Olmsted was only three when Dr. Jacob Bigelow proposed in 1825 that Bostonians create a “rural” cemetery; and only nine in 1831 when General Henry A. S. Dearborn laid out in the grounds of Mount Auburn. By the time Olmsted began his design career in 1837, shifting from writing and publishing to superintend the construction of Central Park, Mount Auburn was a mature landscape over a quarter century old; and many other “rural” cemeteries had been laid out by horticulturists, architects, landscape gardeners, and committees of civic leaders in American cities large and small. The public parks movement grew out of the “rural” cemetery movement, as acknowledged in the 1850s and 1860s by the likes of Andrew Jackson Downing, William Cullen Bryant, and Clarence Cook; but it did NOT begin until over a quarter century after Mount Auburn’s founding, a significant historical gap when considering the cavalier dating of the “brilliant half-century” of creation of “grand gardens of democracy” by Moore and Mitchell. These two professors have carried to a new extreme the often repeated, flippant assumption that any designed landscape of the nineteenth century must have been the work of Olmsted.

Blanche Linden-Ward
Boston, MA