

**Redevelopment Proposal  
for  
Galt Gardens Park,  
Lethbridge, Alberta.**

by  
Michael Beresnak

A Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE**

Department of Landscape Architecture  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba.

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GALT GARDENS PARK,  
LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA

BY

MICHAEL BERESNAK

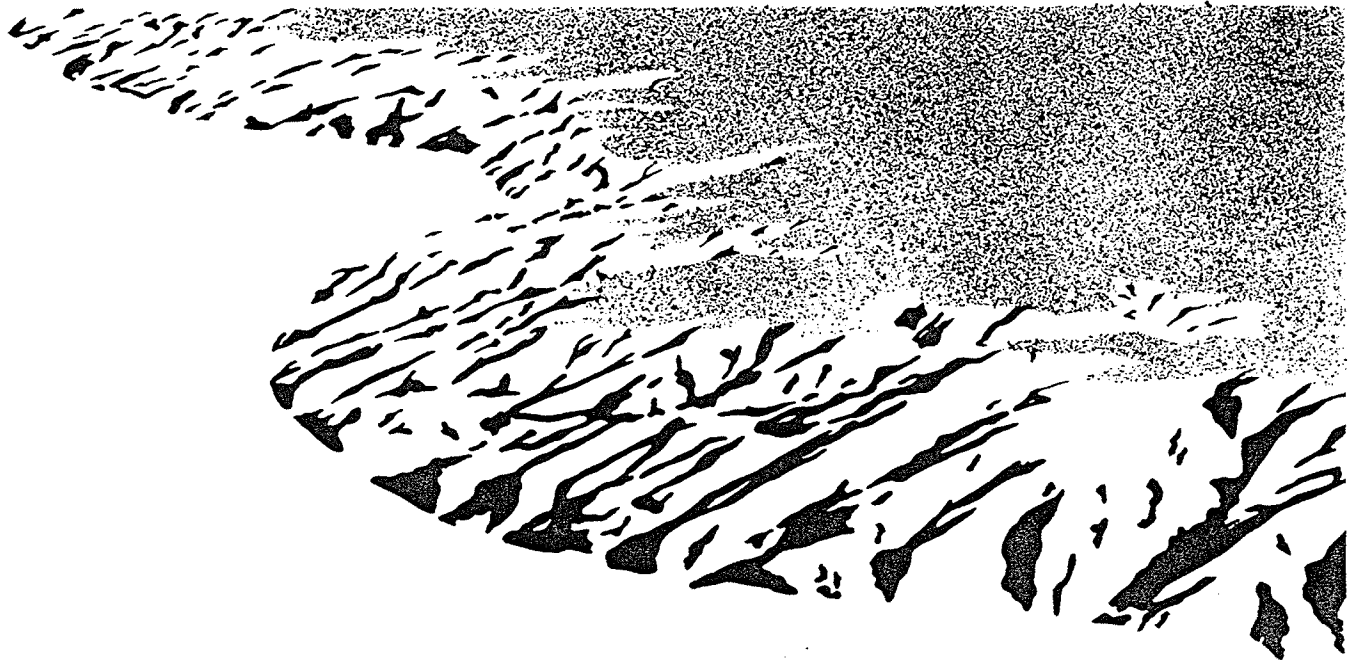
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To family and friends, too numerous to mention, for their continual encouragement throughout my studies.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to my mother Margaret and my late father Frank for their unconditional support and patience. It is to you that this practicum is dedicated.

And from my neck so free  
The Albatross fell off and sank  
Like lead into the sea.

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## 1.0 Introduction

"The process of dwelling, an irreducible fact of every culture, is an aesthetic act, entailing being and doing, a correspondence between nature and culture. Through cultivation and construction, individuals and societies forge a place within nature that reflects their own identities-their needs, values and dreams." (Spirn, 1989, 89.)

Galt Gardens Park is a significant element in the development of Lethbridge. From its establishment as an open space in 1885 through to the mid 1930s, its formal structure represented a correspondence between society and nature, expressing the notion of man's dominion over nature. Since that time, however, both its form and its symbolic meaning have changed significantly, and through default, the park has become merely a remnant of the past.

The objective of this redevelopment proposal is to re-establish the form of Galt Gardens Park as a symbol of society's relationship with nature. This will be accomplished in two steps:

1. Evaluate how the park evolved from a symbol of society's relationship with nature to becoming merely a remnant of the past.
2. Reinterpret the relationship between society and nature and reflect this relationship within the form of the park.

## **2.0 Historical Development**

### **2.1 The park as a symbol of society's relationship with nature.**

The establishment of Galt Gardens Park is linked directly with the establishment of the town of Lethbridge itself. From their very beginning, both the town and the park reflected the correspondence between society and nature.

The town of Lethbridge was established in 1885 by Sir Alexander Galt and his son Elliot as part of a comprehensive development scheme that they envisioned for southern Alberta. Prior to this date the Galts had been operating a coal mine in the region for three years and had just expanded their operations to include a railway company and a land holding company. Their layout for this new town was in anticipation of the area growing rapidly as an industrial coal town and supplier of goods and services to the on coming settlers. While the motivation for this development was unclear - being split between a desire to establish Canadian claim over this region and a desire for personal financial gain - the methods that were used were clearly of an industrial mentality.

"Galt was not interested in the preservation of wildlife nor in the conservation of the grasslands for their own intrinsic worth. As a believer in man's mastery over nature, he considered resources to be valuable only when utilized. The wilderness had to be made productive. He envisioned a beehive of human activity: cowboys herding cattle on the range, farmers cultivating the soil, loggers cutting timber in the foothills, and miners excavating coal."  
(den Otter, 1982, 6)

This was a vision of industry and commerce, and, in anticipation of the rapid growth of the area, the Galts laid out a plan for the city that was both efficient and economical.

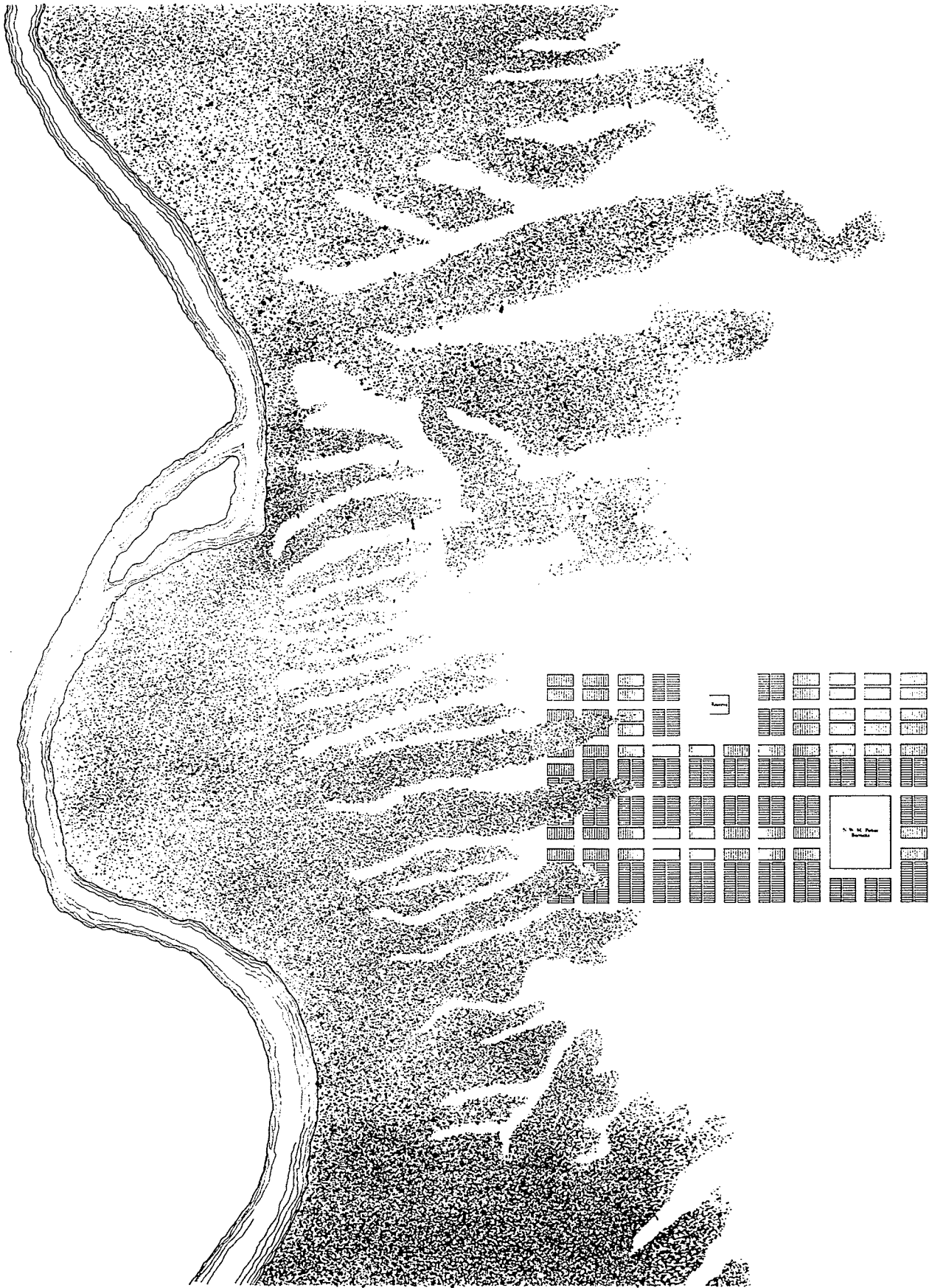
The original plan of the city was an orthogonal grid, five by eleven blocks, imposed upon the prairie level, adjacent to the Belly River valley.

Grid plans were typical during this period in that they provided a way to instantly established order within the environment, but this plan had some unique qualities. Set within the grid was a 10 acre parcel of land, to be "a park and a playground - a breathing space - for the city that Elliot Galt and his father were convinced would one day surround it."(Johnston, 1988, 3) This open space was to become Galt Gardens Park.

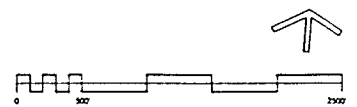
When it was originally surveyed, the open space was separated into two parts: the outside boundaries measuring 650' x 650'; and the central reserve 200' x 200' set in the middle. One purpose for the reserve seemed to be to impose additional controls on the use of the property as separate titles were issued for each portion, but in 1885 the Galts gave no indication of how this open space should be developed.(Johnston, 1988, 3)

Another unique feature of the proposed town was a result of how the plan was imposed upon the land. When the town was laid out, the western edge of the grid was positioned over the coulee embankments that led to the river valley. Initially, this had no effect on the town, as development was concentrated around the open space, but as the town grew, this first street of the plan had to be abandoned because it was impossible to build upon.

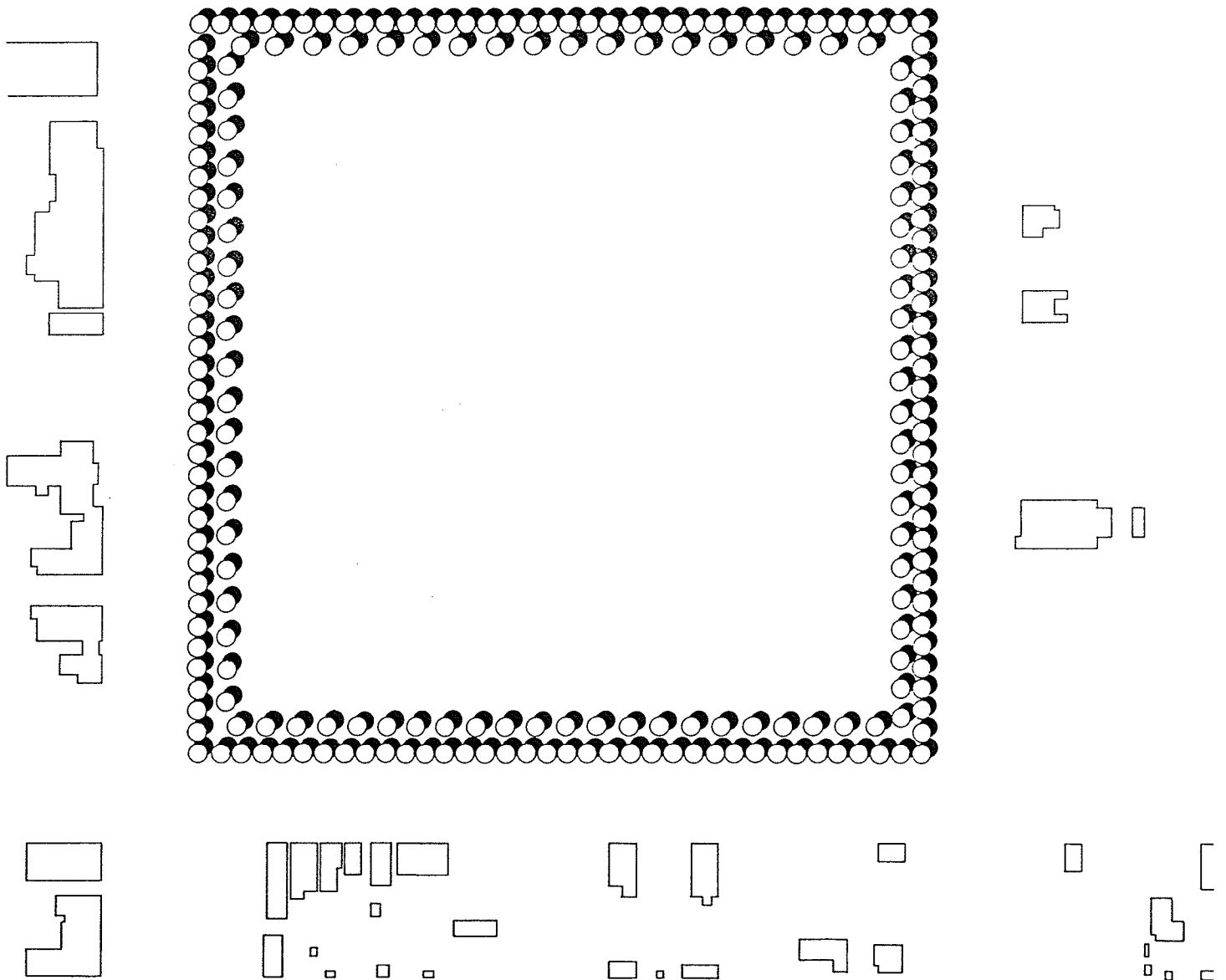
At this initial stage in its development, both the town and the open space reflected the same optimistic vision of the future. The grid layout of the city was in anticipation of the rapid growth of an industrial coal town, and the layout of the park prepared for the future needs of its citizens. But aside from this vision of growth, the layout of the town reflected the correspondence between society and nature. Nature was an object to be exploited; an obstacle to be overcome, and this belief was transformed into the layout of the city - geometry in the wilderness; man's order within the natural environment.



Original Survey of  
Lethbridge • 1885



In its first few years, the park developed without any specific strategy, being used for everything from a parking lot for carriages and wagons, to a baseball field and a circus site. The most significant development came shortly after the introduction of irrigation to the city in 1900. Until this point, there was a reluctance to plant any trees, but with a reliable source of water, the citizens collaborated to plant a double row of trees around the periphery of the park.



The Square • ca. 1901



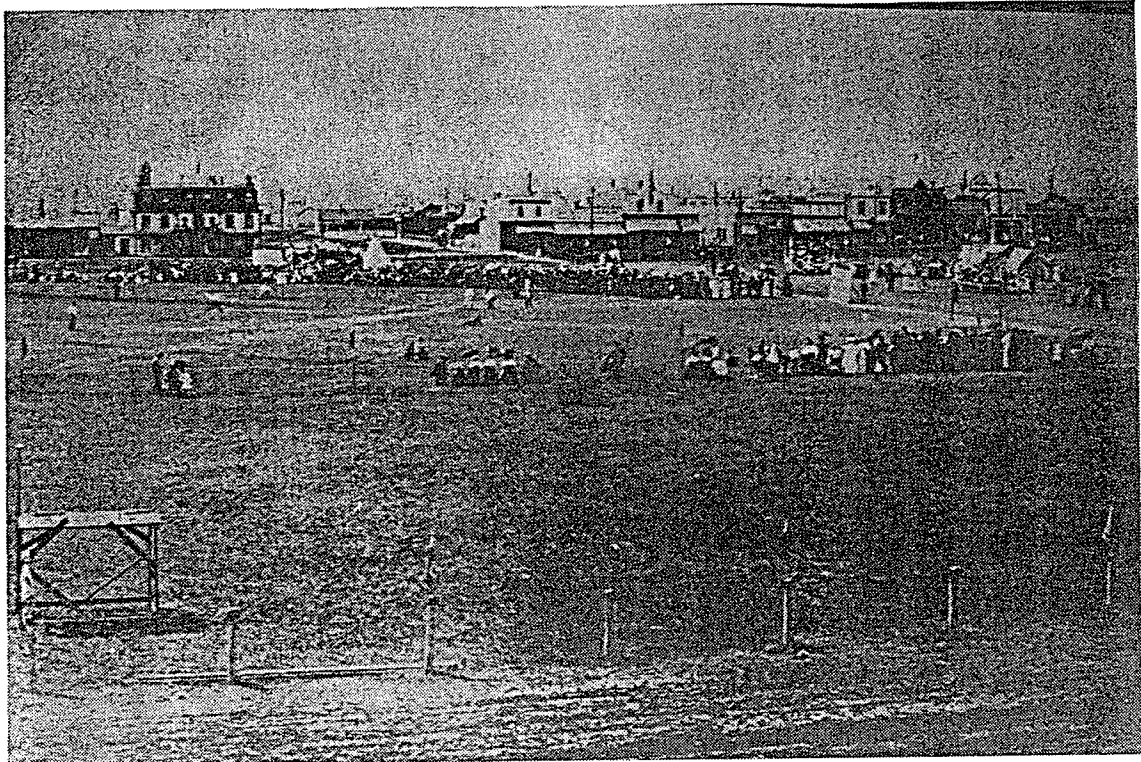


Figure 1: A baseball game in The Square (now Galt Gardens Park) ca. 1895. (Courtesy of The Sir Alexander Galt Museum / Archives)



Figure 2: A large public gathering in The Square (now Galt Gardens Park) ca. 1910. (Courtesy of The Sir Alexander Galt Museum / Archives)

The first comprehensive design of the park was established in 1911 by William Harmon Fairfield, superintendent of the Lethbridge Research Station. It was a formal, rational design that articulated the 200' central reserve established by Galt. The central reserve was preserved as a distinct area within the park, its surface raised approximately 18" with a concrete retaining wall. Within it, there was a wide circular walkway, containing benches, flower beds and shrubs along the perimeter. Around the central reserve was a double row of walkways, with seven paths leading out towards the perimeter of the park; one leading to each corner, plus three along the cardinal points towards the east, west and south. Along the north axis was the park's only structure, a combination of a publicity building on the main floor, with a bandstand on the second level.

Elsewhere in the park, the layout of trees, shrubs and flower beds reinforced the formal ordered quality of the design.

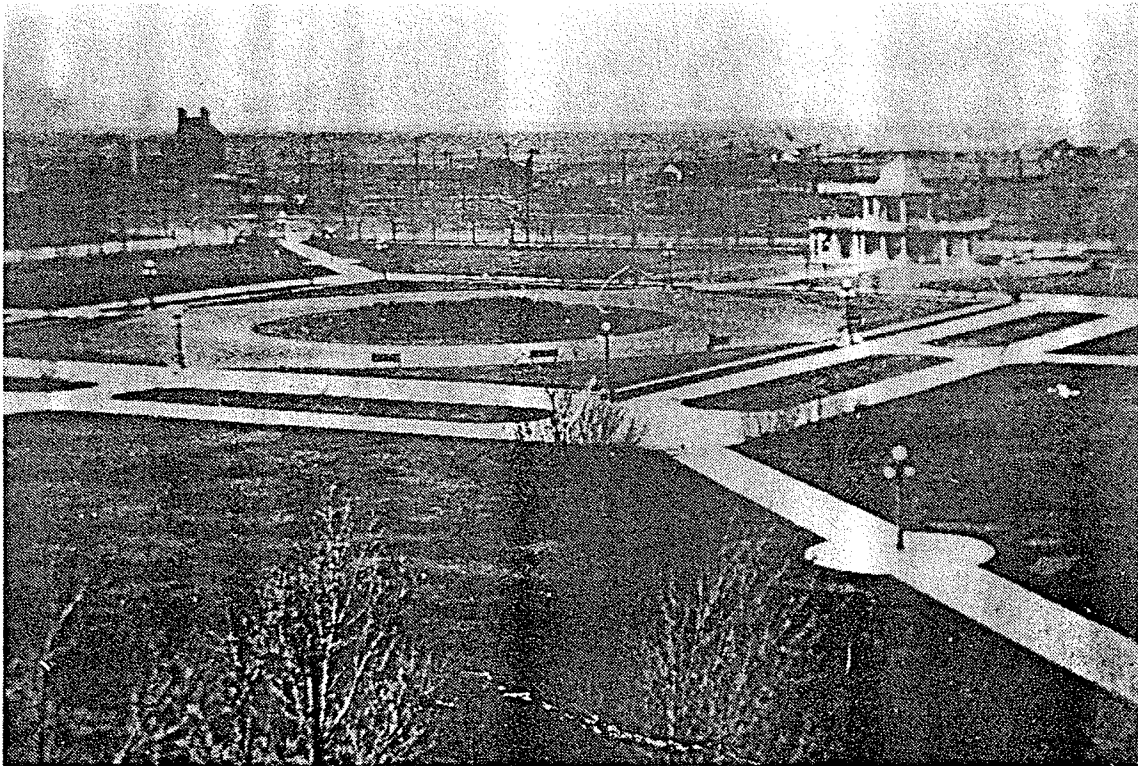


Figure 3: Galt Gardens Park: The establishment of the formal design. ca 1912. (Courtesy of The Sir Alexander Galt Museum / Archives)



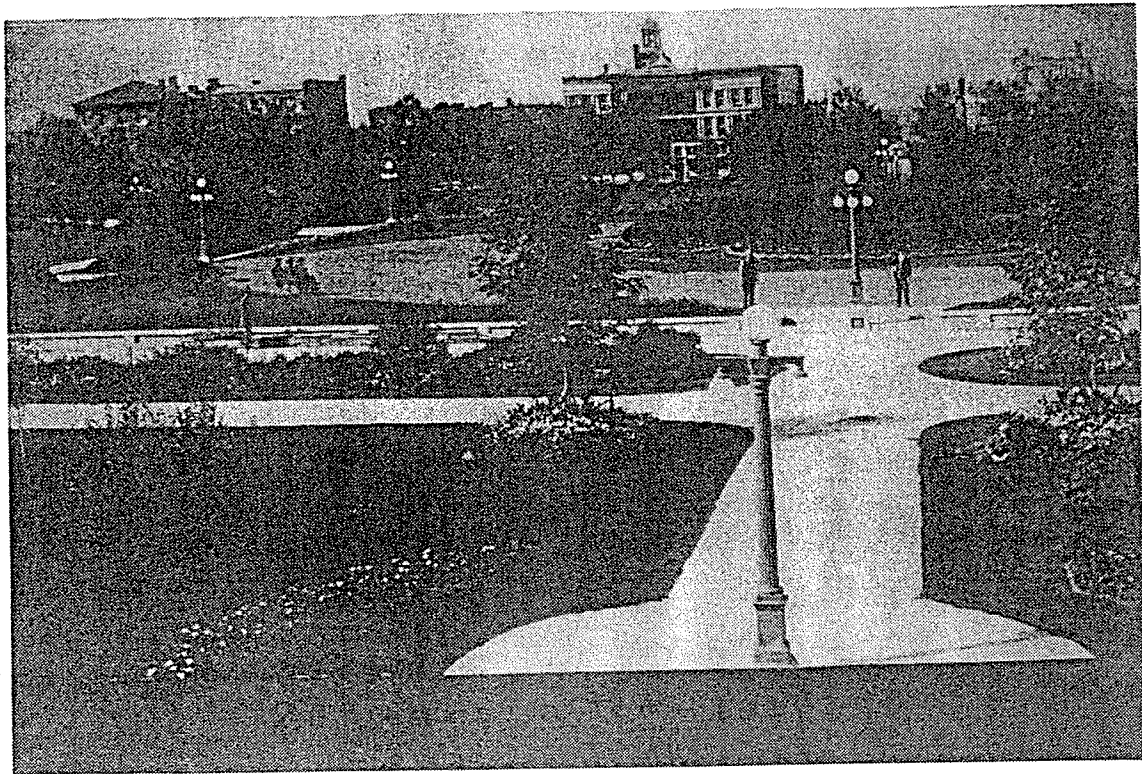


Figure 4: Galt Gardens Park: The development of the formal garden, ca. 1917. (Courtesy of The Sir Alexander Galt Museum / Archives)



Figure 5: Galt Gardens Park: The development of the formal garden, ca 1916-1920. (Courtesy of The Sir Alexander Galt Museum / Archives)

Added to Fairfield's plan during this period were two prominent architectural elements. The first element was the public library (funded by the Carnegie Foundation), which was opened in 1921; the second was the Cenotaph, in memory of those who fell during the First World War, which was dedicated in 1931. The library was positioned along the south end of the park's central axis, acting as a terminus to 5 street, while the Cenotaph was located within the central, raised part of the park, and like the library, was positioned along the park's central axis.

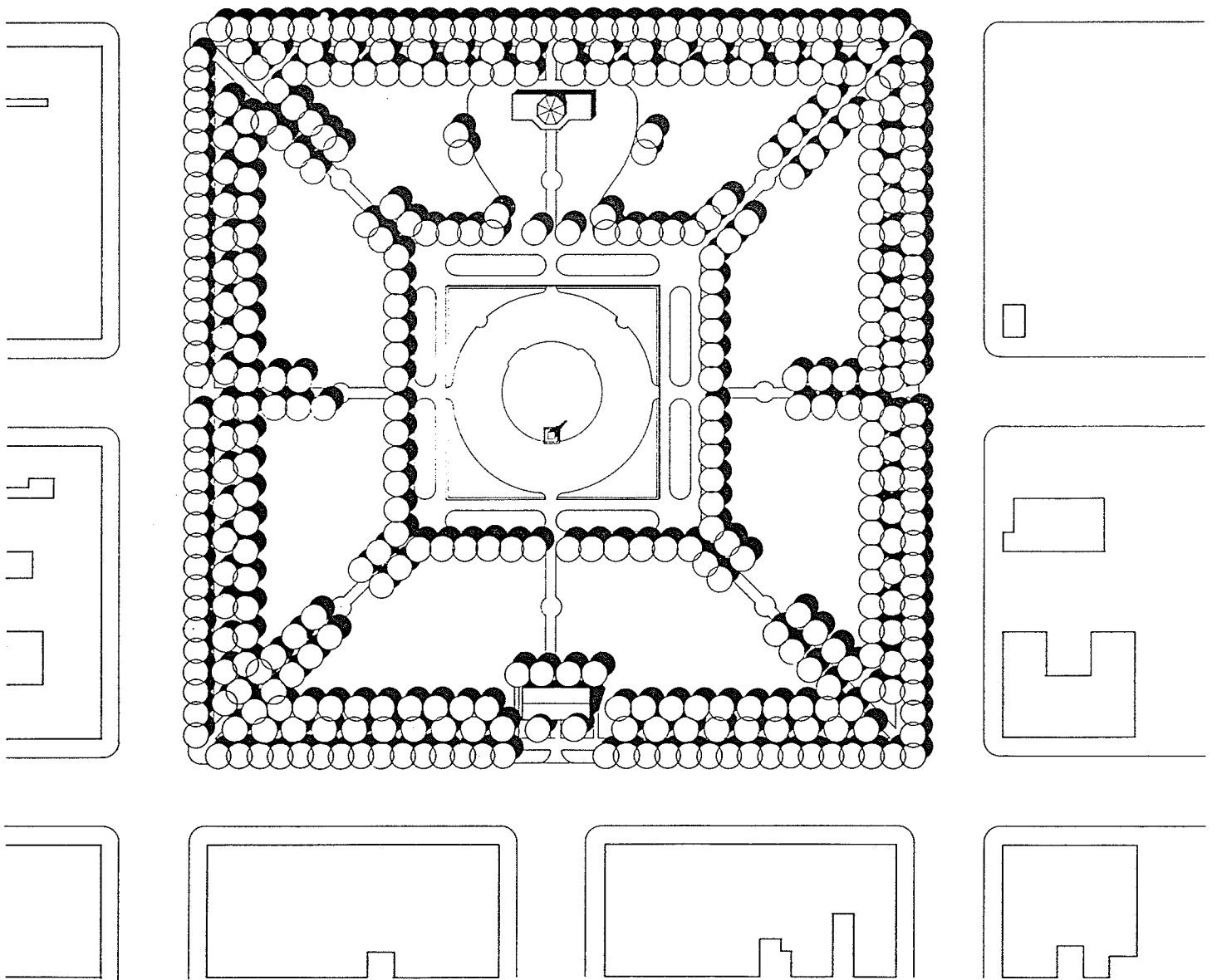
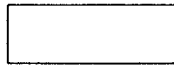


Figure 6: An aerial view of Galt Gardens Park. ca 1930. (Courtesy of The Sir Alexander Galt Museum / Archives)

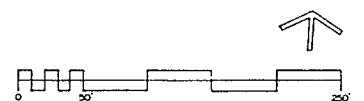
The attention and care that was given towards the park during this period did more than simply create a welcome contrast to the dry prairie environment; it was a continuation of the correspondence between society and nature that had its foundations in the original layout of the city. For just as the grid layout of the town established man's order within the environment, the formal design of Galt Gardens was a reflection of man's dominion over nature. While our contemporary society may question this attitude towards nature, it was, nonetheless, instrumental in the development of Southern Alberta.

When the formal design of the park was established the town of Lethbridge was still an anomaly on the prairies. The town may have been linked to the rest of the world by the railroad, but it was nonetheless on its own in the wilderness. And while Fairfield's design contrasted with the prairie environment, expressing the notion of man's dominion over nature, it did so in a way that reflected the needs, values and dreams of the society. It was a symbol of the society; expressing man's order, by establishing geometry in the wilderness; man's dominion over nature, in the ability to grow trees where none had grown before; society's cultural heritage, through a rational ordered, symmetrical layout; and the hopes and aspirations of the future, by showing the citizens what was possible within this region.

All of these concepts were valuable in the early years of Southern Alberta's development, for while this region offered the on coming settlers an opportunity for a better life, there were no guarantees of success. Life was very much a struggle for existence, and often an individual struggle against nature. In contrast to this struggle, the formal design of Galt Gardens symbolized that, not only was survival possible, but prosperity as well.



Galt Gardens • ca. 1930



## 2.2 The park as a remnant of the past.

The park maintained its high profile within the city for a number of years, but at the outset of World War II, both the form, and the public's perception of it began to change. This started with the physical deterioration of the park. With the shortage of manpower between 1939 and 1945, Galt Gardens Park, like all the other parks in the city, was neglected. And even though the park remained a significant element within the city, it did not achieve the high level of detail and care that had been established in the late twenties and early thirties.

Following the war, the public's relationship with the park began to change. This started when the central business district shifted away from the park's perimeter, isolating it from the daily activity of the city. Compounding this isolation was the public's perception that the park had become a hangout for drunks and idlers.

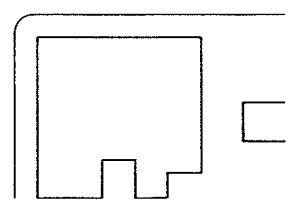
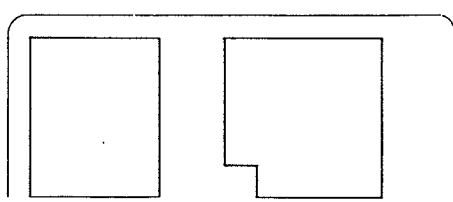
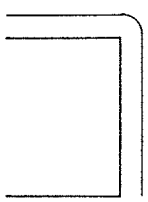
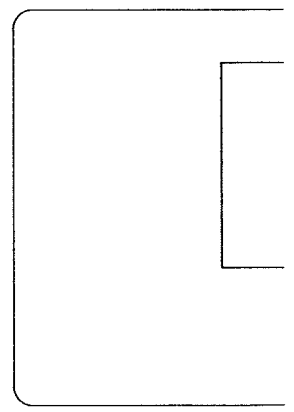
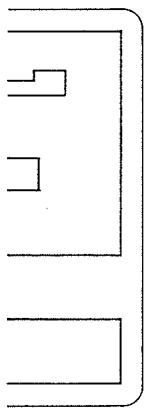
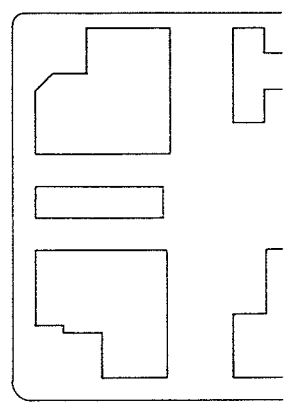
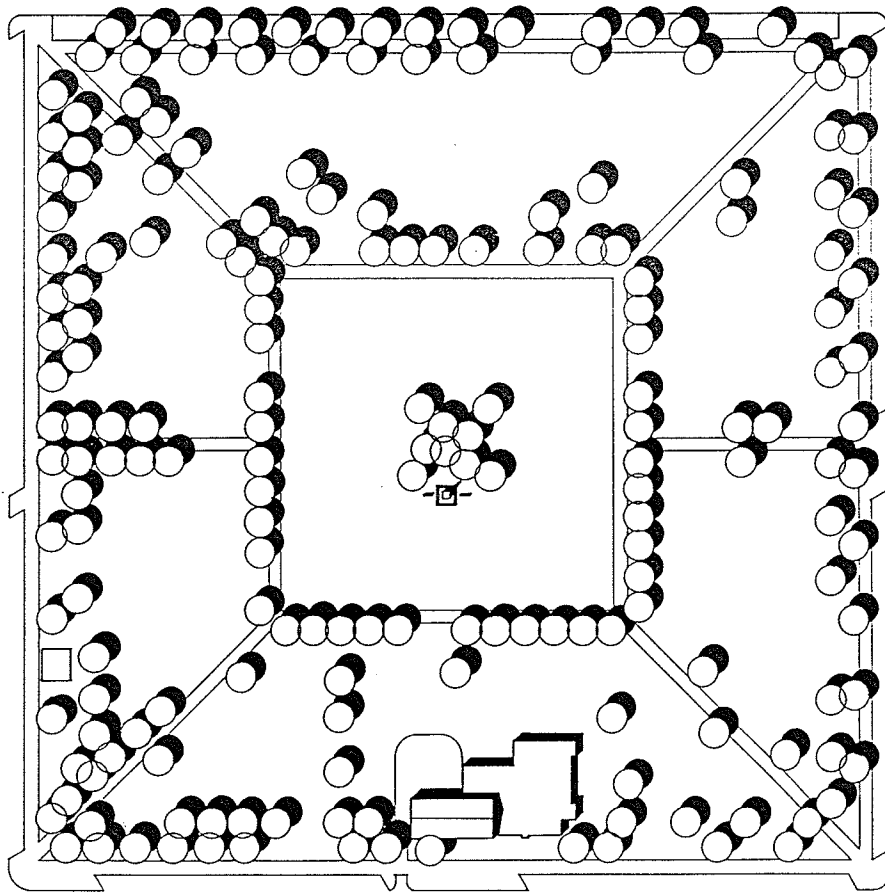
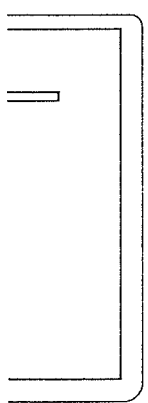
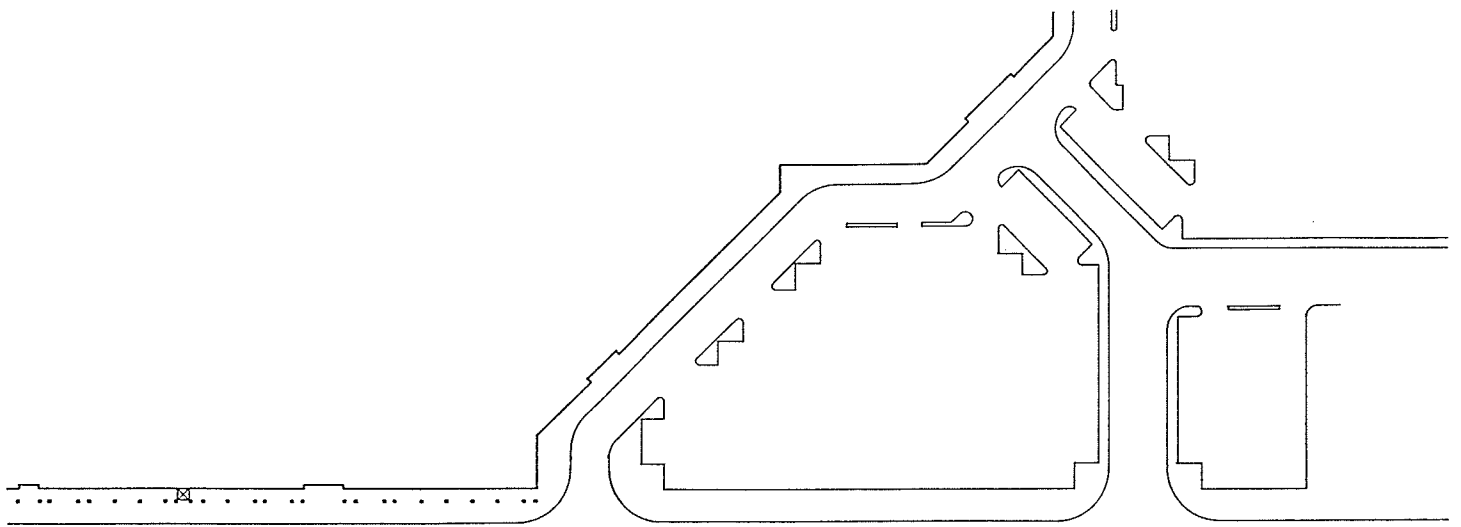
These events were subtle and took place over a twenty year period, but they marked a general shift in the public's attitude towards the park. And while minor work was carried out on the park during this period, it was merely in the form of additions that did not significantly alter the public's perception of it. This work included the construction of a comfort station (washrooms) in 1945, built in southwest area of the park; an expansion to the library in 1951 (the library has since vacated the building and it is now occupied by the Southern Alberta Art Gallery); and the installation of a steam engine at the site of the board of trade building (in 1987, it too was removed from the park).

While the initial stage of the park's decline resulted in a reduction in maintenance, what followed was removal of much of the park's formal structure. In 1956, caragana hedges were removed from around the park, being replaced with Kentucky bluegrass lawn. This action began as an attempt to clear much of the underbrush, which caught blowing paper and other debris, but it also enabled a clear view across the park, allowing the police to monitor the park from the street. Following this, in the late 1950s, the raised section of the park, on the original central reserve, was removed along with much of the original walkways.

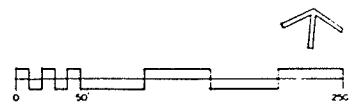
What remains in the park today is a pale reminder of its former grandeur, with only remnants of the original walkway, most of the original trees, and a number of architectural elements surviving. Through deterioration and neglect, the park lost its symbolic relevance to society and

became a collection of historical artifacts reflecting the city's cultural heritage.

This loss of the park's symbolic relevance coincides with the changes that occurred in the relationship between society and nature; the change from society's struggle against nature for existence, to one in which society now dominates nature. This is evident in our society's influence upon the land. Where the grid pattern of Lethbridge was once an anomaly in the prairies, our society has since spread across the entire region to the extent that the natural environment is now the anomaly within the prairie grid. With this prosperity, the notion of man's dominion over nature changed from a vision of the future, to the point that today, it is a fact. As a result, the park lost its symbolic meaning as a vision of the future, and became instead, an expression of an original vision no longer relevant to the contemporary society.



Galt Gardens Park • ca. 1990



### 3.0 Concept

By reflecting the notion of *man's dominion over nature* the formal design of Galt Gardens established a clear separation of man from nature. This separation viewed the rational order of man as superior to the random order of nature. It put no value on nature unless its resources were being exploited by man; for his own use or his own pleasure. It was the notion of order and control that laid the foundation of the formal design of the park; man's order was manifested in the rational, symmetrical design, and the control of nature was reflected by the establishment of trees where none had grown before.

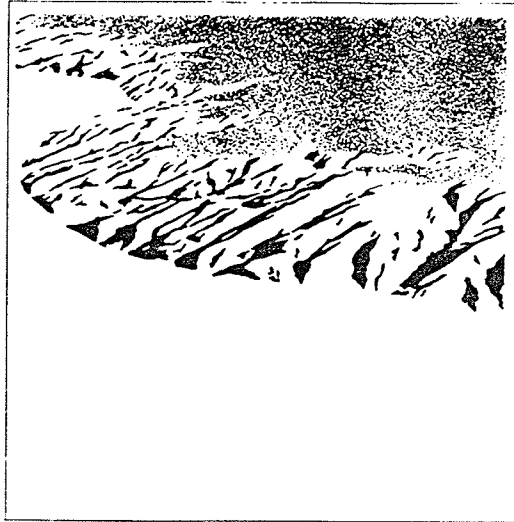
While the notion of *man's dominion over nature* can be credited with the successful establishment of our society, its continued use is coming into question. Global environmental problems are making us aware that our disregard for nature is not without its consequences. We may benefit from the exploitation of nature, but we are in turn jeopardizing our own future. As a result, our society is becoming aware that we are not separate from nature, but a part of it; both responding to and influencing the physical environment. It is this emerging notion of *society within nature* that is the basis of the redevelopment of Galt Gardens.

The notion of *society within nature* views the physical environment not as the product of man's rational order, but as a complex mosaic of natural processes and cultural patterns. In the Lethbridge region, this mosaic is a confrontation between nature and society, with the coulee erosion forms juxtaposing the geometry of agricultural patterns. While the formal design expressed man's order at the expense of nature, the proposed design will draw from the geological and cultural features of the Lethbridge region and express this relationship within the existing structure of the park.





Figure 7: Society within the environment (Aerial photograph of Lethbridge). ca 1970.

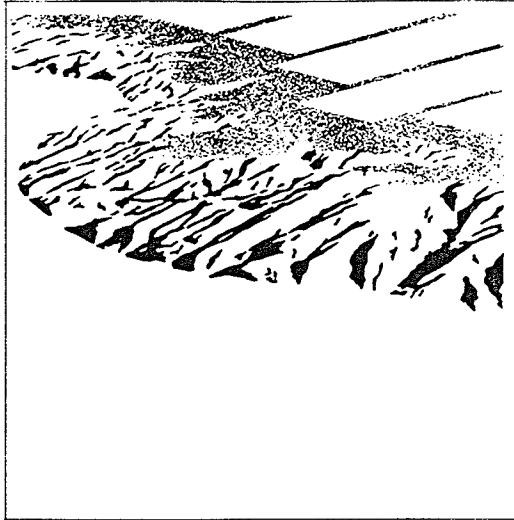


## CONCEPT

Geological  
Feature:

Coulee  
Erosion  
Patterns

One of the most striking features of the Lethbridge region is the Old Man River valley and the coulee erosion patterns that cut through the prairies. Standing in stark contrast with the prairie environment, its edge marks the transition between the prairie level and the river valley below. Aside from its physical contrast though, the coulee erosion patterns have a historical significance in the cultural development of the area. It was along its embankments that coal deposits were discovered, which led to the establishment of Lethbridge, and it was at the coulee's edge that the city was located. Yet, in spite of its prominence in the landscape and its relationship to the foundation of the city, these physical features have essentially been ignored.

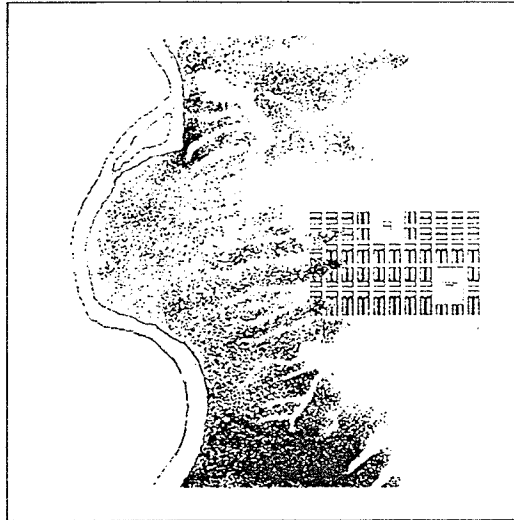


## CONCEPT

Cultural  
Feature:

Agricultural  
Patterns

From the time Sir Alexander Galt opened this part of the country up for settlement, the regional landscape around Lethbridge has changed from one in which the natural forces dominated, to the point that today, the cultural patterns of society have taken over. Where the natural environment has survived is within the coulees, and it is at this edge that a dialogue between nature and culture exists. Here the geometric patterns of agricultural fields articulate the free form of the Old Man River valley, juxtaposing the structure of society with the structure of nature.



## CONCEPT

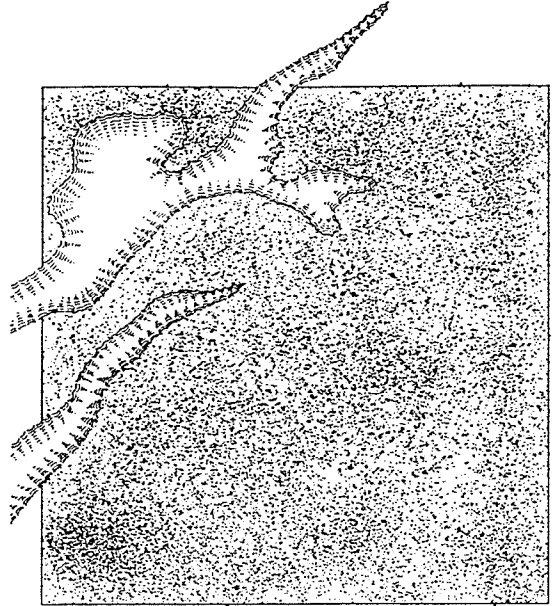
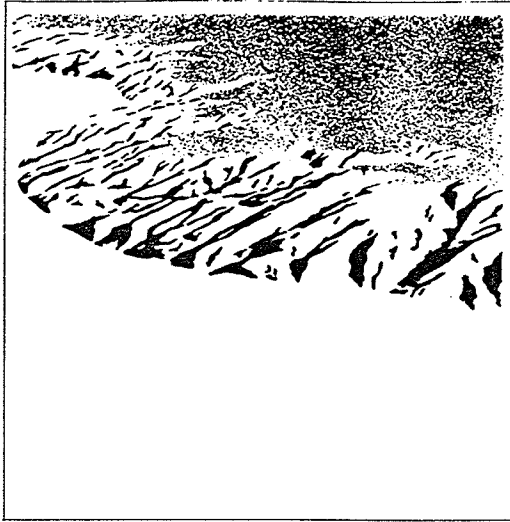
Cultural  
Feature:

The  
Imposition  
of Man

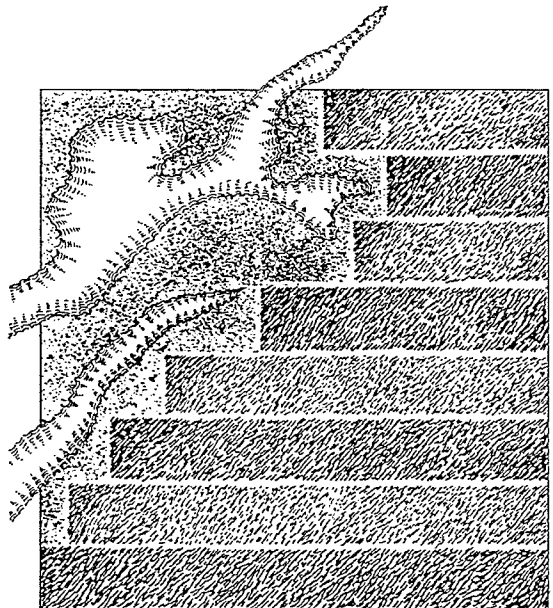
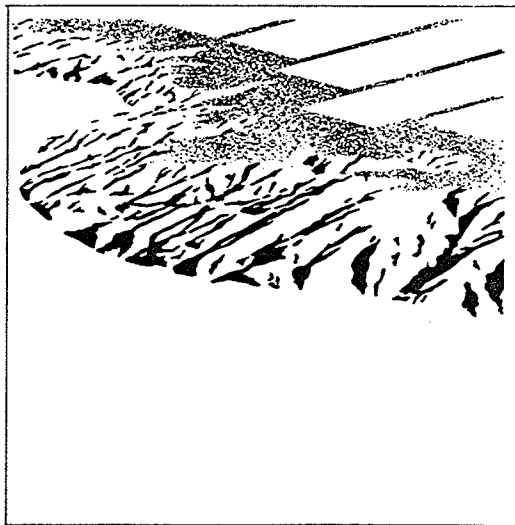
When Lethbridge was established in 1885, its position in the landscape was characteristic of the layout itself. Not only did the orthogonal grid impose man's order within the environment, it even ignored the limitations of the topography by extending the western edge of the city over the coulee embankments. It is this notion of imposition in the landscape that lies at the heart of Lethbridge itself.

Geological / Cultural Features

Interpretation



GEOLOGICAL FEATURE : Coulee erosion patterns.



CULTURAL FEATURE : Agricultural patterns defining the coulee's edge.

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Concept Drawings

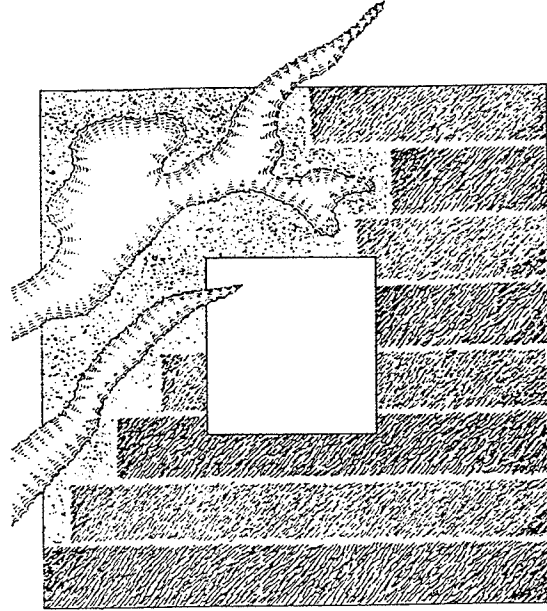
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Geological / Cultural Features

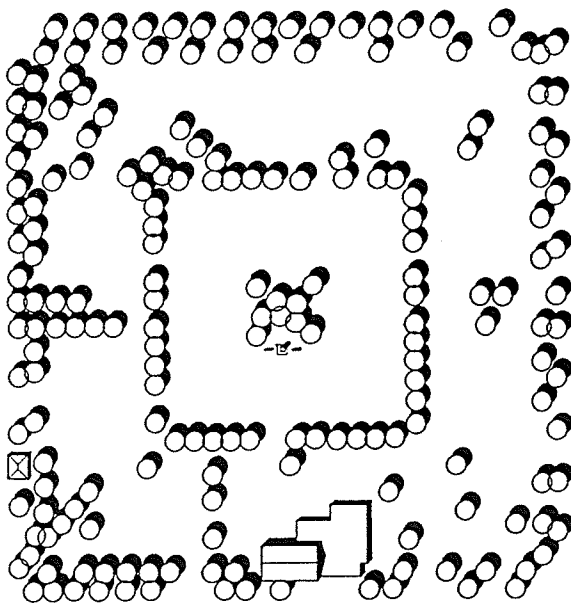
Interpretation



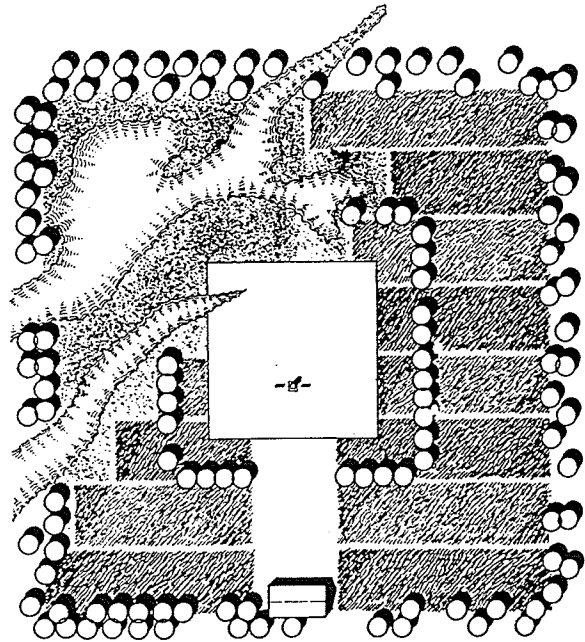
CULTURAL FEATURE : The original survey of Lethbridge imposed upon the prairie level, at the coulee's edge.



Re-establishing the Central Reserve, to act as metaphor of the city's position in the landscape.

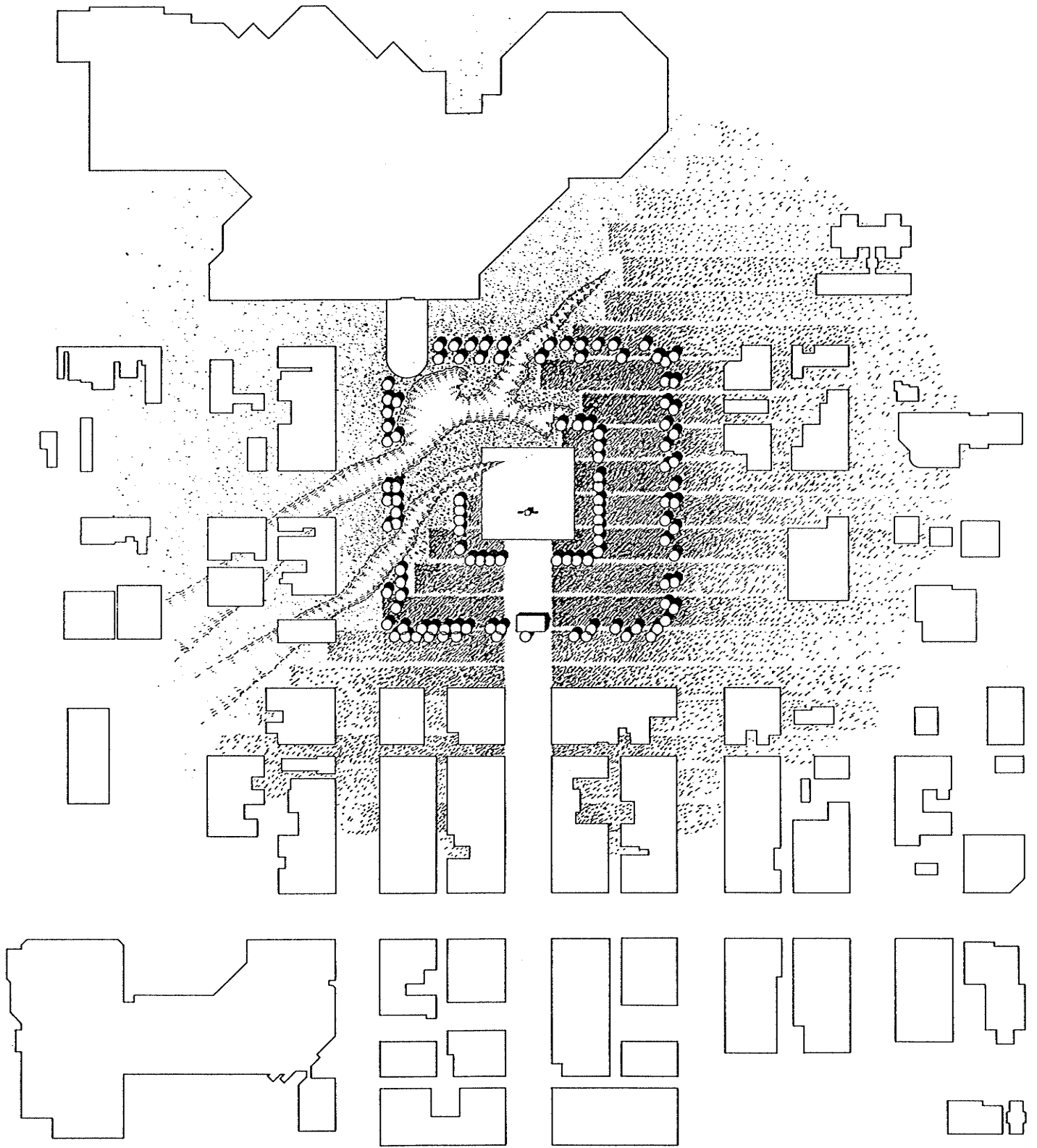


HISTORICAL FEATURE : Existing elements. Galt Gardens Park, ca. 1990.

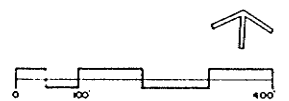


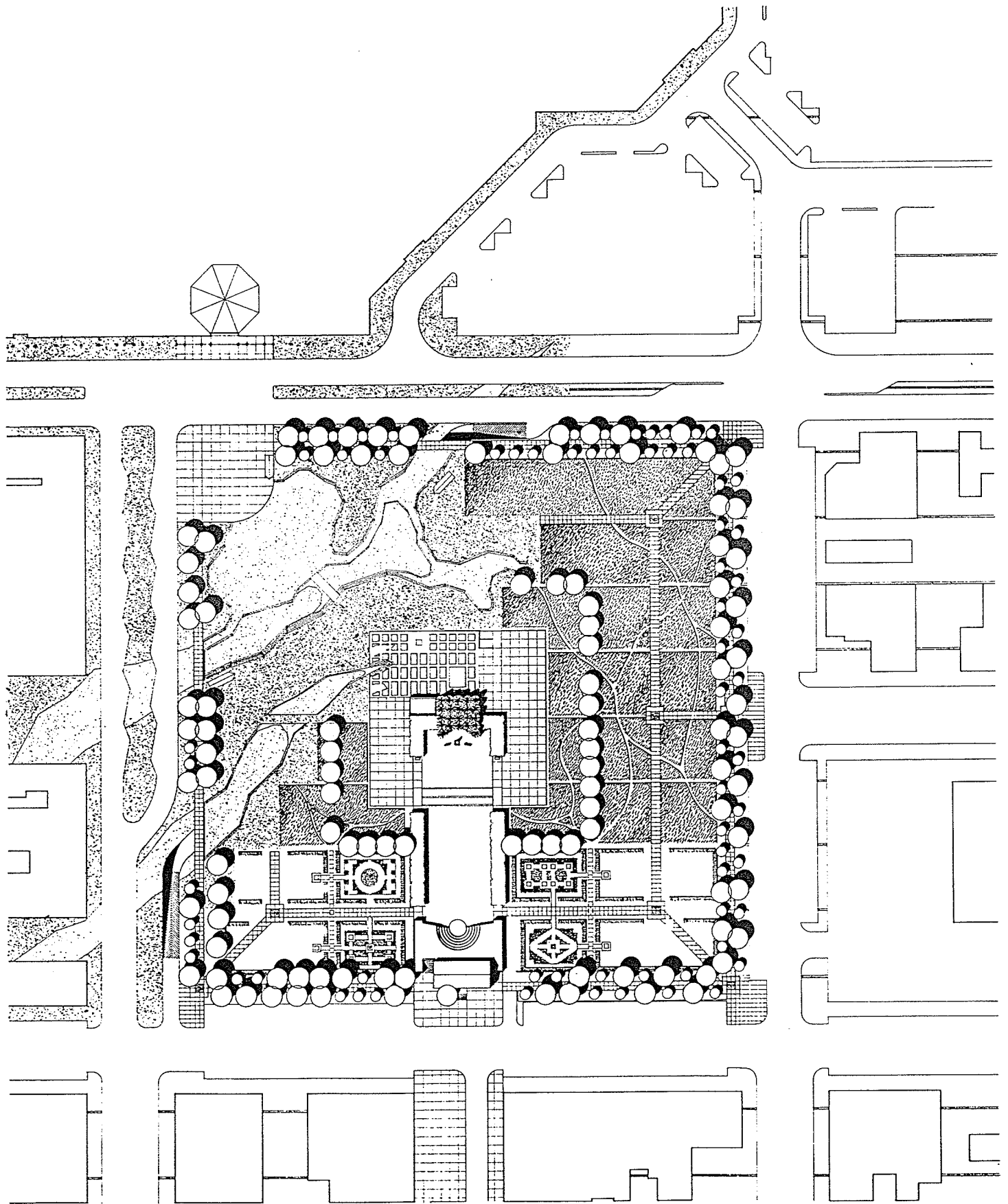
Integration of the distinct geological and cultural features of Lethbridge within the existing structure of the park.

Concept Drawings

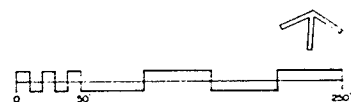


Context Plan

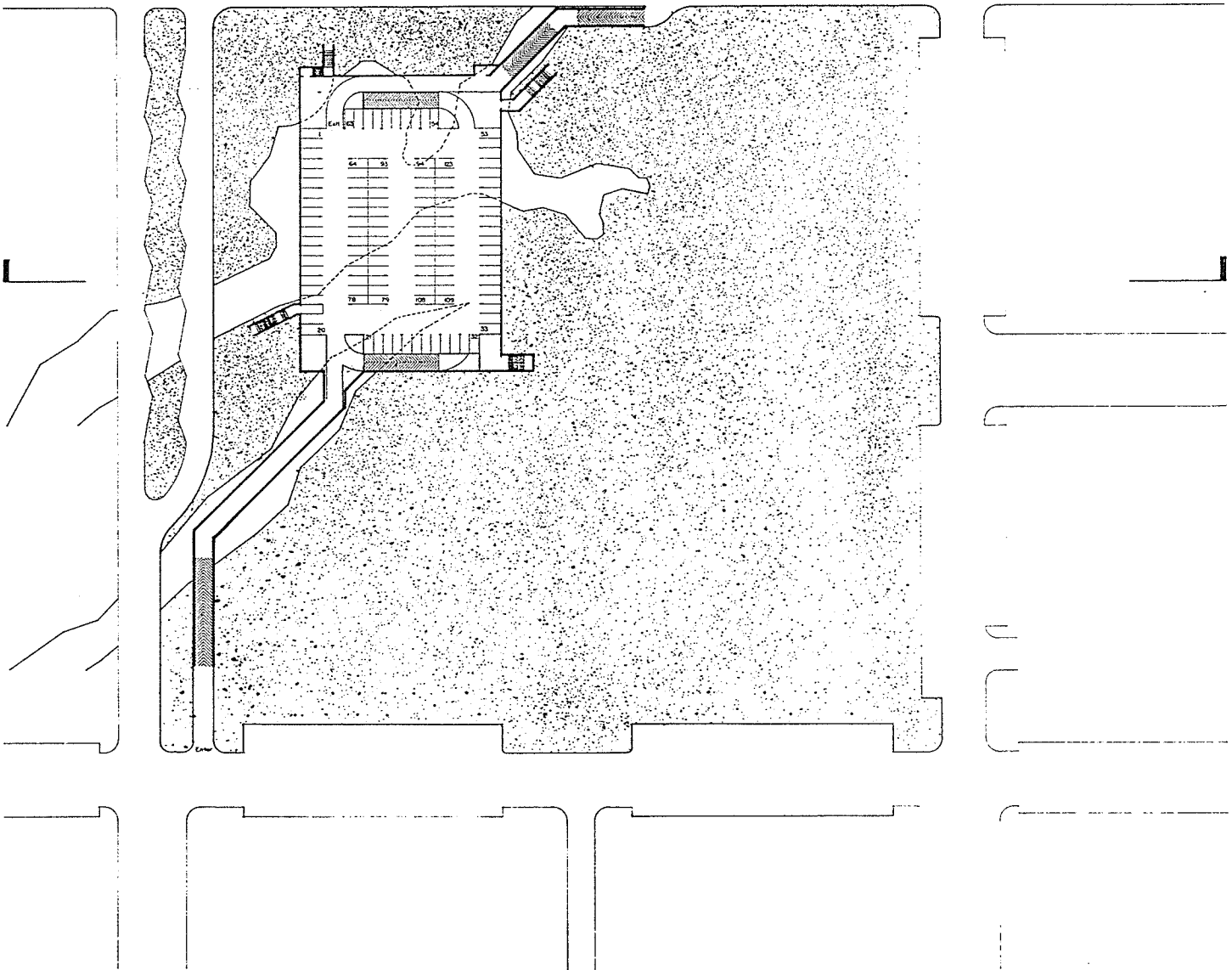
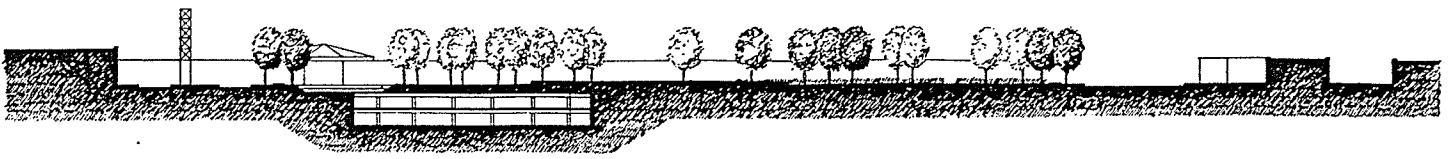




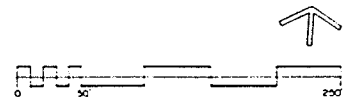
Proposed Plan

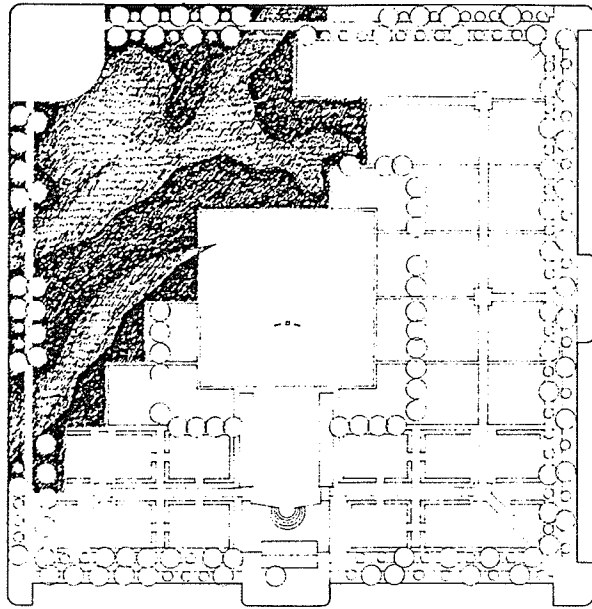






Proposed Parking Structure



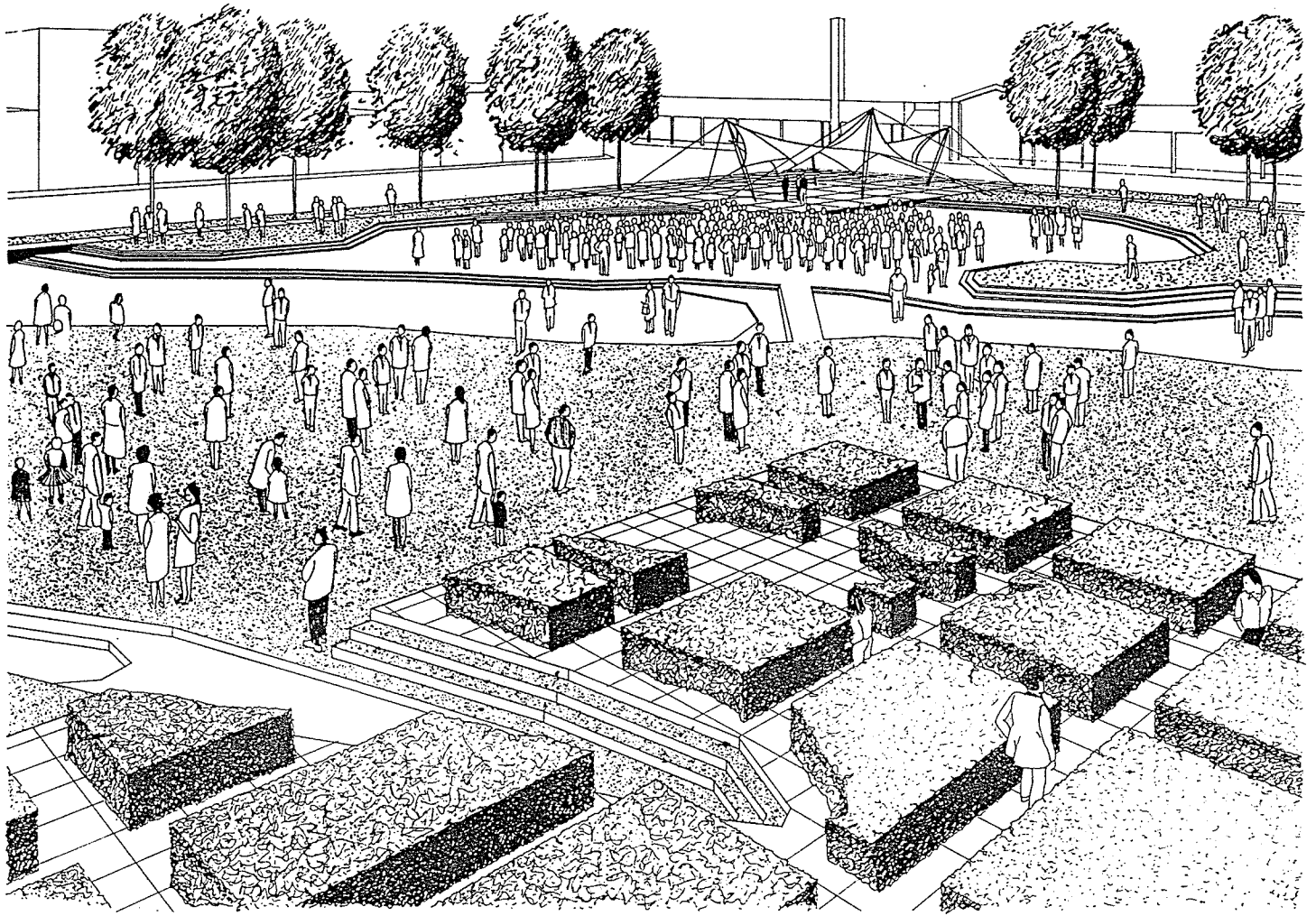


## PROPOSAL

Geological  
Feature:

Coulee  
Erosion  
Patterns

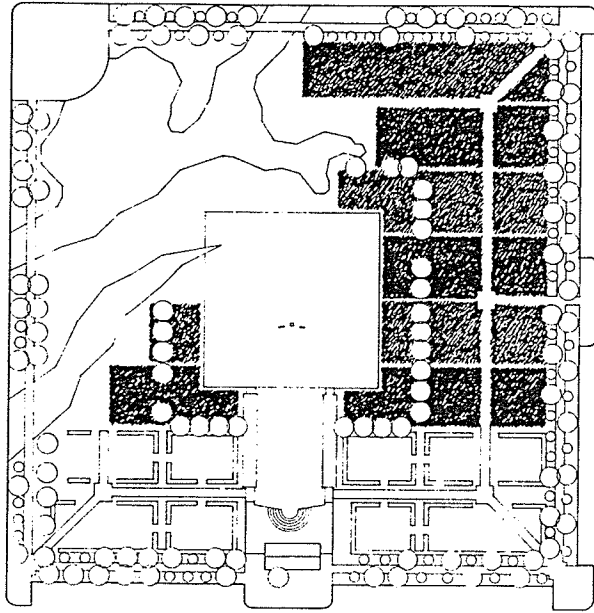
The prairie / coulee form, reflecting the open and free flowing quality of the natural environment, is represented by a large, hard surface open space in the western portion of the park. Within this space, the eroding qualities of the coulees are articulated from the prairie level. Where the erosion patterns enter the park, existing trees in its path are removed. Inside the park, this articulation is achieved by having the coulee forms step down below the prairie level.



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Plaza Perspective

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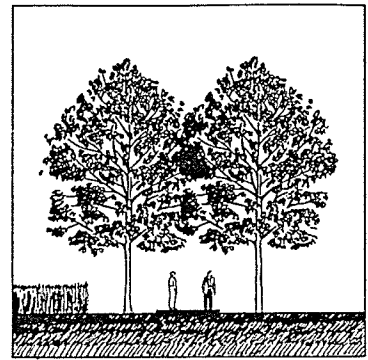


## PROPOSAL

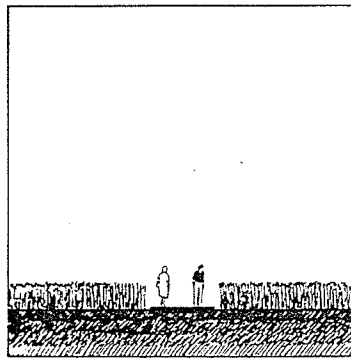
Cultural  
Feature:

Agricultural  
Patterns

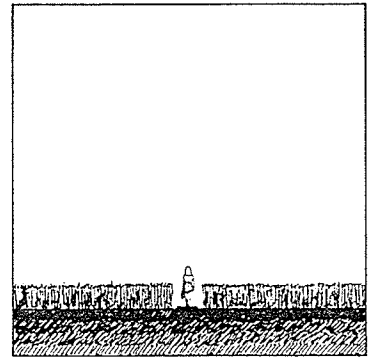
Contrasting the open quality of the prairie / coulee form are the geometric shapes of the agricultural fields. While the forms of these fields are stylized, the materials are actual crops, such as wheat, flax and mustard, selected for their distinct colour and texture. These crops are planted in strips that run east to west, defining the edge of the prairie / coulee environment, and articulating the meandering quality of the coulee form.



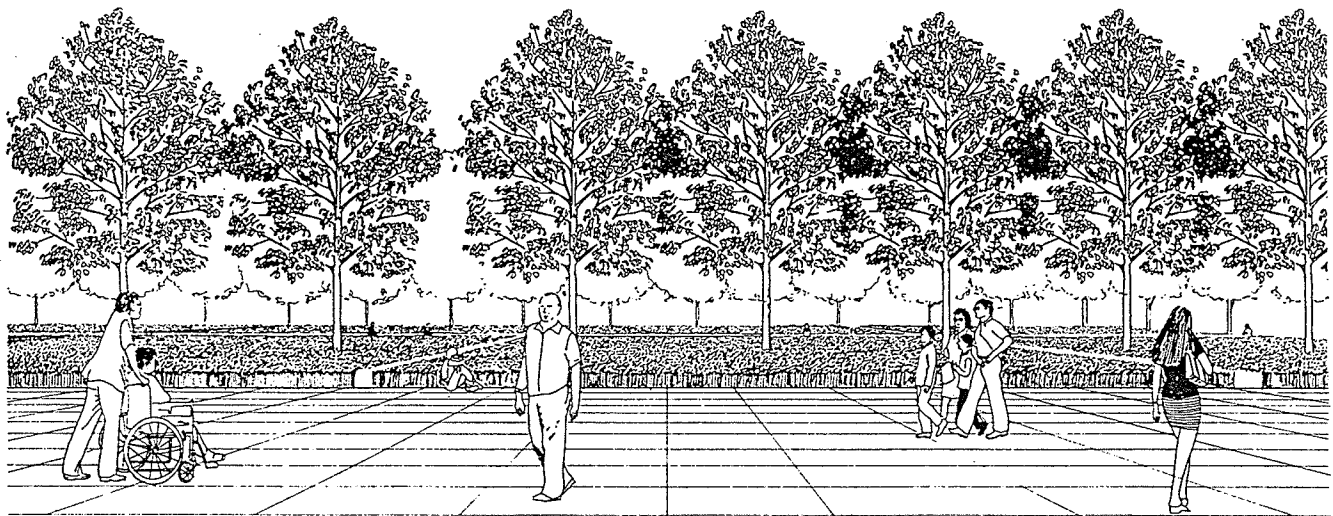
Perimeter Walkway



Interior Walkway



Path



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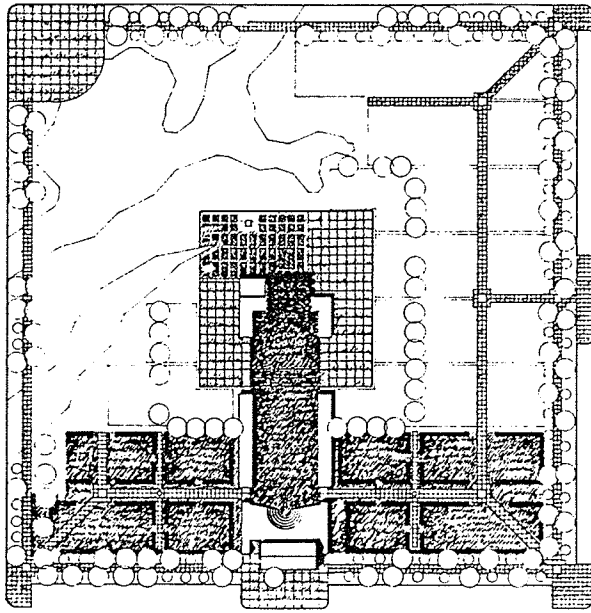
## Agricultural Fields

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## PROPOSAL

Cultural  
Feature:

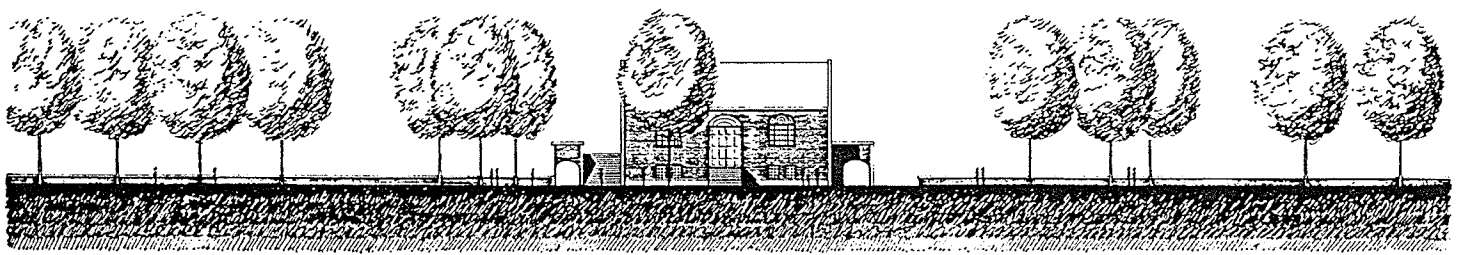
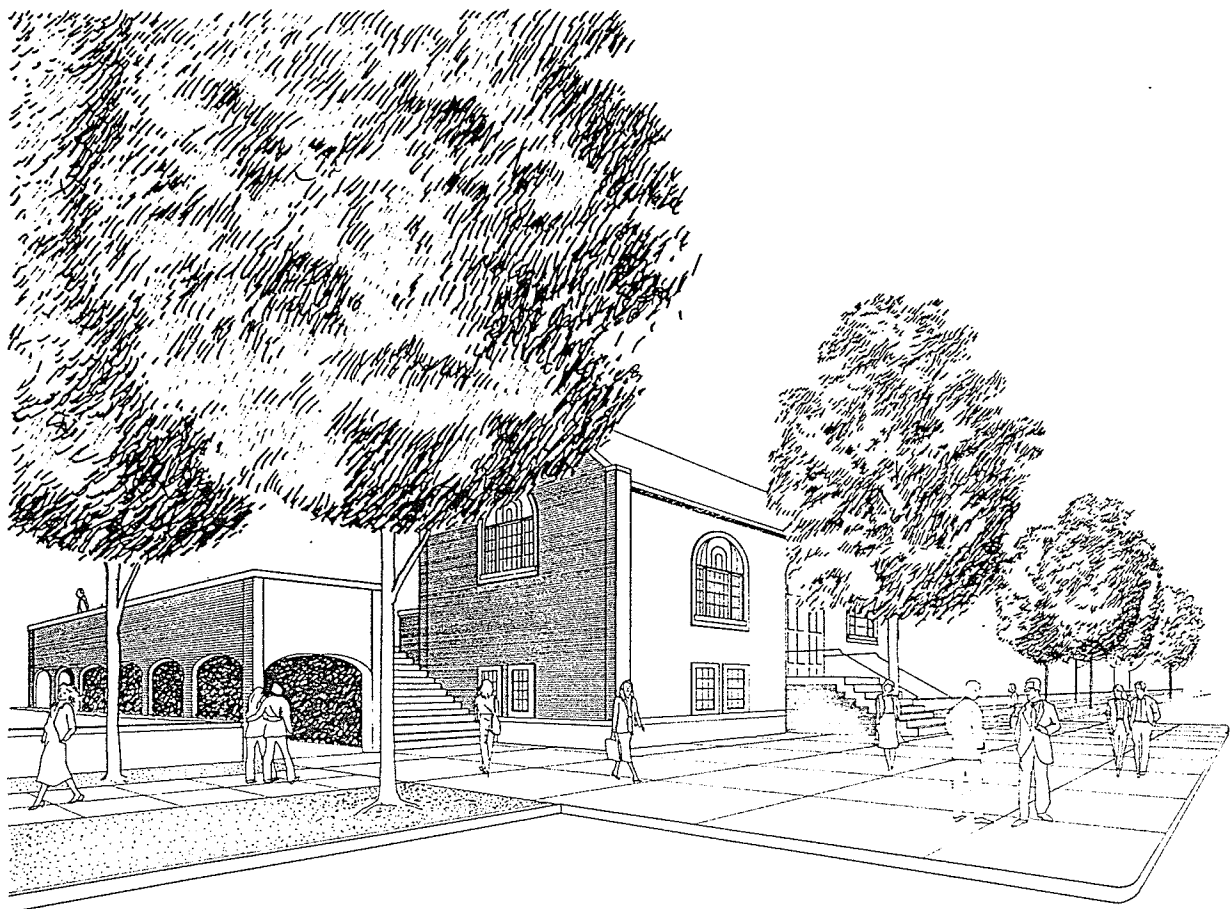
The  
Imposition  
of Man



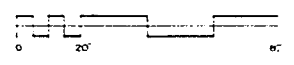
Set between the coulees and the agricultural fields is a representation of Lethbridge itself, reflecting the city's imposition upon the landscape. This is expressed with a raised platform of cut stone, 200' square; the size of the central reserve from the original town layout. At the northwest corner of this space is a replica of Sir Alexander Galt's original layout of the town, establishing a literal connection to city's history. A box hedge is used to define the city blocks with the hedges eroded in the same pattern as the coulee forms of original layout. This symbolic erosion is connected with the coulee pattern of the hard surface open space. An erosion pattern from the open space collides with raised platform, eroding the platform and matching the erosion pattern of the original town layout. (Refer to Proposed Plan)

These three aspects of the Lethbridge's regional landscape are expressed within the existing structure of the park, respecting the fact that the form of Galt Gardens is a remnant of the city's cultural heritage. This cultural heritage is the final component of the proposed design, making a direct connection with the formal quality of William Fairfield's plan.

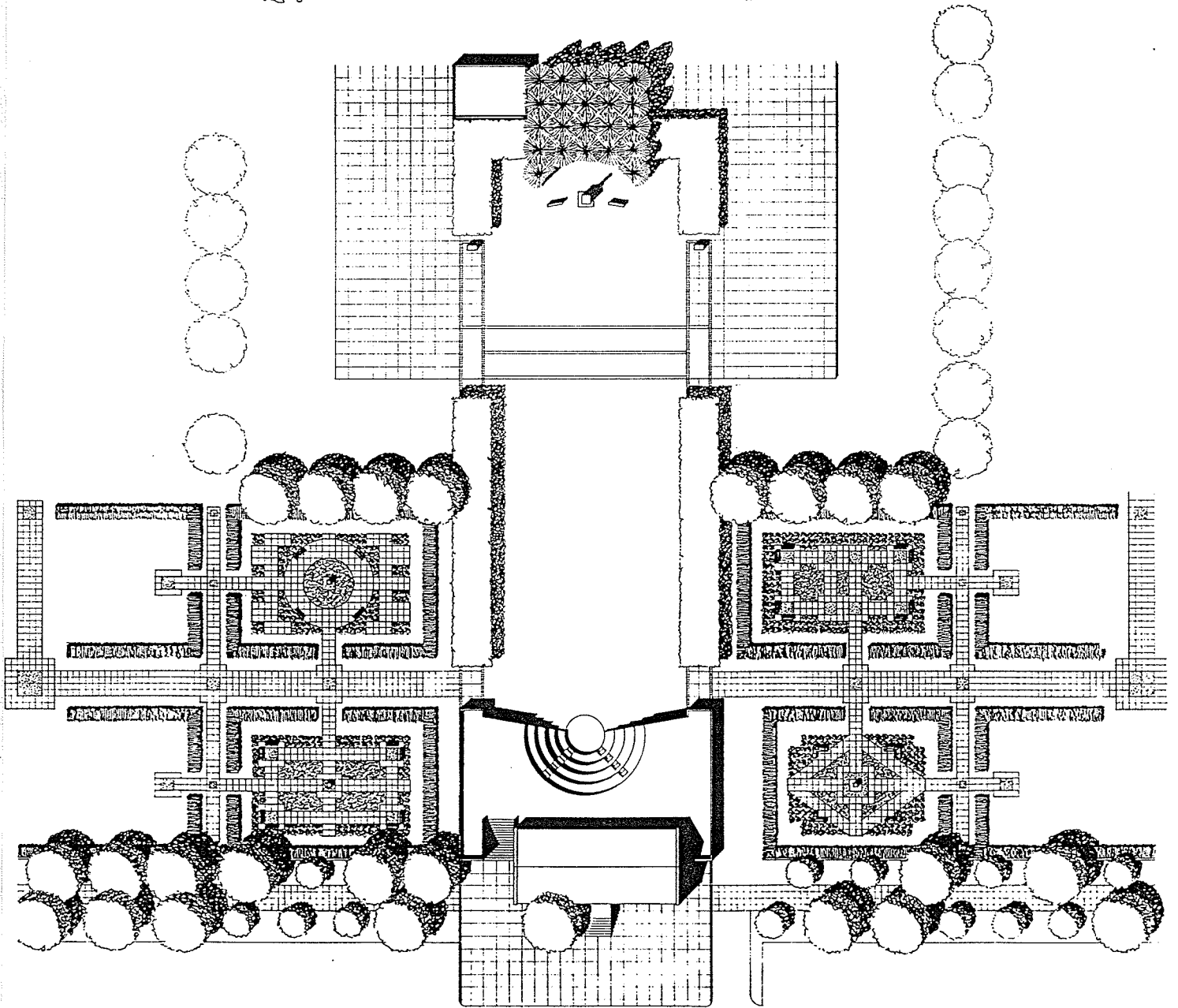
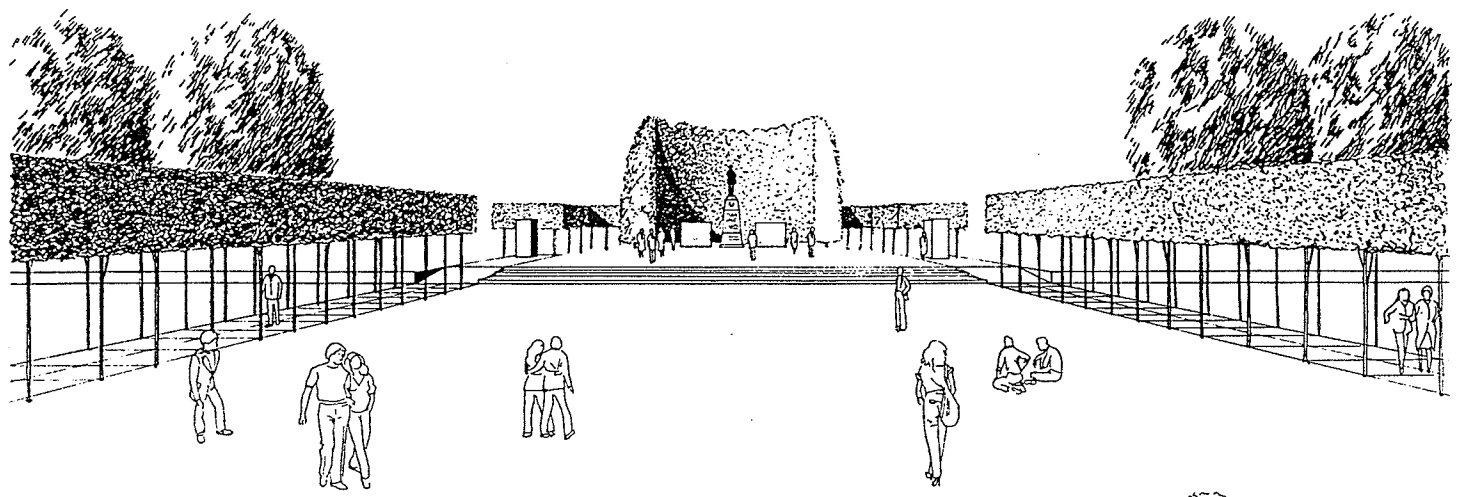
A formal axis is established between the Cenotaph and the Carnegie Mellon Building, emphasizing the significance of these elements within the park. Adding to this formal quality is a renovation to the building itself. The 1951 addition is removed and an amphitheatre, on axis with the Cenotaph, is added to the back of the building. Adjacent to this formal axis are intimate formal gardens. These gardens not only make a direct connection with the park's formal history, but also create an opportunity to relocate various monuments, presently scattered throughout the park, in more appropriate settings.



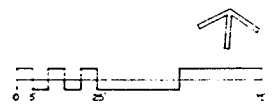
Formal Entrance







Formal Garden



### 3.3 Summary

The proposed design establishes continuity with Fairfield's formal design by re-establishing the park as a symbol of society's relationship with nature. Where the original formal park design reflected the notion of *man's dominion over nature*, the proposed design reflects the notion of *society within nature*, expressing the regional environment that our society has responded to and influenced.

By interpreting and layering the prairie / coulee form within the park, natural forms and processes provide a counterpoint to the rational order of western civilization, and acknowledges their significance within the contemporary landscape. By bringing crops into the park it allows people to experience, in an intimate manner, the physical qualities and seasonal characteristics of the regional environment that they are a part of. Finally, the central portion of the park symbolizes the city's position in the landscape; at the edge between the geological features and agrarian order of the prairie grid.

Expressing this notion of society's position within nature, the proposed park abandons the historical belief in man's dominion over nature. In doing so, it changes the symbolic meaning of the park from a remnant of the past to a vision of the future; one in which society understands that we are a part of nature, both responding to and influencing the physical environment.

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