

EDWARD M. BIGELOW:  
Creator of Pittsburgh's Arcadian Parks

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THE park movement in the United States was launched in the 1850s with the creation of Central Park in New York City. Inspired by this successful model, Chicago, and then most other major American cities, followed New York's example within the next two decades. Pittsburgh, however, had remained an exception; for various reasons, the city failed in 1869, and again in 1871, in its efforts to establish a park.<sup>1</sup> Not until 1889, in fact, did Pittsburgh succeed in acquiring its first land for this purpose.

With the cooperation of Pittsburgh's farsighted political bosses, Christopher L. Magee and William Flinn, one man, Edward M. Bigelow, almost single-handedly built Pittsburgh's park system. In 1888 the city councils appointed the thirty-eight-year-old Bigelow, a young civil engineer and a cousin of Magee's, to head the newly created Department of Public Works. Prior to his appointment, he had attended Western University of Pennsylvania briefly and had worked for the city as a surveyor and engineer.<sup>2</sup> With Bigelow's promotion to director of public works, his integrity, vision, and forceful character made him one of the most influential men in city government.

His engineering background, together with his familiarity with Washington, D. C., London, and Baron Georges Haussmann's Paris, provided him with the dream of a Pittsburgh "beautiful and complete

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1 General James O'Hara, Mary Schenley's grandfather, willed the city a strip of land along Second Avenue, which became public property in 1820. In 1888 that land still had not been developed as a park. See Howard B. Stewart, *Historical Data: Pittsburgh Public Parks* (Ann Arbor, 1943), 38, and Erasmus Wilson, *Standard History of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* (Chicago, 1898), 1065.

2 The state legislature granted Pittsburgh a new charter in 1887 which set up the Department of Public Works. Its director was made responsible to the bicameral councils, which Magee and Flinn controlled. See Allen Humphreys Kerr, "The Mayors and Recorders of Pittsburgh" (Pittsburgh, 1952), 192. Also, *Pittsburgh at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century*, published by the *Pittsburgh Leader*, not paged.

beyond even the fondest dreams of his contemporaries.”<sup>3</sup> During the fifteen years that Bigelow ran the Department of Public Works,<sup>4</sup> he headed a vast program of public improvements, but in order to fulfill his dream, he concentrated his enthusiasm, power, and considerable talent upon the development of parks.

Bigelow believed that his vision of beautiful parks, connected by spacious boulevards, would give Pittsburgh the esthetic dimension it lacked as an industrial city. He also believed that parks would serve as effective and benevolent instruments of social control. The generous support which he received over many years from taxpayers, city government, and public benefactors can be explained, in part, by his appeal to that argument. Pittsburgh's upper and middle classes had been shaken badly by the violence of worker mobs in the Railroad Riot of 1877, and the Homestead Strike in 1892 reinforced the fears of the propertied classes.

Claims for the civilizing influence of a humanized natural landscape go back to such classical concepts as that of the *locus amoenus*, the idealized landscape of peace and pleasure bringing harmony to the soul.<sup>5</sup> The ideal landscape remained a favorite subject of poets, painters, and landscape designers until the end of the eighteenth century and, with modifications, was revived in the last half of the nineteenth century. The growth of American city park systems was inextricably linked to that revival.

The immediate influences shaping Bigelow's ideas about parks were the “back-to-nature” and “City Beautiful” movements that swept urban America near the end of the century. The back-to-nature movement aspired to bring the benefits of a “natural” environment to city dwellers. However, the concept of nature supported by the movement came largely from landscape architects, who took as their model of nature the rationally ordered landscapes of eighteenth-

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3 Kerr, 193.

4 Except for the years 1900-1902, Bigelow directed the Department of Public Works from 1888 to 1906. He was fired in 1900 after a disagreement with Flinn, who owned a construction company, over the lack of competitive bidding in letting city contracts. After Christopher Magee's death in 1901, Bigelow's brother helped create a Citizens' party which aligned itself with the Democrats and won a majority in both councils. The newly elected councils reappointed Edward M. Bigelow director of public works. See Kerr, 178, and Eugene Kaufman, “A Pittsburgh Political Battle Royal of a Half Century Ago,” *WPHM* 35 (June 1952) : 79-81.

5 Ernst Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans., Willard R. Trask (New York, 1953), 183-202. Also see Paul Shepard, *Man in the Landscape: A Historic View of the Esthetic of Nature* (New York, 1967), 65-118.

century English landscape painters and theorists. Following their "rigid standards of Romantic beauty," early landscape architects in America, such as Andrew Jackson Downing, first expressed this "elegant art" in the country estates of the wealthy and in the creation of romantic "park-like 'rural' cemeteries," which were forerunners of the so-called Arcadian parks of the latter nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> In 1858, Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., had adapted landscape design to the modern city with his plan for Central Park in New York City. Because of Pittsburgh's "wonderful natural advantages," Bigelow believed that he could create a park to rival it.<sup>7</sup>

Supporters of the back-to-nature and City Beautiful movements shared the assumption that human psychology and behavior were affected significantly by environment. Ugly, chaotic cities contributed to disorder within the individual. Cities made beautiful with parks, in which landscapers harmonized and ordered nature, and with buildings, to which architects gave formal dignity and magnificence, would contribute to orderly, restrained human conduct. These ideas lay behind Bigelow's plan to create parks which would serve as instruments of social control.

In the first *Annual Report* that Bigelow filed as director of public works, he explained that those concerned with the establishment of parks "have for their chief motive the elevation of the people." His praise of Mary Schenley's generosity for donating land in 1889 for a park clarifies the meaning of that statement. "She has given to the toilers an opportunity for relaxation and recreation, that in its good results must prove beyond all price, in the benefits that it will confer on the masses morally and physically," he stated in his *Annual Report* of 1889.

Subsequent *Annual Reports* show that Bigelow and other advocates of parks were interested primarily in promoting middle-class restraint. Hopefully, parks would induce a behavioral pattern for the lower class acceptable to middle-class values and interests. Bigelow believed, for example, that the "healthful and innocent relaxation"

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6 Peter J. Schmitt, *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America* (New York, 1969), 57. For excellent treatment of the English influence see Edward Malins, *English Landscaping and Literature, 1660-1840* (London, 1966).

Schmitt, 56-76. Schmitt's analysis of the "Arcadian Myth" suggested to me that "Arcadian" is a more appropriate term for large city parks than "rural."

7 City of Pittsburgh, Department of Public Works, *Annual Report of the Department of Public Works, 1891* (Pittsburgh, 1892), 12 (hereafter cited as *Public Works Annual Report*).

which parks afforded was an "absolute necessity," in order to prevent workmen from seeking "artificial stimulation [in saloons] which hurt themselves and bore heavily upon their families."<sup>8</sup>

The first step toward establishing a park system in Pittsburgh came in May 1889 when the councils approved Bigelow's request for a councilmanic committee on parks. In August, the councils followed this step by approving Bigelow's proposal to set aside the ground surrounding the Herron Hill and Highland reservoirs for parks, the land to be improved and beautified by the Department of Public Works.<sup>9</sup>

Another ideal location for a park within the city boundaries was the large, hilly Mount Airy property, today's Schenley Park, owned by Mrs. Schenley. In 1869 the city had tried to raise money to purchase land for a park from her, but the voters had rejected the necessary bond issue, and in 1871, angered by the delays, the Schenleys had broken off negotiations. Finally in 1889, Bigelow reached an agreement with Mrs. Schenley. She gave the city three-hundred acres of the Mount Airy tract for a park with an option to buy an additional one-hundred acres for \$125,000.<sup>10</sup> Thus, after one year as director of public works, Bigelow had acquired land for Pittsburgh's first park.

During the next fifteen years, Bigelow aggressively purchased land adjacent to Schenley Park and the Highland Reservoir. In total, he added about one-hundred-twenty acres to Schenley Park at a cost in excess of \$500,000. The one-hundred-twenty separate land transactions for Highland Park finally cost the city over \$900,000.<sup>11</sup> While smaller parks were established after 1895 (see Appendix), larger amounts of money on land for Highland and Schenley parks and on their improvement were spent than on all the other parks combined.<sup>12</sup> This heavy investment in the large parks was made because it suited Bigelow's conception of the purposes that parks should serve.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 1889, 17, 18.

<sup>9</sup> Stewart, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Bigelow heard rumors that a real-estate developer was about to visit Mary Schenley in London in order to purchase the Mount Airy tract. Hoping to prevent the loss of this valuable property to the city, he left immediately for England, accompanied by Robert Carnahan, a businessman who represented some of Mrs. Schenley's interests. There they concluded an agreement with her a few days before the realtor arrived. Ibid., 32, 33.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 13, 37.

<sup>12</sup> In 1893, the year in which major park improvements began, the councils appropriated \$123,500 for Schenley Park; \$43,500 for Highland Park; and \$4,000 each for Bedford and Herron Hill. City of Pittsburgh, *Municipal Record: Minutes of the Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Pittsburgh, 1892-93*, 25: 153. Amounts spent on improvements in subsequent years followed a similar pattern. See "Bookkeeper's Reports" in *Public Works Annual Reports*.

Because Bigelow believed that "nature improved by art" would act as an effective instrument of social control, he gave highest priority to beautifying park lands. Of Schenley Park, he wrote in his 1891 *Annual Report*, "The more attractive this magnificent breathing spot is made, the more visible will be its effects for good upon the community."<sup>13</sup> In order to make it and Highland Park "more attractive," Bigelow advocated that "art . . . be liberally employed" in building upon the foundation which nature had provided.<sup>14</sup> The art used in developing the parks was that of landscape designers and of architects, engineers, and sculptors who reflected the esthetic qualities of the back-to-nature and the City Beautiful movements respectively. Through their landscaping, statuary, and recreational facilities, parks would also "elevate" lower-class attitudes and behavior, provide places where Pittsburghers of all classes could mingle, and supply symbols which would inspire civic pride.

Under Bigelow's direction, landscapers improved nature by giving it regularity and harmony — esthetic ideals consistent with Bigelow's larger goal of social control. Most of the land purchased for the large parks was extremely rugged with steep slopes, deep ravines, craggy hillsides, and rocky protrusions on which plants and trees could not grow. In order to make the land readily accessible to the public, it had to be graded and filled. But, according to William Falconer, an English landscape architect appointed by Bigelow to head Schenley Park: "Grading . . . does not mean a simple smoothing over the surface of the ground. Prominent, rigid, abrupt banks or breasts of rock and clay have been removed wide and deep enough to allow the introduction of natural-appearing graceful sloping waves instead . . ." <sup>15</sup> Gently undulating contours replaced the sharp, craggy features of undisturbed nature in a conscious effort to tame it and to suggest its benevolence.

When the rough features of nature could not be reshaped, they were softened by covering them with trees and shrubs. Bigelow considered this work "of the first importance in the making of parks."<sup>16</sup> He directed park crews to remove old trees and plant thousands of young trees and shrubs in the "herculean task" of dressing "the uncouth woods for the reception" of the public.<sup>17</sup> By 1897, in an effort

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<sup>13</sup> *Public Works Annual Report*, 1891, 12.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 1889, 19.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 1896, 335.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 1897, 10.

<sup>17</sup> *Pittsburgh at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century*.

to "give a speedy woody effect" to bare hillsides and slopes, workmen had planted 23,500 trees and 14,000 shrubs in Schenley and Highland parks.<sup>18</sup> They harmonized with, and modified, the contours of the land, giving a gentle, informal regularity to nature.

Man's part in the creation of these parks, however, was carefully obscured. The superintendent of parks, George Burke, advised that roads and paths "should be practically hidden, following the shaded shore of a lake, the banks of a stream, the foot or brow of a hill or terrace, the border of a lawn, meadow or forest, taking advantage of natural opportunities, if they exist, or, when necessary creating opportunities which may be natural . . . ." <sup>19</sup> In a further effort to minimize contrasts within the parks, landscapers carefully placed, and partially disguised, "special effects," such as rock gardens, lily ponds, and rhododendron displays. Semiformal flower beds, according to William Falconer, had "to be used with great discrimination" and confined to certain areas within the parks, for "to scatter them broadcast throughout would be in very bad taste . . ." <sup>20</sup> — bad taste because they would contrast with the stylized informality of the parks.

With the efforts of the landscaper disguised and with all elements within the parks harmonized, they offered a serene "natural" environment, which stood in contrast to the "mechanized world" of the city. According to Superintendent Burke, that contrast offered man "much needed rest for his tired body and weary soul, for [in the park] — one can find a solitary place to repose and refresh his memory, after the hours of toil are past, drink deep of the pure waters of the hills, and listen to the sweet song of birds and say, 'sweet rest' . . ." <sup>21</sup>

Bigelow believed that the main entrances to the parks should impress and inspire awe in the visitors, thus preparing them psychologically for the transition from the "mechanized world" of the city to the "natural world" of the parks. This was to be done through imposing structures and statuary in the formal, neoclassical style. Although an entranceway worthy of Schenley Park and of the massiveness of nearby Carnegie Library remained one of Bigelow's unrealized aspirations,<sup>22</sup> he designed the entrance to Highland Park himself. It con-

18 *Public Works Annual Report*, 1897, 10.

19 *Ibid.*, 1907, 1053.

20 *Ibid.*, 1897, 348.

21 *Ibid.*, 1908, 863.

22 The Forbes Street boundary of the park changed a number of times and agreement on the design of a suitable entrance was not reached. In 1910 the superintendent of parks still lamented the lack of an entrance "so necessary to impose upon the minds of the visitors." *Public Works Annual Report*, 1910, 944-45.

sisted of twin fifty-foot-tall Doric columns, each topped by a bronze representation of "Welcome," done in heroic proportions by Guiseppi Moretti. Park records describe the finished group as "extremely picturesque and very appropriate."<sup>23</sup> The entrance was considered picturesque, no doubt, because it conformed to neoclassical standards of beauty established by the City Beautiful movement.

More important, however, to Bigelow's concept of social control were the reasons why it was considered "appropriate." A Pittsburgh newspaper, the *Leader*, provided an important clue when it stated that the entrance "makes a deep impression upon the visitor at his first arrival."<sup>24</sup> But what was the exact nature of the "deep impression" which the design of park entrances was intended to produce? Most obviously, as stated above, the sense of passing from one world into another — from the mechanical world of modern industrial life into a world presumably more closely akin to man's true human condition. The feelings of awe produced by the formal grandeur of the entrance would make the visitor more receptive to the harmonizing influences of nature once he entered the park. Moreover, to anyone as concerned with elevating lower-class behavior as Bigelow, the massive and dignified entrance must have seemed an important instrument for social control. Surely people would not commit violence or behave in an unseemly way in the presence of imposing art, which would almost certainly evoke religious associations in their minds.

Through art Bigelow gave his concept of social control exalted overtones; through art he also demonstrated its paternalistic features. The statue of himself, which was placed near the main entrance to Schenley Park, and the memorial fountain to Christopher L. Magee made explicit the association between the parks and the great benefactors of the city.<sup>25</sup>

When Bigelow wrote of the elevating influence of art and nature, he meant by nature plants and not animals. The zoo, located in Schenley Park until 1898 when Magee donated the Zoological Gardens in Highland Park, never interested him. Nor did Magee's gift win from Bigelow the praise which he customarily lavished upon public benefactors. His lack of interest in the zoo contrasted with his enthusiasm for the conservatory donated by Henry Phipps and built within

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 1896, 359.

<sup>24</sup> *Pittsburgh at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century*.

<sup>25</sup> A statue of Bigelow, paid for by public subscription, was unveiled in 1895. The Christopher Lyman Magee Memorial was unveiled and dedicated in 1908.

Schenley Park.

When the conservatory opened in 1893, stocked with plants from the Columbian Exposition, the Bureau of Parks announced a "continuous free flower show all year round"<sup>26</sup> — a goal that proved too ambitious and that was soon reduced to two elaborate shows annually, one at Easter and one in the fall. These shows attracted large numbers of visitors who came from "[a]ll portions of the City . . . from the tenements and humble homes to the mansions of the rich . . . ."<sup>27</sup> Included among those visitors were representatives from "[a]lmost every nationality . . . ."<sup>28</sup> Superintendent of Parks Burke observed that by bringing Pittsburgh's diverse population together, the conservatory proved the truth of the "homely old saying" that "'[o]ne touch of nature makes the whole world akin.'"<sup>29</sup> The flower shows, which represented in concentrated form nature modified by art, suited perfectly Bigelow's purpose of reconciling men with each other.

Furthermore, the conservatory, through its educational program, actively proselytized for the cult of nature. Capitalizing upon the practice of some public-school teachers who sent students to the chrysanthemum show in order to write compositions about it, the conservatory set up the Phipps Hall of Botany. Pittsburgh high schools and the normal school sent hundreds of students to it, where a staff conducted lessons in nature study and botany and gave pupils "their first impressions of the real value of plant life . . . ."<sup>30</sup> Surely, in Bigelow's mind, no aspect of the park system contributed more to his goal of elevating people through art and nature than Phipps Conservatory.

Bigelow provided limited recreational opportunities which might appeal to park visitors of all social classes and which would encourage the "healthful and innocent relaxation" which he considered so important. Picnic areas were developed and shelter houses built where families or church and fraternal groups might gather for outings. Lakes in both Highland and Schenley parks offered skating in winter and boating in summer. Such park facilities helped to attract "small family parties of parents and children."<sup>31</sup> Bigelow particularly applauded these visitors, for their presence indicated to him that the

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<sup>26</sup> *Public Works Annual Report*, 1893, 13.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 1907, 1042.

<sup>28</sup> *Commercial Gazette*, Apr. 1, 1895.

<sup>29</sup> *Public Works Annual Report*, 1907, 1041.

<sup>30</sup> City of Pittsburgh, *Annual Reports of the Executive Departments, 1912* (Pittsburgh, n.d.), 2: 1133 (hereafter cited as *Executive Depts. Annual Reports*).

<sup>31</sup> *Public Works Annual Report*, 1899, 16.



parks promoted family stability — a basic element to a stable and orderly society.

The parks also gave men an opportunity to engage in more active sports, either as participants or as spectators, which might provide socially acceptable outlets for aggression. The facilities for active sports which Bigelow planned, however, reflected the leisure-time interests of the upper and middle classes almost exclusively. Bridle trails and a speedway for horseracing were constructed in Schenley Park soon after its establishment. The Schenley Matinee Driving Club, "composed of some of our best citizens,"<sup>32</sup> used the speedway, which was later redesigned as the Oval and acclaimed as the "fastest and best track in the states."<sup>33</sup> Baseball fields were a popular feature of the park, and as upper and middle class recreational patterns changed, a polo grounds, a golf course, and tennis courts were added. Golf courses and tennis courts became the most popular features of the parks. In 1913, for example, of the 6,762 park permits issued, over 4,000 were for their use.<sup>34</sup>

But park activities, which served larger social purposes, such as the promotion of piety or patriotism, interested Bigelow more. He either initiated the use of, or gave enthusiastic support to, those who wanted to use the parks for religious services, musical concerts, Masonic functions, and public-school events, such as athletic contests and picnics. Certainly the most spectacular, and to Bigelow one of the most important park activities, was the annual Fourth of July celebration which he planned personally for Schenley and, later, for other parks as well. He provided a variety of kinds of free entertainment — patriotic ceremonies, vaudeville performances, Punch and Judy shows, dog and pony circuses, sensational tightrope acts, balloon ascensions, airplane flights, and fireworks displays — which had wide, popular appeal to people of all ages and interests.<sup>35</sup>

Such celebrations served important assimilative functions. Patriotic speeches, given by municipal, state, and national political figures, inculcated local and national loyalty in all citizens and elucidated the significance of America's most important holiday to the ethnic population. Moreover, if left to themselves on a holiday, lower-class people

32 Ibid., 1904, 475.

33 Ibid., 1906, 574.

34 City of Pittsburgh, *Annual Reports of Departments and Offices, 1913* (Pittsburgh, 1913), 876.

35 Pittsburgh businesses contributed money to pay for Fourth of July festivities. Bigelow reported that \$10,000 was contributed in 1895 and that he hoped to raise \$25,000 the following year. *Pittsburgh Press*, July 3, 5, 1895.

might drink or commit crimes.<sup>36</sup> With attendance estimated as high as 300,000, people from Pittsburgh and adjacent areas shared a common experience for one day.<sup>37</sup>

At the same time that park visitors were elevated morally, they would also be elevated physically by breathing pure park air. Park advocates believed that providing an abundance of pure air was one important function of the large parks. Bigelow rather consistently referred to them as "breathing spots," while the *Pittsburgh Press* of September 12, 1889, called parks "fresh air reservoirs." Superintendent Burke wrote that urban residents might go to a park "with their families and breathe to their hearts' content the refreshing air so hard to get in the crowded portions of the City."<sup>38</sup>

Finally, Bigelow intended that the parks would help modify the industrial image of Pittsburgh as the "Iron Metropolis" and the "Smoky City." Such an image carried positive connotations to some people, but not to a man as deeply influenced by the back-to-nature and the City Beautiful movements as Bigelow. He intended that his public improvements would not only make Pittsburgh a more beautiful city but would make it a cultural and recreational center as well. If Pittsburghers, particularly those of the lower class to whom industrial images must have suggested misery and backbreaking labor, could perceive their city as a place of beauty, learning, and relaxation, they might identify more positively with it. Bigelow made this point in an enthusiastic speech before the Press Club in which he revealed his dream for a greater Pittsburgh. He concluded by asserting, in effect, that magnificent cities make proud and loyal citizens: "Let us make our city . . . such a city that hereafter a man will be as proud to say, 'I hail from Pittsburgh,' as in the old times men were proud to say, 'I am a Roman citizen.'" <sup>39</sup>

The image of parks and Carnegie Institute gave an esthetic, intellectual, and recreational dimension to Bigelow's "greater Pittsburgh" which the older "Iron Metropolis" had lacked.<sup>40</sup> The parks, frequently called "garden spots," put "beautiful and healthful recre-

36 For example, on July 4, 1895, a group of Poles held a picnic at Dilley's groves on the South Side. Beer and liquor flowed freely, a general fight broke out, and one "drunken Pole" stabbed five persons. *Pittsburgh Press*, July 7, 8, 1895.

37 *Gazette Times*, July 5, 1907.

38 *Public Works Annual Report*, 1907, 1051.

39 *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, Jan. 30, 1895.

40 After the annexation of Allegheny in 1907, Pittsburgh was commonly referred to as "Greater Pittsburgh," an appellation which carried connotations similar to those Bigelow had in mind at least twelve years earlier.

ation ground[s]" within the "Iron Metropolis."<sup>41</sup> The flower shows, which attracted visitors from throughout Western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio, contributed significantly to Pittsburgh's image as a regional center of beauty and recreation, while Phipps Hall of Botany represented "an inspiring center of education, in the midst of the great garden spot . . . ." <sup>42</sup> Of Pittsburgh's future, one newspaper wrote confidently: "Already the commercial capital, it should be and will in time become the social and intellectual center of a population of several millions of people."<sup>43</sup>

The parks, and values associated with them, were intended to promote civic pride and responsibility. Parks, with their neoclassical decorations and recreational and educational facilities, gave beautiful and impressive features to the city. To claim, as Superintendent George Burke did, that Pittsburgh possessed a "most modern and up-to-date park system" comparable to any in the United States or Europe,<sup>44</sup> or as one newspaper did that Schenley and Highland parks were "superior to any in the country,"<sup>45</sup> could only make citizens proud of their city and of the man who created the parks. Moreover, parks would especially provide the many immigrants with symbols which could help them identify more closely with their adopted city.

Bigelow and other park personnel quickly recognized the elevating effects of the parks reflected in the good behavior of the visitors.<sup>46</sup> His *Annual Reports* to the mayor, as well as those submitted to him by park superintendents, assert repeatedly that no disorder occurred among the thousands of park visitors and that park police made no arrests. Of the 1894 July Fourth celebration in Schenley Park, which between 150,000 and 200,000 people attended, Superintendent A. W. Bennett wrote, "It gives me great pleasure to say that I have never seen a more orderly and appreciative audience at any public gathering . . . ." <sup>47</sup> Burke wrote in his 1894 report that "no arrests or disorderly conduct" occurred in Highland Park during the entire year.<sup>48</sup> Independent observers also noted the exemplary behavior of

41 *Public Works Annual Report*, 1897, 347.

42 *Executive Depts. Annual Reports*, 1912, 2: 1133.

43 *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, Sept. 19, 1899.

44 *Public Works Annual Report*, 1909, 1239.

45 *Pittsburgh at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century*.

46 Bigelow expressed doubt about whether parks made good people or whether only good people came to the parks. He wrote in 1891, "if the beauties of nature, enhanced by art, have not of themselves a moral effect, they are at least enjoyed by a good and reputable class of people . . . ." *Public Works Annual Report*, 1891, 12.

47 *Ibid.*, 1894, 374.

48 *Ibid.*, 388.

park visitors. The *Gazette Times* reported only one arrest and one slight injury at Schenley Park's 1907 Fourth of July celebration. The paper then added, "This condition of affairs was remarkable from the great number of foreigners in the crowd."<sup>49</sup> Those who came to the parks apparently conducted themselves in a restrained manner acceptable to middle-class standards.

Bigelow had originally won widespread support for the parks with claims that they would make society more orderly. Except for some economy-minded businessmen, who felt that Bigelow spent too much money "for pure embellishment,"<sup>50</sup> no one, in the early 1890s, seriously challenged either his purpose in creating the parks or his assumption that they could fulfill their intended purpose.

In the late 1890s, however, representatives of the playground movement attacked Bigelow's conception of parks.<sup>51</sup> These critics denied his assumption that art and nature could elevate men morally. They rejected the parks as ineffective instruments of social control and called instead for recreational parks located in lower-class neighborhoods. Such parks would offer "games," swimming, and competitive sports supervised by a social director. Vigorous, physical activity would provide an outlet for the aggressive passions of the lower class and, particularly, of the young. The recreational parks would also function as neighborhood centers, similar to settlement houses, where directors would give instructions, for example, in cooking, sewing, and carpentry and provide other social services which would help immigrants make the necessary adjustments for assimilation into American society.<sup>52</sup>

Bigelow answered these critics by agreeing that the large parks should be supplemented "with small ones whenever we can obtain the ground convenient to centers of population" and that an "open square in every tenement district . . . would be a blessing to the City."<sup>53</sup> Yet

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<sup>49</sup> *Gazette Times*, July 5, 1907.

<sup>50</sup> For example, see *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, Jan. 29, Feb. 17, 19, 1895.

<sup>51</sup> The playground movement had originated in Boston in the 1880s, and the "first real playfield opened in 1893" in Chicago. Schmitt, 74. In Pittsburgh the first summer play programs began in 1896, using the playgrounds adjacent to the public schools. The Civic Club and the women's clubs gave strong support to the playground movement. Civic Club of Allegheny County, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, *Fifteen Years of Civic History, October, 1895-December, 1910* (Pittsburgh, n.d.), 14-15, and Beulah Kennard, "The Playgrounds of Pittsburgh," in *The Pittsburgh District, Civic Frontage, The Pittsburgh Survey*, ed. by Paul Underwood Kellogg (New York, 1914), 310, 317.

<sup>52</sup> Kennard, 307-20.

<sup>53</sup> *Public Works Annual Report*, 1899, 16-17.

at the very time he made these statements, he was buying additional land for Highland and Schenley parks and making elaborate plans for their future beautification. In fact, the initiative for most of Pittsburgh's neighborhood parks came, not from Bigelow, but from local businessmen's organizations, citizens' groups, the playground committee, or the Bureau of Recreation Grounds.<sup>54</sup> The director of public works simply "was not an enthusiast on the subject of small parks."<sup>55</sup> Nor did he ever seem to realize their enormous potential as instruments of social control.

That potential, however, was not lost upon public officials and the individuals and organizations that evaluated Pittsburgh's park system between 1910 and 1923. As early as 1906, Mayor George Guthrie pointed to a major weakness of the parks as instruments of social control by indicating that few representatives of the working class took "advantage of these public resorts."<sup>56</sup> Except for special events, such as the Fourth of July celebrations and the flower shows, significant numbers of lower-class men and women did not visit them. In 1910, Mayor William A. Magee suggested a major reason for this failure when he wrote that most parks had not been "located with reference to their maximum use." Turning to recreational parks as a model, he called for expanded and improved recreational facilities within the parks in order to "popularize" their use.<sup>57</sup> Three independent evaluations of the park system made by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., the *Pittsburgh Survey*, and the Citizens Committee on a City Plan all criticized the parks for their inaccessibility to workingmen and their families, and all called for the expansion of neighborhood parks. Bigelow's concept of parks had been rejected.

Bigelow had accepted uncritically the idea that art and nature could uplift workingmen morally and thus make society more orderly. He focused his efforts almost exclusively upon the development of parks in which landscape design and statuary reflected the esthetic principles of order and harmony.

In carrying out these ideas, Bigelow succeeded admirably. He acquired large tracts of land for parks at a time when pressure was increasing both upon land and upon public funds. He also successfully

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 1906, 573.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 1910, 925 and Kennard, 320.

<sup>57</sup> *Executive Depts. Annual Reports*, 1910, 1: 26, 35. The voters supported his appeal by approving a \$200,000 bond issue to provide play facilities in the large parks. Also, Kennard, 322.

directed their development in keeping with the esthetic standards of his milieu and with the recreational interests of his class.

Bigelow's failure was not in the execution of his ideas but rather in his single-minded commitment to a conception of parks that was inappropriate to his objective of social control. Arcadian parks could only be built where large amounts of land were available. This meant that they were located on the fringes of the city, remote from areas where great numbers of lower-class people lived. Workers and their families simply could not reach the large parks quickly, easily, or cheaply.<sup>58</sup>

Moreover, the landscape and art, the recreational facilities, and most of the public entertainments which Bigelow brought to the parks reflected the interests of his own class, rather than the interests of the class whom he hoped to attract. The quiet contemplation of a beautiful landscape might have been appropriate relaxation for "the overwrought nerves of business barons and their middle class clerks," but not for energetic children or for men whose daily work patterns were rigidly controlled. The advocates of recreational parks recognized what Bigelow did not, namely that "[f]actory workers needed the freedom of vigorous movement far more than they needed tranquility and rural scenery."<sup>59</sup> And Bigelow's bridle trails, golf courses, and polo grounds did not offer them appropriate opportunities for "vigorous movement."

Finally, Bigelow's idea that parks could elevate workingmen morally implied disdain for lower-class people and their values. He recognized differences in life style which separated them from members of his own class, but he did not understand the reasons for those differences. He believed that workingmen lived degenerate lives because of moral inadequacy, thus ignoring ethnic background and social and economic conditions upon human behavior. Bigelow assumed that an occasional visit to beautiful parks could offset the social ills to which overcrowded housing, inadequate income, and uncertain employment contributed. Moral elevation would serve the interests of upper- and middle-class people without requiring any changes in their existing economic and social relationships with workingmen.

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58 In order to connect Highland and Schenley parks with downtown Pittsburgh, Bigelow built Grant and Beechwood boulevards. He constructed them, however, without transit service so they might become "the favorite pleasure way" of Pittsburghers who owned horse and carriage or a bicycle and had the leisure time to take scenic drives to and through the Arcadian parks. *Public Works Annual Report*, 1895, 12.

59 Schmitt, 73.

Bigelow gave Pittsburgh its park system, and, as he had intended, Schenley and Highland parks added an esthetic quality to the city. But he devoted himself so completely to their beautification that he neglected other, smaller parks. These might have contributed even more to the image of beauty and relaxation that he wanted to give Pittsburgh. Moreover, the effectiveness of the parks as instruments of social control was severely limited by Bigelow's inability to transcend his own middle-class background which was reinforced by the vision that he had acquired from the back-to-nature and the City Beautiful movements.

#### APPENDIX PITTSBURGH PARK SYSTEM — 1916

<i>Name of Park</i>	<i>Date Acquired</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>Acreage</i>	<i>Location</i>
Arsenal	1907	Leased from fed. govt.	19.9	Penn, 39th St.
Bluff	——*	——	4.6	Bluff, Seneca
Central	——	——	5	Bedford, Ledlie
Friendship	1896	Gift	2	Friendship, Gross
Grandview	1897	\$62,000	18	Barley, Tank
Herron Hill	1889	Reservoir	13	Adelaide, Madison
Highland	1889	\$909,508	366	Beechwood, Butler
Holliday	——	——	3.5	Oneida, Pawnee
Lawrenceville	1903	\$45,516	4.7	Butler, 46th St.
McKinley	1898	\$63,000	63	Michigan, Delmont
Monument Hill	——	——	17	Ridge, Thomas
Mt. Washington	1908	\$49,283	12	Grace
Olympia	1908	\$10,959	9.18	Virginia, Hallock
Riverview	Acquired with annexation of Allegheny		240	Perrysville, Observatory
Schenley	1889	Gift plus \$516,231	422	Forbes
West End	1895	\$24,500	17.5	Walbridge, Kerr
West Park	Acquired with annexation of Allegheny		100	Western, Northern

\*Unable to find data

Sources: Department of Public Works, *The City of Pittsburgh and Its Public Works* (Pittsburgh, 1916), 46; *Annual Reports of the Department of Public Works, 1889-1908*, and Stewart, *Historical Data*.