



NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION *for*
OLMSTED
PARKS

Memorial Park Association, Jacksonville, Florida

By Alida Silverman, NAOP Board Member

The Memorial Park Associationⁱ was founded in 1986 to protect and preserve Memorial Park on the St. John's River in Jacksonville Florida. This park was developed on land set aside in 1919 to commemorate the 1200 Floridians who lost their lives in World War I. It was designed by the Olmsted Brothers firm under the supervision of James Frederick Dawson, beginning in 1922. Initially contacted by Mrs. Arthur G. Cummer, representing the Jacksonville Citizens Memorial Committee, the firm shaped this riverfront area into a simple but richly planted park space, highlighted by a large bronze allegorical sculpture by nationally recognized local artist Charles Adrian Pillars. The park was dedicated in 1924. The Olmsted firm would continue to work with the Cummer family on several other projects, one of which was for the grounds of their private residence, now the Cummer Museum.

In the 60 years following its creation, Memorial Park suffered from decline and disrepair. The Memorial Park Association was formed in 1986 spurred on by Anne Wright Freeman (see note below) and other volunteers, to assure the park's continued viability. A recent major achievement of the Association is a master plan to provide the framework for needed future improvements. Adopted by the board in 2013, the master plan contains the history of the park, the Olmsted plans with an analysis of the design intent represented by those plans, as well as a set of recommendations. The first phase of implementation focuses on conservation of the iconic Pillars' sculpture "Life;" the on the restoration of a non-functioning fountain, and on drainage and irrigation improvements in the park. The cost of these initial improvements is \$400,000.00.

Memorial Park is one of 400 parks in Jacksonville, a city the size of Rhode Island, but the only one with associations to the Olmsted firm. The Memorial Park Association has been energetic in their advocacy and outreach activities to the park's neighbors and local businesses, promoting the importance of the park's Olmsted design heritage. To emphasize its national significance, the Association is seeking a separate National Register designation for the park, now currently listed as a contributing element in a Historic District.

A capital campaign for full implementation of the Master Plan is planned for the near future. Visit www.memparkjax.org for more information about Memorial Park, the Association and their master plan.

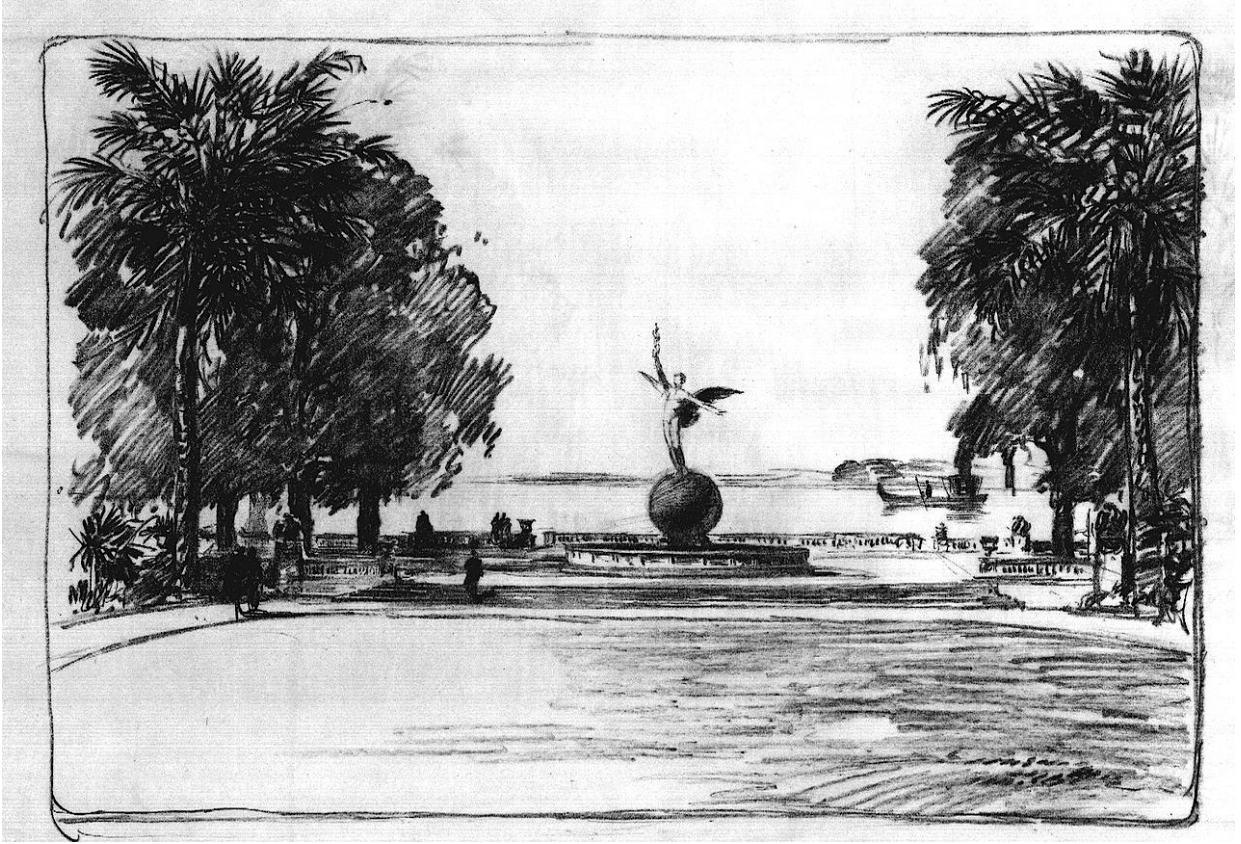


Illustration 1: Job 5151, Memorial Park Sketch, 1922: Courtesy of NPS, Frederick Law Olmsted National Site, Brookline, MA.

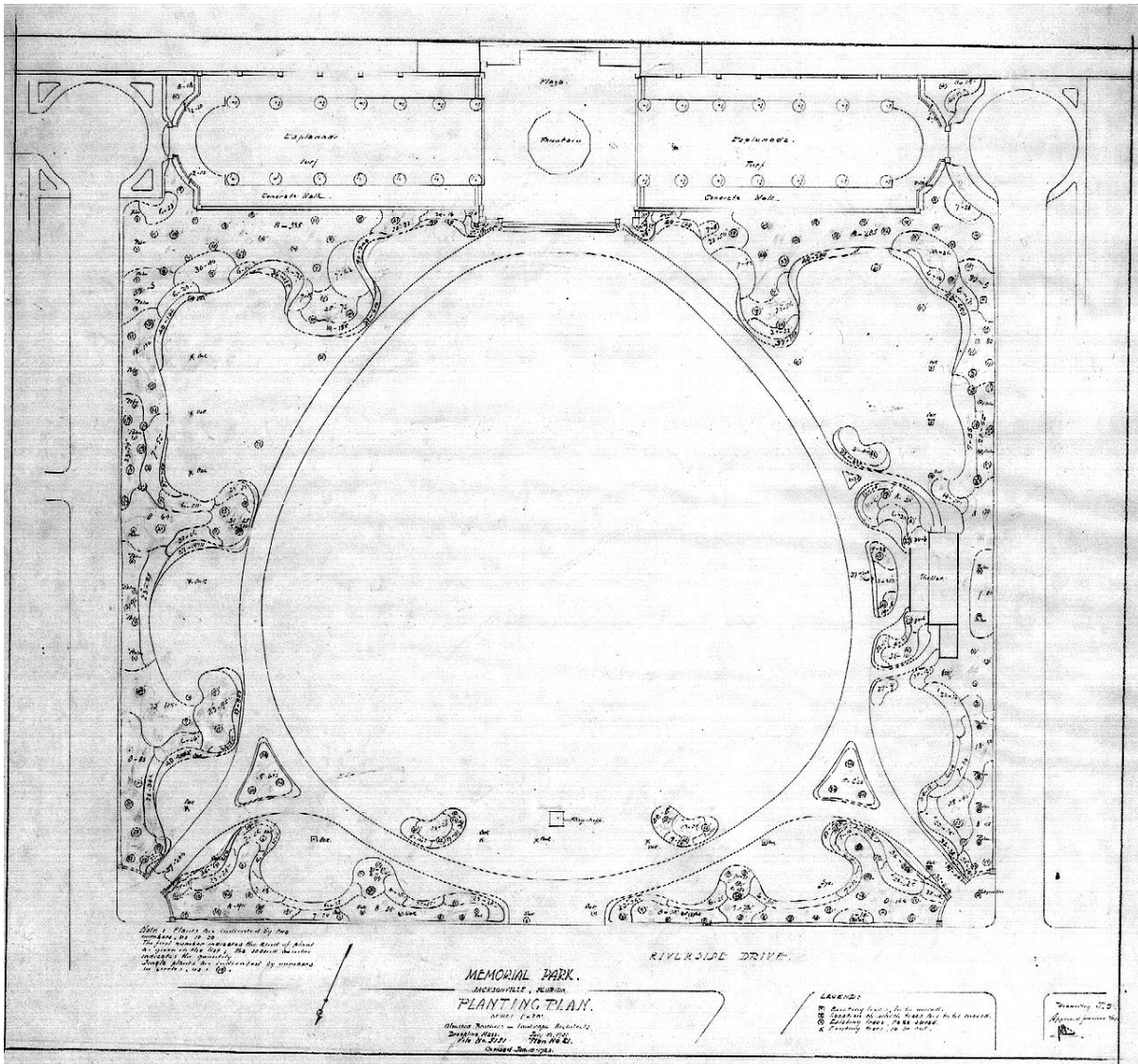


Illustration 2: Job 5151, Memorial Park Plan, 1922; Courtesy of NPS Frederick Law Olmsted Historical Site, Brookline MA.

ⁱ Note: In 1987, shortly after forming the Memorial Park Association, Anne Wright Freeman contacted the NAOP office, asking for information and including a membership donation. Several other letters from her were found among the NAOP files. Having played in Memorial Park as a child, Mrs. Freeman was dismayed by its decline and became one of its champions, insisting on respect for the 1922 Olmsted plan. She was a strong force for preservation until her death earlier this year at age 95