

# Metro

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## Curves of Sudbrook Park turn 100

The surveyors who, at first, staked off the lanes of Sudbrook Park just didn't know how to make a street crooked.

But Frederick Law Olmsted, America's foremost landscape architect, did. Olmsted, who designed this Baltimore County community, hated right angles and dull intersections. His roads were to be curving, arched and rambling.

Don't worry about the radius of a Sudbrook street, he advised, just bend and bow to fit the terrain. "No great city can long exist without great suburbs," he once said.



**Jacques Kelly**

This week, the Baltimore County community just west of Pikesville toasts its 100 years of tree-lined, winding arteries, July 4 celebrations, world-class front porches and battles with county government.

Few American residential communities, consciously conceived as suburbs, can claim to be 100 years old. Here is the early suburban utopia, where the lanes wind around old trees and each home sits placidly on its greensward.

Sudbrook is only one of four "suburban villages" the great Olmsted created. He was under contract to the Sudbrook Co. to conceive a suburb on 204 acres that had once belonged to prominent Baltimore lawyer James Howard McHenry, an intellectual who was a graduate of Yale and Harvard universities.

Olmsted, a 19th century progressive, made his biggest name as the co-designer of New York City's Central Park. He also did the grounds of the U.S. Capitol and an 1876 plan, since altered, for Baltimore's Mount Vernon Place.

Olmsted visited the wooded McHenry lands near Pikesville, made some sketches, and sent back a detailed map of his suburb. He had to do battle to have his wishes followed. Land surveyors literally didn't know how to stake off a crooked road.



By Paul Hutchins — Evening Sun Staff  
Sudbrook Park residents, from left, Kären Brown and her son, Sam, 2; Carol Bernstein with her son, Gregory, 4 months, and Katharine Horsman.

See KELLY, B4, Col. 1

# Sudbrook Park curves up with a good-looking century

KELLY, From B1

Olmsted wanted a year-round community, while the Sudbrook Co. was content with a settlement for summer use only. The roads were to branch out from an entrance circle by the Western Maryland Railway station. Olmsted's wishes took root. A hotel and homes went up. Some, but not many prominent Baltimoreans moved here. At times, there seemed to be many more trees than residents.

Today, Sudbrook's houses seem neither pompous nor pretentious. But they are big. Most of the pre-1920 variety appear to have consumed half a hillside's worth of timber to make the great sloping roofs, gables, eaves, front, side and back porches. Add wicker furniture, canvas hammocks, gliders and chain-suspended swings, and you've got the proper tone of old Sudbrook Park.

Residents refer quite casually to "the Park" as the place where they live. In fact, parts of the neighborhood look as if some 1890s golf course operator got frustrated with the sport and sold it as lots. It's not unusual for a house, itself the size of the clubhouse at a moderate-size country club, to come with two or three acres.

"People from outside the neighborhood run through here. They use it like a park," said Pat Leith-Tertraut, who lives in a wisteria-

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—Melanie Anson

trimmed Cliveden Road home so large it could be a model in a guidebook for country inns.

Melanie Anson, an attorney who lives in the Park, recently completed considerable research on the community for its centennial. The original Olmsted letters shed much light on building a suburb.

"In all of Baltimore County, the Sudbrook Co. couldn't find surveyors who could lay out a curving street. They were afraid they couldn't get the radius right. A curving street wasn't known," Anson said.

Olmsted was a demanding, doctrinaire designer. In pages of correspondence — thankfully preserved at the Maryland Historical Society, the Library of Congress and at his

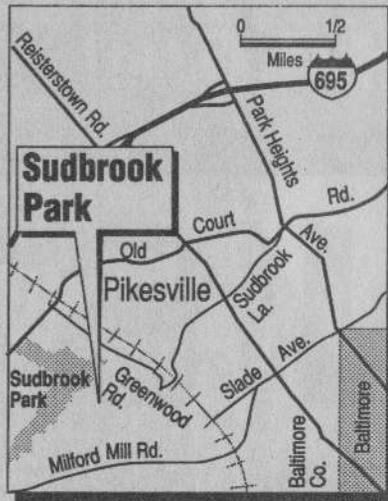
former Massachusetts office — he hammered out his wishes. Sudbrook was not to be a suburb that in any manner resembled "cheap . . . land speculation" or displayed anything "disagreeably commonplace and hackneyed." Olmsted wished the village to be dependent upon the railroad. Years ago, Western Maryland Railway steam locomotives groaned up the steep ascent from Baltimore's old Hillen Station to the community's own station.

Today, the state Mass Transit Administration's silver Metro cars glide into the Milford Mill Road station, which is flanked by a large parking lot. That expanse of asphalt confirms architect Olmsted's worst fears about how Americans will torture and destroy a natural landscape.

It was the subway, as well as the one-time Northwest Expressway, that pitted Sudbrook against transportation planners. The community, thanks to its status on the National Register of Historic Places, kept the road away, but not the subway. The line tunnels under a part of Sudbrook.

"If you didn't know that there was damage done, you wouldn't recognize it today, but it's there," Anson said.

Come 4 o'clock on a silvery fall afternoon, the curving streets of the neighborhood come to life. Mothers



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are out with their Graco baby carriages. The 9-year-old skateboarders are taking full advantage of the hills Olmsted preserved 100 years ago, seemingly with them in mind. Fastidious gardeners tidy beds of mums and purple asters.

Not every street was cut through and laid out in Olmsted's lifetime. In fact, by the middle 1920s, Sudbrook was in a state of sleepy quietude. But by the late 1940s and 1950s, the demand for homes in this part of the county heated up. Oddly enough, when new roads were opened, developers followed the general curving lines that Olmsted prescribed.

As a result, the core of Sudbrook is 100 years old, while the outer fringes are new, featuring Cape Cods and brick Colonial-style homes, but with Olmsted's curving streets. One of these newer streets, by the way, credits the old master. It is named, with incorrect spelling, "Olmstead Road." The old landscape architect might enjoy the perpetuity, if not the misspelled name.