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FOUNDED BY NIELS POULSON, IN 1911

Jens Jensen: Landscape Architect

By RAGNA BERGLIOT ESKIL

IT has the feeling and the spirit of the prairie!" Thus exclaimed a city-weary old prairie pioneer as he gazed at the slow, wandering lagoon in Humboldt Park, with its marshy shores and lily beds, its irregular, ragged banks—rock-jutted here and there—and its suggestion of the free, languid strength of the prairies he had known in his youth. And so, indeed, Jens Jensen, the designer of "Prairie River," had meant him to feel, as he had meant him to rejoice when he could see again (edging a Chicago boulevard) in a long, uneven, tree-and bush-lined grass lane, the prairie road he had swung along in the young pioneer days.



JENS JENSEN

Jens Jensen, perhaps the leading landscape architect of his sort in the world, is a philosopher and a poet of outdoor planning, besides being an artist in this field. He believes passionately in the right of all people to have a part in nature. His creed is that, in these days of crowded civilization, it is absolutely essential for each individual to be able to get away from his fellows to some free spot of nature

where he can get the peace and solitude that will give him soul quietude and soul growth.

There is little formality about Jens Jensen's landscapes. His free and sunny spirit will not be stifled by the established forms of garden conventionality. The only place where he suggests the mathematical symmetry of the continental ideas is in an occasional flower garden, but even then there is a grace and hominess about the scene rarely found in formal garden architecture. Mr. Jensen believes that the feeling of the controlled nature spot should reflect the scenery of the surrounding wild landscape—not copy it, but interpret it. For instance, in a prairie section the spirit of the rolling, flat land should be emphasized; in a mountainous region the spirit of the mountains; in a ridge district the beauty of overlying strata of rock, while a park along the shore of the sea or a large lake should call attention to the majesty and bigness of the water. Every line which he draws on his canvas of living things suggests this. He does not build a lagoon beside an ocean, nor does he simulate mountains in a flat

area, nor disregard the rocks in the ridge section of the Blue Mountains. Like the portrait painter, who is able to reflect the soul of his sitter, he catches the soul of the landscape—a living thing to him—and then lets it emanate from his frame of grass and trees and flowers.

Every detail of his gardening carries out this unconventional and true idea. He uses not ornamental, clipped shrubbery, but native trees and hazel-nut brush, wild gooseberries, raspberries, blackberries, grapevines, and whatever else in tree and shrub is at home in that region. The shores of his artificial lakes are not “parky,” but, like the “Prairie River,” are muddy and marshy and weedy, except where the children are to wade. His walks are not of cement, but of indigenous materials, small pebbles, blocks of stone, or mulled tamarack and cedar bark; sometimes they are just plain “cow-paths” or “deer-trails,” and perhaps there is a bit of “corduroy” along some wider road. Rustic bridges of young maple poles cross little streams that trickle and fall in true woodland fashion, and everywhere are easy seats where one may sit until the peace of the scene has encompassed one’s soul. Or, if one would be sociable, there are picnic grounds



PRAIRIE RIVER IN HUMBOLDT PARK

Jens Jensen, Architect

and golf links and tennis courts and council fires and concert places and open-air theatres—and, by the way, in these open-air theatres Mr. Jensen believes America's contribution to the world stage will be developed. Even the conservatory in Garfield Park, although it is the largest in the world, has not the stiffness and touch-me-not air usual in greenhouses. The spirit of the tropics is portrayed in this landscape gardening under glass, and one is constantly charmed with the little poetic nooks of seeming fairy arrangement that are revealed at every turn.

This holding to the true, which Jens Jensen shows in his portrayal of nature, he also shows in his dealing with men. "The only really honest big man there's been in Chicago's public service," some one has said of him—which statement, let us hope for Chicago's sake, is an exaggeration. "The graft-fighting Dane," as he has been called, hates dishonesty, and especially the dishonesty that expends itself to the public detriment. With the money and the patronage that have passed through his hands, first as superintendent of Humboldt Park, then as superintendent of Garfield Park, and then as superintendent and architect of the West Parks system, Mr. Jensen, if he had

been corruptible, could easily have become an immensely wealthy man. But his undeviating principle, "Never accept any money for influence," and his determination that, as far as he could bring it about, the people were going to get every cent's value out of their park appropriations, drew him into hard conflicts with the grafters who were mulcting the West Park funds, and made his name a headline feature, time after time, in the Chicago papers for some ten or eleven trying years.

His first graft fight was twenty years ago, as superintendent of Humboldt Park, with an interest-protected sidewalk contractor who



Jens Jensen, Architect

A TANGLE OF GRASSES

was attempting to provide cheaper material and work than the specifications called for, and his second was with a combination of coal grafters who were delivering short weights of coal to the heating and power plant of this park, while they charged the city for full-weight loads. This latter, especially, proved a pretty stiff graft to expose, for the influences back of it were some of the most powerful in Chicago, but Mr. Jensen finally managed it, at the personal cost, however, of being ousted from his position. A reform park board that soon came in, though, demanded his reinstatement, and he was made superintendent and landscape artist for the whole extensive West Parks system. But the personnel of this board changed shortly, and the graft machine back of the new members was so strongly entrenched that it even dared try to remove the trained employees of the West Parks and fill their places with its political henchmen. Mr. Jensen, of course, was immediately up in arms against this new move, and after a bitter struggle the merit rule was absolutely established, and the park employees who started in with Mr. Jensen are still there. After that fight—about eight years ago—Mr. Jensen gave up the superintendency and opened a private office, though, fortunately for Chicago, he still retains the position of consulting architect for the West Parks system.

Since leaving the superintendency, Mr. Jensen, besides laying out public parks in smaller cities—Racine, Wisconsin, for instance—designing numerous private estates and university grounds throughout the country, training park superintendents and landscape designers in his own offices, and lecturing before colleges and clubs and associations interested in the out-of-doors, finds a great deal of time to champion the movement for more state and national parks. Especially has he been interested in the park reservations in the Great Lakes commercial region, for his slogan is: "A free spot of nature within the reach of every person." He it was who, some eighteen or nineteen years ago, started the agitation to save the famous sand dunes along the Indiana coast for a national park, so that Chicago and the steel cities could have this near wild spot, and it has been his eager desire to see a school of landscape architecture established on a part of the dunes; for he believes that this unique meeting-place of the plant life of the north and the south, the east and the west, would make an ideal location for a landscape school. Yet his energies have not been confined only to his home territory. Through talks and illustrated lectures he has given of his vigor and his enthusiasm to every public park project in the country, and only last spring he signally aided, by his candid report, the battle which the New York club-women were waging to save Riverside Park from the encroachment of the New York Central interests. Wherever the people's

outdoor recreation spots are in danger, Mr. Jensen's militancy for the right may be counted upon.

Mr. Jensen has been in this country only thirty-six years. He was born of Danish parents in Dybbøl, Slesvig, close beside the sea, on an estate that had been handed down from father to son for almost four hundred years; and he received his first training in an agricultural school in Jutland, later finishing in the famous *Landbrugskole* near Copenhagen. It need hardly be said that this country—especially Chicago, which scarcely knew then what landscape gardening meant—did not, when he first came, give his unique ideas a very warm welcome. He learned what it meant to go hungry, but he persisted in believing that the work he had set out to do would find a place. He made his entry into the Chicago park system by taking a job as a common laborer, and now he is hailed by both American and European critics as a really great creative landscape architect.

But more than his wonderful gardens, his contribution to this country has been revealing the individual, personal beauty of America to herself, and inspiring in thousands of people a hitherto unrealized appreciation and understanding of nature.

The Dream Genius Speaks

By HENRIK WERGELAND

Translated from the Norwegian by ILLIT GRÖNDAHL

*A diamond is my imagination,
Cut thousand-edged; my reason ever
Peers through it as through a kaleidoscope—
Or 'tis a Chinese game which in a thousand
Fresh forms my reason puts—Halloo!
I split asunder easily, arising
A hissing rocket, coming down as ten.
Same time I play upon a sleepy sexton:
Who hears bell-ringing—and upon a grocer:
Forthwith he bacon smells—a maid: she laughs,
Her pillow kissing—then I touch a king:
He struts and feels majestic, seeing that
With phosphorus I paint him, rex, rex, rex!*