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"In the Park": Lewis Miller's Chronicle of American Landscape at Mid-Century

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Abstract:

This study of Lewis Miller's "Guide to Central Park" has taken several approaches in order to create a context for the album as well as to better understand the reception of Central Park in its opening years. In addition to two scholarly essays, this digital publication makes it possible to include a facsimile of the whole album accompanied by transcriptions and descriptions and links to notes, sources, and other relevant material.

Digital Humanities and Art History

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"In the Park": Lewis Miller's Chronicle of American Landscape at Mid-Century

by Therese O'Malley and Kathryn R. Barush

with Emily Pugh, Jessica Ruse, and Courtney Tompkins



[Lewis Miller, "Guide to Central Park," 2. Watercolor and ink on paper. The Henry Ford, Dearborn, MI.](#)

Introduction

Sometime in the mid-nineteenth century, Lewis Miller (1792-1882) of York, Pennsylvania, made an album of ink and watercolor drawings about Central Park, in New York City. This untitled album of 54 pages, referred to here as the "Guide to Central Park," is in the collection of the Henry Ford in Dearborn, Michigan. Each page is fully illustrated with images of park views and texts that include poems, hymns, and botanical names. The actual date of its making is unknown as is the history of its binding.

Lewis Miller (1792-1882) is well known among historians of American art and architecture who have, since the 1930s, viewed his approximately two thousand drawings as documentation of

vernacular life and the cultural landscape. In spite of the long-standing familiarity with his work, little attention has been paid to the rich literary or image sources upon which he drew. Two essays address the visual and textual sources of this album and offer new interpretations not only of the album, but also of Miller's larger body of work.

This study of Miller's "Guide to Central Park" has taken several approaches in order to create a context for the album, and to better understand the reception of Central Park in its opening years. In addition to two scholarly essays, this digital publication makes it possible to include a facsimile of the whole album accompanied by transcriptions and descriptions; a map of Miller's scenes in Central Park; links to all the literary sources quoted by Miller; links to databases of relevant material including Central Park Commissioners annual reports; newspaper articles; audio and video clips of reenactments of the brass band music featured in Central Park; and finally, extensive links to visual comparanda.

This digital scholarly work consists of the following components [\[links to online articles\]](#):

[Lewis Miller, "Guide to Central Park": A full, annotated, digital facsimile](#)

A fully annotated digital facsimile of Lewis Miller's "Guide to Central Park" supplements the scholarly essays that contextualize the album. In addition to viewing each page of the album, the reader can access more detailed information about the "Guide" and what it depicts.

[Lewis Miller's View of American Landscape](#)

[Therese O'Malley](#)

How and why did the new Central Park attract the attention of the folk artist Lewis Miller? O'Malley explains the significance of Miller's "Guide" within the artist's own oeuvre and in relation to the visual culture of Central Park at mid-century.

[A Pilgrim in the Park: Sacred Space in Lewis Miller's "Guide to Central Park"](#)

[Kathryn R. Barush](#)

Barush discusses the theme of the religious traveler within Miller's "Guide," and contends that the religious and sentimental texts accompanying Miller's detailed watercolor drawings function as meditations or prayers, often inscribing a secular or natural site with a sacred significance.

[Mapping Lewis Miller's "Guide to Central Park"](#)

The pages of Miller's "Guide" are mapped onto contemporary Central Park, linking the features he depicts to their current locations. The map opens in a new window.

[Project Narrative](#)

II. Lewis Miller's "Guide to Central Park" [[link to online facsimile](#)]

A fully annotated digital facsimile of Lewis Miller's "Guide to Central Park" supplements the scholarly essays that contextualize the album. In addition to viewing each page of the album, the reader can access more detailed information about the "Guide" and what it depicts:



Clicking on the "Transcription and Description" icon in the upper-right corner of the viewer will launch a popup window containing a transcription of Miller's text (with translation where necessary), along with a general description of the page. Note that Miller's idiosyncratic spelling has been maintained in the transcription.



Clicking the "Notes and Sources" icon, also in the upper-right corner, will highlight elements on the page for which there is further information, including links to textual and visual sources and related material.

The project has attempted to use primarily open-access sources. There are some important exceptions that are not accessible without subscription, although full citation is provided.

Therese O'Malley, Ph.D., is associate dean at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. She oversees the Center's publications and special meetings programs. Her scholarly publications have focused on the history of landscape architecture and garden design, primarily in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, concentrating on the transatlantic exchange of plants, ideas, and people. Her recent publications include a reference work entitled *Keywords in American Landscape Design* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), *The Art of Natural History: Illustrated Treatises and Botanical Paintings, 1400-1850*, co-edited with Amy R. W. Meyers (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2010), and several articles on aspects of the early profession of landscape design and the history of botanic gardens. She is the former president of the Society of Architectural Historians, a member of the editorial boards of the University of Pennsylvania Press Landscape Studies series, and the international quarterly *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*. She is founding board member of the Foundation for Landscape Studies, and board member of the Mount Vernon Place Conservancy, Baltimore. She currently serves as an advisor to the United States Ambassadors Fund for the State Department. Dr. O'Malley was chair of the Association of Research Institutes in the History of Art from 1994 to 2000 and a senior fellow in Landscape Studies at Dumbarton Oaks from 1989 to 1995. She lectures internationally and has been guest professor at Harvard, Princeton, University of Pennsylvania, and Temple University.

Kathryn R. Barush received a Ph.D. from the University of Oxford in 2012 and is currently a postdoctoral research associate at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (CASVA) at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. Barush's work focuses on the art and material culture of religious pilgrimage. Her dissertation, which she is currently preparing for publication, examined the intersections of the concept of pilgrimage and the visual imagination in the

context of early to mid-nineteenth-century Britain. Barush has presented aspects of her research at the College of William and Mary Institute for Pilgrimage Studies, the University of California, Berkeley, the University of Oxford, and the National Gallery of Art. In addition, she has worked as a curatorial assistant at the Yale University Center for British Art and interned at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery. Barush is presently a research affiliate for the Yale University Material and Visual Cultures of Religion project directed by Sally Promey. Her research has benefitted from the support of a Thomas J. Watson 12-month research fellowship and a 3-year Leverhulme Research Studentship.