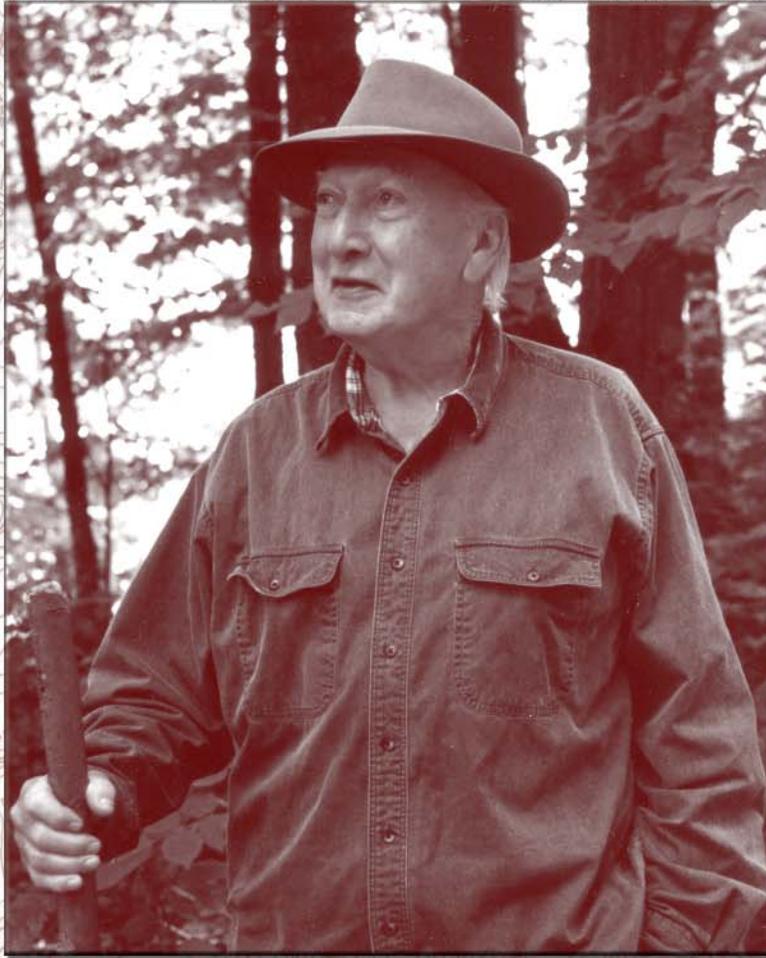


# John Ormsbee Simonds Remembered

Visionary Landscape Architect, Planner, Educator,  
and Environmentalist (1913-2005)



November 15, 2005 - February 3, 2006

The Exhibit Gallery - Second Floor Smathers Library  
George A. Smathers Libraries - University of Florida

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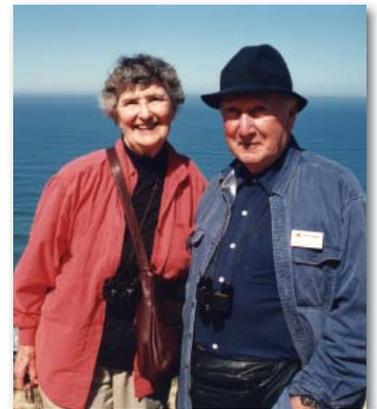


## Acknowledgements

Slightly less than a year ago, I began discussions with faculty and students of the University of Florida Department of Landscape Architecture about the need to create an exhibition focusing on the career of John Ormsbee Simonds that would feature materials from the Simonds Papers held here in Special Collections. Our primary intent at the time was to bring into focus two or three exemplary aspects of his work, particularly as represented by his broad-scale planning efforts in Florida. However, when his wife, Marjorie, informed us of his passing in May of this year, we could not help but reflect on his many achievements, his visionary philosophy, and his far-reaching legacy. We quickly concluded that our original idea for the exhibition would be insufficient to express to others the honor we felt at being able to work with his collection of papers, and thus was born this retrospective look at his life and career.

Special Collections is fortunate both because it can count the Simonds Papers among its manuscript collections, and also because it enjoys a strong relationship with the Landscape Architecture department at UF. In fact, the Simonds Papers probably would not be at the University of Florida if it were not for the efforts of Herrick Smith, former chair of the Landscape Architecture department, who was instrumental in acquiring this collection for Smathers Libraries in 1990. Current chair Bob Grist and graduate coordinator Kay Williams also recognized the importance of the Simonds Papers for students and scholars, and demonstrated a rare level of commitment by providing two outstanding graduate students to assist with the arrangement of the collection and the creation of this exhibition. For

an academic department to appoint and pay two of its graduate assistants to work in another department, particularly when budgets are so tight, is an action worthy of praise. In addition, Professor Williams graciously donated her own time and expertise, providing essential advice and guidance. The importance of this generosity cannot be overstated. The Landscape Architecture department has my gratitude, as well as the gratitude of my colleagues in the Smathers Libraries.



Marjorie and John Simonds

It is a certainty that this exhibition would not be a reality without the hard work of the talented and dedicated landscape architecture graduate students, Brenda Curtis and Nicole Hawkins. During the Fall 2004 and Spring 2005 semesters, both students spent several hours arranging and describing a large portion of the materials that comprise the Simonds Papers. Without their efforts, many of the materials would still be inaccessible to library patrons, and we would not have been able to locate and select many of the materials included in this exhibition. Although Nicole was not able to participate in developing the exhibition during the current Fall semester, she made several

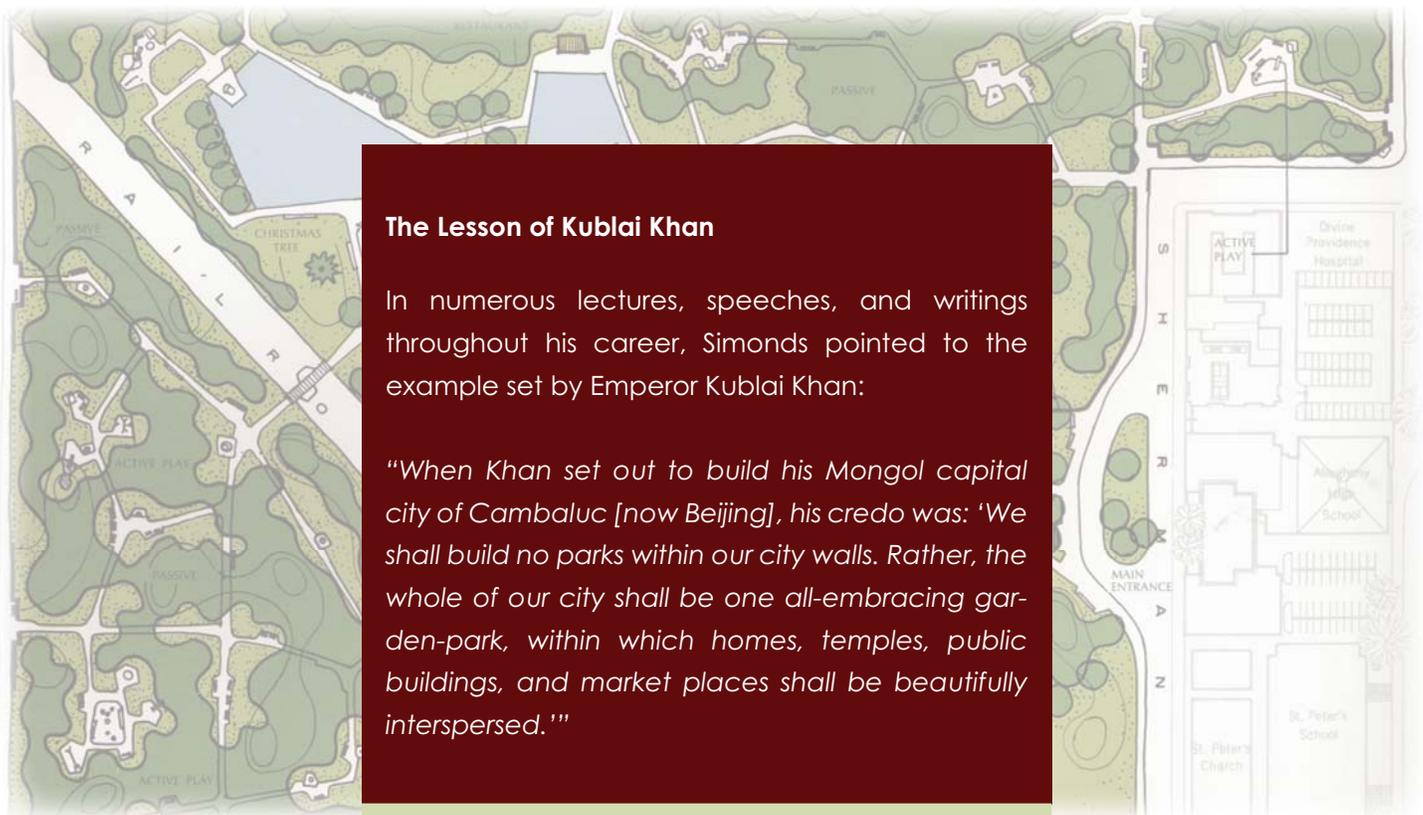
significant contributions earlier in the year by identifying potential exhibit objects, gathering Simonds quotations, and brainstorming ideas about the structure and content of the exhibition. Brenda, as the lone student working on the exhibition during the past few months, has been invaluable in too many ways to recount here. From helping to develop the framework for the exhibition to selecting materials and designing various display cases and panels, she has made the exhibition a reality. I consider both students, as well as Kay Williams, to be full partners in this enterprise, and it has been a great pleasure to work with them.

Of course, there are numerous people who contributed to this exhibition and to whom I acknowledge my sincere gratitude. As this was my first exhibition here in Special Collections, I received invaluable advice from Carl Van Ness, Jim Cusick, and Robert Shaddy. Jim Silk, a longtime volunteer and part-time employee in Special Collections, and student assistant Gilbert Levy worked for many hours assisting with the arrangement and description of the collection. Barbara Hood was instrumental in creating this exhibition catalog, in handling all public relations activities, and in providing much-needed guidance and deadlines. Carla Summers, curator of the department's manuscripts collections for many years, oversaw the acquisition of and established an order for the Simonds Papers – the good work she did more than ten years ago made my job much easier. Laura Nemmers provided essential constructive criticism based on her museum know-how. Erich Kesse, Randall Renner, and the staff in our Digital Library Center were responsible for cre-

ating many of the digital reproductions of the plans and drawings used in the exhibition. My thanks also to Brandy Burgess, Mil Willis, and a number of Smathers Libraries staff members who helped in a variety of ways, large and small.

Finally, I would be amiss if I did not acknowledge my gratitude to John and Marjorie Simonds. Beginning in 1990, when he first donated his collection to Special Collections, Mr. Simonds sent regular shipments of his papers and books from his home in Pittsburgh. As the archivist in charge of landscape architecture manuscript collections for the past two years, it has been my responsibility to accept and process these shipments. I received the last shipment early this year, and I responded to Mr. Simonds telling him of our intention to create an exhibition based on his projects in Florida. When his wife of over 60 years, Marjorie, wrote to inform us of her husband's peaceful passing in May, she was kind enough to tell me that her husband had been very happy to hear of our exhibition. Naturally, this pleased me greatly. It is a special privilege and honor to work with the papers of an individual as admirable as John Simonds. Through this exhibition, and through the use of the Simonds Papers, I hope that others will come to understand the importance of his vision and legacy as I have.

John R. Nemmers  
Descriptive and Technical Services Archivist  
Special and Area Studies Collections





# Introduction

John Simonds, FASLA, was one of the most influential modernist landscape architects in the United States, and was respected internationally as well. If, when looking at his work, it seems mainstream, that's because now it is. But it was cutting edge when he first did it. Clustered housing to preserve open space? Planned Unit Developments? He pioneered PUDs. He was the planner of record for over 80 planned communities and 4 new towns, including Florida's Miami Lakes and Pelican Bay. His work in comprehensive planning grew from projects in Florida — a state that was “going to pot in front of your eyes”. Its ruined landscapes and fragile beauty were the impetus for a new kind of planning based on ecology and human needs. In addition to professional projects, he served on numerous committees and task forces and was a long-term advisor to one of his first Florida clients — Bob Graham. He helped forge laws and programs that, according to him, took Florida from ruin to protection in 15 years. While he may have been optimistic when he said that in 1985, one does have to wonder what Florida would be like if he had not come here.

Simonds masterplanned the Chicago Botanical Garden in the early 1960's, when the typical botanical garden was a horticultural zoo with politely arranged collections. He created a series of garden spaces that delighted as much as educated. Also innovative was the ecological restoration of the site. Derelict and abused, it became stable and healthy, not as a recreation of what was there, but as a new ecosystem that supported human functions within its systems. His office soon became the top firm to go to for botanical gardens, and in the late 1990's, they worked with the University of Florida to explore the possibility of an on-campus botanical garden.

While Simonds is greatly respected for his work, service and leadership, most people became aware of him through his publications. Four decades of landscape architecture students used and still use his *Landscape Architecture* as a basic text. The original *Landscape Architecture* may read as a history book now, but until its publication in 1961, students were using an out-of-

print book from 1917 as *the* comprehensive explanation of the profession. A fourth edition is now in progress, addressing current issues and practice.

Simonds was instrumental in the 1950's rebirth of Pittsburgh; his work was typical of his collaborative nature and of his grasp of issues at many different scales. He helped craft broad plans and policies, and at the other end of the spectrum contributed to the physical renewal. His iconic Mellon Square continues to be a well-used public space, but it was innovative for its time as an early modernist urban square, and widely publicized for placing a park over a parking garage.

At Harvard School of Design at one of the most interesting times in its history — Bauhaus architect Walter Gropius was turning staid Beaux Arts design on its ear — he was part of the famous “Harvard Revolution” that started the modernist movement in landscape architecture. Simonds later wrote of his fascination with modernism's logic and emphasis on process over style, and also of his frustration as to how to come to form. The modernist geometric experiments seemed as arbitrary as the old Beaux Arts. Years later, after travels and much professional work, he realized that he was not designing *forms*, he was designing *experiences*. Perhaps that is why he never had a distinctive style, as did some of his peers.

These archival materials give hints as to how Simonds became what he was. His father, a Presbyterian minister, undoubtedly influenced his oratory style, even if Simonds claims he slept through his father's sermons. His writing is poetic yet accessible, and video and audiotapes present a mesmerizing speaker with wit and passion. His omnivorous curiosity, deep reverence for nature, and Taoist leanings are expressed in both child-like glee and powerful logic as he strived for what seem to be the two most important issues to him — quality and balance.

Sara Katherine “Kay” Williams, FASLA  
Department of Landscape Architecture



## Symbolic of the Environment

Simonds borrowed symbols of air, water, earth, and the sun from primitive cave carvings in Europe and combined them to create this symbol for the total environment.



## Student Remarks

Remarks from Brenda Curtis and Nicole Hawkins  
Graduate Students, Department of Landscape  
Architecture

We were given an assignment... to arrange and describe the life's work of John Ormsbee Simonds in the Special Collections department of Smathers Libraries. Seeing this as a chance to take a break from our messy and noisy studio, we welcomed the challenge. Walking into the cathedral-like setting of the library we felt a sense of awe and calm... until, that is, John Nemmers took us on a field trip to a storage facility where we were introduced to boxes upon boxes of John Simonds' papers. As archival assistants our job was to sort through and organize the contents of these boxes. Despite the daunting size of the collection, this was a far greater experience than simply reading a text or hearing a lecture about John Simonds and his ideas of the world. This was a tangible experience. We were given this once in a lifetime opportunity to organize original plans and documents conceived by a true master.

This collection was a veritable treasure trove, which not only documented the fruits of his labor, but also revealed his personality. We got to know his humorous side. His writing style and whimsical drawings, for example, told us that he did not take himself too seriously. He even scribbled a funny hairdo and curled mustache on his own picture in his first passport. We sometimes came upon small poems he had written, showing his clever side. In reading through his letters, we also became aware that Simonds was a humble man. When he was notified that he was going to be awarded ASLA's "Centennial President's Medal", he told Barry Starke (ASLA President, 1999): "My first reaction was to make a mental list of those who deserved it more. On second thought I have decided never to record this list in case others might see it and agree."

Simonds' sketches of the Far East were a special discovery, for they exemplified his adventurous spirit. Never one to simply take directions, he defied Walter Gropius' urging to ignore Asia in favor of Europe, and booked a steamer ticket overseas. This trip helped to form his land ethic and tolerant nature. We encountered Simonds' forethought and persistence in his plans and project files for such communities as Miami Lakes and Pelican Bay, which have stood the test of time and are still celebrated as an example of environmentally sensitive design. We learned how well respected he was through correspondence with such notables as President Lyndon B. Johnson, Ian McHarg, Senator Bob Graham and Ted Osmudson. He was happy to work with people from other professions, and seemed as



comfortable communicating with a grammar school student, a politician, or a biologist, as he was with another designer. He was a prolific professional, who tackled a wide range of projects. One day we would unroll a design for a botanical garden, while on another day we would discover a park system plan for an entire city or region.

In watching a video recording of an interview with Simonds we became acquainted with his thoughtfulness and well-spoken demeanor. He spoke with the air of a preacher, whose tones rose and fell as he emphasized recollections of past experiences and collaborations. In this presentation, we saw how Simonds cared a great deal for the field of Landscape Architecture. This became even more evident when we found all of the typed lectures that he used while teaching students around the world. We also found letters and writings in which he promoted accreditation in the university system, raising the bar for schools across the country. This concern for education and the future of the profession was punctuated with his simple gesture of donating all of these worldly treasures to a library. Now we all are able to learn from John Ormsbee Simonds.

So, what do we take away from this experience that we can apply as future Landscape Architects? We learn that travel and adventure set the stage for an open-minded attitude. We learn that collaboration is essential for the successful outcome of any project. We learn to represent our ideas with clarity and simplicity, and above all to have a sense of humor.

We feel very fortunate to have worked with the John Ormsbee Simonds Papers, and will cherish this experience far beyond our time as graduate students. We would like to thank Bob Grist, Kay Williams and John Nemmers for giving us this memorable opportunity.



# John Ormsbee Simonds: Biography

1913, March 11	Born in Jamestown, North Dakota
1930	Enrolled at Michigan State University
1933-1934	Took a year off from school to live in Borneo and travel throughout Asia
1935	Graduated from Michigan State with a B.S. in Landscape Architecture
1935-1936	Worked for the Civilian Conservation Corps in Big Bay, Michigan (responsible for rehabilitation of land and design of Marquette State Park)
1936-1939	Attended Harvard Graduate School of Design, receiving a Master's in Landscape Architecture in 1939
1939-1940	Traveled to Asia with fellow Harvard graduate and future partner Lester A. Collins
1940	Established Simonds and Simonds partnership in Pittsburgh with his brother, Philip
1941	Could not enlist when U.S. entered WWII because he had contracted malaria during his travels to Asia, but worked on military base projects in Pennsylvania
1943	Married Marjorie C. Todd
1945-1960	Simonds and Simonds practice flourishes during post-war boom and Pittsburgh Renaissance
1952-1970	Partner in Collins, Simonds and Simonds
1955-1967	Served on faculty of Carnegie Institute of Technology (Carnegie Mellon University)
1961	Published <i>Landscape Architecture: The Shaping of Man's Natural Environment</i>
1963-1965	President, American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA)
1965	Chair, Urban Parks and Open Spaces panel, White House Conference on Natural Beauty
1965	Principal planner and author of <i>Virginia's Common Wealth</i> , one of the first state action plans for land and resource planning
1966-1968	Member, Federal Highway Administration's Board of Urban Advisors — Simonds edited the board's report, <i>Freeway in the City</i> (1968)
1968-1970	Member, President's Task Force on Resources and the Environment
1970	Simonds and Simonds firm renamed EPD: The Environmental Planning and Development Partnership
1973	Awarded the ASLA Medal, one of the highest honors in the profession
1978	Published <i>Earthscape: A Manual of Environmental Planning</i>
1979-1980	Member, Governor's Resource Management Task Force (Florida)
1983	Retired from EPD, but continued to consult afterwards as partner emeritus
1983	Published second edition of <i>Landscape Architecture: A Manual of Site Planning and Design</i>
1998	Published third edition of <i>Landscape Architecture: A Manual of Site Planning and Design</i>
1999	Awarded the ASLA President's Centennial Medal
2005, May 6	Died at the age of 92 at his home in Pittsburgh



Photograph of Simonds, circa 1960s.



# Travels to the East

“While most young professionals were going to Europe for inspiration, Simonds went east to Japan, Borneo, China.”

– Robinson Fisher, *Landscape Architect, introducing Simonds at the University of Georgia, April 2, 1985*

Simonds first traveled to Asia in 1933 at the age of 20. This trip, as well as subsequent travels in 1939 and 1940, had a profound impact on him, both personally and professionally.

The 1933 trip to Borneo, taken during his junior year at Michigan State University, was a remarkable venture that also took him to several other Asian destinations, including Japan, China, Singapore, Tibet, and India. An account of this trip can be found in his unpublished travelogue manuscript, *Borneo Remembered: Headhunters and Cannibals I Have Known* (2002).

In 1939 Dr. Walter Gropius, a member of the Harvard faculty and founder of the influential Bauhaus school of design in Germany, questioned Simonds about his plans following graduation from Harvard. When Simonds informed him that he would travel to Asia, Gropius told him that the Orient offered little instruc-

tion and that he should instead visit Europe. Simonds ignored this advice, much to his benefit, and he felt great satisfaction several years later when he listened as Gropius described his own travels in Japan. As Simonds relates in his 1991 manuscript, *Lessons*:

“It was a moving experience,” [Gropius] began, “for an architect who has spent his life in an unfulfilled search for a dynamic philosophy of design --- to find it at last, full blown and at work as a guiding force in the lives of the Japanese people. This powerful and creative force I find to be inculcated in the teachings of the Zen.”

Simonds' philosophy of planning was based largely on his travels to Asia and his research and observation of Asian practices, particularly those based on Zen philosophy. As an admirer of Asian thought, one of Simonds' lifelong missions was to promote a harmonious relationship between humans and the environment. As Simonds often stated, his travels taught him that:

**“One designs not places, or spaces or things — one designs experiences.”**

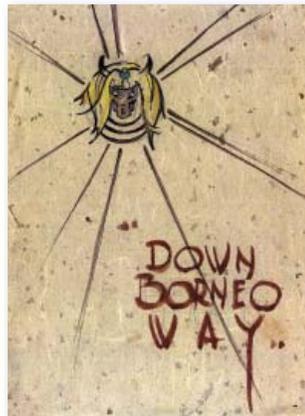
## Down Borneo Way

*Borneo Remembered: Headhunters and Cannibals I Have Known*. Unpublished manuscript of a travelogue (also known as *Down Borneo Way*), by John O. Simonds, 2002.

“A factual account of travels in British North Borneo in 1933. Written and assembled in 2002. Gleaned from diaries, scattered correspondence, albums and recollection.”

– Commentary by Simonds

Simonds originally wrote a partially fictionalized account of this trip in 1934-1935 entitled “Thunder on the Mountain.” He later destroyed this manuscript, but he was able to use it to recreate the factual *Borneo Remembered* manuscript.



## Angkor Wat

Photograph of the temple of Angkor Wat, located in present-day Cambodia. Simonds described his 1940 visit to Angkor, the capital of the ancient Khmer empire, in the “Roomful of Devils” chapter of *Lessons* (1991).

“We crossed over a wide moat by monumental causeway to an enormous ‘temple mountain,’ Angkor Wat. It rose in stepped-back terraces and was capped by lofty stone towers in the form of lotus buds. In its size Angkor Wat was overwhelming, surpassing in richness and ornamentation any structure we’d ever seen.”

*Lessons*, p. 66

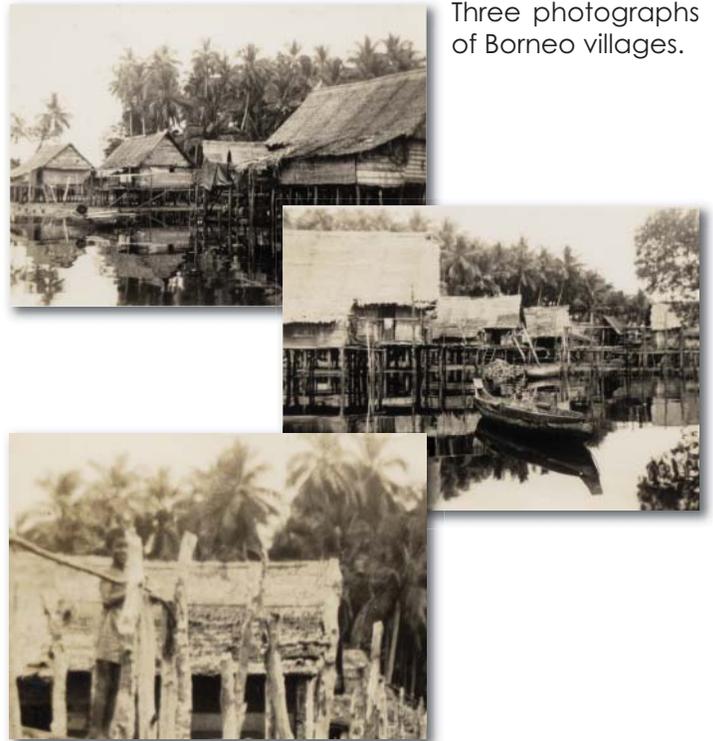
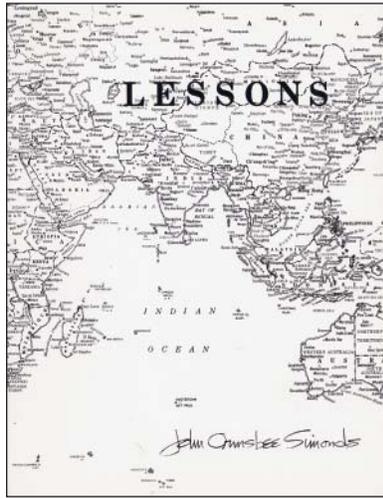


## Lessons

*Lessons.* Unpublished manuscript by John O. Simonds, 1991.

*"A collection of lifetime experiences gained in years of travel by a keen observer. Each illustrative anecdote, compressed into a few pages, makes its own memorable impression. Each presents an idea with the power to expand..."*

– Commentary by Simonds



Three photographs of Borneo villages.

In *Lessons*, Simonds emphasized the importance of travel, research, and observation in order to gain an understanding of the best historic and contemporary landscape architecture around the world. Simonds believed wholeheartedly that travel was vital in the education of a landscape architect and preached the need to experience works of landscape architecture firsthand.

## Borneo Remembrances

Simonds created several sketches and photographs during his stay in Borneo in 1933-1934.



Pencil drawing of a Borneo dwelling.

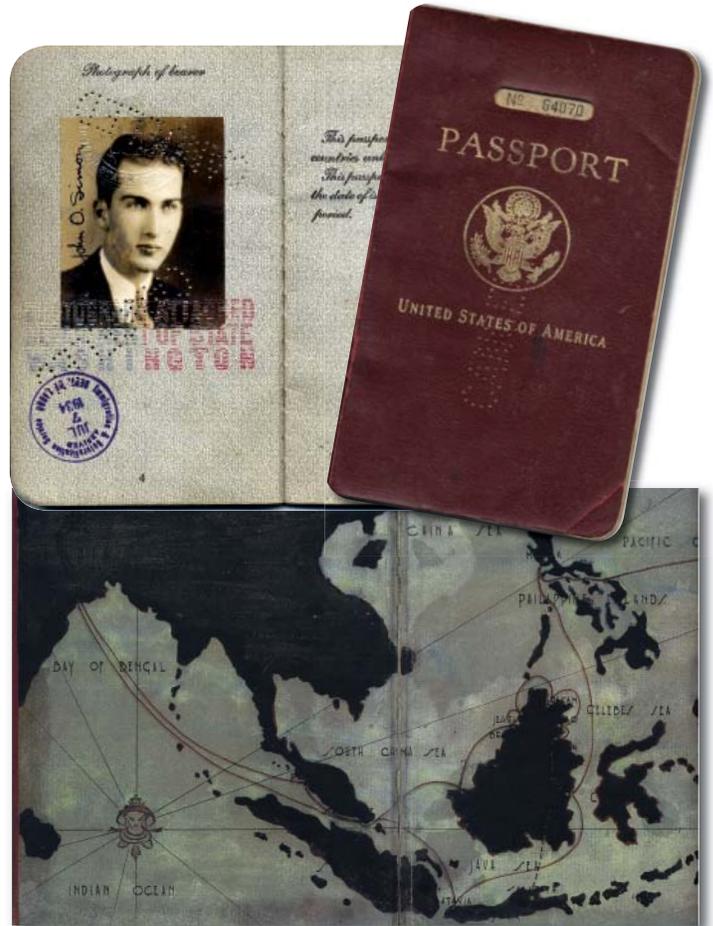


Photograph of a Borneo male posing beside skulls.

## Map and Passports

Below: Passport documenting Simonds' travels in Asia in 1933-1934 and 1939-1940.

Bottom: Map drawn by Simonds showing the route of his travels in Asia in 1933 and 1934.





## Author and Educator

Not only by his practice of the profession, but also by his teaching and writings, Simonds was able to significantly affect the field of landscape architecture. It has been noted by multiple colleagues that he had a significant role in changing the perception of landscape architects from that of plant and garden specialists to environmentalists, urban designers, and regional planners.

A visionary author, Simonds was responsible for several influential publications. His book *Landscape Architecture*, first published in 1961 and with revised editions in 1983 and 1998, has been one of the primary texts used in landscape architecture education for half a century. Other works such as *Earthscope: A Manual of Environmental Planning* (1978) and *Garden Cities 21* (1994) compliment and expand upon the *Landscape Architecture* texts. In these and other writings, he preached his belief that the built environment should be compatible and harmonious with the natural environment. In commenting on his writings, Simonds stated:

“In sum they provide a trace of the growth and transition of the profession of landscape architecture as a vital force in society. Further, they give evidence of a remarkable change in the public attitude toward

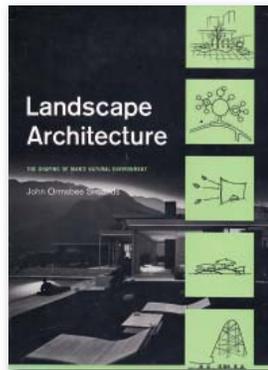
our natural world and living environment --- from apathy toward wanton destruction and desecration, to an awakened concern for worldwide protection and care. It is believed that some of these writings may have contributed to the change.”

It should be noted that Simonds credited his wife, Marjorie, with editing his technical books and serving as his collaborator by spending “long hours in conversation helping to refine the points discussed and bring them into focus.”

Throughout his career, Simonds placed a special emphasis on education. He was a frequent lecturer at universities around the country and worldwide, and he served on the faculty of the Department of Architecture at Carnegie Mellon University from 1955 to 1967. Some of his most important writings, such as *Landscape Architecture*, were intended as educational tools to instruct students in planning and design. He did not limit himself to simply being an educator in a classroom setting, however, and took every opportunity to educate those around him. For over five decades Simonds was a teacher and advisor to community leaders, governors, legislatures, government agencies, and presidents.

### **Landscape Architecture: The Shaping of Man's Natural Environment** (McGraw-Hill, Inc., New York), 1961.

This publication, and its two subsequent editions, has been the primary introductory text to landscape architecture for over 40 years. As Simonds states in the introduction of the book, it “was intended to meet the demand for a book that would outline the landscape planning process — from the selection of a site to the completed project — in simple, clear, and practical terms.” The text, however, is far more than simply an outline of the landscape planning process. As an environmentalist and early proponent of sustainable ecological design, the book also covers topics such as climate, water systems, native plants, and human interaction with nature. And rather than focus solely on the landscape architecture profession, several of the basic principles proposed by Simonds in this landmark publication can be applied to all professions involving design and planning.

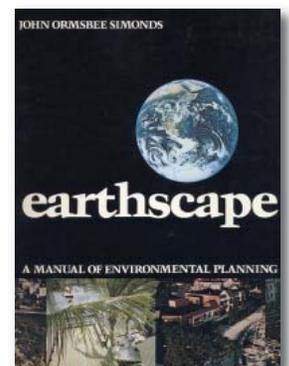


### **Earthscope: A Manual on Environmental Planning and Design** (McGraw-Hill, Inc., New York), 1978.

Intended as a companion to *Landscape Architecture: A Manual of Site Planning and Design*, Simonds wrote this manual to cover the practical principles of environmental planning and design. As evidence of his concern for the environment and his need to educate others about it, the book is dedicated “to the Young... who hold in their hands the shape of tomorrow.” As with *Landscape Architecture*, the text is accompanied by extensive illustrations, photographs, and diagrams.

“We are despoiling our landscape and polluting our water and atmosphere to a shameful, and increasingly harmful degree. Such waste and corruption must be stopped... There is need to formulate a strategy for long term growth and development – an evolving plan to bring people, production, and nature into better balance.”

– Simonds, *Earthscope*, p. 334





# The Simonds Practices

## The Simonds Partnerships

Following his travels in Asia in 1939 and 1940, Simonds and his brother, Philip D. Simonds, founded a landscape architecture firm, Simonds and Simonds, in Pittsburgh. Over the next three decades, with John in charge of design and Philip in charge of construction, their practice developed as a successful landscape architecture and regional planning firm. Initially specializing in residential projects, playgrounds, and public schools and parks, the practice quickly gained a national reputation with several important projects completed during the Pittsburgh Renaissance, a period of revitalization for downtown Pittsburgh. During this period, the Simonds and Simonds firm was responsible for designing major public spaces, including Mellon Square and the Equitable Life Insurance Plaza.

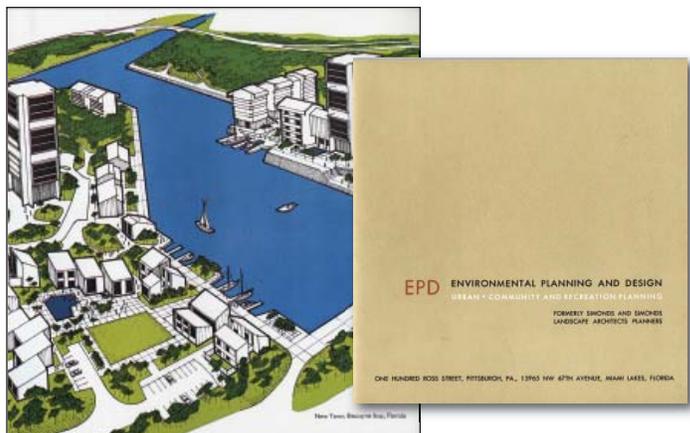
From 1952 to 1970, Simonds also served as a partner in the firm of Collins, Simonds and Simonds, with offices in both Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C. This partnership continued his relationship with his former Harvard classmate and traveling companion, Lester A. Collins. It was this partnership that first allowed Simonds to test his ideas for community planning in the rapidly developing region of southern Florida.

## EPD: The Environmental Planning and Design Partnership

In 1970, at a time when large-scale planning became the focus of his work, the Simonds and Simonds firm became EPD: The Environmental Planning and Design Partnership, with offices in Pittsburgh and Miami Lakes. For the next 12 years Simonds served as senior partner along with his brother and partners Paul Dorr Wolfe, C. Richard Hays, Geoffrey L. Rausch, and Jack R. Scholl. Simonds retired in 1982 but continued to consult as a partner emeritus.

During his career, EPD and its predecessor firms were engaged in over 500 projects and served as planners for more than 80 planned communities and 4 new towns, including Pelican Bay and Miami Lakes in Florida. The Simonds partnerships were instrumental in changing the perception of landscape architects from that of garden and park specialists to regional planners, urban designers, and environmentalists.

Below: An EPD brochure showing the firm's focus on large-scale community planning in addition to landscape architecture and regional design.



Photograph of Simonds standing on a spiral staircase in his Pittsburgh office and a photograph of brothers Philip D. Simonds (left) and John O. Simonds.

"Stated simply, the aim of the planner is to create for mankind a better environment, a better way of life."

– *Simonds, Landscape Architecture (1961), p. 7*



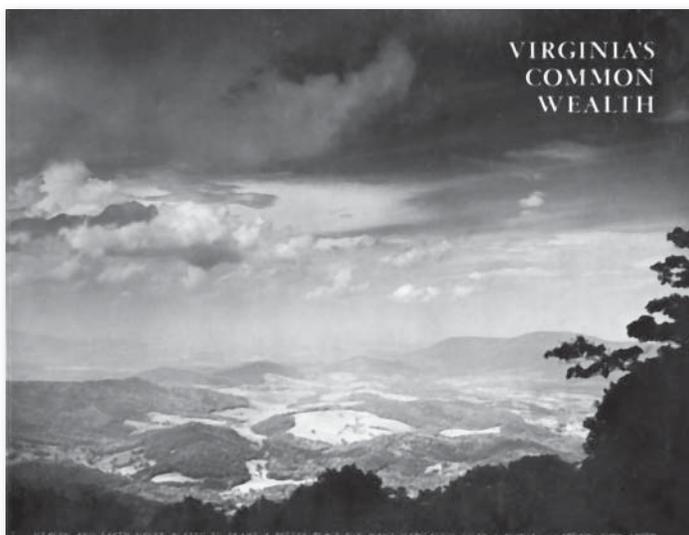
## Planning and Design Projects

During the 1940s and 1950s, projects undertaken by Simonds and Simonds primarily consisted of residential, educational and corporate landscape architecture; urban renewal and redevelopment; and parks, recreation, and open spaces. A large majority of these projects were undertaken in Pittsburgh, including the Pittsburgh Aviary-Conservatory, Frick Park Playground, and Mellon Square, which earned much national recognition and praise for the firm.

In the 1960s and 1970s the focus of Simonds and his firm began to change, as evidenced by the change of the partnership's name to Environmental Planning and Design (EPD) in 1970. During this period, Simonds continued to plan hundreds of parks, schools, and urban districts, but the firm also began to plan highways and transportation systems, large industrial parks for

national and international corporations, and entire new towns. Although several important projects were completed in Pittsburgh, including open spaces such as Equitable Plaza and Allegheny Commons, some of the firm's biggest projects were completed in other states. These projects included the new town of Miami Lakes in Florida, the Chicago Botanic Garden, Interstate 66 in Virginia, and numerous urban riverfronts and business districts in Ohio, Michigan, West Virginia, and Maryland.

In the 1980s Simonds retired from EPD and continued to consult as a partner-emeritus. By this time a significant portion of the firm's workload consisted of Florida projects, including the Ft. Lauderdale riverfront, Key Island in Collier County, and Pelican Bay in Naples.

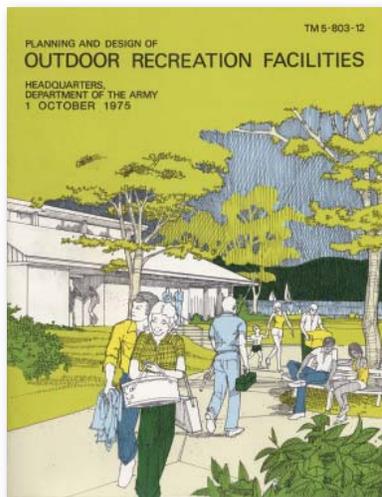


### **Virginia's Common Wealth. Report of the Virginia Outdoor Recreation Study Commission. 1965.**

*"Prepared in 1965 for the Virginia General Assembly, it was among the first state action plans for land and resource planning. It was approved unanimously by the Assembly and for the past 30 years it has continued to be the basic document."*

*– Commentary by Simonds*

During his service on the Virginia Outdoor Recreation Study Commission, Simonds was the principal planner and author of this landmark publication. The report includes a study of the state's outdoor recreation resources and the statewide environmental action plan for conserving and developing them. Simonds considered this to be one of his most important accomplishments during his career.



### **Planning and Design of Outdoor Recreation Facilities, Department of the Army (U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.), 1975.**

*"Prepared entirely by EPD with periodic critiques by the Army Corps of Engineers, [the manual] has been used world-wide as the guideline for all new Army, Navy and*

*Air Force recreational installations."*

*– Simonds*

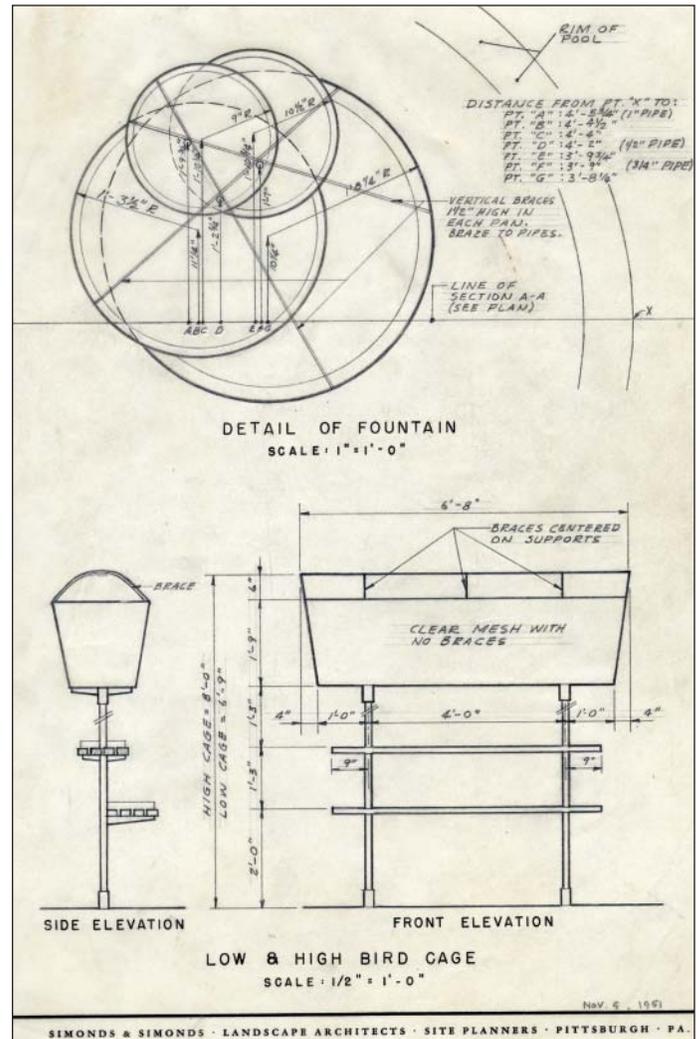
This technical manual provides plans, diagrams, criteria and procedures for the development of outdoor recreation areas and facilities. Many of the environment-friendly guidelines included in the manual reflect the principles applied by Simonds and the EPD firm to large-scale planning projects around the U.S. As stated in the manual, "preservation and enhancement of the land and water resources should receive first priority."

## Recreation, Parks, and Open Spaces

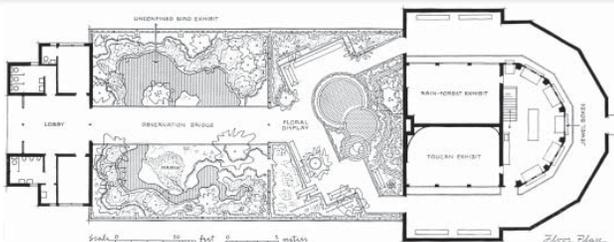
For much of his career, Simonds and his partnerships specialized in designing and planning recreational facilities, parks, and open spaces. Completed projects include hundreds of playgrounds, community parks, botanic gardens, urban squares, state parks, and recreational and sports facilities for schools and colleges.



Above: Long Range Development Plan for Allegheny Commons, prepared by Simonds and Simonds, 1966. The firm was responsible for redesigning this oldest park in Pittsburgh, and intended it to be the “key environmental center for the whole revitalized North Side.” Described by Simonds as “a landmark and major focal point on the north bank of the Allegheny River opposite downtown Pittsburgh,” this open space includes formal gardens, recreation areas, Lake Elizabeth, West Park, and the Pittsburgh Aviary-Conservatory, which Simonds and Simonds had completed in the 1950s.



Below and right: Pittsburgh Aviary-Conservatory



## Mellon Square, Pittsburgh

In 1948 members of the philanthropic Mellon family funded several improvements for downtown Pittsburgh, including Mellon Square in the city's "Golden Triangle" area. As one reviewer noted when the square opened in 1955, the concept for Mellon Square combined the aesthetic and practical by providing an open park above an underground parking garage in the middle of a busy urban area. In addition to serving as a gathering place for the enjoyment of the people of Pittsburgh, the public square was designed to be a significant civic space and a focal center for the surrounding landmarks, including the Alcoa Building, the U.S. Steel Building, and Mellon Bank. The project was an important step for Simonds and Simonds, as it enhanced their national reputation at a time when the firm was beginning to focus on urban spaces and large-scale planning.

Below: Photograph of Mellon Square, not dated.



## Chicago Botanic Garden

In 1961, Simonds and his partners were hired to develop a master plan for the entire garden site. Construction began in 1966, the garden opened to visitors in 1972, and the firm continued to work on the garden for several decades after its opening. The site covers over 300 acres, featuring a series of island gardens with an administration and visitor education center on the largest island. At the time of its opening, the garden included approximately 40 acres for display and teaching gardens and another 5-10 acres for research and experimental areas.



Horticultural Society of Chicago medal awarded to Simonds in 1979.



Master plan for the Chicago Botanic Garden.



A 1971 illustrative site plan for the large garden island and the administration and visitor education center.

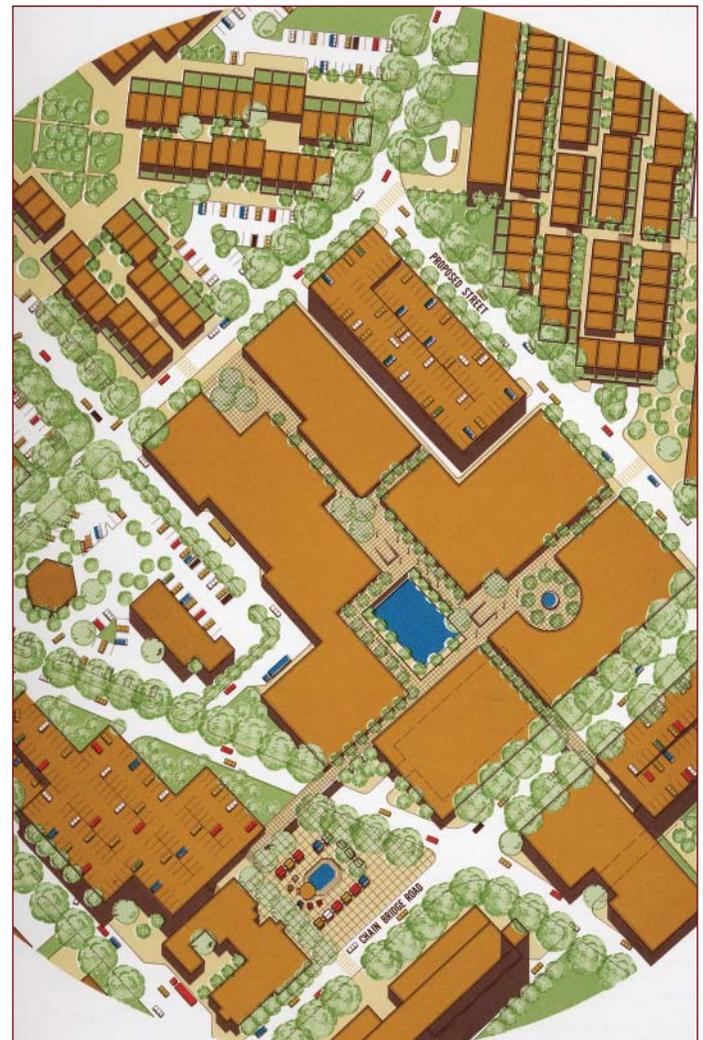
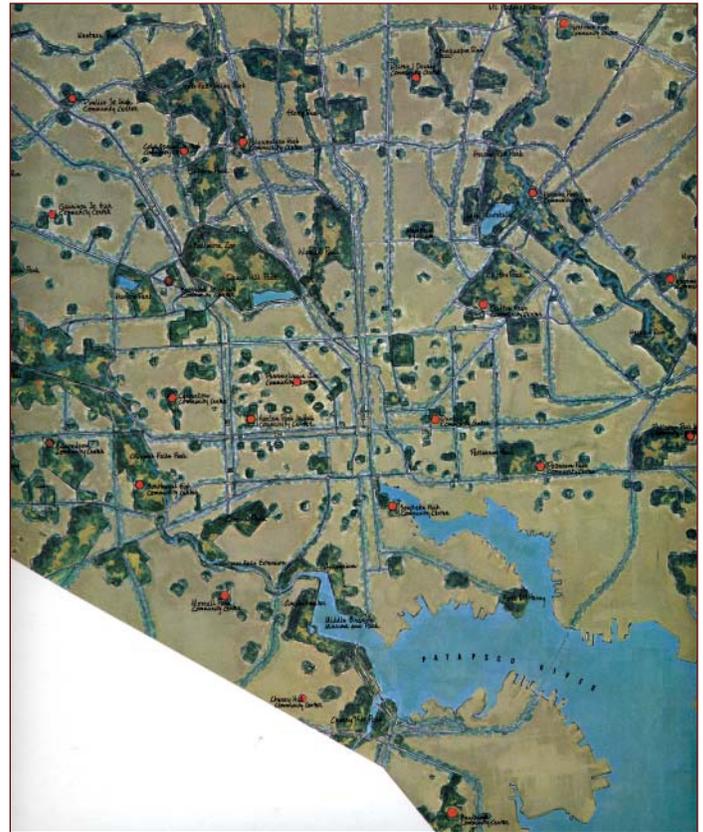
## Planning Humane Environments

Although Simonds was capable of creating superb landscape designs, his forte was working as part of a team to plan urban renewal and development, transportation systems, and new communities. He sometimes claimed, when referring to his broad-scale planning projects, that he did little more than bring developers, community leaders, and special interest groups together and act as secretary and mediator. Although this drastically understates his accomplishments, one of his great strengths was his ability to work with the various groups, to solicit their suggestions, to negotiate with them, and to teach them the advantages to the project.

*"Without doubt, the greatest present threat to our national landscape is that of unmanaged growth, unplanned development or continued urban sprawl."*  
– Simonds

Simonds despised poorly planned growth, particularly when the ecology and quality of life suffered. He stressed the importance of incorporating environmental considerations into all planning and ensuring that developed regions would provide the best experiences for the inhabitants. He planned what he referred to as "humane environments."

The plans and renderings on display in this exhibit represent a very small portion of his large body of work relating to planned growth, urban renewal, transportation, and new communities.





# Planned Development in Florida

*"... that sun-drenched, shimmering, glorious expanse of land and water that is Florida... Our role is to protect it, to use it wisely and enjoy it, to ensure that those generations to follow may be as blessed as we."*

– Simonds

Over a period of 25-30 years, beginning in the late 1950s, Simonds and/or the EPD firm were planners of record for approximately twenty major Florida communities, including Miami Lakes, Fisher Island, Weston, Gateway, West Lake, and Pelican Bay. In a 1979 EPD document entitled "The Florida Operation," Simonds explained why the Pittsburgh-based practice was working in Florida, stating: "that's where the activity is – especially in the field of large scale comprehensive land use planning – a major strength of our firm." With the development boom in the 1960s and 1970s, Florida was a logical choice as a test ground for Simonds to implement his ideas of broad-scale planned development.

In Florida he pioneered the concept of Planned Unit Development, a system in which projects are planned comprehensively to accomplish development while

ensuring conservation of natural resources. In Miami Lakes and similar new towns he utilized clustered planning, in which mixed types of residential units are grouped around lakes, parks, recreation areas, and other preserved open spaces. Simonds and EPD approached all of the planned communities in Florida with their PCD philosophy – preserving an area's resources, conserving its wetlands and water supplies, and developing on less crucial lands. These principles, and others, were considered innovative at the time but are common practice for today's regional planners.

Although a majority of the Florida projects were successful, Simonds did experience disappointments in which his master plans were never realized. His greatest frustrations occurred, according to Simonds, as a result of the efforts of local citizens, organizations, and politicians who opposed growth. Two such projects were Key Island in Collier County and Saga Bay in Dade County. Even these projects, however, were successful in that they allowed the planners to test many innovative concepts and establish new state-wide policy.



## Miami Lakes, Dade County, Florida

In the late 1950s, the Collins, Simonds and Simonds firm was engaged by the Graham family in Dade County to plan the community of Miami Lakes, the first of many new towns to be built in Florida during the latter half of the 20th Century.

*"Five square miles of pasture land converted into a Florida community that preserves and expresses*

*the best qualities of the Florida living environment. By adoption of fresh water lakes, the shaping of palmetto hammocks, and the generous use of indigenous plantings, [the planners] captured the feeling of the Everglades."*

– Simonds

Lester Collins primarily was responsible for the initial plan, but it was not approved by local officials because they favored a traditional grid layout rather than Collins' free-form design based upon a series of 20 lakes. Simonds, whose strength was working with local politicians, began meeting with county officials to revise the plan. He was so successful at teaching them the advantages of the project, that they approved a final plan that retained most of Collins' original concepts. The new town became a reality in 1962.

Residential properties were grouped (clustered) around lakes, recreation areas, and open spaces to create a park-like environment. As Simonds wrote in 1970, "...only in a park-like environment with recreation as a common experience and nature always close at hand can all members of the family find a full measure of delight and satisfaction in their daily lives. This, after all, is the purpose and the promise of the new town."

**Letter to D. Robert "Bob" Graham from Simonds, September 22, 1977**

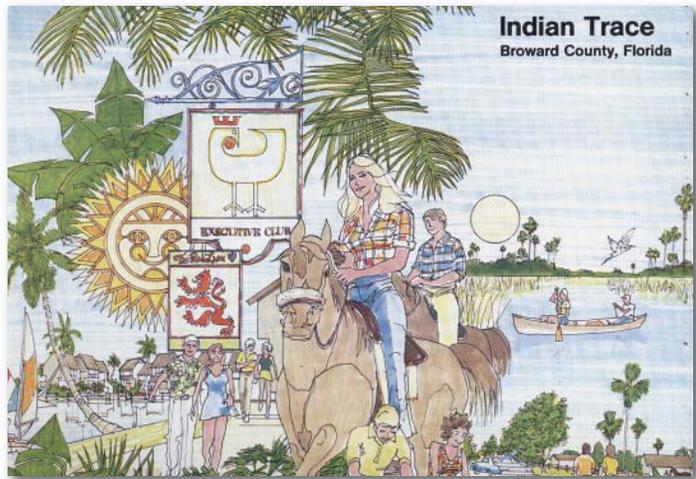
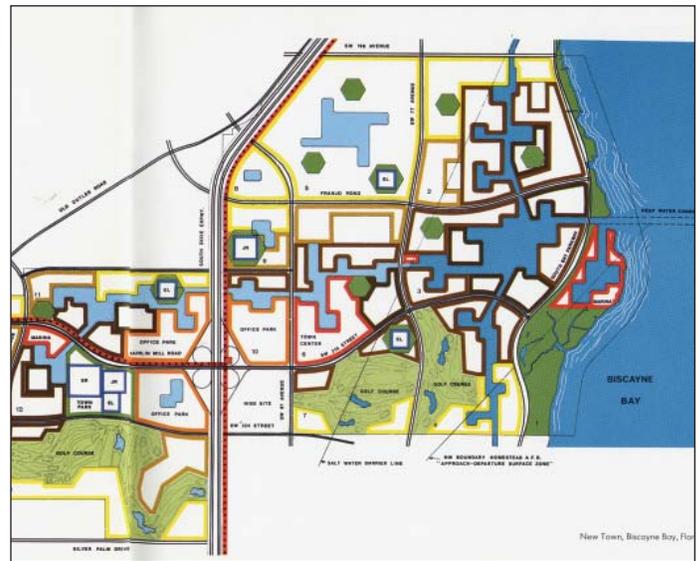
Simonds' long relationship with Bob Graham began in the 1950s when the Collins, Simonds and Simonds firm was hired to plan the Graham family's new town Miami Lakes in Dade County. In this letter, written during Bob Graham's gubernatorial campaign in 1977, Simonds provides the candidate with an assessment of the state's environmental record, and he applauds Graham's conviction that conservation and sound development are mutually supportive. Two years later, Simonds accepted appointment to the Governor's Resource Management Task Force.

In an attached document, entitled "The Care, Protection and Management of the State of Florida," Simonds outlines a complete program for resource conservation and planned development in the state. During the two terms Graham served as Governor (1978-1986), and for many of his years in the U.S. Senate (1986-2004), Simonds served as a friend and advisor to the popular and powerful Florida politician.



the 10,000 acre holding should become the model for large scale land development in Florida. The interdisciplinary planning team was to be supplemented as needed from time to time by scientist advisors to address all environmental concerns and possibilities. [Weston] was to be insofar as possible, 'state of the art'.

The Arvida planning team... spent countless hours/months in conference with various agency heads and staff members seeking to establish acceptable performance standards. In the process...the project [served] as a theoretical testing ground. Much of the current Florida legislation relating to resource and growth management, environmental protection, and comprehensive land planning grew out of these early meetings."



**Weston (Indian Trace), Broward County, Florida**

Above: Indian Trace Master Plan, circa 1978. Simonds described this planned community, developed by the Arvida Corporation, in a lengthy commentary:

"The 'new town' and regional center of Weston (initially known as Indian Trace) was Arvida's major planning endeavor for over seven years --- from the start of studies to development approval.

With Arvida's financial strength, staying power, experience and visionary leadership... it was determined that

**Saga Bay, Dade County, Florida**

In contrast to the successful planned new community of Miami Lakes, Simonds faced disappointment with a second Dade County project, Saga Bay. As Simonds relates:

"At the time of its conceptualizing in 1968-1970, Saga Bay was considered by many... to be "state of the art" in comprehensive community planning and resource management. The best of the landscape features were to be preserved intact – including over two miles of shoreline, tidal estuary, mangrove forest, and over 100 acres of upland recreational open space, exclusive of waterways.

The [town study] featured a voluminous environmental impact analysis that was to become a model for those to follow by mandate from the State. When presented to the County Commission the new town plans bore the favorable recommendation of all department heads. After extensive public hearings they received

Commission commendation and approval. However, plans for construction were yet to be halted.

At the instigation of a local coalition of no-growth, self-styled “environmentalists” the issuance of needed permits was delayed for several years. The period was marked by contentions litigation, suits, injunctions, political pressure, and the whole sorry range of obstructionist tactics. The State and National conservation groups which by all reason should have been the strongest advocates took a hands-off, and sometimes adversarial, position. In the face of so much adverse publicity and such costly delays, the sponsoring group finally abandoned the project and moved away.

The resulting unplanned, unincorporated parcel by parcel development of the Saga tract is just more of disheartening urban sprawl — a tragic loss for Dade County.

### Fisher Island, Dade County, Florida

Fisher Island, a man-made island off the southern tip of Miami Beach, is a private residential community surrounded by Biscayne Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. Once a home to the Vanderbilts and other millionaires, the island was developed as a very exclusive and wealthy community in the 1970s. Simonds and EPD were hired because of their expertise in planning water-oriented communities and regions.

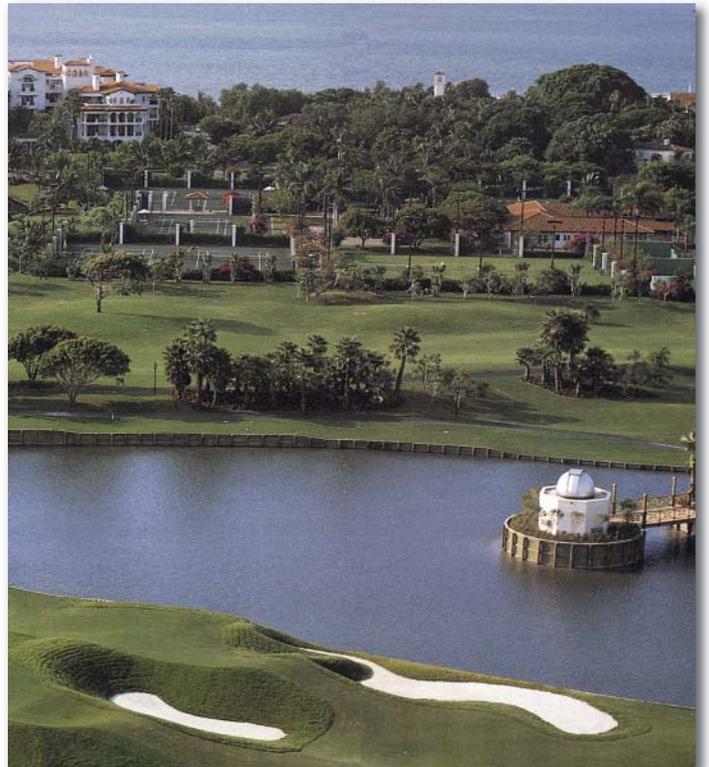
The 216-acre island includes a club, golf course, marina, hotel and resort. It is accessible only by private ferry or by air, as no bridges or roads connect to the island. Development plans for Fisher Island called for a self-contained, limited-growth residential community with its own transit system. With no automobiles on the island and residential parking on the mainland, EPD was able to design open spaces and recreation areas for land that otherwise would have been devoted to streets and parking.



### The PCD Approach

Our approach to all project planning and design — no matter the type or scale — is PCD (Preserve, Conserve, and only then Develop). Preserve, undisturbed, the site's ecological, visual, and historic superlatives, and natural systems. Conserve by sheathing the preservation areas and features with swaths of conservation land devoted to such limited uses (forest management, farmland, parkways, fairways or bicycle paths, etc.) as protect the essential landscape character. Limit development to less sensitive (usually upland) sites between or around conservation bands. Land users will thus view, use and enjoy the best features of the landscape while protecting its quality, productivity and value.

– *Commentary by Simonds*



Fisher Island

## Pelican Bay, Naples, Florida

*"A planned resort-community by the Westinghouse Community Development Corporation, Collier County, Florida. Pelican Bay was the first large scale community to be planned in SW Florida under the evolving coastal protection code (then undefined). It also introduced the application of "PUD" [Planned Unit Development] planning procedures, and the "TDR", or the transfer of development rights. After a review by a team of experts under the sponsorship of the Urban Land Institute it was cited as a "model of environmentally sound community planning." In its four year planning process... it functioned as innovator and catalyst. A primary plan feature was the preservation and protection of the dunes and tidal estuarine system.*

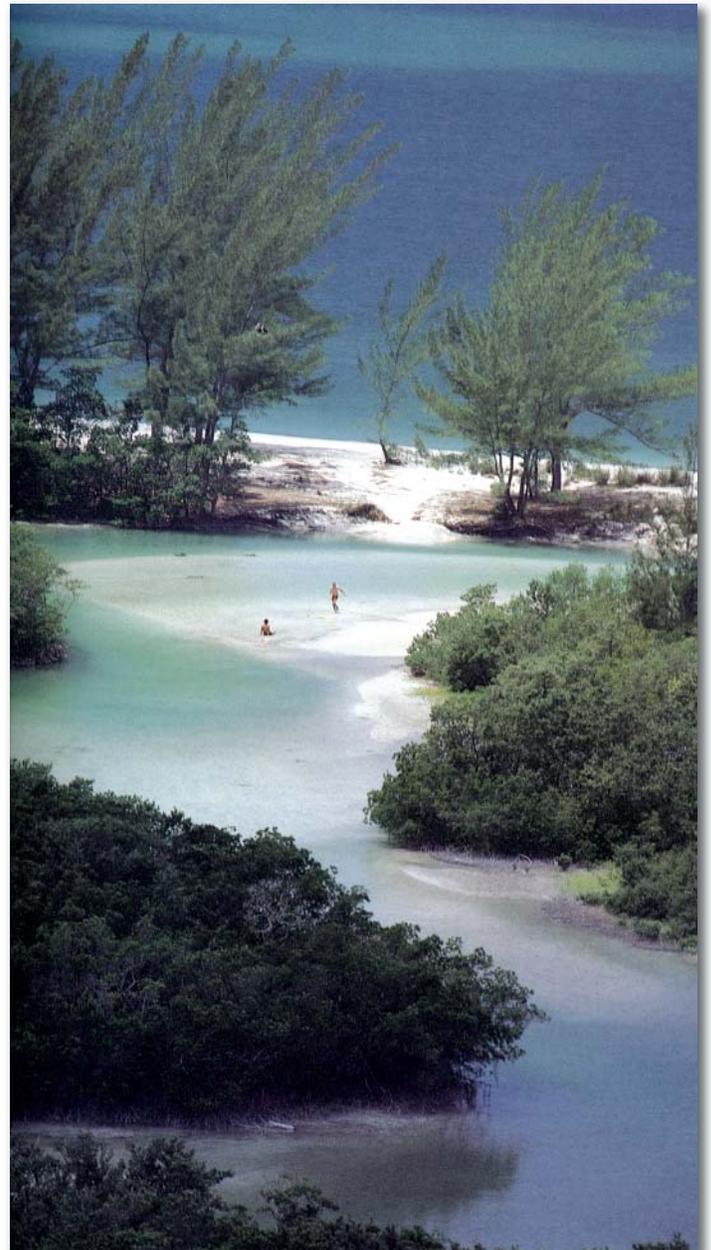
*– Commentary by Simonds*

Planned by Simonds with Charles Turner and landscape architect, J. Roland Lieber, this 2,100-acre mixed-use community includes a 570-acre conservation area of mangrove forests and a 3-mile tidal estuary on the Gulf of Mexico. The master plan preserves the ecology of the region while promoting the enjoyment of its natural resources. To preserve the mangrove forests, housing is set 2000 feet back from the beach with elevated boardwalks over the conservation area to provide beach access for residents. In addition to single- and multi-family housing, the community consists of office and commercial space, a golf course, parks, beaches, wetlands, and cultural and civic facilities. Planning and construction began in the 1970s, and development continued into the 1990s. Pelican Bay was awarded the New Community Development Award for Excellence by the Urban Land Institute, 1995.



Above: Aerial photograph of Pelican Bay (circa late-1980s). The community is separated from the Gulf of Mexico (on the left side of the photo) by a wide conservation area.

Right: Promotional brochure focusing on the environmental aspects of the community.





## Service

### Service to the Profession: The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA)

In addition to his contributions to the profession as practitioner, author and educator, Simonds also was an influential figure in landscape architecture for several decades through his service to the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA). He served as President of the society from 1963-1965, Vice-President from 1959-1963, and chaired and served on numerous committees for the organization.

*"...my circuit-riding minister father once told me, 'The important thing is to leave the world a better place because you've traveled through.' In trying, I've come to believe that no other profession affords a better opportunity than that of landscape architecture."*

– Simonds

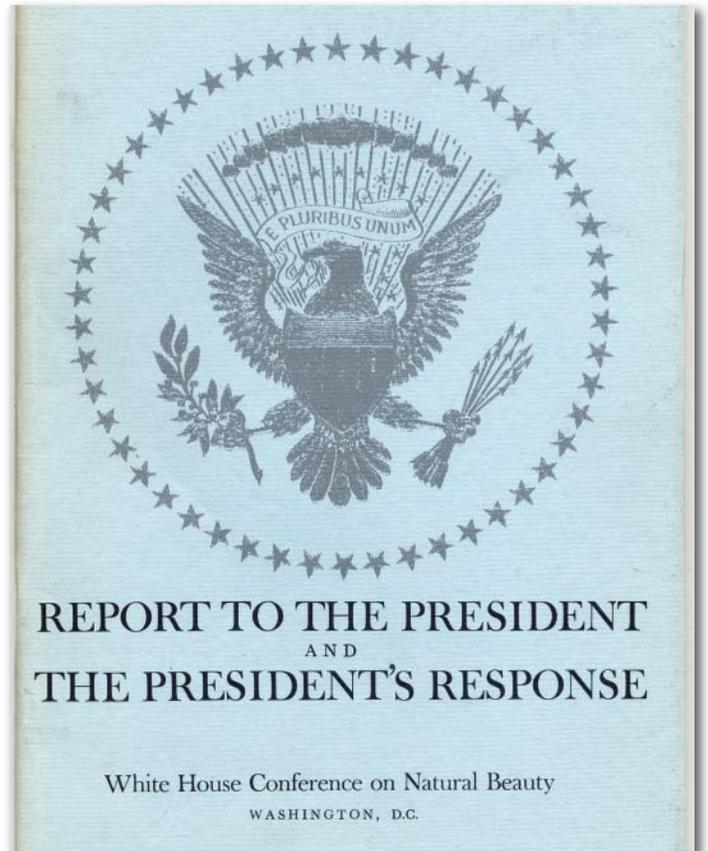


The ASLA Medal awarded to Simonds in 1973. This is one of the highest honors in landscape architecture.

ASLA honored Simonds again in 1999 with a unique recognition of his numerous contributions to the profession, the ASLA President's Centennial Medal.

### Service to the Nation

Simonds' national activities included service on the White House Conference on Natural Beauty (1965), the Highway Beautification Commission (1965-1966), the Federal Highway Administration's Board of Urban Advisors (1966-1968), and the President's Task Force on Resources and the Environment (1968-1970).



### Stewards of the Landscape

Many years ago renowned teacher, Stanley White, coined the phrase, "Stewards of the landscape." That, I believe is what we truly are --- and what it is hoped we may always be.

– Simonds

"One plans not places, or spaces or things - one plans experiences. The places, spaces, and things take their forms from the planned experience."

– Simonds, *Landscape Architecture* (1961), p. 225

### International Service

Simonds' service to the profession did not end in North America. He was a longtime supporter of and participant in the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA). He was a fellow of the Royal Academy of Design (London), and served as visiting lecturer or consultant in Columbia, Korea, and numerous other countries.

"...let it be proposed that over the past 100 years no single group of professionals has done more, or as much, to protect our living landscape and give it meaningful form. Nor does any group hold forth such promise for the creation of a more desirable living environment in the years ahead."

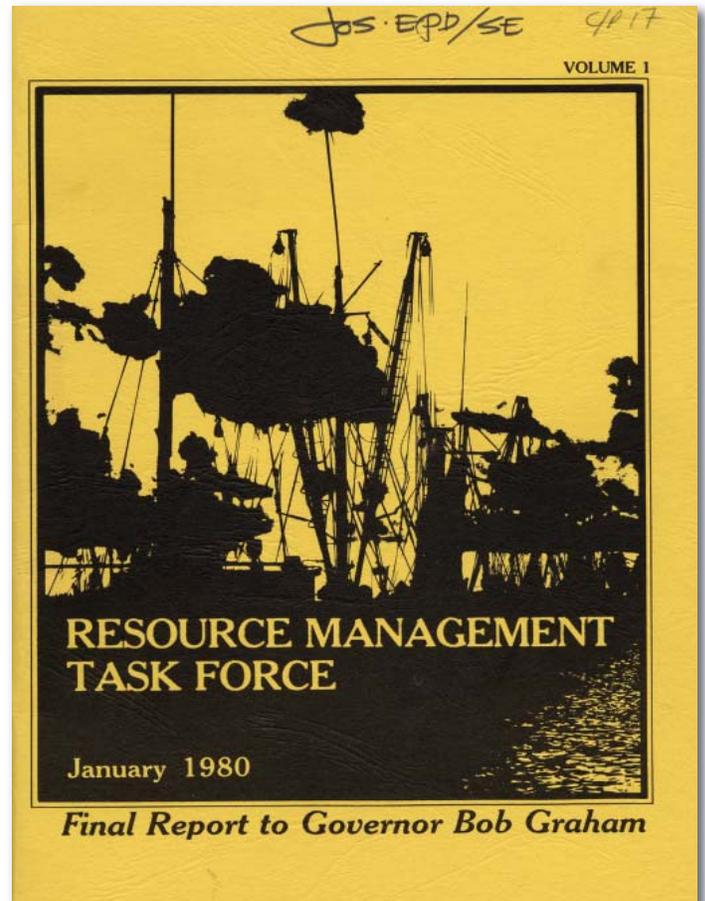
– Simonds

"The design approach then is not essentially a search for form, not primarily an application of principles. The true design approach stems from the realization that a plan has meaning only to man, for whom it is planned, and only to the degree to which it brings facility, accommodation, and delight to his senses, and inspiration to his mind and to his soul. It is a creation of optimum relationship resulting in a total experience."

– Simonds, *Landscape Architecture* (1961), p. 226

### Service to the State of Florida

Simonds' interest in Florida began in the 1950s when the firm of Collins, Simonds & Simonds designed the new town Miami Lakes for the Graham family in Dade County. Realizing that the region's growth would be rapid in the latter half of the 20th Century, he and his partners opened an office in Miami Lakes, from which they could undertake new communities and large-scale planning. With Bob Graham in public office for several years, first as a state legislator and later as a two-term Governor, Simonds was able to advise him on land use, planning, and environmental issues.



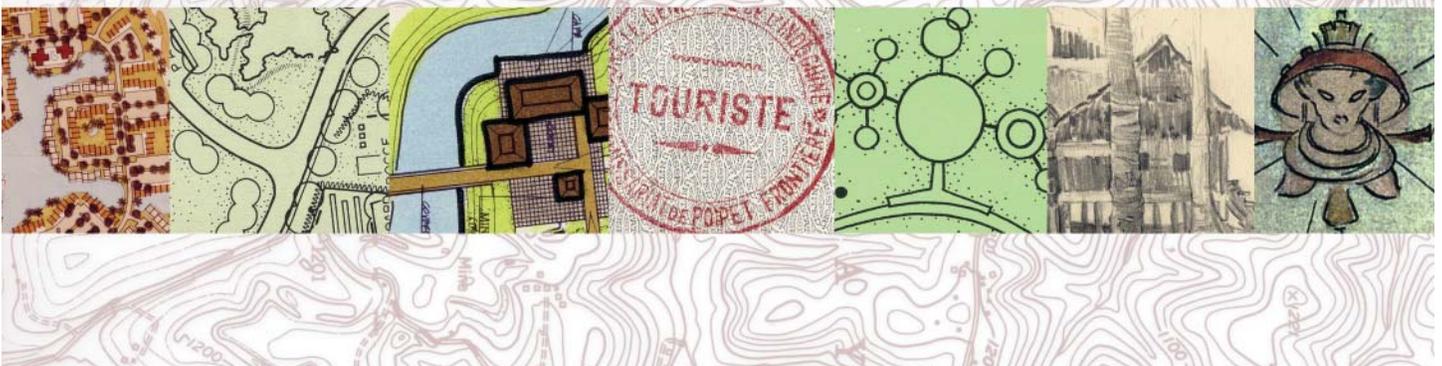
Final Report to Governor Bob Graham of the Governor's Resource Management Task Force. Volume I – Recommendations. January 1980. Simonds served as a member of the Task Force, which was appointed in 1979 to make recommendations for improving the management of Florida's natural resources.

# John Ormsbee Simonds Remembered

## Visionary Landscape Architect, Planner, Educator, and Environmentalist (1913-2005)

"Plan not in terms of meaningless pattern or cold form. Plan, rather, a human experience. The living, pulsing, vital experience, if conceived as a diagram of harmonious relationships, will develop its own expressive forms."

– Simonds, *Landscape Architecture* (1961),  
p. 229





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