**Introduction**

On a recent trip to the Biltmore estate this past spring, I was in awe at the vast beauty of the gardens and surrounding landscape designed by Olmsted, but overcome by the degree to which the landscape had gone amok. Shrubs that were intended to be focal points had now become overgrown and morphed the design out of scale. Prized specimen plantings imported from Europe and Asia had become invasive, killing everything else in its path. Akebia, English Ivy and even the native Magnolia had overpopulated the forests. But perhaps the most significant sign of a landscape gone awry was the bamboo. Interpreters at the estate would cheerily boast to the 13 different species of Bamboo, but what I witnessed was a complete invasion, populating all the river banks (not allowing anything else to survive) and forests, some specimens being larger than the diameter of a man's hand. This led me to question, what were the circumstances and forces in place, that led the Vanderbilt family to focus so intently on the every minute aspect of preserving the house and immediate surroundings, but not applying the exact same lens to the lesser designed landscapes (though still designed by Olmsted) that constituted the remainder of the estate.

The experience led me to ponder what happens when a designed landscape has been neglected, overlooked, or impacted by external forces of development, urbanization or re-wilderness? Using the Biltmore as the backdrop this paper explores issues that exist between landscape preservation, landscape management and cultural landscape fields. I explore some current collaborative approaches to landscape management, and offer different methodology that preservationists may need to employ when attempting to
preserve both landmark and landscape in an effort to create condition-specific restoration/management strategies that yield incremental changes but are sympathetic to the original design intent.

We're used to ideas like periods of significance, boundaries, and the Secretary's standards for treatment ("restoration") as it applies to architecture. But many of these provisions of the 1966 Historic Preservation Act have been problematic when applied to landscapes, which are ongoing and developing (alive), tend to resist easily defined boundaries, and have their own standards and concepts for materiality, and integrity. These treatment standards which were developed for architecture just don’t work when applied to landscapes.

When examining landscapes and determining what and how or if to preserve, one has to take into account, first and foremost, the notion of change. Preservationists need to think hard on this, as the word preservation when thought of in its purest form and the word change do not necessarily compliment each other. Preservationists need to approach the notion of landscape preservation through a different lens then we approach architectural preservation and that lens means change. With this in mind, one has to wonder if the word preservation is even applicable to landscapes. In many cases preservation is counterintuitive when applied to landscapes, especially when that very landscape has been neglected, overgrown and the species that were at one time hailed for their uniqueness are now found to be problematic. The question then must back away from preservation and become one of restoration, replacement or remediation.
In his essay, Considering Nature and Culture in Historic Landscape Preservation, historian Robert Melnick states that the inherent focus of preservation has in the past been “attention to stability, and an agent against change.” ¹ I believe change in landscapes can occur in four forms. Changes that occur naturally due to plant growth, and forces of nature (seasonal, annual, weather), changes that occur from human design, change from interaction and use of the existing landscape (cultural), and finally changes that occur from outside pressures of development, re-use or use for a different purpose such as a roads. So each landscape poses a different dilemma that has to be addressed on an individual level based on the changes that have occurred there.

When we choose to preserve a landmark, do we have an effective model to understand the physical environment in which that landmark currently resides? Is the act of preservation counterintuitive with regard to the surrounding landscapes that are never static, always dynamic with change? Do preservationists have the vocabulary and methods to address these changes? Are we on the same page as landscape architects and the people that manage these landscapes on a daily basis and when something does go awry, do we have the tools to implement the changes needed that will shape the future of the landscape once it has been preserved? Folklorist and preservation advocate, Bernard Hermann went as far as to define preservation as “equal to taxidermy and that stopping change takes landscapes and buildings out of the organic world, an act that means stopping life.” That said, once one makes the decision to preserve a building then the landscape it sits on must be considered as well as they are and always will be part of one fabric so a program that incorporates them both, also has to be developed.

¹ Alanen and Melnick, 23
When applying traditional preservation methods as outlined in the Act, one immediately runs into the problem that the criteria were developed for buildings. Landscape architects and designers tend to wonder if capturing a moment (period of significance) is advisable, and if halting the change that would happen to a landscape over time isn’t counterintuitive because the landscapes are living. An abstract concept here but perhaps helpful when thinking of terminology and proper approach to landscape preservation is that buildings are geometry, a grouping of forms that are stable and unchanging unless by forces of deterioration. Landscapes are fractals, geometric forms that multiply on their own, over and over, and will not remain stable and controlled unless we intervene.

Since the 1960’s the National Park Service has been inventorying and cataloguing cultural resources in our country. However, their primary focus was on architectural, archaeological or museum objects. It was not until the 1990’s that there became a focus on landscape as disappearing resources also. Thus, the practice of landscape preservation has had to develop new criteria and methods to work both in and around the existing National Historic Preservation Act.

**Schisms and Layers**

Goetcheus points out “when one looks at early National Register nominations there is thorough documentation of the building, but rarely a comprehensive description of the relationship of that building to its site, its landscape context or any unique details of designed or vernacular landscape.” She further points out that it is largely the choice of the nomination preparers as to what gets incorporated into the report. However, there is

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2 Goetcheus, 1
The origins of landscape preservation can be traced to the turn of the 20th century at Harvard University. Their program in Landscape Architecture, one of the nation’s first, embraced Boston’s own Charles Eliot (1859-1897) who was hailed as landscape preservation’s founding father. Though he was trained as a landscape architect, it was through his writings, for the magazine Garden and Forest, that Eliot brought to light issues of landscape preservation. Later, after joining forces with Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and John Charles Olmsted, Eliot turned his sights on the creation of a metropolitan Park System for the city of Boston. In his archive of writings, he states this project’s goals were to “invest public money in the purchase of several metropolitan reservations to secure for the enjoyment of present and future generations such interesting and beautiful scenery as the lands acquired can supply.” He succeeded in carrying out this project but died shortly after its completion. However, larger than his writing and his park design, it was his activity as organizer of the Board of Trustees for the preservation of beautiful and historic places in Massachusetts (now the Trustee’s of Reservations) that earned him the title of the movement’s founder.

The field of landscape preservation evolved and changed over the next 40 years, as did thoughts on architectural preservation. Perhaps the largest undertaking of that time was with the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg. Here, Eliot’s protégée Arthur Shurcliff,
influenced by his mentor’s preservation sensibilities, developed his own methodology of
documentation and treatment of historic landscapes. “Lacking specific documentation of
the colonial era gardens associated with the restored and reconstructed buildings,
Shurcliff spent considerable time documenting surviving Virginian gardens from this
period as well as their English precedents.”

He then produced measured plans which in turn were used as the basis for the Williamsburg garden designs.

Thus landscape preservation had a good start and was developing its own path and
methodology. So how did it, by the time the Act was created in 1966, get marginalized?
As I mentioned, it was Harvard that caused the schism. In 1936 a new dean arrived at
Harvard named Joseph Hudnut. At the same time Walter Gropius was hired as a
professor in the architecture program. Hudnut is credited with “purging” Harvard’s
library of history books, while Gropius, was a fan of all things modern. At that same
time three landscape architecture students, Dan Kiley, Garrett Eckbo and James Rose,
reacting to Gropius’s modernism and Hudnut’s disdain for the historical, published three
articles in Architectural Record that promoted an approach to landscape architecture that
“divorced design from history.”

This lack of emphasis on historical curricula became the direction landscape architecture programs headed in and interest in landscape
preservation waned. Why it resurfaced in the 1980’s can partially be attributed to the
restoration of Central Park. While simultaneously, the Statue of Liberty was being
preserved and the need for the work well funded and understood by the nation, the
Central Park restoration that was underway was not as well received. Many groups began

3 Birnbaum & Hughes, 5
4 Birnbaum & Hughes, 9
protesting the proposals, especially when it involved tree removal or areas that were highly used for specific sports. The Central Park restoration reinvigorated attention on landscape preservation and created a new manner of viewing how we interact with our landscapes out of which evolved new thought processes we now term Cultural Landscapes.

**Cultural Landscapes**

Cultural landscapes by definition are “a geographic area, including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife or domestic animals therein, associated with a historic event, activity, or person or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values.”

“As the productive landscape is more densely inhabited, the economic and social forces are more complex, change is rapid, layers proliferate, and often abrupt spatial discontinuities result that cultural landscape studies seem unable to address adequately. At the heart of Carl Sauer's definition of the cultural landscape was "the essential character of a place." It has often proved easier to study either the natural or the built components of a cultural landscape than to wrestle with the combination of the two in the concept of place.”

**Schisms/Layers and the Biltmore NHRP Nomination**

One can find a correlation in the schism between landmark, landscape preservation, and cultural landscapes by examining what went on at the Biltmore during this same time frame. Biltmore Estate, the largest home in the U.S was designed by Richard Morris

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5 NPS, 5
6 Urban landscape history, 17
Hunt between 1888 and 1895, for George Washington Vanderbilt, in collaboration with Frederick Law Olmsted, who designed the landscapes. Upon completion, the house was only occupied for portions of the winter and upon his death in 1914, Vanderbilt’s widow rarely ever returned. His daughter, Cornelia occupied the house briefly with her spouse John Cecil, but their marriage failed and shortly thereafter the estate was placed in trust in 1932. It was the collaboration of the estates superintendent, Chauncey Beadle, G.W. Vanderbilt’s widow, Edith Stuyvesant Dresser Vanderbilt, and attorney, Junius Green Adams, serving as trustees of the newly formed Biltmore Company that took over management of Biltmore and opened it to the public in mid 1930’s. When Superintendent Beadle died, the collaboration dissolved although the Biltmore Company was well established and the house and gardens preserved and open to the public.

It was not until 1963, that the application to put the property on the National Register was submitted. Upon reading the application, while there is considerable attention paid to the Olmsted designed landscape; the clear focus is on the residence, the surrounding architectural structures and the more highly designed landscapes and features that immediately surround the home. This could be in part because the residence and immediate surrounding buildings incorporate such a vast amount of space and require an army to keep it managed, but also, since the Biltmore is now a tourist destination, this is the more profitable area of the estate, thus more attention paid to it in order to generate income for upkeep. As one moves into the vast surrounding 6000 + acres (which were originally 12,000+ during Olmsted’s tenure), is where the problematic landscapes, though still very much part of Olmsted’s design, can be found.
If there is fault to be found with this application, it cannot be blamed on the preparer as this was submitted when the focus of historical preservation was on architecture. The fields of Landscape Architecture, Cultural Landscape Studies and Landscape Preservation had not yet found a common voice. The guidelines that were currently being put forth by the National Parks Service, when considering architecture and landscape as one, were not in place at the time of this application. In addition, because of the Biltmore Company’s decision to open the estate to the public, changes had to be made in the original design of the land to accommodate large volumes of traffic. The approach road, one of the more “natural” of the Olmsted designed landscapes, was widened and straightened to accommodate busses. Also, the Blue Ridge Parkway cut through the estate in the 1950’s and accommodation for that had to be made. Finally, there were 13 years between estate gardener Chauncey Beadle’s death and the submission of this application. Thirteen years is a long time to pay marginal attention to the lesser-designed landscapes of your estate especially when it had already undergone developmental change. Since landscapes are always changing, one can understand that a lot can happen during that amount of time, and bamboo can grow big…really big.

**Schism Repair**

It was not because of the Biltmore that preservation began to include the notion of landscapes again. During the 1960s, the National Parks Service performed system-wide inventories of its cultural resources, such as historic structures, archeological resources, and museum objects on their properties. Then in the early 1980’s the field of historic landscape preservation matured. Rapid expansion of cities to suburbs, urban sprawl and
disappearing natural resources, brought the realization that we are not separate from our landscapes but part of them which renewed interest in landscape preservation. The National Register began publishing guides that intended to assist in the documentation of cultural and natural resources. Such publications gave guidelines for evaluating landscapes, battlefields, cemeteries, rural landscapes, mining properties to name but a few. All of these publications have greatly impacted the nominees, and the preparers are now more consistently trying to incorporate landscapes, and in some cases, it is the landscape, not a structure that is the nominee.

In light of the increased recognition of cultural landscapes since the 1980s, the need for an inventory of these resources was identified. As a result, the Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI) was initiated by the National Park Service, which then inventoried its own properties and existing conditions. As a result of this inventory, in 1990, the Secretary of the Interior’s Annual Control Report identified a material weakness in the preservation of cultural landscapes and historic structures. The weakness as identified and stated is: “historic and prehistoric structures and cultural landscapes are damaged by neglect or deferred work due to insufficient funds or staffing.”

In 1994, Landscape Architect Charles A. Birnbaum, working in association with the National Parks Service addressed this topic with its publication 36 Preservation Briefs. Birnbaum describes the challenges that face cultural landscapes when he states, “all designed and vernacular landscapes evolve from, or are often dependent on, natural resources. It is these interconnected systems of land, air and water, vegetation and

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7 NPS, CLI, 1
wildlife, which have dynamic qualities that differentiate cultural landscapes from other cultural resources, such as historic structures. Thus, their documentation, treatment, and ongoing management require a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary approach.”  

This approach, takes into consideration the Secretary of the Interiors Standard for Treatment of Historic Properties, and addresses the issue of cultural landscapes. This “Treatment Plan” defines the work that has been or needs to be carried out in order to achieve the preservation goals and includes “relative historic value of the property, level of historic documentation, historic, current and proposed uses and current physical conditions, to name but a few.” It recommends that prior to any work being done, a plan of action should be determined based on the current conditions of the landscape and the future goals for preservation. This treatment should be in keeping with the Secretary of the Interiors standards, which are: preservation, rehabilitation, restoration or reconstruction.

In 1998, working with the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation and the National Park Service, Margaret Coffin and Regina M. Bellavia published their Guide to Developing a Preservation Maintenance Plan for a Historic Landscape (PMP). This plan highlights the fact that landscapes “quickly lose their character” unless ongoing maintenance is performed. In addition, they identify and define a new term…preservation maintenance. Preservation maintenance, they explain, “is the act or process of mitigating wear and deterioration of a historic property without altering its

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8 Bimbaum, 3
9 Bimbaum, 10
historic character including the practice of monitoring change, controlling growth, replacing in kind and minimizing disturbance in the landscape to ensure that features such as vegetation, paths, walls, and other landscape furnishings, are not lost and the character of a place is not compromised. The guide divides Preservation Maintenance into two types: Routine, which occurs at regular intervals, such as mowing, sweeping, and Cyclic, which is seasonal but not as infrequent as annual, such as tree replacement, adjusting treads in a stair, etc. It also provides a step by step plan for managing landscapes including, field inspection and inventory, work summary, feature data, record keeping, seasonal calendars and blank forms one can copy or use as templates. It suggests this plan should be kept in a loose-leaf binder that is readily accessible to the work crew in order to add notes or to refer to as needed and that all personnel be part of the process of maintenance. What it doesn’t make clear is that this is ongoing maintenance requires lots of physical man hours in the field, nor does it suggest that this plan should be required with submittal of application to NRHP.

**But…What about Biltmore and its Bamboo?**

So, back to the Biltmore and do we currently have the framework in place to address their issues, issues which in this case are site specific to this property, but which occur in all landscapes in some form or other because, of the nature of the rapid changes all landscapes undergo.

In Biltmore’s case I do believe, the tools are in place for them to use…however, the incentive to use these tools needs to be discussed. When Biltmore received its

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10 Coffin/Bellavia,3
designation in 1963, they were not asked to submit a CLI nor a PMP in order to receive their designation. They fulfilled the requirements and that was that. However, in light of current conditions and the identification of bamboo infestation, perhaps that application should be revisited, but the question is how to facilitate this process or better yet what to do to keep this from happening in the future. In order to address the current conditions of the Biltmore there needs to be an understanding between the historians and researchers currently involved with the estate, the Biltmore Company and the actual landscape workers as to how to address the issue. A Cultural Landscape Inventory should be prepared based on the original designs by Olmsted and the current conditions assessed. Period of significance has already been established but if a Preservation Maintenance Plan has not been established, then it should be and it should be implemented. Unfortunately, because it is a privately owned property, it does not benefit from the same level of stewardship that public properties such as parks, cemeteries and battlefields enjoy, but still, because it is open to the public, visitors, like me, in awe of the absolute beauty of the property itself, feel a level of responsibility, so perhaps the management of the estate could create a volunteer work force to assist in its caretaking, if financial issues are contributing to the lack of proper landscape maintenance.

Suggestions for the Future Landscape Preservation

Now the argument becomes about the wording of the act and how it was written. To be truly sensitive to what we term Cultural landscapes; preservationists, landscape architects, planners and others in the field, begin to question whether the Act itself is not problematic because of how it is worded. Problems arise when one considers two
aspects…period of Significance and Integrity. Birnbaum argues that the “past is always seen though the lens of the present.” Obviously, as time passes, landscapes get used in different ways, are constantly changing and new layers of intimacy appear depending on each user’s personal experience. So the integrity of the original design may disappear based on how the property has been used, and if the use has changed then the period of significance may be difficult to determine as each new use may hold a different period of significance to each user.

In the case of private nominees, a Cultural Landscape Inventory and a Preservation Maintenance Plan should be required at the time of the application to the NRHP if a cultural landscape is to be included in the nomination.

Designation to the NRHP should not be absolute. Properties should be monitored on a biennial basis if they include landscapes, to determine if the Preservation Maintenance Plan is being followed.

Properties including landscapes in their nomination that received the designation prior to 1993 should be revisited and asked to prepare a CLI and CMP.

Properties where invasive species have been identified should be monitored and remediated if necessary.
Sites where initial design integrity has been altered due to overgrowth of plant materials, or pressure from outside development should be re-evaluated and restorative measures taken.

If it is determined that a property is not meeting the PMP, a series of actions should be in place to ensure that the integrity or initial design is not being compromised. If it is determined this to be the case, the property should immediately address the issue or risk losing its designation.

**Conclusion**

There is little doubt that both designed and cultural landscapes have been overlooked over since the Act was written in 1966. However, since this omission has now been brought to light through collaboration of architects, landscape architects, historians and preservationists’, new tools have been created to help us understand their importance and develop new methods for understanding, treatment and approaches. New pressures come as new points of view are brought to the table and no doubt, new treatments and approaches will evolve from these. The most important approach however, is communication and a team approach. Keep all parties cooperating and communicating and above all, understand that the lens that we utilize when aiming to preserve architecture has to be a little more flexible and alive when preserving landscapes My dream is that sometime in the nest 10 years, all of these glitches between the field of architectural preservation and that of landscape preservation, and the preservation of cultural landscapes will someday, find a common ground and the vocabulary necessary to
address all of these very big issues in a very easy way…and that the Biltmore will find a way to utilize these new strategies to control its bamboo. To every thing, turn, turn, turn…there is a season, turn, turn, turn…

\[\text{Birnbaum/Hughes, 3}\]
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