

From a scholarly viewpoint, *Early Daze in Oil* has few new insights into petroleum history, but it does not even pretend to do such a thing, so the author's contribution is the injecting of mirth into an area of history usually categorized as dull. Perhaps prostitution, divining, and phony land deals get more than their just due in this monograph, but excesses are nothing new in scholarly work as well as in more popular accounts.

The research and documentation of these humorous episodes is meticulous, and this is unusual and admirable for a book of this nature. Much of the early technology of drilling for oil and making containers for oil is done in simple and readable prose. Again, this is a refreshing change from many standard works on petroleum history.

While this work is by no means comprehensive, it is a good popular history of notable and hilarious incidents in oil's first years as an industry. Therefore, anyone interested in a light but factual treatment of early oil should be directed to this study. Dr. Miller has drawn on his seemingly endless knowledge of petroleum history to forge a readable book for the general public interested in "black gold."

*Department of History*  
*State University College at Buffalo*  
*Buffalo, New York*

DONALD A. GRINDE, JR.

*FLO: A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted.* By LAURA WOOD ROPER. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973. Pp. 476. Acknowledgments, photographs, maps, appendices, notes, index. \$15.00.)

Laura Wood Roper's biography of Frederick Law Olmsted should take a place of honor among the bicentennial books about famous Americans, although he is a type of man not traditionally praised in historical celebrations. He was not a military man, a statesman, an explorer, or an inventor. He was a defender of the beauty of America.

Without the crusading of this pioneer American landscape architect, the grandeur of Niagara Falls and of California's Yosemite Valley and sequoia groves would have been exploited by businessmen. He planned the setting for the Vanderbilt Biltmore estate at Asheville, North Carolina. Thousands of visitors admired his background for the Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893.

Olmsted's biography ties in with Dr. Barbara Judd's article, "Edward M. Bigelow: Creator of Pittsburgh's Arcadian Parks," in the January 1975 issue of the *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*. These two landscape architects had the same approach to their work and the same dreams for improving the lives of the crowded urban poor.

As a young man, Olmsted "wanted to assume a responsible role in the world as a Christian and a citizen. — how — what?" It took a painfully long time before he found his vocation; for many years his indulgent father must have felt the strain on his pocketbook and patience. Because of young Fred's weak eyes, the usual schooling for Yale had to be replaced by tutoring, and the boy was allowed to roam about, becoming familiar with every road and lane and with every house — "what he best remembered was not what he studied but what he did": horseback riding, fishing, sailing, vacation trips through beautiful countryside with his family, sleighing, skating, drawing lessons, fencing. At an early age, he learned to appreciate landscapes, and, in poking about in his father's and neighbors' libraries, to love the portfolios of prints of English parks. Finally, almost every experience led to his becoming a landscape architect.

When he was almost of age, like many a New England youth, he signed on as a seaman for Canton in 1843. It was a nightmarish experience; home again, he became deeply interested in farming. Father bought him a farm, then a better one on Staten Island.

Next, in 1850, he wanted to study English and Scottish agricultural methods. In England, after exploring Birkenhead Park, two of his life's interests began to converge: his steady interest in landscape and his desire to improve the lot of the poor through parks. For some time, he had also been reading articles in Downing's *Horticulturist* and Bryant's *New York Evening Post*; both publications were urging the establishment of public parks.

But no, young Fred was not quite ready for his ultimate career. Next, he began to write a book called *Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England*. (His poor, neglected farm on Staten Island!) He stopped writing just long enough to plant — and ultimately neglect — his expensive English pear trees. Once more his farm crops were ignored. Brother John took over the farm.

In 1852-1854, Fred Olmsted collected ideas for a book on Southern cotton and slavery. His conclusion was that slave labor was more expensive than free labor. His findings were first printed

as letters, and the columns of the *New York Times* welcomed his contributions. His next literary step was to join the staff of *Putnam's Magazine*.

So far, he had delved into farming, travel, writing, and a city park in Liverpool. Then the final door was opened. While at work on a book called *Back Country* at Morris Cove, Connecticut, he met the commissioner for Central Park in New York City, who offered him a superintendency of park construction. It was a challenge, for there was not a single park in the United States. Olmsted accepted.

At last he was settled. He became a partner of Calvert Vaux, and the two submitted a design for the park and won. Beauty was created in a park that was to become an integral part of the city. Olmsted showed an unexpected talent for turning his work corps into an efficient and enthusiastic group — in fact, all became assistants in projects for the rest of his life. However, much of his and Vaux's careful planning was later undone by Tammany politicians and committees. This kind of situation occurred many times.

The next large section of the book is devoted to Olmsted's leaving Central Park to become executive secretary of the United States Sanitary Commission during the Civil War. For Civil War buffs, this becomes the most exciting section of the book; how Olmsted and the commission, in spite of the War Department and especially its Medical Bureau, brought sanity and efficient removal from the battlefield of legions of the wounded. Neglect had been the number one killer. The sections on the hospital ships going down the Potomac during the Peninsular Campaign and of Olmsted's bringing the first train of supplies and medicines into Gettysburg are memorable.

October 1863 found Olmsted out of the commission and managing for two years a California estate with gold mines at Mariposa. He finally was defeated by the scarcity of water and the mismanagement and dishonesty of his predecessors and resigned with praise from all for his honest efforts. This portion of the book sounds like something from Bret Harte.

Olmsted had many beautiful trips to the Yosemite. Parts sounded like Eden. Olmsted was able to name a mountain after a friend — Mt. Gibbs. Another man named over three-hundred varieties of flowers. It reminds one of Adam, when God brought every beast of the field and every bird of the air "to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name."

Olmsted lingered for a time in California, advising people in Oakland in the laying out of a cemetery, and being called in for consultation on many projects, only to find his plans refused because they were too innovative. He did have the pleasure of helping to plan Berkeley, California, and in 1886, planned the grounds of Stanford University.

Returning to the east, he did many private estates, cemeteries, the Capitol grounds, college campuses, parks, Niagara Falls, Biltmore, the Columbian Exposition, and the New York capitol building grounds. How he ever managed to accomplish so much and to watch every detail, especially with his frail health, is a mystery. A happy family man, he had to neglect his wife and children a great deal for his work, which really came first with him.

*FLO* is an exciting book, at once a history of a man and of the country that he loved.

*Pittsburgh*

FLORENCE C. McLAUGHLIN