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To Rally Discussion

Volume 3, number 3 of *Places* arrived today; and I am shocked and outraged! In their article, “American Edens,” Charles Moore and William Mitchell write, “Frederick Law Olmsted’s Mount Auburn Cemetery in Boston, which dates from 1831, should probably be regarded as the continent’s oldest landscaped public garden. . . . For a brilliant half-century after Mount Auburn opened, Olmsted and others created the grand gardens of democracy.” The authors are correct only in that Mount Auburn was founded in 1831 and should indeed be regarded as America’s oldest landscaped public garden.

Olmsted was only three when Dr. Jacob Bigelow proposed in 1825 that Bostonians create a “rural” cemetery; and only nine in 1831 when General Henry A. S. Dearborn laid out in the grounds of Mount Auburn. By the time Olmsted *began* his design career in 1857, shifting from writing and publishing to superintend construction of Central Park, Mount Auburn was a mature landscape over a quarter century old; and many other “rural” cemeteries had been laid out by horticulturists, architects, landscape gardeners, and committees of civic leaders in American cities large and small. The public parks movement grew out of the “rural” cemetery movement, as acknowledged in the 1850s and 1860s by the likes of Andrew Jackson Downing, William Cullen Bryant, and Clarence Cook; but it did NOT begin until over a quarter century after Mount

Auburn’s founding, a significant historical gap when considering the cavalier dating of the “brilliant half century” of creation of “grand gardens of democracy” by Moore and Mitchell. These two professors have carried to a new extreme the often repeated, flippant assumption that any designed landscape of the nineteenth century must have been the work of Olmsted.

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