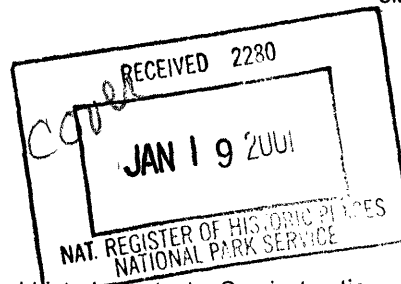


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Multiple Property Documentation Form



This form is used for documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form (National Register Bulletin 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information. For additional space, use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

☒ New Submission ☐ Amended Submission

**A. Name of Multiple Property Listing**

The City Beautiful Movement and Civic Planning in Portland, Oregon 1897-1921

**B. Associated Historic Contexts**

(Name each associated historic context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)

The City Beautiful Movement and Civic Planning in Portland, Oregon 1897-1921

**C. Form Prepared by**

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organization City of Portland Bureau of Planning

date January 25, 2000

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telephone (503) 823-7700

city or town Portland state OR

zip code 97201

**D. Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation. ☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

James Hamrick  
Signature and title of certifying official /Deputy SHPO

January 16, 2001  
Date

Oregon State Historic Preservation Office  
State or Federal agency and bureau

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Edson H. Beall  
Signature of the Keeper

2/16/01  
Date

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## E. STATEMENT OF HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### INTRODUCTION

The 1890s were a time of great change and growth for the city of Portland, Oregon. In 1891, Portland consolidated with the cities of East Portland and Albina, both located on the east side of the Willamette River. Consolidation caused Portland to more than double in size, and, as the 1890s progressed, that growth continued unabated. Nine years after consolidation, Portland's population increased by 50 percent and its geographic area by 40 percent.<sup>1</sup>

As Portland's business leadership tracked the city's growth in the 1890s, their confidence in Portland's future soared. Historians characterize the era as one filled with a "buoyancy of spirit" and go so far as to claim the time as "Portland's golden age."<sup>2</sup> Given such an environment (and a weak local government), Portland's business elite naturally desired to control the city's growth, both physically and spiritually. That impulse conformed to ideals promoted by the City Beautiful movement.

Gaining momentum circa 1897, the City Beautiful movement was significant for its promotion of the planned city. A national movement, it recognized cities as physical entities that could be shaped to reflect beauty, harmony, system, and order. Infrastructure improvements such as the installation of lighting systems and boulevard or park maintenance were seen as possible areas of influence, i.e., the built environment could be ordered and need not occur by happenstance.

The corporeal manipulation of cities had spiritual parallel as well: the orderly and ordered city was meant to affect "the heart, mind, and purse of the citizen."<sup>3</sup> The planned city would heighten a citizenry's civic patriotism, improve labor productivity, and enhance the urban economy through tourism and immigration.

This multiple property submission seeks to provide a context for tracing the effects of the City Beautiful movement upon Portland's built environment, studying, in particular, the Olmsted Plan of 1903 and Edward Bennett's Greater Portland Plan of 1912. It examines the local articulation of a national movement that took as its ideal the comprehensively planned city. Urban planning and design, accepted disciplines now, began to be professionalized practices during the City Beautiful movement. In keeping with Progressive urges of the period, the City Beautiful movement is aptly described as the "the aesthetic expression of turn-of-the-century reform."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it is a worthy endeavor to study its effects upon the city of Portland. Seized by a fervor of enthusiasm, Portland park and planning advocates at the start of the twentieth century heartily supported City Beautiful ideals and pushed for their local realization. Many of their aspirations went unfulfilled, however, highlighting the value of the few resources that remain from that time.

<sup>1</sup> City of Portland Bureau of Planning, Eliot Neighborhood Multiple Property Submission National Register Nomination, 1998, Sec. 8, pp. 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Carl Abbott, *Portland: Planning, Politics, and Growth in a Twentieth-Century City* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1983) 57.

<sup>3</sup> William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989) 1.

<sup>4</sup> Jon A. Peterson, "The City Beautiful Movement: Forgotten Origins and Lost Meanings," *Journal of Urban History* 2 (August 1976): 429-30.

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The period of significance begins in 1897, with the donation of Macleay Park and the start of a concerted park drive. That year also coincides with the national founding of the American Park and Outdoor Art Association, the first successful organization to bring laypersons and professionals together in the City Beautiful movement. The period of significance ends in 1921. Although the national City Beautiful movement ended in the 1910s, the local conceptualization and implementation of its precepts and projects occurred much later in the movement's chronology. For example, the Bennett Plan was not produced until 1912 when the movement was already on the wane nationally. The late closing date was also chosen due to the inherent "delays" in completing civic improvements; property acquisitions for parks did not occur overnight and political priorities were subject to change with each election year. Funding woes and then new park planning priorities altered the types of public parks established in the city; specifically, in 1921, a local bond issue was authorized that called for the acquisition of smaller neighborhood parks and playground tracts. The bond issue showed the growing primacy of the Playground Movement over that of the City Beautiful in terms of park planning. The end date of the period of significance also partially reflects that change.

## THE NATIONAL CONTEXT<sup>5</sup>

*Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. (c. 1858-1892)*

The origins of the City Beautiful movement can be traced to beliefs espoused by the preeminent landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. Born in 1822, Olmsted achieved national prominence in 1858 when he, along with British-born architect Calvert Vaux (1824-1895), won the design competition for Central Park in New York City. That commission proved the springboard for Olmsted's long and successful career as a landscape architect and urban planner. Olmsted's other works of note include the Vanderbilt estate at Biltmore, North Carolina; the grounds of the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C.; and the Niagara Falls Scenic Reservation. Olmsted also prepared plans for numerous clients, both public and private. By the time of his death in 1903, virtually all major American cities bore some form of Olmsted's signature.<sup>6</sup>

What influences shaped Olmsted's approach to landscape architecture and urban planning? A "nonsectarian ethical" Protestant in an increasingly secular society, Olmsted believed that an elevated humankind could be achieved through conscientious social effort and not through personal salvation alone.<sup>7</sup> Given his confidence in man's ability to shape a moral society, Olmsted watched America's urbanization in the late nineteenth century with dismay. He observed the flight from farms to urban centers, with the resulting decline of rural populations. Cities became sites of extreme congestion and disease, with the suburbs and farms at their periphery providing sharp contrast. Urbanization went hand in hand with the destruction and/or radical transformation of sizeable chunks of the natural landscape. For Olmsted, raised to appreciate the natural landscape, the disintegration of the country's scenic heritage was acutely distressing. Both processes—urbanization and landscape despoliation—served to erode further the community values exhibited by the best villages and small towns. He believed that spaciousness and the natural landscape cultivated the values of a village community. Olmsted worried that values such as mutual regard and charity for the less fortunate would disappear in the urban environment. Urbanization and its accompanying woes threatened those attributes so necessary for a healthy society.

<sup>5</sup> This section respectfully borrows from William H. Wilson's valuable work on the movement, cited previously.

<sup>6</sup> Claire L. Ross, Olmsted Parks and Parkways Thematic Resource National Register Nomination, 1981, Sec. 8, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Wilson, 11.

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Andrew Jackson Downing, a horticulturist and landscape architect, also influenced Olmsted. Engaged in personal correspondence with Downing and influenced by his writings, Olmsted could not help but analyze the social significance of landscapes during his tour of the British Isles and Europe with his mentor in mind. Olmsted's visits exposed him to the virtues of the romantic aesthetic, which allowed for the production or enhancement of the picturesque landscape. Following romantic precepts, the grandeur of nature was irreproducible. However, it was noted that the pastoral or agricultural landscape, which held considerable charm for its productivity and natural qualities, was both a product of man and nature. As such, human artistry was fully capable of creating the "middle landscape," that between town and country. That realization justified the insertion of a natural setting within the artificial construct of the city or, more simply, the public park.

Such influences—the secularization and urbanization of late nineteenth century America, landscape despoliation, and scenic appreciation—informed Olmsted's ideas about landscape architecture and urban planning. Motivated by a secular mission, Olmsted's parks were meant to act as "restorative, recreative influences of natural landscape" on the urban dweller.<sup>8</sup> He saw his work in cities as an antidote to the socially deadening effects of urbanization and its companion, the wholesale clearance of land. His parks functioned as spiritually useful products to a city's inhabitants, while granting their designers the peace of mind of conserving the natural landscape. Park designers were also able to satisfy a desire to wed both art and nature, since the landscapes they produced involved the artistic manipulation of natural settings. Leading by example, Olmsted's work combined rural preservation and managed conservation with the possibility for urban beauty.

Grounded in such ideological foundations, Olmsted contributed to the City Beautiful movement in three basic ways. First, he moved from designing individual parks to planning comprehensive park and boulevard systems. Second, Olmsted pointed out that parks and other large-scale civic improvements raised the land values of their adjoining properties. That increase contributed to private enterprise, which returned costs via higher municipal real estate taxation. In essence, he provided an economic argument for the creation of municipal park systems. Third, Olmsted developed a consulting firm that was often hired as an outside consultant to address vexing urban dilemmas. Thus, Olmsted established the practice of hiring planning "experts," presaging the Progressive Era's love of the accredited professional.<sup>9</sup> As the nineteenth century drew to a close, Olmsted's ideas and practices found expression in the burgeoning movement that became the City Beautiful.

## *The World's Columbian Exposition of 1893*

Of course, Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. was not solely responsible for the birth of the City Beautiful movement. In fact, many historians often cite the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 as the main inspiration of the movement and the beginning of comprehensive city planning. However, to attribute singular credit to the Exposition obscures the multiple factors that contributed to the movement and the concept of urban planning. A quick review of the Exposition reveals it to be the culmination of social, professional, and cultural trends rather than the start of a brand new movement.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, 10.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

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The idea of a world's fair to commemorate Columbus' discovery of America began to be bandied about in the 1880s. Many hoped that the event would be the best of a series of international expositions. Cities such as St. Louis and New York placed bids to host the American version. In the end, up-and-coming Chicago was chosen, and work for the event begun.

The Exposition took several considerations into account: architectural professionalism; building design; aesthetics; artistic collaboration; sanitation; the women's movement; and civic spirit—all of which were trends or concerns in aesthetic and civic improvement prior to the world's fair.<sup>10</sup> The Exposition fully embodied the spectrum of those concerns and trends but did not unite them in the name of the City Beautiful movement. The distinction is important because it links the birth of urban planning to the City Beautiful movement and not to the "White City" (as the world's fair was also known) alone. However, that claim does not dismiss the significance of the Exposition. In fact, it is still necessary to study the White City's achievements so that its relationship to the City Beautiful movement may be understood.

First, a look at the fair's organizers. At the helm was the architectural firm of Daniel Hudson Burnham and John Wellborn Root. Behind them stood a cast of well-known architects such as Richard M. Hunt and the firms of McKim, Mead, and White, as well as Peabody and Stearns of Boston. When Root passed away in the early planning stages of the event, Burnham assumed sole leadership of the project. Under Burnham's firm and charismatic leadership, architects very much directed the Exposition's outcome, which helped to cultivate their field's professional growth.

Architects desired to showcase their profession before their patrons and did so by authoritatively controlling the often difficult questions of site and design. That control allowed them to argue to public officials that public buildings were more than just construction projects. Fully embellished public buildings and civic monuments, they opined, expressed a municipality's governmental and cultural identity. That identity, it was felt, was best paired with the neoclassical architectural style. Neoclassic architecture suited the aesthetic motif of the Exposition because it recalled America's European heritage and resonated with the country's urban elite.

Citizens in late nineteenth century America could not help but be inspired to higher ideals if their public spaces were composed of such bold and artistic environs. To that end, architects urged the use of municipal art and collaborated with sculptors and muralists to produce public sites that brought together monuments, buildings, and civic art. Indeed, the grouping of those elements was refreshingly applied to the late nineteenth century public arena. The White City reintroduced the classic definition of a square as a space surrounded by complementary buildings.

The artistic collaboration needed to produce that kind of public space was itself noteworthy. Habitual practice at the revered Parisian Ecole des Beaux-Arts, the collaboration of architects, muralists, and sculptors at the Chicago Exposition demonstrated that cooperation among the different disciplines was possible and profitable on the domestic front. The architectural profession was reaching new levels.

Other facets of the fair merited praise, though perhaps of a more quotidian tenor. For one, the sanitary practices exhibited at the Exposition were a miracle of urban sanitary engineering. Not only were the White City's streets paved, they were swept and cleaned nightly. The White City also featured filtered drinking water and numerous lavatories, aided by a

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, 60.

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sewage treatment system. Such advances stood in sharp relief against the commonplace of the garbage-strewn, muddy or dusty streets of nineteenth century America. In addition, visitors could see the city both day and night. Alternating-current light bulbs lit the Exposition, suggesting the future possibilities of an electrical system to replace the era's gaslighting of city streets. And what did a visitor see? Certainly no billboards, which contemporary public opinion viewed as distasteful. Today's urban dweller might take many of these achievements for granted in the modern city, but in 1893, all of it was new.

In fact, many of the White City's sanitary successes were concerns championed by the women's movement of the time. For example, social activist Jane Addams united tenants and residents in her Chicago neighborhood to lobby the municipal government to bear the costs of infrastructure improvements to public property. Prior to their protest, improvements such as street repaving were left to private property owners.<sup>11</sup> Because that policy was predicated on socioeconomic class, the city's physical and aesthetic landscape could only develop unevenly. Contributions like Addams' were crucial to the growing village improvement movement, where women were strong advocates for municipal reform. The Exposition acknowledged their contributions and had a Women's Department and a Woman's Building at the fair.

The Exposition would not have been possible without the trait so critical to the future City Beautiful movement: civic spirit. Chicagoans had formed committees and lobbying groups to wrest hosting honors from cities like New York, where time and energy had been frittered away appeasing political factions. In Chicago, partisan, economic, political, and cultural differences had been set aside for the collective good. To be sure, the fair's organization was not a study of altruism; shareholders received dividends from the fair, and profits were made. However, the Exposition did show that civic pride, cooperation, and patronage of the arts could be combined in nonpartisan fashion for the common good.

What the White City did not do, though, was jumpstart the City Beautiful movement. Although it pointed professional activity and thought towards issues of civic design and improvement, it did not likewise stimulate nonprofessionals. That inability to spark their interest delayed the movement because nonprofessionals were who gave the City Beautiful movement its force. When nonprofessionals did begin looking at those issues, their gaze was not focused on the Exposition. Instead, they examined European cities' approach to aesthetic and functional matters, the possibilities and missed chances in U. S. cities, or the development and procurement of park and boulevard systems. Those issues, not the fair, stimulated the interests of nonprofessionals.

So, why recount the achievements of the White City at all? Foremost, City Beautiful proponents would find it a useful example in their speeches and discussions. Nonprofessionals were able to look back on it and see that it required the coordination of two groups: the nonprofessional elite who galvanized Chicago's civic spirit and financial charity to organize the fair and the professionals who ultimately finished the job. Nonprofessionals took note of their precedents' mobilization of public opinion and studied their fundraising tactics via bond measures and other options. A tested model for such techniques, the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 worked. For professionals, the Exposition validated their expertise. Remembering the breadth of their executive powers during the fair, the passage of time only sharpened their appetite for increased control of design matters as they pertained to civic improvement. With the City Beautiful movement, both groups were sated: professionals were given the authority to decide aesthetic concerns but citizen

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<sup>11</sup> Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House with Autobiographical Notes* (New York: Macmillan, 1960) 320-321.

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boards—comprising some nonprofessionals—had vetoing powers. But until the City Beautiful movement matured in the late 1890s, that marriage was on hold.

*“...the City Made Beautiful” (1894-1903)*

Having energized professional activity, the Exposition prompted architects, landscape architects, and other professionals to create a formal organization that would instill a sense of identity and pride among themselves. Such an organization would allow its members to share new information and technology as they applied to social issues and give them an opportunity to advance specific goals through public education and legislation. Yet, while there were organizations for specific professions (the American Institute of Architects had been established circa 1856), there was no unifying organization for professionals in different fields who were interested in municipal improvement and beautification. In 1894, the National Municipal League (NML) formed to fill that need, as did the American Society of Municipal Improvements (ASMI), an organization composed entirely of civil engineers. Neither organization would enjoy the success of the American Civic Association (ACA) in promoting and fostering the City Beautiful movement.

A discussion of the ACA necessarily begins with the American Park and Outdoor Art Association (APOAA). The APOAA was critically different from both the NML and ASMI in one way: it counted nonprofessionals among its ranks. In 1897, Warren H. Manning, an Olmsted affiliate, had written a call to arms addressed to park superintendents, landscape architects, and sympathetic laypersons. Manning proposed the creation of a hierarchical association of “landscape gardeners” with landscape architects at the top of that pyramid. Received favorably by most, Manning’s proposal did have its critics, most notably John Olmsted, stepson of the great Frederick Olmsted, and his partner, Charles Eliot. Both urged “a general association, to be made up of all who desire the advancement of landscape art.”<sup>12</sup> Their remarks stressed a wider invitation than Manning might have originally intended since “outdoor art” referred to the disciplines of horticulture, landscape design, and sculpture. Also, instead of a hierarchical association, Eliot suggested a committee organization, with a subcommittee that would recruit members from a variety of sources, such as village improvement societies. Manning smartly heeded his peers, and the APOAA, encompassing sculptors and park board members alike, was born.

The American Park and Outdoor Art Association (APOAA) drew its strength from three sources. First was its inclusive nature, already noted. Second, the APOAA confirmed beliefs asserted by the dean of landscape architecture, Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. His stepson, John, presented a paper at the APOAA’s first meeting that upheld many of his famous parent’s ideals. For example, he argued that municipalities should not cave in to the public clamor for active recreational and institutional spaces in landscape parks. Amusement parks, popularized by the success of Coney Island, should not replace the need for public parks. Indeed, they functioned on completely different levels. One allowed for the appreciation of natural scenery and offered repose from the manufactured landscape of the city, while the other indulged (or over stimulated, as some might have argued) the urban dweller’s desire for artificial enjoyments.

Other papers presented similarly affirmed Olmstedian ideals. Others now agreed with Olmsted’s earlier statements that park developments should adhere to a planned system. They also lobbied for public investment in parks, certain that doing so would evince an increase in real estate values.

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<sup>12</sup> *Op. cit.*, 36.

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Backing Olmsted's principles gave the APOAA a receptive and supportive audience, but retaining that audience also meant knowing when to move away from those principles. The APOAA's ability to recognize and adapt to changing definitions of urban beauty was its third strength. Even as the APOAA organized, new trends in the municipal improvement and beautification movement were established. Charles Mulford Robinson published two influential texts—*The Improvement of Towns and Cities; or the Practical Basis of Civic Aesthetics* (1901) and *Modern Civic Art, or the City Made Beautiful* (1903). The battle against billboards began, and engineers were repeatedly appointed positions in public offices.

Still other developments affected the municipal improvement and beautification movement. Most significantly, the movement acquired a label. In 1899, the Municipal Art Society, founded in 1893, held its first convention. There, the phrase "City Beautiful" was used in a manner that incorporated beliefs and practices that would later define the movement. Another trend was the growing organized playground movement. Indeed, an ever-expanding web of civic organizations was forming locally and nationally. The organizations often shared overlapping memberships, as well as information related to common goals. These changes were underscored by a growing confidence in the future of America's cities. Believers had only to point to the McMillan Plan of 1902.

Prepared by a respected group of professionals including Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and Charles McKim, the McMillan Plan granted its authors the opportunity to apply the lessons of the World's Columbian Exposition to a real city—Washington, D.C. Given the assigned city, the Plan's authors also dealt with similar issues brought up during the Exposition: the stimulation of both national patriotism and local civic pride. The Senate-appointed men rose to the task. They had seen the White City created and destroyed within a matter of years. Inspired by that observation, those who worked on the McMillan Plan, as well as their peers in the City Beautiful movement, confidently assumed that redirecting or planning a city's growth was a feasible goal. In Washington, D.C., the Mall area and the Federal Triangle received particular care, with attention focused on patriotism and unity expressed through national monuments, public buildings, and axial views. For the first time, City Beautiful proponents of all stripes had a plan that grouped municipal buildings and connected them to an advanced park and boulevard system.

The McMillan Plan was also significant because it represented an ideological shift away from Olmsted's traditional beliefs about the role of parks in cities. For Olmsted, parks were "restorative influences." They were locations for the working class or poor to visit in order to spiritually rejuvenate themselves. For those who worked on the McMillan Plan, it was believed that parks and other expressions of civic improvement could be *shaping* influences. In other words, parks could inspire its lower class visitors to lift themselves out of what was certainly their moral morass. They would become, in turn, better workers and thus become more economically productive citizens.<sup>13</sup>

The ideological shift from Olmstedian principles was great but not surprising. Even at the opening meeting of the APOAA, L. E. Holden, editor of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, had attributed a city's beauty to its parks and boulevards. That statement departed radically from Olmsted's views of the city. To him, cities were unrelentingly harsh environments. Parks and boulevards merely provided alternative experiences to the city dweller. They did not actively beautify a city. Holden's declaration challenged that belief. For him and later City Beautiful advocates, America's urban areas could be made beautiful. A great step towards the realization of that goal was the adoption of comprehensive plans

<sup>13</sup> *City Beautiful: The 1901 Plan for Washington D.C.*, ed. Julie K. Rose, Spring 1996, University of Virginia, 26 May 1999  
<<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CAP/CITYBEAUTIFUL/dchome.html>>



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that wove park and boulevard systems into the urban fabric. Olmsted's plans for Boston and other cities had been doing just that for years, but new reasons for doing so were being proposed and supported.

The APOAA absorbed the movement's ideological shifts but had yet to reign its direction. In 1902, the organization decided to study the possibility of merging with a like-minded association, the American League for Civic Improvement (ALCI). Younger than the APOAA by three years, the ALCI was active in municipal improvement from its outset. Merging with the ALCI would include the APOAA in the larger urban Progressive movement. The APOAA's original aim to advance landscape art no longer fit its organizational makeup. With the formation of the American Society of Landscape Architects in 1899, those demanding an organization for professional landscape architects had been mollified. Perhaps as a result, the majority of APOAA members tended to be nonprofessionals. Hence, they sought more than the advancement of landscape art. Composed of a number of citizen activists, the APOAA was becoming an organization made up of folks who believed that the beauty and health of a community depended not only on its parks but also on the holistic civic design of a city or town. A potential merger with the ALCI would more closely satisfy the interests of the APOAA's constituents.

Unlike the APOAA, the ALCI had been concerned with issues of municipal improvement at its founding, which jibed with the larger concerns of Progressivism. Progressives, typically of middle or upper-middle class background, aimed to uplift the moral will and physical conditions of those suffering from the negligences of the passing Industrial Age.<sup>14</sup> Brimming with enthusiastic hope and convinced of their untouchable goodwill, Progressives wished to 'clean up' the city, by-product of America's industrial growth. The ALCI embraced many of these Progressive ideals and hoped to realize them via the aesthetic reform of the city.

Really, the municipal improvement movement did not look that different from the APOAA. Landscape design was no longer the special province of public or private parks. Land as humble as a cottage plot, ordinary residential streets—all was equally relevant landscapes and thus potential studies of landscape design. Also, the term 'outdoor art' had come to refer to such a spectrum of activities and concepts—forestry, the beautification of school grounds, and scenic preservation, for example—that the ALCI and the APOAA were virtually indistinguishable by 1903. They formally merged that year and became the American Civic Association (ACA).

With the formation of the ACA, the City Beautiful movement finally had a guiding organization. J. Horace McFarland, past president of the ALCI, capably took the ACA in hand and retained many of his former organization's features. A prosperous businessman and advocate of the Harrisburg Plan, McFarland was a citizen activist and no expert. His rise to the top of the ALCI and then the ACA was significant because it positioned the layperson over the professional. Again, the key ingredient to civic spirit, that all-important component of the City Beautiful movement, was the informed, involved citizen. Logically, the layperson would figure more prominently than the professional in the ACA. That is not to say, though, that the expert's contributions were not accorded respect. Nonprofessionals could make general recommendations, but their main function in the movement was to drum up public support and funds for improvement projects. The planning experts delivered concept, project, and final product. That dynamic was evident during the planning and construction of the White City. During the City Beautiful era, it replicated itself in municipalities across the country where consultants were brought in to advise and plan while citizen boards or commissions made decisions and

<sup>14</sup> Kenneth J. Guzowski, *Portland's Olmsted Vision (1897-1915): A Study of the Public Landscapes Designed by Emanuel T. Mische in Portland, Oregon* (Master's thesis, University of Oregon, 1990) 12.

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doled out funds. In its early years, the ACA typified that dynamic and illustrated the successful merger of landscape architecture and municipal improvement with novel advances in civic design.

## *Identity & Ideology*

With a supporting organization in place, City Beautiful advocates could begin their campaign in earnest. An ideology to frame the movement had emerged. The base fields underlying its initiative—architecture, landscape architecture, horticulture, and the like—had been enhanced by nuances attributable to other areas such as sociology, psychology, and biology. The publication of a number of planning reports also contributed to the City Beautiful ideology. What follows is an introduction to its advocates and analysis of the components that made up the movement's philosophy.

Because the City Beautiful movement shared many of the same ideals of Progressivism, its advocates tended to be cut from the same cloth. For example, most of the laypersons and planning experts who supported the City Beautiful movement were members, often male, of the urban middle, upper-middle, and upper class. They were usually owners or managers of businesses such as the newspaper industry, manufacturing plants, or large retail stores. Others were part of the professional world, so included bankers, attorneys, and physicians. These elites believed that they offered a convincing solution to urban problems: a beautiful, rational city made possible by comprehensive urban planning. They sought their goal by generating intensive publicity campaigns endorsed by civic bodies such as boards of trade or chambers of commerce. Their campaigns had one objective: the transformation of the smoky, dirty city into a clean and beautiful place.

To reach their goal, City Beautiful advocates turned to Europe for inspiration. That search for guidance has been seen as the American discovery of Europe, the first component of the movement's ideology. For example, before drafting the McMillan Plan, its authors spent time visiting European capitals.<sup>15</sup> City Beautiful supporters well understood the American city's aesthetic and functional flaws but, by studying their European counterparts, they also recognized their possibilities.

The second ideological piece involves the movement's very recognition of the city's aesthetic and functional flaws. With land abundant, retail and industry flexed their business muscle by continually abandoning their locations when they became successful. Setting up shop elsewhere signified their success but littered the city with aging structures left vacant or occupied with undesirable new uses and tenants. City Beautiful advocates hoped to limit such practices or at least preserve what remained of the city's threatened physical beauty. Its streets, unpaved and narrow, meant cramped, seasonally dusty or muddy travel for the urban dweller. Riverfronts were used by citizens and industries alike as sewers and what few parks existed were poorly located or unimproved. Yes, City Beautiful advocates noted, urban waterways tended to be used as sewers, but they need not remain that way. That reply, born from the movement's clear-eyed review of the city's aesthetic and functional flaws, produced the movement's third ideological component, buoyant optimism.

However, City Beautiful proponents realized that their opponents would cling to the status quo until functional proposals were submitted. The *Chicago Post* editorialized, "What is the use of \$1,000,000 worth of public works of art annually while our anti-smoking ordinances are violated every hour of the day and our streets are never cleaned?"<sup>16</sup> The modern

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<sup>15</sup> Witold Rybczynski, *City Life: Urban Expectations in a New World* (New York: Scribner, 1995) 134.

<sup>16</sup> Mel Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) 79.

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industrial city, while sooty and smelly, worked and was of economic benefit to its inhabitants. It refused to spend its earnings on a facelift of a park when more practical considerations, such as its unpaved streets, went uncared for. The challenge for City Beautiful supporters, then, was to package beauty and utility together.

City Beautiful proponents responded admirably. There had been inklings of such concerns when ordinary residential streets were deemed worthy of landscape design. The city plans produced during the City Beautiful period furthered the notion that form and function were inseparable. They contained utilitarian aspects like traffic circulation, recreational improvements, and railroad reorganization. The Harrisburg Plan of 1901 even counted two reports on street and sewer improvements among its products. Civic and cultural centers, often included in City Beautiful plans, were also seen as efficient in that they grouped buildings of similar function together, easing the conduct of a city's business. The movement's fourth ideological trait, then, was to conflate beauty with utility.

For City Beautiful supporters, that "beautility" was more than skin deep.<sup>17</sup> Prosaic improvements such as the widening of a boulevard or grand changes such as the creation of a civic center did more than beautify the city physically. They also inspired the spirits and behavior of its citizens. That belief characterized the movement's fifth ideological component, environmentalism, but that term did not mean what it does today. With the advent of the fields of psychology and sociology and the introduction of Darwinism, humans were viewed as creatures easily influenced by their surroundings. Hence, the total development of the urban environment was of keen interest to the City Beautiful movement. Rather than suffer Olmsted's intractable city, City Beautiful supporters rallied behind the idea of a flexible city wherein one could seek and discover secular salvation. Naturally, that belief assumed a definition of secular salvation as understood by City Beautiful advocates, which has led to weighty charges of social control.

Accusations of social control, while alarming, weaken upon closer inspection of the City Beautiful movement. City Beautiful speech was undoubtedly turgid, but its results were often mild; for example, an anti-billboard ordinance written by the local city council or possibly a cleanup campaign. The movement's florid language did not necessarily beget a consciously sought, sinister social control system.<sup>18</sup> America's political power was too widely distributed to afford City Beautiful enthusiasts that much control.

To aid their cause, City Beautiful advocates turned to experts in the fields of architecture, urban planning, and landscape architecture. Expert counsel about urban issues was the movement's sixth ideological piece. The movement recognized the mounting frustration of middle and upper class elites who had grown tired of shoddy and piecemeal attempts to stay apace with urban issues as they arose.

<sup>17</sup> Wilson, 83.

<sup>18</sup> The playground movement, occurring in the same period as the City Beautiful movement, was more susceptible to charges of social control since it hoped to determine the socialization of children. Like the City Beautiful movement, supporters of the playground movement were usually middle class, but the movement was more activist, more aggressively environmentalist, and focused on specific reform. From early childhood to late adolescence, the organized playground and its director offered a preferred alternative to the dance halls, vaudeville and burlesque shows, and saloons then vying to distract the urban youth. By stressing the finer points of activities such as team play, the organized playground and its director promoted virtues such as national patriotism and individual sacrifice. Wilson, 82.

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Experts served another purpose, too. Laypersons loved their promotional value. Experts who wrote or spoke well lent an aura of respectability to mass meetings or rallies to raise funding for City Beautiful prospects. They capably deflated or dismissed concerns raised by planning's critics.

The City Beautiful movement's final and most important ideological characteristic, acceptance and celebration of the city, gave its supporters their *raison d'être*. Many of them—the architects, landscape architects, and laypersons—had followed the nineteenth century's migratory patterns and lived in cities or suburbs. Scurrilous criticisms of the city, viewed with skepticism and distrust during the nineteenth century, grew less and less as the twentieth century matured.<sup>19</sup> With forethought from experts, City Beautiful supporters believed that urban landscapes could be molded to produce beautiful and functional cities inhabited by a harmonious citizenry. As such, the City Beautiful movement forced the country to take a comprehensive and critical look at its urban centers and participated in the era's revived civic spirit.

## THE LOCAL CONTEXT

### *Background (1852-1902)*

Portland, Oregon, like other cities, was led to urban planning by an initial examination of its park system.<sup>20</sup> In its early history, though, Portland was not proactive about its public recreation spaces. The city's park system depended upon the charity of its wealthy citizens. For example, Lownsdale and Chapman Squares, the first parks in the city's history, were donated to the public in 1852.<sup>21</sup> For almost twenty years after, no further attention was paid to the possibility of expanding the city's park system. The matter was revived in 1871 when it was argued that "Park Row" should be converted from private to public ownership. "Park Row" referred to the blocks between Southwest Salmon and Mill Streets in downtown Portland. Private property owner and farsighted pioneer Daniel Lownsdale had earmarked those parcels for continuous open space use and had willed their ownership to the city after his death. Legal battles tied the matter up for some time, but the blocks were finally given over to public ownership in 1871. The city had aggressively pursued the purchase of more park land that same year by acquiring 40 acres in west Portland from wealthy settler, Amos King. Although contemporaries observed that 40 acres was a relatively small size for a park, they would have to wait another twenty years before another large-scale park would be available to the public. In 1897, Scotsman Donald Macleay donated 107 acres of land in northwest Portland to commemorate Queen Victoria's 60<sup>th</sup> year of reign, significantly expanding the acreage of park lands in the city.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Evolution of American Urban Society* (Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1981) 189.

<sup>20</sup> Mansel G. Blackford, "The Lost Dream: City Planning in Portland, Oregon, 1903-1914," *Western Historical Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (January 1984) 42.

<sup>21</sup> Both sites were set aside for park use in the original plat of December 1852. Later, there was some question about the city's ownership of the land, so the city paid Mr. Chapman \$1,200 for the title. "57 city parks enjoyed by Portland people," *Oregon Daily Journal* 25 Dec. 1925: 22; Eugene E. Snyder, *Portland Potpourri: Art, Fountains & Old Friends* (Portland, OR: Binford & Mort, 1991) 107.

<sup>22</sup> E. Kimbark MacColl, *The Shaping of a City: Business and Politics in Portland, Oregon 1885 to 1915* (Portland, OR: The Georgian Press Co., 1976) 14.

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With the establishment of Macleay Park, it seemed that Portland finally had some parks deserving of attention. In any case, the Portland Park Association was founded after Macleay's generous offering in 1898.<sup>23</sup> Two years later, the state legislature approved Portland's City Charter Amendment that called for the establishment of a Board of Park Commissioners to manage City Park (as King's donation was christened), Macleay Park, and smaller properties around the city. The enactment was a coup for Lester Hawkins and Reverend Thomas Lamb Eliot, local citizen activists who had aggressively lobbied for urban parks and playgrounds for Portland.<sup>24</sup> Even as the amendment was adopted, the Portland Park Association had already started its search for a consultant to advise on the improvement of existing parks and the acquisition of new properties to augment the city's woeful park system.<sup>25</sup> At the time, Portland owned less than 200 acres of park property, lagging far behind Seattle, Tacoma, and major cities in California.<sup>26</sup>

City and business leaders demonstrated new concern for Portland's appearance because the city needed to become a successfully marketed product. The nationwide financial panic of 1893 had slowed most cities' economic growth, and, unfortunately, Seattle recovered faster than Portland. Seattle even claimed to have matched their southern neighbor's population, adding insult to economic injury. Portland's business community knew that they would have to begin asserting their city's advantages to compete in the regional marketplace.<sup>27</sup>

Thought by many to be the "natural" metropolis of the Pacific Northwest, what better way to promote Portland than to extol its scenic beauty?<sup>28</sup> A comprehensive park system, the *Oregonian* editorialized, would "vastly increase the attractiveness of Portland as a Summer [sic] resort and as a place the scenic beauties of which it is worth crossing the continent and the ocean to enjoy."<sup>29</sup> A good municipal park system could increase tourism and thus contribute to the city's economic development. Besides, the city had just invested in huge public expenditures; in 1894, two reservoirs had been constructed on Mt. Tabor as part of the Bull Run water system. They were no ordinary reservoirs either. Each was bordered by an elaborate fence, complete with gas jet lights and a promenade. The slopes around the reservoirs were even planted with flowers and were essentially landscaped lawns. The reservoirs provided an excellent component for a future park system.<sup>30</sup>

Following tendencies of the Progressive and City Beautiful movements, a good municipal park system was also viewed as a curative for ailments threatening a city's civic health. In fact, supporters of a comprehensive park plan for Portland often promoted the idea by using the language of civic virtue. It was easier to gain the trust of the public (who would, after all, foot the bill through their taxes) if such a project was marketed for the good of the civic public. The upper-class elites and middle-class business interests who fueled the City Beautiful movement in Portland could hardly hope to succeed if they advertised their personal business or moral interests in the project.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Guzowski, 17.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, 41; Abbott, 59.

<sup>25</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> MacColl, 14.

<sup>27</sup> *Op. cit.*, 33-4.

<sup>28</sup> Abbott, 35.

<sup>29</sup> "Park idea," editorial, *Oregonian* 23 Dec. 1906: 6.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Vaughan, ed., Vol. 1 of *Space, Style and Structure: Buildings in Northwest America* (Portland, OR: Oregon Historical Society, 1974) 188.

<sup>31</sup> Blaine Merker, *Civic Life and City Planning in Portland, Oregon, 1903-1943* (B.A. thesis, Reed College, 1998) 28-9.

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### *The Olmsted Plan (1903-1909)*

Portland began its efforts to produce a comprehensive park plan by pursuing the services of the reputed Olmsted Brothers firm. The Olmsted Brothers firm was associated with the great Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. but had carved its own identity in the field of landscape architecture. John, Olmsted's stepson, was an estimable landscape architect in his own right. Born in 1852, he received medical training at the Sheffield Scientific School, Yale in 1875 but opted to join his stepfather in the field of landscape architecture three years later. By 1884, John Olmsted was recognized as a full partner and became the head of the firm the following year. During his stepfather's tenure, John had vigorously participated in planning the Boston parks, including Franklin, the Riverway, and the Arnold Arboretum. When his stepfather withdrew from active practice, John came into his own, planning and developing the Essex County, New Jersey park system. Recognized as the "most widely experienced" landscape architect in practice, John became the first president of the American Society of Landscape Architects in 1899 and later served on the advisory board of the ACA.<sup>32</sup>

Unfortunately, John's contemporary reputation dimmed next to the brighter star of his half-brother, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., who had joined the firm in 1898. It was Frederick, not John, who had been chosen to prepare and lead Harvard's new curriculum in landscape architecture, the first time the field had been featured in any university curriculum. Moreover, it was Frederick again, not John, who was invited to participate with Burnham and McKim in the preparation of the famed McMillan Plan.<sup>33</sup> The senior Olmsted had well planned his son's future: when his son was four years old, his father changed his Christian name to Frederick Law so that a Frederick Law Olmsted could continue to be associated with the firm long after his own demise. In fact, the Portland Park Association, hoping to obtain the services of the Olmsted Brothers firm, preferred to work with Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. of the showy name instead of John. He was unable to accept the offer, though, and John's services were procured instead. The Olmsted Brothers firm was officially hired by the Portland Park Association in the spring of 1903.<sup>34</sup>

John Olmsted's work in Portland was his first public commission in the Pacific Northwest.<sup>35</sup> His initial task in Portland was not actually the layout of the city's park system, though. Olmsted was first invited to design the grounds for the Lewis and Clark Centennial and American Pacific Exposition and Oriental Fair to be staged in Portland in 1905. Reverend Thomas Lamb Eliot, Park Board chair, when securing the services of the Olmsted Brothers, had used the Exposition as additional incentive for accepting Portland's request: "...the Exposition Committee ought to seek counsel of a high order as to the landscape work of their charge. Some of us are hopeful that this great interest may be able to avail of your advice."<sup>36</sup> The Fair was to be the first exposition held on the West Coast, so Olmsted would have fine opportunity to enhance his portfolio by claiming its design authorship.

Olmsted's design for the Fair was modeled after the White City in Chicago but was smaller and less grandiose in scale.<sup>37</sup> The formal layout featured a northwest axis that began at the Upshur Street entrance. As the central design element, the

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<sup>32</sup> Wilson, 151; Guzowski, 8.

<sup>33</sup> Wilson, 151.

<sup>34</sup> Guzowski, 18-9.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, 41.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, 18.

<sup>37</sup> MacColl, 266.

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axis was framed by the major buildings of the Fair and was oriented to views of the Willamette River and Mt. St. Helens. Other design components included a sunken garden and a grand staircase that descended from the bluff to a boatstand, boat landing, and waterfront esplanade. The buildings were all designed in the Spanish Renaissance style that, when experienced collectively, were impressive. Seen individually, however, they were of a rather conventional type.<sup>38</sup> Privately, Olmsted wrote his wife that he was disappointed in the cheaply constructed buildings but heartened by what must have been the stunning effect of the buildings and views together.<sup>39</sup>

Of course, there is no way now to assess Olmsted's opinions. The Fair's organizers had chosen Guild's Lake in northwest Portland, undeveloped, private land that was cheap to lease.<sup>40</sup> Olmsted quickly deduced: "Although the site finally adopted is from many points of view an admirable one, it is to be regretted that the ground is almost entirely leased territory, and that most of the improvements will either disappear or revert to private use."<sup>41</sup> His hypothesis was correct, and Portland lost an early chance for a close-in public facility that might have served as an activity center for all social classes.<sup>42</sup> The expensive public improvements were lost to posterity. However, the public did gain from the Fair.

In fact, the Fair precipitated an era of growth and prosperity for the city that has been hard to match since. Between 1903 and 1912, the city enjoyed over \$64 million in new housing and neighborhood development.<sup>43</sup> Portland's business leaders credited the Fair with the city's success and pinpointed the summer of 1905 as the beginning of a sustained real estate boom.<sup>44</sup> A tremendous population explosion accompanied the booming economy. Between 1900 and 1910, the city's population more than doubled. Portland went from a town of 90,000 to a metropolis of 212,000.<sup>45</sup> Population growth was projected to hit targets of 1.5 million to 2 million, even 4 million. More remarkable, the rate of employment growth outpaced that of the population increases.<sup>46</sup> As *Harper's Weekly* noted, the Exposition "marked the close of an epoch and the beginning of a new one for Portland."<sup>47</sup> Portland's growth and healthy economy reassured its business and civic leadership of the city's future. As such, more serious attention was devoted to the park system report submitted by Olmsted in 1903 and the possibilities for comprehensive citywide planning that it called forth.

After working on the Fair design, Olmsted had turned his attentions to the second half of his commission, developing recommendations for Portland's park system. An astute observer, Olmsted had spent less than three weeks on the entire commission. He even finished his design for the Fair while still in Portland. For the park system work, Olmsted took numerous trips around the city, usually escorted by Colonel Lester Hawkins, Park Commissioner. They visited Portland's existing parks and studied potential acquisitions that could lead to a unified system of parks and boulevards. Olmsted left

<sup>38</sup> Abbott, 42.

<sup>39</sup> Guzowski, 31.

<sup>40</sup> *Op. cit.*, 41.

<sup>41</sup> Portland (OR) Park Board, *Report of the Park board, Portland, Oregon, 1903, with the report of Messrs. Olmsted Bros., landscape architects, outlining a system of parkways, boulevards and parks for the city of Portland* (Portland, OR: The Board, 1903) 6.

<sup>42</sup> MacColl, 270.

<sup>43</sup> Scot W. McLean and Elizabeth S. Atly, *Weist Apartments National Register Nomination*, 1989, Sec. 7, p. 5.

<sup>44</sup> Northwest District Association, *Northwest Portland Historic Inventory: Historic Context Statement* (Portland, OR: Northwest District Association, 1991) 19.

<sup>45</sup> Portland Planning Bureau, "Nob Hill," ch. in *Potential Historic Conservation Districts* (Portland, OR: Bureau of Planning, Oct. 1978) 131-2.

<sup>46</sup> Abbott, 49-50.

<sup>47</sup> Carl Abbott, *Portland: Gateway to the Northwest* (Northridge: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1985) 78.

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Portland at the end of April and used field notes and photographs to develop his final report to the Park Board. The report was submitted to the Park Board on December 31, 1903, and was available to the public the following spring.

Olmsted's report did not stray from other comprehensive park systems proposed during the previous decade and resembled plans for cities like Cincinnati and Providence. Generally, Olmsted's proposal presented an extensive park system composed of 'units' typified by municipal squares, playgrounds, small or neighborhood parks, large or suburban parks, and scenic reservations. These park 'units' were to be connected by boulevards and/or parkways. A particular highlight of Olmsted's report featured a series of waterfront parks on marshy lands along the Willamette River at Ross Island, Guild's Lake, and Swan Island. Overall, though, the report expanded on sites with preexisting improvements (such as those at Mt. Tabor) or recommended new parks altogether. For example, a number of new parks were suggested for the west side so that the overcrowding at City Park might be somewhat relieved. Similar treatment was recommended for the east side.

Olmsted's report was not limited to a catalogue of physical improvement recommendations for the city's park system. It also discussed park management—from municipal governance to employee training. In a sense, the report also had to sell its subject matter and did so by including an economic argument for the purchase of park lands: "In the case of money borrowed for the acquisition of park land it should be borne in mind that the land is an asset that will be worth more in almost every instance, by the time the loan becomes payable, than the amount of the loan."<sup>48</sup> Olmsted further proselytized: "Many of the older cities would now pay very high prices for land covered with the primeval forest which the early inhabitants destroyed and which might once have been obtained for a few dollars an acre."<sup>49</sup> Frankly, it just made good business sense to buy while the product was cheap and its future value assured.

Municipal park systems did not concern good business acumen alone. In the introduction to his report, Olmsted wrote:

"All agree that parks not only add to the beauty of a city and to the pleasure of living in it, but are exceedingly important factors in developing the healthfulness, morality, intelligence, and business prosperity of its residents. Indeed it is not too much to say that a liberal provision of parks in a city is one of the surest manifestations of the intelligence, degree of civilization and progressiveness of its citizens."<sup>50</sup>

As Olmsted would point out later in his report, a well-developed park system directly benefited city coffers. More importantly, however, a comprehensive park plan strengthened a city's civic health. However, Olmsted's objective was not to sermonize but to get the plan accepted and set in motion. He both flatters and chides Portland's business and civic leaders to support a park plan for the city ("one of the surest manifestations of the intelligence...of its citizens"). Olmsted also plays to the one-upmanship inherent in Portland's booster efforts: "Leading writers and other authorities on modern municipal development agree that no city can be considered properly equipped without an adequate park system."<sup>51</sup> To compete with other "modern" cities, Portland would have to distance itself from its backwater frontier image and could "properly" do so by outfitting itself with a park system.

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<sup>48</sup> Portland (OR) Park Board, 21.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, 20.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, 13-4.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, 13.



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With the success of the Fair and the ensuing economic and population boom that engulfed Portland, the city's civic and business leaders began to think Olmsted's arguments might hold some meaning for Portland's future growth. Park planning was seen as only one component of a more general framework for the city's growth. Parks and parkways were one way of defining neighborhood identity and separating land uses, especially along the waterfront. In December 1906, like-minded executives and civic supporters formed Initiative One Hundred, a group dedicated to the passage of a \$1 million bond issue for park development. Leading local businessman J. C. Ainsworth headed a subcommittee that recommended the development of scenic boulevards on both the east and west sides of the river. The group as a whole lobbied the city council for \$5,000 for detailed design work. In June 1907, the bond issue passed before voters by a slim margin of 968 votes.

Although the proposal had been voter approved, its issuance was held up by legal action and the Park Board could not actually spend any of the money. In the interim, the board took other actions, such as hiring Emanuel T. Mische for a position as the city's park superintendent.<sup>52</sup> The board also explicitly adopted Olmsted's report as the official manual for the city's park development. These actions dusted the cobwebs from Olmsted's report (which had been ignored for almost three years), but they did not implement anything of substance. In short, new park acquisitions or improvements to existing parks were not actually taking place. Isador Lang, Park Board member, expressed some of the urgency needed to bring Olmsted's plans to fruition: "We have gained 50,000 in population in the last two years and if the city is to have a system of parks and drives it must begin now."<sup>53</sup>

When the \$1 million finally became available in 1909 and 1910, high demand for land had accompanied Portland's population influx and prices in the real estate market had risen in value. The bond money simply did not have the same buying power as it had in 1907. It seems Olmsted had presciently forecasted the situation in which Portland now found itself. Instead of Olmsted's impressive park system (which had been frantically hyped over the previous five years), the public had to settle for a modest go at what might have been and what could still be. The bulk of the money was spent on constructing three miles of Terwilliger Boulevard, which Olmsted had identified as a portion of the parkway system. The rest of the funding went to purchasing park lands that were available and affordable—Sellwood Park at \$47,000, Peninsula Park at \$60,000, Laurelhurst Park at \$93,000, and Mt. Tabor at \$245,000. In just over a decade the city had almost tripled its park acreage, from less than 200 acres in 1899 to 567 in 1910.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, all of the new park purchases were sited on the east side of the Willamette River, providing a more equitable distribution of parks around the city.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Mische had been the acting park superintendent for Madison, Wisconsin when Olmsted recommended him for the same position in Portland, Oregon. Mische had worked in the Olmsted Brothers office, training in drawing and design. He was often called in to work on planting plans because of his enviable horticultural skills. With Mische on board, the Portland Park Board did not feel the need to retain the Olmsted Brothers firm—they had the necessary park expert in Mische. Mische remained true to John Olmsted's recommendations as closely as financial determinants allowed, though. As a result, Portland today has many parks designed in the Olmsted tradition. Guzowski, 60, 99, 90-1.

<sup>53</sup> "Ideas for park system," *Oregonian* 26 Mar. 1908: 7.

<sup>54</sup> Abbott, *Portland: Planning, Politics, and Growth in a Twentieth-Century City*, 60.

<sup>55</sup> MacColl, 14-5. The purchase of park lands on the east side was a necessity in two regards: land on the west side was more expensive and the burgeoning population on the east side demanded it.

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### *The Bennett Plan (1910-1917)*

The park work began on Olmsted's plans only whetted the appetite of the businessmen and civic leaders that had initially set the ball rolling. The nationwide City Beautiful movement was in full bloom and Portland's civic elite was hardly immune to its influence.<sup>56</sup> Other municipalities around the country were experiencing the same growth that Portland was but were doing something different: they were planning for it. A citywide plan also seemed more critical to local leaders as the Panama Canal neared completion. The canal's opening was expected to increase Portland's domestic commerce and foreign trade, as well as raise tourism and immigration in the city. Of course, other cities along the West Coast held similar expectations, and there was no reason to assume that they, not Portland, would benefit. Portland leaders were well aware of the competition and believed that a restructuring of their city could put them ahead of the pack.<sup>57</sup>

The local Architectural Society had had a number of architects draw preliminary plans for a model city but had eventually concluded that expert advice was needed.<sup>58</sup> In November 1909, Portland Mayor Joseph Simon successfully created a City Beautiful fund that was to be used to hire an outside consultant.<sup>59</sup> Representatives from the city's settler establishment had shown immediate support of Simon's efforts, with prominent figures such as Dr. Rodney L. Glisan, politician Jonathan Bourne, Jr., architect A. E. Doyle, and lumber tycoon Winslow B. Ayers readily donating to the fund.<sup>60</sup> The City Beautiful fund was a nonpartisan project—conservatives and liberals alike recognized that physical improvements around the city needed to and should be completed.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, in December of that same year, a Civic Improvement League had formed to address that exact issue. It was clear to all involved that an expert would enhance Olmsted's report by "making a comprehensive plan for the building of a civic center and making Portland a [sic] ideal city."<sup>62</sup> To that end, the services of Daniel H. Burnham, organizer of the Columbian Exposition and creator of the San Francisco Plan, were sought. However, Burnham was unable to accept the commission and recommended his associate, Edward H. Bennett. A recent graduate of the École des Beaux-Arts, the British-born Bennett had served as Burnham's chief lieutenant on the Chicago and San Francisco Plans. He had supervised the staffs of assistants and draftsmen on both projects and was known for his interest in a city's transportation system as well as its embellishments.

Bennett accepted the commission in 1910 and spent a year working on the plan. He frequently visited Portland, gathering data and observing the city's congestion at different times of the year.<sup>63</sup> At the time, Portland had fairly erratic planning practices. Real estate developers drew up plans and plats without having to run them by any planning office, and, as local architect Ellis F. Lawrence remembered, "it was chaos."<sup>64</sup> The *Oregon Journal* summarized: "The building of Portland so far has been largely a riot."<sup>65</sup> Bennett's final submission in late summer 1911 was welcome indeed. As one fan of

<sup>56</sup> Wilson, 1.

<sup>57</sup> Blackford, 40-1.

<sup>58</sup> "Purses open for beautifying city—Businessmen join scheme for making Portland gem of Northwest," *Oregonian* 13 Nov. 1909: 12.

<sup>59</sup> MacColl, 384.

<sup>60</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>61</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>62</sup> Abbott, *Portland: Planning, Politics, and Growth in a Twentieth-Century City*, p. 61.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, 62.

<sup>64</sup> MacColl, 424.

<sup>65</sup> Merker, 36.

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urban planning had said early on (in the typically overblown speech of City Beautiful advocates), a citywide comprehensive plan would make Portland “the artistic municipal gem of the earth.”<sup>66</sup>

In fact, Portland’s civic elite and its political leaders avidly supported the Bennett plan. It only made sense: Portland’s business community had worked closely with Bennett to ensure that they got their money’s worth. Guided by projected growth statistics, Bennett had planned for a city of 2,000,000 and, in keeping with that number, had designed a city of massive scale. The plan was filled with references to European cities such as Amsterdam and Paris, examples to which future Portland could and would surely aspire. As one local lecturer noted, “Beauty is an active monetary asset. The fact that Paris is beautiful has brought it many billions of dollars.”<sup>67</sup> If Portland’s population was going to exceed one million, it might as well dream big and corral some of that traffic that the opening of the Panama Canal was expected to generate. More broadly, Bennett’s plan for a ‘Greater Portland’ recommended a series of diagonal boulevards and highways on both sides of the Willamette River, an expanded park system, and the relocation of harbor traffic further down the Willamette.

Like Olmsted, Bennett’s plan similarly alluded that more than physical benefits would accrue to the city. Indeed, Bennett was downright exuberant about the correlation between civic life and physical design. To his mind, the consummate physical city necessarily entailed an activist polity because for a plan to be implemented, all citizens would have to get involved.<sup>68</sup> That involvement “will automatically produce higher standards of community living.”<sup>69</sup> In fact, Bennett admonished, “[w]ithout a steadily elevated plane of citizenship and the active, intelligent cooperation of the people, the plan would be useless and the city could never be great or greatly desirable.”<sup>70</sup>

Bennett’s bosses loved his civic moralism. It so neatly mirrored theirs. While they angled to capture the predicted Panama Canal traffic, Portland’s civic elites simultaneously worried about the potential moral disruption the newcomers could wreak. In 1911, Mayor A. G. Rushlight had organized a short-lived vice commission to examine the causes of vice and to propose some solutions for their alleviation. It was assumed that one’s socioeconomic status determined a person’s moral behavior, i.e., if you were poor, an immigrant, or working class, your leisure activities were likely to involve drinking, gambling, or ladies of the night. Like other, City Beautiful proponents across the country, Portland’s civic and business elite believed public parks provided their social lessers a preferred alternative to such activities while granting social betters equal recreational pleasures.<sup>71</sup> As John Olmsted had noted earlier, “...a park or reservation of wild woodland character would yield ample returns in pleasure to taxpayers and to those dependent on them, while to a large part of the poorer classes a visit to these woods would afford more pleasure and satisfaction than a visit to any other sort of park.”<sup>72</sup> Olmsted was subtly criticizing amusement parks (“any other sort of park”) but the key implication was that “the poorer classes” chose recreational options of a lower order than did the more important “taxpayers.” Most of the city’s park acreage was concentrated near the wealthiest neighborhoods so prominent families like the Corbetts and the Flanders were used to having parks close by.<sup>73</sup> They supported civic beautification because they had enjoyed its

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<sup>66</sup> “Purses open for beautifying city—Businessmen join scheme for making Portland gem of Northwest,” p. 12.

<sup>67</sup> “City planning means of making Portland beautiful,” *Oregon Daily Journal* 14 Dec. 1913, sec. 1: 7.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Edward H. Bennett, *The Greater Portland Plan* (Portland, OR: Wells & Co., 1912) 6.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Merker, 37.

<sup>72</sup> Portland (OR) Park Board, 40-1.

<sup>73</sup> MacColl, 14.

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advantages, but its utility in controlling social behavior was not lost on them. Unlike privately owned saloons or brothels, social behavior at public park properties could be very much regulated, as explicitly related in one city ordinance: “[parks]...are public property and it is the duty of every person to see that the...rules are observed.”<sup>74</sup> By creating more parks closer to less affluent neighborhoods and encouraging their use, civic elites could at least promote middle-class civic values probably absent at the tavern.<sup>75</sup> All that was needed now was to get the general public equally excited or, at least, excited enough to fund the Bennett plan with tax dollars.

Portland’s civic and business elite put in a massive effort to publicize the Bennett Plan. In 1911, Mayor Rushlight did his part to augment the City Beautiful fund by forming the Greater Portland Plan Association.<sup>76</sup> Charles Merrick of the Civic Improvement League and Marshall Dana of the *Oregon Journal* accepted leadership positions within the association. The association membership fell along the lines exemplified by Merrick and Dana, with activists from the league and representatives from the local newspapers like the *Oregonian* and *Evening Telegram* balancing the organization. Small business entrepreneurs who had not previously participated now joined.

Their enthusiasm for the Bennett Plan brought about events such as Greater Portland Day, dedicated by Mayor Rushlight on February 29, 1912. At 10:30am on that day, factory whistles throughout the city went off, signaling the start of the association’s membership drive. Canvassers roamed about the city, and 7,000 Portlanders bought Greater Portland Plan buttons for a dollar apiece. The day ended at the Multnomah Hotel where participants were treated to a slide show of Portland Beautiful. A similar drive repeated in June brought membership totals to over 4,000. While impressive, the association’s activities did not amount to much without the public’s formal recognition of the Bennett Plan. To that end, the association pushed for a referendum that would acknowledge the Bennett Plan as the city’s official plan.

To build support for the referendum, Marshall Dana led a committee that, using city funds, released a summary of Bennett’s ideas in October 1912. Familiarized with the topics at hand, the public was then regaled by a culminating civic rally later in the month. A parade of commercial and civic organizations, bands, and 100 automobiles wound their way around downtown Portland, stopping at the Gypsy Smith Tabernacle, a temporary structure near Multnomah Field. There, Frank Branch Riley, Rabbi Jonah Wise, and Dana spoke to an audience of 4,000. They took turns grandly outlining the advantages of the Bennett Plan. When votes on the referendum were tallied a few days later, it seemed that the association’s publicity efforts had been amply rewarded. By a margin of two-to-one, voters had officially approved the Bennett Plan as the plan for the city.<sup>77</sup>

The referendum was not accompanied by any bond measure, though. Voters had approved the concepts of the Bennett Plan but had not dedicated any funding towards its realization. Association members continued to plug the plan and went so far as to establish the publication *Greater Portland* in 1913 to keep interest afloat. Representatives from the local papers who had supported the association also tried to sustain enthusiasm for the plan. One article stated, “The city beautiful campaign should and will bring to every man, woman and child in Portland a personal responsibility in civic

<sup>74</sup> Merker, 37.

<sup>75</sup> Blackford, 41.

<sup>76</sup> MacColl, 425.

<sup>77</sup> Abbott, *Portland: Planning, Politics, and Growth in a Twentieth-Century City*, pp. 65-6; MacColl, 428.

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affairs with a better understanding of not only what it means to have a beautiful city, but to properly live up to such claims.”<sup>78</sup> Another hotly answered critics,

“...the argument that we do not need to acquire the sites for these recreation grounds until some indefinite time in the future is a penny-wise-and-pound-foolish argument. We certainly do not consider it of record that we shall eternally lag behind every other progressive city in this regard. Portland must be a municipality of full stature and comprehensive activities. We are not bound forever and a day to be niggardly in anything that contributes to the health of the people, to the cultivation of the esthetic sense in municipal environment, or the comfort and pleasure of the citizens, so far as it is recognized to be a civic duty to consider these.”<sup>79</sup>

Advocates of the Bennett Plan were certainly passionate, but they faced a formidable challenge: economic collapse. The prices of wheat and lumber, two staples of the region’s shipping economy, dropped in 1913 and 1914, thereby causing a mini-depression in the Pacific Northwest. Local construction fell radically with the annual value of building permits dropping from \$20 million to \$3 million by 1917. The collapse created a more fiscally conservative public averse to taking on the tax burdens that the realization of the Olmsted and Bennett Plans necessitated. In November 1913, voters rejected a \$2 million bond issue that would have gone towards implementation of the Olmsted and Bennett plans. A month later, they similarly rejected a \$200,000 levy for the improvement of existing parks.<sup>80</sup> Park enthusiasts would have to wait four years for public funds to again be appropriated towards the city’s park system. However, when a charter amendment approved a four-tenths of a million levy for the purchase of new parks and the development of playgrounds in 1917, public sentiment had shifted. Following Bennett or Olmsted’s plan to the letter was no longer a burning issue.<sup>81</sup> Consequently, the fanfare and attention paid to the Bennett Plan produced little of consequence and nothing of it’s content was ever realized.

## *The Playground Movement (1918-1921)*

As the end of the ’teens neared and Portland recuperated from its economic malaise, beliefs about city and park planning changed. Olmsted and Bennett had posited that semirural preserves were critical palliatives to a city’s civic health. They allowed their visitors a chance to appreciate the rapidly disappearing natural landscape while granting respite from the city’s artificial constructs. Parks acted to renew the citizen, thus energizing him or her to become a more productive laborer and a better civic participant. In the park systems that they designed for Portland, parkways and boulevards gave those wealthy enough to own an automobile an opportunity to enjoy a Sunday drive on the bluffs. Those less privileged could escape their crowded hovels by hopping on a short, half-hour trolley ride to large park preserves situated nearby. The Olmsted and Bennett Plans dedicated hundreds of acres around the city for precisely those purposes.

However, as the 1920s progressed, changing transportation technologies affected the kind of parks the public would support. The automobile had become more affordable to a greater number of people, and its popularity quickly eclipsed that of the streetcar. The automobile’s rapid dominance of the American terrain meant that more people could visit

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<sup>78</sup> Emery Olmstead, “City beautiful plans unfolded,” *Oregon Daily Journal* 3 Jan. 1915: 3.

<sup>79</sup> “We Need Both,” editorial, *Evening Telegram* 5 Aug. 1913: 6.

<sup>80</sup> Merker, p. 41; Abbott, *Portland: Planning, Politics, and Growth in a Twentieth-Century City*, 67.

<sup>81</sup> “57 city parks enjoyed by Portland people,” 22.

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authentic wilderness. They did not have to settle for the prefabricated preserves that landscape architects such as Bennett and Olmsted had designed. As a result, expansive park systems lost favor with the public. Smaller neighborhood parks with recreational amenities such as tennis courts and baseball diamonds as well as school playgrounds were seen as better investments of public funds. Real estate developers and homeowners couldn't have agreed more. "Pocket" parks and school playgrounds enhanced existing neighborhoods and stabilized property values made shaky by suburbanization.

Support for large public parks had definitely subsided. The automobile had worked against them, but there were other variables. For one, parks competed against playgrounds for public funding. Related to the City Beautiful movement, the drive for local and school playgrounds was particularly strong in Portland and received greater support as automobiles both increased mobility for visiting authentic nature preserves and took over city streets. Before cars dominated local neighborhoods, children had been able to play safely in the streets. As autos quickly took over the American landscape, designated play spaces for children became an apparent need to parents and officials. Their creation seemed more critical than did the establishment of more parks. Secondly, park space was often equated with passive recreation (which addressed activities such as walking, talking, and picnicking) and psychic restoration. Playground advocates came to see that attitude as inferior. Why set so much land aside for passive recreation when money could be used to purchase smaller parks in greater numbers around the city for active recreation (defined by activities such as swimming, baseball, and tennis)?<sup>82</sup> It was the age of Teddy Roosevelt, and a lust for outdoor, active recreation informed cultural impulses.<sup>83</sup> Portland fell in with the national current, and, in 1921, authorized a bond issue for \$500,000 for the acquisition of park and playground tracts.<sup>84</sup> Park planning in Portland came to rest on the belief that neighborhood parks stabilized property values, abandoning the comprehensive park systems proposed by Olmsted, Bennett, and other figures in the City Beautiful movement.

### CONCLUSION

The local articulation of the City Beautiful movement in Portland, Oregon exhibited many of the traits that defined the national movement. For example, its supporters were drawn from the same demographic that characterized the movement. Eliot, Hawkins, Glisan, and others were all middle- or upper-middle class elites interested in uplifting the city both aesthetically and spiritually. As laypersons, they worked with professionals like esteemed local architects A. E. Doyle, Edgar Lazarus, and Ellis Lawrence in a unified, nonpartisan effort to define a comprehensive vision for Portland's future. They followed the national trend of hiring outside consultants like Olmsted and Bennett to produce comprehensive city and park plans for their specific locality. These actions were guided by the force that made the City Beautiful movement possible: civic spirit. As Paul C. Keyser, past superintendent of Portland's city parks marveled,

"The early enthusiasm for parks is the more remarkable considering that at that time one had only to step out of the dooryard to be in the woods, on the river, or in the scenic hills and mountains with which the country round about has been so generously blessed. Surely there could not have been any lack of naturalistic park atmosphere convenient to the citizenry..."<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Wilson, 82.

<sup>83</sup> "Youth—Adults—All Have Their Fling at Sports in Portland," 2.

<sup>84</sup> "57 city parks enjoyed by Portland people," 22.

<sup>85</sup> Paul C. Keyser, "History of the Portland Park Department," unpublished manuscript, 1958, p. 1.

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Portland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century grew at an incredible pace, and public improvements to the city's infrastructure stayed barely in stride with the city's growth. However, Portland definitely did not resemble New York or any other East Coast city—its natural scenic beauty was not yet irretrievable. The city's business and civic leaders had to combat that line of thought in their attempts to boost Portland above other West Coast cities that faced the same situation. As one local advocate of a planned park system retorted,

“I have been told by certain Wiseheimers that the people would not use parks and playgrounds in a city of this size on account of the great amount of green country within easy reach. It is not so easy to reach in a city of 300,000 and more than eight miles by diameter and crowded streetcars. It is almost for many of our less fortunate brothers and sisters.”<sup>86</sup>

Portland's civic elite couched their promotional efforts in the language of civic virtue (“It is almost for many of our less fortunate brothers and sisters”) in a focused drive to obtain public support for a citywide park system. Their success produced the Olmsted and Bennett Plans. Unfortunately, the city was only able to realize the former plan in limited measure, while the latter plan was virtually unfulfilled. However, both plans left a continuing enthusiasm for smaller parks and, more significantly, organized playgrounds that has put Portland in the vanguard of cities with worthy green spaces. Keyser noted, “Our system is notable because of the distribution of many comparatively small units, featuring playgrounds convenient to the people whom they serve, in contra-distinction to large and few, all-inclusive parks.”<sup>87</sup> Yet, the most important legacy left Portland and other places nationwide by the City Beautiful movement has been the concept that cities should be looked at critically. Thanks to the City Beautiful movement, Portland and other cities across the country realized that it was important and possible to determine the physical and cultural future of urban spaces. The City Beautiful movement professionalized the field of urban planning and design, and it has since been the charge of its legatees to continuously improve upon the field.

<sup>86</sup> V. Vincent Jones, “Portland's need of more public parks is declared to be great,” *Oregonian* 23 Mar. 1913, sec. 5: 10.

<sup>87</sup> Paul C. Keyser, “Concerning the Field of Leisure: What are its possibilities as a gainful occupation?,” unpublished manuscript, 1933, p. 1.