

Unbounded Practices: Women in the Public Landscape

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abstract:

Far from being a handful of wealthy women involved in garden design for a few wealthy friends and peers, explorations of landscape architecture's history in the United States reveal a significant presence of women as practitioners, clients, writers, and critics. As the both volumes of *Pioneers* illustrate, during the profession's formative years in the early twentieth century, women actively engaged in the discipline through practices addressing a broad range of project types. Women were featured in professional exhibits, they taught in landscape education programs at prestigious universities, their work was published in professional journals, and they participated in the professional organizations at both local and national levels. Designs by Mary Parson Cunningham, Rose Greeley, and Isabella Pendleton were featured in popular magazines. Martha Brookes Hutcheson, Ellen Biddle Shipman, Ruth Bramley Dean, and Mary Rutherford Jay were frequently invited to lecture to garden and art clubs, civic improvement organizations and professional associations. Katherine D. Jones, Mabel Keyes Babcock, Florence Robinson, and Elizabeth May McAdams taught design, site planning, city planning, and horticulture in programs at Columbia University, the University of California, Berkeley, Wellesley, and the University of Illinois, among others. Nonetheless, the assumption has held that these women designed a few gardens and that is all.

In fact, the public practices of these women ranged from university campuses to city parks to urban housing projects and highway systems. Marian Cruger Coffin designed the campuses of the University of Delaware; Elizabeth Lord and Edith Schryver (who together comprised the respected firm of Lord & Schryver) were hired by the city of Salem, Oregon to design parks and public spaces; Maud Sargent and Elizabeth Bullard worked for Robert Moses in New York City and for the state of New York; Iris Ashwell worked for the Federal Public Housing Authority; Marjorie Sewell Cautley designed and supervised the construction of ten New Hampshire state parks; Ruth Shelhorn was a landscape architect for Walt Disney's Disneyland. Many times, public sites present the work of a number of women practitioners, such as when the New York Botanical Garden engaged Beatrix Farrand and Marian Cruger Coffin. This talk begins to describe the variety and depth of the work and the role of women in shaping the profession through their work in the public landscape.

Retelling the stories of these early women in landscape architecture brings a deeper perspective to the profession and to the development of the American landscape. We have the opportunity to recognize how movements such as sustainable design draw on the precedent setting work of H.W.S. Cleveland, Wilhelm Miller, Ruth Dean, Jens Jensen, Elsa Rehmann, and Marjorie Cautley. My hope is that this research might inspire a more thoughtful reflection on our place in the American Landscape, helping us understand what has been lost, what has been gained, and what might be our collective future.