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# Central Park, An American Masterpiece: A Comprehensive History Of The Nation's First Urban Park



## Synopsis

Marking Central Park's 150th anniversary, this is a history of America's first public park and a paragon of 19th-century landscape design. Sara Cedar Miller, the official historian and photographer for the Central Park Conservancy, draws on extensive research to tell the story of the park's creation, placing it in the context of 19th-century American art and social history, and illuminating the roles of its designers Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux and their associate Jacob Wrey Mould. Period views and original plans and drawings are complemented by Miller's photographs, which show the restored park's glory.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Commemorating the 150th anniversary of Central Park, photographer and historian Sara Cedar Miller celebrates the aesthetic, cultural and historic significance of America's first public park with the book "Central Park, An American Masterpiece." This is the park's definitive illustrated history, and offers some of the most gorgeous photographs I have seen on the subject - a difficult task given the number of pictures that have been drawn, painted and photographed of the Manhattan landmark. The book includes over 200 color illustrations, original plans and drawings alongside modern photos, giving the viewer/reader an historical perspective. Accompanying Ms. Miller's work, portraying the park throughout the seasons, is a well written text which highlights the conception and creation of the park and its art and architecture. This is a big, beautiful picture book that would make a wonderful addition to any home or library. It's a wonderful gift idea. I know as I have given it

numerous times. Ms. Miller is the parks official historian and photographer and has been since the mid-1980s. JANA

Sara Miller has put together an outstanding book: a book as vast and detailed as the Great Park itself. For those not familiar with the park and its history, this is an invaluable introduction to the political, demographical, economic and, especially, aesthetic thinking that went into the creation of 800 acres of gorgeous park space in the middle of Manhattan. For those seasoned veterans of NYC history, this is a welcome reminder of the enormous vision and efforts of Calvert Vaux and Fredrick Law Olmsted, as they conceived the park. Nota Bene: A lot of books have gorgeous photos but the print job is miserable ... Others have high-quality prints but the photos aren't that interesting ... This book has glorious prints and an expert print job. Pick up this book. Rocco Dormarunno, author of *The Five Points* and *The Five Points Concluded*

As an avid fan of Central Park who has been exploring it and studying the books on it for decades, I was amazed at what there was still to learn about it from Miller's book. For example, other historians allude to a connection between Central Park's design and the Hudson River School of landscape art: Miller provides actual sources of the designer's inspiration and shows the results explicitly in the photos. And all in a way that is not at all "bookish" but instead makes you want to go right in and see for yourself the scenes she shows so well in the book's illustrations. The beautiful photos and fascinating stories and the well chosen historical prints all work together in such a compelling and entertaining way that one might never realize one is being educated by a superb textbook in the field of art. With her emphasis on the past of the park, and its present restored beauty, it is understandable that the author does not use very much of the book's valuable space on the remaining present-day problems, but she might at least have alluded to the incongruity of the city's insistence on using this artistic masterpiece as a through route for motor traffic during the majority of daylight weekday hours. In effect, the city's Dept. of Traffic is providing a refuge from the chaos of the surrounding streets during rush hours - but for the cars, not for the people. If you want to appreciate the park shown in this book, go during the times when the traffic noise does not drown out the wind in the trees, the birdsong, and the happy voices of children!

Did you know that the elm lined mall leading to the Bethesda fountain and the view of the ramble are actually based on the layout of a church? Or that all of the lakes in Central Park are manmade. This and many other very interesting facts are interspersed with lovingly taken photographs of the

park which were taken by the author of the book as well. Miller starts describing how the park came to be and the leading ideas and ideals that lead to its creation by Olmsted and Vaux. She proceeds to describe systematically the various sections of the park providing historical information as well. She delves into some of the controversies and compromises that Olmsted and Vaux encountered in the creation of one of the finest examples of 19th Century art but it is not a comprehensive history of the park. There is a 2 page map of the park at the end of the book with a legend identifying each of the features discussed in the book. If you are first time visitor to the city wishing to explore the park in detail or a life long New Yorker this book will delight and surprise you.

An Aesthetic Pleasure. For anyone who uses Central Park and appreciates its open naturalistic, not natural, landscape as Ms. Miller points out in her beautifully written highly informative text, this is a masterpiece about "The Masterpiece" that is Central Park. The Park as I didn't know way back when, is the result of a successful artistic collaboration between its two designers and nature. In fact it is completely man made. Ms. Miller who has been C.P's official historian and photographer for over twenty years has captured with love and a keen eye in her photographs the essence of what Central Park means to New Yorkers of all ages, backgrounds, nationalities: Relief from the 'concreteness' of the city surrounding it. In addition, to the aesthetic pleasure her exquisite photographs provide, the book answers questions many of us have while breathing deeply and getting lost in Central Park. This chance to get lost through careful design was one of many visionary choices the original designers made 150 years ago when Central Park certainly wasn't "central" to a city that only eventually caught up with it. Ever since I discovered Ms. Miller's book I've given it many times as a present because there are so many of us who have criss-crossed the park and who certainly 'know' it yet might want to know more about it.

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