

# 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 Franklin. 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 150th 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 Unpractical 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.

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 career 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 boathouse 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 Justine Liff, who told him some of the party guests planned to appear in Victorian garb.

"It's about kinship," Wright said.



The impersonator, Gerry Wright of Jamaica Plain...



GLOBE FILE PHOTO

... and the great landscape architect himself.

his typewriter or use e-mail — must decide what the future holds for him and his play. And once more, he notes a similarity between himself and his idol.

"Olmsted went through life and kept finding things that grabbed him," Wright said.

## 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 performance "Frederick Law Olmsted: Passages in the Life of an Impractical Man." Wright is known in all the cities of the American century.

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

Joseph Monti  
Author and

Any similarity between person living or dead is purely coincidental. The common disclaimer is far from true in the case of Joseph Monti's new play, "Frederick Law Olmsted: Passages in the Life of an Impractical Man." Wright is a natural in the one-man show, which he has performed at various venues in the area.

The JP Bulletin

August 28, 2003

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

included—questioned whether such an ambitious, yet barebones, production, would succeed. But it has indeed succeeded with well-outdressed performances. Wright's performance in "Frederick Law Olmsted: Passages in the Life of an Impractical Man" is a joy to watch. Wright's performance in "Frederick Law Olmsted: Passages in the Life of an Impractical Man" is a joy to watch.



**OTHER VIEWS**

In a brief feature but with a global eye, Wright's play is a gem. It's a play about a man who was a landscape architect and a conservationist. Wright's play is a gem.

**Calendar**

among the stars as World Wrestling Entertainment takes the ring. 7:30 p.m. Flu Center, Copley Street, Boston. \$20-\$45. 017-931-2000.

**KING RICHARD'S FAIR**

Walkers, fire eaters, swordsmen, jugglers, and more. All part of this art and craft fair. Live music, puppetry, and more. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Rte. 58, Carver, MA. 978-932-5500.

**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. This year's event includes a St. Road Race, power loom and spinning demonstrations, and a spinning demonstration. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Lawrence, MA. 978-686-1655.

**Tuesday 9/2**

**FREE "ALMOST TEN RUSSIA"**

Julia Zlotnik returned to her native Russia and found cities playing catch-up with the rest of the world. Her black and white photographs capture a culture's present and peers into its past. 7 p.m. Copley Center, Copley Street, Boston. 017-931-2000.

**Wednesday 9/3**

**"CET AMOUR-LA"**

Joseph Deyan's 2001 novel based on the autobiographical sketch at this summer's Boston French Arts Festival that the Museum of Fine Arts is bringing it back for several screenings. 7 p.m. Copley Center, Copley Street, Boston. 017-931-2000.

# BROOKLINE TAB

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2003

Vol. 25, No. 17 48 Pages

**Olmsted legacy celebrated at historic site**

By Debra Fickman

To celebrate the life and work of Frederick Law Olmsted, the national historic site on Walnut Street in Brookline will host a series of events on the centennial anniversary of his death this past weekend.

Olmsted, who is also referred to as the father of landscape architecture, moved to Brookline in 1863 and set up the first landscape architecture office in the city. He died in 1902.

Called "Franklin" (Olmsted designed the Boston Park system — now known as the Emerald Necklace) — as well as hundreds of other public and private landscapes from his modest office in Brookline. He lived on Walnut Street until his retirement in 1890.

To commemorate Olmsted's legacy, "Frederick Law Olmsted: Passages in the Life of an Impractical Man" will be performed on Sept. 28 at 7 p.m. at the historic site. Tickets are \$12. 017-931-2000.