

Newsletter

October 2013

OUR NEXT VOLUME ... THE PLANNING OF MOUNTAIN BROOK

Our next book, *Mountain Brook-A Historic American Landscape*, chronicles the creation of Birmingham's most stunning residential district. The visual record features the work of the local Jemison & Company real estate firm led by high-caliber planner and landscape architect Warren Manning, a national authority with a legacy that included 100 projects with the firm of Frederick Law Olmsted Sr.

"What you see instantly through the drawings and plans from the Jemison Papers in the Birmingham Public Library Archives is the careful professionalism and creative planning and execution that laid the foundation for the Mountain Brook we know today," says Marjorie White, director of the project. "We all know that Mountain Brook is gorgeous—and this book shows why." The volume is centered around a 13-sheet documentation by Birmingham Historical Society (BHS). It includes a look at the planning history and contemporary analyses of parkways, bridges, residences, and roads, prepared by Birmingham landscape architect Birgit Kibelka and documentation specialist Richard Anderson of South Carolina. Aerial and National Park Service photographers made detailed photographs of Mountain Brook today for the volume.

The nearly completed work-in-progress provides map after map, drawing after drawing, and photograph after photograph detailing the topography, the careful use of floodplains versus



Marjorie White, John Wathen, Birgit Kibelka. Photograph April 2013 by Patrick Dent of Rotor Wing

ridges and low-lying land, and the skilled thinking that led to the masterful network of roads weaving through a seemingly undisturbed wilderness landscape.

"We bring together the process of the Mountain Brook planners as they envisioned the roads, bridges, entrances, and open spaces we cherish today," continues White. "This book is a look at today's Mountain Brook experience as conceived and executed by a team of forward-thinking planners early last century."

In his foreword, Paul D. Dolinsky, chief, Historic American Landscapes Survey, writes to today's readers: "Page through this publication with great pride as you view Mountain Brook through a new filter, one of a fine cultural landscape accomplishment with high integrity to its original design, worthy of being included in the Historic American Landscapes Survey, our national archive of significant landscape architectural accomplishments."

— Carolanne Roberts

Photographing the Mountain Brook Landscape

When Warren Manning designed Mountain Brook in the late 1920s, he flew an aerial mission to picture the area's diverse land forms... to the end that his planned development would conform to and enhance the existing topographic conditions.

To prepare the Society's documentation of the community today, John Wathen of Tuscaloosa, a specialist in aerial nature photography who currently serves as the Hurricane Creek keeper, flew an aerial mission for BHS. The Birmingham native, mentored in digital photography by Beth Maynor Young, did yeoman duty recording the Gulf of Mexico following the Katrina storm.

Veteran National Park Service (NPS) photographer Jet Lowe photographed Mountain Brook from the ground. Using the NPS large-format camera, Lowe made 55 black and white, 5x7 inch negatives and photographs for the Library of Congress. No stranger to the Birmingham area, Lowe made more than 800 photographs here during the 1990s when the NPS and BHS documented historic and active industrial firms for the Historic American Engineering Record.

These Mountain Brook photographs provide an outstanding, new perspective that we look forward to sharing in our forthcoming book and exhibit.



Jet Lowe photographing the Beechwood Road Bridge. Photograph April 2013 by Marjorie White

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Improvements at the Duncan House

The heavy rains of summer made abundantly clear the need for renovations at Duncan House, the Society's 1905 cottage moved to Sloss Furnaces in the mid 1980s to serve as offices for the Society and Sloss. The heat and air quit, the porch buckled, exterior paint peeled, the sills fell out, windows leaked, but thankfully the roof held.

Fast forward to fall, a new roof is soon to be installed courtesy the Goodrich Foundation. Additional grants have been submitted to cover costs of the much needed renovation and renewal.

We are indebted to T.C. Roll & Son, whose knowledgeable crew worked hard to restore the Duncan House exterior. Second Saturday volunteers—Wayne Hester and his dutiful daughter Georgeann, Carol Slaughter, Karen Utz—scraped the front porch and got on the two coats of paint. However, the task called for additional weeks of professional labor. Today, Duncan House has never looked better.

The following was accomplished:

- Carpentry and painting of the exterior siding, fascia, and windows completed
- Front porch floor sanded and painted with four coats!
- Sumter Coleman's grandmother's wicker porch furnishings received
- Storm windows made and installed
- New 5-ton heat and air system installed
- Plumbing (water heater, commode, sink, attic vent) repaired
- New sign for Sloss Quarters made and installed
- Telephone/internet lines repaired and service cut to one line



T.C. Roll & Son at work on Duncan House. Photograph August 2013 by Marjorie White.

- Old wooden power poles, black cloth, and promise of gravel for new garden paths received from Alabama Power Company, Sunshine Supplies, and Wade Sand and Gravel
- Shotgun porch stabilized
- Hallway cleared of files and books to once again serve as exhibit and entertainment space

Artists in the Garden

Wednesday mornings find not only gardeners at work, but also plein air painters capturing the garden's industrial setting and fleeting blooms. Sumter Coleman is rallying artists, but all are welcome. Please join us in the beautiful autumn light.



Open-pollinated, non-hybridized, heirloom corn is a visitor favorite at the Society's garden at Sloss. It is chewy, tasty, and also pops. Even the unpopped kernels are edible.

SOCIETY CALENDAR

- **DAILY:** The Garden at Sloss Quarters, heirloom vegetables and flowers, kitchen and medicinal herbs. For tours, email Sallie Lee, leesall@aces.edu
- **WEDNESDAY MORNINGS, UNTIL FROST:** Artists in the Garden, nine to noon. Bring your paints and join in.
- **THROUGH OCT. 31:** *Unseen...Unforgotten Civil Rights Photographs of The Birmingham News*, Exhibition, showing at the Birmingham Public Library, First Floor Gallery
- **NEXT EVENT:** Release of the 2014 publication: *Mountain Brook-A Historic American Landscape*

Coming soon...

