

Developing a Historic Landscape Research Network to Uncover Warren H. Manning's Legacy

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Abstract

Warren H. Manning (1860–1938) was arguably one of the most productive and influential American landscape designers in the profession's early years. Manning worked in the landscape architectural firm of Fredrick Law Olmsted and went on to practice independently in thirty-four states, recording more than 1,600 diverse projects in his fifty-year career. Although Manning was an important figure and a creator of numerous known works, the loss of his primary records has made it difficult to understand the breadth and detail of his projects. To recover information about Manning's commissions and document their current state of preservation, the Library of American Landscape History (LALH) designed a collaborative research model that employs the skills and resources of a large research network, encourages collaboration among researchers, and uses technology to facilitate communication across geographies and research needs. Through this research model, which could be applied to any number of historic landscape research endeavors, the findings will afford an understanding of Manning's designs to pave the way for their appropriate preservation.

Key Words

Research, collaboration, technology, survey, landscape, Warren H. Manning

Introduction

Recent research suggests that landscape architect Warren Henry Manning (1860–1938) was one of the most productive and, arguably, most influential American landscape designers and planners in the profession's early years (Figure 1). Manning began his career as a horticulturist in his father's nursery and then worked as an assistant in the firm directed by Frederick Law Olmsted. He went on to practice in thirty-four states from his Massachusetts-based firms, recording more than 1,600 diverse projects in his fifty-year career. Manning's commissions covered a wide range of landscape types, from small home lots, private estates, golf courses, parks and park systems, subdivisions, company towns, institutional grounds, and amusement parks, to regional plans and even a national plan. Hundreds of Manning's designs survive, with varying degrees of integrity and preservation.

Nearly all of Manning's projects encompass aspects of both landscape architecture and planning, with

many also incorporating preservation concepts; he paid attention to both the historic and natural contexts in which he designed. His projects link the work of his mentors, Fredrick Law Olmsted and Charles Eliot (with whom he worked at the Olmsted firm), with that of his assistants, including Fletcher Steele, A. D. Taylor, Marjorie Sewell Cautley, Charles Gillette, and Dan Kiley. Although his commissions figured prominently in the landscape design achievements of the period, for the most part these have not yet been carefully studied. The destruction of most of Manning's professional documents after his death in 1938 and the far-flung geographical range of his projects have made any sort of traditional research initiative nearly impossible.

With so many obstacles to overcome, a different kind of research model is needed to study Manning's work. This paper proposes one solution to the boundaries that have previously hampered historic landscape research (i.e., physical access to records in disparate locations, lack of collaboration among researchers with similar interests, up-to-date access to current research finds, etc.). By creating research linkages using technology and a common goal, the Library of American Landscape History (LALH) has designed a research model to expand on the traditional process of individual researchers conducting historic landscape research on a single site or group of sites. The model employs the skills and resources of a large number of research associates to simultaneously recover information about Manning's many built commissions and document their current state of preservation.

Although the use of technology has become common in many research-based disciplines, the



Figure 1. Warren Henry Manning (1860-1938). (University of Massachusetts—Lowell, Center for Lowell History, Warren Manning Collection)

research that was developed pushes the boundaries of historic landscape research by using the Internet and other technological tools to coordinate a large research network. The research network is working towards an understanding of Manning's design principles by documenting his existing landscape designs. As this project and the network upon which it relies continue to grow, not only are LALH efforts paving the way for appropriate preservation of Manning's landscapes, but they are also creating a research model with vast potential applications to other historic landscape research topics.

Research Project Background and Pilot Study

The Library of American Landscape History was founded in 1992 to educate and thereby promote thoughtful stewardship of the land, through the production of books and exhibitions. In its fifteenth year of not-for-profit publishing in collaboration with trade and university presses, LALH has produced twenty books and three traveling exhibitions and commissioned preeminent scholars in the field to write on a wide range of topics. Its initiatives include the American Society of Landscape Architects Centennial Reprint Series *Pioneers of American Landscape Design* and several monographs on practitioners and important sites.

The Warren Manning research project began in 2004, when LALH executive director and historian Robin Karson explored ways to conduct comprehensive research for a book about Manning's legacy. As she had learned in research for previous books and articles, only a few other scholars, notably William Grundmann and Lance Neckar, published on Manning, and none had attempted a comprehensive analysis beyond the scope of an article.

For primary sources, two repositories—Iowa State University's Park Library and the University of Massachusetts at Lowell's Center for Lowell History—house the bulk of Manning's known practice records. Unfortunately, those repository holdings represent only a small portion of his total professional work. An unknown number of documents reside with historical societies, town offices, and institutional archives, while still other records are held by the descendants of original clients or by current owners of properties on which

Manning worked. It became apparent to Karson that a research network of unprecedented size, geographic breadth, and specialization would be necessary to survey the status of Manning's projects and identify the resources needed to bring his legacy to light.

After contemplating various alternatives, Karson decided to tap her experience managing the editorial parameters of multiple contributors as co-editor of *Pioneers of American Landscape Design* (Birnbaum and Karson 2000). Since the scope of *Pioneers* far exceeded any one person's expertise, the project had drawn upon many people's experience, knowledge, skill, and work. Ultimately, the book had comprised 161 essays by 102 scholars, with LALH contributing the comprehensive guidelines, project coordination, and editorial skills necessary to create a product of uniform tone and quality. The complicated logistics inherent in any attempt to study Warren H. Manning's long, diverse, and geographically sprawling career, combined with the lack of a central repository of Manning's documents, prompted Karson to apply a research model similar to that used for *Pioneers*. LALH then invited several U.S. scholars to act as the core team to guide the project and assigned two part-time LALH staff members, Jane Roy Brown and Reid Bertone-Johnson, to assist with its development.

In the summer of 2005, LALH acquired an electronic copy of Manning's client list from the University of Massachusetts, Lowell, and piloted a study of twenty-five Manning projects within a twenty-mile radius of the LALH office in Amherst, Massachusetts. The pilot study tested an LALH-designed survey tool that incorporated portions of the National Register of Historic Places nomina-



Figure 2. Skinner Estate in South Hadley, Massachusetts, discovered during the pilot study. (Photo by author)

tion-form data, the Historic American Landscapes Survey (HALS) survey-form data, and several data fields from a variety of state historic preservation office surveys. The LALH survey also contained specific questions about types of projects on Manning's client list and the quantity and quality of available research materials. The survey attempted to capture enough in-depth information to assess the potential for future research while remaining manageable for researchers with limited time.

The pilot research project yielded some exciting results. Among other discoveries, the researchers

identified complex projects with high levels of historic integrity, uncovered previously unknown research-material sources, and located several extant Manning-designed landscapes. Specific examples of the discoveries include: a neighborhood of small homes in Holyoke, Massachusetts; a significant cluster of work for a single client in Middlebury and Naugatuck, Connecticut; and a large, private-estate landscape adjacent to Mount Holyoke College (Figure 2). Although surveys would not necessarily yield such fruitful results in all locations on the client list, the pilot study encouraged LALH to expand the geographic scope

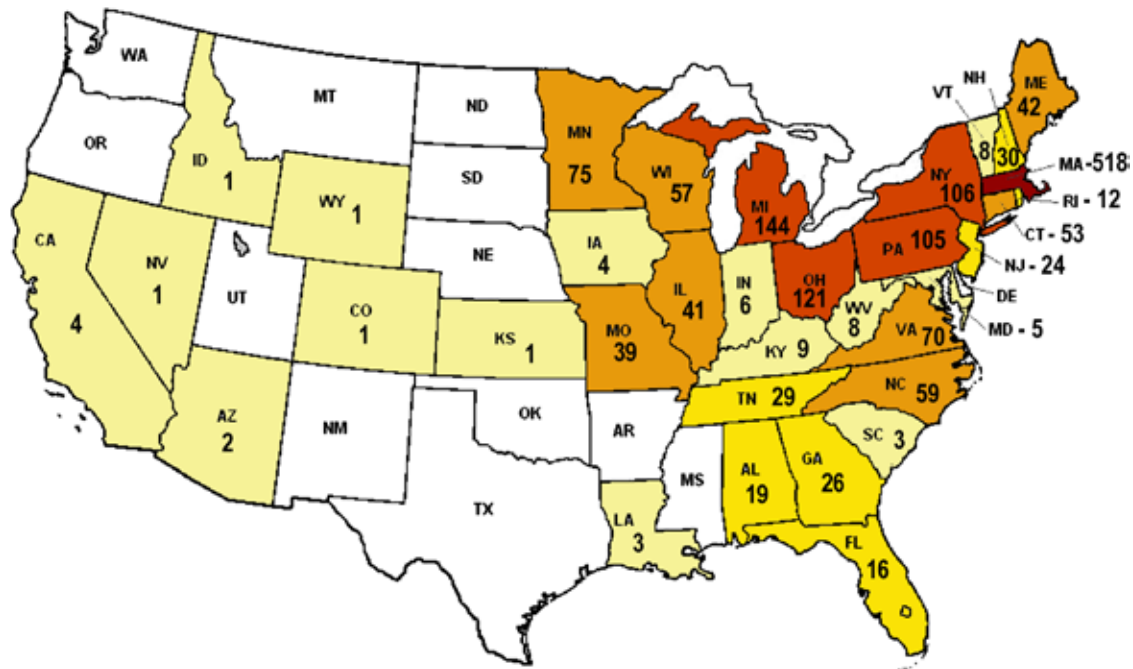


Figure 3. Distribution of Manning projects throughout the United States. (Drawing by author)

of research and explore ways to build a network of qualified research associates to bring Warren Manning's legacy to light.

The Warren Manning Research Project

To plan the prospective research network, LALH first quantified and mapped Manning's projects by state. The resulting map clearly indicated where to focus research efforts: Massachusetts, for example, contains more than 500 projects, while Arizona has only two (Figure 3). The core scholarly team was then consulted to identify which project types—such as company towns and city park systems—were particularly important to include. All of that input formed a subset of specific research priorities.

The next task was to recruit qualified researchers and organize them into a nationwide network. The researchers would need to visit local historical societies, libraries, and other repositories of regionally specific materials. LALH contacted colleagues in academia and other professions affiliated with historic landscape preservation, design, and planning to help identify potential researchers. Over the following six months, almost twenty researchers signed on to survey Manning properties in several states. During this period, Reid Bertone-Johnson was hired as project manager to track the progress of the growing network of research associates. New researchers were continually recruited through bulletins on the LALH Web site (www.lalh.org) and in publications of the Alliance for Historic Landscape Preservation, the National Association

for Olmsted Parks, the American Society of Landscape Architects, and other professional organizations. Technological and managerial skills were critical in keeping researchers apprised of new discoveries, actively engaged, and in contact with one another. Funds obtained from grants and private donations supported the work.

Since the late 1990s, when the research effort for *Pioneers* was underway, technological innovations have greatly improved, easily facilitating the organizational infrastructure needed for this large-scale, multiple-contributor research effort. The almost universal use of e-mail among researchers has streamlined communication for all involved;

online discussion groups provide semiprivate, virtual “spaces” for far-flung researchers to share discoveries and techniques; and inexpensive, easy-to-use Internet survey tools are available to collect quantities of data, including images.¹

The Manning research project used Internet technology in a number of ways. First, a dedicated Warren Manning Research Project site was created

¹ The book *Digital Land: Integrating Technology into the Land Planning Process* (Sipes & Lindhult, forthcoming) analyzes the use of technology by design firms, per results of an extensive online survey. The book demonstrated the potential benefits of Internet surveys for research purposes and influenced LALH to apply similar tools and techniques to their research model.

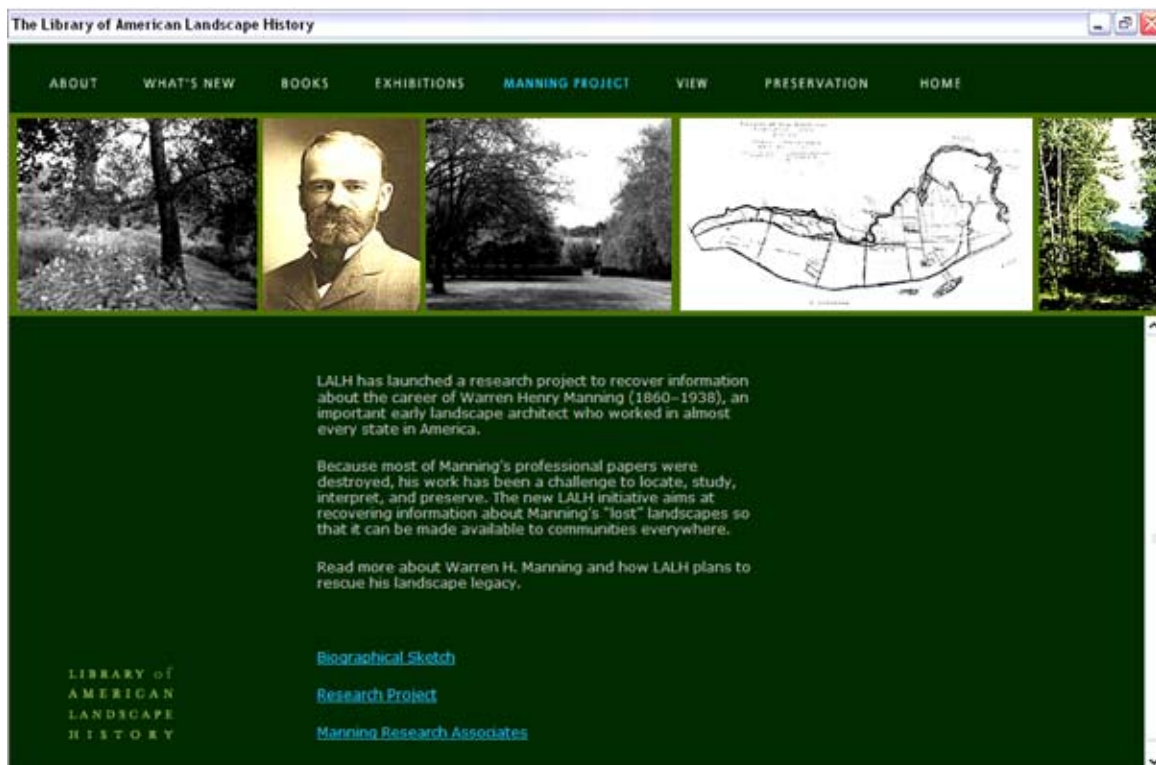


Figure 4. Warren Manning Research Project page on the Library of American Landscape History website. (Image by author)

on the LALH Web site (Figure 4). The research-project site provides background information to prospective researchers, posts the Manning client list and field survey for researchers to download, and contains a password-protected portal for assigned research associates to file their field-survey data. The field-survey data was entered into surveymonkey.com, a Web-based survey service that provides design flexibility to accommodate a variety of question- and response-types. After a researcher posts survey data about a Manning site, LALH retrieves the data from the hosting Web site and imports it into an Excel spreadsheet. Online data collection allows LALH to contact researchers with timely queries to ensure a high standard of information quality. Harvesting the information in this manner also facilitates the eventual creation of a searchable database of Manning's projects, similar to the Olmsted Research Guide Online (ORGO).

The Research Network

The Manning researchers come from a wide variety of disciplines—primarily landscape architecture, planning, architecture, and history, with an interest in each of the aforementioned fields. To recruit professors from accredited landscape architecture and planning programs, LALH solicited assistance from managers of e-mail lists and compiled its own list. Cooperation from professional groups such as the Alliance for Historic Landscape Preservation (AHLP), the American Planning Association (APA), the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), and the Society of American City and Regional Planning History (SACRPH) also has led to a significant expansion of the Manning research network in both numbers and geographical scope.

The research network facilitates researchers, allowing them to connect with one another, collaborate to move the project forward, and track progress on each Manning project. Regular contact from the LALH Manning research-project manager helps to identify geographic gaps in coverage and ensures that the research associates remain motivated and do not duplicate efforts. A running list of collaborating scholars, archivists, historical societies, and material resources to facilitate the research is maintained. Mass e-mail letters containing project updates keep researchers informed on new discoveries and promulgate the sense of being part of a larger research network.

In addition to frequent e-mail contact with researchers, an online discussion forum in which researchers (and, subsequently, scholars and writers) can post queries is maintained. This tool affords the project manager the ability to distribute digital copies of finding aids or other pertinent information. For example, the recently scanned text of Warren Manning's unpublished autobiography was distributed to researchers, allowing them the capability to search the digital document for client names and other key words related to their specific projects. The digital client list originally obtained from the Center for Lowell History has been updated, based on the results of the various researchers' findings.

The network continues to grow, and researchers have now taken on a significant portion of Manning's 1,668 projects. As of this writing, 550 projects have been assigned to more than sixty active researchers, and ninety-nine completed surveys reside in the database. As geographic gaps in the research coverage have emerged, significant project types, such as city plans, have been identi-

fied within those gap areas and researchers with appropriate backgrounds (e.g., planning history) have been recruited to conduct surveys for those properties. With such a large network of active researchers, the Manning project encourages collaboration. This model of sharing information, rather than viewing information as proprietary in a competitive environment, has already proven valuable to working scholars. As Manning research associates have made discoveries, LALH has contacted scholars who had formerly pursued related research and persuaded them to join the Manning project.

The success of the diverse and dispersed network of researchers, coupled with an Internet presence and the cooperation of affiliated organizations, has allowed LALH to build widespread awareness of the Manning project. Prospective researchers with an interest in Manning or in a specific property now routinely contact LALH asking to become involved. Some targeted recruitment is still necessary, but the network of active researchers continues to grow independently as word of the project spreads. In a recent example, Elizabeth Igleheart, an instructor in historic landscape preservation practice at the Landscape Institute at the Arnold Arboretum in Boston, contacted LALH to ask how she might incorporate the Manning project into her course. Igleheart collaborated with LALH to build her curriculum around the Manning project, and her class of a dozen students became some of the project's most prolific and thorough researchers while gaining hands-on experience in historic landscape field research. Graduate students in other landscape architecture and planning programs have also participated in the Manning project as part of independent studies.

Types of Research

Thus far, three kinds of collaboration have emerged within the research network: regional, client-oriented, and subject-oriented. Regional collaboration has taken the form of small research teams working under the oversight of local "captains" appointed by LALH who coordinate the research and field queries, and identify local resources. For example, Joan Randall, staff historian for the Ohio State Department of Transportation, oversees a group of ten researchers in that state and provides LALH with frequent updates on their progress. Other such teams have formed around clusters of projects in Massachusetts, Kentucky, Maine, and Pennsylvania.

Client-oriented collaboration has developed as a result of Manning's tendency to work for a single client on multiple projects. For example, the McCormick family of the International Harvester Company hired Manning for properties in seven states. Members of the Manning research network are pursuing his projects for the McCormicks, sharing information with one another via the online discussion group and their own frequent e-mail contacts. One researcher working in Chicago, Julie McKeon, has found documents in local archives that illuminate Manning's work on McCormick family properties in Michigan and California, where other researchers are conducting surveys. Two researchers are also pursuing Manning's work for the Tufts family in Maine and North Carolina.

A few researchers in the network who have expertise in particular subject areas related to Manning's work have been drawn to collaborate, based on project types. For example, three researchers are pursuing Manning's work on his national plan,



Figure 5. Hopedale Town Park, designed 1912-1913. (Photo by author)

while others have expressed interest in analyzing Manning's planting schemes for private estates and examining his park designs. Sometimes, multiple researchers express interest in the same project or group of projects, potentially leading to conflicts within the research network. Thus far, overlapping interests have been successfully resolved, and on more than one occasion, once professionals and scholars with similar interests had been introduced, they decided to collaborate.

Conclusion

In meeting the challenge of researching a large body of work dispersed over a broad geographic area with few centralized resources, the Manning project's research model has developed into a unique approach to scholarly research in American landscape history. Facilitated by Internet-based technology, a collaborative, information-sharing approach is central to the research process. By establishing a large network of researchers, LALH has become a clearinghouse for issues, discoveries, and queries related to Manning and his work.

LALH has not only established relationships with countless small archives and property owners that hold Manning-related materials, but it has also helped connect those local repositories to the many researchers pursuing that exact information.

After eighteen months, the value of this pioneering research effort is already apparent: researchers are discovering previously unknown information about Warren Manning, his designed landscapes, and other projects with which he was involved. In some cases, researchers have located extant Manning landscapes that are largely intact; in other cases, they have uncovered new information about how Manning worked and developed such a large number of projects. As surveys are completed, LALH is identifying and resolving discrepancies in existing records, compiling the most accurate project list possible, and commenting on which projects were built and, of those, which ones remain intact.

New understanding brings new questions, and the research model's infrastructure affords the

ability to efficiently pursue new questions. One such new question relates to when Manning began taking on projects independent of his work for the Olmsted firm. It is commonly held that Manning's separation from the Olmsted firm in 1896 marked the beginning of his independent work, but new evidence of Manning's work in Hopedale, Massachusetts, indicates that he took on his own projects even while employed by Olmsted. By visiting previously unknown, extant Manning landscapes, researchers are beginning to develop a more refined sense of Manning's characteristic design features and approaches to projects of similar types. Common elements, such as prominent stone walls surrounding Manning's parks, for example, and large masses of native broadleaf evergreens near springs and ponds on private estates, suggest that Manning may have worked on a property. With a clearer understanding of Manning's application of his design principles, it may be possible to appropriately protect and preserve the landscapes of his design.

The Manning project's research model has laid groundwork for other large-scale, historic landscape research projects. Few researchers in the Manning research network are interested solely in Manning's work; hence the now-established research network could later investigate the work of other under-recognized designers, or perhaps historical trends in landscape design. The Warren Manning research project model paves the way for appropriate preservation of his landscape designs by accounting for multiple layers of design and history, and providing new, richer opportunities for education. This research process also facilitates information collection, sharing, and synthesis, leading to new levels of understanding of the design tendencies of Manning and other

under-studied landscape designers and planners. This new understanding is achieved by placing researchers on the ground in as many landscapes as possible and making the information they gather readily accessible. The strategic application of technology has overcome obstacles presented by the diverse and dispersed nature of Manning's work. The network has also introduced many scholars and professionals to one another, affording opportunities for dialogue that could potentially result in future collaborations across disciplines, as well as regions.

For these reasons and others yet to be realized, the Manning project's research model will serve as a valuable case study for the use of technology to build a large and complex research project, both within and beyond the field of landscape design history.

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