HARRISBURG'S SUCCESSFUL
CITY BEAUTIFUL MOVEMENT,
1900–1915*

The success of Harrisburg's City Beautiful Movement refutes many of the generalizations about this early, nationwide city planning effort. No monumental, superficial scheme, it embraced Harrisburg comprehensively, but was sensitive to topography, taste, and human need. It emerged from patient, careful study. It was popularly approved. After a major public campaign during 1901 and 1902, Harrisburg witnessed many years of City Beautiful construction.¹

*The author wishes to thank the Johnson Fund of the American Philosophical Society and the North Texas State University Organized Research Fund for financial support.

Harrisburg’s tripartite plan called for a park system and river front development combining recreational and naturalistic esthetic features; a new water supply coupled with reconstructed sewers and flood control apparatus; and street paving. The plan outlined a multiple-system program reaching all parts of the city and designed to benefit all of its citizens. Experts created the plan. That they would advise on its realization was a clear implication of the plan’s proponents. The experts did not, however, direct the campaign or control the course of Harrisburg’s physical improvement. Members of the city’s commercial-industrial-professional elite organized the campaign, retained the experts, and oversaw the expenditure of the funds authorized by the bond issue vote of 18 February 1902.2

What in retrospect was the campaign’s opening volley came on the night of 20 December 1900 when Mira Lloyd Dock delivered a stereoptican-illustrated lecture on “The City Beautiful; or, Improvement Work at Home and Abroad.” Dock epitomized the energetic “new woman” who was abandoning parlor studies for practical civics. An accomplished photographer, botanist, forester and writer, she was also a witty, charming lecturer. Her speech placed her among those upper middle class reformers who were gathering a variety of answers to urban ills under the rubric of the City Beautiful, and were advancing them as a solution to the major problems of the city.3 Dock’s address suggested that some members of Harrisburg’s elite had already begun to worry about the city’s situation and

---


prospects. She could hardly have delivered her lecture at the Board of Trade, been enthusiastically heard, and received a resolution of "heartily tendered" thanks by the board without some budding sense of inadequacy. The speech itself was a spirited, if conventional, City Beautiful attack on urban ugliness and squalor. Dock punctuated her remarks with one hundred slides taken during a recent European tour, in and around Harrisburg, and during American travels. She contrasted attractive riverine treatments in European cities with a Susquehanna River burdened by sewage and garbage as it flowed past Harrisburg. She discussed Harrisburg's relative lack of beauty and recreation spots, denouncing the idea that such improvements had "no place in a busy manufacturing town. . . ." Deft comparisons between local "hideous conditions" and attractive scenes in Milwaukee, Boston, Hartford, Dayton, and European cities illustrated "the cash value of cleanliness and beauty. . . ." She praised voluntary ameliorative work, but urged more citizens to take an interest in Harrisburg's development.4

Physically Harrisburg was ready for improvement. The railroad-industrial community lay some five miles along the Susquehanna, between the river's eastern shore and the western bank of a flood-prone tributary, Paxton Creek. The city's distinctive stretched-ovoid shape was defined by a gentle westward bend in the Susquehanna. In 1900 Harrisburg had been Pennsylvania's capital for eighty-eight years and enjoyed a population of 50,167, making it the 77th largest city in the United States. Its setting atop steep, high river banks forced the Pennsylvania and Reading tracks and yards, and the Pennsylvania Canal into the Paxton Creek basin. The city's shoreline, undefiled by railroad tracks, and its picturesque topography, were unexploited scenic advantages.5

4. Harrisburg Telegraph, 21 December 1900, and 9 January 1901.
That Harrisburg’s residents had failed to capitalize on capital or site was all too evident to anyone who glanced around. Sewers spewed their contents over the rocky river bottom during low water. Dumps cascaded down the bluffs, detracting from the few patches of parkland on their summits. The riverfront and Capitol Park—sixteen acres in the center of the city—were the scenic alternatives to the older residential areas. The only well-developed recreation ground was twenty-six-acre Reservoir Park. It spread over the crest of a newer, eastward business and residential extension named Allison’s Hill. Many streets were poorly paved or lacked pavement. Sewage from the creek’s western slope and from Allison’s Hill poured into the Pennsylvania Canal and Paxton Creek. The city pumped its unfiltered, untreated water from a Susquehanna laden with sewage from upstream cities and towns, and with culm washed down from anthracite mines. Low water in the river brought murky, foul-smelling liquid to spigots in Harrisburg’s homes and businesses.

After Dock’s galvanic speech, the Board of Trade, other groups, and individuals proposed a variety of improvement projects. It was not until late April 1901 that the "Harrisburg Telegraph" announced the possibility of a comprehensive attack on the city’s problems. The text of the "Telegraph"’s lengthy, front page article, together with subsequent activities, indicated that the sponsors of the "Telegraph" idea had already concerted upon the elements of a city plan and a scheme for implementing them. The "Telegraph" article moved beyond Dock’s themes of beautification, recreation and citizen activism. It asked for parks, pure water, paved streets, a city hall, and increased taxes to pay for them. It called for combining beauty and utility in a covered interceptor sewer along the river, to carry sewage away from banks converted to parkland. The essentials of the "Telegraph" suggestion, and more, were in place fifteen years later. An analysis of this success requires answers to four questions: Who sponsored the plan? Why did the sponsors organize when they did? Why did they identify the problems which they did? How did they maneuver the necessary bond issue through passage? 6

The sponsors were members of the city’s business elite. Twenty-one people were actively involved in the bond issue campaign, or served on the first citizen boards established to spend and oversee the bond funds. Their socio-economic and ethno-cultural characteristics were similar to those of other progressive reformers. Of the

seventeen whose occupations could be identified, ten were industrialists, two were attorneys, and two were bankers. One leader belonged to each of the following professions: publisher (of the Telegraph), writer-lecturer (Dock), and businessman-inventor. All but Dock were male. Of fourteen whose lineage could be traced, the paternal families of eight had been in the United States two generations or more prior to their birth; of four, two generations; and of two, one generation. It is almost certain that none was an immigrant and that they represented no racial or ethnic groups besides Anglo-German. Among the thirteen sponsors who recorded their highest educational level, two attended common schools, one attended college, five graduated from a college or university, and five received a secondary or advanced specialized education. This was an extraordinary group record for mature persons in 1901, a year when only 6.3 percent of seventeen-year-olds graduated from high school. Of eleven sponsors, eight were Republicans and three were Democrats. Religious affiliations among eleven leaders were predominately middle or upper class. There were five Presbyterians, one Episcopalian, three Methodists, one Roman Catholic, and one Lutheran. They were in early middle age, the twelve cases in which age as of 1 January 1901 is known, having a mean of 41.8 years and a median of 39.5 years. 7

7. Active involvement in the bond campaign is defined as contributing to the expert’s fund and playing an active role in the campaign, such as speaking or serving on the expert’s fund executive committee. Sources of the biographical information include clippings and files of the Harrisburg Patriot and Telegraph, especially the accounts of the campaign in the Telegraph, 27 December 1900–21 February 1902; the Mira Lloyd Dock Papers, Library of Congress, hereafter cited as Dock Papers; Dock Family Papers, Manuscript Group 43, Pennsylvania State Archives, hereafter cited as Dock Family Papers; J. Horace McFarland Papers, Manuscript Group 85, Pennsylvania State Archives, hereafter cited as McFarland Papers; John W. Jordon, Encyclopedia of Pennsylvania Biography (New York, 1914); Thomas Lynch Montgomery, ibid., (1924); Ernest Spofford, ibid., (1928); Frederick A. Goodcharles, ibid., (1930); Donehoo, Harrisburg and Dauphin County; Luther Reily Kelker, History of Dauphin County Pennsylvania, with Genealogical Memoirs 3 (New York, 1907); Commemorative Biographical Encyclopedia of Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, Containing Sketches of Prominent and Representative Citizens, and Many of the Early Scotch-Irish and German Settlers (Chambersburg, Pa., 1896); American Biography: A New Cyclopedia, 20 (New York, 1924); The National Cyclopedia of American Biography, 35, (New York, 1949), and W. Minster Kunkel to author, 26 January 1979. The City Beautiful leadership did not directly represent the foreign-born 5 per cent of Harrisburg’s population, the black 8.2 per cent, or the 15.2 per cent of natives with foreign parentage. U.S. Census Office, Twelfth Census . . . 1900, Pt. 1: cx, cxxii, clxxxxix. That the population groups were practically unrepresented does not necessarily follow, however. High school graduates, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970 (Bicentennial ed., Washington, 1975), Pt. 1: 379.
The elite organized a City Beautiful campaign because of Harrisburg's palpable defects. Poor paving and planning impeded journeys to work, hindered communication, slowed the growth of newer areas, and fragmented the city into self-concerned neighborhoods. The successful bond issue campaign and the election of the young, wealthy, reforming industrialist Vance C. McCormick to the mayor's office were more than coincidental. McCormick promised and delivered an effective, efficient, honest city administration and oversight of public improvements. The elite's expressions of increased community concern, then, were justifications for the social, economic, and physical rationalization of the city. The group was determined to accomplish through public authority and funds what it could not achieve by private means.  

Elite self-interest was not, however, either narrow or negative. There was concern for the quality of urban life in demands for pure water, parks, and improved streets. A workingman who enjoyed these things was a better workman, to be sure, but he was also a happier man and a superior citizen. Most members of the elite had direct or inherited memories of a more rural, less industrialized and urbanized society. Public improvements could provide ruralized environments for working class people similar to those which the elite group remembered or sought during leisure time. The elite would assume its class responsibility, providing environmental opportunities for the less fortunate. The elite enjoyed the leisure for travel and could see, or learn through reading or conversation, how other cities were improving. Urban chauvinism, concerned about keeping up with the municipal Joneses, demanded an attractive city desirable to the best people at all social and income levels. How else except through beauty, healthfulness and convenience would a superior population be attracted and retained? The elite never doubted that the city's public features could be improved and that the physical improvement would elevate the urban population.

The answer to the question, who were the City Beautiful advocates, largely determined what sort of improvements they would sponsor. Harrisburg's leaders firmly believed in the rights of private property.

They were unlikely to approve any plan involving its taking or limiting except as needed for the improvements themselves. One leader, J. Horace McFarland, built a successful book-printing business while becoming a publicist for Harrisburg and the City Beautiful nationwide. Despite his relatively advanced social impulses, McFarland pressed the hoariest of defenses for municipal improvements—the rise in surrounding property values. The elite's sense of civic responsibility and grasp of political realities prevented it from advocating any development which benefitted only one group, class, or area of the city. Extensive street paving, a park and boulevard system, and a safe water supply were, by 1901, tested means of downing any charges of urban sectionalism or class favoritism raised against public improvements. Finally, the City Beautiful
advocates did not concern themselves with low-income housing problems. They believed in personal responsibility for one's own housing, recognized the local opposition to disturbing landlords' property rights, and respected what Jon A. Peterson has called the "widely accepted division of labor" between themselves and housing experts.\(^9\)

The City Beautiful leaders' carefully planned, thoroughly controlled campaign was of a piece with their backgrounds and attitudes. On 3 May 1901, John V. W. Reynders, the superintendent of the Pennsylvania Steel Company, published a letter in the *Telegraph* suggesting that a private fund be established to retain "specialists" who would study Harrisburg's municipal needs and make a report. Reynders made suggestions for the selection of experts and the topics to be studied, and offered $100 to begin the fund. McFarland's letter of support and offer of $50 appeared the next day in the *Telegraph*, followed by a drumfire of *Telegraph* supporting articles and editorials, and the pledging of $5,000 within ten days. McFarland described how the leadership dealt with recalcitrants among the elite. "The money came 'voluntarily,'" he wrote, "but I never did notice the voluntary part of it, because Mr. Reynders and several other men with nothing to do but run big industries simply came into your office and looked pleasant until you cashed up, or signed up!"\(^10\)

Having raised the private fund, the elite was determined to control its disbursement. At the same time it arranged for the appearance of increased citizen involvement. On 17 May the fund contributors established a permanent organization and appointed a seven-man committee to choose the experts, a committee including the future mayor McCormick, Reynders, and McFarland. An overture to the city government, that the mayor, the city engineer, and representatives of each house of the council join the committee,


\(^10\) *Telegraph*, 3, 4, 13 May 1901. McFarland to J. Kennard Johnson, 9 November 1915, Box 5, McFarland Papers.
was accepted. The arrangement identified important city officials with planning, but without compromising elite control. The committee chose James H. Fuertes, a consulting engineer from New York City, to study water supply, sewage, and drainage problems; M. R. Sherred of Newark, N.J., to report on paving; and Warren H. Manning, a Boston landscape architect and friend of Dock's and McFarland's, to recommend park and boulevard treatments. By late November the reports were completed. Fuertes urged a low dam in the non-navigable Susquehanna to raise the river above the sewer outfalls and to provide a wide sheet of water in front of the city for swimming and boating. He proposed a flood control system for Paxton Creek, and an intercepting sewer to divert wastes from the creek. The creek, Fuertes found, carried five to twenty times the sewage it could safely accept. He called for a water filtration plant with a capacity of 10,000,000 gallons per day and a new reservoir to solve the health problems posed by the culm, clay and sewage in the Susquehanna. Manning recommended a parked river front, expansion of Reservoir Park, the creation of a large landscape park on "Wetzel's Swamp" north of the city, playgrounds, and a ring boulevard connecting the large parks. Sherred presented a paving plan giving careful attention to the proper surfaces for all conditions of traffic and grade."

After receiving the reports the contributors further broadened their base of support. They secured council's approval for a $1,090,000 bond issue vote to be held with the municipal election in February 1902. They created the Harrisburg League for Municipal Improvements, which opened downtown offices in January, to promote the bond issue. Anyone could join the HLMI for $1.00. An executive committee and other committees organized and conducted the HLMI campaign. Finally, the HLMI in January began a second $5,000 fund drive to raise money for publicity expenses. Large contributions formed the backbone of the second fund but the HLMI actively solicited and received small amounts.

The elite systematically propagandized the improvements. Sympathetic newspapers used the HLMI releases while they followed the organization's carefully orchestrated neighborhood meetings and mass rallies. Dock, McFarland, and other movement luminaries

12. Telegraph, 22 November; 12, 20 December 1901; 6, 7, 10 January 1902; McFarland, The Awakening of Harrisburg, pp. 3–5.
as well as public officials, spoke on those occasions. They answered audience questions, not all of them friendly. From Dock’s December 1900 speech onward, the *Telegraph* and Harrisburg’s two other dailies played on fears that comparable Pennsylvania cities would outstrip Harrisburg in wealth and population; printed statements and letters about the importance of the improvements from prominent local people; ran articles on beautification and improvement projects undertaken elsewhere; attacked urban sectionalism and its cry that the park projects were merely a “Front Street scheme;” countered threats of higher taxes and rents with assurances that rents were rising because of a housing shortage; insisted that the improvement’s impact on local taxes would be modest; and used the experts’ reports to down attacks on the parks, proposed water filtration methods, and the low dam on the Susquehanna. The HLMI worked other fields. Its members investigated how drinking water from the sewage-laden Susquehanna was affecting the incidence of typhoid, and were dismayed to learn of no dramatic increase in the disease. They did discover lax reporting among local physicians. The doctors were encouraged to bring their reports up to date in January. The result was a manufactured typhoid “epidemic” of thirty cases in one month, double the number of the previous quarter. After the successful bond issue campaign in February the reported cases dropped to nine and in March they fell to four.13

The HLMI’s downtown office displayed and dispensed material. The League published and sent summaries of the experts’ reports to “each house.” From early January to the election it hired high school boys who distributed additional propaganda to every home.

It isolated the ineffectual opposition to the improvements, stigmatizing the opponents as "clams," tight-fisted landlords who refused to consider reasonable increases in their property taxes. It persuaded the councils to create a Board of Public Works in advance of the vote. After the councils appointed three elite businessmen to the board, the League claimed that the bonds should be voted because the board's portion of the funds would be in competent hands.  

Other circumstances aided the League. The Civic Club, composed of middle and upper class women, already had contributed to

local beauty and cleanliness by setting up trash receptacles, and by hiring a man to keep a city block clean after the manner of New York's "white wings." The action prompted the city to improve its street cleaning. In advancing the bond issue the club cooperated with the Board of Trade to sponsor a stereoptican lecture by Manning in October 1901. A month later it directed to city councils a resolution denouncing the trash-strewn condition of the riverbank. In 1901 the Pennsylvania Canal company abandoned the last section of the "main line." Odors from the sewage-clogged segment near Paxton Creek underscored the need for a collector sewer. A determined but unsuccessful effort to remove the Capitol to Philadelphia pointed up the desirability of an attractive capital city with contemporary amenities. Two brief floods in Paxton Creek during December 1901 and January 1902 demonstrated the worth of the flood-control proposals.\(^{15}\)

On 18 February the voters went to the polls. They voted the bonds by almost a two-to-one majority, 7319 to 3729. The bonds carried all but six of thirty-six precincts, and each of the ten wards but the tenth, a sparsely settled ward undivided into precincts, where the measure failed by four votes. In Table 1 the mean house values and high-value houses by ward, a rough index of the economic status of ward residents, are compared with the vote in each ward. The table refutes an easy assumption that high economic status and a favorable vote, or low economic status and a less favorable vote, were closely related. True, the voters of the first ward, with the lowest mean house value, rejected the bond issue in one of three precincts and voted favorably by less than 54 percent. The fourth "silk stocking" ward, where mean house values were highest and the percentage of high-value houses was grossly disproportionate, voted over 82 percent favorably. Two other wards returned votes below the city-wide favorable majority of 66.2 percent, as their position below the city-wide mean house value of $1,837.74 would suggest. However, five wards of the nine in which house values could be determined do not follow that pattern. Wards two, eight, and nine were below the mean house value, yet they returned

---

## TABLE 1

**Comparison of Mean House Values, Number of Houses, Number and Percentage of High-Value Houses, 1900, and Vote on Improvements, 1902, by Ward**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>Number of Houses</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
<th>Mean House Value</th>
<th>High-Value Houses (valuation $5000 +)</th>
<th>Vote</th>
<th>Percentage Favorable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>For</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>747</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>$930.50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>845</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>$1754.36</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>858</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>$3722.74</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>959</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>$2240.56</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2570</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>$1653.20</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>1102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1327</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>$1339.43</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>846</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>$1363.16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1165</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>$1717.82</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>1196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>$3270.51</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Number of houses = 9611; Harrisburg mean house value = $1827.34; high-value houses = 492; total “for” vote by precinct = 7319; total “against” vote by precinct = 3729; city-wide percentage favorable vote = 66.2.

Table 1 is constructed partly from the 1900 Dauphin County Triennial Assessment, the last complete assessment before the improvements, or their anticipation, might have affected property values. Mean house values could not be determined for the third ward because the assessor did not distinguish between houses and businesses in this, the principal retail-commercial ward, except in a few instances. The few surviving houses approximate those in the fourth ward, as the vote suggests that most third ward houses did in 1902. Mean house values tend to obscure the enormous range of values within each ward as reflected in large standard deviations. For example the standard deviation for the first ward is 1040. Vote totals by ward are the sums of the precinct vote as recorded in the Harrisburg Telegraph, 21 February 1902. The precinct ward totals add to more “for” votes and to 50 more “against” votes than the totals recorded in the Telegraph. The official tallies are no longer available.
By 1915, the Susquehanna had been dammed and parked, with steps and a walkway defining the river's edge.

(William H. Wilson).

favorable majorities of 76.9, 83.4, and 78.8 percent. Ward five, with a house value above the mean, delivered a favorable vote lower than the city-wide percentage. The sparsely-populated tenth ward, with only 3.1 percent of the houses, but containing 11.2 percent of the high-value residences, defeated the bonds.16

The bond issue vote paralleled partisanship to a remarkable degree. In Table 2 the bond results are compared with the election of certain Republican and Democratic candidates or the percentage of partisan votes for the common council during the three years preceding and following the bond election. The wards ranking above the city-wide mean shared a partisan characteristic. All of them gave the majority of their votes to Republicans, when the votes for the candidates for mayor, treasurer, and controller in triennial elections, and the percentage of votes for common council candidates in other years, are taken together. Extreme partisanship was not typical of any ward except the seventh, which was heavily Democratic. Wards preponderantly Republican, for instance, gave

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WARD</th>
<th>Vote Mayor, Treasurer, Comptroller</th>
<th>Greater Percentage Vote, Common Council</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Mean Vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The mayor, treasurer, and comptroller were the leading officers of administration and oversight. They were elected concurrently every three years. Representatives to the common council were chosen each year, with half the wards selecting two councilmen every year. Thus each ward chose its common councilmen every other year. The two parties typically placed two names in nomination in each ward. The greater percentage of the vote for the pairs of nominees is listed as Democratic or Republican irrespective of the party affiliations of the individual winners.
comfortable majorities to some Democratic candidates. The
generally mild partisanship of the Harrisburg electorate precludes
absolute statements about the relationship between Republicanism
and a strongly favorable vote on the bond issue. Possibly there is an
ethno-cultural or historical connection. Perhaps the vote reflects
some partisanship. The campaign leadership, predominately
Republican, may not have been entirely successful in giving the
bond issue a non-partisan cast. Perhaps the voters who favored the
bond issue for its progressivism also imagined Republicans to be
more aggressive, enlightened public servants than their Democratic
opponents.

Additional reasons might be adduced to explain the vote, such
as the presence of Paxton Creek in wards eight and nine, or the
large lots artificially inflating house values in ward ten. The facts
remain that there was no consistent relationship between economic
status and the vote, that the total vote was decisive, and that the
measure carried every ward but one. Dock, McFarland, McCormick,
and their cohorts argued for improvements to the community's
public health, transportation, recreation, and esthetics. Individual
benefits would accrue, they insisted, without respect to economic
status. Almost two of every three voters believed them.

During the next decade and a half the bond funds brought
extensive improvements to Harrisburg. Park acreage grew from 46
in 1902 to 958 in 1915. A 140-acre lake in Wildwood Park served
recreational needs while it impounded flood water above the
urbanized banks of Paxton Creek. Concrete steps topped by a
broad walkway defined the base of River Front Park for almost
three miles along the Susquehanna. They provided a seating and
strolling area while protecting the bank from the river's fluctuations.
Despite a rise in the city's population from about 51,000 to about
73,000, park area had grown from one acre for every 1260 people
to one for every 76. A Capitol Park expansion program under
state auspices, in which McFarland was unofficially but deeply
involved, promised to increase the city's scenic area. Recreational
opportunities had developed from band concerts and children's
play equipment in Reservoir Park to eleven public playgrounds,

17. Telegraph, 23 February 1899; 21 February 1900; 20 February 1901; 18 February
1903; 22 February 1905. Patriot, 20 February 1902, and 17 February 1904.
18. Comparisons on the precinct level were not possible without noting the
street address of every house in each ward, then comparing each house address
with precinct boundaries and numbering arrangements.
including one large playground park. Island Park, in the Susquehanna midway between Harrisburg and the western shore, boasted swimming facilities, athletic fields, and a grandstand. Athletic fields were included in other play areas while a nine-hole golf course was developed on the eastward extension of Reservoir Park. Park visits rose to an estimated 1,599,000 in 1912. Landscape Architect Manning consulted with the park commission during the implementation of his 1901 plan.¹⁹

Nor had the utilitarian side of the City Beautiful been neglected. Four and one-half miles of streets were paved in 1902, more than seventy-four miles by 1915. Filtered water, intercepting sewers, and flood control had raised municipal sanitation to levels merely imagined in 1902. The citizen water, park, and public works boards had overseen all construction, cooperating when necessary. McFarland insisted that "the national importance of this lies in the completeness and co-ordination of the effort." Other cities had made significant improvements, McFarland wrote, but "no other city in all this broad land has done all these things concurrently, harmoniously, and entirely upon the plans of experts so that a baker's dozen of years shows a made-over town with a degree of efficiency ... much more characteristic of the average German city. . . .²⁰"

From 1906 through 1914 Harrisburg's citizens approved three additional bond issues for projects totalling $1,341,000. Most of these later developments involving streets, parks, bridges, a viaduct, playgrounds, and sewers, were related to the first City Beautiful construction. McFarland credited the bond issue successes to the good record of the citizen boards, which generally remained in the hands of the elite. Despite the elite's continuing involvement, its members soon became immersed in routine. The old unity and City Beautiful fervor faded rapidly. McFarland retained his


²⁰. McFarland to Watrous, 27 September 1915, Box 11, McFarland Papers. McFarland had two reasons for claiming the Harrisburg achievement to be the result of a coordinated effort. First, the work was, in fact, coordinated. Second, McFarland recognized that most Harrisburg leaders were more concerned with paving, sewers, and water supply than with a park and boulevard system, which they were likely to believe was mere beautification. From the beginning McFarland insisted upon all phases of the improvement proceeding as one, Telegraph, 30 April 1901; and McFarland, Awakening of Harrisburg, p. 10.
first enthusiasm for the City Beautiful. His hyperactivity helped to realize Harrisburg's beautification, but it brought him into conflict with others, including his former allies in civic improvement.  

McFarland was not named to the first park commission of 1902, although he was appointed to fill a vacancy in 1905. He remained on the park commission until Harrisburg's mayor-council government and boards were superseded by the commission form in 1913. Soon after his first appointment he was actively involved in every phase of the park commission's work. McFarland credited his interventionism partly to the ignorance of some fellow commission members who did not "know a pine from a pumpkin. . . . These people," he wrote to Dock, "give me almost a free hand, and the way in which I am meddling . . . would make your hair stand on end if it was as short as mine!"  

Much of McFarland's "meddling" was constructive. He urged landholders along the proposed circumferential parkway to donate right-of-way to the city, and probably tried to wheedle land for Wildwood Park as well. He lobbied with councilmen for a park extension. On at least one occasion, in 1905, he delivered an illustrated address on municipal improvement, and argued the necessity for continued citizen involvement. In 1906 and 1907 he labored to put through a bill providing for the municipal control of shade trees on the streets of every first-class city accepting the responsibility. The governor approved the bill in May of the latter year. When, in 1912, sewer-laying crews began cutting down trees along the river front, McFarland rushed to the rescue of the remaining timber.  

He inveighed against billboards and signs. Political signs adorning telegraph poles, he told the mayor, were "very much against the

idea of the city beautiful, . . .” “I have personally torn down a great many posters,” he proudly informed a friend. By 1910 he and others had persuaded the Harrisburg councils to pass a billboard ordinance restricting the size of the boards, and requiring adequate bracing and inspection. He continued to serve as secretary of the renamed Harrisburg Municipal League, helping to mobilize it in favor of subsequent improvement bond issues. In 1908 alone McFarland or his company donated prizes for the park commission’s water carnival on the Susquehanna, contributed to the Reservoir Park concert fund, and loaned a slide projector, screen, and some of the slides shown during concert intermissions. One of McFarland’s great delights was showing visitors over the expanding park and boulevard system and receiving their favorable comments.24

McFarland’s pride in the new Harrisburg was tempered by failures and disappointments. His “meddling” was not always viewed as joyously as he pursued it. It hurt him when other park commissioners did not wish to proceed as rapidly as he in land acquisition. He suffered when other members of the elite subordinated his love for urban beauty to their self-interest. When the president of the park commission, a prosperous shoe manufacturer, allowed billboards on some property he owned, McFarland offered to buy the advertising rights at the rental paid by the billboard company. McFarland would have placed no signs on the property. When he discovered that the park board president had renewed the lease at a higher price without first informing him, he was furious. Recalling that the offending manufacturer had promised not to renew the lease, McFarland wrote: “It is, however, just a little anomalous for you as President of the Park Commission, supposedly interested in making the city more beautiful, to be taking a comparatively small sum for making it more ugly, . . .” At about the same time McFarland “upset a scheme . . . to girdle Front Street by a trolley line and practically destroy our city entrance, . . .” Then he learned that the “scheme” was a project of a fellow member of the elite, who “himself gave me the most unpleasant, personal lambasting of the tongue I ever received, . . .”25

24. Signs, McFarland to Ezra S. Meals, 7 October 1908, Box 15, and to Vance C. McCormick, 19 May 1914, Box 6, McFarland Papers; municipal league, McFarland to Mrs. H. S. Artieda, 21 September 1915, Box 1, McFarland Papers; 1908 donations, Harrisburg Park Commission, Report for the Year Ending December 31, 1908, pp. 32, 36, 39; visitors, McFarland to G. M. Steinmetz, 24 April 1919, Box 9, McFarland Papers.
By 1910 McFarland was tired of his park work, but he stayed on until the commission-type council took office late in 1913. The commissioner for parks, M. Harvey Taylor, was an effective politician, for whom the old park commission agreed to remain in an advisory capacity. McFarland regarded Taylor as a well-meaning incompetent at best. When a disagreement led to the advisory commission's resignation, McFarland privately denounced Taylor, "exceedingly shallow, vacillating and uncertain," whose chief accomplishment was "to arise to the dignity of running a cigar store, . . ." McFarland was also distress over Taylor's refusal to implement his pet project, the Pennsylvania shade tree law.

McFarland scarcely could be ignored when, in 1915, the city celebrated its progress under the plan. The man who had contributed so much to the plan's success admitted that he was "between two fires." He was proud to be a center of attention, but his beforehand description of the affair revealed a weariness characteristic of his later discussions of Harrisburg events. "The whole celebration is based on a vaudeville idea," he wrote, "and I am tired of it in advance." He rode in one of 120 cars touring a 25-mile route to view the improvements, then gave what he termed the "heavy speech" of the evening of 21 September. It was an exhilarating tribute, but McFarland was by then no longer important to planning in Harrisburg. The final blow to his self-esteem had come when the council appointed a city planning commission in April 1914. By then the doughty little printer enjoyed a national reputation in city planning circles, but he was not chosen for the commission. He could not resist "going through the interesting process of educating the amiable gentlemen" who composed the commission "as to what city planning really is." His efforts did not lead to an appointment. Years later he characterized the commission as a group of "five very excellent gentlemen who do nothing, except to keep me off!" McFarland's bustling activity, his desire to dominate, his sometimes scornful approach to those he considered his inferiors, partly explain his loss of popularity and place. His continuing commitment to urban beautification was also responsible, for it was not shared by most others in Harrisburg's elite.

billboards, McFarland to Charles A. Disbrow, 30 June 1908, Box 14, McFarland Papers; trolley line, McFarland to Watrous, 13 April 1914, Box 10, McFarland Papers.

26. McFarland to Dock, 19 February 1910, and 26 February 1914, Box 3; McFarland to Taylor, 16 September 1914, and 2 October 1914, Box 9, McFarland Papers.

27. McFarland to Watrous, 20 September 1915, Box 10; McFarland to Watrous,
McFarland's isolation typified the rapid developments in city planning that made his City Beautiful goals appear to be old fashioned. Later, "City Practical," planning shifted to other problems including housing and land use. Rising professionals, eager to control planning, condemned the earlier citizen-dominated City Beautiful Movement, falsely accusing it of superficiality and meretriciousness. It was true, as McFarland himself realized, that the City Beautiful conception was too limited to confront all urban ills. The achievements of McFarland, Dock, and others were no less real for that reason. Those citizen-activists wanted to bring recreational, sanitary, and other functional improvements to Harrisburg under the banner of comprehensive design. They succeeded, and they left a substantial legacy for later planners. 28
