

# *Public Ritual and Cultural Hierarchy: Philadelphia's Civic Celebrations at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*

IN THE CLOSING DECADES of the nineteenth century American city governments planned and subsidized giant public celebrations. Cities sponsored the public observance of not only national holidays such as July Fourth, but also Thanksgiving, New Year's, St. Patrick's Day, and the anniversaries of local historical events. St. Louis, Memphis, New Orleans, Cincinnati, Louisville, and Baltimore were among the cities in the 1880s and 1890s which promoted annual city-wide carnivals as both tourist attractions and public spectacle.<sup>1</sup> Celebration planners incorporated diverse elements from popular commercial amusements and neighborhood street processions within comprehensive holiday programs designed to appeal to the urban masses while insuring public order and retaining central control.

The educational and hereditary elite within these cities, however, argued that municipal governments should plan and sponsor civic celebrations that would elevate public taste and morality, rather than merely pander to the lowest common denominator in their diverse constituencies.<sup>2</sup> Genteel intellectuals who had been most active in the founding of public museums, libraries, and symphony orchestras in the

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<sup>1</sup> See *The Veiled Prophets' Golden Jubilee: A Short History of St. Louis' Annual Civic Carnival 1878-1928*; Leonard V. Huber, *Mardi Gras: A Pictorial History of Carnival in New Orleans* (Gretna, La., 1977); and Rollin Van Horn, *Our First Hundred Years: A History of Van Horn and Son 1852-1952* (Philadelphia, 1952). Van Horn was a theatrical costume firm which developed a lucrative sideline supplying civic festivals at the turn of the century.

<sup>2</sup> This paper defines "educational and hereditary elite" as genteel intellectuals who guided urban cultural institutions, occupying those positions largely through educational attainment or belonging to families of high status and wealth. E. Digby Baltzell offers similar working definitions in *Philadelphia Gentlemen* (N.Y., 1958), 6-7, and in *Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia* (N.Y., 1979), ch. 2. Frederic C. Jaher describes a more quantified, wealth-based methodology for studying urban elites in "19th Century Elites in Boston and New York," *Journal of Social History* 6 (1972): 32-77.

late nineteenth century viewed the display of history and the arts in public celebrations as vehicles to communicate to the rest of the city such political, aesthetic, and ethnic ideals as strong executive government, city planning, and Anglo-American supremacy.<sup>3</sup> Although a minority of the urban population, they nevertheless were accustomed to exercising leadership in cultural matters within their cities and across the nation.

Differences between the concepts of mass and genteel public culture appeared in the early years of the twentieth century when cultivated intellectuals attempted to shape urban public holiday celebrations. Unlike their other forays into urban public life such as erecting lasting monuments to high culture, the organization of a massive holiday celebration required the simultaneous cooperation, if not the enthusiastic participation, of the rest of the city for success. Eliciting widespread public participation was an immediate measure of public influence; in fact, to the extent that social harmony and civic unity constituted important parts of the refined intellectuals' conception of common civic culture, their celebration's widespread popularity *was* their message.

Philadelphia's civic celebrations between the Civil War and World War One offer superb examples of municipal leaders' successive efforts to elicit the mass participation of an urban population who rarely shared the same values and tastes. Philadelphia city officials organized giant parades and public spectacles to amuse local residents and attract visitors. There also existed a self-conscious, well-documented attempt by Philadelphia's genteel intellectuals to institute a new form of public celebration aimed more directly at municipal uplift as well as mass appeal. Their relative successes and failures in designing civic celebrations for a large, heterogeneous city illuminate ways in which the Anglo-American Protestant establishment interacted with the city around them.

<sup>3</sup> The establishment of urban cultural institutions as agencies of reform is discussed in The Brooklyn Museum, *The American Renaissance 1876-1917* (N.Y., 1979) and Helen L. Horowitz, *Culture and the City: Cultural Philanthropy in Chicago from the 1880s to 1917* (Lexington, Ky., 1976). Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America 1820-1920* (Cambridge, 1978) and Daniel Walker Howe, "Victorian Culture in America," in *Victorian America*, D.W. Howe, ed. (Philadelphia, 1976), 1-29, discuss how these aesthetic reforms were also a form of social control.

Philadelphia's population in the half-century between the Civil War and World War One continued to grow at an astounding rate: from less than 200,000 in Philadelphia city and county in 1830, the city ballooned to over 500,000 in 1860, 800,000 by 1880, 1.3 million by 1900, and nearly 2 million in 1920. Though Philadelphia's proportion of foreign-born population between 1870 and 1920 remained among the lowest of all large northern cities (averaging approximately 25%), when the immigrants' children are added, the proportion climbed to nearly 55%.<sup>4</sup> City neighborhoods became ethnically, racially, and economically segregated as settlement sprawled over 120 square miles of Philadelphia County—though in 1880 over 70% of the city's population still lived within the sixteen square miles surrounding center city.<sup>5</sup> Despite the extension of streetcar and commuter rail service to the city border and beyond, all but upper-middle-class Philadelphians in 1880 lived within walking distance of work, further emphasizing the separation of districts and neighborhoods.<sup>6</sup>

Public holiday celebrations in the mid-nineteenth century followed a pattern of neighborhood, class, and ethnic differentiation. Each group had its own holiday calendar and unique form of celebration. Only the city's upper-class native-born Protestants of English descent gathered to mark the anniversary of William Penn's founding of Pennsylvania.<sup>7</sup> Afro-Americans celebrated the anniversary of the abolition of slavery in the West Indies, and, beginning in 1870, the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment.<sup>8</sup> Germans feted Kosuth in 1851; Poles, the semicentennial of the Polish Revolution in 1880.<sup>9</sup> By 1873

<sup>4</sup> Caroline Golab, "The Immigrant and the City: Poles, Italians, and Jews in Philadelphia 1870-1920," in *The Peoples of Philadelphia*, Allen F. Davis and Mark H. Haller, eds. (Phila., 1973), p. 203.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret S. Marsh, "Suburbanization and the Search for Community: Residential Decentralization in Philadelphia 1880-1900," *Pennsylvania History* 44 (April, 1977): 103.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*; also Theodore Hershberg, Harold Cox, and Dale Light, Jr., "The Journey to Work: An Empirical Investigation of Work, Residence, and Transportation, Philadelphia, 1850 and 1880," in *Philadelphia: Work, Space, Family, and Group Experience in the 19th Century*, T. Hershberg, ed. (N.Y., 1980), pp. 128-73.

<sup>7</sup> See "Proceedings of a Meeting. . .to Commemorate the Landing of William Penn," *American Philosophical Society Pamphlet*, v. 472, no. 5, 1824, for the first of these celebrations.

<sup>8</sup> In the 1870 celebration, blacks were pelted with bricks and rotten eggs along their parade route. *Philadelphia Press*, April 20-27, 1870.

<sup>9</sup> The appendix to George Morgan's *City of Firsts* (Phila., 1926) lists many of the annual ethnic processions in Philadelphia, particularly between the Civil War and World War One.

the Irish fielded 9,000 marchers on St. Patrick's Day.<sup>10</sup> Susan G. Davis notes that even the most commonly celebrated holidays, Christmas, New Year's and July Fourth, were occasions primarily for neighborhood festivities and private banquets, and that public processions through downtown were generally limited to only one type of group, whether elite militia companies, Bible societies, temperance societies, nativists, or abolitionists.<sup>11</sup>

Only rarely did many of these groups show up at the same event. In the George Washington Centennial Procession of 1832, units representing Irish, French, and German immigrant societies, together with outlying townships such as Northern Liberties, Southwark, and Moyamensing, and thirty-seven neighborhood volunteer fire companies joined the customary line-up of public officials, soldiers, and tradesmen marching through downtown Philadelphia.<sup>12</sup> Firemen from different districts continued to hold a triennial "grand parade" through the 1850s. The events surrounding the Civil War provided another occasion for mass display—when the thousands of troops representing most city districts returned home, residents from throughout the city turned out to greet them.<sup>13</sup>

Typically, these city-wide celebrations consisted of a single day's program of events, with a morning procession, afternoon speeches, and evening banquet or picnic followed by fireworks. Patriotic imagery displayed marchers' particular ethnic, occupational, political, or neighborhood identity, as well as their allegiance to the state and nation. Symbolic representations of the city "Philadelphia" were absent, however, as were attempts on the part of celebration planners to orchestrate the proceedings beyond the order of march and sequence of the day's

<sup>10</sup> "St. Patrick's Day Observed," in Dennis J. Clark, *The Irish Relations* (Rutherford, N.J., 1982), 193-202.

<sup>11</sup> Susan G. Davis, "Making Night Hideous: Christmas Revelry and Public Order in 19th Century Philadelphia," *American Quarterly* 34 (1982), 185-99. Also "Festive Forms and Popular Politics: The Case of July Fourth in Philadelphia 1788-1844," Seminar paper for Philadelphia Center for Early American Studies, April, 1982.

<sup>12</sup> *Philadelphia Daily Chronicle*, February 23, 1832 contains a complete account; see also Henry Leffman, "Some Philadelphia Celebrations Since the Revolution," in *Philadelphia History: Papers Read Before the City Historical Society of Philadelphia*, (1917), 67-82.

<sup>13</sup> J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia 1609-1884* (Phila., 1884), III, 828-29. Also Russell F. Weigley, "The Border City in Civil War 1854-65," in *Philadelphia: A 300 Year History*, R. Weigley, ed. (N.Y., 1982), 363-416.

events. Each participating group dressed and carried banners as it pleased, subject only to the praise and criticism of the spectators and local press. Despite its enormous scale, the Centennial celebration in 1876 followed this same pattern, with large crowds, a firemen's procession, and various special "days" for local groups throughout the year—but no ceremonial representation of "the city."<sup>14</sup>

Yet even as Philadelphia's population was spreading out over a larger area and becoming more diverse in its residents' group affiliations and tastes, an expanding municipal government throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century brought the city under more centralized administration and control. A single metropolitan police department was created in 1850; in 1854 the city consolidated the thirteen independent townships, nine districts, and six boroughs of Philadelphia County within its borders and four years later renumbered its street system to integrate the new territory. By 1871 a paid municipal fire department replaced the more than seventy neighborhood volunteer fire companies, and a single board of tax assessors replaced the district assessors. By 1905 a single Board of Education administered Philadelphia's public schools. Philadelphia's new city hall, among the largest (and most expensive) buildings in the world at the turn of the century, symbolized the attempt to administer centrally the sprawling city and assert a single, overarching municipal identity.<sup>15</sup>

Philadelphia civic celebrations by 1900 followed this trend of more central control and the promotion of a unified, city-wide identity. Very early, the city government used its newly consolidated police force to preserve public order on holidays.<sup>16</sup> Mayor Samuel H. King issued a proclamation prohibiting the shooting of guns and detonation of fireworks in 1880. Two years later, the New Year's Shooters Clubs were compelled to obtain official city permits to stage their annual parade.

<sup>14</sup> S. Edgar Trout's *The Story of the Centennial of 1876* (Lancaster, Pa., 1929), 148-66 describes the September 1876 firemen's parade. See also *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 10 and July 4, 1876; Johns Maas, *The Glorious Enterprise* (Watkins Glen, N.Y., 1973).

<sup>15</sup> City Hall took nearly three decades and twenty million dollars to build—approximately double its originally estimated cost. Howard Gillette, Jr., "Emergence of the Modern Metropolis: Philadelphia in the Age of Its Consolidation," in *The Divided Metropolis: Social and Spatial Dimensions of Philadelphia 1800-1975*, W.W. Cutler and H. Gillette, Jr., eds, (Westport, Conn., 1980), 3-26.

<sup>16</sup> Susan G. Davis, "Making Night Hideous. . .," 196.

The city not only prohibited unruly holiday activities but also sponsored events to replace them, as it became both the host and subject of future municipal festivals. Amid a pattern of ethnic, racial, and labor conflict, city officials used public celebrations to assert social harmony and civic unity by sponsoring week-long programs of varied entertainment that appealed to every conceivable taste and interest. Rather than sponsoring merely the customary holiday oration, leaving the planning of amusement features to the neighborhoods, city officials in Philadelphia in the 1870s and 1880s joined those in other cities in assuming a more prominent role in staging urban carnivals, giving public backing to what earlier had been privately organized extravaganzas.



ARRIVAL OF WILLIAM PENN FLOAT, PHILADELPHIA FOUNDER'S WEEK, 1908

The first in this new pattern of civic festivals in Philadelphia occurred with the commemoration of the Bicentennial of Pennsylvania in 1882. During the first half of the nineteenth century the "Society for the Commemoration of the Landing of William Penn," founded in 1824, marked the day with a banquet, historical speeches, and round after round of toasts honoring their ancestors, the early settlers of Pennsylvania. By contrast, in 1882 the "Bicentennial Association of Pennsylvania," using city as well as private money, planned a week-long program of activities featuring parades of military, industrial, and fraternal organizations, athletic contests, bicycle races, a regatta on the Schuylkill, displays of manufacturers, and historical reenactments. The

Association engaged a professional acting troupe to reenact Penn's landing; brigades of federal, state, and municipal employees—including the city's fire department—joined Penn and his party of settlers and Indians in the Landing Day Parade, along with the city's German, Polish, Irish, and Italian fraternal organizations—the latter group pulling a float depicting the female "Italy" flanked by "William Penn" and "Christopher Columbus." The following day, local businesses displayed samples of their products from sugar cubes to machine tools in a trades procession in which their employees, organized by craft, also marched under the banners of their respective firms. That evening, in a historical carnival parade, the city displayed a set of ten original floats based on Pennsylvania history, along with two sets of floats borrowed from that year's New Orleans Mardi Gras depicting "Illustrious Women Rulers of World History" and "The Ramayana—Ancient Hindu Epic of the East." In the closing ceremonies of Bicentennial Week, solemn civic ritual mixed with popular mass entertainment at the Academy of Music where several thousand children from the Philadelphia public schools sang, accompanied by the German Society Orchestra.<sup>17</sup>

The Bicentennial Association cancelled the final night's fireworks display. Even though the fireworks show which had opened the celebration had been brilliant—set pieces outlined in fireworks Penn's Treaty With the Indians, Bartholdy's Statue of Liberty, and replicas of Mount Vesuvius and Niagara Falls—the event had been traumatic. Seven people died when an iron mortar used to launch the fireworks exploded, spewing metal fragments into the crowd. An *Inquirer* editorial praised the Association's decision to cancel further fireworks displays and called for the total elimination of "barbaric" fireworks at future municipal celebrations.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> The carnival floats came from New Orleans via Baltimore, where they were used in the annual "Oriole" procession "The Oriole," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 13-18, 1882. Detailed descriptions of Philadelphia's commemoration of the Pennsylvania Bicentennial can be found in Bicentennial Association of Pennsylvania, *Historical Sketches, Illustrations of Philadelphia, and Official Programme of Days, Religious Services, Processions, Pageants, Exercises, Receptions, and Entertainments Connected With the Bicentennial Celebration of the Founding of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Phila., 1882), as well as the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October, 1882, and a "Bicentennial Scrapbook," privately held.

<sup>18</sup> "Holiday-making," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 27, 1882.

The Pennsylvania Bicentennial Celebration of 1882 marked the beginning in Philadelphia of municipally sponsored holiday celebrations that highlighted local history and manufactures. Formerly visitors flocked to the Centennial Exposition in 1876 to view the works of the whole world, noted the *Philadelphia Times*, but in 1882 they came to see what Philadelphia itself had to show.<sup>19</sup> Philadelphia city officials eagerly enlisted the services of veteran theater professionals for a celebration which focussed on popular entertainment as well as civic display. Although the customary holiday orations were delivered—members of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania gathered to hear a lecture on “Penn, Franklin, and Pennsylvania in Their Relation to Our Form of Government”—the inclusion of new celebration features such as a carnival procession and athletic contests reflected the attempt to appeal to popular taste. The *Times* editorialized, approvingly, “Nothing like this has ever happened here before, and what is still more remarkable is that people are really enjoying it—not in rowdyism and disorder, but in an interested idleness to which Americans are not accustomed.”<sup>20</sup>

Through the 1880s and 1890s, city government hosted many other municipal celebrations. The centennial of the U.S. Constitution was commemorated in 1887 with another week of military and industrial parades.<sup>21</sup> The Peace Jubilee at the close of the Spanish-American War in 1898 and the National Export Exposition in 1899 showed off the city to its neighbors and brought out large crowds for diverse activities.<sup>22</sup> Philadelphia City Councils supervised July Fourth celebrations throughout the 1890s, not only at Independence Hall but also in nine other squares throughout the city. Each site’s morning activities began at precisely the same time and appeared in a common souvenir program. Afternoons included athletic competitions in Fairmount Park; evenings, a municipal fireworks display over Girard Avenue Bridge and other locations.<sup>23</sup> The city sponsored a “Dawn of the Century”

<sup>19</sup> *Philadelphia Times*, n.d., pasted in “Bicentennial Scrapbook.”

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> The Constitution Centennial Celebration was to have been federally sponsored, like the Centennial of 1876, but when the U.S government failed to come up with the money, the State of Pennsylvania put up \$75,000 and private citizens another \$50,000. *History of the Celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the Promulgation of the Constitution of the U.S.*, Hampton L. Carson, ed. (Phila., 1889).

<sup>22</sup> *Official Program, Peace Jubilee, 1898*. Collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), Philadelphia.

<sup>23</sup> *Historical Souvenir Programme of the Fourth of July Demonstrations*, 1893, 1894, 1895, 1896, 1897, 1899, and 1901. HSP collections.



celebration on New Year's, 1901, which featured electrical illuminations, a military parade down Broad Street, and a public reception for all Philadelphia residents at the newly completed City Hall. As an added feature, City Council agreed to lure the annual New Year's Shooters Parade to downtown Broad Street with \$5,000 in prize money. What had been a rowdy, back street carnival procession through most of the nineteenth century remained under city sponsorship (though not under direct supervision) as the annual Mummers Parade.<sup>24</sup> By the beginning of the twentieth century, civic carnivals had become an integral part of public celebrations in Philadelphia and elsewhere, and the celebrations' diverse activities, as a whole, attracted large crowds.

Alongside the relaxation of cultural hierarchy, however, were complaints that civic holidays had lost their meaning and that the city was wasting a golden opportunity for public mass education. The *Inquirer* warned in the wake of the Centennial celebration in 1876 that if the public did not come away from the festivities with a finer appreciation of its history, "the anniversary will have been an idle pageant as purposeless and profitless as All Fool's Day."<sup>25</sup> Across the nation, including Philadelphia, members of the educational and hereditary elite worried about a growing commercialization of municipal ceremonies and concomitant infusion of a carnival atmosphere. First families of Lexington, Massachusetts, complained that the hucksters who came to town every April 19 were transforming the commemoration of the battle anniversary into a county fair, while attendance at the Historical Society's exercises plummeted.<sup>26</sup> The *Dial* grumbled in 1893 that the procession of exotically garbed Midway characters in the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition's July Fourth celebration threatened to "barnumize the fair," observing that "Amusement of the cheap and even vulgar sort is being substituted for education."<sup>27</sup>

Genteel intellectuals worried that ethnic and class divisions within their cities, exacerbated by the most recent flood of largely non-English speaking immigrants, undermined the extent to which the urban masses shared the aesthetic and moral values embodied in the new cultural

<sup>24</sup> Charles E. Welsh, *O'Dem Golden Slippers* (N.Y., 1970).

<sup>25</sup> "Today's Lesson," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 4, 1876, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Doris L. Pullen and Donald B. Cobb, *The Celebration of April the 19th from 1776 to 1960 in Lexington, Massachusetts* (Lexington, 1960), 17.

<sup>27</sup> "A Midway Review," *The Dial* 15 (September 1, 1893), 106.

institutions they had founded. The popularity of tawdry commercial amusements among the lower classes seemed only to underscore the disintegration of responsibly led common civic culture. Although some members of the hereditary elite, despairing of public influence, suffered crises of faith, grew increasingly self-absorbed, and ultimately withdrew from public life in the presence of mass-based urban commercial amusements, other genteel intellectuals sought to reassert their public presence by directly shaping these new popular cultural forms to their needs and values.<sup>28</sup> Municipal celebrations became one of several forms of urban public recreation and entertainment—others were motion pictures, live theater, and playgrounds—in which genteel intellectuals displayed new interest at the beginning of the century.

Newly formed patriotic and hereditary societies joined long-established veterans organizations in the last two decades of the nineteenth century to uphold proper public reverence in the conduct of municipally-sponsored celebrations by taking a more prominent role in their planning.<sup>29</sup> The Lexington Historical Society first assumed direct supervision of the April 19th battle commemoration in 1886.<sup>30</sup> The Rhode Island Society of the Cincinnati, which had previously marked July Fourth with only a private dinner, held public exercises for the first time in 1895.<sup>31</sup> Philadelphia's Society of the War of 1812 first assumed

<sup>28</sup> John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Millions: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (N.Y., 1978), Lewis Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture* (Westport, Conn., 1981), and Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (N.Y., 1980) have interpreted, respectively, the rise of amusement parks, nightclubs, and popular film as challenges to "Genteel culture." John Tomsich, *A Genteel Endeavor* (Stanford, Ca., 1971), Stow Persons, *Decline of American Gentility* (N.Y., 1973), and T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Anti-modernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920* (N.Y., 1981) have described the Protestant intellectuals' spiritual crises. Lears notes that the late-Victorians' quest for "peace of mind" would in the long run have greater impact than their official public optimism on the emerging "therapeutic culture" of the 20th century.

<sup>29</sup> This campaign also included placing flags in public buildings, enacting legislation to create and enforce observance of Flag Day, and sponsoring patriotic essay contests in public schools. The increasing public presence of these societies is documented in the "Celebrations and Proceedings" section of the *American Historical Register*, 1894-97, as well as in Wallace E. Davies, *Patriotism on Parade: The Story of Veterans and Hereditary Organizations in America 1783-1900* (Cambridge, 1955), Wesley F. Craven, *The Legend of the Founding Fathers* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1956), and Merle Curti, *The Roots of American Loyalty* (N.Y., 1946).

<sup>30</sup> Pullen and Cobb, p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> *American Historical Register* 2 (1895), 1480.

responsibility for arranging the July Fourth program at Independence Hall in 1896.<sup>32</sup> While not controlling the large civic holiday festivals, the hereditary and educational elite took a much more active role in trying to influence their form and content, to foment "a renaissance of patriotism" and reinforce civic loyalty.<sup>33</sup>

Instead of relying on commercial carnival producers, argued genteel intellectuals, municipal festival planners should consult expert historians and fine artists to insure the accuracy of representation on costumes, banners, and parade floats, as well as the commemoration's proper overall visual effect. Barr Ferree insisted in the *Century* magazine that a civic celebration was above all "a work of art." "The moving figures in the hands of a parade designer becomes the pigment with which his picture is prepared."<sup>34</sup> An artistic, colorful, public historical celebration would not only improve the moral, patriotic, and aesthetic qualities of mass holiday spectacles, but it would also bolster the genteel elite's confidence in the vitality and picturesqueness of their own Anglo-American Protestant history and customs in the presence of more lively, if less morally sturdy, immigrant festivals and popular entertainments.<sup>35</sup>

The genteel elite called the new feature they wanted to add to public celebrations "historical pageantry." Pageants were similar to the popular tableaux vivants of historical scenes that appeared in the Pennsylvania Bicentennial celebration in 1882 as well as to the costume balls and "colonial teas" that became increasingly popular among patriotic and hereditary societies in the 1890s. They were a series of historical scenes, sometimes with dialogue, arranged episodically and dramatically as if illustrating an historical oration. Pageantry advocates traced the earliest demonstration of this new festival form to England, where in 1905 professional musical director Louis N. Parker persuaded virtually the entire population of Sherbourne to reenact a dozen dra-

<sup>32</sup> *Historical Souvenir Programme of the Fourth of July Demonstrations*, HSP.

<sup>33</sup> George G. Manson, "A Renaissance of Patriotism," *The Independent* 52 (July 5, 1900), 1612-15.

<sup>34</sup> Barr Ferree, "Elements of a Successful Parade," *Century* 60 (July, 1900), 459.

<sup>35</sup> David Glassberg discusses this phenomenon in "Restoring a Forgotten Childhood: American Play and the Progressive Era's Elizabethan Past," *American Quarterly* 32 (Fall, 1980), 351-68.

matic scenes from their town's medieval past as part of an 1100th anniversary celebration. Soon American as well as British intellectuals and reformers embraced historical pageantry as a way to foster mass participation in civic life while promoting morality, aesthetic uplift, and social cohesion.<sup>36</sup>

Spurred on by the efforts of local historian and civic reformer Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer, Philadelphia was among the first cities in the United States to include a "historical pageant" as part of a municipal celebration. Oberholtzer was born in West Chester, Pennsylvania, in 1868. His father was a wealthy merchant and his mother, Sarah Louise Vickers, a writer active in the movement to establish a system of savings banks in the public schools. He attended private schools and then the University of Pennsylvania, where he remained for graduate study with John Bach McMaster.

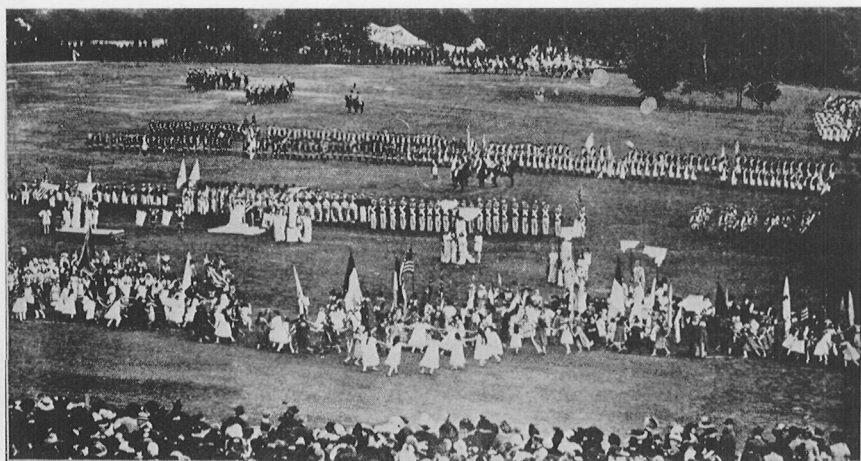
After receiving his Ph.D. in 1893, Oberholtzer worked for several Philadelphia periodicals, while devoting most of his time to historical and political writing. Among his books were biographies of Robert Morris, Henry Clay, and Jay Cooke; a two-volume history of Philadelphia; and a five-volume *History of the United States Since the Civil War*; as well as *Home Rule for Our American Cities* and *The Referendum in America*. With fellow Philadelphia authors S. Weir Mitchell and Owen Wister, Oberholtzer joined the Franklin Inn Club, the base for his literary activities over the following three decades.<sup>37</sup> Oberholtzer learned in February 1908 that the city government was planning a week-long festival in October to commemorate the 225th anniversary of Philadelphia's founding. "Founders' Week" would include the then-usual Church Day (Sunday), Military Day (Monday), Municipal Day (Tuesday), Industrial Day (Wednesday), and Children's Day (Thursday), as well as Saturday athletic contests. Oberholtzer persuaded the celebration's Executive Committee Secretary George W.B.

<sup>36</sup> See David Glassberg, "American Civic Pageantry and the Image of the Community 1900-30," Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1982.

<sup>37</sup> Oberholtzer's early career is summarized in the biographical volume of *Philadelphia: A History of the City and Its Peoples* (Phila., 1908), IV, 594. The Franklin Inn Club was limited to 500 men, each of whom had published at least one book. Its world is described in John Lukac's portrait of Owen Wister in *Philadelphia: Patricians and Philistines 1900-50* (N.Y., 1981), E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class* (N.Y., 1966), 343, and C. Williams, "Literary Clubland: The Franklin Inn Club of Philadelphia," *Bookman* 21 (1905), 576-80.

Hicks (of the Office of the Mayor of Philadelphia) to add a Friday afternoon "historical pageant" to his program of festivities, and to have the city foot the bill, which eventually totalled \$60,000.<sup>38</sup>

Oberholtzer conceived of the pageant as a single dramatic illustrated story in which the city's history offered tangible examples of community solidarity, moral fortitude, and artistic achievement. Germantown muralist Violet Oakley served as Art Director, designing sixty-eight floats to be built by Habermehl and Sons, the florists who had decorated the city for the Peace Jubilee in 1898. Guernsey Moore of the Philadelphia School of Industrial Art designed the costumes, based on the historical costume collections of Wilmington artist Howard Pyle.<sup>39</sup>



FORMING THE FINALE IN PAGEANT AT BELMONT PARK, PHILADELPHIA.  
THIS PAGEANT WAS SO STUPENDOUS IT WAS SPOKEN OF AS A SERIES OF FINALES.  
NOTE THE CIRCUS TENT IN THE BACKGROUND FOR HORSES.

1912

The parade divided Philadelphia history into seven "periods" from "Exploration and Settlement" through the "Civil War," ending its re-creation of scenes from the city's past with the Centennial of 1876.

<sup>38</sup> Correspondence, Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer (EPO) Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

<sup>39</sup> EPO to A.G. Hetherington, 7/31/1908. Box 6, EPO papers.

Two-thirds of the sixty-eight episodes reenacted events that occurred before 1781. Generally the floats depicted well-worn tableaux such as Penn's Treaty with the Indians, Betsy Ross Sewing the Flag, and Franklin at the Court of France, along with scenes of past festive occasions such as a Street Fair of 1740, the Meschianza of 1778, First Lady Martha Washington's Reception in 1794, and Lafayette's Visit of 1824—the types of scenes common in costume balls of the period. The final float, "The City Beautiful," was allegorical; it featured young men and women in Greek gowns symbolizing the various arts, crafts, and sciences. Oberholtzer described the float as sounding a "prophetic note" and originally suggested that it include a plaster model of the proposed Benjamin Franklin Parkway and municipal Art Museum.<sup>40</sup>

As director, Oberholtzer's main task was to secure groups and individuals to march in his procession and ride on his floats. He wanted members of prominent long-settled Philadelphia families to impersonate their ancestors in leading roles, but with the exception of the First City Troop, none of the hereditary elite were accustomed to joining a public street procession. Philadelphia ethnic organizations representing the descendants of early settlers—Swedes, Dutch, Welsh, and Germans—were accustomed to marching in public, but with their own costumes, floats, and banners trumpeting their particular group identity. Oberholtzer was adamant that no group would participate except with the official float and in official costume, and refused to allow the popular Mummers' groups to participate except on his terms.<sup>41</sup> He also felt that because this was primarily a civic ceremony, not entertainment, his "performers" should not be paid (beyond a free lunch at the start of the parade). When the Canstatter Verein responded to Oberholtzer's invitation to participate with a list of German performers for hire, Oberholtzer complained that the group "did not seem to appreciate the character of the procession. . . . Our procession is made up of a different class altogether."<sup>42</sup> White Cloud, proprietor of a shop which sold American Indian paraphernalia, and Frederick "Chinese" Poole, theatrical agent for "The Domain of the Dragon" in Philadelphia's Chinatown, met a similar rebuff when they offered to rent the historical

<sup>40</sup> EPO to Violet Oakley, 7/14/1908. Box 17, EPO papers. Floats are described in detail in *The Book of the Pageant* (Philadelphia, 1908).

<sup>41</sup> EPO to George W.B. Hicks, 6/25/08. Box 6, EPO papers.

<sup>42</sup> EPO to Dr. C.J. Hexamer, 9/9/08. Box 17, EPO papers.

pageant committee authentic members of their respective ethnic constituencies for the day.<sup>43</sup>

Oberholtzer recruited by personally contacting “qualified” participants—descendants of prominent citizens and those of the right ethnic background for the early settler floats. Although descendants of William Penn refused to appear in public impersonating Penn, Benjamin Franklin’s great-grandson Henry W. Bache agreed to impersonate Franklin, and descendants of several other less well-known first families joined in. Oberholtzer relied on college students from Temple University and the University of Pennsylvania for extras in the Colonial Philadelphia scenes, while students from Haverford College agreed to ride on the float of Penn’s Treaty with the Indians. With the exception of blacks who appeared in an underground railroad scene (Oberholtzer provided separate dressing facilities for them at the parade’s origin point), the pageant failed to acknowledge any ethnic arrivals to Philadelphia after the Revolution. No Irish, Polish, or Italian organizations were invited to appear as part of the city’s history—though individual members probably marched on other days of Founders’ Week and may have appeared in the historical procession as part of a unit of volunteer firemen or Civil War veterans. Oberholtzer constructed a highly exclusive portrait of Philadelphia’s population through the careful selection of participating groups, invited to display solely their identification through history with “the city,” not their particular occupational, district, or ethnic affiliation.

Oberholtzer insisted that his historical extravaganza was patriotic and civic education, not mere popular entertainment, and eschewed contact with commercial performers and celebration entrepreneurs as much as possible. He authorized Habermehl, previously under contract to build floats, also to rent the costumes. He was furious that the Founders’ Week Executive Committee had allowed bandmaster Frederick Phinney to produce and charge admission for a twenty-five episode musical spectacular “Philadelphia” each evening at Franklin Field, which used professional singers, as well as costumes rented from

<sup>43</sup> EPO to White Cloud, 7/28/08. EPO papers. Oberholtzer wound up importing 70 Indian children from the Carlisle School, paying their transportation, food, and lodging expenses. Oberholtzer wanted Chinese for a historical scene representing Philadelphia’s China Trade of the 1790s.

a firm that had earlier unsuccessfully offered Oberholtzer a kickback for his patronage.<sup>44</sup> Worse, Phinney labeled his show a "pageant." Operatic-like episodes traced the city's history from the first Indian settlement through the Revolution, then leaped to a five-episode finale depicting the Spanish-American War, as Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever" surged in the background.<sup>45</sup> Founders' Week celebration general secretary Hicks tried to assuage Oberholtzer's objections with the explanation that similar spectacular musical dramas had proved to be popular features at other public festivals.<sup>46</sup>

Along with the other Founders' Week processions, Oberholtzer's Friday afternoon historical pageant received high praise in the press and drew a large crowd lining its route down Broad Street for four miles through central Philadelphia. He concluded that there was "much appreciation of the pageant from all classes of the people."<sup>47</sup> Many spectators, however, viewed the street procession in much the same light as the Bicentennial in 1882 or the annual Mummers Parade—another amusing feature of a diverse public holiday program. Even the city officials who funded Oberholtzer's show viewed it as complementing, not replacing, Phinney's popular historical entertainment. Appearing as part of a larger, week-long celebration, the historical pageant seemed less of a departure from the usual pattern of holiday fare than originally announced. This probably contributed to its popularity, but from the point of view of its planners, weakened their intended moral and aesthetic "message."

Encouraged by this initial foray into producing public spectacle, within a few months after Founders' Week Oberholtzer organized a permanent Historical Pageant Association of Philadelphia, with the purpose of producing a Philadelphia historical pageant quadrennially. Thirty-three of the original seventy-one incorporators of the association had served on the Founders' Week historical pageant committee; another seven, on its executive committee. Among the seventy-one were superintendent of schools Martin Brumbaugh, millionaires E.T.

<sup>44</sup> EPO to George W.B. Hicks, 6/25/1908. Box 6, EPO papers.

<sup>45</sup> *Official Programme, Musical-Historical Drama 'Philadelphia'*; "Outdoor Drama Stirs Spectators," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 4, 1908, 26.

<sup>46</sup> Hicks to EPO, 7/20/08; EPO to Hetherington, 8/25/08; EPO to Kabierske, 9/10/08. All box 6, EPO papers.

<sup>47</sup> EPO to Mayor John E. Reyburn, 10/21/08. EPO papers.



Stotesbury and Cyrus H.K. Curtis, literati Owen Wister, John Bach McMaster, and H.H. Furness, as well as ex-Mayor John E. Reyburn and six city councilmen. Oberholtzer continued to be the major force behind the next pageant, which the Association tentatively scheduled for October 1912, claiming it would commemorate, simultaneously, the inauguration of the new mayor, the 125th anniversary of the U.S. Constitution, and the centennial of the War of 1812.<sup>48</sup>

Oberholtzer wanted greater control over the entire celebration to insure its historical and artistic value. Rather than produce another downtown street procession, he decided to stage a dramatic pageant play in Fairmount Park near the site of the 1876 Exposition. The pageant was along the lines of the English historical pageants, using volunteers not only for the performers, but also for sewing costumes and building sets. English historical pageantry was greatly influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement, which viewed the public reenactment of medieval and renaissance handicrafts in preparing for the pageant as a "protest against modernity."<sup>49</sup> In March 1910, the Historical Pageant Association of Philadelphia hosted a lecture on pageantry by May Morris (William Morris's daughter), and between 1909 and 1912 Oberholtzer traveled twice to England to view pageants. Though Oberholtzer did not seem to share the English pageantry movement's anti-industrial bias, his Philadelphia Historical Pageant of 1912 consciously copied the British form, and unlike the Founders' Week historical procession of 1908, included no scenes of industrial Philadelphia, halting its dramatic rendering of Philadelphia history in 1824.

Oberholtzer recruited artistic and directing help from many of the same people who produced the street procession in 1908. The Association called on Francis H. Williams of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, a member of the historical committee in 1908, to pen a pageant script (which Oberholtzer extensively revised by the time of performance). Professor Hugh A. Clarke of the University of Pennsylvania, who oversaw selection of the music in 1908, performed the same role in 1912, in addition composing original pieces for the interludes between dramatic scenes. Henry Kabierske, formerly of Ha-

<sup>48</sup> Membership book, Historical Pageant Assn. of Philadelphia. Box 10, EPO papers.

<sup>49</sup> Community historical pageants were held in York, Colchester, and Bath in 1909; Chester in 1910. Louis N. Parker, "Historical Pageants," *Journal of the Society of Arts* 54 (December 22, 1905), 143.

bermehl's, supervised construction of the props and sets. Interestingly, Oberholtzer hired professional dance instructor Albert Newman as Master of Dances—a role he had performed for Frederick Phinney's Franklin Field spectacular in 1908.<sup>50</sup>

Unlike 1908, when the city provided an initial subsidy, Oberholtzer needed to raise a “guarantee fund” to help meet the pageant's early expenses; contributors would be reimbursed after the performance out of income from the sale of tickets and advertising in the souvenir program.<sup>51</sup> Members of the Finance Committee personally solicited donations from their colleagues in large local businesses and the professions, but hired professional fund-raiser John Lucas (who claimed ten percent of what he raised, plus expenses, as his fee) to tap those who fell outside their social and professional circle. Oberholtzer justified Lucas's hiring, explaining:

There are politicians, liquor dealers, and small tradespeople all over the city who ought to be made to bear their share of the expense of making the pageant ready. They will not do so unless they are personally interviewed. They will not send in their contributions by mail and you nor I do not care to visit them.<sup>52</sup>

The Association was somewhat reticent in acknowledging these contributions. In contrast to the Founders' Week Industrial Parade in 1908, which included seven floats sponsored by the Lager Beer Brewer's Association, the Historical Pageant of 1912 banned all advertisements for alcoholic beverages from its souvenir program.

Rather than rent costumes as in 1908, the Pageant Association set up seven volunteer sewing circles in different districts of the city to make the nearly 5,000 costumes by hand—one group convened at Independence Hall under the direction of Oberholtzer's mother. Although Oberholtzer declared that such work brought about “the identification of all classes of people with the undertaking,” these volunteer women only did the finishing—adding trim and brocade.<sup>53</sup> The Pageant Association, after purchasing and cutting out the cloth, distributed the work to professional “poor women” seamstresses who were paid a piece

<sup>50</sup> *Official Pictorial and Descriptive Souvenir Book of the Historical Pageant* (Philadelphia, 1912).

<sup>51</sup> See list of contributors to the guarantee fund. Box 2, EPO papers.

<sup>52</sup> EPO to Harold Pierce, 3/15/1912. Box 21, EPO papers.

<sup>53</sup> Minutes, Executive Committee, Historical Pageant Assn. of Phila., Box 10, EPO papers.

rate to manufacture the garments.<sup>54</sup> While the Executive Committee asserted that social distinctions among Philadelphians would be sunk in the common effort of producing the pageant, the differences between paid and volunteer labor in preparing for the pageant in fact underscored social divisions.



HISTORICAL PAGEANT SEWING PARTY AT WORK IN INDEPENDENCE HALL

Pageant casting also reinforced social hierarchy, despite the claims of historical pageant promoters. Participants were drawn from the same two groups as in 1908: prominent citizens and members of ethnic groups which landed before the Revolution, with Philadelphia elementary and high school students mostly from the area surrounding the pageant grounds in West Philadelphia filling out some of the crowd scenes.<sup>55</sup> The general letter soliciting participation read: "The committee in charge of the Pageant has the honor to invite descendants of noted personages of the Colonial and Revolutionary periods and of the War of 1812 to patriotically enroll their names, that they may be assigned suitable places in the representation, and. . . (to) specify the

<sup>54</sup> EPO to Harry J. Stone, 3/22/1912; Minutes, Directing Committee, Historical Pageant of Philadelphia, 7/19/1912. EPO papers.

<sup>55</sup> A sample of 180 of 718 schoolgirls who played fairies in the pageant's opening scene revealed that 136 (75.6%) lived in West Philadelphia, even though West Philadelphia contained only 16.0% of the city's population. Cast list, Historical Pageant of Philadelphia, 1912. Box 4, EPO papers.

name or names of their historic ancestors, whom they would like to represent.”<sup>56</sup> More so than in the street pageant in 1908, which had no speaking parts, participants in the pageant play of 1912 were divided between “lead” and “supporting” cast. Most of the cast of 5,000 appeared only as crowd in scenes reenacting the turning back of the British tea ship “Polly” in 1773, the reception for George Washington en route to his inauguration in 1789, and the welcoming of Marquis de Lafayette in 1824.<sup>57</sup> The eight historical reenactments, though intended to depict the entire city turned out in past times of communal celebration, in fact reinforced the notion that social life was played only by prominent citizens, with the remainder of the city as audience. Much more so than in the Founders’ Week parades in 1908, which remained within the tradition of urban street processions, the Historical Pageant of 1912 was like an elite costume ball on an unprecedented scale, as reflected in the fact that it was much easier for Oberholtzer to recruit women participants than men in 1912, the exact reverse of the situation in 1908.

The grand finale, which occurred after the reenactment of Lafayette’s reception in 1824, symbolized the consolidation of the city in 1854. Oberholtzer invited each of the city’s formerly independent districts to send a “comely” young girl from a “prominent family” to play this scene, in which one by one they enter the pageant field and gather around a “matronly” figure representing “Philadelphia,” played by the wife of new mayor Rudolph Blankenburg.<sup>58</sup> This scene baldly expressed the centralization of political power with the strong mayor receiving fealty from his component districts. It is probably not coincidental that Oberholtzer was a strong supporter of Blankenburg. Barely elected on a reform ticket in 1911, Blankenburg quarreled with the dominant Republican machine for the remainder of his term and remained consistently frustrated that the state legislature would not consolidate the City Councils into a single fifteen member body.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> One copy of the mimeographed invitation is in Box 19, EPO papers.

<sup>57</sup> An episode reenacting the Philadelphia procession in 1788 celebrating the adoption of the Federal Constitution was omitted because of time limitations.

<sup>58</sup> Oberholtzer to T.W. Worrell of Frankford, 7/19/1912; EPO to John E. Reyburn, 8/2/1912. EPO papers.

<sup>59</sup> See Donald W. Disbrow, “Reform in Philadelphia Under Mayor Blankenburg 1912-16,” *Pennsylvania History* 27 (1960), 379-66. Also see Lloyd M. Abernathy, “Progressivism,” in *Philadelphia: A 300 Year History*, Russell F. Weigley, ed. (N.Y., 1982), 363-416. For a general discussion of the struggle between urban city councils and reform mayors, see Samuel P. Hays, “Changing Political Structure of the City,” *Journal of Urban History* 1 (1974), 1-36.

Those responsible for the pageant, as well as the press, viewed it as "lesson" in vivid form for the urban masses. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* noted that "The spectacle is not merely to delight the eye; it has the laudable purpose of fixing in the minds of spectators the important events of our history in a way which is impossible by any number of readings of the printed page."<sup>60</sup> The *Public Ledger* observed that the pageant was "devised to teach the people sublime lessons through a medium that they could most easily grasp,"<sup>61</sup> adding in an editorial, "Our own historical pageant will go far to humanize the dull and pallid chronicle, in cold type, of the deeds of the forefathers; and the past will be visualized in such outstanding line and form and color that the least receptive intellect must be quickened."<sup>62</sup>

Despite the planners' intentions, the general public perceived the event in the context of other competing Philadelphia public celebrations and amusements. The same month as the pageant, West Philadelphia and Passyunk held neighborhood carnivals; Frankford, an "Industrial and Historical Parade;" and South Philadelphia, a giant (fifty societies, ten thousand men) Columbus Day parade, while the Police Department mounted its annual athletic festival and the Phillies and Athletics played their city championship baseball series.<sup>63</sup> The Historical Pageant Association of Philadelphia placed a display advertisement in the theater pages of local newspapers, trumpeting the pageant's spectacular features—come see the "Realistic Battle of Germantown," "Reading the Declaration of Independence," "Franklin at the Court of France." The advertisement appeared immediately next to "100 Handsomest Women on Earth—Ziegfeld Follies 1912."<sup>64</sup>

Public confusion reigned over whether or not the pageant was public ceremony or private show. Pageant attendance was only mediocre. In order to offset expenses, the committee counted on filling 20,000 specially built grandstand seats priced from \$3.00 to 50¢ a ticket for each of six performances.<sup>65</sup> Although the Saturday afternoon per-

<sup>60</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 7, 1912.

<sup>61</sup> *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, October 8, 1912, p. 1

<sup>62</sup> *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, October 8, 1912, p. 10. The *Philadelphia Evening Times* was less kind to the pageant, prompting Oberholtzer to pen a rebuttal. Unfortunately, no copies of the paper from the month of the pageant have survived.

<sup>63</sup> See the *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, October 13, 1912, for a sample of the range of public activities going on in Philadelphia at the same time as the historical pageant.

<sup>64</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 6, 1912.

<sup>65</sup> Minutes, Executive Committee, Historical Pageant of Philadelphia, 9/4/1912. Box 10, EPO papers.

formance, which fell on Columbus Day, was crowded, the week-day afternoon and especially the evening performances—stretching for three hours in the October chill—drew less well. For most Philadelphians in 1912, reaching Belmont plateau required at least one change of streetcars and two fares. Oberholtzer rejected the idea of parading the cast in costume downtown, in the manner of the circus parade, to lure spectators out to performances.<sup>66</sup> Many of those who did come jammed into the standing area, which afforded less of a view of the action than the grandstand, but maintained the same price they were accustomed to pay to view civic celebrations—free. Toward the end of the run the Pageant Association placed advertisements in local newspapers asserting that the City of Philadelphia had made no appropriation for the spectacle. This was intended to boost paid admissions but may have also undercut the pageant's claim to legitimacy as a municipal event.<sup>67</sup> Even with three additional performances (Saturday evening, and Monday and Tuesday afternoons), the Pageant Association raised only half the money it expected from gate receipts. Not only did none of the guarantors of the pageant get back any of the \$27,000 pledged, but the production wound up \$15,000 in debt.<sup>68</sup> Despite the participation of prominent and wealthy citizens, the historical pageant could not acquire enough public support through either city appropriation or box office to pay for itself.

The Historical Pageant Association appealed to the city government for \$10,000 to make up its deficit, claiming that the event was of educational value and was good for local businesses.<sup>69</sup> It cited the city's support of the New Year's Mummers as precedent for helping to fund a privately managed celebration. Mayor Blankenburg agreed, and remarkably, so did enough city councilmen to pass an appropriation bill in June 1913. But city Controller John Walton refused to release the money, declaring the bill illegal because the city was bailing out a "private exhibition." When in turn the Pageant Association sued Walton to release the money, Walton testified in court that since the city

<sup>66</sup> Minutes, Executive Committee, 10/10/1912, Box 10, EPO papers.

<sup>67</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 13, 1912.

<sup>68</sup> H.G. Stockwell and Co., "Auditor's Report: Historical Pageant Association of Philadelphia," April 28, 1913. Box 9, EPO papers.

<sup>69</sup> C.P. No. 3, June Term, 1913, No. 2402: "Historical Pageant Assn. of Phila. vs. John M. Walton and Murrell Dobbins," 7/9/1913. Box 5, EPO papers.

would not have received any of the pageant's profits (the money was slated to go to Pennsylvania Hospital, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and the American Philosophical Society), it should not absorb the pageant's losses.<sup>70</sup> The Association suit dragged on for six years, appealed up to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, but the Association never received its money—nor did the group's creditors, some of whom were owed as much as \$2,000. Oberholtzer never received the \$5,000 he had budgeted for his salary as pageant-master. With Mayor Blankenburg out of office by 1915, the Pageant Association, one of many competing groups clamoring for municipal appropriations, could never muster the political pressure necessary to override Walton's objections, and the city allocated the money elsewhere.<sup>71</sup>

After the financial failure of the pageant of 1912, Philadelphia's hereditary and educational elite were slow to involve themselves in another city-wide celebration. The Historical Pageant Association of Philadelphia's membership of 204 dropped by more than half to 95 in 1913 and dwindled to 25 before disbanding in 1919. Over the life of the Association, 181 (60.3%) of the total 300 members belonged three years or less, and 53 (17.7%) joined only for 1912.<sup>72</sup> Philadelphia's two largest municipal extravaganzas of the following decade were the downtown parade in 1919 welcoming troops back from World War One, and the U.S. Sesquicentennial International Exposition in South Philadelphia in 1926. In the latter affair, festival planners emphasized

<sup>70</sup> Charles E. Hires to Councilman P. Oliver Derr, 4/2/1913. Copy in EPO papers.

<sup>71</sup> Charles Jenkins, Treasurer of Historical Pageant Assn. of Phila., to EPO, 11/13/1913. EPO papers.

<sup>72</sup> *Table One: Dues-paying Membership by Year, Historical Pageant Assn. of Phila.*

1909	158	1913	95	1917	39
1910	133	1914	89	1918	26
1911	168	1915	67	1919	26
1912	204	1916	47		

*Table Two: Length of Membership by Member, Historical Pageant Assn. of Phila.*

1 year	99	33.0%	6-7 yrs.	38	12.7%
2-3 yrs.	82	27.3%	8-9 yrs.	17	5.7%
4-5 yrs.	52	17.3%	10-11 yrs.	12	4.0%
			Total	300	100.0%

Mean length of membership: 3.5 yrs.; Standard deviation 2.7 yrs. Source: Membership book, Historical Pageant Assn. of Phila. Box 10, EPO papers.

professional popular entertainment—"Freedom" the principal historical pageant, was performed by actors and actresses from New York City<sup>73</sup>—and the planning committee politely ignored Ellis P. Oberholtzer's suggestion that the city use Belmont plateau for a sesquicentennial municipal historical pageant. Although several of the city's ethnic groups did stage historical pageants in Sesquicentennial Stadium—Greek, Italian, Afro-American—with the major exception of the Sesquicentennial Women's Committee's restored Colonial "High Street," Philadelphia's traditional elite left the public celebration planning and execution to others.<sup>74</sup> James W. Beck's prediction about elite participation in the Sesquicentennial, made to Oberholtzer in 1922, proved essentially correct:

The old leadership doesn't want to be bothered with the affair and will do little or nothing; the new leadership, of a newer and younger group of men, are too timid and feel that nothing can be done unless Mr. Stotesbury and men of his class do the work. I have no doubt that there will be some kind of celebration, but I suspect that it will wind up in the kind of an affair like the Bicentennial Celebration of Pennsylvania—good while it lasted, but of no permanent influence.<sup>75</sup>

Ellis P. Oberholtzer continued his interest in the public's education, however, through other channels. He remained active in the national organization to promote historical pageantry—the American Pageant Association—as well as the Society for Visual Education—a national network dedicated to using motion pictures for educational rather than commercial purposes. When Martin G. Brumbaugh, chair of the 1912 Pageant's Executive Committee, was elected governor of Pennsylvania in 1914, he appointed Oberholtzer to head the new Board of Motion Picture Censors under the State Department of Education. For the next six years (1915-21), Oberholtzer rewrote subtitles and deleted objectionable scenes from the movies which entered Pennsylvania. He also

<sup>73</sup> "Freedom" consisted of 43 scenes tracing its theme from the Stone Age through the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. See Wm. W. Matos, "Pageantry, Drama, and Spectacle," in *The Sesquicentennial International Exposition*, E.L. Austin and O. Hauser, eds. (Phila., 1929), 238-48.

<sup>74</sup> The black history pageant, "Loyalty's Gift," featured the Hampton and Fisk University Quintets with soloist Marian Anderson. *Ibid.*, 246-47. See also Sarah D. Lowrie and Mabel S. Ludlum, *Sesquicentennial High Street* (Phila., 1926).

<sup>75</sup> James W. Beck to Oberholtzer, 8/24/1922. Box 13, EPO papers.



served on the Valley Forge Park Commission from 1925 until his death in 1936, directing the Valley Forge Sesquicentennial Pageant in 1928.<sup>76</sup>

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Philadelphia's civic celebrations over the half-century between the Civil War and World War One reveal changing patterns of interaction among local residents as well as changing notions of what public cultural forms could appropriately encompass "the city." Sally Falk Moore argues that all public rituals involve attempts by those in power to structure reality for others.<sup>77</sup> As Philadelphia city officials in the late nineteenth century came to view civic unity, public order, and popular entertainment as key elements of civic celebrations, the city promoted new celebrations such as the Pennsylvania Bicentennial while bringing long-established ones such as July Fourth and the New Year's Mummers Parade under municipal sponsorship and control. By assigning a place in city-wide celebrations to virtually every organization in the city, municipal officials at once superimposed a new level of group identity—the city—upon the customary affiliations of neighborhood, occupation, ethnicity, and nation. They determined the structure of group participation in the ritual construction of the civic identity—but not the form of each constituent groups' participation. Philadelphia's Italians in 1882, for example, celebrated an essentially Anglo-Saxon identity of Philadelphia by participating in the William Penn landing day procession, but they used the opportunity to assert publicly the claim of their own national hero—Christopher Columbus. Philadelphia's municipal celebration planners in the last quarter of the nineteenth century sought to promote a broadly shared, though loosely defined, civic ideal.

With the re-emergence of "Philadelphia gentlemen" to a more active

<sup>76</sup> Oberholtzer spent the last two decades of his life writing his five-volume *History of the United States Since the Civil War*. Among Oberholtzer's writings on film censorship are *The Morals of the Movies* (1922) and "The Moving Picture: Ober Dicta of a Censor," *Yale Review* 9 (1920), 620-32.

<sup>77</sup> Sally Falk Moore, "Epilogue: Uncertainties in Situations, Indeterminacies in Culture," in *Symbol and Politics in Communal Ideology*, S.F. Moore and B. Myerhoff, eds. (Ithaca, N.Y., 1975), 210-39.

role in civic affairs through the establishment of cultural institutions at the close of the nineteenth century,<sup>78</sup> genteel intellectuals such as Ellis P. Oberholtzer attempted to impart a specific and particular meaning to the public celebrations and concomitant civic ideal. They tried to alter the make-up of public "collective" representations by carefully delineating who could participate and in what form, regulating even the advertising in the souvenir program. Although no group in the city seemed to have been deliberately excluded, participants other than descendants of early settlers were placed on the margins of the city's historically derived identity. Not only did the historical pageants circumscribe what was the "appropriate" Philadelphia history, but the pageant episodes reenacting past civic celebrations displayed the organizers' notion of a deferential consensus of eighteenth-century society as a model for civic celebrations and public behavior in the twentieth.

Whatever consensus existed in public among disparate urban groups, however, lay in the ambiguity of the ritually constructed civic ideal and in the broad appeal of holiday spectacle.<sup>79</sup> Philadelphians by and large continued to interpret Oberholtzer's historical symbolism in a variety of ways, rather than only as he intended. For most Philadelphians, what the genteel intellectuals offered as mass uplift in historical pageantry was virtually indistinguishable from mass entertainment. And Anglo history alone, as depicted in the Historical Pageant of 1912, fared poorly as mass spectacle in competition with other attractions in the urban setting.

The changed relation of civic celebration planners and their audience by the early twentieth century is underscored when the Philadelphia historical pageant experience in 1912 is contrasted with that of St. Louis two years later. Planners of the Pageant and Masque of St. Louis, like

<sup>78</sup> Among these institutions were the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1877), Free Library of Philadelphia (1891), and Philadelphia Orchestra (1900). See Lukacs, *Philadelphia*; Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen*; and Nathaniel Burt and Wallace E. Davies, "The Iron Age 1876-1905," in *Philadelphia: A 300 Year History*, 511-23.

<sup>79</sup> Consensus in American history has often been the product of ambiguity and mutual misperception of language and symbol. John Higham suggests that an essentially vague national ideology and primarily local social patterns allowed widely different definitions of American nationality to coexist without challenging one another through most of the nineteenth century, until improved national communications and a drive for "purity" and a standard definition of "American" at the turn of the century brought about a "crisis." "Integrating America: The Problem of Assimilation in the 19th Century," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 1 (1981), 7-25.

those in Philadelphia, were upper-middle-class white professionals who also advocated progressive political reform and the City Beautiful, and hoped to use their celebration to overturn St. Louis' image as a corrupt, lethargic river town. Unlike the Philadelphians, however, the St. Louisians mobilized virtually the entire city (except for blacks) in their production, declaring early that their event would not be dominated by the same "Old French Families" who customarily led municipal celebrations. They invited the participation of local ethnic organizations (in assigned roles) and opened cast enrollment stations for the general public in the twenty-five branches of the public library system. The Finance Committee systematically contacted local businesses, industry by industry, and established a speakers bureau which dispatched representatives throughout St. Louis to solicit contributions from church groups and fraternal organizations. Contributions of as little as 25¢ were accepted from thousands of local schoolchildren purchasing pageant buttons and from adults registering in a commemorative book. Pageant planners launched a \$12,000 publicity campaign to attract visitors to St. Louis, blanketing the nation with post cards, posters, railroad handbills, and press releases, and erected twice as many grandstand seats for sale as their Philadelphia counterparts. Promoting the civic extravaganza as mass entertainment and soliciting the active participation of a broad-based constituency enabled the St. Louis pageant planners to garner public support. Although the civic effects the planners sought—greater cooperation in progressive reforms—did not entirely come to fruition, at least the \$125,000 production did not lose money, and in fact wound up with a surplus of nearly \$17,000.<sup>80</sup>

In the assessment of one group surveying the state of the nation's civic festivals in 1911, public tastes "have been vitiated to such an extent (by commercial amusements) that the longing for accentuated pleasures makes it difficult for those who wish to plan and carry out true festivals."<sup>81</sup> As American urban cultural patterns, reflected in public celebrations, grew more pluralistic and oriented to commercial mass en-

<sup>80</sup> See D. Glassberg, "American Civic Pageantry. . .," ch. 4, Also Donald B. Oster, "Nights of Fantasy The St. Louis Pageant and Masque of 1914," *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society* 31 (April, 1975), 175-205.

<sup>81</sup> "Report of the Playground and Recreation Association of America Committee on Festivals," *Playground*, 4 (1911), 372.

tainment by the late nineteenth century, the genteel intellectuals' ability to mold public opinion through "visual education" in a marketplace of competing ideas and values ultimately depended upon their willingness to transcend their Anglo-centric and hierarchical vision of society and culture. In Philadelphia they were more successful in 1908, when their historical pageant appeared as merely one contribution to a week-long program of diverse activities collectively representing the city's rather ambiguous civic identity, than in 1912, when they assumed that their historical pageant alone could assert that civic identity.

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