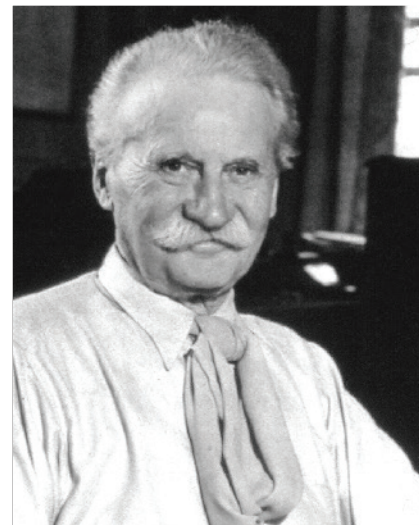
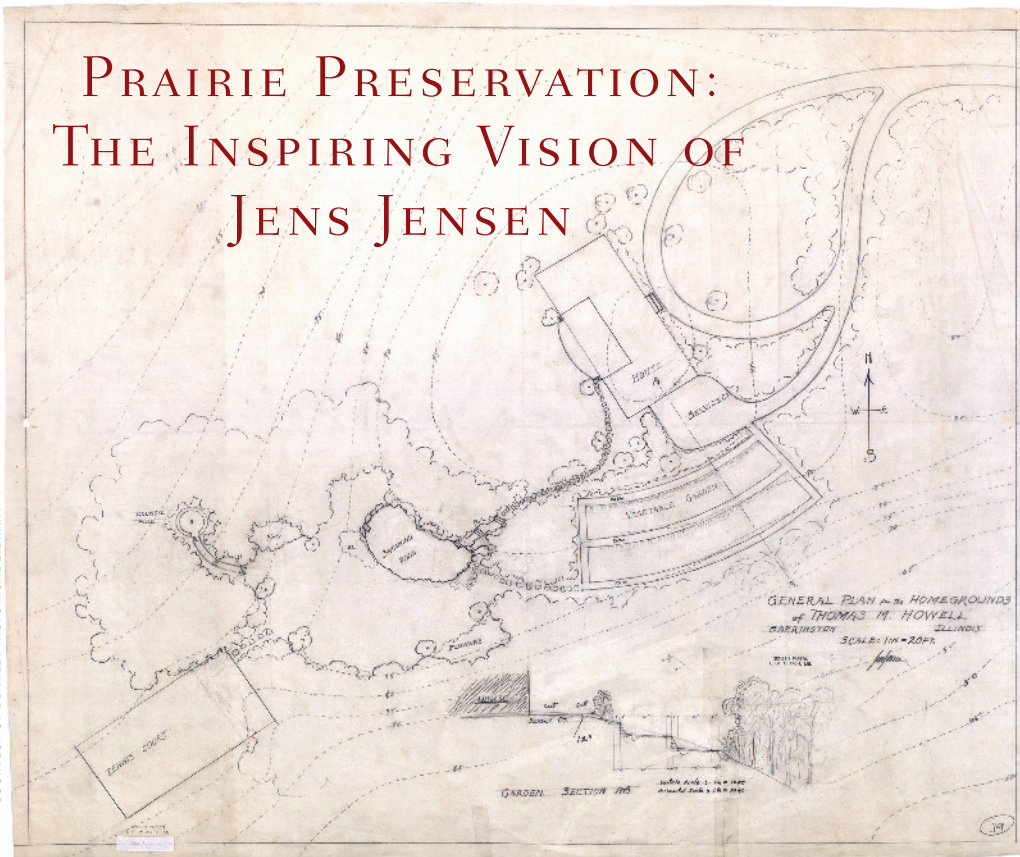


PRAIRIE PRESERVATION: THE INSPIRING VISION OF JENS JENSEN

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Barbara L. Benson grew up in Kent, England, and later moved to New York. She settled in Barrington and has walked with our history since she first arrived here in 1980.

THE FIRST WORLD WAR, with its appalling loss of young life on both sides of the Atlantic, was in the rear-view mirror. The Edwardian and Victorian ages had lost their luster, and societal change was everywhere.

This was certainly true in the Barrington countryside, where, beginning in the 1920s, pioneer farms were selling at a fast rate to successful entrepreneurs looking to create country retreats away from the pressures of the city. Into the countryside they brought their architects and designers to build their manor houses, and just as the early pioneers had broken the prairie, landscape designers were commissioned to create terraces, lawns, flower gardens, vegetable gardens, and orchards out of well-used farmland.

One of those who sought this country lifestyle was grain broker Thomas Howell. In the early 1920s he assembled 175 acres of old farms and swamp land at the southwest corner of Brinker and Otis Roads. What inspired him to call on Jens Jensen to reshape this sprawling, haphazard acreage following the design philosophies that would distinguish Jensen's career, we do not know. Perhaps, with a seat on the Chicago Board of Trade, Howell had seen the transformation of open space and parks in Chicago, where from the early 20th century Jensen had been the consulting landscape architect for Chicago parks, including what he considered his finest work, Columbus Park.

Born in Denmark in 1860, Jensen came to America in 1884 and started working in the Humboldt Park buildings. But the inspiration for his life's work emerged from his wonderment of the vast prairie landscape. The vistas of colorful native flowers, trees, and shrubs stretching

to the horizon were introduced into the city park projects that became his legacy. Besides his original design for Columbus Park, he redesigned Humboldt, Garfield, and Douglas Parks in his now admired Prairie style aesthetic. He was mindful of ordinary, hardworking city folk who could rarely escape to the country, and designed city parks with naturalistic spaces where the country came to them.

For prestigious clients, he often worked with Prairie School architects on great estates such as those of Ford family members. Jensen's only recorded client in the Barrington area was Thomas Howell, who had a first-class kennel for Springer Spaniels and Labrador Retrievers, professionally trained and managed. Howell's dogs, carrying the Barrington pre-fix, reached the highest levels of Trials achievement. By 1935 the first Mid-West, AKC authorized Field Trials were held on the property.

Away from the Jens Jensen design that surrounded the residence, the property offered rough marsh cover, heavy underbrush and a large, oval lake edged with cattails and high weeds. Neighbors nicknamed it "Howell's Swamp"; it would become Goose Lake. Today, aerial photographs of the area suggest that some elements of Jensen's design may still exist.

Jens Jensen was an environmentalist long before the word came into daily use, and one of the early leaders of the conservation movement in America. His philosophies and respect for the environment have had a lasting impact and have found worthy heirs, especially in the Barrington area. U