

Frederick Law Olmsted: *Passages in the Life of an Unpractical Man*

A one-man play by Gerry Wright

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Celebrating Olmsted's Legacy

A hundred years after his death, America continues to be challenged with issues of social justice and conservation for which Olmsted was a most persevering, principled pioneer.

Gerry Wright has researched, written and produced a one-man show honoring the life and work of Frederick Law Olmsted, the father of landscape architecture. The play provides insights into Olmsted's passionate vision as he played critical roles in the dynamics of slavery as a writer, as an appointee of Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War, and as the landscape architect and catalyst for New York City's Central Park, Boston's Emerald Necklace, the US Capitol grounds, along with multiple parks for colleges, communities and private estates. Olmsted was a key pioneer in the movement to preserve land as national parkland, both at Yosemite and Niagara Falls.

Olmsted's life story, from "vagabond," to farmer, traveller, journalist, author, publisher, executive (including a goldmine in California), to becoming the father of landscape architecture in America is both inspiring as history and reason for continued commitment in the 21st century.

"Passages in the Life of an Unpractical Man" has toured from the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site in Brookline, Massachusetts to the New Horizons Project in Vologda, Russia; Derby Academy in Hingham, MA to the New York City Central Park Celebration, Olmsted Parks Conservancy in Louisville, Kentucky to the "Biltmore" in Ashville, North Carolina.

Gerry Wright works in areas of human services, environmental advocacy, international relations. In the 1960s he founded DARE Incorporated, a nonprofit agency in Massachusetts which pioneered new community services for adolescents with social and emotional problems due to poverty and neglect. He has also championed projects that foster international communication, beginning at the time he ran the Moscow Marathon in 1982, and co-founded the Worldwide Running Club for Peace with the president of the Moscow Running Club. He has received numerous awards, including the 2008 Robert F. Kennedy Embracing the Legacy Award and named Father of Community Based Caring in Massachusetts by president of the State Senate. Wright is founder and president of Friends of Jamaica Pond and has been portraying Frederick Law Olmsted since 2003. He holds a BS from the forestry school at the University of Maine and a MS in wildlife conservation from Cornell University. Further graduate study include philosophy, theology, sociology, and psychology at Boston University and Harvard University.



Photo: Renee Dekona

Boston Sunday Globe

A dedicated follower of Olmsted

First the kinship, then the one-man show

By Shari Rudavsky
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Memphis has its Elvis look-alikes. Philadelphia its wannabe Ben Franklins. Jamaica Plain has its very own Frederick Law Olmsted impersonator.

With his long white beard, intelligent gaze, and gentlemanly demeanor, Gerry Wright does not have to don his 19th-century costume to channel the landscape architect when he does his impersonations at various events. But this year — the 20th anniversary of Olmsted's death and the 20th anniversary of a Jamaica Pond cleanup effort which Wright helped launch — the Jamaica Plain man has been suiting up as Olmsted more often than usual, in a one-man play he created that draws liberally from Olmsted's own words.

Originally, Wright, who has had no formal acting experience, had planned to stage his play six times. He's now performed it more than 15 times at such venues as churches, schools, and the Olmsted house in Brookline, and requests keep pouring in for more.

"Frederick Law Olmsted: Passages in the Life of an Unpackaged Man" strives to be more than a biography of the man behind Boston's Emerald Necklace and New York's Central Park. It's a way to share with viewers Olmsted's earth-friendly philosophy, according to Wright.

"It's about kindness," Wright said.

one corner devoted to the works of Olmsted and those who wrote about him, books spill off the shelves.

"The more I've pursued my research, the more kinship I feel with Olmsted," Wright said.

The 68-year-old Wright first discovered Olmsted in the '80s, when he moved to Boston to pursue a divinity degree at Boston University. A marathon runner, he frequently jogged around the pond, whose paths had fallen into disrepair.

Already a fan of Emerson — he had left Cornell's doctoral program in conservation to pursue a career that gave him more contact with people — Wright instantly appreciated Olmsted's efforts to create public green spaces in the city. The more he read about the man considered to have fathered landscape architecture, the more he grew to respect him.

While Wright, the founder of a residential program for troubled youth in Jamaica Plain, has never worked full-time as a landscaper, he has made forays into that world. Twenty years ago, he and Christine Cooper founded the Jamaica Pond Project, a neighborhood group that cleaned up the park and restored the bathhouse to working condition.

His debut as Olmsted came in 1996, when the Parks Commission celebrated the centennial of the Emerald Necklace. During party preparations Wright was chatting with then-Parks Commissioner Justice Liff, who told him some of the party guests planned to appear in Victorian garb.



The impersonator, Gerry Wright of Jamaica Plain...



GLOBE FILE PHOTO

Tribute to Olmsted coming to Easton

He's coming to Easton! Frederick Law Olmsted is coming to Easton on Sunday, Sept. 28.

The Easton Film Festival Committee is proud to present renowned conservationist Gerry Wright and his first impersonation "Frederick Law Olmsted: Passages in the Life of an Unpackaged Man" known in the area as "The Olmsted Show."

Wright is a natural in a one-man Olmsted show!

Gerry Wright is a natural in one-man Olmsted show!

Joseph Monti
Author

Any similarity between person or thing is mostly coincidental. The common disclaimer is far from true in the case of Jamaica Plain resident Gerry Wright. His impersonation of Frederick Law Olmsted is a tribute to the landscape architect and his work on the Emerald Necklace in Boston. Wright is the author, actor and director of a one-man show that brings the man to life through his own words. Wright's one-man show, "Frederick Law Olmsted: Passages in the Life of an Unpackaged Man" was performed in Easton on Sept. 28. Wright is a natural in a one-man Olmsted show!



Calendar

among the stars as World War II Entertainment takes the ring. 7:30 p.m. PlanetCenter, Crosscut Street, Boston, 617-646-937-937, 2000.

KING RICHARD'S FAIR Juggling, fire eaters, swordswomen, Renaissance fair. Period foods, art, games, live music, puppetry, magic, jugglers, and the finest acrobatic artists to their realm. 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. Rte. 58, Corner of Rte. 1A and Rte. 58, Crosscut Street, Boston, 617-646-937-937, 2000.



OTHER VIEWS

In a letter to the editor, I read a piece of the magazine that said that Gerry Wright was a "natural" in a one-man Olmsted show. I am a fan of Olmsted and his work. I am also a fan of Gerry Wright and his work. I am a fan of the one-man Olmsted show.

BROOKLINE TAB

Olmsted legacy celebrated at historic site

By Dave Fleming

To celebrate the site and work of Brookline's most renowned landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, the national historic site on Warren Street, Brookline, is set to celebrate with a one-man show on the centennial anniversary of his death.

Wright, who is often referred to as the father of landscape architecture, moved to Brookline in 1968 and set up the first landscape architectural office in Brookline.

Called "The Olmsted Show," Wright designed the Boston United States Bank, now known as the Eastern State Bank, as well as the first office in Brookline.

To commemorate Olmsted's legacy, "Frederick Law Olmsted: Passages in the Life of an Unpackaged Man" will be performed on Sept. 28, 2000 at the historic site.



Monday 9/1

FREE BREAD AND ROSES LABOR DAY HERITAGE FESTIVAL

Lawrence commemorates the famous 1912 Bread and Roses Strike that led to higher wages and better working conditions for its mill workers. The day's event includes a 5K Road Race, power looms and spinning demonstrations, and a labor exhibit, trolley tours, t-shirts, and a free demonstration on Shaw Boston, featuring Martin and Scott Clark, Jake and Taylor Art, and a free demonstration on Shaw Boston, featuring Martin and Scott Clark, Jake and Taylor Art, and a free demonstration on Shaw Boston, featuring Martin and Scott Clark, Jake and Taylor Art.

Wednesday 9/3

"CETAMOU-LA" Jose Davila's 2001 novel by Ivan Andrea music troupe a splash at this summer's Boston French Film Festival at the Museum of Fine Arts is bringing it back for several screenings. Action Jeanne Moreau stars as Andrea's lover and co-creator, the celebrated and often fiery author Marguerite Yourcenar. In French with English subtitles.

Tuesday 9/2

FREE "ALMOST TEN RUSSIAN" Julia Zingis returned to her native Russia and found cities playing catch-up with the rest of the world and villages locked in the past. Her black and white photographs capture a culture's present and peers into its past.

SUNDAY

Frederick Law Olmsted: Passages in the Life of an Unpackaged Man

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