RICHARD SCHERMERHORN, JR.
NEW YORK ENGINEER
AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT:
FORT LAUDERDALE'S FIRST
CITY PLANNER

by William G. Crawford, Jr.

Early Influences: the Dutch Schermerhorns

Fort Lauderdale’s first city planner, New York engineer and landscape architect Richard Schermerhorn, Jr., was born on October 17, 1877, in Brooklyn, New York, a descendant of Schermerhorn patriarch Jacob Janse Schermerhorn. Born in Holland more than two hundred and fifty years before, in 1622, the patriarch settled in Albany, New York, in 1636. The Schermerhorn family apparently originated in the Dutch village of Schermerhorn (pronounced Scare-mer-horn), although that connection has not been completely established. The patriarch died in 1688 in Schenectady, New York, leaving five sons. Four of the sons would become the four branches of the Schermerhorn family in America: Ryer Jacobse (the Schenectady branch), Simon Jacobse (the New York City branch), Jacob Jacobse (the Schodack branch), and Cornelius Jacobse (the fourth branch); the fifth son, Lucas Jacobse, left no record of descent through the male line. The patriarch also left four daughters: Helena, Machtelt, Jannetie, and Neeltje.¹

A descendant of the patriarch’s fourth son (Cornelius Jacobse), Richard Schermerhorn, Jr. described his branch of the family as preferring careers in the professions rather than “the merchant’s career.” By 1913, of all male descendants of the Schermerhorn family in America, forty-seven had pursued professional occupations, including nineteen lawyers, eleven clergymen, nine civil engineers, seven physicians, and two architects (Clarence Eaton Schermerhorn and Cornelius H. Schermerhorn); the Cornelius Jacobse Schermerhorn branch alone produced seven civil engineers.²

Richard Schermerhorn, Sr.
Civil Engineer

Like many members of the Schermerhorn family, Richard Schermerhorn, Jr.’s father, Richard Schermerhorn, Sr., attended...
Richard Schermerhorn, Jr. (above, courtesy of the New York State Library), began his career as a civil engineer, following in the footsteps of his father, Richard Schermerhorn, Sr. (left, courtesy of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Archives).

In 1873, the senior Schermerhorn served as engineer for the Long Island Land Company; later, he acted as assistant to the division engineer of the New York and Canada Railroad. In 1874, Schermerhorn Sr. began employment as chief engineer of the Prospect Park and Coney Island Railroad in Brooklyn, supervising construction of the railway; and he would continue to serve in that position for the next eighteen years. In 1892, the senior Schermerhorn resigned his position with the railroad to enter the private practice of engineering.

Elder Cousin: Louis Younglove Schermerhorn, One of the Schodack Schermerhorns and Riverside, Illinois, Engineer

Aside from his father, perhaps the relative to whom Richard Schermerhorn, Jr. formed his closest attachment was his older cousin, Louis Younglove Schermerhorn (1840-1908), a member of the Jacob Jacobse Schermerhorn or Schodack branch of the family. Like the senior Richard, Louis Schermerhorn also enjoyed a distinguished career in civil engineering. And like Richard Schermerhorn, Sr., Louis studied civil engineering at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, but graduated instead from Union College in 1864 in Schenectady, New York, a town...
administered in its early years by still another Schermerhorn—Ryer Jacobse (1652-1719), the Schermerhorn patriarch's eldest son. From 1866 until 1869, Louis Schermerhorn worked as a division engineer on the construction of Brooklyn's Prospect Park, one of the more famous commissions of acclaimed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted. From 1869 until 1873 Louis Schermerhorn served as chief engineer of the Riverside Improvement Company, a firm engaged in planning, designing, and constructing the new community of Riverside in suburban Chicago, Illinois, with partners William Le Baron Jenney (an important Chicago architect and inventor of the modern skyscraper) and John Bogart of New York. In the early stages the firm of Jenney, Schermerhorn & Bogart served as local architects and engineers in the project with Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux; later, the Jenney firm became lead architects and engineers after Olmsted and Vaux relinquished primary responsibility in 1870. And when the Riverside Township came into legal existence that same year, Louis Younglove Schermerhorn became one of two commissioners of the highways for the municipality. A home for Schermerhorn in Riverside, which was designed by Jenney in the Swiss Gothic style in 1871, remains standing today, and of all the houses Jenney designed in Riverside, it alone remains substantially unaltered. In 1993 the Village of Riverside, Illinois, designated the L. Y. Schermerhorn house a Riverside Landmark; twenty-three years earlier, the Riverside Landscape Architectural District was declared a National Historic Landmark.

Among the features of the precocious Riverside community were an unusual number of underground utilities, gas illumination for streets and homes, a thirty-foot setback for houses, and the requirement that the front yard "be kept open and free of fences and that at least two trees be planted in it." Louis Schermerhorn was in charge of installing Riverside's walks, roads, storm water and sanitary sewer pipes, as well as the gas illumination for streets and homes and the construction of a parkway to the city of Chicago. After the Riverside project, Louis Schermerhorn served as chief engineer of the Chicago and Great Western Railroad from 1873 until 1874. He acted as assistant engineer on river and harbor improvement works in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, New York, Vermont, Pennsylvania, and Delaware from 1874 until 1891. For a period of fourteen years (1881 until 1895), Schermerhorn co-authored an important three-volume work entitled, "Analytical and topographical index to the reports of the chief of engineers and the officers of the Corps of Engineers, United States army upon works and surveys for river and harbor improvement 1866-1892," which today continues to aid researchers studying the history of American river and harbor improvements during Reconstruction. Schermerhorn was assisted in the preparation of the second and third volumes by his son, Holden B. Schermerhorn, an eminent legal scholar in his day. From 1891 until his death in 1908, Louis Scher-

Richard Schermerhorn, Jr.'s Early Years: Apprenticed to Guy Lowell, C. W. Leavitt, and N. F. Barrett

In 1888, at the age of ten, Richard Schermerhorn, Jr. began attending New York City's Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute, pursuing a curriculum in science until 1894. Following both his father and older cousin, the junior Schermerhorn attended Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute from 1894 until 1897. Unlike his father, though, Richard Scher-
Schermerhorn, Jr. did not graduate from Rensselaer, and in fact, did not graduate from the Brooklyn school. Schermerhorn nevertheless embarked upon a distinguished career in civil engineering work, and like his father and elder cousin, became a member of the American Society of Civil Engineers; later, he would even become a life member of the society.

After first serving as an assistant in his father’s civil engineering practice, in the fall of 1900, at the age of twenty-three, Richard Schermerhorn, Jr. began the study and practice of landscape architecture, serving until 1905 with Boston and New York landscape architects engaged in the design of numerous large private country estates and properties. Schermerhorn first joined the office of Boston architect Guy Lowell. A graduate of Harvard College and the Ecole des Beaux Arts (1899), Lowell would design many landmark works in the Northeast, including the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the New York County Court House, as well as many private residences and grounds. At the time of his death at the age of fifty-six, Lowell served as sole trustee of the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona.

From 1903 until 1905, Schermerhorn worked as an assistant to prominent Boston and New York landscape engineer Charles Wellford Leavitt (1871-1928). Designer of many racetracks in New York State, Leavitt served also as a planner for the cities of Camden, New Jersey; Garden City, Long Island; West Palm Beach, Florida; Brunswick, Georgia; and Lakeland, Florida. A member of the American Society of Civil Engineers, the Architectural League, and the National Conference of City Planning, the New York planner would also serve as president of the American Institute of Civil Engineers.

Schermerhorn also worked briefly for Nathan Franklin Barrett, landscape architect for Pullman, Illinois (1880-84), the country’s first planned model industrial town. In 1904, Schermerhorn joined the American Society of Landscape Architects, an organization formed in New York City only five years before by ten men, including Barrett, John Charles Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. (stepson and son of Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.), Downing Vaux (son of Calvert Vaux), and Samuel Parsons, Jr.; and one woman, Beatrix Cadwalader Jones (later known as Beatrix Jones Farrand, designer of Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D. C.). Schermerhorn would become a fellow of the Society in 1914.

Schermerhorn Opens Office in New York City: Wins Top Prize for Jacob Riis Park Design

In 1905, Schermerhorn opened an office in New York City in the private practice of both landscape architecture and civil engineering, working on a number of prominent properties, including those of William C. Whitney, Andrew Carnegie, and the City of New York, as well as the Belmont Park race course. In 1909 New York City Mayor McClellan appointed Schermerhorn to serve as a member of the Citizen's Committee for the famed Hudson-Fulton Celebration. While there is some evidence that Schermerhorn promoted his abilities as an architect in New York City from 1912 until 1913, again from 1916 until 1918, and a third time from 1920 until 1921, there is no evidence that Schermerhorn’s work actually resulted in the construction of a building there. Although “socially prominent,” Schermerhorn apparently could not “trade long on name alone” in the practice of architecture, according to at least one authority.

In 1912, Schermerhorn delivered an historically important paper before the Brooklyn Engineers’ Club, summarizing what several cities had accomplished or attempted to accomplish in their planning programs. Noting first the differences between the “City Beautiful” and the “City Practical,” Schermerhorn argued: “If the City Practical is first realized there is no doubt that the City Beau-
tiful will follow as a matter of course. The latter will require only a perfection of detail the way for which is readily paved by the former." The New York engineer then went on comprehensively to describe efforts at city planning in Paris, France; Germany; Washington, D. C.; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Cleveland, Ohio; San Francisco, California; Detroit, Michigan; Manila, The Philippines; Baltimore, Maryland; Denver, Colorado; Kansas City, Kansas; St. Louis, Missouri; Boston, Massachusetts; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Cincinnati, Ohio; St. Paul, Minnesota; Columbus, Ohio; Chicago, Illinois; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Brooklyn, New York; and many other American cities.15

In 1913, the thirty-six-year-old Schermerhorn wrote an important genealogy of the Schermerhorn family, Schermerhorn Genealogy and Family Chronicles, recounting a history of the family from its roots in Schermerhorn, Holland, even before the arrival of Jacob Schermerhorn in Albany in 1636; the work drew heavily, according to Schermerhorn, upon an earlier genealogy written by his older cousin, Louis Younglove Schermerhorn. By the time of the work's publication, Schermerhorn had become a member of the Brooklyn City Plan Committee and the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society.16

Two years later, Schermerhorn won top prize in a competition conducted by the New York Department of Parks for the first plan in the development of Telewana (now Jacob Riis Park) in Queens; at the time, Schermerhorn was associated with James L. Burley of Brooklyn.17 From 1917 until 1919, Schermerhorn served as captain in the engineering section of the Sanitary Corps of the U. S. Army in World War I, participating with the American Expeditionary Force in the Saint Mihiel offensive. Utilizing Schermerhorn's planning skills, the Army in 1917 employed the Brooklyn-born landscape architect in the development of a plan for Camp (now, Fort) Jackson, in Columbia, South Carolina; the 10,000-acre facility would become the world's largest military training ground of its kind during World War I.18
Schermerhorn Becomes President of New York Chapter of Landscape Society, Opposes Central Park Development

From 1916 until 1924, Schermerhorn served as secretary of the New York chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects. In 1920, the Society published an article Schermerhorn wrote on the passing of Nathan Franklin Barrett (1845-1919), landscape architect for the town of Pullman, Illinois (1872), and for more than twenty years associated with the Palisades Interstate Park Commission. Noting that his former employer had been both a founder of the American Society of Landscape Architects (1899) and its president in 1903, Schermerhorn chronicled that Barrett had planned or been associated in the planning of the municipalities of Birmingham, Alabama; Fort Worth, Texas; and Chevy Chase, Maryland. According to Schermerhorn, Barrett “claimed to be the earliest exponent of the formal garden in America,” aside from the early Colonial gardens. Among Barrett’s earliest examples were the Hotel Ponce de Leon (St. Augustine, Florida) and the estate of R. G. Dun at Narragansett Pier. Until Barrett, Schermerhorn asserted, landscape architects followed “the vogue of Olmsted and Downing,” who had been inspired by the teachings of famous eighteenth century English landscape architect Humphrey Repton.

In 1924, Schermerhorn became at once president of the chapter (a position he would continue to hold until 1927) and embroiled in a controversy of a kind that had plagued Frederick Law Olmsted, Calvert Vaux, and Samuel Parsons, Jr.: the proposed unbridled development of Central Park. “Park sacredness” (or preserving the park in its original form) had been advocated since at least 1892, when New York lawyer Richard Welling battled the proposed construction of a racetrack; other attempts to construct park “encroachments” followed: the National Academy of Design (1909), the Lenox Library (1912), a proposal for a sports stadium (1913), and a Safety Museum (1919). In the 1920s the American Society of Landscape Architects, the Central Park Association, and other park preservationists would oppose more planned park “encroachments,” ultimately prevailing against a body of architects advocating, among other things, a large-scale amphitheater and a war memorial. In February of 1924, Richard Schermerhorn, Jr. led the charge against the proposed use of a portion of the Park for a $15,000,000 “music and art centre,” declaring that the city plan would destroy “one of the very attractive natural park vistas.” In opposing the proposed park development, the New York chapter president doubted the efficacy of gathering a number of different arts groups in one location:

“The grouping of art interests in a combination of buildings, is desirable as related to city planning, but it is not certain that it is of great necessity from a practical standpoint, as there is a decided question whether one art body is largely benefited by close proximity to another. Particularly would it seem impracticable if a sacrifice of other civic facilities is involved, or if the execution of the project cannot meet all economic conditions.”

Schermerhorn concluded his argument by submitting that only structures ancillary to the park itself should be allowed in the park and that one “encroachment” would inevitably lead to others:

“In the last analysis, therefore, the great principle to be recognized is that no structures can be allowed within the Park area except those which clearly take the form of park accessories or natural adornments. One single encroachment, and a precedent would be established, and then it would be only a matter of time when many others would be permitted.”

Two months later, Schermerhorn was spearheading what had become a “city-wide protest” against another proposed Central Park intrusion: the use of a portion of the Park for a “$1,000,000 war memorial.” The landscape society’s New York president argued that the proposal was inconsistent with both city and park planning:

“With the eventual possibility of the replanning of Central Park, required by excessive city congestion, this memorial would be found located without relation to any portion of the city plan or a new park plan. The mere extension of the Metropolitan Museum of Art which has been talked of, would interfere with the suitability of the projected location of the war memorial.”

To the voice of the landscape architects was added the support of J. A. H. Hopkins, chairman of the Examining Committee of the Committee of Forty-eight, and the City Gardens Club. The garden club advocated the preservation of the park for those less fortunate and unable to use other recreational areas within the city:

“The City Gardens Club believes that Central Park is of inestimable value to the people and should be maintained in its...
present character as a rural park for the benefit of those who have not the time and means to go elsewhere.”

Three days later, Schermerhorn issued a statement on behalf of the New York chapter of landscape architects, pointing out that the proposed war memorial “would cost the taxpayers between $2,000,000 and $3,000,000,” two to three times the amount originally anticipated. Schermerhorn argued in his three-point announcement that 1) the design of the monument was unsuitable, 2) the proposed seven-acre site in the park was not the proper location, and 3) the memorial was not fitting as a park structure. He concluded the argument by recommending further study.

Even before Central Park’s construction the Schermerhorn family had long been associated with controversies surrounding the park. Seventy years before the junior Schermerhorn’s opposition to Park “encroachments,” the New York landscape architect’s ancestor Peter Schermerhorn, a descendant of the Simon Jacobse Schermerhorn or Schermerhorn’s battle against an art and music center in Central Park is the subject of this February 4, 1924 New York Times article.

Says Park Art Site Would Spoil Vista

Fears Other Invasions
Head of Landscape Architects Here Joins the Forces Against Proposed Encroachment.

Schermerhorn’s obituary for Samuel Parsons praised the famous landscape architect, who also fought for the preservation of Central Park.

New York City branch of the family, blocked attempts by wealthy New York City landowners in the 1850s to cause the Schermerhorn interest in Jones Wood to become part of a New York City public park; undeterred, the landowners’ efforts nonetheless resulted in the acquisition of more centrally located land for what would become Central Park.

Schermerhorn Writes Paean for Samuel Parsons
In January of 1924, the American Society of Landscape Architects adopted as a “Biographical Minute” a tribute Schermerhorn penned in memory of the great landscape architect Samuel Parsons, Jr., who passed away the year before; the paean was published in the July, 1924, issue of Landscape Architecture magazine. In addition to recounting Parsons’ role as Landscape Architect of the Greater New York Parks for much of a twenty-nine-year period ending in 1911, Schermerhorn praised Parsons’ work in preserving Central Park “from encroachments by outside interests” and, referring to the aid Parsons gave to younger landscape architects, commented that it “seemed natural to think of going to Mr. Parsons for information or assistance.” Schermerhorn would continue to contribute articles for publication in landscape architecture, architecture, and gardening magazines throughout his career as a landscape architect, displaying a particular interest in Colonial landscape architecture. His contributions to professional publications would span an astounding thirty-eight years, beginning in 1908 with a contribution to House and Garden magazine on Long Island country estates.

Schermerhorn Appointed City Planner for the City of Fort Lauderdale
Following the recommendation of the city’s first Planning and Zoning Commission, the City Commission of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in January, 1926, employed the forty-eight-year-old New York landscape architect and engineer as the city’s first professional city planner for $8,500 for four months’ work. Only a month before, the City Commission had appointed pioneer city residents C. E. Rickard, E. N. Sperry, Mrs. Frank Stranahan, E. J. Willingham, and Commodore A. H. Brook to serve on the first planning commission. At its first meeting on December 21, 1925, the planning commission voted to recommend the hiring of Schermerhorn, acting upon a suggestion made by the city’s consulting engineer, Gabriel Roberts Solomon.

Three years younger than Schermerhorn, Solomon maintained offices in Troy, New York, and Fort Lauderdale. Like so many of the Schermerhorns, Solomon had attended the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, graduating with a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering in 1902. From 1902 until 1904 Solomon served as an assistant engineer for the Rapid Transit Subway Construction Company. In 1905, he obtained a law degree from Mercer.
CITY PLANNER IS EMPLOYED BY LAUDERDALE

Electors of City to Vote on Hiring New York Man at $8,500 Salary

Richard Schermerhorn, Jr., of New York City, was employed as city planner at a salary of $8,500 a year by the city commission Tuesday, following recommendations of the city planning and zoning board and City Manager B. J. Horne. Commissioner C. D. Kittredge said he thought the salary was high.

This January 13, 1926 Fort Lauderdale Daily News article announced Schermerhorn's employment as Fort Lauderdale's first city planner.

University, in Macon, Georgia, Solomon's birthplace. Following a military career as an army engineer that began during World War I and continued until 1921, Solomon practiced engineering in New York City from 1921 until 1922; in civilian life he was often referred to as Colonel Solomon because of the rank he attained during military service.

Solomon may have known Richard Schermerhorn, Jr. from the latter's prominence as president of the New York chapter of landscape architects. Fort Lauderdale's city engineer may have also known Harvey O. Schermerhorn, one of Richard Jr.'s cousins, who graduated from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering just a year after Solomon obtained his degree there. A member of the Cornelius Jacobse Schermerhorn branch, Harvey Schermerhorn also worked as an engineer in the construction of the Rapid Transit Subway in New York City from 1903 until 1904, perhaps alongside Solomon for some period of time.

Engaging Richard Schermerhorn, Jr. to formulate comprehensive city and zoning plans, Fort Lauderdale city commissioners expected the New York planner to address a large number of significant issues: 1) the future geographical limits of the city and its ultimate growth and population, 2) a street system, 3) the development of main thoroughfares, 4) the control of subdivisions, 5) city bridges and waterways, 6) street traffic, 7) traffic regulation, 8) one-and two-way streets, 9) city parking areas, 10) grade crossings, 11) recreation parks, 12) playgrounds, (13) parkways, (14) zoning into business, (15) residential and industrial districts, (16) the improvement of the "New River parkway," (17) railroads, including freight terminals and station improvements; and (18) civic centers. Once completed, Schermerhorn's city plan was to be submitted to the voters for approval; if approved, the plan was expected to result in the expenditure of bond proceeds of more than $3,000,000 for city improvements. The city commission was to approve the zoning part of the plan.

City Planning in the 1920s

At the time of Schermerhorn's employment in 1926, the profession of city planning was still in its infancy. In the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century, public control of private property was thought nearly impossible. The "city beautiful" movement at the turn of the century nonetheless fostered municipal improvements such as civic centers, park systems, and broad thoroughfares planned by both architects and landscape architects.

In 1907, the City of Hartford, Connecticut, became the first municipality in the country to create an official planning commission. Two years later, Harvard University introduced a lecture course on city planning for students in the department of landscape architecture. In the 1910s and early '20s rapid urbanization made city planning a required activity of municipal government. In 1925, Cincinnati, Ohio's city council became the first of the major American city commissions to adopt a city plan. During the 1920s literally hundreds of municipalities across the country would establish planning commissions and adopt zoning ordinances.

As early as October, 1925, the Florida Supreme Court had ruled that a city could, if properly authorized by state statute, implement and enforce zoning regulations. At the federal level, however, the right of municipalities to control private property in a substantial way without compensation would not be established until November 22, 1926, when the United States Supreme Court decided the landmark case of Village of Euclid, Ohio versus Ambler Realty Company. Three years later, Harvard University would found the first school for city planning with the financial assistance of the Rockefeller Foundation, providing for the award of a master's degree in city planning after a three-year course of study.

In Florida, there were several rather desultory attempts at city planning between 1917 and 1923, beginning with a comprehensive plan for the city of St. Augustine prepared by Myron West of Chicago, Illinois, and submitted to municipal authorities in November, 1917. In 1922, twenty-six delegates representing eleven Florida cities convened at the invitation of the city of Jacksonville and formed the Florida City Planners' Association. Two cities published comprehensive plan reports prepared by nationally-known experts: Sarasota, in 1925 (John Nolen of Cambridge, Massachusetts) and Fort Myers, in 1926 (Herbert Swann of New York City).

Gabriel Roberts Solomon, Fort Lauderdale's consulting engineer who recommended Schermerhorn as planner and who designed the Walter S. Peele Dixie Water Plant on the West Dixie Highway (now U.S. 441).
John Nolen also prepared a plan for the city of St. Petersburg as early as 1922; Nolen was also then developing plans for establishing Clewiston, "an industrial town on 1500 acres" on the southern shore of Lake Okeechobee. In the early 1920s, Nolen joined the Olmsted Brothers (John Charles Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., successors to acclaimed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted's practice) in laying out Kelsey City (now Lake Park) in northern Palm Beach County. As early as 1920, Nolen had prepared a plan for West Palm Beach. In 1925, the city of Orlando employed the renowned Harland Bartholomew of St. Louis, Missouri, to prepare a city plan; during the same year, the cities of West Palm Beach, St. Petersburg, and Lakeland engaged Schermerhorn's former mentor, Charles Wellford Leavitt of New York City, to prepare their municipal plans. 38

Schermerhorn Explains Recommendations, Voters Adopt Comprehensive City Plan

Within four months of his engagement, in May 1926 (six months before the Village of Euclid, Ohio decision), Fort Lauderdale's first professional city planner, Richard Schermerhorn, Jr., had created a comprehensive city plan that addressed street widths and routes, sidewalks, parkways, boulevard plantings, large park areas and riverside drives, and a zoning plan as well. The effort appeared to be the first such professional city planning in Broward County. During the process of Schermerhorn's work, various civic and fraternal groups and individuals not only in Fort Lauderdale, but also in Hollywood, Davie, Pompano and Deerfield, began to discuss a strategy for "regional planning" under the auspices of the Broward County Association of Engineers. Prominent among the leaders of the "regional planning" movement were Dr. H. W. Hunt, F. C. Dickey (Hollywood Port Everglades engineer), and Mrs. O. E. Behmeyer of Hollywood (wife of the editor of the weekly newspaper The Hollywood Magazine), Frank Stirling of Davie, Mr. Chamberlain of Floranada, W. Blount of Pompano,

Above is the first of Schermerhorn's series of six articles in the Fort Lauderdale Daily News outlining his plan. Below is his map of Fort Lauderdale's traffic arteries. Note the plans for the city's present Harbor Beach area in the southeast corner, which was undeveloped at the time this map was prepared.
R. J. Butler of Deerfield, along with B. J. Long, Mrs. Frank Stranahan, and Horace Stilwell of Fort Lauderdale. The movement appeared to mirror efforts throughout the country that attempted to respond to the explosive growth of the cities in the 1920s.49

In May, 1926, Fort Lauderdale’s city planner explained his new city scheme in a series of six articles published by the Fort Lauderdale Daily News almost daily over a seven-day period. The first article, published on May 8, 1926, described the remarkable development and expansion of the city, its street system, and proposed state and county highways, noting the growth in population from 160 in 1910 to 2,000 in 1920, to nearly 7,000 on January 1, 1925, to almost 17,000 a year later on January 1, 1926. In his second article, appearing two days later in the May 10th issue of the Daily News, Schermerhorn explained his plans for the proposed routes and widths of north-south and east-west streets, suggesting street widths as great as eighty feet for major north-south and east-west traffic arteries and as much as a hundred feet for parkways.41

Published on May 11, Schermerhorn’s third article outlined the planner’s projected widening of streets, the development of Progresso subdivision streets, and the need for extending several streets. Schermerhorn asserted that if Fort Lauderdale were to be a “great city[,] it must get rid of its narrow streets and where there is a practical possibility to do this at the present time that opportunity will soon be gone forever as the city becomes more compactly built up with permanent buildings.”42

In his fourth article, published on May 12, Schermerhorn articulated for the first time standard street sections and widths, calling for minimum sidewalk widths of eight feet in residential areas and twelve to fifteen-feet widths along commercial streets, instead of the existing five-feet width for city sidewalks. Schermerhorn also advocated a citywide street tree-planting program and described the eleven park areas owned by the city totaling a mere twenty acres.43

Schermerhorn Unveils Dramatic Parks, Parkways, and River Drives Plan

In his fifth article published just two days later, Schermerhorn unveiled a striking plan for city parks and parkways, noting Fort Lauderdale’s “sixty miles” of water frontage along New River, New River Sound, and Middle River. Schermerhorn argued: “Not to take advantage of these great waterways and develop them suitably would be a failure to take advantage of the most wonderful resources of the place.” Presaging the dramatic rise in the prices of city waterfront properties in the latter part of the twentieth century, Schermerhorn wrote:

“It is not possible for a community to have a complete street system, and at the same time...”

Schermerhorn’s park plan was a proposed Middle River Park between Middle River and the East Coast Canal (now, the Intracoastal Waterway), encompassing between three hundred and four hundred acres. Schermerhorn described the proposed tract as consisting partially of poor soil and suggested a means of improving it:

“The greater part of the land is high and wooded and although in some places the soil is poorer than usual, a system of enrichment of the soil, aided by pumpage from the ditches, thus accomplishing two purposes at once, will eventually secure the necessary fertility for common trees and shrub growth as well as occasional lawn areas.”45

Other significant parks advocated by Schermerhorn included Tide Creek and Osceola Parks. The proposed Tide Creek Park was to be located in an area “through which the Tide Creek flows, bounded on the north by Center street, on the south by Tide Creek road and on the west by the proposed Seaboard Air Line right-of-way” and to comprise “approximately fifty-five acres.” The last of the large parks, Osceola Park, was to be placed in the southwest corner of section 17, “including Osceola Creek and bordering the south fork of the New river on both sides,” and to comprise about fifty acres.46

Schermerhorn’s park plan also envisioned a number of smaller parks totaling thirty-six acres in the aggregate, including Progresso Park (eleven acres), City Hall Park (two and three-fourths acres), Stranahan New River Park (part of a proposed Civic Center, three and three-fourths acres), Sagamore Park (also part of a proposed Civic Center, three-fourths of an acre), East Avenue Park (also part of a proposed Civic Center, two and a half acres), Sospiro Park (three-fourths of an acre), Rock Park (about fifteen acres), and Malecon Park (about five acres).47

Schermerhorn also observed that while the city’s planned subdivisions comprised a total of three thousand acres, only twelve and a half acres had been set aside by developers for park and playground purposes, less than one percent of the total (“a negligible amount,” in the opinion of the city’s planner). Noting that some cities had required a ‘set-aside’ for parks and playgrounds of as much as ten percent, Schermerhorn suggested that five percent of a subdivision’s total area would be a “reasonable” donation by developers for green spaces and that a minimum of three percent should be required “at the lowest.” Finally, Schermerhorn’s parks plan recommended “a definite play ground system,” finding the only playgrounds in the city connected to the schools and “these are insufficient.” The New York engineer suggested that a “comprehensive study should be made for the location of schools and play grounds throughout the city.”48

Schermerhorn Unveils Plan for Civic Center and New River Parkways

Schermerhorn’s final article described his plan for a civic center, the establishment of New River parkways, the location of industries and parking areas, and the Florida East Coast Railway. Schermerhorn first described Florida’s natural vegetation and listed several trees suitable for street planting: “Red Maple, Australian Pine, Oak, Eucalyptus, Gumbo Limbo, Mango, and of course, the Palms.” Schermerhorn suggested that such trees and other
In revealing his “civic center” plans, Schermerhorn observed that the city had only three public buildings at the time (the city hall and firehouse on Andrews Avenue, the county courthouse, and the city water plant), as well as five “semi-public” buildings: “the hospital, high school, South side school, West side school and the negro school.” Noting a need for a public library, Schermerhorn suggested the grouping of public and semi-public buildings “in relation to each other” in the “heart” of the city:

“There may be an opportunity now, which certainly there will not be later, when the city’s growth has advanced, for securing area within the heart of the city which can be used for a group of public buildings in park surroundings, and this should be taken advantage of.”

Characterizing the present city hall annex as “not a building of particularly imposing character,” Schermerhorn advocated the planning of a building “of some considerable proportions and particular dignity” to be located “on the block between Andrews Avenue park and the high school grounds, located in the center of the block.” At one end of the block a “community building” could be located, and at the other end “nearest the high school grounds” could be situated a public library, according to Schermerhorn’s plan. Schermerhorn also described a plan for “an esplanade” or “broad walk bordered by two lines of trees” in the block between the high school and the proposed Stranahan park, connecting the park areas on both sides of the East Avenue bridge and “the school and other public buildings.”

Concluding his civic center plan, Schermerhorn argued that such a center “would be a great asset for Fort Lauderdale and if properly handled would give to Fort Lauderdale a monument which would become famous throughout the Florida East Coast.”

One of the more striking features of Schermerhorn’s city plan was his plan for the improvement of the North and South New River drives on both sides of the river. He envisioned the straightening and extending of the river line, building a river wall along the border, and acquiring “some 10 to 15 feet” of private property adjoining the present drive for the purpose of creating a river side drive. The roadway was to be thirty-two feet wide—sufficient for four lanes of vehicles, with the far sidewalk ten feet in width; the remaining area of twenty-eight feet was to be devoted to a park area and “the widening of the walk along the river.” A row of trees was to be planted on each side of the roadway; there were also to be “seats conveniently located along the river” with occasional “shrub plantations.”

Schermerhorn’s final article also treated, albeit in a summary fashion, the planning of industrial areas, noting that the development of such a plan would require additional careful study. He observed that perhaps the “logical harbor” for the area was Lake Mabel (present-day Port Everglades) and that “[t]here should be a pooling of common interests, those of Fort Lauderdale, Hollywood and others to help secure the proper solution.” Remarking that Fort Lauderdale’s streets were not sufficiently wide for parking, the New York planner recommended the expansion of parking “within the centers of blocks which are now used for public parking spaces” and a survey by the police department of potential parking areas that might be leased by the city. The city, Schermerhorn suggested, might act “to establish fixed rents for parking spaces within these areas under police supervision.” Finally, Scher-
merhorn advocated the raising of the Florida East Coast Railway tracks and "the need for abolishment of grade crossings, particularly in the heavily trafficked downtown section" as a means of facilitating the east-west flow of traffic within the city.53

**Fort Lauderdale Voters Approve Schermerhorn Plan**

In addition to writing newspaper articles, Schermerhorn also presented a number of talks about his proposals before the city's social and fraternal organizations, including the Kiwanis and Rotary clubs. Calling Fort Lauderdale's waterways one of the city's "greatest resources," Schermerhorn advocated beautification of the waterfronts and the establishment of waterfront parkways.54 To the south, the City of Hollywood, following Fort Lauderdale's lead, was just beginning plans to establish its own planning and zoning commission.55

The vote on Schermerhorn's plans, which had been scheduled for June 15, was delayed one week to allow the Chamber of Commerce to distribute booklets describing the New York engineer's proposals. On the eve of the election, both Rex D. Kaufman, secretary and treasurer of the Fort Lauderdale Riparian Company (developer of Riviera), and Ralph J. Blank, president of the Fort Lauderdale Chamber of Commerce, outlined their reasons for supporting Schermerhorn's plans at a public meeting. Kaufman argued that "[e]very citizen should vote for the plan" because, among other things, it had been "worked out by a planning expert of national reputation;" Blank believed that it was "the civic duty" of every citizen to vote for the plan, pointing out that "within the last week or two" the "Lions, Rotary, Kiwanis, Engineers Exchange, Master Builders, Insurance, Woman's Club, Realty Board as well as the Chamber of Commerce [had] voiced approval of the Plan."56 Others endorsing the plan included prominent citizens such as Russell G. Snow, P. H. Thompson, and B. A. Cromartie, who wrote testimonials published on the eve of the election by the Daily News.57

On June 22, 1926, the city electorate at a special election approved Schermerhorn's plan by a resounding six-to-one majority vote. While only 421 votes were cast from among the nearly 17,000 persons comprising the city's population (only freeholders were permitted to vote), the popular referendum drew fifty votes more than the number of votes cast in any previous municipal election. Fort Lauderdale voters approved all five ballot questions in the following order of popularity (from the most to least popular): 1) the proposed street widenings and extensions (352 votes); 2) the beautification of river drives in the central part of the city (345 votes); 3) the creation of main arterial thoroughfares and secondary streets (345 votes); 4) the parks, parkways, and recreational plan (265 votes); and 5) the proposed civic center. At the time, the Daily News reported Schermerhorn as claiming that Fort Lauderdale was the first city in Florida to "fully adopt" city planning.58

Emphasizing that city planning would necessarily extend over a number of years, E. N. Sperry, city planning and zoning commission chairman, in a statement the day after the referendum, asserted: "It would be impossible and too costly for the city to immediately enter into the entire project, but we intend laying our plans and making preparations." Sperry also explained that the city would begin first to renumber and rename the city's streets.59 Later, on June 29, 1926, the city commission adopted Schermerhorn's zoning plan as a city ordinance.60

The wisdom of Schermerhorn's plan was demonstrated when the great hurricane of 1926 slammed into the Florida Gold Coast just three months later on September 17 and 18, according to Robert M. Kerr, a member of both the city's planning committee and the Chamber of Commerce. In a November, 1926, article for The American City magazine, Kerr wrote that the storm "emphasized to the people the need of building wisely for permanency, and in accordance with modern standards, not only for business and residential structures but also for public works." Admitting that implementation of the Schermerhorn plan would be delayed because of the devastating effects of the hurricane, Kerr nonetheless insisted that its "measures would be followed even closer [sic] since the storm." A year after the city plan's adoption, Schermerhorn discussed the formidable obstacles confronting his planning efforts in the city in an article published in City Planning magazine: "It is difficult to imagine city planning being conducted under more confusing conditions than existed in Florida at that time; and then, too, there was a wide variation in the character of the classes of people forming the citizenry of Fort Lauderdale."61

**Schermerhorn's Other Works as Planner, Becomes Trustee of National Landscape Society**

In addition to the thirty-square-mile plan for the City of Fort Lauderdale, Richard Schermerhorn, Jr. created city and regional plans for a number of municipalities on Long Island, New York, including a zoning and master plan for Huntington in 1933 (100 square miles), a zoning plan for North Hempstead six years earlier in 1927 (fifty square miles), a master plan and rezoning plan for Lawrence Village (five square miles), and a master plan for Great Neck District (nine square miles), as well as a master plan for Newark (Schermerhorn's vision of a trafficway over the city would result in the Pulaski Skyway) and a plan for Princeton, New Jersey. Never forsaking his advocacy for green spaces, in addition to Fort Lauderdale's proposed city parks, Schermerhorn would design numerous parks at both the state and local levels, including state parks at Allegheny and Taconic, New York, and municipal parks throughout New York state and at Spartanburg, South Carolina. In the park plan for the city of Spartanburg prepared in 1927, Schermerhorn devised a scheme for a rural park surrounding a waterworks plant, including spaces for formal gardens, athletic fields, campgrounds, and a swimming pool.62

From 1928 until 1931 Schermerhorn served as a trustee of the American Society of Landscape Architects. In 1930 he served as chairman of the prestigious Landscape Architects Committee for the colonial
Two of Schermerhorn's post Fort Lauderdale activities included his master plan for Great Neck, New York (above) and his work on the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg (below).

Williamsburg, Virginia, restoration. The group, which included landscape society founder Warren H. Manning (Cambridge, Massachusetts), Markley Stevenson (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), Rose Greely (Washington, D.C.), and Fletcher Steele (Boston, Massachusetts), recommended that studies be undertaken to determine, among other things, the grasses, hitching rails and rings, and street lighting that prevailed in the Colonial period. Emphasizing the character of Williamsburg during the period, Schermerhorn's committee suggested that "extensive areas be reserved in great part against occupation by residence, business, or industry for the purpose of preserving a suitable rural background for historic Williamsburg."63

In 1934, Schermerhorn participated in the work of the National Planning Board, a New Deal precursor to the Council of Economic Advisers that attempted to create a means for national planning.64 From 1935 until 1939 Schermerhorn lectured at Columbia University in landscape architecture despite his never having graduated from college.65

Interestingly, the Schermerhorn family appears to have always maintained close ties to this New York City school. From 1873 until 1883, Columbia University's law school was housed in a residence built and long occupied by Peter Scher-

merhorn, a member of the Simon Jacobse Schermerhorn or New York City branch of the family. In 1877, John Jones Schermerhorn, another member of the New York City branch and an 1825 graduate of the school, bequeathed $5,000 to the University to provide scholarships for his descendants. William C. Scher-

merhorn, son of Peter Scher-

merhorn, served as chairman of the board of trustees of the University from 1893 until 1903 and was founder of Schermerhorn (pronounced Scher-mer-horn) Hall, which today houses the University's Wallach Art Gallery. Originally, this McKim Mead & White-designed fa-

cility accommodated the natural sciences department. Frederick Augustus (F. A.) Schermerhorn, a member also of the New York City branch of the family, served as a trustee of the University from 1877 until 1908; he donated Townsend Hall to the school in 1893. In 1880, F. A. Schermerhorn was a leader among the trustees in the founding of a school of architecture at the University; the new school was launched as a course or department in the School of Mines.66

In 1938, while Richard Schermerhorn, Jr. served as secretary of the Association for the Preservation of Lindenwald (the Martin Van Buren homestead at Kinderhook, New York), the Hudson
Peter Schermerhorn (above, left) and his son William C. Schermerhorn (above, right), distant relatives of Richard Schermerhorn, Jr., were both associated with Columbia University, where Richard lectured in the 1930s. Peter's New York City home (below) housed the university's law school in the 1870s and 1880s.

Schermerhorn's plan for the Spartanburg, South Carolina, Waterworks.

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Peter Schermerhorn served his country again during World War II, acting as landscape architect and planner for the U.S. Army at Fort Hamilton and as a consultant for the Federal Public Housing Authority on housing projects in Bound Brook, New Jersey. By the close of his career, Schermerhorn had planned over a hundred private country estates in New York, New Jersey, and elsewhere. He prepared plans for park cemeteries in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, ranging in size from twenty to two hundred and fifty acres. A member of the American Institute of Planners, Schermerhorn also designed plans for colleges and universities in New York, including Albany College, Union College, and his alma mater, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

Fort Lauderdale's first professional city planner, Richard Schermerhorn, Jr., died on September 28, 1962, at the age of 84, a resident of Montclair, New Jersey. A former assistant in Schermerhorn's landscape architecture practice recorded his passing as the end of the "old guard" in the profession:

"I remember Richard Schermerhorn as a gentleman of the old school - the last of the old guard whose professional career started in 1900 and never really ended. Looking back to the days when I served as his assistant, I recall the wealth of historical background of the landscape architectural profession and practice he had at his fingertips, of the days when the New York Chapter [of the American Society of Landscape Architects] was an intimate group, of the camaraderie of the small band of members, now all gone. Mr. Schermerhorn's death marks the end of an era in the history of the Society." 70

Recognizing his fight to preserve Central Park in 1924, Schermerhorn's New York Times obituary noted that the landscape architect had been "a strong advocate of the principle that land should be acquired early for park use and once acquired should be kept free of special installations." 71

River Conservation Society engaged the New York engineer to serve as consulting landscape architect to numerous waterfront communities along that famous river. At the time, one of the major issues confronting the society (now known as the environmentalist group Scenic Hudson, Inc.) was "the quarrying of stone at Mount Taurus, opposite West Point, which is 'disfiguring' the shore." Schermerhorn's consulting work on the Hudson River would result in the creation of general plans for eight different riverfront municipalities. 67

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5. Ibid., pp. 55-62, 289.


7. Additional material on Riverside may be found in Herbert J. Bassman, ed., *Riverside, Illinois: The First One Hundred Years* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); information on L. Y. Schermerhorn's Riverside work is located on pages 76, 102, and 113.


10. Schermerhorn Genealogy, op. cit., pp. 382-3; Richard Schermerhorn, Jr., *City Planner - Landscape Architect - Engineer: Condensed Record of Work of Private Office (1910-1942)*, no date, Faculty/Alumni File, Archives and Special Collections, Folsom Library, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York (hereinafter "RPI"), interview with Heather Walters, Librarian, Polytechnic University (formerly, Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute), New York, New York, on September 16, 1997.

11. Schermerhorn left Rensselaer at the end of his sophomore year. He was elected secretary of his class in the first term of his freshman year; he was elected treasurer of RPI Union for the 1896-97 term. See, *Transit*, RPI (1898), p. 35, and also, *Register of All Students 1824 - 1929*, RPI (1929), p. 84.


20. "City Planner Is Employed By Lauderdale," *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, January 18, 1926. Fort Lauderdale Planning and Zoning Commission Minutes, December 21, 1925 and January 6, 1926; City Commission Minutes, January 12 and 19, 1926. Real estate developer E. J. Willingham did not attend the planning commission's first meeting; the minutes of the meeting indicate that Willingham did not "qualify" for his appointment.


22. In addition to Solomon, Commodore Brook, who made the motion to recommend Schermerhorn's hiring, undoubtedly knew Schermerhorn from his years living in Brooklyn (Schermerhorn's residence) before retiring to Fort Lauderdale in 1919 at the age of 53 to become the city's biggest promoter; in Brooklyn, Brook managed a large outdoor advertising firm and ran his own firm. In retirement, Brook began to establish