"Manifestations of refined domestic life" ranked high on Frederick Law Olmsted's scale of values. He called them "unquestionably the ripest and best fruits of civilization." In 1888 he published his plan for a residence in East Greenwich, Rhode Island, in Garden and Forest, Charles Sargent's journal of horticulture, landscape art, and forestry. Within this small site Olmsted accommodated many modes of outdoor living—a vine-canopied garden room, a tiny pleasure garden to be considered a part of the house, a "retired seat" for quiet pursuits—and with an artful planting design, connected the homestead to the larger landscape, achieving the sense of Nature's infinitude that the owner desired. Olmsted never put into writing his intentions for his own home in Brookline, but we can assume that the Rhode Island design exemplifies his ideal, combining "the enjoyment, the comfort, the tranquillity, the morality and the permanent furnishings, interior and exterior, of a home."

Plan for a Small Homestead

Frederick Law Olmsted

Conditions and Requirements.—The site is upon the south face of a bluff, the surface of which is so steep that the rectangular street system of the city, to the east and south, had not been extended over it. The diagonal streets, M and N, have been lately introduced and building lots laid off on them, as shown in Figure 1. The triangular space between L and M Streets is a public property containing the graves of some of the first settlers of the region. Its northern and western parts are rock and partly covered by a growth of native Thorns and Junipers, east of which there are Willows and other planted trees. At A there is a meeting-house and parsonage. Arabic figures show elevations above city datum.

The lot to be improved is that marked IX. The usual conveniences of a suburban cottage home are required, and it is desired that it should be made more than usually easy and convenient for members of the household, one of whom is a chronic invalid, to sit much and be cheerfully occupied in out-of-door air and sunlight. A small fruit and vegetable garden is wanted and a stable for a single horse and a cow, with carriage room and lodgings for a man. Water for the house, garden and stable is to be supplied by pipes. There is a sewer in M Street.

The problem is to meet the requirements thus stated so snugly that the labor of one man will be sufficient, under ordinary circumstances, to keep the place in good order and provide such gratification of taste as with good gardening management the circumstances will allow.

The north-west corner of the lot is 21 feet higher than the south-east corner, the slope being steeper in the upper and lower parts than in the middle. There is a small outcrop of a ledge of limestone about 30 feet from the south end, and the ground near it is rugged and somewhat gullied. M Street, which has a rapid descent to the eastward, opposite the lot, was brought to its grade by an excavation on the north side and by bank-
ing out on its south side, the bank being supported by a retaining wall. The excavation has left a raw bank two to five feet high on the street face of the lot.

Looking from the middle part of the lot over the roof of the parsonage a glimpse is had of a river, beyond which, in low bottom land, there is a body of timber, chiefly Cottonwood, over which, miles away, low, pastured hills appear in pleasing undulations.

The narrower frontage of lot IX, its irregular outlines, its steepness, its cramped surface, the raw, caving bank of its street face and its apparent rockiness and barrenness, had made it slower of sale than any other on the hill streets, and it was, accordingly, bought at so low a price by its present owner that he is not unwilling to pay liberally for improvements that will give him such accommodations upon it as he calls for. From the adjoining lots and those higher up the hill to the north the view which has been referred to, over the roof of the parsonage, is liable to be curtailed off by trees to grow, or houses to be built, on the south side of them. Either this liability has been overlooked or the view has been considered of little value by those who have bought them. "Most people," says the owner of lot IX, "find their love of Nature most gratified when they have a trim lawn and a display of flowers and dehances of vegetation upon it in front of their houses. I find Nature touches me most when I see it in a large way; in a way that gives me a sense of its infinitude. I like to see a natural horizon against the sky, and I think that the advantage we shall have here in that respect will fully compensate us for the want of a fine lawn-like front, provided the place can be made reasonably convenient." Fortunately his wife is essentially like-minded. "I am a Western woman," she says, "and would not like to live in a place that I could not see out of without looking into the windows of my neighbors."

**Controlling Landscape Considerations.**—The only valuable landscape resource of the property lies in the distant view eastward from it. Looking at this from the house place, it can evidently be improved by placing in its foreground a body of vigorous, dark foliage, in contrast with which the light gray and yellowish greens of the woods of the river bottom will appear of a more delicate and tender quality, and the grassy hills beyond more mysteriously indistinct, far away, unsubstantial and dreamy. Such a foreground can be formed within the limits of lot IX, and, strictly speaking, the forming of it will be the only landscape improvement that can be made on the place. It is, however, to be considered, that when the middle of the lot is occupied by a house but small and detached spaces will remain to be furnished with verdure or foliage, and that anything to be put upon these spaces will come under direct and close scrutiny. Hence nothing should be planted in them that during a severe drought or an intense winter or in any other probable contingency is likely to become more than momentarily shabby. Further, it is to be considered, that when the eye is withdrawn from a scene the charm of which lies in its extent and the softness and indefiniteness, through distance, of its detail, the natural beauty in which the most pleasure is likely to be taken will be of a somewhat complementary or antithetical character. But to secure such beauty it is not necessary to provide a series of objects the interest of which will lie in features and details to be seen separately, and which would be most enjoyed if each was placed on a separate pedestal, with others near it of contrasting qualities of detail, each on its own separate pedestal. It may be accomplished by so bringing together materials of varied graceful forms and pleasing tints that they will intimately mingle, and this with such intricate play of light and shade, that, though the whole body of them is under close observation, the eye is not drawn to dwell upon, nor the mind to be occupied with, details. In a small place much cut up, as this must be, a comparative subordination, even to obscurity, of details, occurring as thus proposed, and not as an effect of distance, is much more conducive to a quiescent and cheerfully musing state of mind than the presentation of objects of specific admiration.

**Anatomical Plan.**—The important common rooms of the family and the best chambers are to be on the southern side of the house, in order that the view over the river, the south-western breeze and the western twilight, may be enjoyed from their windows. [See figure 2.] It follows that the kitchen and the main entrance door to the house are to be on its north and east side. Were it not for excessive steepness, the best approach to the house would be on a nearly straight course between its east side and the nearest point on M
feet in front of the wall of the house. This retaining wall is to be built of stained and crannied, refuse blocks of limestone which have been formerly thrown out from the surface in opening quarries on the back of the bluff. They are to be laid without mortar and with a spreading base and irregular batter. Where the ledge can be exposed they will rest upon it, and the undressed rock will form a part of the face of the wall. A railing two and a half feet high is to be carried on the top of the retaining wall, and the space (b) between this and the wall of the house will be an open terrace upon which will open half-glazed French windows on the south of the library, parlor and dining-room. At c (figure 2) there is to be a little room for plants in winter, the sashes of which are to be removed in summer, when the space is to be shaded by a sliding awning. At d a roof covers a space large enough for a tea table or work table, with a circle of chairs about it, out of the house proper, forming a garden room. This roof is to be sustained by slender columns and lattice-work, and lattice-work is to be carried over it and the whole to be overgrown with vines.

Street—i.e., the south-east corner of the lot; this partly because it would be least costly and most convenient, and partly because it would make the smallest disturbance of the space immediately before the more important windows of the house. But to get an approach of the least practicable steepness the place will be entered at the highest point on M Street—i.e., the south-west corner; then a quick turn will be taken to the right, in order to avoid the ledge, then, after passing the ledge, another to the left. On this course a grade of one in twelve and a half can be had. (The grade on the shortest course would be one in seven.) Opposite the entrance to the house there is to be a nearly level space where carriages can rest.

The caving bank made by the cut for grade of M Street requires a retaining wall four feet high along the front of the lot. This will allow a low ridge, nearly level along the top, to be formed between the wheelway and the street, making the wheelway safer and a less relatively important circumstance to the eye.

Even in the part of the lot chosen, as being the least steep, for the house, a suitable plateau for it to stand upon can only be obtained by an embankment on the south and an excavation on the north. The embankment is to be kept from sliding down hill by a wall ten (Honeysuckle on one side, Wistaria on the other, the two mingling above). The space ee is reserved for a tiny pleasure garden, to be entered from the house and to be considered much as if, in summer, it were a part of it carpeted with turf and embellished with foliage and flowers. At f there is to be a retired seat for reading and intimate conversation, and east of this an entrance to the service gardens, to be described later. The laundry yard, h, and the kitchen yard, i, are to be screened by high lattices covered by Virginia Creeper [Parthenocissus quinquefolia]. The court yard, j, is to be smoothly paved with asphalt blocks or fire brick, which it will be easy to thoroughly hose and swab every day. In one corner of it is a brick ash house, k; in another a dog house, m. The stable and carriage house are entered from the court yard, but hay will be taken into the loft from a wagon standing in the passage to the back lane. At n is the stable yard.

Landscape Gardening.—The soil to be stripped from the sites of the house, terrace, stable, road and walks, will be sufficient, when added to that on the ground elsewhere, to give full two feet of soil wherever needed for turf or planting.

Trenches, nowhere less than two feet deep, are to be made on each side of the approach road south of the
terrace and to be filled with highly enriched soil, the surface of which is to slope upward with a slight concavity as it recedes from the approach. The base of the wall is to merge irregularly into this slope. The space between the terrace and the street is so divided by the approach, and, in the main, is so steep and dry, that no part of it can be well kept in turf, nor can trees be planted in it, because they would soon grow to obstruct the southward view from the house and terrace. The steep dry ground and the rock and rough wall of this space are to be veiled with vines rooting in the trenches. The best vine for this purpose is the common old clear green Japan Honeysuckle (*Lonicera Halliana* (now *L. japonica* ‘Halliana’)). In this sheltered situation it will be verdant most, if not all, of the winter, and blooming, not too flauntingly, all of the summer. It can be planted not only over the rough, sloping wall of the terrace, but also over the railing above it, and here to be kept closely trimmed, so as to appear almost hedgelike. Also it may be trained up the columns of the shelter and along its roof; the odor from its bloom will be pleasing on the terrace, and will be perceptible, not oppressively, at the windows of the second story. Other vegetation is to be introduced sparingly to mingle with it, the wild Rose and Clematis of the neighborhood; the Akebia vine (*Akebia quinata*), double flowering Brambles (Rubus ulmifolius ‘Bellidiflorus’?), and, in crevices of the wall, Rhus aromatica, dwarf Brambles, Cotoneaster microphylla, Indian Fig (Opuntia sp.), Aster, and Golden Rod, but none of these in conspicuous bodies, for the space is not too large to be occupied predominatingly by a mass of foliage of a nearly uniform character. Near the southwest corner of the pleasure garden, Forsythia suspensa is to fall over the wall, and, also, as a drapery in the extreme corner (because the odor to those near the bloom of it is not pleasant), Matrimony vine (Lycium vulgare (now L. barbarum)). Upon the walls of the house east of the terrace, Japanese Ivy (*Ampelopsis Veitchii* (now Parthenocissus tricuspidata ‘Veitchii’)) is to be grown, and before it a bush of the fiery Thorn (*Crataegus Pyracantha*, now *Pyracantha coccinea*). For the ground on the street side of the approach, *p.p.*, smooth-leaved shrub evergreens would be chosen were they likely to thrive. But both the limestone soil and the situation is unfavorable to them. Next, a dark compact mass of round-headed Conifers would best serve the purpose of a foreground to the distant view, but there are none that can be depended on to thrive long in the situation that could be kept within the required bounds except by giving them a stubbed and clumsy form by the use of the knife. The best available material for a strong, low mass, with such deep shadows on the side toward the terrace as it is desirable to secure, and which is most sure to thrive permanently in the rather dry and hot situation, will be found in the more horizontally branching of the Thorn trees (*Crataegus*), which grow naturally in several varieties on other parts of the hill. Their heads may be easily kept low enough, especially in the case of the Cockspur (*C. Crus-galli*), to leave the view open from the terrace without taking lumpy forms. But as a thicket of these spreading thorn bushes, fifty feet long, so near the eye, might be a little stiff and monotonous, a few shrubs are to be blended with them, some of which will send straggling sprays above the mass and others give delicacy, grace and liveliness, both of color and texture, to its face. Common Privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*), red-twigged Dogwood (*Cornus sericea*), common and purple Barberry (*Berberis vulgaris*), Deutzia scabra, Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) and Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*) may be used for the purpose. American Elms have already been planted on the lot adjoining on the east. The Wahoo Elm (*Ulmus alata*) and the Nettle tree (* Celtis occidentalis*) are to be planted in the space between the approach and the boundary. They will grow broodingly over the road, not too high, and mass homogeneously with the larger growing Elms beyond. Near the stable two Pecans (*Carya oliviformis* (now *C. illinoensis*)) are to be planted. The three trees last named all grow in the neighboring country and are particularly neat and free from insect pests. A loose hedge of common Privet having the effect of a natural thicket is to grow along the boundary. No other shrub grows as well here under trees.

As the pleasure garden is to be very small, to be closely associated with the best rooms, and to be not only looked at but used, it must be so prepared that no...
excessive labor will be needed (as in watering, mowing, sweeping and rolling), to keep it in superlatively neat, fresh and inviting condition. No large trees are to be grown upon or near it by which it would be overshadowed and its moisture and fertility drawn upon to the injury of the finer plantings. It must be easy of use by ladies when they are shod and dressed for the house and not for the street. Its surface is to be studiously modeled with undulations such as might be formed where a strong stream is turned aside abruptly into a deep and narrow passage with considerable descent. It will be hollowing near the house and the walk, and will curl and swell, like heavy canvas slightly lifted by the wind, in the outer parts. Wherever it is to be left in turf the undulations are to be so gentle that close mowing, rolling and sweeping will be easily practicable. The upper and outer parts are to be occupied by bushy foliage compassing about all the turf; high growing shrubs next the fences and walls; lower shrubs before them; trailers and low herbaceous plants before all. But there must be exceptions enough to this order to avoid formality, a few choice plants of each class standing out singly. The bushes are to be planted thickly, not simply to obtain a good early effect, but because they will grow better and with a more suitable character in tolerably close companionship. As the good sense of the lady who is to be mistress of this garden ranges more widely than is common beyond matters of taste, it may be hoped that due thinnings will be made from year to year and that the usual mutilation of bushes under the name of pruning will be prevented.

The following little trees and bushes may be used for the higher range: The common, trustworthy sorts of Lilac [Syringa vulgaris], Bush-honeysuckle [Diervilla sessifolia], Mock-orange [Philadelphus], Forsythia, Weigela, the Buffalo-berry (Shepardia), common Barberry, the Cornelian Cherry [Cornus mas] and the red twigged Dogwood. In the second tier, Missouri Currant [Ribes odoratum], Clethra [C. alnifolia], Calycanthus [C. floridus], Jersey Tea [Ceanothus americanus], Japanese Quince [Chaenomeles japonica], Japanese Mahonia [M. japonica], Spiræas, and the Mezereon Daphne [D. mezereum].

In the third tier, Deutzia gracils, Oregon Grape [Mahonia aquifolium], flowering Almond [white and red] [Prunus triloba], Spiræa Thunbergii and S. japonica, Waxberry [Myrica pensylvanica!], Daphne Cneorum, small-leaved Cotoneaster, and the Goatsbeard Spiræa [Aruncus dioicus]. The Virginia Creeper is to be planted against the walls of the house, Chinese Wistanias near the garden room. Oleanders, Rhododendrons, Figs, Azaleas and Bamboos, grown in tubs, are to be set upon the terrace in summer. They are to be kept in a cold pit during the winter.

The service garden (gg. Fig. 2) will have a slope of one to five inclining to the south. It is intended only for such supplies to the house as cannot always be obtained in the public market in the fresh condition desirable, and is divided as follows:

1. Roses and other plants to provide cut flowers and foliage for interior house decoration;
2. Small fruits;
3. Radishes, salad plants, Asparagus, Peas, etc.;
4. Mint, Parsley, Sage, and other flavoring and garnishing plants for the kitchen;
5. Cold-frame, wintering-pit, hot-beds, compost-bin, manure-tank, garden-shed and tool-closet.

Brookline, Mass., 14th April, 1888