

Designers of Voigt Park

VPBC has no information about who designed Voigt Park.

Two landscape architects prevalent at the time who were competitive contemporaries, were Fredric Olmstead and Jens Jensen. Their similar but distinct approaches to landscape design both emphasized natural design, contrary to any formal planned landscape e.g. Paris's, Jardin de Tuileries, or the Gardens at the Belle Isle Conservatory.

Jensen had ties to the Boston-Edison neighborhood, as he did extensive work for two notable residents adjacent to Voigt Park, both Albert Kahn as well Henry Ford. The Three Graces a configuration of three wild crab trees were noted in the Historic Map below are also used by Jen Jensens for the Edsel and Eleanore Ford Estate The reason for this repeat of the 3 Graces at both homes is an interesting question. Perhaps Edsel liked the configuration while living as a boy in the neighborhood, enough to allow Jens Jensen to use this his often employed configuration at his and Eleanore's Estate. The following excerpt from.....refindingXXX

“Jensen] considered flowerbeds an intrusion and relegated them to areas away from the house. He also preferred as few architectural elements in the landscape as possible... Jensen's results were inevitably less formal than Wright's and certainly less intimately related to the architecture...”

The Edsel and Elenor Ford Home Website has this.-

Danish-born Jens Jensen (1860 - 1951) studied at Tune Agricultural School, outside Copenhagen, and in 1884 immigrated to the United States. He found a job as a laborer for the Chicago West Parks, where he created the "American Garden," a unique prairie wildflower garden that revealed the beauties of the local region to park visitors. Jensen's long, sometimes stormy American career built firmly on this early experiment. He continued to advocate for the appreciation and

conservation of the natural landscape, creating parks and gardens that utilized primarily native plants in spatial arrangements that evoked native landscapes. His enthusiasm for the mystery and power of nature was unbridled.

Jensen came to know Edsel Ford through his mother, Clara and his father, Henry, founder of Ford Motor Company. At Fair Lane, the Fords' Dearborn, Michigan estate, Jensen had created huge tree and flower-lined meadows aligned to the path of the setting sun. Artistic differences eventually separated the senior Fords and Jensen, but Edsel (an inspired automotive designer and avid art patron) so admired Jensen's talent that he and Eleanor commissioned him to design four residential landscapes for their family, the last of which was begun in 1927, on Lake St. Clair.

See Revisiting Riverside: A Fredrick L. Olmsted Community , chapter 7

Other things indicate the possibility that Jensens was involved in the design of Voigt Park. First, its design. The minimal and contained floral elements in Voigt Park's design generously highlights and prioritizes the natural forest of trees. A feature that creates a natural character for Voigt Park is that the forest trees are planted in clusters. No formal pattern of tree plantings is used. This is a landscape design approach utilized extensively by Jensens, implicating his possible involvement in the design of Voigt Park.

Second, the Voigt Park natural character is emphasized by the master park designer, Frederick Law Olmstead, who criticized the newly planted Voigt Park, because it “shows a... lack of artistic composition.” *Aside from the formal rows of street trees, the plantations both along the [Grand] Boulevard and in many of the smaller parks, while usually of good materials are so indiscriminately arranged as to be very lacking in character. In general the present condition would seem to be the result of a long series of plantings and maintenance operations conducted by successive park administrations without keeping in view any sufficiently well defined artistic designs for the several parks of the park system; but the case of Voigt Park for example shows an equal lack of artistic*

composition in a plantation which appears to have been very recently executed. Nearly everywhere the same material rearranged in position and composed with more definite artistic purpose and skill would produce an astonishing increase in the interest and beauty and variety of appearance of the small park and the boulevard parkings. (Frederick Law Olmstead, Conditions in Detroit – 1915, pp. 10-11).

Considering the competitiveness of Olmstead and Jensens, the former's comments may give further credence to the designer of Voigt Park being Jensens or someone else that Olmstead may have enjoyed criticizing.

Research on Jens Jensens contributed by Anne-Marie D'Anna.

Reference to Olmsted on Voigt Park contributed by Andrew Moskalik