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# **GRANT PARK MASTER PLAN**

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**CITY OF ATLANTA**  
**Department of Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs**  
**March, 1999**

# **CITY OF ATLANTA**



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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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### **Master Plan Prepared by:**

**Dr. Charles E. Beveridge**

**The Jaeger Company**

**Hispanic Engineers Architects Consultants, Inc.**

**Neil Engineering Associates**

**New South Associates**

**R & D Testing & Drilling, Inc.**

**Rust Environment & Infrastructure**

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**Grant Park Advisory Committee**

**Grant Park Neighborhood Association**

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# **Grant Park Master Plan**

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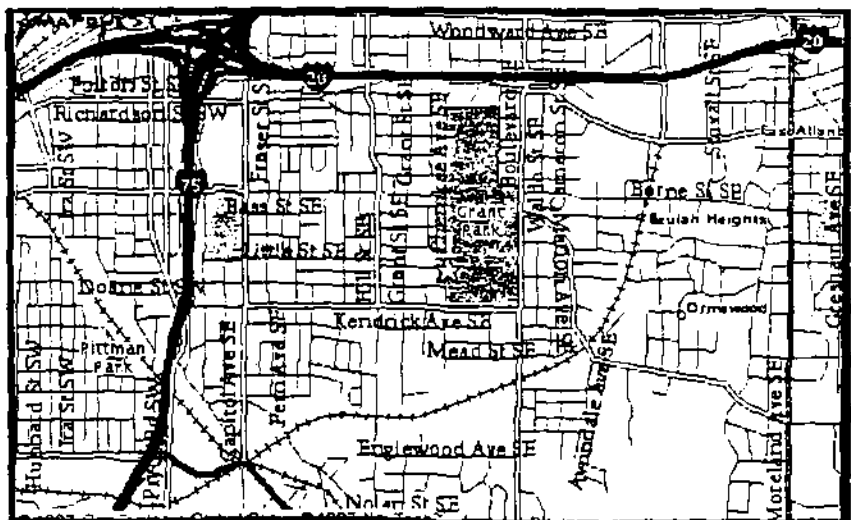


## 1.0 Introduction

Grant Park, a 131.5 acre tract of land with numerous large oak trees, rolling topography, and picturesque stone walls and gates is a rare public green space for the City of Atlanta. Grant Park, with a history which begins in the 1800s, was and is home to a variety of events from the Civil War fortifications at Fort Walker, to Zoo Atlanta and the “Church-nic” and Shakespearean plays today. A constant throughout Grant Park’s existence is its importance as a natural public landscape. This was the basis for the Olmsted firm’s Master Plan created in 1904. The Olmsted firm is the company responsible for the design of Central Park and many other noted parks throughout this country. The founder, Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., is recognized as the “Father of Landscape Architecture” and is also considered by many the *greatest park designer of all time*. “More than anything else the Olmsted firm believed that the special purpose of an urban park was to use the art of landscape design to create scenery that would have a soothing and beneficial psychological effect on its users.”<sup>1</sup>

From the beginning Grant Park has been appreciated for its interesting topography, natural springs, streams and lush vegetation. It has given the residents of the surrounding neighborhood a place to escape the noise and business of the city for over 100 years. During the early 1900s Grant Park was the place for relaxation — hosting activities varying from leisure walks and carriage rides through the landscape to boat rides in Lake Abana. Today many buildings and structures have been constructed as the trends in park design have demanded structured recreational activities. More than ever the importance of a public natural landscape in the city is realized and being demanded by its residents. Green spaces within cities are essential for educational resources, wildlife and plant habitats, and quality of life. Grant Park provides the opportunity for the preservation of not only an important historical landmark, but the necessary natural open landscape we require in our cities.

Grant Park is located in the Grant Park neighborhood, in the city limits of Atlanta east of the intersection of I-20 and I-85/75 south. The land for Grant Park was donated to the City of Atlanta in 1894 by Colonel L.P. Grant for the purpose of a park.



Grant Park Site Location map

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Charles Beveridge, Report on the Olmsted firm

The revitalization of the Grant Park neighborhood has led the residents to recognize Grant Park as an important resource. Some concerns of the Grant Park residents have been identified and include the following: (1) the high crime rate, (2) the conflict of pedestrians and vehicular traffic within the park, (3) the deterioration of the historical elements within the park, (4) the loss of the mature landscape, (5) the recurrent storm water/sewer problem, and (6) the conflict of park uses within the park and also between the neighborhood and the park. These concerns have resulted in the decision to create a Grant Park Master Plan.

A master plan will guide future improvements at Grant Park. The intent of the plan will be to reflect the "spirit and intent of the original Olmsted Brothers design" while responding to contemporary needs. The following provides a description of the various tasks to be accomplished in the development of the Master Plan.

A Concept Plan for the park will be developed based on the findings of the analysis phase and input of the City of Atlanta, the Grant Park Citizens Advisory Committee, and other interested citizens. An overall pedestrian and vehicular circulation plan will be developed recommending the location of walks, drives and parking. The plan will suggest treatments for the various types of landscape zones and landscape features within the park. The recommended treatments will be sensitive to the historical significance of the park and will follow established preservation standards.

An overall drainage plan will be developed based on the current system and its relation to the original Olmsted plan. Events and public assembly areas will be noted with the level of support required to maintain such spaces. The plan will identify general recommendations for a variety of site elements including lighting, site furniture, paving surfaces, and plant materials. The master plan will be based on the recommended landscape treatments for the park within the spirit of the original design by the Olmsted firm.



Granite bridge taken by JCO, 1903



Granite bridge-same location, 1997

## **1.1 The Olmsted Firm and L.P. Grant Park**

By Charles E. Beveridge, Series Editor  
The Frederick Law Olmsted Papers  
American University, Washington, D.C.

In early 1903, John C. Olmsted returned to Atlanta to begin park designing for Piedmont, L.P. Grant, Mims and Springvale parks, and to resume the planning of Druid Hills and its series of linear parks along Ponce de Leon Avenue for which he and Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. had done preliminary planning in the years 1890-94. From early 1903 to late 1904 he became familiar with the condition and recreational possibilities of Grant Park. A change in city administration interrupted his work, but he and his staff returned to complete preparation of general and planting plans during the years 1909-1912. Little that he proposed for the park was ever carried out, but the analysis he made of its problems and potential, and the detailed program for its improvement that he developed over nearly a decade is still today a valuable source of park planning analysis, ideas, and methods.

### **The Park-making Career of John C. Olmsted**

In 1903 John C. Olmsted was fifty years old and had been a partner in the Olmsted firm for nineteen years and a staff member of the firm for another ten. He had played an important part in the designing of numerous parks and park systems with his stepfather, Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. These included Belle Isle Park in Detroit, Mount Royal Park in Montreal, and the Boston Park System. In other instances he had played the leading role in creation of park designs after the elder Olmsted had worked out the overall concept. Examples of this are the park systems of Rochester, New York, and Louisville, Kentucky; South Park and Cazenovia Park in Buffalo; and the redesigning of Jackson Park in Chicago following creation on that site of the "Great White City" of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., retired in 1895 and died in 1903. By 1903, John C. Olmsted was the senior partner in the firm of Olmsted Brothers. He was beginning the remarkable career of park planning on his own that included the Atlanta parks, the extensive park systems of Seattle and Baltimore, and Audubon Park in New Orleans. He was therefore the most experienced and eminent designer of urban parks in the United States of this period. As such, John C. Olmsted had a clear concept of what an urban park should be, and how it should be designed in order to bring maximum benefit for expenditure to the city in which it was sited. More than anything else, he and his stepfather before him believed that the special purpose of an urban park was to use the art of landscape design to create scenery that would have a soothing and beneficial psychological effect on its users. It should be designed to provide an escape from the noise, artificiality and fast pace of the city surrounding it; all elements of the design should work to heighten this special character of the place. This was all the more important because in Atlanta only Piedmont and L.P. Grant parks were sufficiently large enough to provide the desired landscape experience. The many other institutions of culture and recreation needed in a city should be provided elsewhere, the setting of each being carefully planned so as to serve the particular function in the best possible way.

*See Map 1: Olmsted Firm Planting Plan 1912.*

## 1.2 History of Grant Park

The history of Grant Park is particularly important because it helps in understanding the role the park has served in the neighborhood and the City of Atlanta. The history of the park will serve as an important basis for the Master Plan being created. A chronological time line of Grant Park's history follows:

**1863** During the Civil War, fortifications for Atlanta's defense system were built through the area which is now Grant Park. These earthworks were either batteries or they were trenches (rifle pits). There are several types of batteries; Fort Walker is a 'redoubt' battery, which is defined as an enclosed work of polygonal form. Shown on the 1903 survey are the Fort Walker battery and 2100' of trenches. Two sections of trenches are shown; one section is attached to Fort Walker and the other is near the ball field area. (The connecting section was probably destroyed in early park development.) Grant Park's earthworks were a small section of the ten and one-half miles of earthworks, which consisted of a cordon of redoubts on hills connected by rifle pits encircling the city. (See *Map 2: City of Atlanta and Line of Defenses*.) These earthworks were designed and supervised by Colonel L.P. Grant, pioneer citizen, construction engineer and railroad builder of Atlanta. The fort was named for Major General W.H.T. Walker who was killed in the Battle of Atlanta. Although Fort Walker was not involved in the Battle of Atlanta, it is the only intact portion of Atlanta's defense line left in the city today.



Cannons at Fort Walker, 1917



Rifle Pits from Civil War, 1903



Early Grant Park, 1890s

**1882** Colonel L.P. Grant donated 100 acres of land to the City of Atlanta for the purpose of a park. This land is partially inside the city limits and southeast of Grant's residence. Grant stipulated, "*this land should always be used for park purposes, a violation of the condition to result in the forfeiture of the title.*"<sup>2</sup> The area was being used as a park soon after the Colonel's offer, and actually a year before he made the deed. The park was described in the local paper as "having varied and picturesque topography, many fine springs of pure water and an abundant and splendid flora."<sup>3</sup>

**1883** Atlanta City Council accepted Grant's offer and authorized the appointment of a park commission to consist of six members (three Council members and three citizens). The park was named L.P. Grant Park, after its donor. A topographic map was made of Grant Park by Charles Roesch, a civil engineer, and the work at the park was begun. Sidney Root, an Atlanta merchant and lover of nature and trees, had suggested to Colonel Grant that the land be donated to the city. Root was appointed park commissioner by Mayor John B. Goodwin and supervised construction of the park until his death in 1897.

**1885** The corporate limits of Atlanta were extended to embrace L.P. Grant Park and vicinity, for police and sanitation purposes; the mayor and council of Atlanta were empowered to regulate the sale of ardent spirits and all kinds of merchandise and refreshments from within the limits of the park and 200 yards in any direction of said limits. The "Battle of Atlanta" painting, a depiction of the battle which took place in Atlanta during the Civil War, is begun by artists from Milwaukee. They erected a forty-foot observation tower at the site of the battlefield near the Moreland Avenue crossing in order to command a panorama of the landscape. With notes, drawings, portraits of commanders, maps and papers, they returned to Milwaukee to work on their gigantic undertaking. Completed in late 1886 the finished painting weighed 18,000 pounds and measured fifty feet in height and 400 feet in circumference.

**1888** Steam car service was made to Grant Park by the Metropolitan Street Railway Company.

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<sup>2</sup> Garret, *Atlanta and Environs, Volume II*, pg. 41

<sup>3</sup> *Journal* Nov 18, 1883, pg. 15