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From Rose Gardens to Watersheds: A Survey of Ecological Designs by the Olmsted Brothers in Southern California

Writing from the Biltmore grounds during the last weeks of his own practice, Frederick Law Olmsted shared his vision with his son Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., advising that the future of their firm would be in developing a new and original landscape style that would contend with the problems of the arid West (Olmsted 1895; Beveridge 1995). While considerable research has been done on Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., this study adds to a little researched area: that of his sons' firm, the Olmsted Brothers, and their designs in Southern California.

This paper is part of on-going new scholarship looking to the built and un-built designs of the Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture, surveying landscapes at a variety of scales developed by the firm from 1900 - 1930. Their progressive ideas from 100 years ago provide modern models for landscape design that look to ecological process and senses of place as the foundation of design. The firm's design approach and regional expression is revealed through early recommendations for urban layout of Catalina Island, to their un-built design of Balboa Park, to urban and residential design in Los Angeles County (Streatfield 1994, O'Hara 2011). Scholarship focuses on the letters, drawings and photographs from the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site collection in Brookline, Massachusetts and the Library of Congress.

References:

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O'Hara, C. (2011). The Panama-California Exposition, San Diego, 1915: The Olmsted Brothers' Ecological Approach to Developing a new Park Typology for the arid West. *Journal for the Society of Architectural Historians*, 70, (1).

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Sites:

- *Catalina Island*
- *Leimert Park*
- *LA Residential Designs*
- *LA Highway Design*
- *PV Residential Designs*

- *Rancho los Alamitos*
- *Torrance*
- *Palos Verdes*
- *LA River*

--Associate Professor Christine Edstrom O'Hara