Country and City in the American Romantic Suburb

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American romantic suburbs of the 1850s and 1860s have traditionally been considered the progeny of at least four prior phenomena: romantic cemetery planning, picturesquely landscaped urban parks in England, A. J. Downing's efforts to promote a consciously "rural" style of American landscape gardening, and a growing interest in family life and domesticity. But a variety of prototypes for American romantic suburbs already existed in England, not only in parks but also in resorts and metropolitan suburbs. Many of these were known to American travelers since the 1830s. The impetus for adopting such prototypes in America—and for developing indigenous, American suburban types—can be tied to an important development in the history of American ideas. During the 1840s and 1850s the long standing conflict between ideals of "country" and "city"—the conflict between agrarian gentility and mercantile progress, and also between rural independence and cultural sophistication—was at least partly resolved by suggestions that both could flourish together, if only the detrimental aspects of each could be avoided. There followed a variety of proposals for suburbs that, according to their proponents, would become superior residential environments by providing the amenities of both country and city while eliminating the disadvantages of each.

Suburbs are communities of “detached dwellings with sylvan surroundings yet supplied with a considerable share of urban convenience”; thus in 1871 Frederick Law Olmsted described the romantic combination of country and city in a type of American community planning that was not yet 20 years old. As early as 1857 an article in The Crayon had identified Llewellyn Park (Fig. 14), located in West Orange, N.J., as “the first development, so far as we know, of an idea which may mark a new era in Country Life and Landscape Gardening in this country,” and a new stage in the perfection of “the Landscape Gardener’s Art.”2 Nearly a century later in a seminal study Christopher Tunnard concurred, calling Llewellyn Park the “first romantic suburban community,” and suggested its design was “a complete landscape based on picturesque principles of gardening” established by Andrew Jackson Downing and Alexander Jackson Davis. Tunnard also highlighted Riverside, Illinois (Olmsted, Vaux & Co., 1869; Fig. 15), tracing its form to Olmsted’s earlier landscape work at Central Park (1858) and ultimately to Joseph Paxton’s design for Birkenhead Park in England (1843).3

Neither author explored the unique combination of urban and rural characteristics that contributed to the success of the Llewellyn Park or Riverside designs. Historians of subsequent generations have likewise skirted this issue, while exploring other ideals and precedents connected with the genesis of American suburban planning.4 The story clearly begins in 1811 in London at

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3. Christopher Tunnard, “The Romantic Suburb in America,” Magazine of Art, 40:5, May 1947, 184–187. Olmsted had visited Birkenhead briefly in 1850: see Frederick Law Olmsted, Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England, New York, 1852, 74–82. Although Tunnard did not define the term “romantic,” it is clear the term refers to an informal, naturalistic, and above all picturesque manner of laying out grounds. I have retained this sense of the word in this article.

4. In a brief discussion of “Romantic Planning in the American Suburb” John Reps cited three precedents: Downing’s theories of landscape design, picturesque urban parks, and romantically landscaped cemeteries such as Mount Auburn in Cambridge (1831), Laurel Hill in Philadelphia (1836), and Greenwood in Brooklyn (1838) (The Making of Urban America, Princeton, 1965, 339–348). In a brief history of city parks and park systems Albert Fein likewise traced the form of the Riverside plan to romantically landscaped cemeteries of the 1830s ("The American City: The Ideal and the Real," in Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., ed., The Rise of an American Architecture, New York, 1970, 81–101, and especially 109 n. 65), despite the improbability of a designer intentionally imbuing a residential landscape with such lugubrious associations. Indeed contemporary commentary primarily emphasized the recreational value of romantically landscaped cemeteries located near large cities, and I have found no suggestion that such designs should serve as models for residential communities. See for example The Picturesque Pocket Com-
Regent's Park, a familiar and important example of romantic urban planning. Thereafter, the chain of connection includes English resorts, suburbs, and urban parks of the 1820s through 1840s, many of which were studied by American visitors. Early examples of American romantic planning followed in the 1830s to 1850s, and finally came Llewellyn Park and Riverside. In addition to laying out this hitherto unexplored sequence of historical examples, my greater goal is to demonstrate the role of twin ideals, country and city, in the formation of this new American planning type, the romantic suburb. Attempts to bring together and reconcile the two ideals recur frequently in the history of Western thought, but from the birth of the American republic until the mid-19th century Americans generally considered the city to be incompatible with the predominantly agrarian and wilderness landscape of North America. Yet by the 1840s poets, novelists, travelers, social scientists, and architects began to suggest that city and country could thrive in harmony if the less desirable aspects of each could be eliminated. Attempts to achieve such new, hybrid environments in the 1850s and 1860s became the first prototypical romantic American suburbs.

**English precedents**

Four British planning types, examples of which many Ameri-

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can travelers observed in the 1820s through 1850s, constitute important precedents for American romantic suburbs. The first type is exemplified by a single case, Regent's Park: a Crown estate landscaped in a picturesque manner, embellished with isolated villas in the center, and surrounded by long, picturesquely articulated terraces. Begun in 1811, the park was completed in 1832, after John Nash modified his original designs several times. The grounds were partly opened to the public in 1835. Only during the later stages of its development (Fig. 1) did critics perceive the park as a true combination of country and city. Among the first was James Elmes, who in 1827 remarked on "this farm-like appendage to our metropolis," a combination of "splendour, health, dressed rurality and comforts such as nothing but a metropolis can afford."7 More characteristically suburban was Nash's design of 1823 for the Park Villages at the northeastern edge of the park (Fig. 2). As completed over the next several years, this pair of picturesquely landscaped communities flanking the Regent's Canal consisted of much smaller, denser, and less socially restrictive cottage and villa residences than in Regent's Park itself.8

The second relevant planning type is the private residential estate laid out at resort towns beginning in the 1820s. The designers of these estates clearly learned from Regent's Park and the Park Villages, applying in particular five planning techniques intended to create more attractive and profitable enterprises—techniques which also resulted in an effective combination of country and city. These innovations included first of all a uniformly low density of development, enhanced by open, "natural..."
ral” areas for recreation; second, accommodation of just one homogeneous class of resident, to insure the stability and uniformity of the area; third, nearby but carefully segregated service and market areas; fourth, provision for stables and mews at the periphery of the community; and finally the development of the estate according to a single plan, under one ownership. An early example is the Pittville estate at Cheltenham, laid out beginning in 1824 (Fig. 3).9

Perhaps the quintessential example of private estate development, and a seeming prototype for Llewellyn Park, is Calverley Park in Tunbridge Wells, laid out in 1827–1828 by Decimus Burton (Fig. 4). The principal feature of the design was a private park on the side of a hill, lined on its upper perimeter by middle class villas. Trees and hedgerows between the houses gave each a feeling of isolation in nature, while open space in front accommodated pleasure walks and commanded views of distant hills. The market was located some distance to the north, and stables were established to the northwest, closer to the center of town. John Britton immediately called this estate “a fashionable hamlet so rural,” and others specifically praised the successful combination here of country and city.10 In the same years John Nash and James Morgan collaborated on a plan for the Newbold Comyn Estate at Leamington (Fig. 5), a combination of detached villas, terraces, gardens, and walks that was a far more complex integration of city and country than Nash’s earlier work at Regent’s Park. Beginning in 1828 Decimus Burton’s father James also began plans for a highly picturesque group of detached villas surrounding a private subscription garden overlooking the Channel at St. Leonards (Fig. 6).11 In all these cases the architect placed a high premium on picturesque integration of dwellings and landscape, while maintaining a sense of privacy and separation from the rest of the town.

By the 1830s the growth of omnibus, rail, and ferryboat transportation facilitated development of a third planning type, the metropolitan commuter suburb.12 Unlike Regent’s Park, whose population could afford private carriages, and unlike resort estates whose residents had “retired” there for the season, metropolitan suburbs catered to middle class households with employment in the city and a taste for country life. In their picturesque form and in their organization as private companies many met-

9. Consisting of detached and semidetached villas and short terrace blocks, the development was separated by half a mile from the center of town, far enough away to avoid the bustle of urban life but close enough to insure access to markets and services. The center of social life, the Pittville “Spa” or pump room, was situated at the furthest end of the estate from town and connected to the villas and terraces by a series of curving rides and walks. Stables were provided on the eastern periphery for all villa owners, and transportation services soon were available on demand from a number of stations in the town. See especially S. Y. Griffith, *Griffith’s New Historical Description of Cheltenham*, London, 1826 and later editions. More recently see Gwen Hart, *A History of Cheltenham*, Leicester, 1965; Simonia Pakenham, *Cheltenham A Biography*, London, 1971; and Steven Blake, *Cheltenham Historical Walks No 1, The Pittville Estate*, Cheltenham, n.d.


ropolitan suburbs closely resembled such resort estates as Pittville and Calverley Park. Of dozens of such suburbs planned in the 1830s through 1850s, two will serve here as appropriate examples, for they both were familiar to Americans. In 1837 the Victoria Park Company was established in Manchester for laying out a private residential estate. Richard Lane, a prominent local architect, drew up a plan composed entirely of detached and semidetached residences plus four parks or greens, connected by serpentine, circular, and crescent-shaped roads, with outside access controlled by entrance gates and lodges (Fig. 7). The plan included one church; commercial structures were expressly forbidden. Within two years an observer found the design combined “the advantage of a close proximity to the town, [with] the privacy and advantage of a country residence.” Also in 1837 the Rock Park Estate, connected by ferry across the Mersey to Liverpool, was established as a private community with covenants in its Articles of Agreement providing for detached and semidetached houses, no more than two stories high, with no trade or business “other than the learned professions” to be carried on. The accompanying plan (Fig. 8) was prepared by Jonathan Bennison, a Liverpool surveyor, and incorporated gate lodges and serpentine roads, with houses sited to take advantage of views of the Mersey and of Liverpool beyond.

In 1838 the ideals of metropolitan suburban planning were canonized by John Claudius Loudon in his Suburban Gardener, and Villa Companion, a treatise known well by Downing and a host of other American architects. On the one hand, Loudon wrote, the suburban villa should offer advantages of country life: “The master of a suburban residence, however small may be his

Fig. 4. Decimus Burton, Calverley Park, Tunbridge Wells, 1827–1828, plan (John Britton, Descriptive Sketches of Tunbridge Wells, London, 1832).

13. Manchester As It Is, Manchester, 1839, 182. See too Maurice Spiers, Victoria Park Manchester, Manchester, 1976. Howard Daniels, landscape designer at Llewellyn Park, appears to have visited Victoria Park in the 1850s. See note 60 below.

demesne, may thus procure health and enjoyment at the same time." On the other hand, "One immense advantage of a suburban residence over one isolated in the country consists in its proximity to neighbours, and the facilities it affords of participating in those sources of instruction and enjoyment which can only be obtained in towns: for example, public libraries and museums, theatrical representations, musical concerts, public and private assemblies, exhibitions of works of art, &c."15

15. John Claudius Loudon, *The Suburban Gardener, and Villa Companion*, London, 1838, 9–10. Loudon also stressed the need for social homogeneity in a suburban neighborhood (p. 32), as well as the opportunity offered by a suburban location for personal reflection, growth, and regeneration (p. 33).

Fourth and finally, the recreational amenities of Regent's Park, recognized once it was fully opened to the public in 1841, catalyzed the development of urban parks throughout Britain in the 1840s and after. In a number of these parks private terraces, villas, and gardens were combined with public walks, drives, lawns, woods, and lakes. Birkenhead Park, begun in 1843, is one of the most frequently cited because of Frederick Law Olmsted's visit there in 1850.16 Nevertheless Prince's Park in Liverpool, laid out in 1842 by Joseph Paxton and James Pennethorne (Fig.

9), was an equally successful design, and known to William Cullen Bryant as early as 1845.17 Within two years of its inception contemporary observers noted “the advantages of both town and country” at Prince’s Park, describing it as a “welcome ... retreat from the bustle of business and the din and the dust of the streets,” and “surrounded by noble scenery,” yet “within a short distance of the town” and all its amenities.18

City versus country

Despite such a variety of attempts during the first half of the 19th century to combine rural and urban environments in England, many Americans during the same period feared the disease, corruption, and poverty that cities might bring to their predominantly agrarian society. Other Americans championed the progress of urbanization. But few in either camp actively promoted the physical union of urban and rural.19 Early in the life of the republic Thomas Jefferson argued in Notes on the State of Virginia (1787) that “mobs of great cities add just so much to the

17. Ibid., 46-48, and fn. 41.
support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body.” The moral corruption of cities clearly outweighed their economic and commercial benefits, and he recommended that “our work-shops” should “remain in Europe.” Horror of the city is combined with guarded appreciation of cities’ contributions to human culture in Charles Brockden Brown’s novel Arthur Mervyn (1799–1800). According to the author’s preface the book graphically depicts “the evils of disease and poverty” in Philadelphia during the yellow fever epidemic of 1793. At first Arthur, a country man, professed that “to plow, to sow, and to reap were employments most befitting a reasonable creature, and from which the truest pleasure and the least pollution would flow.” But on his second visit to the city Arthur admitted that culture, hitherto lacking in his life, thrived in an urban environment: “if cities are the chosen seats of misery and vice, they are likewise the soil of all the laudable and strenuous productions of mind.”

On the other hand Timothy Dwight, president of Yale and a keen observer of American life, was willing to overlook the ability of cities to nurture culture. He foresaw instead a day when the nation’s upper classes would be free of cities: “The time will come when it will not be thought necessary to place a country residence in the purlieus of a great city, or desirable to look for the pleasures of rural life in the neighborhood of the dwellings of market people and the stalls of butchers.” By living in country houses people could be free to perceive “beauty and elegance in a wilderness,” away from the corruptions and artificialities of urban life. Turning from the spiritual benefits of nature to the problem of political freedom, the lead article in the first issue of The United States Magazine and Democratic Review (1837) denounced cities, ruled by wealth, luxury, “aristocratic habits,” and “social influence,” as corrosive of post-Jacksonian democratic liberty.

Andrew Jackson Downing’s Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening (1841) well suited his contemporaries’ anti-urban attitudes. Praising Americans’ “love of rural life” and their common “ideal of a rural home,” he encouraged a “taste for rural improvements,” suggesting “practicable methods of embellishing our Rural Residences” in order to “render domestic life more delightful.” Downing was highly successful in promoting the application of picturesque aesthetic principles to rural American architecture, and contemporaries appreciated his insights into the special place of country life in America. One reviewer, for example, observed that Downing “has done for America what Sir Uvedale Price, or Whately, or Loudon, could

20. Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia, London, 1787, 275. Jefferson’s anti-urban sentiments have been the topic of some debate. See White, Intellectual versus the City, 14–19; Bender, Toward an Urban Vision, ix–xii; and Glaab and Brown, Urban America, 46–47.
not do. The work abounds in practical directions, while it also awakens that passion for the beautiful which must precede the beginning of exertion.” The reviewer concluded that “in the raised estimation of country life, we see a sign of hope for the advancement of the kingdom of Taste” in America.26 In 1849 Downing included an article in The Horticulturist further analyzing the pervasive and democratic character of American rural taste. Whereas European rural taste was “usually the offspring of concentrated wealth,” America was entirely “a nation of landholders, landlords,—not mere occupants, but owners of the soil,” thus facilitating “universal diffusion” of rural taste in America.27

This idealization of America as a democratic rural Arcadia is epitomized by Susan Fenimore Cooper’s Rural Hours (1850), a “simple record of those little events which make up the course of the seasons in rural life.” According to a contemporary reviewer it was meant to be taken in hand daily, and read “as the season unfolds itself,” like “a diary of nature, telling us of every bird, and flower, and rural incident that makes part of the out-door life of country people.”28 One year later Henry David Thoreau delved more directly into the private, spiritual aspects of nature in a brief essay titled “Walking,” written during the hiatus between his departure from Walden Pond and publication of his account of his stay there. In the essay he described nature as “absolute freedom and wildness,” and wholly superior to “merely civil” culture. Believing that man is more a part of nature than of society, Thoreau contended that America’s woods and swamps particularly suited his need to “recreate” his spirit and improve his health, far more so than “lawns and cultivated fields” or “towns and cities.”29

But many of Thoreau’s contemporaries found that the progress of urbanization could not be ignored, and soon began to champion the growth of cities. George Tucker, reflecting on the 1840 census returns, noted that during the previous decade population increased at a proportionately greater rate in towns than in rural areas, and he found much to praise in city life: “The growth of cities commonly marks the progress of intelligence and the arts, measures the sum of social enjoyment, and always implies increased mental activity.”30 In 1855 philosopher and educator Henry Tappan contradicted his own earlier animad-

28. [Susan Fenimore Cooper], Rural Hours, New York, 1850, v. Review of Rural Hours, Horticulturist, vi:4, Apr. 1851, 192.
29. Henry David Thoreau, “Walking,” in Writings, Walden Edition, New York, 1968, v, 205, 228, 226. In the same essay Thoreau noted that many of his contemporaries were “champions of civilization” (p. 205), and his own respect for human culture is apparent in the third chapter of Walden, where he discussed the importance of Classical literature, poetry, painting, sculpture, music, and philosophy.
versions on cities,31 asserting that “the association of men in cities is favorable to the highest development of humanity”: labor, capital, intelligence, and culture all would achieve their fullest potential in cities. He also foresaw a time when culture would expand across the landscape, but in a manner apparently in harmony with nature: “I hear the voice of the Genius of the place inviting to build and improve and adorn; to plant institutions; to erect temples to Minerva, Apollo, and the Muses; to revive the grove of Academus; to spread the garments of beautiful art over the form of beautiful nature—to make an Athens in the West.”32

In contrast to this optimism Henry Whitney Bellows complained in 1862 of the evils of both town and country. The latter, he said, was “a stupendous bore,” and its “monotony, seclusion, lack of variety and of social stimulus” led only to moral degeneracy. He also declared that the “first murderer was the first city-builder,” citing a host of urban problems. Nevertheless he predicted a prosperous future for American cities, for three principal reasons: first, cities were “the nurses of democratic institutions and ideas,” and thus were of increasing importance to “a great agricultural and commercial nation” such as America; second, cities were “the chosen residences of the enterprising, successful, and intelligent”; and third, in an age of rapid technological improvements cities could provide water, gas, fuel, food, transportation, and other amenities that “are not to be had in the country at any price.”33

Thus by the 1850s and 1860s Americans recognized the special advantages and disadvantages—spiritual, physical, political, and commercial—inherent in both city and country life; but they generally insisted that the two environments could not be mixed. Most believed that refined culture, while necessarily dependent on urban manufacturing and commerce, would flourish best in the country. None raised the possibility of physically combining the best of country and city, eliminating their respective defects, and creating a new, superior type of environment.34

Early proposals to combine city and country

Apart from those who argued that society and culture flourish best in cities, or that they require isolation and protection in the rural countryside, some Americans in the 1840s and 1850s began to suggest that city and country could be combined. Much of the impetus for this change in attitude came from exposure to English examples of suburban planning. No less important was the fact that America had become an increasingly urban society, dependent on manufacturing and commerce for its well-being. An expanding middle class of merchants, entrepreneurs, and others who were employed in cities had become well educated by Downing and his followers to a sophisticated taste for rural landscape. No doubt with these circumstances in mind American writers, architects, and landscapists shortly began to suggest that city and country could be combined, in a manner that would eliminate the disadvantages of each yet retain the amenities of both.

As early as 1835 Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, an American essayist, published a highly favorable account of the Park Villages in London (Fig. 2). He regretted “the unfavourable character of the comparison between these charming cottages, and the tasteless masses of brick and mortar in which people of the same class and of greater means are contented to live in my own country.” Mackenzie praised the picturesque beauty of Regent’s Park and its recreational opportunities, and called for similar attention to the picturesque landscape of Manhattan.35

James Fenimore Cooper visited Regent’s Park in 1828, too early to see it completed; but he did visit St. James’s Park, and in remarks published in 1837 he enthusiastically praised it as a perfect combination of town and country. The dwellings bordering the park, he said, were the most desirable in London: “their best windows overlook a beautiful rural scene interspersed with the finer parts of a capital.” Cooper even suggested that London as a whole displayed “finer rural beauties” than could be found anywhere in the surrounding countryside, implying that urban environments were not inherently antithetical to natural beauty.36 Shortly afterward Cooper resumed his Leatherstocking Tales and in The Pathfinder (1840) revealed a new tolerance of city life and commercial enterprise. At the end of the novel Pathfinder himself still remained the devotee of a natural God in the forest, but Jasper Western, whose “natural gifts” at times equaled those of Pathfinder, moved to New York to become a successful and respected merchant.

In 1833 Ralph Waldo Emerson also visited Regent’s Park, but apparently he was little impressed.37 Three years later he pub-

31. “Life in a great city is, at best, a war with nature.” Henry P. Tappan, A Step from the New World to the Old, and Back Again, New York, 1832, 1, 79.
34. I refer here to the lack of American proposals for quasi-rural resort, suburban, and urban developments such as those built in England during the early 19th century. For attempts in contemporary American art and literature to embrace both worlds in a new type of “middle landscape,” see Marx, Machine in the Garden, Chapter v.
lished his seminal transcendentalist essay on "Nature," which focused solely on the relation between the individual and nature. Nevertheless an entry in his journal for 1844 expressed a desire to combine the spiritual strength of nature with city sophistication: "I wish to have rural strength of religion for my children, and I wish city facility and polish. I find with regret that I cannot have both."38

William Cullen Bryant’s transcendental experience of nature was not unlike Emerson’s. In "A Forest Hymn" (1825) he wrote: "Here is continual worship;—Nature, here, In the tranquillity that thou dost love, Enjoys thy presence."

Yet Bryant also found a spiritual presence in the city: in "Hymn of the City" (1830) he exclaimed “Even here do I behold / Thy steps, Almighty!—here, amidst the crowd.”39 Bryant’s visit in 1835 to the gardens of Munich apparently stimulated thoughts of a similar park for New York City, culminating in an editorial in the Evening Post praising the picturesque beauties of Manhattan and regretting the need for people to leave New York in order to enjoy rural pleasures.40 In 1845 Bryant traveled to England, and his visits to three sites in particular—Prince’s Park (Fig. 9), Regent’s Park (Fig. 1), and the town of Leamington—are significant. In Letters of a Traveller (1850) he praised the landscape at Prince’s Park, including its lake, trees, shrubs, and views.41 He also was impressed by Regent’s Park, and lamented the lack of a similar plan for New York.42 During three days at Leamington he made no mention of recent projects for villa estates, but he hardly could have ignored a townscape that since 1822 had been described as true “rus in urbe” and “urbs in rure.”43

By the mid-1840s literary works by Americans who had not been to Europe also began to reflect a desire to meld country with city. When Cornelius Mathew’s Big Abel and the Little Manhattan appeared in 1845, a reviewer noted its “absorbing love for two utterly opposite modes of life, The Wilderness and Civilization.”44 These are personified by two principal characters, one a descendant of the Indian chiefs who originally owned Manhattan, and the other a descendant of the European explorer Henry Hudson. The two surveyed the streets of Manhattan together, the Indian claiming his right to the island’s natural amenities and Big Abel claiming the products of civilization for himself. The reader nevertheless recognizes that even in New York, despite the characters’ competing claims, nature and civilization flourished together in harmony.

In 1841 Nathaniel Hawthorne spent several months at the communitarian Brook Farm settlement, during a period when its members were committed to Transcendentalism. The Blithedale Romance (1852), a novel based in part on his experiences there, reveals an author keenly aware of the attractions and the displeasures of both city and country life. It demonstrates his distaste for the corruption and disease of cities, as well as his unease with the nakedness of his spirit alone in nature. Upon first leaving the city he was glad to inhale air “that had not been breathed once and again! air that had not been spoken into words of falsehood, formality and error.” But in the country he soon found “It was impossible, situated as we were, not to imbibe the idea that everything in nature and human existence was fluid, or fast becoming so; that the crust of the earth in many places was broken, and its whole surface portentously upheaving; that it was a day of crisis, and that we ourselves were in the critical vortex.” There followed an immediate, almost desperate return to the city: “the thick, foggy, stifled element of cities, the entangled life of many men together, sordid as it was, and empty of the beautiful, took quite as strenuous a hold upon my mind.”45

One year after publishing this novel Hawthorne went abroad as American Consul and settled in Rock Park (Fig. 8), a community he may have found attractive precisely because it combined both urban and rural amenities, with few of the disadvantages of either type of environment.

Among the earliest American proposals for a community that would combine the advantages of country and city was Albert Brisbane’s Concise Exposition of the Doctrine of Association (1843), a pamphlet promoting the establishment of Fourierist utopian communities. The design he proposed was a single large edifice, encompassing a series of interior courtyards and gardens, and also surrounding three sides of a large public square. Located in the countryside far from urban areas, this edifice would accommodate the “intimate correlation, correspondence or analogy between Nature and the human Soul.” Brisbane also promised that such communities would “combine all the advantages, resources and enjoyments of city and country life, and avoid the disadvantages of both.”46

38. Ibid., vi, 506.
40. On Bryant’s visit to Munich see his Letters, ed. William Cullen Bryant II and Thomas G. Voss, New York, 1975, i, 465–473. On his early thoughts concerning a park for New York see Parke Godwin, A Biography of William Cullen Bryant, New York, 1883, i, 335. N.b. Alexander Slidell Mackenzie had published similar ideas concerning New York while Bryant was still in Europe; see fn. 35. Bryant’s editorial appeared in The Evening Post, xl, i, 3 July 1844, 2.
42. Letters of a Traveller, 169–170.
Approximately four years later William Ranlett prepared the first published American design for a suburban village similar to English prototypes, incorporating detached, picturesquely landscaped villas. Indeed Ranlett may have learned something of English examples through his acquaintance with William Cullen Bryant, who had recently returned from England. The design, illustrated in Ranlett’s book The Architect (1847; Fig. 10), was prepared for a site on Staten Island apparently not far from the already successful suburban community of New Brighton (Fig. 11). Ranlett’s design consisted of 16 rectangular plots, each containing one house, and landscaped with trees, gardens, and curving walks. In his text Ranlett indicated that a suburban residence “combines, to some extent, the advantages and pleasures of city, and country life,” but as an architect whose work primarily consisted of country houses, he was reluctant to accord too much praise to suburbs. A suburban residence, he said, does not contain the advantages of either city or country “to the full,” while a “country residence affords . . . pleasures and profits which are unknown in exclusive city life.”

Over the next few years another country house architect, Andrew Jackson Downing, expounded several ideals that shortly became fundamental to suburban planning. In a speech delivered in 1848 he acknowledged that he, like Boston, was “an associationist,” believing that in all the human race there is a “yearning after the lost garden.” He considered gardening, therefore, “as being[,] next to religion, the great humanizer of the age.” His own goal was to bring “men into daily contact with nature . . . in their country and cottage homes.” Two years later he published an essay on “Country Villages” in which he advocated a “true rural faith” and included a description of an ideal “rural village.” This incorporated “a large open space, common, or park, situated in the middle of the village,” covered with lawn and trees and extending over 20 to 50 acres. “This park would be the nucleus or heart of the village, and would give it an essentially rural character.” The “best cottages and residences” would front on the park. Wide streets bordered with elms or maples would lead to other parts of the village, in which the minimum lot frontage would be 100 feet. Thus all parts of the village would have “space, view, circulation of air, and broad, well-planted avenues of shade-trees.” In addition the park would serve as a center for social gatherings and musical performances. Downing did not apply the term “suburban” to his design, yet in its principal features it prefigures several important suburbs of the

48. Ranlett indicated the design was prepared for Col. N. Barrett of Staten Island (The Architect, New York, 1847, 1, 61). Most of Barrett’s property lay just to the west of New Brighton; for this information I am grateful to Hugh Powell, Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences. In 1871 Olmsted singled out New Brighton to praise its suburban character, finding its houses “wholly untownlike, . . . surrounded by grounds with a variety of flourishing trees.” The views were “magnificent,” and the roads were well lighted, paved, and neatly bordered with sod (Fein, Landscape into Cityscape, 195).


Fig. 10. William H. Ranlett, design for a village, ca. 1847, plan (Ranlett, The Architect, New York, 1847).
next two decades, including Llewellyn Park and Riverside.  
Three months later Downing was in Europe, and his remarks on Regent’s Park are telling: he admired the private villas in the center of the park for being “the perfection of a residence in town, viz., a country-house in the midst of a great park,” a perfect *rus in urbe.*

Over the next several years architectural and horticultural writers used the word “suburb” in an increasingly restricted manner. Formerly referring in a general way to the outskirts of urban areas, the term eventually came to denote a positive union of urban and rural characteristics. In 1855 Gervase Wheeler, an English architect who had emigrated to America, divided country houses into three classes, of which the first class, or “villa,” specifically served “those who, doing business in the city, make their family home in the suburb.” “Partaking in its form and arrangements both of the town-house and the country residence,” a villa would especially suit, for example, “a family of moderate size, . . . who to their rural tastes [have] joined the social habits of the city.” The next year Henry W. Cleaveland and William and Samuel Backus described the “suburban village” as a combination of city “conveniences and privileges” with the rural “luxuries of a garden and an unrestricted supply of light and air.” Likewise in 1857 Calvert Vaux, a former associate of Downing, described the “suburban house” as a “combination of both the city and the country residence.”

Landscapists were considerably less successful in their attempts to characterize “suburban” gardens and village landscapes, but through the 1850s there was a concerted effort to identify specific physical features of such gardens and villages. In 1853 an editorial in *Harper’s* recommended that roads in suburban towns “ought to wind,” in order to preserve “quiet” and facilitate “rural enjoyment.” In 1856 an article in the *Horticulturist* carefully prescribed the necessary elements a “rural improver” should incorporate in any “village” subdivision: schools, walks, water, gas, gardens, a lake, trees, shrubbery, flowers, curved drives—in other words, the amenities of city life combined with the beauties of the country. Howard Daniels, a landscapist

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52. Frederick Law Olmsted, whose work included Riverside, knew this essay and apparently thought of it favorably (*Papers*, ed. McLaughlin, 1, 362).

53. Downing, *Rural Essays*, 553. His remarks originally appeared in the *Horticulturist*, vi:6, June 1855, 281–286. Downing’s tone suggests disapproval of the undemocratic way in which the Regent’s Park villas were reserved for “certain favored nobles.”


57. For example, the author of “Suburban Gardening” (*Horticulturist*, viii:10, Oct. 1852, 447–448) tried to define “landscape gardening” and “suburban gardening” as different “species” of gardening, but did little more than note that “one retires far from the city, the other lingers on its skirts.”


who worked at Llewellyn Park following his return from England in 1856, described some of the characteristics of English suburban “Villa Parks” in an article he contributed to the Horticulturist in 1858. These communities were “groups of villas, with gardens of greater or less extent, surrounding a park of from ten to an hundred or more acres, which is owned, managed, and used exclusively by the residents of the surrounding villas.” He cited particularly “splendid examples at Birkenhead, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, and many other towns in England,” thus indicating that he must have known such important prototypes as Victoria Park (Fig. 7) and Prince’s Park (Fig. 9) before beginning work at Llewellyn Park.60

First American examples

A common factor in the rise of nearly all American suburbs, especially those that would combine proximity to city life with the amenities of a natural landscape, was convenient transportation. Indeed reliable commuter ferries or railroads with frequent service and within the financial means of prospective residents not only preceded the foundation of most suburbs, including all but one of those to be discussed here, but also were essential to their success. As early as 1831 Charles Caldwell predicted that railroads would bring city and country together: “The entire people of the United States, . . . will experience all the benefits, with but few of the evils of a crowded population. . . . They will possess a large share of the knowledge, refinement, and polish of a city, united to the virtue and purity of the country.”61 A third of a century later architect George Woodward declared that railroads and ferryboats had made it possible to realize the suburban ideal, to “live in the country and enjoy its best luxuries, without abandoning the city as far as its commercial advantages are concerned.”62

One of the earliest American commuter suburbs laid out in a formal plan with particular attention to the natural beauty of the site was New Brighton on Staten Island. A prospectus issued in 1836 touted the site’s “beauty of location, extent of prospect, and salubrity of climate,” and its connection with lower Manhattan “throughout the day by two swift and beautiful steamboats.” Individuals “engaged in active business” could retreat

60. On Daniels’s work at Llewellyn Park see “Landscape-Gardening” (fn. 2). His return from Europe was announced in “Howard Daniels, Esq.,” Horticulturist, n.s. vii:2, Feb. 1856, 98. His remarks on England appear in “Villa Parks,” Horticulturist, n.s. xiii, 1858, 495–496.


“from the labor and anxiety of commerce to the quiet of their own families, unexposed to intrusion,” and enjoy “extensive rides over roads in excellent order” and “fish and game” which “are to be found in every direction.”63 The prospectus included a plan and view of the proposed development, possibly designed by the British-born architect John Haviland.64 The centerpiece (Fig. 11) consisted of three rows of villas ranged parallel to the waterfront, topped by a crescent of large, imposing residences, all commanding impressive views of New York Bay. Along the waterfront were small “Bathing houses” and, farther to the west, two large hotels, all adding a “resort” character to this suburb.65

As at New Brighton, the plan of Evergreen Hamlet (Fig. 12) did not consist of winding, landscaped avenues, so common in later suburbs. Nevertheless its site—top a ridge and a bluff in the hills north of Pittsburgh—was thoroughly picturesque. Laid out in 1851, the settlement embodied characteristics of a middle class suburb as well as a utopian community. The six original founders, professional men and merchants with businesses in Pittsburgh, were able to commute daily by plank road and, eventually, by rail from nearby Bennett’s Station (now Millvale).66 They hoped “to combine, if possible, some of the benefits of country and city life; and, at the same time, avoid some of the inconveniences and disadvantages of both.”67 The community

Cullen Bryant’s editorial proposing a public park for Manhattan he referred to New Brighton as one of the principal resorts for “short excursions” from the city (“A New Public Park,” The Evening Post, XLII, 3 July 1844, 2). Nor was the combination of resort and suburb unknown in England: see for example the “Hotel” at New Brighton and the “Hotel” and the “Baths” at one side of the 1837 plan for Rock Park (Fig. 8).

I am indebted to Shirley Zavin, Eloise Beil, and Hugh Powell, all presently or formerly of the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences, for sharing their knowledge of New Brighton with me.

64. On Haviland see Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences, Staten Island an Architectural History, New York, 1979, 5. Also see Matthew Eli Baigell, “John Haviland,” Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1964, and additional information at the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences, files 6. Arct. II 19.25 and 19.26. Haviland emigrated to the United States in 1816. It is clear that he was engaged at several sites in New Brighton, and perhaps designed the entire Crescent, but his connection with the entire layout is tenuous at best.
65. Although it is generally assumed that New Brighton was meant to emulate Brighton in England, the design bears a far closer resemblance to New Brighton, laid out as a resort suburb of Liverpool ca. 1832. At New Brighton, England, villas are arranged in rows parallel to the waterfront, rising up the side of a hill and overlooking the water in a manner much like that on Staten Island. See William Williams Mortimer, The History of the Hundred of Wirral, London, 1847, 300–301; E. Cuthbert Woods and F. Culverwell Brown, The Rise and Progress of Wallasey, Wallasey, 1960, 151–153; and Edwards [of Dale Street, Liverpool], Plan of New Brighton, [1835?], (copy in Wallasey Library).
66. One of the earliest descriptions of New Brighton noted that “it promises fair to be one of the most frequented watering places in the country” (The Richmond County Mirror, 1:1, July 1837, 1). In William
67. [Shinn], Constitution, 1. Shinn also noted the “health, comfort, and happiness” of a country location. But unlike “the usual isolated plan of country residences” this community would have “the benefits of convenient neighborhood, and social intercourse,” of particular advantage in “the education of children” and in preventing loneliness (ibid., 1–2). Shinn appears to have had a special interest in education: see his Home
was governed by a private constitution, which limited the number of families to 16, and provided for communal ownership of a 50 to 150 acre farm, a dairy, fruit orchards, gardens, and pasturage.68

Perhaps the first suburb to be designed in accord with Downing’s suggestions for “Country Villages” was Glendale, Ohio (Fig. 13), laid out in 1851 adjacent to a railroad line providing commuter service to Cincinnati.69 In March 1851 a local newspaper article had recommended, like Downing, that grounds be reserved in the center of suburban subdivisions for parks, to be embellished with trees and shrubbery, and that roads and lots be laid out according to the “natural advantages” of the site.70 Shortly afterward a group of 30 men formed the Glendale Association and had 200 acres laid out for suburban residences. The plan, prepared by Robert C. Phillips, accords well with Downing’s recommendations and also with those in the newspaper article: private lots of one to 20 acres, four parks, and a lake are connected by winding roads following the contours of the landscape.71

In 1857 Jed Hotchkiss, a St. Louis engineer and landscapist, prepared a similarly picturesque plan for the community of Lake Forest, Illinois. The site was purchased in 1856 by the Lake Forest Association, with 50 acres reserved to establish Presbyterian institutions of higher learning, and the rest to be sold as private residential lots. Located between the shore of Lake Michigan and the tracks of the North-Western Railroad, the site was within easy commuting distance of Chicago. Hotchkiss’s plan took advantage of the 50- to 90-foot bluffs overlooking the lake, several deep ravines, and the otherwise gently rolling forested terrain, with curving avenues bordered by green “parkways” connecting college buildings, park lands, and spacious residential lots.72

In 1853 Llewellyn Haskell, a New York City pharmaceutical merchant who suffered from rheumatism, sought out a healthful site for a country residence. He chose a location in the Orange Mountains, immediately adjacent to two mineral springs that had been popular resorts in the 1820s.73 Over the next three years Alexander Jackson Davis carried out architectural improvements for Haskell and also built a summer residence for himself on an adjacent site.74 An 1856 map shows a few additional residences, plus extensive landscaping in “The Glenn” and “The Forrest” to the southwest of the Haskell and Davis residences, with curving drives, woods, streams, and ponds.75 The next year


73. Little is known of Haskell’s personal history. On his “rheumatic complaint” see David Lawrence Pierson, *History of the Oranges*, New York, 1922, 11, 306. The two most authoritative studies of Llewellyn Park are Davies, “Llewellyn Park,” and Wilson, “Idealism.”

The springs, known variously as Chalbybeate Springs, Condit’s Spring, and Orange Springs, were discovered and developed beginning in 1820 and the resorts flourished until the mid-1850s. In 1823 a newspaper article described the site in terms portentous of Llewellyn Park, noting it was frequented by those “who seek relaxation from business and the turmoil of a city residence” (The Centinel of Freedom, XXVII, 48, 12 August 1823, 3). Additional articles and advertisements appear in issues of the Centinel dated 15 August, 29 August, and 19 September 1820, 18 March, 8 May, and 12 June 1821. See also Joseph Warren Greene, Jr., “Orange Springs a Century Ago,” in New Jersey Historical Society, Proceedings, n.s. XV, July 1930, 361–371; Pierson, *History*, 11, 255–258; Harry B. Weiss and Howard R. Kemble, *They Took to the Waters*, Trenton, 1962, 115–119; and Henry Whitemore, *The Founders and Builders of the Oranges*, Newark, 1896, 305–309.

74. Davies, “Llewellyn Park,” 143; Wilson, “Idealism,” 80–81. Some have suggested that between 1853 and 1856 or 1857 Haskell conducted a communitarian experiment in utopian Perfectionism here: see *Pageant in Honor of . . . Llewellyn S. Haskell*, [n. loc.], 1916, 8; Tunnard, “Romantic Suburb”; and Wilson, “Idealism.” Nevertheless sound evidence of Haskell’s commitment to Perfectionism is scanty, and Perfectionist sentiments of other residents are not well documented.

75. Thomas Hughes’s *Map of the Town of Orange*, 1856, includes an inset titled “Map of Eagle-Ridge Property of L.S. Haskell 1856.” There is a copy of the map in the collection of The New Jersey Historical Society. It is unclear who was responsible for landscaping The Glen and The Forest. Davies found no evidence of such work among Davis’s records, and attributed the design to Haskell, as did the author of an article on “Landscape-Gardening” that appeared in 1857 (see fn. 2 and 4). These portions of Llewellyn Park are illustrated in Henry Winthrop
a lithographed promotional plan (Fig. 14) appeared, showing additional areas laid out as “villa sites,” a scheme for which Howard Daniels, recently returned from England, may be partly responsible.\textsuperscript{76} At the same time an advertisement appeared in the \textit{Orange Journal}, announcing “Villa Sites of, from 5 to 10 Acres Each,” and characterizing the community for the first time as a perfect commuter suburb: the site, within an hour of New York City via the Morris & Essex Railroad, was “selected with special reference to the wants of citizens doing business in the city, and yet wanting accessible, retired, and healthful homes in the country.” The community was laid out “in the modern natural style of landscape gardening,” with “magnificent” views available, while the privacy of all residents would be protected “by a Lodge and gate-keeper at the entrance.”\textsuperscript{77}

Sargent’s supplement to \textit{Daniels’ Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening}, 6th ed., New York, 1859, Figs. 105 and 106.\textsuperscript{78} Contrary to this hypothesis, a newspaper article of 1860 attributed this “plan for constructing a park, which should make the locality a desirable residence for business men of New-York” to Haskell (“Llewellyn Park at Orange, N.J.,” \textit{The World}, 1:74, 8 September 1860, 3). Nevertheless the article dated the “plan” to the spring of 1856, which still would permit time for Daniels to have made a contribution.

\textit{The Orange Journal}, iii:47, 16 May 1857, 3. The advertisement appeared regularly, with minor changes, through 28 November 1865. The article on “Landscape-Gardening” in \textit{The Crayon} (ft. 2) highlighted three aspects of the design: the picturesque layout, the division of the estate into lots of one to ten acres, and the privacy of the estate. Further discussion of its suburban characteristics appears in \textit{The Orange Journal} for 6 June 1857 and 26 March 1859. Sargent, in his supplement to \textit{Daniels’ Treatise}, enumerated several “advantages” of this “social park” designed for “merchants or professional men, who seek a refuge

By the mid-1850s, therefore, the combination of country and city was a firmly established principle of American suburban planning. When a group of eastern businessmen consulted Olmsted, Vaux & Co. in 1868 regarding a tract of land at Riverside, south of Chicago, that they proposed to develop as a suburb, they took it for granted the design should combine “urban and rural advantages,” and the landscape architects concurred.\textsuperscript{79} The next year Olmsted and Vaux prepared a plan (Fig. 15) that incorporated convenient commuter rail access to Chicago, as well as gently curving drives “to suggest and imply leisure, contemplativeness and happy tranquility,” plus open landscaped “public grounds” for recreation.\textsuperscript{79} In 1871 the developers’ own publicity again made the combination of country and city explicit: Riverside was designed “in such a manner as to combine the conveniences of the city—viz, Gas, Water, Roadways, Walks and Drainage—with all the beauties of landscape gardening and the essential advantages of the country.” Indeed they suggested that society and culture would flourish far better here than in the city:


\textsuperscript{77} ibid., 17, 28.
A life at Riverside... is rather the elegant culmination of refined tastes which cannot be gratified in the city, and is the proper field for the growth of that higher culture which finds in art, nature, and congenial society combined a greater variety of pleasures than can be found between the high walls of city houses, and affords a fuller, freer, happier life for man, woman and child, than a home in the city.80

80. Riverside Improvement Company, Riverside in 1871, Chicago, 1871, 5, 15. See also Alonzo James’s remarks in “Chicago No. III.—Riverside,” The Western Home, III:3, Mar. 1870, 33–34, praising Riverside for incorporating “the benefits conveniences and luxuries of city life, as well as the advantages of pure country air and suburban homes.”

Discussion of the preceding examples of American suburbs has been condensed due to space limitations. These examples, plus others in England and America, will be the focus of a much larger study of ideals of country and city in suburban planning that I am preparing for future publication.

What had only been implicit in the design of Regent’s Park two generations earlier—a desire to combine the amenities of country and city—now had been transformed into an explicit principle on which Riverside and other American romantic suburbs were built. This transformation had been accomplished in part in English resorts, suburbs, and parks during the first half of the century. The process was completed in mid-century American suburbs through a combination of two circumstances: first, Americans were well aware of English precedents; second, and perhaps more important, the ongoing expansion of population, commerce, and industry began to force an accommodation of country and city environments. The American romantic suburb thereby evolved through a sequence of attempts to resolve conflicts between country and city by creating a synthesis of the best of both worlds.