



# John Nolen, Landscape Architect and City Planner

*R. Bruce Stephenson*

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John Nolen (1869–1937) was the first American to identify himself exclusively as a town and city planner. In 1903, at the age of thirty-four, he enrolled in the new Harvard University program in landscape architecture, studying under Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and Arthur Shurcliff. Two years later, he opened his own office in Harvard Square.

Over the course of his career, Nolen and his firm completed more than four hundred projects, including comprehensive plans for more than twenty-five cities, across the United States. Like other progressive reformers of his era, Nolen looked to Europe for models to structure the rapid urbanization defining modern life into more efficient and livable form. His books, including *New Towns for Old: Achievements in Civic Improvement in Some American Small Towns and Neighborhoods*, promoted the new practice of city planning and were widely influential.

In this insightful biography, R. Bruce Stephenson analyzes the details of Nolen's many experiments, illuminating the planning principles he used in laying out communities from Mariemont, Ohio, to Venice, Florida. Stephenson concludes by discussing the potential of Nolen's work as a model of a sustainable vision relevant to American civic culture today.

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