IF "IMPROVEMENT" PLANS HAD GOBBLED CENTRAL PARK

Many Other Proposed Grabs Are Not Shown in the Picture, for Lack of Room

IF the various persons who have sought to invade Central Park in the last sixty years, for projects in themselves often worthy, oftener grotesque, and frequently purely commercial, had had their way, there would now be nothing left of the park except a few walks and drives, and a lake on which steamboats and full-rigged ships would be plying.

The park was a new institution in 1860, but already it had become apparent that there were plenty of people in New York who saw in this large expanse of ground only room for profitable private enterprise. The Board of Commissioners for Central Park reported in that year that "the demands of people who wish to advance their business interests by means of the park are most astounding."

The accompanying chart gives a birds-eye view of Central Park as it would look if all these enterprises had been carried into effect, although it fails to represent the case fully, since the park would not have had room for all of them.

Digging of a trench system as a publicity scheme for the Third Liberty Loan, just authorized, is the first actual use of the park for other than park purposes, except the construction of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, but suggestions for its utilization have ranged all the way from the installation of a speedway for the sportive rich and an academy of design for the art artists to the granting of concessions for private amusement enterprises.

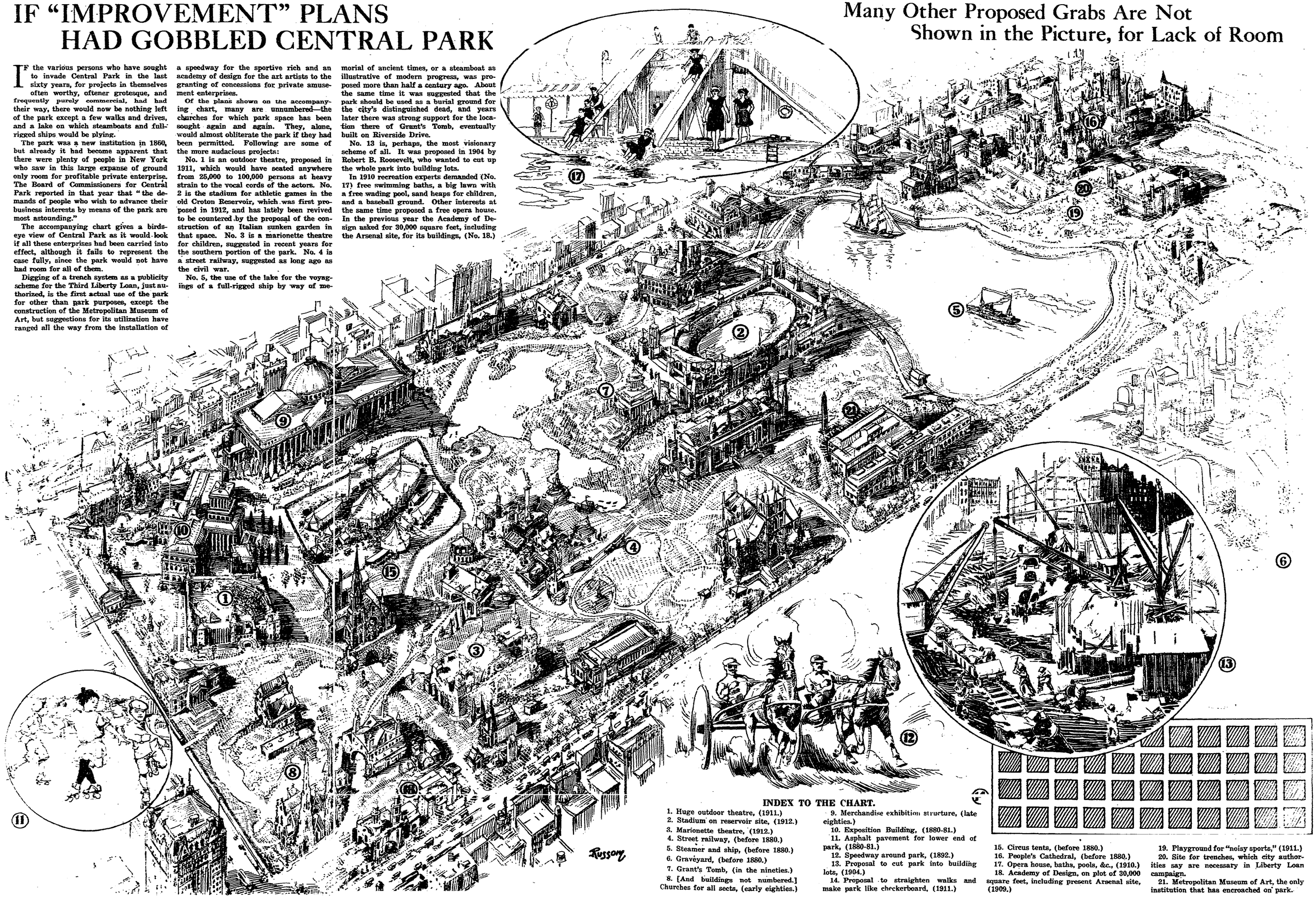
Of the plans shown on the accompanying chart, many are unnumbered—the churches for which park space has been sought again and again. They, alone, would almost obliterate the park if they had been permitted. Following are some of the more audacious projects:

No. 1 is an outdoor theatre, proposed in 1911, which would have seated anywhere from 25,000 to 100,000 persons at heavy strain to the vocal cords of the actors. No. 2 is the stadium for athletic games in the old Croton Reservoir, which was first proposed in 1912, and has lately been revived to be countered by the proposal of the construction of an Italian sunken garden in that space. No. 3 is a marionette theatre for children, suggested in recent years for the southern portion of the park. No. 4 is a street railway, suggested as long ago as the civil war.

No. 5, the use of the lake for the voyagings of a full-rigged ship by way of memorial of ancient times, or a steamboat as illustrative of modern progress, was proposed more than half a century ago. About the same time it was suggested that the park should be used as a burial ground for the city's distinguished dead, and years later there was strong support for the location there of Grant's Tomb, eventually built on Riverside Drive.

No. 13 is, perhaps, the most visionary scheme of all. It was proposed in 1904 by Robert B. Roosevelt, who wanted to cut up the whole park into building lots.

In 1910 recreation experts demanded (No. 17) free swimming baths, a big lawn with a free wading pool, sand heaps for children, and a baseball ground. Other interests at the same time proposed a free opera house. In the previous year the Academy of Design asked for 30,000 square feet, including the Arsenal site, for its buildings, (No. 18.)



INDEX TO THE CHART.

1. Huge outdoor theatre, (1911.)
2. Stadium on reservoir site, (1912.)
3. Marionette theatre, (1912.)
4. Street railway, (before 1880.)
5. Steamer and ship, (before 1880.)
6. Graveyard, (before 1880.)
7. Grant's Tomb, (in the nineties.)
8. [And buildings not numbered.] Churches for all sects, (early eighties.)
9. Merchandise exhibition structure, (late eighties.)
10. Exposition Building, (1880-81.)
11. Asphalt pavement for lower end of park, (1880-81.)
12. Speedway around park, (1892.)
13. Proposal to cut park into building lots, (1904.)
14. Proposal to straighten walks and make park like checkerboard, (1911.)
15. Circus tents, (before 1880.)
16. People's Cathedral, (before 1880.)
17. Opera house, baths, pools, &c., (1910.)
18. Academy of Design, on plot of 30,000 square feet, including present Arsenal site, (1909.)
19. Playground for "noisy sports," (1911.)
20. Site for trenches, which city authorities say are necessary in Liberty Loan campaign.
21. Metropolitan Museum of Art, the only institution that has encroached on park.

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