

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

MAR 07 1989

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Capitol Park  
other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number Between State, Union & Capitol Streets  not for publication  
city, town Augusta  vicinity  
state Maine code ME county Kennebec code 011 zip code 04330

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	_____	_____ buildings
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	<u>2</u> objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>2</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:  
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Emilie S. Fitzsimonds, J.H.P.O. 3/1/89  
Signature of certifying official Date  
Maine Historic Preservation Commission  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Sharon Byers Entered in the National Register 4/2/89

fa Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Landscape/Park

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Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Landscape/Park

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

No Style

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Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/Awalls N/A

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roof N/Aother N/A

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**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

Capitol Park is a rectangular 20 acre site which lies to the east of the Maine State House. The appearance of Capitol Park today is in many ways similar to its original appearance. Bounded by the Kennebec River to the east, Capitol Street to the north, Union Street to the south, and State Street to the west, Capitol Park was part of the original 34 acre site offered to the State of Maine by the citizens of Augusta for the construction of the State Capitol. Since 1827 Capitol Park has been the focus of a number of conscious design efforts. Each has respected the spatial organization of the original design. Throughout the years the boundaries of the park and its strong axial relationship to the State House have survived intact. The design intent of the park also survives; that is, to provide a dignified setting for the State Capitol Building and serve a variety of functions as a public ground.

The spatial structure of Capitol Park was established in 1827, the same year in which it was decided that Augusta would be the State Capitol. On February 24, 1827, the Legislature approved an act providing that on and after the first day of January, 1832, the permanent seat of the government should be established in Augusta. The same act placed the sum of five-hundred dollars at the disposal of the Governor and Council, "to enable them to cause such lot as may be chosen to be improved, fenced and ornamented with forest trees". At a meeting of the Council on October 25, 1827, General Joel Wellington was charged with the task of obtaining plans and estimates for expending the five-hundred dollar appropriation. The residents of Augusta laid out what is now State Street, thereby separating the Capitol site from the balance of the property. General Wellington proposed that, "...a row of forest trees be set out on the easterly [river] side of State Street and also that two rows of forest trees be set out, one on each side of the contemplated avenue, as laid down in the plan, from the road aforesaid [State Street], to the [Kennebec] river, of such kinds and at such distance from each other, as the Agent to be appointed to superintend this business shall determine."<sup>1</sup> The record of expenditures indicated that the work was executed in a timely fashion; \$373.13 was spent by November 28, 1827.<sup>2</sup>

 See continuation sheet

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In 1831 the site was described in the legislative record as, "a beautiful spot of commanding prospect, pleasing to the eye and everyway suitable for the execution of public buildings" (North, p. 470). In order to take advantage of the "commanding prospect", the State House was situated on a "conical elevation" at the northwestern corner of the 34 acre site rather than symmetrically placed along the east/west axis. From the small knoll the terrain slopes gradually toward the Kennebec River. At the southern end of the site the terrain becomes more rugged, with steep ravines. The slope quickly drops approximately 80 feet to the river's edge. In 1831 the legislature appropriated funds to "complete the public buildings, leveling and preparing the grounds and (constructing) an iron fence and granite steps". The architect of the Capitol, Charles Bulfinch, had prepared a site plan for the immediate Capitol grounds, elevating the State House on three terraced ovals with trees delineating the perimeter of the terraces. This landscape plan, as well as the already established features of the Park, are clearly evident in the 1838 Augusta map, the earliest graphic record of the design. In 1842 a monument to Governor Lincoln, who died in 1829 was erected on axis with the southern alley. The granite obelisk survives near the eastern boundary of the park.

An 1851 plan of the Capitol grounds and park reveals further improvements to the site. The three terraced levels are unchanged. However, the single rows of trees that appeared in the 1838 plan of the park have been increased to double rows, and at the western boundary of the park a path has been introduced which aligns with the front walk to the State House. This path divides and extends between the paired groups of trees towards the river, forming in plan, an elongated "Y", thus establishing a definite system of circulation linking the State House and the Mall, as it was called on the plan. By 1851 the Kennebec and Portland Railroad had taken over a small portion of the eastern edge of the site adjacent to the river. The 1851 map of the park also shows that two single rows of trees were planted to the south of the Mall as if to balance the overall design and achieve a symmetrical composition within the park site.

During the Civil War Capitol Park was used by a number of Maine regiments as a camp site and parade ground. The Maine Farmer reported in its May 22, 1862, editorial that, "tents and stables and barracks have been spread over them, infantry, artillery and cavalry have practiced their drill and evolutions there until a short time ago, when they all departed for 'Dixie', and left the field in peace." After the departure of the troops, the grounds

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were plowed and planted, and in the opinion of the Maine Farmer, "It (the grounds) will be productive of what will sustain and save life rather than destroy it. War may be as some people assert a 'necessary evil', but the less we have of it the better. The plow does more good than Parrott Guns." (Maine Farmer, May 22, 1862)

By 1878, Capitol Park was no longer in agricultural use, but had returned to its original function: an intentionally designed dignified setting for viewing the State House. The 1878 Birds-Eye View of Augusta illustrates the same arrangement of trees and walks as did the pre-war map. Although the design detail and perhaps the plant material of the park had changed since the 1830s, the boundaries and the strong axial relationship between the State House and the park survived.

In 1920, the Capitol complex was the focus of an ambitious "improvement project" when Governor Carl E. Milliken commissioned the nationally prominent Olmsted Brothers firm to prepare a plan for the Capitol grounds, Capitol Park, the adjoining driving park to the south, which was owned by the City of Augusta, and the neighboring Blaine House grounds. The impetus for this initiative was the donation of the James G. Blaine House to the State of Maine for use as an executive mansion. When the remodelling of the house was completed, Governor Milliken asked the Olmsted firm to develop landscape plans for the three sites. The plan was conceived as a whole, but was broken into separate projects for administrative convenience. Carl Rust Parker, who had practiced landscape architecture on his own in Portland from 1910 to 1919, was in charge of the work.

Correspondence between Governor Milliken and Parker referenced the existing park features that were incorporated into the Olmsted plan. Parker noted that "In the design for the State Park we have accepted as the most important feature, the four rows of Elm trees which exist at the present time on the continuation of the southeast axis of the Capitol toward the river" (reference 1851 double rows of trees). Within the established structure of the site, Parker's intent was to add recreational and educational features, develop scenic vistas of the river and the State House, improve circulation between the State House and the park, and strengthen the relationship between the State House, the Blaine House, and Capitol Park.

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Consistent with the Olmsted firm's approach to design, Parker divided the park into "activity zones", areas of structured and unstructured recreation. In the northwest corner of the park, Parker proposed a shrub garden surrounded by a plantation of trees and shrubs native to Maine. In the flat area to the east, he recommended adding three more tennis courts next to the two that were already there. In the south of the park, Parker proposed to divide the space into two areas. The southwest corner of the park was laid out as a grove for public speaking and concerts with a rostrum in the center. Below the grove Parker included an open flat grassy area ideal for unstructured activities.

At the point where the slope becomes too steep to continue the row of trees, Parker planned an overlook terrace defining the end of the formal area of the park. The terrain of this eastern section is more rugged and naturalistic. Here Parker recommended the construction of pools for displaying native fish and a zoo for Maine animals, proposing that the dens be built into the steep banks of the ravine.

Parker, recognizing that funding would be limited, phased the construction over three years. In 1921 planting plans were prepared for the south and western sections of the park, and some grading and path construction was started. By 1926, the plan had been scaled back; the fish pools and zoo were eliminated and the expansion of the steps and flanking paths from State Street were modified.

Little has changed in Capitol Park since the 1920s effort. Prior to the 1960s, the tennis courts had been removed. The majestic elms fell victim to Dutch Elm Disease and were replaced by red oaks in 1983. In 1985, a Vietnam War Memorial was installed in the northwest area of the site. Plant materials have been added in a haphazard manner throughout the years. Despite the effects of Dutch Elm Disease and the years of general neglect, the design could be recovered with the development of a management and preservation plan for the park.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Landscape Architecture  
Architecture  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance

1827, c. 1851  
1920-1929  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates

1827  
c. 1851  
1920-1929

Cultural Affiliation

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Olmsted Brothers  
\_\_\_\_\_

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Capitol park is significant as a landscape design, dating from 1827, that survives today with its spatial structure intact. It is unique in two ways: as an early example of a designed landscape and as a remarkable survivor within the Capitol complex. Although the park has accommodated a variety of functions throughout its history, it continues to perform its primary function of providing a dignified setting for the State House.

Capitol Park is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criteria C for landscape design. The periods of significance include: 1827, c. 1851, with the design embellishments illustrated in the 1851 Augusta map, and 1920-1929, the years that the Olmsted Brothers' firm was active with the project.

Capitol Park is the earliest known, consciously designed public ground in Maine, and was laid out the same year that the Legislature chose Augusta as the permanent location of the State Capitol. Having reached their final decision the Legislature and Governor's Council acted quickly to improve the site and create an appropriate setting for the construction of the Maine State House. A five-hundred dollar appropriation was made in June to improve the site; the money was expended and the task completed by the end of November of that year. The park design was laid out by Edward Williams, a member of the Governor's staff:

In conformity to the instructions expressed in the report of the Committee of Council of the 25<sup>th</sup> [October, 1827], I have laid out an Avenue eighty feet in width, immediately in front of the Capitol Hill, to the bank of the river, with a walk of thirty feet in width on each side of the avenue -- A row of forest trees has been planted on each side of the Avenue and two other rows

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Books

North, James W., The History of Augusta, Maine Somersworth: New England History Press, 1981.

Newspapers

The Kennebec Journal, "Notice for Proposals" April 10, 1863.

The Lewiston Journal, "A Bit of Maine History" April 13, 1889.

The Maine Farmer, "Plowing the Parade Ground" May 22, 1862, June 12, 1862.

Legislative Reports

October 25, 1827.

November 30, 1827.-

Abstract of Expenditures, November 28, 1827

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of property Approx. 20

**UTM References**

A 1 9 | 4 3 1 7 | 6 1 7 0 | 4 9 0 6 | 1 1 6 0  
 Zone Easting Northing

C 1 9 | 4 3 8 | 1 4 0 | 4 9 0 5 | 8 0 0

B 1 9 | 4 3 8 | 2 0 0 | 4 9 0 6 | 0 1 2 0  
 Zone Easting Northing

D 1 9 | 4 3 7 | 6 1 2 0 | 4 9 0 5 | 9 1 3 0

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

Capitol Park occupies the City of Augusta tax map 32, lot 24.

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary is drawn so as to embrace the surviving portions of the Park that are historically and presently associated with it.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Elizabeth Igleheart, Architectural Historian  
 organization Maine Historic Preservation Commission date January 1989  
 street & number 55 Capitol Street telephone (207) 289-2132  
 city or town Augusta state Maine zip code 04333

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have also been planted on the outside of the side-walks -  
- An additional row of forest trees has been set out on the east side of the Circular Street at the base of the Hill -- On this latter line I have erected a fence and have partly filled up a ravine on the north side of the government land with earth and stone taken from the Hill, and ploughed that part of the lawn, which presented an irregular and uneven surface. The forest trees which have been selected to border the Avenue and side walks, are elms, maples and double firs.

Mr. Williams also suggested that "...a new fence will be required early in the spring on the North and South lines of the government land, for the preservation of the trees which have been recently planted to exclude cattle, recommending that the balance of the appropriation be used to construct this fence."

The conscious design intent and the reference to excluding cattle clearly distinguish Capitol Park from a town common. Although rarely encountered in Maine, the common was a familiar organizing feature in 18<sup>th</sup> century New England.

The 1851 map of Capitol Park indicates that a second row of trees had been added to the south side of the Park, balancing the original composition. It is interesting to note that the addition to the original design was in the same classical mode, resisting the then fashionable "naturalistic" style favored in landscape design and further balancing Charles Bulfinch's classically styled State House that was completed in 1832.

During the Civil War the park was used by the militia as a camp and parade ground, a use that would be associated with a "Common". When the troops left for the south, the land was leased for agricultural use. Advertisements were placed in the Kennebec Journal on April 10, 1863, for the purpose of leasing "...the Public Grounds in front of the State House for one year. Said Grounds contain about 20 acres, well manured and plowed." This use of the Park was temporary and perhaps patriotic in nature; by 1878 the site was restored to its former appearance.

The structure of the park remained much as it had always been until 1920 with the development of the Olmsted Brothers' proposal for improvements to the Capitol Complex. The 1920 scheme incorporated the original spatial structure overlaid with a socially oriented, organically derived design. The plan incorporated civic and recreational features into the park and expanded to include the adjacent city-owned Augusta driving park.



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The proposal also included native botanical and zoological displays. The entire plan for the Capitol Complex improved circulation between the State House, Blaine House, and the Park, connecting the components of the complex while reinforcing their respective functions.

The Olmsted plan received little financial support from the Legislature and consequently only portions of the plan were implemented. The changes include improvements to circulation at the western boundary of the Park.

At the center of Maine's Capitol Complex in Augusta are three historic components which date from the 1830s; the State House, the Blaine House, and Capitol Park. Recently, efforts to enhance the State House and the Blaine House have been formalized with Legislative authorization of the State Capitol Commission and gubernatorial establishment of the Blaine House Restoration Fund. While no support group has been formed for Capitol park, the Legislature did affirm the state's commitment to preserving this large open space during its last session by prohibiting construction within park boundaries.

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# **National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet**

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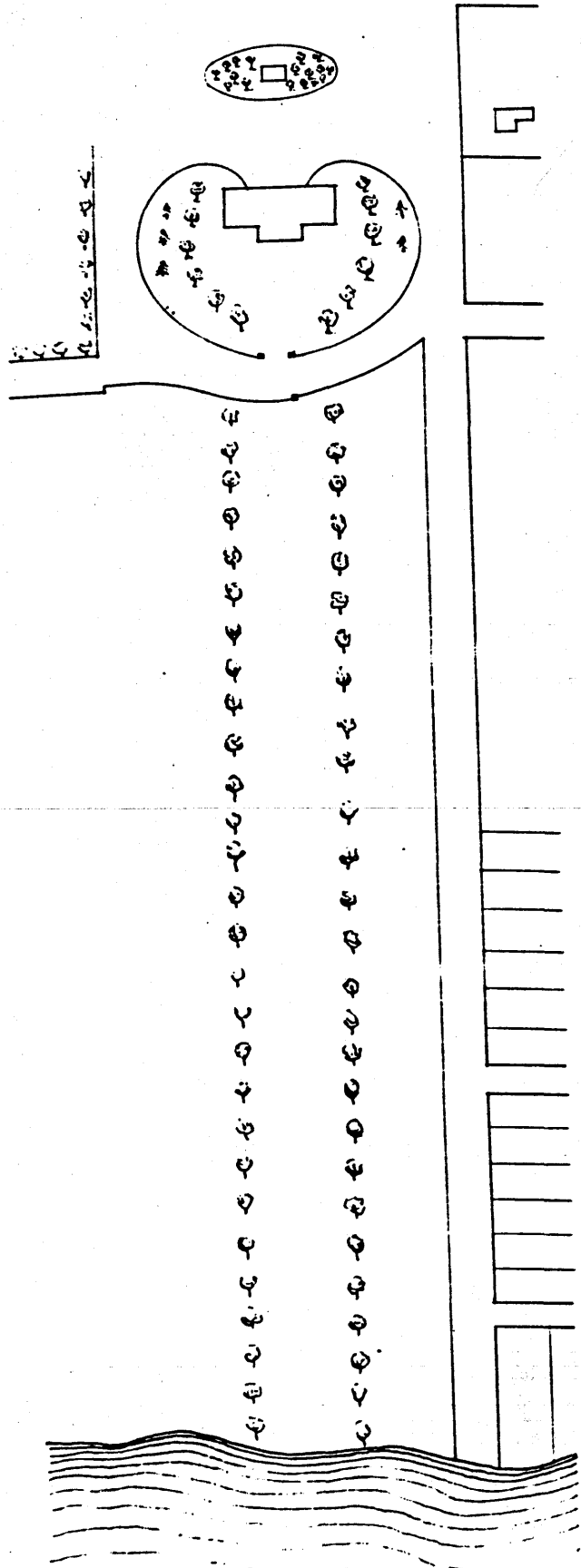
Correspondence, Job #6833:

Collection of the Manuscript Division, Olmsted Associates, Library of Congress,  
Washington, D. C.

Drawings, Job #6833:

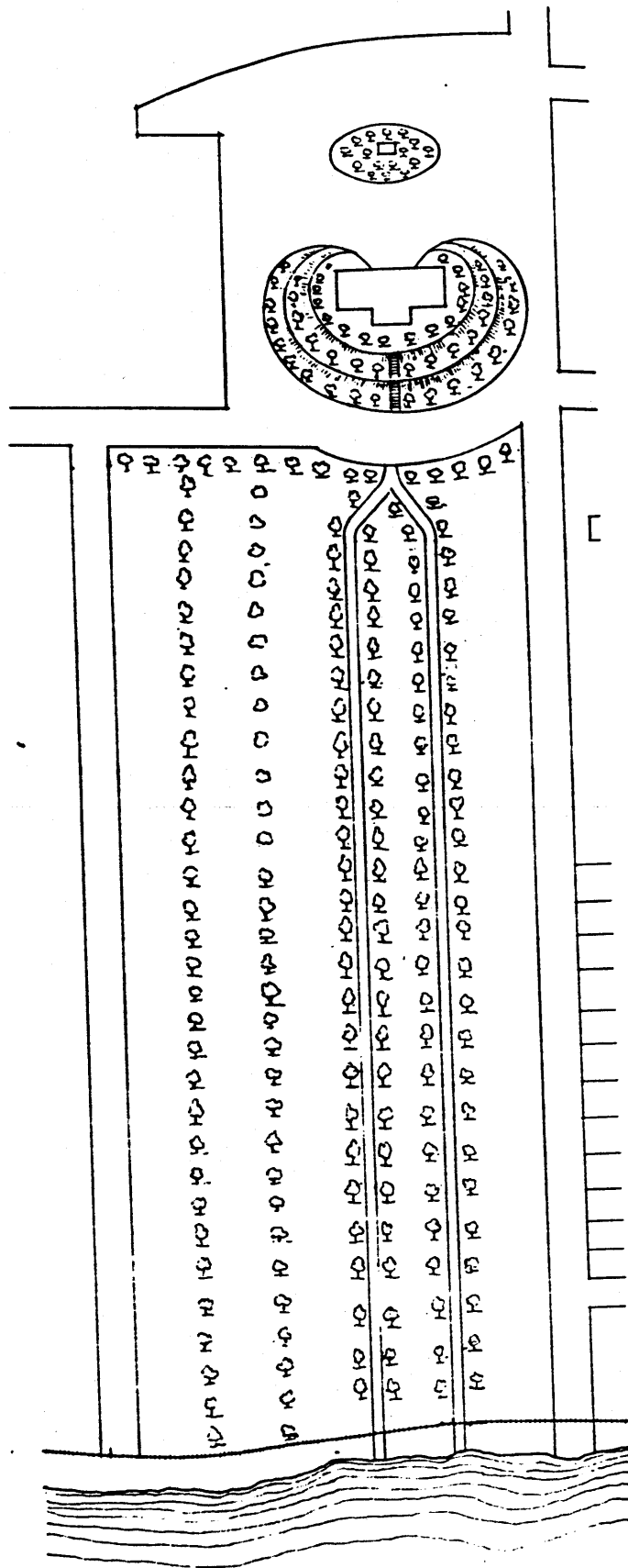
Frederick Law Olmsted, National Historic Site, Brookline Massachusetts.

Abstract of Expenditures, November 28, 1827.



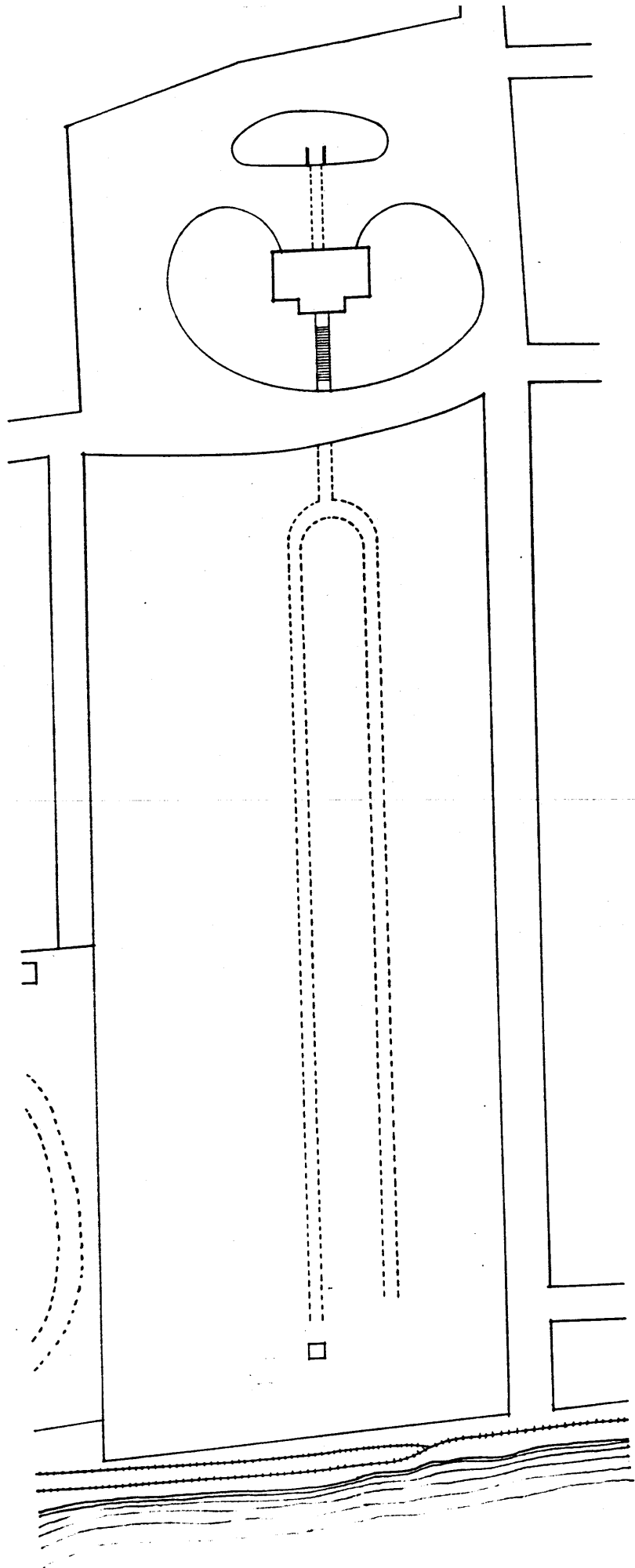
Capitol Park  
Augusta, Maine

1838 view



Capitol Park  
Augusta, Maine

1851 view



Capitol Park  
Augusta, Maine

1878 view

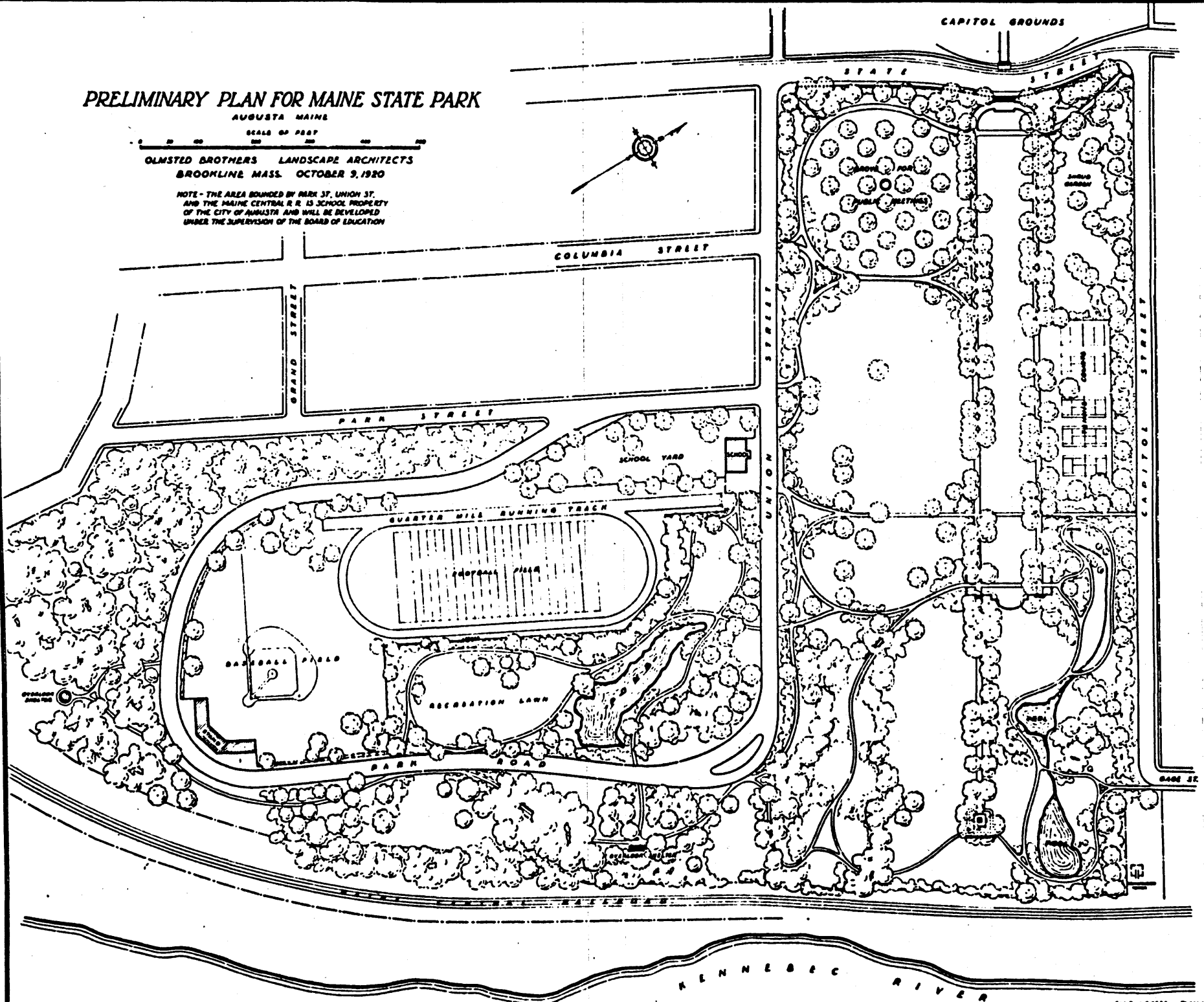
# PRELIMINARY PLAN FOR MAINE STATE PARK

AUGUSTA MAINE



OLMSTED BROTHERS LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS  
BROOKLINE MASS. OCTOBER 9, 1920

NOTE - THE AREA BOUNDED BY PARK ST., UNION ST.  
AND THE MAINE CENTRAL R. R. IS SCHOOL PROPERTY  
OF THE CITY OF AUGUSTA AND WILL BE DEVELOPED  
UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION



CAPITOL GROUNDS

STATE STREET

COLUMBIA STREET

GRAND STREET

PARK STREET

SCHOOL YARD

QUARTER MILE RUNNING TRACK

PROPRYAL FIELD

BASEBALL FIELD

RECREATION LAWN

PARK ROAD

KENNEBEC RIVER