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# Community by Design: The Olmsted Firm and the Development of Brookline, Massachusetts by Keith N. Morgan, Elizabeth Hope Cushing, and Roger G. Reed (Book Review)

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**Community by Design: The Olmsted Form and the Development of Brookline, Massachusetts.**

By Keith N. Morgan, Elizabeth Hope Cushing, and Roger G. Reed.  
Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013. Pp. 320. \$39.95.

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First and foremost, this volume is a contribution to the history of architecture and landscape design in the United States, tracing the work of the Olmsted firm within the seven square miles that constitute the independent suburb of Brookline. Frederick Law Olmsted moved to Brookline in 1883 and lived in the same house until his death in 1903. John Charles Olmsted (nephew/stepson) was a Brookliner until his death in 1920, as was Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. until he moved to California in 1936. They developed a town where wealthy owners of large estates and upper-middle-class owners of gracious homes were working to realize the somewhat contradictory goals of preserving and promoting a bucolic townscape, realizing real estate profits, and fending off the spread of triple-deckers and apartments to serve the less privileged.

The book opens with scene-setting chapters on pre-Olmsted Brookline and on pre-Brookline Olmsted. It follows with chapters devoted to different facets of the Olmsted firm's work with: individual landowners, planning Brookline streets and parks, institutions such as churches, schools, and the nation's original country club, and the immediate neighbors of the Olmsted family. Interspersed are chapters about Henry Hobson Richardson, whose residence in Brookline was one of the factors that attracted Olmsted, and about horticultural leader Charles Sprague Sargent, another long-time resident.

*Community by Design* originated as a study for the National Park Service to help with the contextualization and interpretation of the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, and it reflects this derivation. The authors have combed through the Olmsted business papers to provide information on dozens and dozens of projects large and small. The volume includes nine appendixes listing all of the firm's Brookline projects, all of the other architects and landscape architects who lived in the town from the 1870s to 1930s, collaborative projects between H. H. Richardson and F. L. Olmsted Sr., the office's collaborations with three other major design firms, and the full lists of all Brookline projects of these firms. A pair of maps shows where Brookline architects lived and another pair shows Olmsted firm projects in the Green Hill neighborhood where the family lived. Abundant illustrations include many site plans from the Olmsted archives. To use an Olmsted-appropriate metaphor, there are a lot of thoroughly researched trees that will be of great interest to design historians and to people interested in Brookline itself.

Not being familiar with Brookline, however, this reviewer had a bit of

trouble finding his way within this scholarly forest, longing, perhaps, for a clear hilltop from which to survey the surrounding woods. For example, there is no map of Brookline showing its major streets, its relationships with Boston roads and parks, and the relative locations of the different neighborhoods, estates, and institutions that are discussed. Granted that this is not a study in social history, more than one citation of census data would be useful, given the town's changing ethnic makeup, as well as some consideration of how its claim to have been the wealthiest town in the United States might look in comparison with other upscale suburbs.

By providing abundant detail on the Olmsteds and their design profession neighbors, however, the authors have made a very interesting contribution to the historical sociology of the professions. Brookline's wealth made it a rich source of architecture, planning, and landscape jobs, and the Olmsted firm found itself in competition with other practitioners in the burgeoning design professions. Sometimes the firm offered informal advice and then lost the commission, sometimes it donated its services to public projects, and many times it partnered with other firms. Readers see the growth of professional education in the design fields reflected in the changing organization and practices of the Brookline firms. It is striking how thickly embedded the Olmsteds were in both the professional communities of Boston and the elite social community of their town—all while they were so often on trains doing interesting things from one coast to the other.

It sometime seems that the Olmsteds are the Shakespeare of American design, creators of seminal texts that repay repeated analysis and exegesis. Within its spatially limited compass, *Community by Design* is a very useful addition to the historical and critical body of Olmsted studies, for both its detail on their designs and for its insights into the evolution of the professions.

CARL ABBOTT

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### **Engineering War and Peace in Modern Japan, 1868–1964.**

By Takashi Nishiyama. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014.  
Pp. xi+264. \$55.

The kamikaze fighter and the Shinkansen (bullet train) evoke modern Japan's close association with technology during the two eras of total war mobilization and high-speed economic growth. Takashi Nishiyama seizes on these two artifacts of war and peace to analyze Japan's rapid technological transformation during the twentieth century. Departing from histories that overly emphasize the continuity or discontinuity of factors from wartime that enabled Japan's postwar rise into a technological superpower,