November 12, 1902.

Miss Caroline Hazard,  
President, Wellesley College.

Dear Madam:

The problem of the future development of Wellesley College grounds is one of the most interesting to which an architect can address himself. We have given careful consideration to Mr. Olmstead's preliminary report, and have been in consultation with him. In order to bring the discussion to a practical focus we have added to this note a summary of his conclusions as we understand them. In the main, we entirely agree with them, but it seems to us that this is a problem of architecture with landscape treatment as accessory and subordinate, rather than a problem of landscape architecture with the buildings subordinated. In other words, the site is devoted to the purposes of a great college, and is not solely a public park. The buildings even at the present time are large and can not be hidden. They inevitably form a feature, and in the future will be a still more dominating feature in the landscape. This point of view, then, is one forced upon us by the necessities of the case, and much as we may regret the partial obliteration of natural features, such obliteration is not to be taken to mean insensibility to natural beauty, but merely that a more definitely arranged and formal treatment will be necessary wherever the
buildings come within sight of each other, substantially enclosing given areas.

It seems obvious that the future development of the College must be along the line of large groups, each group being devoted to special needs. The courts or quadrangles actually enclosed by groups would seem to require formal landscape treatment. This formality should be of the nature of a highly cultivated park, and is not to be mistaken for stiffness, but only that the spaces enclosed by buildings should be most carefully kept. The outlying areas beyond these large groups can properly be treated in a more informal, natural style, retaining natural surfaces and wild growths to the fullest possible extent. There remains only to consider the areas not enclosed as quadrangles or court yards, but lying between the separate groups, intersected by roads and communicating paths. These areas should be treated in a semi-formal or balanced manner, in which neither the formal nor the naturalistic should have the upper hand.

In our judgment the future development, say in the next twenty or thirty years, will lead to additional dormitories entirely enclosing Norumbega Hill, and to additional buildings for College purposes, forming three sides of a quadrangle on College Hill. The chapel group could properly be completed by the addition of a building which would form the third side of a quadrangle open to the road.

The block plan sent herewith is not to be taken as strictly accurate in detail, nor is it necessary that it should be so. Its purpose is to outline a general program, the details of which
would of necessity be modified as the particular building in question came up for actual and definite consideration. This block plan shows, (a) that the College quadrangle, if it may so be termed, should have formal and symmetrical treatment; (b) that the dormitory close on Norumbega Hill should have formal, but unsymmetrical treatment; (c) that the Chapel and Music Hall group should have formal treatment, probably in the nature of a sunken garden; (d) that the spaces between these three large groups should have semi-formal treatment, while all outlying spaces should be left as nearly as possible in a state of nature.

The most important single point to be considered in the landscape treatment is that of vistas. We can not get rid of the buildings, but we can arrange that vistas between the buildings or vistas terminated by buildings, or natural open spaces, shall be studied so as to produce the most effective results. In this general view of the case it may be necessary at times to sacrifice individual trees or bushes for the sake of the general result. It must never be forgotten that trees will grow again, and it would be very shortsighted policy to mar or hinder the beauty and order of the whole arrangement for the sake of such a perishable feature as a few trees which might be struck by lightning or blow down at any time.

The architecture of these various groups should, it seems to us, follow along the same general lines as is above indicated for the general landscape treatment. In other words, that of the College quadrangle should gain its impressiveness by a formal, balanced treatment. That is, in approaching, the two sides of the
quadrangle should substantially balance each other, with the west connecting wing dominating the whole court yard. The dormitory group would be irregular in outline, following in general the contour of the hill, and the treatment should be domestic in character, appropriate to its purposes. The Art Building is, strictly speaking, out of place in this group, but not so far out as to be seriously objectionable.

It seems to us that the new dormitory should be placed between Wilder Hall and the Art Building. This is a natural corner and we think it should be accentuated and emphasized by a tower. Furthermore, this is one of the natural approaches to Nurembega Hill, and this fact should be emphasized by a foot approach. The treatment indicated on the plan is merely suggestive; it should be treated in the simplest and most inconspicuous manner. Marble terraces and marble balusters, and urns, and expensive work of that kind would be entirely out of place. Simple paths with turf borders, and the very simplest kind of steps and retaining walls, as much covered with vines as possible, seem to us the proper treatment of this approach. We do not think it is desirable that buildings crowning a hill should follow strictly level contours on the exterior lines. On the contrary, an occasional projection forward, as in the present case, would give an outlying spur reaching a somewhat lower level. This would produce a certain picturesqueess and interest, and would unite, as it were, the buildings with the hill. It is just this quality of design, growing gradually out of a hill, rather than confined to the very top, which gives a particular charm to most of the mediaeval work similarly
situated. And the same character is found in Greek work, as in the Acropolis at Athens, where the entrance stretches down the hill, as it were, to meet the visitor. This is a consideration, it will be observed, which is independent of the style of architecture. A treatment similar in principle, but different in detail should be adopted for the main entrance to the Dormitory Hill, coming from the College Hill. Here, the entrance should be patterned, in general, after some of the tower entrances to the Oxford quadrangles.

It is somewhat difficult to assign a suitable use to the additional building in the Chapel-Music Hall group; by sentiment a library would seem to be indicated, and a library here might be very convenient, although on the other hand the library in the center building of the College group might be preferable. We may say, in reply to Mr. Olmstead’s criticism of lack of harmony between the Chapel and the Music Hall, that we understood at the time the Chapel was designed that the Music Hall was inadequate, and would need enlargement or partial reconstruction, and inasmuch as its materials are not very permanent, the conclusion was reached that it could properly be neglected so far as it would affect the style and treatment of the Chapel.

Regarding the future of College Hall, it would be difficult to convert the northerly rooms into suitable laboratories, because the narrowness of the building would give insufficient depth between the outer walls and the corridors. We would recommend that additional projections should be constructed between the present main wings, as indicated on the block plan. These would give large
rooms alternating with small ones, which would be a very con-
venient arrangement.

It is in any event quite obvious that College Hall is the
one building of the entire group which can not be vacated for
reconstruction until accommodation is elsewhere provided during
the interval. The kitchen may not be dispensed with until
sufficient new dormitory accommodation is had, and the only way
the building could be remodeled would be to take it wing by wing,
to compensate and even then accommodation must be provided for such part of the
building as is under reconstruction. In other words, the neces-
sary program would be to build additional dormitories, and also
an additional building or wing for college purposes, vacating,
when these are done, a given area of College Hall for remodeling.
In our judgment, the whole effect of the new College group would
be vastly improved if during this reconstruction an entire new
roof could be placed on College Hall. The outline and details
of the present roof are unnecessarily atrocious. The walls,
themselves, are not offensive, and a great deal can be done by
adding new and larger windows, grouping the openings, etc., if
the roof outline could sometime be redesigned. This is con-
structively quite feasible. We may say in general as to the
outline, that Stone Hall is a conspicuous example of a successful
outline. The details are not good, but the outline is inter-
esting and satisfactory from all points of view, and shows quite
conclusively that broken and picturesque sky lines are proper
to follow. It is largely with this in mind that the new dormi-
tory between Wilder Hall and the Art Building is shown with a
pronounced tower. This tower would serve to give vigor and interest, and would forcibly, as it were, bring Wilder Hall and the Art Building into harmony. The materials of the new dormitory should be of brick and stone in about equal proportions. The tower, we think, should be entirely of stone; possibly also, the two end pavilions, and the wall spaces between should be largely of brick. In other words, the materials of these two buildings should be commingled in the intervening and connecting structure.

It seems to us, further, that an Administration Building or a separate wing for administrative purposes, is a distinct necessity. It should contain the Trustees' room, ante rooms, the President's office, stenographer's rooms, and offices for the Dean, the Secretary, Treasurer, and others connected with the administration of the College. The basement might contain the College post and telegraph offices. If this is a separate building it should probably be situated at the point indicated on the block plan, which seems to be conveniently central; but it might be placed in the center building of the College Court.

The project of an Art Commission or Board, unless composed of members of the Board of Trustees might possibly introduce a discordant element. The Trustees can not properly yield their authority to an outside committee, however formed. If this Commission, however, were in the nature of a Building Committee, composed of influential and active members of the Board, it
would serve a most valuable purpose.

The sketch elevation of the dormitory is intentionally made to a very small scale, in order that the details should not divert attention from the main massing. The Art Building and Wilder Hall are shown in developed elevation. All these buildings would be more or less masked by trees on the slope. The details of the new dormitory would require to be studied with considerable care in order to strike just the right note. The building is intended, like Wilder Hall, to be entered from a driveway on the upper level, gaining the additional height of basement on the outer lines, by reason of the slope of the hill. There should be a sub-cellar at least underneath that part of the basement used for kitchen and diningroom purposes. This diningroom would have a good exposure and would be perfectly healthy, as it is in reality the first floor. There would be two dormitory floors above the main entrance floor, and servants' rooms in the attic and tower.

The difference of elevations, mentioned by Mr. Olmstead, in the Chapel-Music Hall group, taking into consideration the proposed elevation of the main road above the steam conduit, would, it seems to us, lend itself to a very attractive treatment in conjunction with the sunken garden. This garden has perhaps not the most favorable exposure, but it is somewhat sheltered by Norumbega Hill.

Very truly yours,
November 12, 1902.

Summary of Mr. Olmstead's Report to the President of Wellesley College, dated March 24, 1902.

1. Keep the buildings out of the meadow.
2. Concentrate the buildings on top of the plateaus, following their contours.
3. Retain present Art Building and Wilder Hall, possibly adding wings to the latter. Consider that all the other buildings on this plateau should, as the College grows, be replaced by larger structures, giving increased dormitory accommodations.
4. Add a building, possibly library, to balance the Chapel on the other side of the open space fronting Music Hall.
5. Remodel College Hall for laboratories and class rooms, and add another building or wing for college purposes, either beyond the kitchen, or approximately upon its site, if removed.
6. Place the Gymnasium on the high land across the valley, north west of College Hall.
7. Establish an Art Commission, or Board, charged with general supervision of future development.
8. Discussion of roads and approaches, and recommendations as to concrete paths, underground drainage, and underground wiring.