

CHARLOTTE'S NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING TRADITION

by Dr. Thomas W. Hanchett

Three of the most important city planning firms in the United States helped shape Charlotte. They were the Olmsted Brothers, John Nolen, and Earle Draper. All worked in the city during the boom years of the 1910s and 1920s. They gave the city new ideals in urban design which are still followed today. In addition, Nolen and Draper took lessons learned in Charlotte's neighborhoods and applied them in hundreds of cities throughout the nation, giving Charlotte's early planning efforts special importance.

When Charlotte's original hundred acre tract was laid off in house lots in the 1770s the city fathers chose a gridiron street pattern.¹ A surveyor, either hired by the village or supplied by the colonial government, laid out the streets at right angles to each other. Many cities of the era were not planned at all, with streets growing up from trails and cowpaths running in every direction. The grid was the most popular alternative because it was orderly and easy to understand, and its straight lines meant that it could be created quickly and broken up into lots easily.

Many grid cities featured a central square or squares. These could occupy a block between streets, as in Savannah, or they could be at a central intersection with the open square carved out of the corners of the four surrounding blocks. This is what Charlotte had at Trade and Tryon Streets, with the courthouse sitting at the center of the intersection in the earliest decades.²

Charlotte's grid was unusual in one respect. Most surveyors aligned their plats with the points of the compass so that streets ran due east-west and due north-south. In Charlotte the layout followed the existing Indian trails, and streets ran at almost a forty-five degree angle to the compass points.

Charlotte's reliance on the grid continued throughout the nineteenth century. When Edward Dilworth Latta created his [Dilworth](#) suburb in 1892 he had the streets laid out in a grid roughly oriented to existing city streets. The first avenues of the [Belmont](#) neighborhood were in a similarly oriented grid as were those of suburban [Elizabeth](#) in 1897. Even when a piece of property was of such a shape or orientation that new streets could not be aligned with existing ones, developers insisted on straight parallel avenues. This was the case in Western Heights off West Trade Street in 1897 and in Piedmont Park straddling Central Avenue, circa 1900.

The better suburbs of this era featured a wide boulevard for grand homes and narrower side streets for the middle class. Elizabeth Avenue was the boulevard for Elizabeth, Central Avenue the boulevard for Piedmont Park. Dilworth's boulevard was originally projected as a four-sided loop, including Morehead Street, South Boulevard, East Boulevard, and a fourth street partially graded but never completed.

In the 1910s Charlotte's New South leaders, as part of their drive to make Charlotte a modern city, hired John Nolen, the Olmsted Brothers, and Earle Sumner Draper who turned the city forever from the grid pattern. The very idea of having a landscape architect/city planner design streets was unusual. In progressive Dilworth, Latta had hired Joseph Forsyth Johnston, a landscape architect from New York City, to create Latta Park and evidently also asked him for suggestions on the surrounding street pattern. Most areas, though, were laid out methodically by surveyors or civil engineers.³

Nolen, the Olmsteds, and Draper were part of a generation with a strong appreciation for nature. America's first National Parks were established in the era and the conservation movement blossomed, extending even to President Theodore Roosevelt (1901-09). Landscape architects sought to bring this consciousness to city planning.

No longer would streets be laid in a grid oblivious to hill and valley, necessitating expensive cuts and fills. Now roadways would follow the natural topography. Extensive use of trees and shrubbery enhanced the image of the suburbs as romantic semi-rural parks, separate from the crowded city. Streets were designed not to continue existing circulation patterns but to be separate from them. Access to a new suburb was limited to a small number of entrances.

The "suburban party idea was not new. One of the first, Llewellyn Park, was begun outside New York City before the Civil War, and Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., designed his famous "Riverside" development near Chicago in 1868.⁴ But it was not until the first years of the twentieth century that the idea came to be widely accepted. Roland Park in Baltimore, Maryland, designed by the Olmsteds in the late 1890s and still an elite neighborhood today, caught the attention of Charlotte's New South leaders and led them to hire landscape architects.⁵ Nolen and the Olmsteds brought the concept to Charlotte in 1911-12.

Key to the planners' new concepts was the generation's belief that the city should be split into its constituent elements, a very radical idea. Housing should be separate from business which in turn should be separate from industry. Black people and white people, who had often lived together on the same block in Charlotte and other southern cities throughout the nineteenth century, for the first time began to be segregated into distinct neighborhoods. In 1916 New York City adopted the country's

first zoning ordinance, based on a German model, which made separate land use zones part of the law. ⁶ Charlotte did not pass an effective zoning law until the 1950s, but it did informally adopt a system of covenants written into deeds to regulate land use. Deeds in Dilworth, [Myers Park](#), and some other New South neighborhoods specified that lots could only be owned by whites and used for residences, and often also set minimum building cost, setback lines, and so on.

John Nolen

John Nolen's first job in Charlotte was the design of Independence Park in June of 1905. ⁷Independence was the city's first public park, and it was also Nolen's first public commission after his graduation from Harvard University's School of Landscape Architecture. Nolen went on to become one of the nation's top city planners, designing more than 400 projects across the nation and helping to found the first city planning professional organization. ⁸

Nolen was part of a movement in the decades around the turn of the century that sought social reform in America's cities, a movement that included such well-known figures as social worker Jane Addams and muckraker Lincoln Steffens. Born in lower-middle-class circumstances in Philadelphia in 1869, Nolen graduated from the University of Pennsylvania's prestigious Wharton School majoring in economics and public administration. ⁹ He spent ten years as executive secretary of the American Society for the Extension of University Teaching, a "people's university" which brought college-level night classes to the urban working class.

By 1903, after visits to Europe's "Garden City" experiments, he became convinced that the new profession of city planning was more effective way for him to improve urban conditions. ¹⁰ The Garden City idea, begun in England in the 1890s, proposed medium-sized new towns surrounded by greenbelts. The new communities were to be carefully planned by professional designers to include the best features of both city and country, and to be self-sustaining with commercial and industrial areas as well as residences. No university in the United States yet offered a city planning degree, so Nolen enrolled in Harvard's School of Landscape Architecture and graduated in 1905 at age thirty-six. ¹¹

It is not known how Nolen came to be engaged by the Charlotte Park and Tree Commission to design Independence Park. The job proved quite fortuitous to Nolen's career. While he was in town a young real estate developer named George Stephens commissioned him to design the grounds of Stephens' own residence. ¹² Evidently the result greatly impressed Stephens, and he became Nolen's patron for a substantial number of projects all over North Carolina. ¹³ In 1909 Nolen drew plans for Stephens' Kanuga Lake resort colony Hendersonville, North Carolina, now a religious retreat for

the Episcopal Church. ¹⁴ In the early teens, possibly as a result of Stephens' influence, he planned Greensboro's country-club suburb of Irving Park in Guilford County near where Stephens had been born. ¹⁵ Nolen did the 1918 plan for the expansion of the campus of Stephens' alma mater, UNC Chapel Hill. ¹⁶ In the 1920s he prepared a city plan for Stephens' adoptive home town of Asheville, North Carolina, a document that received national attention as one of the first thorough small city plans in the Southeast. ¹⁷ Later projects included a new town development called Penderlea in Pender County, North Carolina, for the U. S. Farm Service Administration, and a western North Carolina regional plan undertaken in connection with Stephens' advocacy of the proposed Blue Ridge Parkway. ¹⁸

At the same time, John Nolen continued his activities in Charlotte. Between 1905 and 1907 he designed grounds for private residences of Stephens' partner F. C. Abbott, Chamber of Commerce leader Wade Harris, E. R. Russell, P. M. Brown, A. J. Crowell, W.B. Rodman, L.A. Dodsworth, R. A. Dunn, F.O. Hawley, and O. A. Robbins. ¹⁹ In April 1907 Nolen visited the city and gave a slide lecture on "Parks and Playgrounds" illustrated with stereoptican slides. ²⁰ That June, the Park and Tree Commission hired him once again, to provide designs for the area around the city Post Office, known as Vance Square, and for the old cemetery behind First Presbyterian Church, then known as Cemetery Square and now called Settlers Cemetery. ²¹

In 1911 John Nolen returned to Charlotte at George Stephens' behest, to work on his greatest project in the city, the suburb of Myers Park. ²² Stephens spared little expense, and gave Nolen free rein to plan a state-of-the-art "unified suburban design." Myers Park gave the city curving tree-lined avenues, grand boulevards with landscaped medians, and the beginnings of a system of greenway parks along creek banks. The results will be discussed in a later section of this report, but suffice it to say here that Myers Park has proved to be Charlotte's most lastingly successful suburb, and a model for similar developments across the South.

Nolen's final job in Charlotte was preparation of preliminary studies for what would have been the city's first master plan. The Charlotte Chamber of Commerce hired him in 1917 to gather and map data on existing land use, population densities, racial patterns, industrial location, transportation corridors, land values, water and sewer lines, and parks. ²³ The resulting Civic Survey is an extremely comprehensive and meticulous picture of this Southern city at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The Civic Survey was intended to lead to preparation of a full scale plan. Such a plan was vital to Charlotte's orderly growth; Charlotteans had given up the old grid city with its easy understandability and it was necessary now that some other form or organization be developed to tie together all the new suburbs. At the end of the Civic Survey field supervisor Earle Draper sketched an indication of what the plan might

look like. He extended Nolen's Independence Park and Edgehill Road Park into a city-wide network of greenways along stream beds. Boulevards radiated from the center of the city to carry commuters, and a belt road ringed the old urban core to provide easy cross-town travel.

The Chamber never appropriated the money to allow Nolen to turn his data into a master plan. Nolen watched sadly as potential greenways were cut up into residential backyards, and as expanding development made the possibility of new radial and belt roads more and more expensive. He wrote Chamber official Clarence Quester in 1924, "I think Charlotte is slipping so far as city planning goes. There are examples in the city of errors that are costly and more or less irremediable. Other errors will follow without a city plan."²⁴

Charlotte remained without a coherent development scheme throughout its early twentieth century boom years. No comprehensive plan was adopted until 1960.²⁵ Ironically, its proposals were very similar to Nolen and Draper's in concept. During the 1970s the city finally completed a belt road, dubbed "Charlotte 4", and in the 1980s is struggling to buy up floodplain greenways.

John Nolen's work in Charlotte and North Carolina in the 1900s through 1920s was only part of his growing national practice. From his start in Independence Park, Nolen went on to be one of the nation's busiest planners, with projects ranging from private estates to some of America's first regional plans. By the time he began Myers Park he had already had private commissions all over the East Coast from Bar Harbor, Maine, to Havana, Cuba.²⁶ In the teens and twenties he became sought after by municipalities. He delighted in drawing city plans to guide small Charlotte-sized places with great growth potential. His designs for such places as Wisconsin's capital city of Madison, and California's capital of Sacramento and port of San Diego, among many others, are important factors in the shape those cities retain to this day.

In addition to his planning work, Nolen was a major leader in the creation of a network of professional planning organizations. In 1917, just as he was completing Charlotte's Civic Survey, he helped found the American Institute of City Planners (later the American Institute of Planners).²⁷ He also participated in creation of the American Society of Planning Officials and the National Housing Association, and was the first American president of the International Federation of Housing and Town Planning.²⁸ The honors underscored the fact that Nolen was considered a leader of his profession. When he died in 1937 the *New York Times* praised him as an "internationally known architect and pioneer in modern city and regional planning."²⁹

Along with the Olmsted Brothers and a handful of other early twentieth century practitioners, John Nolen helped transform American city planning.³⁰ Frederick Law

Olmsted, Sr., had developed the principles of sensitive urban design in the nineteenth century, but it was Nolen's generation that created "city planning" as a full-fledged profession to carry out those principles, with its own educational background and professional organizations. John Nolen helped set up planning schools at major universities including Harvard and M.I.T. and his six books, dozens of articles, and thousands of speeches aided in "spreading the gospel" of city planning. By the end of his life, cities no longer saw planning as a rich man's luxury, but as an integral part of municipal growth, and many large places had their own planning departments. John Nolen's far-ranging impact as a city planning pioneer makes his early Charlotte work of special interest to students of urban development.

The Olmsted Brothers

George Stephens and developer Edward Dilworth Latta were fierce business rivals. When Latta saw the publicity Stephens received for hiring Nolen, he determined to secure a planning firm of similar stature for the extension of Dilworth.³¹ On a trip north in February, 1911, Latta met with the developer of Baltimore's Roland Park and asked him to speak with the Olmsted Brothers about the possibility of working in Charlotte.³² A few months later Latta proudly announced to the Charlotte newspapers that he had hired the famous Olmsted firm to lay out the new streets of Dilworth.³³

The Olmsteds are America's most well-known name in landscape architecture and city planning. The brothers' father, Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., had practically invented both professions beginning with his design for Central Park in New York City in the 1850s. He went on to create park systems in almost every major U. S. city from Boston to San Francisco. One of his last commissions was in North Carolina, the immense grounds of George Vanderbilt's Biltmore estate near Asheville.³⁴

The Olmsted brothers, John Charles and Frederick Law, Jr., took over the firm in the decade before their father's death in 1903.³⁵ They had not only the famous name but they had their father's talent. Their commissions included the White House grounds, city park systems from Washington, DC, to Seattle, and hundreds of smaller projects including the west campus plan of Duke University in Durham, North Carolina.³⁶ Because the Olmsteds were already an established firm, the Dilworth design probably had less impact on their later work than Nolen's Charlotte projects had on his subsequent output, though the basic idea of the Dilworth street layout does appear to be repeated in the Olmsteds' design of Forest Hills Gardens done at about the same time in Queens, New York.³⁷

Extensive letters and drawings concerning the Dilworth plan still exist in the Olmsted collections at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, and at the Olmsted

National Historic Site in Brookline, Massachusetts. They give a good picture of the process of suburban planning in this era.

First the Olmsted firm directed Latta to hire local engineers to make a topographic survey of the land to be developed. Charlotte civil engineers Blair and Drane produced a large map meticulously showing not only hills, valleys, existing streets, pathways and buildings, but even the location of every tree coded with its species and size. Latta's son, E. D. Latta, Jr., then traveled to the firm's Boston office. There he met with Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., and Perceival Gallagher, one of the firm's top designers and later a partner.

The Lattas were at first wary that the Olmsted Brothers might be only interested in designing for the very wealthy. Olmsted assured them, however, that the firm was happy to work with "what the local real estate market demands . . . that there might be a variety of priced lots for instance, and that only a portion of the area would be actually developed at first. It is essential, however," Olmsted went on, "that the entire tract be considered in a general way, that the lines of essential thoroughfares joining the street system of the city be decided upon, and some general principles of development be decided." ³⁸

Over the next six months Perceival Gallagher and the staff drew up their proposals with periodic suggestions from Olmsted. Gallagher visited Charlotte at least three times, accompanied by Olmsted on the second visit. ³⁹ By early 1912 the overall street plan was complete. ⁴⁰ The firm in addition drew suggested landscaping for a typical block, cross-sections through typical streets specifying sidewalks, tree, and utility location. They also drew a design for a "Garden Courts" townhouse development, never built, on the north side of Morehead Street.

All of these services were included in the firm's charge of five dollars per acre. This was a fairly low fee according to fellow planner Earle Draper, probably because the Olmsteds were not asked to provide any of the engineering work to implement their vision. ⁴¹ The total cost of the Dilworth plan was \$2,000. ⁴²

Over half of the design was carried out just as the Olmsted Brothers specified. Dilworth Road and all the streets south of Latta Park, including Dilworth Road East and West, Charlotte Drive, and Ideal Way, were evidently constructed first and followed the Olmsted plan. By the time Berkeley, Lexington and other streets north of the park were developed, however, the Olmsted plan had been discarded.

Though the Olmsted street pattern was followed in only part of the enlargement of Dilworth, their concepts carry through the entire area. Winding avenues follow the natural topography, not the grid of the adjoining older area, and they are lined with

trees to create a park-like setting. Dilworth is important to Charlotte not only because a nationally famous design firm created a beautiful neighborhood for residents to enjoy, but also because the Olmsted's work helped set the standard for suburban development all over the city. To the present day most developers strive for curving streets and tree shaded lots, the radical new ideas brought to Charlotte by the Olmsted's, Nolen and their New South backers.

Earle Sumner Draper

Earle Draper arrived in Charlotte in October, 1915, as field supervisor for John Nolen's Myers Park.⁴³ He had graduated that spring from the landscape architecture program at what is now the University of Massachusetts with a passion for what he called "Civic Art" -- city planning.⁴⁴ He won a position in Nolen's office upon graduation and after only a few weeks of internship under chief designer Philip Foster, Nolen offered him the chance to move south.

Draper's first tasks in Charlotte included creating landscape designs for lot buyers in Myers Park and spending one week per month supervising the construction of the industrial center of Kingsport, Tennessee, a Nolen-designed new town.⁴⁵ In 1917 with Nolen's blessing he established his own firm, by some accounts the first professionally trained resident landscape architect to establish practice in the southeastern United States.⁴⁶

Between 1917 and 1933 Draper's firm was extremely busy, becoming, he remembers, one of the five largest in the U. S.⁴⁷ Work continued in Charlotte on private estates and revisions to the general design of Myers Park. At least a third of the street layout in Myers Park is Draper's. In addition Draper laid out other new developments around the city, including one for developer Lex Marsh on Old Pineville Road, and a design for the Rosemont section of Elizabeth that was apparently not executed.⁴⁸ Draper's most notable Charlotte suburb was [Eastover](#), the 1920s' most prestigious development.⁴⁹

Through his schooling and his work with Nolen, Draper shared the new ideals of suburban development. "I was of the old school, the Olmsted school," he recalled in 1982, "that the best and finest use of the land is the most important thing and that all developments have to be keyed to the land itself. . . I tried to analyze. . . what the future would be 40 or 50 years away, the growth pattern and so forth, so as to make sure that they fitted into the environment that was developing. . . That wasn't done in a lot of places."⁵⁰ Like many of his contemporaries, Draper sought to "limit access to heavily traveled highways as much as possible" in his developments, and he believed in the "idea of adjusting to the topography, and very little of that had been done in town planning up to that time."⁵¹

Despite their similarity of intent, it is possible to distinguish Draper's work from Nolen's in Myers Park. Nolen favored tightly winding streets to heighten visual interest, while Draper used grander curves. "I didn't feel that you wanted to introduce a curve. . .just for the sake of putting a curve in," he says, "you had to have some reason to. The topography or direction or relationship. . .to other areas." ⁵² In Myers Park the winding curves of Queens Road in the northern, older section of the neighborhood are Nolen's, while the sweeping radius of Queens Road West at the south end of the neighborhood is Draper's, laid out in 1927-30. ⁵³ Cherokee and Colville roads, the main streets of Draper's Eastover, have similar majestic curves.

From 1917 to 1933 Earle Draper's work extended all over the South. In the early twenties the firm had twenty to thirty employees in Charlotte, with branch offices in Atlanta, Washington, DC, and New York City. ⁵⁴ Draper planned over a hundred suburbs from Alabama to Virginia, as developers from all over the region visited Myers Park and determined to create something like it at home. ⁵⁵ Among his projects in North Carolina were Raleigh's Hayes-Barton neighborhood, Durham's Forest Hills, Highpoint's Emorywood, and the resort development at Lake Lure. ⁵⁶ Many of Draper's elite neighborhoods included golf courses, and he claims to have introduced to the South the notion of weaving country-club golf fairways among suburban streets with his design of Farmington outside Charlottesville, Virginia. ⁵⁷ In addition, he did dozens of parks, cemeteries, private estates and college campuses including parts of Winthrop and Davidson colleges near Charlotte. ⁵⁸

At least as important as Earle Draper's contribution to suburban planning in the Southeast were his activities in mill village design. The decade following the outbreak of the First World War was a boom period for the textile industry and tax laws encouraged companies to channel some profits into worker housing.

Mill villages had always been part of textile production in the region because of the number of rural workers the plants drew. Early villages consisted of straight streets lined with crude houses. Draper helped change this. ⁵⁹ He worked hard to convince owners that modern conveniences, including electricity and plumbing, were essential. He pushed for sidewalks in the villages, pointing out that they would keep workers from tracking dirt into the plants. ⁶⁰

Above all, Draper insisted on the importance of planning. Beginning with his design for Spindale, North Carolina, for Charlotte's Kenneth Tanner in 1917, Draper brought many of the era's suburban concepts to mill village design. ⁶¹ Draper's villages were conceived as complete communities, with curving tree-lined streets, plentiful parks, churches, and often a community center. He did nearly one hundred and fifty village and village extension designs, including the Arkay mills in Gastonia, the Erlanger mills near Salisbury, the Pacolett mills based in Spartanburg and the Kendall mills

based in Camden.⁶² Probably his finest and most comprehensive design was the new mill town of Chocopee, Georgia. When Harvard's Arthur Comey toured U. S. new town experiments for a government report in 1939, he praised Draper's work and wrote that "Chocopee is the best. . .of the mill villages visited in the South."⁶³ Even before the Comey report, Draper was recognized as a leader in industrial new-town design. In 1933 his reputation resulted in his being named head of planning for the new Tennessee Valley Authority.⁶⁴ Draper was excited by the prospect of directing what was to be the country's largest planning effort. He remembers, "I thought it over and just said okay, that's the most interesting planning project ever to come up in the history of the United States . . .I was the first or second man on at TVA."⁶⁵ He put his private practice in the hands of assistant Harold Burdsley and left Charlotte for good.

At TVA Earle Draper directed land-use planning, pushed for development of recreational areas along the new hydroelectric lakes, and supervised the creation of the new town of Norris, Tennessee. He brought with him ideas he had begun to develop in private practice in Charlotte. A cornerstone of Draper's planning philosophy was the need for land-use controls, something he had had long experience with dating back to Myers Park's restrictive deed covenants. "Prior to TVA all federal dams. . .acquired land. . . only to mean high water. . .," he later wrote.

From my experience in the South from 1915 on I realized the importance of controlled land use. I was aided by the men in my division -- we got the board to accept takings of one-half to one mile of land above reservoir water level, which was the beginning of TVA's famous shoreline recreation development. Without that, much of TVA's beneficial by product activity would have been lost."⁶⁶

By 1940 much of the TVA planning work was done and Draper accepted a high level post with the recently established Federal Housing Administration. He was hired to broaden the FHA from its established role as a mortgage insurer into a backer of new town development. World War Two, however, forced abandonment of this goal and Draper took responsibility for war housing all over the United States. In 1945 President Truman designated him Acting Commissioner of the FHA, the agency's highest post.⁶⁷

As part of his government work, Draper was occasionally "loaned out" as a consultant on specific planning projects. One such was the Baltimore-Washington-Annapolis regional plan in 1937.⁶⁸ Under Draper's direction, the plan proposed a system of beltway freeways around Baltimore and Washington, recalling the parkway loop he had first sketched around Charlotte back in 1917. According to Draper, today's interstate highway system in that area largely follows the 1937 proposal.⁶⁹

At the close of the war Draper resigned from the FHA and became a full-time consultant. He did little physical planning in this fourth phase of his career, instead helping builders and developers guide projects through the Federal bureaucracy.⁷⁰ In 1965 he retired after fifty years in the profession and now lives in Vero Beach, Florida.⁷¹

Other Landscape Architects

Nolen, Draper and the Olmsteds were not the only landscape architects active in Charlotte in the early years of the twentieth century. Leigh Colyer, who set up practice here in the late 1890s, was probably the first Charlottean to call himself a landscape architect, and may have been one of the earliest practitioners in the South. Colyer was born and schooled in England, then moved to the United States with his parents, residing briefly in Asheville and Statesville, North Carolina, before coming to Charlotte. City directories listed him as "landscape architect", indicating this interest was not a sideline of another profession, from the turn of the century until shortly before his death in 1953.⁷²

His son, Leigh Colyer, Jr., still lives in Charlotte and remembers that his father designed the street pattern for Chatham Estates, the subdivision that is the heart of today's [Plaza-Midwood](#) neighborhood.⁷³ Colyer created not only The Plaza and parallel streets but also landscaped the grounds of the [Van Landingham estate](#), the grandest early home.⁷⁴ Colyer also planned much of Charlotte's Elmwood Cemetery, created the circular rose garden in Independence Park, and landscaped homes for the prominent Eford family.⁷⁵ Commissions elsewhere in North Carolina included the grounds of the N. C. State Sanatorium, estates for the Lineberger family at Belmont, mill villages in Lincolnton, and the Belvedere suburb of Shelby.⁷⁶ Additional research will undoubtedly turn up more major commissions from the long career of Leigh Colyer, one of North Carolina's pioneers in the landscape architecture field.

A few less active landscape architects practiced in Charlotte in the first half of the century and may have taken occasional neighborhood planning assignments. Early national membership rosters of the American Society of Landscape Architects, the field's main professional organization, list Clarence Leemon and Harold Bursley as members in Charlotte.⁷⁷ Both were top designers in Earle Draper's office and later worked on their own. Bursley took over the Draper firm in 1933 and headed it until his death a few years later.⁷⁸ He is probably best known for his collaboration with fellow planner Hale J. Walker on the design of Greenbelt, Maryland, one of a handful of Garden City new towns created by the United States Farm Security Administration during the Depression.⁷⁹

A 1937 membership list also includes a Mrs. S. Porter Graves, Jr., 100 Ardsley Road, Charlotte, but nothing is known of her work.⁸⁰ Charlotte did have at least one active woman landscape architect in the period, though. Helen Hodge began in Draper's office and is remembered by Charlotteans today for her design of the Arhelger Memorial in Independence Park.⁸¹

The Civil Engineers

While landscape architects Nolen, the Olmsteds and Draper set the trend of Charlotte planning in the twentieth century, many developments were still planned by civil engineers. One of the most active firms, beginning in the 18th century and continuing into the present, was run by the Spratt family, descendants of Charlotte's first settler. Their competitor in the late 19th and early 20th century was the firm of Blair and Drane. Earle Draper remembers Brent Drane occasionally laying out small subdivisions, and it is likely that the Spratts did as well.⁸²

Perhaps the most prolific subdivision designer among Charlotte's civil engineers was Alse V. Blankenship. A graduate of the engineering program at what is now Auburn University near Montgomery, Alabama, he set up his own business in 1935 after an internship with Charlotte engineer Wilbur Smith. From the late 1930s until the 1960s he headed Charlotte's largest engineering firm, with over a hundred employees regularly on the payroll.⁸³

Blankenship's first job was for E. C. Griffith, the Charlotte developer who took over Myers Park from the Stephens Company.⁸⁴ In Myers Park Blankenship laid out Kings Drive, Maryland, Sterling, Portland, Hampton, Chilton, and part of Queens Road East.⁸⁵ He also designed the street systems of Charlotte's Lansdowne, Myers Park Manor, Tryon Hills, Mountainbrook and Cotswold neighborhoods.⁸⁶ He created all subdivisions in the county owned by C. D. Spangler and George Goodyear and did work for the region's two largest post-WWII developers, John Crosland and Charles Erwin, including what is believed to be Erwin's earliest project, Smallwood Homes.⁸⁷

Blankenship's widow remembers him personally designing the street layouts for his projects, rather than relying on a landscape architect. Because he began practice in the mid-thirties, he never met Nolen, the Olmsteds or Draper in Charlotte. But the curving streets of his designs testify to the impact of those men both on professionals like Blankenship and especially on the Charlotte development community.

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Notes

¹ Bailey T. Groome, *Mecklenburg in the Revolution, 1740-1783* (Charlotte: Sons of the American Revolution, 1931), p. 15.

² *Ibid.*, p. 16. *Beasley and Emerson's Charlotte Directory for 1875-76*. . . (Charlotte?: Beasley and Emerson, publishers, Observer Job Office, printer, 1876?), p. 132.

³ Dan L. Morrill and Ruth Little-Stokes, *Architectural Analysis: Dilworth: Charlotte's Initial Streetcar Suburb* (Charlotte: Dilworth Community Association, 1978), section 2, pp. 7-8.

⁴ Robert A. M. Stern, ed., *The Anglo American Suburb*, in the *Architectural Design Profile* series (London: Architectural Design, 1981), pp. 10, 21, 24.

⁵ Local papers compared Charlotte's Myers Park to Roland Park, and Charlottean E. D. Latta visited Roland Park and met with its developer before deciding to hire the Olmsted Brothers. For more on the suburb see Stern, p. 39.

⁶ Mel Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 152-161.

⁷ Dan L. Morrill, "[Independence Park: Survey and Research Report](#)" (Charlotte: Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1980).

⁸ John L. Hancock, *John Nolen: a Bibliographical Record of Achievement* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, Program in Urban and Regional Studies, 1976), pp. 13-17. See also Scott, p. 738.

⁹ Hancock, *John Nolen: a Bibliographical Record*. . ., pp. 15-16. John L. Hancock, "John Nolen and the American City Planning Movement: A History of Cultural Change and Community Response, 1900-1940" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1964), pp. 1-20.

¹⁰ Hancock, *John Nolen: a Bibliographical Record*. . ., p. 16. Hancock, "John Nolen and the American City Planning Movement. . .", pp. 21-37.

¹¹ Hancock, *John Nolen: a Bibliographical Record*..., p. 16.

¹² "Draft of Preliminary Finding Guide: Papers of John Nolen, Sr., 1869-1937," collection 2903, Cornell University Department of Manuscripts and Archives, Ithaca, New York. The "Finding Guide" includes a copy of Nolen's "job book" listing all his projects chronologically.

¹³ Hancock, "John Nolen and the American City Planning Movement. . .," p. 42.

¹⁴ *Charlotte Observer*, December 15, 1943.

¹⁵ Stephens' connection with the Greensboro project needs to be explored. Plans for the street layout and gates are in the Nolen collection at Cornell. It has not been possible to determine exactly when Nolen created the streetplan. A draft essay by Ray Manieri of Greensboro, "From City Beautiful to City Useful: the Development of Civic Improvement Activities in Greensboro, North Carolina, 1900-1923," April, 1982, places the design in 1911, based on an undated promotional booklet. One large scale street plan in the Nolen papers is undated, but the rest of the documents were produced in 1915 and 1916.

¹⁶ Hancock, *John Nolen: a Bibliographical Record*. . ., p. 20.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 30, 64.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 66.

¹⁹ "Draft of Preliminary Finding Guide. . .," job list.

²⁰ *Charlotte Daily Observer*, April 20, 1907.

²¹ "Draft of Preliminary Finding Guide. . .," job list. According to Kathleen Jacklin at the Cornell archives, Nolen's office discarded all material from these earliest designs.

²² *Ibid.*

- ²³ John Nolen, "Civic Survey, Charlotte, North Carolina: Report to the Chamber of Commerce" (Cambridge, Massachusetts: typescript, 1917). The only known surviving copy of this document is in John Nolen's papers at Cornell.
- ²⁴ John Nolen, letter to Clarence Kuester, March, 1924, in Nolen collection at Cornell.
- ²⁵ Charlotte Mecklenburg Planning Commission, "The Charlotte Mecklenburg Comprehensive Plan (draft)" (Charlotte: Charlotte Mecklenburg Planning Commission, 1973), p. 4.
- ²⁶ "Draft of Preliminary Finding Guide. . .," job list.
- ²⁷ Scott, p. 164.
- ²⁸ Hancock, *John Nolen: a Bibliographical Record*. . ., p. 16.
- ²⁹ *New York Times*, February 19, 1937.
- ³⁰ Hancock, *John Nolen: a Bibliographical Record*. . ., pp. 13, 15-17.
- ³¹ Earle Sumner Draper, .. interview with Thomas W. Hanchett, Vero Beach, Florida, August 1982.
- ³² E. H. Bouton, letter to F. L. Olmsted, Jr., February 13, 1911. Letter at the Library of Congress in the "Olmsted Associates, Inc." collection, container B287, job file 5109.
- ³³ *Charlotte Evening Chronicle*, July 1, 1911. It was the accidental discovery of this article by Dr. Dan L. Morrill that led to the recent rediscovery of the Olmsteds' role in the creation of Dilworth.
- ³⁴ Laura Wood Roper, *F. L. O.: a Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1973), pp. 414-419, 540.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 468-474.
- ³⁶ *Architecture and Design* 3:8 (August 1939). Entire issue is devoted to the Olmsted Brothers' work.
- ³⁷ *Stern*, pp. 32-34.
- ³⁸ F. L. Olmsted, Jr., to E. D. Latta, April 24, 1911. Library of Congress collection.
- ³⁹ Memo on conference with E. D. Latta, Jr., F. L. Olmsted, Jr., and P. Gallagher at Brookline, June 20, 1911. Library of Congress collection. *Charlotte Evening Chronicle*, February 1, 1912, reported that one of the Olmsted Brothers would be arriving in two or three days.
- ⁴⁰ Olmsted Brothers, "Dilworth: Preliminary Plan for Subdivision," January, 1912, job 5109 plan 7, in the collection of the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, Brookline, Massachusetts.
- ⁴¹ Draper, interview with Hanchett, August 1982.
- ⁴² "Memorandum Statement" from the Olmsted office to E. D. Latta, Jr., December 31, (1913?). Library of Congress collection.
- ⁴³ Earle Sumner Draper, interview with Earle Sumner Draper, Jr., on behalf of the Myers Park Homeowners Association, Vero Beach, Florida, June 1971. Transcript in the archives of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina.
- ⁴⁴ Earle Sumner Draper, letter to John Nolen, 1915, in the Nolen collection at Cornell, box 73.
- ⁴⁵ Draper, interview with Hanchett, August 1982.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.* and Kay Haire Huggins, "Town Planning in the New South: the Work of Earle Sumner Draper, 1915-1933." (unpublished paper presented to the Citadel conference on the New South, Charleston, South Carolina, 1978), p. 1.
- ⁴⁷ Draper, interview with Hanchett, August 1982.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁹ Draper, interview with Draper, Jr., June 1971.
- ⁵⁰ Draper, interview with Hanchett, August 1982.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵² *Ibid.*
- ⁵³ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office, map book 3, page 317.
- ⁵⁴ Draper, interview with Hanchett, August 1982.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.* and *Who's Who in America* 16 (Chicago: A. N. Marquis Co., 1930-31), p. 712.
- ⁵⁷ Draper, interview with Hanchett, August 1982.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.* Draper, interview with Draper, Jr., June 1971. Huggins, "Town Planning in the New South. . .", *passim*.

- ⁵⁹ Brent Glass, "Southern Mill Hills: Design in a Public Place," in Doug Swaim, ea., *Carolina Dwelling: Towards Preservation of Place*. . . (Raleigh: North Carolina State University, 1978), p. 124. Kay Haire Huggins, "Town Planning in North Carolina, 1704-1920," *North Carolina Architect* 20 (November/December 1973), p. 19.
- ⁶⁰ Draper, interview with Hanchett, August 1982.
- ⁶¹ Ibid.
- ⁶² Ibid. For other examples of Draper's mill village planning see Huggins, "Town Planning in the New South. . .".
- ⁶³ Arthur C. Comey and Max S. Wehrly, "Planning Communities," in *Urban Planning and Land Policies: Volume Two of the Supplementary Report of the Urbanism Committee to the National Resources Committee* (Washington, DC: U.S.G.P.O., 1939), p. 24.
- ⁶⁴ Earle Sumner Draper, interview with Charles W. Crawford, Director of the Oral History Research Office at Memphis State University, Vero Beach, Florida, December 1969.
- ⁶⁵ Draper, interview with Hanchett, August 1982.
- ⁶⁶ Earle Sumner Draper letter to R. Walter Creese, July 19, 1969. In the Earle Sumner Draper papers, collection 2745, Cornell University Department of Manuscripts and Archives, Ithaca, New York.
- ⁶⁷ Harry S. Truman, letter to Earle Sumner Draper, June 29, 1945. Carbon copy in the Draper papers at Cornell.
- ⁶⁸ Draper, interview with Hanchett, August 1982.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid. Huggins, "Town Planning in the New South. . .", p. 2.
- ⁷¹ Draper, interview with Hanchett, August 1982.
- ⁷² *Charlotte Observer*, August 14, 1953, p. 24B.
- ⁷³ Leigh Colyer, Jr., telephone interview with Thomas W. Hanchett, August 1982.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid. Dan L. Morrill, Jack O. Boyte, and Thomas W. Hanchett, "The Van Landingham Estate: National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form," 1982. On file at the Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.
- ⁷⁵ Colyer, Jr., interview with Hanchett, August 1982.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid. Tim and Genevieve Keller, conducting an architectural inventory of Shelby, North Carolina, for the Division of Archives and History, have found a handsomely drawn plan of Belvedere signed by Colyer in the Washington County Register of Deeds Office.
- ⁷⁷ American Society of Landscape Architects, yearly membership lists. In the collection of the Harvard University architecture library.
- ⁷⁸ Draper, interview with Hanchett, August 1982.
- ⁷⁹ Comey and Wehrly, p. 75.
- ⁸⁰ American Society of Landscape Architects, membership list for 1937.
- ⁸¹ Dan L. Morrill, "[Independence Park: Survey and Research Report](#)" (Charlotte: Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1980).
- ⁸² Earle Sumner Draper, interview with Earle Sumner Draper, Jr., based on questions written by Thomas W. Hanchett, Vero Beach, Florida, March 1982.
- ⁸³ Mrs. A. V. Blankenship, interview with Thomas W. Hanchett, Charlotte, North Carolina, June 1982.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid. Plat maps filed for Myers Park from 1935 onward at the Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office list Blankenship as the project's Civil Engineer.
- ⁸⁶ Mrs. Blankenship, interview with Hanchett, June 1982.
- ⁸⁷ Ibid.