Orientalist Cartographies: Granada and the Alhambra
by Ana del Cid Mendoza

(Detail) Rafael Contreras, Plano de Granada con el recinto de sus antiguas murallas y monumentos árabes, guía de calles, plazas y dependencias oficiales, e indicador de los edificios más notables históricos o artísticos, 1872. Courtesy: Archivo Municipal de Granada.
Have you felt the excitement of all the presentations held so far this season? The Underground Railroad, Election Mapping, Persuasive Cartography, mapping northern Virginia, the Members Map Evening. If you have been unable to personally attend, you can view videos of several of these presentations via the Members Only site on the WMS web pages. You must register and sign into the site to receive this benefit.

The Society in this issue honors one of our Founding Members – Ralph Ehrenberg, who retired in January as Chief of the Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress, for the SECOND time. See the tribute article to him on page 62. His successor, Paulette Marie Hasier, is interviewed on page 65.

Our other contents are varied to hopefully appeal to much of our membership. The 2016 Ristow Prize winning article, about Spain, is our lead item, followed by articles on the mapping of Washington, the Civil War’s Underground Railroad, and a fascinating atlas. Bert Johnson updates readers on the July 2017 ICHC meeting in Brazil, noting registration needs and travel documents needed. Many WMS members always attend this week-long feast of cartographic lectures and exhibitions, this year in the food capital of Brazil.

Our 2016–2017 season continues, and is due to conclude at the annual dinner in May. See the enclosed RSVP flyer for dinner event details.

Since the next Portolan will not be mailed until August, I wish all continued enjoyment at map meetings and exhibitions continuing through the summer months.

Tom
In 1905 the Olmsted firm, the preeminent American landscape design firm and successor to Frederick Law Olmsted, took on a small project which must have engendered a profound sense of déjà vu. Amos H. Plumb asked them to create a plan modifying a small portion of the District of Columbia’s Permanent System of Highways along Massachusetts Avenue NW. Plumb would have been familiar to them as the son of Senator Preston Plumb for whom they had devised a plan for his Emporia, Kansas estate in 1883. Plumb senior died in 1891. The younger Plumb was a member of the Massachusetts Avenue (or John W. Thompson) syndicate which he represented in dealing with the Olmsteds now. The syndicate (which controlled the lands through which Massachusetts Avenue had been extended) proposed to revise the street plan for the area, which was an unimaginative set of grids, unfriendly to the undulating topography of the neighborhood. The area would have been exceedingly familiar to the Olmsted firm—it had been an object of special study for months during their engagement reviewing the permanent system of highways during its creation. The section of street layout which included this area had been finalized in 1898, after the firm’s involvement had ended, and there is no indication this area reflected any of their design input (Figure 1).

They numbered this new project 3086; the District Highway plan years ago was 2821. Revisiting this section is a fitting dénouement for the Olmsteds’ (Frederick Law Olmsted and the successor firm) involvement in the District’s Highway Plan, an engagement which even predated the start of the plan. The “Permanent System of Highways for the District of Columbia” had a long gestation and many fathers. One of the first to express the need for a plan which would extend of City of Washington street design throughout the entire District was the far-seeing Lieutenant Francis V. Greene. Having reported for duty as an Assistant Engineer Commissioner May 15, 1879, Greene was bursting with ideas for civic improvements for the nation’s capital. His first report, dated October 10, 1879 and covering the brief month and a half he had been employed by the District, addressed his duties regarding “pavements, street improvements, county roads, sweeping and repairs to streets and alleys, lighting streets, and, generally, all surface work…” His ambition and interests caused him to think much more broadly and he included a suggestion that legislation requiring subdivisions “to conform to a general plan to be drawn up by the Commissioners and approved by Congress.”

Adequate topographical knowledge would be a prerequisite for successfully planning development beyond Washington City’s L’Enfant plan. The area outside the city was still called Washington County despite the fact the county had been abolished in 1871, under the Organic Act which unified all District government under a territorial form with a Governor and legislature. The area was also referred to as “suburban” Washington. The Evening Star (May 14, 1881) noted the progress Greene was making on the survey, with maps to be produced by the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey. By 1886, bills for street extensions were bubbling through Congress. Congressman Benjamin Butterworth, Republican of Ohio, proposed a bill for extension of streets in conformity with the existing city plan and the creation of an official map that would govern future subdivisions. The bill offered by Senator John Sherman, Republican of Ohio, specified a number of streets to be extended, mapping the extensions, and the land to be condemned. Senator William Mahone, Republican of Virginia, included a three-person commission as well as the directions to extend avenues and create east-west streets in conformity with the city plan. None of these became law but all contain elements of the legislation which ultimately passed.

A Senate resolution of August 4, 1886 requested the Commissioners submit a plan for the extension of streets northward to Spring Road between Rock Creek and Lincoln Avenue (Lincoln Road today). This was in response to Senator Mahone’s bill (Figure 2).
The Olmsteds and the Development of the Permanent System of Highways for the District of Columbia

Figure 1. Massachusetts Avenue Syndicate, Washington, DC. – Preliminary Plan for Modification of Adopted Street Plan. 1st December, 1905. 3086–3-pt1 Olmsted Archives. Courtesy Frederick Law Olmsted Historic Site.
William Ludlow briefly served as the District of Columbia’s Engineer Commissioner (January 1, 1886 to January 27, 1888) and oversaw preparation of the map. The plan proposed was a bold one, bisecting the area with two broad avenues (New Jersey extended and California) and the extended 16th Street (re-dubbed Meridian Avenue), over a grid more orthogonally correct than the existing streets, and including five new circles (Meade, Grant, McClellan, Humphreys, and Sedgwick) where avenues met. Massachusetts Avenue extends westward, deflected from Rock Creek with a circle named Logan (now Sheridan). “The result is in effect a compromise, by which on the one hand a substantial adherence to rectangularity and parallelism is secured, on the other the least violence is done to existing routes and constructions…” LeDroit Park is noted as a lost cause. A note naively appears in reports in the Evening Star: “Nor is it believed that the cost would be great.”

**EXTENDING MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE**

While official attention focused on the areas immediately north of old Washington City, development pressure shifted west. Extending Massachusetts Avenue, which ended abruptly at Boundary Street [known today as Florida Avenue], was the next approach to the undeveloped tracts in Washington County. The *Washington Post* of October 17, 1886 (p.2) heralded “A Great Project Begun.”

It brings into easy access a large amount of property which heretofore has been almost valueless and opens up for building purposes the most healthy as well as the most beautiful portion of the suburbs. Few strangers could have looked from the line of handsome houses at the end of Massachusetts Avenue over the rough stone wall which encloses the rugged and almost unimproved Kalorama estate without being surprised by the striking contrast presented.
The Olmsteds and the Development of the Permanent System of Highways for the District of Columbia

Care will be taken when the new property is subdivided to have the streets correspond to those of the city. Mr. John W. Thompson is already carrying out this idea with his estate...

The deflection in the extension of Massachusetts Avenue had prompted controversy in the newspapers and a resulting congressional query to the District Commissioners. Engineer Commissioner William Ludlow provided this map (included in the 1887 Annual Report) (Figure 3).

His explanation of the deflection (in response to criticism) was detailed. “This deflection is forced by the configuration of the Rock Creek Valley, which, bending eastward, occupies a large part of the direct route, which would render the construction of the avenue at the requisite elevation enormously costly, and in effect impracticable. The Oak Hill Cemetery also constitutes a formidable difficulty as the necessary embankment would cover a considerable part of its occupied area.” There was concern that the extended avenue might interfere with the operation of the new Naval Observatory (ultimately another curved deflection would be added to steer clear of the Observatory). Additionally, the more northerly alignment would offer better access the county hinterlands, including the John W. Thompson property.

In 1888, the John W. Thompson syndicate’s idea was legislated for the District of Columbia in its entirety. “An Act to regulate the subdivision of land in the District of Columbia” approved August 27, 1888 section 5 read “No future subdivision of land in the District of Columbia, without the limits of the cities of Washington and Georgetown, shall be recorded in the surveyor’s office of the said district unless made in conformity with the general plan of the city of Washington.” This was familiarly called the “subdivision law.” The District Commissioners expanded on the language of the law (December 8, 1888), reiterating the conformity clause (“as far as practicable”) but adding a desire for extended streets to have exact alignment and equal width as their city of Washington counterparts. But “…where topography is such as to render the adoption of the rectangular street system of streets impracticable, special subdivisions will

Figure 3. Plan of Extension of Massachusetts Avenue from Boundary St. to Tennallytown Road.
be permitted…” A street naming plan was suggested, begin-
ing alphabetically with cities (e.g. Albany, Baltimore, Chicago) followed by rivers and lakes. This law and the accompanying regulations were a game attempt to alle-
viate the confused situation, but lacking an accompanying plan merely added and orthogonal gloss and batch of duplicated names to the mix. Uncoordinated, each subdivision might begin its naming with “Albany”, thus sprinkling them across the terrain—still a bewildering patchwork.

While these governmental efforts were underway, de-
velopers like Senator Francis Newlands were privately engaged in discussions of how to extend streets through and to develop their holdings (Figure 4). Newlands ex-
changed correspondence with Frederick Law Olmsted in late 1891. Newlands was soliciting Olmsted’s advice on how to lay out Chevy Chase Land Company holdings along Connecticut Avenue. Olmsted wrote in response to Newlands’ query on November 16, 1891: “…we are of the opinion that a system of streets could be devised with courses winding to a considerable extent fittingly to the larger undulations of the ground, which would have a decided advantage over any system of streets laid in rigid straight lines over the same ground.”

Newlands pressed Olmsted to come visit him in Washington; Olmsted was reluctant to interfere with the Land Company’s existing planner and plans.

On December 30, 1891 Olmsted wrote a memoran-
dum to himself for his files describing his meeting with Senators William Stewart and Newlands in New York City. They were proposing a commission for the exten-
sion of streets in the District and wanted him to serve on that commission. Perhaps Stewart was picking up on Senator Mahone’s 1886 commission suggestion and surely he was harking back to the Commissioners ap-
pointed by George Washington one hundred years earlier in 1791 to oversee the development of Washington.

This was a decade before Senator McMillan’s Senate Park Commission. He demurred saying he could not afford to commit to spend that much time in Washington.

Olmsted was well-known in Washington, for his work design-
ing the grounds of the United States Capitol, as well as many other projects. A glance at the Olmsted archives reveals seventy-five projects in the District of Columba—many small (such as Cooke Park in Georgetown), others much larger (American University or the National Zoological Park).

On January 12, 1892 Olmsted wrote Senator William Stewart about the proposed legislation, suggesting some flexibility in wording about minimum width of streets.

It took until 1893 for the passage of the first plan to extend the street network beyond Boundary Street. What came about drew upon Congressman Butterworth’s proposal for a map and Senator Mahone’s three-person com-
mission. Congress passed “An act to provide a permanent system of highways in that part of the District of Columbia lying outside of cities” on March 2, 1893.

By July 1894 Senator Newlands was writing to Olmsted that he and Senator Stewart were just about successful in getting language passed employing Olmsted on Washington’s “…plans for its parks, res-
ervation, and streets, and avenues. It is a great work and there is no one the country will intrust it with so great confidence as yourself.”

Engineer Commissioner Charles Powell wrote to Olmsted October 17, 1894, recognizing the passage of the legislation authorizing $6,000 to pay Olmsted for “…preparation of sketch
The Olmsteds and the Development of the Permanent System of Highways for the District of Columbia

plans and report on the extension of streets and avenues of the District of Columbia...” Considering that the District outside of the City of Washington is approximately forty square miles, the amount was a pit- tance, particularly considering the amount and detail of the work to be done.

The Olmsteds did plunge ahead. The first section (of four) of the highway plan was nearly ready, giving them little time for their review. For the Olmsteds this was their project 2821. Over the next several years the files contain around eight items of correspondence between members of the firm and District government officials, nearly half in 1895 when most of the Olmsted reviews took place. The notes and correspondence and the official publications hint at a strained relationship between the Olmsteds and District officials. Frequently, the Olmsted project notes indicate that Commissioners did not have time to meet with them much on their visits. These visits were not impromptu, rather scheduled when a member of the firm was travelling to or from their project at Biltmore. Commissioners simply didn’t make time for the Olmsteds. Their role was advisory, in essence offering competing advice, visions, to that of the staff of the Engineer Commissioner, perhaps the other Commissioners wanted it worked out before it came to them. The openness to curvilinear street plans grew less as the project proceeded and as officials changed. Major Charles E. Powell was Engineer Commissioner 1893 to 1897; succeeded by Lieutenant Colonel William M. Black, 1897 to June 1898. Virtually all of the work was done with Powell. Due to Frederick Law Olmsted’s illness and retirement, his son John C. Olmsted carried out the project for the Olmsted firm (Figure 5).

On February 9, 1895 Commissioner Powell wrote to the Olmsteds indicating he had requested another appropriation of $10,000. Publication of the first section of the plan lead to the assembling of the highway commission authorized by Congress, consisting of the Secretary of War, Secretary of the Interior, and the Chief of Army Engineers. They began their work serving as a board of appeals in June 1895. Daniel S. Lamont was the Secretary of War at the time, Hoke Smith the Secretary of the Interior, and William P. Craighill the Chief of Engineers. (The duties of the highway commission were ultimately transferred to what is now the National Capital Planning Commission, which still retains final approval of changes.)

WOODLEY NORMANSTONE STUDY

For reasons not entirely clear, one tract of land in Section 3 of the Permanent System plan received extra special, intense study by the Olmsteds. The area was bounded by Rock Creek on the south, Connecticut Avenue on the east, Massachusetts Avenue (recently extended) on the west, and that which became Cathedral Street on the north. Today it is partly Woodley Park, and partly Massachusetts Avenue Heights. Originally (1911) the area was two subdivisions, Massachusetts Avenue Heights for the curvilinear portion.

Woodley Park had seen several development attempts. In the 1870s the Kervand family subdivided (surveyed by Washington County surveyor Nicholas Dubois) much of the Woodley estate into rural, villa-sized lots as Woodley (later Woodley Park), shown on the 1887 G.M. Hopkins Real Estate Atlas of the District of Columbia. It was resubdivided June 15, 1888, prior to the Subdivision Act, and given the charmingly prolix name, “Thomas E.
Waggaman and John Ridout, trustees’, Addition to the City of Washington, formerly called Woodley Park”—to distinguish it from its previous incarnation. Many more, and smaller, lots made up the new subdivision. It did not conform in any way to the plan of the City of Washington, but rather hewed to the terrain with Woodley Lane snaking through as the main route.

The area received attention several years later, during debates over the extension of Massachusetts Avenue. In 1890 Herman K. Viele mapped the area with Massachusetts Avenue extended beyond Wisconsin Avenue at an even further northerly deflection (Figure 6). Intriguing is the putative Dunbarton (or Dumbarton) Heights subdivision on the eastern side of Massachusetts. The whole area was laid out in conformity with the L’Enfant plan of Washington City and even included three new circles (Perry, Monroe, and Jefferson). This subdivision, not recorded at the time with the Surveyor of the District of Columbia, was described in the November 23, 1889 Evening Star as having been prepared for the Thompson syndicate.

The Thompson syndicate was one of the players vying for advantage in the development of northwestern Washington; others included Senator Francis Newlands.

The Olmsteds were given a topographic map (Figure 7) of the area from which to work, setting the boundaries of this special study area.

An undated first draft shows a dense curvilinear array of streets throughout the area, with some penciled in edits.

The density of streets is surprising—streets had to be at least ninety feet wide for the highway system, the density of today’s development would not have been possible with this plan.

On May 13, 1895 a new map appeared (Figure 8). Almost deceptively similar, it simplified the street plan and reduced the number of streets and land dedicated to them.

Discussion ensued in response to this new map and the next one on file had an even further simplification sketched over a further simplified curvilinear plan, this is the origin of a variety of grids thrown over the area for the next decade and a half.

The resultant map dated July 20, 1895 looked very different from its curvilinear predecessors (and the sketched in grid) (Figure 9).

The grid ran parallel to Massachusetts. This was probably not a preferred option. An undated map in the project file, from perhaps around this same period shows the entire area and that adjacent cut into a perfect grid to match the L'Enfant plan. Another map dated July 20 reorients the northwest to southeast grid to emulate the L’Enfant grid.

But the sequence of the discussion is obscure, because a September 18 map of the larger highway plan section included the study area with a north-south grid. This grid too had been modified with a few streets deleted or rearranged.

A map dated November 26 indicates there was one more attempt. It was very much like the September 18 plan with a few minor tweaks. And here the trail runs cold—there are no further studies by the Olmsteds of this area. What’s remarkable is that all of the street...
configurations were so different, reflecting many ways to cope with the topography. The street plan ultimately published in the highway plan split the difference on grid orientation; half went north to south, half went northwest to southeast diagonally (Figure 10).

The study area did not pose the only challenges for the Olmsteds. The Evening Star of January 17, 1895 noted the receipt of Frederick Law Olmsted’s report on the fourth portion of the first section of the Highway plan map. An illustration of the dynamics is shown “In a former report Mr. Olmsted recommended a system of curvilinear streets for the Blagden tract, and that section immediately adjacent, dividing the ground into irregular-shaped blocks, When the owners of the property heard of this they called upon the Commissioners and protested vigorously against such a scheme, declaring it would injure their property. The Commissioners thereupon adopted another plan.”

Unsurprisingly the report, after a long description of the latest Olmsted report, concludes “…if the Commissioners decide to adopt any of the suggestions they will be transferred to the big map.”

In July 1895 the Washington Post was reported on Olmsted’s work. The Commissioners had disapproved of the Olmsted proposals. The sub headline reads “Curved streets do not generally meet with favor.” “The Commissioners do not believe in curved streets except adjacent to parks or very rough country…” Newlands of the California Syndicate “has been in conference with the Engineer Commissioner and Mr. Olmsted about these plans.” For the Woodley area plan “…Mr. Olmsted has submitted a plan which may be accepted. It provides for straight streets, parallel or at right angles to Massachusetts Avenue. The Commissioners think
well of this plan, but are inclined to see if they can better it by streets arranged a little differently. 16

The Post was able to report in November that issues were resolved “all objections now rectified” for the third section of the highway plan. 17 This was far too optimistic and in 1897 a new plan for the section was drawn up by Assistant Engineer William Richards. 18 Commissioner Black wrote to the Olmsteds on July 19 asking for their review, at a rate of $100 a day plus travelling expenses. Olmsted telegraphed back his acceptance and that he would visit on the 26th. 19 This was where the Olmsteds’ engagement ended for the project; correspondence ends here and there is no record of the meeting, although it was reported in the Evening Star.

A new law revising the permanent system of highways plan was passed in June of 1898, repealing fourteen sections of the original act. The final plans for the four sections were in process at the time. Five steps were required for the plans to be made final: first, preparation by the Office of the Engineer Commissioner; second, approval by the Office of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia; third, adoption and approval by the Highway Commission (composed of the Secretary of War, Secretary of the Interior, and the Chief of Army Engineers; fourth, an order for recordation by the Commissioners; fifth, recordation by the Surveyor of the District of Columbia. The first section of the plan was prepared September 21, 1898 and finally recorded February 11, 1899. The second section was prepared March 15, 1898 and recorded April 16, 1898. The third section lacks a preparation date but was recorded May 27, 1898. The fourth and final section was prepared March 24, 1900 and recorded May 16. 20 From a design view the plan had somewhat the aspect of a

**Figure 9.** District of Columbia Street Extension, dated July 20, 1895.
camel—design by a committee. But reading back through the design principals and guidelines as were published in reports and the press some aspects are clear. A north/south grid is employed wherever possible. Blocks are smallest where topography allows.

No plan in Washington, D.C. goes unchanged. Congress abolished the highway commission in 1926, turning its responsibilities over to the new National Capital Park and Planning Commission (which included in its membership Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.)—language in the 1913 District Appropriations Act looped Congress itself out of the approval process. The same pressures and interests that existed before and during the creation still were at work. For the Woodley area patience on the part of the developers paid off. After all the Olmsted special studies proposing curvilinear patterns then grids oriented in various fashions, and a split grid in the final plan, the Massachusetts Avenue Syndicate came back to the Olmsted firm in 1905 to try again. The plan the Olmsteds devised on December 1, 1905 resembles somewhat the street plan as ultimately developed; curvilinear streets would replace the system’s grid entirely, with no attempt to retain any of the grid. Interestingly the curvilinear plan of 1905 designed for the syndicate did not resemble the first curvilinear map done over a decade earlier.

Congress passed legislation in 1910 allowing a curvilinear design. What might have been an orthogonal plan (with several traffic circles) “The Dumbarton Heights” in the 1890s was finally platted as a curvilinear, “Massachusetts Avenue Heights” and a grided “Massachusetts Avenue Park”, with a substantial swath of land dedicated as parkland (Figures 11 and 12). Today, most of the area is called Woodland-Normanstone, after the two drives running through it. A small cul-de-sac (added to the plan later) bears the name Thompson Circle, in tribute to John W. Thompson. Fittingly D.C. mover-and-shaker R. Donahue Peebles owns the one house drawing a Thompson Circle address.

The Olmsteds’ role in the development of the highway plan and the role of the highway plan in the development of Washington have both been incompletely understood. The Olmsted firm had a role in reviewing the development of the plan initially and then contributing suggested street
alignments. Their ideas were subject to review and revision by the District Engineer Commissioner office and little passed through unscathed. The irony of the entire situation employing the Olmsteds lay in the legislative mandate to extend the streets into the county in close conformity to the L’Enfant plan, a plan composed of grids and diagonals—there was nothing curvilinear about it. Interposing a curvilinear and topographically-conformant design ethic went much against the design mandate. The quality of “design-by-committee” is evident mostly in Northwest Washington where the grid terminates at its edges in curved streets, on the approaches to parks and/or rough topography.

A clear understanding of the Olmsteds’ contribution is vital to a proper appreciation of the highway plan’s part in the development of the District of Columbia. Some give the McMillan Commission too much credit and fail to even recognize the highway plan. For the areas outside of the ceremonial core, the permanent system has had a permanent impact and directed the development of residential Washington. Some small excuse may be given for the confusion, as the McMillan Commission used the Permanent System of Highway map as its base map and drew all of its proposals in that context. Yet the McMillan Commission came and went, while the Permanent System had and has the ongoing process for managing and updating the map governing subdivision of land in the District of Columbia.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Matthew Gilmore is an independent scholar who specializes in the history of Washington, DC and the metro area. With expertise in urban planning, cartography and GIS, library science, information systems, and photography, he has published several books and articles on a wide variety of topics related to DC history. He is the editor of the H-DC discussion list and blogs on Washington history and related subjects at matthewbgilmore.wordpress.com. He served as reference librarian at the Washingtoniana Division of the DC Public Library for a number of years, and chaired the Annual Conference on DC Historical Studies for four years. Matthew writes a monthly DC history column for the The InTowner (www.intowner.com). This article is based on his December 17, 2015 presentation on the same subject to the Washington Map Society.

ENDNOTES
2 “Extension of the city” Evening Star April 24, 1886, p.2; ‘Extension of the city” Evening Star October 20, 1886, p.5.
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6 Frederick Law Olmsted to Senator Francis Newlands, November, 18, 1891. Olmsted Papers, Library of Congress [299].
8 Olmsted Research Guide Online (ORGO) at www.rediscov.com/olmsted.
10 Newlands to Olmsted, Olmsted, and Eliot, July 17, 1894, Olmsted Papers, Library of Congress.
11 Charles Powell to FL Olmsted, October 17, 1894. Olmsted Papers, Library of Congress.
13 “Board of Complaints” Washington Post June 15, 1895, p.10. The duties of the highway commision were ultimately transferred to what is now the National Capital Planning Commission, which still retains final approval of changes.
14 Plate 43; Evening Star May 15, 1874, p. 2.