

In October 1881, the Kessler family returned to New York. From January 1882 through March, Kessler sent four letters to Frederick Law Olmsted. The January 22nd letter is the first record of his attempt to begin work in the United States. In the letter Kessler wrote of his studies and travel in Europe and wondered about an arboretum job at the Boston (Arnold Arboretum). In the February 15th letter, Kessler wrote that he was “certain of a situation in Central Park” and of an offer of a partnership with a florist in Woodlawn. “Since November”, Kessler wrote, “I have been in the employ of A. LeMoult 172 and 174 Bowery, having charge of his greenhouse, seed and grass stock. Decoration of concert halls were also mostly in my care.” Kessler also sent drawings.

Olmsted responded in March and urged Kessler “to be ambitious to be master in higher fields” than pleasure grounds and home gardens. Also Olmsted encouraged Kessler to educate himself about nature through reading, reflection and excursions and to aim to free himself from German associations in order to expand his capabilities and to not limit his influence and opportunities. A recommended list of books to read was included. Olmsted concluded by writing that the Kansas City, Fort Scott, and Gulf Railway Company might be in need of a man to take charge of a public picnic or excursion ground. He told Kessler that the President, H.H. Hunniwell, would be in New York and that Olmsted had given him Kessler’s address.

On March 18th, Kessler provided additional information on his work in the Bowery and wrote that if he stayed with LeMoult, he would receive fifteen dollars a week. The last letter to Olmsted on March 23rd stated that Kessler was taking a Merriam Park, Johnson County, Kansas, position with the railroad at a salary of forty dollars per month. The work was to design and supervise the construction of the railroad’s pleasure park.

Merriam Park was located ten miles southwest of Kansas City, Missouri. Kessler along with his mother and sister moved to a house on John Mastin’s Johnson County farm. Besides working on the park, Kessler served as caretaker of the farm property.

Although [Merriam Park](#) had been dedicated in 1880, when Kessler arrived there was only one building intended for visitors, a square dance floor, and nearly all the valuable trees had been cut down for cordwood. Less than two years after Kessler started the park was a great success. The park had been enclosed with a fence and the main entrance was an ornamental archway. [Features](#) included an open-air shelter for large public gatherings, wild animal exhibits, picnic grounds, Pavilion, lake, tennis courts, croquet grounds, horse drawn merry-go-round, numerous swings, and a baseball diamond. The cost to enter the park was 25 cents and the park attracted more than 20,000 visitors per day. A detailed description of the park before and after Kessler may be found in [Landscape of the American Renaissance: The Life and Work of George Edward Kessler](#)

Kessler maintained a nursery on the park filled with a large variety of trees and shrubs, was responsible for sales from the park’s icehouse, and arranged excursions to the park. His work

for the railroad was not confined to Merriam Park, for he had charge of the trees and shrubs around all Kansas City, Fort Scott, and Gulf (later "and Memphis") railroad stations in the area. He also planted and supervised 1,500-acres in two experimental tree farms at Farlington, Kansas, which produced railroad ties and telegraph poles. He probably laid out and landscaped a residential development the railroad opened near the park in 1886.

These activities would have satiated most men, but Kessler opened an office in Kansas City and went looking for more work. His next biggest commission was landscaping a rugged hollow—Hyde Park.

Source:

Culbertson, Kurt, 2005. [Landscape of the American Renaissance: The Life and Work of George Edward Kessler](#)