

Landscape Planning Pioneer

In Charlotte, NC, John Nolen began a career that would make him one of America's most influential landscape planners. Over 400 projects nationwide – neighborhoods, parks, entire cities – show his genius.

In 1905 he designed his very first project, Independence Park near uptown Charlotte. In 1911 he launched Charlotte's gracious neighborhood called Myers Park, one of the most important garden suburbs of its era.

Today, John Nolen's ideas are reflected in the "New Urbanism" movement of a whole new generation of planners.

"Definite engagement for Charlotte, NC. First important landscape work."

Diary entry by Harvard student John Nolen,
May 29, 1905



WORKING WITH NATURE:

John Nolen, based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, became a leader of America's pioneering generation of landscape architects and city planners.

Before Nolen, city streets were usually laid out in boring grids. Parks and greenery were rare.

Nolen pushed to change all that. Throughout his career (1905 - 1937) he championed nature and thoughtful design.

His career began when Nolen, just a student, talked his Harvard professors into letting him skip final exams so that he could travel to Charlotte to create Independence Park.

GARDEN CITIES: English "Garden City" experiments around 1900 inspired John Nolen. Visionaries in England proposed creating new small towns designed in harmony with nature – an alternative to the industrial squalor of London and Birmingham.



"After a century, the Garden City still inspires visions of a more efficient, just and sustainable society."

– Prof. Bruce Stephenson, Rollins College

"Nolen ... is now recognized as perhaps America's greatest town planner of the early decades of the 20th century."

– David Walters and Linda Luise Brown, "Design First: Design-Based Planning for Communities"

Year	City	Project Name
1905	Charlotte, NC	Independence Park
1906	Charlotte, NC	Myers Park
1907	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1908	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1909	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1910	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1911	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1912	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1913	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1914	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1915	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1916	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1917	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1918	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1919	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1920	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1921	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1922	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1923	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1924	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1925	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1926	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1927	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1928	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1929	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1930	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1931	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1932	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1933	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1934	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1935	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1936	Charlotte, NC	University Park
1937	Charlotte, NC	University Park



City Plans

MARIEMONT: Near huge, grimy, industrial Cincinnati, John Nolen planned a fresh new Garden City called Mariemont (at left). Philanthropist Mary Emery funded the project to provide a better life for factory workers. Nolen laid out a complete community with its own factory, homes and shops.

Can you find:
the factory (lower left)?
town center (right)?
curving streets for homes (left, lower right)?
farm area for growing food (upper right)?



VENICE: Nolen planned dozen of new towns and suburbs in Florida during the real estate boom of the 1910s - 1920s. Venice, Florida, looks today much as he laid it out in 1926.

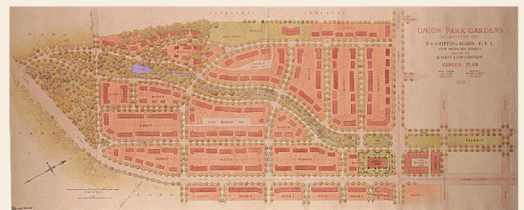
"By 1919 he had risen to the top of his profession... and presided over the nation's largest planning firm."
Prof. Bruce Stephenson



KINGSPORT: John Nolen designed the new industrial city of Kingsport in the mountains of Tennessee for a railroad company starting in 1915.

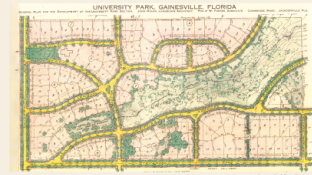
Can you find:
town center (rectangular blocks, with a broad main street)?
residential neighborhoods (gently curving streets)?

"In 1912 the only human habitations were two farmhouses... (By 1919, Kingsport) had become a flourishing city of more than 10,000 people."
John Nolen, "New Homes for Old"



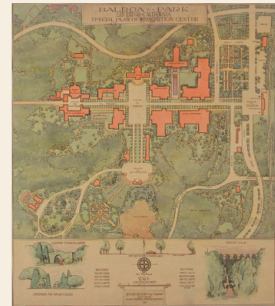
UNION PARK GARDENS: One of America's first "public housing" projects was Union Park Gardens constructed by the U.S. government for Delaware shipyard workers in World War I.

Neighborhoods



UNIVERSITY PARK: John Nolen showed his love of curving streets and greenway parks in dozens of neighborhood designs nationwide. The University Park district of St. Petersburg, Florida, left, breaks through the city streetgrid.

"... one of the founders of the American planning profession..."
– "Urban America: Documenting the Planners"



BALBOA PARK: In San Diego, California, John Nolen created the city plan – and the detailed layout of grand Balboa Park.

Parks



MADISON: In Madison, Wisconsin, he envisioned a landscaped boulevard hugging the lakefront. Built long after his death, it is today called John Nolen Drive.

"... a wider democracy of recreation."
John Nolen

JOHN NOLEN'S VISION -- Walkable town centers, neighborhoods embraced by trees and greenery, and parks and tree-shaded boulevards to bring people together



JOHN NOLEN: Neighborhood-Maker

www.nolenandstephenson.org. Created by Tom Houchens and Tim Lee. Designed by Rudy Green. Thanks to Louise Linneman, Laura Everett, Chris Means, Rachel Eldridge, Myers Park Homeowners Association

