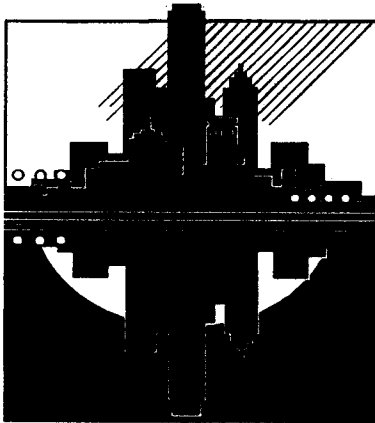


# THE CAPITAL AREA GREENBELT: REMAKING A CITY BEAUTIFUL



## INTRODUCTION

**T**he urban landscape is in many ways poorly suited for human habitation. Composed of cement, steel, granite and asphalt modern cities are designed for function rather than beauty. They allow business to be conducted efficiently but neglect other aspects of life that are equally as important. Factories and vehicles spit smoke and fumes into the air. Cars and trucks speed along the streets. Crowds flood out over sidewalks. Because of these facts of urban life, parks, playgrounds and other recreational areas have been created to provide city residents with opportunities to relax, enjoy themselves and escape from their cramped quarters. However, these resources have not always been available, they were created through the hard work and dedication of people committed to a cause.

As America advanced into the twentieth century and industrialization took hold, the poor living standards in our nations cities reached the crisis level. Societal changes that caused a migration from rural areas into cities, this trend, combined with immigration and natural population growth caused new cities to spring up and existing ones to increase greatly in size. Concerned citizens, civic leaders and

professional planners worked together to develop plans to accommodate the ever increasing urban population. An important concern for the earliest of these experts and activists was the physical beauty of American cities. They believed that practical improvements could be combined with beautification to create what they called the City Beautiful, a name which reflected the high priority given to aesthetics and natural beauty by its proponents.

The City Beautiful has had a tremendous effect on the city of Harrisburg and its development. Beginning in 1900 and extending into the 1920s, Harrisburg saw the creation of parks, monumental architecture, public art, improved city works and utilities. One of the products of this wave of development was a system of parks that surrounded the city, ringing Harrisburg with green space and allowing all citizens easy access to recreational areas.

Unfortunately, in the years following the City Beautiful movement much of the park land was allowed to fall into disrepair. Trash and refuse was illegally dumped in the city's parkways, parks became havens for illegal activity and city grounds were not adequately maintained. Thankfully, this downward spiral ended when the City of Harrisburg, as well as citizens groups, worked together to restore Harrisburg's parks and public spaces. The Capital Area Greenbelt Association has led the effort to revive the concept of an encircling system of parks and greenways beginning in 1991.

"Before it was erected [the new Capitol] , no matter what it was called, Harrisburg was an overgrown country town. Think of it as it was before 1900. What did Market St. look like? What did the River Front look like? What were the surroundings of the old Capitol? In fact, think of the present city as it then was, with not a truly modern building in it, with bad streets and with a river front strewn with garbage of every sort, with no attempt to beautify anything, save a few homes."<sup>1</sup>

--Dr. George P. Donehoo, Harrisburg historian

Prior to the turn of the century, Harrisburg was truly more an overgrown country town than a modern city. Houses and people were being crammed into a city ill equipped to handle its rapid growth. Roads were unpaved, sewage ran untreated into the Susquehanna River, local creeks and streams flooded regularly. The rapid growth of the city was making it unhealthy, unpleasant and unlivable. In fact, the water system was so bad that the Governor, who advocated an improvement of the city's antiquated public works, was quoted in the Harrisburg Telegraph as saying,

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<sup>1</sup> George P. Donehoo, The City Beautiful , Romantic, and Historic. Telegraph Press, Harrisburg, 1927.

"Let your bathtub run full of city water any morning without filtering it and look at it. You might as well go down to the tannery and bathe in a vat. It might take your hair off, but you would come out clean. Debt is not a disgrace nor is it a serious impediment. It has always been and will always be the forerunner of prosperity."<sup>2</sup>

—Pennsylvania Gov. William A. Stone

By 1930 the city had been transformed. Roads were paved and improved. New reservoirs, waterworks and water treatment facilities were constructed that drastically improved water quality. Local streams and rivers were dammed and channeled to prevent flooding and to enhance their utility.

However, the centerpiece of the plan which brought this about was a new system of parks, created to beautify the city and to introduce green, open space amidst industry and crowded residential areas. The park system was planned to create an uninterrupted beltway of natural beauty around the city. The city's river front was transformed into a long stretch of park, with trees, walkways and a carriage path. A parkway that straddled the Spring Creek joined the river park with Paxtang Park, located just southeast of the city proper. Another parkway joined Paxtang Park with Reservoir Park, which stood on a promontory overlooking the city. Wildwood Park was built at the northern outskirts of town with a large boating lake and nature trails.

The need to improve Harrisburg, as well as other American cities was a direct result of the changes that were taking place in other urban centers. Cities were growing rapidly. Immigrants had been flowing steadily into the country, settling for the most part in eastern cities. Farmers were gradually leaving the land to find work.



Manufacturing plants paid relatively high wages, drawing workers into the cities where the plants were located. As a result, facilities and public works were desperately needed to handle the extra load. In addition to such practical needs as water and sewage facilities, growing cities needed recreational facilities for their new workers.

The Harrisburg Plan, as it came to be called, was such a success that it was held up nationally as an example of how urban planning and beautification could drastically improve the quality of life in the American city. The City Beautiful movement has been defined as a "cultural, aesthetic, political, and

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<sup>2</sup>Paul B. Beers, Profiles From the Susquehanna Valley

environmental movement", concerned with the physical beauty of cities.<sup>3</sup> The national movement was really a collection of local improvement projects that shared similar goals and techniques. These movements were typically lead by civic leaders who believed that through expert, comprehensive planning the growth of modern cities could be directed in such a way as to solve health problems, improve utility, and incorporate physical beauty right into the heart of industrial ugliness.

## **A HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION TO HARRISBURG**

### **Early Days**

**H**arrisburg began as a trading post on what was then America's western frontier. English settlement began in 1733, when John Harris was granted land on the eastern bank of the Susquehanna River. The region was inhabited by the Susquehannock Indians, who at the time of Harris's arrival, maintained four semi-permanent settlements in Dauphin County. Soon after Harris's arrival and settlement he was captured by local Indians, according to a local legend. Harris heard a knock on his door that afternoon, when he answered he found a large gathering of intoxicated Indians glaring belligerently and demanding that he provide them with more rum. When he refused they dragged him out into the yard and tied him to the mulberry tree that stood on his property, threatening to burn him. Just in time, Harris's slave Hercules arrived with a small force of other, more friendly Indians to free his master. Harris freed Hercules in return for saving his life.

In 1753 Harris' son, John Harris Jr., seeking to expand on his father's operations, was granted the exclusive right to operate a ferry within 1 and 3/4 miles from the site of his father's trading post. The agreement required that the younger Harris pay Thomas and John Penn, acting governors of the colony, 10 shillings per year.<sup>4</sup> The ferry route began at what was then and is still known as Paxton Street,

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<sup>3</sup> William H. Wilson, The City Beautiful Movement, The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1990.

<sup>4</sup> G.G. Stockay, Dauphin County: Elements Toward a 20th Century Pictorial History, Tiger Cave, Harrisburg, 1971.

crossing to City Island, then continuing across the river to Market Street in Lemoyne. The town, then known as Harris Ferry, was fast becoming a regional trading and transportation center. Trading rafts began to ply the Susquehanna, stopping at the town. Goods traveling east to Philadelphia, Lancaster, or other market towns passed through -- often conducting business as they traveled. With the profits flowing in from his ferry service, and money gained through his trading interests Harris became a wealthy man. In 1766, he built himself a stone house on what is now 219 South Front Street. It still stands at this location, although greatly expanded in the years since. In front of the mansion in what is today River Front Park is the grave of John Harris Sr.. It is surrounded by a segment of the iron fence that surrounded the original Capitol building.

#### **Harrisburg: Capital City**

**T**he small settlement known as Harris Ferry began to expand as settlers were steadily flowing westward, filling what was then the frontier. To accommodate the growth, Harris began to plan for his town's expansion. In 1785 his son-in-law, William Maclay who would go on to serve in the original U.S. Senate, created the formal plans for what would become the City of Harrisburg. Maclay was in some ways prophetic, he set aside the 4 acres near the center of town to be used by the state, ostensibly for the construction of its new western Capitol. This planning was somewhat brash for a young frontier town which, at the time, consisted of only a smattering of homes.

In some ways Maclay's aspirations were not aimed high enough. Harrisburg was almost made the nation's Capital following the Revolutionary War. Congress decided to place its new capital city "as near the center of wealth, population and extent of territory" of the rapidly growing country. These guidelines pointed to central Pennsylvania. In fact, one early proposal specifically mentioned the eastern shore of the Susquehanna River between Harrisburg and Middletown. Unfortunately for the region, southern delegates would not agree to this proposal and a compromise was reached that placed the District of Columbia at its present location on the Potomac.

In February 1810 the Pennsylvania Legislature, then based temporarily in Lancaster, decided to move to more permanent quarters. The Commonwealth was expanding westward, making the commute to Lancaster difficult for some of the western delegates. In addition, the Lancaster Courthouse was too small to accommodate the rapidly growing legislature. They decided on Harrisburg as the site for their new capital. This was a bold choice for the town was then only a small borough, lacking the benefits and amenities of a larger city at the time. Architect Stephen Hills was commissioned to design a Capitol building for the new seat of state government in these somewhat rustic surroundings. Construction began in 1816 and the structure was completed and dedicated in 1822. Built of red brick, the Capitol featured a rounded white colonnade in the neoclassical style of the age. A large clock, visible from the river, was featured at the top cupola.

#### **Transportation Center**

**T**he town of Harrisburg enjoyed a burst of prosperity as it emerged as a regional transportation center. Beginning in the 1800s the Susquehanna became a major artery for the transportation of timber from northern Pennsylvania forests. The wood after being cut into logs 25 to 30 feet long in the field, was tied into large rafts that could be floated down river to mills for further processing. These rafts were from 150 to 300 feet in length, and restricted to 24 feet in width. These restrictions were necessary to navigate the tricky passes and chutes caused by rock outcroppings in the shallow river, which was only navigable to the rafters during the spring flood period. The Harrisburg area was a major stop for the rafters, who sold as much as half of the timber to mills in the region, the balance heading further downstream to the Chesapeake. The raftsmen who operated on the river were a hardy bunch. Constantly wet from spray shooting between the seams in the rafts, consuming large quantities of whiskey to take away the chill. Moreover, after a long river journey, the raftsmen came to port like cowboys in from a long cattle drive, raising hell and drinking hard during their brief respite. The "Hardscrabble" region along the river front was a favorite haunt of the raftsmen, who gave the neighborhood a wild reputation for their antics and drunken fights.

The end of the rafting era was brought on by the development of another form of inland navigation, the canal. New western cities were being established that lacked natural waterways that connected them with the east coast. As a result, transportation of goods to and from port cities was prohibitively expensive. To remedy this problem New York State constructed the Erie Canal. By 1825, canalboats were traveling the Erie Canal from Lake Erie to the Hudson River. At first attacked as folly and mocked as the "ditch", the canal was an overwhelming success, making New York harbor the busiest in the country. This success came at the expense of Philadelphia's shipping companies who watched their business move northward. To compete, Pennsylvania had to have canals of its own.

The first, the Union Canal, ran 81 miles from Reading, Pennsylvania to the eastern shore of the Susquehanna at Middletown, a few miles south of Harrisburg. Privately owned, the canal was completed in 1828. The crowning achievement of its construction was a 729 foot tunnel that bored through a large hill at the canal's highest point, located in Lebanon county. It was possible to travel the Union from Philadelphia to Harrisburg, connecting the Susquehanna and Delaware Rivers. The canal became an important link for regional iron production. Ore was shipped from the Cornwall banks in Lebanon county down to Harrisburg and Middletown. In return, coal was hauled back to fire the furnaces. Unfortunately for the owners of the canal, it was plagued by technical problems that limited its usefulness. First, the canal was built too narrow for all but the smallest barges, limiting its carrying capacity, and the profitability of each barge. Secondly the canal was located above the water table at some points and as a result had problems with its water supply and leakage. Often, the flow of freight was delayed for lack of water as the barges sat high and dry, stuck on the muddy bottom of the canal.

For these reasons the Union was seen as the second choice for east-west shipping in the state after the Pennsylvania Main Line Canal went into service in the spring of 1835. The concept of the Main Line had been around for a long time, with proposals for a canal linking Pittsburgh and Philadelphia had been put forth beginning in 1762. However, the legislature finally gave approval to the plan after New Yorkers had proven the value of such an undertaking. The race was on to catch up with the Erie. Governor George Shultz broke ground for the new canal amidst great ceremony on July 4, 1826. The celebration was held at the site of what was to become the "Penn Lock" located near Walnut Street in the

heart of downtown Harrisburg. In their haste, construction began even before the planning was complete.

When completed, the Main Line was an unusual combination of canal and rail line. The easternmost portion of the route that connected the eastern canal terminus at Columbia, Lancaster County with Philadelphia was a rail line originally designed for horse drawn carriages. By the time of its completion however, the steam railway engine had been invented, leading to a combination of horse and steam powered traffic on the railway. An additional railway section was used to cross the Allegheny Mountains in the western portion of the state. Originally, plans called for a four mile long tunnel through the mountains which would allow the canal boats to pass through the region, but this proved to be a technical impossibility at the time. Instead, the Allegheny Portage Railway was constructed to carry the cargo up and over the mountains rather than through them. It consisted of a series of inclined planes where the railway cars would be attached to ropes and pulled up the mountain by stationary engines located at the top of each hill.

With both the Union and Pennsylvania canals passing through or near Harrisburg, the city became an important regional trading and transportation center. However, Harrisburg's importance became even more vital with the beginning of the railroad age. Harrisburg became a central crossroads for both east-west and north-south rail lines. The two largest of all of these, the Pennsylvania and Reading Railroads, passed through the heart of the town. Large and elaborate terminals were constructed downtown as showplaces for the blossoming railroad age. The growth of these and other railways made Harrisburg an important city for the exchange and manufacture of goods in a sprawling young nation dependent on the rail to maintain linkage between its far flung shores.

The first railway to serve Harrisburg was the Harrisburg, Portsmouth, Mount Joy & Lancaster Railroad (H.P.M. &L.). Its first train arrived in Harrisburg September 16, 1836. Linking the towns mentioned in its name, this railway line was swallowed by the newly created Pennsylvania Railroad (P.R.R.) company soon after its creation in 1846. Founded through an act of the Pennsylvania Legislature to connect Philadelphia with Pittsburgh and the west, the Pennsylvania Railroad was a very large company, eventually employing over 8,000 people in the city of Harrisburg alone. One of the



largest engineering projects for the P.R.R. was the construction of a new bridge crossing the Susquehanna River just north of the city at Rockville.

In addition to the P.R.R. Harrisburg was also connected to the Philadelphia & Reading, the Cumberland Valley, the Northern Central, the Schuylkill & Susquehanna, and the Harrisburg & Potomac railway lines. In addition the city served as a terminus for many local rail lines, which added to its importance as a railway center.

To service all of the rail lines coming into town Harrisburg developed extensive facilities for maintenance and repairs of the rail lines, cars and locomotives. Freight yards were developed to handle and process the massive quantities of goods coming through the town. The rail yards employed thousands of workers to handle the flow of goods.

The railways brought with them a new era. Harrisburg was experiencing a revolutionary period in American history, industrialization. The resources of the American interior were now accessible. Coal from northern Pennsylvania and dredged from the Susquehanna was traveling via railway to industrial plants throughout the state and country. Iron ore from Central Pennsylvania was being processed in massive foundries near the city. The prosperity brought on by the industrial age was interrupted by the coming of the Civil War.

## Civil War

Most historians agree that it was the North's greater industrial strength that won the Civil War. Its industrial economy was able to out produce and out supply its southern counterpart, enabling Northern armies to eventually wear down the Confederates, who were usually the tactically superior force. If so, Harrisburg played a decisive role in the eventual northern victory. The city's location and transportation facilities made it a kind of staging area for the northern armies. Troops and supplies were gathered to be sent to the front lines of both the eastern and western theaters of the war. In fact, more war supplies and troops flowed through Harrisburg than any other northern city, save Washington and Baltimore. In addition to supplies, wartime Harrisburg

was flooded with troops preparing for battle. Almost as soon as war was declared and President Lincoln called for Pennsylvania to supply 25,000 troops, volunteers poured into the city.

Unlike today, the army did not have permanent training facilities to prepare men for battle. To handle the flood of new soldiers, encampments were quickly established on the outskirts of town. Here, the volunteers were organized into units and, if there was time, received some military training. The largest of these encampments was known as Camp Curtin, after the Pennsylvania Governor Andrew Curtin. It was located north of the city in an area bounded by Watts Lane, the Pennsylvania Railroad, Maclay and 5th streets on the fair grounds of the Dauphin County Agricultural Society. The camp became known as the "Rendezvous of the North", for it was estimated that 300,000 troops went through the camp on their way to the battle fields. On September 16, 1862 the Pennsylvania Daily Telegraph described Harrisburg as troops were massed to stop Lee's northern invasion.

"Camp Curtin is full to overflowing; the Capitol grounds are now literally covered with tents, the Senate and House of Representatives are used as barracks; every room in the Capitol, not occupied for other uses, is now filled with troops; vacant rooms in the court house are appropriated to the soldiers; wherever there is a spot that will accommodate a weary soldier it is seized upon and used according to "the articles of war". The hotels are like bee-hives swarming; private houses are open, their accommodations at once cordial and free to all who choose to enter; and thus the State Capital is one vast camp, where [the] soldier is at liberty to bivouac on the street corner, in our most elegant mansions, the Capitol grounds or the Capitol buildings."

With the city swamped with inactive soldiers, special laws were passed to prevent lawlessness. Liquor sales were banned by the mayor, and passes were required for soldiers. These provisions were largely ineffective however, and Harrisburg was a wild, brawling city, filled with the energy of thousands of bored and anxious soldiers. During the summer months, the troops often occupied themselves playing a game they called "base ball" and tossing the smaller recruits high into the air with their blankets.

In the summer of 1863, war preparations took on a new importance to the city. General Lee had marched his Army of Northern Virginia north into Pennsylvania, and was poised to invade Harrisburg. He planned to capture the city, breaking the north's supply lines to the western theater of the war, then march east to Philadelphia. He hoped that by bringing the war into the north he could force the Union to negotiate a settlement and end the war. The war was politically unpopular in the north, especially in the border states of Maryland, Delaware and in southern Pennsylvania. Lee actually came quite close to

achieving these goals that summer, but was stopped short of the Pennsylvania capital. Southern armies met little opposition as they entered Pennsylvania. In fact the town of Chambersburg even aided the southerners in their advance. The northern Army of the Potomac was mainly concerned with protecting Washington, careful to stay between Lee and our nations capital. They did not engage the southern forces allowing them to march northward with little or no resistance. Rebel troops sent in advance of the main forces reached as far as Camp Hill, in fact a few soldiers were even captured on eastern shore of the Susquehanna River in Harris Park.

The city of Harrisburg prepared for a siege. Fortifications and earth works, named Fort Washington were constructed on the west shore. The Camelback Bridge was prepared to be burned at a moments notice, and over ten-thousand militia men from New York State were brought in to defend the city. Refugees fleeing west shore communities were flowing into the city, fearing the advance of Lee's army. The nervous citizens gathered on June 15, 1863 at the courthouse and issued the following proclamation. "Resolved, that we individually and collectively pledge the last dollar and last man in defense of the State in its present emergency."<sup>5</sup>

However, the bulk of the invading force was stopped before they could lay siege. The Union victory at Gettysburg stopped Lee's advance and ended his northern campaign. Following this massive battle, Harrisburg was again filled to the limit with soldiers. This time, however, they filled makeshift hospitals rather than training camps. Entire families moved into the hospitals to care for their injured sons, filling the city to its bursting point. On a happier note, Camp Curtin was being called "Camp Return" by veterans returning to the city on their way back from the fighting to their homes and families. After Gettysburg the war continued for almost two more years, but the city was never again threatened. Northern armies were advancing far into the south, ending the Rebels capacity to fight and eventually capturing Richmond.

### **Beginning of a New Era**

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<sup>5</sup> Janet Mae Book, Northern Rendezvous: Harrisburg During the Civil War. Telegraph Press, Harrisburg, 1951.

**H**arrisburg was permanently transformed by the war economy and the industrial buildup associated with the war. The city's population doubled between 1860 and 1870, with 23,000 people calling Harrisburg their home by the end of the decade.

With this new phase of Harrisburg's development came unprecedented prosperity for the region. Front St., the fashionable address in Harrisburg, was lined with mansions from Mulberry to Maclay Street and beyond, a concentration of industrial wealth that stretched along the river. The Grand Opera House and the State Street Bridge over railroad tracks were both constructed in 1873. Allowing easy access to the new neighborhoods being constructed in Allison Hill, the State Street bridge stimulated the city's continued growth eastward, where streets were expanded out to 12th street. The northern edge of the city, formerly at North Street, was now extended to Maclay. In all approximately 500 acres were added.<sup>6</sup> The Harrisburg Railway Company, formed in 1861, built trolley lines throughout the rapidly growing city. By 1888 the rails were electrified, powered by coal dredged from the Susquehanna River. This made Harrisburg only the second city in the nation with an electric trolley service. The electric cars replaced the old horse drawn trolleys which disappeared completely by 1892. Lines were continually expanded and, for a fare of six cents, service to Steelton was added in 1888.

However, the industrial development of the Harrisburg area was not without its price. The rapid growth of the city was outstripping its ability to cope with the expansion. Smoke and soot was flowing into the air. Trash was filling the river front. Sewage was stopping up the small Paxton Creek and fouling the Susquehanna River. Large industrial buildings were crowding the land. In places, billboards blocked all views of any beauty that remained. In sum, Harrisburg was exchanging its healthiness and beauty for the rapid growth and prosperity brought by industry.

The changes that accompanied the industrial revolution in Harrisburg were not just physical. Large industrial corporations with their massive factories and innumerable employees were changing the city's social fabric. These changes were noticed to an appreciable degree following the "Panic of 1873",

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<sup>6</sup>Richard Steinmetz and Robert Hoffsommer, This Was Harrisburg. Stackpole Books, Harrisburg, 1976. 103

an economic crisis that lead to a drop in national production, unemployment and a general economic recession. The pinch was especially felt by the worker, who was forced to accept pay cuts, layoffs and demands for increased productivity. Of all the companies in Harrisburg, the railroads were by far the largest employers. Therefore in 1877 when they announced pay cuts of ten percent, a cut that reduced wages by a third since the beginning of the decade, the effects were felt directly by a sizable percentage of the population. These workers, many of whom on the edge of starvation before the additional cuts were announced, were enraged. The railroad companies continued to pay generous dividends to stockholders while workers were forced to take pay cuts. They refused to work at the reduced rates and started labor strikes throughout the state and country.

Crowds of workers took to the streets of Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, Reading and other towns in protest. Nervous city officials, many with close ties with the railroad companies, responded with force. State militias were called up to stop what was quickly becoming a violent insurrection. Governor Hantraft, an ex-General, who was on vacation at the time, went so far as to order federal troops to his state to quell the riots. In Pittsburgh the militiamen fired on mobs of workers, who responded by burning the rail yards. The city of Harrisburg, fearing for the worst, declared martial law. Citizens were ordered to stay in their homes, businesses were closed, and the sale of liquor was banned in city saloons, taverns, taprooms and restaurants. Armed groups of citizens, local militias and the Seventh and Eighth Regiments of the Pennsylvania Militia patrolled the streets at the mayor's request. This action effectively prevented the violence from spreading to the state capital, but was indicative of the gravity of the situation. In all sixty strikers were arrested in Harrisburg.

## THE CITY BEAUTIFUL MOVEMENT IN HARRISBURG



### Starting the Movement

**T**he old state Capitol was a red brick structure fronted by white columns that featured large round clocks placed around its round cupola. Since the Capitol first opened in 1822, it was scene of many important events in Pennsylvania history. From legislative fights to serving as a temporary campground and hospital for Civil War troops, the Capitol had withstood it all. Then, February 2, 1897 it burnt to the ground in a dramatic blaze. Harrisburgers gathered on the Capitol grounds during a blizzard to watch the fire consume the entire structure. The conflagration began in the basement and was roaring out of control before the alarm was even sounded, which prevented fire fighters from bringing it under control.

"In almost any civic improvement, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact time at which progress actually began. Before the burning of the Capitol, Harrisburg had been rather an overgrown country town but this disaster served as a stimulus. People began thinking in terms of reconstruction, rehabilitation and action. Thus out of the ashes of neglect and indifference arose the flame of hope and progress, leading to the 'Wake Up, Harrisburg!' movement of a few years later."<sup>7</sup>

Soon after the fire, the Harrisburg Civic Club held its first meeting in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Lyman Gilbert, 203 Front Street. The Civic Club became the organization most responsible for Harrisburg's civic revival and the creation of its "City Beautiful" movement.

If the Capitol fire generated a spirit of civic action, and the Civic Club was a major influence in the city's reform, the movement to improve and beautify Harrisburg began in earnest following a speech sponsored by the Harrisburg Civic Association. The speech was given by the local environmentalist Mira Lloyd Dock on December 20, 1900. Delivered to the Harrisburg Board of Trade, an organization of publicly minded business leaders, it was entitled "Wake Up, Harrisburg!". Dock exhorted the men to

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<sup>7</sup> Harrisburg Centennial: 100 Years Celebration Pamphlet (24), published 1960

clean up and beautify their city before rival cities quickly overtook Harrisburg, playing on the competitive nature of the men to induce them to undertake the much needed reforms. Her goal was to induce the men to sponsor a comprehensive program to beautify the city of Harrisburg and make it a healthier and more enjoyable place to live.

To emphasize her point that the city was in desperate need for improvements, and that it was falling behind other cities which had already begun to make needed changes, Dock presented slides projected by a Kerosene-burning lantern. The slides were of local scenery, including shots of the Susquehanna River and Paxtang Creek with their trash and sewage problems, city streets strewn with garbage, in comparison to photos of scenes from other "improved" cities. In addition to beautification, Dock was also concerned with making the city a healthier place to live. Accordingly, she stressed the benefits of a new sewage system, water filtration, and green space within the city.

The speech was not simply the spontaneous expression of one woman's desire to improve the city. Rather, it was part of a well coordinated effort of a small, core group of activists dedicated to the improvement and beautification of Harrisburg. The three figures who were perhaps the most responsible for what has been called, "the elite campaign"<sup>8</sup> were Dock, J. Horace McFarland, and Warren H. Manning. Together, they spearheaded the successful campaign to improve the city by leaders of the local political and business communities.

Mira Lloyd Dock, born in 1853, was a horticulturist who received her training as a bluestocking<sup>9</sup> at the University of Michigan. Her family was financially secure, allowing Dock to spend her time pursuing her academic and public interests. By the late 1890s she had published a series of scholarly reports concerning plants, horticulture, and forestry that gave her prominence among Pennsylvania naturalists and civic activists. In 1899, she traveled extensively throughout Europe to study their forestry

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<sup>8</sup> see William H. Wilson, The City Beautiful Movement, Chapter 6 "An Elite Campaign for Beauty and Utility in Harrisburg".

<sup>9</sup> The term then used for a female scholar, the term was derived from Bluestocking Society -- 18th century literary clubs, some of whose members wore informal attire often including blue worsted stockings (Websters Third International Dictionary).

and horticultural practices.<sup>10</sup> Upon her return, she published her findings from the trip in A Summer's Work Abroad, a publication of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to her official research, Dock was exposed to the beauty and efficiency of European cities. She was especially impressed by the way that growth and industrialization had been managed, by the Germans especially, in such a way as to incorporate physical beauty into the very core of their cities. In comparison, Harrisburg was a shambles. It lacked an organized effort to take advantage of the natural beauty of the city and its surroundings. A woman of action, Mira Lloyd Dock was determined to do something about Harrisburg's urban ugliness and poor sanitation. In that era however, opportunities for women like Dock who wished to be involved in public affairs were limited. She therefore began to do what she could through local women's organizations and began to talk to some friends who could do something to improve the city, J. Horace McFarland and Warren H. Manning.

At the same time that Dock was beginning her campaign to beautify Harrisburg, McFarland and Manning were starting a campaign of their own. McFarland was a wealthy Harrisburg gentleman who owned a publishing and engraving business, the McFarland Press. In addition to his business interests, McFarland had a deep concern for urban development, the environment and the city of Harrisburg. By the mid 1890s he became President of the American League for Civic Improvement. This organization soon merged with the American Park and Outdoor Art Association to form the American Civic Association. The purpose of this newly formed organization was to "be the cultivation of higher ideals of civic life and beauty in America, The promotion of city, town and neighborhood improvement, the preservation and development of landscape, and the advancement of outdoor art."<sup>12</sup>

Warren Manning was a Boston based landscape architect. He shared McFarland's concern for civic affairs, especially landscape architecture and outdoor art. He had been a trustee of the Outdoor Art Association before the merger to form the American Civic Association, and continued to serve as the vice-president for Outdoor Art of the ACA. The three, Dock, McFarland and Manning, soon began a series of

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<sup>10</sup> Dock was invited to attend the International Conference for Women's horticultural section, held in London. Her employer, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture agreed to sponsor an extension of her trip to a study of forestry and aboriculture throughout Europe.

<sup>11</sup> Mira Lloyd Dock, A Summer's Work Abroad. Bulletin #62, Penna. Dept. Of Agriculture 1900.

<sup>12</sup> J. Horace McFarland, Personal Correspondence, Penna. State Archives, Manuscript Group 35.



meetings and correspondence, the subject of which was a unified effort to kick-start the city of Harrisburg into a period of urban renaissance that they called the city beautiful movement.

The campaign began with Dock's speech for the Board of Trade, after which there was debate concerning what projects would best serve the city. By April of 1901 the Harrisburg Telegraph began calling for a unified improvement plan for Harrisburg in its editorial pages. The paper's plan combining sewer, water works, road paving and park construction was first published in April of 1901. These editorials were soon followed by a letter to the editor written by John V.W. Reynders. He suggested that a fund of \$5,000 be raised to contract specialists to design and engineer these planned improvements. It seems that it was McFarland who was instrumental in the Telegraph's seizing of the Harrisburg improvement issue. In a letter to Mira Lloyd Dock he wrote,

"... I guess I am responsible for the Telegraph notice. I find that the Board of Trade contains a good many people who promise but do not perform, and it seemed too bad to leave this important affair go by unnoticed in the newspapers, which would not miss, if they could help it, a dog fight somewhere else!"

Three experts were hired to complete the designs. James Fuertes, of New York City, was to produce plans for a new water supply, sewage and drainage systems for the city. M.R. Sherred, of Newark, New Jersey was to report on street paving. Lastly, Manning himself was contracted to plan the new city parks and boulevards.

Fuertes' plans called for the construction of a small dam on the Susquehanna just above the sewer out fall to prevent the sewage from backing up the river to the city front. The dam would also raise the river level several feet, making it more useful for swimming and making it navigable for small boats. Secondly, he proposed a water filtration plant to improve the quality of drinking water for the city. Thirdly, he proposed channeling the Paxton creek and installing a flood control system. Lastly, Fuertes designed an intercepting sewer that would transport the sewage directly to the Susquehanna below the planned dam.

Sherred's proposal for street paving proposed for streets in the entire city area to be covered with asphalt. The paving was to follow the construction of underground sewers.

Manning's proposal for the new park system had five separate elements. First, the creation of a narrow park running along the river front. The river front park would include a carriage drive, tree plantings, and a stepped beach front. Second, an expansion of Reservoir park, a 40+ acre park located east of the downtown area. Third, the creation of a "landscape park" at the location known as Wetzel's Swamp (now known as Wildwood Park). Fourth, the installation of playgrounds at several locations within the city. Lastly, the creation of a ring boulevard, known as the parkway, that would link the parks and encircle the city.

### **Implementing the Plans**

**A**fter receiving the plans the Harrisburg Civic Association formed a new subcommittee, The Harrisburg League for Municipal Improvements (HLMI), to promote the plans and aid the city in implementing them. Through fundraising, publicity, and lobbying civic leaders, the HLMI managed to get a referendum for a \$1,090,000 bond issue for "Harrisburg Improvement".<sup>13</sup>

The program began when the bond issue passed by an impressive margin. The election returns show a vote of 7,319 to 3,729 in favor of the proposal in the February 1902 elections. The money from this original bond was used for "the improvements of the water supply, the sewage system, the construction of a dam in the Susquehanna River, parks and park improvement, and the paving of the intersections of streets."<sup>14</sup> Further aiding the efforts of the reformers was the election of Vance McCormick as Harrisburg mayor. McCormick campaigned on a platform known as the "Anti-Typhoid Ticket". "Anti-Typhoid" was in reference to the disease caused by impure water that was killing many city residents at the time. The presence of raw sewage in the Susquehanna was causing an outbreak of the disease at the turn of the century. McCormick and his supporters believed that the addition of an intercepting sewer and water filtration plant included in the city beautiful package would eradicate the

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<sup>13</sup> Paul B. Beers, Reporter At Large Column, Harrisburg Patriot News March, 8, 1983.

<sup>14</sup> George P. Donehoo

disease, hence the slogan "anti-typhoid". He whole-heartedly endorsed all other planned improvements and became a firm supporter of the City Beautiful Movement.

### **The National City Beautiful Movement**

**T**he concept of connecting city parks with a parkway to form a connected system was not an entirely new one. It was first developed by Frederick Law Olmsted, a landscape architect most famous for his design of New York's Central Park. Despite the success of his New York City plans, Olmsted realized that, "for practical everyday purposes to the great mass of the people, the Park might as well be a hundred miles away."<sup>15</sup> In order to remedy this problem, Olmsted incorporated parkways into the plans for Brooklyn's Prospect Park, completed in 1868. Olmsted created parkways in such a way as to "combine the elements of a park, park drive, park footpath, and residential commercial street" to bring natural beauty into the heart of the city and to direct and stimulate urban growth.

Olmsted and his contemporaries believed that organic, natural beauty was derived from God. Through the construction of naturalistic parks, he sought to bring this naturalistic beauty into what was considered the artificial ugliness of the industrialized city. It was thought that if flowing, irregular natural shapes and the green soothing colors of nature were brought into the hard landscape of the city, they would provide a relaxing and more livable atmosphere for city residents. Moreover, these small oases would be open to the public, meaning all social and economic classes would have access to the new recreational areas. It was hoped that this would help to create a more cohesive urban society, and ease class and economic tensions of industrial America. These concepts had a strong influence on the plans for Harrisburg's park system, designed by Olmsted's student, friend and protégé Warren H. Manning.

Another great influence was London's Hyde Park, which he saw as being "in, but not of the city." Moreover, he saw Hyde Park as a place where all classes of people could relax and enjoy the beauty together, unifying the city into a organic whole. The construction of similar parks in the United States

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<sup>15</sup> Frederick Olmsted in David Schuyler's The New Urban Landscape, J. Hopkins Press, 1986. (126)

would be part of the civilized progress of the young nation. Lastly, he thought the conditions of the late nineteenth century American city created a certain tension within its resident. The modern industrial and commercial city took its residents from their natural environment, the pollution from its factories affected its residents' health. Therefore, he strove to create natural spaces within them that freed the city resident of the hard straight lines of steel, brick and stone. He created natural, flowing spaces as refuges of clean air and green space within the city itself.

Olmsted's crowning achievement was the creation of New York's Central Park, designed in 1857 and 1858 while he was supervising the clearing of the park area. Created at what was then the northern edge of the city, Central Park was the embodiment of all of Olmsted's ideas about the natural landscape. The naturalism that Olmsted espoused was a carefully created one. He sculpted the land not to recreate an indigenous landscape, but rather pursued his own vision of natural beauty. Each planting and landscape element was carefully placed to create an enhanced naturalism, and increased sense of space, and insulation from the surrounding city. While this did create the desired effect while inside the park, Central Park was not an unqualified success because its use was limited to those who lived nearby. Residents of other parts of the city left without park land or green space.

To remedy this problem Olmsted then began to change his designs from one large park to several smaller ones, forming a park system. To connect these parks he created the parkway, a carriage path lined with trees, plants, grass and open space. These parkways, in addition to creating green space within the heart of the city and connecting the park system into a cohesive whole, were also to direct and stimulate the growth of the city. Olmsted believed that the parkways would encourage city residents to move further from the congested city centers and into suburban regions, while still being connected with the heart of the city. The presence of a parkway would also raise the property values, encouraging owners near the proposed parkways to support their construction.

Olmsted's landscape and park designs were widely influential throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His concepts of interconnected parks and parkways became a key element to the "city beautiful" plans for Harrisburg and other cities. Olmsted's designs for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago, were also of landmark importance to the city beautiful movement. The 1893

world's fair helped to bring American's attention to the possibilities of civic design and made the shortcomings of existing cities more clear.

The Chicago World's fair was to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Columbus's famous voyage. To house the displays and events for the fair, a "White City" was constructed on an island in Lake Michigan. The entire city was constructed in three years, a monumental achievement of technology and organization given the monumental scale of the project. The city combined neoclassical architectural style and the very latest technology provided fairgoers with an example of an efficient, modern and beautiful city and raising the expectations of city life for the over 21 million people that attended.

### **City Beautiful in Harrisburg**

**W**aterworks and sewer construction began almost immediately following the passage of the bond issue in 1902. Fuertes's designs were used to construct the Dock Street Dam, which raised the river level several feet, improving the utility of the Susquehanna for swimming and boating. The Paxton Creek basin was expanded and channeled into a concrete bed, increasing by a factor of five the streams flood capacity. Wetzel's Swamp was dammed and transformed into Wildwood Lake. A spillway was added to the lake to prevent flooding. Ninety-five miles of new water lines were added under the as yet unpaved streets. Lastly, what was perhaps the centerpiece of the Fuertes' plans, the filtration plant was constructed on what is now City Island. At a cost of, \$295,000 the plant opened for business in 1907 pumping filtered Susquehanna River water to Harrisburg's citizens.

The street paving portion of city beautiful improvement package progressed almost as rapidly as the waterworks. As of January 1, 1905 22 miles of roadway had been paved<sup>16</sup> at a cost of \$1.75 per square yard. Clarence A. Weaver, author of The Story of Harrisburg: The Capital City wrote in 1912, "Harrisburg has very modern municipal improvements of every character and the city is one of the best paved in the United States". At the time of its publication over 65 miles of streets were paved.

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<sup>16</sup> Historic Dauphin County

However, of all the planned improvements, it was the park system that truly earned the title, "City Beautiful". Manning designed a comprehensive plan for the entire city, adding new parks and improving those that already existed. Furthermore, the plan would link the existing parks with a parkway, a linear park surrounding a carriage drive that would encircle the entire city. The land needed to complete the proposed parkway was acquired in stages beginning in 1904, when the Harrisburg Bridge Company donated City Island. In 1905 James Cameron donated the land now known as the Cameron Parkway. Between 1906 and 1915 the Hoffer, Cameron, Boyd, Dull, Allwick, and Rutherford families donated land for the Paxtang Parkway. In 1913 James McCormick donated McCormick's Island. Finally, land for Italian Lake Park was donated in 1919 and 1926.

By 1905 the improvements to the park system were already being noticed. Historic Dauphin County, a book published in 1905, contains the following description of Reservoir Park,

"The most extensive and popular park for public gatherings is Reservoir Park, which is away from the din and hustle of the city, and is on a very eminent elevation overlooking the picturesque Susquehanna Valley. Within this park is situated the large water basin, or reservoir, containing the city water supply, which is pumped from the waterhouse on the river bank, hard by the main business portion of the city [Front and North Streets]. Here one finds numerous pavilions, swings, rustic seats, flower gardens and refreshment stands. The car line runs near its border, while good paved walks span nearly the entire distance from the city."<sup>17</sup>

Immediately following the description of Reservoir Park, the author writes of the planned parkway.

"A magnificent system of driveways is now being provided for the city along the Susquehanna River to the outskirts. The scenery along this stream at this point is charming; wending its way as it does between the two mountain points, it presents its broad rippling surface to full view. Connecting all the parks in the city there is, in all, eighteen miles of parkway, of which two miles is now highly improved and in service; the balance of which is being acquired and improved as rapidly as possible. This parkway encircles the entire city, following small water courses, and presents a driveway of great beauty."

While plans to improve the city of Harrisburg were being implemented by local leaders, the Pennsylvania state government was making plans of its own to replace its fire razed Capitol. Meanwhile, the legislators continued to meet at the Grace Methodist Church, located on State Street between Second and Third Streets. It was here that they decided against moving the capital back to Philadelphia and

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<sup>17</sup> Historic Dauphin County 527

sponsored a design contest for a new Capitol to be constructed on the site of the old Capitol's fire charred shell. The winner was architect Henry Ives Cobb, whose design called for a grand and elaborately decorated structure. However, financial constraints forced Cobb to redesign the Capitol as a much plainer building after construction began. The end result of this compromise of design and economics was, according to Governor Daniel H. Hastings, "a frightful mess".<sup>18</sup> The building was opened for use in 1899, but Cobb's design was never completed.

Instead, plans to enlarge and redecorate were made by Joseph Miller Huston, a Philadelphia-based architect. Huston had a grand vision for the building, hoping to make it the, "greatest work of art in America".<sup>19</sup> In keeping with these lofty goals, Huston incorporated elements from some of Europe's most famous architecture. The dome was modeled after that of Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome and the main Rotunda staircase was inspired by the Grand Opera House in Paris. The Capitol's interior was richly decorated by Pennsylvania artists, making it in Huston's words, "a palace of art". Edwin Austin Abbey, a Philadelphian living in and painting in England, was commissioned to paint murals for the Rotunda, House and Senate chambers and the Superior Court Room. Abbey died in 1911, after completing only the Rotunda and House murals. A group of artists, Violet Oakley (Senate Chamber, Governor's Reception Room, and Supreme Court Chamber), Donald MacGregor (Ladies Reception Room and light courts of the spandrel arches), Vincent Maragliotti (north corridor of the Rotunda) and William Brantley van Ingen (south corridor) were hired to decorate respective areas in the Capitol's interior. The floor was covered with earthenware tiles designed and crafted by Henry Mercer. Inlaid in the tiles were mosaics that portrayed many aspects of life in Pennsylvania both modern and historic, from native Americans to telephones and automobiles. Stained glass windows designed by van Ingen lit the House and Senate Chambers. George Barnard created the statuary that flanks the main entrance to the Capitol Rotunda.

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<sup>18</sup> Steinmetz, This Was Harrisburg 129

<sup>19</sup> Preserving a Palace of Art: A Guide to the Projects of the Pennsylvania Capitol Preservation Committee. Joseph Pitts, Chairman.

## **A HISTORICAL TOUR OF HARRISBURG'S PARKS**

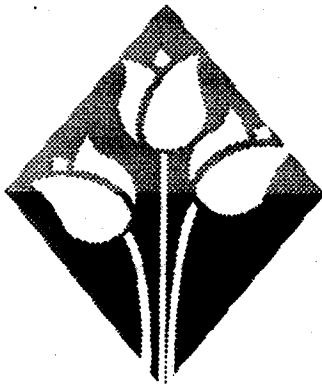
### **River Front Park**

**T**he concept of a park along the Susquehanna River is an old one, for the first plans for the city, laid out in 1785 by Senator William Maclay, included a parcel of land set aside as a public park along the eastern banks of the river. John Harris Jr. built a large stone mansion facing the park, and his father was buried along with other members of the Harris family in a small graveyard. This stretch along the river soon became the most fashionable in Old Harrisburg, Front Street was eventually lined with large homes in a row that stretched for miles. This, according to historian A. Boyd Hamilton, prevented the railroad companies from securing the entire river front for railroad tracks and forced them to lay their tracks inland, preserving the river front from industrial blight. In 1859 the Pennsylvania Legislature officially designated a portion of the river front, between Paxton and Mulberry Streets, as Harris Park. This original park was joined by Lincoln Park, extending from Mulberry to Market Streets in 1867, and D.W. Gross Park from the Water House to Herr Street, forming a strip that extends from what is now the southern end of river front park to the area directly in front of the State Capitol.

The river front park land was extended by city planners in the early 1900s by the City Beautiful movement to its present length. A carriage path was placed along the lower banks of the river and in addition, the characteristic "Front Steps" of the city were built at a cost of \$400,000. Construction of the 3 mile long staircase was supervised by engineer Henry McCormick Gross, who formed the one foot layer of concrete from one part cement, two parts sand, and four parts stone. The steps and carriage path were designed to protect the intercepting sewer, which carried waste to below Dock Street dam, from ice damage in the winter and to fix the shoreline against erosion. Street lights were placed along the carriage parkway and trees were planted along a footpath placed at the top of the river bluff.



A small district of houses extending four or five blocks rested directly on the bluff rising from the river. This area, known as the "Hardscrabble" for its run down appearance, was demolished to create a continuous parkway along the river front. The small district originated as a tie off point for raft crews navigating the Susquehanna who would stop here to relax and unwind, usually with the help of alcoholic refreshment. The unique name Hardscrabble is believed to be a derivation of "Hart's rabble", the name of an early stone structure in the district owned by the Hart family. The change to Hardscrabble may have been a recognition of the rough crowd that populated the area in the early days. The low-lying area that remained from the basements of the homes after their demolition was made a small flower garden, called the sunken gardens, in 1922.



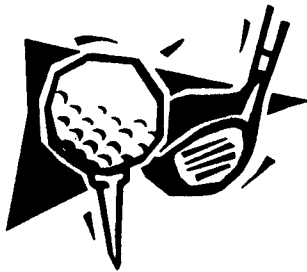
In warm weather the river front was a popular recreational area for Harrisburg residents. Easter Sunday after church Front Street became a promenade, filled with strollers bedecked in their new clothes. After the construction of the Dam, canoes were a common site on the river. With the water level raised several feet, it was possible to paddle even during dry spells. Many of the canoes were stored in a dry dock located along the shore near Walnut Street. Next to the canoe storage was the mooring for Reese's Dance boat. The Dance boat ran on summer evenings from seven to midnight, paddling up and down the river between Locust and Harris Streets. It was a flat, barge-like craft that looked like a floating ballroom, with a bandstand, railings, seats and bright lanterns around the perimeter and bright lanterns. A one way trip on the boat cost 25 cents, but many people walked the shore along with the boat and heard the bands for free. The Depression of the 1930s ended the nightly trips of the craft which is fondly remembered by its former patrons.

In the winter time, the river again became a recreational focal point of the city when ice began to form. Ice skaters flocked to the river, as did automotive enthusiasts who would race on the slippery surface. Spectators would flock to see ice pile ups, mountains of ice that formed giant ice dams. These pile ups would burst suddenly when the pressure from the ice and water, making a startling noise and pent

up water rushed rapidly downstream. As road salting became a popular practice, the river iced less frequently and these dramatic events became a rarity.

## **Reservoir Park**

**T**he original portion of Reservoir Park, a 45 acre plot, was purchased by the city in 1841. The park housed an elevated reservoir of Susquehanna River water designed to increase the city's water pressure. The land opened as a park in 1876, then expanded in 1896 when an additional 45 acres were acquired and a second reservoir built. After the Capitol fire of 1897, the site was suggested as a site for the new Capitol, a proposal that was rejected. The caretaker's mansion and an additional brownstone home were built in 1898. Following the passage of the "City Improvement" package in 1902, a picnic pavilion and band shell were added to the park.



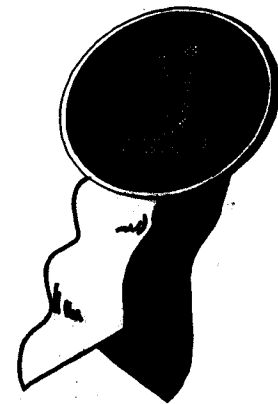
In 1903, control of the park was shifted from the Reservoir Park Commission to the newly formed Harrisburg Park Commission. An act which reflected the acquisition and development of new parks within the city. A nine hole public golf course complete with clubhouse was constructed in the land adjoining Reservoir park in the 1910s. The golf course was short lived, disappearing only a decade after its construction. It was said that the errant balls from the course was causing havoc with area residents and motorists. After the golf course was gone, the croquet and shuffleboard courts were popular attractions for older area residents.

Judy McClain, is a long time resident of Harrisburg who lived on State Street near the entrance to the park in the late 1930s into the 1950s. She remembers Reservoir Park as an active, social place where children would gather to play. In the summer months, she "would live in the park after school had ended". As she recalled there was always something going on in Reservoir Park. Park Instructors were responsible for directing the summer activities at Reservoir Park as well as in playgrounds throughout the city.

Thanks in part to the playground instructors, city parks and playgrounds became the “summer camp” for city kids. Many children, from small kids to those of high school age, would spend nearly every day at their neighborhood playground. Playground teams were organized for all age groups that competed in an informal league against teams from other playgrounds around the city. These teams gave the kids a sense of neighborhood identity, as well as a chance to meet others from around the city.

For the children, the end of the summer park season was marked by “Romper Day”. This celebration was the culmination of the summer for all of Harrisburg’s park and playground goers. It attracted kids from all of the city’s neighborhood playgrounds, who would ride the trolleys to Reservoir Park for the final blast that capped off a summer of play. Held just before Labor Day, Romper Day was an opportunity for the kids to show off the results of a summer of fun.

Playground teams would face off in tournaments to decide city championships. Games such as tetherball, marbles, jacks, baseball, softball (then known as kittenball), quate pitching (similar to horseshoes) and others were held to determine city champions. The large enclosed pavilion became a showcase for the children’s artwork, which adorned its walls, and served as a showcase for the weeks of dance practice. Thanks to the generosity of Samuel Kunkle, who donated a trust to fund the celebrations, refreshments were free to all the children who attended.



Besides Romper Day, Independence Day was the cause for great celebrations hosted by Reservoir Park. The festivities included a baby parade, in which babies in decorated strollers competed for prizes. Later, fireworks would be launched from the very top of the park’s hill, which housed the covered reservoir. Families would stretch out blankets, laying down to watch the brilliant displays cascading through the sky above.

On Sundays in the warmer months, bands would play at the bandshell, usually following services sponsored by nearby churches. The grassy lawn and hill with a view of the bandstand would be filled with onlookers, children occupying the hilltop. The American Legion band would usually perform Sousa marches or other inspiring martial music. Their leader, George Ream, was a colorful figure described as

“lively and robust” by one former fan. Dressed in a white suit, he was active figure on the bandstand, becoming part of the performance as well as directing the music.

In winter months Reservoir park was again a popular spot for children, snow would bring them flocking to the northeast gate of the park to sled or even ski down the hill. Near the formal entrance of the park was the Detweiler Gate, on which was placed a large elk statue. The sledders would begin under the elk and sled down the hill. When they reached the bottom, sliding across a small street, they would continue down into the “Devils Dip”. The “dip” was a deep bowl in the earth that made an exciting finish to a sled run, the goal being to slide fast enough down the slope to make it up the other side of the dip.

All was not fun and games at the park, however. During the Second World War guards were stationed in Reservoir Park to protect the city’s water supply from tampering and to spot planes flying overhead.

### **Paxtang Park**

**T**he area known as Paxtang Park was an amusement park, picnic grove and entertainment center that attracted guests not only from Harrisburg but also from throughout central Pennsylvania. It was originally created by the Harrisburg Railway Company on land used for its trolley turn around. A large loop of track formed the terminus of the Harrisburg line and allowed the trolleys to reverse their direction and head back into town. In addition, barns to house the trolleys when not in use were located at the facility.

Richard Hawthorne, who lived on Derry St. during the parks heyday, recalls seeing trolleys headed for the park overflowing with people. Men, women and children spilled out of the trolley onto running boards, sometimes in layers two deep. The trolley company ran special cars for Paxtang Park passengers. They were open at the sides with wicker or cane seats. Judy McClain, a longtime resident of the city recalls that the seats made the open cars smell like hay or straw. The Park was outside of what was considered Harrisburg city. Paved roadways ended around 18th or 19th Street, making the trolleys the only convenient way to reach to the park for most city residents.

The trolley company first purchased the land from the Rutherford family, who owned the property since it was first settled in 1744. Located on the property was, and is, the Rutherford spring house, a stone structure lying above a small natural spring. This spring feeds the Spring Creek, which flows southwest into the Susquehanna. The actual date of construction is somewhat controversial, with contradictory evidence suggesting 1730, 1740 and 1749. Regardless of its exact construction date, the building is one of the oldest in the area, built on what was then the frontier by family patriarch Thomas Rutherford. According to legend, Rutherford constructed the building above the spring to protect his family's water supply in case of an Indian attack.

In later years the Spring House was used by one of Rutherford's descendants, Dr. Thomas Rutherford, as a link in the Underground Railroad. Dr. Rutherford was a dedicated abolitionist who lived in a stately mansion at 11 South Front Street. He would often hide slaves in the Spring House or in the barn located nearby. In the park's prime a farm raising ostriches was located behind the old stone house.

The original park was much larger than what remains today, extending from Derry and Progress Avenues through the area that now contains the Harrisburg East Mall. The theme park was said to be bigger and better than the original Hershey Park. "The park also had two rollercoasters, a merry-go-round, dodge-'em cars, shooting galleries and concession stands with popcorn and apple taffy. There was a small zoo with the sign , 'Do Not Feed the Bear,' and a picture remains of one Harrisburger feeding the bear popcorn."<sup>20</sup> It also had a small stage on which movies were shown, followed by vaudeville productions. Upon entering the park one could buy novelties, play games of chance or skill, or buy a popcorn ball (or two, or many) from Johnny Lot's Popcorn Stand. On the stand was his motto, "the more you eat, the more you want". Within the park was a shallow lake used for boating and swimming. The lake was created by damming Spring Creek and flooding a small valley that is now occupied by the county prison. For those who were a little more daring, there was a limestone quarry just outside the park grounds that had filled with water. It was possible to dive from the sides into the water, a height of up to fifty feet.

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<sup>20</sup> Column, Faces and Places of Harrisburg, produced by the Dauphin County Historical Society Harrisburg Patriot-News.

Hot air balloon exhibitions also entertained park goers. Once a year, an entertainer known as "King Kelly" would amaze onlookers with his balloon show. First, the balloon would be filled with hot air created from an open pit of fire (modern burners had yet to be invented). After the balloon was sufficiently filled, the opening would be sealed and its tethers released. Now filled with the hot light air, the large sack of heated air would drift slowly skyward, raising a trapeze hung from its bottom. An acrobat would then perform suspended under the giant balloon. Finally, when the air within the balloon cooled and the entire apparatus began to fall, the performer would gracefully drift to the ground via parachute. Air shows of a different kind were also sponsored by the park. Airplanes could land and takeoff from a grassy strip within the park. At the first Harrisburg Air Show, held in 1911, aviator Paul Peck hit a tree and crashed, falling sixty feet. None the worse for wear, Peck returned the next day and circled the capitol dome.



The theme park closed during the Depression of the 1930s, and ownership of the land was transferred to the City of Harrisburg. In recent years, responsibility and ownership of the park has been the subject of considerable controversy. Although Harrisburg retains the rights to the park, it is actually located outside of city limits in Paxtang, an independent borough. Maintenance of the park has been a low priority for Harrisburg since it is technically outside of city land. As a result, Paxtang Park has been somewhat neglected in recent years. The city has offered to sell the property to the borough of Paxtang for as little as one dollar. However, the borough has been unwilling to accept the offer for fear of liability and other legal concerns surrounding ownership of the property.

### **Wildwood Park**

"The opportunity for a great country park at Harrisburg lies to the north of the city in the tract known as Wetzel's Swamp, which includes about 500 acres of swampy and dry land, framed in with wooded bluffs on one side, and a line of fine old willows along the canal on the other. As it stands today is a natural park with beautiful passages of landscapes, and fine vistas, even great stretches of meadow land to the distant hills beyond. It is rare, indeed, that a city can secure a property having all the elements of a park landscape, its border planting of fine trees, splendid individual specimens, and the woodlands carpeted in the spring with numerous wild flowers."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Paul B. Beers "Reporter At Large" (12 City Contented) Harrisburg Patriot News, March 11, 1983.

--Warren H. Manning, landscape architect

**T**he area known as Wetzel's Swamp, lying northeast of the city, was to be the gem of the new park system. The 969 acre property was owned chiefly by the Cameron family but sections were owned by the Alricks, Graham, Hoffer, Bergner, Fleming, Hiestler, Fox and Nisley families, as well as the Pennsylvania and Southern Central Railway Companies. The land was acquired by the city between 1904 and 1909. Unfortunately, Wildwood Park never did quite live up to Manning's lofty expectations. Because of its location and relative inaccessibility, Wildwood was never as widely used as its planners had hoped. Instead of becoming a naturalistic landscape park in the tradition of Frederick Olmsted, Wildwood Park has been used in a variety of ways.

Landscapers began their work on the Wetzel Swamp site by damming the Paxton Creek to create a 140 acre lake on the swampy ground. Completed in the summer of 1907, the dam was 1100 feet long, 10 to 12 feet high, and thirty feet wide at the top. The water filled in behind the dam at a depth of six or seven feet, creating Wildwood Lake. Despite the ambition of the early projects however, park development ended before Manning's plans were completed.

In 1927 the "Harrisburg Zoological Gardens" was constructed on the site. The Harrisburg Zoo was improved and enlarged in the 1930s by workers of the WPA (Works Progress Administration, who built the masonry cages for the animals. A pole fence surrounded the zoo, with entry possible through a large gate. The Zoo remained at Wildwood until 1945, housing 4 lions, 4 bears, 1 tiger, mountain lions, wolves, raccoons, seals, and monkeys. Many of the animals were donations, one lion was a donation of a circus company after the animal had broken its back. In all the contained, "old scraggly looking animals" according to Paul Goodman who had attended the park as a boy.

Throughout the early days the park was visited by a group of gypsies. Every year the group would pull in its carts and horse-drawn wagons into a clearing and stay for several weeks. These temporary camps were useful to Harrisburgers, who would bring their pots, pans and copper goods to the Gypsies for repairs. While they were there they could have their tools sharpened, palms read and fortunes told.



Residents of uptown Harrisburg could get to Wildwood and the Zoo via a footbridge over the railroad tracks at Division Street. Wildwood Lake was a popular spot for fishing and boating. Lou Miller, a former resident of uptown Harrisburg remembers Wildwood as the scene of many boyhood adventures and a “really neat place to go”. An especially fond memory for Miller was fishing for the blind, white catfish that lived in the underground culvert that funneled lake water down to the Susquehanna River. Others would use rowboats to cast their lines in the middle of the lake, hoping for sunfish or the catfish that cruised the lake bottom. Wild raspberry and elderberries encircled the lake, much to the delight of those who would pick them in the late summer months. Adjacent to the Park, to the southeast, was a public golf course. It was owned by Fred Waring, who was at the time a prominent band leader. A roller skating rink, a public swimming pool and a riding stable, all owned by the Hagy family, were also located on property adjoining the park.

Following the zoo’s closure, the area became in 1950 the Harrisburg City Dump. The dump extended across what is presently known as Industrial Road to the area now occupied by the farm show parking lot. Despite the unpleasantness of the dump facility, the park was still of great natural beauty. During this period both Albright and Messiah Colleges considered moving their campuses to the Wildwood Lake site, but these proposals were rejected. Also at this time Interstate 81 was built with a large interchange, splitting the park in half. Then, in 1967, Harrisburg Area Community College was constructed on the southern half of Wildwood Park on the old dump site.

### **The Parkway**



"As connecting in a sense all of these various park developments and providing a complete encircling scheme of the park developments, a parkway was planned, including the river front, the eastern border of the Wetzel Swamp district, a connection from there by way of the State Insane Hospital and the State Arsenal with Reservoir Park, and thence, by way of Paxtang and South Harrisburg with the river front. It will be noted that this parkway scheme was of exceptional character, though directly in line with modern ideals in the best park practice and tending toward the continual purpose of this Commission of bringing the people to seek the parks."

--Report of the Harrisburg Park Commission<sup>22</sup>

As is evident from the park commission report, the parkway system was to be an important an integral part of Harrisburg's park system. Unfortunately, these plans were never actualized, the parkway has yet to be completed. The primary cause was the commissions inability to acquire the land needed for continued construction. As of 1908, one and one half miles of parkways was owned by the city. This strip, known as the Cameron Parkway, was a donation made Senator J. Donald Cameron in 1905. Rachel Cameron Hale and Hoffer made a subsequent donation of land east of Reservoir Park, now known as the Paxtang Parkway in 1906. The following table appears in the 1908 Park Commission Report under the heading, "Park lands to be acquired to complete the General Park Plan."

Cameron Parkway	Acreage	Miles in length
From present terminus of Cameron Parkway to Hoffer tract adjoining Reservoir Park.....	151.789.....	4.35
North Parkway		
Reservoir Park to Maclay St.....	48.598.....	1.60
Inner Parkway		
23rd and Market St. to Cameron and Dock St.....	48.869.....	2.50
Cameron Parkway		
From present parkway entrance to Front and Cedar St.....	3.000.....	0.43

Although there were no additional donations of land for the completion of the parkway, the confidence of civic leaders that it would be completed was unswayed in 1915. This confidence is evident

<sup>22</sup> Harrisburg Park Commission, Report for 1908 and Historical Statement.

in a speech' "Our City and its Future", given by former mayor Vance McCormick to mark the fifteen year anniversary of public improvement in Harrisburg, in which he states, "this encircling parkway will be joined at many points by other parkways, leading away through the new parts of the city."<sup>23</sup>

Although the parkway is as yet uncompleted, it has seen a variety of uses throughout the years. During the First World War when supplies were needed by soldiers overseas and vegetables were in short supply "Victory Gardens" were planted in the Cameron Parkway to meet the demand. The gardens, also known as "War Gardens", were small plots of vegetable plantings to be cultivated by city families to supplement their diet with much needed vegetables. After the war these gardens were abandoned, and dense, wild growth was allowed to return. Fox grapes, a purple wild grape variety, occurs naturally in the Parkway especially near the Spring Creek. One area resident recalls picking the grapes to make homemade jelly.

The original carriage drive, a gravel road now paved, has been used mainly by kids for bicycling or hiking trail. At least one rope swing was located on a bluff overlooking the parkway near Paxtang. It was possible to swing out over the treetops of the parkway, a sensation akin to flight. In earlier years when the parkway was open to vehicular traffic, it was popular to drive over to the Spring Creek on a weekend and get a free car wash with spring water. Fire trucks would use the Parkway to race to a blaze, avoiding much of the usual cross-town traffic.

### **Trouble with City Beautiful**

**A**fter more than ten years of success, the energy that characterized the early City Beautiful Movement began to wane. Harrisburg had successfully completed Manning's plans for Riverfront and Reservoir Parks. However, the plans for Wildwood Park were not completed and the city never obtained the land needed to complete the parkway system. The problem was that the land donations that characterized the early park development

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<sup>23</sup> Vance C. McCormick, "Our City and Its Future", speech at Public Improvements Celebration Reception. 1915.

eventually stopped. As early as 1904, the Harrisburg Park Commission realized that private donations were necessary, stating the completion of the plan

“depends to a very great extent upon the generosity of the public of this community and it is hoped that a liberal response will be made to the appeals of the Park Board in the matter of donating land necessary to complete the new parkways.”<sup>24</sup>

However, the prosperity that allowed Harrisburg's City Beautiful program to push forward with its aggressive plans for park construction and urban beautification ended after the stock market crash in 1929 and the ensuing depression. In the tough economic climate of the thirties, survival of one's family became a higher priority than civic improvement and interest waned in the City Beautiful movement. At the end of the period of new park construction now known as Harrisburg's City Beautiful movement, the city contained 1,087 acres of park land. This gave Harrisburg a ratio of 80 residents for every acre of park, the highest ratio of any city in the United States at the time.

Following the Depression and the Second World War the parks of Harrisburg fell onto hard times. The city experienced an overall drop in population as the suburban lifestyle attracted many residents to move outside the city limits. Most likely to move were those in the highest economic classes, eroding the city's tax base. This decline continued as the parks began to attract illegal activity. Law abiding citizens began to fear for their safety in public parks and park attendance dropped. This overall decline was allowed to continue until the 1980s when Mayor Stephen Reed began programs to upgrade the city's waterfront, develop City Island and restore and develop Reservoir Park.

#### **CONCLUSION: THE REVIVAL OF AN OLD PLAN**

**I**n 1989, while doing a tree inventory for Paxtang Borough, foresters Norman Lacasse and Ellen Roane came upon a heavily wooded strip of land that ran through the borough. Dan Ricker, a lifelong resident of Paxtang and member of the borough's tree commission, mentioned that it was part of Paxtang Parkway which ran for miles through the city. Lacasse and Roane

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<sup>24</sup> Harrisburg Park Commission Report, Annual Report of the City of Harrisburg for 1903, Harrisburg Publishing Company, 1904.

were interested in what they had discovered and investigated further. They envisioned the land as part of a greenbelt to be used as for recreation by area residents.

In 1990 meetings were organized to garner support for the idea and to develop a plan for the linear park that would encircle the city. Representatives from the local townships, boroughs, the City of Harrisburg and Dauphin County were invited, along with representatives of state and county natural resource management. A public meeting was held in November 1990 to present the plan to the public. It was sometime later that they discovered that the greenbelt concept was not new and that Warren Manning's original plans for the park's of Harrisburg included a parkway similar to the Greenbelt. In fact, when comparing the two plans, the new Greenbelt follows a nearly identical course to the plans for the old parkway. Early in 1991 a nonprofit citizens organization called the Capital Area Greenbelt Association (CAGA) was formed to facilitate the completion of the project.

Segments of the original parkway still existed, but were in a sorry state of disrepair. The parkways were gated off to traffic. The roadways were in places totally obscured by brush, some sections had become local dumping sites. Two bridges had been washed out and never repaired. The CAGA took on as its first objective the restoration of the existing parkway segments. Saturday workdays were organized once a month. Volunteer labor cleared brush and removed tons of debris and trash on the roadways and into Spring Creek. The City of Harrisburg, Swatara Township and Paxtang Borough joined in the effort, assisting with the removal of trash and loaning tools and equipment to the volunteers. Harrisburg City boosted volunteer efforts tremendously by repairing and rebuilding bridges in the Cameron Parkway while repairing sewer lines in the area. Efforts to restore Spring Creek are underway, with assistance from the Pennsylvania Fish Commission and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources.

Thanks to a grant from the State Department of Community Affairs the CAGA was able to hire a landscape architectural firm to create a formal master plan for the development of the entire Greenbelt. The plan was approved in the Spring of 1994. It includes some 53 color plates detailing restoration and enhancements recommended to complete a twenty mile linear park which would encircle the city, linking existing parks via stream corridors and other greenspace not yet developed. Trail development, tree

plantings, extensive landscaping and lighting as well as the construction of environmental centers along the trail are all detailed in the plan.

The CAGA continues to evolve as an organization. As local support for the effort grows, the focus of the organization expands. Efforts to ensure continued maintenance of existing segments remains a high priority, but efforts to establish new trail linkages will require even greater attention. Given the various municipalities, state, local and private ownerships involved the CAGA will serve and increasingly important role in coordinating the project.

#### **Appendix:**

#### **The Leaders of the City Beautiful Movement**

##### **Mira Lloyd Dock**

**M**ira Lloyd Dock is recognized by most scholars as the catalyst of the City Beautiful movement in Harrisburg. In December of 1900 her speech, "The City Beautiful", for the Harrisburg Board of Trade marked the beginning of the local movement. Miss Dock, born in 1853, began her civic career in 1896 when she attempted to organize a club to clean the city streets. Her efforts culminated in the formation of the Civic Club of Harrisburg, of which she was a founding member and chairperson of the Department of Forestry and Town improvement. Dock was a horticulturist who received her training as a bluestocking at the University of Michigan. Her family was financially secure, allowing Dock to spend her time pursuing her academic and public interests. By the late 1890s she had published a series of scholarly reports concerning plants, horticulture, and forestry that gave her prominence among Pennsylvania naturalists

and civic activists. In 1899, she traveled extensively throughout Europe to study their forestry and horticultural practices. Upon her return, she published her findings from the trip in A Summer's Work Abroad, a publication of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to her research, Dock European trip exposed her to the beauty and efficiency of European cities. She was especially impressed by the way that growth and industrialization had been managed, by the Germans especially, in such a way as to incorporate physical beauty into the very core of their cities. In comparison, Harrisburg was a shambles. It lacked an organized effort to take advantage of the natural beauty of the city and its surroundings. A woman of action, Mira Lloyd Dock was determined to do something about Harrisburg's urban ugliness and poor sanitation. In that era, however, opportunities for women like Dock who wished to be involved in public affairs were quite limited. Therefore, her pivotal role in the City Beautiful movement, as well as her work to establish Forestry and resource management in Pennsylvania has often been overlooked.

#### **J. Horace McFarland**

**J**. Horace McFarland has been called the "leading lay spokesman for the City Beautiful" for his advocacy of urban improvement and beautification nationwide. McFarland, a Harrisburg native, was also a key player in Harrisburg's City Beautiful movement.

Vance C. McCormick, mayor during the early years of the movement, said of McFarland,

"if there is one man above others who stands out preeminently as a patriot in all these long years of improvement campaigns, it is J. Horace McFarland, the creator of our park system, and who to my mind has done more than any other man for the parks and public improvements of Harrisburg."<sup>26</sup>

Described as "a kindly but feisty giant of a man"<sup>27</sup>, McFarland actively sought to enhance the physical beauty of the entire nation. This interest in public beauty sprung most likely from his interest in horticulture. McFarland, born in 1859, was an avid gardener. His "Breeze Hill" garden, located at his

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<sup>25</sup> Mira Lloyd Dock, A Summer's Work Abroad. Bulletin #62, Penna. Dept. Of Agriculture 1900.

<sup>26</sup> Vance C. McCormick, "Our City and its Future", speech at Public Improvements Celebration Reception. 1915.

<sup>27</sup> Ernest Morrison, "Doctor Rose" Apprise Magazine, June 1989.

home, was world renowned for the beauty and originality of the rose hybrids produced there. However, McFarland was not a man to retreat to his own private preserve in order to escape the ugliness faced by those financially secure. He sought to improve the beauty and sanitation of all areas of his city and country.

In order to face the organized business and government agencies McFarland created the American Civic Association (ACA) for

“the cultivation of higher ideals of civic life and beauty in America, the promotion of city, town, and neighborhood improvement, the preservation and development of landscape, and the advancement of outdoor art.”

Through the ACA McFarland was able to do his most successful campaigning for urban beautification. The ACA was to have enhanced impact on the Harrisburg campaign. It was through this organization that McFarland met Warren H. Manning, who would eventually be responsible for the landscape design of Harrisburg’s parks.

After his success in catalyzing the Harrisburg “City Beautiful” campaign McFarland sought to export the movement to cities nationwide. Catherine Meikle, a lifelong resident of Harrisburg and an editor at his printing business, the McFarland Co., described her boss as constantly traveling to deliver lectures. These lectures were accompanied by slides, many taken by McFarland himself. Ms. Meikle described her former employer as being small of stature and with mild features; yet she claimed he was “full of energy” and willing to fight for what he believed in. She saw McFarland as being “scrappy” and that he could “ruffle feathers”. However, “the boss” was well liked for his gentle way of interacting with his employees, it seems that he saved his irascibility for those who opposed his civic activities.

It was this combination of concern and toughmindedness that made McFarland an effective spokesman for the beautification movement. Roderick Nash describing this quality said of him, “he was a kindly, gentle man, but he stiffened when justice or beauty was at stake.” A second McFarland campaign was against the billboards that were springing up on every flat surface of America’s cities in the 1900s. McFarland believed that they were contributing to the increasing ugliness of the city and sought to reduce their number. Yet another campaign was to save Niagara Falls. New York power companies wanted to

use the falls to generate hydroelectric power. McFarland dissented, believing that the falls were far more valuable for their natural beauty than their capability to generate electric power. In order to save the falls McFarland convinced President Teddy Roosevelt that federal intervention was necessary to save America's scenic resources. From this concept sprung the National Park Service, and the creation of Yellowstone Park.

### **Warren H. Manning**

**W**arren H. Manning was a student and protégé of Frederick Law Olmsted. He was responsible for planning and supervising the construction of the Harrisburg Park system. Manning began his involvement in the City Beautiful movement as the leader of the American Park and Outdoor Art Association. His activity in this organization brought him in contact with Horace McFarland, then the president of the American League for Civic Improvement. The two groups soon merged to form the American Civic Association and the men established a rapport that developed into a lifelong friendship.

### **Frederick Law Olmsted**

**B**orn April 26, 1822 to a wealthy family in Hartford, Connecticut, Frederick Law Olmsted became the superintendent to New York City's as yet unconstructed Central Park in the year 1857. The following year, 1858, he and his partner Calvert Vaux, devised and submitted the winning design in the Central Park design contest. The design was a complete success, establishing Olmsted as the foremost landscape architect in the country. The success of the design stimulated other cities to begin constructing their own parks, starting a movement that evolved into what became known as the City Beautiful movement.

After supervising Central Park's construction, Olmsted formed a consulting firm to design and aid in the construction of landscape architecture nationwide. In this capacity Olmsted designed portions



of the Stanford University campus, the grounds of the U.S. Capitol and many other projects. His most influential project in this capacity was the landscape design for the Columbian National Exposition, the World's Fair held in Chicago, 1893.

### Vance C. McCormick

**A**s mayor of Harrisburg from 1902-1905  
McCormick was ultimately responsible for the  
city improvements that began during his term.

His career as a reformer began when he was a young city councilman.

He was 29 years old, and only a few years removed from Yale University,  
when he suggested a \$525,000 debt to finance the planned "City



Beautiful" improvements. Two years later, running for mayor, he headed the "Anti-Typhoid" ticket. This was a slate of candidates and referendum aimed at improving and beautifying Harrisburg, that drew its name from the typhoid epidemic that was caused by the city's unsanitary water supply. This campaign platform, which included the 1 million dollar plus bond issue that financed the construction of Harrisburg's park system, was victorious in a landslide election (7066 to 4503) in the 1902 election. J. Horace McFarland said of McCormick, "The City was cleaned up morally and physically as fast as this active young man could bring it about."

### Sources

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