

John Nolen and the Planning of Savannah's Daffin Park, 1906 - 1909

BY THOMAS W. HANCHETT

IN May 1906, George J. Baldwin, a member of the Savannah Park and Tree Commission, wrote to a young Boston-based landscape designer named John Nolen. "As you know, in many places it is advisable to arouse the people on the subject of parks, and . . . my friend Mr. Edward Howard Griggs . . . suggested that you would be quite willing to give one or two talks on this subject if it seemed advisable." Intimated Mr. Baldwin, "[W]hile at the moment there is no work going on which needs the services of a landscape architect, yet it is possible there may be considerable work in the future."¹

Although Baldwin could not have known it in 1906, he had sought out a fast-rising star in the budding field of city planning. Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., had launched urban design as a profession in America with his work on New York's Central Park and

¹George J. Baldwin to John Nolen, May 1, 1906; Nolen to Baldwin, March 7, 1907, Box 75, John Nolen Papers, Department of Rare and Manuscripts Collections, Kroch Library, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y. Edward Griggs was a professor in Montclair, New Jersey.

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a host of other projects in the late nineteenth century.² During the first years of the twentieth century, a cohort of younger men picked up the Olmsted banner, expanding the scope of planning from creation of isolated parks or suburbs to a consideration of the arrangement of the city as a whole. Today historians consider John Nolen (1869-1937) among the most influential and prolific of that pioneering second generation of planners.³

When Baldwin contacted him, however, the young man was barely a year into his career. Nolen's background lay in education and urban reform. He belonged to the generation of Progressive reformers—led by such men and women as “muckraking” journalist Lincoln Steffens and social work pioneer Jane Addams—who urged America to recognize and remedy its urban ills. Born the son of a Philadelphia carpenter in 1869, Nolen had worked his way through the University of Pennsylvania's prestigious Wharton School majoring in economics and public administration.⁴ Upon graduation he took charge of the Society for the Extension of University Education, a “people's college” that brought college classes to urban workers. In the course of that work, he discovered the field of city planning, and slowly became convinced that this new

²Mel Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890* (Berkeley, Cal., 1969). David Schuyler, *The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore, 1986); Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982); Stanley Schultz, *Constructing Urban Culture: American Cities and City Planning, 1800-1920* (Philadelphia, 1989), 154-61; Cynthia Zaitzevsky, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982); Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), 54-64; John Reys, *The Making of Urban America: A History of City Planning in the United States* (Princeton, N.J., 1965), 339-48; John Archer, “Country and City in the American Romantic Suburb,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 42 (May 1983): 2:139-56.

³Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890*, 71-72, 78, 98, 114-16, 127-28, 146, 164, 172, 233-37, 248-50, 314, 325, 373. John L. Hancock, “John Nolen and the American City Planning Movement: A History of Cultural Change and Community Response, 1900-1940” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1964). Nolen seems to have ranked as America's second most prolific planner during the 1910s and 1920s, surpassed only by Harland Bartholomew. Norman J. Johnston, “Harland Bartholomew: Precedent for the Profession,” in Donald A. Krueckeberg, ed., *The American Planner, Biographies and Recollections* (New York, 1983), 283-84. “Except for Lewis Mumford, Nolen also was perhaps the profession's most versatile and prolific writer, producing six books, more than one hundred major articles, reports, technical monographs, and many minor papers,” according to John L. Hancock, *John Nolen: A Bibliographical Record of Achievement* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1976), 16-17.

⁴Hancock, “John Nolen and the American City Planning Movement.” John L. Hancock, “John Nolen: The Background of a Pioneer Planner,” in Krueckeberg, ed., *American Planner*, 37-57.

profession might offer a more effective way for him to improve urban conditions. A visit to Europe's "garden city" experiments in 1900 particularly intrigued him. The garden city idea, invented in England during the 1890s, proposed medium-sized towns as an alternative to the unmanageable metropolis. Carefully planned and surrounded by belts of green fields and parks, such communities could combine the best features of city and country.⁵ Nolen returned to the states, quit his job, and—at age thirty-three, with a wife and two children—went back to school. No university in America yet offered a city planning degree, so Nolen enrolled in Harvard's School of Landscape Architecture. In May 1905 he launched his career with the design of Independence Park in the small North Carolina city of Charlotte. His ability to convey his glowing vision of urban improvement quickly caught the attention of other communities, and soon he was winning commissions up and down the eastern seaboard, from Maine to Havana.

George Baldwin's missive from Savannah arrived at a crucial time in the planner's career. Nolen burned with a desire to make his mark on a major American city, and his work schedule was as yet far from full. Baldwin's letter suggested an exciting opportunity to play a role in a town that had a reputation as one of America's best planned, dating from its eighteenth-century founding by General James Oglethorpe, who had insisted that a system of public squares be incorporated into the city's street grid. Nolen was enthusiastically engaged in what he termed "missionary work" in a number of other towns, seeking to spread the gospel of city planning, but few places offered the potential of Savannah.⁶

Along with Savannah's physical heritage, Nolen recognized a powerful ally in George Johnson Baldwin. Baldwin (1856-1927) possessed the drive and the connections that might push a plan-

⁵Stanley Buder, *Visionaries and Planners: The Garden City Movement and the Modern Community* (New York, 1990); Mark Girouard, *The English Town: A History of Urban Life* (New Haven, Conn., 1990), 308-309.

⁶On Nolen's "missionary work" elsewhere early in his career, see for instance Nolen to George Stephens of Charlotte, March 2, 1917, Box 98, Nolen Papers. "You will recall how my services began there with the parks of Charlotte, passed then to a consideration of private places, then to the campaign of lecturing and speaking . . . and finally to the preparation of the plan for Myers Park. All of this work was done without much, or any profit, some of it at a direct loss. In other words I was a missionary."



George J. Baldwin, a Savannah businessman, civic activist, and Progressive reformer, helped create the Savannah Park and Tree Commission. In that capacity, he invited John Nolen to the city to "arouse the people on the subject of parks." *Photograph of Baldwin from the Georgia Historical Society.*

ning initiative toward reality. His father, a wealthy Savannah cotton broker, had sent him north to college at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston. Upon graduation in 1877, George Baldwin returned south first as a chemist and engineer for mines in Alabama and Dahlonega, Georgia, then as a dealer in the booming commodity of phosphate fertilizer in Savannah. In the late 1890s he left the phosphate business to become head of the Savannah Electric Company, a division of the huge Boston-based utility firm Stone & Webster, Inc. Through Baldwin's leadership, Stone & Webster soon controlled the streetcar and electricity busi-

ness not only in Savannah but also in Columbus, Georgia, Houston, Texas, and Jacksonville, Tampa, Pensacola and Key West, Florida.⁷ While directing these far-flung enterprises, Baldwin found time to become one of the most active leaders in Savannah's Progressive effort for better schools and improved city services. He helped institute a system of free kindergartens throughout the city, and in 1895 he and a group of associates created the Savannah Park and Tree Commission.⁸

Nolen quickly wrote back to Baldwin, offering to visit and deliver a lecture on city planning entitled "Outdoor Art."⁹ The planner already had a trip to Charlotte on his calendar for autumn. If Savannah sponsors would provide a lantern and operator to project Nolen's glass slides—the state of the art in visual presentation at that time—he offered to pay his own expenses southward for a visit.

Subsequently Baldwin took the occasion of a business trip to Stone & Webster's Boston headquarters to meet with Nolen in Cambridge, and Nolen journeyed down to Georgia in early December.¹⁰ What the planner saw excited him. While most cities in

⁷William Harden, *A History of Savannah and South Georgia*, Vol. 2 (Atlanta, 1981), 608-610. Walter E. Campbell, "Profit, Prejudice and Protest: Utility Competition and the Generation of Jim Crow Streetcars in Savannah, 1905-1907," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 70 (Summer 1986): 197-231. Baldwin was also "an officer and director in two banks in Savannah, the Savannah Trust Company and the National Bank of Savannah . . . On the civic side, Mr. Baldwin was President of the Savannah Chamber of Commerce, also the Associated Charities which he was largely instrumental in organizing, and of the Kate Baldwin Free Kindergarten, which he supported for nearly thirty years. He served as a member of the Park & Tree Commission and of the Board of Curators of the Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences, also of the Board of Trustees of Chatham Academy (our local high school)." Gordon C. Carson to J. G. de R. Hamilton, October 12, 1943, Box 5, George Johnson Baldwin Papers, Collection 850, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

⁸Kate Baldwin Free Kindergarten Papers, Collection 2384, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. *Municipal Report, 1895, City of Savannah* (Savannah, 1896), p. 4. George B. Sudworth, *Report on an Examination of the Street and Park Trees of Savannah, Georgia, and Surrounding Country*, Park and Tree Commission Bulletin No. 1 (Savannah, 1897). Copy in the Rare Book Room, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In 1897 the commission consisted of George H. Stone, chair; George J. Baldwin, vice-chair; W. W. Gordon, Jr., secretary; P. D. Daffin; and C. S. Ellis. By 1906, the commission was made up of P. D. Daffin, chair; C. S. Ellis, vice-chair; I. A. Solomon, secretary; George J. Baldwin; and J. H. Entelman. Daffin to Baldwin, April 9, 1906, Box 5, Baldwin Papers.

⁹Nolen to Baldwin, May 21, 1906, Box 6; Broadside, pencil dated March 7, 1907, Box 7, George Baldwin Papers.

¹⁰Baldwin to Nolen, November 30, 1906; Nolen to Daffin, March 7, 1907. Box 75, Nolen Papers.

America were only beginning to warm to the notion of urban parks, Savannah already possessed a bounty of public spaces dating back to Oglethorpe's plan. Nolen was "strongly impressed," he wrote Baldwin,

with the peculiar wealth of your city in centrally situated small parks and open spaces, in broad and interesting streets and in happily located public or semi-public buildings. In these matters Savannah—considering its population—stands unquestionably at the head of American cities. I have recently discovered in support of this impression that the U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor places a valuation upon your parks of over five million dollars—a sum equal to that of the very largest cities of the South.¹¹

But, Nolen continued, despite "these rich gifts of nature and man, the city has certain limitations which anyone interested in its rise and development would be glad to see removed." Public squares were being omitted in newer areas, and the city had "hardly kept pace in proportion to its growth and population with the splendid modern park movement, a movement which calls in every densely settled city for a system of outlying parks of considerable size, agreeable connection parkways or boulevards, and a varied series of city play grounds and athletic fields."¹² To Nolen, Savannah seemed poised "at the turning of the ways."

The designer's visit not only engaged Nolen's enthusiasm, but also made a start at arousing local interest as Baldwin had hoped. In the spring of 1907, P. D. Daffin, chairman of the Park and Tree Commission, invited Nolen to formally submit his credentials to become the commission's landscape architect. The Boston planner responded enthusiastically. "Your good city holds a leading place not only in Georgia, but in the whole South . . .," Nolen wrote, "and therefore I should undertake your work with an enthusiasm that would not be measured by remuneration."¹³ Savannah would be a highly visible commission in a region where Nolen was already heavily involved; he had projects already underway in

¹¹Nolen to Baldwin, December 10, 1906, Box 75, Nolen Papers.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Nolen to Daffin, March 7, 1907, Box 75, Nolen Papers. See also Baldwin to Nolen, March 4, 1907, and Daffin to Nolen, March 4, 1907, Box 7, Baldwin Papers.



John Nolen of Boston applied his creative talents as a landscape architect to southern cities such as Charlotte and Savannah early in his career. He would later earn a reputation as one of America's foremost urban planners. *Photograph of Nolen courtesy of Rare and Manuscripts Collections, Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University.*

Charlotte and Edgemont, North Carolina, and Lynchburg and Roanoke, Virginia, and would soon embark on the creation of the industrial new town of Kingsport, Tennessee.¹⁴ "I know and sympathize with Southern conditions—physical, social and economic. I never feel like a stranger there," Nolen assured. The "South has become an important and permanent part of my field."¹⁵

¹⁴On Charlotte see Thomas W. Hanchett: "Sorting Out the New South City: Charlotte and Its Neighborhoods" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1993). On Kingsport, see Margaret Ripley Wolfe, *Kingsport, Tennessee, A Planned American City* (Lexington, Ky., 1987). George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge, La., 1967), 96-97.

¹⁵Nolen to Daffin, March 7, 1907, Box 75, Nolen Papers. Nolen won the Daffin Park commission despite a competing bid from the Augusta landscape firm of P. J. Berckman. Baldwin to Berckman, September 26, 1907, Box 7, Baldwin Papers.

Initially, Nolen was hired to provide a plan for Daffin Park, the city's first major park project since Forsyth Park half a century earlier.¹⁶ "Once engaged upon this," confided Baldwin, "I shall then urge your employment by the Commission for a general report as outlined between us when you were here." The notion of a full-scale city plan was still "in tentative shape" though, Baldwin cautioned, "needing considerable diplomacy."¹⁷ The businessman even suggested that he himself might personally fund an outline of such a plan, in the hope that a tangible document might win over his fellow commission members.

Meanwhile, Nolen proceeded with the Daffin Park work. The project lay just beyond the southern edge of the city in 1907. Streets had been laid out about as far south as Dale Avenue (subsequently renamed Victory Drive as a memorial to World War I veterans). Developers were eyeing land beyond Victory Drive for the suburban neighborhoods that would soon become known as Chatham Crescent and Ardsley Park, home to white middle-class commuters who traveled downtown daily on the city's streetcar system. The proposed pleasure ground would occupy a rectangular tract of approximately eighty acres, and would have provision for the athletic fields beloved by Progressive era recreation specialists—"a general playground for the people of Savannah," as Baldwin and Nolen put it.¹⁸ Honoring the chair of the Park and Tree Commission, its full name would be Daffin Athletic Park.

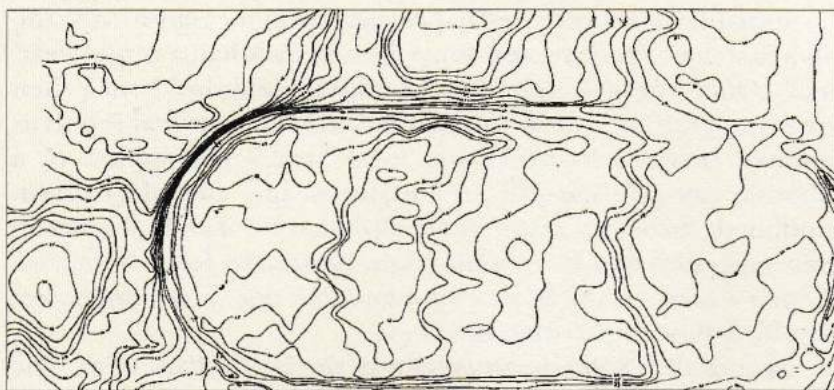
Nolen eagerly set to work even before the City Council formally approved the appropriation of \$5,000 that would be needed to carry out any design. "One of the first steps, in fact *the* first step, is to ask the city engineer to have a topographical survey prepared," Nolen wrote to Baldwin. "This should be a contour-line plan showing contours at every foot difference in level."¹⁹ Once he had the contour map in hand, Nolen and his office staff in Cambridge worked out the arrangement of the park, completing it in the fall of 1907.

¹⁶On the 1851 Forsyth Park, see Margaret Wayt DeBolt, *Savannah: A Historical Portrait* (Norfolk, Va., 1976), 57. On pre-twentieth-century parks and planning, see also Edward Chan Sieg, *Eden on the Marsh: An Illustrated History of Savannah* (Northridge, Cal., 1985).

¹⁷Baldwin to Nolen, April 9, 1907, Box 75, Nolen Papers.

¹⁸Nolen to Baldwin, June 8, 1907; Baldwin to Nolen, April 9, 1907; Baldwin to Nolen, June 5, 1907, Box 75, Nolen Papers.

¹⁹Nolen to Baldwin, June 8, 1907, Box 75, Nolen Papers.



The first step in the creation of Savannah's Daffin Park was a careful survey of existing conditions. This topographical map indicates contours of the land at one-foot intervals. In all of Nolen's plans of Daffin Park, north is at the bottom of the drawing. *This and all following plans reproduced courtesy of the Rare and Manuscript Collections, Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University.*

The Daffin Park design embodied neoclassical ideas of order and symmetry, a sensibility that characterized much of John Nolen's early work. A long straight promenade formed the park's central feature. It consisted of a walkway bordered on each side by two rows of live oak trees. Flanking the oaks was a double "drive-way" meant for carriages, and perhaps also for the newfangled automobiles that some wealthy Savannah enthusiasts were then beginning to buy. Nolen gave the promenade the name "the Mall," recalling the famous tree-lined avenue in front of London's Buckingham Palace. Daffin Park's Mall terminated at each end in a circular driveway and a large ornamental water basin. From each circle a pair of short straight drives angled to the corners of the park.

The central promenade and the four short angled drives divided the remainder of the park land into four areas:

~ South of the promenade was a large tract left open as a "parade ground and baseball field." Nolen sketched a small "casino" building on the promenade overlooking the playing fields, and drew a "men's gymnasium" with a running track and indoor swimming pool at the southeast edge of the parade ground.

~ On the equally large tract north of the promenade there was to be space for tennis courts, an open air theater, a bandstand, a "lawn for women and children" and a "women's gymnasium."

~ At the west end of the park, the smaller triangular tract bounded by the angled drives was to be dedicated to a playground for small children, and Nolen, probably mindful of Baldwin's interest in education, sketched a "public school" building for the spot.

~ The similar triangular tract at the east end of the park was to be given over to a shady "pine grove," perhaps with a monument of some type overlooking the adjacent water basin.

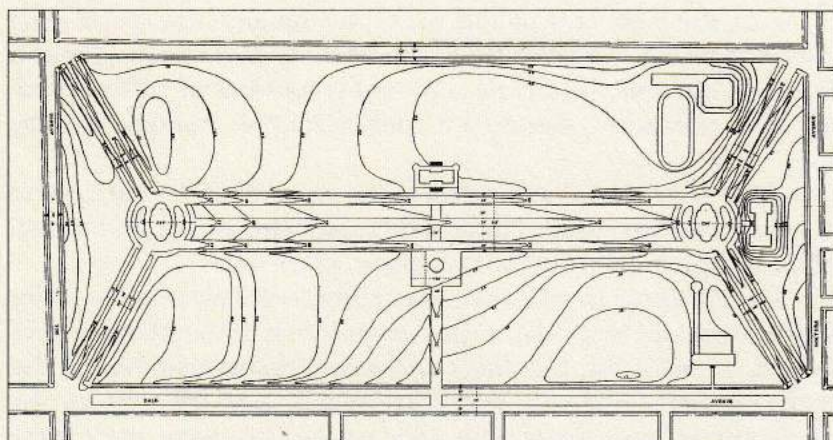
The Park and Tree Commission embraced Nolen's scheme for Daffin Park and carried out the design much as the planner envisioned. Most of the buildings and water basins that Nolen had sketched were evidently not constructed. But the rest of the plan—the promenade with its four rows of live oaks, the circles, the angled tree-lined drives, the children's area, the pine grove, and the generous open space for playing fields—was developed almost exactly according to the planner's drawings.

John Nolen's Daffin Park design proved quite popular with Savannah citizens, and over the decades the city made conscious efforts to stay close to its spirit. The largest change came in 1927 when a sports stadium was inserted in the pine grove at the east end of the park, obliterating two of the short angled drives.²⁰ Later a large swimming pool joined the tennis courts and lawns on the north side of the park. Officials staunchly resisted other attempts to alter the park or put extraneous structures on its land. "Park Board Votes to Adhere to Nolan's [sic] Daffin Park Plan," headlined a newspaper article as late as the 1950s. Over the years, explained Park and Tree Commission chair Joseph H. Harrison, "some of the uses for which park area has been requested are . . . circus area, sports arena, skating rink, midway shows and minstrel shows," as well as placement of billboards along Victory Drive. "Due to the limited park and recreation area in the city, the commission has taken the position that it should not relinquish any area" and should continue to follow the Nolen design.²¹

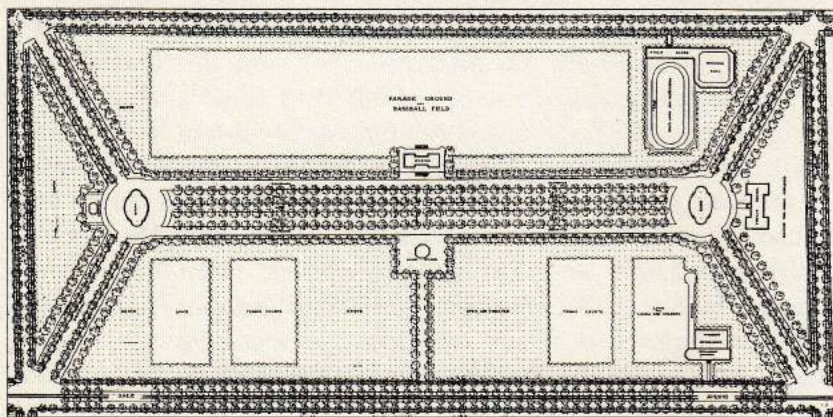
²⁰*Savannah Morning News*, September 25, 1927. The 1927 Municipal Stadium gave way to the present Grayson Stadium in 1941. Telephone communication with Jan Flores of the Georgia Historical Society, July 9, 1993.

²¹"Park Board Votes to Adhere to Nolan's [sic] Daffin Park Plan," unattributed newspaper clipping dated January 17, 1954; in the "Daffin Park" vertical file of the Georgia Historical Society, Savannah. See also *Savannah Morning News*, January 13, 1954; *Savannah News-Press*, August 18, 1974.

For photographs and a description of Daffin Park in the 1920s, see Robert M. Hitch, "Modern Savannah," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 13 (1929): 326-29.



The 1907 grading scheme (above) and "general plan" (below) of Daffin Park were prepared in Nolen's Cambridge, Massachusetts office. The design features a tree-lined central promenade called the Mall, playing fields, and a "ground for small children." Much of the park proposed was realized and remains in use. Dale Avenue, running across the bottom of both plans, is today's Victory Drive.



In 1993 the results of that conviction could still be seen in Daffin Park. The arrow-straight central promenade still boasted its rows of live oaks. The south side of the park remained an open expanse of ball fields. Much of Nolen's pine grove continued to shade the east end of the park. The angled drives and circle still formed a grand symmetrical entrance to the west end, and young children still played—on modern equipment—in the triangular tract set aside for them in 1907.

* * *

With the Daffin Park project underway, John Nolen won authorization from city fathers to take the first steps toward a comprehensive city plan. He was given the go-ahead to draw up a preliminary report suggesting some planning ideas for Savannah and outlying areas. George Baldwin forwarded city and county maps, a copy of the City Code, data on tax rates and municipal debt, and related information to the office in Cambridge.²² The Bostonian was well aware of the earlier Oglethorpe Plan for the city, assuring Baldwin that a copy of that design need not be sent. Nolen set to his drafting board and by fall had ready a nine page typewritten *Report on the Improvement of Savannah*.²³ To accompany it, he made drawings of a number of particular proposals:

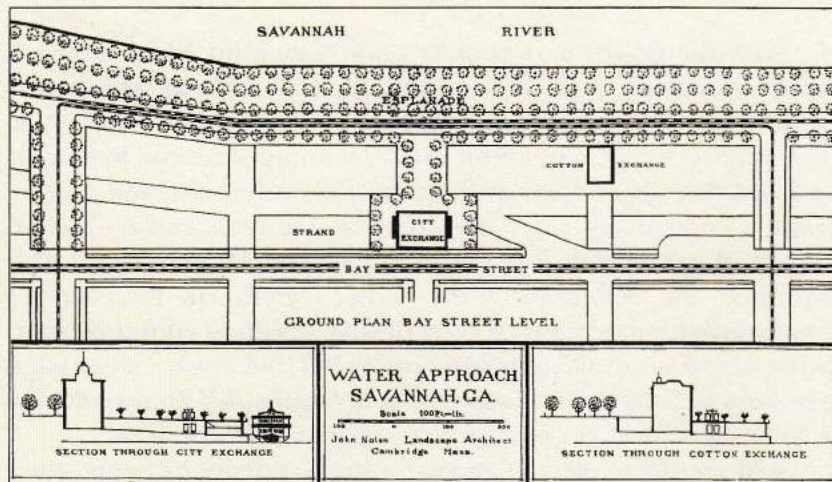
~ Along the neglected and decaying riverfront he proposed a "broad esplanade." It would have streetcar lines and a wide landscaped walk for the pleasure of strolling tourists and townspeople. Out of sight on a second level below would be a roadway for business vehicles. The esplanade idea was later realized, on only one level, with the construction of Riverwalk during the 1960s, and today is one of Savannah's favorite spaces.

~ In front of the Union Railroad Station on West Broad Street, Nolen proposed cutting a new angled boulevard two blocks long, which would lead arriving visitors smartly from the station's door to Jones Street, making the station's placement with regard to the urban street grid seem less haphazard. Interestingly, in this same general area, traffic planners later carried out a similar sort of angling of Liberty Street—for the convenience of autos rather than for the aesthetic delight of rail travelers.

~ On Bull Street, the city's main boulevard, Nolen proposed adding uniform street-side trees and landscaping between Oglethorpe's squares to increase the sense of procession along the avenue. A somewhat similar sort of effort is today being worked out by Historic Savannah.

²²Baldwin to Nolen, July 15, 1907, Box 75, Nolen Papers.

²³John Nolen, *Report on the Improvement of Savannah* (September 28, 1907), Box 39, Nolen Papers. For drawings, see Drawer V, Nolen Papers.

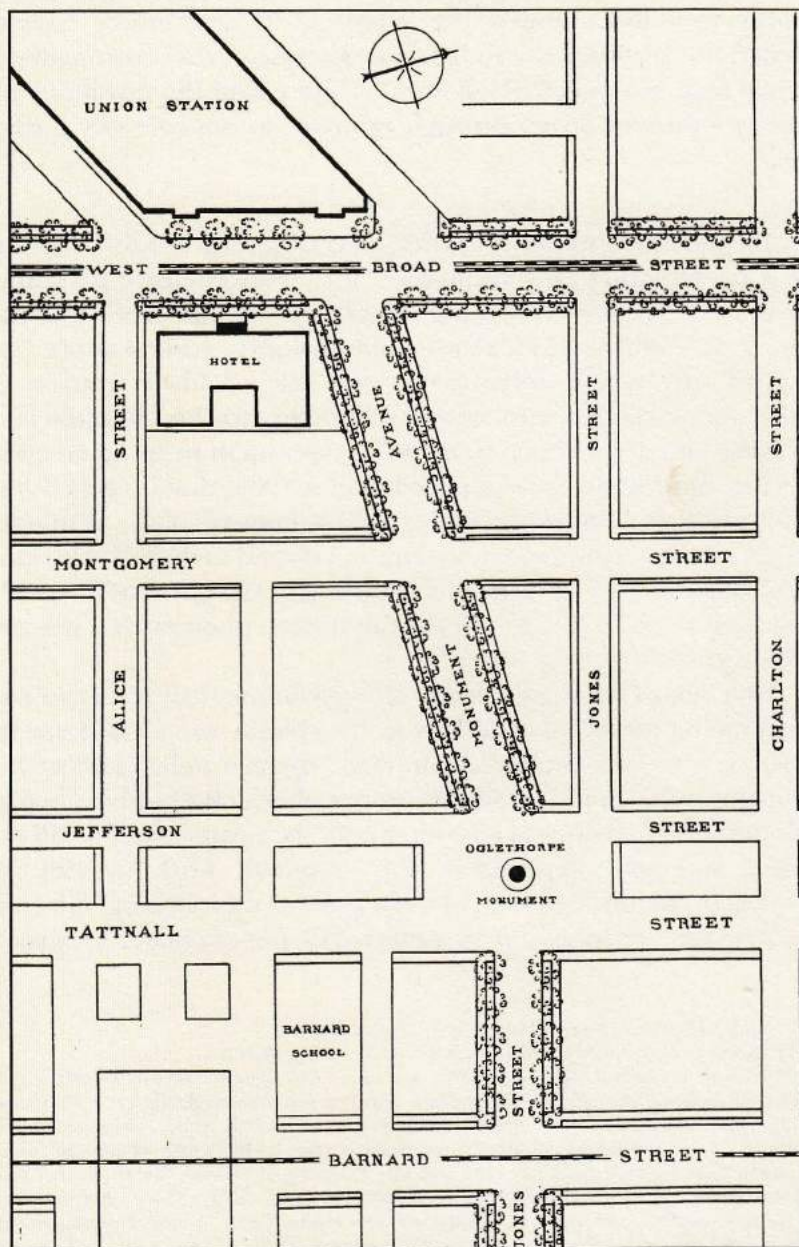


As part of Nolen's project for a complete city plan for Savannah, he submitted this far-sighted design for the city's decaying waterfront. It included a "broad esplanade" for strolling pedestrians, with a hidden roadway below for motor traffic. The plan fell on deaf ears, and waterfront improvements came only in the 1960s.

Nolen also proposed gently modifying the squares along the Bull Street corridor in order to ease traffic flow and improve aesthetic vistas. The roadway would go through, rather than around, Wright Square; smaller Monterey and Madison squares would be rounded "practically into circles"; and the Nathanael Greene monument would be shifted to open up the view of City Hall. Such suggestions would horrify guardians of Savannah's heritage today, yet Nolen's efforts to balance twentieth-century traffic needs with public open space were much more sensitive than the modifications later carried out by engineers in other squares.

~ For Forsyth Park, the city's largest nineteenth-century public space, Nolen suggested a redesign of the under-utilized southern section. Much of it was currently an open "parade ground." With the creation of Daffin Park, the planner felt, this space might be better used for tennis courts and for playgrounds for small boys and girls.

This suggestion sparked some interest on the part of the Park and Tree Commission, and led to additional work for Nolen. In the summer of 1908 he wrote to Baldwin giving details of a forthcoming report on the redesign of Forsyth Park. The proposal, ev-



Nolen's other ideas for his redesign of Savannah included a more dramatic "entrance" into the historic district from the railroad station on Broad Street. He proposed the creation of a new boulevard connecting the station to Chippewa Square and Jones Street.

idently now lost, showed the playgrounds and tennis courts, advised the addition of a fountain or statue or other "distinctively formal feature opposite Hall Street," and raised the possibility of cutting Gwinnett Street through the park to improve city traffic flow.²⁴

* * *

Despite the popularity in retrospect of several of John Nolen's ideas for Savannah, his enthusiasm for comprehensive planning did not catch fire with the members of the Park and Tree Commission. P. D. Daffin and his fellow commissioners balked at the notion of any grand scheme for the city. Baldwin remained interested, but other efforts were competing for his energies. His "outside time [had] been so entirely taken up in pressing an educational fight here," he confessed late in 1908, that he had done little additional lobbying for a comprehensive plan, although "when the opportune moment comes, I intend to do it."²⁵ The moment had evidently already passed, though. On January 12, 1909, George Baldwin wrote to inform the Boston planner that his services were no longer needed.²⁶

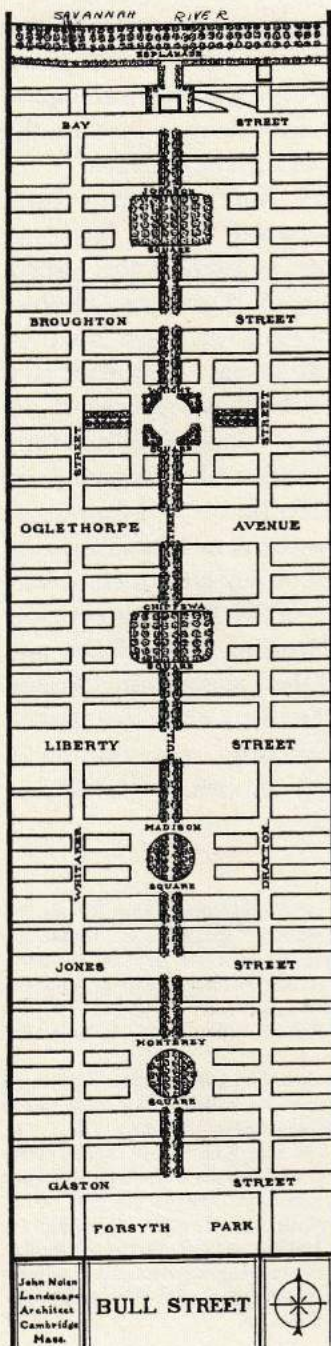
The rebuff came as a major disappointment to John Nolen. Terminating the effort would mean "we should lose what seems to me to be the main result of all our work together so far, namely the opportunity to do something for Savannah which would be creditable and advantageous to all concerned," he wrote.²⁷ Nolen had invested time and expense in the Savannah work far out of proportion to the \$500 he had been promised for Daffin Park and the preliminary master plan report. His out-of-pocket expenses

²⁴Nolen to Baldwin, June 9, 1908, Box 75, Nolen Papers.

²⁵Baldwin to Nolen, December 19, 1908, Box 75, Nolen Papers.

²⁶Nolen to Baldwin, January 19, 1908, Box 75, Nolen Papers. Savannah's reluctance seems to have been part of a regional pattern. Southerners were markedly less enthusiastic about urban plans than were non-southerners in this period, notes historian Blaine Brownell. Of 786 municipal planning commissions extant by 1930, only 71 were in Dixie. Brownell, "The Commercial-Civic Elite and City Planning in Atlanta, Memphis and New Orleans in the 1920s," *Journal of Southern History* 41 (August 1975): 343-44. A good brief overview of southern city planning history, see Christopher Silver, "Urban Planning in the New South," *Journal of Planning Literature* 2 (Autumn 1987): 371-83. See also F. Stuart Chapin, Jr., "City Planning: Adjusting People and Place," in Rupert B. Vance and Nicholas J. Demerath, eds., *The Urban South* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1954), 268-82. Blaine A. Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930* (Baton Rouge, La., 1975), 172-89.

²⁷Nolen to Baldwin, January 19, 1908, Box 75, Nolen Papers.



Nolen proposed a major re-landscaping of what was then Savannah's central thoroughfare, Bull Street, in order to improve the flow of traffic along it. His plan included a more uniform distribution of trees bordering the street and squares from Bay Street to Forsyth Park.

alone totaled \$400, he estimated. "I expected my main return from the credit which I might have in doing a good piece of designing for Savannah and . . . in the reputation I might gain for intelligent, useful public work and the satisfaction in having a part in the present movement for the improvement of American cities."²⁸

The disappointment ultimately did little to harm John Nolen's distinguished career. Even as he wrote his last letters to Baldwin, he was signing contracts for the city plan of San Diego, California, and for the state park system of Wisconsin.²⁹ Subsequently he would win renown for creation of the "new town" of Mariemont outside Cleveland, for the influential Myers Park suburb of Charlotte, North Carolina, and for the development of city plans for numerous Savannah-sized cities including Reading, Pennsylvania and Madison, Wisconsin.³⁰ Nolen's leading place in his profession was confirmed in 1917 when he helped found the American Institute of City Planners (now the American Planning Association), planning's first professional organization. He subsequently played major roles in the creation of the American Society of Planning Officials and the National Housing Association, and served as the first American president of the International Federation of Housing and Town Planning.³¹ He took an active part in the development of World War I military housing, now considered a prototype for subsequent federal public housing efforts, and

²⁸*Ibid.* In August, Baldwin mailed Nolen a check for \$400, evidently his own money, "to relieve myself from any personal obligations I had entered into." It is unclear whether this was in addition to the \$500 appropriated by the city. Baldwin to Nolen, January 28, 1909; Baldwin to Nolen, August 7, 1909, Box 75, Nolen Papers. Baldwin had earlier sent the designer another personal check. Nolen to Baldwin, January 3, 1907, Box 6, Baldwin Papers.

²⁹Nolen to Baldwin, January 9, 1909, Box 75, Nolen Papers. Nolen job book, Nolen Papers. Hancock, *John Nolen*.

³⁰Nolen discussed several of his major projects in two books: John Nolen, *Replanning Small Cities: Six Typical Studies* (New York, 1912); John Nolen, *New Towns for Old: Achievements in Civic Improvement in Some American Small Towns and Neighborhoods* (Boston, 1927). On Mariemont, see also Robert A. M. Stern, *The Anglo-American Suburb*, in the Architectural Design Profile Series (London, 1981), 81. On Myers Park, see also Mary Norton Kratt and Thomas W. Hanchett, *Legacy: The Myers Park Story* (Charlotte, N.C., 1986). As part of his Madison assignment, Nolen drafted state enabling legislation to allow the city to hire its own planning staff. Historians now believe that Nolen's law served as the model for similar legislation in other states, spurring widespread creation of planning departments in municipalities across the United States. Brian F. O'Connell and Dan Dyke, "The Wisconsin Planning Enabling Act of 1909," *Planning History Present* 6 (1993): 1-6.

³¹Hancock, *John Nolen*, 16.

into the 1930s his office maintained a steady stream of designs for college campuses, private estates, municipal parks, and city and regional plans. One later project, interestingly, brought Nolen back to Georgia: creation of a 1925 comprehensive plan for the city of Columbus, where George J. Baldwin also headed the local street railway company.³² Upon John Nolen's death in 1937 the *New York Times* praised the designer as an "internationally known architect and pioneer in modern city and regional planning."³³

Savannah, though, remained without a city plan well into the 1960s. The sort of problems noted by Nolen in 1906—departures from the Oglethorpe Plan, lack of new park development, an unsightly waterfront, and so on—continued to detract from the community's livability for decades. Not until recent years have Savannah leaders begun to catch the enthusiasm for planning that John Nolen and George Baldwin tried to generate long before. As today's citizens lay plans to revitalize Daffin Park, landscape Bull Street, and otherwise beautify their city, they may wish to recall the work of that earlier proponent of thoughtful urban design, John Nolen of Boston.³⁴

³²Nolen job book, Nolen Papers. F. Clason Kyle, *Images: A Pictorial History of Columbus, Georgia* (Norfolk, Va., 1986), 184.

³³*New York Times*, February 19, 1937.

³⁴"Daffin Park Live Oaks' Life On Line," *Savannah Morning News*, June 18, 1993.