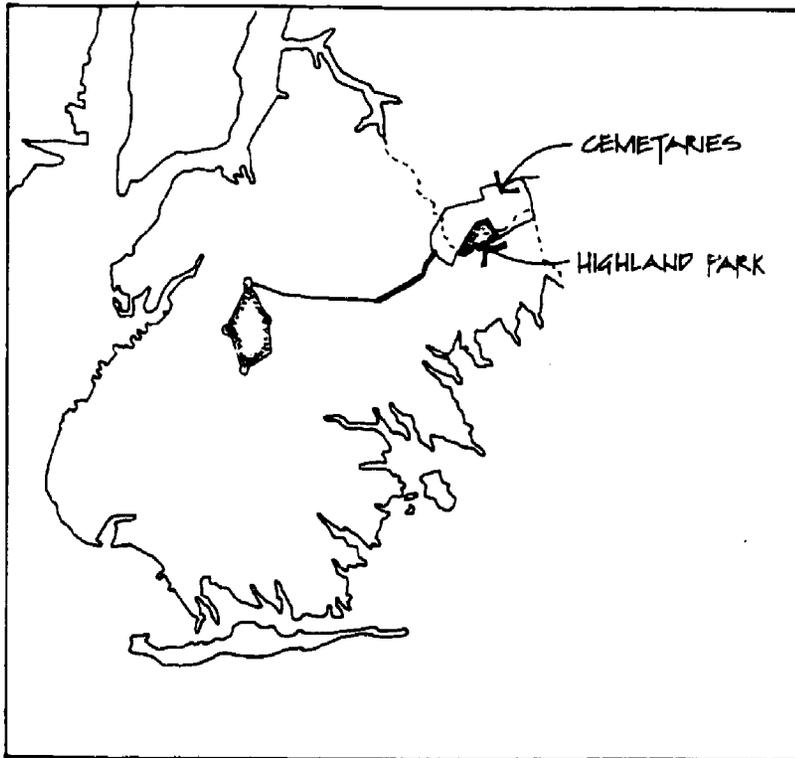
Another characteristic of Ocean Parkway's location contributed to its appeal: in relation to the main population of Brooklyn it lay geographically beyond Prospect Park. When built, Prospect Park lay south of the built-up areas of Brooklyn, and Ocean Parkway lay south of the park. People making a pleasure outing by carriage or horseback would travel out of the built-up areas toward the park, make their way through the park, then go out the southern entrance and

down Ocean Parkway. Some would stop at the village of Parkville, or the fairgrounds, or at one of the various roadhouses that were quickly springing up along the parkway, while others would go all the way to the beach. At the end of the day, people would travel home again, retracing their path. Even those living in the more easterly built-up districts, such as Bedford or Williamsburgh, would make the same general trip. They would travel down busy Bedford Avenue, turn right on Eastern Parkway and travel along it a few blocks to the park, then go through the park and down Ocean Parkway. On a regular basis, therefore, only about three-quarters of a mile of Eastern Parkway was used as a pleasure drive, while the whole length of Ocean Parkway was used.

From the start, Ocean Parkway was perceived as a destination as well as a movement corridor. But Eastern Parkway was perceived as merely an initial segment of the route to the park and the ocean beaches.

At various times, boosters tried to promote the attractions of Eastern Parkway as a pleasure drive, particularly emphasizing its scenic views. In the 1890's, the park commission built an extension to it and established a park near the end of the extension, but these things did not turn the eastern end of Eastern Parkway into a popular pleasure drive. The extension took an awkward northward jog and was built with a different configuration than the original parkway, it was only 110 feet wide and didn't have separated roadways or pedestrian malls on it.

The park developed at the end of the extension, Highland Park, was surrounded by cemeteries whose combined area was much greater than that of the park. Fifty years earlier, the centrally located Greenwood cemetery had been used as a pleasure ground, but these cemeteries did not appeal for this use. In *Walker in the City*, Alfred Kazin described his memory of what Highland Park was like in the 1920's and 1930's: "It was somehow not a real park then, not the



The Eastern Parkway Extension

usual city park—more like an untended wild growth they had forgotten to trim to the shape of the city. Most people I knew did not care for it; it was too remote, and at night, almost completely dark. it ran past interminable cemeteries where there seemed to be room for all the dead of New York.”⁶

Probably the biggest deterrent to the use of Eastern Parkway as a popular pleasure drive after the extension was opened was the development of the Brownsville community immediately east of the end of the original parkway. Brownsville was the place Eastern European Jewish immigrants began moving to in the 1890’s to escape the slums of New York’s Lower East Side. It grew rapidly and soon became the most densely built and densely populated area of Brooklyn. Garment factories and other industries located there. The population was poor



View of Brownsville from the Eastern Parkway extension (1896)
Photograph from the New York City Parks Photo Archive

and buildings were hastily built.⁷ A photograph taken from the extension, included in the Annual Reports of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners of 1896, showed that views from the parkway were of this dense, working community.

Along with unattractive urban views at odds with the idea of a pleasure drive, Eastern Parkway may have appealed less to pleasure drivers than Ocean Parkway in part because of the poor people living in Brownsville. Some of these people must have at times made use of the public space of the nearby parkway. Pedestrians encountered on the far reaches of Eastern Parkway were probably very different than those encountered along Ocean Parkway. The park commissioners reports of the 1890's refer to vandalism on Eastern Parkway. We don't know who was doing this or exactly what was done, or perceived to have been done, but clearly there was a perception that unruly behavior occurred at the far end of the parkway.

Because debates over parkway use usually began in reference to Ocean Parkway, and by newspaper accounts these debates were more vigorous than debates over use of Eastern Parkway, the evolution of parkway use is easiest to trace out on it. For this reason, Ocean Parkway will be the main focus of the rest of this section, with some, much shorter, discussion of Eastern Parkway at the end.

Ocean Parkway

The 1870's

When Ocean Parkway was constructed, all three roadways and the two malls were built and all six lines of tree rows were planted, two on each mall and one on the outer edge of the side roads, but sidewalks were not built. Bluestone curbs and gutters were laid along the roadways, and the roadways and malls were prepared with special driving and walking surfaces. The center roadway was constructed of six inches of compacted gravel topped by three inches of premium screened gravel. The side roadways were built of six inches of compacted gravel without special surfacing. The malls were divided into three strips, continuous planting strips for trees along each side, prepared with special soil, and a center path built of a two inch layer of compacted gravel.⁹

As soon as Ocean Parkway was opened for use, pleasure carriages flocked to it in droves, especially on fine summer afternoons.⁹ These were fast carriages, drawn by a single horse, in all the popular new styles: open two and four person Phaetons and Demi-Landaus, and covered family-style six passenger cut-under Rockaways.¹⁰ They traveled mostly on the center roadway. Its broad open space and particularly fine and smooth roadway invited and allowed fast movement.



Pleasure Carriages on Ocean Parkway (1891)
Photograph from the New York City Parks Photo Archive

Carriages could be driven there faster than anywhere else in the city, at speeds likely approaching ten miles per hour.¹¹

Traffic was at first regulated only by generally accepted rules of the road: vehicles were supposed to keep to the right of a roadway and overtake other vehicles to the left. On the parkway, carriage drivers heading south would stay generally to the west side of the center roadway, while those traveling north would stay generally to the east side. No fixed dividing line separated the travel directions. Rather, a fluid imaginary line moved back and forth across the roadway depending on traffic conditions. In the mornings and early afternoons, when most carriages were heading toward Coney Island, the southward flow

took up much of the roadway. In the evenings, when people were returning home, the northward flow covered most of it.¹²

Most carriages were privately owned and held family groups. Equestrians on fine mounts shared the roadway with them. Although movement could be fast, early photographs indicate that a general sense of order and decorum prevailed among these travelers.¹³

At the same time, on a daily basis and throughout the year, farmers and small businessmen drove heavy wagons along the parkway, transporting goods back and forth between their farms and Brooklyn, or between rural towns and villages. They drove on the side roads but they also used the center roadway, no doubt especially at times when pleasure traffic was light. One can imagine that travel of this sort, by a different class of people, may have been perceived by the pleasure travelers as unseemly. Farm products included manure and farm hands could be rough. Many Italians operated truck farms in southern Kings County and at the time their ways and manners were often ridiculed.¹⁴

In addition to carriages and wagons, another type of vehicle also used the center roadway. Velocipedes were invented in 1868 and by the early 1880's high-wheel bicycles were becoming popular recreational vehicles.¹⁵ At first they were used mostly by men. Like carriage drivers and horse-riders, bicyclists preferred the wide open space and smooth pavement of the center roadway.

Pedestrians also used the parkway. People on foot used the paths on the malls to walk along or congregate on, especially near the park, near villages, near the fairgrounds, and near popular roadhouses. They gathered to watch the carriages and the horses, and increasingly to watch the bicyclists, sometimes sitting on the grass under the trees.

The 1880's

The number of pleasure carriages, equestrians, bicyclists, and commercial wagons using the parkway kept increasing. By the mid-1880's, the park commission and members of the public felt that the mix was chaotic enough to warrant imposing regulations to control things.

Bicyclists were perceived as one of the problems. In 1885, Commissioner Gibbs enacted regulations to curb their behavior. His order allowed bicyclists to use the parkway at all times but prohibited them from speeding or racing. To get access to the parkway, however, they had to register with the park commission and were given a numbered badge that they had to wear "conspicuously" on their left breast.¹⁶ This requirement was suggested by organized bicycle clubs. These clubs, whose members were of the wealthier classes, were interested in establishing bicycling as an accepted activity and so wanted to establish codes of bicycling conduct. Requiring bicyclists to register was likely intended to discourage people who weren't club members from riding on the parkways.

Commercial wagons were seen as the other problem, and restrictions were also imposed on them. They were barred from the center roadway during times when pleasure traffic was heavy. This was reasonable, the commissioner argued, because: "The heavy wagons loaded with farm produce, manure, coal and building material of all kinds, subjects the road surface to needlessly excessive wear, breaking it up frequently and impairing to a considerable extent its condition for light vehicular travel, for which the main drive was specially designed. Many of those heavy vehicles are careless of the interests of others upon the road, and are very indifferent to the possibility of accident, especially during the crowded parts of the day."¹⁷

The 1890's

Spatial segregation of different types of traffic on the parkway began to be codified in the 1880's, as did some differentiated requirements on the behavioral practices of people using different traffic modes, but traffic types still remained mixed. Things changed in the 1890's. It was during this decade that different traffic types were strongly separated into different assigned channels on the parkway. The spatial divide was accomplished in stages and was precipitated by the construction of a new element on the parkway.

By 1890, the safety bicycle had been invented and bicycle use in the city, and everywhere, was surging. Brooklyn bicycle clubs began efforts to have a bicycle path built on one of the Ocean Parkway malls. In 1894, Commissioner Squier agreed to this path and the state legislature passed a law allowing the Parks Department to build one on the western mall. In conjunction with this law, the commissioner issued an ordinance further restricting how bicyclists and wagon drivers could use the parkway. The ordinance included both spatial restrictions and behavior restrictions. Business wagons could only use the west side road, period, although other modes of travel were not restricted from this road. Only bicyclists could use the bicycle path and only when they were moving, dismounted bicyclists had to step off the path. Bicyclists could still use the center roadway, but their behavior there was more restricted than on the bicycle path. The ordinance imposed speed limits on bicyclists: twelve miles per hour on the bicycle path and ten miles per hour on the center roadway. The speed limit in the center matched the limit placed on carriages and horses. The behavior of bicyclists was further regulated: like other traffic they had to keep to the right and pass on the left, and they were prohibited from coasting or riding without hands.¹⁸

Bicyclists generally approved of these regulations and no big debates arose over them. Wagon drivers, on the other hand, resented the regulations. They wanted to be able to use the center roadway when necessary, and apparently they often thought it was necessary. A Brooklyn Eagle article reported on the case of an iceman, Mr. E. C. Fernald of Flatbush, who was fined for driving his wagon on the center roadway in the summer of 1895. Fernald argued that: "As every farmer and tradesman in this vicinity knows the wretched conditions of the side roads makes it impossible for persons driving heavy loads to use them." He also complained about uneven treatment because some types of wagons, brewery wagons and Coney Island stages, were allowed to use the center.¹⁹ He intended to contest the park commissioners' right to keep heavy wagons off a public highway, especially one he, as a taxpayer, had helped to pay for. The article reported that a number of framers from Parkville, Greenfield and Gravesend were joining Fernald's fight, and that a subscription was being taken up to pay for his litigation costs.²⁰

The partial paving of the west side road with macadam, a surface of rolled crushed stone, in 1894 did little to appease wagon drivers.²¹ The roadway, which was becoming known as the west traffic road, was only paved for its last, northern-most, mile and a half stretch between Parkville and Prospect Park. The rest of it remained gravel.

The bicycle path was built in the summer of 1895. It was sixteen feet wide and paved with limestone screenings. It was built by the Parks Department workers but materials were paid for by local bicycle clubs. This path was the first path exclusively for "wheelmen" built in the United States. A big parade marked its June 15th opening. Divisions of bicycle clubs, led by a military and police escort, paraded down Bedford Avenue onto Eastern Parkway, through Prospect Park, out the southern entrance, onto the new bicycle path, past a reviewing



The new bicycle path on Ocean Parkway (1894)
Photograph from the New York City Parks Photo Archive

stand in Parkville, and all the way to Coney Island--laying symbolic claim to the traditional pleasure carriage route.²²

Before the bicycle path was even complete, bicyclists began calling for another path on the eastern mall. They wanted the first path turned into a one-way outbound path and the second path built as a one-way inbound, or return, path. Commissioner Squier wasn't willing to accede to this demand. He felt that the east mall couldn't be turned into a bicycle path unless sidewalks were built, otherwise pedestrians would be completely displaced from the parkway. Lots of pedestrians used the malls. They were so popular that in a Letter to the Editor of the Brooklyn Eagle, written a month before the first bicycle path was completed, E. E. Latham called for placing seats along the malls near the park because on

summer Sundays hundreds of people would gather along it to watch the carriage and bicycle promenades.²³

While the return path was being debated, the issue of night lighting also came to the forefront. The Brooklyn Eagle reported that accidents were occurring with some frequency at night, and called this "a great evil."²⁴ Throughout the fall of 1894, various citizen groups campaigned to have the parkway lighted, arguing for it on the grounds of both safety and decency. Ocean Parkway was "the chief driveway of the city throughout the whole year" and yet its darkness after sundown encouraged a "lawlessness of behavior...."²⁵ In response, the commissioner first issued an order requiring all vehicles using the parkway to have headlights. In addition, bicycles had to be equipped with a bell which bicyclists had to ring to warn others of their approach.²⁶

In October 1895, the parkway itself was lighted. Ninety-two 1,200 candle power electric lights were installed the length of the parkway, spaced 260 feet apart. When the lights were turned on for the first time, people said they made the parkway bright as day. That night, the parkway was "... crowded as never before with bicycles and vehicles of all sorts."²⁷

In early 1896, Commissioner Woodruff agreed to build the return bicycle path. In April, the state legislature passed an act authorizing its construction and also the laying of sidewalks on both sides of the parkway. To fund the project, the act diverted money to it that had been raised the year before by a sale of bonds meant to improve streets in the Twenty-Sixth Ward of the city, the ward which included Brownsville.²⁸

In May, as the construction of the return bicycle path got under way, Commissioner Woodruff issued a new ordinance that completed the spatial segregation of traffic on Ocean Parkway. Bicycles were barred from the center roadway at all times, with violators subject to arrest and a fine. Business wagons



Ocean Parkway: three drives, two bicycle paths, and sidewalks (1896)
Photograph from the New York City Parks Photo Archive

were barred from the center and restricted to the side roads at all times. The center roadway was left to carriages and horses, but a restriction against speeding was placed on them. Between Prospect Park and Twenty Second Avenue they couldn't travel faster than ten miles an hour.²⁹ This was the part of the parkway along which development had begun and by this time a number of large houses had been built.³⁰ The new residents may have had a hand in securing a speed limit for their neighborhood.

Upon issuing the order, Woodruff declared that: "The Ocean Parkway [...] is now divided into seven distinct courses."³¹ He explained the new spatial ordering as a rationalization necessary for safety and order: "Upon my assumption of the duties of Park Commissioner, I at once concluded that pedestrianism, bicycling and the riding and driving of horses constituted three altogether incompatible

kinds of travel, and I set to work to devise means for their divorcement upon lines which would prove satisfactory to all fair minded people."³²

Controversy immediately erupted over the part of the ordinance that regulated bicycle activity. State-wide bicycle advocacy groups, such as the New York State Division of the League of American Wheelmen, called the regulations illegal and organized to have them repealed. Bicyclist rights were evoked under the Liberty Law that had been passed by the state legislature in 1887. This law stated that: "No commissioner or other authority having charge of any street, avenue, highway, parkway or public place within the State of New York shall have the power or authority to exclude bicycles from the free use of highways and parkways whenever the same are open to the free use of persons using carriages drawn by horses." Bicycle advocates argued that just because there were bicycle paths on the parkway, it didn't mean bicyclists must relinquish their rights to the rest of the roadway.³³

Woodruff argued that: "[...] the two cycle paths may be considered the sides of the main driveway, and my order is tantamount to a regulation that bicyclists shall keep to the right of the road....."³⁴ Besides, the ordinance was necessary to control unsafe behavior. He claimed that he was induced to issue it after first-hand observation of reckless bicycle riding on the parkway: "They were on the main driveway, dodging in and out among the horses, and scaring the timid ones." And fair was fair. If drivers of horses and wagons couldn't use the cycle path, than bicyclists shouldn't be able to use the center roadway.³⁵

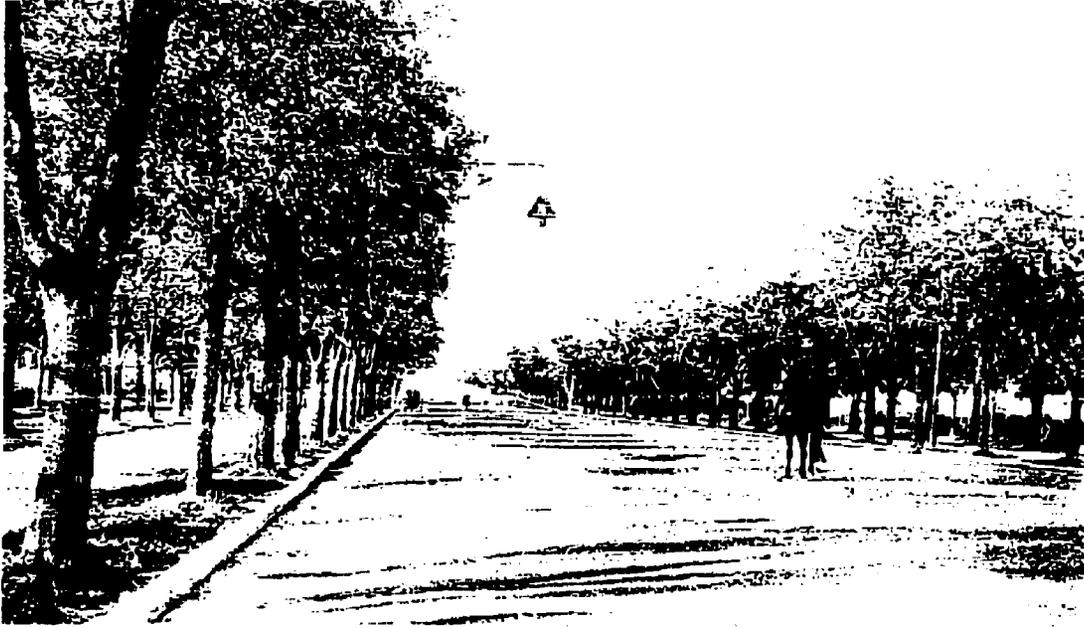
The Brooklyn Eagle sided with the commissioner. An editorial printed shortly after the new ordinance was announced, defended his right to regulate use of the parkway: "He has the right, as park commissioner, to keep bicycles off the rambles in the park and he has the same power to regulate travel on the boulevard. He can keep trucks from using the main drive, for there are side

drives laid off expressly for their use. He can, by the same token, keep light wagons from interfering with the trucks. He can keep walkers and baby carriages from the cycle path where they are a danger and a nuisance and where the young roughs who ogle the women have been endured with too much calmness in the past. He can restrain the ferocious scorcher³⁶ who is the biggest nuisance of all. If he can not do these things it is not worth our while to retain a park commission."³⁷

Locally, some bicyclists supported the new regulations and some did not. Michael First, a prominent member of the Brooklyn Bicycle Club, agreed with the order: "I think the common sense view is in favor of the park commissioner." He felt it was to everyone's advantage to restrict certain traffic to certain parts of the parkway. Alex Schwalbach, another Brooklyn bicyclist, disagreed and threatened to ride his bicycle in the center of Ocean Parkway every day until he was arrested and then keep appealing the case until he got a ruling in his favor.³⁸

The legislature upheld the ordinance, and on May 8th Woodruff announced that it would be enforced.³⁹ The following day, twenty-one bicyclists and members of the Good Roads Association were sworn in as special police officers to help enforce the rules.⁴⁰ Over the course of the whole of 1896, 204 arrests were made on Ocean Parkway, probably most of them for reckless cycling.⁴¹

The return bicycle path and the new sidewalks were quickly built. The bicycle path was eighteen feet wide and built of limestone screenings. A concrete sidewalk was laid on the west side of the parkway from Prospect Park to Coney Island, and a bluestone sidewalk was laid on the east side from the park to Kings Highway. At the same time, crosswalks were laid wherever intersecting streets were open. These were four and a half feet wide, consisting of two courses of bluestone, two feet wide each with one course of Belgian block in between.⁴² Amenities were also installed along both the bicycle paths and the sidewalks,



Policing the Ocean Parkway
Photograph from the New York City Parks Photo Archive

including benches and drinking fountains for both people and horses. The return path was opened on June 27th with a parade of 10,000 participants and thousands of viewers.⁴³

As the bicycle regulation controversy played out, carriage drivers and equestrians were complaining about the state of the center roadway and wagon drivers were complaining about the state of the side roadways. In July, an angry citizen sent a letter to Commissioner Woodruff charging him with only being interested in cyclists and asking him to use a little "if only a little" money to put the center roadway "formerly the drive of the city" into shape.⁴⁴ The same month, a Brooklyn Eagle article described the side roadways as hub-deep in mud.⁴⁵

Woodruff responded by initiating a drive to get money from the city to rebuild the parkway roadways with a new foundation and drainage system. He lobbied the cause heavily. In interviews, he described the parkway as either dusty or muddy at all times and: "... nothing more than a heavy dirt country

road for much of its distance."⁴⁶ He described clouds of dust sweeping the parkway, forcing riders and drivers to give up their afternoon runs to the ocean.⁴⁷ Cost estimates for the work kept increasing. In April, Woodruff estimated it would take \$200,000 to rebuild the parkway. In July, he estimated it at between \$300,000 to \$400,000. At the time, the annual appropriation the city gave the Parks Department for maintenance of Ocean Parkway was around \$22,000,⁴⁸ which went to daily sprinkling and scraping of the roadways, and occasionally to filling in low spots with gravel .⁴⁹

Citizen complaints and Woodruff's lobbying paid off. In 1897, the Parks Department received a huge increase in appropriations, mainly for rebuilding Ocean Parkway. The center roadway was reconstructed with a new foundation for its entire length and macadamized from Prospect Park to 22nd Avenue.⁵⁰ The west side road was reconstructed with a new foundation and paved with macadam from Parkville, where the old macadam paving ended, to Coney Island, making it the only paved road connecting Brooklyn with Coney Island.⁵¹ Wagon traffic along it increased and equestrians adopted the habit of using the east side road, which became known as the equestrian path.⁵²

In 1897, at the request of the Good Roads Association, all the ordinances previously adopted in relation to parks and parkways in Brooklyn were revised and consolidated into a single set of rules. These rules were operative twenty-four hours a day and any violation was subject to arrest and a fine.⁵³ Many of these regulations concerned the parkways. They were as follows:

1. All vehicles must carry lighted lamps, showing a white light ahead, from thirty minutes after sunset until thirty minutes before sunrise.

2. Riders, drivers and cyclists must observe all the rules of the road, keeping to the right of the road at all times, except when overtaking vehicles going in the same direction, when they must pass to the left.
3. Riding or driving is prohibited on the paths in Prospect Park. Cyclists will be permitted to push their wheels on the walks from the drives to convenient shelters or to places of refreshment. They will also be permitted to push their wheels to benches on the walks, near the drives, when desiring to rest themselves. The owners of bicycles requiring temporary repairs must remove them to a place of safety on the sod near by until they have completed their repairs. Cyclists will not be permitted to lounge on benches of the Park after the hours fixed for closing. Only equestrians may use the paths especially set aside for them.
4. Cyclists must not coast in Prospect Park nor upon the bicycle paths, and must keep their feet on the pedals and their hands on the handlebars.
5. Bicycles and tricycles must be provided with bicycle bells not to exceed two and one-half inches in diameter.
6. The use of Chinese lanterns is positively prohibited in Prospect Park, on the Parkways and on the bicycle paths, excepting for parades, when a special permit must be obtained.
7. Riding more than two abreast on the bicycle paths is prohibited.
8. Cyclists must use the west path when going toward Coney Island and the east path in returning.
9. Cyclists must not mount or dismount except upon the extreme right of the paths.
10. Cyclists must not exceed a speed of eight miles an hour in the Park and twelve miles an hour on the bicycle paths.
11. Racing on the bicycle paths is prohibited.

12. Horses, wagons, carriages and pedestrians must not use the bicycle paths.
13. Instruction on the bicycle paths at any hour is prohibited.
14. It shall be unlawful for persons to speed their horses at any time whatsoever between Twenty second avenue and the Ocean Parkway entrance to Prospect Park.
15. Speeding is defined to be at a rate exceeding ten miles an hour.
16. Business wagons, trucks, etc., heavy or light, are prohibited from using the main drive of the Ocean Parkway. They must use the side roads at all times.
17. Speeding is prohibited upon all parts of Eastern Parkway.
18. Business wagons, trucks, etc., must use the block pavement at either side of the main road, or the side roads of Eastern Parkway.

In 1898, Brooklyn consolidated with New York, the Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island to become one large city. Title and authority over the Brooklyn parks and parkways were transferred to the Department of Parks of the City of New York. The Mayor of New York appointed a park board consisting of three members, one member for the Bronx, another for Brooklyn and Queens combined, and the third for Manhattan and Staten Island. The Manhattan commissioner was designated president of the board. Each borough commissioner had sovereign control over parks in that borough, but the position was held at the Mayor's pleasure. Each new mayor choose three new borough commissioners, so they were positions of political partisanship.³⁴ In 1911, a separate commissioner was named for Queens, bringing board membership to four commissioners.

Just prior to consolidation, Brooklyn had annexed the towns of Flatbush, Gravesend, New Utrecht and Flatlands. All of Kings County was now part of Brooklyn and all of Brooklyn was now part of the greater New York City.

The 1900's and 1910's

Two years after consolidation, at the turn of the century, members of the Pleasure Drivers Association, an association of horse men, began lobbying for a speedway on Ocean Parkway, on which to race harness trotters. They argued for it on the grounds of civic pride: "Brooklyn is the only city approaching its size in the United States which has no speedway"⁵⁵ and because it would attract the right people to live in the borough: "A speedway would be an attraction to Brooklyn Borough and draw both people and money here from over the river [....]."⁵⁶ Promoters of the speedway claimed it would be easier for downtown New York businessmen to reach than the popular Harlem River Speedway which had been built in Manhattan, north of Central Park, in 1897.⁵⁷

A Brooklyn Eagle reporter following the story declared that he had canvassed horse clubs, road houses, and drivers on the road and had found no one opposed to the idea of a speedway. "The subject was an all important topic of conversation along the road...."⁵⁸ But there was debate over where the speedway should go. The Pleasure Drivers Association wanted it to run between 22nd Avenue and Kings Highway, while members of some local riding clubs wanted it to run from Kings Highway to Coney Island. The Pleasure Drivers Association favored the upper stretch because it was more accessible, had no major cross roads, and had the largest and most fashionable roadhouses on it.⁵⁹

Some people argued that while a speedway was desirable, it shouldn't be built on the parkway. Theodore Miller, a member of the Riding and Driving Club of Brooklyn, wanted a speedway but thought building it on the parkway would

crowd traffic and push pleasure carriages onto the bridle path. Another member of the same club suggested putting the speedway on 22nd Avenue instead.⁶⁰ These suggestions, as well as one to put the speedway on the west traffic road of the parkway, got nowhere. Most people who wanted the speedway wanted it located on the prestigious parkway.

In the summer of 1900, Park Commissioner Brower approved a speedway between Twenty-Second Avenue and Kings Highway. This course ran between the southern edge of the village of Parkville and the northern edge of Gravesend. At its terminus was the Brooklyn Jockey Club, occupying the grounds of the former Prospect Park Fair Grounds Association. For about half its length, the speedway was bordered on one side by the open space of the Washington Cemetery. The speedway was 70 feet wide, covering the whole width of the center roadway, and 7,800 feet (or a mile and a quarter) long. It was constructed of loam with fine sand. The official opening on July 1, 1900 was celebrated with a big parade and the presentation of a solid silver loving cup to Commissioner Brower.⁶¹ A Brooklyn Eagle article reported that nearly 2,000 fast horses paraded through the streets of Brooklyn and down the new speedway.⁶²

Use of the speedway was regulated by informal rules. It only operated between three and five-thirty in the afternoon and racing was allowed only in one direction, going south. Pleasure carriages and horse-riders not engaged in the contests were supposed to use the side roadways while the speedway was in use. If the side roads became too crowded, carriages could be driven slowly along the sides of the center roadway, along one side coming and the other side going. Racing horses returning to the start of the course would jog inside of these carriages.⁶³

The speedway was very popular, boasting daily speed contests with sometimes as many as 4,000 hand-clapping spectators.⁶⁴ Recalling these times

later Maurice E. McLoughlin wrote that: "There are still a good many of us who can remember the thrill we got as youngsters, standing on the curb on Ocean Parkway and watching the "Brushes" as the fast steppers came thundering down the road, driven by skilled owners who wore a smile of triumph when they won and seldom allowed their expression to change if they lost one of those glorious impromptu races."⁶⁵

Even if they didn't have carriages, people could get to the speedway, to see the races, by taking the Prospect Park and Coney Island Railroad (also known as Culver's Railroad) which ran along Gravesend Avenue and had stops in both Parkville and Gravesend. This railroad had begun operation around the same time that Ocean Parkway was built. Its construction and low fares had opened up the Coney Island beaches to the masses, who came in droves. Hotel and amusement park development followed. In the late 1890's, Steeplechase Park and Dreamland Park were opened on Coney Island, followed in 1905 by Luna Park.⁶⁶ These were fantasy parks, featuring brilliant light displays, hair-raising rides, fantastic animal shows and natural disaster recreations—elephants sliding down special shoot-the-chutes, the Mount Pelée eruption, the sinking of the Titanic, to name just a few. "If the original Chicago Midway in 1893 gave country cousins a chance to kick their heels, a park like Luna a decade later gave middle-class city folk a chance to escape from the rut of cautious living. Luna not only had appeal for people with money and leisure, it served as a Caribbean cruise for the stenographer and truck driver who couldn't afford to go to sea."⁶⁷ A stop along the way to watch the speedway races on Ocean Parkway was just another attraction.

Automobiles were just starting to come into use as pleasure vehicles when the speedway was built and within the first ten years of the speedways existence, the Parks Department erected signs at either end of the speedway proclaiming:

"Automobiles Must Take the Westerly Drive."⁶⁸ This was not enforceable by law, because a state law enacted around this time gave automobile drivers complete use of all highways in the state, but newspaper articles suggest that at first automobile drivers generally complied.⁶⁹

At the time, traffic on both side roadways was two-way. Automobile drivers and wagon drivers used the paved west roadway to travel both north and south, and equestrians used the unpaved east roadway. Along the length of the speedway, when it was in use, carriage drivers probably used either side roadway that was convenient.

The west traffic road saw heavy use and new residents living along its upper stretch complained about its condition. They used the roadway to get to their houses and complained about the wear caused by heavy motor trucks. A spokesperson for the Ocean Parkway Taxpayers Association complained that: "So deep and numerous are the potholes [...] that residents break their automobiles and carriage springs while trying to get out to the main drive."⁷⁰

After 1900, motor vehicle use kept increasing. Bicycle-riding and horse-back riding remained popular, but numbers began to wane. Carriage-driving was increasingly seen as old-fashioned. With more autos using the parkway, speed limits were increased. In 1903, New York City issued its first comprehensive set of rules of the road.⁷¹ These rules dealt with issues like right and left turns, hand signals, and right of way issues (right of way was given directionally: vehicles traveling in a northerly or southerly direction had the right-of-way over those going east or west).⁷² The same year, New York City also enacted a twelve mile per hour vehicle speed limit, which in 1908 was raised to 25 miles per hour after the courts ruled that state speed limit laws superseded local laws. This general speed limit seems to have applied to Ocean Parkway.⁷³ In 1904, the park

commission raised the speed limit on the bicycle paths to eighteen miles per hour.⁷⁴

In 1910, competition between people driving automobiles and harness racers on the speedway came to a head. Some automobile drivers decided they were being deprived of their rights by being asked to drive on the west traffic road for the length of the speedway, and they started driving on the center roadway. When they weren't arrested other automobile drivers did the same.⁷⁵ Harness drivers complained that accidents were occurring between autos and horses.⁷⁶

As the result of lobbying efforts by harness racers, a bill was introduced in the state legislature that would give the park commission jurisdiction over regulating automobile use of the parkways. The intent was to allow a park commission directive to supersede the state law that gave automobile drivers the right to use all state highways. A Brooklyn Eagle article reported that harness racers wanted to "[...] secure their rights to the use of the Ocean Parkway speedway, for, they claim, the boulevard was really built for the use of light harness horsemen." It also reported that automobile drivers were "aroused" by this possible regulation.⁷⁷

The legislative bill passed in 1913, giving the park commissioner discretionary power to regulate or prohibit the use of any parkway by any particular class of vehicles. The commissioner used this power to exclude automobiles from the speedway during race times.⁷⁸ But, this regulation would be short-lived, because horse-racing was losing popularity while automobile driving was gaining in popularity. As the number of automobile drivers continued to increase, it put pressure on the park commission to open the entire parkway to automobiles, all the time.

The struggle over who had rights to use the speedway was between two powerful opposing interests, one gaining in numbers and strength and the other

declining. The struggle between horse drivers and auto drivers over the right to use city streets played out in American cities during the first decades of the 1900's. The struggle over use of the mile and a quarter stretch of the central roadway of Ocean Parkway that was the speedway was merely a very prominent struggle.⁷⁹

The 1920's and Early 1930's

In 1921, the act giving the commissioner the right to restrict any vehicles from any part of the parkway at any time was amended to give the right to at any time remove any restriction and permit use of any part of the roadway by vehicles of any kind.⁸⁰ The Ocean Parkway speedway ceased to be.

Between 1921 and 1922, the whole length of the center roadway of Ocean Parkway was paved with macadam. Once paved, it became the clear realm of automobiles. Horses could not keep their grip on the hard macadam surface as well as they could on loam or gravel. Writing later about the demise of the speedway, Maurice E. McLoughlin wrote that: "Little by little the old boulevard was hardened up to suit the rubber tires, making it impossible for the fine horse to have any comfort."⁸¹

The paving was done with some sensitivity. The pavement was 70 feet wide between Prospect Park and Avenue I in Gravesend, but only 66 feet wide from there on to Coney Island. The narrower width of pavement at the southern end was to avoid killing trees whose roots extended into the center roadway. Two hundred and seventy-six new trees were also planted to replace ones that had died.⁸²

After the paving, Commissioner Harmon declared that: "Ocean Parkway is now the greatest and finest thoroughfare in Brooklyn, in fact, in Greater New York."⁸³

Things were speeding up on the parkway. Not just the speed of the automobiles rushing at 25 miles per hour, but also the speed with which changes were happening. Over the next decade, new traffic controls were added to the parkway, and traffic flows were reorganized, in an attempt to impose more order.

In 1924, the east side road, which had always been the least used, was brought into service for heavy vehicle traffic. The west cycle path was converted into a two-way bicycle path, the east cycle path was converted into an equestrian way, and the west side roadway was converted into a roadway for commercial vehicles.

In 1925, a Brooklyn Eagle editorial described a constant stream of "machines" on the parkway and called on the city to install traffic signal towers. "[...] Autos dash madly up and down, drivers for some reason—I suppose just plain selfishness—not making any attempts to stop. [...] Weekdays and nights the traffic has to shift for itself. So do pedestrians."⁸⁴ By 1927 traffic signals were installed at major intersections.⁸⁵

Traffic may have been heavy and fast but apparently pedestrian accidents weren't a big problem. A "municipal murder map," published by the City Club of New York in 1927, showed that no fatal accidents involving children occurred on either parkway during the year,⁸⁶ in spite of the fact that pedestrians were moving back out onto the parkway, reclaiming space they had given up thirty years earlier. That same year the park commissioner turned down a request by equestrians to turn the west cycle path into an equestrian path because cyclists weren't using it, by saying that: "Its not really a cycle path any longer [...] It's used as a promenade by hundreds of mothers with their children."⁸⁷

In 1928, the east side roadway was paved with macadam, completing the paving of all the roadways. In the process, many large, old trees--some more

than fifty years old--were destroyed. Residents lamenting the loss were told by the Parks Department that: "Progress must take its toll of sylvan adornments in the modern city...."⁸⁸ With this paving, commercial traffic movement was reorganized. The west side roadway became a one-way road for southbound travel, and the east side roadway a one-way road for northbound travel.

In 1929, a dividing line was painted down the middle of the center roadway for the entire length of the parkway, with paint supplied by the Long Island Automobile Club. Those doing the painting started simultaneously at either ends and met in the middle. The line was a foot wide and five and a half miles long. It was heralded as: "...the world's longest and widest traffic safety line...."⁸⁹

In 1932, new traffic lights and lane markings were installed. The center roadway was marked for three lanes in each direction. The new signals, forty-five in all, controlled every intersection along the parkway, except a few unimproved ones near Coney Island, and were directed at traffic on both the parkway and cross streets.⁹⁰ Not everyone agreed that the signals made things better. Several months after they were installed, the Ocean Parkway Civic League complained that they made conditions more dangerous rather than safer. Auto drivers were racing on the side streets to beat the light, whereas before they had approached the parkway cautiously until they could see that parkway traffic was halted.⁹¹

In 1933, in order to discourage speeding, the traffic signals were changed from all changing simultaneously to being staggered. Drivers driving at 30 mph could travel without stopping, while those driving faster would hit a red light.⁹²

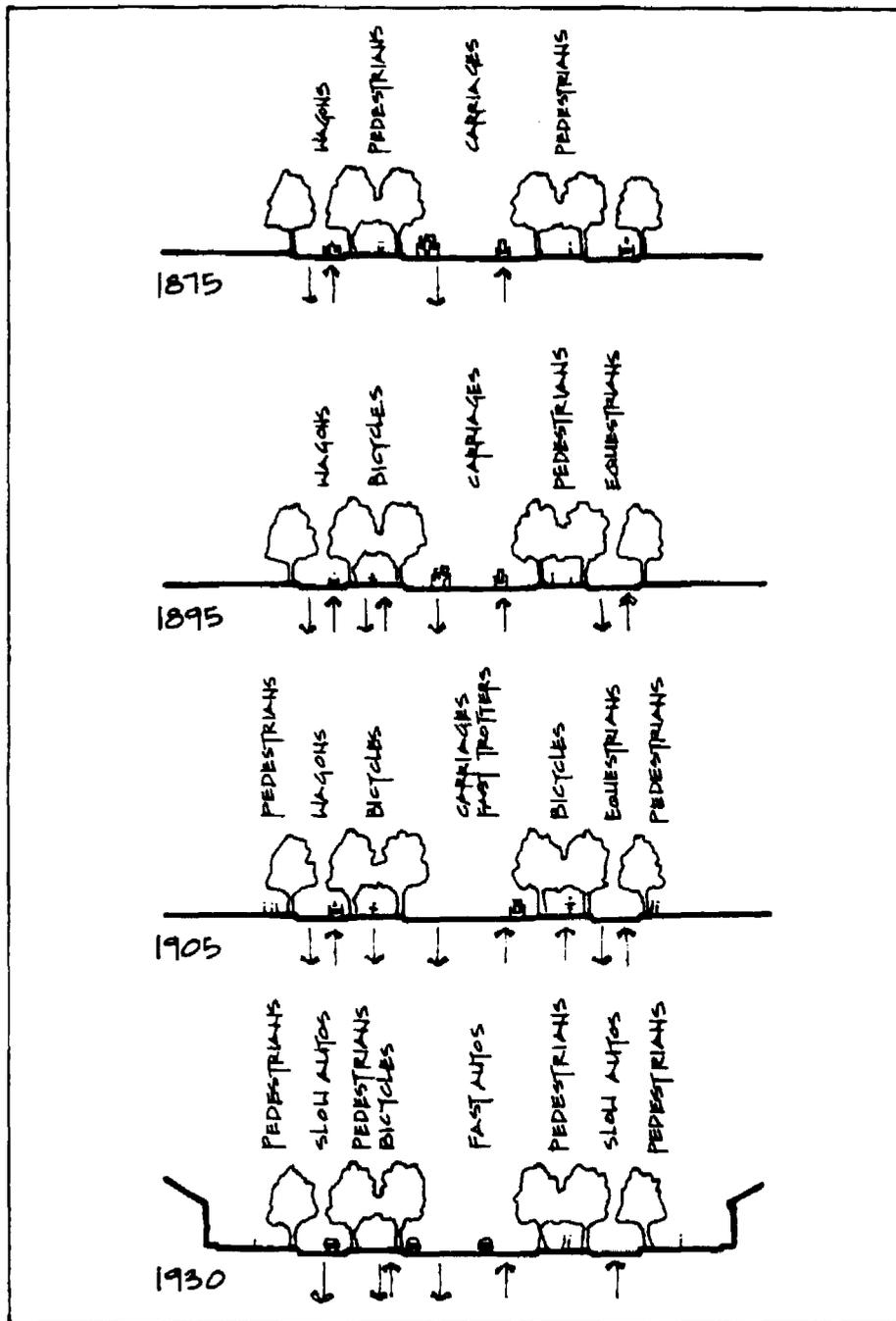
While the new traffic controls were being implemented, the parkway saw an influx of new users. This was the Depression, and poor entrepreneurs began using the public space of the park to make some money. A 1932 Brooklyn Eagle article describes an "invasion" of unlicensed ice cream and pop vendors with



Automobiles on Ocean Parkway (1939)
Photograph from the New York City Parks Photo Archive

wheeled carts. On a given day, there were more than a hundred vendors along the length of the parkway, two to three on each block, making a profit of between 70 cents to \$2.00 per day. The article described the vendors as a "poor, wandering tribe" of former musicians, tailors, blacksmiths, businessmen.⁹³

Other parkway users were unhappy with the vendors and increasingly unhappy with the behavior of automobile drivers. People living along the parkway complained about trash: "Much of the filth on Ocean Parkway is caused by passing motorists who buy ice cream and other confections from the vendors operating at every corner and then toss their wrappers away indiscriminately."⁹⁴ Equestrians still using the bridle path on the east mall complained that auto drivers were trying to intimidate them from using the parkway. They said that



The different uses of Ocean Parkway during different time periods

female riders were often taunted with critical comments and that truck drivers frequently followed groups of riders to scare the horses.⁹⁵

Automobile drivers had gained dominance over the roadways on Ocean Parkway, and their presence had changed the character of the street. The

parkway was no longer the bucolic place it had once been. It was now marked by the constant throb of engines.

The automobiles were changing the character of Ocean Parkway. Early automobile use of the parkway, in the 1900's and 1910's, was associated with pleasure driving, so the pleasure drive character of Ocean Parkway at first remained intact, although the nature of the pleasure driving experience had changed: it was less bucolic, noisy, and faster. By the 1920's and 1930's, as substantial residential development occurred along Ocean Parkway, its popularity as a pleasure drive began to wane. Other parkways, totally devoted automobile use, were built in outlying areas of the New York Metropolitan area and these became the popular pleasure drives. We will return to this shortly. First, we will briefly chart the evolution of the use of Eastern Parkway from the time when it was built into the early 1930's.

The Eastern Parkway

The 1870's through the Early 1930's

When Eastern Parkway was built, all three roadways, the two malls, and both sidewalks were constructed and all six rows of trees were planted. The center roadway was paved with a combination of materials: a central strip of macadam with a Belgian block border on either side. The side roads were paved with cobblestones, and the sidewalks were paved with limestone flagging. Over the years, the same general sorting out of uses happened as on Ocean Parkway, with a few differences: special restricted bicycle paths were not built on the malls, there was never a speedway, and the regulated separation of business vehicles from pleasure vehicles was never as complete as it was on Ocean Parkway.



Roadmaking on Eastern Parkway (1896)
Photograph from the New York City Parks Photo Archive

The 1896 ordinance enacted by the park commissioner to control use of the parkways prohibited speeding on all parts of the parkway, as on Ocean Parkway, but instead of restricting business wagons completely to the side roads, they were also allowed to use the block pavement on the sides of the center roadway.⁹⁶ In other ways as well, Eastern Parkway was more a work-a-day street than Ocean Parkway. A map of Brooklyn's trolley system shows that in the 1890's Eastern Parkway was crossed by six electric trolley lines.⁹⁷

While the physical form of Ocean Parkway was never questioned, in the late 1880's Commissioner Brower, concerned over the lack of development, proposed changing Eastern Parkway completely, saying: "There was something radically wrong in the manner in which the avenue was originally laid out, and after eighteen years but few signs of improvement are on or about it." He wanted the

state legislature to pass an act to authorize filling the center roadway and planting it with grass, shrubs and pedestrian walks, and widening the side roadways by ten feet each (to 35 feet wide), with the extra width coming out of the set-backs. In the annual report of 1889 he declared that this plan had the approval of the majority of the property owners along the parkway, who would be willing to pay the entire cost of filling the center roadway and half the cost of widening the side roads, if the city would pay the rest of the widening costs.⁹⁸ Nothing came of this proposal.

Not much is recorded about changes that did happen to the physical form of Eastern Parkway, or when various traffic controls were installed. We do know that the western end of the parkway was lighted ten years earlier than Ocean Parkway was lighted: in 1884, twenty-three electric lights were installed between Bedford Avenue and the Plaza.⁹⁹ We also know that in 1887 the malls were planted with flowering shrubs, in rectangular beds set in the middle of the paths, and benches and drinking fountains for pedestrians and horses were installed.¹⁰⁰

The one big change was the construction of a subway under the length of the parkway, but other than new subway entrances on the malls the subway had no impact on the surface form of the parkway. New York's first subway lines opened in Manhattan and the Bronx in 1904, and in 1913 lines were extended into Brooklyn.¹⁰¹ The subway under Eastern Parkway was constructed between 1915 and 1922, part of a line that ran down 7th Avenue in Manhattan, through the financial district, across the river, through downtown Brooklyn, to the head of Prospect Park, out Eastern Parkway and into Brownsville and East New York. For the seven years that the subway was under construction, the entire center of the parkway was torn up and completely impassable.¹⁰² When the center surface was reconstructed it first received a temporary asphalt pavement. Permanent sheet asphalt wasn't laid until sometime between 1927 and 1935.¹⁰³

Public transit was the one use incorporated on Eastern Parkway that never was incorporated on Ocean Parkway (with the exception of the Coney Island Coaches that ran along Ocean Parkway during its early years) although a decade after the Eastern Parkway subway line was opened, civic organizations representing landowners along Ocean Parkway tried to get a subway line, and then when this failed tried to secure a bus line which also failed. They wanted a subway line, because apartment house development had followed the opening of the line on Eastern Parkway, and they wanted this type of development along their parkway as well.¹⁰⁴ (Public transit and its association with development along the parkways is discussed at some length in Chapter Four.)

The Parkways in the 1930's

By the early 1930's, Sanborn maps show that land along the whole length of Ocean Parkway was developed with housing, except a few blocks near its Coney Island end, and the whole length of Eastern Parkway was also developed, mostly with housing.¹⁰⁵ Development had a big impact on the use of the parkways. The parkways no longer served as just pleasure and recreation grounds, they were also central parts of residential neighborhoods. People living along them, or nearby, began using them as neighborhood streets and as local park spaces. People on foot, especially women and children, used them on a daily basis, not primarily to travel along but to sit and to socialize along. At the same time, people living in both immediate and outlying neighborhoods began using the parkways as commuting routes to get to places of employment in downtown Brooklyn and Manhattan. The mall spaces on the parkways were taking on a predominantly local character while the center roadways were taking on a through movement character, serving the larger city. Meanwhile, the parkways

were becoming less attractive as pleasure drives because other, newer, pleasure drives had been built in outlying areas which were more attractive to automobile drivers. By this time, most of the amusement parks at Coney Island had closed, and those that remained were losing their allure.

The development of the parkways is the subject of Chapter Four and their community use is the subject of Chapter Five. While these issues are intertwined with the formation of the complex public open space character of the parkways, those aspects of the story are woven into the text in those chapters. This chapter continues the story of how professional debates over the meaning of the term "parkway" developed and changed, and how these debates eventually impacted the public open space character of Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway.

PROFESSIONAL REDEFINITIONS OF THE PARKWAY IDEA

The new traffic controls installed on Ocean Parkway in the 1920's and early 1930's coincided with the first efforts on the part of regionally focused city planners and traffic engineers to fit the Brooklyn parkways into a regional system of through traffic routes. These efforts included the beginnings of professional re-definitions of the Brooklyn parkways themselves. But professional redefinition's of the term "parkway," and of appropriate parkway form, had been underway for some time. The story of these professional redefinition's is complex. To simplify, I shall first give a brief overview and description of a range of parkways designed and built after Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway and through the early 1930's, including those built by Olmsted and Vaux, in order to give tangible form to the subsequent analysis. Then, I will

analyze the professional concerns and debates that led to the new forms evident in the twentieth century parkways.

The thing that is so compelling about the Brooklyn parkways is their complex three-roadway, two-mall form and how this form allows for complex, overlapped, use of the public space. The emphasis, here, is on this. The following is not intended to be an exhaustive analysis of changing professional views about all aspects of parkways, since such a study has already been done.¹⁰⁶ Rather, the focus is on how professional re-definitions altered perceptions about parkways in ways that simplified their physical form.

A Sampling of Parkway Built After the Brooklyn Parkway

Olmsted and Vaux Parkway

After the Brooklyn parkways, Olmsted and Vaux collaborated on designing other parkways and parkway systems for other cities. Some of these they designed with the same physical form, but they also designed different forms and called them parkways as well. After the 1870's, when Olmsted and Vaux dissolved their partnership, Olmsted went on to design parkway systems on his own and in collaboration with new partners.

The Buffalo Parkway System

At roughly the same time that they designed the Brooklyn parkways, Olmsted and Vaux designed several parkways for other cities that had a three-roadway, two-mall form similar to Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway. In 1868, they designed a park and parkway system for Buffalo, New York. Two of the four parkways they designed for this system, Lincoln Parkway and Humbolt Parkway, were designed almost identical to the Brooklyn parkways in both

width and cross-section. Like the Brooklyn parkways, they were straight and formally laid out. The other two parkways, Bidwell Parkway and Chapin Parkway, were called "parkways" but were designed with two roadways on either side of a center, tree-lined mall. All four parkways were built as designed.¹⁰⁷

The Parkway at Riverside

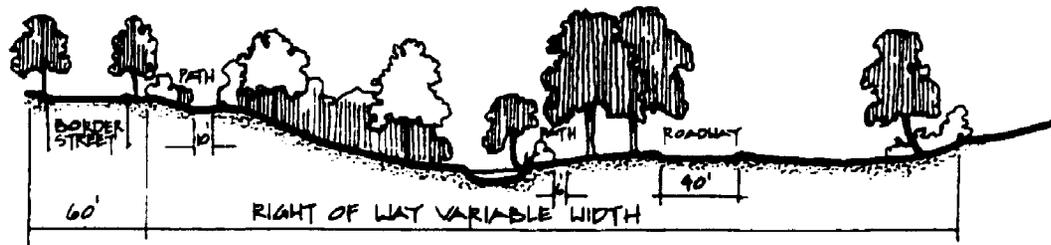
Also in 1868, Olmsted and Vaux also prepared a plan for a residential suburb near Chicago, in Riverside. The plan was structured around a parkway with a similar form as the Brooklyn parkways, but only 150 feet wide.¹⁰⁸

Parkways Designed by the Olmsted Firm

In 1872, Olmsted and Vaux dissolved their partnership, although they continued to collaborate on some projects. Vaux did not design any more parkways but Olmsted went on to design a number on his own and in collaboration with partners in the new firm he started in 1884. Notable partners in this firm were, first, his nephew and step-son John C. Olmsted (one and the same person, Olmsted had married his brother's widow) and later Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and Charles W. Eliot. Olmsted led the firm until he retired in 1895 and then the Olmsted brothers continued the firm until 1950.

The Boston Parkway System

Olmsted remained interested in and kept using the three-roadway parkway form throughout the rest of his career. With his partners, he designed a park and parkway system for Boston between 1878 and 1895, and one for Louisville, beginning in 1891 and carried on by the firm until 1921. For the Boston plan, Olmsted designed parkways with various forms but mostly single roadway and



Section of the Bronx River Parkway

Westchester County, north of the Bronx. They were called "parkways," but their purpose was not to connect urban parks with each other but rather to open-up rural areas for scenic enjoyment by automobile drivers. According to Charles W. Eliot: "The speed of automobiles has made a great expanse of open country accessible to the automobile owner. The whole countryside has become the motorist's park."¹¹⁵ These new parkways were very long and laid out through broad right-of-way swaths that were partially re-landscaped but also retained many of their natural landscape features. They were graded, curved, and banked to provide for easy driving. Like the Brooklyn parkways, they were intended to lay the path for residential development, but such development would be around the parkways, at some remove, rather than directly on them.

The first of these new parkways was the Bronx River Parkway, extending for 15 1/2 miles between the Bronx Botanical Garden and the Kensico Dam. Built under the auspices of the Bronx Parkway Commission, it is often referred to as the first "modern" parkway.¹¹⁶ Its right-of-way varied from two hundred feet to twelve hundred feet. It was designed with a main driveway running close to the river and a single side roadway some distance away, across the river and

screened by landscaping. Access to the main roadway was infrequent and cross-traffic was grade separated at intersections. The point of the design was to disencumber the center roadway from interference by cross-traffic, like the design for the Grand Concourse, but also to disencumber it from interference from traffic on close side roads. This was a radical innovation, the beginning of the substantial erosion of the original complex and interactive parkway form. The Bronx River Parkway was very successful, leading to the construction of other similarly designed parkways, such as the Hutchinson River Parkway in 1928, and the Saw Mill River Parkway in 1930.

Herbert S. Swan described the Hutchinson River Parkway in the following manner: "Separation of grades at intersecting streets, openness of view at all points, easy curves with generous radii, the absence of any privately developed frontage abutting upon the roadway, and beautiful plantings, all combine to make this one of the most delightful highways as well as one of the most efficient carriers of fast traffic in the country."¹⁷

In these parkways, emphasis was totally on through traffic movement, and this meant separating the center roadway from other elements of the street form.

Professional Concerns and Debates

Where did the new forms come from? They emerged within the context of continued rapid urban growth and ever increasing numbers of automobile drivers, and within the context of emerging new professional disciplines whose charge was to deal with these things.

Beginning around 1900, landscape architects and people involved in the new professions of city planning and traffic engineering collectively engaged in defining and re-defining the purpose of parkways, and also their physical form.

Along with definitions came classification systems. Different professionals—landscape architects as well as the traffic engineers and city planners who were taking over as the dominant designers of streets—developed different definitions with different emphasis, and put parkways into different classification systems. It took some time before these were resolved into a single system. At the same time, professionals were also defining and classifying other street types and inventing altogether new types, and developing hierarchical street systems.

The evolution of professional thought regarding parkways can be traced through articles published in professional journals. In exploring this evolution, two things are of primary interest: First, how professional definitions of the term "parkway" and related terms such as "boulevard" evolved; and second, how professional thought evolved regarding the complex three-roadway, two-tree-lined-mall form of the original parkways. We will explore these things separately, starting with definitions.

Evolving Professional Definitions of Parkways

As their plan for Brooklyn evolved, Olmsted and Vaux used a series of different terms to describe the new public spaces they were designing. Initially, they called them "suburban connections," "park approaches," and "shaded pleasure drives," and "broad boulevards." The first time they used the term "parkway" was in their annual report of 1868, in which they presented the parkway plan. Later, they used more terms, calling the parkways "trunk lines of residence," and "stately avenues."¹⁸ Once built, the newspapers, the park commission, and individuals referred to Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway as both "parkways" and "boulevards."¹⁹

Between 1900 and the early 1930's, professional definitions of what parkways were became increasingly legalistic and professional debates about the purpose of parkways see-sawed back and forth between concerns over their aesthetic purpose and concerns over their functional purpose, with functional concerns eventually gaining complete dominance. Early definitional issues involved differentiating "parkways" from "boulevards," while later ones involved jurisdiction and abutter's rights.

John C. Olmsted's Definitions

In 1915, in a report prepared to give guidance on a proposed parkway system in Essex County, New Jersey, and partially reprinted in the professional journal *Landscape Architecture*, John C. Olmsted classified parkways into two types based on their aesthetic form: 1) informal parkways and 2) formal parkways or boulevards. Their differences were basic, and inherent in the names. Informal parkways followed the natural topography and were naturalistically landscaped, while formal parkways were straight and planted with rows of trees. He recommended building the former in suburban and rural locations and the latter in "citized" conditions. This classification approach solidly associated the term "boulevard" with formally designed parkways, like the Brooklyn parkways. The term "parkway" was becoming disassociated with this form and more associated with informal, outlying forms.

Charles W. Eliot's Definitions

In 1922, in an article in *Landscape Architecture* that analyzed the impact of automobiles on the design of park roads, Charles W. Eliot talked about parkways in terms of their functional purposes. He reiterated the two long-standing functional purposes originally described by Olmsted and Vaux— connecting

parkways with each other and connecting parks with population centers—but to these he added a third: connecting congested population centers with the suburbs and the countryside. In other words, as far as Eliot was concerned, parkways could be divorced from parks altogether. The main purpose of the article was advocating protecting naturalistically designed urban parks from automobile intrusions. With this objective in mind, Eliot advocated designing parkways from the viewpoint of the automobile drivers. He sounds like he's conceding contested territory to keep from giving up the whole country. He evokes an image of urban parks under siege by automobiles, and in this war parkways were the logical territory to give up: they had always been primarily about movement. "There is no question but that parkways should be designed primarily for the convenience and pleasure of motorists. By surrendering the parkways completely into their hands perhaps we can atone for the exclusion of automobiles from landscape parks except under rigorous conditions."²⁰ It is not clear from the article how Eliot thought existing parkways should be treated.

Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.'s Definitions

Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. was not yet ready to concede all parkways to automobile drivers or to commuting. In 1926, in an article published in *Landscape Architecture*, he laid out a classification system for parkways based again on their aesthetic purpose. It was a more elaborate system than the one described by his brother a decade earlier. It classified parkways into four different types based on their aesthetic purpose, but also dealt with how the different types fit in the general street system.

Olmsted's parkway classifications were: 1) Elongated Parks, 2) Boulevards, 3) Intermediate Elongated Parks/Boulevards, and 4) Glorified Ornamental Streets. Landscape scenery influenced the aesthetic impression of Elongated Parks,

whose purpose was to connect urban parks in such a way that people could pass from one to the other without interruption of the park-like environment.¹²¹ Abutting buildings influenced the aesthetic impression of Boulevards, whose purpose was to enable people to travel under conditions more enjoyable than those of an ordinary street. Intermediate Elongated Parks/Boulevards were transitional parkways on which both park-like elements and buildings were present, giving a mixed aesthetic impression. Often running along the edges of parks, their purpose was to allow people to enjoy park scenery without feeling they were actually inside a park. The purpose of Glorified Ornamental Streets, which Olmsted dismissed as not really parkways at all, was simply to add value to abutting property and to serve only incidentally for travel and enjoyment by the general public. Based on this classification system, Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway would qualify as boulevards. Within the classification system, boulevards were described as being part of the general street system, the same understanding that Olmsted and Vaux had regarding the place of the Brooklyn parkways in relation to the street system. The jurisdictional status the classification system assigned to boulevards, however, was different. Boulevards were described as normally occupying "...the legal status of streets rather than of parks, or of streets enclosing islands of land having park status." By this definition, three-roadway boulevards might be either wholly under the jurisdiction of public works departments or jurisdiction over them might be mixed: the mall parts of the boulevard might have park status while the roadway parts had general street status. But the whole boulevard would not have park status. Unlike Olmsted and Vaux's vision for the original parkways, the "park" nature and the "way" nature of boulevards were here being conceptually separated, with the "way" nature having dominance.

Edward Bassett's Definitions

Four years later, in 1930, Edward Bassett, a city planner trained as a lawyer,¹²² who was then the president of the National Conference of City Planning, reduced parkways into a succinct legal definition, which carried with it only an abstract sense of their purpose and physical form. In an article published in *American City* in 1930, he presented a definition of the term "parkway" within the context of trying to establish the need for a new kind of thoroughfare which he wanted to call a "freeway," which he conceived of as being like a parkway for general traffic, not in any aesthetic sense but purely in an unencumbered movement sense.¹²³ To define what a freeway was, Bassett also had to define the terms "highway" and "parkway". His definitions:

A highway (or street) is a strip of public land, dedicated to movement, over which abutting owners have the right of light, air and access.

A freeway is a strip of public land, dedicated to movement, over which abutting owners have no right of light, air or access.

A parkway is a strip of public land, dedicated to recreation, over which the abutting owners have no right of light, air or access.

In this definition, aesthetic concerns were completely disassociated from the term "parkway" and social uses associated with it were greatly simplified. Parkway were conceived as single purpose recreation corridors, substantially isolated from interaction with their surrounding context.

Herbert S. Swan's Definitions

In an article published the following year in *American City*, Herbert S. Swan, an engineer, reiterated Eliot's earlier advice and advocated laying out boulevards and parkways with strict reference to the characteristics and requirements of automobiles, but he now assigned only one purpose to parkways: "The elaborate systems of boulevards and parkways developed in various cities between the seventies and nineties were designed originally as connecting links between large parks. We still believe in large city parks; we still believe in parkways; but the basis for our belief in them rests upon entirely different ground from that of forty or sixty years ago [...]. The development of a comprehensive system of parkways today finds its justification primarily in the need of the community for rapid trafficways radiating from the center of the city to the suburbs, and connecting the various suburbs themselves with one another."¹²⁴

The automobile, and commuting uses, had won out.

Evolving Professional Thought Regarding Physical Form

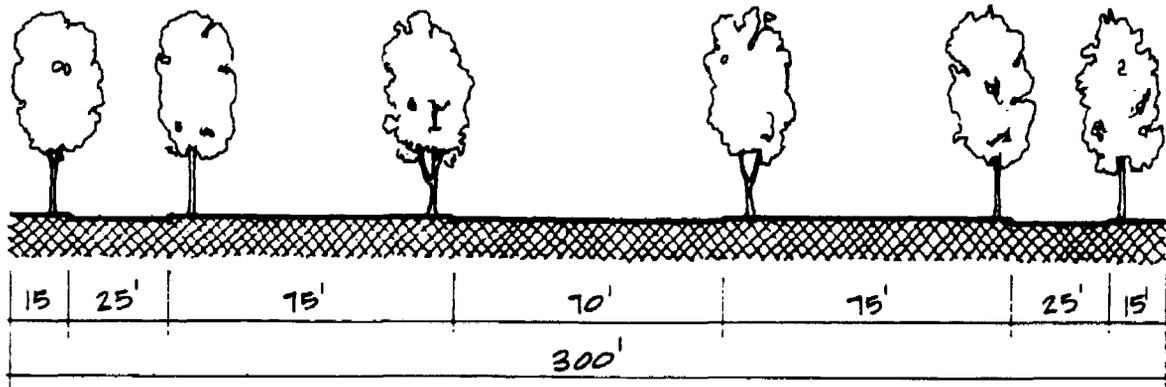
What about more detailed issues of physical form? The three-roadway, two-mall form persisted within professional street classification systems, both as a "boulevard" form and as a "parkway" form, until the early 1930's and then substantially disappeared. To understand how professional thought about this form evolved, we will look again at the two classification systems already discussed and also analyze the form of several parkways that were actually built or proposed.

John C. Olmsted's Ideas About Physical Form

At the same time that he divided parkways into formal and informal types, John C. Olmsted also identified three types of formal boulevards: single-drive, two-drive, and three-drive. He compared and contrasted the dimensions and pros and cons of each type, and in the process set standards for the widths of the different types. Single-drive boulevards ranged from 60 feet wide to 150 feet wide but were usually 100 feet wide. Two-drive boulevards varied between 100 feet wide and 200 feet wide but were generally 200 feet wide. Three-drive boulevards were generally 300 feet wide, substantially wider than any of the parkway designed by the senior Olmsted and approaching the width of the Champs Elysées, in Paris.

Olmsted lends some insight into how the different types were perceived by property owners and why the three-drive kind was not often being built by the 1910's. He states that the two-drive kind was the most popular with adjacent property owners because it gave them immediate access to the driveway from their property, while the single-drive type, with broad park strips in front of houses, was the least liked because it required owners to build long private drives through the park space, which was expensive. This had aesthetic problems as well, because the park strips were interrupted frequently by the driveways, especially when land was platted in narrow lots. Olmsted states that the three-drive kind of boulevard wasn't being built much anymore, chiefly because, since it was wider, it required taking more land and was more expensive to build. However, he argued that three-drive boulevard type was greatly superior to the others because of its "marked dignity," and also because its form allowed pleasure driving to proceed with less disruption.

Olmsted's description of a three-drive boulevard, and the width he suggests as appropriate for it, suggest that he thought there should be more separation



John C. Olmsted's hypothetical three-drive boulevard

between the center roadway and the side roadways than had been the case in the nineteenth century boulevards designed by his father. He doesn't provide cross-sectional diagrams of his parkway types, but it is easy to construct one from his detailed written description. This exercise suggests that in one of Olmsted's hypothetical three-drive boulevard, the malls separating the center roadway from the side roadways would be about 75 feet wide.

Olmsted addressed two issues regarding boulevards which led him to suggest design innovations to the three-drive boulevard form: automobiles and electric street cars. In 1915, automobiles were sharing roadways with horse-drawn carriages, equestrians and bicycles. Olmsted proposed adding a new and distinct "way" channel in the center of the center roadway of three-drive boulevards which would be for cars only. This channel would consist of a wide band of concrete paving. Horses and carriages would be relegated to moving along either side of this band.

The design alteration he suggested for streetcars was to incorporate them on three-drive boulevards by placing the tracks along the center edge of the side

medians, so that the streetcars would travel at the edge of the center fast-moving roadway. His discussion of streetcars is interesting because it shows a willingness to set aesthetic concerns aside if compelling social reasons warranted. Obviously responding to public debates about whether or not streetcars were appropriate on boulevards, he sided in favor of their inclusion. He recounts the history of excluding public transit from boulevards. Horse cars were excluded from the earliest boulevards because they were ugly and uncomfortable and because no one used them for pleasure purposes. But people perceived electric street cars differently: they found them comfortable and convenient even if ugly and noisy. Olmsted recognized that running street cars on boulevards would liberate them from general traffic and so make them more efficient and the ride more pleasant. Even though street cars would be "...very seriously objectionable to those who use the boulevard but are not using the electric railway]....]," given that more people would be accommodated on the street cars than in other modes of transportation perhaps "the greatest good and pleasure for the greatest number would warrant the extra cost, the increased danger and the serious interference with the quiet enjoyment of the beauty of the boulevard by the pedestrians and visitors in automobiles, carriages and on bicycles [...]"¹²⁵

Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.'s Ideas About Physical Form

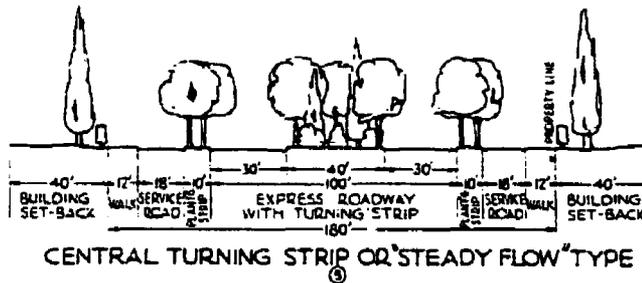
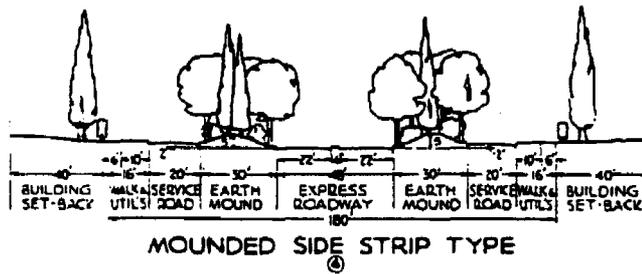
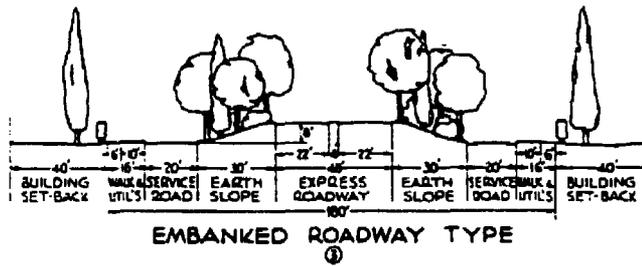
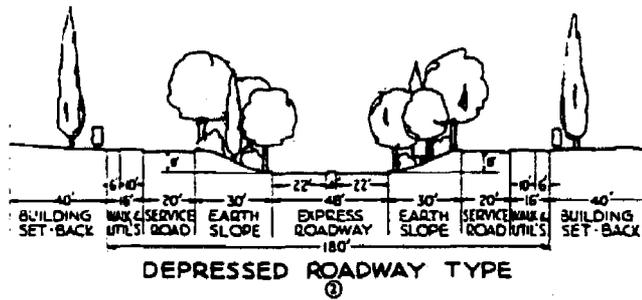
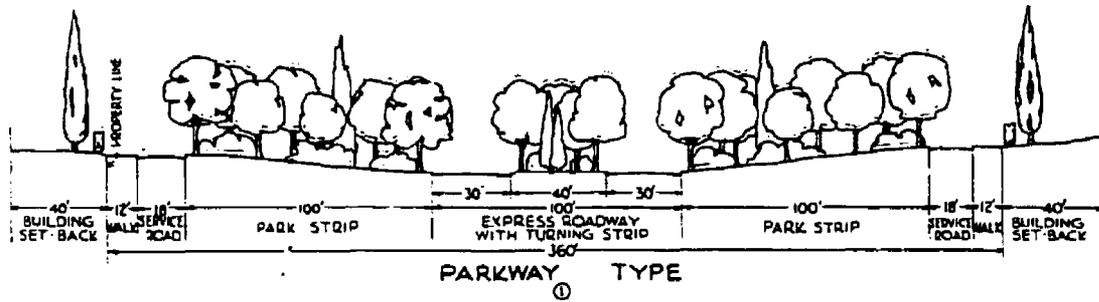
In his mid-1920's classification system, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. divided boulevards into the same three classes as his brother had earlier—single-roadway, double-roadway, and triple-roadway—but he used new terminology to talk about the side roadways, calling them "border" roads. His article in *Landscape Architecture* was written to specifically address ".....the problem of border roads vs. their omission in parks and parkways" and he advocated their advantages: "There is a strong presumption in favor of providing border roads except in cases

where the narrowness of the land which can be acquired forces adoption of a design which is no more than a dignified ordinary street with some planting on its sidewalks [....]."¹²⁶

Physical Form of New York Metropolitan Area Parkways

In parkways actually being built in the 1910's and 1920's, side roads, when included, were usually called either border roads or service roads. They often were included in designs, but how they were located and what status they carried varied. The Bronx River, Hutchinson River and Saw Mill parkways were each characterized by either one or two "border" roads separated from the center roadway by wide landscaped spaces. In the Saw Mill River Parkway design a border road was included within the parkway right-of-way, while in the other two, border roads were separate streets outside the parkway right-of-way.

When three-roadway designs were used for parkways in the 1920's and 1930's, attention focused on the design of the separating mall spaces. An illustration on the cover of a 1931 edition of *The American City* magazine showed five cross-sections of streets with a three-roadway, two-mall form. The sections were drawn by Robert Whitten, a city planning consultant in New York City, and the caption described them as typical cross-sections for expressways through metropolitan residence areas. Four of the sections were of streets with an 180 foot right-of-way. Three of these showed identical dimensional division of space into a 48 foot center roadway, 30 foot malls, 20 foot service roads and 16 foot sidewalk and utility spaces, but with different elevational treatment of the malls and center roadway. One showed the malls sloping down from the service roads to a depressed center roadway, while another showed the malls sloping up to an elevated center roadway. The third showed the malls shaped in a mounded berm between roadways at the same grade.



Typical Cross-Sections for Expressways Through Metropolitan Areas
From *The American City*

The fourth 180 foot wide street cross-section was shown with narrower side malls and a wider center roadway divided by a central mall, described as a turning strip. This expressway was labeled a "steady flow" type. The fifth cross-section was labeled as a "parkway" type of expressway. It was twice as wide as the others, 360 feet wide, with a 100 foot center roadway that included a central turning strip, 100 foot wide malls, 18 foot service roads and 12 foot sidewalks.

In these cross-sectional diagrams, the designer was exploring ways to separate the three roadways through the design of the malls. The sections indicate that the malls didn't contain paths, they were not for promenades. Rather, the malls were conceived purely as buffer zones rather than "ways" in their own right. The sections indicate that the side roads were contained within the overall street right-of-way, but, because of the mall design, they appear highly separated from the center roadway.

An article in *American City* in 1933 by Charles U. Powell, an engineer working for New York City, talks about parkways as "arterial parkways" and discusses the usefulness of what he calls the "marginal street" or "service road" on them. His vision, in keeping with his technical terminology, was purely functional. Service roads were the streets into which surrounding neighborhood streets would dead-end so as to not interfere with the parkway. He recommended that they were only necessary in built-up areas.¹²⁷

In the space of about sixty-five years, between the mid-1860's and the early 1930's, the professional concept of what a parkway was had changed enormously. Professionals put aside Olmsted and Vaux's complex concept in favor of a simplified concept. All the while, however, Eastern Parkway and

Ocean Parkway continued to exist, substantially in their original complex form, and continued to support a complex array of public space functions.

REGIONAL PLANS, HIGHWAY PROJECTS, PRESERVATION EFFORTS

Professional debates about the purpose and form of parkways and boulevards manifested themselves in highway plans. Many of the debates were sparked and revolved around what was going on in the New York area. New York was leading the way in traffic engineering strategies and the first highway plans for American cities were developed for it.¹²⁸ In this section, we shall analyze the plans that were developed for the New York metropolitan area and the impact these plans had on Eastern and Ocean Parkway.

The 1929 Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs

In the early 1920's, the privately organized Sage Foundation had founded and funded the Committee on the Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs. The committee was charged with determining regional needs and preparing a plan covering over 5,000 square miles: New York, Long Island, northern New Jersey, Westchester County, and Connecticut.¹²⁹ The plan was produced in 1929 and published in ten volumes. It included a plan for a regional highway system.

In the highway plan, routes were classified into two broad categories: major regional routes and minor regional routes. Both types were divided into three functional classifications: general highways, boulevards, and parkways. Legal descriptions were provided of each:

An ordinary highway is predominantly a public right-of-way for all classes of traffic with a public right of access to and from the land which abuts it on both sides.

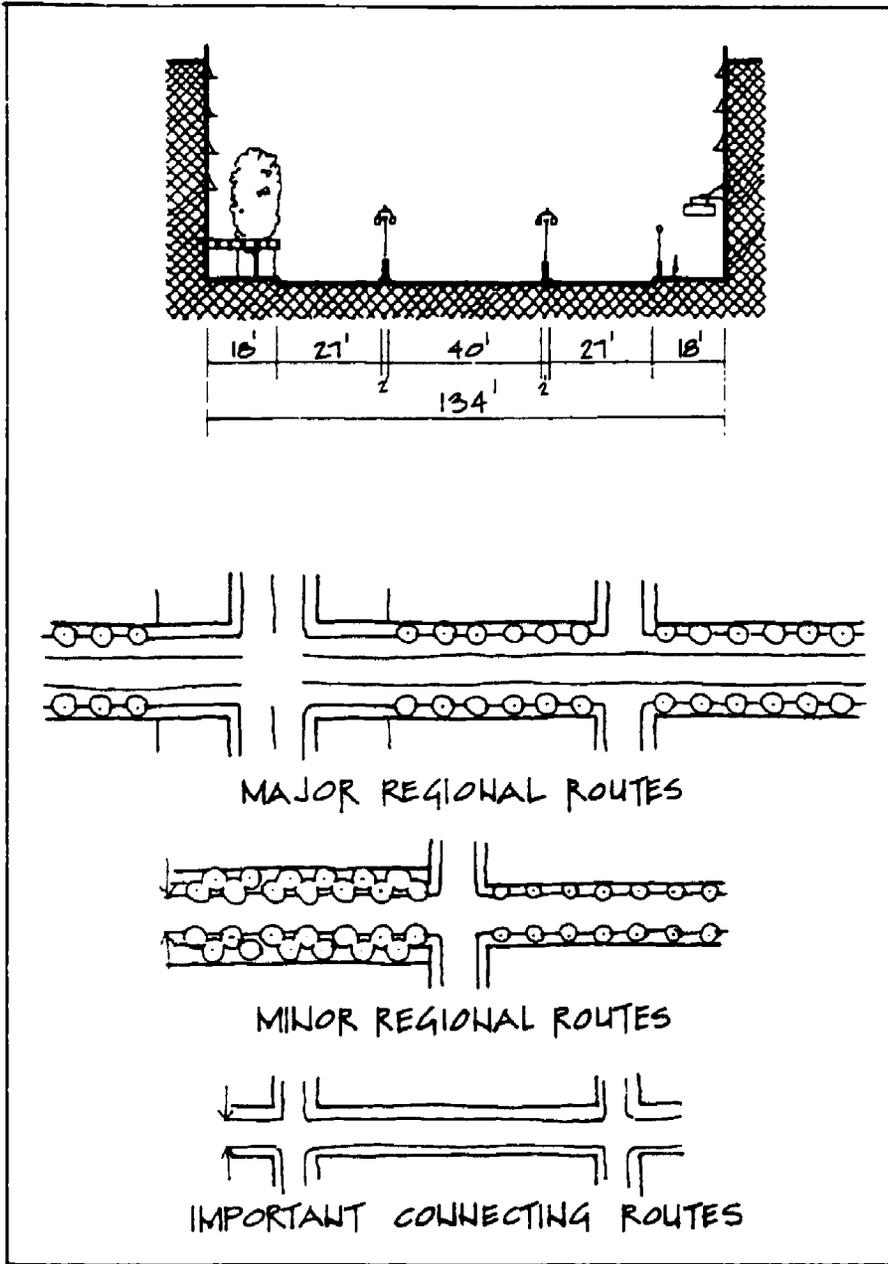
A boulevard is a highway that is furnished with trees, grass, or other landscape features, but to which right of access from abutting property is not denied.

A parkway is a park and road combined, with a special legal quality that denies right of access to it from abutting land.

In these legal definitions, boulevards were differentiated from parkways primarily in terms of abutter's rights: abutters on boulevards had rights to the roadway, those on parkways did not. Additional descriptions included in the plan differentiated them further, in terms of both their purpose and use:

"Boulevards are proposed where it is desired to have strips of land available in the highway for landscape treatment." They would be "minor adjuncts" to the park system and usually, but not always, restricted to passenger cars. "The Parkways, on the other hand, are proposed as roadways within existing or proposed park lands and would form a type of express highway for passenger vehicles." They would always be restricted to passenger cars.¹³⁰

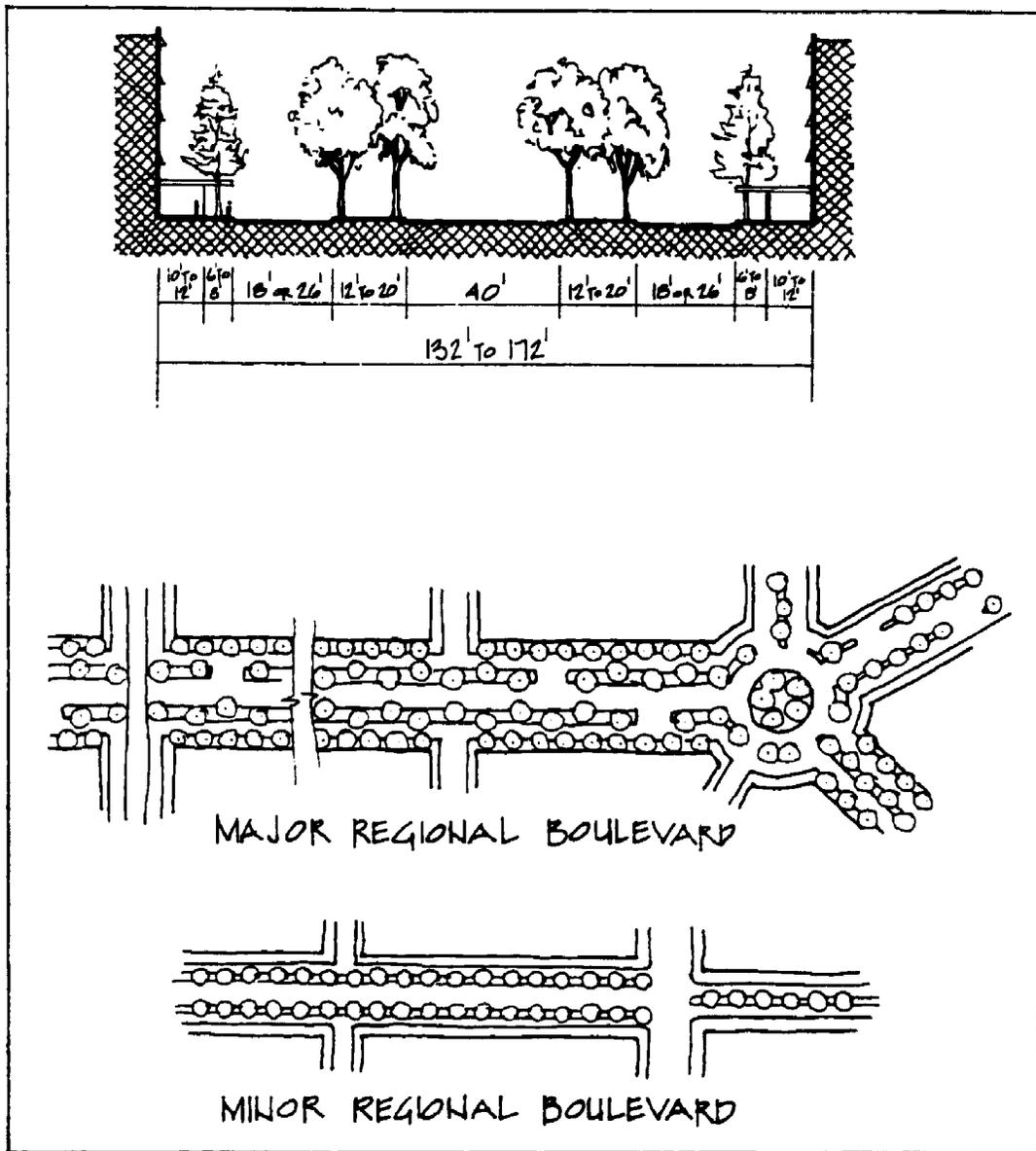
Parkways were intended to facilitate speed. They were described as "ways of communication." While also providing recreational features—paths for walking and riding, and places for picnics and gathering—these would be supplementary to the larger "way" function. In other words, the plan conceived of the parkways more as "ways" than as "parks"—or, at least, the "park" part of the equation had



General Highway Types
 From The Regional Plan of New York and its Environs

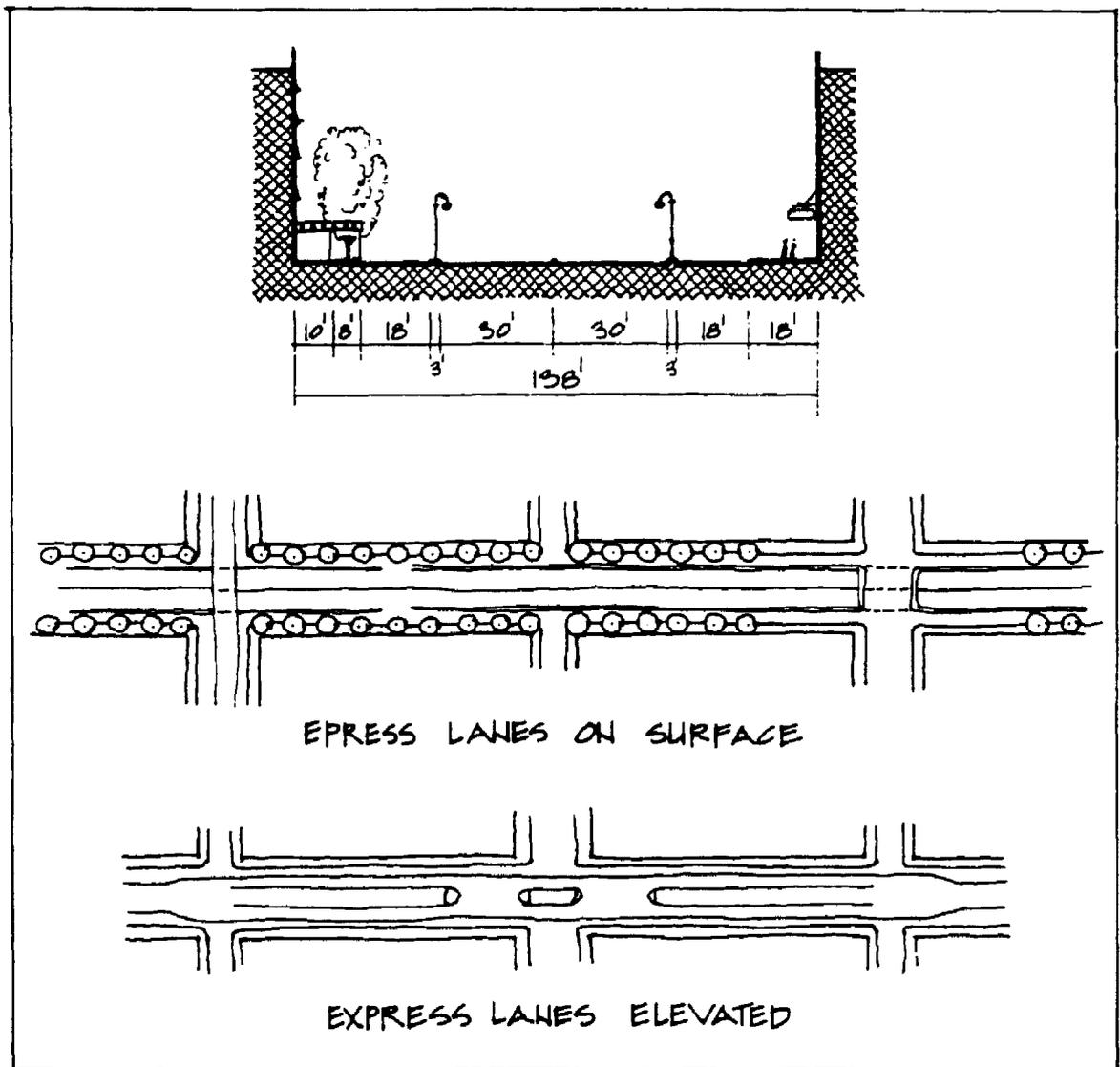
become mostly visual. The complexity of the "way" quality of the original Brooklyn parkways was entirely absent.

The plan described the proposed regional highway system as two-tiered. The main system was comprised of the general highways, used by all types of traffic.



Boulevard Types
 From The Regional Plan of New York and its Environs

The parkway and boulevard system was conceived as a parallel and supplemental system which would make the general highway system more efficient, because passenger cars would use the boulevards and parkways and thereby free up regular highways for commercial vehicles. The design of the parkway and boulevard system was to be coordinated with both highways and parks, and conceptually based on the system being built in Westchester County.



Express Highway Types
 From The Regional Plan of New York and its Environs

The Regional Plan didn't provide a drawn cross-section of a parkway, but it did provide cross-sections of general highways, express highways, and boulevards. Of interest is that both major and minor regional boulevards are shown with a three-roadway form and so were major regional general highways and one form of express highway.

The suggested width of general highways and express highways and the minimum width of boulevards was very similar: 134 feet, 138 feet, and 132 feet, respectively. The maximum width shown for a boulevard was 172 feet.

Differences between the boulevard and general highway were that on the boulevards, the medians were wider and were planted with trees, whereas on general highways they were just barren two foot wide concrete curbs. On narrow boulevards, the access roads were narrower than on the general highways, but on the wider boulevards they were the same width. The medians on both narrow and wide boulevards, which ranged from 10 to 20 feet wide, were substantially narrower than those on Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway.

Plan diagrams included with the sections indicated that for all street types with three roadways, the side roads were intended to intercept cross-traffic at minor intersections so that it wouldn't interfere with movement in the center. On major boulevards, cross traffic at major intersections was grade separated just like on expressways.¹³¹

On the graphic diagram included in the Regional Plan, Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway were shown as existing boulevards. The next highway plan developed for the New York area also showed them as existing boulevards, but suggested a different future.

The 1938 City of New York City Wide Transportation Study

This plan, published in 1938, was included in a series of reports prepared for the newly established Mayor's Committee on City Planning that were based on planning studies undertaken between 1934 to 1938 with aid from the Work Projects Administration. The studies were intended to ascertain city-wide

deficiencies and future needs and their purpose was to lay the groundwork for a comprehensive master plan.

The plan laid out an 18-year program for new highway construction, organized into three six-year plans. It detailed 23 new express highways and parkways, including seven for Brooklyn: the Eastern-Interboro Parkway, the Cross-Brooklyn Expressway, the Manhattan Beach Expressway, the Shore parkway, the Sunrise Freeway-Southern Parkway, the Brooklyn-Queens Highway Outer Route, and the Cypress Hill Express Highway. In addition, it recommended that "because of their exceptional width and strategic location" Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway should be considered for conversion into non-stop express highways.¹³² The reconstruction of the parkways was not, however, itemized in any of the detailed three six-year plans.

Studies were also prepared for the park system. This study specifically excluded parkways, saying: "Parkways, though legally the same as parks, partake of the nature of highways." Parkways had been given firmly into the hands of engineers.

1924 - 1960: Robert Moses's Parkway Plans and Projects

Both the Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs and the City Wide Study were prepared under the shadow of the emergence of a powerful parkway building regime in New York City, a regime headed by Robert Moses. While the 1929 Regional Plan was developed independently of Moses, the 1938 highway plan incorporated his parkway vision. The complete and final redefinition of the term "parkway" and of parkway form is attributable to Moses, because he built parkways on such a large scale. His relentless plans led to a complete redefinition of the purpose of Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway, at least in

professional classification terms. His road-building projects linked Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway into a new system of thoroughfares, permanently altering aspects of their public open space character. The brief summary of Moses and his plans that follows owes much to Robert Caro's brilliant analysis in *The Power Broker*.

In 1924, Robert Moses was appointed president of the newly established Long Island State Park Commission. The state law which established the commission authorized it to locate, create, acquire and improve parks, parkways and boulevards in Long Island and gave it the right to condemn and appropriate land. Using the terms "parkways" and "boulevards" in the law was crucial to establishing the state commission as a road-building power, because state highway law gave county governments veto power over the location of highways in their county. Because at the time boulevards and parkways were legally undefined, counties had no veto power over them.¹³³ As head of the commission, Moses constructed several long parkways, including the aforementioned Hutchinson River and Saw Mill River Parkways and also the Southern State and Northern State Parkways.

In 1934, Moses became the New York City Park Commissioner and he served in this capacity until 1960. During this period he was the only park commissioner for the whole city. At Moss's request, newly elected Major LaGuardia had reorganized the Parks Department. Where before there had been five separate, independent park departments, each with its own borough park commissioner, now there was one department controlled by one city-wide park commissioner. By this time, as well, Moses was in charge of all of the other government agencies that had anything to do with parks and parkways in the New York City metropolitan area: The Long Island State Park Commission, the New York State Council of Parks, the Jones Beach State Park Authority, the Jones Beach State

Park Authority, the Triborough Bridge Authority, and the Marine Parkway Authority.¹³⁴

Of these agencies, the Triborough Bridge Authority emerged as the most powerful park-building mechanism. Originally set up to build one bridge and then given the right to build all New York area bridges and approaches, in 1939 the powers of the TBA were enlarged to include building new roads and parkways connecting with bridge approaches, and to develop public parks in association with any of these projects. The TBA financed projects by issuing bonds. Moses maneuvered things so that it could endlessly re-issue new bonds when old ones came due, which meant that the TBA could continue to exist indefinitely. He also maneuvered things legally so that it was virtually impossible for anyone to remove him from the authority.¹³⁵

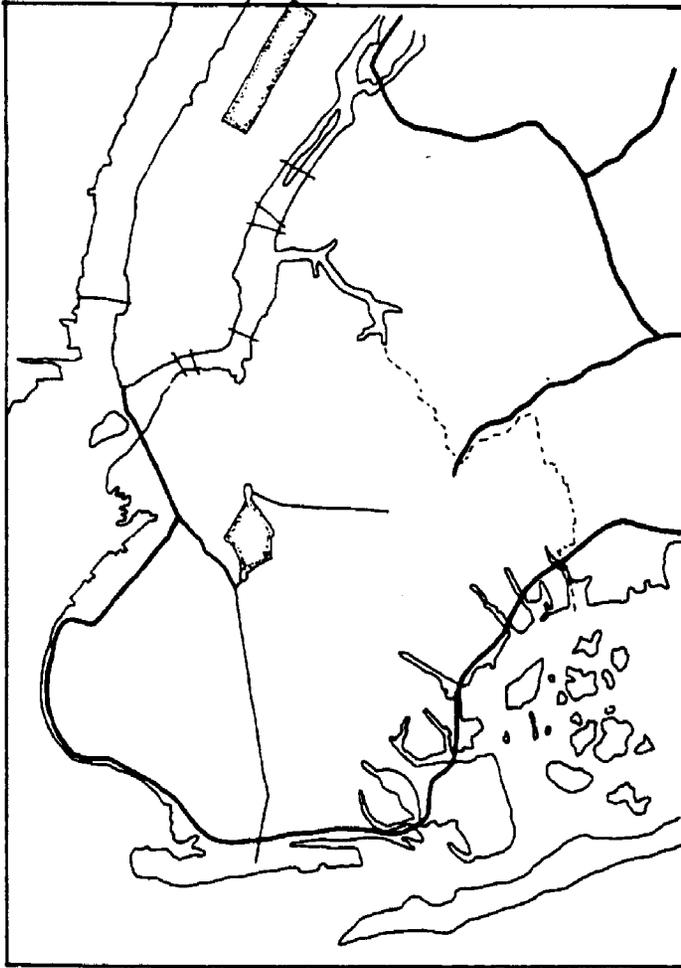
Moses had big parkway-building plans and along with funds from TBA bonds, he was very successful at getting other money to implement his plans. With plans in hand for a massive system of parks and parkways in New York City, he successfully secured large amounts of Depression-era federal funding available for public works. Between 1934-40, the federal government, through the Civic Works Administration, the Works Progress Administration and the Public Works Administration, contributed more than \$1.15 billion dollars to public works in New York City. Moses used much of this money to build parkways.¹³⁶ In 1936, the Grand Central Parkway, the Interborough Parkway and the Laurelton Parkways were opened, bringing to over 100 miles the total combined length of parkways built by Moses in Long Island and New York City. In 1937, the Henry Hudson Parkway was completed, followed the next year by the Wantagh State Parkway extension, and two years later by the Gowanus Parkway.¹³⁷ These parkways were all designed similarly to the Bronx River Parkway, with grade-separations and flanking but distanced service roads. They

were open only to private automobiles. In fact, they were specifically designed with low overpasses to make sure that trucks, and buses, would be unable to drive on them.¹³⁸ As each parkway was opened, it immediately became totally congested with traffic. Traffic lessened during World War II, as energy was directed elsewhere, but afterwards rose quickly to pre-war levels and then kept increasing.

To respond, Moses proposed a massive new program of arterial highway construction. According to Caro: "Blueprints were ready, [Moses] said, for widening the city's old boulevards [...] and his old parkways [...] and for building close to a hundred miles of new, broader roads, "expressways" to carry not only automobiles but trucks and buses."¹³⁹ Moses intended to get the funding for this from the federal government, which was getting involved in cities on a large scale through building programs and funding allocations. In 1944, the Federal-Aid Highway Act was enacted, which made federal funds available for building arterial highways within city limits. In 1946, an amendment to New York City's administrative code created a new position of City Construction Coordinator. Moses drafted this law and he was appointed to the new position. The City Construction Coordinator had the authority to represent New York City in its relations with state and federal agencies. Moses now had singular power to negotiate and write contracts with the federal government. New York City had no money to build highways on its own, and it couldn't get state or federal money without Moses' approval.¹⁴⁰

The Prospect Expressway

Moses gave highest priority to an expressway he had planned for Brooklyn.¹⁴¹ The Prospect Expressway was designed to link the Gowanus Parkway with Ocean Parkway, so that together the three roadways would create



Robert Moses' Parkways in Brooklyn

a direct thoroughfare between central Brooklyn and the new Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel. It was designed to feed into the northern end of Ocean Parkway and the plan called for widening the first several blocks of the parkway and depressing the center roadway so that cross traffic on Fort Hamilton Parkway could be diverted overhead. This design meant that the connection between Ocean Parkway and Prospect Park would for all intents and purposes be severed. Direct connection would only remain via the east side access road.

When the plan was first presented to the public in 1949, Ocean Parkway residents expressed concerns that the expressway would deface the parkway. Engineers in the Borough President's office dismissed these fears as without basis.¹⁴² The Brooklyn Eagle heralded the 2.3 mile expressway as modern progress, declaring that it would: "...extend an inviting ribbon of super-roadway from the Belt system into the heart of mid-Brooklyn."¹⁴³

Concerns over the impact the expressway would have on the parkway faded in the face of the massive displacement of people building the expressway would entail as it passed through built-up parts of the city on its way to the parkway. The big debates over the expressway were first over exactly where it would run before reaching Ocean Parkway, and then about the plight of thousands of uprooted residents. After 1949, aesthetic concerns were not voiced, at least not in the newspapers.

Construction of the expressway began in 1952 and took 17 1/2 years to complete. It was finally opened, without fanfare, on June 12, 1962. It cost \$32 million dollars to build, about half of which came from Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority funding and the other half from state funding made available after the passage of the Interstate Highway Act in 1956.

The expressway caused traffic problems on Ocean Parkway. It was open to trucks, but the parkway was not. At the end of the expressway, trucks were directed onto the west side road, and had to travel several blocks along it before they were allowed could turn off. The fifteen mile per hour speed limit differential between the expressway and parkway also caused problems. The speed limit on the expressway was 45 mph, while it was 30 mph on the parkway. As drivers reached the end of the expressway, they would come up the grade and suddenly encounter reduced speed signs and traffic signals. A Brooklyn Eagle article referred to it as a "....high speed alley of accidents [....]."

Apparently Ocean Parkway itself may have been considered for reconstruction as an expressway during the time period when the Prospect Expressway was being constructed. A memo in a file maintained in the Parklands division of the New York City Parks Department refers to funds set aside in 1961 for a study of grade separations on Ocean Parkway.

Highway Construction Projects of the 1970's through 1990's

The 1970's Reconstruction of Ocean Parkway

The next threat to Ocean Parkway occurred about a decade later, and almost led to its substantial demise. In 1971, the city applied for federal and state grants to repave the roadways on Ocean Parkway, in order to fix the potholes.¹⁴⁴ The Federal Highway Administration announced it would only approve the application if the center roadway lanes were widened to meet current federal road-building standards for arterial streets. This meant widening each of the six center lanes from nine or nine and a half feet to twelve feet, thereby substantially reducing the width of the medians and eliminating at least one line of trees on each. Residents strenuously objected and fought the plan. It turned into a four-year struggle.

August Heckscher, former commissioner of parks for New York City, angrily declared: "The issue is the government's insistence that it impose on the community its own standards of so-called safety. As if carriages and cars had not been going down the existing roadway for more than a hundred years."

Dr. Frieda Hoffman, resident of the area and Executive-Secretary of the Kensington-Flatbush Preservation Association captured the general community outrage in a statement she made in an interview in 1974: "Suddenly a disastrous threat has appeared. A threat which strikes at the viability of a large community.

It lacks humanity, disregards the needs of our area and is completely devoid of an understanding of the spirit of the inhabitants as well as their attachment to their beloved parkway. I shudder at the thought that the future of this beautiful boulevard is being determined by such insensitivity."¹⁴⁵

The city, responding to the broad and vocal opposition, submitted a request to the state asking that the work be done without damaging the malls. State officials were persuaded, and they submitted a revised plan to the Federal Highway Administration. In response, the FHWA proposed a compromise: keeping lane widths as they were but placing twenty inch high safety curbs along the outer edges of the medians. Residents again fought the plan, claiming it would encourage drivers to act like they were on a speedway and also would be unsightly.

Joseph B. Milgram, Brooklyn Civic Council spoke for many when he declared: "You may call that a curb, but there is no curb like that in the whole city. That is not a curb, that is a barrier. The only place I've seen these is on super highways."¹⁴⁶

While this issue was being debated, residents and interested civic groups were working to have the parkway declared a national scenic landmark. This designation was awarded in January, 1975, but the City Planning Commission held up ratification of it for three months because they were concerned that it would jeopardize federal funding for the resurfacing. Historic landmark status was finally conferred on April 10, 1975. That is what saved the parkway form. The FHWA decided it was willing to over-ride its own standards in favor of the rules of historic preservation. They funded the re-paving project while allowing the parkway form to remain as it was, settling for placing a seven-inch high steel-faced curb along the medians.



Ocean Parkway in 1998

Construction began in 1976. The project included repaving the roadways with a new concrete base and also rehabilitating the malls by planting 598 new trees, replanting the grass, resurfacing the walks, providing new benches, and installing a new pipe-rail fence on the west mall to separate the bicycle path from the pedestrian path.¹⁴⁷

Interestingly, throughout the conflict the complex intersections on the parkway, caused by the multiple roadways, were not perceived as a problem by the FHWA. There was no attempt to force intersection redesign or to alter how intersections were controlled. By this time, the center traffic and cross-traffic were controlled by signals, while traffic on the side roads was controlled by stop signs.



Eastern Parkway in 1998

The 1990's Reconstruction of Eastern Parkway

Shortly after Ocean Parkway received its scenic landmark designation, residents in communities along Eastern Parkway began efforts to have it declared a landmark as well. This status was granted in 1978, and about a decade later, in 1987, Eastern Parkway too was reconstructed; but it was an undertaking of a different sort than the reconstruction of Ocean Parkway. It was a \$63 million dollar project aimed at restoring an historic character to the parkway. New pedestrian-scale light fixtures and benches, with an historical design, were installed on the malls, paths on the malls were paved with special hexagonal pavers, and many new trees were planted to replace those that were missing. Mayor Koch dubbed it: "...a landmark reconstruction job for a landmark roadway."¹⁴⁸ It was funded with federal money.

Continued Rationalization of the Parkways for Automobiles

Control of traffic flow on the parkways has been done by computers since the mid-1970's, when computerized signal light systems were installed to monitor traffic on the parkways. This system uses sensors to bounce sound signals off of passing cars and then relays the heaviness and speed of traffic to a computer at the Traffic Department's Long Island City Headquarters, which then adjusts the timing of green lights to speed the flow.¹⁴⁹ Today, the average daily traffic volume on the parkways ranges from about 50,000 to about 70,000 cars a day.¹⁵⁰

The 1990's Greenway Plan

The most recent official re-visioning of Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway occurred in the early 1990's, when they were designated as routes in the Greenway Plan for New York City. This plan defined greenways as bicycle-pedestrian pathways along natural and manmade linear spaces in the city and described them as "...at once parks for the 21st century and a part of the transportation infrastructure, providing for pleasant, efficient, healthful and environmentally-sound travel by foot, bicycle or skates." The total emphasis on automobile use of the parkways is losing ground.

CONCLUSIONS

In the end, what stands out about Eastern and Ocean Parkway is the adaptability of their physical form: the form successfully adapted to a shifting array of uses over a long period of time. The complex form provided space

where competing uses could be sorted out gently, remaining in close proximity to each other rather than completely wrenched apart and separated. They were vital, modern public spaces where new technological inventions were first displayed and where different inventions competed with each other for space on the road; where modern inventions jostled against each other; where people invented new "modern" ways of being. On the parkways, the new was always in juxtaposition with the old, and things remained that way. Today, fast-moving automobiles share the space with older forms of travel, pedestrians and bicyclists, and rollerbladers are using the parkways in substantial numbers as well.

Unlike the so-called "modern" parkways, whose purpose was to isolate, or "free", automobile drivers from the interference of other less modern and encumbering forms of travel and social activity, the Brooklyn parkways were right in the midst of it all. As such, they compelled people to face and wrestle with the juxtapositions. Throughout their history, they compelled people to debate how the new was impacting the old, and vice versa. Today, they compel us to pause and reflect on, and question, the simplified path urban street design has followed in the twentieth century. They suggest that another path might have been possible.

Another thing that stands out is the definite shift over time on the part of local public agencies towards thinking about the parkways less holistically. Over time, the public agencies responsible for the parkways came to consider them more as "ways" than as "parks," following the general trend of professional thinking about parkways. When the parkways were originally built, their whole extent was considered a park space, and policing and regulating was done by the park commissioner. In 1938, policing the parkways and regulating traffic was turned over to the municipal police. In 1978, responsibility for the roadway parts

of the parkways was transferred to the public works department. Today, only the parkway malls are considered park spaces. As a result of the fragmented jurisdiction, policies regarding the roadways and the malls are not always well-coordinated

That Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway escaped massive reconstruction during the highway building years of the 1930's through 1960's is remarkable. Perhaps this is attributable to Brooklyn's declining importance in metropolitan New York. Attention focused on other, newer, areas; roadways were easier and more exciting to build in undeveloped areas. Perhaps the long struggle over the Prospect Expressway foretold what the reaction would be to reconstructing the parkways as expressways, a reconstruction which in fact happened to Olmsted and Vaux's Humbolt Parkway in Buffalo. Likely, we just got lucky.

In the end, what saved the Brooklyn parkways from destruction, and what will hopefully protect them in perpetuity, was a re-emergence of concern for their aesthetic qualities, which culminated in the designation of both parkways as historic landscapes. Local people had long valued the aesthetic qualities of the parkways, now a larger community has recognized and valued them, claiming them along with local people and bestowing upon them a mantle of protection against change. In this regard, the association of the parkways with Olmsted was crucial. In the 1970's, Olmsted's work was being rediscovered and re-valued (Vaux's name was less resurrected) and large sums of private and public money were going into fixing up Central Park and would soon go into work on Prospect Park as well.¹⁵¹ Once given historic landmark status, the Brooklyn parkways assumed a new, enlarged meaning, and, in a sense, the "parkway" designation was re-attached to them. The re-valuing of the parkways speaks to the endurance of the design.

The endurance of Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway as complex streets and public open spaces, and their adaptability to a wide and shifting variety of uses, suggests that Olmsted and Vaux's parkway street form may be useful in cities today where there is a need, or desire, to provide for many uses--large amounts of through traffic, local traffic, bicycle traffic, and pedestrian activities--on a single street

¹AR66 through AR73; BE 29 January 1868; BE 18 January 1875; BE 18 November 1876.

²BE 30 August 1895.

³See for instance the series of editorials and articles that were published following Commissioner Woodruff's issuing of an order restricting bicycle usage on Ocean Parkway: BE 5 May 1896, BE 7 May 1896, BE 8 May 1896, BE 10 May 1896.

⁴BE 5 September 1895.

⁵Kazin, 10.

⁶Kazin, 174.

⁷Landesman, 51.

⁸Report of the Chief Engineer, AR73, 40.

⁹Stiles, 173.

¹⁰Stratton gives a lively account of these carriage types in "The World on Wheels" written in 1878.

¹¹This was the speed limit set in 1873 for carriages in Central Park. See PoFLO SS:1, 305.

¹²Early photographs of Ocean Parkway printed in the Annual Reports of the Brooklyn Parkway Commissioners indicate that this is how the parkway was used.

¹³Such photographs are included in the Annual Reports of the Brooklyn Park Commissions for the years of 1891-92 (page 36), 1896 (page 38), and 1897 (page 6).

¹⁴BE 5 August 1900. Find other references as well.

¹⁵McShane.

¹⁶AR85.

¹⁷AR85, 46.

¹⁸AR94.

¹⁹Stages may have just come into use around this time because a Letter to the Editor of the Brooklyn Eagle dated 1 May 1895 called for starting such a service.

²⁰BE 30 August 1895.

²¹Macadam was named after its Scottish inventor. It became popular after the 1960's with the advent of steam rollers and mechanical stone crushers. Kostof (1992), 211.

²²AR95, AR96.

²³BE 16 April 1895; BE 1 May 1895.

²⁴BE 25 October 1894

²⁵BE 17 November 1894; BE 25 October 1894.

²⁶AR96.

²⁷BE 16 October 1895

²⁸AR97

²⁹See AR97, 39, for the text of this ordinance.

³⁰Robinson maps of 1890.

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- ¹¹BE 7 May 1896
¹²BE 7 May 1896
¹³BE 7 May 1896.
¹⁴BE 10 May 1896
¹⁵BE 7 May 1896.
¹⁶Speeding bicyclists were called scorchers.
¹⁷BE Editorial 7 May 1896
¹⁸BE 7 May 1896
¹⁹BE 8 May 1896
²⁰BE 10 May 1896
²¹The Annual Report of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners for 1896 gave statistics for arrests in Prospect Park and on the Parkways. Of a total of 537 arrest made in the park and on the parkways, 204 were for reckless cycling and 21 for reckless driving. The report states that 204 of the 537 arrests were made on Ocean Parkway, but does not state exactly what the offenses were. Considering the overall statistics, however, it seems likely that many of the arrests on Ocean Parkway were for reckless cycling.
²²AR97, 186. The total length of crosswalks installed at this time was 2,146 lineal feet.
²³AR 97.
²⁴BE 1 July 1896
²⁵BE 24 July 1896
²⁶BE 16 April 1896
²⁷BE 16 April 1896
²⁸Commissioner Woodruff stated this appropriation amount in an interview he gave to the Brooklyn Eagle (BE 24 July 1896), although it does not appear as a discrete figure in the Annual Reports of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners. After 1893, the annual maintenance costs for Ocean Parkway were folded into one figure for all parks and parkways.
²⁹In the 1880's, six to ten teams of park workers were apparently constantly employed at these tasks. AR88.
³⁰AR02
³¹AR97, 64.
³²AR02 refers to the east side road as the equestrian road.
³³AR97, 168.
³⁴Wheelwright; Carr.
³⁵BE 28 March 1900
³⁶BE 29 March 1900
³⁷Clay McShane describes this speedway in *Down the Asphalt Path*.
³⁸BE 28 March 1900
³⁹BE 28 March 1900
⁴⁰BE 29 March 1900
⁴¹BE 1 July 1900
⁴²BE 1 May 1910
⁴³BE 28 March 1900
⁴⁴BE 28 March 1900
⁴⁵BE 11 June 1930
⁴⁶1939 New York City Guide.
⁴⁷Pilat and Ranson, 88.
⁴⁸BE 28 April 1910
⁴⁹BE 28 April 1910
⁵⁰BE 18 July 1901
⁵¹McShane.
⁵²The regulations were then revised six times between 1903 and 1919. Tilden, 1928.

⁷³McShane.

⁷⁴Section 41 of Article 2 of the Ordinances, Rules and Regulations of the Department of Parks of the City of New York.

⁷⁵BE 28 April 1910

⁷⁶BE 1 May 1910

⁷⁷BE 28 April 1910

⁷⁸1913 Amendment (Chapter 34) to the 1904 Ordinances, Rules and Regulations of the Department of Parks of the City of New York.

⁷⁹Clay McShane provides an account of these struggles in *Down the Asphalt Path*.

⁸⁰1921 Amendment (No. 387, Int. 367) to the 1904 Ordinances, Rules and Regulations of the Department of Parks of the City of New York.

⁸¹BE 11 June 1930

⁸²BE 1922 (unknown month and day: from a clipping file at the Brooklyn Collection, in the Brooklyn Public Library).

⁸³BE 1922 (unknown month and day: from a clipping file at the Brooklyn Collection, in the Brooklyn Public Library).

⁸⁴BE 25 June 1925

⁸⁵I don't know the precise date for this, but a Brooklyn Eagle article of 27 March 1927 mentioned their presence.

⁸⁶American City, 1928

⁸⁷BE 27 March 1927

⁸⁸BE 20 May 1929

⁸⁹BE 17 July 1929

⁹⁰BE 18 May 1932

⁹¹BE 28 Sept 1932

⁹²BE 28 April 1933

⁹³BE 15 August 1932

⁹⁴BE 15 June 1933

⁹⁵BE 28 July 1933

⁹⁶AR96.

⁹⁷Greller (1986).

⁹⁸AR89, 21.

⁹⁹AR85.

¹⁰⁰AR87.

¹⁰¹Fischler (1976), 48.

¹⁰²BE 16 October 1921.

¹⁰³Dierickx.

¹⁰⁴BE 9 February 1929; BE 2 October 1931; BE 16 October 1931; BE 27 January 1932; BE 25 June 1932.
¹⁰⁵1929 Sanborn maps.

¹⁰⁶In his 1992 dissertation "The Evolution of the American Urban Parkway" Glenn Orlin describes the evolution of parkway design as the creation of successive generations of designers, from landscape architects to engineers, and identifies how these designers intended their parkways to influence urban form. He identifies three successive eras of parkway design:

First Era (1850 - 1910): Boulevards and Park Drives

Primary purpose was recreation

Intended to foster fine and stable residential neighborhoods

Second Era (1910 - 1930): Parkways Along Stream Valleys and City Edges

Designed for a balance of recreation and traffic movement

Intended to foster decentralization

Third Era (1930 - 1950): Grade Separated, Controlled Access Parkways

Primary purpose was traffic movement

Intended to accelerate decentralization

¹⁰⁷Kowsky, 20.

¹⁰⁸Fisher.

¹⁰⁹A dimensioned cross-section of this parkway is shown in Nolen and Hubbard.

¹¹⁰Louisville Olmsted Parks and Parkways Historic Landscape Analysis Report.

¹¹¹AR05, 141.

¹¹²Louis A. Risse, who had just been appointed Chief Engineer of the Department of Street Improvements of the 23rd and 24th Wards of New York City.

¹¹³Risse.

¹¹⁴Sometime between the 1930's and 1960's, the Grand Concourse was reconstructed. Its malls were narrowed, many trees were removed, and the side access roadways were widened. Today, it has a very different character than the Brooklyn parkways.

¹¹⁵Eliot, 28.

¹¹⁶Reference Orlin's dissertation.

¹¹⁷Swan, 86.

¹¹⁸Reference various reports.

¹¹⁹Reference various articles, etc.

¹²⁰Eliot, 36.

¹²¹One might ask why people would want to do this. The definition assumes that some people would desire to move between parks at some distance from each other and yet all the while retain the sense of being within a park environment.

¹²²Peter Hall, 58.

¹²³His choice of this term is explained by the following quote from the article: "This word is short and Anglo-Saxon. It connotes freedom from grade intersections and from private entrance ways, stores and factories. It will have no sidewalks and will be free from pedestrians. In general, it will allow a free flow of vehicular traffic."

¹²⁴Swan, 84.

¹²⁵John C. Olmsted, 1915, 44.

¹²⁶Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., 1926, 83.

¹²⁷Powell.

¹²⁸McShane.

¹²⁹Gilmartin, 271.

¹³⁰The Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs, 217.

¹³¹Such an arrangement was also advocated as an improvement that could be made to existing three-roadway boulevard to turn them into "steady-flow" expressways. In 1933, in an article in *American City*, a city engineer described how the steady flow system developed by town and traffic planner Fritz Malcher could be implemented on a multi-way boulevard by redesigning the street section to eliminate conflict points. Powell, 1933.

¹³²Also the Grand Concourse in the Bronx, Queens Boulevard in Queens, and part of Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn.

¹³³Caro, 175.

¹³⁴Caro, 360, 362.

¹³⁵Caro, 624, 615-636.

¹³⁶Caro, 465.

¹³⁷Caro, 347-575.

¹³⁸Caro, 899, 951, 952.

¹³⁹Caro, 896.

¹⁴⁰Caro, 704.

¹⁴¹Caro, 925; BE 9 May 1951.

¹⁴²BE 6 November 1949.

¹⁴³BE 27 June 1954.

¹⁴⁴They applied under an "early action program" of the Federal Aid Urban System, which provided that costs would be paid 70% by the federal government and 30% by the state government. New York Times, 2 August 1974, 31.

¹⁴⁵The Flatbush Citizen, 17-23 July, 1974.

¹⁴⁶NYT 20 June 1975.

¹⁴⁷BE 20 September 1976.

¹⁴⁸BE 5 August 1987.

¹⁴⁹Daily News 23 March 1973; NYT 9 December 1975.

¹⁵⁰Jacobs, Rofe, Macdonald (1994); Bosselmann, Macdonald (1999).

¹⁵¹Carr; Rosenzweig and Blackmar, 469-530.

CHAPTER FOUR

CATALYSTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF URBAN FORM

There is no quick, easy way to appropriate the past. Walking in an old town center, sketching it and thinking about it, is instructive in a direct way. It is the first and indispensable step. But it will not tell us what really happened until we turn to the archives, the history books, the old maps--until we assemble all the evidence, some of it often contradictory, that will help explain how a particular downtown got the look it now has. That kind of evidence is what this book leans on to conduct its analysis of urban form.

(Spiro Kostof, 1991)

In Brooklyn today, Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway stand out physically in the urban fabric because they are exceptionally wide streets with luxuriant rows of trees. They go on and the trees go on, continuously, for miles. Being on the parkways is unlike being anywhere else in Brooklyn. They are at once place markers and place makers: their presence gives shape and character to the landscape and communities that surround them.

Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway are impressive and memorable today and were even more so when they were first built. They were an immediate presence in the landscape because they were constructed through essentially undeveloped land, and built in their entirety over the course of just a few years. They were impressive because they were 210 feet wide, at a time when most streets in Brooklyn were 60 to 70 feet wide and main streets were normally 100 feet wide. They were memorable because of this and because of their unusual

form: no other streets in Brooklyn, or in New York City, or in any other nearby American city, had three separate roadways, two wide malls, and six rows of trees.

Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway were special and different streets in their appearance, and also in their status. They were not normal city streets. They were built by the Park Commission and they were under its jurisdiction, which set them apart. They were streets but they were also parks, a special kind of park, at a time when the whole idea of urban parks in American cities was new and wonderful.

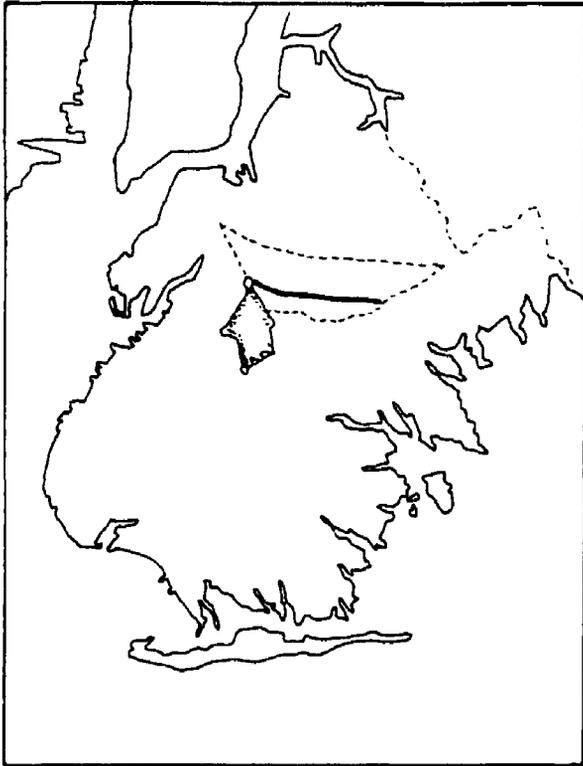
Because they were an early and major built presence in the landscape, and because they carried a prestigious status, the parkways were bound to have some influence on what was built around them. They were in fact designed specifically to have a particular influence, but the built form that Olmsted and Vaux, and other early parkway promoters, envisioned developing around them was different than the form that actually developed.

This chapter describes and analyzes the built form that developed around Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway. It is divided into two main sections: the first section looks at the intended development form of the parkways, and the second, much longer, section looks at the development form that actually occurred, followed by conclusions.

INTENDED DEVELOPMENT FORM

Intended Development Form of Eastern Parkway

Eastern Parkway was designed to be the center of a large district of single-family houses on large lots. Olmsted and Vaux did not specifically delineate the



The bounds of the Eastern Parkway District

bounds of the parkway district, but a real estate pamphlet of 1873 described it as an area of about three square miles, bounded by Fulton Street to the north, Flatbush Avenue to the west, the town boundary of Flatbush to the South and the town boundary of New Lots to the East.¹

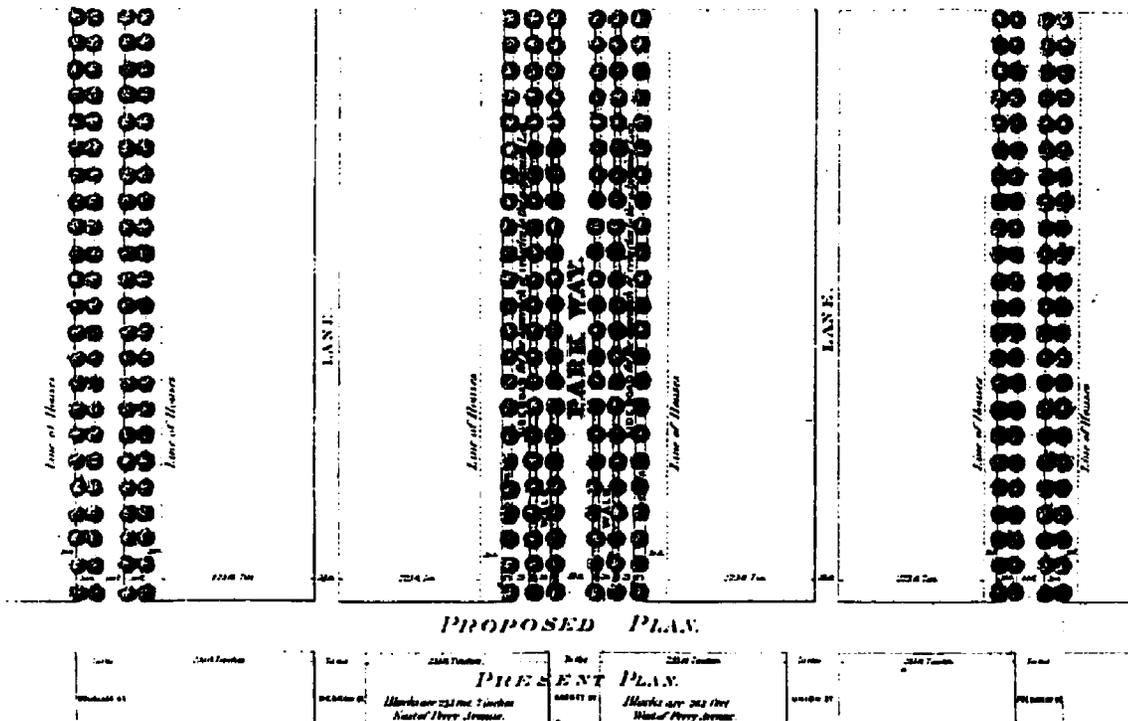
Prior to the construction of Eastern Parkway a number of mansions had been built in a northwestern part of this area.² Olmsted and Vaux, and the land owners who agreed to finance the construction, anticipated that building Eastern Parkway would fix the neighborhood character so that the whole district would develop in this fashion.³

Olmsted and Vaux included in their plan for Eastern Parkway a design arrangement they thought would encourage people to build large homes along the parkway: a special pattern of flanking streets intended to protect a wide

linear swath around the parkways from inferior development. The pattern entailed building the two closest parallel streets on either side of the parkway as narrow service alleys, and the next parallel streets as wide, tree-lined boulevards. Olmsted and Vaux described this design arrangement and its purpose in their 1868 annual report to the Brooklyn Park Commissioners: "It is clear that the house lots facing on the proposed Parkway would be desirable, and we assume that the most profitable arrangement would be to make them, say 100 feet wide, and of the full depth between two streets, convenient sites for stables being thus provided. The usual effect of such a plan of operations would be an occupation of the rear street by houses of inferior class, and it is with a view of avoiding any such unsatisfactory result that the design is extended over four blocks of ground. If the two outermost streets are widened to 100 feet and sidewalks shaded by double rows of trees introduced in connection with them, the house lots on these streets will be but little inferior to those immediately facing the Parkway, for they also will be of unusual depth and will be supplied with stable lots that can be entered from the street already mentioned, which should be made suitable for its special purpose, and with the idea that it is only to be occupied by such buildings as may be required in connection with the large lots which are intended to be arranged throughout back to back, with the stable street between them."

Accomplishing this arrangement meant re-configuring existing street and block platting because the district through which the parkway would run had already been platted, although few streets had actually been constructed. Along with a written description of their design, Olmsted and Vaux included a drawing of a typical block indicating how the existing street and block platting would be modified for the new street pattern. The existing platting consisted of a regular grid-iron pattern of 70 foot wide streets surrounding blocks that were 255 feet seven inches wide by an average of 700 feet long. (Several skews in the regular

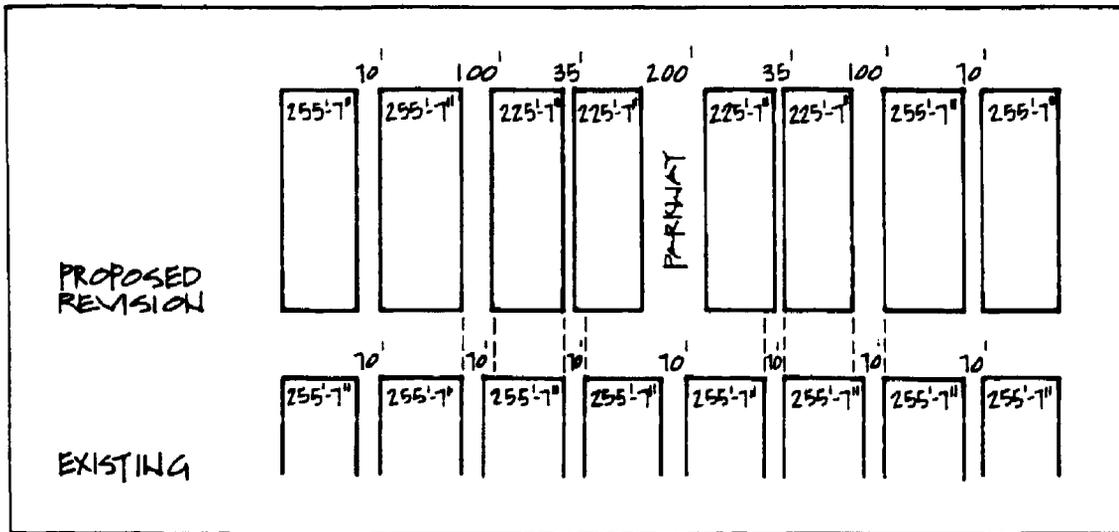
CITY OF BROOKLYN.
PLAN OF A PORTION OF PARK WAY AS PROPOSED TO BE LAID OUT
FROM THE EASTERN PART OF THE CITY
TO
THE PLAZA.



Olmsted and Vaux's Parkway Plan
 From the Annual Reports of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners for the year of 1867

pattern occurred around two slightly off grid north-south streets, and west of Bedford Avenue blocks were 262 feet wide.) To insert the parkway and the flanking alleys and boulevards into this pattern, Olmsted and Vaux proposed reconfiguring four adjacent blocks.

Imagine six rows of uniformly-sized rectangular blocks (255 feet and 7 inches wide) separated by five uniformly wide streets (70 feet wide). This was the original platting. Across this section, the total width dedicated to street right-of-ways was five times 70 feet, or 350 feet. Olmsted and Vaux's plan called for



Detail of Olmsted and Vaux's proposed block and street replatting for the Eastern Parkway neighborhood

widening the middle street in the pattern to 200 feet (the parkway), widening the two outermost streets to 100 feet (the boulevards), and narrowing the two intermediate streets to 35 feet (the alleys), for a total combined street right-of way width of 470 feet. The extra 120 feet of street width came out of the four blocks in the center of the pattern: each was narrowed by 30 feet to a width of 225 foot seven inches. The drawn plan also indicated 30 foot front yard set backs on the parkway, from the edge of the street right-of-way, and 20 foot front yard set backs on the boulevards.⁵ At the time, the typical front yard set back on residential streets in Brooklyn developed with rowhouses was 10 feet.⁶ (The drawing also described the detailed arrangement of drives, malls, sidewalks, and trees along the parkway, and sidewalks and trees along the boulevards, see Chapter Two.) The drawing didn't show lot widths, but the previously quoted written description of the parkway plan suggests that 100 foot wide lots were intended.

The street lay-out was intended to support a much lower density than was typically being built in most of Brooklyn at the time. If the originally platted

	block width	lot depth	lot width	lot area
original platting	255'- 7"	127'- 7 1/2"	25'	3,195 s.f.
O & V platting				
on parkway	225' - 7"	225' - 7"	100'	22,558 s.f.
on boulevards (near side)	225' - 7"	225' 7"	100'	22,558 s.f.
on boulevards (far side)	255' - 7"	127' - 9 1/2"	50'	6,390 s.f.*

Likely original gross density	Envisioned Eastern Parkway density
= (127'-7 1/2" + 35'**) x 25'	= (225'-7" + 117.5'**) x 100'
= 1 D/U per 4, 070 s.f. (if single family)	= 1 D/U per 34,308 s.f.
= 10.7 D/U per acre	= 1.27 D/U per acre
or	
= 1 D/U per 2, 035 s.f. (if two-family)	
= 21.4 D/U per acre	

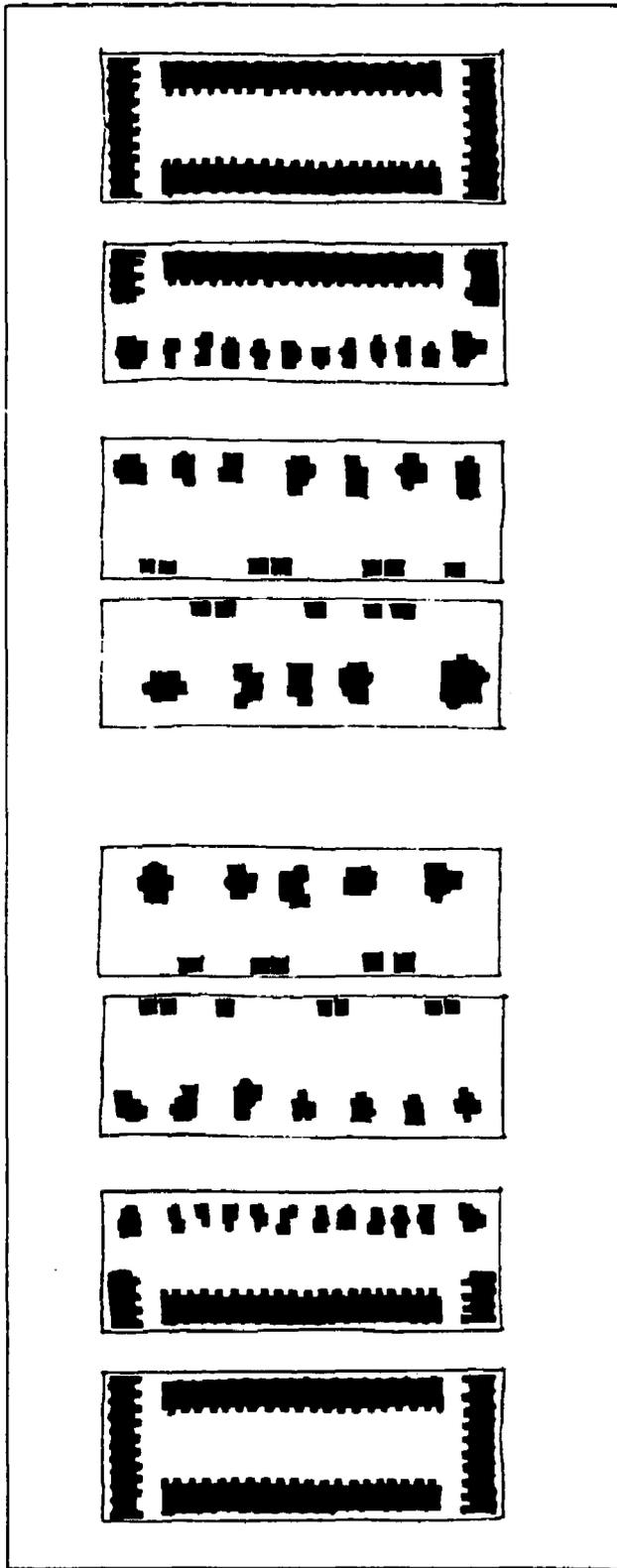
* This calculation assumes that the lots on the far side of the boulevards, because they would be only half the block depth deep, would also be narrower; it is purely an assumption, Olmsted and Vaux did not specifically speak to this issue.

** half of a 70 foot street width

*** half of the 200 foot parkway width plus half of the 35 foot alley width

Eastern Parkway density calculations

street pattern had remained intact, and if the blocks had been developed in a typical rowhouse fashion, with 25 foot wide lots, gross density would have been 10.7 buildable lots per acre. Depending on whether lots were developed with single-family or two-family rowhouses, the dwelling unit count would have been between 10.7 to 21.4 dwelling units per acre. In contrast, Olmsted and Vaux's design, which assumed 100 foot wide lots going the full depth of the block, called



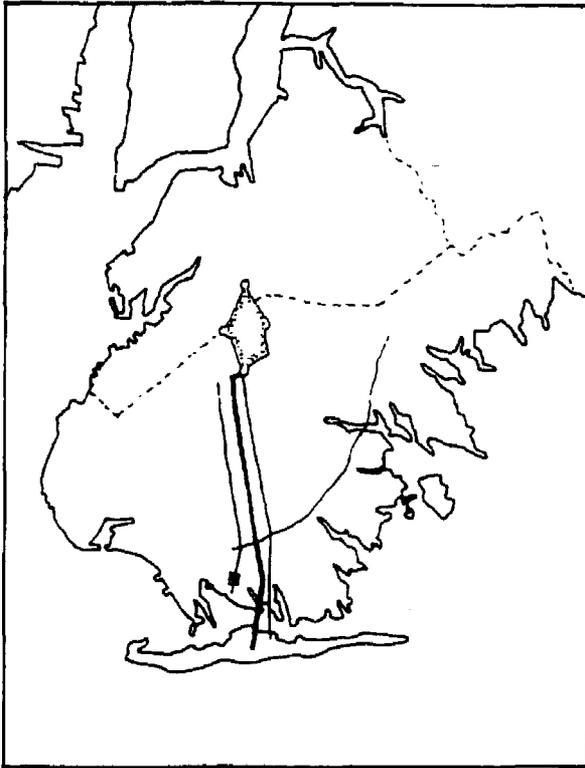
This hypothetical drawing shows the type of development patterns that were envisioned by Olmsted and Vaux for Eastern Parkway and the flanking boulevards and alleys, surrounded by the typical rowhouse pattern that was occurring throughout much of Brooklyn at the time.

for a gross density of about 1.27 dwelling units per acre along the parkway. (Gross density calculations require assigning land area taken up by streets to adjacent properties.) The design incorporated the notion of an alley as a lane running along the rear of properties, with properties reaching through the entire depth of the surrounding blocks and not only half the depth as would be the case for a block between two regular streets. Olmsted and Vaux never actually talked in terms of density, but the envisioned density can be derived by doing calculations based on the plan.

Intended Development Form of Ocean Parkway

Ocean Parkway was also meant to be the center of a neighborhood of single-family homes. No drawing or other evidence exists, however, describing the extent of the area intended as its neighborhood district. Likewise, no plan or written description exists indicating that Olmsted and Vaux designed a flanking system of boulevards and alleys along Ocean Parkway. Unlike Eastern Parkway, Ocean Parkway was designed to run through an area that had not been previously platted. Area-wide platting was in process during the time when the location of Ocean Parkway was fixed, and completed while the parkway was being constructed. There is no clear evidence that Olmsted and Vaux, or the Park Commissioners, had a direct hand in designing the platting around Ocean Parkway, but it is likely that they may have been involved.

The first attempt to lay out a comprehensive street plan for Kings County was an effort undertaken by a commission appointed in 1869, whose goal was to establish connections between the existing rural towns and villages.⁷ This effort was superseded by a drive to platt the countryside in relation to Brooklyn's existing main roads and established street grids, a plan which won the approval



Plan showing alignment of Ocean Parkway

of the State Legislature.⁸ As a former state senator, Park Commissioner Stranahan had strong connections in the State Legislature. It is likely that he would have been concerned about how land around Ocean Parkway was platted and that his suggestions, probably sought out, would have been influential. It is likely, also, that he would have consulted his landscape architects on this matter.

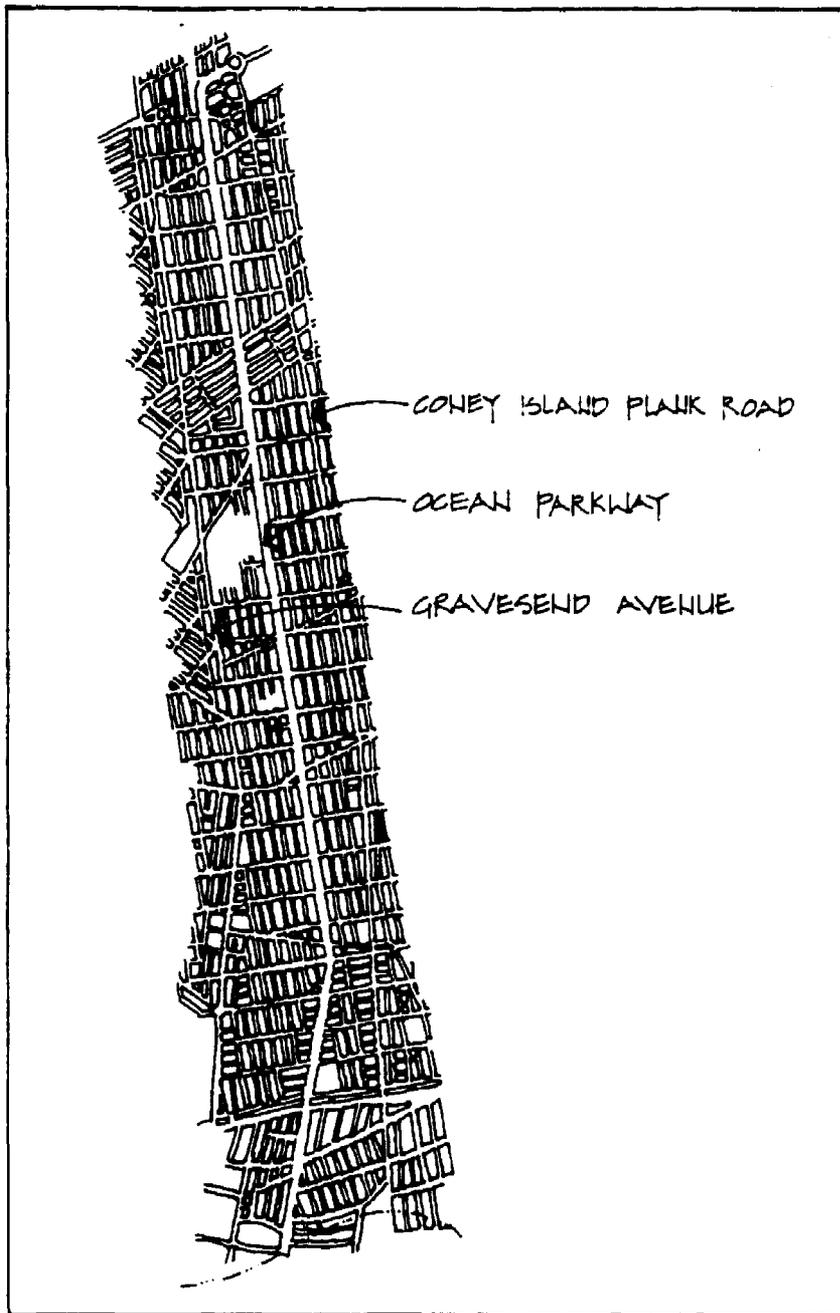
The alignment of Ocean Parkway was laid out to roughly parallel two existing north/south highways, Gravesend Avenue and the Coney Island Plank Road. Gravesend Avenue, the more westerly of these roads, was built in 1838 and ran between the Brooklyn city line and the center of the Town of Gravesend. The more recent Coney Island Plank Road, built in 1850, ran between the Brooklyn city line and Coney Island. Originally a toll-road, with gates at either

end, it was turned into a free road in the early 1860's and was used as the main thoroughfare to Coney Island.'

Ocean Parkway begins as the southwest corner of Prospect Park, where Olmsted and Vaux designed a circular space for the junction. Ocean Parkway exits this circle heading southwest and then after about a thousand feet makes a sharp turn and heads south. The beginning of the parkway was laid out in this peculiar fashion so that when it turned south it would line up centered between Gravesend Avenue and the Coney Island Plank Road. This alignment also meant the parkway would skirt the edges of two existing racetracks, allowing them to remain untouched.

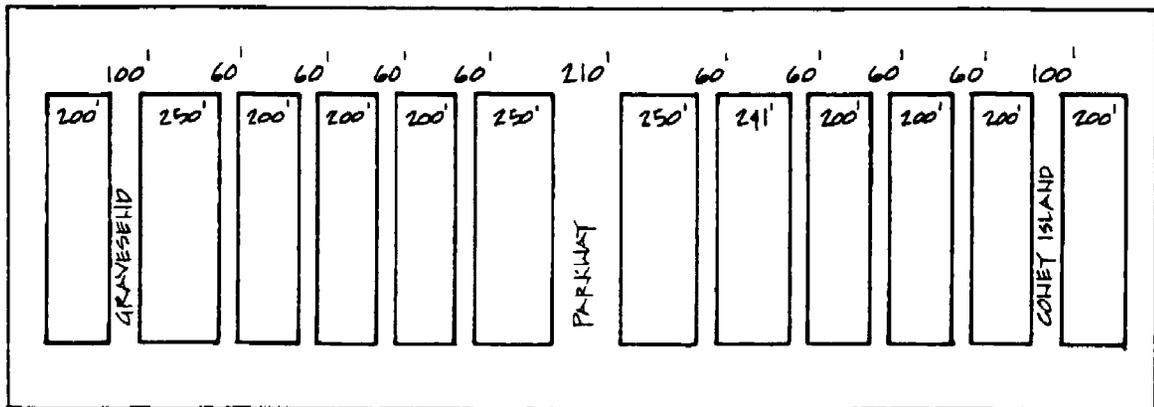
Both Gravesend Avenue and the Coney Island Plank Road ran straight along one alignment for most of their length and then jogged to the west near where they crossed the crooked, diagonal-tending path of Kings Highway--the old rural highway through Kings County dating from the 1700's. Ocean Parkway was laid out similarly, but with a jog a bit further to the south. By examining maps, one can discern three possible reasons for the later jog: it set up the easiest crossing of the marshland below Kings Highway, it aimed the parkway to arrive on Coney Island at a wide area of undeveloped beach, and, perhaps more importantly, it spared existing development around the Town of Gravesend.

The street and block platting laid out around Ocean Parkway was a regular rectangular grid pattern, oriented to align with the parkway for most of its length and with the long sides of most blocks facing onto it. The two main areas where street and block platting was not laid out to align with the parkway were where it passed through the existing village of Parkville, and after its jog toward Coney Island. At Parkville, the existing village streets remained and they were at a diagonal to the parkway, with short ends facing onto it; near Coney Island, while the parkway jogged to the west the surrounding grid pattern didn't jog,



Street and block platting around Ocean Parkway

which meant that for its last blocks the parkway crossed the grid at a slight diagonal. Looking closely at how the grid pattern was laid down right around Ocean Parkway, one discerns a regular swath platted between Gravesend Avenue and the Coney Island Plank Road.



Detail of block platting around Ocean Parkway
From the 1890 Robinson maps

Within this approximately half mile wide swath, streets running north/south were laid out 60 feet wide, and those running east/west 80 feet wide, except for a few wider ones. (This general pattern continues for some distance east of the Coney Island Plank Road, and for short distances at some places to the west of Gravesend Avenue.) The replatting included widening both Gravesend Avenue and the Coney Island Plank Road to 100 feet. Within this pattern, ten blocks were laid out between Gravesend Avenue and the Coney Island Plank Road. They were not all the same width but rather were laid out to establish hierarchy in favor of Ocean Parkway and Gravesend Avenue. The blocks on both sides of Ocean Parkway and on the east side of Gravesend Avenue were 250 feet wide, while all the rest were 200 feet wide, except the second block east of the parkway which was 241 feet wide.¹⁰ Looking further, at places where the same grid continued to the west, the blocks on the far side of Gravesend Avenue were platted only 200 feet wide. In the larger picture, then, the platted block pattern established something of a hierarchy around Ocean Parkway: blocks along it were the widest in the area, presumably so that lots

	block width	lot depth	lot width	lot area
plattng on parkway	250'	250'	100'	25,000 s.f.
plattng on parkway	250'	150'	100'	15,000 s.f.

Envisioned Ocean Parkway density First Scenario	Envisioned Ocean Parkway density Second Scenario
= (250' + 135 ^{**}) x 100'	= (150' + 105 ^{**}) x 100'
= 1 D/U per 38,500'	= 1 D/U per 25,500'
= 1.13 D/U per acre	= 1.7 D/U per acre

- * half of the 210 foot parkway width, and half of the next 60 foot street width
- ** half of the 210 foot parkway width

Ocean Parkway density calculations

facing onto the parkway could be deeper than elsewhere, and among the widest blocks in all of southern Kings County.

While Olmsted and Vaux didn't leave a detailed description of how they envisioned land around Ocean Parkway developing, they probably imagined similar development around it as around Eastern Parkway, given the linked descriptions of the two included in their reports to the Brooklyn Park Commissioners and the lack of any evidence to the contrary.¹¹ If one assumes they envisioned the same 100 foot wide, full-block-depth lots along Ocean Parkway as they did along Eastern Parkway, then their envisioned gross density for Ocean Parkway was 1.13 dwelling units per acre. However, if one assumes that since no adjacent alleys were platted around Ocean Parkway this meant that the designers didn't intend the lots to go the full depth of the block, and if one then further assumes that the lots facing onto Ocean Parkway would be not half

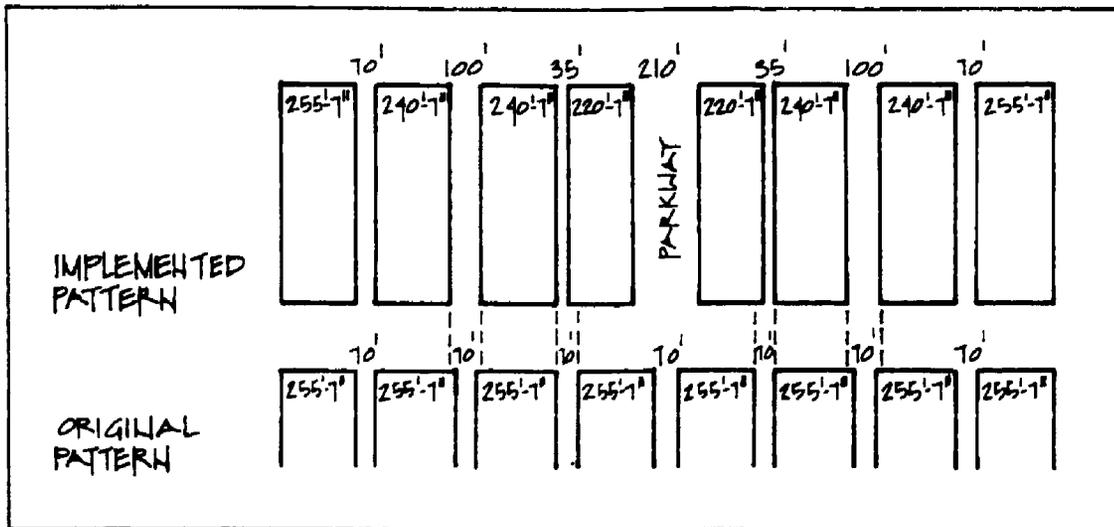
the block depth but would be platted to take full advantage of the extra depth of the parkway blocks, and so be 150 feet deep, then the envisioned gross density was 1.7 dwelling units per acre.

EMERGENT DEVELOPMENT FORM

Olmsted and Vaux, and the other early parkway promoters, had a particular vision of how land around the parkways would develop, but things turned out differently due to a host of intervening socio-economic factors. The physical form of the parkways did not determine the form of subsequent land development, but their presence did influence it. This influence derived from a number of things: public and private expectations; special development restrictions which, though rudimentary, precluded some types of development; and a jurisdictional arrangement which nurtured and maintained the original development vision over the long years that passed before development actually occurred. Though development around the parkways did not turn out as originally envisioned, aspects were similar—more so on Ocean Parkway than on Eastern Parkway for a combination of structural and social reasons.

Emergent Development Form of Eastern Parkway

Eastern Parkway and its flanking boulevards and alleys were laid out generally according to Olmsted and Vaux's design, but with some differences. It is unclear how much involvement Olmsted and Vaux had in the design alterations. The parkway was built 210 feet wide, instead of 200 feet wide, and six rows of parallel blocks, rather than four rows, were reconfigured. The legal



Actual street and block replatting that was implemented for the Eastern Parkway neighborhood

act which authorized laying out the parkway (enacted four months after Olmsted and Vaux officially presented the design) stipulated that Sackett Street—the platted but unbuilt street that would become the parkway—was to be widened from 70 feet to 210 feet by adding seventy feet in width to each side of the street; the next parallel street to the south, Union Street, was to be narrowed from 70 feet to 35 feet by taking away 35 feet from its northerly side; the next parallel street to the north, DeGraw Street, was to be narrowed to 35 feet by taking away 35 feet from its southerly side; and the next parallel streets beyond each of these, President and Douglass Streets, were to be widened to 100 feet by adding 15 feet in width from the block on either side.¹² This reconfiguration scheme made the blocks along the parkway 220 foot seven inches wide, and the blocks along both sides of the boulevards 240 foot seven inches wide. One result of these design changes was an equalization of block depth around the boulevards, suggesting that landowners may have envisioned platting both sides of the boulevards with full-block-depth lots rather than just the block backing onto the alley. Another result was that blocks along the parkway became the narrowest blocks in the

district—a full 35 feet narrower than the typical 255 foot seven inch blocks, and 20 feet narrower than the boulevard blocks.

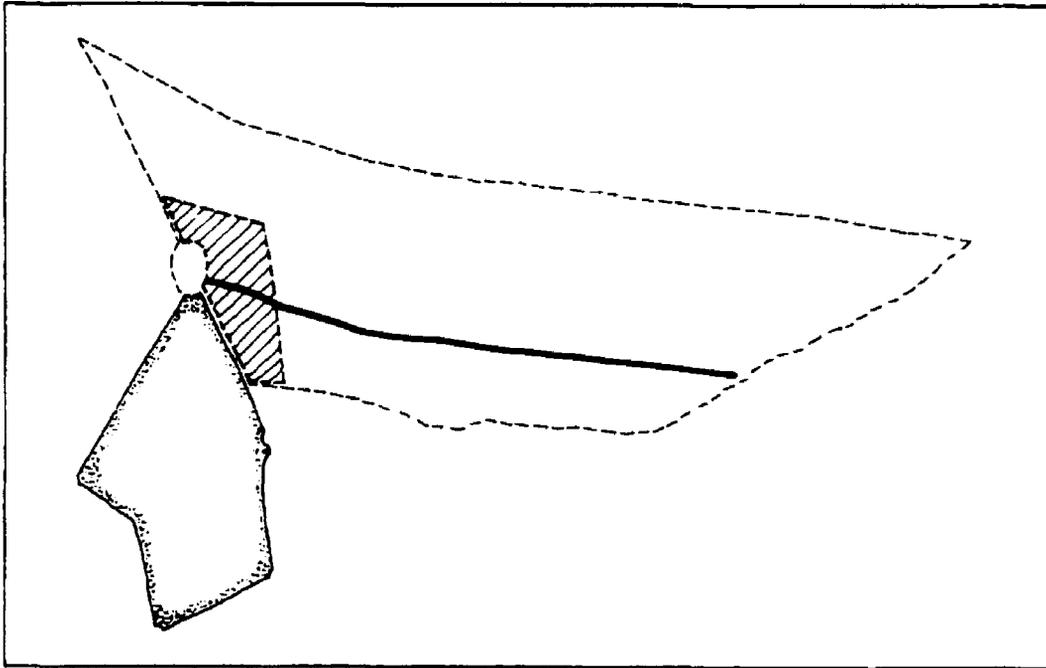
The authorizing act also stipulated different set backs than Olmsted and Vaux's design, and imposed development restrictions. (It is not clear if Olmsted and Vaux drafted the development restrictions or if this was done by others, but they were in keeping with the design intent.) All three wide streets were given a 30 foot set back, the boulevards as well as the parkway, and these spaces could only be planted with trees and shrubbery. Absolute development restrictions were placed on the alleys: buildings on them could only be used as private stables, carriage houses, or greenhouses.; commercial livery or railway stables, or car houses, were specifically disallowed. In addition, general nuisance restrictions against uses that might be smelly or noisy were placed on the entire reconfigured parkway swath: "...at no time shall there be erected, established or carried on, in any manner whatever, upon any land to be affected by the said widenings, or either of them, any slaughter house, tallow chandlery, furnace, foundry, nail or other factory, or any manufactory for making starch, glue, varnish, vitriol, oil, or gas or for tanning, dressing, repairing or keeping skins, hides or leather, or any distillery, brewery, or sugar bakery, lime kiln, railway or stable or depot, or any other manufactory, trade, business or calling, may be in any wise dangerous, obnoxious or offensive to the neighboring inhabitants."¹³

These development restrictions represent a very early instance of nuisance use restrictions over a large undeveloped area in an American city. Such nuisance use restrictions were an early form of zoning. Real estate promoters emphasized the restrictions in their advertisements for the Eastern Parkway district. A promotional pamphlet published in 1873 made colorful claims: "The Eastern Parkway when completed, will be the finest street in the world. This is probably the grandest attempt ever made by force of law to make a district of a

city fashionable and exclusive. [...] The supreme law of the State protects this whole district from the possibility of any nuisance. Even the mere semblance to an offense can be crushed and annihilated [...]."¹⁴

Landowners along Eastern Parkway anticipated that development would occur right away and had this prospect in mind when they agreed to pay for its opening and improvement completely out of their own pockets, even though it meant conceding a large amount of otherwise developable land to the Park Commissioners.¹⁵ But development did not happen. An immediate cause was the business depression that began in 1873, before construction of the parkway was even complete, and went on for a number of years. The depression halted development everywhere in the city, and when it resumed in the 1880's, it went elsewhere.

One lingering probable reason that developers turned their backs on the Eastern Parkway district was the continuing unsettled state of the East Side Lands, the 132 1/2-acre area of land surrounding the western end of Eastern Parkway from Washington Avenue to the Plaza at the entry to Prospect Park.¹⁶ This land had been taken by the Park Commission for Prospect Park but Olmsted and Vaux had ultimately excluded it from the park area. The Park Commission owned the land but, because of the circumstances surrounding its acquisition, its right to sell the land for profit was questioned and became the subject of protracted legal battles that went on into the 1870's. The battles were waged by surrounding and former landowners who still wanted the area turned into park land. The right was finally granted by the State Legislature, and lots were put up for auction in 1881. However, expected prices were not attained and the Park Commission stopped the sale after only half the lots were sold. Many people who had bought lots defaulted on their payments, resulting in confused land titles. All the while the area, which was geographically situated on a



Location of the East Side Lands in relation to Eastern Parkway

commanding rise of land, remained partially graded and barren.¹⁷ In the 1890's, the Park Commission decided to use the lands south of Eastern Parkway for cultural institutions, and the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences (later renamed the Brooklyn Museum) was built in 1897, fronting on Eastern Parkway. Development of the northern lands, however, remained at a standstill until after 1910, when a New York guarantee company agreed to vouch for titles in the area.¹⁸

If property in the East Side lands had not been the subject of such dispute, it is likely that development would have gravitated there, given its proximity to both Prospect Park and fashionable Bedford Avenue and the views offered by its high vantage point. The Park Slope district on the opposite side of the Plaza, to the west, was developed with fine houses and rowhouses in the 1880's.¹⁹ As it was, these lands for decades gave Eastern Parkway an unsightly and

uncomfortable beginning. Although structurally advantageously located to be a catalyst for development along the parkway, the arrested condition of the area instead worked against any development.

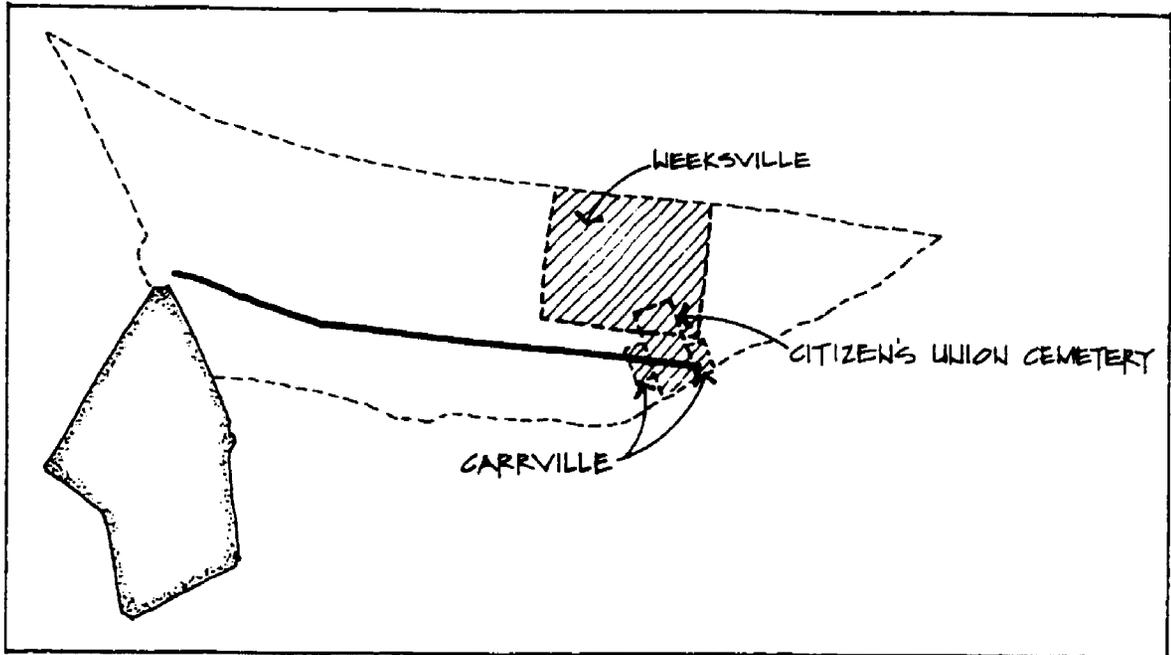
Other structural reasons for high-end development not gravitating to the Eastern Parkway District may have been the emergence of heavy industrial areas nearby, north of the parkway along Atlantic Avenue and at the eastern end of the parkway in Brownsville. We'll return to this later.

Disrupted Existing Development Patterns

Although development did not immediately follow the opening of Eastern Parkway, its construction effectively disrupted existing built development patterns in the area. The district was platted with a rationalized pattern on paper prior to the parkway plan, but the parkway was the first street crossing the district actually built and its construction fixed the grid pattern on the land, disrupting existing patterns both directly and indirectly.

Existing development consisted of two small recently built communities, called Weeksville and Carrville, and a related cemetery. These were not incorporated villages, rather they were informal communities that were populated by blacks.

Weeksville was located in an isolated and densely wooded eastern part of the district, on land that had been part of a farm owned by a Dutch landowner and slave owner named Leffert Lefferts. When Lefferts freed his slaves following New York State's emancipation act of 1827, he began selling his property to them. Other blacks purchased property from Lefferts, including James Weeks, a stevedore from Virginia, who purchased several lots in 1838 and later bought a large piece of the Lefferts farm. Weeks became one of the largest property owners in the settlement and the community was named after him. The exact



Locations of Weeksville, Carrville, and the Citizen's Union Cemetery in relation to Eastern Parkway

bounds of the community are uncertain. The Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant History estimates that it was bounded by Atlantic Avenue on the north, St. John's Place on the south, Kingston Avenue on the west, and Ralph Avenue on the East.²⁰

At its height, Weeksville was a not insubstantial community including at least 30 to 40 middle-class, property-owning families.²¹ According to historical accounts, they were the upper-crust of former slave society and included teachers and preachers, as well as artisans, tradesmen, and drivers. In the 1870's, the community boasted seven black institutions: the Citizen's Union Cemetery, the Zion Home for Colored Aged People, the Howard Colored Orphan Asylum, the African Civilization Society, two churches, and a school for colored children.²² The population of Weeksville swelled during the Draft Riots of the



Detail of the Robinson maps of 1886, which shows Eastern Parkway and other streets laid out over the former grounds of the Citizen's Union Cemetery

Civil War, where it was "...one of the principal refuges for Black families fleeing from the terror of the Manhattan streets."²³

Less is known about the community of Carrville, except that it was physically located south of Weeksville near the Citizen's Union Cemetery. The

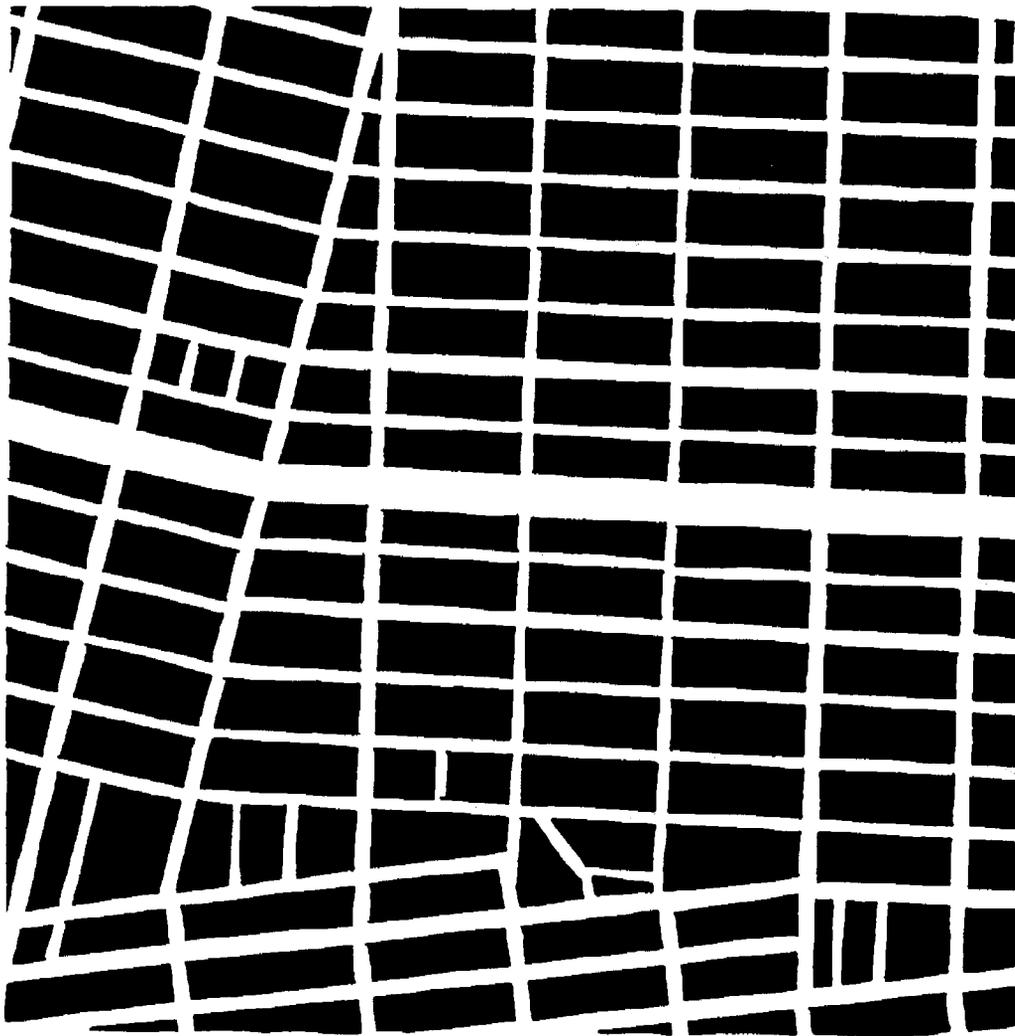
cemetery, consisting of 12 acres, was built in 1851 and was the only burial ground in Brooklyn where blacks could be buried. It was owned by a black association and apparently the trustees provided free burial ground to the poor.²⁴ We know the location of the Citizen's Union Cemetery because its outline shows up on some historic maps, but nothing is known about how it was laid out or how occupied it was.

There is little record of the physical qualities of Weeksville or Carrville, but we do know that buildings were wood frame structures and that they were laid out in relation to rural highways, such as the old Hunterfly Road, rather than according to a rectilinear grid pattern.²⁵

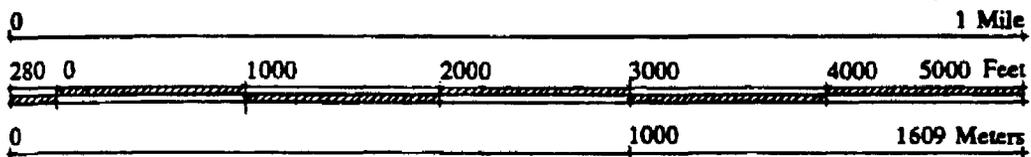
Following the platted line of Sackett Street, Eastern Parkway ran just to the south of Weeksville and right through the middle of Carrville and the Citizen's Union Cemetery. Its construction caused major portions of Carrville and the cemetery to be demolished. The opening of surrounding streets according to the platted grid pattern between 1870 and 1890 virtually eliminated Weeksville and Carrville because the buildings in these communities were askew of the new street lines.²⁶ By 1886, a decade and a half after the parkway was built, little trace of these distinct communities remained. The Robinson maps of 1886 do not display the names of either one, and the Citizen's Union Cemetery is shown overlaid by grid platting.

Dismantling the Special Flanking Street System

The failure of immediate development along Eastern Parkway was a bitter disappointment to landowners, and its continued failure lent a character of failure to the parkway itself. There is a sense that landowners didn't quite know what to do with their reconfigured property. When the area failed to attract the wealthiest home builders, the special street and block pattern, development



Eastern Parkway



Square mile map of Eastern Parkway near Bedford Avenue

restrictions, and likely extra costs associated with building on the parkway may have scared other developers off. The deeper than normal front yard set back requirement (30 feet versus the normal 10 feet) combined with a narrower than normal block depth may have made the parkway blocks less attractive for division into typical rowhouse lots. It is likely that assessments went with the land for some time and so lots along the parkway were probably more expensive than elsewhere.

The Robinson maps of 1886, which show lot platting, seem to point to disgruntlement with the parkway plan, or confusion over it, and perhaps reflects a desire on the part of land owners and developers to return to the original street platting.²⁷ Many of the blocks around the parkway and the boulevards are shown divided into lots in the manner that would have likely occurred if the original platting had remained in place. Lots were not platted the full block depth, rather mid-block property lines were located at what would have been the center of the originally platted block depth.

As development continued to avoid Eastern Parkway, the system of flanking alleys and boulevards was slowly dismantled. This was possible because while the entire parkway had been constructed by 1874, the alleys and boulevards were only partially graded and improved.²⁸ More importantly, the boulevards and alleys were under a different jurisdiction than the parkway: the act which authorized laying out the system had placed the parkway under the jurisdiction of the Park Commission, but not the alleys or boulevards. This meant there was no agency or broad constituency invested in maintaining the layout. Working against the design layout was the fact that it set up a very unusual pattern: nowhere else in Brooklyn were three wide streets in such close proximity to each other, and mid-block service alleys were not the norm. It is easy to understand why, given the lack of development interest in the area, landowners would

decide the unusual layout was unnecessary and the development restrictions attached to the boulevards and alleys excessive.

A lack of firm commitment to the boulevards by landowners is reflected in the fact that the "boulevard" appellation was never attached to them, although this was the descriptive term used by Olmsted and Vaux as well as early real estate promoters. The streets retained their original names of President Street and Douglass Street—later, sometime between 1903 and 1929, Douglass Street was renamed St. John's Street.²⁹ Also, they were never planted with the double rows of sidewalk trees envisioned in Olmsted and Vaux's design.

A legislative act of 1888 which combined into one act all laws affecting public interests in Brooklyn indicates that by this time the following development restriction revisions had occurred: the 30 foot front yard set back requirement had been lifted from the first two blocks on Eastern Parkway, and from the blocks on Douglass and President Streets west of New York Avenue (the first eight blocks and five blocks respectively); the use restriction to stables and greenhouses had been lifted from the blocks on DeGraw and Union Streets west of New York Avenue; and the general nuisance use restrictions had been lifted from all the streets west of New York Avenue, including the parkway, and for the rest of the way only applied to the parkway and the south side of Douglass Street, and the north side of President Street.³⁰

Organized efforts on the part of landowners to revise the development restrictions attached to the "boulevards" and "alleys" for the rest of their length, and to change street widths, were underway in 1897, as were efforts to impose more stringent use restrictions on Eastern Parkway. A Brooklyn Eagle article of this year reported on three petitions that were circulating regarding the area.³¹

The first petition, which would be presented to the State Legislature, called for widening DeGraw and Union Streets and removing the building restrictions

that confined them to stables and green houses.³² The effort was directed toward returning Olmsted and Vaux's "alleys" to normal streets. Petitioners wanted to widen DeGraw Street to 60 feet, by adding 19'-5" on the north side and 5'-7" on the south side, and to widen Union Street to 70' by adding 10' on the north side and 25' on the south side. They had devised this reconfiguration in order to leave all existing buildings untouched. The argument for lifting development restrictions was that they were "a dead letter through custom" because social habits had changed since the design was laid out and people no longer maintained private stables on their property but rather used commercial livery stables. Petitioners claimed that almost all the owners of property that would be affected by the re-platting had signed the petition.

The second petition, also being brought before the State Legislature, requested reducing the required front yard set back on Douglass Street to the 10 foot line (measured from the street right-of-way) generally adopted in residential areas throughout the city. A trolley line had been built on this street, and petitioners argued that it had fixed the character of the street and changed the demand for property along it: large expensive homes were not practical on a streetcar street.

The third petition sought to bring together all the property owners on Eastern Parkway under a private agreement to restrict their property against the building of flats, apartment houses, hospitals, and dispensaries. Petitioners argued that: "Such a restriction will mean an immediate enhancement in values and make builders more confident in their ventures." If successful, the restriction would "....result in making positive an improvement that has long been a dream." Petitioners claimed that large property owners along the parkway had signed the petition and they were working on getting signatures from the rest.

expectations went along with the original normal street platting. High expectations attached to the revised platting. When things went wrong and development failed to occur, the host of street revisions likely appeared somewhat ridiculous. Although the blocks surrounding the parkway would have been significantly narrower, only 185 feet seven inches wide, if only they had been reconfigured when the parkway was inserted into the existing street pattern, this may in fact have caused less uncertainty on the part of developers about how to approach the surrounding streets once the very highest end development failed to occur.

The effort to protect Eastern Parkway from apartment buildings was not successful, in fact things ended up exactly the opposite. The processes leading to this development began in the 1880's, as did processes that resulted in some commercial uses on the parkway, as we shall see below.

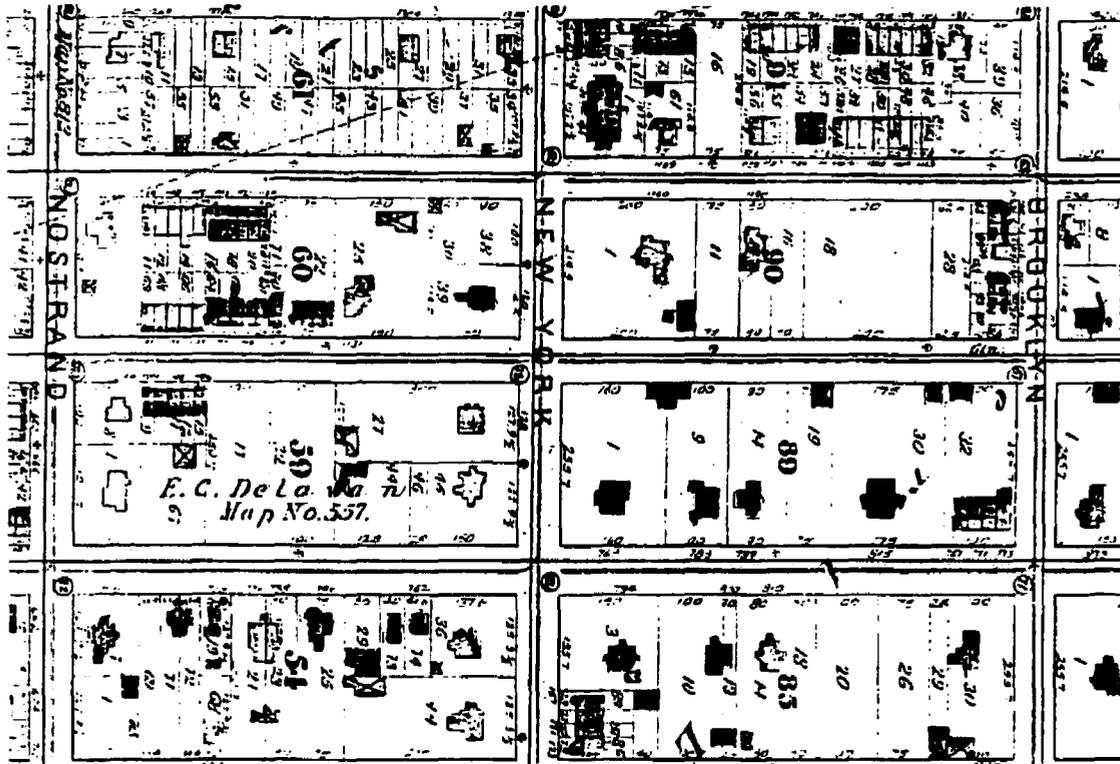
Development

An understanding of the physical aspects of historical development processes can be gained by looking closely at maps and paying attention to things like the details of lot platting and building sizes.

The Earliest Emergent Development Patterns: 1880 - 1910

The Robinson maps of 1889 show no buildings along the parkway except a few structures between Washington Avenue and Bedford Avenue and, because of their awkward siting, these seem to be remnants from before the parkway was built. But the maps show that development processes were going on in the area, including some having a direct physical impact on the parkway.

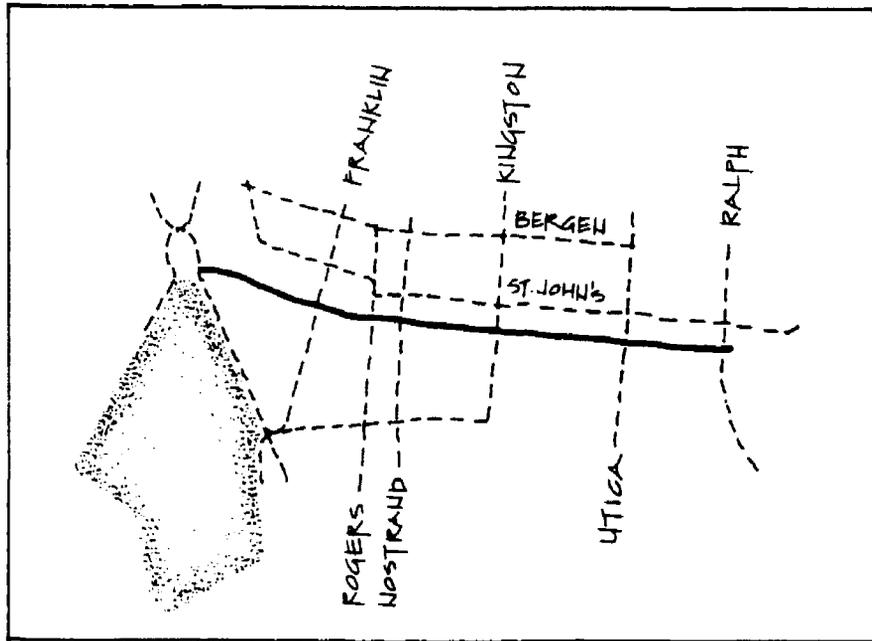
Dense development of a mix of industrial and tenement uses is evident at the northern edge of the area that had been described as the Eastern Parkway



Detail from the Robinson maps of 1886 showing area of large homes being infilled with rowhouses

district, in the east/west corridor running between Fulton Street and Atlantic Avenue. Both of these streets had noisy train lines running on them: the Long Island Railroad on Atlantic and an elevated street car line on Fulton. The people displaced from Weeksville and Carrville, as well as other blacks who had gravitated here from elsewhere in Brooklyn and Manhattan, had largely settled in this corridor.³⁵ North of Fulton, rowhouses and large single family homes had been built in the Bedford and Stuyvesant neighborhoods.³⁶

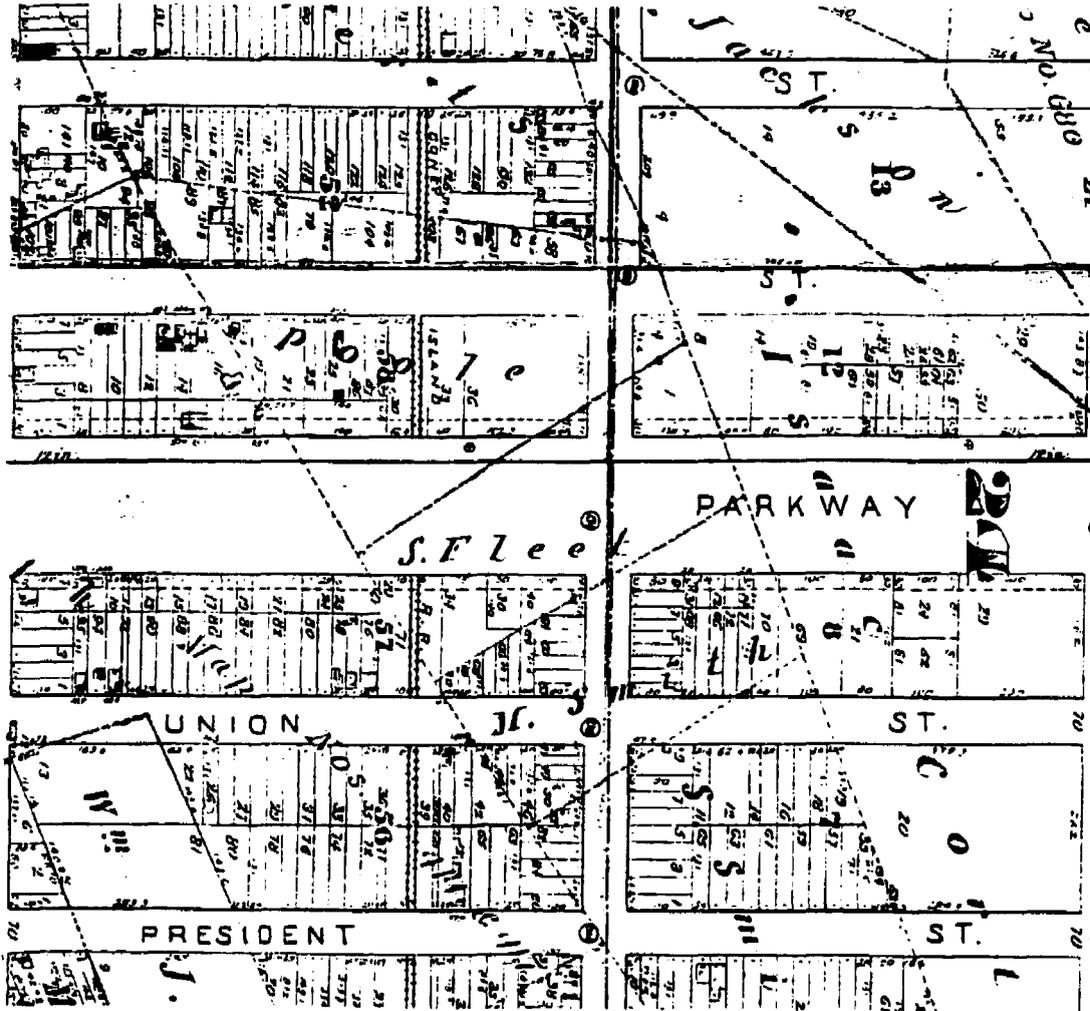
The maps show few buildings in the Eastern Parkway district south of Atlantic Avenue, except for a roughly square twenty-one block area between Atlantic, Nostrand, and Kingston Avenues and Park Street containing large houses on large lots (100 to 200 feet wide by the full block depth, which was 255



Streetcar lines crossing and near Eastern Parkway in the 1890's
 Draw from a map in *Brooklyn Trolleys* by James C. Greller and Edward B. Watson

feet seven inches), as well as clusters of rowhouses on small lots (20-25 foot wide by half the block depth). This is the area that had been developed with "mansions" prior to the construction of the parkway. The presence of the rowhouses indicates subsequent lesser infill development.

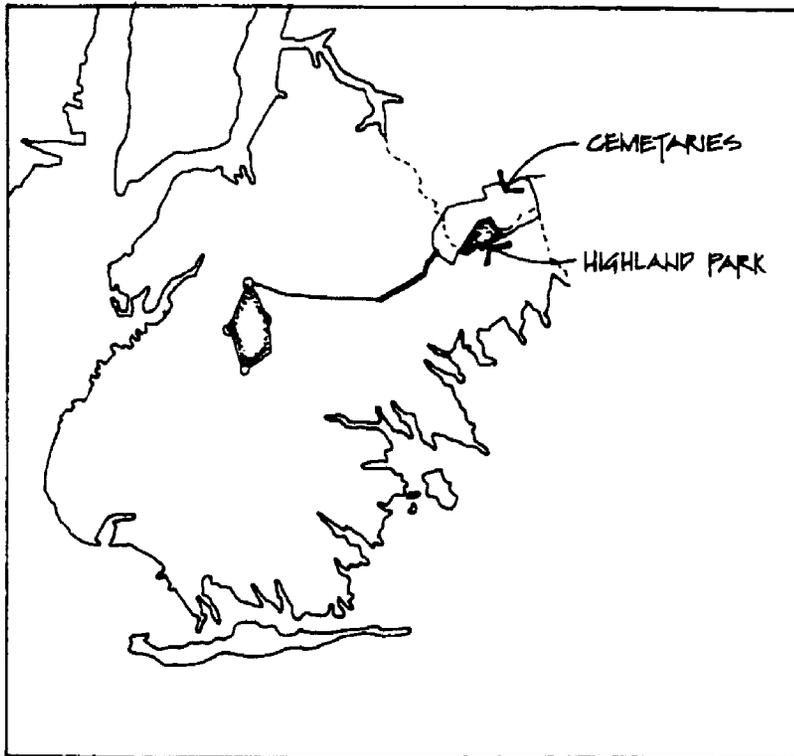
While there weren't many buildings in the rest of the Eastern Parkway district, the maps show many blocks platted into lots and some concentrations of development. The pattern was less a blanket platting or development of groups of blocks, rather both occurred most frequently on certain streets running perpendicular to the Atlantic/Fulton corridor. This is because lot platting was following street-car lines. Electric streetcars had been introduced in Brooklyn in the early 1880's, and in the Eastern Parkway area they were mostly laid out on north/south streets to feed into the Atlantic/Fulton transportation corridor. This infrastructure directly affected Eastern Parkway because tracks had been built on



Detail from the Robinson maps of 1886 showing how corner lots on Eastern Parkway were platted to orient toward cross streets carrying street car lines, rather than toward the parkway

six streets crossing the parkway (on Franklin, Rogers, Nostrand, Kingston, Utica and Ralph Avenues).³⁷

Where the streets carrying streetcar lines intersected the parkway, corner lots were platted to face the streetcar street rather than the parkway. This set the pattern for the whole parkway: corner lots at most of the rest of the parkway intersections were platted to face the cross street. Later maps show that the streetcar streets developed with commercial uses and this use prevailed at parkway intersections.



The Eastern Parkway Extension

The proliferation of streetcar crossings and the emerging corner lot layout suggests that landowners were giving up on the parkway as a development tool and focusing instead on the new development tool of streetcar lines. One wonders what would have happened to Eastern Parkway if it had not been under the jurisdiction of the Park Commission and if development restrictions had not applied to it. It is not hard to imagine that its physical form would have been altered. Quite possibly a streetcar line would have been laid on it and, if this had happened, the parkway would likely have become a commercial street.

However, the Park Commission had not given up on the parkway. The 1890's were marked by vigorous efforts to expand Brooklyn's park and parkway system, and a big part of these efforts was building an extension of Eastern Parkway as a link to the new Highland Park at the Brooklyn-Queens border. This

effort included improving the old parkway with new plantings and paving and renewed promotional efforts by the Park Commissioners.³⁸

Maps of 1903-1904 indicate that some development had finally come to Eastern Parkway. Several isolated clusters of five to ten rowhouses had been built, mostly on the north side of the parkway on lots 20 feet wide by 100 feet deep. In addition, five freestanding houses had been built toward the eastern end of the street, between Albany and Utica Avenues, on full-block-depth lots varying from between 40 feet wide to about 100 feet wide.³⁹

On occasion, these new residents organized to keep the parkway free of unwanted commercial activities. In 1908 they joined in signing a petition to oppose the operation of soda water stands and a moving-picture tent on the parkway at the intersection of Bedford Avenue. They wanted the city to revoke the licenses for these businesses, claiming they were a menace to residents and would cause property values to go down. They were a desecration of the parkway and "...the entering wedge for a succession of cheap shows." Mostly, residents objected to the outsiders who frequented the show. Shows were inexpensive and the tent accommodated several hundred patrons at a time. Residents complained that "...the show attracts an undesirable and noisy element to the vicinity each evening, and [...] the comfort, peace, and rights of the residents have been seriously infringed upon."⁴⁰

Solidified Development Patterns: the 1910's and 1920's

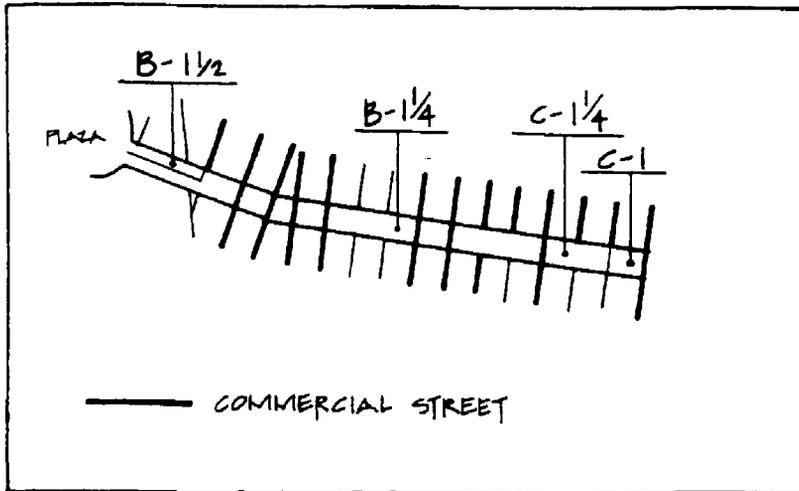
The next maps that show development along Eastern Parkway are the Hyde Maps of 1929. They show it lined with buildings for its whole length, mostly apartment buildings, some rowhouses, some large institutional buildings, and some commercial buildings. Most of the development had occurred during the previous ten or so years and the predominance of apartment buildings was the

result of a confluence of factors. Two general factors led to a general upsurge in apartment building construction in Brooklyn: massive post-war immigration into the borough, and changes in elevator technology and building code requirements which made apartment buildings less expensive to build and operate than previously. Three linked factors pushed developers to build apartment houses on Eastern Parkway: the provisions of New York City's new zoning plan, the construction of a subway line under the parkway, and the presence of a nearby population of second generation immigrants ready to move into middle-class housing for whom the apartment house was a desired residence form.

A simple explanation of the general factors will suffice. The 1920's saw a huge influx of people into Brooklyn. Between 1910 and 1930, the borough population grew by 119 percent, to 2,560,401, surpassing Manhattan's population which grew by only 1 percent during this period, to 1,850,093. From 1916-1929, the number of apartments in Brooklyn grew by 33%.⁴¹ Most of these were a new kind of apartment building: middle-class elevator buildings. Prior to this time, elevators were only used in high-rise luxury apartment buildings for the wealthy because they were expensive to operate. In the late 1910's, developers started using elevators in low-rise middle-class apartment buildings as well, because they became economical for two reasons: less expensive to operate alternating current machinery was developed and the New York City building code was revised to allow self-service elevators.⁴²

The particular factors that led to apartment house development on Eastern Parkway require more substantial explanation.

The Building Zone Plan The 1916 New York City Building Zone Plan was the first comprehensive zoning ordinance enacted in the United States. It controlled three dimensions of growth; use, building height and lot coverage. It stipulated



The earliest zoning of Eastern Parkway
From the New York City Building Zone Plan of 1916

three use districts: residence, business, and unrestricted (or industrial); five height districts based on street width: 1, 1 1/4, 1 1/2, 2 and 2 1/2 times street width; and five area districts: A (which was intended for warehouse districts), B (which stipulated minimum rear-yard setbacks), C (which stipulated rear-yard, courtyard and side yard setbacks), D (which stipulated lot coverage and configuration suitable to 1 and 2 family rowhouses) and E (which stipulated lot coverage and configuration suitable to detached and semi-detached single family houses).⁴³

In the plan, Eastern Parkway received residential zoning for its entire length except where it was crossed by eight business streets. (Which meant that of the seventeen intersections on the parkway, half of them were commercial.) It was given Area B zoning for its first fourteen blocks and Area C zoning for its last three blocks, and was placed in the 1 1/2 times street width height category for its first three blocks, the 1 1/4 times street width category for its next eleven blocks, and the 1 times street width category for its last block.⁴⁴

In reality, height limitations along Eastern Parkway were less than implied by the mapped zoning categories because heights allowed on streets wider than 100 feet were the same as for a 100 foot wide street.⁴⁵ Therefore, height along Eastern Parkway was limited to 150 feet for its first two blocks, 125 feet for the next 13 blocks, and 100 feet for the last block. By way of comparison, the surrounding 70 foot wide streets categorized in the same height zones would have been limited to heights of 140 feet, 87.5 feet, and 70 feet.

The zoning plan was reactionary, it simply reflected the status quo, or what the status quo was predicted to become, based upon the lay-out of transit lines and main thoroughfares.⁴⁶ The high-density zoning for Eastern Parkway reflected the fact that a subway line was being constructed on it.

The Subway The story of the building of the New York subway system is long and complicated and does not bear full reiteration here. Just the rudiments will suffice. The subway system was built in three phases. The first phase, opened in 1904 and operated by the Interborough Rapid Transit Company (IRT), consisted of subway lines in Manhattan and the Bronx, with a connection extended into downtown Brooklyn in 1908. The second phase, built between 1913 and 1930, consisted of lines built by both the IRT and the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company (BRT), the corporation that had built the elevated trolley lines in Brooklyn in the 1890's. (This corporation was later renamed the Brooklyn-Manhattan Transit Corporation.) In this phase, more subway lines were built in Manhattan and many lines were extended into Brooklyn, as well and Queens and the Bronx. The third and final phase, occurring between 1932 and 1940, was undertaken by the publicly owned and operated Independent Subway System (IND).

Subway routes were subject to the approval of the Rapid Transit Commissioners (RTC). As early as 1904, a delegation from Brooklyn went to the

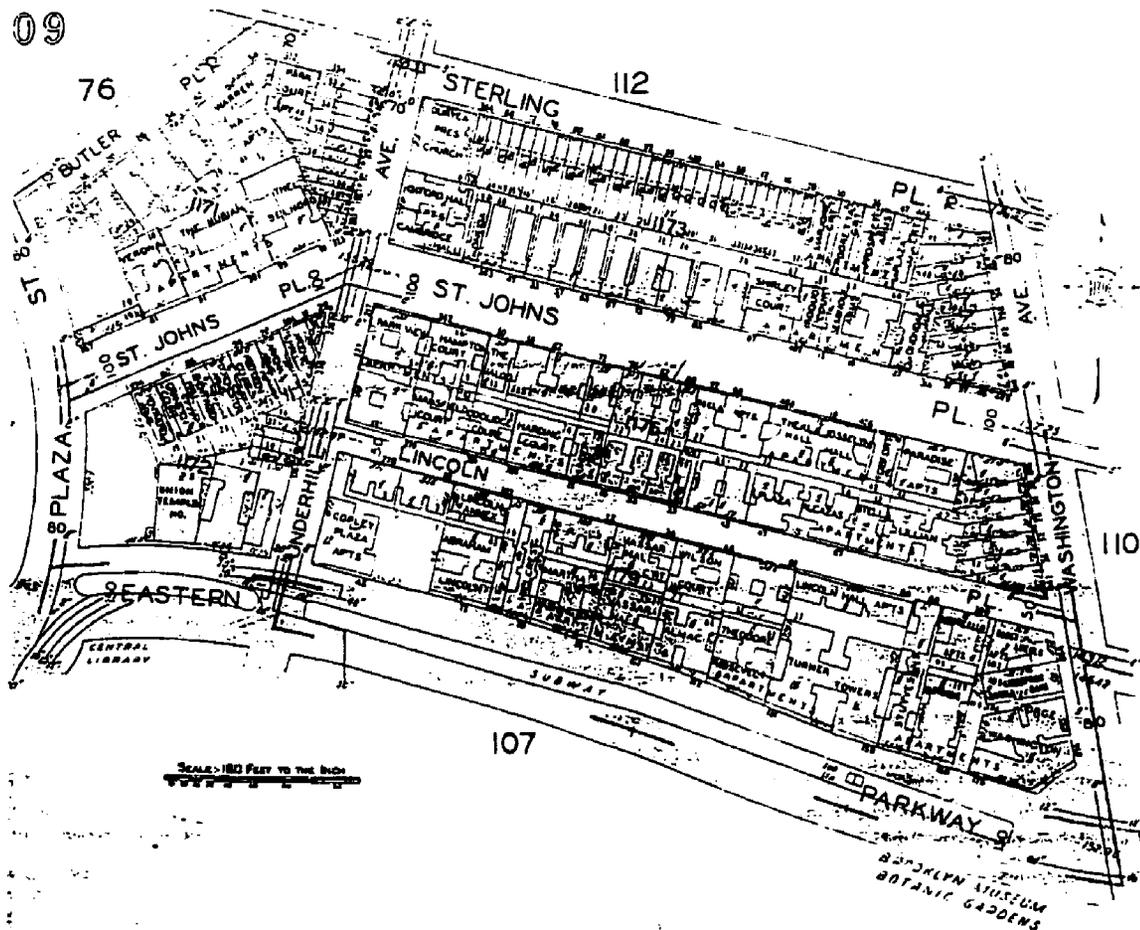
RTC to request extending the downtown Brooklyn IRT line along Atlantic Avenue to Prospect Park, and then out Eastern Parkway into Brownsville.⁴⁷

Looking at a map, the line made sense from a structural point of view: Eastern Parkway was the first wide east/west street south of Atlantic Avenue and, since it was generally undeveloped, the disruption caused by building the subway would be minimal. Although existing residents may have resisted the idea of a subway, no doubt those landowners still trying to develop their land avidly supported the idea, because development had followed the construction of other subway lines, especially in the Bronx.⁴⁸ A group called the Eastern Parkway Subway Association apparently proposed forming its own subway company to undertake the project.⁴⁹

The IRT extension was eventually approved, and the line was built under Eastern Parkway between 1915 and 1920. It formed the end of both the Lexington Avenue and Seventh Avenue lines that converged in Manhattan around Wall Street, so it directly linked Eastern Parkway with the heart of Manhattan. People predicted a real estate boom. A Brooklyn Eagle article reported that: "Eastern Parkway, one of the most attractive boulevards in the country, has a very promising future, real estate agents say [...]." Promoters predicted hundreds of new homes of all types: elaborate houses on big lots, single-family attached and detached rowhouses, and apartment buildings.⁵⁰ The extension included five stops along the parkway--at Washington, Franklin, Nostrand, Kingston, and Utica Avenues--before jogging to the south and then east again to follow Livonia Avenue into the heart of Brownsville. A map of 1911 showing proposed subway routes and stops indicated that three-fourths of the length of the parkway would be within a 7 to 14 minute running time of Park Row.⁵¹ It would be even quicker to get to Brownsville.

A Ready Nearby Population Brownsville was first opened up for development when the elevated railway was built on Fulton Avenue in the 1880's. Between 1890 and 1920, it developed into one of the largest communities of Eastern European Jewish immigrants in New York City, with many people moving to it from the Lower East Side. For these first generation immigrants, living in Brownsville meant living in an almost completely Jewish world: Yiddish was the common language and the newspapers were written in Yiddish. Brownsville was developed hastily and densely. Most residential buildings were tenements, and there were many garment factories in the area. Brownsville began dense and it kept getting denser. Although the United States Immigration Act of 1924 restricted European immigration, particularly southern and eastern Europeans, the Jewish population of Brooklyn increased by 250 percent between 1920 and 1930.⁵² In 1925 there were over 285,000 Jews in Brownsville and the adjacent community of East New York.⁵³ During this period a Jewish middle-class emerged, the successful children of immigrants. Those living in Brownsville wanted to get out as the area densified in the 1920's, and Eastern Parkway presented the opportunity to do so. At the time, some of the best middle-class housing developments in Brooklyn—in Park Slope, Brooklyn Heights, and parts of Flatbush--had restrictions against Jews.⁵⁴

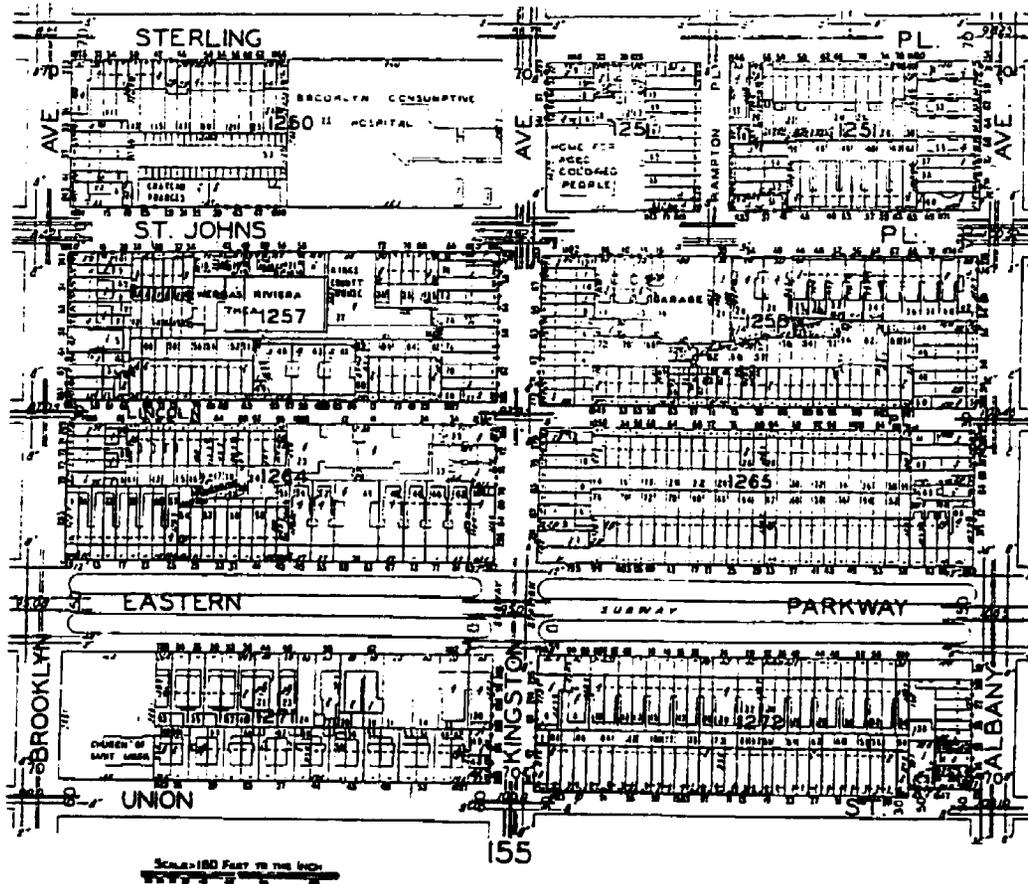
Many of the developers who built the apartment buildings on Eastern Parkway in the 1920's were Jewish entrepreneurs. Before W.W.I, Jews had been barred from construction trade unions in New York City, but after the war these restrictions broke down and it was easier for Jews to become real estate speculators.⁵⁵ They were attracted to Eastern Parkway because it was close and apparently lots were cheap.⁵⁶ Chroniclers of Jewish urban history have concluded that emerging second generation middle-class Jews were attracted to living in apartment houses because they were "... an ethnic version of the American



Details from the Hyde maps of 1929 showing the large apartment houses that were built at the western end Eastern Parkway

Dream [...].⁵⁷ Others have concluded that living in apartment houses on Eastern Parkway appealed to middle-class Jews leaving Brownsville because they were used to tenement house density and because the new neighborhood was still largely a Jewish enclave.⁵⁸

The most luxurious apartment buildings built on Eastern Parkway were at its western end, in the three blocks zoned with the greatest height allowance. Most of these were six stories high, but one was twelve stories and another sixteen stories. Most were built on full depth lots.



Detail from the Hyde maps of 1929 showing a typical area of small apartment buildings mixed with rowhouses

The next six blocks, between Washington and New York Avenues, were developed primarily with a mixture of large and small four and six story apartment buildings on lots averaging a little more than half the block depth. From New York Avenue on, development was a mix of smaller four story apartment buildings and rowhouses. Most corner lots along the parkway were built with apartment houses, and where this occurred they were oriented to front on the parkway. Elsewhere, the original corner lot layout configuration—lots oriented to face the cross street—remained.

This analysis reveals that most of the apartment houses built on the parkway were much lower in height than the zoning allowed. This occurrence wasn't due to any factor specifically related to the parkway however, because most apartment buildings built in the outer boroughs during the 1920's were four to six stories high.⁵⁹ The main reason for this were building code requirements related to life safety which meant that buildings six stories or less in height were far less expensive to build than higher buildings. The building code allowed buildings five stories or less to be built of non-fireproof construction except for the ground floor and six story buildings to be non-fireproof except the lowest two floors. However, buildings higher than six stories had to be of fireproof construction throughout.⁶⁰ The analysis also reveals that the advent of apartment building construction substantially altered earlier emerging development patterns, changing them to orient firmly toward the parkway.

The provision of the 1916 Zone Plan superseded the nuisance use restrictions originally attached to Eastern Parkway. In light of this, it is interesting to observe what kinds of development other than residential development finally occurred on the parkway. Non-residential development included both major public institutions and several commercial buildings. Public institutions built on the parkway included the Brooklyn Public Library—located on a site in the city-owned portion of the former East Side Lands facing onto the Plaza—a public school, and several large neighborhood religious institutions, including the 12-story Union Temple, the large and prestigious Brooklyn Jewish Center, and a Catholic church. Commercial buildings on the parkway included a large bank, and a cluster of automobile showrooms and a gas station at the intersection of Bedford Avenue. So, in fact, with the exception of the gas station, non-residential uses on the parkway were of a fairly high caliber. The 30 foot front yard set back requirement originally attached to the parkway was not altered by the provisions



Gas station on the corner of Eastern Parkway (1954)
From the New York City Parks Photo Archive

of the Zone Plan, and the Park Commission enforced it. All development along Eastern Parkway respected the set back, even that in the first several blocks where the set back was not required by law.⁶¹

Post-1920's Development

The fabric that was built along Eastern Parkway in the 1920's is essentially the fabric that remains today, although the community has changed substantially. Eastern Parkway's flush of prestige lasted through the 1940's, after which the parkway neighborhood was abandoned by the middle-class and taken over by a low income black population. In the 1920's and 1930's, black migration

to Brooklyn surged and the Atlantic/Fulton industrial corridor to the north of the parkway had solidified into a solidly black neighborhood. As the community grew, it expanded first to the north, into the Bedford and Stuyvesant areas, then southeast into Brownsville, and then south into the Eastern Parkway district, which had come to be known as Crown Heights.⁶²

Following the middle-class "white-flight," there has been very little development pressure on Eastern Parkway. Because of the low-income population, developers have found no incentive to take down existing buildings and build new ones. At the same time, there has been little pressure for public redevelopment, even during the redevelopment prone 1960's and 1970's, because conditions elsewhere, particularly in Brownsville, were deemed much worse.⁶³ (The housing stock around Eastern Parkway was fairly well constructed whereas the housing stock in Brownsville consisted primarily of hastily built tenements. Brownsville is the area in Brooklyn where most of the 1960's redevelopment projects went.)⁶⁴ However, land along Eastern Parkway has been steadily densified because many rowhouses have been divided into apartment flats.⁶⁵ In the 1960's a community of Orthodox Hasidic Jews began establishing itself in neighborhoods to the south of Eastern Parkway. The community is now substantial, and since it is the norm for members of this religious group to have large households, the community's presence is contributing to increased density.

Zoning provisions for Eastern Parkway are different today than they were in the 1920's, but the changes have not had much impact. New York City implemented a comprehensive zoning revision in 1961 which replaced height and set back controls with floor area ratio (FAR) allowances. The FAR provisions for higher density districts were designed to encourage set-back "international style" apartment building forms.⁶⁶ The new zoning districts mapped for Eastern Parkway suddenly made 20 story apartment buildings possible at the western

end of the parkway and 12 story apartments possible for the rest of its length. But nothing was built to these new allowances. When general contextual zoning was introduced in the 1980's, mainly to overcome concerns that the 1961 zoning was resulting in buildings that didn't fit with existing neighborhood forms, two contextual zones mandating lower bulkier building types were mapped on the western end Eastern Parkway, but again nothing new was built.

The main revision to New York City's zoning plan since 1961 has been the mapping of what are called Special Districts. This mapping began in 1969 and today there are thirty-four Special Districts throughout the city. When an area is zoned as a Special District, special rules pertaining only to that district, are laid over the existing zoning and supersede its provisions.⁶⁷ Special Districts have generally been created as a result of advocacy by citizens, in order to accomplish certain preservation or development agendas.⁶⁸ Although the area around Eastern Parkway would certainly qualify for protective special district zoning on the basis of Eastern Parkway's designation as a historic landscape in 1978, no advocacy group has yet developed to push for one.⁶⁹ Perhaps this will happen in the future if development of some kind starts to occur that residents, or other interested parties, don't like.

Emergent Development Form of Ocean Parkway

Ocean Parkway presents a different development story than Eastern Parkway, due to a different set of socio-economic pressures. After Ocean Parkway was built, the platting laid over the surrounding area was followed in a straightforward manner. No substantial replatting revisions occurred as around Eastern Parkway. The street pattern around Ocean Parkway no doubt made

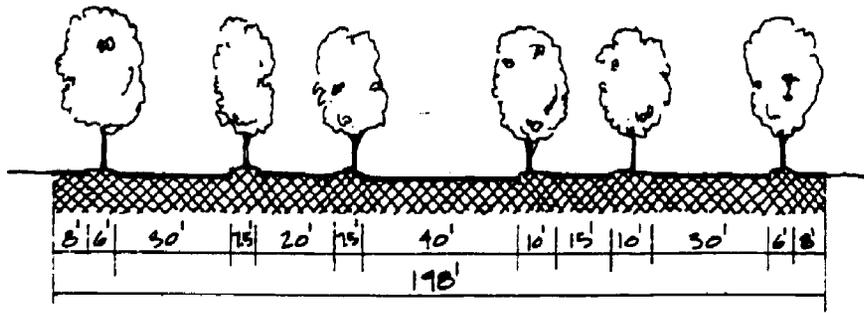
more sense to people than the pattern laid out around Eastern Parkway because the three wide streets in the pattern were spaced a more normal distance apart.⁷⁰

The legal act that authorized laying out Ocean Parkway stipulated front yard set back requirements but not any limitations on building uses. The set backs were 30 feet, as on Eastern Parkway, and these spaces were subject to the same development restrictions: they could only be used for planting trees and shrubbery.⁷¹

Several possible reasons suggest why the nuisance use restrictions attached to Eastern Parkway were not placed on Ocean Parkway, although my examination of records has not uncovered specific references to this. First, Ocean Parkway was laid out through working farmland, and property owners may not have wanted to exclude farm-related uses from it. Second, when the parkway was built it had several substantial existing non-residential uses fronting on it: two large race tracks, with their associated stables and service buildings, and a cemetery. Third, Ocean Parkway was much farther away from the built-up areas of Brooklyn than Eastern Parkway, and so property owners probably didn't imagine residential development occurring along it immediately, at least not for its whole length. They may not have wanted to preclude other possibilities.

Disrupted Existing Development Patterns

Although residential development didn't immediately follow the building of Ocean Parkway, its construction and the legal imposition of its related surrounding street pattern substantially disrupted existing development patterns. It disrupted the existing rural land holding pattern as well as two urban development patterns, one quite recent and the other quite old.

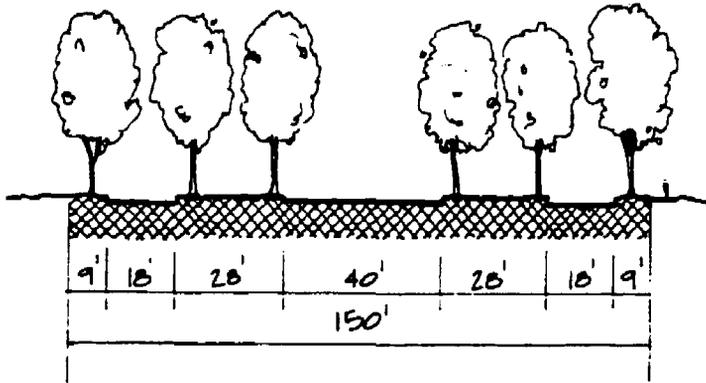


Section of the Arborway in Boston

double roadway versions. Some of these were straight and formally laid out while others were informally laid out and landscaped. Only one parkway, the Arborway, was designed with three-roadways and two-malls. It was 198 feet wide, just a little narrower than the Brooklyn parkways, and had a similar cross-section, although the center roadway was narrower, only 40 feet, and the side roadways were wider, 30 feet.¹⁰⁹

The Louisville Parkway System

In Louisville, where parkways had to be narrower than in Brooklyn because of difficulties associated with securing rights-of-way, Olmsted designed one 150 foot wide three-roadway parkway and several 120 foot wide single-roadway parkways. The three-roadway parkway, Southern Parkway, was essentially a scaled down version of the Brooklyn parkways, the center roadway, the malls, the side roadways, and the sidewalks were all proportionally narrower. The city had trouble financing construction costs, and as a result this parkway system was only partially built. The side roadways on Southern Parkway were only sporadically constructed.¹¹⁰



Section of the Southern Parkway, Louisville

Later Parkways

After Olmsted's retirement his partners went on to design many more parkways. Until the 1930's, when engineers became the primary designers of parkways rather than landscape architects, the Olmsted brothers were widely acknowledged as experts on parkway design. A comprehensive typology of the parkways designed by Olmsted, and by the Olmsted firm, is something that remains to be done.

Parkways by Others

From the turn of the century on, other people were also designing and building streets they called "parkways," as well as streets that had a three-roadway form, similar though not identical to the original Brooklyn parkways, and calling them concourses or boulevards rather than parkways.

By the early 1900's, an untidy mix of different types of streets in the New York area, and in other cities, were called parkways. The name was sometimes attached to ordinary streets by land developers in order give them a sense of

specialness. In Brooklyn, all the streets under the jurisdiction of the park commissioners were referred to as parkways regardless of their form. Lumped into this group were specially landscaped wide streets, such as the Bay Parkway and the Shore Parkway, as well as a number of regular business streets.¹¹¹

The Grand Concourse

Around the turn of the century, an altogether new type of parkway-like street was built in the Bronx in order to link Manhattan with the new parks being built in the northern part of the borough. The Grand Concourse had a similar cross-sectional form to the Brooklyn parkways, although at 165 feet wide it was substantially narrower, but its design included the novel feature of grade separations at major intersections. It was designed by an engineer,¹¹² who conceived of it as a speedway rather than a parkway. The Concourse was sited on a ridge. To facilitate fast traffic on the center roadway, major cross-streets were tunneled through the ridge, under the parkway, so that through cross traffic would not interfere with through movement on the parkway. Access to and from cross streets was had at intersections by narrow roadways leading up and down from the sides of the main cross-traffic tunnels.¹¹³ Like Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway, the Grand Concourse was a residential street. The side access roads were intended to provide access by service vehicles to abutting houses. Unlike the Brooklyn parkways, however, it was not considered to be part of the park system and it was not put under the jurisdiction of the Park Commission.¹¹⁴

Westchester County Parkways

During the 1910's and 1920's several parkways with a new form and different conceptual purpose were built along river courses in the outlying parts of

Rural Patterns

While I have not uncovered maps showing the layout of existing farms in rural Kings County at the time when Ocean Parkway was built, maps dating from 1890, a decade and a half later, show existing rural property line divisions as well as the platted grid pattern. These maps show property holdings around the parkway ranging from very large plots to very small ones. On examination, most of the largest plots were located near the northern end of the parkway and these were generally labeled as individual estates, or had corporate names attached to them. Along the middle and southern end of the parkway, most land holdings were fairly small, except right around Gravesend where several old families held large plots. The large holdings at the northern end had likely been agglomerated for speculative purposes. Historical documents indicate that land speculation in the area began around the time the construction of the parkway was being debated. A letter by Tunis G. Bergen, resident of Bay Ridge, written on 26 February 1877 states that: "Nearly all the land on the line of the Ocean Parkway is farm land, and will have to be used as such for years to come. The farmers on the line were opposed to its being opened, it being favored only by a few individuals who had purchased land on the line on speculation, and who were a minority of the owners."⁷²

The pattern of smaller holdings still evident in 1890 probably more accurately represent the typical rural land owning pattern that existed before the parkway was built. Historical accounts that describe the area as a district of small truck farms lend credence to this assumption.⁷³ On close examination, one notes that some smaller properties were divided by the parkway, so some individual farms, or properties leased for farming purposes, may have been substantially disrupted when the parkway was built. Even more disruptive to the existing rural landscape, however, was the new mapped grid. Along with the lot

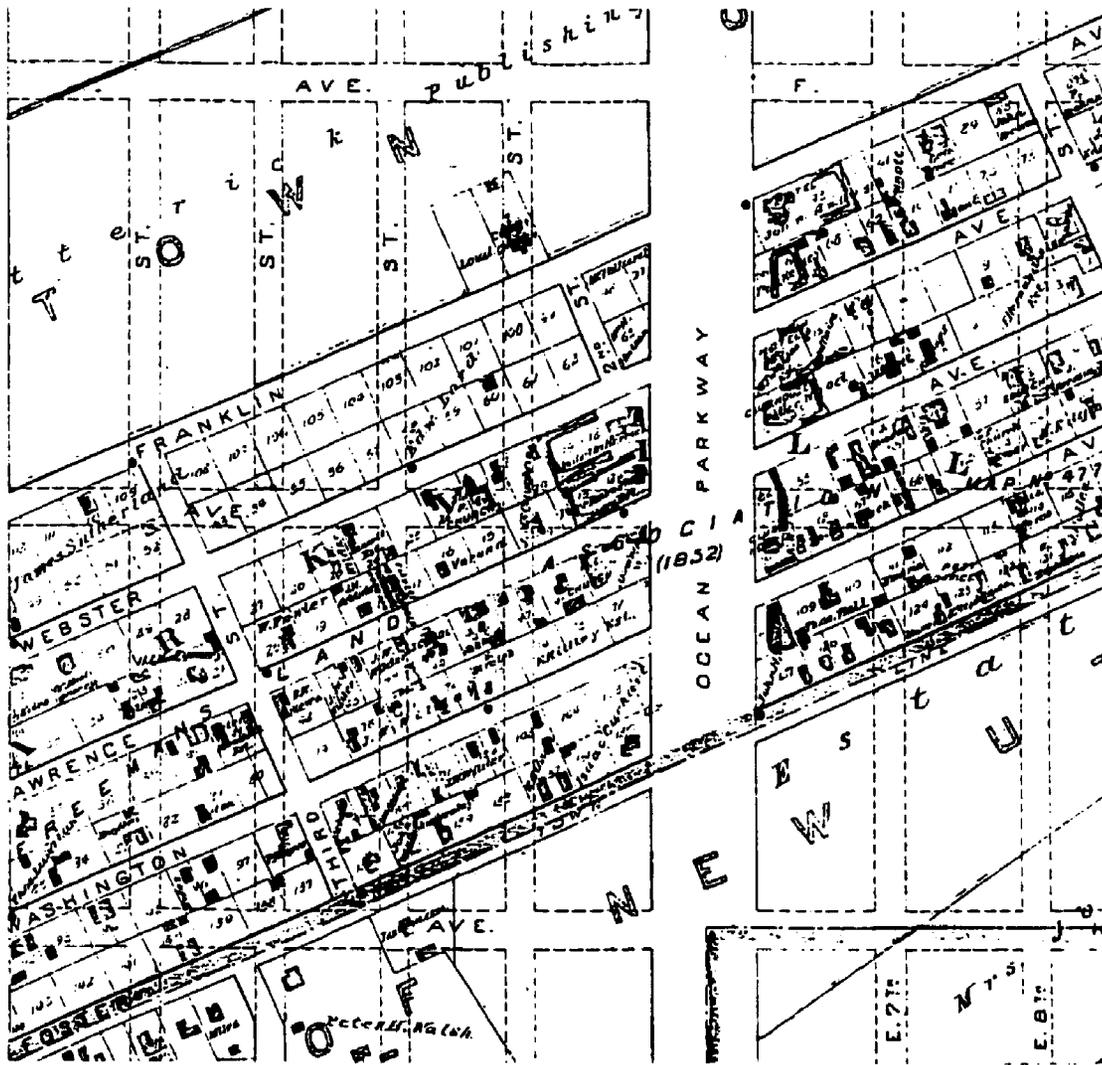
accumulation evident along the northern part of the parkway, soon after the parkway was constructed, some smaller rural property owners began improving streets across their land, in accordance with the plan, and laying out urban lots. Both the processes of land accumulation and lot platting substantially altered previously existing rural patterns.

Parkville

Ocean Parkway was laid out to run right through the middle of the small, recently built village of Greenfield, which was renamed Parkville shortly after the parkway was legally authorized.⁷⁴ The name change suggests that at least some local residents embraced the parkway idea, even though it took out a broad swath of the village. Its construction meant demolishing a number of buildings, including a church, a schoolhouse, and several private homes.⁷⁵ A contemporary historical account supports this notion, because it recounts that a village resident, J. Paulding, was a member of the State Assembly and instrumental in securing the act creating Ocean Parkway.⁷⁶

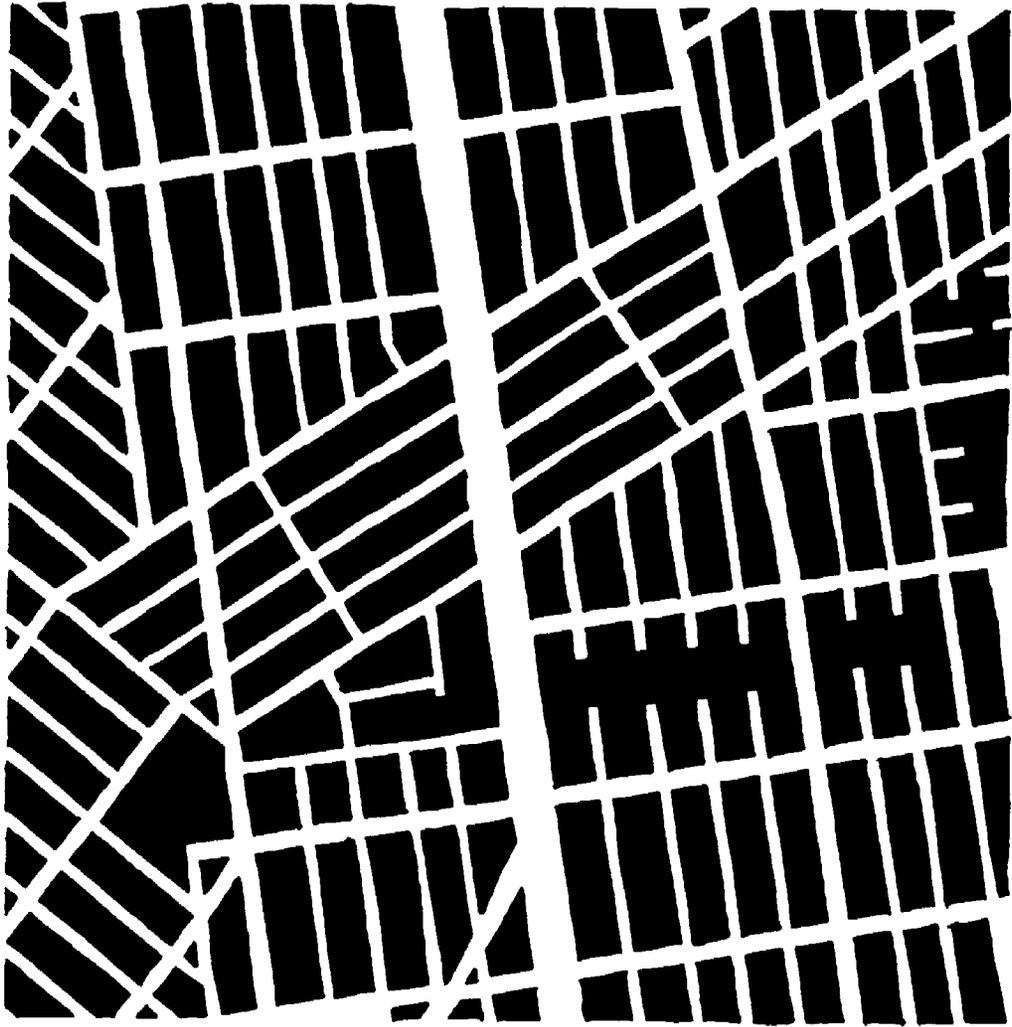
The village was laid out in 1853 on a 114 acre tract of farmland along the southern border of the town of Flatbush by a private group called the United Freeman's Association. The association laid out and graded streets (in a rectilinear grid pattern aligned with the town line), planted shade trees, dug wells, and platted blocks into lots. It was a speculative venture. Acting essentially as real estate agents, the association sold lots in the village between 1853 and 1856. By 1860 there were 200 residents.⁷⁷

The street pattern platted to go with Ocean Parkway paid no attention to the existing street grid of Parkville: village streets stopped abruptly where they met the new pattern. The village grid was encased within the larger imposed grid pattern. The village itself became one of the attractions of the parkway. In 1887,

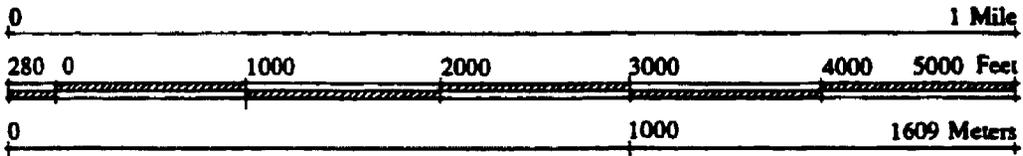


Detail from the Robinson maps of 1890 showing how Ocean Parkway cut through the middle of the existing village of Parkville

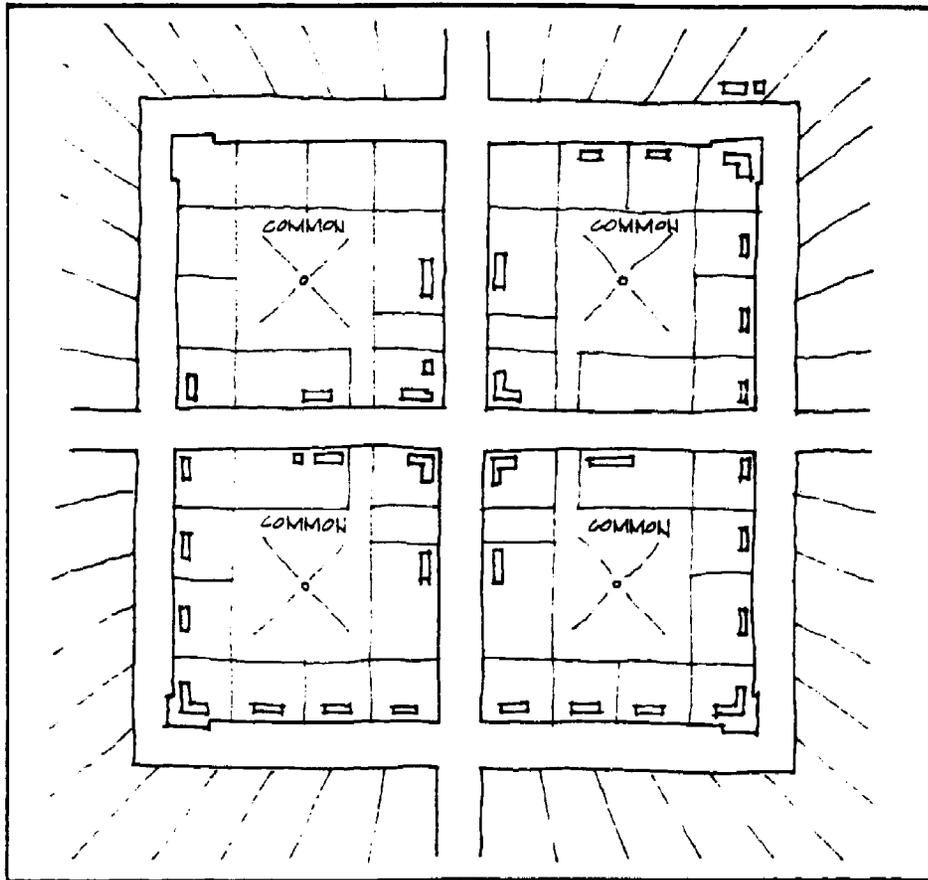
Park Commissioner Easton described Ocean Parkway thus: "Opening out of the southwesterly corner of the park, skirting the beautiful village of Flatbush and afterward passing through the lovely hamlet of Parkville, runs the famous Ocean Parkway straight down to the sea."⁷⁸



Ocean Parkway



Square mile map of Ocean Parkway at Parkville

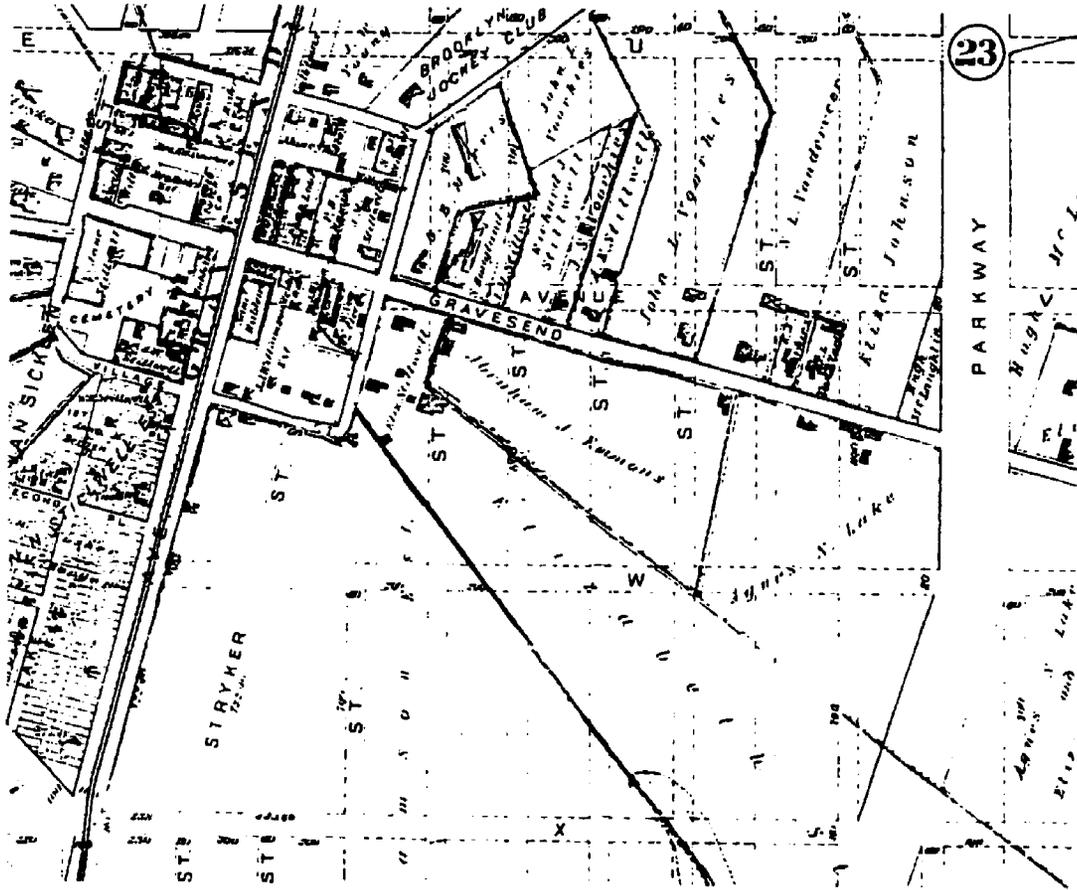


Plan of the original layout of Gravesend
From an original drawing of 1645 reproduces in Stiles

Gravesend

Ocean Parkway skirted the village of Gravesend to the east, so its construction didn't interrupt the village core, which remained intact. But the parkway, and the street pattern that came with it, did disrupt the flow of the village street pattern into the rural landscape--a pattern that had been in existence since the middle of the seventeenth century.

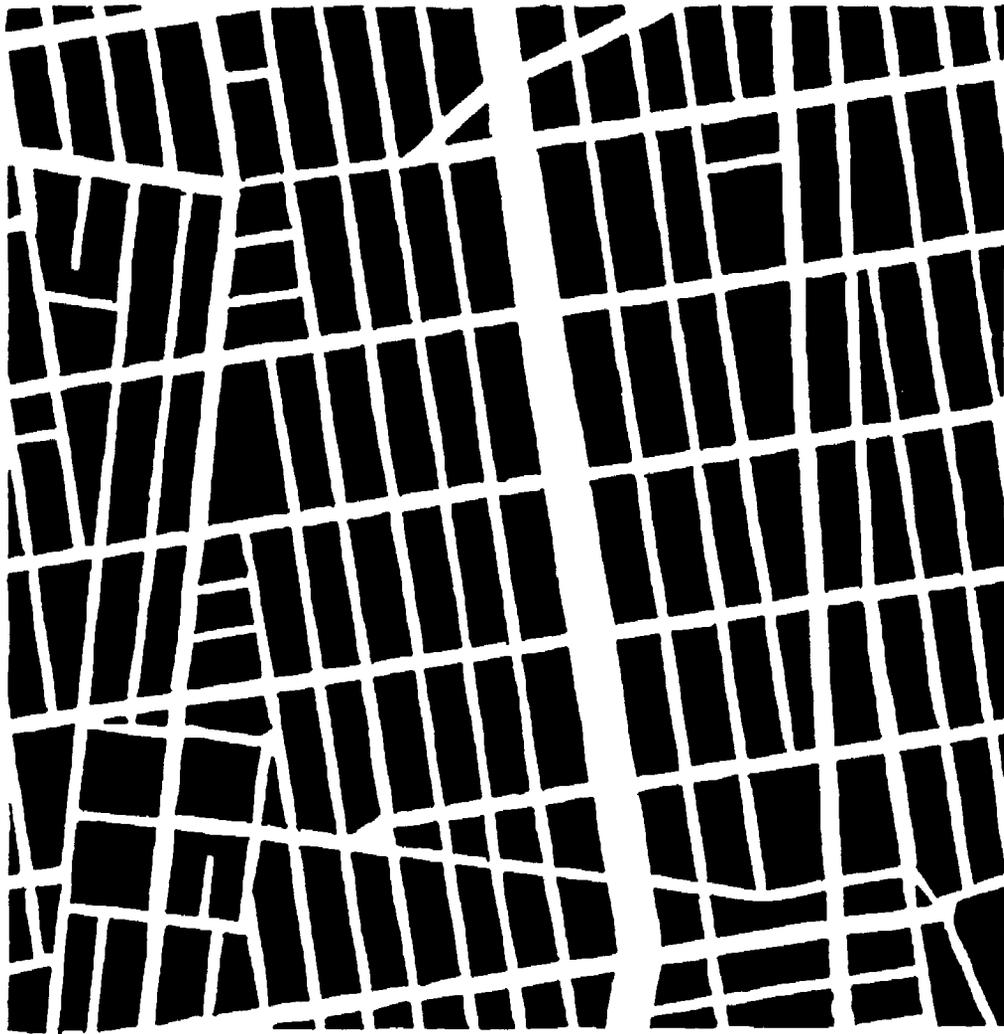
Gravesend was one of the original Kings County towns, established in 1645. Its first settlers envisioned building a "city by the sea" to rival New Amsterdam. The town was laid out in a designed pattern: the town center was a 16 acre square, divided into four equal squares by cross streets. Each square was



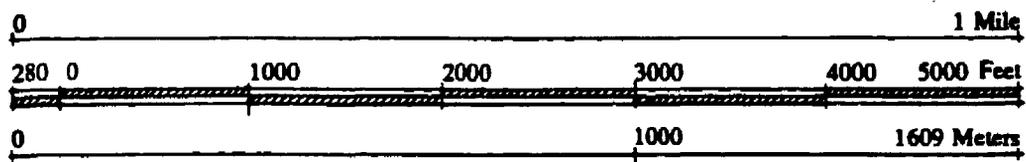
Detail from the Robinson maps of 1890 showing how Ocean Parkway disrupted the existing development patterns of Gravesend

subdivided into 10 plots surrounding a central public yard. Farm lots known as planter lots were laid out radiating diagonally from the central square.

Prior to Ocean Parkway's construction, development patterns around Gravesend town center spread outward following the diagonal lines of the planter lots. This pattern was interrupted by Ocean Parkway and replatted with the new parkway-associated street grid. Although the old diagonally-tending pattern remained on the ground for a number of years, by the 1930's only a few vestiges of diagonal street platting remained in the area marking the lines of the original planter lots.



Ocean Parkway



Square mile map of Ocean Parkway near Gravesend

The disruption of existing rural and urban patterns was both resisted and willfully sought. Different landowners had different visions of how the land should be used. Highly capitalized speculators wanted to use the land for development to realize large real estate profits. Some land owners embraced this vision, while others didn't want the rural landscape, and their rural way of life, changed. Some farmers tried to block the construction of the parkway and some bitterly complained about the new imposed urban grid.⁷⁹

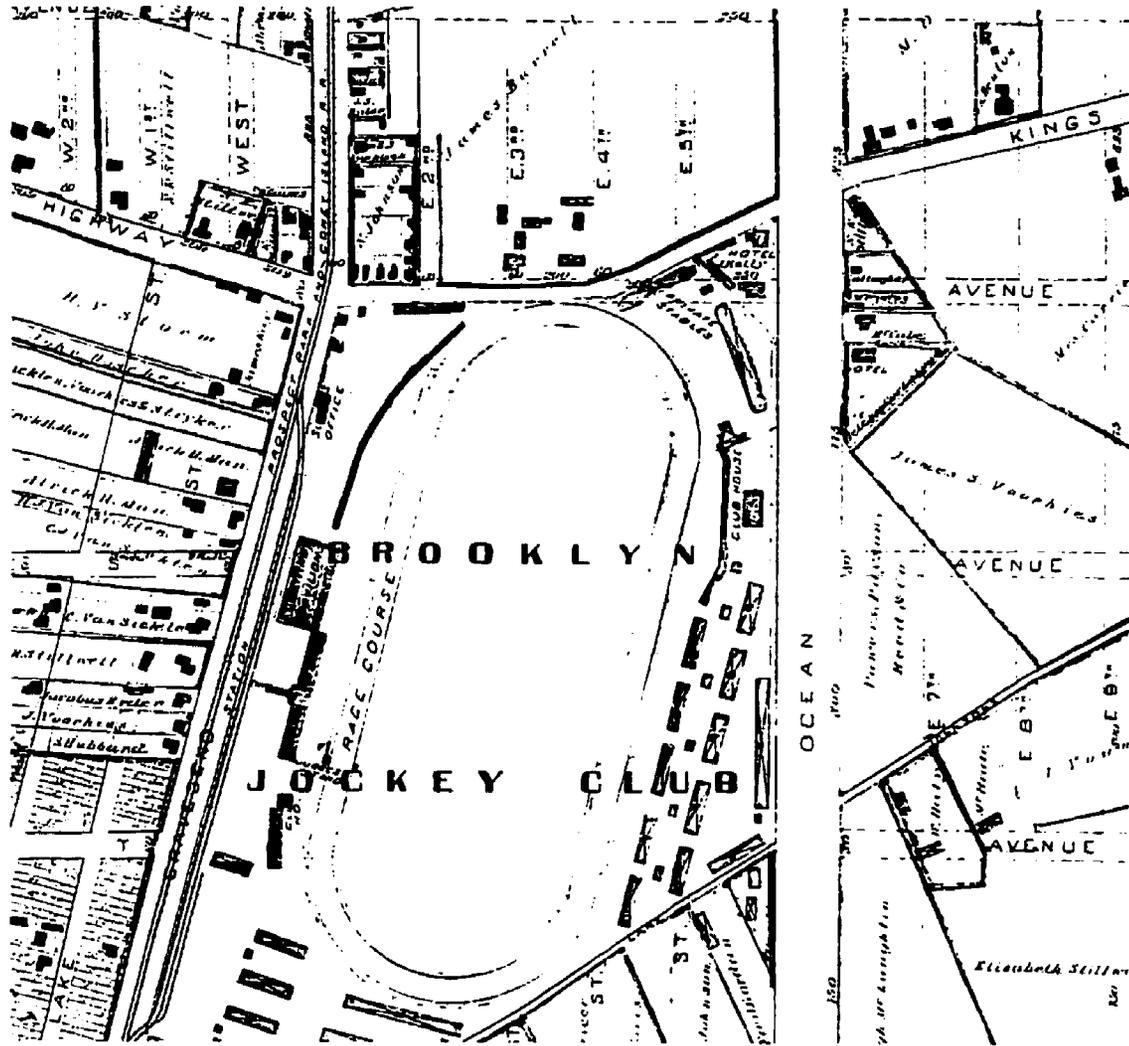
Development

The Earliest Emergent Development Patterns: 1880-1910

The Robinson maps of 1890 show few buildings along Ocean Parkway. A scattering of hotels and roadhouses had been built on it, including several near Prospect Park, several in Parkville, several near Kings Highway, and a large cluster near Coney Island. The race tracks that existed when the parkway was built—the small one near Parkville and the large one owned by the Brooklyn Jockey Club near Gravesend—were still standing, and another one, the large Brighton Beach Race Course, had been built near Coney Island. Other than this, the only buildings along the parkway were a few houses in Parkville, and a few scattered houses and rowhouses near Gravesend. Development was anticipated, however, because a large estate north of Parkville, had been subdivided into regular building lots, although nothing was yet built.

The new hotels and roadhouses were a major important presence on the parkway. They were handsome buildings and served a wealthy clientele who used the parkway as a pleasure drive.

Unlike Eastern Parkway, the Park Commission zealously protected Ocean Parkway from crossing streetcar lines during the period when Brooklyn's trolley



Detail from the Robinson maps of 1890 showing area of hotels along Ocean Parkway near Kings Highway

system was established, between roughly 1880 and 1910. One crossing trolley line was built in the mid-1890's, near Parkville, but the Park Commission forced the operating company to put it in a tunnel under the parkway. This move received public support because there was a large constituency interested in keeping streetcars off of the parkway, since it was heavily used as a pleasure drive.⁶⁰ A Brooklyn Eagle article reported on the public outcry that ensued when Park Commissioner Squier gave the company building the crossing line the right

to temporarily cross the parkway at grade while the tunnel was under construction.⁸¹ The difficulty with crossing Ocean Parkway, as well as the profit-motivated desire on the part of competing streetcar companies not to connect their lines with other lines, probably contributed to the pervasive north/south orientation of streetcar lines in southern Kings County: almost no lines were constructed running east/west. However, lines were built on both Gravesend Avenue and the Coney Island Plank Road (by this time renamed Coney Island Avenue), so the area around Ocean Parkway was relatively well served by transit, even if not immediately served by it.⁸²

Maps show a different corner lot configuration emerging on Ocean Parkway than that emerging on Eastern Parkway. Wherever lots were platted in the blocks lining the parkway, corner lots faced onto the parkway and not onto the cross street. This is the pattern that subsequently prevailed along the entire parkway. The different lot orientation was likely due to the fact that landowners maintained a vision of Ocean Parkway as an attractive development tool long after it was built, unlike landowners around Eastern Parkway who became disillusioned with the parkway after development didn't immediately follow its construction. Ocean Parkway remained attractive because of the prestige associated with its role as a popular pleasure drive.

Solidified Development Patterns: the 1910's and 1920's

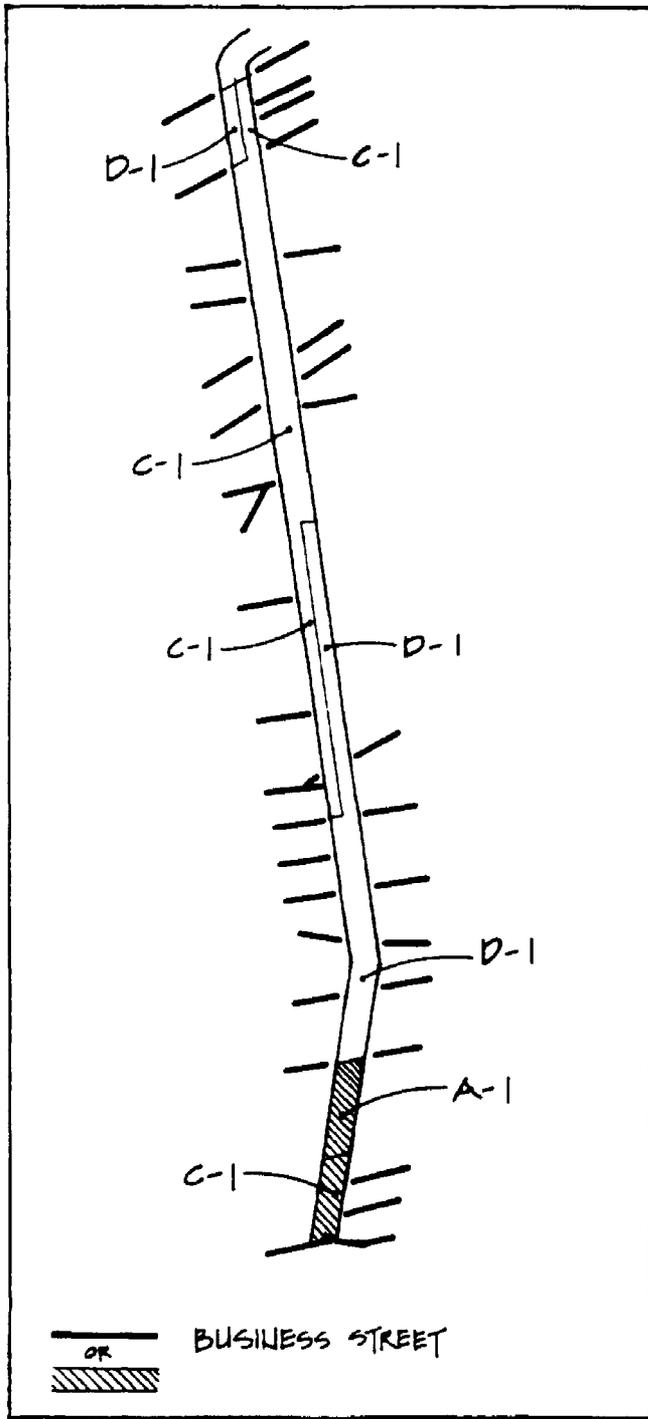
The next maps showing development along Ocean Parkway date from thirty years later. The Hyde Maps of 1929 show the parkway lined with development, mostly rowhouses and single-family attached and detached houses but also a number of apartment buildings. This development had taken place over the previous ten or so years, and was the result of a confluence of factors. The same general factors that led developers to build apartment houses on Eastern

Parkway (large immigration into the borough and changes that made elevators cost effective in middle-class apartment houses) led developers to build them on Ocean Parkway, but different particular factors worked against as many apartment houses being built and worked for the development of lower density housing forms.

Unlike Eastern Parkway, no subway line was built under Ocean Parkway prior to the 1920's immigration boom and when the 1916 Building Zone Plan was enacted, Ocean Parkway was mapped with lower density districts than Eastern Parkway.

Like Eastern Parkway, Ocean Parkway was zoned residential for most of its length, except at its southern end where it was zoned as a business street in Coney Island. A number of cross streets were zoned as business streets but, unlike the pattern established around Eastern Parkway, where these streets crossed Ocean Parkway they were zoned residential for a block on either side. Ocean Parkway received a 1 times street width zoning for its entire length, which meant that the allowed building height was uniformly 100 feet. By comparison, the surrounding parallel 60 foot wide streets in the same height zone could only be built to a height of 60 feet. Ocean Parkway was mapped with a staggered pattern of Area C and Area D zoning, except for several blocks in Coney Island where it was mapped with Area A zoning. Area C zoning was intended to produce apartment house densities, while Area D zoning was intended to produce rowhouses. Some areas immediately adjacent to the parkway received Area E zoning, the lowest density zoning designation, which was intended to produce single-family neighborhoods. (See the discussion in the Eastern Parkway section for more discussion about the nature of these area zones.)⁵³

The zoning mapped for Ocean Parkway allowed for the same type of low-rise apartment buildings primarily built on Eastern Parkway—apartment



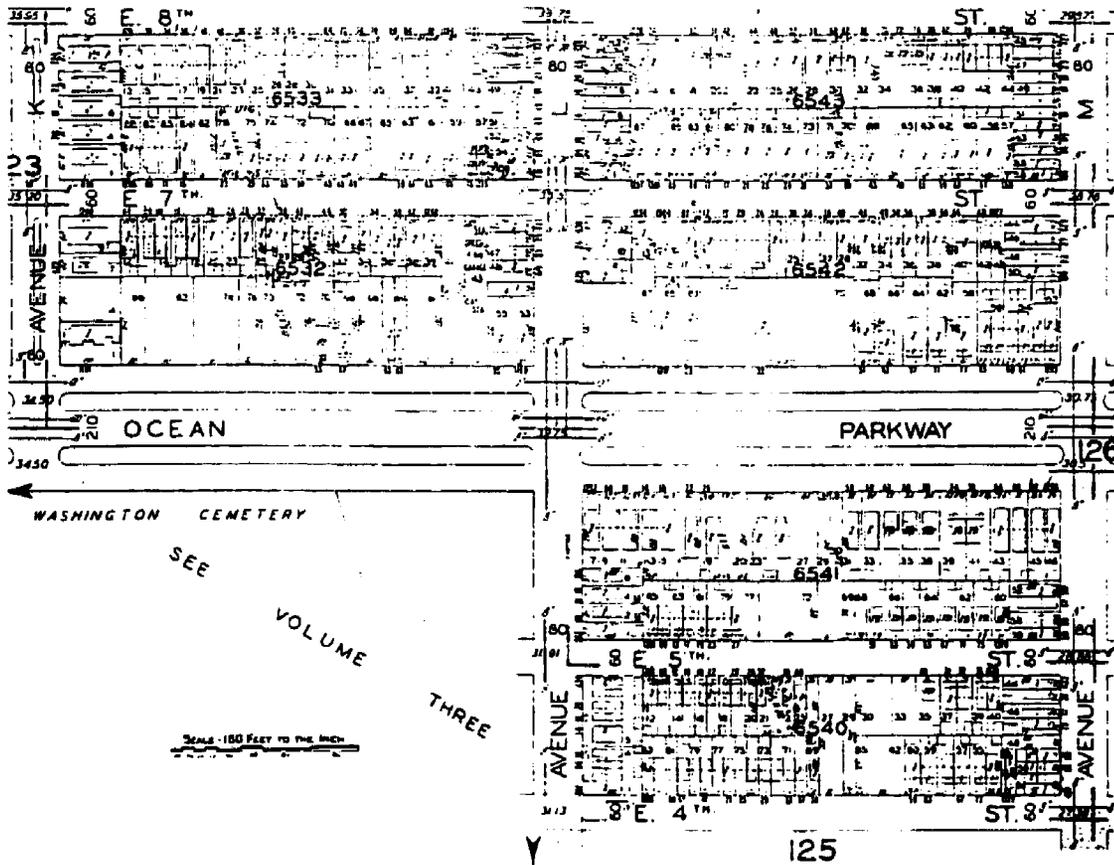
The earliest zoning of Ocean Parkway
From the New York City Building Zone Plan of 1916

buildings up to four and five stories in height could even be built in areas zoned D or E if they had reduced lot coverage—but the zoning did prohibit high-rise

apartments like those built on the western end of Eastern Parkway near Prospect Park. The reason fewer apartment houses overall were built on Ocean Parkway than on Eastern Parkway, even though it was a much longer street, was because the location was less attractive to apartment house developers, due to the somewhat distant transit lines, while at the same time it was more attractive to developers building a different form of large-scale development: single-family subdivisions. This type of development was occurring in outlying areas of all the boroughs, in areas not directly served by transit but well served by roads. Land costs were generally lower in such areas, so there was less financial pressure to build high density, and these areas were proving attractive to single-family home buyers precisely because they were removed from noisy streetcar lines. These sub-divisions were developed with middle-class homes, and what made them viable was that by the 1920's, many middle-class families owned cars.

One of the things that made the area around Ocean Parkway especially attractive for development was the parkway itself. It was a well-known landmark in the area and functionally it provided a straight, wide, and well-paved route into Central Brooklyn.

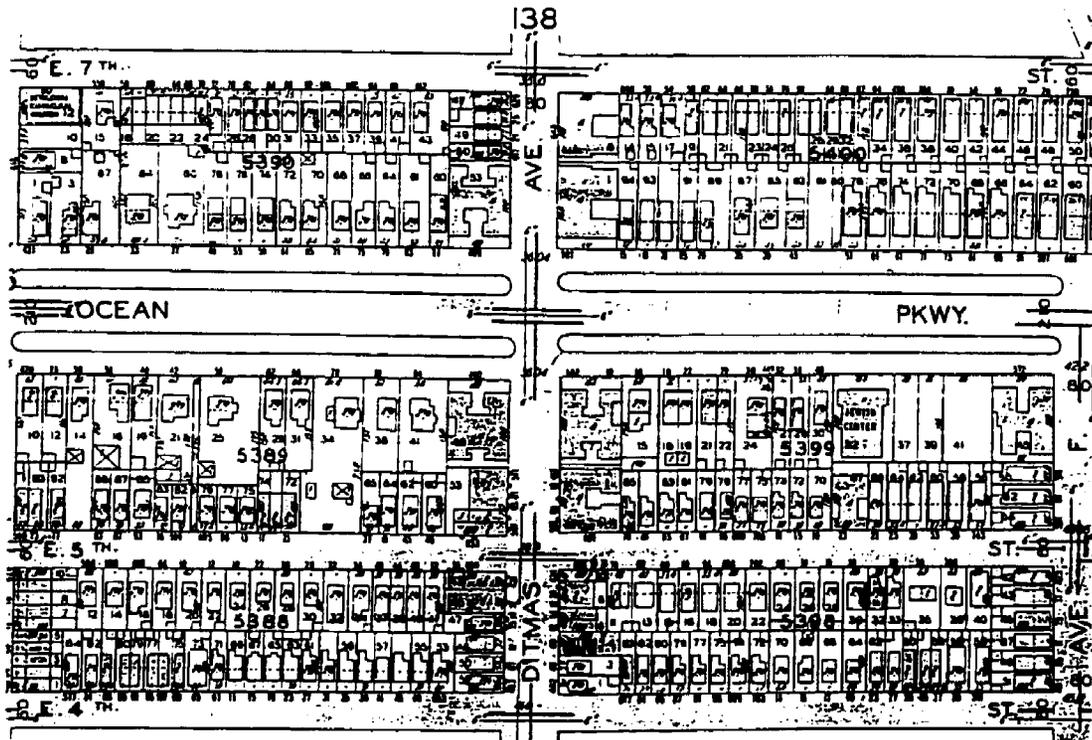
The parkway became a focal line for both new small house subdivisions and apartment buildings. Its prestige lent prestige to both types of development and proximity to the parkway was advertised as a selling point.⁶⁴ A Brooklyn Eagle article of 1919 described a boom of development along the parkway, reporting that 500 to 600 new homes had been recently completed or were under construction. One of these was the Parkway Gardens Development near Kings Highway. It was a 22 acre subdivision containing 150 colonial style single-family homes with two car garages (a new residential design innovation), built on 40 to 50 foot wide lots. The development included a "high-class" 60 family elevator



Detail from the Hyde maps of 1929 showing single-family house development patterns near the northern end of Ocean Parkway

apartment house on Ocean Parkway. Another large subdivision was Midwood Manor, along the west side of Ocean Parkway near Avenues J and K.⁸⁵

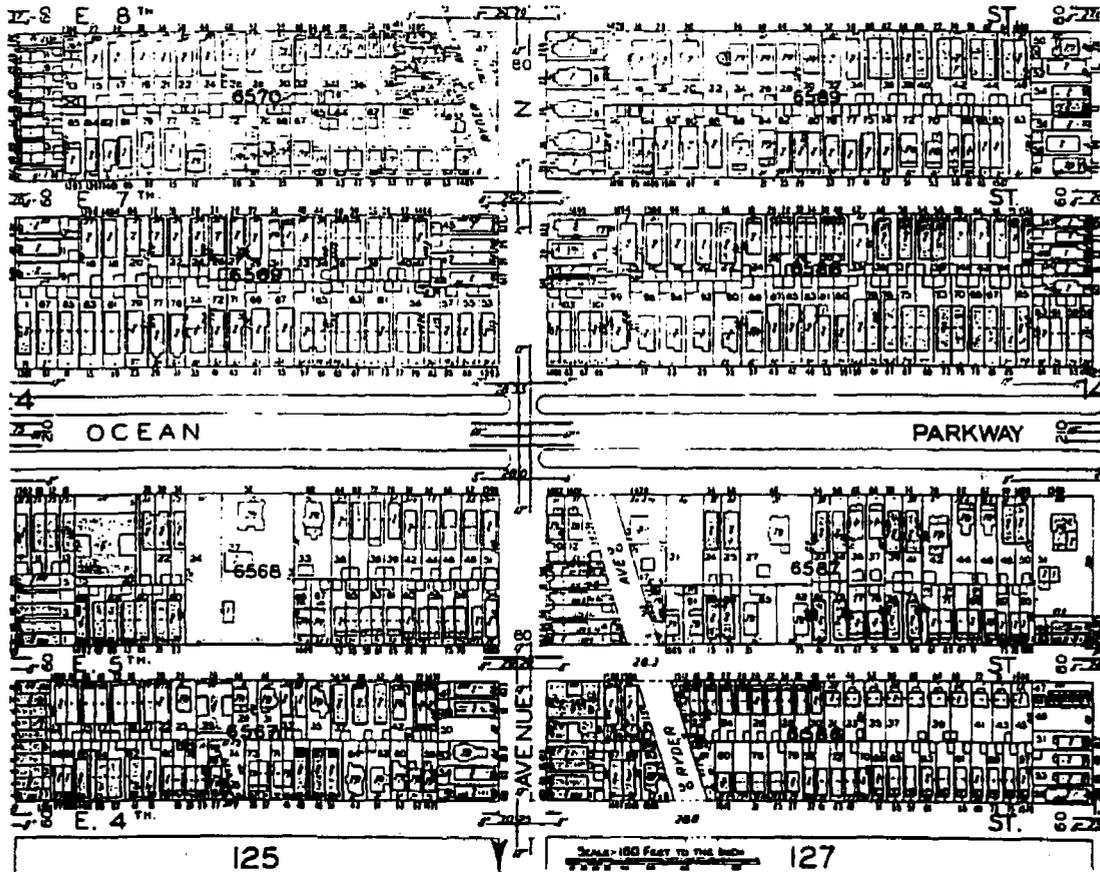
The building boom along Ocean Parkway continued through the 1920's. A 1926 Brooklyn Eagle article described many more recently completed projects and many that were on the drawing boards. Projects included a number of apartment buildings near Gravesend, and more large subdivisions of individual homes. The grounds of both the Brooklyn Jockey Club and the race track near Parkville had been covered with houses.⁸⁶ A 1928 Brooklyn Eagle article described the construction of several more apartment houses on Parkway near Kings Highway.



Detail from the Hyde maps of 1929 showing a mix of apartment buildings, single-family houses, and duplexes on Ocean Parkway

The people moving into these developments were middle-class families, including many Italians and also Jews. Some of the developers building apartment houses on the parkway were Jewish developers, like those building on Eastern Parkway. Apartments on Ocean Parkway and houses in the surrounding subdivisions appealed to Jews who were moving out of older well-to-do Jewish neighborhoods such as Borough Park and Williamsburgh.

Looking at the 1929 Hyde maps, one sees patterns of mixed residential development along the parkway, with certain building types predominating in particular areas. The first thirteen or so blocks contained mostly single family houses on wide lots (ranging from 40 feet to 140 feet wide) but also some rowhouses on narrow lots and several four to six story apartment buildings. The next six blocks contained mostly attached single-family houses on 25 to 30 foot



Detail from the Hyde maps of 1929 showing an area of predominantly single-family houses on narrow lots

wide lots, but also a number of free standing houses on 40 foot wide lots and several six story apartment buildings. The next five blocks contained both attached and detached single family homes on 25 foot to 40 foot wide lots, followed by several blocks containing hardly any development at all, followed by several blocks containing a mix of four to six story apartment houses on 80 foot to 120 foot wide lots and attached and detached single family houses on narrow lots.

Development followed the lot platting pattern that emerged in the 1880's: virtually all corner lots fronted onto the parkway and not the cross streets. Lot divisions were also laid out to establish the hierarchy of the parkway over

parallel streets. Where mid-block lot divisions occurred, they were almost always laid out so that the lots facing the parkway were deeper than those facing the parallel street, typically 150 feet deep versus 100 feet deep.

Meanwhile, both Gravesend Avenue and Coney Island Avenue had developed as commercial streets, following the norm for most other wide streets in Brooklyn. Unlike Ocean Parkway, they had received business zoning in the 1916 Zone Plan.

Post-1920's Development

By the end of the decade, real estate interests were greedy for more apartment house development along Ocean Parkway. In early 1929, civic organizations united to campaign for a subway extension under Ocean Parkway.⁸⁷ In competition with others who wanted subway lines in their areas, they promoted the growth potential of the Ocean Parkway corridor over that of other nearby corridors, particularly disparaging the potential of the Gravesend Avenue corridor, in part because of its rather morbid name.⁸⁸

Efforts to get a subway line were still underway in 1931, with the lead organization emerging as the Ocean Parkway Civic League. Trying to persuade the membership to approve the subway plan, Director Meyer Block declared that "The private homes are doomed" and argued that a subway line would insure adequate transit facilities for the "apartment-lined boulevard of the future." He envisioned 15 to 16 story apartment houses along Ocean Parkway. But the membership was divided over whether a subway line would benefit property owners or if the excavation necessary to build it would harm apartment rentals. They also debated the best timing for a hypothetical subway line. Would it be best to build one right away, or wait until more apartment buildings had been built? Ultimately, the Civic League voted to pursue the plan, even though they

were advised by the Board of Transportation that no funds were available for the line.⁸⁹

The effort to get a subway line failed and several months later the Ocean Parkway Civic League started efforts to secure a bus line instead. A Brooklyn Eagle article reported that the proposal was backed by local capital: property owners along the parkway would supply \$250,000 to establish the line. A private bus line operator, who had previously operated other bus lines in the city, was prepared to buy the franchise for the line from the city.⁹⁰ This effort failed, and a few months later the Civic League tried again, this time to secure semi-sight-seeing bus service on the parkway—double-decker buses like the ones running on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. They would run on the side roads of the parkway, and would serve both recreational and residential needs. President Breithart declared that the line "...would fill up vacant apartments along the broad thoroughfare and would induce further building."⁹¹ Apparently nothing came of this effort, and several months later the League renewed efforts to get a subway line. They wanted an extension built from the new line that crossed under Ocean Parkway at Church Street.⁹² Nothing came of this plan either.

Development pressure lessened in the 1930's as the business depression took hold and as a result the buildings in place on Ocean Parkway at the end of the 1920's remained relatively intact until the late 1950's, when a new boom of apartment house construction occurred. Pressure to densify was influenced by the opening of the Prospect Expressway in 1962. The expressway fed directly onto the northern end of Ocean Parkway, and put property along the parkway in short and direct automobile commuting range of downtown Manhattan.

The provisions of New York City's comprehensive zoning revision of 1961 also created development incentives. The new zoning mapped on Ocean Parkway allowed buildings up to 14 stories high at its northern end, followed by

staggered zones that typically produced 3-12 story apartment buildings, 3 story apartment buildings, and garden apartment buildings.⁹³

During the 1960's and 1970's, the remaining large houses on large lots along Ocean Parkway were bought up and the lots were developed with large apartment buildings. This included two buildings eight to ten stories high, six buildings 12 to fourteen stories high, two buildings sixteen stories high. The sixteen story buildings and several of the lower ones were built in the first few blocks at the northern end of the parkway, the area most impacted by the construction of the Prospect Expressway and also the area where the most large houses on large lots still remained. The connection of the expressway with Ocean Parkway was accomplished by lowering the grade of the parkway's center roadway for several blocks, making the street much less graceful in this area.⁹⁴

The rest of the new apartment buildings were build at intervals along the parkway, but mostly in the northern and middle sections where denser zoning districts were in place. In general during this period, new apartment houses were only built on the parkway and not on surrounding streets because the larger block depths and lot sizes on the parkway made for easier accommodation of large buildings.

Another big change that came with the zoning revisions of 1961 was the rezoning of the southern end of Ocean Parkway into a residential street. This coincided with the agglomeration of land in Coney Island, and the resultant construction of three international style twenty-plus floor apartment buildings on Ocean Parkway.⁹⁵

Since the 1960's, there has been continued development pressure on and around Ocean Parkway. It has come in two forms: pressure to build large community facilities and pressure to enlarge existing houses. The former was

eventually successfully stopped through resident resistance, the latter was a right successfully won through resident advocacy.

The New York City Zoning Code allows community facilities to be built in residential zones, and also allows them to exceed the bulk restrictions applied to residential buildings in the zone. The 1960's and early 1970's witnessed a proliferation of large new community facilities on and around Ocean Parkway, including a number of religious schools and nursing homes, and many were built to the greater allowed envelopes.⁶⁶ Residents objected to the spread of these bulky buildings because they felt they were destroying the character of their residential neighborhoods, and claimed that activities associated with them, such as parking and busing, were causing congestion on the side roads of the parkway. To fight this, residents all along Ocean Parkway banded together to have the whole corridor designated as a Special District. The drive was successful and the Ocean Parkway Special District was created in 1977. Ocean Parkway had been designated a scenic landmark in 1975, and the purpose assigned to the special district was "...to strengthen the existing character and quality of the community and to enhance the scenic landmark designation of Ocean Parkway [....]."⁶⁷ The special rules applied within the district limited community facility developments to the residential bulk regulations of the underlying districts.

A decade and a half later, residents along the middle part of the parkway organized to push for another zoning change, this time because they wanted the right to expand their homes beyond the building envelopes specified in the mapped zoning districts. The effort resulted in the creation of a special sub district within the Ocean Parkway Special District in 1993. The sub-district was mapped between Avenue H and Avenue U (from just below the former village of Parkville to just before Ocean Parkways jog toward Coney Island) but did not

include property facing onto Ocean Parkway.⁹⁸ The purpose of the sub district was to allow large houses on narrow lots. The rules attached to the sub-district limited development to only single-family attached and detached building types, even if the mapped zoning district allowed otherwise, and allowed much greater floor area ratios than the normal zoning requirements.

Although Ocean Parkway itself is not a part of the special sub district, one observes development occurring along it as through it were. In more than one location, old houses are being demolished and very large new houses are being built in their place.⁹⁹ It is an interesting transformation of the original parkway vision: large houses on small lots instead of large houses on large lots. It is a highly urbanized form of suburbia.

The intense community activism evident in these efforts to both protect neighborhood character and encourage unique new kinds of development is a sign of a strongly rooted resident community. People had put down roots in parkway neighborhoods and had decided to dig in and stay. It is primarily an ethnic community: today the Ocean Parkway area has the single largest concentration of Jews of Syrian origin in the United States.¹⁰⁰ The spatial focus of the re-zoning efforts speak to community identification with Ocean Parkway. Residents in a whole series of neighborhoods apparently consider the parkway to be the center of their neighborhood.

Throughout the entire development history of Ocean Parkway, the originally mandated 30 foot front yard set back restriction has remained intact and has been enforced by the Parks Department. An interesting test of this requirement occurred in 1981 when trustees of the Washington Cemetery requested the right to use the set back area for burials. The Department of Parks and Recreation gave the cemetery the right to do so as long as no standing monuments were erected, only flathead stones, and if plantings were restricted to low shrubs and grass.¹⁰¹

CONCLUSIONS

The above analysis shows that, in the end, only the most basic aspect of Olmsted and Vaux's original development vision for Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway was achieved: both parkways are primarily residential streets. But, the nature of the residential building forms and the density of inhabitation is quite different than originally envisioned: neither support, nor ever supported for any length of time, single-family houses on large lots. Eastern Parkway is the densely built center of a neighborhood of large and small apartment houses, and rowhouses--a neighborhood with a very urban form and density--and itself contains the largest apartment buildings in the neighborhood, as well as some commercial buildings. Ocean Parkway is the less densely built--though still fairly dense--center of successive neighborhoods of single family attached and detached houses on relatively small lots, and the parkway itself has a mixed pattern of large apartment buildings, duplexes and single family houses, as well as nursing homes and religious buildings.

How effective were the parkways, then, as catalysts for the development of urban form? This question can be looked at in several ways. At the basic, but highly important level of street and block patterns, they had a large and enduring impact. Eastern Parkway was inserted into a previously platted regular grid-iron pattern, but, because of its exceptional width, it became the stand-out physical element within the pattern. Its insertion into the regular pattern created narrower blocks along it than elsewhere in the pattern. The originally built system of flanking boulevards and alleys, although eventually mostly dismantled, also created differentiation in the pattern, although this stands out much less than the differentiation created by Eastern Parkway. A few blocks of

narrower than normal roadways, and a few blocks of wider than normal roadways, remain to this day.

Ocean Parkway was one of the main streets that set the street and block platting for the central part of Southern Brooklyn. Two nearby parallel major roads, Gravesend Avenue and the Coney Island Plank Road, existed before Ocean Parkway was built, but the promotion associated with Ocean Parkway and the great expense associated with its opening and improvement, prompted the platting of a regular grid pattern in relation to it, and fixed the pattern on the ground. Within the pattern, Ocean Parkway became the differentiated, stand-out, physical element, again because of its exceptional width.

In terms of built form, the original development vision associated with the parkways proved a sluggish catalyst for actual development. The original development vision endured much longer for Ocean Parkway than for Eastern Parkway and ultimately more strongly influenced the development of built form on the former.

On Eastern Parkway, the original development vision lost its appeal when it didn't occur immediately, because immediate development was expected. The idea was perceived as a failure, and disgruntled landowners looked to other development visions instead. On Ocean Parkway, the original development vision remained intact even though development did not occur immediately, in part because immediate development was not expected.

The original development vision strongly influenced lot platting along the Ocean Parkway, which was enduring, and which ultimately influenced both a modified form of the envisioned development and a completely different form. Because it was anticipated that Ocean Parkway would attract the development of large houses on large lots, the blocks lining the parkway were platted to be wider than other blocks in the area and lots facing onto the parkway were platted to be

substantially deeper than other lots. Because large houses were anticipated, lots along the parkway were also generally platted wider than typical lots on surrounding streets. Because of the greater lot depth and width, developers found it easier to agglomerate large, apartment sized lots on Ocean Parkway than on surrounding streets during the phases of apartment building development that occurred in the early and mid-twentieth century, and they were encouraged in this because of zoning provisions.

Ultimately, the development of built form along the parkways was influenced by many factors, not just the original development vision. This included the provisions of the various zoning laws that were enacted in the early and mid-twentieth century, fire code requirements, the layout of subways lines, and the development of elevator and automobile technologies.

The Planning Effort

Concept and Implementation

In the end, one thing that stands out is the audaciousness of the public planning effort which was the parkway plan: its conception and its implementation. It is remarkable to think of the public parts of these long, wide streets (eight miles in combined length) with their six continuous rows of closely spaced trees being built as quickly as they were, and as completely. It is remarkable to think of both parkways remaining intact and being maintained for more than forty years before any substantial development occurred along them. As an advance planning effort it was a remarkable undertaking, especially considering that it was undertaken at a time when most American city planning initiatives, with some notable exceptions such as Washington D. C. and Detroit, were limited to the preparation of urban grid plans.¹⁰²

In fact, the Park Commission that built the parkways functioned as a relatively stable planning body for the city of Brooklyn during a long time when no other one existed. In its formative years, the Park Commission was a state empowered agency, and so it was relatively independent of the shifting whims of city politics. In a very conscious undertaking, the first Park Commission President, Commissioner Stranahan, supported and implemented a plan meant to structure the landscape, not just for current residents but for several generations of residents to come.

While Olmsted, Vaux and Stranahan saw the parkway plan as a long range plan, and intended it to achieve certain social goals, many of the property owners who supported the plan saw the it differently: they had a more short-sighted vision and were concerned primarily with immediate profit—especially the landowners around Eastern Parkway. For Olmsted and Vaux, the parkways were both an aesthetic vision and a development tool: the physical qualities of the parkways were intended to influence the course of built development. Those landowners who supported building the parkways through their land holdings were interested in development and embraced the parkway aesthetic as a means to achieving high quality development. As infrastructure, the parkways were supposed to work not unlike the way electric streetcar lines were later used: property owners laid out streetcar lines through their land holdings in order to open their property up for residential development.

A strong development vision was attached to the parkways when they were built: single-family houses on large lots. But, at the time, the regulatory mechanisms available to achieve the vision were rudimentary. The built design itself was supposed to achieve the development vision by attracting the right sort of developers, and the development was supposed to be fixed on the ground through restrictions against nuisance uses. This effort to make development

permanent over a large area was a bold undertaking in an era when urban built forms were very ephemeral: all around, and especially in New York City, urban landscapes were being built up one way and then over run with new, denser construction.¹⁰³ Everywhere, urban landscapes were being densified as landowners sought to exact more profit from their land holdings; everywhere the creative destruction of capitalism was working full force and in high gear.¹⁰⁴

Olmsted and Vaux's suburban development vision was unrealistic for its time because the parkway plan did not encompass any transit planning: it assumed people living in the new suburbs around the parkways would have access to private carriages. Given the immense land area that the parkway plan was intended to organize, this assumed a lot. The lack of transit planning in the parkway plan is an omission for which the plan can rightly be criticized. Olmsted and Vaux's vision was only possible, and finally somewhat fulfilled fifty years later around parts of Ocean Parkway, once people had widely adopted private automobiles as their form of transportation.

Power Relations

Another thing that stands out is that the planning effort was an expression of political power. Building the parkways was a huge undertaking and during the process power relations operated at various levels. The Park Commission was able to push through its plans over the protests of local elected officials, because it was empowered by the state. Ocean Parkway was a major initial gesture toward Brooklyn's eventual annexation of the southern Kings County rural towns. Building the parkways meant appropriating private land: some landowners ceded their land willingly, because they felt they stood to profit from the parkways, others ceded their land unwillingly. The state empowered Park

Commission, acting for the city of Brooklyn, had the authority to compel rural landowners to allow the parkway to be opened through their land.

The building of the parkways, and in the case of Ocean Parkway the imposition of its associated street grid over the surrounding rural landscape, transformed the rural landscape. The parkways rationalized the physical space through which they passed, and, once built, they provided linear frameworks around which urban transformation processes already underway, sparked by capitalism, could cluster and play out.

Modern-Day Usefulness

The analysis of the development of urban form around Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway shows that Olmsted and Vaux's parkway street form has worked as a residential street within a relatively dense American urban context during the twentieth century. It has supported, and continues to support, several levels of density: apartment houses, rowhouses, and duplex and single-family houses. What we can derive from this in terms of how well such a street form would work today as a place for residential development in new suburban or New Urbanist communities is debatable. However, it seems clear that streets like Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway could potentially work as residential streets within urban environments. The experience of the Brooklyn parkways suggests that Olmsted and Vaux's parkway street form might be useful in urban contexts today where there is a necessity, or desire, to provide housing along major traffic-carrying streets.

¹This lengthy and highly descriptive promotional pamphlet was entitled *The East Parkway and Boulevards in the City of Brooklyn*, published in New York by Baker & Godwin, Printers.

²*ibid.* This development shows on the Robinson maps of 1886.

³*ibid.*; AR67.

⁴PoFLO: SSI, 139.

⁵The drawn plan is actually somewhat confusing and misleading due, I believe, to a slight dimensioning error. In the drawing, dashed lines are used to show the front yard set backs on the parkway and the boulevards. Dimensions for each of the two blocks on either side of the parkway are shown as 225'-7", but the dimension line arrows are placed at the edge of the set backs rather than the edge of the blocks. On first look, it appears that Olmsted and Vaux intended the blocks along the parkways to be 255'-7" wide (225'-7" plus the 30' set back), and the next blocks to be 245'-7" wide (225'-7" plus the 20' set back). However, the drawing also shows the entire reconfiguration set within the width taken up by the five originally platted streets and four encompassed blocks—and the numbers do not jibe. On the other hand, the numbers work out perfectly, and the alignments shown on the drawing make sense, if one assumes that the block dimension given was for the entire block width. Olmsted and Vaux's written description, quoted in the text, adds credence to this assumption.

⁶BE 21 November 1897.

⁷This information is contained in a petition to the State Legislature by residents of Flatbush, New Utrecht, and Gravesend, which objected to the construction of Ocean Parkway.

⁸A history of the Town of Gravesend written by the Reverend Stockwell includes reference to the platting efforts: "The same session of the legislature which passed the Ocean Parkway Act, passed another, appointing commissioners for laying out streets and mapping the towns of Kings County. In 1870, this commission began active operations, and completed the work in about three years. Consequently we find our town covered with streets and avenues on the country map, in many instances sorely conflicting with the existing order of streets." Stiles, 173. A history of the Town of New Utrecht written by Tunis G. Bergen also includes reference to the platting of the countryside: "Through the force of politics many new roads have been ruthlessly opened as avenues, with mathematical accuracy, across the beautiful old lanes and highways of the town [...]." Stiles (1884), 267.

⁹Stiles (1884) 171.

¹⁰This was the general pattern. In some places, however, block widths near Gravesend Avenue varied, for instance with the block fronting on Gravesend Avenue being 224 feet wide and the one adjacent 226 feet wide.

¹¹Particularly AR67 and AR68.

¹²Chapter 361 of the 1868 Laws of the State of New York.

¹³State of New York, 1868 Act, Chapter 631, passed 6 May 1868.

¹⁴*The East Parkway and Boulevards in the City of Brooklyn.*

¹⁵BE 29 March 1868; *The East Parkway and Boulevards in the City of Brooklyn.*

¹⁶The area included 11 1/2 acres of city owned land that held the Prospect Hill reservoir. AR87, 62.

¹⁷The difficulties pertaining to the East Side Lands are discussed at length in numerous Annual Reports of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners. See particularly AR87, which recounts a detailed history.

¹⁸Olmsted and Kimball, 185.

¹⁹Ment (1979), 71; Robinson Maps of 1886.

²⁰Maynard.

²¹New York Times 27 March 1983.

²²Landmarks Preservation Commission report of 18 August 1970.

²³Landmarks Preservation Commission report of 18 August 1970.

²⁴Stiles (1867-70), 633.

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- ²⁵Several small houses remain on Bergen Street, near Buffalo Avenue, and these are now on the historic register. Landmarks Preservation Commission Report, 18 August 1970, Number 8.
- ²⁶New Muse Community Museum of Brooklyn.
- ²⁷On the other hand, it may simply reflect remnants of existing lot platting in place prior to the street and block reconfiguration, although early maps showing the original street and block platting for the area does not indicate any lot platting.
- ²⁸AR69, 547; Robinson maps of 1886.
- ²⁹The new name had been applied to a section of Douglass Street lying west of the Plaza in 1870, in honor of a large Episcopal Church called St. John's that had been built on it. Ment (1979), 69. The eventual changing of the name of the entire line of the street may have been an attempt to lend prestige to the street, but this is not documented.
- ³⁰Laws of the State of New York, 1888, Chapter 583.
- ³¹BE 21 November 1897.
- ³²The petitions were intended for the State Legislature because during this time that was the acting governing body which controlled such matters in the city of Brooklyn.
- ³³Between New York Avenue and Kingston Avenue.
- ³⁴Laws of the State of New York, 1903, Chapter 252.
- ³⁵Connolly, 44.
- ³⁶Connolly describes these as among the best in the city at the time. Connolly, 43.
- ³⁷Reference the map showing street car lines. Also, the Nostrand and Franklin lines were in place at the time Eastern Parkway was built, operating as major horse car lines. (from *The East Parkway and Boulevards in the City of Brooklyn*.)
- ³⁸AR87, 36; 1897, 95.
- ³⁹1903-1904 Brooklyn Atlas.
- ⁴⁰BE 14 June 1908. The petition apparently contained over 100 signatures.
- ⁴¹Plunz, 28.
- ⁴²Plunz, 40.
- ⁴³Plunz, 37; Ford, 7, 8, 9, 14.
- ⁴⁴Ford, zoning map section 16 and 17.
- ⁴⁵Ford, 5.
- ⁴⁶Ford, 32.
- ⁴⁷Coppola. (In fact, reference to a proposal for a future underground railroad is mentioned in an 1873 promotional real estate pamphlet: *The East Parkway and Boulevards in the City of Brooklyn*.)
- ⁴⁸For instance along the Grand Concourse in the Bronx.
- ⁴⁹This is mentioned just briefly in *Silver Connections: A Fresh Perspective on the New York Subway System*, by Philip Ashforth Coppola.
- ⁵⁰BE 18 November 1918.
- ⁵¹This map is entitled: *Map Showing Rapid Transit Routes of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit System with Proposed Extensions in Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan and Richmond*.
- ⁵²Snyder-Grenier, 278.
- ⁵³Landesman, 95.
- ⁵⁴Middle-class Jews moving up didn't all go to the Eastern Parkway, they also moved into Flatbush and East Flatbush.
- ⁵⁵Moore, 40.
- ⁵⁶Moore, 41.
- ⁵⁷Moore, 52.
- ⁵⁸Braunstein and Weissman, 48.
- ⁵⁹Plunz, 41.
- ⁶⁰Plunz, 41.

¹A letter contained in a file on Eastern Parkway contained in the Parklands division of the City of New York Parks and Recreation, states that the Department of Parks and Recreation had always enforced the set back restriction on Eastern Parkway. (Letter from Julia Vitullo-Martin to Charles M. Smith, Commissioner of Buildings, dated 11 December 1984.)

²Connolly; Kasinitz.

³Crown Heights Area Maintenance Program: Facts, 1972; Between Promise and Performance: A Proposed 10-Year Program of Community Renewal for New York City, 1968.

⁴Between Promise and Performance: A Proposed 10-Year Program of Community Renewal for New York City, 1968.

⁵This observation comes from direct field work performed in 1997.

⁶Marcus, 63.

⁷Marcus, 73.

⁸Marcus, 77.

⁹In 1965, a Landmarks Preservation Commission was established by the Federal Landmark Preservation Act and granted power to designate landmarks and regulate development within historic districts. In 1973, the act was amended to allow landscapes to be designated scenic landmarks. Eastern Parkway was designated as a historic landmark on the basis of its association with Frederick Law Olmsted and the parks movement of the late nineteenth century.

¹⁰Although in fact one of the reasons dissenting landowners gave for why Ocean Parkway should not be opened was that these streets had just themselves been widened.

¹¹The very first authorizing act, Chapter 861 of the 1869 Laws of the State of New York, left the ornamentation of the set back space to property owners discretion. When the act was amended in 1872 (Chapter 726), control over ornamentation was vested in the Park Commission.

¹²Quoted in a Petition made to the Legislature of the State of New York in 1879 asking for relief for the assessments levied for opening and improving Ocean Parkway.

¹³Robinson maps of 1890; Stiles (1884), 159; Bergen, 5; Appletons Dictionary of Greater New York and Its Vicinity.

¹⁴The renaming occurred in 1870. Stiles (1884), 233.

¹⁵Stiles (1884), 233.

¹⁶Stiles (1884), 233.

¹⁷Stiles (1884), 233.

¹⁸AR87.

¹⁹The Reverend Stockwell in Stiles (1884), 173; Petition made to the Legislature of the State of New York in 1879 asking for relief for the assessments levied for opening and improving Ocean Parkway.

²⁰Sometime late in the game a surface streetcar line was laid crossing Eastern Parkway on Neptune Avenue near Coney Island. I don't know exactly when this streetcar line was built, but the line crosses the parkway along the length later zoned as a business street, which may explain why the Park Commission allowed it.

²¹BE 15 November 1894 .

²²Map of the Brooklyn Trolley Lines contained in Greller.

²³Plunz, 35.

²⁴An article in the Brooklyn Eagle describing the new home developments also described many existing Ocean Parkway Landmarks, BE 19 October 1991.

²⁵BE 19 October 1919.

²⁶Betting was outlawed in the early 1920's, which helped close down these racetracks.

²⁷BE 9 February 1929.

²⁸BE 2 October 1931.

²⁹BE 16 October 1931.

³⁰BE 27 January 1932.

³¹BE 25 June 1932.

⁹²BE 3 October 1933.

⁹³1961 New York City Zoning Resolution.

⁹⁴Many of the people who moved in to the apartment buildings at the northern end of the street were new Jewish immigrations from the Soviet Union. NYT, 7 December 1980. This population is still in residence today and can be seen gathering on the parkway malls on a daily basis.

⁹⁵1961 New York City Zoning Resolution; 1998 Sanborn Maps.

⁹⁶Amendment of the Zoning Resolution of Section 200 of the New York City Charter relating to Article XI, Chapter 3 concerning the establishment of the Special "OP" Ocean Parkway District. New York City Planning Commission, Calendar item #7, 22 December 1976.

⁹⁷New York City Zoning Handbook, 116.

⁹⁸Earlier, a special contextual zone had been created which could only be mapped in the Ocean Parkway Special District. This was the R-2X zone, which also allowed large houses on narrow lots. It was mapped in two areas that were later surrounded by the sub district.

⁹⁹Personal observation made in September 1998.

¹⁰⁰Postal and Koppman, 183; New York times 7 December 1980, 1:1.

¹⁰¹From correspondence found in a file on Ocean Parkway contained at the Parklands Division of the City of New York Parks and Recreation Department.

¹⁰²Reps, 294.

¹⁰³Girouard, 313.

¹⁰⁴Berman, 18.

CHAPTER FIVE

FOCAL LINES FOR PUBLIC LIFE AND NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITY

The paths, the network of habitual or potential lines of movement through the urban complex, are the most potent means by which the whole can be ordered.
(Kevin Lynch, 1960)

The space around us--the physical organization of neighborhoods, roads, yards, houses, and apartments--set up living patterns that condition our behavior.
(Kenneth Jackson, 1985)

First and foremost, a great street should help make community; should facilitate people acting and interacting to achieve in concert what they might not achieve alone.
(Allan B. Jacobs, 1993)

Thus far, we have looked at the history of the design of the Brooklyn parkways, the history of the use and regulation of their roadway spaces, changing professional perceptions of the parkway idea, and the history of built development around the parkways. But what is it like to live on or near one of the parkways, or to experience them? In this concluding chapter, we will look at how the unique spatial qualities of the parkways have influenced the community life that has been lived around them, and which continues to be lived. The analysis draws on insights gained from many hours of observation of the parkways over the last several years, historic readings, discussions with colleagues, and the knowledge gained through several research projects that I

have been involved in, with others, which have focused, in part, on the parkways.¹ While exploring the issue historically, I focus more on the present and recent past because this is better documented and easier to infer from my own observations—historical records of the common events of everyday life are hard to come by. Research that remains to be done is to collect oral histories of long-time parkway residents.² In many ways, this chapter presents a personal understanding and reflection on the nature and value of the Brooklyn parkways as consciously designed and planned public open spaces. Others may have other experiences of these streets, I may be missing things that others would see. Other research methods than observation would uncover different things. Studies could be undertaken to interview parkway users to find out where they come from and how they value the parkways. Other studies could be undertaken to determine the differences in property values between buildings along the parkways and those along other streets, either nearby streets with a different physical form but similar building types or other major traffic residential streets, as another way of understanding how people value these streets. You cannot discern everything or even most of what you would want to know about community life by observation alone, but you can tell a lot.³ And, there is an important role to be played by the trained eye—connoisseurship—in the understanding of spatial organization.⁴ A professional trained eye can relate what is observed to what has been seen and documented elsewhere, and to research findings.

Once built, the linear parkway spines had the capacity to order things. They created a neighborhood form that shaped a particular kind of urban experience. Their strong linear qualities and complex cross-sectional form together

contributed to the development of complex social rituals. Like in all American cities, there have been successive waves of different settlements in the neighborhoods surrounding the parkways, as different immigrant groups have moved in and then moved on. But for each successive community, there has been some continuity of experience that has come from living on or near a parkway.

What follows are first some scenes from the parkways, to give a sense of what it is like to experience them today, followed by analysis of various aspects of the parkways in relation to their role as focal lines for urban public life and neighborhood identity. The aspects I cover are the aesthetic experience of the parkways, the linear rituals of public life which occur on them, their livability, their role as focal lines for political expression, and their role as urban place-markers.

PARKWAY SCENES

Stepping out of a subway portal on to a mall on Eastern Parkway on a crisp winter morning after a snowfall one is amid a linear forest of gracefully arching bare limb trees that stand tall and dark against the general gray and whiteness of the sky. Lines of trees spread out tracing the length of the mall as far as can be seen inviting a walk along the path they frame. Others, too, are walking on the malls: women with small children, men with small children, and people walking by themselves. Most people seem to be on their way somewhere, walking purposefully, perhaps toward subway stops. But some are moving more slowly, enjoying the scene, and going for many blocks. Most of the children are off the path altogether, walking in the snow under the trees, and stopping as often as they're allowed to make snowballs and play.



Eastern Parkway in Winter

Walking along one of the malls on Ocean Parkway on a sunny Saturday morning in early Spring, one is part of a procession of many walkers that goes on for miles. One is part of a large choreography of movement, part of the flow of walkers and also somehow part of the flow of bicyclists on the western mall, and even part of the flow of the many cars passing on the center roadway. Sitting for awhile on any of the many benches, one becomes part of the large audience that is casually watching the others moving. Some people are walking slowly and stopping often to visit with people sitting on the benches. Some are walking more purposefully, in groups of two or three, or five or six, and are dressed up. These people are making their way to any number of synagogues on the parkway. Moving amongst them are people out for exercise or a stroll: joggers and bicyclists dressed in shorts and t-shirts, some sporting Walkmans, and casually dressed couples pushing baby carriages.



Ocean Parkway in early Spring

These experiences are part of the normal rhythms of everyday public life that take place on Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway throughout the year. Spend a Labor Day on Eastern Parkway and you will experience a less frequent but still regular rhythm of parkway life that will leave you with a fuller understanding of the capacity of the parkways as stages for public life.

Labor Day is when the annual West Indian Carnival Parade is held on Eastern Parkway, an event attended by people numbering in the millions.⁵ It is a local festival, put on by people who live in the neighborhood, but it attracts people from all over New York City and elsewhere, West Indians and others. It is not an exclusive affair, although there are far more West Indians than others. Arriving in the morning, you find both malls, for the whole length of the parkway, lined with stalls where you can buy home-cooked food. Most of it is being cooked on the spot: fried chicken, and smoked sausages, and steamed corn



Carnival on Eastern Parkway

on the cob, and just about everything else anyone could possibly want. It is mouth-watering and impossible to resist. People have set up home-made smokers and fryers in old oil-drums. There is a whir of generators and everywhere there are incredible crowds. The New York City Police are out in force, and they are trying to control where people walk. They are trying to get people to stay on the malls and off the center roadway and they are trying to regulate where and when people can cross the street, but their attempts are only partly successful and only intermittently so. The surging flows of people are simply too great to control. Walking is slow and music is everywhere. Slowly the sounds build together, and slowly the parade evolves—it doesn't so much start as evolve. The largest of Mack trucks, packed with steel bands and dancing young people, begin slowly making their way down the center of the parkway, surrounded by colorful costumed revelers. The trucks weave back and forth

across the roadway as drivers avoid the largest overhanging tree limbs and the groups of people who have spilled onto the roadway in many places. As the trucks approach, the crowd presses toward the music and against the police barricades lining the malls, and soon these are pushed aside and people flow into the street, surrounding the trucks and mixing and moving down the parkway with those in costume. It is as if the whole crowd and the whole parkway has become the parade.

The regular activities that occur on Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway are different than those that occur in other public places in the city. The designed spatial qualities of the parkways allow special kinds of public life to occur on them, and special kinds of community experience to revolve around them. There are many different aspects to this, let us start with the aesthetic experience.

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Olmsted and Vaux designed Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway to provide a particular aesthetic experience. They were to be park-like streets, but also street-like parks. The aesthetic experience the parkways provide today is obviously very different than the aesthetic experience they provided when they were first built. The experience is fundamentally different because land around the parkways is now densely developed, whereas originally the parkways passed through open land. For the first fifty or so years of their existence, the parkways were relatively undeveloped. For the last seventy-five or so years, buildings have lined them, giving enclosure and an urban character to the public space. Because of the enclosure, and the development all around, Eastern Parkway no longer offers long views toward the ocean and Ocean Parkway no



The severed connection between Ocean Parkway and Prospect Park

longer offers peaceful views of woods and cultivated fields. Today, some of the activities and color of the many intersecting commercial streets spill out on to Eastern Parkway.

The parkways are also very different aesthetically now because the surfaces on them are harder than they were at first, and because they are constantly occupied by the throb of engines. Much of the physical space of the parkways is always occupied by cars, both moving and parked, and there are traffic signals and traffic signs everywhere.

Passing along the parkways in vehicles we experience these streets very differently than how people would have experienced them in their early years, because we are moving at a very different speed. In a modern car, we can easily drive the length of Ocean Parkway in less than ten minutes, whereas in the 1870's it would have taken closer to an hour to make the trip in a carriage.

Engineering provisions for modern traffic have seriously altered one aesthetic aspect of Ocean Parkway that was originally very important: Ocean Parkway's connection with Prospect Park is today virtually non-existent. The connection was destroyed when the Prospect Expressway was built in the 1950's and the last several blocks of Ocean Parkway were reconstructed. To get between the parkway and the park these days is a bleak and very un-pedestrian-friendly experience. The connecting space is occupied by numerous on and off ramps, grade changes, and large freeway directional signs. You can walk the route, but the space provided for pedestrians is marginal and tree-less. Not many people make the trip.

Many aspects of the aesthetic experience of the parkways are different than they once were: in general the parkways are much more urban and much more work-a-day. And yet, one important aesthetic aspect has remained constant, and that is the trees. The rows of trees remain as they have always been, and today most are large and mature, many well over one hundred years old, creating an impressive linear forest, even more impressive than when it was first planted. On Eastern Parkway, the trees are mostly American Elms of stately girth, planted at about twenty-five feet on center. On Ocean Parkway, the trees are a mix of different kinds of elms and maples, planted at a similar spacing. Generations of people have experienced and enjoyed these trees, in all their changing seasonal aspects. The trees on Ocean Parkway, especially, provide a kaleidoscope of changing colors every fall. This observation suggests that the parkway street form may provide a valuable opportunity for cities to create and sustain an urban forestry program.

LINEAR RITUALS OF PUBLIC LIFE

Olmsted and Vaux designed the parkways to provide for what they called gregarious receptive recreational activities, activities involving large crowds that people could engage in without excessive physical or mental exertion (see Chapters One and Two.) Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway have fulfilled this promise: they have been promenade spaces in Brooklyn since they were built, Ocean Parkway especially. They are at once major public open spaces for the whole city and local community park spaces, and in both these roles their physical qualities set them apart from other public open spaces: their formal linear nature invites and provides a stage for linear movement activities. Traveling along one of the parkways today, either in a car, on a bicycle, or on foot, one experiences strong linear rhythms: the regularly spaced trees and benches that go on and on, and the repetition of similarly scaled blocks. Sitting in one place on a parkway one also experiences linear rhythms: the lines of trees leading away in both directions, and the procession of travelers. People traveling and gathering on the parkways in earlier times would have experienced similar repetitious linear rhythms.

The parkways invite linear movement and at the same time they also invite, and offer the opportunity, for display. (Just as in Paris, Haussmann's boulevards offered a display opportunity for the emerging bourgeois class in the nineteenth century, and continue to provide the opportunity for social display today.) Experience and observation suggests that to be on a parkway, especially to be walking or bicycling along one of the malls, or sitting on a bench, is to be on display in a different way than on a normal street. One is occupying a very visible and open public space. This visibility and openness are characteristics of



The Ocean Parkway malls a very open and visible public spaces

promenade spaces, and were an intended aesthetic quality of Olmsted and Vaux's design.

With their open, linear, formality, the parkways function as a public open space system of a very different kind and character than most other parkway systems in other American cities, those designed later by Olmsted and Vaux, and those designed by others (see Chapter Three). Compared, for instance, with the Boston Parkway System, which, with the exception of Commonwealth Avenue, is characterized by more curvilinear and informally planted parkways that following topographical contours and often water courses, the Brooklyn Parkways are much more urban. Their urban character and urban context invites more socially-oriented, out-going public activities. On the more naturalistic parkways, one might encounter others, but observation suggests that the

recreation experience tends to be less congregative and more concerned with enjoying natural scenery.

The promenade possibilities of the parkways have captured the different imaginations of the different communities who have lived around them over the years, and the imaginations of those living elsewhere in the city. Different communities have created their own parkway rituals. These have changed over time, as the communities have changed and as social customs have changed, but there has been some continuity in terms of their character.

Early Parkway Rituals

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the parkways were used as sites for the display and celebration of new forms of transportation. Early on, Ocean Parkway especially supported daily processions of city dwellers in carriages, on horses, and on bicycles, making forays into the countryside: straight processions, very urban in their character. At times, bicycle races and horse races, formal and informal, were held on the parkways and sometimes vehicle parades were held to mark important occasions—such as the opening of the new bicycle path on Ocean Parkway in 1896. During the first several decades of the twentieth century, when automobiles first came into popular use, the parkways were used as major scenic driving routes. They were used in this capacity more than other wide Brooklyn streets, because they were more scenic—people did not pleasure drive on Flatbush Avenue.⁶

The parkways were also at times used as sites for large public processions marking important civic events. When the Chinese Viceroy Li Hung Chang visited Brooklyn in 1895 he was honored with a procession through Prospect Park and up Eastern Parkway, where he was received by the Governor.⁷

These early linear rituals were engaged in primarily by people living at some distance from the parkways, in the built-up parts of Brooklyn. Since the 1920's, after substantial development had occurred around the parkways, the parkways have been sites for more locally oriented community activities as well as the larger public rituals.

The first communities that settled around both parkways included many second generation Jews with Eastern European backgrounds, who were emerging as a new Jewish middle class. Deborah Dash Moore suggests that these people found Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway (as well as other wide, tree-lined streets elsewhere in New York City such as the Grand Concourse) compelling places to live, and made them their homes, in part because of their promenade possibilities.⁸ These people brought with them cultural traditions that included ritual and social promenades.

Moore argues that: "Jews brought to the streets a pattern of association and they transformed public places into arenas of Jewish interaction. The parks and boulevards Jews prized so highly served as setting for ethnic expression."⁹ She describes how the Jewish community used the parkways in the 1930's and 1940's, recalling the prominent weekly ritual of the Sabbath promenade, but also the more everyday rituals that took place on the malls, such as mothers tending babies in prams and people gathering to socialize. "Older people also sat on the benches placed along the center greensward of the large boulevards like Eastern Parkway [...]. The chess tables in particular attracted a steady clientele of Jewish men."¹⁰

The use of the parkways in these ways brings to mind images of other people in other cultures using public spaces in their cities. I think particularly of the old men who gather daily in countless belvedere in small Italian towns, or the women who gather daily at one end of the Piazza Navona in Rome: they choose

to gather in these places for particular reasons, which have to do with location and with design. People gather in places where they feel comfortable being, where gathering is easily accommodated, and where they are likely to encounter other people. They gather in places that are special in some way: places where they like to be.¹¹ Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway were designed to have these qualities.

Along with the many Jews living in the parkway neighborhoods during this period, there were other people living there as well. Moore describes the neighborhoods around the parkways as ethnically mixed, with perhaps 50% of the people being Jewish. The usual pattern was for the Jews to live in the apartment buildings lining the parkway while the gentiles lived in the single-family houses on surrounding side streets.¹² While the Jewish promenade traditions must have been a major part of the public life on the parkways during this time, today's observed use of the parkways by other groups suggests that in earlier times non-Jews used the parkway malls as well.

Today's Parkway Rituals

Observation suggests that today many different groups of people claim use of the parkways. Many of the people that use them regularly live very close by, but some come from a bit further away, and some come from afar.¹³ Different users have different daily or weekly or seasonal rituals they engage in on the parkways, and at any given time these rituals are juxtaposed, creating a complex choreography of movement and interaction, and mutual watching and being watched.

I have observed that the parkway malls are the most important places for public life and community display, because they are the places where people

move at a slow enough pace to interact. The malls are the places where people gather to exercise, to socialize, to see and be seen, or, for those alone, to just be amongst the activity. These tree-lined spaces have a comfortable, people-oriented scale, and the generous walkways and many benches invite people to walk and to gather. This is especially so on Ocean Parkway, where the long benches are almost continuous on every mall. People gather in a linear fashion, because the linear orientation of the benches invite spreading out rather than clustering. Importantly, the mall spaces are not prescriptively over-designed. Rather, they are designed with the simplest elements, set in regular patterns: benches, walkways, grass, and trees. The simplicity of the design means that it is very flexible, allowing people to use the space in their own imaginative ways.

While the other physical spaces of the parkways contain less social activity, they contribute in their own and different ways to the complexity of the public life that occurs on the parkways. The narrow, slow-moving, tree-lined side access roads contribute to the character of the public life that occurs on the malls because they connect the neighborhood with the malls in a gentle, neighborly way. They, and the sidewalks, link the private space of the front yards of the dwellings with the very public space of the malls. They provide a domestically scaled spatial transition between the two realms which helps to establish a strong local claim on the parkway malls.

Likewise, the center roadways, and the way that they are used as major through-traffic roadways, contribute to the character of public life on the malls because their width and the presence of many people passing by opens the parkways up to the larger community of Brooklyn. They are streets that visitors to the Southern or Eastern areas of Brooklyn are likely to use to get from one place to another, because they are fast-moving streets, and pleasant to drive on because the center roadways are protected from the interference's found on most

other major streets—there are no parked cars or drivers looking for parking spaces along the center roadways, no cars pulling in and out of driveways, and no double parked trucks. Passing through, an observer notices the public life on the parkway malls, and learns a little about the ways of the community. Perhaps the glimpse compels some to return to the neighborhood, to participate in the public life happening on the malls.

Although today the center roadway is not the promenade space it once was, primarily because people in this realm now move at high speeds and are relatively isolated from other people, the presence of the people in the cars is felt by others on the street even if it is mostly anonymous and fleeting. In a sense, the people passing in cars provide a larger audience for the community display. Also, because of their width, the center roadways contribute a sense of spaciousness to the parkways, giving relief from the surrounding density.

In terms of the center roadways, it is interesting to note that although they are wide and heavily trafficked spaces which could well serve as major dividers between the neighborhoods on either side, in fact they do not function this way: the same activities occur on both sides of the street, and people cross from one side to the other with some frequency. This speaks to the unity of the whole street: there is something about the physical form of the space, the fact that strong pedestrian realms are established on both sides, which save the wide parkways from being the neighborhood dividing lines that so many other major traffic carrying streets seem to be.¹⁴

Ocean Parkway

On a daily basis, the malls on Ocean Parkway are used by many people. Local people use them as neighborhood park spaces and short-distance movement corridors, and people from afar, on foot and on bicycles, use them as



Public life on the Ocean Parkway malls

longer distance movement corridors. They are the main public green spaces in their vicinity. For the whole five and a half mile length of the parkway, whenever the weather is the least bit comfortable there are always people out sitting on the benches and always people walking and bicycling.

At the northern end of the parkway, where it is lined by tall apartment buildings, there are permanent tables with chessboards engraved on their top set in front of some of the benches and groups of older men gather around them, playing games and watching games being played. On nearby benches, older women cluster in their own groups. These people are Russian Jews, a group that has been immigrating to New York City since the early 1980's and which has established a large enclave in the area.

There are several nursing homes and retirement homes in places along the parkway, and near these many older people sit on the parkway benches



Groups of people gather around chess tables at the northern end of Ocean Parkway

throughout the day, or sit in wheelchairs parked on the malls. Toward the middle and southern end of the parkway, where it passes through areas of single-family attached and detached houses, the front yards are well tended and families often gather on the front steps of their houses.

Observation suggests that on weekends, the activity level swells. On Saturdays, I have observed a mix of people engaged in very different activities using the parkway malls. Many Jews belonging to different congregations live in the neighborhoods around the parkway, and they go to their synagogues on Saturdays.¹⁵ It is a tradition to walk to services, and a required ritual for Orthodox Jews who are not supposed to drive cars on the Sabbath.¹⁶ The largest synagogues in the area are on the parkway. There are several of them, and people belong to different congregations. All along the parkway, people are walking in different directions to the synagogues. The Orthodox Jews walk in sex



Bicyclists and pedestrians share the western mall on Ocean Parkway

segregated groups: large groups of men and boys in black suits and hats, many with long locks of hair, and some wear flowing white shawl draped over their shoulders; smaller groups of women and girls are dressed in colorful fine suits and dresses. Jews of other sects walk in family groups.

Along with those walking to religious services, there are many other walkers and people doing other things. There are many more people sitting on the benches than during the week, and many more bicyclists and joggers. The bicyclists are supposed to keep to the bicycle path on the western mall, and most do, but occasionally some use the eastern mall as well. The walkway on the western mall is divided by a low iron railing, which separates the bicycle path from the walking path. Usually, bicyclists keep to their designated path--on the far side of the rail, away from the benches--but most of the time joggers and

rollerbladers and walkers use this part of the walkway as well. People give way to those moving faster when it is necessary.

The heavy use of Ocean Parkway for the observance of social rituals associated with the Jewish religion can be read as a form of territorial marking. On the Sabbath, the distinction between who is a part of the Jewish community and who is not is clear. And yet, from my own experience, these religious activities do not mark Ocean Parkway as an exclusive territory. There is a range of religious observance, and I experienced a level of tolerance. Although I did not interact with those on their way to religious services, I did interact with others who were observing the traditional Sabbath promenade in a different way. I observed a young man walking along one of the malls with his small daughter and son. The family was making its way slowly up the street, stopping often to visit with people sitting on benches, and so that the children could play. I engaged in conversation with this young man, who was interested in why I was taking pictures, and afterwards he invited me to join his family for the traditional Sabbath mid-day meal.

No large annual parades are held on Ocean Parkway, but at least several times a year organized bicycling and running events take place, usually on the parkway malls. It is recognized as a special location for linear, non-local activities.

Eastern Parkway

Eastern Parkway is less used as a neighborhood park space than Ocean Parkway. On any given day, there are fewer people on the benches and fewer people walking for exercise or riding bicycles. But the mall spaces are highly used nonetheless. People are always walking along them going to and from subway entrances, and to and from neighborhood shops. In summer, vendors



People gathering on Eastern Parkway

selling shaved-ice drinks set up shop on the malls, and people come to the parkway to find them and gather on the park benches to drink the cool drinks. When the weather is good, small children ride their bikes and play games on the parkway malls, and it is often possible to see people dozing on benches.

Many colorful commercial streets intersect Eastern Parkway, and where they do activities related to them, such as people eating take-out food, spill out onto the parkway. In some blocks along the parkway, especially those built with rowhouses, there are often people socializing on the stoops and yard spaces in front of their dwellings.

On weekends, the activity level intensifies somewhat. A three-story red brick house on Eastern Parkway is the world headquarters of the Lubavitcher Chasidim, a conservative orthodox Eastern European Jewish sect. On Saturdays, members of the Hasidic community walk along the malls on their way to and

from this place of worship. These people walk in strictly sex-segregated groups, the men and boys dressed in the traditional black suits and hats.

On Sunday mornings, the parkway malls in front of three churches—a Baptist Church, a Lutheran Church and a Catholic Church—overflow with people after services let out. The colorful, dressed-up crowd drifts along the malls in all directions for awhile, and then disperses into the neighborhood.

And then, of course, once a year, there is the earlier mentioned West Indian Carnival parade. Eastern Parkway has been the site for the parade since 1969. The locale was chosen, because the surrounding Crown Heights neighborhood is home to the largest West Indian community outside of the Caribbean. Carnival is a community-led ritual, and the community identifies with it. If you ask people living along the parkway what they like about living there, one of the things they mention is carnival.¹⁷ This annual event can be read as a marking of territory as well as a celebration. The West Indian community lays particular claim to the parkway during carnival, and others are forced to limit their use of the parkway accordingly. Some share in the ritual and others do not.

LIVABILITY

The fact that Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway seem to work well as residential streets in spite of the presence of heavy traffic on them runs counter to normal assumptions about residential streets. Donald Appleyard's Livable Streets Study showed a strong correlation between high traffic on a residential street and low livability. He found that streets with heavy traffic had more renters than owners living on them, and that residents on such streets engaged in less socializing with neighbors on their block, cared less for the street, and claimed it less as their territory.¹⁸ However, observation finds that properties

along the Brooklyn parkways are generally well cared for, especially on Ocean Parkway, indicating that residents value the street. In addition, observation suggests that both parkways support socializing activities. Something different must be operating.

A recent research project I was involved in sought to examine this issue.¹⁹ We hypothesized that the physical form of the parkways might be offsetting the negative impact of traffic, thereby making the parkways livable streets in spite of the traffic. To test this, we examined the livability of Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway (as well as a third street, in Chico, California, with a similar physical form) by using methods identical to those used by Appleyard in his study. These included a series of environmental measurements, such as noise measurement and traffic volumes and speeds, and resident surveys designed to allow residents to assess the livability of their street. For each parkway we selected two normally configured control streets: a nearby medium traffic street and a nearby light traffic street. What it is important to know is that the average daily traffic on the parkways ranged from 42,000 to 44,000 cars a day while that on the medium traffic streets ranged from 4,000 to 13,000 cars a day.

One of the main findings of the study was that residents living on the parkways in fact considered their street to be more livable than residents living on the normally-configured streets carrying medium traffic levels. In general, people living on the parkways, while definitely aware of the traffic generally did not feel negatively impacted by it, and in fact many people appreciated their proximity to the activity on the parkway and felt a connection with urban life. Our explanation is that, in fact, the physical form of the parkways does in fact work to counteract the nuisance impacts of traffic on a residential street. It is not any one physical feature that contributes to this, rather a combination of physical features: particularly important are the side access roadways and malls, which

remove residents from traffic noise (our measurements showed that noise levels were much lower at the curbs in front of dwellings on the parkways than at the curbs in front of the dwellings on the medium-traffic streets) and the trees, which give a park-like feeling to the street (many parkway residents mentioned their fondness for the trees in their responses to survey questions asking what they liked about their street). A compelling observation that came out of the research, which showed up both in residents answers to the survey questions and in the casual conversations I had with parkway residents after they had completed the survey, was that some people living on the parkways value them because they are "parkways" and thereby associated with specialness: they perceive their streets as different, and better, than other streets in their neighborhood. This observation would be good to follow up with further research.

The study was designed to look at streets representing a range of residential densities (Eastern Parkway had the highest density, than Ocean Parkway, than the street in Chico), and it is interesting that in all three cases the livability finding remained constant for all three case studies.

These findings speak to another aspect of the value of the parkway street form. As well as providing a place for public life in a park-like setting, the parkway form appears to be a form that can handle large amounts of traffic in an urban environment, where it is necessary to do so, without degrading the livability for parkway residents.

FOCAL LINES FOR POLITICAL EXPRESSION

"The street is a political space. [...] Whether as a meeting ground for the development and exchange of ideas and hopes or as a stage for demonstration

and mass expression, the public street is a special political space, most difficult to control, as important in the playing-out of people's most cherished ideals as the piazza or public square."²⁰

"The only legitimacy of the street is as public space. Without it, there is no city. Practical needs—access to adjacent property, passage of through traffic—come to mind first because they are obvious. But the fundamental reality of streets, as with all public space, is political."²¹

And so it has been with Eastern and Ocean Parkway: they have served as places to gather for political reasons. The wide malls provide a place where people can easily gather in large numbers, and at times they do.

At different times in the history of the parkways, groups of citizens have vied with each other for rights to use the different roadway and mall spaces of the parkways for different forms of movement. The conflicts which resulted were resolved through political means: the allowed uses of the different cross-sectional parkway spaces have been controlled through regulations imposed by legislation (see Chapter Three). But the parkways have been political spaces in different senses as well: they are spaces in which people have at times congregated in large groups to protest events not to their liking or to bear witness to significant community occasions, and spaces around which community groups have rallied conceptually to collectively push for certain goals and rights.

Eastern Parkway

Eastern Parkway is something of a seam between two communities: a large black community that lives mostly on the north side of the parkway but also to the south and a much smaller Hasidic Jewish community that lives mostly on the south side. The parkway is a spatial territory claimed by both groups.

The Lubavitcher Hasidic community first established itself in the neighborhoods around Eastern Parkway in the 1940's, but many left during the 1960's as part of a general white flight from inner city neighborhoods. A determined group, led by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, stayed behind and has tried to secure their foothold in the area. Their numbers have been increasing since the early 1980's.²²

The black community is not a monolithic community in terms of its ethnic or political backgrounds. Some are part of, or descendants of, the various great waves of immigrants from the south who came to Brooklyn and settled in the Bedford and Stuyvesant areas in the late 1800's, the 1920s, and the 1940's, and began pushing into Crown Heights in the 1960's.²³ But the majority are West Indians from the Caribbean. West Indians began immigrating to New York City in large numbers following a favorable 1965 amendment to the U.S. Immigrations laws, and many settled in Bedford/Stuyvesant alongside the American blacks. During the 1970's, as immigration intensified, the core of the West Indian community shifted to Crown Heights.²⁴

In 1987, there were approximately 15,000 Hasidic Jews and 80,000 mostly Caribbean blacks living in Crown Heights who were: "Competing aggressively and sometimes violently for space."²⁵ Both groups share similar economic circumstances: generally they are working class and most families have modest incomes.²⁶ But, the two groups have very different social customs and they do not mix much. The Hasidic community observes strict religious rules regarding conduct, dress, and association, while the West Indian community has more relaxed social customs. In public, members of each community stand out from each other: one group is black while the other is white, and the Hasidic Jews wear distinctive, traditional styles of dress, while the West Indians dress more casually. The cultural differences between the two groups have been the source

of misunderstanding and substantial tension. Anna Deavere Smith describes the situation poetically in *Fires in the Mirror*, an artistic exploration of Black-Jewish relations in our time presented in the form of a play: "Everyone wore their roots on their heads. The Hasidic Men wore yarmulkes and black hats, and women wore wigs. The African American and Caribbean Americans frequently had on hats with Afro-centric meaning, or dreadlocks and shells in their hair. The lines were so clearly drawn that they were ready to snap. The tension was not a tension that was moving an identity forward, it was a tension that threatened to explode."²⁷ It exploded in the summer of 1991, when Eastern Parkway was the site of large-scale rioting and demonstrations.

The event that precipitated the rioting was a car accident in which a black child was killed by a Jewish driver. Gavin Cato was playing on a sidewalk when a police-escorted entourage bearing Lubavitcher Grand Rebbe Menachem Schneerson ran a red light and one of the escort cars jumped a curb, running into him. It happened two blocks north of Eastern Parkway, at the intersection of Utica Avenue and President Street. Three hours later and five blocks away, a young Hasidic professor from Australia named Yankel Rosenbaum, was stabbed and killed by a group of young blacks, and he died shortly thereafter. Rioting and protest rallies began the next day. Smith describes the upheaval: "For three days, Black people fought police, attacked Lubavitcher headquarters, and torched businesses while Hasidic patrols responded with their own violence."²⁸ Over fifteen hundred police officers were brought in to quell the riots.

The mayhem erupted because each community felt they were the victims of injustice, and they were fighting for public recognition of this and for justice. The black community had long been unhappy with what they saw as preferential treatment being given to the Jews. Since the 1970's, police had diverted traffic on Saturdays from Crown Height streets where Lubavitcher synagogues were

located, which caused problems for the non-Jewish residents and business owners.²⁹ Apparently, speeding police-escorted entourages of Lubavitcher religious leaders are a common occurrence.³⁰ Many members of the Black community resented these police-sanctioned annoyances and dangers, seeing them as a lack of respect for the traditions of others and as real safety concerns. The child's death brought the issue to a boiling point. They called the accident a murder, and demanded the arrest and prosecution of the driver—but he had already left the country for Israel.

The Jewish community saw Gavin Cato's death as an accident, and was horrified that Yankel Rosenbaum had been murdered simply because he was a Jew. They demanded that his murderer be prosecuted. In October, the man who had been charged with the murder was acquitted and released. The Jewish community was outraged and felt betrayed by the authorities.

Many of the central events of the conflict were acted out on Eastern Parkway: the overturning of police cars, the funeral procession for Yankel Rosenbaum, a march of over fifteen hundred Blacks led by the Reverend Al Sharpton, a rally of over one thousand Hasidic Jews following the acquittal of the man charged with Yankel Rosenbaum's murder. The original events happened elsewhere, but the large public gatherings and demonstrations happened on the parkway. It functioned as the open, public stage for confrontations between the two communities and also for displaying local sentiments to the authorities and the larger public. It was a stage that held many voices. The use of Eastern Parkway in this way had to do with its capacity to physically hold large demonstrations—the generous malls provide places where people can gather, the parkways are not all paving and traffic—but it also had to do with the parkways role as the symbolic center of the neighborhood: it was central turf which each community exerted their claim to at a highly charged political moment.

The conflict was never resolved to either community's satisfaction and uneasiness still remains today. Eastern Parkway continues to be the place where these two communities most publicly encounter each other and each other's cultural rituals.

Some may argue that public spaces like the parkways may serve to heighten political tensions between communities by making differences more visible. While to some extent this may be true, I argue that public spaces like the parkways serve as stages for open political expression, places where differences can be publicly displayed, confronted, and, hopefully, resolved.

Ocean Parkway

Ocean Parkway has been the site of community political expression, but of a very different sort. Ocean Parkway has been the physical space that a series of neighborhoods have identified with and organized around on a number of occasions to push for certain collective objectives.

First, in the early 1970's, people in the neighborhoods surrounding Ocean Parkway banded together to fight the destruction of the parkway malls by a federally funded roadway rebuilding project. Collectively, they exerted enough political pressure to obtain an exception to federal road building standards (see Chapter Three). Later, in the 1980's and 1990's, people in the parkway neighborhoods on several occasions organized themselves to collectively push for, and achieve, zoning changes to stop certain kinds of development they didn't want, and allow other kinds they did want (see Chapter Four). These locally led efforts have focused on the parkway as the linear spine for a series of linked neighborhoods. Looking at a current zoning map, one sees a distinct linear swath

of special zoning following the line of Ocean Parkway: neighborhood activism has clearly marked it as the conceptual center of a linear neighborhood.

URBAN PLACE-MARKERS

As well as being linear promenade spaces and political spaces, the parkways have long served another role: they are linear place-markers in the physical fabric of the city and also in people's imagination. As distinct linear spaces, imageable and memorable, they have long given structure and orientation to the landscape and the communities surrounding them. They have functioned, and continue to function, as referential lines.

Memorable Streets

In *The Image of the City*, Kevin Lynch speaks of the value of key movement paths in cities having some singular quality about them, which marks them off from other surrounding paths and make them strongly imageable, thereby giving structure and orientation to people's image of their city. The singular quality may take a variety of forms, Lynch suggests: "...a concentration of some special use or activity along their margins, a characteristic spatial quality, a special texture of floor or facade, a particular lighting pattern, a unique set of smells or sounds, a typical detail or mode of planting."³¹ The parkways fulfill this role. They have a characteristic spatial form and tree planting that is different than surrounding streets, and which is consistent for their whole length. Each parkway also has a consistent type and arrangement of street furniture: long wood benches on the Ocean Parkway malls, and historic benches and light

fixtures on Eastern Parkway. The parkways work as clear wholes and this makes them highly imageable.

The parkways are memorable places in Brooklyn, because of their size, their magnificent trees, their spaciousness, and the public life that takes place on them: and they are compelling attractions. Passing through the neighborhood, one is likely to go out of her way to walk along one of the parkways rather than along another street. People go to them on a regular basis and spend large amounts of time on them. One remembers the neighborhoods around the parkways because of the parkways: the neighborhoods themselves are not that distinctive. When getting to know Brooklyn, once the parkways have been encountered, other locales are thought of and remembered in reference to them.

Both parkways stand out in their local landscapes. They are major, wide streets, but very different than other wide streets in the city. The tree-lined malls, particularly, make them stand out: the six rows of mature trees on the parkways are highly memorable in their own right. In addition, the parkways are lined with residential buildings rather than commercial buildings, while most wide streets in Brooklyn are commercial streets. They are major traffic arteries, but very different from other traffic arteries because they are more complex and have much more diverse activity on them.

They are large, larger than what's around them, so they stand out. They were designed as a unit, a complex unit, but a single unit nonetheless, and they stand out as units with special things on them that other streets don't have—so they are memorable. They have a long history of special care and maintenance, under the auspices of a special caretaker, the park commission, so they are, generally, better maintained, as units, and this too sets them apart and makes them memorable.



The Brooklyn Museum on Eastern Parkway (1944)
Photograph from the New York City Parks Photo Archive

Landscapes of Civic Culture

Over the years, both parkways have been marked as important cultural landscapes through the erection of public institutions and monuments on them, Eastern Parkway more than Ocean Parkway. These contribute to the memorability of the parkways, but their presence has never defined either one. There were more monuments on the parkways in the past than there are today.



The Slocum Statue on Eastern Parkway (1905)
Photograph from the New York City Parks Photo Archive

The western end of Eastern Parkway is marked by the several major cultural institutions—the Brooklyn Museum, the Brooklyn Botanical Garden, and the Brooklyn Public Library. Although these are major public places, they somehow do not define the street. They occur along Eastern Parkway’s least impressive, least parkway-like section—the narrow, steeply graded part of the street west of Washington Avenue, which only contains one mall. Walking along Eastern Parkway from the Plaza, the parkway doesn’t really seem to begin until after the museum, where the roadway opens up to its full width, the second side mall begins, and all six lines of trees are in place.

When it was first built, the west end of Eastern Parkway was marked by an octagonal brownstone tower that stood on the grounds of the Mt. Prospect

Reservoir. This tower lasted into the early 1900's. The western end of Eastern Parkway has been marked since the turn of the century by monuments built in the Plaza, remnants of the City Beautiful movement: a large triumphal arch in the middle of the Plaza commemorating the Grand Army (the plaza is now called Grand Army Plaza), which was erected in 1892, and had heroic bronze sculptures placed on the top in 1898, and two granite columns topped by bronze eagles flanking the park entry, which were erected in 1901.³²

A large statue of a man on a horse, the Slocum monument, stood for awhile on Eastern Parkway, in the middle of the street, at the intersection of Bedford Avenue. It no longer exists, victim to the increasing rationalization of the roadway for automobile use.³³

Smaller, subtler, cultural monuments installed on Eastern Parkway were the memorial trees that were planted on the parkway malls near its western end following World War Two. Each tree well is embedded with a plaque bearing the name of a soldier from Brooklyn that was killed.³⁴ Many of the plaques are still in place today.

Ocean Parkway has been marked by only two monuments during its history and only one of these remains, now at some distance from the parkway proper. The southwest entrance to Prospect Park, where Ocean Parkway had its beginning until the 1950's freeway construction changed things, has, since 1890, been marked by a pair of statues called the Horsetamers: two rearing horses, one of which is ridden by a nude young boy brandishing a whip.³⁵ Their presence recalls Ocean Parkway's original use as a carriage and horse drive.

A war memorial to the men of the 61st army division was erected on Ocean Parkway at the Fort Hamilton intersection following the second World War. It was a female liberty of heroic size, laying a palm leaf on the altar of peace. Like



The *Horsetamers* at the Ocean Parkway entrance to Prospect Park

the Slocum statue on Eastern Parkway, it too was removed to make way for automobiles.³⁶

Today, Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway are defined as important cultural landscapes in a different way: they are officially designed historic landscapes. This is a national designation, which means that the parkways are claimed as cultural landscapes by a very large public. This claiming may not manifest itself on a everyday basis—the parkways are not tourist destinations—yet, they are now under the oversight of a national preservation body. If anyone in the future wants to change the physical configuration of the parkways, it will not be easy to do so. Ocean Parkway received its designation in 1975, Eastern Parkway received its in 1978. To get an area designated as a historic landscape takes a lot of time and effort, and with landmark status come restrictions against change. For Ocean Parkway, the efforts were led by neighborhood boards and

community activists and were widely supported by the local community.³⁷ For Eastern Parkway, the efforts were led by outside preservationists and a small number of local activists.³⁸ As such, landmark status may sit more uneasily on Eastern Parkway than on Ocean Parkway.

Landmark status was conferred on the parkways because of their association with Olmsted and Vaux. The 1970's was a time when Olmsted and Vaux's landscape architecture works were being re-valued. Both Central Park and Prospect Park were having their maintenance attended to and efforts were being made to reconstruct them back to their original forms, where changes had been made. Much of this work was being done by private foundations and community volunteers.³⁹ The parkways found themselves included under the umbrella of this renewed interest in Olmsted and Vaux's work.

The fact that the parkways are designated as official historic landscapes speaks to a wide recognition of the value of the parkways as designed physical spaces. This valuing is a layered thing, it can be read as elitist--in the case of Eastern Parkway perhaps an elitist appropriation of a landscape existing in a non-elite part of town--but there are other readings as well.

The late 1980's/early 1990's reconstruction of Eastern Parkway with historic-look light fixtures and benches smacks of gentrification--primary participants in the planning of the reconstruction were groups representing the cultural institutions at the western end of the parkway, the Brooklyn Museum and the Brooklyn Public Library. One can argue that the parkways have always been elitist public spaces, built and supported by those with wealth and power, and sites where the normalization of public activities to conform to elite social norms of proper behavior was socially enforced. But, nonetheless, both parkways, Eastern Parkway as well as Ocean Parkway, remain open public places--accessible to local people as well as to the larger public. They remain strongly

integrated within particular neighborhoods, and most used by local inhabitants, not by tourists. In the case of Ocean Parkway, some of the people who live along the parkway, and use it often, are quite wealthy, but many residents along both parkways are not wealthy, and the historic landscape status held by the parkways guarantees that their valued public space qualities will remain—for this generation of neighborhood residents, and for others to come.

Place-Markers in the Imagination

Since land around the parkways has been developed, the parkway neighborhoods have been places that a succession of different groups of people have aspired to. As in all American cities, successive waves of different communities have moved into the parkway neighborhoods over the years, as earlier groups have moved on. For each successive group, moving to the parkway has been seen as a step up (while, of course, at the same time those moving away also saw their leaving as a step up). Some understanding of the dimensions of these aspirations can be found in autobiographical literary texts and novels.

Eastern Parkway

The history of settlement around Eastern Parkway is marked by successive waves of distinct ethnic groups, as described earlier. In the 1920's, when it was first developed, Eastern Parkway was the place Jews living in nearby, lower-class, Brownsville aspired to move to. In his book *A Walker in the City*, Alfred Kazin describes growing up in isolated Brownsville in the 1930's and 1940's and the image of assimilation into the larger culture that Eastern Parkway held for him. The subway ride from New York City to Brownsville was long, and

Brownsville was the end of the line. "When I was a child, I thought we lived at the end of the world."⁴⁰ Along the way were the five subway stops on Eastern Parkway, stops which led to a Jewish world, but a very different one than the Jewish world of Brownsville: "Franklin Avenue was where the Jews began—but all middle-class Jews, *alrightniks*, making out "all right" in the New World, they were still Gentiles to me as they went out into the wide and tree-lined Eastern Parkway."⁴¹

In the mid-1960's, as Jews began moving out of the Eastern Parkway neighborhoods, West Indian immigrants began moving in. Many of these new residents came from the Bedford-Stuyvesant ghetto, just to the north. In her novel *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, Paule Marshall tells the story of a West Indian family living on Fulton Street at the edge of Bedford-Stuyvesant. A character in the novel speaks (in dialect) of the community's aspirations to improve their situation and to spatially relocate to the Eastern Parkway neighborhoods: "More Bajan than you can shake a stick at opening stores or starting up some little business....Every West Indian out here taking a lesson from the Jew landlord and converting these old houses into rooming houses—making the closets-self into rooms some them!—and pulling down plenty-plenty money by the week. And now the place is near overrun with roomers the Bajans getting out. Every jack-man buying a swell house in dighty Crown Heights."⁴²

Ocean Parkway

The history of settlement around Ocean Parkway is also marked by successive waves of different groups, but overall by less wholesale abandonment and reappropriation. The Ocean Parkway neighborhoods were first settled by middle-class people moving out of older, inner city Brooklyn neighborhoods. Many were Jews, but there were other groups as well.

To one individual who grew up near Ocean Parkway in the 1950's and 1960's, but not in one of the immediate Ocean Parkway neighborhoods, Ocean Parkway represented a distinct line of otherness which was compelling to her. Marianna De Marco Torgovnic grew up in the Italian working-class neighborhood of Bensonhurst, a mile or so to the west of the south-middle section of Ocean Parkway. She wrote about her experiences in a book of essays called *Crossing Ocean Parkway*. She has this to say about the image the parkway held for her, and for others: "For Brooklynites, Ocean Parkway is a powerful state of mind and a symbol of upward mobility. I see it as a stage set, an anticipation, a preparation for the bastions of elite American life."⁴³ The physical form of the street, and its use as a recreational corridor, were the elements that made it special: "Ease and spaciousness are the essence of Ocean Parkway and the reason why, for Brooklynites, Ocean Parkway is a powerful state of mind."⁴⁴ In her desire to move from her working class circumstances into the mainstream of middle-class urban life, and her journey to do so, the image of the parkway remained strong in her mind as a symbolic place that structured her personal journey. She puts it poetically: "To use a metaphor: I will always be crossing Ocean Parkway; I have crossed it; I will never cross it."⁴⁵

CONCLUSIONS

My observations of how Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway support public life and give identity to the neighborhoods in which they are situated suggest that the parkway street form may be useful in urban contexts today. Although the high levels of public life found on Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway may be associated with the fact that they exist within a dense urban

environment—in Brooklyn, most people do not have large private back yards and so, to some extent, public open spaces serve as outdoor living rooms—such streets might also provide for high levels of public life in less dense areas. This remains to be tested.

In the end, Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway can be read as landscapes of power, but they can also be read as landscapes of community identity and public life. They are intensely public spaces. They may be more heavily claimed and used by the communities immediately around them, in the same way that communities claim local neighborhood parks, but they are also used by a wider public. They are inclusive rather than exclusive spaces. They provide places where people can witness diverse others, and hopefully learn to tolerate and perhaps understand them. There is an everydayness to the public life of the parkways—mostly they witness everyday rituals—but they also hold the potential to become prominent stages for community political expression.

The parkways have played, and continue to play, important roles in community life. They function as major green open spaces in Brooklyn. They are both important streets and important park spaces. As public open spaces, they are different than normally-configured streets and different than neighborhood parks. The generous tree-lined malls, lined with pedestrian amenities, allow the parkways to provide for more public life activities than normally configured streets. Yet, their linear form means that they function differently than neighborhood parks: they draw from a large linear catchment area rather than from a small encircling catchment area.

Both parkways are landscapes that people have organized to care for over the years. They are landscapes that give substance and orientation to people's daily lives, and to their imaginations. They are memorable for their physical

form and for the forest of trees on them. Their presence differentiates the urban landscape.

In all, Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway are compelling, workable, and valued public open spaces in Brooklyn, suggesting that streets of Olmsted and Vaux's parkway form are worthy of future research and worthy of consideration for use in cities today.

¹These research studies have included a safety study, a study of professional perceptions about streets of this type, and a study of their livability. (See Jacobs, Rofe, and Macdonald, 1994 and 1995; Bosselmann and Macdonald, 1999.)

²It is possible that such oral histories might exist in the collection of the Brooklyn Historical Society, however I was unable to verify this since the Brooklyn Historical Society was closed for extensive renovations during 1997 through 1999 and the collection was inaccessible.

³Allan B. Jacobs writes about this persuasively in *Looking at Cities*.

⁴Michael Polanyi speaks of the importance of connoisseurship as a practical way of knowing in his book *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*. The following is an abbreviated quote from that book, page 54. "Connoisseurship, like skill, can be communicated only by example, not by precept. [...] Wherever connoisseurship is found operating within science or technology we may assume that it persists only because it has not been possible to replace it by a measurable grading. For a measurement has the advantage of greater objectivity, as shown by the fact that measurements give consistent results in the hands of different observers all over the world, while such objectivity is rarely achieved in the case of physiognomic appreciation. The large amount of time spent by students of chemistry, biology and medicine in their practical courses shows how greatly these sciences rely on the transmission of skills and connoisseurship from master to apprentice. It offers an impressive demonstration of the extent to which the art of knowing has remained unspecifiable at the very heart of science."

⁵I attended the parade in 1998. On that occasion, newspaper accounts recorded attendance of over two million people. *New York Times* 8 September 1998.

⁶Other wide streets built later by the Park Commission, such as the Bay Parkway and the Shore Road, were used as pleasure drives, but the annual reports of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners suggest that none were as popular as Ocean Parkway.

⁷AR96.

⁸The parkways were also appealing because they were spacious and airy and the apartment buildings along them had large apartments in them that were good for families. Moore, 53.

⁹Moore, 83.

¹⁰Moore, 85.

¹¹Whyte; Gehl.

¹²Moore, 52.

¹³The parkways are part of a borough-wide bicycle path system and many people use them, especially Ocean Parkway, for long-distance bicycling riding.

¹⁴Earlier research on boulevards documented the presence of a strong pedestrian realm on Ocean Parkway, see Jacobs, Rofe, Macdonald (1994). Research on arterial streets suggests that many heavy traffic streets serve as dividers between places in a city, see Jacobs, Macdonald, Marsh, Wilson (1997).

¹⁵Postal and Koppman, 182; New York Times 7 December 1980, Section 8, 1:1.

¹⁶Postal and Koppman, 183;

¹⁷This observation comes from personal experience gained in the course of conducting a research study that involved interviewing parkway residents. Bosselmann and Macdonald, (1999).

¹⁸Appleyard and Lintell.

¹⁹Bosselmann and Macdonald.

²⁰Allan B. Jacobs (1993), 5.

²¹Kostof (1992), 194.

²²Postal and Koppman, 183.

²³Connolly.

²⁴Kasinitz, 59.

²⁵Kasinitz, 61.

²⁶Kasinitz, 61.

²⁷Smith, xxxiv.

²⁸Smith, xliii.

²⁹Postal and Koppman, 183; Smith, xlv, xxxv.

³⁰Smith, xxxv.

³¹Lynch, 1960, 96.

³²The Annual Reports of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners chronicle the erection of these monuments.

³³Donald Glassman, the photo archivist at the New York City Parks Photo Archives dates the Slocum monument to around 1905, based on existing photographic evidence.

³⁴Dierickx.

³⁵The Annual Reports of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners chronicle the installation of these statues.

³⁶Riders New York City: A Guide for Travelers.

³⁷The Flatbush Citizen, Vol. 1 No. 26, 17-23 July 1974; New York Times 2 August 1974, 31:1; New York Times 11 April 1975, 69:6; Daily News 23 June 1975, 37.

³⁸Daily News 6 May 1979.

³⁹Rosenzweig and Blackmar, 469-530.

⁴⁰Kazin, 8.

⁴¹Kazin, 9.

⁴²Marshall, 312.

⁴³Torgovnic, ix.

⁴⁴Torgovnic, 23.

⁴⁵Torgovnic, ix.

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Abbreviations Used in the Footnotes

BE	Brooklyn Eagle
AR60 - AR86	Annual Reports of the Brooklyn Parks Commission
AR87 - AR97	Annual Reports of the Brooklyn Department of Parks
AR02 - AR20	Annual Reports of the New York City Department of Parks, Brooklyn Borough.
PoFLO: VI	Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Volume VI: The Years of Olmsted, Vaux & Company 1865 - 1874.
PoFLO: SSI	Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Supplementary Series, Volume I: Writings on Public Parks, Parkways, and Park Systems.

Note: For the Annual Reports (AR__), the dates shown in the footnotes refer to the year the report covered and not to the year the report was published. (Some confusion is possible, because the reports were generally published in January of the year following the year they covered, and the early reports carried the publishing year date.)

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Brooklyn Public Library

- Brooklyn Eagle* microfilm collection
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- The Brooklyn Collection *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* clipping file

New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

- Parklands Division File B-29 "Eastern Parkway"
- Parklands Division File B-65 "Ocean Parkway"
- New York City Parks Photo Archive
- Sanborn maps of Brooklyn

New York City Municipal Reference and Research Center

- Annual Reports of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners

New York Public Library Map Division
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