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Green Space in the Gritty City: The Planning and Development of Philadelphia's Park System, 1854-1929

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Green Space in the Gritty City: The Planning and Development of Philadelphia's
Park System, 1854-1929

by

Robert P. Armstrong

A Dissertation

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(Doctor of Arts)

in

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Approved and recommended for acceptance as a dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Robert P. Armstrong
Green Space in the Gritty City: The Planning and Development of Philadelphia's Park System, 1854-1929

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Abstract

This is a study of the planning and development of Philadelphia's park system from the consolidation of the city and county in 1854 to the creation of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission in 1929. Unlike other major urban American park systems of the mid-nineteenth century, Philadelphia's park system is organized around a series of watershed parks, all of which were formerly industrial, commercial or residential areas. This dissertation examines the planning goals behind the acquisition of these parks: Fairmount, Wissahickon Valley, Cobbs Creek, Tacony Creek, and Pennypack, as well as the Benjamin Franklin Parkway and Roosevelt Boulevard which connect citizens to them. It traces the expansion of the park system and the ongoing political struggles between the Park Commission, the Republican Organization, various mayors, and the city council for control of resources. There were two primary groups leading the effort to expand and improve the parks: the Fairmount Park Commission, created by the Pennsylvania legislature in 1867, and the private, citizen-led City Parks Association, founded in 1888. The central argument of this dissertation is that, prior to the formation of the planning commission, those two agencies were the de facto planners of Philadelphia, including entire sections of Center City, Northwest, Southwest, and Northeast Philadelphia. The park planners, with their emphasis on acquiring parks to protect the water supply and connect citizens to Philadelphia's natural areas, constituted an early form of environmental planning. The efforts of these groups tremendously affected the built environment and the spatial layout of the city.

Introduction

Philadelphia is a city connected to the natural world by its vast park system. Stretching over 9,200 acres, or roughly ten percent of the city's 134 square miles, Philadelphia's open spaces are the result of decades of planning and acquisition, much of it achieved, remarkably, when the city was the epicenter of America's second great industrial revolution from the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century. The planning and development of Philadelphia's park system during this era reorganized much of the spatial arrangement of the developing city around park spaces. Entire sections of the city, from the crowded, urbanized core to the far reaches of the Northeast, Northwest, and Southwest, were planned not according to the dominant grid system first laid down in 1683 by William Penn and his chief surveyor, Thomas Holme, but around large watershed parks, with parkways and boulevards connecting residents to green open spaces. Unlike other large American urban park systems, Philadelphia's park system was not built on predominately vacant or underutilized land. Rather, park planners reclaimed vital industrial land along the banks of the very rivers and creek valleys which allowed Philadelphia to become an industrial behemoth.

While Philadelphia is often identified for its urban grittiness, based on its long association as a blue-collar manufacturing center with the attendant deindustrialization it can also be seen as unique among America's largest cities for its abundance of publicly accessible natural areas, notably its watershed park system, the largest element of public space in the city. Unlike other large American urban park systems, Philadelphia's park system was not the result of one leading landscape architect's vision, such as that of Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted's plan for New York. Rather, the planning of

Philadelphia around its parks was achieved by a diverse group of activists over the span of more than eighty years. This group achieved a legacy inherited by those who would officially plan the twentieth-century city, under the auspices of the first official city planning commission, organized in 1929.

This study provides a comprehensive planning and developmental history of Philadelphia's park system and its impact, from the Consolidation Act of 1854 to the creation of an official planning body for the city in 1929. There exists no single scholarly volume regarding the history of planning or the park system in Philadelphia. When the park is mentioned by historians, it is typically as an aside to the overall history of the city, overlooking the key linkage between the park, planning, and the city. Few mention the park's importance to both the city's environmental history and the planning of Philadelphia.¹ Typically, historians treat the development of the Fairmount Water Works, the Centennial Exhibition of 1876, and the planning and construction of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, all keys to understanding the park system, as separate from the overall history of the park or of the city's growth and land use patterns.² Instead, these developments are discussed as engineering marvels, Victorian spectacle, or art history. The scant amount of actual scholarship on Fairmount Park mainly revolves around the origins and early history of the park. Art historian Elizabeth Milroy's 2006 essay "For the

¹ For an overview of the city's history, see the single most complete work: *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*, edited by Russell F. Weigley (New York: Norton, 1982). Of particular interest are essays by Dorothy Gondos Beers on the Centennial City and Lloyd B. Abernathy on Progressivism from 1905 to 1919. The creation of the first official planning body in 1929 receives some discussion in Arthur P. Dudden's essay covering the period 1919 to 1929.

² These include Jane Mork Gibson's *The Fairmount Water Works* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1988), Bruno Gilberti's *Designing the Centennial: A History of the 1876 Exhibition in Philadelphia* (Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky, 2002) and David Brownlee's *Building the City Beautiful: The Benjamin Franklin Parkway and the Philadelphia Museum of Art* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1989).

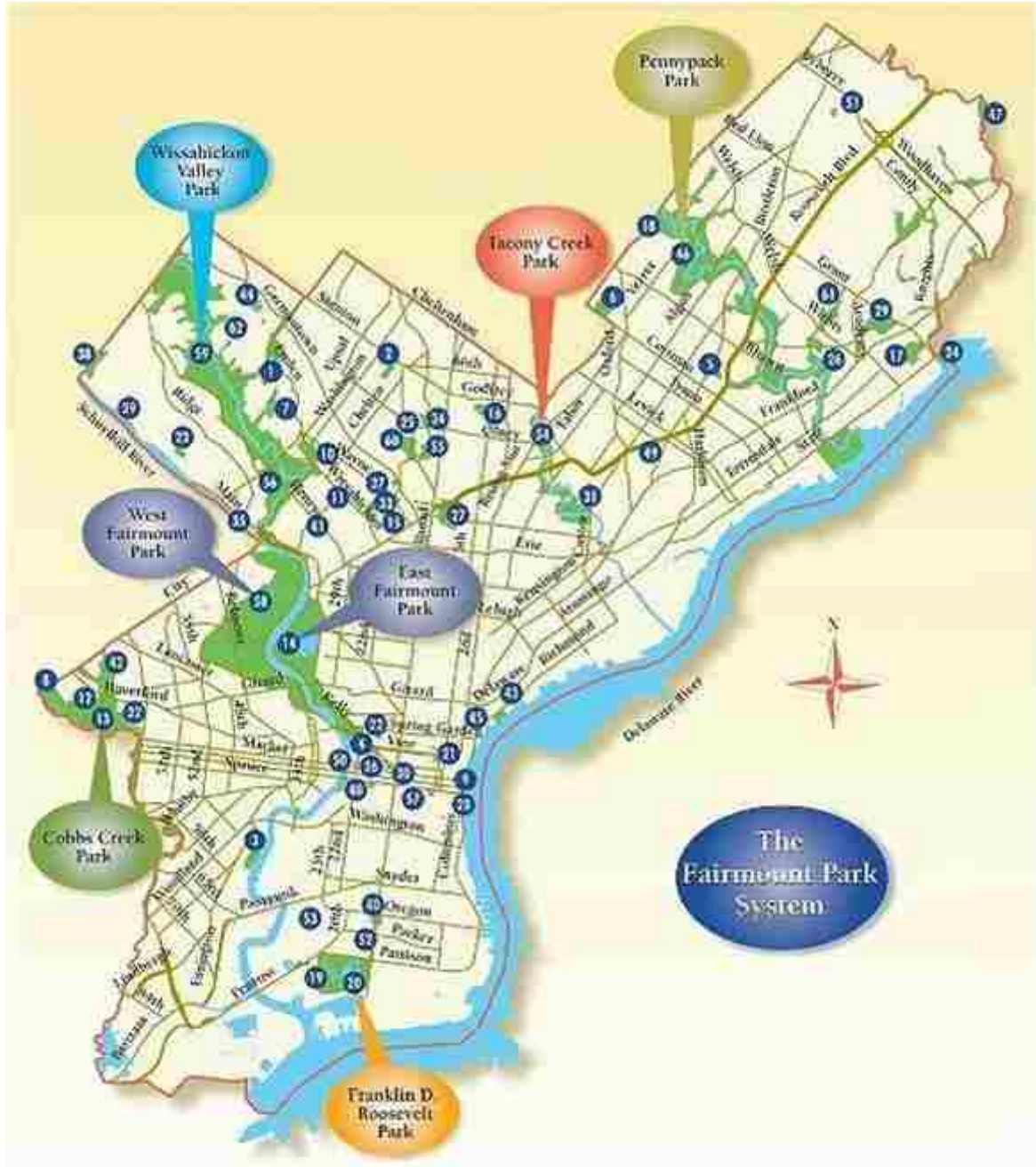


Figure 1. Philadelphia's Park System, early twenty-first century, with all major parks identified. All watershed parks, excepting Franklin D. Roosevelt Park (League Island Park) in South Philadelphia, were acquired for environmental and aesthetic reasons, to both protect Philadelphia's water supply and reconnect urban residents to the rapidly disappearing natural world. Note the continuous green space from Center City at Center Square, the site of City Hall, through East and West Fairmount Park and Wissahickon Valley Park to the city line. The Roosevelt Boulevard, designed as a parkway, connects the large, watershed parks of Tacony Creek and Pennypack Creek in the Northeast, while Cobbs Creek Park forms the border between city and suburb in the Southwest (Fairmount Park Commission).

Like-Uses, as the Moore-fields: The Politics of Penn's Squares," is the best overview of early open space planning associated with the city's founder.³ In addition, Milroy's essay in *Philadelphia's Cultural Landscape: The Sartain Family Legacy*, "Assembling Fairmount Park," provides a solid background on the early environmental ideals of park planners and the issue of creating a park to protect the water supply, although the impact of the early park planners on later park advocates is not covered.⁴

The Consolidation Act of 1854, uniting the City of Philadelphia with the many districts, boroughs, and townships of Philadelphia County, is covered in several histories of the City, most significantly by Howard Gillette's "The Emergence of the Modern Metropolis: Philadelphia in the Age of Consolidation."⁵ However, Gillette does not mention the impact that consolidation had on the creation of the park. In fact, he does not mention the park at all, although Eli Kirk Price, the author of the Consolidation Act, would later become the chief advocate for park space in the city and a founding member of the Fairmount Park Commission. Instead, Gillette focuses on the drive to extend the spatial and social reach of the newly created city government, concluding that this influenced the planners and development from the City Beautiful movement at the turn of the century to the urban renewal of the post-World War II era. Gillette fails to mention that consolidation led to park planning in the years immediately following 1854 and continued well into the twentieth century. Gillette argues that after consolidation, "each generation stressed the development of a monumental urban core tied to suburban

³ Elizabeth Milroy, "For the like Uses, as the Moore-Fields:" The Politics of Penn's Squares." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 130, 3 (July 2006), 257-82.

⁴ Katherine Martinez and Page Talbott, eds. *Philadelphia's Cultural Landscape: The Sartain Family Legacy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 73-86.

⁵ William Cutler, III and Howard Gillette, Jr., eds. *The Divided Metropolis: Social and Spatial Dimensions of Philadelphia, 1800-1975*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980).

residential areas through a vast network of transportation routes, planned in conjunction with land set aside for recreation.”⁶ As this study shows, the recreation land was actually set aside to protect the city’s fragile environment as the protection of the city’s water supply drove watershed park acquisition. Therefore, because this land was tied to a specific geographic place, the acquisition of these reclaimed industrial spaces led to the development of entire neighborhoods and several major transportation routes in the city. The large parks of Philadelphia were, in fact, the drivers for much of the city’s development and land use patterns.

The highly regarded work of Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth*, provides useful context for the city. In particular, Warner discusses the years 1830 to 1860, the period of Fairmount Park’s creation, and 1920 to 1930, the apex of the Fairmount Park Commission’s second great burst of achievement as the Benjamin Franklin Parkway and the Roosevelt Boulevard, both planned as park projects, were completed during those years. However, like other scholars of the city, Warner fails to mention the importance of the park commission or the nascent planning undertaken by the private, citizen-led City Parks Association (CPA) during those periods to acquire large public spaces and protect the city’s water supply. Instead, Warner argued that Philadelphia can be seen as a microcosm of the American urban tradition, whose defining element is liberal capitalism, or “privatism” as he names it: the “concentration upon the individual and the individual’s search for wealth.”⁷ For Warner, this impulse was already an American tradition by the late eighteenth century, and by the nineteenth century the “great thrust of private and public effort was to

⁶ Ibid., 20.

⁷ Sam Bass Warner, Jr. *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth*, Second Edition (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1987), 3.

organize an atomized city into reliable and effective social units: the private manufacturing corporation, the labor union, the political machine, and the railroad were its achievements.”⁸

The development of Philadelphia’s park system complicates Warner’s thesis, although he states it is the “greatest civic monument of Philadelphia,”⁹ because the land acquired was already useful, privately held industrial land. If the great thrust of Philadelphia’s development was privatism, the acquisition of valuable land for public use directly opposes the driving capitalistic impulse of the American metropolis. Indeed, in discussing the Fairmount Water Works, Warner argues that it failed largely because the city’s “general culture of privatism stopped a universal public health program short of full realization,” referring to the continuing contamination of the water supply and the final closure of the municipal water works in 1909. However, despite the failure to clean up the water supply, private citizens and the park commission continued to acquire valuable private land and to plan the city around open spaces. In many respects, other large, American cities such as New York, Chicago, and San Francisco, by building their public parks on low value land and therefore not impeding private growth, exemplifies Warner’s argument much more so than Philadelphia. Philadelphia’s park planners, in many respects, were the opposite of liberal capitalists. When it came to park acquisition, they choose public good over private gain, attempting to protect the environment in a rampant industrial age.

More recently, essays in the collection *Social Capital in the City: Community and Civic Life in Philadelphia*, cover several aspects of Philadelphia’s civic life and serve

⁸ Ibid., xiii.

⁹ Ibid, 106.

as a companion to Warner's earlier *The Private City*, as it tests the limits of social capital

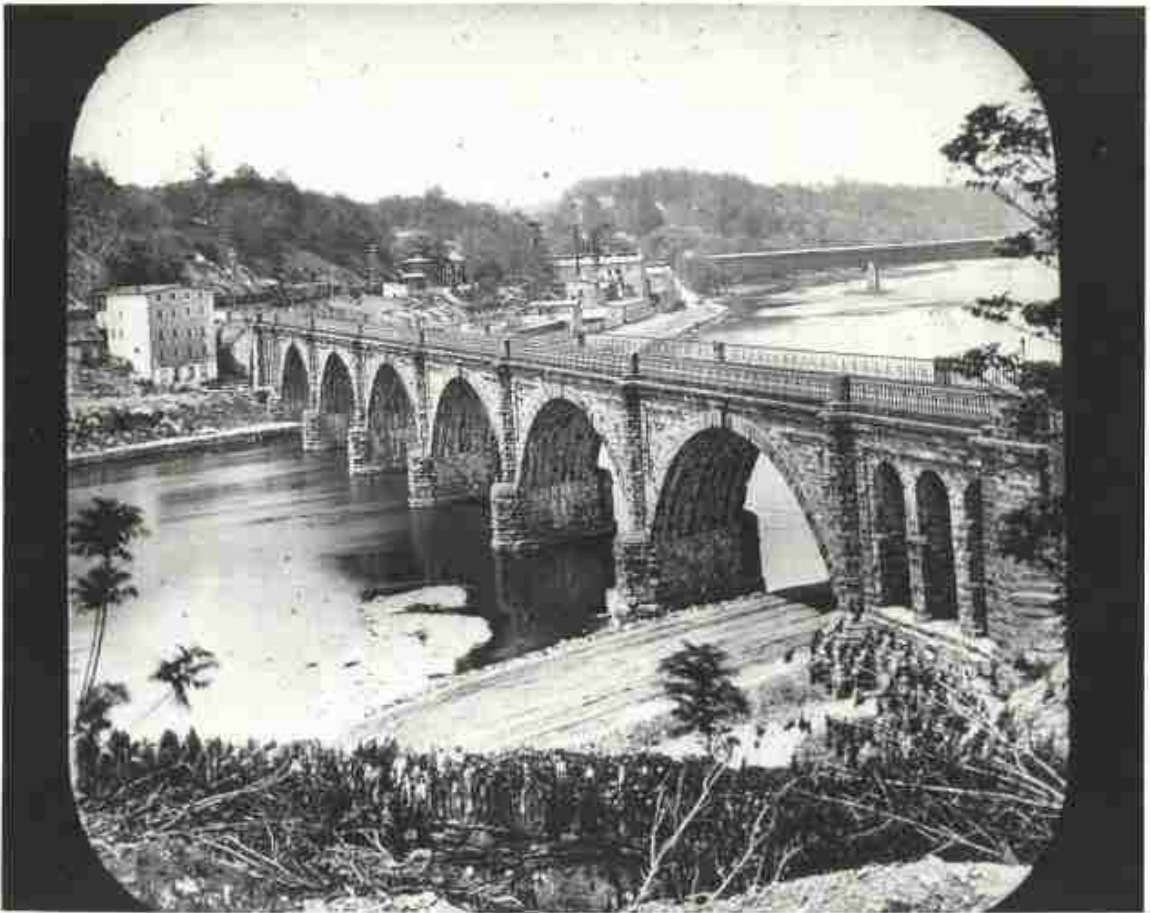


Figure 2. William Simpson Print Works in West Fairmount Park, late 1860s. Seen from across the Schuylkill River, the large industrial complex was eventually demolished once its area was annexed as part of Fairmount Park to protect the water supply. The Falls Bridge (covered) is in the distance (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

versus individualism in Philadelphia.¹⁰ In many respects, these essays also complicate Warner's argument as they point to how park spaces encouraged or shaped community. Two essays deal specifically with elements of Philadelphia's park system and how the park bonded certain groups of citizens: Jerome Hodos's "The 1876 Centennial in Philadelphia: Elite Networks and Political Culture" argues that the Centennial served to bridge different fragmented groups around this singular event, while David Contasta and

¹⁰ Richardson Dilworth, ed., *Social Capital in the City: Community and Civic Life in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

Carol Franklin's "Community Advocacy and Volunteerism in Wissahickon Park, 1895-2005" explains the sometimes conflicting relationship between the elite, citizen-led Friends of the Wissahickon, formed by wealthy Chestnut Hill denizens, and the working-class district of Roxborough, both of which border the park¹¹.

The Philadelphia elite discussed in E. Digby Baltzell's *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class* are removed from park planning; in fact, Fairmount Park is not mentioned at all. To Baltzell, the city's upper-class encouraged and continued the tradition of Warner's privatist society, as they are "an excellent example of a business aristocracy which has too often placed the desire for material comfort and security above the duties of political and intellectual leadership."¹² In fact, park planners during the era of the park system's creation were by and large members of the elite class and used their political power to create the vast park system in place today. While this study does not attempt to discuss the class origins of park planners, it does further complicate Baltzell's argument.

The best overall history of the ideals surrounding the creation of urban parks in the nineteenth century remains David Schuyler's *The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America*. Schuyler highlights the importance of the rural cemetery movement of the 1830s and 1840s, as well as Andrew Jackson Downing's influence on park planning. Schuyler spends little time on Philadelphia and Fairmount Park, devoting the bulk of his research to the influence and legacy on the urban landscape of pioneering landscape architects Frederick Law Olmsted and his partner Calvert Vaux. When Schuyler discusses Fairmount Park at all, it is in the

¹¹ Ibid., 19-39, 56-80.

¹² E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1958).

context of New York, arguing that “Philadelphia learned the lessons of Central Park only incompletely.”¹³ This study adds to Schuyler’s scholarship as it places Philadelphia’s park system outside the Olmstedian tradition. Philadelphia did not need to learn the lessons of New York, because they were purposefully avoiding Olmstedian ideals.

Olmsted is the towering figure in the first half of Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar’s *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park*, the most significant piece of scholarship on an American urban park to date.¹⁴ The authors argue that Central Park is best understood in its urban context: the people who shaped its planning, acquisition, landscape, and policies and the relation of the citizens to the park over the course of its history. While not placing Central Park in relation to Philadelphia’s park system, their model framed many of the questions that this study attempts to answer, particularly the placement of Philadelphia’s park system in its political context.¹⁵

In many respects, this study also builds upon the more general studies of planning history by Stanley K. Schultz and Jon A. Peterson. Schultz argued in *Constructing Urban Culture: American Cities and City Planning, 1800-1920* that the City Beautiful movement was the culmination of an earlier generation’s efforts to plan the city, which makes sense in the case of Philadelphia.¹⁶ Peterson’s *The Birth of City Planning in the United States, 1840-1917* argued that very little comprehensive planning existed prior to 1900, as it was done in a piecemeal fashion centered on sanitation, landscape, and civic

¹³ David Schuyler, *The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 108.

¹⁴ Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992).

¹⁵ In addition Terence Young’s *Building San Francisco’s Parks, 1850-1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), provides a similar account of the political struggles over land acquisition and park use, placing San Francisco’s parks within the larger American park movement of the mid-nineteenth century, reflecting the influence of Olmsted’s larger plan for that park system and its implementation.

¹⁶ Stanley K. Schultz, *Constructing Urban Culture: American Cities and City Planning, 1800- 1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

art.¹⁷ Yet, all of these elements were taken into account by nascent park planners in Philadelphia prior to the era that Peterson argues constituted the true onset of city planning.

Since Philadelphia lacked a visionary park planner such as Olmsted to define its park system and was beset by a politically corrupt commission between the 1890s and 1905, those who guided the park emerged as comprehensive planners for the undeveloped areas of the city. They created a unique form of city planning based around a watershed park system, much of which, surprisingly, was implemented. This study argues that the planning and development of Philadelphia's park system was unique among large, American cities, as it remained focused on environmental protection from its genesis. It did not follow an Olmstedian vision, nor was it based solely on recreation as a means of reform. Instead, planners utilized the reclaimed, natural environment as a basis for an early comprehensive plan of development, prior to the creation of an official city planning body.

The study begins with the consolidation of the city and county of Philadelphia in 1854 and ends with the creation of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission in 1929, the first official planning body firmly within the structure of city government. The majority of Philadelphia's park spaces, many connected to natural watersheds, were acquired during those years, along with the parkways and boulevards that connected this vast system.

Chapter I, covering the years 1844 to 1859, provides an overview of early open space planning in Philadelphia and discusses the origins of the park system during the

¹⁷ Jon A. Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States, 1840-1917* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

consolidation era of Philadelphia's government. In 1844, prior to consolidation, the city and county were racked with a wave of deadly riots, which were difficult to control as the municipal police force had yet to be created. Morton McMichael, the sheriff of Philadelphia County at the time, witnessed the riots firsthand and later became both mayor and the first president of the Fairmount Park Commission. In addition, early park activists and supporters worked from 1844 to 1854 to protect the water supply along the banks of the Schuylkill that fed the Fairmount Water Works. After 1854, once Philadelphia's government controlled the entire county, planning and acquiring the park took on new relevance until finally a design competition, held in 1859, provided the first formal design for Fairmount Park, although much of this design was never built.

Chapter II covers the years between 1859, when Sidney & Adams won the design competition for Fairmount Park, and the eve of the nation's grand Centennial Exposition, held in Fairmount Park in 1876. The bulk of this chapter explains the sometimes tumultuous relationship between nascent park planners and the city government as they struggled to acquire land, implement design recommendations, and continue their goal of protecting the water supply. The creation of the Fairmount Park Commission in 1867, the setting of the park boundaries in 1867 and 1868, and the acquisition of this land were the triumph of the original park planners. The early years of the commission were defined by the demolition of industrial, commercial, and residential buildings along the banks of the Schuylkill River and Wissahickon Creek. Finally, despite preparations for the Centennial Exposition, the struggle over protecting the water supply of the city remained the central premise for the original park planners. The discussion of their attempts to achieve this is the heart of this chapter.

Chapter III begins with the grand Centennial Exposition in 1876, the crowning achievement of the first era of park planning in Philadelphia, and ends with the 1905 publication of *American Park Systems*, a landmark study created by the City Parks Association (CPA) which recommended the acquisition of major watershed parks throughout the city and the completion of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, connecting City Hall and downtown Philadelphia with Fairmount Park. The chapter focuses on the rise of the private, citizen-led CPA, which, upon its creation in 1888, filled a gap in planning around parks and watersheds once the original park commission gave way to its second generation, firmly controlled by the Republican political machine.

Chapter IV covers the years 1905 to 1915, arguing that this decade constituted the culmination of years of CPA-lead planning of Philadelphia based around its watershed parks. Major parks such as Cobbs Creek, Pennypack Creek, and Tacony Creek were either placed on the city plan or acquired during this era. In addition, the Northeast (now Roosevelt) Boulevard and Fairmount (now Benjamin Franklin) Parkway were either placed on the city plan or were in some stage of design. After the publication of *American Park Systems*, the CPA worked tirelessly to convince the city government to plan Philadelphia around its parks. Finally, the 1908 city plan showed all the CPA recommendations for the future city, with an entire system of connections to the few remaining large, natural areas. Much of this plan was implemented over the next two decades.

The final chapter of the dissertation, Chapter V, covers the period between 1915, when the Fairmount Park Commission entered into its second great powerful phase as a planning and authoritative body, and 1929, when the Philadelphia City Planning

Commission was established, in some ways to curb the powers of the commission. It was during this era that both the Roosevelt Boulevard and Benjamin Franklin Parkway were completed, changing Philadelphia's connection to its natural areas. As park projects, both of these roadways were under the purview of the commission and as such, it wielded immense power over the development of two large sections of the city: Center City and Northeast Philadelphia.

This study arose from a need to understand how the park commission and park planners viewed the city from the mid-nineteenth century to the late 1920s. After the creation of an official city planning body, both the CPA and the commission would never regain the power they maintained in planning large sections of the city. The important achievement about the park planners and activists, however, was their ability to not only plan the park system but also to control its acquisition, construction, and management over several generations. How did their ideas about the environment and connecting to the natural world shape the building of the city? How does a park system function in a large, American city like Philadelphia, especially when it is not designed under the watchful eye of a figure such as Olmsted? Instead, Philadelphia's park planners attempted to connect citizens to the existing natural world, not a built urban landscape such as Central Park, and in many respects, they were successful. The heart of Philadelphia is its park system, its parkway, its boulevard, its river drives, and the acres upon acres of natural areas in the watershed park system. This study attempts to investigate how those areas became the great, public spaces that they remain into the second decade of the twenty-first century.

Chapter I

The Creation of Fairmount Park and the Democratization of Public Space in Philadelphia, 1844-1859

Public space was at the core of Philadelphia's original city plan as envisioned by William Penn and Chief Surveyor Thomas Holme in their *Portraiture of the City of Philadelphia in the Province of Pennsylvania in America*, published in 1683. According to Holme, the intent of the original five squares was "for the like Uses, as the Moore-fields in London." Essentially, these spaces were planned as part of Penn's "Greene Countrie Towne," the new type of city the founder envisioned which would include public open space ("like-uses"). In practice, however, these spaces languished for generations, as Penn never "obtained a legal warrant to confirm that city government, rather than the proprietary, had jurisdiction over the lots designated for Penn's squares."¹ Instead, they were used as grazing grounds for cattle, trash dumps, potter's fields and for public hangings. Penn's vision for the original squares, representing a new type of urban open space plan, albeit on a small scale, would not be fully implemented for over a century.

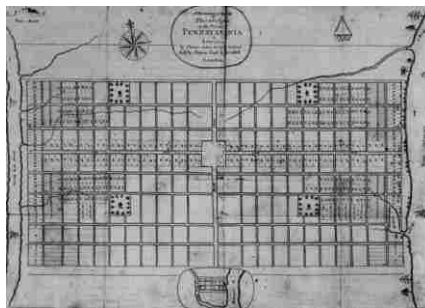


Figure 3. Penn and Holme's Plan for Philadelphia with Five Squares, 1683. Note "Faire Mount" to the northwest at the top of the plan (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

¹ Elizabeth Milroy, "For the like Uses, as the Moore-fields:" The Politics of Penn's Squares," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 130, 3 (July 2006): 257-82.

The foundations of Philadelphia's park system, while related to Penn and Holme's planned open spaces, resulted from several municipal developments over the course of the early to mid-nineteenth century. The park system developed out of a search for a clean water supply, the need for open spaces in a rapidly growing city, and the ideals of the rural cemetery movement of the 1830s. The origins of the park cannot be fully understood without a discussion of the creation of the first municipal water works in the United States, planned and constructed in Philadelphia at the end of the eighteenth century as a response to the decimating yellow fever epidemics. The earliest municipal water works, opened in 1801, were located at Centre Square, one of Penn's original squares, at the intersection of Broad and Market Streets. The building of the original Centre Square Water Works, the agreed-upon solution to the need for a clean water supply by the newly formed Joint Committee on Supplying the City with Water (later known as the Watering Committee, the antecedent of the present day Philadelphia Water Department), consisting of members of Philadelphia's City Council. Prior to 1801, the city depended on well water to supply public pumps and hydrants, many of which were contaminated by nearby cesspools. During the devastating outbreak of yellow fever in 1793, the purity of this supply was questioned and the search for clean water began in earnest. Although yellow fever was not waterborne, city officials incorrectly believed at the time that "miasmas," bad air emanating from stagnant pools, caused the outbreak. After an additional major outbreak of yellow fever in 1798, the need for clean water was even more pressing. The solution to the problem was either to bring clean water by canal or aqueduct from outside the city or to access the city's two primary rivers, the Schuylkill

and Delaware. Architect and engineer Benjamin Henry Latrobe (1764-1820), recently arrived from England in 1796 (sometimes referred to as the father of American architecture for his involvement in a variety of major engineering, surveying, and architectural projects during the Early Republic era), found the solution to Philadelphia's problem. He proposed pumping Schuylkill water from the terminus of Chestnut Street by underground pipes to the Centre Square Water Works, where a steam powered pump house was connected to reservoir tanks within the building. From there, water would flow from the reservoir by gravity to a distribution chest and then through pipes to pumps, hydrants, and the buildings of water subscribers.

Problems with the Centre Square Water Works were inherent from the beginning: the small reservoirs would empty within twenty-five minutes if no additional water was pumped in; purchase of wood for fuel was expensive; the boilers were inefficient; and the machinery frequently broke down.² The city needed a new solution to the water problem, especially as the scourge of yellow fever continued in 1802, 1803, and 1805. In 1811, Latrobe's former assistants, John Davis and Frederick Graff, proposed moving the location of the municipal water works to a site on the east bank of the Schuylkill at the foot of Fairmount, a high point just outside the original city limits in the Spring Garden District, just north of present-day Spring Garden Street. Construction began on the site in August 1812 and by its completion in 1815, the original Centre Square Water Works was replaced. By locating the municipal water works on the banks of the Schuylkill and investing in beautiful, neoclassical temple-like architecture to shroud the pumps and machinery, the buildings began to draw visitors from the urban core by the late 1810s.

² Jane Mork Gibson, *The Fairmount Water Works* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1988), 9.



Figure 5. *Fairmount Water Works*, Thomas Birch, 1821. The future grounds of Fairmount Park (Lemon Hill) are in the background. In the foreground are flat-bottomed canal boats and the canal lock of the Schuylkill Navigation Company, connecting Philadelphia to the coal region in Schuylkill County. Note the plantings, pavilions, and formalized paths surrounding the water works (Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts).

The investment that Philadelphia made to beautify its municipal infrastructure at the water works extended into a formalization of public space, prompting municipal authorities to invest in the public realm as never before. Indeed, it was during the 1820s, immediately following the completion of the Fairmount Dam, the final major engineering undertaking at Fairmount, when Penn’s squares were given the commemorative names Franklin (NE), Logan (NW), Rittenhouse (SW), Washington (SE) and Penn (Centre), and the two eastern-most squares were landscaped. It should be noted, of course, that the two western squares would not have been in use as public space until the nineteenth century anyway, since they were far removed from the city’s core residential area (at that time located to the eastern edge of the city along the Delaware River—see Figure 2). For this reason, most Philadelphians considered the State House Yard (Independence Square), bounded by Chestnut, Walnut, Fifth, and Sixth Streets, as the preeminent public space in Philadelphia from the mid-eighteenth century until past the mid-nineteenth century, used as a gathering space for “people of lower and middle rank,” who demonstrated there and

created the “revolutionary movement that challenged established authority” during the 1770s.³ However, by redesigning Washington and Franklin Squares, two public spaces directly to the north and south of the State House Yard, opportunities for citizens to access public space increased during this time period. The design of these public spaces, with formalized walkways, plantings, and fountains, provided a much needed respite from the crowded downtown area, as both squares were located just five city blocks from the Delaware River port area.



Figure 6. *Plan for North East or Franklin Public Square*, William Rush, 1824 (The Library Company of Philadelphia).

Although two of the original public squares were landscaped and redesigned during the 1820s, the actual design of early American parks arose from principles associated with the rural cemetery movement of the 1830s, rooted in the Romantic ideals then in fashion. These were the earliest large spaces open to the public that were designed

³ Charlene Mires, *Independence Hall in American Memory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2002), 17.

in the “natural” or “picturesque” style of landscape gardening. The earliest American rural cemeteries — Mount Auburn (1831, Cambridge, Mass.), Laurel Hill (1836, Philadelphia) and Greenwood (1838, Brooklyn) — were modeled on grand Parisian cemeteries such as Pere la Chaise (1804). Catalysts for the rural cemetery movement included the crowding and disrepair of existing churchyards, many located in cramped districts; a strongly-held belief that public health was threatened by these overcrowded graveyards; the growth of the core of older cities such as Boston and Philadelphia and the requisite demand for property, resulting in the “desecration of older cemeteries;” and, perhaps most importantly for park development, the “acknowledgement of the psychological impact of scenery,” a direct influence of the Romantic movement on landscape design.⁴ As John W. Reps points out in *The Making of Urban America*, the “first application” of Romantic theories based on “informality, naturalism, romanticism, and the picturesque” in the United States applied to the layout of cemeteries, which in turn “influenced both the movement for public parks and the designs of the parks themselves.”⁵

Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-1852), the father of American landscape architecture, argued rural cemeteries were “the first really elegant public gardens or promenades formed in this country.”⁶ Downing theorized, as editor of *The Horticulturalist* and in his influential *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1841), about the usefulness of parks for their “sanitary value and importance of these breathing places for large cities” and as areas of “popular refinement” which

⁴ David Schuyler, *The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 41.

⁵ John W. Reps, *The Making of Urban America: A History of City Planning in the United States* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), 325.

⁶ Schuyler, *The New Urban Landscape*, 37.

possessed the “elevating influences of the beautiful in nature and art.” Furthermore, Downing added a didactic element to the usefulness of public parks, stating that they “soften and humanize the rude, educate and enlighten the ignorant, and give continual enjoyment to the educated.” The consequence of the creation of parks in crowded municipalities would be nothing short of “elevating the national character.”⁷ By the early 1840s, the emerging middle class of Philadelphia flocked to the scenic pleasure ground of Laurel Hill Cemetery, located above the Schuylkill’s eastern bank. Laurel Hill received 30,000 visitors between April and December of 1848, many arriving via carriage on the Ridge Road from their new residences around Rittenhouse Square, or by horse-drawn trolley.⁸



Figure 7. Laurel Hill Cemetery, circa 1848 (The Library Company of Philadelphia).

While Laurel Hill Cemetery provided a respite for the carriage set, the area around the Fairmount Water Works became increasingly known as a recreational space and tourist attraction. Within a few short years after its completion in 1815, the steam engines originally used to pump Schuylkill river water to the reservoirs above the water works were dangerous and expensive to operate. This prompted the Watering Committee

⁷ For an excellent discussion of Downing, see David Schuyler, *Apostle of Taste: Andrew Jackson Downing, 1815-1852* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

⁸ Schuyler, *The New Urban Landscape*, 45.

to construct the Fairmount Dam, completed in 1821.⁹ At 2,008 feet, the long dam at Fairmount created an eight-mile “slack water” area behind it thereby transforming the area of the lower Schuylkill above the Water Works to a recreation area in the process, becoming known for rowing in summer months (the first recorded regatta on the Schuylkill was in 1833) and ice-skating in winter. By 1829, the grounds south of the Fairmount Water Works, known as the South Garden, were laid out by Frederick Graff, Sr., chief engineer of the Water Works, with fountains, sculpture, formalized walks and plantings, and ornamental railings along “Cliffside Paths” leading to the reservoir. Charles Dickens remarked in *American Notes* that the Fairmount Water Works were “no less ornamental than useful, being tastefully laid out as a public garden, and kept in the best and neatest order.”¹⁰

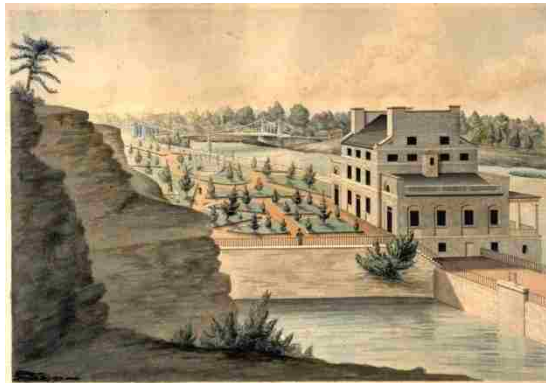


Figure 8. *Plan for the South Garden of the Water Works*, Frederick Graff, Sr., 1829 (The Franklin Institute).

At the same time that visitors were flocking to the Fairmount Water Works, the area just north along the banks of the Schuylkill was quickly becoming industrialized. The mills of Manayunk and East Falls and the breweries located along the banks of the Schuylkill immediately north of the Water Works at Lemon Hill were producing a variety

⁹ Gibson, *Fairmount Water Works*, 20-21.

¹⁰ Charles Dickens, *American Notes* (Boston: Aldine Publishers, 1844), 95.

of goods. By the 1820s, the borough of Manayunk, located approximately ten miles upriver from the Water Works, had become so thoroughly industrialized with textile mills that it was nicknamed the “Manchester of America” by a town booster.¹¹ This very industrial growth prompted city leadership to promote public ownership of the banks of the Schuylkill in order to protect the city’s water supply from industrial pollution and to create Philadelphia’s first large-scale public park. Indeed, the entire impetus to create Philadelphia’s park revolved around the protection of the water supply at Fairmount.



Figure 9. Engel & Wolf's Brewery, circa 1855. This brewery, located along the east bank of the Schuylkill at Fountain Green, north of Lemon Hill and the Water Works, contributed significantly to the river's pollution. Note the eroded banks of the river in the foreground (The Library Company of Philadelphia).

While the kernel for the park movement was in place by the 1830s with the reclamation of Penn's squares, the opening of Laurel Hill Cemetery, and the creation of the Water Works' South Garden, the practical idea of acquiring land along the Schuylkill to protect the water supply and create a large-scale park in the process originated in a proposal by Thomas Pym Cope (1768-1854), an influential merchant and member of City

¹¹ Cynthia J. Shelton, *The Mills of Manayunk: Industrialization and Social Conflict in the Philadelphia Region, 1787-1837* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 1.

Council. The property known as Lemon Hill, located immediately north of the Water Works on the former estate of Revolutionary War financier Robert Morris, became available at sheriff's sale in the early 1840s, the result of the large-scale devaluing of real estate after the financial crisis of 1836-37.¹² Cope proposed the purchase of Lemon Hill to "prevent it from falling into hands that may render it a nuisance to the City," thereby hindering additional industrial growth along the banks of the Schuylkill and the resulting further pollution of Philadelphia's water supply. Cope outlined his plan in a resolution to "more effectively protect the basin at Fairmount from the introduction of substances more or less prejudicial to the community" because "it is the bounden duty of Councils as the Guardians of the City interests to pursue all proper means to protect the health & comfort of the inhabitants." Not everyone in Council agreed with Cope, but the resolution passed after much debate on October 26, 1843.¹³ Cope spent a considerable amount of time in the following weeks convincing his fellow council members to purchase the fifty-two acre Lemon Hill site for the agreed-upon amount of \$75,000. Despite facing considerable opposition, Cope's plan won acceptance after being championed by the efforts of citizen groups, chiefly the College of Physicians, which supported the resolution with over three thousand signatures.

Despite Cope's civic improvement efforts, the Lemon Hill site did not become the public park that he had envisioned. Since the grounds of Lemon Hill were officially outside of the city limits, certain members of council deemed it inappropriate to improve the grounds with public funding, "lest some benefit might accrue, from their being laid

¹² The extant Lemon Hill mansion was not occupied by Morris. Morris's estate, known as "The Hills," was purchased by Henry Pratt in 1797. Pratt erected the present structure in 1800.

¹³ *Philadelphia Merchant: The Diary of Thomas P. Cope: 1800-1851*. ed. Eliza Cope Harrison (South Bend, Ind: Gateway Editions, 1978), 410-415. See also, City of Philadelphia, Select Council, 1843, *Report of the Joint Special Committee on the Purchase of the Lemon Hill Estate*, no. IV, Appendix to the Journal of the Select Council for 1843.

out and planted, to the citizens of districts lying north of Vine Street.”¹⁴ Instead, in 1847 the city leased the land to William H. Kern, who in turn subleased the Lemon Hill property to P. Zaiss, a German entrepreneur who opened up the property for recreational purposes. Zaiss operated a lager beer garden out of Lemon Hill mansion, allowing for a large leisure and cultural space for the city’s recent large influx of German immigrants.

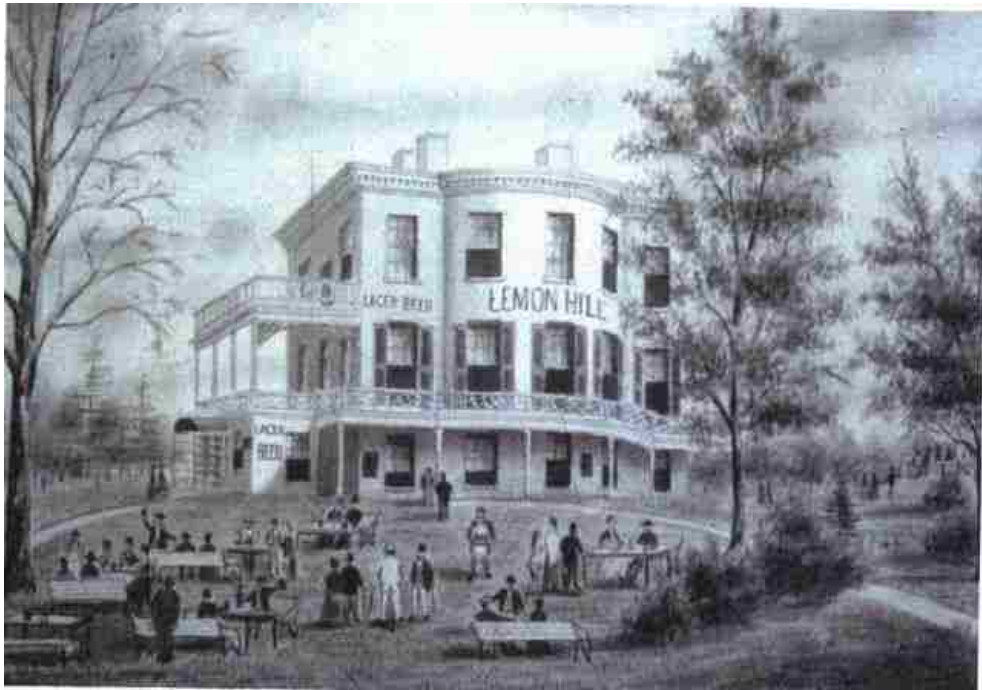


Figure 10. Lemon Hill in the 1840s. Note “Lager Beer” sign and picnic area but no formalized paths or gardens such as in Franklin Square, the South Garden, or Laurel Hill Cemetery (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

Undoubtedly, many of the council members did not perceive any disconnect between the intention behind the acquisition of Lemon Hill and its immediate usage. Cope’s legislation did not directly introduce any of the ideals of landscape architecture associated with Andrew Jackson Downing and, after all, the land was being protected from industrial encroachment, therefore addressing the principal reasoning of the

¹⁴ Charles S. Keyser and Thomas Cochran, *Lemon Hill and Fairmount Park, 1856-1872* (Philadelphia: Horace J. Smith, 1886), 5.

resolution: to protect the city's water supply above the Fairmount Water Works. In addition, precedent for "Pratt's Garden," as the site became known during the 1840s, had been set by the long tradition of public pleasure gardens in Philadelphia, where picnickers consumed beer and other refreshments in an outdoor, garden-like setting. Several of these were also located along both major rivers, including the "Cherry Garden," open for much of the eighteenth century near Front and Shippen (now Bainbridge) Streets along the Delaware and "Gray's Ferry Gardens," opened in the early nineteenth century along the lower Schuylkill.¹⁵

However, in the minds of political leaders like Cope, who had long struggled to acquire the site, the distinction was that this land was "public," unlike the privately-owned commercial establishments that "Pratt's Garden" emulated. Newspaper accounts pointed out that the behavior of the patrons was especially appalling because it occurred on "*city property* upon the Sabbath."¹⁶ Therefore, within a few years of its operation, "Pratt's Garden" on Lemon Hill began to face considerable opposition among the original backers of the legislation: the reform minded professionals and elite Philadelphians, including old Quaker families and an emerging middle class.

While the need to protect the city's water supply was the central catalyst for the park movement, another contributing factor was a growing sense of unease among Philadelphia's elite regarding the difficulty of social control, especially of the working poor. The 1840s were a contentious time in the history of Philadelphia. Rapid population growth, primarily due to an overwhelming influx of Irish immigrants, added to the densely built up and overcrowded conditions in Delaware River districts such as

¹⁵ See Joseph Jackson's entry: "Gardens, Public," in *Encyclopedia of Philadelphia, Volume III* (Harrisburg, Pa.: National Historical Association, 1932), 711-715.

¹⁶ *Morning Times* (Philadelphia) 19 May 1857.

Kensington and Northern Liberties to the north and Southwark to the south of the city proper. Living conditions for most of the lower working class worsened due to high population density, rapid industrialization, and poor sanitation in these older residential and highly industrialized neighborhoods. In addition, Philadelphia was a place of considerable violence and upheaval as the rapidly growing Irish Catholic immigrant working class clashed with nativist Protestant groups and African-Americans throughout the decade. The major riots of 1844 in Kensington and Southwark alarmed both city and county leaders, including Sheriff Morton McMichael, owner of the *North American*, a leading newspaper, who served as mayor from 1866 to 1869 and was also the first president of the Fairmount Park Commission.¹⁷ As the principal law enforcement official within both the city and county, McMichael, an Irish Protestant and a Whig, was directly involved in quelling the riots in both neighborhoods, as a professional police force did not yet exist.¹⁸ Racially motivated violence increased as well, culminating in the California House Riot of 1849, in which white mobs from Moyamensing clashed with the African-American owner and patrons of the California House, a tavern located near Sixth and Lombard Streets, on election night. The riots of the 1840s led political leaders to consider the consolidation of the city and county as a public safety issue, as the chief motive was “to curb the disorder between the Irish and nativist gangs and fire companies.”¹⁹ Consolidation would allow for the prospect of a city-wide police force to patrol the entire city, while in the 1840s this remained difficult as rioters and criminals simply escaped capture by leaving one of the several jurisdictions and entering another.

¹⁷ For an in-depth discussion of McMichael’s role during the 1844 riots, see Michael Feldberg’s *The Philadelphia Riots of 1844: A Study of Ethnic Conflict* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975). A statue of McMichael stands in the oldest section of Fairmount Park, a tribute to his involvement and leadership role as first president of the Fairmount Park Commission.

¹⁸ Joseph Jackson, “Police” entry in *Encyclopedia of Philadelphia, Vol. IV* (Harrisburg, Pa.: National Historical Association, 1933), 1012.

¹⁹ Feldberg, *Philadelphia Riots*, 189.

The Consolidation Act of 1854 and the Creation of Fairmount Park

Until 1854 the city of Philadelphia was a separate entity from the other twenty-eight political subdivisions, districts, boroughs, and townships that made up the county of Philadelphia. By the Act of Consolidation of 1854 the Pennsylvania legislature annexed all divisions into one City of Philadelphia. Therefore, the area of the city increased from two square miles, located between Vine and South Streets to the north and south and the

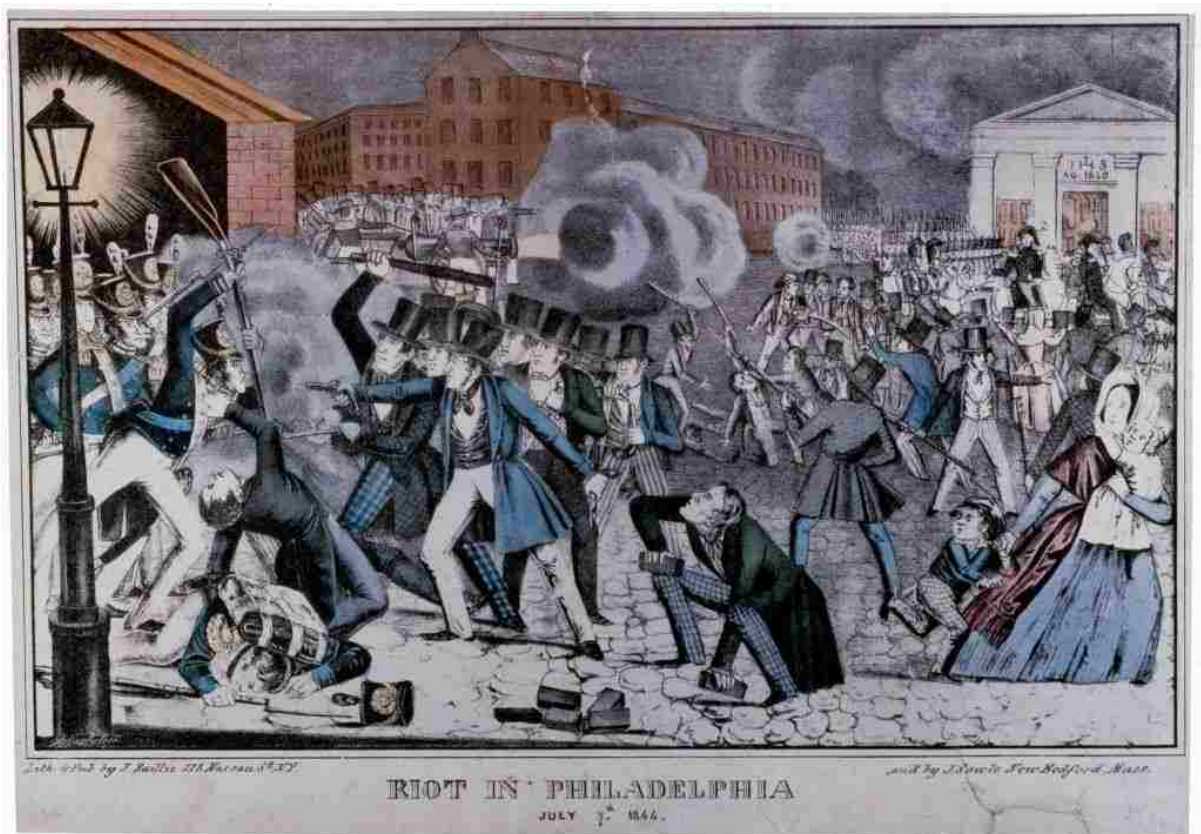


Figure 11. Philadelphia's Nativist, Anti-Catholic Riot in the Southwark District: an older, overpopulated area along the Delaware River, just outside the original City limits, 1844 (Historical Society of Pennsylvania).

Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers to the east and west, to a 134-square mile behemoth, bounded by the Delaware River and New Jersey to the south and east, and Delaware, Montgomery and Bucks Counties to the west and north. While public safety was the chief motive for consolidation, the argument was made that the “city and contiguous territory

had practically become one city with a common future and common wants, and their adequate development was crippled by the multiplicity and jealousy of the many existing governing bodies acting independently of each other.”²⁰

The Act of Consolidation of 1854 also included a provision requiring City Council to “provide for the people within the city limits, suitable squares or areas of ground ‘for the health and enjoyment of the people forever.’”²¹ While the majority of the public supported the creation of Fairmount Park, there were certain elements, particularly represented by business interests that believed that parks, located in this area, wasted taxpayer money, being foisted upon the public by “land-jobbers,” those individuals owning property along the Schuylkill who would benefit by selling their real estate to the city at inflated prices.²² In particular, this criticism arose from certain parcels being appraised for up to \$35,000 per acre, a substantial sum in the 1850s. However, Robert Thomas Conrad, first mayor of the consolidated city, ignored these criticisms and signed the ordinance in September 1855 dedicating the Lemon Hill estate as a public park, to be called “Fairmount Park.” The passage of the ordinance did little, however, to change the character of the Lemon Hill property and its usage as a beer garden. In October 1855, the tenant of Lemon Hill was given an eviction notice to take effect in six months. A “farewell” luncheon featuring sauerkraut and lager beer had occurred in September of that year at the “public house,” the name given to the Lemon Hill mansion. However, concerned citizens in their inspection of the property in October found “unmistakable evidences of a continuous and

²⁰ E.P. Allinson and B. Penrose, *Philadelphia, 1681-1887, A History of Municipal Development* (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane & Scott, 1887), 140-141.

²¹ Charles Keyser & Thomas Cochran, *Lemon Hill and Fairmount Park*, 8. See also Consolidation Act, 39 Pamph. Laws, 1854, 42.

²² *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia) 8 November 1854.

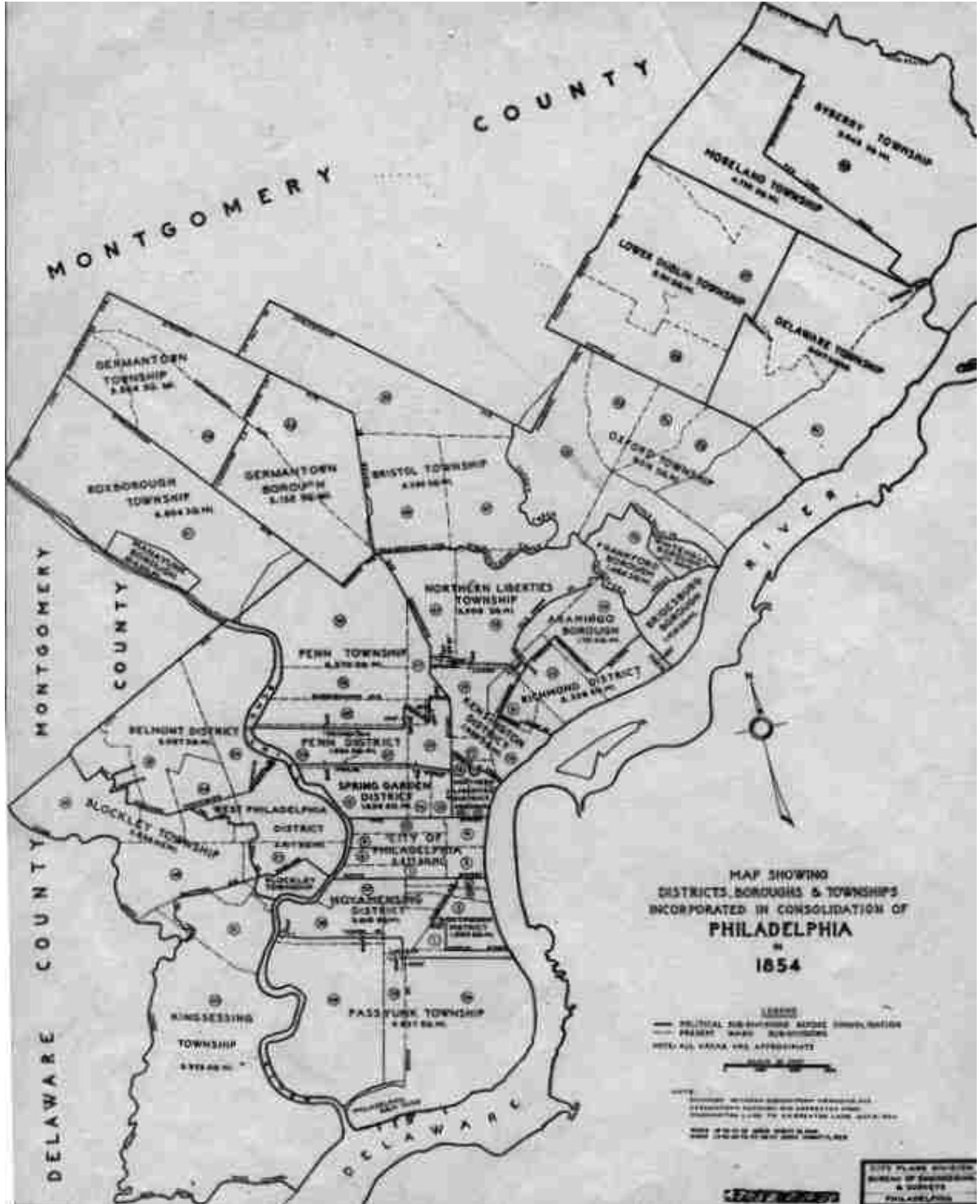


Figure 12. Pre-Consolidation Philadelphia, 1854. Fairmount Park would be carved out of portions of Spring Garden District, Penn District, and Penn Township on the east side of the Schuylkill and Blockley Township, West Philadelphia District, and Belmont District to the west of the river. (City of Philadelphia Plans Division, Bureau of Engineering and Surveys).

to be continued possession.” It seems that on the same day that the tenants were given their notice of eviction, they were also given an agreement to remain from year to year at a nominal rent. According to citizens and editorial writers, the passage of the Ordinance did very little to actually change the nature of Lemon Hill’s usage, considered a problem because the land was being used for a commercial entity and therefore was not a true public park. Charles S. Keyser, a pamphleteer and key leader in the movement to create Fairmount Park, blamed the debacle on the inactivity of council, stating:

It makes our heart very sick to write these words, but we write them again, for the future, and for the glory or shame of Philadelphia:
*In the year 1856 the City of Philadelphia had the opportunity to secure a Park (in the future heart of the city, and then convenient of access to the mass of her population) at a cost, to the property holder paying then \$100, of six cents, to her few wealthy citizens, of sixty cents, and to the great body of people, nothing. . . . let us, then, urge on our city authorities, its object. Let the present Councils complete the labors but partially effected by the former councils. We have been contented enough in our little squirrel cages. We are tired of the New Jersey sand gardens, and we want grounds of recreation in our own borders.*²³

By “squirrel cages,” Keyser was referring to the original public squares, which he elaborated on by noting their dimensions of between six and seven acres for Franklin, Washington, Rittenhouse, and Logan Squares, four acres for Independence Square, and two acres for Southwark’s Jefferson Square, the only existing public spaces within Philadelphia, save for the South Garden of the Fairmount Water Works.

Certain newspaper editorials also took up the charge for a large public space, especially as it related to the needs of the working class:

Under a democratic system one would naturally suppose that the masses of people—the hewers of wood and drawers of water—whose lot is cast within the walls of the city, having the political power, would so exercise it as to secure

²³ Keyser and Cochran, *Lemon Hill*, 25.

for themselves and their families some large, open tracts on the present margin of the city, as places of resort for fresh air, exercise, and pleasure The builders-up of cities, the masses, the carpenters, the bricklayers, all that large class of laborers employed in rearing the large blocks of stores and dwellings—the mechanics, artisans, and storekeepers among us—find no time, even were they possessed of the means, to enable them to escape the city during the hot months of summer. . . .

The editorial went on to exhort voters to place men in public office who would hold a “tight rein on the cormorants who forever hover round the city treasury,” and take an interest in the real welfare of the city by providing ample space for a large public park, “to be held sacred for the use and enjoyment of the people forever.”²⁴

Between 1855 and 1858, council did very little to improve the Lemon Hill property. Editorials complained about municipal “drag-weights” who “have adopted, in its most snailish sense, the policy of making ‘haste slowly.’” According to park supporters, the stubborn resistance to actually improving the park was not merely confined to City Hall but also was manifested within a large part of the community. With regard to improvements that could be made in Fairmount Park, park supporters argued that the problem was not strictly financial, rather “we are *slow*—we are provincial—and we must . . . rouse the drag-weights to an active sympathy . . . or we shall never attain the rank of a genuine metropolis.”²⁵ The key to this statement was that civic pride was at stake as Philadelphia was clearly being outdone by New York on the subject of public parks as Central Park was already underway. The faceless bureaucracy of the consolidated city was called out in editorials as a “mysterious agency” that always worked to “defeat or paralyze” every effort made to improve upon the park. Calling on the Department of Public Property and the Law Department to “crush the Vandalism

²⁴ *Daily Times* (Philadelphia) 24 April 1856.

²⁵ *Evening Journal* (Philadelphia) 25 January 1858.

which is thus, under our very eyes destroying that which no money and no skill can, during at least one generation, replace,” newspaper editorials led the charge against what was seen as a negligent city government, too caught up with consolidation to care about improving a public park.²⁶

Of course, the consolidated government faced considerable challenges as all of the mayors, township officials, district aldermen, borough councilmen, and other former elected officials of the former county of Philadelphia were struggling with their respective council members, who now represented their interests to City Hall, while the newly elected members of the consolidated city began to take control, creating new agencies such as a police department, a survey department, and a new water department that would serve the entire city. A public park, located away from the population center along the Delaware, was not at the top of their list of concerns. This prompted several members of the press to become activists, calling for improvements to the park as an embodiment of civic beauty, something the newly consolidated city could be proud of. They argued that this could be accomplished for a relatively nominal price, if only the new leadership in city government would pay attention.

By the mid-nineteenth century, Philadelphia’s prominence as the most important American city had faded. In contrast, New York had become the leading American city in population and trade, while Boston and New York shared cultural dominance. Even after consolidation increased Philadelphia’s political power, New York was untouchable as the leading American urban center. This was not lost on Philadelphians, who railed against city politicians who lacked the will or foresight to complete Fairmount Park. The New

²⁶ *North American* (Philadelphia) 28 October 1856.

York press, always available for a pointed jab at Philadelphia, argued that “there is a great deal of individual capital, enterprise and dexterity in Philadelphia, but, in contrast with New York, its municipal cowardice and skin-flintiveness are remarkable,” especially as it related in comparing Central and Fairmount Parks.²⁷ New York acquired the land for Central Park in 1856, and work on improving it commenced soon after. In contrast, many considered the land acquired for Fairmount Park in the 1840s to be already naturally beautiful; therefore, comparing the two parks is difficult as Central Park was entirely man-made. Indeed, in the first five years, workers transformed Central Park through a massive undertaking involving complete excavation and then bringing nearly 2.5 million cubic yards of stone and earth into the park to create the illusion of “picturesque abundance and distant prospects.”²⁸ By contrast, little if anything was being expended on Fairmount Park and the Lemon Hill site specifically. This lack of municipal will to improve Fairmount Park led the *New York Daily Tribune* to comment that “the Central Park undertaking, and the bold, direct, business like way in which having been determined on, it is straightway carried out, help much to fix the mind of the country and the world upon New York as the unapproachable center of Metropolitan wealth, luxury and traffic.” In contrast, the editorial alluded to Philadelphia’s tradition of provincialism: “Philadelphia is becoming content to be what it is, a quite respectable manufacturing town, with several objects of historical interest, well worthy of the passing stranger . . .” while adding condescendingly that Philadelphia had become little more than “an important station on the railroad line from New York to Cape May.”²⁹ Other editorials

²⁷ *Tribune* (New York) 12 September 1859.

²⁸ Roy Rozenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), 150.

²⁹ *Tribune* (New York) 12 September 1859.

commented on the fact that New York was not necessarily a model city, but the difference between Philadelphia and New York could be characterized as a difference in “public spirit” as the “residents of that city (New York) have begun to comprehend the fact that the greatest amount of trade cannot make a great metropolis. They see the vast importance of rendering New York an attractive place of residence . . .”³⁰

The improvement and expansion of Fairmount Park from 1856 through 1858 provided an opportunity for the newly consolidated city to demonstrate a direct manifestation of civic beauty. The park was the primary means to convey this, especially as New York continued to complete Central Park during this time period. This was the primary cause of Morton McMichael and in 1857 his *North American* took the lead in editorials supporting the extension of Fairmount Park. McMichael, formerly a Whig and now associated with the People’s Party, an antecedent of the Republican Party, believed that citizens would support the park if disinterested wealthy “gentlemen” invested in purchasing land adjacent to the Lemon Hill property, thereby allowing for a park extension. This view was in contrast to the overwhelmingly Democrat-led council, which countered that the park remained inaccessible to the majority of their constituents. McMichael also called on the merchant class, many of whom would soon form the Republican Party in Philadelphia, to purchase subscriptions to buy park land at Fairmount. These contributions towards the cause of the park “will have the satisfaction of giving to their townsmen a noble park, on a site unrivaled by any in the world,”³¹ pointing out the natural beauty. McMichael argued that Philadelphians would not be able to appreciate nature and beauty as industrialization contributed to the loss of open space.

³⁰ Fairmount Park Scrapbook Collection, volume I, 7 May 1858 (Philadelphia: Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

³¹ *North American* (Philadelphia) 14 January 1857.

Arguing for planned public space long before the official birth of the city planning movement later in the nineteenth century, McMichael argued that the park would make the case for the “importance and beauty which result from good planting and adequate care.” McMichael joined his fellow newspaper editors in comparing Philadelphia with New York, stressing that Fairmount’s desirable location with river views, picturesque character, and the graceful undulations of topography would easily surpass Central Park.



Figure 13. Lemon Hill, from the west bank of the Schuylkill River, mid-19th century (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

A visionary, McMichael believed that all this could be accomplished if citizens, particularly members of the merchant class, would mobilize. In addition, he made the case that members of the boathouses, located along the Schuylkill above the Fairmount Dam, should also volunteer in the effort to improve and expand the park. Although McMichael became Republican mayor between 1866 and 1869 and first president of the Fairmount Park Commission in 1867, it was his role in the expansion and improvement of Fairmount Park during the mid-1850s that prompted his fellow citizens to erect a full-

figure sculpture of him on the grounds of the former Sedgeley estate which he was so instrumental in acquiring.

While McMichael clearly led the charge for expanding and improving Fairmount, there existed an opposing view, outlined by the *Evening Journal*, that argued the citizens of Philadelphia did not need additional park space in such a relatively unpopulated and remote section as Fairmount. Instead, basing his argument on “public opinion,” the editor outlined that parks should be of smaller size and fairly distributed throughout the city. Without Sedgeley, the park at Fairmount was seventy acres, including the South Garden of the Fairmount Water Works, which was more than enough to accommodate the residents of the neighborhoods around the lower Schuylkill. The editor discounted that the protection of the water supply had any basis in reality, stating that “the water question we look upon with no importance” for the case was being made to expand Fairmount Park on the eastern bank of the Schuylkill with no discussion of expansion on the western banks. Any “nuisances” being created by pollution would still easily flow into the forebay of the Water Works and therefore enter the drinking supply. Foreseeing future residential development on a grand scale, especially since the supporters were using the park to encourage movement into the Fairmount neighborhood, the editor of the *Evening Journal* argued that “it is time now, or soon must be, when we must draw our drinking water from the river above Manayunk. The very sinks which would multiply all about the new park, like the graves of Laurel Hill, would make the water from the Schuylkill too unwholesome for domestic purposes.”³² Instead, the argument reflected a belief that public investment for parks should be made by placing several sixteen-acre tracts around

³² *Evening Journal* (Philadelphia) 8 January 1857.

the city in locations more central to improvements such as streetcar and water lines than the city's edge near the Schuylkill River. In addition to McMichael and the *Evening Journal*, an additional perspective argued that if Fairmount and the expansion were successful, it would lead to similar improvements in other sections of the city and citizens would respond positively to their preservation as open space.³³

While newspaper editors outlined the debate about how Fairmount and open space in Philadelphia should be planned, the expert opinion of prominent botanist and landscape gardener William Saunders solidified the importance of the Fairmount site as the future of public space in the city. Saunders (1822-1900), a native of Scotland and a resident of the Germantown section of Philadelphia, would later become the first botanist for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, placed in charge of experimental gardens and grounds in 1862.³⁴ By 1857, Saunders was already respected in the U.S. as a botanist and landscape gardener, having trained at London's Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew.

In an open letter to both city council and the citizens of Philadelphia, published in several newspapers, Saunders outlined all the reasons that Fairmount Park should be expanded, as well as proclaiming its virtues from a landscape architecture perspective. Saunders, invited by the contributors to the Sedgeley purchase to inspect the grounds, praised the location as embodying what he considered the "picturesque," which was the highest quality to be found in public spaces. Believing that one could be "shut out from the city by the curving slopes and wooded prominences . . . and "the ample breadth of water" therefore dispelling "all thoughts of being intruded upon in our solitude" and fostering "a feeling conducive to contemplation," Saunders argued that "every object is

³³ "Public Parks," Fairmount Park Scrapbook Collection, Vol. I, 19 February 1857.

³⁴ *New York Times*, 14 September 1900.

apparently adapted to uninterrupted and secluded recreation.” Of course, this reflected certain ideals which Andrew Jackson Downing popularized in the 1840s. He also made the case that the park should be expanded to the western banks of the Schuylkill and called upon the city to take control of this area in pursuit of a clean water supply. He added that “there is great variety of surface, enough of natural shrubbery and full grown trees, both to form a nucleus for further improvement, and satisfy the wants of the present. The river views are extensive, pleasing and the water within reach. The situation is elevated and open, presenting no impediment to the free circulation of air, is so far central as to be of easy access from all parts of the city, and so isolated that only partial views of the city can be obtained.”³⁵ For these reasons, Saunders laid the groundwork that

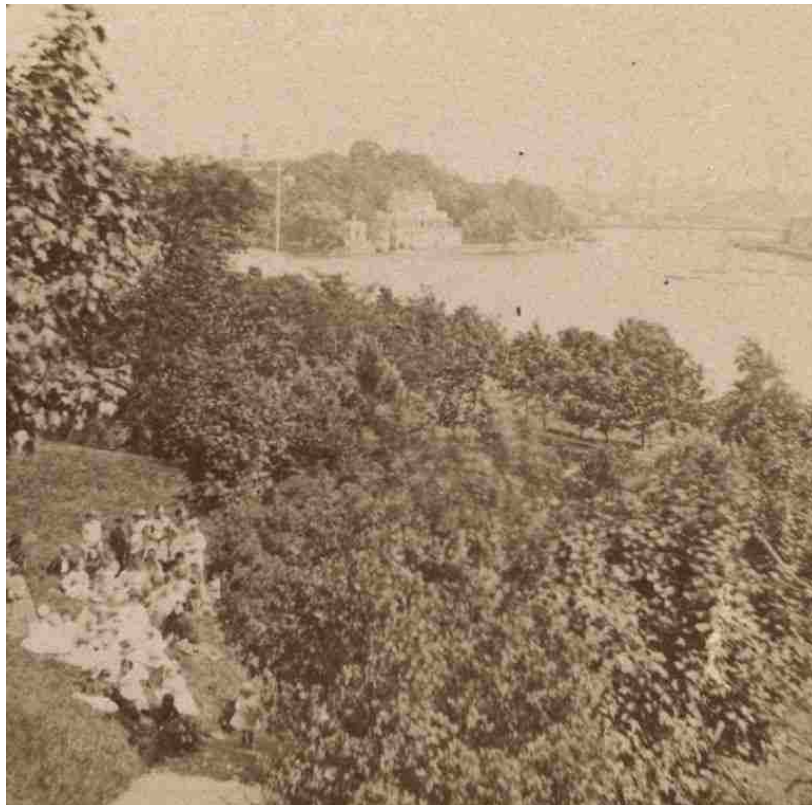


Figure 14. Lemon Hill, 1860s. The natural topography, existing trees, and vegetation coupled with views of the Schuylkill embody William Saunders’s “picturesque” landscape. The Fairmount Water Works is in the central background (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

³⁵ “William Saunders Letter-The Lemon Hill Park” Fairmount Park Scrapbook Collection, Vol. I, 25 February 1857.

Fairmount Park's natural beauty does not necessitate an overriding Olmstedian vision of landscape architecture as its virtues occur naturally.

In October of 1857, while McMichael and Saunders promoted the park, powerful members of council, including Councilman "Uncle" Andrew Miller, began to voice a strong opposition to the Sedgeley expansion. Miller, a Democrat, speaking as an authority on land transfer since he was the City's Recorder of Deeds between 1843 and 1848, brought up the older argument that a "band of speculators" was attempting to make a profit by selling the land at an inflated rate. Miller published an open letter to the "taxpayers of Philadelphia" outlining his objections to receiving the parcel of ground. Miller stated that the thirty-three acre parcel had been sold in 1851 for \$26,000 and the "generous gift" which citizens were giving to Philadelphia would cost the city \$60,000 as council passed an ordinance in April to pay the remaining balance of the cost of the property. Miller appealed to the public that the land was worth no more in 1857, especially as the nation was in the midst of a financial panic, than it had been in 1851, directly addressing the public: "fellow tax-payers, even the humblest creditors of the city cannot be paid, and the children of the men who labor on its streets are in want of bread, and will you, under these circumstances, permit this foul wrong to be consummated? You are overburdened with taxes. And will you permit the public moneys to be pocketed by a band of heartless speculators? Come to the rescue and save your money in some way." Countering Miller was Theodore Cuyler, chairman of the committee on city property, who utilized the expertise of Henry Haines, surveyor of the seventeenth district, to make the case that the land was not being sold at inflated prices. In addition, Cuyler appealed to

Miller, stating that all of the subscribers had made their contributions and he believed that there was no land speculation involved.

A few days later, Councilman Miller was implicated in a scheme that involved some sixty persons who were trying to get council to stall the acceptance of the extension of Fairmount Park in order to pool their finances and purchase the property to sell the gravel on the property for \$15,000 to \$20,000 and then divide the property into lots. Of those proposing to purchase the ground, two were butchers and two were brewers, both of whom wanted to occupy the riverfront so that the “filth from their works might be pumped into the reservoirs at Fairmount, thereby engendering disease and pestilence hereafter.” McMichael called this scheme nefarious and wondered how “Uncle Andy” could “subject the pure, sweet waters of the Schuylkill to the contamination of the offals of the slaughterhouses, and the horrible poisonings and refuse filth of the distilleries.” The councilman’s heart was “full of verjuice” and he should “cleanse his gall and liver and become more sweet-tempered in the future.”³⁶ After this became public, Miller’s motion failed in council, which was celebrated by the press as a major achievement since “Sedgeley is a property which should belong to the people.”³⁷

Once council approved the park extension, the work to improve the park was the next step, undertaken by several reformers. The Panic of 1857 remained a substantial challenge to these reformers, as businesses were struggling and it was difficult to make the case for park improvements when the park was seen as more beautiful than necessary. The case was made to utilize the “thousands thrown out of work by recent events” by executing “of such public works as have been delayed on account of their costliness, at a

³⁶ “The Snarleyyow’s Exposed” Fairmount Park Scrapbook Collection, Vol. 1, 18 October 1857.

³⁷ Fairmount Park Scrapbook Collection, Vol. 1, 25 October, 1857.

time when labor was in demand and high in price,” especially as it related to the public health and protection of the water supply argument, for pure air and pure water are “primary elements for the sustenance of life and the preservation of health.”³⁸

Frederick Graff, Jr., the consulting engineer to the committee on city property and chief superintendant of the Water Works, argued that the Sedgeley extension was of the highest value to the water supply. It was an adjoining property which was not directly connected to the banks of the Schuylkill. Newspaper editors seized onto this argument to bolster their plea to use the vast amount of cheap labor available in the city because of the financial panic. There seemed to be little political will to heed this argument from council, especially as it had just appropriated over \$60,000 to execute the purchase of the extension. Besides, the end of 1857 was a lame duck session for council, as several members did not seek re-election and there was little activity devoted to improving the park.

By early 1858, it appeared there would be new council members in the election year, and there was hope that once and for all the city would rid itself of the type of government “which sets its face against works that conduce to the public convenience, security and enjoyment, and which wins for the city the reputation of being spiritless and mean.”³⁹ By May 1858, a new council was about to go into session and the *North American*, among other journals, believed that some of the most intelligent and public-spirited individuals were moving into the political realm. The hope was that the old, tight-fisted ways of council, as well as corrupt schemers such “Uncle Andy” Miller, would be replaced by those who “check extravagance” but ultimately will govern with

³⁸ “The New Park and Unemployed Labor,” Fairmount Park Scrapbook Collection, Vol. 1, 18 November 1857.

³⁹ *Evening Journal* (Philadelphia) 28 January 1858.

“enlightened views” and “advocate a liberal expenditure for whatever will conduce to the welfare of the community and is not beyond the legitimate province of the city government.”⁴⁰ The first order of business to the incoming council, McMichael argued, should be the improvement to Fairmount Park and its recent extension. Again, New York was used as a foil to Philadelphia, as editors argued that if council made Fairmount Park a priority which was “greatly superior in natural beauty to that monster of our sister city, we need not fear a comparison with the New York Central.”⁴¹ In the face of economic depression, New York employed thousands of day laborers by the later 1850s transforming the landscape in the process, while Fairmount Park remained an unimproved, though naturally beautiful public space.⁴²

By late 1858, there was still little activity to begin the work in the park, and *The Press* took up the cause by mentioning that during a recent meeting of the Guardians of the Poor, the announcement was made that 300 able-bodied men resided in the almshouse. Echoing earlier sentiment surrounding the unemployed, the case was made that those men could be used to improve the park. The park could be the greatest public works project that Philadelphia had ever witnessed. Nothing short of changing the character of the city dweller was at stake, for “to the jaded business-man, and to the invalid, it will be a boon beyond price, and to all the classes of our people it will afford space for pure air, exercise, and pleasure, free from the turmoil, confusion, and dust of our streets and roads.”⁴³ By late 1858, improvements to the park, particularly that area closest to the Fairmount Water Works near Coates Street (now Fairmount Avenue)

⁴⁰ Fairmount Park Scrapbook Collection, Vol. 1, 7 May 1858.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*, 150.

⁴³ *The Press* (Philadelphia) 11 September 1858.

finally commenced, with council approving minor appropriations. Again, council argued that gradual improvements should be made particularly with such reduced amounts in the city treasury because of the economic downturn.

In late 1858, council debated how much should be expended on improvements to Fairmount Park as very little had been done since consolidation except the approval of the expansion. Proposals varied from \$4,000 to one upwards of \$50,000, made by Theodore Cuyler, the former Commissioner of Public Property and now a member of council. Cuyler argued that the “New Yorkers had recently expended eight millions of dollars for the purchase and improvement of a park.”⁴⁴ In the end, council appropriated \$5,000 for the coming year. Council also voted to finally eject the vendor of lager beer from the Lemon Hill mansion and announced a design competition for a plan for Fairmount Park.

The competition for “Plans for the Improvement of Faire Mount Park,” organized by council’s Committee on Public Property, was announced in the Philadelphia press in late 1858. The stated goal was to design a landscape covering the 130 acres which would unify the newly acquired property with the grounds of Lemon Hill into one seamless park. Eight firms competed, but only four names were announced: William Saunders, the landscape gardener who had recently praised the park for its picturesque natural beauty; Andrew Palles, a civil engineer; Edwin F. Durang, an architect who designed several Catholic churches; and the newly formed firm of Sidney & Adams, specialists in landscape and villa architecture.

⁴⁴ Fairmount Park Scrapbook Collection, Vol. 1, 26 January 1859.

On March 3, 1859, City Council, the judges of the competition, awarded the firm of James Clark Sidney (c.1819-1881) and Andrew Adams (c.1800-1860) \$500 and first prize for the design competition. Sidney, a cartographer by training, had co-authored the Downing-influenced work *American Cottage and Villa Architecture* (1850) and also designed South Laurel Hill Cemetery between 1849 and 1854, the addition to Philadelphia's original rural cemetery located directly north of Fairmount Park.

The Sidney and Adams plan, as it came to be known, proposed a Grand Avenue and carriage drive, an open parade ground, and a terraced garden, interlaced by a network of serpentine paths. The plan proposed that the purpose of the Park was to “present the greatest possible contrast to the artificiality of the city, with its straight and closely built up streets.” Following the lead of numerous editorials and park promoters, Sidney and Adams considered that the “natural features of the ground are, happily, so park-like already, that little more art is necessary than to complete what is already so perfect in outline; we have therefore avoided everything formal or geometrical, except where some especial object showed it to be desirable.” In contrast to the “artificiality” of Central Park, their plan argued that “rural enjoyment is most effectually obtained by simplicity, both in design and embellishment; it has therefore been our object to utilize that which nature has already made beautiful, rather than introduce . . .” any “necessarily expensive artificial feature.”⁴⁵

After several years of political inertia and the goading of private citizens and newspaper editorials, the citizens of Philadelphia finally had a plan for the improvements to Fairmount Park. The problem now was finding the \$58,744 that Sidney & Adams

⁴⁵ James Sidney and Andrew Adams, *Description of Plan for the Improvement of Fairmount Park* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Thompson, 1859), 3. See also Michael J. Lewis, “The First Design for Fairmount Park,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 130, 3 (July 2006), 283-297.

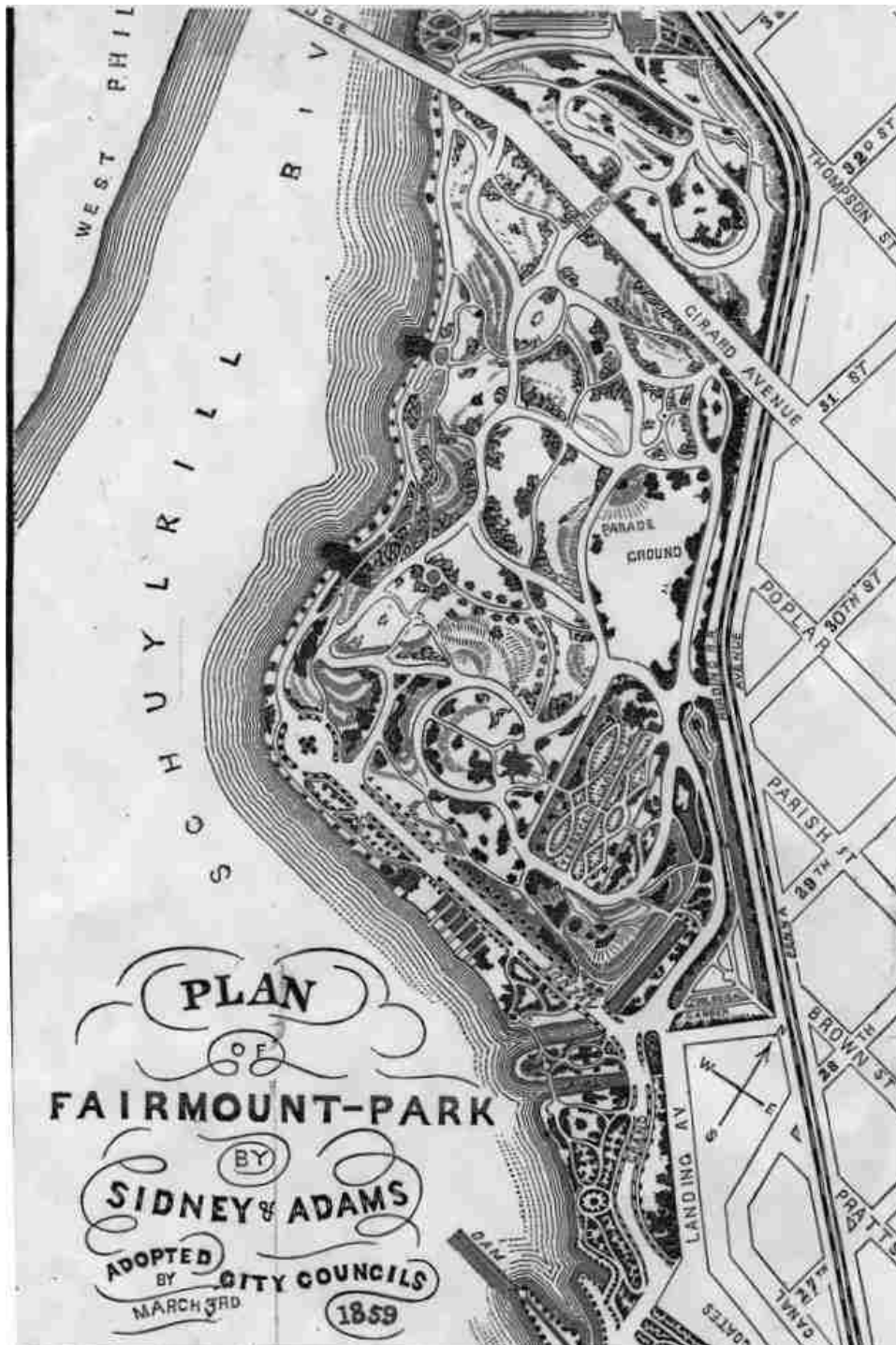


Figure 15. *Plan of Fairmount Park, Sidney & Adams, 1859* (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

estimated the total improvements would cost to make over the park. In addition, concerned citizens also began the fight for the city to appropriate even more ground than that included in the plan, looking to the west banks of the Schuylkill. Nonetheless, the plan, according to the designers, could be implemented gradually, but council also had to appropriate some money for maintenance of the new public space, which it was reluctant to do. In the years to come, the struggle between the will of Philadelphia's citizens to realize the goals of the plan and the continuing political obstacles placed in their way by council would only intensify.

Chapter II

The Plan for the Park: The Expansion of Fairmount Park, the Creation of the Fairmount Park Commission and the Protection of the Water Supply, 1859-1875

The years between the adoption of the Sidney & Adams *Plan for the Improvement of Fairmount Park* in 1859 and the great Centennial Exhibition of 1876, held in West Fairmount Park, witnessed the greatest expansion of the original grounds of Fairmount Park in its history. The park's area expanded from the original 104 acres encompassing the Lemon Hill and Sedgely estates and the area around the Fairmount Water Works to approximately 3,000 acres, extending along both banks of the Schuylkill River up to and including its main tributary, the Wissahickon Creek. Between 1859 and 1865 there was some clearing of formerly industrial land within the confines of Fairmount Park and implementation of a few elements of the Sidney & Adams plan. With the creation of the Fairmount Park Commission in 1867, the governing body for the entire park system, an era of initial park expansion commenced. The era culminated in the grand Centennial Exhibition of 1876, creating a need for substantial improvements to the walks, drives, and landscapes of Fairmount Park. These improvements in turn made the park a popular leisure destination for Philadelphians. In addition, in a period of rapid urbanization, the acquisition and development of Fairmount Park provided city dwellers with a connection to the disappearing natural areas in the city.

The development of Fairmount Park during this time period clearly demonstrated an early form of city planning, as evidenced by the critical decisions made by park designers, supporters, and commissioners. The protection of the water supply was the foremost reason for increasing the acreage of the park. However, early park planners also

wanted to accommodate the future population growth of the city. This form of planning accounted for both environmental and recreational measures as a means to ensure a present and future healthy population, predating both the City Beautiful and Progressive movements' emphases on public health. In addition, this planning was necessitated because supporters of the park were constantly at odds with most members of City Council. Therefore, park planners relied on ideals surrounding environmental protection and public health to advance their agenda.

The environmental focus of the development of Fairmount Park set it apart from other major American urban parks created during the nineteenth century. No other urban park in the United States was acquired for the protection of the water supply and no other major American city acquired prime industrial property to create its park. Although it has been argued that laissez-faire capitalism, or "privatism" as defined by Sam Bass Warner, defined the American city, particularly during the industrial era, the planning and creation of Fairmount Park complicates this interpretation. The importance, as well as the success, of Fairmount Park was its heralding of a planned urban environment. Its failures derived from the constant threats from the powerful forces of corrupt politics and the industrial pollution that continued to de-spoil the very waterways the park was designed to protect. However, new leadership arose whose views echoed and enlarged the goals of William Penn regarding public open spaces, believing that some spaces in the city should not only be set aside for the public good but also provide for the city's environmental health. They challenged the values associated with private, personal wealth and corrupt politics. In the last third of the nineteenth century, the tension between the capitalist forces of industrial growth and their political enablers and the forward-thinking supporters of the park's

growth was particularly pronounced.

The Struggle for the Expansion of Fairmount Park, 1859-1867

The primary struggle to implement the plan for Fairmount Park resulted from partisan politics, as power in Philadelphia shifted away from the Democrats during the late 1850s to the People's Party, an antecedent of the Republican Party. Democrats clearly wanted to control the building of Fairmount Park, but without the power of the mayor, members of council slowed progress and expansion since they did not control the patronage associated with a large public works project. In March 1859, after council approved the Sidney & Adams plan, Morton McMichael, the editor of the *North American*, advocated for the implementation of park improvements. But without political support, his effort would be in vain. McMichael, allied with the People's Party since the dissolution of the Whigs in the mid-1850s, argued that the park would not have existed were it not for the efforts of his party.¹ The People's Party in Pennsylvania included former Whigs, disaffected Democrats, and Republicans who differed from their national party (mainly over the emphasis placed on the issue of slavery). The People's Party candidate, Alexander Henry, became mayor in 1859. By 1860, the party had largely merged with the Republican Party. Improvements to Fairmount Park languished as Henry did not receive support from council, since the majority of them were Democrats.

McMichael blamed the problems of converting the public grounds at Lemon Hill into a proper park on the Democratic leaders in council, many of whom represented districts far removed from either the original city boundaries or areas around the

¹ *North American* (Philadelphia) 11 March 1859.

Schuykill. He noted, “If the People’s party did not institute Fairmount Park, who did? Was it done during the democratic administration of the city affairs? Of course not. All that time lager beer ran riot at Lemon Hill; the place was abandoned to the most disgraceful rowdyism and debauchery, and the park had no existence.” McMichael explained that the original park was purchased under the pre-consolidation government of the “old Whig Councils of the city proper.” However, after consolidation “democracy got control of it at last, and let loose upon it all the worst elements of a great city.”

McMichael was quick to point out that he was not referring to the Germans who used the area for their Sangerfest celebrations during the time that Lemon Hill was a beer garden. Stating that the Germans were “peaceful” in their occasional festivals but were being interfered with by “desperadoes” with riots of “continual occurrence,” McMichael blamed this behavior on the inability of Democratic members of council to make any investment in the park. McMichael, ever the park booster, went so far as to claim that all park improvements were “their [People’s Party] policy, suggested by their administration, adopted by Councils, controlled by their men, and fostered by their financial system. Whatever merit there is in the establishment and improvement of the park belongs to them. They not only authorized it to be done, but they brought the city finances to a degree of prosperity which enabled the appropriations to be made without difficulty, without a loan, and upon a reduced tax rate.”² Of course, this was selective memory, as there were several park supporters who were not allied with any particular political party.

While McMichael argued that his party was responsible for the awarding of the Sidney & Adams plan, the adoption of the plan after the first year saw many challenges

² Ibid., 25 April 1860.

for its supporters as the city struggled to carry out the approximately \$58,000 in improvements with the very limited budget approved by council. The initial hurdle for the full implementation of the plan was the prevention of appropriations by Democratic council members who feared that patronage jobs would be awarded to the loyal followers of the “present administration,” the People’s Party. Instead, work began gradually with only \$4,000 appropriated. Initially, this entailed clearing of the beer industry’s icehouses along both banks of the river, which required large amounts of capital.



Figure 16. Large ice houses, used by the lager beer industry, line both banks of the Schuylkill, c. 1860s. Prior to the improvements of the original plan, these buildings needed to be demolished (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

The first recommendation of the plan was that a fence and retaining wall be erected surrounding the park, which would be concealed by a “screen of plantations,” at a cost of \$2,272. The remaining proposed work was road making, with the primary goal of

getting citizens into the park and connecting them to the natural surroundings.³ By May 1859, with some of the initial improvements to the park complete, newspaper accounts noted that park visitation was growing and that the “laborious preparations and improvements” resulted in a pronounced change.⁴ However, there remained opposition within council to funding anything more than these minor improvements, prompting park supporters to argue that the general public wanted the full plan implemented rather than “worrying lazily through two or three dozen years.”⁵

The lack of urgency on the part of council to implement the Sidney & Adams plan prompted strategizing by park supporters to ally the city’s economic growth with the success of the park, since the positive environmental and recreational aspects of the park were insufficient to sway council to action. By the summer of 1859, McMichael, once again using his voice as editor of the *North American*, expressed the view that a citizen petition was justified in order to convince council to appropriate the full plan. McMichael stressed his belief that the mercantile community should unite with all taxpaying citizens to pressure council to appropriate funds. Claiming that investment in the park would lead to economic growth, McMichael argued that it is “a measure of economy to have the work done now, as well as most entirely advisable for the good of the mercantile interests. It will pay us back a thousandfold, in the attraction it will add to our city, the increased value of the real estate, the additions to our trade from abroad, and the beneficial effect it will have on the health of our people.”⁶ In effect, McMichael believed that the park would be an economic driver for the region—rather than being a burden to

³ *North American* (Philadelphia), 11 April 1859.

⁴ *Ibid.* 11 May 1859.

⁵ *Ibid.* 13 June 1859.

⁶ *Ibid.*

taxpayers, it would increase property values and add to the health of the working population. For the mid-nineteenth century, this argument was visionary in its effects, essentially calling for space to be set aside not only for the societal benefits of the public and for environmental concerns, but also for the economic growth of Philadelphia. McMichael clearly outlined the economic benefits of a planned environment, which detailed usage beyond commercial and residential and, in fact, added value to both.

McMichael believed that many citizens did not fully realize what constituted a park, so he used his editorials to address his chief concern: the education of the public on the importance of large, managed open spaces. He believed that if the public's vague and indistinct notions about public parks could be changed, some of the objections to making the improvements could be removed. Arguing that a park is not "a play ground, a common, a walk, a parade ground, a promenade; but a combination of all these and far more," McMichael used the existing five squares, as laid out by William Penn, to explain the difference. In his opinion, the main difference between a park and a square was the relationship of park users to the surroundings: "there is very little in such a place to see." The vistas of the Schuylkill River from Lemon Hill would have a positive psychological effect, exposing park users to a natural world lost to residents of the dense commercial and residential districts of Philadelphia's downtown.

In addition, he felt that park maintenance and improvements were of the utmost necessity, arguing that a "park, then, for a city like Philadelphia, requires something more than merely to dedicate a certain piece of ground to any use the people choose to make of it." He felt that the object of improvements was to encourage the user to engage in nature,

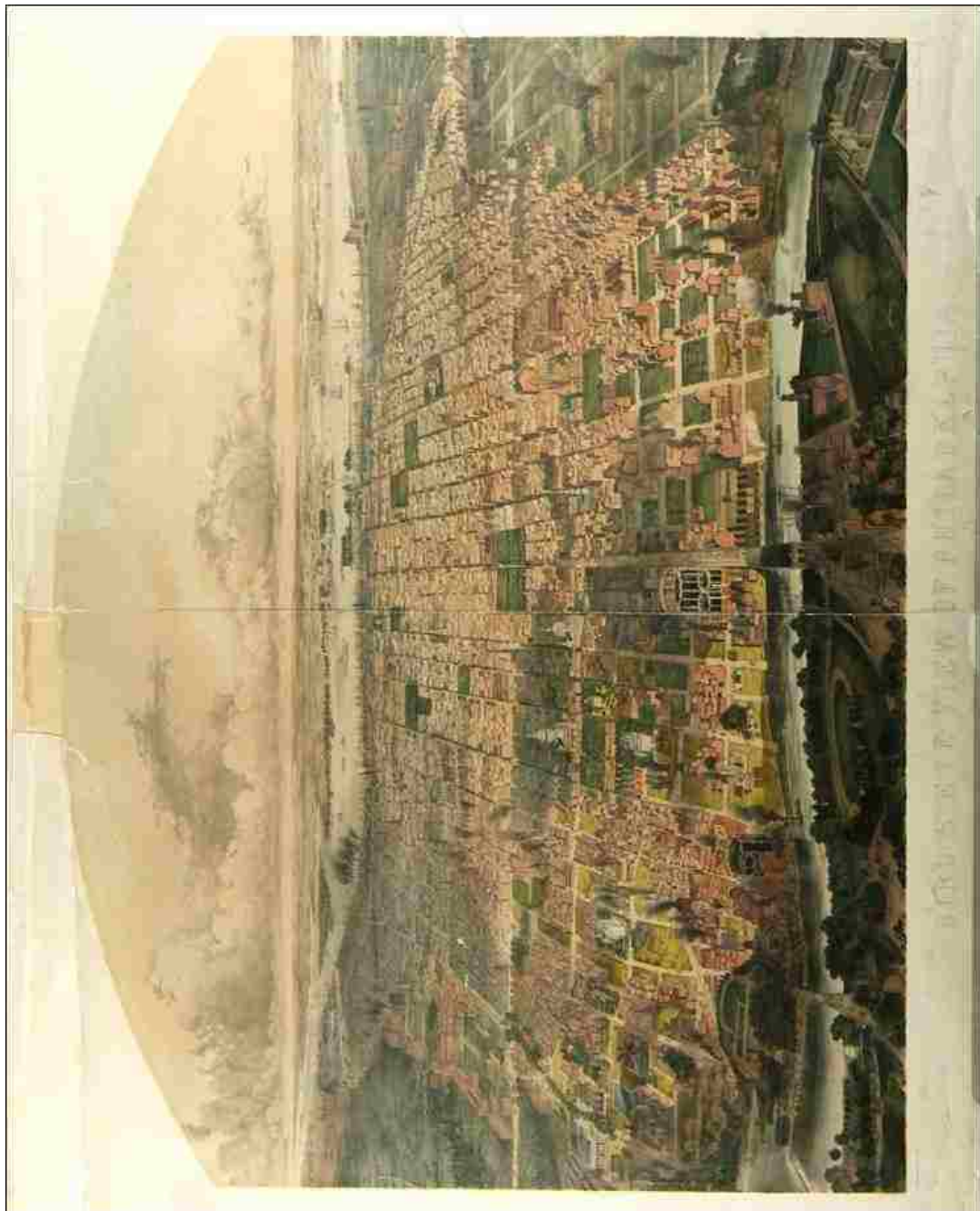


Figure 17. *Bird's Eye View of Philadelphia*, c. 1857. The bustling city of the original park advocates stretches from river to river. Penn's original five squares are identified as green, open spaces, with Center (Penn) Square in the center of the image. The Fairmount Water Works and dam is in the left foreground of the image. Fairmount Park is identified as a small green space extending to the northeast of the Water Works, although Lemon Hill is not shown. Note the amount of industry in the downtown area represented as smoke rising from stacks of factories (Historical Society of Pennsylvania).

to “lay out the whole area that the roads and paths winding about under cliffs, over hill tops, along the river bank, shall dip into every place where there is an object of interest, and take you three or four miles without wearying.” Spelling it out more directly, McMichael argued: “we want in a park, not a mere common, where six hundred thousand persons may go and do just what they please, but an improved resort, where all is order, where no class need interfere with the enjoyment of another; where, in fact, we may see what Philadelphia is made of, and how her people manage to find amusement in the open air.” This call for order, for control over the public, is a key element of McMichael’s definition and should not be underestimated in its influence on how the park would be managed in the future, especially after creation of the Fairmount Park Commission in 1867.⁷

While certain council members continued to delay the appropriations for the full implementation of the plan, others proposed to increase the size of the park, extending it to the west bank of the Schuylkill River from the area opposite the Fairmount Water Works to above the Girard Avenue Bridge. Council hired Andrew Palles, a civil engineer who had competed against Sidney & Adams for the original plan, to expand upon their plan, incorporating walks and drives around the West Philadelphia estates of Solitude and Eggesfield and removing industry from the banks of the Schuylkill to protect the water supply. The short-lived Sidney & Adams partnership (1859-60) was dissolving by that time. Council hired the runner-up to both reproduce their original plan and expand by adding an additional 56 acres to the original 110 protected on the east side of the river.

⁷ Ibid.



Figure 18. *Plan of Fairmount Park as adopted by the councils with the proposed Addition of the West Bank of the Schuylkill*, Andrew Palles, Civil Engineer, 1859. Palles's recommendations for the west side included a large parade ground while keeping all of Sidney & Adams recommendations to the east bank intact as these were already adopted by council (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

Advocating again in favor of protecting the water supply, McMichael argued additional acreage could be purchased for a nominal price, for if it were not secured by the city, it would “very speedily become the site for shops and factories, the refuse and pollutions from which will pass directly into the Schuylkill and thence into the basin,

imparting their poisons and impurities to . . . the whole city.”⁸ Industry was expanding quickly onto the western bank of the Schuylkill, particularly after ground on the east had been incorporated into Fairmount Park. In addition, West Philadelphia was growing, with civic boosters and developers claiming it would soon “rival Brooklyn in size and population.” Therefore, the people of that “great and flourishing” district needed a park, a “breathing space,” much like those residents living on the east bank of the Schuylkill.⁹

Council also began investigating a proposal to purchase land between the Fairmount Water Works and the Lemon Hill estate, a mixed residential, commercial, and manufacturing neighborhood known as the Flat Iron. The council debate over the Flat Iron and the expansion of Fairmount Park revolved around the divergence among those members who desired to fund the improvements in the original Sidney & Adams plan, those who believed the city should acquire additional properties to protect the water supply, and those who believed the entire plan was a waste of taxpayer money, with members of the People’s Party falling into the two former camps and Democrats representing the latter. The cost of expanding the park was approximated at \$200,000, and a petition was distributed by McMichael to council to move forward with the purchases. As the majority of council was Democrat, however, they continued to challenge either the improvements to the Park or the further acquisition of land for it.

Finally, while council continued to disagree over the bill before them, the Pennsylvania legislature began debating the appropriation of the ground on the west side of the Schuylkill to be incorporated into Fairmount Park. The same legislators who were involved in the earlier consolidation movement again became interested in Philadelphia’s

⁸ Fairmount Park Scrapbook Collection, Vol. 1, 20 August 1859.

⁹ *The Mercury* (Philadelphia) 20 August 1859 and 28 August 1859.

affairs after Eli Kirk Price, the author of the consolidation act and park advocate, used his influence in Harrisburg once again. The relationship between the legislature and council was always contentious, particularly when Harrisburg began meddling in Philadelphia's affairs. Until the Constitution of 1874, which granted local governments, including Philadelphia, recognition, the state constitution was silent on city governments. Therefore, at any time the state legislature could and indeed did, in the case of consolidation, impose acts on Philadelphia. All that was required was for influential Philadelphians, such as Price, to gain political power in Harrisburg and the actions of council could be overturned.¹⁰ This action prompted opponents to argue that the "interests of the city are footballed between the State Capital and Independence Hall at a fearful rate . . . with a sublime indifference as to what our citizens may think about the proposition." However, although complaints were lodged against the interference of the Pennsylvania legislature in municipal matters, editorials continued in their claim that "if the bill is passed, we shall have to thank our talkative Councils—for nothing . . . [I]n general the city has to suffer when the gentlemen at Harrisburg meddle with matters that are purely municipal . . ." adding that "this kind of interference has been invited by the demands of citizens, to which our own Councils have made no fitting response."¹¹ The debate in the state legislature only made council slower in its movement to appropriate the ground, even when every delay made the acquisition of the ground more difficult as industry continued to expand along the west side of the Schuylkill.

Citizens soon entered the debate, some continuing to oppose the extension and improvement of Fairmount Park as a taxpayer burden despite the favorable endorsement

¹⁰ Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, *City Government in Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Governor's Center for Local Government Services, 2002), 3.

¹¹ Fairmount Park Scrapbook Collection, Vol. 1: "Councils and the Legislature," 25 March 1860.

of several newspaper editors. The most vocal opposition came in the form of complaint letters published in the *Germantown Telegraph*, couching the acquisition not in terms of the public good but rather expressing the proposition to expand the park as mere extravagance. Arguing that private landowners, many of whom had considerable influence with the legislature, would gain the most as they could sell their property at an inflated cost, they urged the “rural wards” to unite against the interests of central Philadelphia and the legislature.¹² This argument was countered quickly by a letter to the *Germantown Telegraph* which stated that if the land was not appropriated for park purposes, it would very soon be developed, and therefore the land could not be purchased by the “reduced rates which non-occupancy offers.” The editor of the *Germantown Telegraph* quickly retorted that the “pure air” argument for the park was faulty as the appropriated ground would act as a park only for the neighborhoods on the Schuylkill and would not correct any problems with clean air in other sections, such as Germantown. Indeed, so much money was being expended on municipal projects, such as bridges over the Schuylkill, that it seemed as if “the treasury will be abundantly depleted in behalf of the Schuylkill and extreme western interests of the city.” The argument for the purity of the water supply would afford the “smallest mite of security against the impurities constantly issuing into the stream above the limits” of the park. In contrast to the claims that the park was protective of public health, the editor stated that the Delaware River provided many more healthy opportunities for citizens as the “change of air” could be had by taking a boat ride to Gloucester and Riverton in New Jersey or Tacony and Torresdale in Philadelphia at a fare of a few cents. In their judgment, these were “a

¹² *Germantown Telegraph* (Philadelphia) 11 April 1860.

thousand times more promotive of the health of the masses than expansive and expensive parks, provided with carriage drives, to be forever a burden upon the city.”¹³

During the summer of 1860, again council took up the debate, with some members opposed to the idea of appropriating additional ground and spending any funds on improvements. In June 1860, councilmen toured Fairmount Park to view firsthand the improvements that had been undertaken on the east side of the Schuylkill, including the clearing of industry and some walkways and perimeter plantings, and the land that would be appropriated on the west side. While several members seemed swayed towards supporting the act of the Assembly, there was opposition to the measure, with members of council filibustering to push the matter into the fall session after the summer recess.

By November 1860, with little movement in council, editorials cried out against the “want of action,” stating that not only New York, but even cities such as Baltimore, with one-third the population, were making strides to acquire and complete an attractive public park. However, even though it appeared to park supporters that Philadelphia was rapidly losing ground in the municipal park movement, “example does not shame [council] into action, nor public demand speak loud enough to be heard.”¹⁴ Many of the park’s supporters believed that there simply was no will among council to do anything to further the cause of the park as the state bill was ultimately defeated that year.

This refusal to appropriate funding for acquisition or improvements continued until 1862, when council finally approved the acquisition of the land between the Fairmount Water Works and the Lemon Hill section of Fairmount Park, the Flat Iron area. The *North American* made recommendations for the “neatest and least costly of all

¹³ Ibid. 18 April 1860.

¹⁴ *Philadelphia Inquirer* 16 November 1860.

improvements in the park ... those which render the dense wild wood thickets skirting the hilly river side practicable to pedestrians by means of winding paths.” These small improvements were necessary since council appropriated so little money. The small sums that were appropriated were given to specific projects and therefore movement continued, albeit slowly.¹⁵

By 1864, much of the improvement to the ground between Fairmount (where the reservoirs for the Fairmount Water Works were located) and Coates Street (Fairmount Avenue) was complete, along the lines of the Sidney & Adams plan (see Figure 19). However, the condemnation and clearing of the Flat Iron neighborhood continued to be problematic, until finally this area was appropriated by ordinance of council in June of 1864, for the “preservation of the purity of water.” This was the largest residential area appropriated by the park up to that point. The area included manufacturing plants, with much of the refuse flowing into the forebay intake of the Fairmount Water Works. The purity of the water supply allowed council to deem it appropriate for park purposes. Arguing for the passage of the ordinance, the *North American* persuasively stated that the time was “favorable for liberal outlay upon works of public improvement. The community is prosperous. Wealth is rapidly increasing. Employment is abundant, and the prices of labor remunerative.” In addition, the “small squares which were the pride of Philadelphia in days gone by have long been outgrown. More than two-thirds of the city are [sic] beyond their reach. Moreover, in the development of American civilization public grounds are demanded for purposes which William Penn did not

¹⁵ *North American* (Philadelphia) 15 July 1862.



Figure 19. 1862 Smedley Atlas of Philadelphia, showing the existing limits of Fairmount Park with Environs. The Flat Iron neighborhood, named for its unique shape, is shown between Coates Street, 29th Street and the railroad, north of the Fairmount Basins of the water works. The forebay intake for the water works is shown to the southeast of the dam. The grid extends up to the river in West Philadelphia, worrying park planners that opportunities for park space on the west side would soon be lost to development (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).



Figure 20. The Flat Iron neighborhood, mid-1860s. A typical mid-nineteenth rowhouse Philadelphia neighborhood. (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

dream of.”¹⁶

Despite the recommended improvements, the reality was that “at the rate we are going, there remained a score of years’ work to be done before the place would look finished.” This “laggard pace” was actually a detriment, since every summer work needed to be performed to repair damages to unfinished jobs that occurred in the winter.¹⁷ With the perpetual conflict in council between the Republican supporters of the park and the Democrat detractors, it seemed as if the park would never be completed.

Echoing the state legislature park bill introduced in the early 1860s, State Representative James Miller introduced a bill in 1865 to appropriate additional lands on both sides of the Schuylkill and to implement Palles’s re-landscaping plan for the west banks of the river. Several members of council adamantly opposed the bill, countering that Miller’s bill would add roughly \$10 million to the city’s debt, as the city would be responsible for acquisition fees. When the bill came before the House for a vote, enough city politicians travelled to Harrisburg to ensure its defeat, but Miller’s bill included a provision that a nonpartisan body, patterned on New York’s Central Park Commission, should administer the park. This idea quickly caught on among park advocates, particularly members of the reform-minded Republican Party.

The turning point for the park finally came in 1866 when two events facilitated the creation of the Fairmount Park Commission and the expansion of the park. In that year, Morton McMichael was elected mayor of Philadelphia as a Republican, based upon a campaign that strongly favored public improvements and fiscal responsibility.

¹⁶ Ibid., 2 March 1864.

¹⁷ Ibid., 1 March 1865.

McMichael's platform claimed to represent the new voters establishing themselves in the outer wards, which included areas near the park. Although Republicans had support from some native-born working classes and some German immigrants, the Democratic Party courted the majority immigrant wards situated near the Delaware, such as Kensington, Richmond, Southwark, and Moyamensing. The Democratic platform was that the park simply could not enhance the lives of residents so far removed from Fairmount and the Schuylkill. The Republican Party courted the emergent middle class, many of whom were leaving the congested downtown and settling in areas such as Spring Garden, Fairmount, and West Philadelphia, all near the park. As one editorial for the *North American* explained, "the Republican party in Philadelphia is inseparately identified with the cause of improvement. It takes ground boldly and unequivocally in favor of the enlargement and improvement of the Park. . . . In reply to all this the only cry of the Democrats is in regard to the expense."¹⁸

Secondly, after the Miller legislation was defeated, a group of private citizens, all of whom were Republicans, purchased the 140-acre Lansdowne estate on the west side of the Schuylkill and offered it to the city at cost. The group was comprised of several future park commissioners, including John Welsh, a merchant and former chairman of the Sanitary Fair held in Logan Square in 1864; Joseph Harrison, an industrialist and locomotive designer; A.J. Drexel, the most prominent banker in Philadelphia at the time and future partner of J.P. Morgan; and George Childs, the influential publisher (along with Drexel) of the *Public Ledger*, the foremost Philadelphia newspaper of the period. By early 1867, this change in the city's administration and the continued support of the park

¹⁸ *North American* (Philadelphia) 13 October 1868.

by prominent citizens prompted the introduction and passage of yet another bill before the state legislature, one that created the Fairmount Park Commission and added an additional 2,000 acres to Fairmount Park.¹⁹

The Creation of the Fairmount Park Commission

According to Eli Kirk Price, author of the Consolidation Act and an original Fairmount Park Commissioner, the principal roadblock to the full realization of Fairmount Park was the mentality of public servants, including members of council, who were “slow to follow out the purposes of consolidation,” which included language regarding the creation of a large public park. In addition, Democrats wanted to continue the role of patronage politics in creating a large public works project like the park. With the Republicans in the mayor’s office in the 1860s, the Democrat-controlled council continued to make the park a low priority. Without the intervention of the legislature in creating the park commission, Philadelphia politics might have continued to define the park.

Like his fellow Republican McMichael, Price believed in radically altering the city’s landscape to enlarge the park. Price even suggested that the growth in Philadelphia’s population after consolidation might require that the city own the entire Schuylkill, up to its headwaters located in Schuylkill County, in order to furnish fresh water for the “two, three, or more millions, with manufactories to be supplied in numbers and magnitude not now to be imagined.”²⁰ This was environmental planning on a grand scale, something that was entirely unprecedented for the nineteenth century. For, while

¹⁹ See Milroy, “Assembling Fairmount Park” in Martinez and Talbott.

²⁰ Eli Kirk Price, *The History of the Consolidation of the City of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: J.P. Lippincott & Co., 1873), 121.

New York protected its water supply, the area around the Croton River which fed the Croton Aqueduct was never as industrialized as the northern Schuylkill River, which began in the heart of the anthracite coal region in Schuylkill County and ran through numerous industrial cities and towns such as Reading, Pottstown, Norristown, and Phoenixville, not to mention Manayunk in Philadelphia.

Price was clear that Fairmount Park was purchased and laid out “as a necessary means to protect the supply of water.” However, Price also believed, like the father of American landscape architecture, A.J. Downing, in a didactic park that would “teach its own sciences and other refining culture; constantly refine and improve the whole population; cultivate taste of all in the beauty of its landscapes; make the people more happy and healthy; cause them to live longer and love each other better; for happiness thus consciously derived from the contributions of all is ever sympathetic in kind.” Price believed that the park could teach people landscape gardening, the fine arts, botany, and zoology, benefitting not only residents but also the region and the nation. All of these things could be accomplished, Price argued, because they are no “. . . longer thwarted by local jealousies, nor prevented by deficiency of power” since the passage of the Consolidation Act.²¹

After the formation of the Park Commission in March 1867, the park’s future became much more defined, as the legislation clearly stated that Fairmount Park would be “laid out and maintained forever as an open public place and park, for the health and enjoyment of the people . . . and the preservation of the water supply of the City of Philadelphia.” The Act included the annexation of the west bank of the Schuylkill, which

²¹ Ibid., 125.

had been secured with private funds, including the grounds of the “West Philadelphia Water-Works, which were opposite Lemon Hill, and the noted country seats of Solitude, Egglesfield, Sweet Brier, and Lansdowne.” The Act also called for a permanent administrative body for Fairmount Park to relieve the Chief Engineer of the Water Works and the Commissioner of Public Property from their increasing duties. This newly-formed commission consisted of six ex-officio members, including the mayor, two council representatives, the commissioner of public property, the chief engineer and surveyor, and the chief engineer of the Water Works, together with ten citizens appointed for five-year terms by the District Court and the Court of Common Pleas. The commission, once it was fully organized, had power over the care and management of the enlarged Fairmount Park on both sides of the Schuylkill, and all plans and expenditures for the improvement and maintenance of the same.²² However, though the commission was given quasi-governmental status from the beginning, it continued to rely on council to appropriate funds for improvements and maintenance. As the *North American* made clear,

It is mere moonshine to talk about having a park unless we are prepared to pay the expense of keeping it always in good order. No public work requires more care than a park. The walks must be well graveled and drained; the grass kept clear of weeds; the trees in good condition; the effect of floods and storms repaired; the shrubbery looked after, and the work of renewing must go on constantly. Nothing of this kind was provided by Councils.²³

The importance of elite Republicans, many of whom were from the law, engineering, or business professions, to the foundation of the commission cannot be

²² Laws, Ordinances and Regulations Relating to Fairmount Park and other Parks Under the Control of the Fairmount Park Commission (Philadelphia: Fairmount Park Commission, 1933), 9-13.

²³ *North American* (Philadelphia) 1 July 1867.

overestimated. Unlike Central Park, where landscape architecture under the leadership of Olmsted and Vaux was most prominent, Fairmount Park was to be an engineer's park. No less than six of the first park commissioners were civil engineers or industrialists, including General George Gordon Meade, Chief Surveyor Strickland Kneass, Chief Engineer of the Water Works Frederic Graff, Jr., John Cresson, William Sellers, and Joseph Harrison.

The commission's first order of business was to complete an accurate survey of the park as appropriated by the legislature. Commissioner and Chief Surveyor of Philadelphia Strickland Kneass created the *Map of the Farms and Lots Embraced Within the Limits of Fairmount Park*. The *North American* pointed out that "this was never thought of by the previous management, although the necessity and usefulness of it must be obvious to all."²⁴

The work to improve the park primarily took place between 1867 and 1872. After the completion of the topographical survey, the commission hired a professional staff, including a superintendent, sub-engineer, and assistant secretary, so that "hereafter the affairs of the Park will in the first place be constantly under the supervision of an able official; in the second place be regulated by scientific principles, and in the third place be duly reported to the public by the paid Secretary of the Board."²⁵ The work of the commissioners was divided among several standing committees: Land Purchases and Damages, Plans and Improvements, Superintendence and Police, Finance, Audit and an Executive Committee.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

Park Superintendent Thayer mentioned that “in the year 1867, the grounds included within the limits of the Park presented in general a very rugged and unsightly

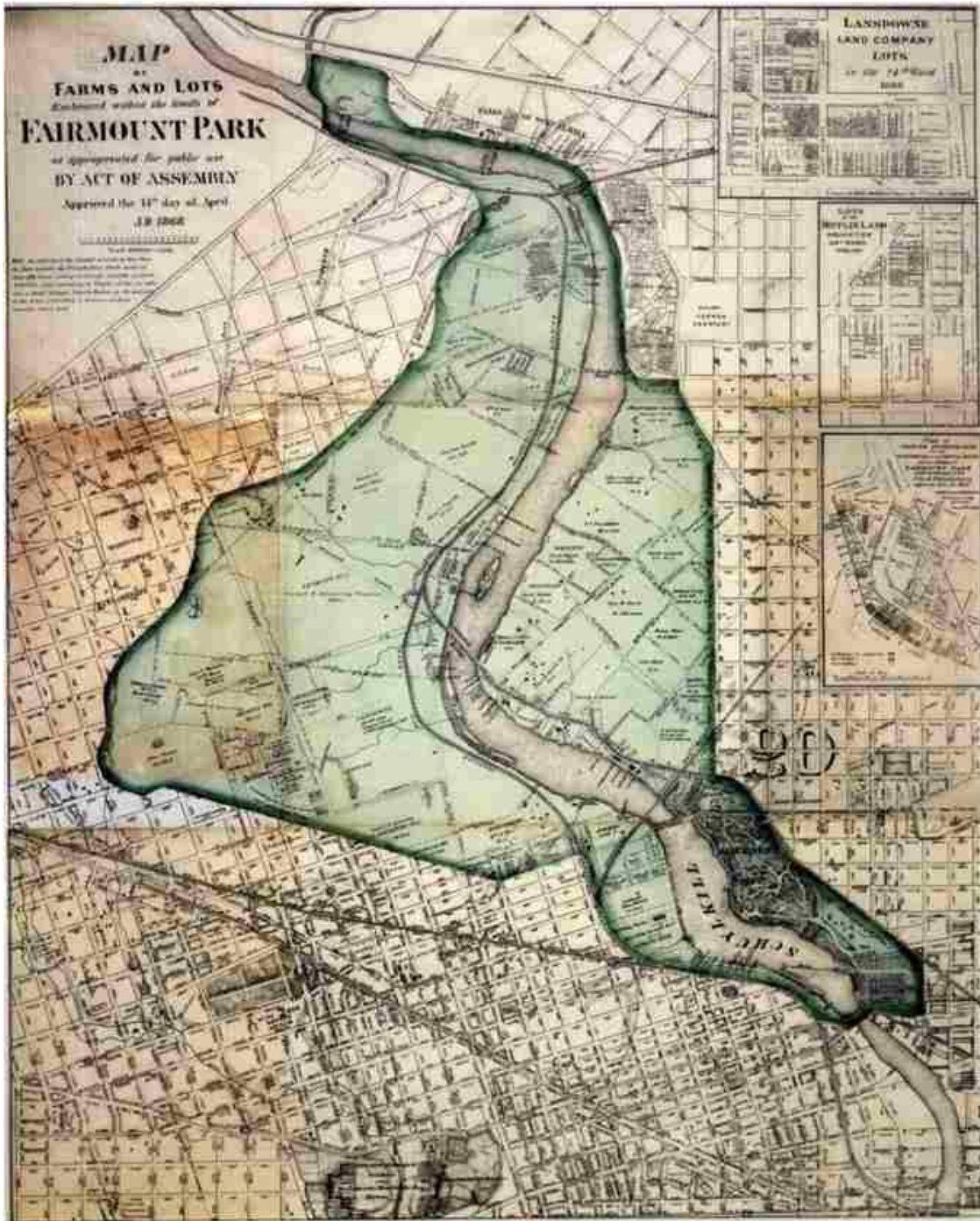


Figure 21. *Map of the Farms and Lots Embraced Within the Limits of Fairmount Park, 1868*. The three insets to the right represent residential areas encompassed within the limits: the Lansdowne Land Company in West Philadelphia, the Mifflin Lands in East Park and the Flat Iron neighborhood (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

appearance, relieved only by the natural beauty of the landscape in many places and the general adaptability of the whole area to the purposes for which it had been appropriated.” Certain sections of Old Park, the area from the Fairmount Water Works to the Girard Avenue Bridge, were “low and swampy, and overgrown with brush and rank weeds and grass.” Previously, these grounds were used as “deposit ground for refuse material from that section of the City.” The section was “entirely built up on the north side with stone, brick, and frame houses of various descriptions.” Thirty-two residences were located within the park’s boundaries, all of which were demolished in 1869.²⁶ The demolition of the entire neighborhood of the Flat Iron finally took place at that time.



Figure 22. Demolition and grading of Flat Iron, 1869 (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

Unlike Central Park in New York, Fairmount Park retained several buildings, most of which were historic houses with connections to early Philadelphia history. Following in the tradition of retaining Lemon Hill Mansion in the Old Park, these houses included Mount Pleasant, Woodford, Laurel Hill, Ormiston, Rockland, and Strawberry

²⁶ *Annual Report of the Commissioners of Fairmount Park* (Philadelphia, 1878), 46-49.

Mansion in East Fairmount Park, and Belmont Mansion, Boelson House, Chamounix, Ridgeland, Solitude, and Sweetbriar in West Fairmount Park. The decision to retain certain houses while demolishing others revolved around the historical importance of a given house.

The commission spent its first two years organizing the various committees, creating reports, completing acquisitions, and hiring a professional engineering corps that surveyed and created maps and plans. The earliest improvements, begun in 1869, consisted of the construction of Lansdowne Drive and other roads and paths in the West Park, including a three-and-a-half mile drive connecting the western end of the Girard Avenue Bridge to George's Hill. This property, donated by the George family, an old Quaker family, was the first of many large private donations of land by wealthy Philadelphians to the park in the nineteenth century. In addition, park engineers built four miles of pedestrian walkways and constructed seven miles of carriage drives in the West Park, which, combined with the walkways, equaled eleven miles opened for public use by the end of 1869. In East Park, a roadway from the Old Park located around Sedgeley was graded to the Girard Avenue Bridge, allowing greater access to the West Park gateway.

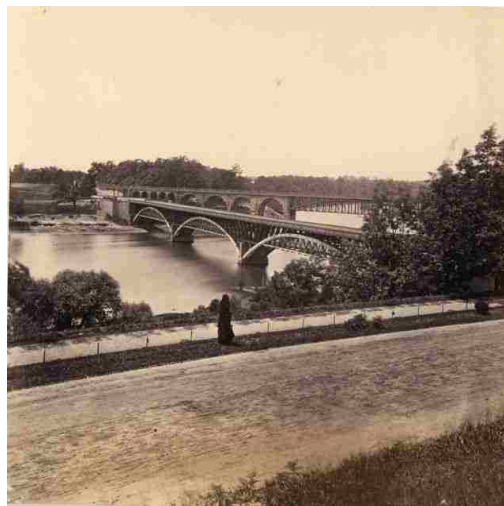


Figure 23. East Fairmount Park Carriage Road and Walkway with Girard Avenue Bridge crossing the Schuylkill, c. 1869. The laying out of river drives were the first improvements by the commission upon the completion of building demolition. (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

The Committee of Practical Engineers, consisting of Graff as chairman, Cresson, Kneass, Sellers, and Meade, investigated the quality of the water, and found that it “is of undoubted excellence when free from impurities introduced by human agency, standing in the first rank as a water proper and desirable for ordinary domestic uses, perfectly soft, pleasant to the taste, and remarkably free from organic matter.” The members recommended that the “City retain the Schuylkill as a source of supply” and that the commission urge upon council “the importance of carrying out plans suggested for the preservation of the purity of the water.” It is clear from their report that the commission anticipated a great growth in the city’s population over the next twenty years and saw its primary role as environmental planners, responsible for maintaining a clean water supply, since it was more cost-effective for the city to continue to use the Schuylkill rather than to procure a supply elsewhere, as New York had done. In order to do so, they believed that “guarding its banks on either side, for a sufficient distance from the pumping apparatus at Fairmount, against filthy deposits and polluting drainage; and to effect this the ownership of these banks and the adjoining lands must be vested absolutely in the City, so that it can apply and enforce measures of protection.” In their first annual report, the commissioners also stated the secondary nature of the park was “public” space, while reaffirming the primary importance of pure water: “The grounds necessary for this purpose are to constitute the Park, and thus while their possession will give to the people the opportunity of breathing the fresh, free air, in the midst of rural surroundings,

their acquisition is indispensable to the health and comfort of the people, as connected with the water supply of the City.”²⁷

During the first decade of the Fairmount Park Commission, the park’s senior negotiator in all land dealings was Eli Kirk Price, who encouraged land owners within the park’s boundaries to donate or sell their land to the city. These properties included a range of buildings: hotels, beer vaults, ice houses, wharves, oil refineries, dwellings, mills and manufactories on the Schuylkill and the Wissahickon.²⁸ When landowners did not agree to sell, the commissioners used eminent domain to acquire all titles to park land.

The commission deemed it wise that all communications regarding acquisition from the claimants should be received as confidential. According to the official record of the Fairmount Park Commission, this allowed “no feeling of hostility against the Park,”²⁹ although later they admitted that initial criticisms called the park a “rich man’s park.” It is unclear, however, if these complaints came from the claimants themselves.³⁰ By the time the Park Commission completed all purchases for land, it had paid a total of \$6,105,069 for the area included in East Park (510 acres), West Park (1,232 acres) and the Wissahickon (416 acres), for a total of 2,275 acres within the park proper.³¹

In addition to his activities as the primary agent of land acquisition for the park, Price was a proponent of tree planting, using the park as a platform to raise awareness of the importance of urban trees. Long before any discussion of the environmental and aesthetic attributes of urban tree canopies, Fairmount Park incorporated trees into its

²⁷ Fairmount Park Commission, *First Annual Report* (Philadelphia: King & Baird, 1869), 13-17.

²⁸ *Annual Report of the Commissioners of Fairmount Park* (Philadelphia: 1878), 25.

²⁹ *First Annual Report*, 19.

³⁰ *Annual Report, 1878*, 20.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 71. The area was known as the “park proper” because at times the Commission included the extent of the water surface of the Schuylkill River within the limits of the park, totaling 373 acres and the area of outlying lots paid for out of park loans, totaling 143 acres. Therefore, the Park sometimes used the figure 2,791 acres for total park area.

mission. In his 1877 lecture, “Sylviculture,” delivered to the American Philosophical Society, Price explained that Fairmount Park was at the forefront of tree planting in the entire state of Pennsylvania. He was an early proponent of the preservation of American forests, and argued that in Pennsylvania “we have no considerable tree planting, except it be that in Fairmount Park.” This differed with Central Park, where trees were selected based on aesthetic qualities, following the Greensward plan of Olmsted and Vaux.³² In contrast, Fairmount Park contained several stands of mature forest, and Price believed in their conservation. In addition, the park would further another cause favored by Price, that of temperance : “let us open up the roadside springs and wells, and furnish the cup for cold water; and maintain the supply of medicinal herbs, roots and barks. This will begin in the Park as soon as the Pharmacists will lend their efficient co-operation.” For, as Price pointed out, the water springs would provide the public a source of fresh water, which “except in the hospitals of our large cities, and county poorhouses, the sick wayfarer must depend upon humane tavern landlords and benevolent citizens, who seldom fail in Christian charity.”³³

The largest number of employees in the park was 940 in 1869, the majority of whom were unskilled laborers used to demolish buildings, grade walkways, and construct roads. This number also included skilled jobs in the engineering and horticultural professions, as well as the Fairmount Park Guard, several of whom were skilled horseman who had served in the United States Cavalry during the Civil War, including many Irish immigrants. The Park Guard enforced strict Victorian codes of conduct in the

³² Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*, 130, 194.

³³ Eli Kirk Price, *Sylviculture* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1877), 15. Price spoke to the Pennsylvania legislature on 6 and 7 April 1855 on a bill “to restrain the sale of intoxicating liquors.”

park, including forbidding gambling and abusive language and regulating all traffic to not exceed seven miles per hour.

During 1870, the main entrance to the park, the Green Street Drive, was

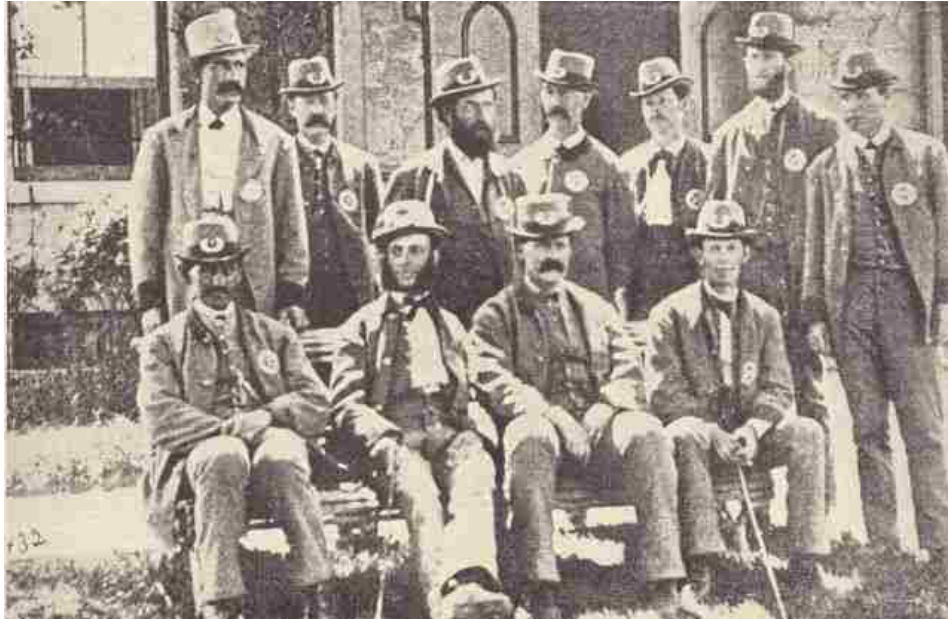


Figure 24. The original members of the Fairmount Park Guard, 1869. Originally consisting of Irish immigrants and Civil War veterans, the guard provided steady employment during this time period (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

constructed while the construction of the Promontory Rock tunnel, a major feat of engineering, commenced that year, connecting when finished the Old Park with the newer East Park above the Girard Avenue Bridge. The carriage concourse in the West Park around George's Hill was improved, and an ornamental pavilion was added on George's Hill, providing views into the Park and the downtown of the City. A walk around Belmont Mansion was improved, and the Belmont Station on the Reading Railroad opened. Improvements were also made to Belmont Avenue and Elm (now Parkside) Avenue in West Park. Horseback riding was encouraged in the Park, as a bridle path opened from the Lansdowne entrance to Chamounix, passing over the grounds of Sweet Briar, Lansdowne, Belmont and Ridgeland. The park was also fenced along its

boundaries in order for park users to use the official entrances, under the purview of the Park Guard.

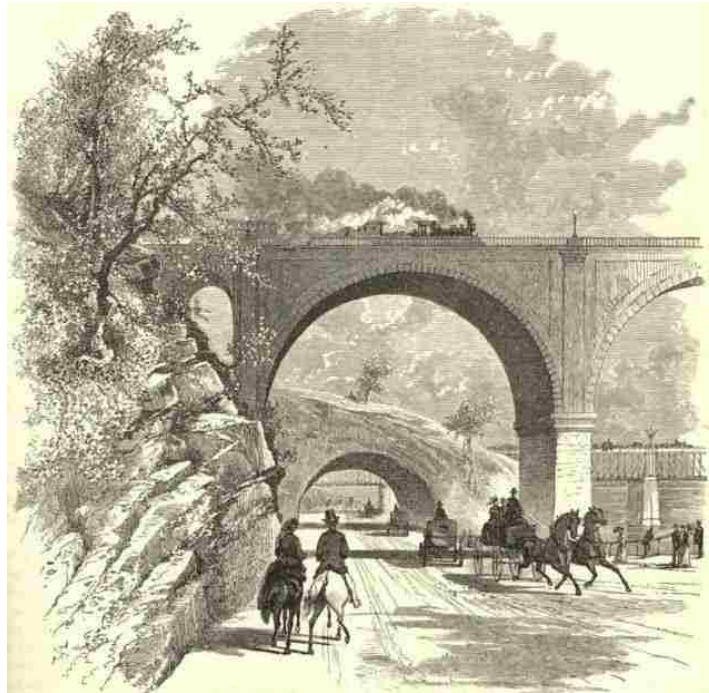


Figure 25. The East River Drive along the Schuylkill passes through the Promontory Rock Tunnel, 1872. Note the existence of the railroad in the park, very unlike other major American parks of the period (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

Because of the improvements undertaken by the park commission, the public began using the park in even greater numbers in the early 1870s, reaching it by either private carriage, several street railways from all points in the city, or “hackney-coach by the hour” from “any depot or hotel.”³⁴ According to reports of the Fairmount Park Guard, a record number of visitors came to the park even while the 1869 improvements were being made—an aggregate of 257,558 people passing through the Park from July 1 to November 1, 1869. While the majority of the users came for walks and carriage rides, the Park also hosted “Gala-Days” featuring organized ice-skating on the Schuylkill during the winter, several regattas, military parades, band concerts on Lemon Hill, George’s

³⁴ Charles S. Keyser, *Fairmount Park: Sketches of its Scenery, Waters, and History* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen and Haffelfinger, 1871), 1.

Hill, and Belmont on summer afternoons, and German festivals, since Germans were the “best examples in the use of these grounds,” as German immigrant areas were located adjacent to the park.³⁵

Fairmount Park entered the 1870s as the largest public space in any American city. With the addition of the Wissahickon, the park attracted the attention of other cities, including New York and Boston, as the “most successful achievement of its kind anywhere attempted.”³⁶ In addition to creating a vast pleasure ground, the commission still took great pains to ensure that the park’s first purpose was always the health of the water supply. Mindful of its critics, who complained that the park constituted a tax burden, the commission stated that “far from increasing the burdens of the tax-payer,” the park will “ultimately lighten them” — reasoning that if it did not stop the rapid growth of manufacturing along the Schuylkill and Wissahickon, especially that which was connected with oil refineries, it would have “so corrupted that stream that it could no longer be relied on as the main source of our water supply.”³⁷

Promoters of the park, cognizant that capitalism and industrial growth remained the bedrock of urban centers such as Philadelphia, couched their appeal for the importance of public health and sanitation in economic terms, therefore making it more acceptable for the Victorian age. To the reform-minded park advocates, if the city was not made sanitary, and if clean water, the nineteenth-century alternative to alcohol, was not made available, it would not prosper. The early commissioners had great foresight, working to protect and reclaim a natural resource that was previously exploited and despoiled for private gain. By removing industrial usage and ensuring the protection of

³⁵ Ibid., 42.

³⁶ Fairmount Park Commission, *Third Annual Report of the Commissioners of Fairmount Park* (Philadelphia: King & Baird, 1871), 5.

³⁷ Ibid., 6.

the natural environment, park leaders in Philadelphia were early environmentalists, more in line with the nascent nature movement of this time period to preserve natural areas that would later become the National Park Service, than with the urban park movement associated with Olmsted.

The creation and execution of Fairmount Park is unique among American urban parks created during the nineteenth century for three primary reasons. First, Fairmount Park was developed specifically to protect the water supply of the city; therefore, its placement along the banks of the Schuylkill River and its main tributary, the Wissahickon Creek, was never open for debate. The process of selecting the location of parks was always a compromise between political, economic, and demographic considerations, but finding the land was always the most important factor. In New York, the controversy between the legislature, which authorized the purchase of Jones Wood, a 154-acre wooded area along the East River, and those clamoring for the much larger Central Park, revolved around accessibility, size of the park, and the costs of purchasing the property.³⁸ Although there were controversies in most urban areas over park locations, in practice, the overwhelming majority of large parks in the nineteenth century within the city limits were placed on land for which “there was no competition at all, those unusable for other purposes.”³⁹ For this reason, New York’s Central Park was built upon poor, rocky soil; Chicago’s South Park system sat on a swampy wasteland; and San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park arose from sand dunes located on that city’s periphery. In contrast, the area of Fairmount Park was not a vast wasteland; it was, in fact, heavily used and contributed greatly to the burgeoning industrial economy. By acquiring economically viable land and

³⁸ Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*, 37-42.

³⁹ Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982), 26.

transforming it from a resource to be exploited for private gain, the park commission actively changed both the economic and environmental landscape, altering Philadelphia's ecology in the process.

Second, because of this lack of flexibility over its location, park design became a secondary issue. While council retained Sidney & Adams to plan the original layout of the park, they were not retained after the acceptance of the plan, and their short-lived firm dissolved soon after. Once established, the commission never hired an outstanding landscape architect of any national prominence to lay out an overarching plan; consequently, the park design unfolded in a piecemeal fashion. After the acquisition of most of the appropriated lands and the completed survey work in 1870, the commission adopted a gradual "general plan, which, while blending into a symmetrical whole the separate features of the Park, would give to each feature its due relation and prominence."⁴⁰ Of course, this differed greatly from Central Park or San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, surveyed in 1870, which were constructed from an overarching design document.

Third, in its first decade, the commission allowed for the preservation of pre-existing railroad and historic buildings, as well as statuary and even a forty-two acre zoological garden, something any Olmsted park—designed with the express interest of placing the urban resident within a naturalized landscape, with quiet repose—would never allow during that era. According to the prevailing ethos of park designers in the late nineteenth century, "statuary reminded the viewer of man's handiwork, not nature's, and, because it was associated with European aristocratic formal gardens, it was an anathema

⁴⁰ *Third Annual Report of the Commissioner's of Fairmount Park*, 1871, 10-11.

to democrats.”⁴¹ In Philadelphia, the creation of the Fairmount Park Art Association (FPAA) in 1872, a private organization chartered by the Pennsylvania legislature to adorn the park with works of art, created a vastly different type of park than one matching the Olmstedian vision. As Benjamin Harris Brewster, a prominent attorney who had studied law under Eli Kirk Price, pointed out in his address to the FPAA in 1872, “as you enter the West Park you behold an object that to the eye of the thoughtful mind is at once a subject of admiration and surprise. I allude to the railroad bridge that spans the river. What more fitting and striking monument could be conceived, to illustrate and adorn the genius and vocation of our people.”⁴² The artificial, man-made environment that adorned the park from the beginning was viewed as a positive addition to the natural landscape.

Since the land that the park acquired was valuable, especially in the era of water-powered mills, although steam was beginning to replace water as a source of industrial power, the commissioners spent a considerable amount of time and money acquiring the factories and other businesses along the river and creek. In its 1872 report, the commission explained its reasons for the enormous costs, reminding them that park land was located in close proximity to the thickly-built portions of the city, and therefore was “entitled to be estimated at metropolitan prices.” In addition, since the land acquired featured “manufacturing establishments of great extent and expensive auxiliaries . . . due compensation had to be allowed.” The commissioners reassured the public that:

from the outset . . . [we] never lost sight of the fact that Philadelphia is an immense manufacturing center, and is dependent, in a large measure, for her present and future prosperity, on the support and development of her industrial interests and resources, everything that can should be done to cherish these, and nothing . . . should be permitted to disturb them.⁴³

⁴¹ Cranz, 55.

⁴² Fairmount Park Art Association, *First Annual Report* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1872), 11.

⁴³ *Fourth Annual Report of the Commissioners of Fairmount Park* (Philadelphia: King & Baird, 1872), 7.

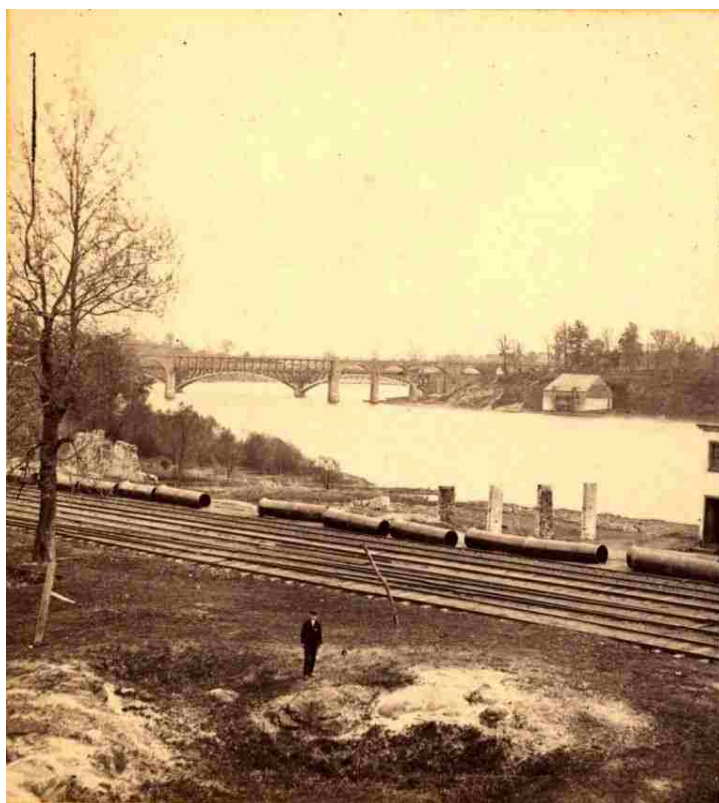


Figure 26. The building of West Fairmount Park, c. early 1870s. The ruins of a demolished factory are along the Schuylkill's banks, between railroad tracks and the river (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

The Continued Struggle to Protect the Water Supply

Despite the initial purpose of the park to preserve the water supply, the Schuylkill continued to become increasingly polluted, primarily because of the manner in which the city government dealt with its sanitation problems. Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, the city continued to suffer through epidemics, several of which (cholera and typhoid) were directly connected to the impurities of the water supply. Most city politicians and bureaucrats possessed very limited knowledge of public health issues. Nepotism and favoritism were deeply entrenched in city government, often to the detriment of real sanitation reform, as positions requiring expertise in this field were sometimes filled by the patronage system. The local medical community, although maintaining a rich tradition within the city's educational institutions, did very little to

promote public health and hygiene. The water department was subject to the politics of council, which declined to fully report on the problems of the contaminated water supply since it could have an adverse effect on business and industry. Of course, germ theory was still in its infancy during the 1860s and 1870s.

In 1868, a bill, “Relative to the Schuylkill Water,” was introduced in the state legislature seeking to extend the protection of the water supply from the Flat Rock Dam in Manayunk, fifteen miles north to the Norristown Dam, in neighboring Montgomery County. In addition, the bill sought to protect the water supply in the area of the Fairmount Pool, adding that anyone owning property would be liable for pollution between Manayunk’s Flat Rock Dam and the Fairmount Dam at the Water Works. This bill included all of the mills and industry in Montgomery County located along the western banks of the Schuylkill, across from Manayunk, and in East Falls, the small industrial village located south of Manayunk in Philadelphia. It was clear that the bill was meant to protect Philadelphia’s water supply, as opposed to that of the suburban districts, for any suits to enforce the act “shall be brought in the name and for the use of the city of Philadelphia.”⁴⁴

Not surprisingly, the owners of industrial sites along the Schuylkill immediately opposed the bill. At a meeting at the Masonic Hall in Manayunk three days after the introduction of the bill, the industrialists appointed a Committee on Statistics, which would report back to the larger committee and provide the basis for a lengthy petition. This petition listed the ninety-two manufacturers along the Schuylkill between Fairmount Dam and Norristown Dam, including nine paper manufacturers, two chemical works, one

⁴⁴ *Memorial to the Senate & House of Representatives of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: J.B. Chandler, 1868), 1.

print works, five machine works, fifty-three textile mills, two oil works, three flour mills, twelve iron works, two soap works, and two gas companies, employing a total of 9,362 workers and producing \$23.3 million per year in sales of goods and securities. The petition also stated that with the extra capital investment expended for equipment, machinery, and dwellings, the total value which these mills and factories represented was roughly \$36 million. Not stopping at the bill's adverse effect on industry, the petition added that there would be repercussions to the agricultural areas of Montgomery, Chester, and Bucks counties, as farming communities would be deprived of this great market for their products since workers and industry would be forced to relocate from the lower Schuylkill region. In addition, the petition, of course, addressed the business interests of the city of Philadelphia, as it "threatened destruction of a large amount of taxable property, and the diversion to other markets, of products now particularly controlled in our city, and an important element of its prosperity." The committee argued that the growth of industry was as essential to the prosperity of the city as the supply of pure water to the health of its inhabitants. Finally, the committee appealed to the legislature to "protect us in the pursuit of our avocations and forbid any interference therewith, on any *doubtful* experiments to purify the Schuylkill River, instead of securing a supply of pure water free from the possibility of contamination."⁴⁵

In response to the petition, a letter to the *Sunday Ledger and Transcript*, titled "The Wholesale Poison Question," argued that the real position of the petitioners was this: "a few men plant themselves by the side of a stream, the water of which supports the life of one million human beings. Deliberately, they empty into that stream foul matter

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 5-8.

which, in large or small quantities, is taken into the stomachs of this great multitude of people. The manufacturers know this must be the case when they make the river their common sewer.” The letter continued to argue that “the people have the best right to the river; because they are in the majority; because they erected their works before the factories were thought of; and because the Almighty placed the stream there as a source of water supply, and not as a sewer.” The argument being made that the responsibility of the legislature was to protect the people and to “let manufacturers look out for themselves when their interests militate against those of the whole community.”⁴⁶ Despite this appeal to the public good, the interests of the manufacturers seemed to win over the legislature, and the bill was easily defeated.

Finally, in 1875, after years of inactivity from council, an independent commission of engineers, consisting of water department and commission personnel, investigated and reported on the possible pollution of the water supply. Colonel Julius W. Adams issued a report specifically dealing with the causes of the pollution of the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers. He found that the amount of refuse from the slaughterhouses, breweries, and above all the manufactories at Manayunk made the water unfit for domestic use. In addition, the principal cause was the sulphuric acid from coal mines and refuse and sewage from the population that drained into the Fairmount Pool. The amount of raw sewage going into the Schuylkill was astounding, and there was little the commission could do to end it. By that time, several of the city’s streams had become, in effect, sewers, and the filth of the city littered the streets and the banks of the creeks

⁴⁶ *Sunday Ledger and Transcript* (Philadelphia) 29 March 1868.

which eventually found its way into the drinking water of the city.⁴⁷ In the 1870s, however, there was not a general consensus among the engineering and medical professions on the effectiveness of stream purification. Therefore, there was no sense of urgency to spend money to treat sewage for health reasons, so the raw, untreated sewage was dumped into the city's water supply. Indeed, as the industrialist petitioners in 1868 had argued, any attempt at purifying the Schuylkill could be deemed doubtful at best. It seemed that there was very little that could be done to maintain the purity of the Schuylkill, especially in the face of industrial and population growth. The growth of industrial jobs attracted waves of newcomers to the city in the 1870s, when the city's population jumped from 674,000 in 1870 to 847,000 in 1880, an increase of over 25 percent. With the city generating such growth based around industry, it is not surprising that bills curbing industrial development would be defeated. After this report was filed, city council sought no action against industrialists and the pollution of the Schuylkill continued unabated well into the twentieth century.

In the Centennial year of 1876, the commission finally decided to take matters into its own hands. As the nation celebrated its new industrial power, the commission, acting under the power vested by the commonwealth and the city to act as the guardians of the water supply within the limits of Fairmount Park, brought legal action against mill owners John and James Dobson, owners of Dobson's Carpet Mill. Although Dobson's mill complex was just outside of the boundaries of the Park in East Falls, it was using both the Wissahickon and the Schuylkill for waste disposal for the dyes from its wool and cloth mills. The commissioners brought the suit since Dobson was directly affecting the

⁴⁷ *Report on the Water Supply for the City of Philadelphia, made by the Commission of Engineers Appointed by the Mayor under the Ordinance of Councils, approved June 5, 1875* (Philadelphia: EC Markley & Son, Printers, 1875).

water supply within the confines of Fairmount Park. Finally, in 1880, the Dobson Mill won the case. The attorney for the mill owners successfully argued that property rights trumped public health as “health of a population rapidly approximating one million souls” would be imperiled by “the destruction of a most important branch of the manufacturing industries . . . upon which this great city mainly depends for her revenues and without which she could never have afforded to acquire or maintain such a park at all.”⁴⁸

By the time of the 1880 decision to allow pollution to continue unabated, the powers of the commission were already very much diminished, having been dealt a crushing blow by the decision of the Court of Common Pleas in the case of the *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania ex-relazione Morton McMichael, et al, Commissioners of Fairmount Park vs. William K. Park, et al, members of Select and Common Council of the City of Philadelphia*, decided on November 16, 1875. The overriding problem facing the commission was its reliance on council for its budget, seriously hindering its ability to act independently. Every year, it had to justify its expenditures and hope for their approval.⁴⁹

The commission was asking the court for an appropriation to be made, by loan, for one million dollars to be used for permanent improvements to the park, especially as it was the year prior to the Centennial and there were several improvements that were needed above and beyond the typical yearly budget. In 1868, the state had amended the original act of assembly, requiring the city to pay for all permanent improvements, stating

⁴⁸ William Wilkins Carr, *History of the Fairmount Pool, and the Rights of the City of Philadelphia Therein* (Philadelphia: George H. Buchanan and Company, 1886), 18-22.

⁴⁹ Fairmount Park Scrapbook Collection, 1869-1903, Vol. 1: “Park Mandamus Decision,” 7.

that the City of Philadelphia would be authorized and *required* to raise money for Fairmount Park, and “for the laying out and construction thereof for public use.”⁵⁰

The basis for the commission’s case was that the word “required,” as they believed this imposed upon the council an imperative duty to borrow for the improvement of the park. President Judge Martin Thayer opined that when land was appropriated, compensation was certainly due the former land owner, but land could only be taken by the consent of council, so there would be no reason for the commission to ever ask for a decision in those cases.

The second portion of the judge’s decision clearly defined the powers of the commission, which would extend well into the twentieth century. In the question of who was to decide what loans were necessary for construction and permanent improvements in the park, Judge Thayer asked if commissioners were allowed to determine the necessity of the improvements. If so, then it followed as a corollary that the city was bound to create loans whenever the commissioners called for them, for any amount. In addition, the power to indefinitely increase the debt of the city was vested in the commissioners. Therefore council members, the representatives of the people, directly responsible to them for any abuse of power or mismanagement of their affairs, would have no control over the city debt. According to Thayer, this was a great power to claim and was “in derogation of the ordinary methods of administering municipal government in a republican country and most dangerous in its tendencies.” Thayer could not find

⁵⁰ Ibid.

that the state legislature, upon creating the commission ever gave them power “either in express words or by necessary implication.”⁵¹

According to Thayer, the powers of the commission were the government, care, and management of the park. The commission could appoint staff, create rules and regulations, vacate and open roads and streets in the park, grant licenses for park concessions (including a passenger railroad), employ a police force, have control over all the property in the park limits, be in charge of all construction projects, and improvements and maintenance in the park, while never actually being allowed the budget to achieve this.⁵² Therefore, the commission, in order to function, was forced to rely completely on council approval of its submitted budget. Effectively, the court refused the commission any legal standing. The commission declined to appeal.

In the face of this ruling, the commission continued to lead the efforts for a park planning in Philadelphia. The fact that the decision was handed down on the eve of the great Centennial Exhibition in Fairmount Park was ironic as this event led to both an increased visitation to Fairmount Park and a more powerful role for the commissioners in the civic life of Philadelphia. In fact, the layout and planning of the Centennial would expose fairgoers to the possibilities of a planned environment, something which would ultimately lead to the future of Fairmount Park as a fully integrated park system, reaching every corner of the city.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

Chapter III

The Birth of the Modern Day Park System in Philadelphia, 1876-1905

The period between the Centennial Exposition in 1876 and the 1905 proposal for a full-fledged park system expanding into every section of the city represented the genesis of the reformist ideals of twentieth-century city planning in Philadelphia. The private citizen-led City Parks Association (CPA), created in 1888, believed in park space as a means to organize an improved city. These goals differed from the primary objectives of the original commissioners, who were focused on the protection of the main water supply of the Schuylkill, thereby fixing the geographical location of the original park. By advocating for open spaces throughout the city, to protect the environment during a time of great population expansion and urban development, the CPA had transformed itself by the first decade of the twentieth century from an organization advocating for small parks in poorer neighborhoods to one with a comprehensive plan for the entire city centered on park space. Its efforts, when fully realized, dynamically altered the spatial development of the city in the first half of the twentieth century. By making park space the primary planning tool for development, the CPA became the catalyst for developing entire areas of Philadelphia.

The era of the original commission ended roughly by the late 1880s, by which time the majority of early commissioners were deceased. In its place, the commission headed by “Boss” Jim McManes, formerly the head of the powerful gas trust and a symbol of Philadelphia corruption, ceased to be an advocate for park planning. This strengthened the independent CPA’s power to advocate for park growth separately from city government and the commission. By the turn of the twentieth century, the protection

of the water supply was a failure, since the commission could not secure any more land along the Schuylkill and polluted water continued to enter the river unabated. Thus, the primary mission of the park transitioned from protection of the water supply to geographic expansion centered on Philadelphia's watersheds, with the CPA leading these efforts.

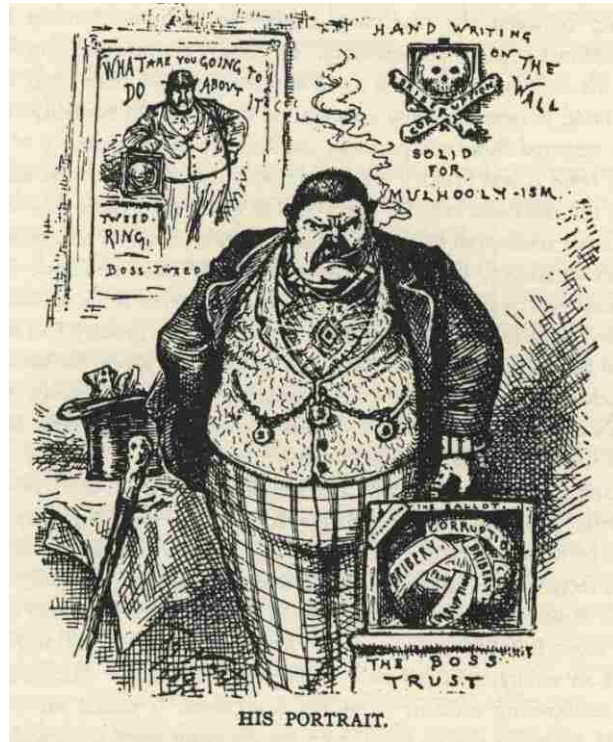


Figure 27. “Boss” Jim McManes as caricatured by Thomas Nast, 1889. McManes was president of the Fairmount Park Commission from 1890 until his death in 1899. A symbol of Philadelphia corruption, he was the opposite of early park planners such as Morton McMichael and Eli Kirk Price. This vacuum allowed the CPA to begin park planning. (*Solid for Mulhooly: A Political Satire by Rufus Shapely*, Philadelphia, 1889).

During this period, Fairmount Park transformed from a geographic area along the Schuylkill to something resembling the later Fairmount Park system: a planned, open-space environment touching nearly every section of the city. This occurred in spite of the park commission—the nascent planning movement in Philadelphia in the late nineteenth century was primarily the result of the efforts of the CPA and a dedicated group of activists.

The Centennial Exposition and Its Effect on Fairmount Park

While the Centennial Exposition had a profound impact by announcing the entry of the United States onto the world's stage as an economic and industrial power, the importance of the Fair to the history of the commission and Fairmount Park is little known. Occurring between May and November 1876, the Fair transformed over 200 acres in West Fairmount Park with over 400 structures, most of which were meant to be temporary. The Centennial was described by the early park planners on the commission as the most memorable event associated with Fairmount Park, since it "was the Park, because of its identification with the men and scenes of our revolutionary era and its unequalled adaptedness to the purpose, that secured for Philadelphia the presence of the Exposition; it was the Park, because of its unlimited capabilities, that enabled the managers of the Exposition to give to it those magnificent proportions . . ."¹

The planning and execution of the fair, carried out by the commission and its architect, the young German-born Hermann Schwarzmann, was unprecedented in urban America at the time as it was much larger in size than New York's Crystal Palace exhibition of 1853. Schwarzmann, first employed by the commission in 1869, would become its architect and chief engineer, carrying out the design of many of the buildings, although he was not formally trained as an architect. The commission sent Schwarzmann to Vienna in 1873 to study European models of architecture. Upon his return, he designed several primary buildings based on European models, including Horticultural Hall (based on the Alhambra) and the Beaux-Arts style Art Gallery (Memorial Hall).

¹ Fairmount Park Commission, *Annual Report of the Commissioners of Fairmount Park*, 1878, 5-6.

As early as 1866, Philadelphia was suggested as a site for a centennial celebration. In December of that year, Professor John Campbell of Wabash College in Indiana wrote a letter to Mayor Morton McMichael suggesting that an international exhibition be held in Philadelphia. It is conceivable that McMichael used this idea to further the acquisition of land in West Philadelphia along the Schuylkill that would become West Fairmount Park and later the grounds of the fair. Within one year after this suggestion, the land was acquired in West Fairmount Park by an Act of Assembly.²

The competition between Philadelphia and other major American cities to host a centennial exposition was fierce, with New York, Washington, and Chicago all vying for the honor. When Pennsylvania U.S. Senator Simon Cameron introduced the bill for the celebration in 1871, New York members vehemently opposed it on the grounds that they had first suggested it and that New York was a far superior city than Philadelphia. While the case was made that the “national celebration must be where the nation was born,” the recent acquisition of Fairmount Park also worked to Philadelphia’s advantage. The open and relatively unimproved nature of the recently acquired West Fairmount Park finalized Philadelphia as the natural choice of the site selection committee.³

In the years leading up to the centennial, foreign visitors traveled to Philadelphia to see the site of the future world’s fair. Friedrich Ratzel, a German travel writer, visited the city during the winter of 1873-1874 and remarked that the upcoming exhibition gave the park “a double interest since it is also a good example of land use planning for all those who take an interest in the good health of urban populations.” Ratzel compared Fairmount Park to Central Park, commenting that unlike New York, Philadelphia

² Faith Pizor, “Preparations for the Centennial Exhibition of 1876,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 94 (April 1970), 214-215.

³ *North American* (Philadelphia) 23 February 1871.

“needed only to deviate from Nature here and there by removing an occasional rough spot in order to be utilized to its maximum as a recreation area.” In contrast, Central Park

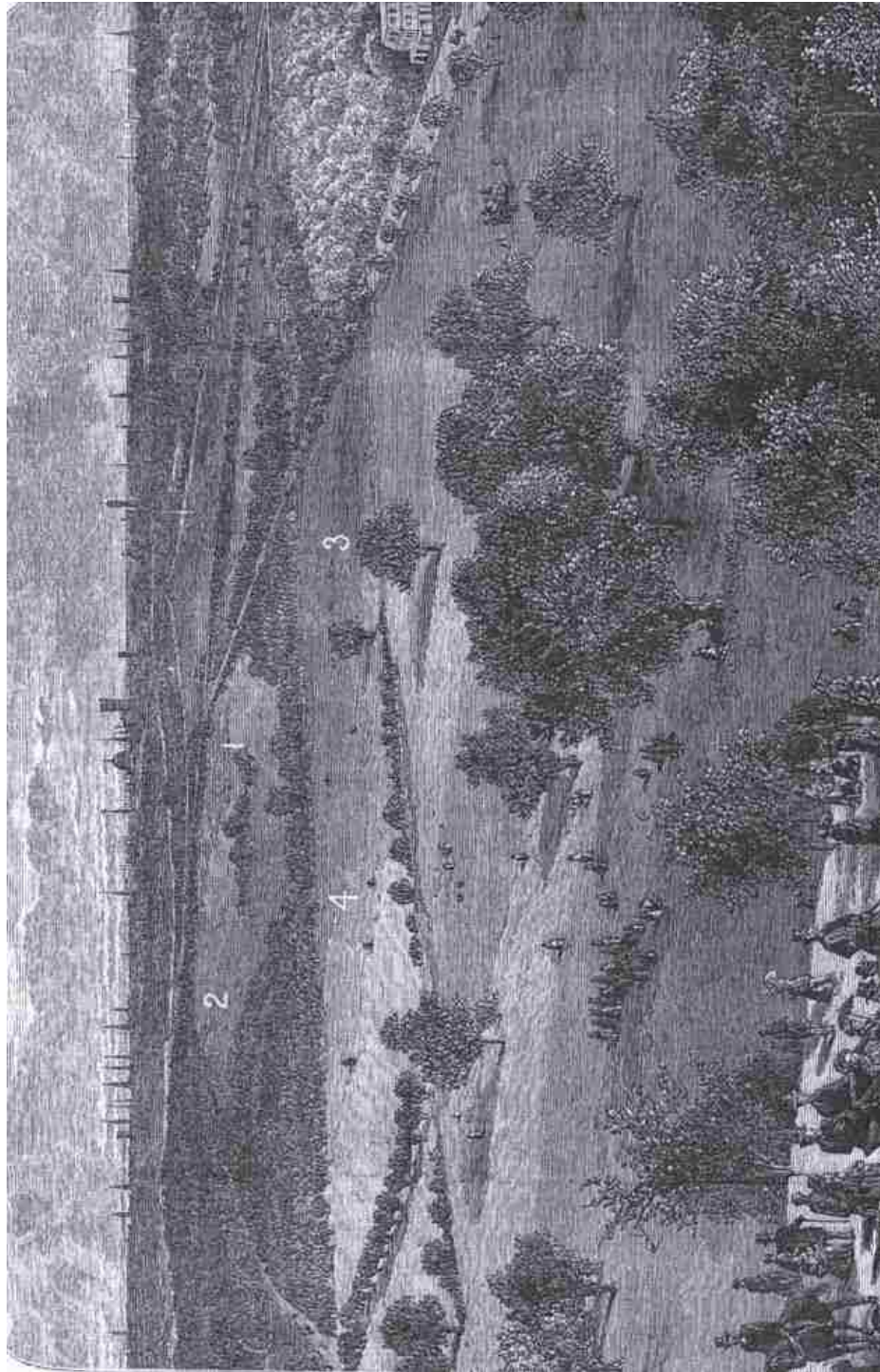


Figure 28. The site of the Centennial in West Fairmount Park, 1872. The relatively unimproved nature of the park provided a perfect canvass for the planning and design of the Centennial. Numbers refer to the placement of major buildings. (*Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive*).

would “never be able to bring such complete satisfaction as here despite its abundance of trees and pools.”⁴

Despite Philadelphia’s selection, the New York press continued to doubt that the city could successfully host the exhibition. Indeed, even as late as March 1876, two months prior to opening, critics from New York panned Philadelphia as “quietly expecting the world to do everything for the Centennial and to be doing nothing herself.” Morton McMichael’s son, now the editor of the *North American*, took issue with this criticism, stating that “the absorption of the city in this undertaking is unprecedented,” while New York’s “whole study thus far has been how best to intercept the incoming multitude” to the centennial.⁵

The improvements to Fairmount Park as a result of the centennial were extraordinary and unprecedented in the park’s history, since the commission had always relied on scant funding from council for any large capital improvements or maintenance. By contrast, Congress appropriated funds to improve the park in preparation for the fair, and these were further subsidized by the selling of stock. The Centennial Board of Finance, organized and directed by park commissioner John Welsh, sold shares for the fair to Philadelphia’s business community, many of whom had previously doubted the importance of the park. With the centennial, the commission suddenly had a viable event, one that would promote the business and industry of the city, to create interest in park improvements. From a municipal standpoint, the exhibition provided a large quantity of work for the city’s laboring classes during a time of economic depression that did not end until 1879.

⁴ Friedrich Ratzel, edited and translated by Stewart A. Stehlin. “Philadelphia on the Eve of the Nation’s Centennial: A Visitor’s Description in 1873-74” *Pennsylvania History* 44 (January 1977), 25-36.

⁵ *North American* (Philadelphia) 7 March 1876.

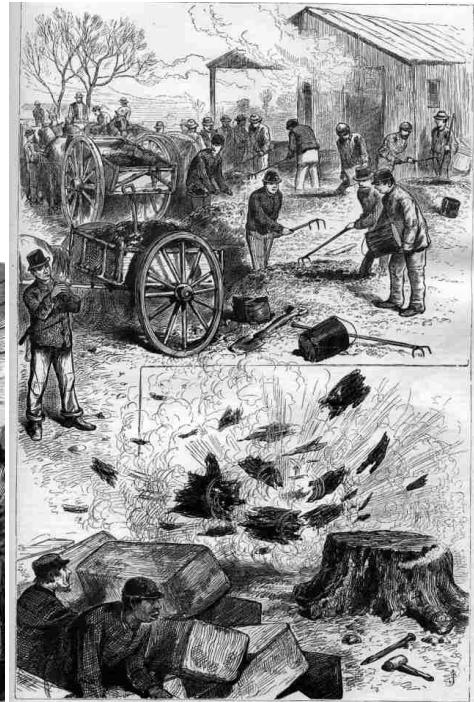


Figure 29. Building the Centennial in West Fairmount Park, 1874-76. Workers included African-Americans and immigrants as noted in these illustrations from Frank Leslie's *Illustrated Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition, 1876* (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

This was not lost on the park's supporters, who commented that the city suffered less during the depression than other cities since there was much work to be done in preparation for the fair. Again pointing to the success of the exhibition to rebut New York's persistent belittling of Philadelphia, the fair's improvements "may serve to show of what efforts the people of Philadelphia are capable of when once thoroughly aroused and in earnest." The exhibition and the development of Fairmount Park during the depression allowed civic boosters to believe that the headway gained in the time period leading up to the celebration should not be lost, for "our rivals are bold, active and

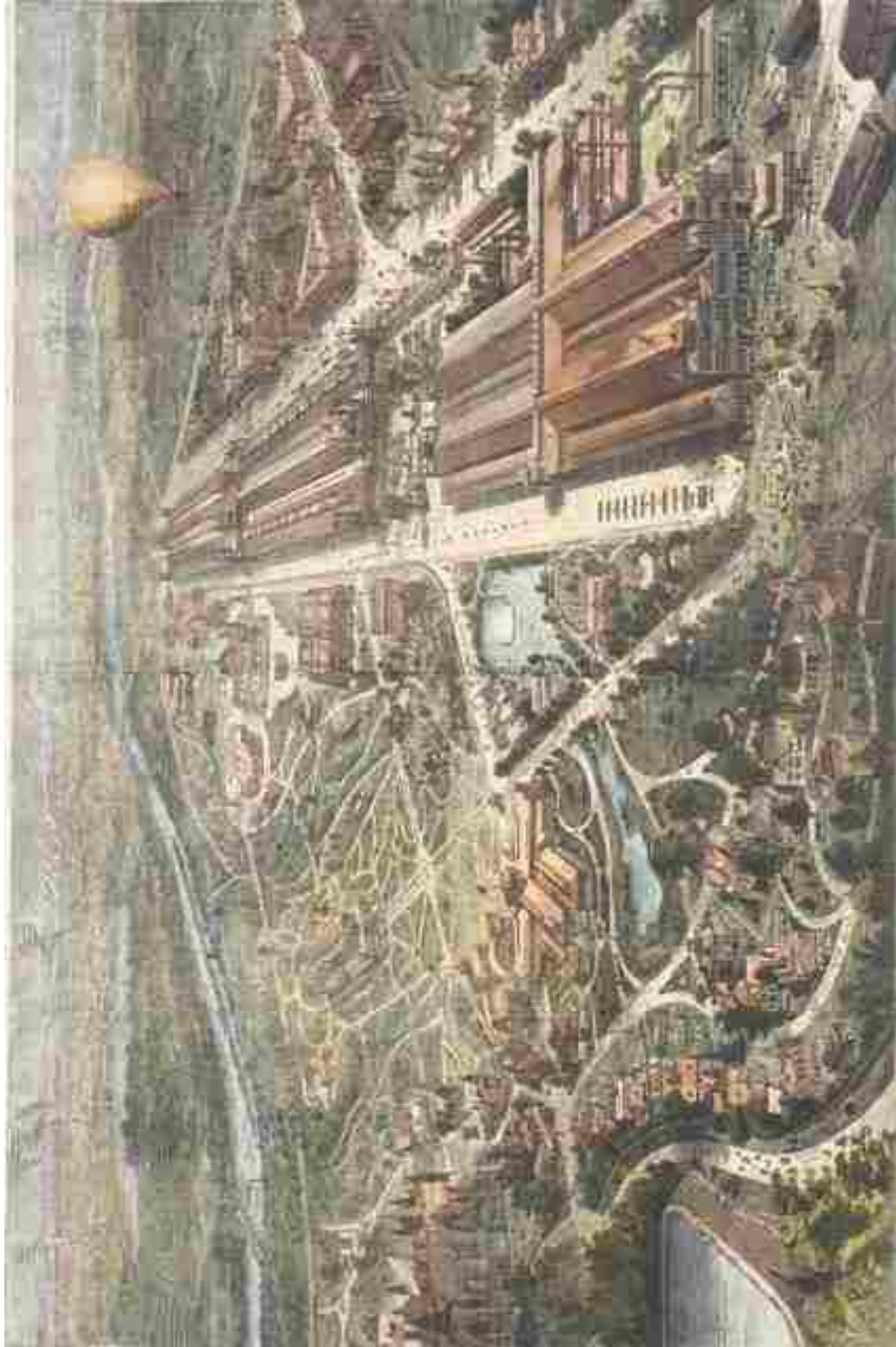


Figure 30. *Balloon View of the Centennial Grounds, Harper's Magazine, 1876*. While the majority of the buildings were temporary, the Art Gallery (Memorial Hall) and Horticultural Hall would remain permanent, attracting more visitors to Fairmount Park once the fair was over (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

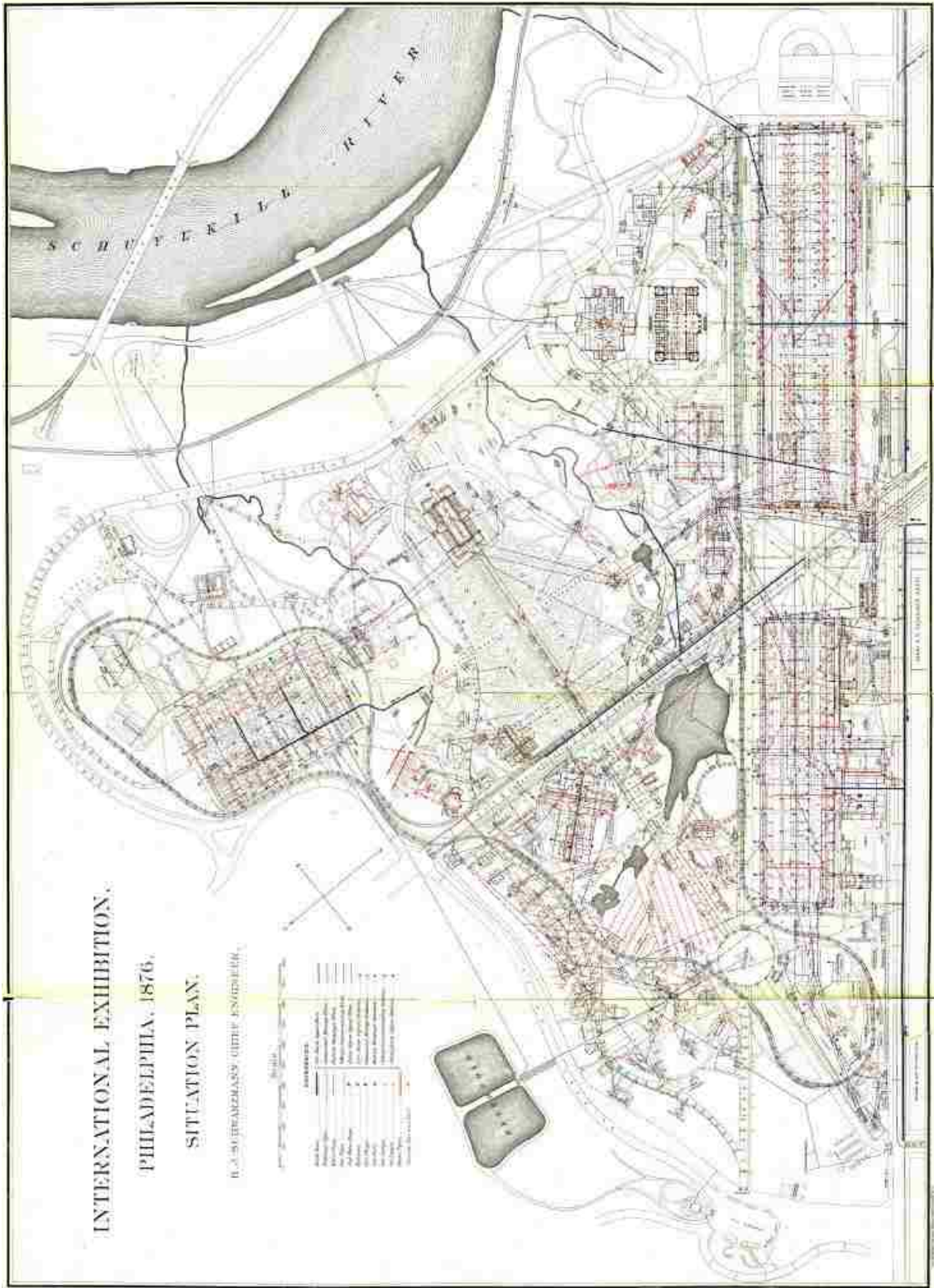


Figure 31. *International Exhibition, Philadelphia, 1876, Situation Plan* by H.J. Schwarzmann, Chief Engineer. The fair had a remarkable impact on infrastructure improvements to West Fairmount Park. The Centennial Lake to the left center of the plan, the grounds of the Horticultural Center in the center of the plan and roadways, water systems, fountains, drainage, and rail lines were added during this time (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).



Figure 32. Horticultural Hall, 1880s. Schwarzmann based the design of this building on the Alhambra in Spain, including the sunken flower beds and long reflecting pool, design elements associated with European models. The building was demolished in 1955 after years of deferred maintenance and severe damage by a hurricane (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

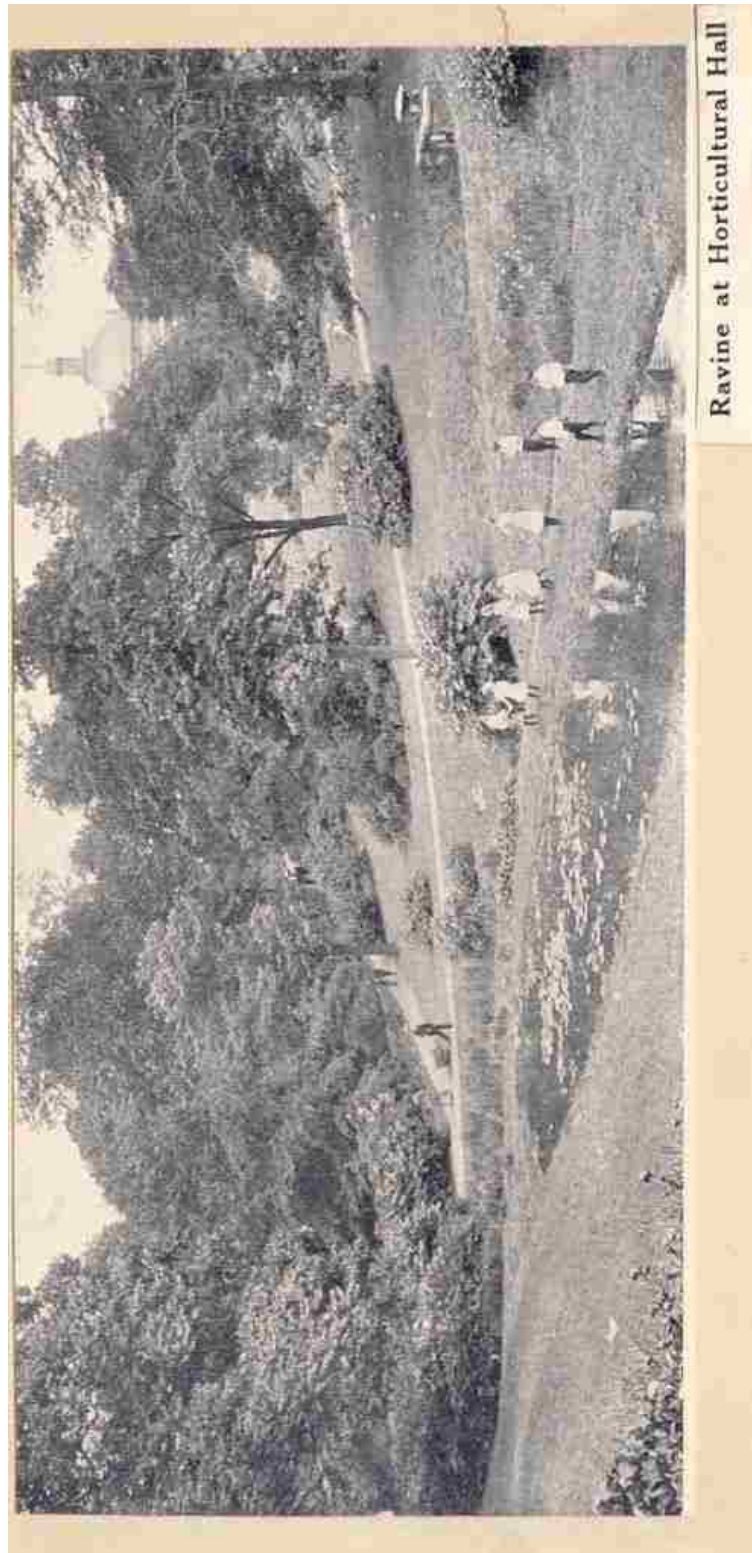


Figure 33. *Ravine at Horticultural Hall, 1880s*. The improvements to the landscape in West Fairmount Park resulting from the Centennial were significant. With improved rail service, families began travelling to the park on weekends. The dome of Memorial Hall is in the background (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

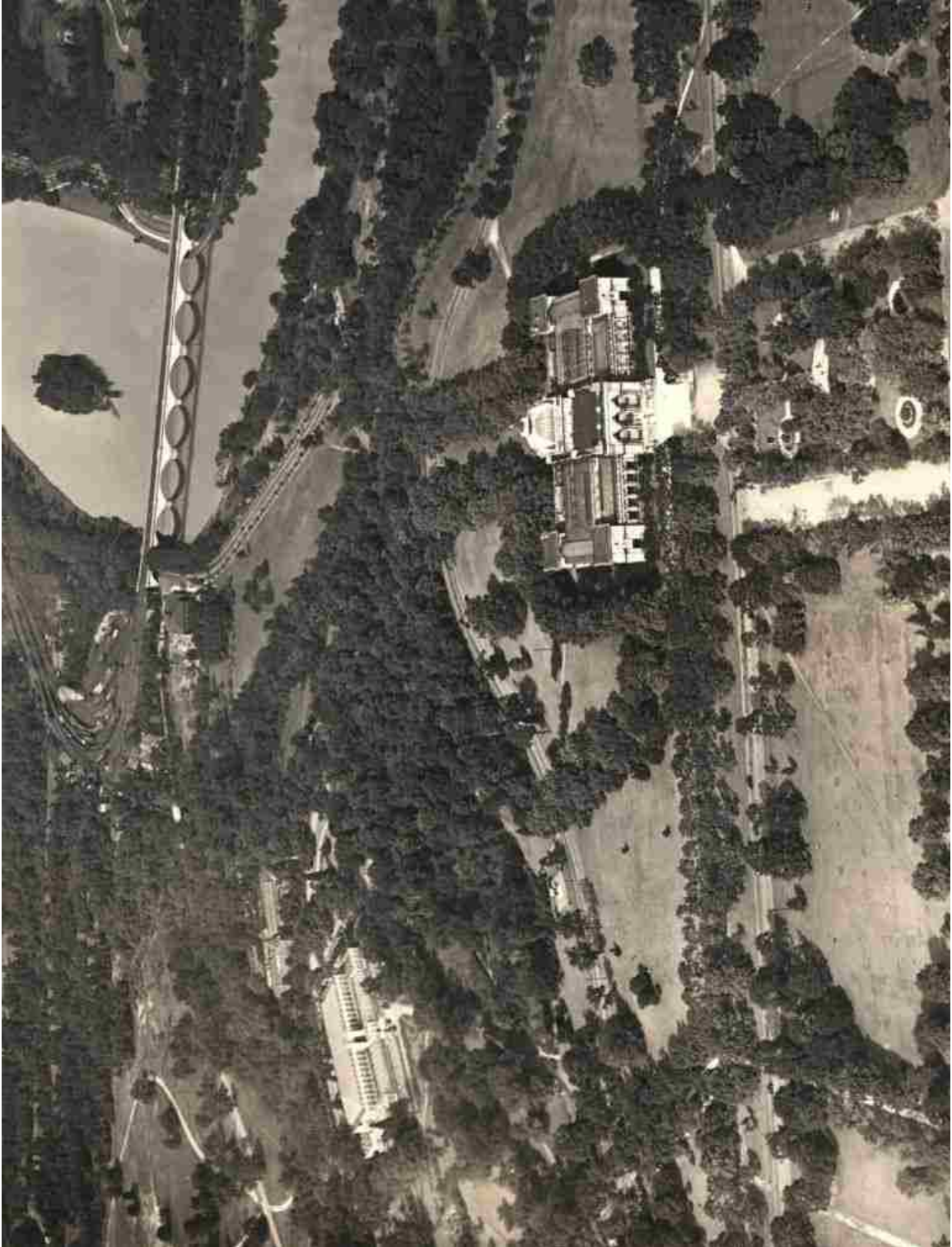


Figure 34. The Centennial landscape, West Fairmount Park, 1920s. The only remaining major buildings are the Beaux-Arts style Memorial Hall in the center and Horticultural Hall to the northwest. Plantings were arranged and maintained around the buildings and walkways but other areas remained open and relatively unimproved, testament to the scant budget allocated to the park. Note the absence of the Schuylkill Expressway (I-76) along the western edge of the Schuylkill (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

untiring, and one of them has been the greatest commercial emporium in this country”—of course referring to New York.⁶ The energy associated with the centennial allowed civic leaders to imagine an even better city with vast improvements, possibly defeating the stereotypical image of the slow-moving, conservative Quaker city mired in its former glories. The fair, while celebrating the past, was really about the future. Philadelphians involved in its planning began to imagine a better metropolis, opening up the door for both industrial and commercial expansion as well as to ideas that would become known in the twentieth century as city planning. The centennial proved that Philadelphia could accomplish large-scale works, despite the doubts registered and nauseam by New Yorkers. Philadelphians had designed and built an entire operating small city in West Fairmount Park, which was not lost on civic-minded residents. For this reason, boosters questioned “why cannot this spirit be utilized in many ways to extend our internal and external commerce by multiplying grain elevators, grain warehouses, stone enclosed docks, marginal storehouses, new lines of steamships to foreign ports, and engaging in commercial enterprises on the largest possible scale?”⁷

Echoing this argument, civic leaders envisioned a future Philadelphia where there would be no overcrowding on street cars, putting an “end to the disgraceful and indecent packing of people into dense masses, like herring in a box.” In addition, the steam railway companies “should be compelled to abolish all crossings at grade and mask all their lines to prevent accidents.” Finally, “Fairmount Park should be finished in keeping with its beauty and fame.” Civic leaders also believed the time was ripe to improve all of Philadelphia, arguing “the whole of the public works should be completed as soon as

⁶ *Ibid.*, 26 May 1876

⁷ *Ibid.*, 6 June 1876.

possible, including public buildings, water-works, reservoirs, gas works, sewers, school houses, etc.”⁸ The exhibition provided the impetus for Philadelphia to expand Fairmount Park while laying the groundwork for the city to become an industrial powerhouse, known as the “workshop of the world,” by the dawn of the twentieth century.

Despite the overwhelming success of the exhibition and the ideas for a better, more efficient city that percolated during the fair, the major problem facing Fairmount Park in the years that followed was the attack on the park’s budget by members of council. Council maintained its position that the park was inaccessible for the majority of Philadelphia’s population. The heavily populated Delaware River wards of Kensington, Richmond, Southwark, and Moyamensing remained far removed from the lush, green forests and glens of the park. After the fair, several streetcar companies continued service to the entrances of the park, which included five companies serving West Fairmount Park alone, but ridership remained centered around the residents of Center City and the newer residential enclaves of West Philadelphia, mainly a merchant, middle class population with available free time to travel and recreate in the park.⁹ The majority of working people still could not afford the streetcar fare to get across town and into the park. In addition, council members did not feel beholden to the commission since it was not a city agency.

The dreams of the civic boosters notwithstanding, the park did not receive better treatment despite the success of the fair. In March 1877, council voted overwhelmingly to slash the park’s maintenance budget, cutting \$145,290 from its 1876 appropriation. The *North American* noted that the onslaught against the park enabled council to “get off an

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Harold Cox, *Philadelphia Car Routes: Horse, Cable, Electric* (Forty Fort, Pa.: Harold E. Cox Publisher, 1982), i-iv.

immense amount of buncombe without giving any offence to any of the Department Chiefs of whom they seem to stand in so much awe.”¹⁰ In addition, the business class of Philadelphia, whom the *North American* had always counted on for support, attacked the idea of improving public works after the fair and were supported by council. While West Fairmount Park did receive significant improvements in roads, landscaping, and drainage from the fair, little was done to continue the work after the fair ended. A movement of retrenchment from any public works took hold among the local politicians as the economy continued to falter in the late 1870s.

Philadelphians were losing the battle of public parks that had been waged from the 1850s forward. Park advocates in Philadelphia, upset at the old ways of council returning after the promise of the centennial, argued vehemently that “the people of New York know the value of their Park in a business point of view, and are aware that it has paid handsomely in the trade it has drawn to that great emporium, and the amount of wealth it has attracted to reside there, the people of Philadelphia choose to regard their park only as a source of expense and to ignore all the benefits it has conferred.”¹¹ Council argued that the park could only use the meager budget to continue to pay a small maintenance staff without committing to any large scale improvements. To park supporters, “demagogues and skinflints have sought to prejudice the masses of people against the Park, and with no small effect. It is now time that the friends of this great public resort defend it with becoming spirit and indignation; for it needs help, and thus far has had very little.”¹²

¹⁰ *North American* (Philadelphia) 9 March 1877.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 20 December 1877.

¹² *Ibid.*, 20 November 1877.

An effort to paint the park as a “rich man’s resort” began in earnest among several members of council. However, this argument did not consider that the park was increasingly being used by working-class Philadelphians, especially after the development of nearby neighborhoods such as Fairmount and Brewerytown by 1880 (see Figure 38). The park commission, “instead of being able to devote its attention to the progressive development of the grounds, is always assailed by parties threatening the very existence of the Park; denouncing it as intended only for the rich and luxurious, whereas it is notoriously the pride and glory of the working classes.”¹³ Park supporters began to argue that there were indirect social benefits of the park since it offered working-class Philadelphians an alternative to the saloon and the congested street. This moral view of the park’s impact, echoing the earliest arguments for open space in Philadelphia, would be repeated by park supporters as the growing industrial city became increasingly associated with vice, crime, and other urban ills. The park offered “refined and rational enjoyments under the restraints of wholesome discipline, and has cultivated higher tastes, social habits, and innocent field sports, and repressed rude and boisterous manners, unbridled licentiousness, and the miserable coarseness and vulgarity peculiar to street mobs. Such a discipline as that has a substantial money value to a city like Philadelphia.”¹⁴

By the end of the 1870s, crowds began gathering in Fairmount Park during weekends, and several reports surfaced describing park usage as anything but a playground merely for the wealthy. The commission issued counts of usage in an effort to dispel the idea in council that funding the park was not a wise investment of taxpayer

¹³ Ibid., 6 February 1880.

¹⁴ Ibid., 20 December 1877.

money. For the year 1878, more than five million pedestrians were counted entering the park using the Green Street and Girard Avenue entrances.¹⁵ In addition to many family picnics, streetcar companies sponsored nightly band concerts during summer months on Lemon Hill, Belmont, and George's Hill, to increase ridership on their lines. According to the *The Times* (Philadelphia), the audiences were "quiet [and] orderly, with faces beaming with contentment, who sit in the cool of the evening enjoying the music and resting from the labors of the day under the best conditions attainable anywhere within the boundaries of the city." The editorial argued the concerts in Fairmount Park acted as a safety valve for the city's growing population, since the crowds "form poor material for demagogues and Anarchists to mould [sic] to their selfish and destructive purposes. A comfortable, contented population, with means of recreation and enjoyment within easy reach, will not engage in riots or otherwise jeopardize the peace and prosperity of the community that furnishes free of cost so much to render existence tolerable and even a pleasure."¹⁶

By 1880, the Fairmount Park Commission, especially after the death of Morton McMichael, received criticism not only for its ineffectiveness in handling pollution but also for its perceived elitist mentality. In many respects, the charges of elitism were unfounded as the park provided protection of the water supply and an escape from the industrial metropolis for city residents. Democratic members of council did not control the commission and therefore failed to control a fair share of the number of patronage jobs at the commission's disposal. Despite this, an 1880 editorial posed the question

¹⁵ Ibid. 5 February 1879.

¹⁶ *The Times* (Philadelphia) 31 July 1892.



Figure 35. *View from Lemon Hill Observatory*, late 1870s. The mature trees of Lemon Hill shrouded park users from the crowded area of the city, seen in the foreground (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).



Figure 36. Despite the attacks by council and underfunding, the park was very much in use, allowing for recreation and connections to the natural world. Park usage during the 1870s: a game of baseball on Lemon Hill (top) and boating on the Wissahickon Creek (bottom). (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).



Figure 37. East River Drive, late 1870s. Although minimal, park improvements such as these drives allowed families to connect to the Schuylkill River. Leisure steamboat excursions were also popular during this era with several landings in the park. (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

“Trouble Brewing: Has the Park Commission the Right to Grant Certain Privileges,” referring to the commission’s right to allow the “State-in-Schuylkill” club to occupy land within Fairmount Park. The elite social club, founded in 1732 and claiming to be the “oldest social club speaking the English language,” occupied park land and a large old mill building (now home to the Philadelphia Canoe Club) at the confluence of the Wissahickon and Schuylkill without paying any rent. When questioned, a member of the commission answered that this was allowed because the land “was only purchased to keep it from having any factory or other building erected on it which would prove a nuisance, standing as it would right on the mouth of the Wissahickon.”¹⁷ The commissioner, unnamed in this article, obviously did not understand the irony of

¹⁷ *The Press* (Philadelphia) 3 January 1880.

allowing an elite club to occupy space for free, the primary duty again being the protection of the water supply.

Fueled by Democrats upset by the Republican control of the city, the perception of the commission as elitist was because they were perceived as undemocratic. In contrast, New York City's independent Board of Commissioners adjourned their final meeting in April 1870; after that, the mayor appointed the park commissioners, and debates over its management would remain in the thick of city politics.¹⁸ In Philadelphia, however, by the time the commission entered its third decade, calls for revising the manner in which commissioners were selected were beginning to resound with the public. The attacks on the commission primarily targeted their selection process, noting that "the Commission . . . has failed from its creation to command popular confidence, because it has never been a representative body. Its members are not chosen by the people, and, as a rule the people, meaning in the larger sense the great mass for whom the park was designed as a health and pleasure resort, have had no representation in it." The editorial even went so far as to denounce the "gilded" commissioner's supervision of Fairmount Park as "arbitrary," equating it to the "forester who keeps ward over the baronial estates of England."¹⁹

This editorializing by the press was not a complete exaggeration, since Superintendent Russell Thayer was under investigation for utilizing park staff, paid by taxpayer money through the appropriation by the council, to do work for him at Woodford, the large park house where he resided. Thayer allegedly had the stable and bath house at his residence "fitted up in sumptuous style" and sometimes used park staff

¹⁸ Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*, 263.

¹⁹ *The Press* (Philadelphia) 13 September 1881.

to drive him around the park in a carriage. In addition, it was noted that the superintendent sometimes used ice from the Schuylkill and wood from felled trees, utilizing park staff to transport this to Woodford. The superintendent was cleared of any wrongdoing after it was determined that Woodford was public property and repairs, fuel, and ice were needed. Despite this vindication, charges against both park staff and the commissioners as being out of touch with the needs of average Philadelphians persisted.

The charges of elitism continued when the commission sent Superintendent Thayer on a trip to Europe to inspect the public parks and gardens there and submit a report upon his return rather than provide new public parks for city residents, several of which remained completely disconnected from Fairmount Park. Thayer visited dozens of parks in England, France, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Holland, Belgium, and Germany in what amounted to a “grand tour” of Europe, not uncommon in the Victorian era. His report advised of the “necessity of providing some place where the people can take recreation, breathe the fresh air uncontaminated by the smoke and gases of the City, and see the green grass and growing trees.” Thayer contrasted the parks of England to those in the rest of Europe, which he found to be more “elaborately constructed and decorated.” The English parks, however, were “more natural and less artificial in their character,” obviously more like Fairmount Park.²⁰ This research trip, though justifiable because the park lacked the leadership of a landscape architect, did little to quell the accusations of upper-class snobbery being leveled at the commission constantly by the press and council. It is not entirely clear who paid for Thayer’s trip to Europe, but he did so “by the direction of the Commission.”

²⁰ Russell Thayer, *The Public Parks and Gardens of Europe: A Report to the Commissioners of Fairmount Park* (Philadelphia: Gillin and Nagle, 1880), 3-4.

The Creation of the City Parks Association

The commission's failure to expand park acreage, despite its limited budget, prompted council to pass an ordinance in April 1884 that authorized the creation of "small parks and squares, in the future growth of the City of Philadelphia." Although in 1872 the state legislature required the commission to take charge of Hunting Park, an 86-acre tract located in the Nicetown neighborhood, the commission had done very little to actively acquire any other open space. Hunting Park's landscape, designed by William Saunders in 1857, reflected the design principles associated with formalized, small public parks of the mid-nineteenth century, with curvilinear paths and plantings. The 1884 ordinance stated that council should follow the 1854 Act of Consolidation, which clearly provided that councils should obtain an adequate number of squares or other areas of ground for all inhabitants. The passage of this ordinance did not, however, compel the city to actively acquire any land for these purposes. In addition, there was nothing in the ordinance that mentioned the commission's role in managing space, even though they remained the organization most knowledgeable about the acquisition and management of open space. Instead, it would be four more years before another organization formed to compel the city to act on the passage of this ordinance.

In early 1888, a group of wealthy, philanthropically-minded Philadelphians, originally named the "Philadelphia Open Space Committee," met to attempt to solve one of Philadelphia's "most serious needs—the creation in all the built-up portions of the city of open breathing spaces, or small parks, where fresh air, green grass and overhanging foliage would confer their blessings upon the poor—otherwise deprived of these

enjoyments—and also serve to purify and beautify the entire city” and “create and maintain open spaces as park areas for the citizens of Philadelphia.”²¹

By June 1888, the renamed City Park Association (CPA) urged council to create seven small parks within the thickly populated portions of the City. The problem of accessibility to Fairmount Park was one of the primary concerns of the CPA. Indeed, in the early minutes of the organization, they refer to the hundreds of thousands of Philadelphians “to whom Fairmount Park is almost as inaccessible as the forest of the Alleghenies.”²² Sensing the inertia of both council and the park commission to do anything to act on their open space policies, the CPA divided itself into two branches, the first and principal object “to which its energies are to be devoted is agitation.” This was directed at the public to impress upon them the “necessity of saving . . . gardens and plots as are now unoccupied by the insatiable builder.” In addition, the CPA encouraged “private benevolence so that the establishment of parks and kindred municipal improvements will become recognized charitable uses as deserving as hospitals, homes and asylums and even more important because heretofore so much more neglected.”²³ The second branch was acquisition. Within a short time, the CPA was successful in getting results, and by July council authorized five parks (See Figure 38 for location): Stenton in Germantown (69); Wecacoe Square in Southwark (11); Bartram’s Garden, located along the western bank of the Schuylkill (23); Northwood Park in Frankford (82); and Juniata Park (61). The neighborhoods of Germantown, Southwark, and Frankford were all older communities far removed from Fairmount Park proper. In addition, the placement of Juniata Park on the city plan protected lower Tacony Creek, one of the

²¹ The City Parks Association of Philadelphia., *First Annual Report* (Philadelphia, 1888), 1.

²² City Parks Association, Minutes and Agendas, 1888-1929 folder, Box 1, Temple University Urban Archives.

²³ *Ibid.*, folder, Box 1

major watersheds in the city. The protection of Bartram's Garden, the site of the nation's first botanical garden, was clearly an early form of historic preservation, the area being threatened by the rapid industrial development along the lower Schuylkill.

On February 11, 1890, John A. Clark, a park advocate in the manner of earlier commissioners such as Price and McMichael, read before the Medical Jurisprudence Society of Philadelphia a paper entitled "The Duty of the Municipality of the City of Philadelphia to Provide Small Parks and Open Spaces for the Comfort and Health of the People of the City." Clark reflected the late nineteenth-century view that parks, especially as they served crowded, urban areas, would provide moral uplift to citizens while also promoting public health. This was removed from the earlier, romantic ideal of communing with nature which Fairmount and the Wissahickon represented. Clark began by referencing the history of William Penn's plan and the inclusion of open space, noting that it took far too long for the City to realize Penn's vision and use these squares as public space. Clark argued that from "1854 to 1888 there was a complete failure of our municipal government to perform its duty in this regard," of acquiring small parks. The only squares established in the developed area near the Delaware River up to 1888 contained a total of forty-eight acres. Clark added that "this number is insignificant in so vast a city as Philadelphia, which should have abundant play-grounds for children, and local resorts for all in pleasant weather."²⁴ He continued that open spaces were a public health issue and that "no duty is more imperative upon a municipal government than to provide sanitary measures for the protection of the health of its people."²⁵ Clark did not

²⁴ John A. Clark, *The Duty of the Municipality of Philadelphia to provide Small Parks and Open Spaces for the Comfort and Health of the People of the City* (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane & Scott, 1890), 5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

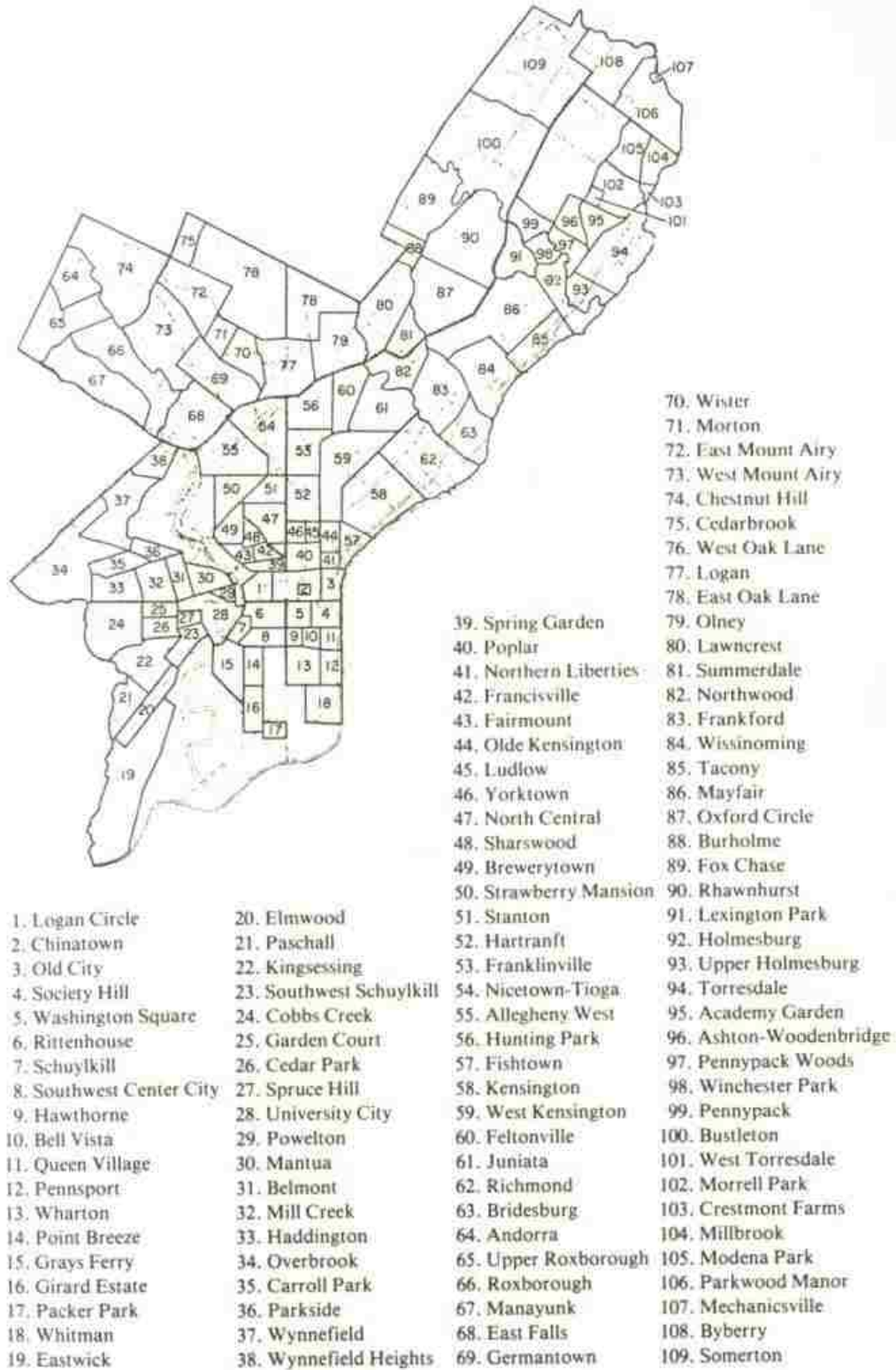


Figure 38. The Neighborhoods of Philadelphia. The first five parks placed on the City Plan by the CPA were far removed from Fairmount Park. These were in the neighborhoods of: Germantown (69); Southwark (now known as Bella Vista and Queen Village-10 and 11); Southwest Schuylkill (23); Frankford (83); and Juniata (61) (Philadelphia City Planning Commission).

look solely to Fairmount Park to solve the problem of public health within the city since he argued that “within a century our population may be 5 or 6 million. Now is the time certainly to make provision for our future.”²⁶ It was clear to Clark and his audience that this could only be accomplished by adding additional parks and open space in Philadelphia.

It was not until 1888, with the creation of the CPA, that Clark believed Philadelphia had finally “woke up from her lethargy and showed some disposition to atone for her fatal supineness on the subject of small parks.” He attributed this change not to the park commission but to Councilman Thomas Meehan. An amateur botanist, Meehan lobbied for the city’s acquisition of the eleven-acre Bartram’s Garden. Because other parks were set aside, council reported that the “people at large feel these open spaces a greater immediate want than council could have supposed, for no sooner are plots located than great pressure is brought to bear upon the municipality to purchase them.”²⁷

Finally, and most importantly for the growth of the park system, Clark called upon his audience of elite Philadelphians to bequest their land to the city for open space. His argument was that a “gift of even a small park will be the most enduring charity. Money left to charitable purposes is sometimes squandered, wasted or lost, but ground donated to the city and set apart to public use, under the provisions of the act of 1854, will remain so forever.” Over the next five decades, wealthy Philadelphians gave large portions of their estates as bequests to the city for open space, most of which eventually

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

came under the management of the commission. It should be noted that the commission did little advocacy to acquire these parcels for park purposes, due to their inability to



Figure 39. Typical conditions of Philadelphia's crowded, poor areas, City Parks Association, early 20th century. The CPA printed several images like this in their early years to agitate for parks (Temple University Urban Archive).

raise funds from council for even the smallest improvements and maintenance. Rather, it was the efforts of the CPA and the influence of Clark's ideas which allowed for their creation as small neighborhood parks. These parcels included Burholme Park in Fox Chase, bequested by Robert Ryerss in 1896 and opened to the public in 1905; Clifford Park, located in the Wissahickon Valley in Mt. Airy, bequested by George C. Thomas in 1907; Fisher Park, located in Olney, bequested by wealthy industrialist Joseph Wharton in 1909; and Morris Park, located in Overbrook.²⁸

The role of the CPA and the activism of its membership in forcing the city government to acquire new park property and in effect create Philadelphia's comprehensive park system

²⁸ See Ordinances and Regulations.

cannot be underestimated. Without the role of private citizen-led groups, Philadelphia's park system would have continued to languish far behind other American cities.

According to a 1901 study of urban park systems by M.O. Stone of the Rochester Parks Department, other North American cities had surpassed Philadelphia in park acreage per capita. By that time, Philadelphia had even been exceeded in actual park acreage by Los Angeles, a city of approximately 103,000 in 1901 that contained 3,737 acres of park land. Philadelphia's population was 1,293,000, but the city only had 3,396 acres of park land, and most of it was contained in one space, Fairmount Park. Conversely, smaller cities such as Buffalo (population 352,000) and St. Louis (population 575,000) had a much larger per capita acreage of park land, with 1,026 and 2,183 acres respectively.²⁹ By 1902, the CPA reported that Philadelphia lagged in new park area, noting that Boston had surpassed Philadelphia in acquisition of new park land having spent 12 million dollars between 1893 and 1902 and had under its control roughly 12,000 acres. The CPA urged Philadelphia to be "up and doing" in regards to open space, urging the city to purchase additional lands along creeks and create a system of parkways and boulevards to connect them.³⁰

The CPA revealed the problems associated with so many different agencies managing the open spaces throughout the city, with virtually no cooperation or plan for them, including the Bureau of Highways, Department of Public Works; the Bureau of City Property, Department of Public Safety; and the Fairmount Park Commission.

²⁹ *Philadelphia Press*, 26 May 1901. See also original story with chart comparing thirty North American urban parks, *Post Express* (Rochester) 22 February 1901.

³⁰ *North American* (Philadelphia) 22 March 1901

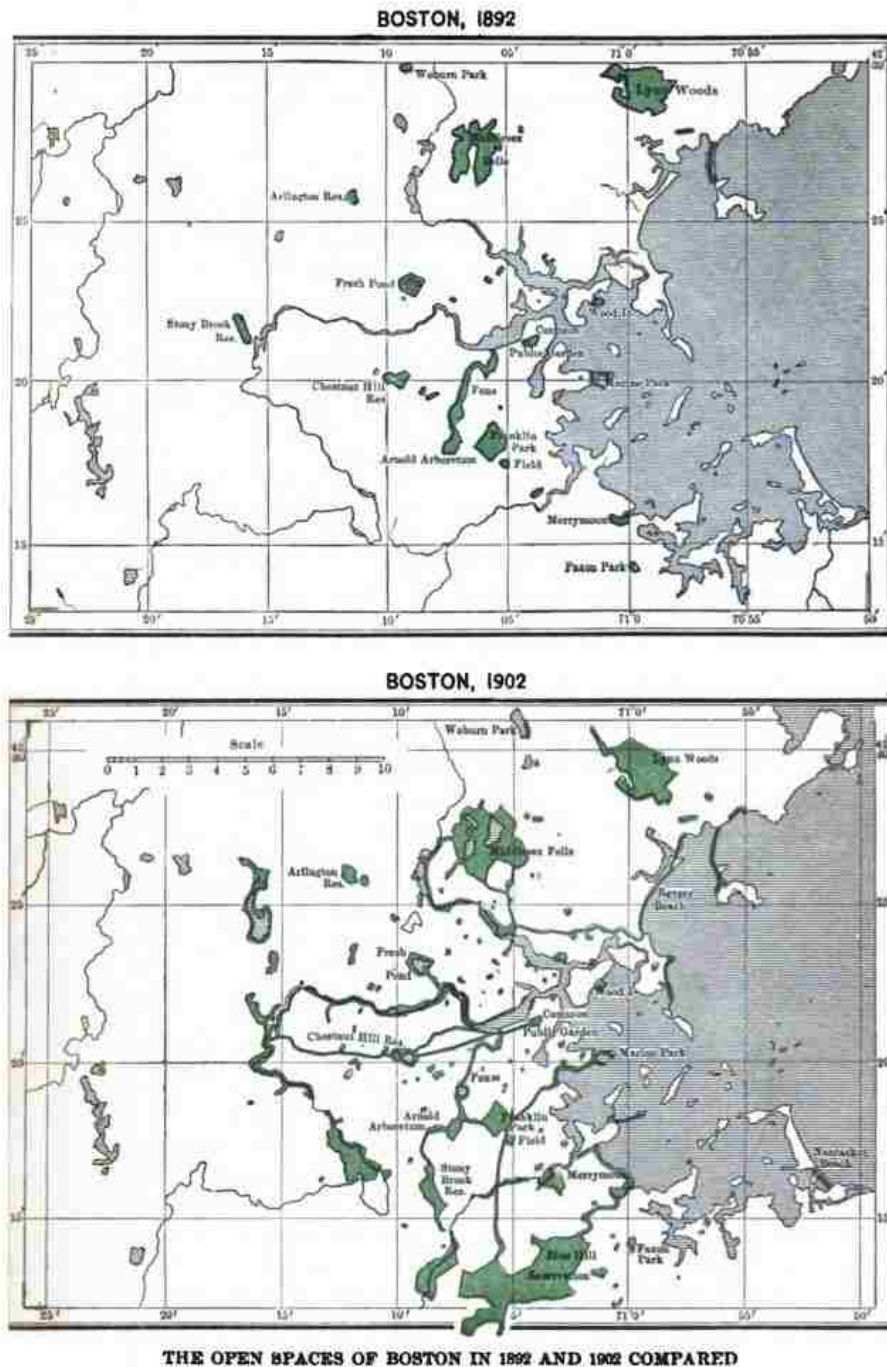


Figure 40. The Open Spaces of Boston in 1892 and 1902 Compared. The CPA used images such as these to urge acquisition of a true park system for Philadelphia (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

The CPA believed it important that “not only the care of all parks and squares and small triangular grassplots, but also the construction and maintenance of all parkways or

boulevards and the planting and maintenance of all street trees, be placed under the charge of one commission, and we believe that the community at large shares our confidence in the Fairmount Park Commission as at present constituted as the best available body for such comprehensive care and maintenance.”³¹ It was clear to the membership of the CPA that so long as these various parcels remained in disparate hands, their management would not be carried out in an organized manner and planning would languish.

By endorsing the commission as the organization best equipped to handle the management of the city’s open space, the CPA reversed their original mission, which was to “agitate” for parks, presumably because the commissioners had done little since the original formation and planning of Fairmount Park. The key to this reversal of opinion towards the commission can be found in the words “at present constituted,” since the new post-“Boss” McManes commission reflected the values of the CPA, and the two organizations shared memberships. “Boss” McManes died in 1899, and the presidency of the commission passed to Col. A. Loudon Snowden, a former Superintendent of the United States Mint in Philadelphia and owner of an elite Main Line estate.³² The CPA, whose membership was made up of the same elite patrician class that again dominated the commission, believed that with the appointment of Snowden, the commission could remain above the political machine. With the election to the commission of Eli Kirk Price II in 1902, it appeared to be back firmly in the hands of the elite class of reform-minded Philadelphians. Price, also a leading member of the CPA, was the grandson of Eli Kirk Price, author of the Consolidation Act and a founding member of the commission. During

³¹ *Sixteenth Annual Report of the City Parks Association of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: City Parks Association, 1904), 15.

³² *New York Times*, 16 September 1885.

the early twentieth century, the CPA reported over 500 members, the names of which they published in each annual report with the majority living in the wealthier enclaves of Rittenhouse Square, Chestnut Hill, and the newly created elite western suburb known as the Main Line.³³

The CPA, utilizing the political clout and power of their membership, was instrumental in the establishment of another organization that was solely intent on achieving the goal of a comprehensive park system for Philadelphia. The initial meeting of the Organizations Allied for the Acquisition of a Comprehensive System of Parks and Parkways for the City of Philadelphia and Vicinity (commonly called the Philadelphia Allied Organizations) was held on January 28, 1904. The list of 30 member organizations included representatives from a broad variety of government and academic institutions, business, retail, civic, and improvement associations, and professional societies. This meeting, lead by Leslie W. Miller of the Fairmount Park Art Association and the first principal of the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Arts (now the University of the Arts), prominent architect Edgar V. Seeler of the Philadelphia Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, and Andrew Wright Crawford, an attorney with the City Solicitor's office and secretary of the City Parks Association, outlined the Allied Organizations' purpose as determining "what ought to be done and how it ought to be done" regarding park acquisition and to "determine upon a scheme for formulating and properly presenting the subject to the public."³⁴ During the initial meeting, George Webster, chief of the bureau of surveys, outlined what other American cities had accomplished with their comprehensive park systems. In addition, architect Frank Miles

³³ *Sixteenth Annual Report of the City Parks Association of Philadelphia*, 33-42.

³⁴ Minutes of the First Meeting of the Organizations Allied, Papers of the City Parks Association, Temple University Urban Archives.

Day tentatively outlined the locations of the outlying parks, showing images of the creeks and wooded areas of the city which would be proposed for parkland.

While the leadership of the Allied Organizations represented the progressive element interested in beautifying and planning the city and uplifting its citizenry, the presence and support of William S. Vare, political boss of South Philadelphia and part-owner of the powerful Vare Brothers contracting company, recipient of large municipal contracts, belied the notion that the Allied Organizations were comprised of only progressive-minded citizens. Ostensibly, even though Vare, a former member of council, stated that he was “speaking for the residents of South Philadelphia” and that he “endorsed the object of the meeting,” he was probably more interested in benefitting from large contracts for public works projects. The Vare Brothers appeared in public as “generous benefactors to the [South Philadelphia] poor because they were making exorbitant profits from such work.”³⁵ Vare supported the expansion of the park system because he controlled no-bid contracts through insider deals with council to his firm. It is this very mixture of machine politics and municipal contracts and patronage that Lincoln Steffens referred to in his 1904 essay criticizing Philadelphia as “corrupt and contented.” Even though the Allied Organizations, the CPA, and the commission were supposed to be above the local political machinery, they were tied to local politics since very little could be accomplished without the financial support of council and ward leaders. In addition, the CPA could not actually build the parkways, boulevards, and parks without the contractors, again placing them in the realm of council politics.

³⁵ McCaffery, *When Bosses Ruled Philadelphia*, 128.

The CPA celebrated the election of Republican Mayor John Weaver in 1903, as he ran on a reform ticket that promised to return the city to the original Republican values, stating the “Boss” McManes era of Republican politics was a thing of the past. The CPA believed that real reform in city government with regard to parks and open spaces had arrived as Weaver stated in his inaugural address that “our parks and squares are a great blessing. We should see not only that they are kept in good order but also that sites are secured wherever possible, particularly in those districts where none exist. These parks and squares are not only places that help make the city beautiful, but are also of far greater benefit in that they are breathing spots for our people during the hot summer days and nights.”³⁶

The Allied Organizations wasted little time in compiling a report on the existing and proposed park systems of other American cities. Stating that it was “facts not fancies, works not wishes” that “mark the successful national movement for the preservation of places of natural beauty for the use of the public and the substitution of city squares and playgrounds for spots of wretched squalor and ugliness,” the report argued that in Philadelphia the work to have a comprehensive park system had only begun. While Fairmount Park and other public spaces were “fine in themselves,” overall they were “inadequate for the needs of a city that has far outgrown them.”³⁷ The report canvassed large American cities such as Boston, New York, Chicago, and St. Louis, smaller cities such as Harrisburg, Toledo, Louisville, and Hartford, county park systems in Essex and Hudson Counties in New Jersey, and park systems in Manilla and Ottawa, Canada. Twenty-nine different park systems were reviewed, and recommendations were made as

³⁶ *Sixteenth Annual Report of the CPA*, 5

³⁷ *American Park Systems: Report of the Philadelphia Allied Organizations* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Mount Pleasant Press, 1905), 3.

to what Philadelphia could and should accomplish. Additionally, the report provided detailed maps and plans of almost each municipal park system, providing a visual reference for each case. The report appealed to the pride of Philadelphians, arguing that the city was “resting on its laurels, unconscious that other cities were pushing it farther and farther from the lead in park area.”³⁸ In an ultimate humiliation, the report found that Harrisburg had “secured the lead of Philadelphia” in park planning, a lead that Philadelphia, as the most important city of the state, ought to have held.³⁹ Using the case of the Boston Metropolitan Park System, which connected the city’s park system to those of thirty-nine other municipalities, the Allied Organizations argued that to secure an adequate park system for Philadelphia, it would be necessary to obtain parks in Delaware and Montgomery Counties, so that “instead of the cooperation of thirty-nine political entities, the park movement in Philadelphia will require that of but three.”⁴⁰

The Allied Organizations took the opportunity to show the need for the acquisition of the “beautiful valleys” of Cobbs Creek, Pennypack Creek, and Tacony Creek within the city. In cities such as St. Louis, Cleveland and St. Paul-Minneapolis, park planners had devised a “group plan” and an outer park system. The “group plan” consisted of grouping grand public buildings. This would influence the design of a centrally-located parkway connecting City Hall with Fairmount Park. The Allied Organizations looked to this “group plan” to mention how the “Fairmount Park Parkway” would be, raising the question “shall not Philadelphia construct at an early date its Fairmount Park Parkway, which will not only be an approach to its City Hall, but bring

³⁸ Ibid., 6.

³⁹ Ibid., 28.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 4.

our great park to the very center of the city? That will be an achievement no other city has attempted.”⁴¹

The Allied Organizations and the CPA would drive the planning and acquisition of the Fairmount Park system from 1905 until well into the following decade, which shaped residential and neighborhood growth for much of the twentieth century. By picking up the mantle of city planning, these forward-thinking groups laid the groundwork for how the city would develop in the twentieth century. During a time of great political corruption and inertia, the private-led citizen groups were the progenitors of comprehensive planning in Philadelphia. Thus, the case can be made that the birth of city planning in Philadelphia centered on the growth of the park system and was a creation of a non-governmental body, the powerful and forward thinking CPA.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, 45.

Chapter IV

Planning Philadelphia: The City Parks Association and the Making of an Urban Park System, 1905-1915

The years between 1905 and 1915 were the watershed in the planning of Philadelphia's city-wide park system. During this period, Philadelphia's great variety of public open spaces took shape as the vision of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century city planners came into focus. The planners of Philadelphia's park system wanted nothing less than to change the physical and spatial character of the entire city by connecting virtually every resident to Philadelphia's parks through parkways and boulevards. To that end, city planning in the first two decades of the century was driven by the parks movement, as entire neighborhoods throughout the city developed around the new parks, parkways, and boulevards. The spatial arrangement of present-day Philadelphia is a direct result of the planning undertaken during those years.

Virtually all of the planning developments during that period were spearheaded by the private, citizen-led City Parks Association (CPA) and its focused leadership team of President Eli Kirk Price II (1860-1933) and Secretary Andrew Wright Crawford (1873-1929). Both Price and Crawford were attorneys, and both were familiar with the political landscape and the workings of Philadelphia's bureaucracy. Price, grandson of Eli Kirk Price, was also the vice-president of the Fairmount Park Commission, serving from 1902 until his death in 1933. Like his grandfather, Price rebelled against the elite culture of Philadelphia by bucking tradition and providing broad minded, progressive leadership to the city. As E. Digby Baltzell pointed out, the Philadelphia elite had "an unusual lack of drive toward leadership and accomplishment . . . [and] a deeply ingrained

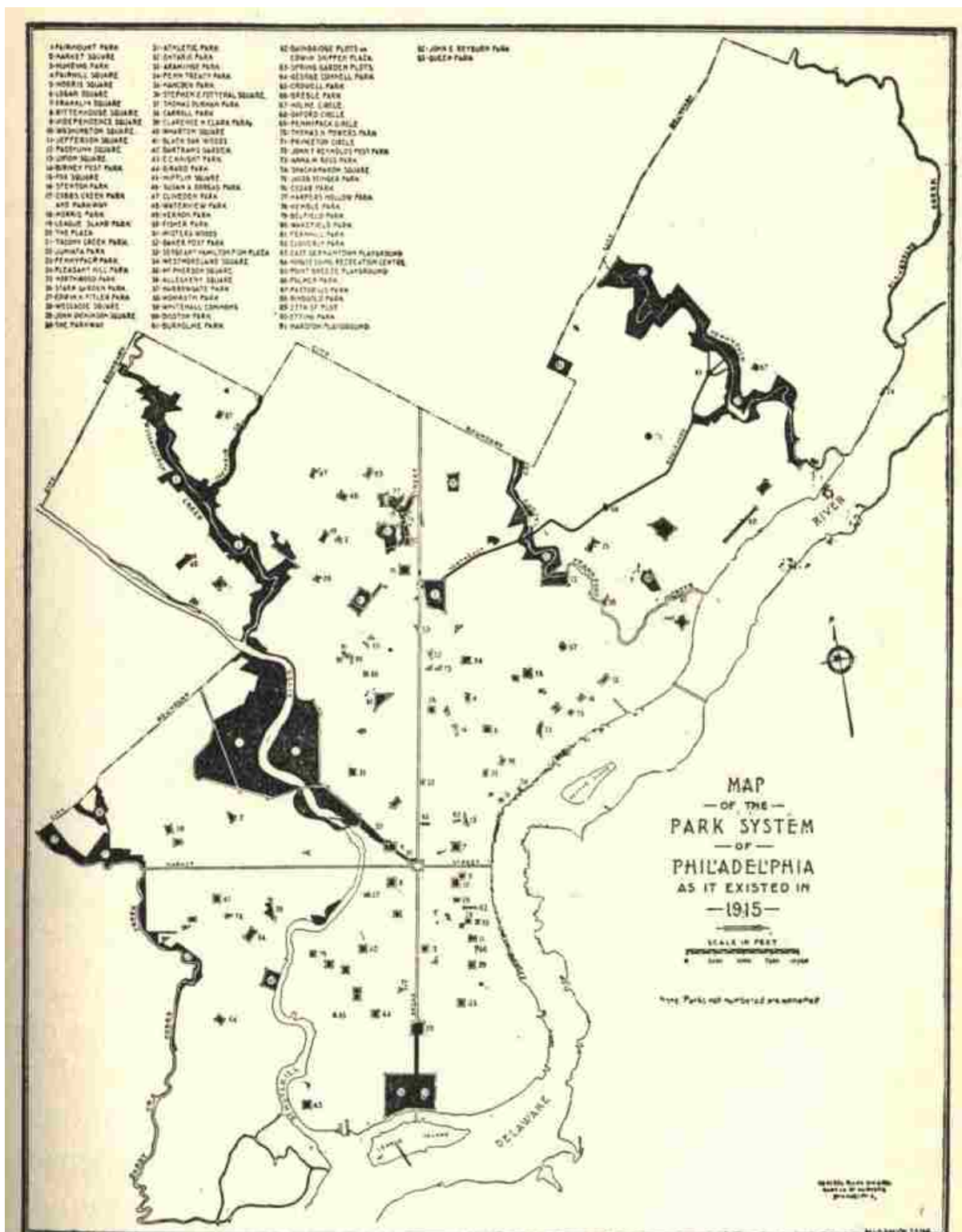


Figure 41. *Map of the Park System as it Existed in 1915*, City of Philadelphia Bureau of Surveys. All parks and open spaces are shown on this map, including the major watershed parks of Cobbs Creek in the Southwest and Tacony Creek and Pennypack Creek in the Northeast, connected by the Boulevard (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

class tradition that inhibited those who tried to do anything out of the ordinary.”¹

By advocating for parks and parkways as a way to improve the quality of life for city residents less fortunate than he, Price was anything but conventional in terms of his class background complicating, Baltzell’s argument.

Although Price was a member of the commission, his major advocacy work was performed as a member of the CPA, for the commission maintained the status quo throughout this era, as it was never apportioned an adequate budget by council. The commission did little to build on its earlier success of acquiring new park land; instead, its staff functioned merely to maintain and embellish its existing property: East and West Fairmount Park, Hunting Park, and Wissahickon Valley Park. Therefore, the citizen-led CPA was necessary in order to create a city-wide park system. While many of the leaders of the commission were members of Philadelphia’s old guard, several members of the newly wealthy class created by Philadelphia’s growing industrial strength joined by the late 1890s. Commission members such as E.T. Stotesbury, who made his fortune in banking as the lead partner at A.J. Drexel after the founder’s death in 1893, epitomized the staid commission from the early to the mid-twentieth century. Stotesbury, elected to the commission in 1907 and serving as its president from 1912 until his death in 1938, seemed more interested in maintaining his wealth and position in Philadelphia society than in planning and acquiring a world-class park system. In fact, Stotesbury had so little influence and clout over park matters that the politically connected South Philadelphia contractor William S. Vare decided that South Philadelphia’s League Island Park, at the

¹ E. Digby Baltzell, *Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia*, 2d ed. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1996), 44.

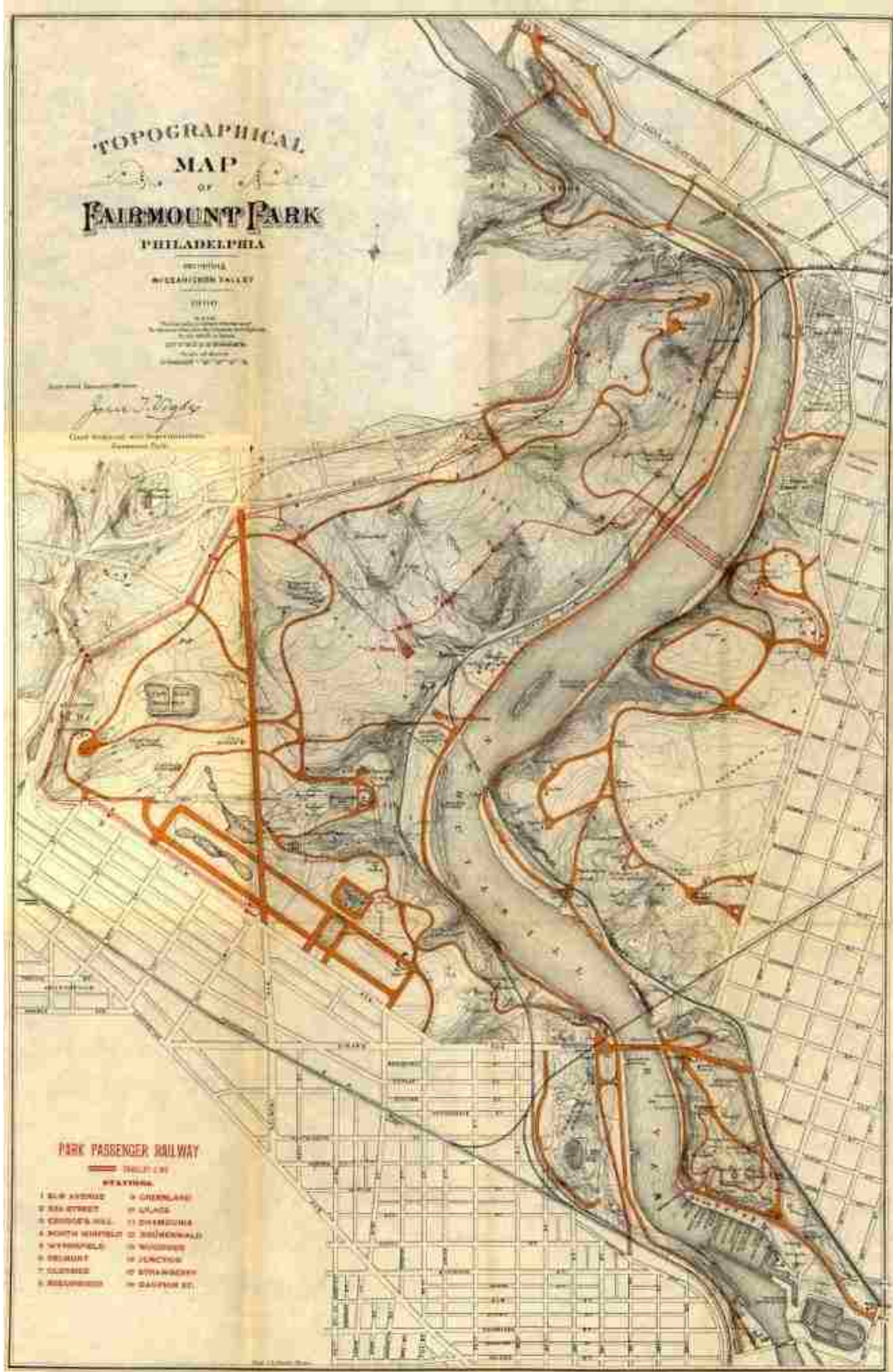


Figure 42. *Topographical Map of Fairmount Park, 1900*. By the early twentieth century, the commission remained responsible for this large area, which they were barely able to maintain due to budgetary constraints. The private Park Passenger Railway provided trolley service through the park to its terminus at Woodside Park, an amusement park just outside Fairmount's northwest boundary. This line operated from 1896 to 1946 (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

time not under control of the park commission, would be the location for the Sesquicentennial Celebration in 1926, rather than Fairmount Park, the location Stotesbury agitated for.²

By 1905, the meager funding allocated to the commission for routine park maintenance became noticeable to the public as the condition of the park deteriorated. Though the public was aware of the park's small budget, this did not hinder direct attacks on the lack of maintenance. "So bad is the stretch of pavement between the Green Street entrance and the Girard Avenue Bridge," one editorial noted, "that pedestrians have their attention diverted thereby from the unmown grass and the filthy condition of the fountain basins." Furthermore, the *Philadelphia Record* noted that "the fact that this walk is a popular promenade for the plain people, and that they, the uncomplaining majority, are most generally the victims of poor care-taking, deepens the reproach of the officials responsible."³ These officials, meaning the commissioners, appeared to the common Philadelphian as disconnected since they were seen as "persons who spend their Summer out of town, or who only visit the park when riding."⁴

By the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century, the commission was also under attack from within city government. Mayor John Weaver, elected in 1903, led the attack against the commission, calling for its abolishment and placing its duties fully under the city government structure by reassigning the responsibilities of all open space to the Bureau of City Property. Labeling Mayor Weaver an "autocrat," the press quickly retorted that the mayor "plainly suggests that since the commission receives favors at the hands of council it should grant favors in return." To the editorial staff at the *Inquirer*, the

² Russell A. Weigley, ed., *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History* (New York: Norton, 1982), 571.

³ *Philadelphia Record* 28 August 1905.

⁴ *Ibid.*

“mayor would seem to regard the commissioners as beneficiaries of council, whereas, they are but the agents of the people, serving without salaries and doing their best to take care of the playground of the people.”⁵ While it was clear that the mayor was interested in a power grab for the City’s open space, by not being part of the political machine, the commission clearly lacked any political capital to continue to acquire open space.

For these reasons, the CPA took up the charge to plan the City and its park system. The parkways were part of the CPA’s general idea that Philadelphia would be a much more beautiful, efficient city if it committed to building a radial system of streets to connect to its proposed park system, much of which had yet to be acquired. In 1902, the CPA began the campaign for the city-wide parkways and radiating streets by proposing a streets plan to improve South Philadelphia. The leadership of the CPA believed that city residents were far more likely to access open space if there were easier transportation routes to the planned parks. In 1904, a council ordinance was adopted to place a small park on the city plan, bounded by Thirteenth and Fifteenth Streets, Oregon Avenue, and Bigler Streets, with Broad Street running through it. It was later named Marconi Plaza in honor of Guglielmo Marconi, the Italian co-recipient of the 1909 Nobel Prize for his work in developing radio wireless technology thus honoring the Italian heritage of many of South Philadelphia’s residents. The park was at the northern end of what came to be known as the Southern Boulevard, the widening of Broad Street to connect residential South Philadelphia with League Island (now FDR) Park in the extreme southern end of the city.

⁵ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 15 January 1905.

The CPA believed that the most important of all the improvements to Philadelphia, however, was the construction of the Fairmount Park (now Benjamin Franklin) Parkway. Proposals for a parkway connecting Center City to Fairmount Park dated from as early as 1871, when construction on City Hall in Center Square began. An unsigned 1871 pamphlet entitled “Broad Street, Penn Square, and the Park” outlined the need for improved access to the park: “If the great park, with which we have undertaken to adorn the city, is to be a place of general resort and to benefit *all* of our citizens, it must be brought within reach of all. It must be connected with Broad Street and with the centre of the city by as short a route as possible; and the avenues which lead to it must be made elegant and attractive, in short, must be made part of the park.”⁶ Over the remainder of the nineteenth century, numerous similar proposals appeared. The most substantive of these was the 1884 scheme by Charles Landis, the founder of Vineland, N.J., who proposed the axis followed rather closely when the Parkway was finally designed in the twentieth century.

In 1900 several prominent citizens, including members of the CPA, formed the Parkway Association which issued a report in 1902 outlining the plan for the Parkway and illustrating the proposal with examples of similar designs in other world-class cities, including Paris’s Champs-Elysees, on which the Parkway would be modeled upon. The CPA applied pressure on politicians until finally council passed an ordinance authorizing the placement “on the City Plan of an Avenue or Parkway between City Hall and Fairmount Park,” the width to be 160 feet east of Logan Square and 300 feet west of

⁶ Anonymous, *Broad Street, Penn Square and the Park* (Philadelphia: John Pennington and Son, 1871), 10.

Logan Square.” In May 1904, Philadelphia voters approved a loan ordinance that included a \$2 million bond for the Parkway, the first money approved by voters for

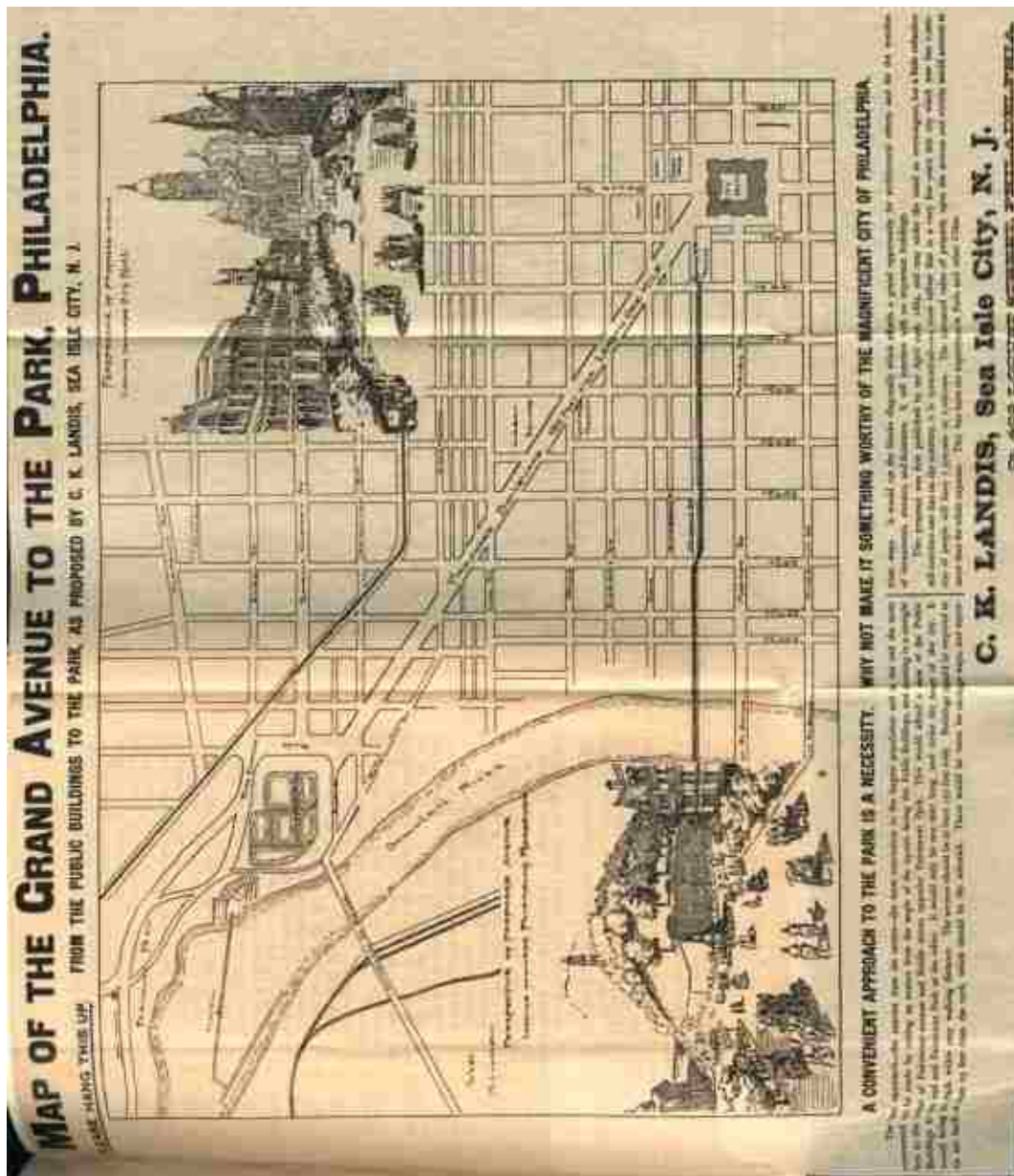


Figure 43. *Map of the Grand Avenue to the Park, Philadelphia* by Charles Landis, 1884 (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

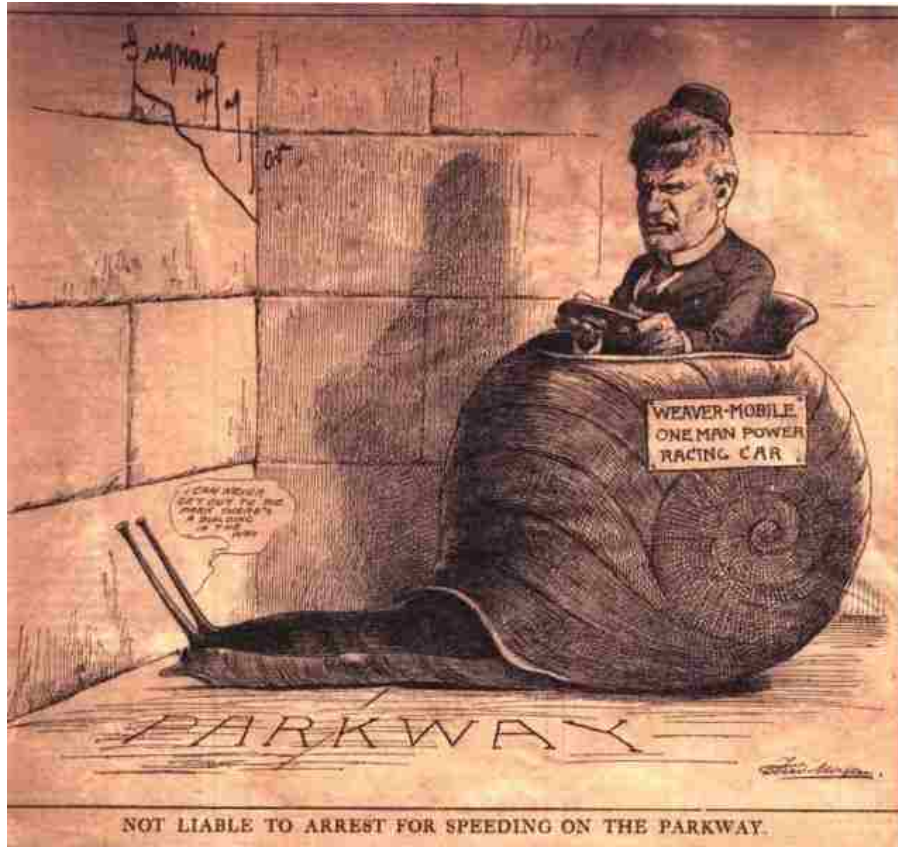
the project. By November 1904, the plan for the Parkway was confirmed by the Board of Surveyors.⁷

⁷ *Sixteenth Annual Report of the City Parks Association*, 9-10.

Because of the lack of leadership in either council or the commission to begin the Fairmount Parkway, Mayor Weaver, once the champion of park projects, inserted himself into the process. He went so far as to demand all questions regarding settlements with property owners be left to him to negotiate. In April 1905, Mayor Weaver's scheme for beginning the Parkway project was to "send for the owners of residences along the line of the Parkway and ask them for their lowest prices."⁸ In an editorial, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* opined that "the Mayor is not treating the magnificent project either wisely or progressively" and "this Parkway enterprise is altogether of too much importance to Philadelphia to be permitted to be made the plaything of even Mayor Weaver." The *Inquirer* pointed out that the original council ordinance regarding the Parkway instructed the director of public works to notify the property owners west of Logan Square that their property would be required at the end of three months, the time allowance fixed by law. This arrangement was interrupted by the insertion of the mayor into the process, and the ordinance was not adopted. Finally, when the mayor was unsuccessful in attempting to deal with property owners on his own, council passed the ordinance and the director of public works was placed in charge of all negotiations, but the project had already been slowed considerably and the first building was not demolished until 1907, when the mayor's term ended.⁹ This stalled the Parkway project for several more years as a new administration under Mayor John Reyburn took over, taking the original design back to the planning stages.

⁸ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 8 April 1905

⁹ *Ibid.*



NOT LIABLE TO ARREST FOR SPEEDING ON THE PARKWAY.



Figure 44. Mayor Weaver stalling the Parkway project, 1905. In the top image, the snail complains “I can never get out to the park there’s a building in the way.” (*Philadelphia Inquirer*).

Despite setbacks from Mayor Weaver and the Republican machine, the CPA continued to plan the city on a grand scale. The second major initiative of the CPA was the Torresdale or Northeast (now Roosevelt) Boulevard which later would transform Northeast Philadelphia from open farmland with a few scattered older settlements, such as Holmesburg, into the densely populated row house neighborhoods of the lower Northeast and the single family homes of the Far Northeast. The CPA was the major group that advocated building the Boulevard, introducing it as a “park approaches” project that would also connect city residents to the watershed parks of Tacony Creek and Pennypack Creek that were already placed on the city plan but had yet to be acquired.¹⁰ In 1906, \$1 million was apportioned for the Boulevard, with \$500,000 for land acquisition and \$500,000 for construction between Broad and Second Streets. The CPA reported that there was intense opposition to the construction of the Boulevard because “it runs through unopened territory,” an opposition it contended that “in a moment’s consideration will show to be anything but well founded.” Reminding its members that the city made a mistake by not acquiring the land for a direct approach to Fairmount Park “before the ground was built up,” it made the case for the acquisition of land through this undeveloped portion of the city. In fact, the CPA argued that “the fact that the Parkway runs through open territory means that it will have its full effect in determining the character of building along its route; in other words, it will have full opportunity to pay for itself by causing the erection of costly buildings to front upon it, thus creating a section of comparatively high values from which the City will get a correspondingly high return in taxes.” The CPA furthered the economic underpinnings of their argument by

¹⁰ *Sixteenth Annual Report of the CPA*, 11-12.

stating that the Boulevard will bring “not only beauty, but health, to the section within half a mile of it on either side; in other words, to ten and a half square miles of thickly built city houses.”¹¹

In addition to creating a ribbon of green in the as yet to be developed section of the city, the Boulevard would form a natural approach to the recently acquired valleys of both Pennypack and Tacony Creeks, which, lying between the already built-up portion of the city and the Delaware River neighborhoods of Frankford and Richmond, were in danger of being filled in. Therefore, the placement of the Boulevard directly linked the development of the entire northeastern portion of the city to the acquisition of park land. The CPA, in their planning recommendations and considerable influence, were the leading catalyst in the development of this portion of the city.

While the CPA continued to agitate for open spaces, the actual management of these spaces remained confusing. The responsibility for many open spaces rested with agencies other than the commission, many of which were less cash-strapped since they were politically connected to members of council. As Price pointed out, the “fact that it is necessary for the City Parks Association to exist is a serious reflection upon the form of our city government.” That the CPA remained the only agency urging acquisition of open spaces “shows either that the officials of the City are derelict in their duty or that there is no body which will take unto itself this duty. And both these things are true.”¹²

In 1906, when the leadership of the CPA asked the Bureau of City Property if it would continue the merely administrative function of overseeing the open spaces and city parks or if it would be engaged in the more constructive work of acquiring public space,

¹¹ Minutes of the City Parks Association, 1905-1910, Temple University Urban Archives.

¹² *Seventeenth and Eighteenth Annual Reports of the City Parks Association of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: The City Parks Association of Philadelphia, 1906), 31.

the response it received was “no funds.” The CPA believed this ignored the main point of the question, which was “How do you propose to get the funds?” Andrew Wright Crawford wrote directly to Sheldon Potter of the Bureau of City Property to ask why the agency was not taking the lead on acquisition of open spaces, stating that other cities, such as Boston, were constantly recommending new parks and squares. Crawford received no response.¹³

The CPA pointed out in its 1908 Annual Report that “the acquisition of ground for park purposes is the most permanent improvement that we can make. While buildings, bridges, water and sewer systems and other improvements have to be replaced sooner or later, for they will wear out, the areas that are acquired for parks will be there forever.”¹⁴ By not having a clear municipal agency in charge of open space acquisition, the CPA believed the city was in danger of being completely developed with no clear advocate for planning.

Politics and the Park: The CPA, Reformers, and the Municipal Government of Philadelphia

To most of the nation in the early twentieth century, Philadelphia was “corrupt and contented,” an impression popularized by Lincoln Steffens in his 1904 collection of muckraking articles for *McClure’s Magazine*. Steffens argued that, by and large, most Philadelphians were actually disenfranchised as the machine controlled “the whole process of voting, and practices fraud at every stage.”¹⁵ Soon, other contemporary critics of Philadelphia chimed in. To novelist Henry James, Philadelphia was “the American city of the large type, that didn’t bristle . . . settled and confirmed and content.” Hometown

¹³ Minutes of the City Parks Association, 1 February 1906, Temple University Urban Archives.

¹⁴ *Twentieth Report of the City Parks Association* (Philadelphia: The City Parks Association of Philadelphia, 1908), 20.

¹⁵ Lincoln Steffens *The Shame of the Cities* (New York, McClure, Phillips and Company, 1904), 138.

novelist Owen Wister quipped in 1907 that Philadelphia was “well-to-do, at ease, with no wish but to be left undisturbed, the Philadelphian shrinks from revolt.”¹⁶ While Philadelphia was indeed corrupt at the turn of the century, this was also when the CPA began to thrive amidst, or in spite of, the climate of corruption, indifference, and resistance to change. In fact, the CPA relished the opportunity to redefine the city at the same time that Philadelphia was being ridiculed by both the national and local press. This negativity and pessimism regarding large American cities was so pronounced that it prompted Andrew Wright Crawford to assert that the pessimism tended to induce inaction rather than action. Crawford stated that, “had the forces spent in criticism been spent in constructive effort, the work and joy of it would have been sufficient reward for the pessimists themselves and the results would have benefitted their fellowmen whose condition they impotently deplore.”¹⁷

Philadelphia was a particularly hard place to have the optimism for which Crawford argued for, as it was known as a conservative, one party town with no place for those with grand, expansive ideas. The primary source of this corruption and complacency was the Republican Party. So great was the power of the Republican machine (known as the Organization) that it was described by reformer and future mayor Rudolph Blankenburg as a “pernicious machine, which, well-greased, runs smoothly and unchecked on the highway of vice, graft and civic demoralization.” According to Blankenburg, all it took was obedience to the Organization and your needs were taken

¹⁶ Weigley, ed. *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*, 535.

¹⁷ Andrew Wright Crawford, “City Planning and Philadelphia Parks,” in *Public Recreation Facilities* (Philadelphia: *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 1910), 287.

care of.¹⁸ Of course, within this system, certain ethnic groups were more favored than others. However, many recent immigrants actually benefited from corruption, getting employment as unskilled labor on the larger public works projects. In addition, charitable organizations also provided worker cards to unskilled workers, who used them to get work on commission park projects.

The Organization thrived by determining which projects were funded and which utility or private company received the contracts. Heads of departments, who served at the pleasure of the mayor, were then responsible for awarding public contracts. The Organization controlled the three most important of the twenty-seven council committees—Finance, Highways, and Surveys—which doled out 75 percent of all city work.¹⁹ With control of these three committees, the Organization influenced the budget and all large public works, as these committees appropriated funding to the Streets Department, which controlled the building and development of Philadelphia. Although the Pennsylvania legislature created the Fairmount Park Commission to remove the park from problems associated with political corruption, by 1905 its miniscule operating budget was controlled by a council dominated by conservative Republicans, all of whom were benefitting from the status quo of the Organization.

The leadership of the CPA realized that in order to accomplish their three lofty aspirations—completing the Fairmount Parkway, acquiring a comprehensive park system, and creating a network of parkways and boulevards connecting city residents to this park system—careful maneuvering within the political climate of complete

¹⁸ Rudolph Blankenburg, "Forty Years in the Wilderness; or Masters and Rulers of 'The Freeman' of Pennsylvania: Part VI. Municipal Black Plague," *The Arena* 34 (June-December 1905), 15.

¹⁹ Peter McCaffery, *When Bosses Ruled Philadelphia: The Emergence of the Republican Machine* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 104.

Organization control would be required. As a citizen-led group, the CPA did not possess the governmental authority to complete any of the planning projects that they initiated. Therefore, the mission of the CPA was to advance its agenda without becoming a part of a political platform of either the reformist organization known as the City Party or of the Republican machine. In fact, the leadership of the CPA reminded its elite membership, mainly businessmen and wealthy Philadelphians interested in beautifying the industrial city, not to associate their mission with any political organization. They argued it has “always been, and must always be, the policy of our Association to keep politics and parks as far apart as possible, even though we recognize that the City Administration and Councils must be depended upon to find the funds to create a park system.”²⁰ By remaining outside of the political spectrum, the CPA could advocate for parks without becoming either an Organization pawn or allied with outside reform or progressive organizations, which would have been political suicide in early twentieth-century Philadelphia.

In 1905, the CPA and the Organizations Allied for the Acquisition of a Comprehensive Park System issued their important *American Park Systems* report, which encouraged Philadelphia’s movement toward a regional park system. At the same time, the City Party formed, comprised of reform-minded Progressives in order to take on the dominant Organization. In March of that year, the City Party’s representative Morris Llewellyn Cooke, a Lehigh University-educated mechanical engineer and disciple of the scientific management theories of Frederick W. Taylor, contacted Andrew Wright Crawford. Cooke informed Crawford that the City Party was seeking a platform and

²⁰ *Seventeenth and Eighteenth Annual Reports of the City Parks Association*, 1 May, 1906, 14.

asked specialists in the different departments of the municipal government to outline principles that the City Party should adopt. Cooke argued that one of the problems facing reformist organizations in the past was their reliance on criticism and that reform needed to be more constructive. In order to do this, Cooke sought expert opinions to build the platform of the City Party. Cooke believed that Crawford and the CPA had laid the “ground work for very good, practical issues” regarding parks, playgrounds, and open space. In an effort to court Crawford into the reformist movement, Cooke even stated: “I am almost disposed to say that we will be willing to give more space in our Platform to Parks and Playgrounds than to anything else.” Cooke asked Crawford if he could contribute to the acquisition of new watershed parks, the development of parks and playgrounds now on the City Plan and the development of parks on the “East side, where the population is very dense, where the development of existing playgrounds will afford good material.”²¹ Cooke, possibly anticipating Crawford’s negative reaction to being courted politically, even went so far as to compose a follow-up letter to Crawford in which he stated that he “may not have made it sufficiently clear . . . that my request for a tentative plank on the Public Parks and Playgrounds was entirely unofficial. In other words, I and a few of my associates, are preparing this plan for acceptance on the part of the proper authorities, if they see fit to do so.” Cooke went on to inform Crawford that the matter should be kept entirely confidential. Instead of responding to Cooke’s letters, Crawford read both letters into the March 1905 meeting minutes, stating that since the message was not official, no formal response was necessary. Instead, Crawford decided that he would personally notify Cooke that “it was the policy of the Association to

²¹ Meeting Minutes of the City Parks Association, 1904-1919, 24 March 1905, 9, Temple University Urban Archives.

endeavor to keep the acquisition of Parks and Playgrounds from becoming a political issue, and to express the hope that it would not become such an issue.”²²

During the same month, Crawford published “The Development of Park Systems in American Cities,” a groundbreaking article in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Crawford argued against what he considered the “fashionable” negative coverage of municipal government by the news media, which decries “indiscriminately all things municipal . . . that the majority of us are loath to believe there is anything to be said in actual praise of municipal government in this country.” Crawford believed that nothing needed more accuracy than a reform movement. However, he also believed that reformers were “honest, but ill-informed” since they often exaggerated to such an extent that the average citizen believed them no more than parties in power. To Crawford, the fact that the municipal park movement was making strides in American cities was evidence that the parties in power were actually making progress, even though they received no credit from either the reform movement or the general public. He believed, perhaps naively, that “if politicians have been brought to the point of appreciating natural beauty” then it followed that “if the appreciation of beauty is really uplifting, it would seem that the general pessimism of the day as to municipal government fails to take into account the real facts of the case.”²³ Crawford felt that politicians were beginning to understand the importance of nature, which signified a dawning of reform, an idea being ignored by the progressives. In addition, he understood that it would be beneficial to the movement to make the parties in power understand the definition of the City Beautiful movement taking shape in Philadelphia.

²² Ibid, 9-10.

²³ Andrew Wright Crawford, “The Development of Park Systems in American Cities,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 25 (March 1905), 16.

The City Beautiful movement arose in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century out of a progressive impulse to change the character of the American city. Cities, including Philadelphia, were characterized by poverty, overcrowding, uncontrolled growth, and industrialization. The desire among a range of American designers to “bring beauty, aesthetic order, and grandeur to urban environments as a means to offset the moral deficiency and impact of poverty” upon America was far-reaching. The broad movement, covering roughly the period between the 1890s and mid-1920s, can be defined as influencing several aspects of urban form, from the desire to remove unsightly billboards and advertisements in the downtowns, to organized tree plantings and landscaping, to improvement of the facades of buildings. Especially after the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893, held in Chicago, American architects and planners, influenced by the monumental classical architecture of the Beaux-Arts buildings on display there in the “White City,” began to rethink the designs and plans of cities, planning on a more monumental scale. This, of course, would be manifest in Philadelphia upon the final completion of the Parkway, designed, at different times, by Paul Cret and Jacques Greber, both graduates of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. However, the City Beautiful movement also manifested itself in the impulses of Crawford, who referred to the CPA’s reforms as part of the City Beautiful movement repeatedly, to correct the Philadelphia’s issues through planning around natural areas.²⁴

The importance of keeping the CPA out of politics, even reform politics, was of immense importance to Crawford. In the 1906 Annual Report, Crawford brought up Cooke’s communication as a “direct attempt to make the acquisition of parks and

²⁴ Ian Morley, “City Beautiful Movement” in *Encyclopedia of American Urban History* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2007), 150-152. Jon A. Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning*, 123-138.

playgrounds a political issue.” Crawford never mentioned Cooke or the City Party directly, instead stating that the chance to become political was “abandoned before it became public.” Crawford went on to argue for keeping parks a non-partisan issue, stating that the park movement consisted of “Republicans and Democrats, stalwarts and independents, reformers and organization men. There is no reason why, because a man believes in free trade or protectionism, in the gold standard or bimetallism, in civil service reform or in the organization slogan ‘to the victors belong the spoils,’ he therefore should or should not believe in the necessity of open spaces.” Instead, Crawford believed in the ideal of the City Beautiful: that parks, open spaces and a well-planned city was one in which “its citizens take pride, not because they feel they ought to, but because it is really beautiful and they cannot help being proud of it.” This city, as described by Crawford, is apt to be the best-governed city.²⁵

The CPA began operating as a progressive organization without the shadow of politics and political reform, perhaps understanding that being pragmatic in its efforts to improve Philadelphia was more likely to be successful than to take on directly the entrenched Organization. It can be argued that Crawford was politically naïve, as there was no indication of any potential increase in the city budget approved by council during this time. While the call for new parks and a park system was warranted, without an increase in the city’s budget, new parks would be neglected as an issue.

The goals of the CPA for 1906 were built on their two great successes of 1904-1905: the placing of the valleys of the Pennypack and Cobbs Creeks on the city plan. This was the largest addition of park land to be placed on the plan since the original

²⁵ *Seventeenth and Eighteenth Annual Reports of the City Parks Association*, 1 May 1906, 20-25.

acquisition of Fairmount Park and the Wissahickon Valley almost forty years prior. The valleys of both the Pennypack in the Northeast and Cobbs Creek in the Southwest, which was also the boundary between Philadelphia and Delaware County, would thus be protected from being filled in and developed. Like the Wissahickon and the Schuylkill areas in the nineteenth century, both areas were already industrialized, with several mills and factories operating along their banks.

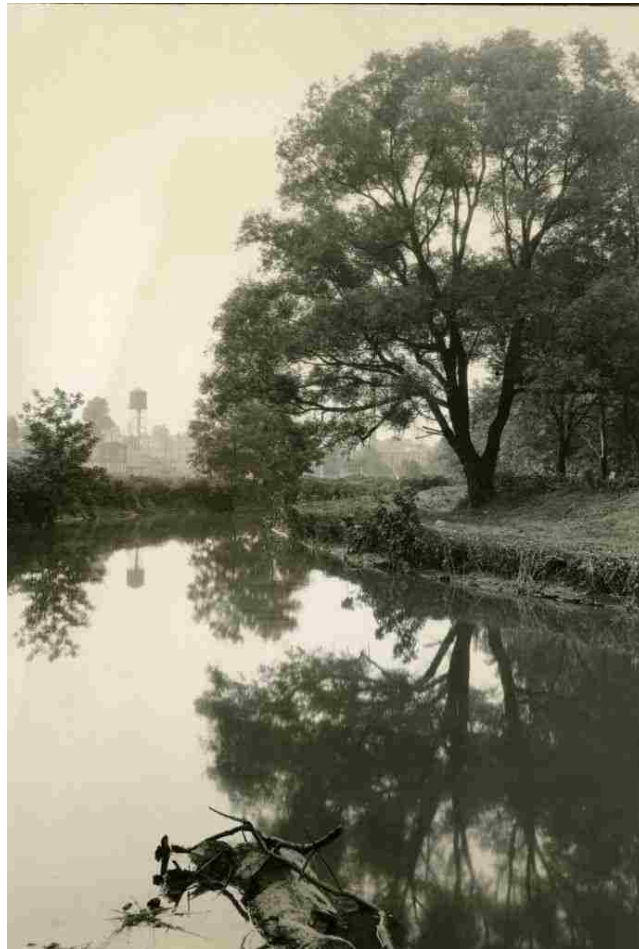


Figure 45. Cobbs Creek, c. 1907, City Parks Association. Note the industry in the background (Temple University Urban Archive).

The Pennypack Creek acquisition was for six-and-one-half miles, while Cobbs Creek stretched four miles. The placement of Cobbs Creek Parkway on the city plan was particularly important to the leadership of the CPA; the fact that the Cobbs Creek

Parkway would follow “generally the line of Sixty-third Street” was encouraging because it “interfered somewhat with the preconceived system of streets if that system is the gridiron plan.”²⁶ In effect, the CPA believed that unless the gridiron system was abandoned in areas surrounding Philadelphia’s watersheds, the opportunities to place these areas on the city plan would be lost, as developers relied on the grid system of streets as a source of rationalized profit making. The CPA felt that the lateral boundaries of the outlying parks should be the crests of the two sides of the valleys of all of the outlying creek areas: Cobbs Creek, Pennypack Creek, Tacony Creek, and Poquessing Creek. Of course, the CPA argued that none of these creeks followed the gridiron of the streets. Therefore, the city would have to fill in all of the creek valleys in order to maintain the grid system, something which the CPA believed was unconscionable.

In addition to its ability to influence planning policy prior to the creation of an official city planning department, the CPA recommended budgets for council. In 1906, the CPA recommended a loan of \$7 million for acquisition for parks: \$3 million for an outer park system; \$1 million for recreation centers; \$2 million for the extension of the Fairmount Parkway from Logan Square to the southeast; and \$1 million for beginning the improvement of the lower Schuylkill waterfront, below the Fairmount Water Works. The CPA had already been successful in securing a loan for the completion of the approach to League Island Park in the amount of \$150,000. This was the first time that a line item for parks had been included in the loan bill since 1872, when Fairmount Park was being acquired. Fairmount Park was still being starved by council, every year relying on its budgetary approval. As a result, citizens noticed that the low amount of money being

²⁶ Ibid., 26

spent on the park affected its appearance. In 1907, the park commissioners asked for \$715,000 to manage the existing park. One editorial board stated that by only giving a meager budget, the park's "actual development has gone forward slowly, while large sections of it remain neglected and shabby."²⁷ Despite this lack of funding, the CPA believed that it could advocate for more money.

In 1907, the CPA published a special report on the complete park system that it had been preparing for several years. The managers of the CPA considered the topography, the needs of the different sections of the city, the possibilities of connecting the various portions of the park system by parkways, and the opportunities for playgrounds, recreation piers, and additional city squares, "all of which would give the City of Philadelphia a park system that would not merely compare with its sister cities but make adequate provision for the citizens of Philadelphia and for Philadelphia's children of this and the next generation."²⁸ The CPA made the case that this plan should be implemented without incurring enormous cost, a lesson being learned by the extraordinary amount of money and time being spent on the Fairmount Parkway project, as that area was already developed.

To the CPA, the city's park system should be planned, which would in turn influence the development and land usage of the city. The argument can certainly be made that parks and open space have determined the other features of the built environment since the city's inception; however, the CPA expanded on the Fairmount Park model as a key determinant of the built environment, creating a full city plan where open space and access to it emerged as a major factor. The managers of the CPA

²⁷ *Evening Bulletin* (Philadelphia) 6 March 1907.

²⁸ *Nineteenth Annual Report of the City Parks Association of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: City Parks Association, 1907), 9.

determined that their plan would work as it was the “only logical solution,” even though they were open to suggestions regarding the location of a playground in one square rather than one immediately adjoining it. The CPA was confident in its plan because the “natural character of the ground surrounding the City is the decisive factor in the problem.”²⁹ Philadelphia’s park system and plan would be based upon its natural topography and its many watersheds.

The CPA proposed that, because of the topography of the city and its neighborhoods, the park system should be divided into six grand subdivisions by the creek valleys and the Schuylkill River. The creek valleys of Pennypack, Tacony, Cobbs, and Wissahickon, including their branches, were all within a radius of twelve miles of City Hall (see Figure 51). The CPA argued that the valleys were not adapted to building purposes and that their natural beauty made them especially desirable as public parks. George S. Webster, chief engineer for the bureau of surveys, estimated that if the valleys of the Tacony and Pennypack Creeks were not acquired, the City would pay “as much to the owners for the consequential damages of running streets across them as the City would now pay for them as parks.”³⁰ Each grand subdivision of the park system would be supplemented in four ways: large parks ranging from 20 to 50 acres, such as Fisher Park in Olney; playgrounds and city squares that would serve the most congested portions of the city; recreation piers; and, last and most important, a series of parkway approaches, of which the Fairmount Park Parkway would be the gateway to the entire system. In addition, the CPA also called for improvements to tree planting throughout Philadelphia.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.



The Pennypack Park about a Mile and a Half from the City Limits
 This portion is not yet acquired.

(Photograph by Andrew Wright Crawford)



The Pennypack Park

(Photograph by Andrew Wright Crawford)

This valley has been placed upon the City Plan from hillcrest to hillcrest as a park. This is a view of the top of one of the crests and shows the wisdom of preserving the valley fully. In the case of the Wissahickon the original Commission had authority to preserve the valley from hillcrest to hillcrest, but only did so about one-third of the way up the sides. This mistake has been avoided in the case of Pennypack Park. The entire valley should now be acquired through condemnation proceedings.

Figure 46. Pennypack Park, 1907. The natural topography and forests of the watershed parks required minimal investment once acquired (City Parks Association)



Tacony Creek Park

(Photograph by Andrew Wright Crawford)



Figure 47. Tacony Creek Park, 1907. Andrew Wright Crawford used these pastoral images to convince city administrators to acquire this natural area (City Parks Association).



Figure 48. Cobbs Creek Park, 1907. Although much of the area was industrial along its banks, Cobbs retained several natural areas (City Parks Association).

Chief among the recommendations made by the CPA, and one of their primary focuses for ensuing decades, was the reclamation of the lower Schuylkill embankments for park purposes. This was the grandest of the subdivisions in the creation of parks for planning purposes. The CPA believed that the Schuylkill embankments were an extension of Fairmount Park, the original boundaries which were on both sides of the Schuylkill from City Line Avenue to Spring Garden Street, a distance of over four miles. By stretching the east and west river drives on embankments south at least as far as Bartram’s Garden on the west side and the ground opposite on the east side, the City of Philadelphia would have accomplished what other North American cities would only begin in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries—to reclaim their river frontage from industrial usage. The CPA believed Philadelphia was fortunate to have frontage on two major rivers. Since the Delaware, home by the early twentieth century to a vast industrial, commercial, and ship building infrastructure, was more than sufficient to handle the mercantile interests of the city, the Schuylkill could be left for a “superb pleasure riverway, running through what is at present the center of the residential area of the City and what in the future will be the dividing point between Philadelphia’s residential section and its business section.”³¹ In addition, the city was planning to build an exceptional art gallery on the Fairmount Reservoir site, which would afford a “magnificent view up the river and a disgraceful view down the river.” The CPA pointed out that the “squalor and ugliness of both sides of the river south of the Spring Garden Street bridge was due solely to neglect.” A study conducted from that bridge to Bartram’s Garden showed that a large portion of ground was not used at all. The CPA felt that the presence of railroads lining

³¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

the river should not be a deterrent from improving the banks. They again cited the example of European cities, which typically placed their railways underneath the boulevards lining the riverbanks. In addition, Fairmount Park proper was interspersed with many rail lines.



Figure 49. The lower Schuylkill in the early twentieth century, City Parks Association (Temple University Urban Archive).



Figure 50. Plan for the lower Schuylkill Embankments, 1905, Paul Cret. The CPA began advocating for improvements to the banks of the Schuylkill, although the area was heavily industrialized (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

The Reyburn Administration and the Expansion of City Planning

The recommendations of the CPA received a significant boost with the election of Mayor John E. Reyburn in 1907. Reyburn, although a member of the Republican Organization, was progressive when it came to planning and parks. In its twentieth annual report, the CPA pointed out that its crowning accomplishment was within reach since the mayor was adopting a comprehensive plan of city development believing it was a “pleasure . . . to record that the City has at last secured an official at the head of its government who realizes that . . . advance thinking, must be done if the City is to grow into a complete organic whole.”³²

The initial report of Mayor Reyburn laid out both the need for and key elements of a comprehensive plan: “From what I have been able to learn, there has never been any attention given to a comprehensive plan of city development, and I have, therefore, given considerable time and attention to the task of formulating a plan for the city’s future.” He then outlined several areas that should be included in the plan, including extensive improvements along the Delaware riverfront such as a complete concrete bulkhead, which would extend from the improvements from South Street around the back channel and then up the Schuylkill River. It also included the straightening of the Schuylkill and Delaware to make them more conducive to navigation, as well as the construction of commercial boulevards on both the Delaware and the western bank of the Schuylkill. The proposal also called for dredging of both rivers, which would provide fill for the straightening project. With the addition of the commercial boulevard, the property values along the river would inevitably increase in value. The most important point of the plan

³² Ibid., 12.

from a park standpoint was the inclusion of a stipulation “to keep free from contamination certain streams along which property has been taken by the city for park purposes. It further provides for certain parks in different sections of the City, and includes the completion of the northeast boulevard, and the parkway from City Hall to Fairmount Park.”³³ By 1909, the Fairmount Water Works had closed and the city was engaged in devising an entirely new water supply system, based on filtration.

The mayor was also very supportive of the CPA’s proposal for an Outer Parks system, which included Tacony, Cobbs, and the Pennypack. In his 1908 address, which supported his initial report and was accompanied by a large scale map that the CPA had produced called the “Plan of Municipal Improvements Suggested for Philadelphia,” he stated:

I am in favor of the preservation of the valleys of the Pennypack creek, the Tacony creek and Cobbs creek. As these creeks lie in deep valleys the Chief Engineer of the Bureau of Surveys has estimated that the cost of opening streets across them at the approved grades, with the consequential damages that must be paid abutting land owners, will be as much or more than the cost of acquiring the entire valleys as parks. This alone would be a sufficient reason for doing so; but I think the people of the City are entitled to these public places where they may enjoy the beauties of nature and the benefits of recreation.

Reyburn outlined the work plan in a letter to the CPA, arguing that their work should be to plan for not only the city but the suburbs as well. Reyburn believed that the “wisdom of its [the plan’s] recommendations will be so plain as to commend them to the adjoining townships and counties.”³⁴ By 1909, the CPA recommended a team to work on the comprehensive plan: Daniel Burnham, the architect and City Beautiful advocate from

³³ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁴ Twenty-first Annual Report of the City Parks Association (Philadelphia: City Parks Association, 1909), 6.

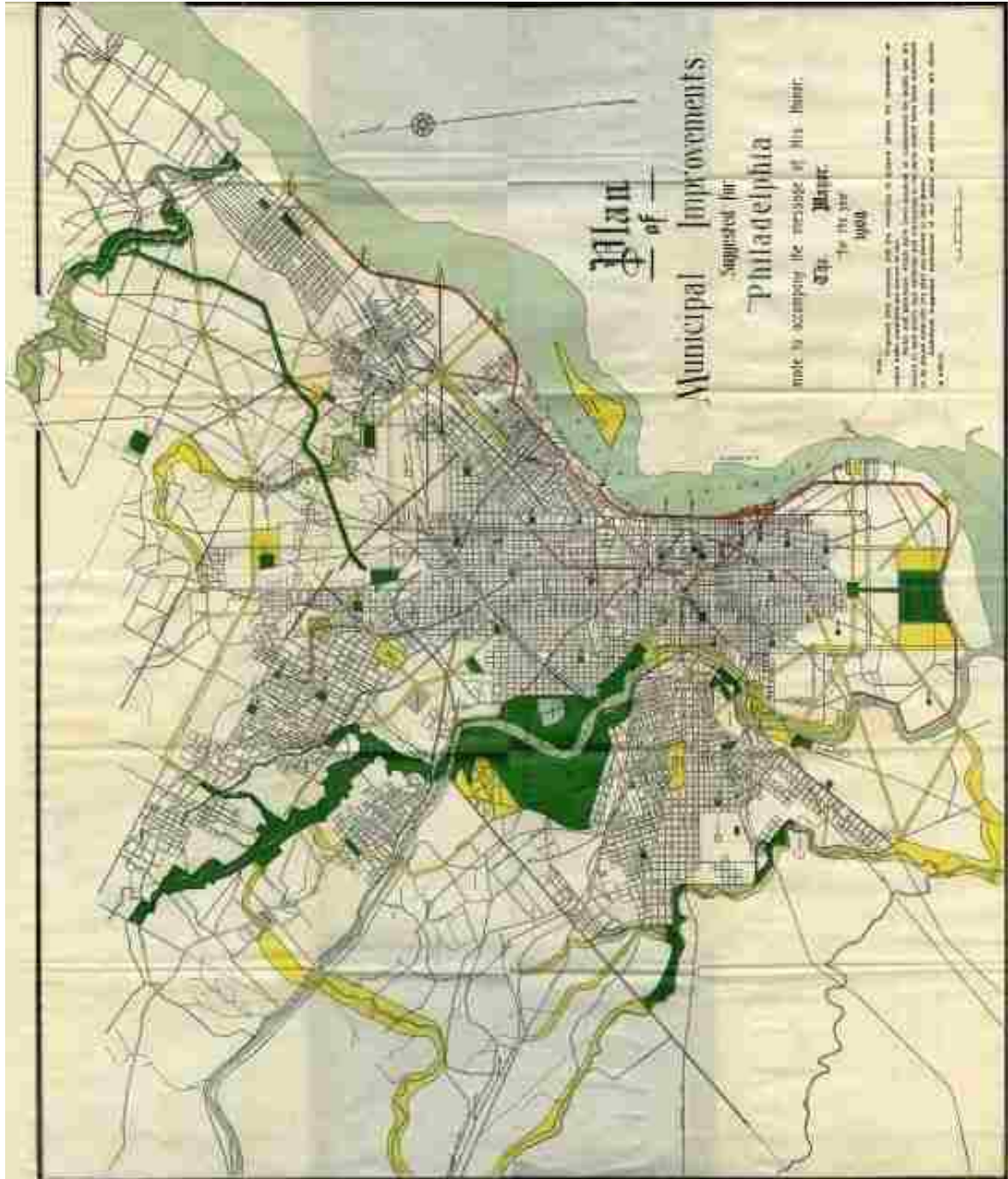


Figure 51. *Plan of Municipal Improvements Suggested for Philadelphia*, by Mayor Reyburn, 1908. After years of planning and advocating for parks and comprehensive planning, the CPA's plan for outer parks connected by a system of boulevards and parkways was accepted by the City. Proposed new avenues and the widening of present streets for commercial or heavy traffic purposes are shown in red; parks and parkways which have been acquired or condemned for public use are shown in dark green, and additions and extensions to the same which have been authorized to be placed upon the city plan are shown in light green. Additional suggested extensions of parks and parkway systems are shown in yellow. Note the Northeast Boulevard connecting Tacony and Pennypack Creeks in the Northeast, a major accomplishment for the CPA (Temple University Urban Archive).

Chicago; Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., landscape architect and son of the originator of the urban park movement; Horace Trumbauer, Clarence Zantzinger, and Paul Cret, all architects of note and residents of Philadelphia and members of the design team for the Fairmount Parkway; Director George Stearns of the Department of Public Works; and Chief Engineer George Webster of the Bureau of Surveys.

While Reyburn's advocacy for parks and planning was championed by the CPA, council continued to underfund the Fairmount Park Commission. In January 1908, council informed the commission that their request for slightly over \$1 million in operations funds would be reduced to roughly \$398,000. Again, the commission, existing separate from city government, was to be the victim of a money shortage "as a consequence of the 'raid' made upon the annual appropriation bills by the contractor-controlled finance committee of councils."³⁵ This action deserved the "most severe condemnation" according to the press, as Philadelphia "spends less on its Park, proportionally, than any city of the country and it has small reason to be proud of its treatment of that which should be made on one of the city's chief glories."³⁶ Hearing of the proposed budget for the park, certain members of the commission stated they might be obliged to close the park.³⁷ The Reyburn administration continued the previous administration's contempt for the park commission, "squandering millions on new positions and higher salaries for their political henchmen," according to the Philadelphia press. Again council took the opinion, according to council president McCurdy, that the

³⁵ *North American* (Philadelphia) 23 January 1908.

³⁶ *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia) 11 January 1908.

³⁷ *Bulletin* (Philadelphia) 9 January 1908.

“commission will get along all right as it will be allowed all that can be spared from other departments.”³⁸

Mayor Reyburn did follow through on the promises of his 1908 inaugural address by attempting to solve the problems associated with poor living conditions in the city’s densely populated wards by providing recreational opportunities. In February 1909, Reyburn recommended a study to provide adequate playgrounds and recreation centers for children. He mentioned the importance of the recently formed Playground Association, organized to promote the idea of open air activities for children and citizens, and he formed a Public Playgrounds Commission.³⁹ In 1910, the commission produced the report *Playgrounds for Philadelphia*, which argued that despite Fairmount Park’s large size, its location was not ideal to serve the needs and demands for recreation of the “younger children in the city and of the population of those sections remote from it.”⁴⁰

The playground movement of the early twentieth century was somewhat distinct from the planning and parks movements in Philadelphia, as it arose from convictions put forward by President Theodore Roosevelt: “Playgrounds are necessary means for the development of wholesome citizenship in modern cities,” for “strenuous as is the life of our people, the great danger in the American city is not in overwork, nor in intense work, but in the relaxation of our people Not until we care for the relaxation of the nation may we boast of a permanent and virile civilization.”⁴¹ According to the members of the playground commission, it was their duty to “bring the playgrounds to the doors of the children, while the parks continue in the main to serve other groups, particularly of older

³⁸ *Record* (Philadelphia) 12 December 1908.

³⁹ *Appendix to Journal of the Common Council for 1909*, Appendix No. 190, 741.

⁴⁰ *Playgrounds for Philadelphia*, Report of the Playgrounds Commission, Philadelphia, Pa., 1910, 8.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 12.

children and adults.”⁴² The recommendations outlined were the seeds of the Philadelphia Department of Recreation, which was not created until the Home Rule Charter of 1951. However, the Department of Public Welfare did administer several playgrounds and recreation centers beginning under the Charter of 1919. Funding for playgrounds and neighborhood recreational facilities proved more politically beneficial to council members than funding for Fairmount Park, and became ingrained within Philadelphia’s political culture as a means for council members to directly affect the lives of their constituents.

In addition to the playground movement, Mayor Reyburn also worked closely with the CPA to advocate for much more than a regional park system, tackling such problems as transportation, which was clearly connected to the city’s growth. To the CPA, transportation “must always be the chief factor in a city’s development. Where transportation is cramped, the movement of the people is hampered, and unhealthy, immoral and uneconomic. Where transportation is direct and unhampered, business moves smoothly and rapidly.”⁴³ The CPA also believed that the city should address the street system, housing conditions, health, litter, and an overabundance of billboards, all issues connected with the larger City Beautiful movement. The result would be “the beautification of the entire city and suburbs.”⁴⁴

The election of reform mayor Rudolph Blankenburg in 1911 was met with little enthusiasm by the CPA. To the members of the CPA, Blankenburg and his Director of Public Works, Morris L. Cooke, did not necessarily create the same positive, pro-comprehensive plan as the Reyburn administration. Blankenburg was praised by the local

⁴² Ibid, 30.

⁴³ *Twenty-first Annual Report of the City Parks Association* (Philadelphia: City Parks Association, 1909), 7-8.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 16.

press as being the wise “Old Dutch Cleanser,” although there was very little his administration accomplished regarding parks and planning that had not already been put in motion by the CPA or the Reyburn administration. Blankenburg believed that Reyburn had been corrupt, and for a time, early in his administration, he was successful in so persuading the public, particularly since little had been accomplished regarding the Fairmount Parkway.

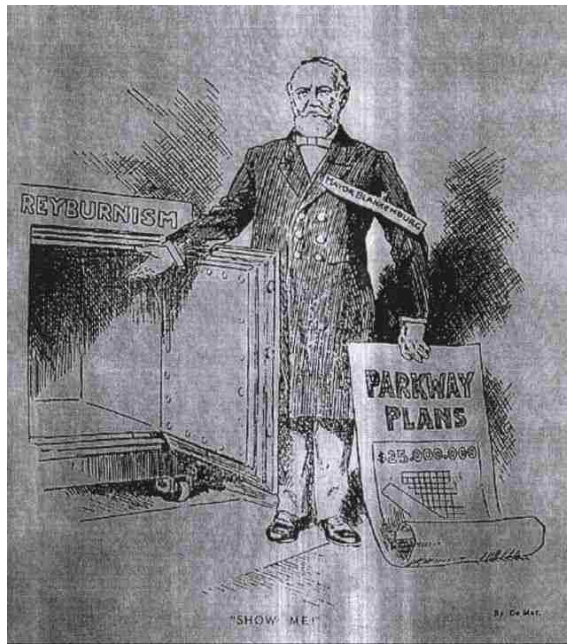


Figure 52. “Show Me!” A pro-Blankenburg political cartoon (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

In many ways, the reform Blankenburg administration actually hampered the CPA’s progress since it removed two critical members of the expert team that had devised the original plan: Chief Engineer Webster, a strong advocate for planning, and Director Stearns of the Department of Public Works. Andrew Wright Crawford had a long-standing feud with Cooke dating from 1905 when he refused to assist Cooke in putting together the platform for the City Party. Recent historians, such as Peter McCaffery, have reassessed the Blankenburg administration, stating it was “not the

roaring success contemporary reformers suggested it would be.”⁴⁵ Blankenburg alienated so many members of city government as well as the Organization that there was very little he could accomplish. To the CPA, it was Reyburn who was a reformer and a progressive, not Blankenburg, whose disdain for the inner workings of the city turned potential allies such as Crawford into enemies.

The Blankenburg administration also clashed regularly with the commission, particularly as it began to take responsibility for the outlying parks. The CPA had long clamored for one agency to be responsible for all parks. Despite its meager budget, the CPA believed the commission was the body with the most expertise in managing park land within the city. It was also the least politically motivated of all governing agencies, as its members did not serve at the pleasure of the mayor and council had little influence over its membership and the decisions of its staff. The CPA pushed for the commission to take control over Penn’s four original squares. In 1915, council passed an ordinance transferring the control of the city squares from the Department of Public Works, headed by Morris Cooke, to the commission. Cooke was furious and questioned the legality of the ordinance, writing letters to Commissioner Eli Kirk Price and the press. Cooke questioned what the transfer of land would mean to property owners since the commission had the power to regulate buildings within twenty feet of the land they controlled. Arguing that he could “hardly imagine that those who own property around these parks and squares in different parts of the city will relish having the Park Board say how it is to be developed and to what use it is to be put,” Cooke attempted to get property

⁴⁵ McCaffery, *When Bosses Ruled Philadelphia*, 182.

owners to fight against commission control.⁴⁶ However, he was ultimately unsuccessful, and all of the squares and several of the recently acquired outlying parks came under the commission's control in 1914-1915, although the park's budget remained miniscule.

Very little was accomplished between 1911 and 1915 regarding movement on the problems identified by the CPA during the years of the Reyburn administration. It was difficult for the CPA to work for the actual acquisition of park parcels that had been placed upon the city plan, since it had no authority or access to capital for either condemnation or construction projects. The CPA continued to advocate for acquisition of the Outer Park system, but the inactivity and inertia created after the early successes was disheartening to Crawford and Price. Price became focused on the completion of the Fairmount Parkway, utilizing his skills as an attorney to acquire the property that had been condemned. This work consumed him so much that he would share with his family members daily which buildings he had acquired that day, playing a game with his son placing the letter "X" on all buildings he successfully gained.⁴⁷

The CPA had been largely successful in creating the climate for the discussion of planning in Philadelphia and the need for a regional park and parkway system. It was successful in creating and shaping the spatial elements which would drive the twentieth-century development of the city. It took, however, several decades before the plan became a reality, including the Parkway, Boulevard, and the actual acquisition of all the outlying parks placed on the city plan. Even after the CPA was successful in its efforts to have the commission take control of these spaces, it would take many more years for these areas to be developed fully as park spaces, mainly due to lack of political will by

⁴⁶ *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia) 11 July 1915.

⁴⁷ Author interview with Phillip Price, the grandson of Eli Kirk Price II, 1 February 2010.

council and a miniscule budget. The City of Philadelphia continued to be as slow-moving and conservative as ever, and there were few people working in government like Crawford and Price, even fewer that had the ability to maneuver within the Organization once Blankenburg took office. In the ensuing decades of the twentieth century, their dreams of a “City Beautiful” would be partially realized, with many of the changes for which they advocated so passionately finally incorporated into the physical character of the city, albeit one park at a time.

Chapter V

The Parkway, The Boulevard, and Park Extensions: The Fairmount Park Commission and City Planning, 1915-1929

By 1915, the power of the Fairmount Park Commission once again began to rise as it controlled the planning of a regional park system begun by the City Parks Association (CPA). Fairmount Park would extend far out of the city limits with the expansion of Wissahickon Valley Park into Montgomery County to Fort Washington. While the citizen-led CPA initiated the planning of the park system, the commission's power, under the vice presidency of Eli Kirk Price II, increased as the implementation of the Parkway and the Boulevard projects commenced. The commission acted as the de facto planning body for large areas of the city as they began implementing these plans. Indeed, the commission's power extended over the entire length of the Parkway, the Boulevard, the Cobbs Creek area adjacent to Delaware County, and the development of the areas adjacent to Wissahickon Valley Park.

The development of the Parkway led to the redesign of entire sections of the city, as the design ideals associated with the City Beautiful movement spilled over from the Parkway into the redesign of the lower Schuylkill embankments, particularly the area surrounding the Pennsylvania (now JFK) Boulevard Bridge and Pennsylvania (now 30th Street) Station, as well as a reclamation of the lower river embankments for park purposes. The development of the Northeast Boulevard as a parkway, connecting existing Hunting Park in lower North Philadelphia with the newly acquired watershed parks of Tacony Creek and Pennypack Creek in undeveloped sections of Northeast Philadelphia, cemented the commission's role as the leading planning body in the city.

In the early twentieth century, Northeast Philadelphia consisted mainly of farmland and large estates. By advocating for the placement of the boulevard on the city plan, therefore deviating from the original grid plan around which most of Philadelphia was organized, the commission drove the planning and suburban-style development of that entire area, from lower Northeast Philadelphia all the way to the Bucks County border. Meanwhile various mayors, council, and other city agencies constantly contested the power the commission possessed during this time period. Indeed, the commission's power would be challenged and ultimately usurped by the creation of zoning and planning bodies for the entire city by the late 1920s.

While the creation of planning and zoning bodies in Philadelphia and the region ultimately diminished the power of the commission after 1929, the primary reason given by council for eliminating the commission was the perceived control over the city budget for the many park acquisitions. By the early 1930s, as the city became enmeshed in the Great Depression, it became much harder to justify the expenditures on park acquisition and improvements. Therefore, council used the budget to limit the powers of the commission, ceding power to newly created planning bodies. The commission's power would never be as great as it was during the 1920s.

The Planning of the Regional and Municipal Fairmount Park System

Announcing the "World's Finest Park System Planned Here," the *North American*, a proponent of the park since the days of Morton McMichael, declared a new era for the commission as it acquired land outside of the city to create and control a regional park system. The park extension, encompassing 1,000 acres of the upper reaches

of the Wissahickon Creek in Montgomery County, would reach Fort Washington, site of Fort Hill and Militia Hill, areas associated with the American Revolution.

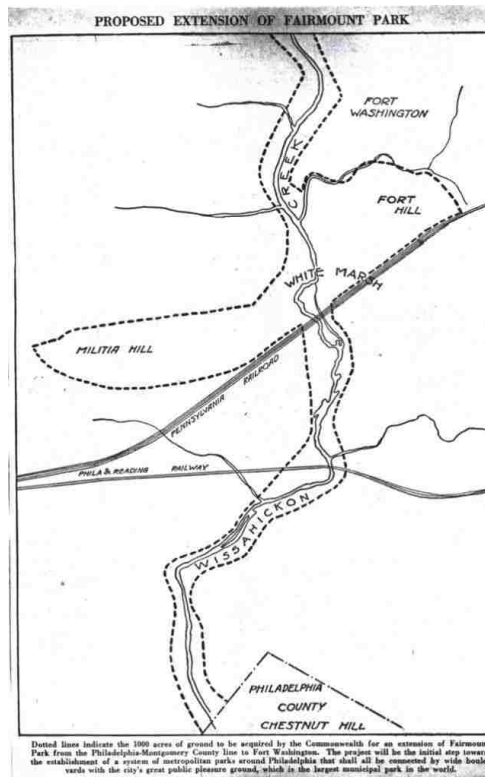


Figure 53. Fort Washington Extension of Fairmount Park, 1915. For the first time, the commission would control land outside of Philadelphia in an effort to create a regional park system and protect the Wissahickon Creek (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

This area connected with Wissahickon Valley Park, acquired under the original legislature creating the commission and the original boundaries of the park in 1868. Therefore, in many respects, the commission returned to its original mission by protecting the waterways of Philadelphia while preserving historic sites from development. Further, the commission worked to acquire additional land in Montgomery County in the areas of the Tacony-Frankford Creek and Pennypack Creek watersheds and in Delaware County in the area of Cobbs Creek, areas bounded by existing city-owned park land. This was the first step toward connecting Fairmount Park by boulevards with

other parts outside of Philadelphia, making the city the owner of a world-class regional park system.¹

The planning of the park extension and the regional park system was the recommendation of a committee formed in 1912 that consisted of not only members of the CPA and the commission, including Andrew Wright Crawford and Eli Kirk Price, but members of city government such as George S. Webster, chief of the Bureau of Surveys. The Fort Washington extension was the first part of their proposed plan to create an inter-county park system, administered by the commission and funded in part by the commonwealth that reached from Philadelphia to Lansdale in Montgomery County, some forty miles from Fairmount Park proper.²

The committee's recommendation resulted in a bill to expand the park system on a grand scale introduced by Senator Edwin H. Vare of the powerful Vare Brothers construction family of South Philadelphia, providing \$8,000 for the acquisition of the Fort Washington Extension. The law allowed cities of the first and second class to condemn and purchase land in adjoining counties.³ The wording of Vare's bill left no question that the extension would incorporate a parkway connecting the city to the region through its park system, as its caption read: "To provide for a survey of Militia Hill and Fort Hill, as a site for a public park with ample approaches thereto from Philadelphia."

The bill authorized the commission to accept, on behalf of the Commonwealth, gifts of money or of lands included within the boundaries of the park and parkway approaches from Fairmount Park. Vare also provided that the state would seek adequate donations of land for the extension from owners affected by the extension, including the

¹ *North American* (Philadelphia) 19 November 1915.

² *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia) 15 November 1915.

³ *North American* (Philadelphia) 14 February 1916.

Whitemarsh Country Club, the surrounding estates of the suburban wealthy, and the holdings of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Mindful that landowners might attempt to increase the value of their land prior to condemnation, Vare informed the press that he “told the Governor that if, in the taking of the land, there was any attempt to ‘squeeze’ the Commonwealth, at once I should introduce a measure in the Legislation to repeal the bill.”⁴ Vare leaned on council for park projects as this meant public works for hundreds of immigrant laborers in South Philadelphia.

As the commission was in the midst of creating a regional park system, council acted on the recommendations of the CPA by adding additional parcels that wealthy Philadelphians bequeathed to the city to existing parks. The CPA, long a proponent of giving land to the city for park space, began to see their decades-long outreach campaign to both the elite and council come to fruition. In 1912 the McKean family bequeathed ten-and-half acres at the intersection of Wissahickon and Abbotsford Avenues at the southern edge of Germantown for Fernhill Park, along with \$26,000 for park improvements. Councilman George P. Darrow, introducing the bill on behalf of the commission, advocated for enlarging the park by forty acres to protect the additional open space from planned industrial development by nearby Midvale Steel, which would include a new munitions plant and the consequent housing of hundreds of workers. In a complete turnaround from the original creation of Fairmount Park, which was delayed for years by the “drag-weights” of council—often due to the influence of industrialists—it was council that championed the acquisition. In an open letter to the commission, an unnamed member favored prompt action, stating that “it will not be many years before

⁴ *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia) 15 November 1915.

the whole of the surrounding region will be thickly built up to meet the needs of the locality where, within a comparatively small area, thousands of men are employed and must find homes near at hand. The increase in the population in the neighborhood is considered ample justification for the acquisition of the ground, as the present park is not adequate for the needs of the residents.” Council, acting in the interest of residential need for open space, followed the reasoning of park commissioner Theodore Justice, who responded to council’s introduction of the bill by stating: “people respond to this liberality by their intense appreciation and continual use of the instructive, beautiful and pleasure-giving provisions made for them.”⁵

By 1916, the commission was essentially acting as the de facto planning and zoning arm of government. It had such power that the sixty-four members association of the United Business Men’s Associations (UBMA) objected to an ordinance to transfer control of the boulevards from the department of public works to the commission. UBMA, believed whole sections of the city then under development would be without mass transit as the commission would block construction. UBMA, ever with an eye to future residential development in Northeast Philadelphia, particularly did not want the commission to take control over the Northeast (Roosevelt) Boulevard, a project originally championed by the CPA. As planned, the Northeast Boulevard would connect Hunting Park (which was connected to Fairmount Park via Hunting Park Avenue) with the watershed parks of Tacony Creek Park, Pennypack Creek Park, and ultimately the Poquessing Creek, which formed a large portion of the Bucks County border and was also a potential future park site.

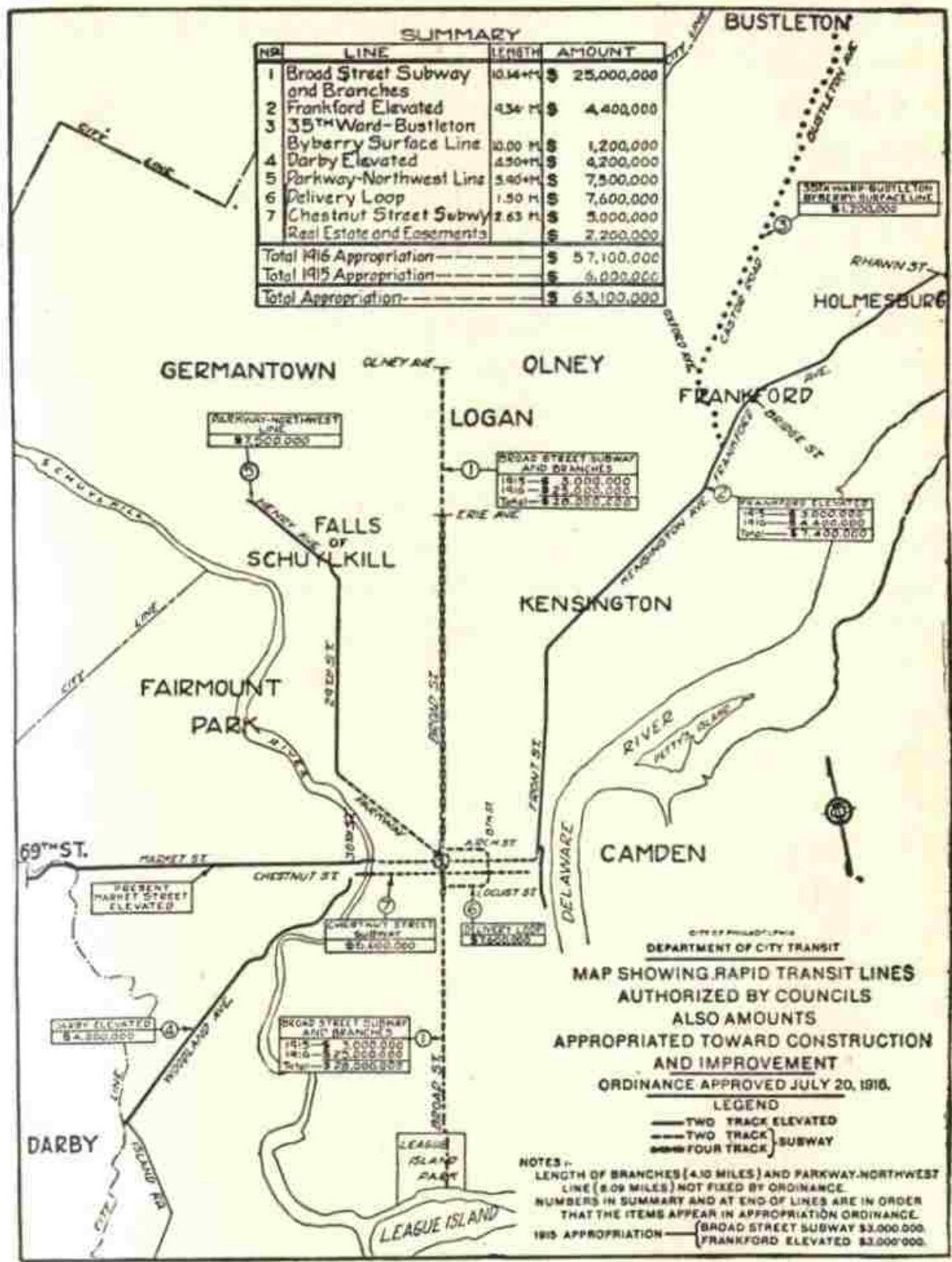
⁵ Ibid., 24 November 1915.

Although council authorized the construction of the transit lines, UBMA feared that the commission, with unlimited power, could refuse to give the right of way. City Solicitor John P. Connelly stated that these fears were unfounded, since the commission would only be responsible for the maintenance of the trees, flowers, and grass plots with “the idea of making the boulevards parts of our beautiful park system.” Connelly added that council could remove the commission’s power at any time, reverting control of the land back to public works.⁶ UBMA responded that while beautifications would be welcome, the ordinance ought to be constructed to keep the right of the city to build future high-speed transit lines. However, by the time the city planned and approved the high speed mass transit lines in 1916, there was no provision made for Northeast Philadelphia, as the commission controlled the Boulevard. The area around the Boulevard would never be connected to mass transit, paving the way for the automobile suburb it would become by the mid-twentieth century.

While the UBMA was pushing the city to limit the powers of the commission in Northeast Philadelphia, the local trade board, encompassing much of Wissahickon Valley Park, worked to protect the natural beauty of the park from autos. According to the *Public Ledger*, the trade board’s announced “Plan to Save Wissahickon” centered around a compromise accommodating the needs of automobile drivers without “destroying the natural beauties of the Upper Wissahickon” by opening Henry Avenue, an 80-foot-wide road which would carry autos along the edge of the park to the Montgomery County line.⁷ This would limit the need for the widening of Upper Wissahickon Drive, a project

⁶ *North American* (Philadelphia) 10 February 1916.

⁷ *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia) 4 February 1916.



Courtesy of the Department of City Transit.

Figure 54. Map Showing Rapid Transit Lines Authorized by Councils, 1916. The area between Logan, Olney, and Bustleton would not be served by mass transit, allowing the Boulevard to be the primary transportation spine for Northeast development (Philadelphia Streets Department).

that would have removed park land. Ironically, the Henry Avenue Bridge, which spanned the Wissahickon Creek, would eventually factor into the demise of the commission's power as council and city agencies accused the commission of holding up city plans.

The Fort Washington extension deal awarded new power to the park commission and its professional staff. Chief Engineer and Superintendent Jesse T. Vogdes urged the commission to use its state-mandated powers to acquire 500 acres in Delaware County on the banks of Cobbs Creek, the western boundary of Philadelphia. Vogdes declared that until this action was taken, the pollution from Delaware County would continue unabated into the creek. In addition to ending the industrial pollution, Vogdes also wanted to eliminate the unsightly shacks and buildings. Estimating the land value at \$1,000 per acre, he believed the whole area could be acquired for \$500,000, money which, prior to state intervention in commission and park affairs, would have been unavailable under the scant budgets council had traditionally approved for the park. The Councilmanic Association of West Philadelphia favorably viewed the recommendation of Vogdes, encouraging Mayor Smith to confer with the chair of council's finance committee to make a permanent large loan to complete Cobbs Creek Park, portioning the amount needed to purchase the land from Woodland Avenue all the way to City Line Avenue on the western portion of the creek.⁸

The commission planned portions of Cobbs Creek Park as a large municipal golf course, one of the first of its kind in the country. This usage suddenly made park land more valuable to the city's middle-class businessmen, mid-level managers who were not allowed entrance into the elite country clubs of Chestnut Hill and the Main Line suburbs.

⁸ *North American* (Philadelphia) 14 February 1916.



Figure 55. Industrial buildings along the Delaware County side of Cobbs Creek, 1912. (City Parks Association).

The city's middle class could now take advantage of park land in a much more active manner than contemplative walks through the Wissahickon and Fairmount Park proper. Though golf allowed for active recreation in an otherwise passive area, the course was designed and constructed for minimal impact to the natural setting of the park. And since Cobbs Creek Golf Course was only a half hour away from the downtown business offices, accessible by automobile or the Market Street elevated line, completed in 1907, suburban men could utilize the course between leaving work downtown and dinnertime in the newly-constructed neighborhoods of West Philadelphia, where many of them resided. Three months prior to the official opening of the course in April 1916, several hundred Center City businessmen and officers stationed at the nearby Navy Yard in South Philadelphia applied for lockers. The natural area around Cobbs, long denuded by industry and farming, was vastly improved to create a course which would "surprise the visitor, who formerly saw only a barren waste of ground along the line of the creek."⁹ By activating this space with golf, open space became suddenly more valuable to the city's

⁹ *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia) 30 January 1916.

middle class, which allowed the commission to continue to make the case that public lands were needed for the growing city.

The Fairmount (Benjamin Franklin) Parkway

Nowhere was the unlimited power of the commission as visible and therefore as contested as it was in the heart of Center City. Since the decision in 1871 to place City Hall at Center Square, park proponents pushed for a grand parkway from the public building to the public park, therefore solving the problem of accessing Fairmount Park that had long plagued the commission. The diagonal area from City Hall to Fairmount Park, bisecting Logan Square, was the potential route. But by the time construction commenced, the area was densely developed, with residences interspersed with several factories, hospitals, and churches. The commission, however, had a proven track record for acquiring land dating back to the initial acquisition of the park in the mid nineteenth century and for demolishing factories and neighborhoods along the banks of the Schuylkill. Rather than using the water supply as its reason to demolish a major swath of the city, the commission used the ideal of connecting the city to the park. In 1909 council adopted the original parkway planned of Paul Cret, Horace Trumbauer, and C.C. Zantzing. The years between the approval of the original plan and 1915 were spent acquiring the condemned parcels, along the line of the approved plan, with some demolition of buildings.

By 1916, with the alignment and acquisition finally over, the commission began to take the lead in planning the landscape and buildings along the route. The state legislature gave the commission power over the design and approval of all buildings within 200 feet of any park or parkway, and the commission therefore began laying down

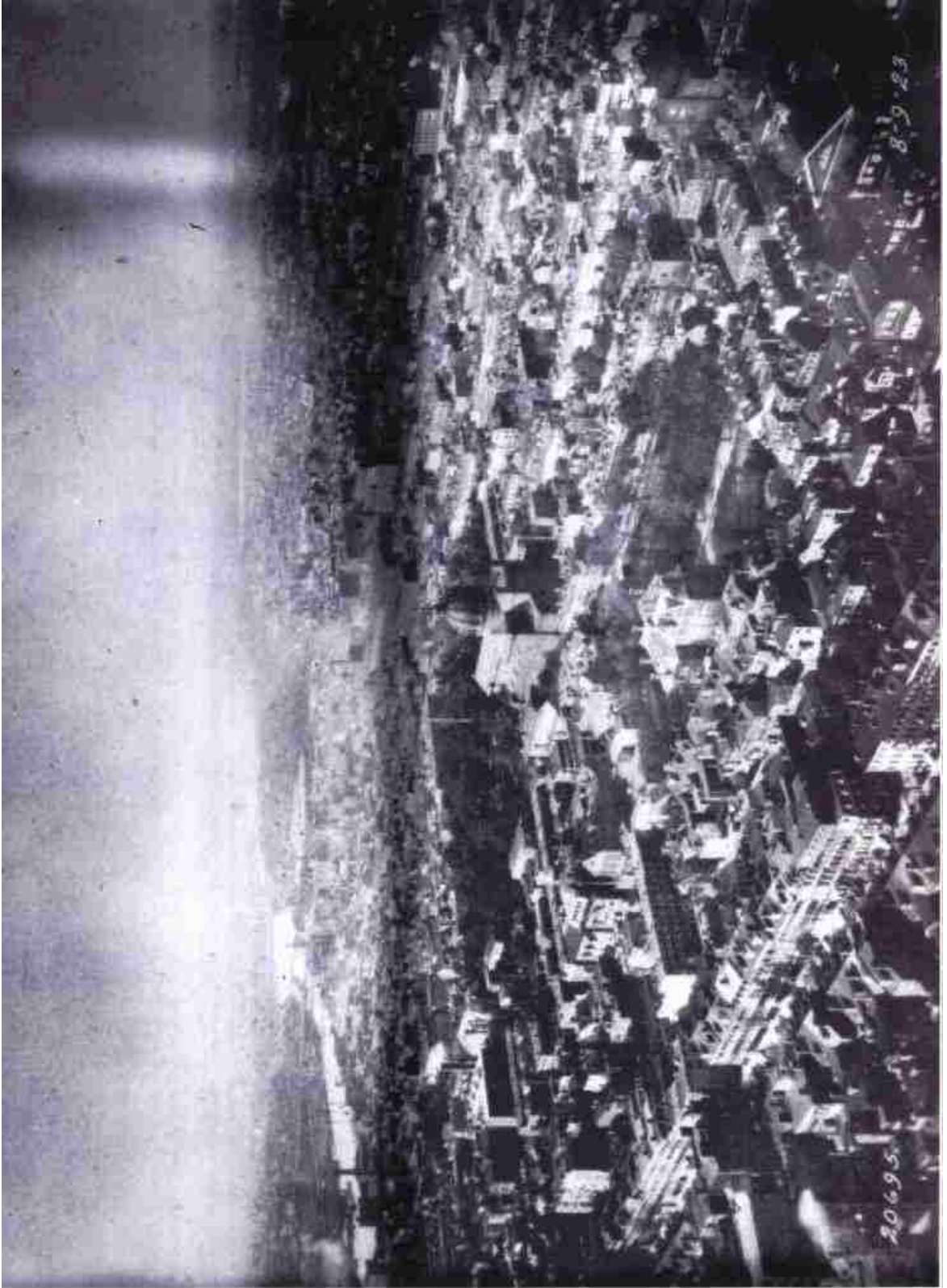


Figure 56. The Parkway area, pre-demolition, circa 1909. Note the Basilica of SS. Peter and Paul in the center of the image and the open space of Logan Square immediately to the northwest of the Cathedral (Philadelphia City Archives).



Figure 57. Original plan of the parkway as adopted by council, 1909 (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

restrictions on the size of buildings along the route. At its meeting in November 1916, as building heights were being suggested, Mayor Smith, fearing a conflict of authority, interposed that the newly formed Philadelphia Zoning Commission should also be involved in the discussion. Eli Kirk Price, as vice president of the commission, ever involved in matters of park planning, established rigid guidelines for development of the

size and character of buildings along the parkway, stating no building should be higher than 250 feet or three times the width of its façade, except churches.¹⁰

The Philadelphia Zoning Commission, established in 1916, functioned as an advisory board only. Though it had no official governmental powers, it was charged with protecting the entire city, not merely the Parkway, against the “arbitrary inclusion, in residential or other selected districts, of buildings of any extraneous or unsuitable type.” Price believed that the zoning commission could further protect the parkway and other similar future thoroughfares by keeping “all structures of ugly design at such a distance as not to interfere with the lines or appearance of the highway.” The Fairmount Parkway restrictions marked the first instance of modern zoning regulations in the city. The fact that the Fairmount Park Commission was responsible was no surprise, as Price had been president of the CPA and vice president of the park commission for several years. The grand plans for the Parkway, which he had championed since the beginning of the century, were finally within the CPA and commission’s grasp. Price used the example of the existing 200-foot tall Bell (Verizon) Telephone Company Building, located just off the alignment of the Parkway at Seventeenth Street, as the height limit of the Parkway.¹¹

The park and zoning commissions quickly decided on building size regulations, dividing the area into two zones: the area between Broad and Eighteenth Street and the area from west of Eighteenth Street to the park’s entrance. The regulations for the zone closer to the city stipulated no building be higher than 200 feet or three times the width of its façade, unless the building was setback from the cornice line—less than the original

¹⁰ *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia) 9 November 1916.

¹¹ *Philadelphia Inquirer* 9 November 1916.

250-foot limit set by Price in his original proposal. This is the first instance of setback provisions in Philadelphia. In addition, no buildings could be used as a stable, garage, or



Figure 58. The Bell (Verizon) Telephone Building at Seventeenth and the Parkway, 2012. The Comcast Tower, Philadelphia's tallest skyscraper in 2012, is the glass building to the immediate left (southwest) of the building (photo by author).

for any manufacturing purpose, or for the display of a billboard or roof sign. The provisions for the regulations even included the following far-reaching regulation, staking the claim that the parkway was following all principles of good park design in keeping with the ideals of the City Beautiful movement:

No building shall be erected or altered until the plans therefore have been submitted to the Art Jury and approved by the commissioners, and no sign, notice or advertisement of any kind, visible from any point within the boundaries of the Parkway, shall be displayed thereon, unless the design and location of said sign, notice or advertisement have been submitted to the Art Jury and approved by the commissioners.

The area closer to the park, from Eighteenth Street to the park's entrance, had even stricter height provisions, restricting buildings in the area from the crescent (now Eakins Oval) to Fairmount Park at 100 feet, and 160 feet for those from the crescent to Eighteenth Street.¹²

Two other issues complemented the height restrictions. First, in keeping with a longstanding ban on alcohol sales in Fairmount Park, two municipal judges ruled in March 1917 to refuse any licenses for liquor sales on the parkway. The judges viewed that their decision “goes a little further and insures what might be called the morals of the Parkway as well as contributes something also to its seemly physical appearance by this prohibition of a kind of business that might easily be out of harmony with the proper development of the Parkway as a pleasure ground for all classes.” In addition, advocates for the City Beautiful called for the commission to deal with the “sign nuisance” where it impinged upon parks and parkways, noting that “it is worse than folly for American communities to spend millions for beautiful public buildings, civic centers, parks and

¹² *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia) 14 December 1916.

parkways and then let hideous signs abut on the finest sites, destroying priceless vistas and practically killing the very beauty that the city has endeavored to set up.”¹³

The regulation against advertisement on the parkway received its first test when the commission ordered the National Guard, recruiting in July 1917 just days before the Fourth of July, to remove all posters erected at Broad and Filbert Streets at the entrance to the Parkway—even though the signs, featuring the message, “Come on, Boys—Give the Guard a Fighting Chance,” were regarded of strategic importance to the Guard. The Philadelphia Poster Advertising Company was surprised to receive the commission’s letter, which stated the Guard did not receive Art Jury permission, although it had received permission from the Bureau of City Property to erect the signs. The Guard retorted that the area was very unsightly since the Parkway had not been finished at that point, so advertising relieved this perceived ugliness. In addition, several vendors also occupied the site without permission of the Art Jury, so it was noted that the commission ordering posters to be removed two days prior to the Fourth of July was particularly excessive.¹⁴ Upon winning this fight over advertisements, even at the risk of being unpatriotic, the commission’s powers were firmly entrenched.

The arrival of Jacques Greber on the parkway project in 1917 altered the original 1907-1909 plan of Cret, Trumbauer, and Zantzinger. Joseph E. Widener, the wealthy art collector and son of P.A.B. Widener, brought Greber to Philadelphia to embellish Lynnewood Hall, his estate in Elkins Park, Montgomery County. While they were working together, Greber expressed an interest in the parkway project. Widener believed that the original plans required changes which would “better display the beauty of the

¹³ Ibid. 9 March 1917.

¹⁴ *Public Record* (Philadelphia) 3 July 1917.



Figure 59. The entrance to the Parkway from City Hall Tower, c. 1915. The unimproved area where the commission successfully asserted their power over advertising is in the left center foreground (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

great thoroughfare.”¹⁵ Like his predecessor on the parkway project, Paul Phillippe Cret, Greber studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris and was fluent in the classical ideals associated with the City Beautiful movement. The designs of Lynnewood Hall, especially its façade and the alee of trees leading to a circular plaza in the rear of the building, reflected Greber’s training and also bear a striking resemblance to his embellishments of the original parkway plan and art museum.

The primary differences between the original 1909 design of the parkway and Greber’s final design were in aesthetic decisions, for Greber did not realign the route as acquisition of the properties were complete and demolition of buildings continued. Instead, he believed the parkway would be improved by incorporating simple design elements. These aesthetic revisions were a direct outcome of the commission gaining

¹⁵ *Evening Telegraph* (Philadelphia) 30 January 1918.

control over the parkway designs from the Bureau of City Property. According to the *Evening Telegraph*, the Greber revisions “will bring Fairmount Park more than a half mile into the city, as a vista in the centre of Logan Square, and tree-lined avenues from there northwestward to the Art Museum virtually will set the entrance of the great public park at Eighteenth and Race streets.”¹⁶ Greber worked to utilize the natural sloping land elevations of the banks of the Schuylkill to enhance the plan from the Art Museum to the river. Greber also worked to alter the section of the Parkway closest to City Hall and the Pennsylvania Railroad’s Broad Street Station, adding a diagonal driveway cutting through the square at Broad and Filbert streets , running southwest from Broad and Arch and connecting with the parkway. All traffic was diverted to this driveway, thus lessening the congestion around City Hall. This was one of the first instances of traffic planning for the automobile in Philadelphia.

The nature of Greber’s plan was much more comprehensive than the earlier plans as it continued the planning for the parkway from City Hall into Fairmount Park and the area behind the Art Museum. This was based on precedent set years prior, particularly those recommendations made by the CPA in the early twentieth century. Paul Cret’s 1905 plan for the “Study and Development of Schuylkill River and Adjacent Portions of Philadelphia,” and 1907 plan entitled “The Entrance of the Philadelphia Parkway into Fairmount Park” were the basis for the placement of the Art Museum on Fairmount Hill, home of the soon to be obsolete Fairmount Water Works reservoirs. By the time of the parkway’s expansion, the Philadelphia Water Department had closed the Fairmount Water Works and opened five filtration plants and a sewage disposal plant, located near

¹⁶ Ibid.



Figure 60. Jacques Greber's Design of the Parkway, 1917 (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

the mouth of the Pennypack Creek. In addition, the 1907 plan called for an elaborate treatment plant below the Callowhill Street Bridge. Following this plan, B.H. Haldeman, under George S. Webster, chief engineer of the Department of Public Works, prepared an elaborate map of Philadelphia for the National Conference of Civic Planning in 1911 that contained several suggestions for new diagonals connecting existing parks and parkways. Thus, the area once closely associated with the creation of a park and the protection of the city's water supply would become the primary location for the new park planning movement in Philadelphia, with parks no longer a means to an end, but rather an end in and of themselves as they beautified the city.

Although the Parkway plans that had been touted for two decades by the CPA were finally becoming reality, Philadelphia continued to be controlled, in part, by those who believed that the "city should cut out all luxuries until the financial condition is settled. Expenditures for parks and boulevards and such things should be dropped entirely in favor of a necessity like a new water plant."¹⁷ Mayor J. Hampton Moore further stated that having independent bodies such as the Fairmount Park Commission controlling public monies through the writ of mandamus ensured abuse. The mayor argued "I don't think the Park Commissioners, because they have power, should buy ground, fix the price and pay with mandamuses. There should be a check on the system which has hamstrung the city and upset the budget." Of 11 acres of land acquired for Fairmount Park along Wissahickon Avenue, the mayor argued "It did not invite children nor add to the beauty of the Park at that point. A mile away children played on an ash dump. Inquiry showed

¹⁷ *Inquirer* (Philadelphia) 18 March 1920.

that this plot of ground cost \$121,000, and we could not get \$15,000 for a playground to save the health of those children.”¹⁸

Eli Kirk Price retorted that the powers of the commission were largely misunderstood and that it did not, in fact, have the same powers to purchase land as council had. He stated that “the whole subject of acquiring park lands is in the hands of the mayor and the council. The Park Commission is not in a position to multiply parks and it is only fair to remember in the future, when the problem is discussed, that council must first make an appropriation before a property can be purchased.” Explaining that the role of the park commission was a planning body, commissioner Theodore Justice argued that the commission has the “view in interests of generations to come after us, and the improvements that are being made are not from the standpoint of immediate approval, but for the use and enjoyment of the future generations,” citing the Parkway as an example.¹⁹

The discord between the commission and city government was furthered when the commission worked to remove two ex-officio members, chief of the water bureau and chief of the bureau of city property, from their roles as commissioners, positions held since the commission’s inception in 1867. Standing up to the mayor and the heads of city agencies, the park commission did not call these two former members during roll call at their regular monthly meeting in May 1920. Mayor J. Hampton Moore was told that the new 1919 city charter technically did not mention these two officials by name, so therefore they were appointees, not city officials, and could be removed from the commission. The fact that these two agencies could interfere with the commission’s power more than any other was not lost on the mayor. On getting a reverse ruling from

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

the city solicitor, he expressed concern that “both of these officials have jurisdiction over a vast amount of valuable property in close proximity to the property under the jurisdiction of the commission. To say that they shall be eliminated from this board on a technicality is a very dangerous proceeding.”²⁰ While ultimately the mayor triumphed and the two ex-officio commission seats were restored, the rift between the commission and city agencies only grew throughout the 1920s and continued until the park commission ceased to exist.

The Northeast (Roosevelt) Boulevard

While the Parkway was created by demolishing entire sections of the built environment—leading to the first zoning laws in Philadelphia—the development of Northeast Philadelphia surrounding the Boulevard, based on planning and implementation decisions of park planners, allowed citizens to connect to larger watershed parks with very little demolition of the existing built environment. Originally conceived by the CPA in the first decade of the twentieth century as a wide boulevard connecting Tacony Creek and Pennypack Creek with existing Hunting Park (1855) in lower North Philadelphia, the Boulevard was placed on the city plan in 1910. The Boulevard would ostensibly solve the problem of park access that had so plagued the park commission. Therefore, using park land and the boulevard to encourage the development of Northeast Philadelphia from its unplanned amalgam of farms and large estates, this last remaining large open space of the city would be planned according to

²⁰ *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia) 13 May 1920.

park principles, as outlined by the CPA, connecting residents to parks by way of wide parkways.²¹

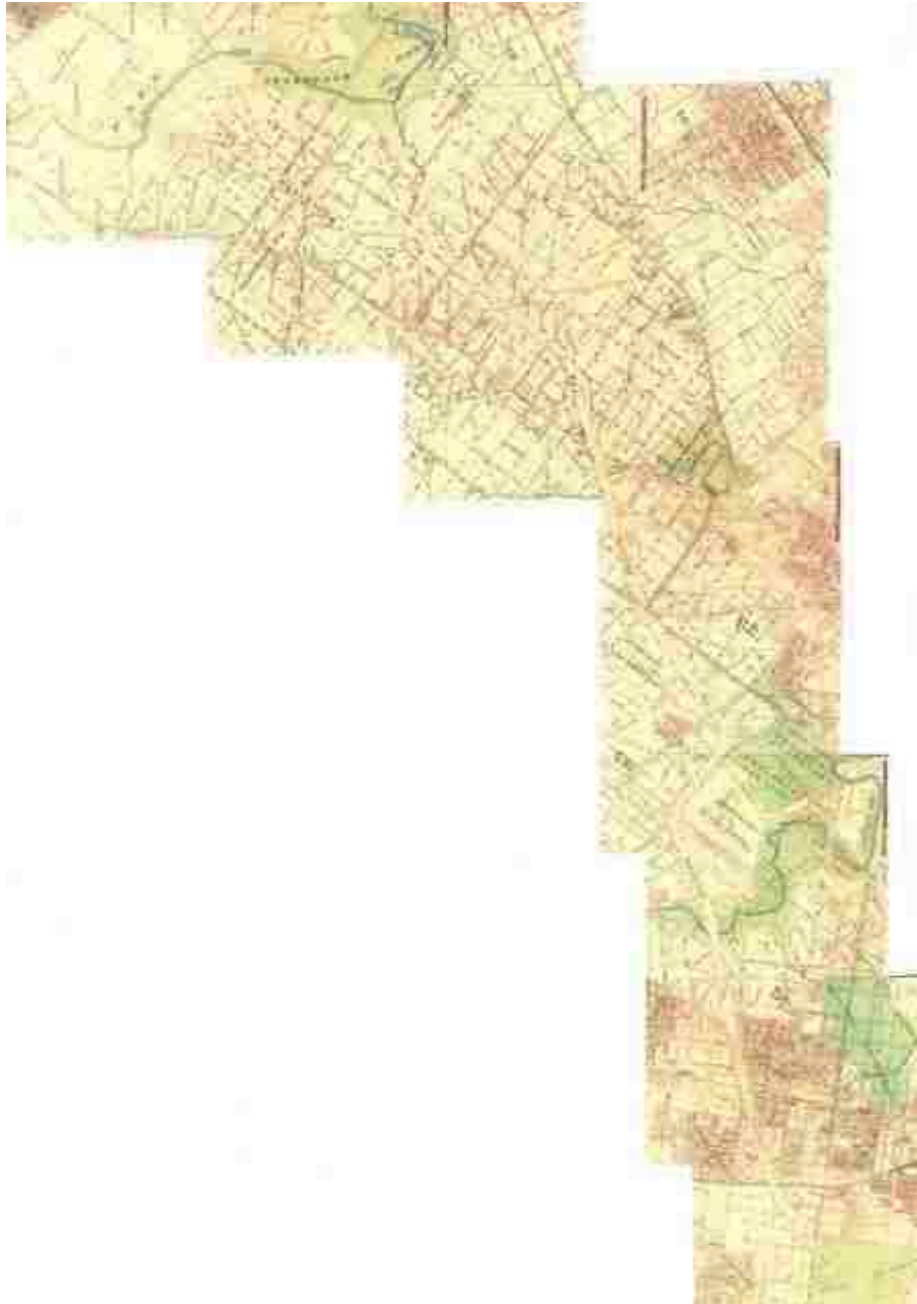


Figure 61. *The Smedley Atlas of Philadelphia*, 1910. The boulevard is shown stretching from Hunting Park (green space in the lower left) to Tacony Creek Park (green space in center left). From there, the boulevard meanders across the grid until it reaches Pennypack Park (green space in upper right). (The Athenaeum of Philadelphia).

²¹ *Sixteenth Annual Report of the CPA*, 11-12.

Rather than turning their attention to rectifying the ills associated with older, densely populated areas along the Delaware, the CPA and the commission actually controlled development of the built environment in the Northeast. The Boulevard would break across the grid and private property in a meandering fashion. Only railroads needed to be crossed, but park planners had plenty of experience dealing with railroads as rail lines existed in Fairmount Park proper prior to the park's acquisition in the 1860s.

Mass transit determined much of the development of North and West Philadelphia, with such figures as P.A.B. Widener who made a fortune by purchasing land, laying out trolley lines, and therefore developing these areas as "streetcar suburbs." However, the boulevard was never serviced by mass transit, therefore ensuring its place as the catalyst for the coming automobile-centered suburbanization of the entire northeast. Indeed, when the Transportation Committee of the Lindley Improvement Association proposed an extension of the Market-Frankford Elevated line to the Boulevard in 1920, it was objected by residents along the Boulevard as

there has been no public demand by the people living along the Boulevard or adjacent to it, asking for a trolley line on the boulevard, but on the other hand there is almost unanimous objection to the defacement of the Boulevard by the placing of overhead wires and trolley tracks through the central portion of the grass plots, which is that portion of the Boulevard on which the taxpayer's money, amounting at this time to over three million dollars, has been expended for the embellishment and beautification which would all be destroyed, especially if the traction company were permitted to operate the old, broken down yellow cars.²²

The editorial continued that "it is generally understood that the transportation in vogue on boulevards in foreign countries is of the motor bus type, there not being any trolley tracks on the boulevards abroad." Lastly, the editorial urged council not to grant

²² *Bulletin* (Philadelphia) 15 May 1920.

the franchise to any traction company as “it would be done solely in the interest of one corporation.”²³ The Boulevard would be developed for the automobile.

Although Tacony Creek Park had been placed on the city plan as early as 1907, it was not acquired by the city and placed under the care of the commission until that portion of the Boulevard was developed. The same day that Mayor Moore announced a “new park for the boulevard” in February 1921, acquiring 250 acres of land on either side of the creek, council approved the extension of the Boulevard from Welsh Road northeast of Pennypack Park to the Poquessing Creek, the border between Philadelphia and Bucks County.²⁴

As the Boulevard developed for the automobile, the park commission came under serious fire from both the Keystone Automobile Club and a delegation of businessmen and farmers organizations of Philadelphia for their parking regulations as enforced by the Fairmount Park Guard. These organizations demanded that the commission’s powers be removed and all parking regulations along the boulevard be rescinded. Eli Kirk Price, speaking on behalf of the commission, insisted that the commission regulations eliminated “hold-ups, objectionable spooning parties and have facilitated traffic greatly.” By declaring that residents could not park their cars in front of their houses and that prospective real estate buyers could not get out of their cars to view houses and lots for sale, the Keystone Automobile Club pushed the commission to adopt a compromise parking code covering residences, businesses, and unoccupied sections of the Boulevard. Therefore, the Boulevard became the first place in Philadelphia designed for parked automobiles by allowing for permit parking along its route, therefore further encouraging

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *Evening Ledger* (Philadelphia) 17 February 1921.

its growth as an automobile-centered “open air” suburb, which the CPA believed would cure the ills surrounding the crowded downtown.²⁵

Mayor J. Hampton Moore invoked the spirit of Theodore Roosevelt at the dedication, given at the intersection of Broad Street and the Northeast Boulevard, stating:

Philadelphia has constructed here a great boulevard; it is a credit to the builders, and a connecting link between Philadelphia, the first American city, and New York, the great metropolis where Roosevelt was born. The Mayor and council have deemed it fitting that this thoroughfare, destined to unite the two great cities and to connect up the highways of the country, shall be dedicated upon this the natal day of the great American, to whose honor we are assembled.²⁶

This “gorgeous esplanade leading up to the northeast gates of the City of Brotherly Love” with its “beckoning invitation to play and disport in the clean, cool sweep of air and the radiant sunshine here within a half hour’s run of the city’s noise and traffic” was being compromised from the unsightly buildings, shacks and billboards placed along it.²⁷ By 1922 the Boulevard was being criticized by the press due to the avenue of “hot dog emporiums” placed along its stretches by vendors who had struck deals with private property owners whose homes fronted the boulevard.

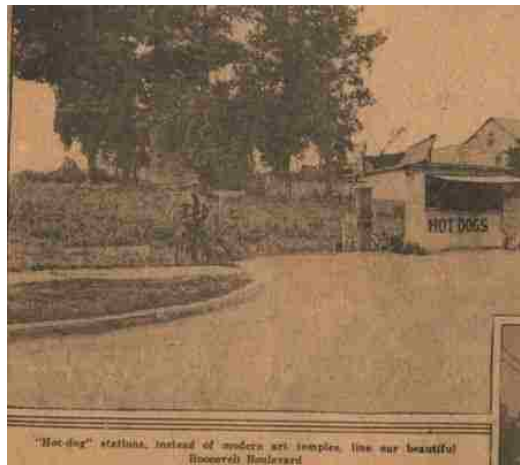


Figure 62. “Hot-dog stations, instead of modern art temples, line our beautiful Roosevelt Boulevard,” 1922 (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

²⁵ *Inquirer* (Philadelphia) 6 April 1922.

²⁶ *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia) 3 September 1922.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

In response to the outcry by the press and public over the unsightly conditions along the boulevard, council confirmed the commission's power over the new "City Beautiful," ruling by the 1923 building-height ordinance established for the parkway would apply to the Roosevelt Boulevard and Cobbs Creek Parkway. The press greatly supported the measure, as "these pleasure thoroughfares ought to be protected against all unsightly structures, even if no rigid regulations are enforced in other parts of the city ... [if] the Park Commission uses a wide discretion the beauty of these two thoroughfares can be preserved without in any way interfering with the erection of any buildings which properly belong upon them."²⁸ By the early 1930s, photos of the boulevard show the clean lines of the planned roadway with no unsightly adornments and no mass transit. While the suburban style rowhouses were being erected with parking for automobiles, older farmhouses, soon to be cleared for development, exist separated from the main thoroughfare.

The Rise of City and Regional Planning and the Demise of Commission Power

Although the park commission's power over the planning, implementation, and aesthetics of the Parkway, the Boulevard, and park extensions into suburban counties was at an apex during the 1920s, the seeds of its demise were being sown by members of council and the mayor. Recommendations by the CPA continued to call attention to issues of environmental degradation, with their suggested means of "redemption." Although many of its ideas were being implemented, the private body continued to encourage beautification of other sections of the city not controlled by the commission. In 1924, the CPA published an influential work entitled *The Redemption of the Lower*

²⁸ *Evening Ledger* (Philadelphia) 24 January 1923.



Figure 63. The Roosevelt Boulevard, 1931 (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

Schuylkill: The River As It Was; the River As It Is; the River As It Should Be. Addressed to the mayor, it made the case that the lower Schuylkill should be redeemed from “being an open sewer, with its dump collecting station, its oil refineries, abattoir, chemical and paint manufactories, and garbage disposal plants, and making it a beautiful river, with bordering parkways upon both banks lined with trees, and with open places for public use in the peninsulas formed by the river’s windings.”²⁹ Calling attention to the fact that the residential areas of South and Southwest Philadelphia adjacent to the lower river were poorer than those above the Fairmount Dam adjacent to Fairmount Park and the Wissahickon, Lewis believed that the redemption was nothing less than a major “social uplift worthy of a second Messiah.” Since “the health and happiness of the poor are vital to the health and happiness of the rich” as “disease, physical, moral, and political, originates in the lowest stratum of society,” therefore “the best way to prevent and eradicate such disease, is to raise the deadly level.”³⁰ Quoting a report from 1913, Lewis added: “Fouly polluted streams flowing through sections of the city, convert what might be attractive residential sections into slum districts, where buildings are erected and housing conditions exist, which foster unwholesome conditions of living.”³¹

The outcome of the redemption of the lower Schuylkill’s banks created economic opportunities through beautification. As Lewis explained “making a city beautiful is investing money, not spending it. It is creating and increasing municipal capital, not diminishing it. Beauty in a city is economy, where ugliness is waste. Visitors are attracted

²⁹ John Frederick Lewis, *The Redemption of the Lower Schuylkill* (Philadelphia: City Parks Association, 1924), 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

by splendid parks and parkways, by playgrounds and handsome buildings.”³² The first recommendation was turning both banks of the entire lower Schuylkill into park land.

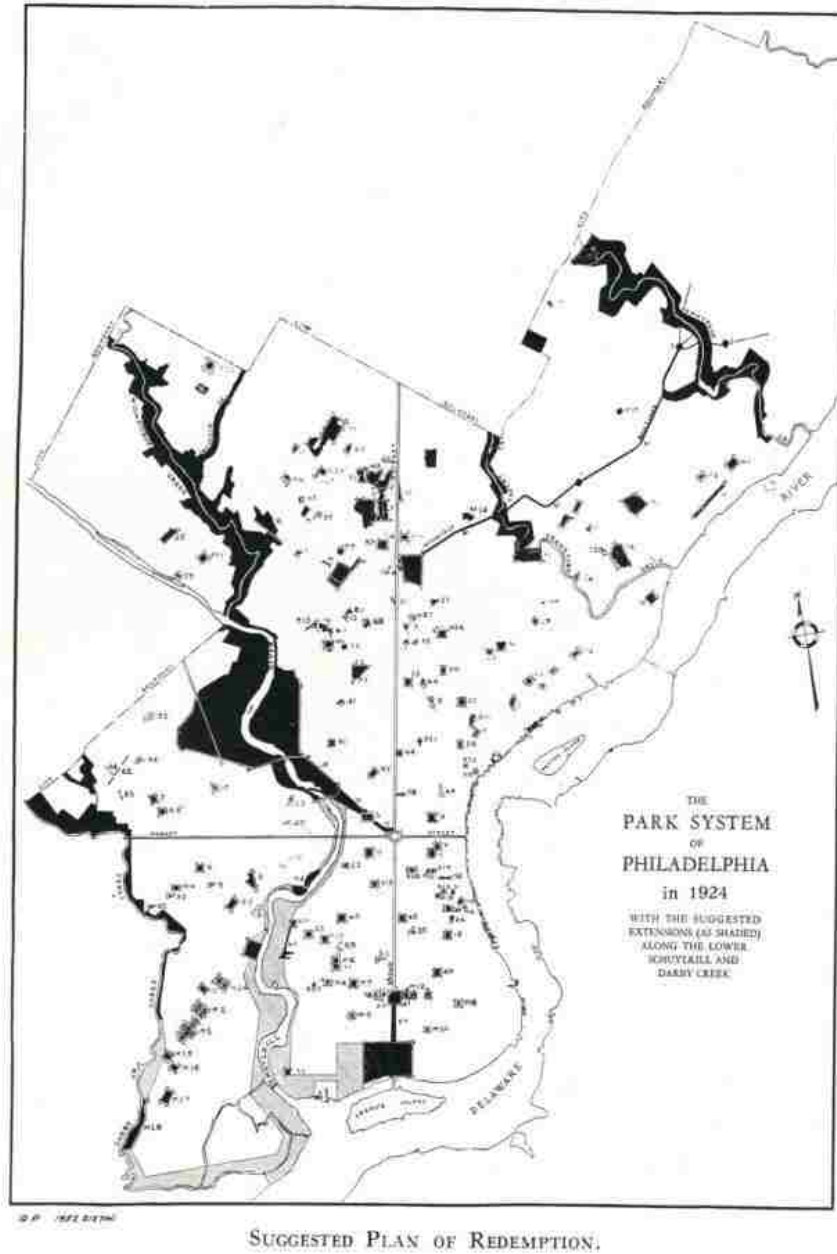
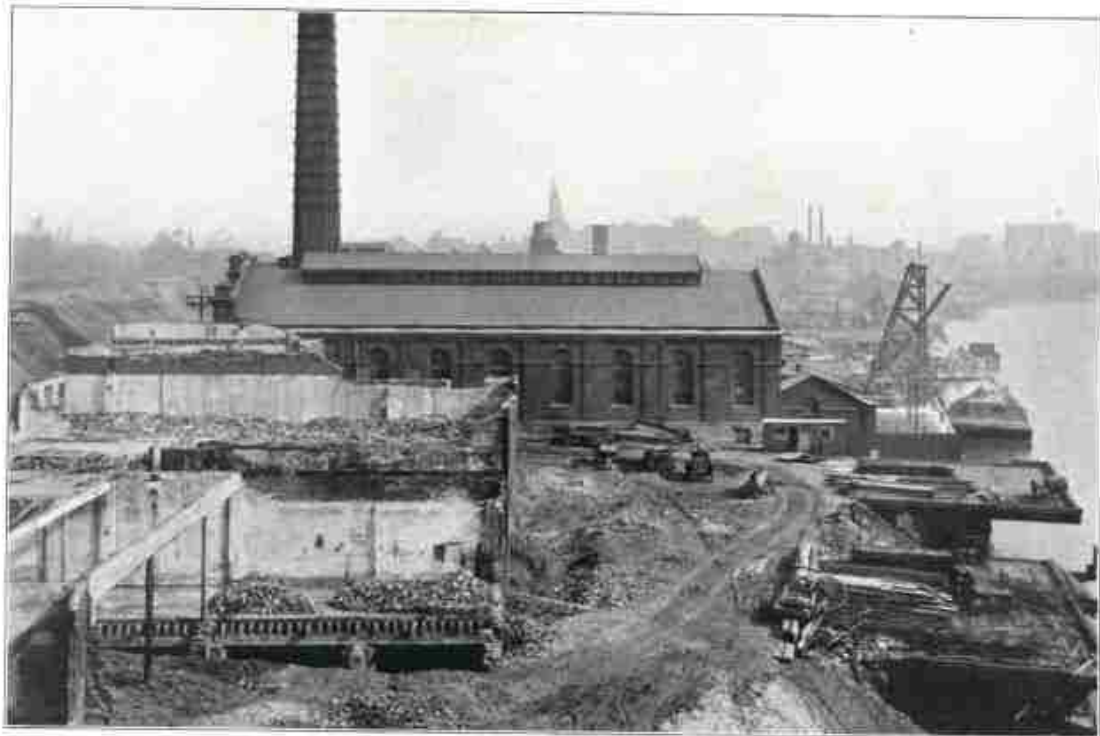


Figure 64. CPA’s Suggested Plan of Redemption, 1924. The CPA used the map of Philadelphia’s existing park system for their “suggested plan of redemption,” which included the acquisition of the entire lower Schuylkill and Darby Creek, the area south of Cobbs Creek in Southwest Philadelphia. Both areas were heavily industrialized. (City Parks Association).

³² Ibid., 137.



EAST BANK OF THE SCHUYLKILL BELOW SPRING GARDEN STREET BRIDGE.
THE BANKS HAVE LONG BEEN A DISGRACE TO PHILADELPHIA.

Figure 65. East Bank of the Schuylkill Below Spring Garden Street Bridge. From *The Redemption of the Lower Schuylkill*, 1924 (City Parks Association)

Although the CPA could make recommendations such as these from a private standpoint, hoping that its ideals would become policy and that the removal of nuisance industries would become a reality, the commission, the body which had the most power to enact the recommendations of the CPA, was coming under significant attack.

The attack on the commission's unchecked power was over the very authority it was granted over the Parkway and the Boulevard. By 1927, the press was questioning why a body "created primarily for the protection of Philadelphia's water supply," had become involved in beautification and "grown in corresponding power and responsibility" while ex-officio members of the body had "given little attention to the work of the commission." In the press's view, "commissioners appointed by the courts,

and responsible solely to them, are too often a law unto themselves.”³³ The city solicitor brought suit against the commission over its power to transfer land along the parkway. By not going through the city process in transferring land to the elite Philadelphia Club, which hoped to build a clubhouse along the Parkway and had the backing of the commission, the commission countered that they did not need city approval. City Solicitor Gaffney took this opportunity to write an opinion regarding removal of the Parkway from the commission’s control. ³⁴ The judge ruled that the commission’s power was only over the boundaries of the original parks, Hunting Park, Fairmount Park, and Wissahickon Valley Park, placed under its management in the original acts of 1867 and 1869. Their power over adjusting boundaries of the parkway was thereby limited and the constitutionality of their power over the Parkway and the Boulevard in 1915 was questioned. Finally, council intervened and stated that the park commission could oversee the care and management of the park land outside of the original boundaries, but could not acquire any more land or adjust boundaries without an ordinance approved first by council.³⁵

The debate over the commission’s power over the parkway allowed the mayor to attack Price directly in his delay of many city projects which touched on areas of park land. A 1928 report to Mayor Mackey, prepared at his request, by the departmental heads of the Department of Public Works, the Bureaus of Engineering and Surveys, and the division engineer of grade crossings, blamed the commission for “holding up big city plans,” including tunnel work for railroads, demolition of buildings, construction of bridges, sewers, and streets. The commission allegedly “consistently refused to approve

³³ *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia) 9 February 1927.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8 June 1927.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 15 October 1927.

plans” as they requested a “comprehensive plan of street development . . . over the vast portion of which it has absolutely no control.” The commission’s critical attitude to all designs sent to them was costing the city significant time and money, as projects could not be bid until the commission was satisfied.³⁶ The beautification of the city, which the CPA and the commission had long fought for, was ironically being slowed down by their very power, according to city officials.

In 1929, these perceived abuses of power finally led City Controller S. Davis Wilson to urge the state to pass a comprehensive zoning bill for Philadelphia. Stating that the “one-man control of the commission,” referring to Eli Kirk Price, “prevented the building of the proposed Hahnemann Hospital and College on the Parkway” while permitting “the erection of a stable in the Upper Wissahickon,” was evidence of a need for a separate, city-controlled body, he argued “we need this zoning bill enacted into a law to encourage the correction of abuses in the control of the erection of buildings by the Fairmount Park Commission . . . over city projects.”³⁷

By the time the city was using the commission’s power to encourage the adaptation of a comprehensive zoning ordinance, citizen groups were forming to contest the power of the commission in their neighborhoods. Residents of Chestnut Hill and the newly formed Friends of the Wissahickon opposed the taking of ground for a stable, to be leased to the private Chestnut Hill Riding and Driving Club, in the Upper Wissahickon. Price’s brother, John Sergeant Price, had sold the land to the city to be used as parkland and then Eli Price approved the erection of a stable to be used by a private entity.

Whereas matters of the commission’s power prior to this were between the city and the

³⁶ *Record* (Philadelphia) 2 August 1928.

³⁷ *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia) 19 March 1929.

commission, now private residents were beginning to take the commission to court over its abuse of power. However, Price ignored the suit over the stable and cast the deciding vote allowing its construction. The residents of Chestnut Hill, several of them powerful members of the elite, began to push for council to enact zoning at that time.³⁸

In June 1929, Mackey successfully created the first City Planning Commission (CPC), authorized by ordinance of council, and the City Zoning Commission (CZC) by an act of the legislature. The CPC's first order of business was to create a ten-year plan for the city's development; while it also would oversee all proposals for the business district, its primary mission would be "the beautification of the city through a supervision of building construction."³⁹ The CZC's members were to provide a zoning ordinance for submission to council. The first head of the planning commission, as selected by the mayor, was Joseph Widener, the art patron who had hired Jacques Greber to beautify the plans for the parkway, but who was not a member of the park commission. Indeed, seeming to know that its power was being challenged, the Fairmount Park Commission held up its appointee for months, stalling the mayor in the completion of his list. The subjects of study for the CPC, as outlined by the mayor, included parks and the recreational system in the city, removing the original park commission from being the primary agency in those matters. In addition, the CPC's recommendations would trump any debates of the commission over matters outside of its jurisdiction, such as railways, bridges, and city projects, which they were accused of delaying. While Price was finally given a seat on the CPC, the Park Commission's official representative was its president, E.T. Stotesbury.

³⁸ *Record* (Philadelphia) 12 July 1929.

³⁹ *Inquirer* (Philadelphia) 13 June 1929.

In addition to the creation of the CPC and the CZC, the economic depression that began to manifest itself throughout the city also curtailed the commission's power. Parks were always expensive, and city officials began to attack the commission for expenditures related to park improvements dating back to the construction of the Parkway and Boulevard years prior. The Law Department and the city controller issued what they called a "swollen" list of expenditures, totaling \$13 million, composed principally of park and parkway acquisitions. Controller Wilson, the principal figure behind the creation of planning and zoning bodies, demanded the abolition of the commission because "they are a law unto themselves." The Law Department added that "more than three-fourths of our indebtedness is caused by the Park Commission." Controller Wilson agreed, stating: "The Park Commission gives us the greatest trouble ... they should be wiped out. Council and the mayor, the elected representatives of the people, should be responsible. The Park Commission should be abolished." Councilman McCrossan further agreed: "the Park Commission wants land and gives us an estimate. When the land is taken it is found the cost is three times the estimate. If that keeps up we will always be in financial difficulty."⁴⁰

By the early 1930s, the commission found itself embroiled in several lawsuits questioning its power. A court ruling by Judge Stern over whether a property owner could erect a service station on the edge of the Boulevard, stated that the commissioners power was arbitrary, giving them "the absolute right to say whether or not a building shall be erected or altered. Such a grant of power is without precedent in law. The commissioners may, in their unbridled exercise of power, refuse permits to buildings that

⁴⁰ Ibid., 25 February 1930.

are not built of marble, or that are more than two stories high, or are less than twenty stories high, or are not built in a particular shape which the Commissioners may think desirable. They need give no reasons for their action. It requires no elaboration of argument to come to the conclusion that such grant of power is wholly invalid.”⁴¹ Of course, the commission was responsible for the necessity of the service station to begin with, having planned and regulated the area as an auto centric suburb.

In addition, the Wharton family, which had bequeathed Fisher Park in the Oak Lane section of the city in 1911, brought suit against the commission to recover the property, stating that it was not being properly maintained. The commission retorted that it did not have the funds to maintain the park. Of course, this could not have come at a worse time for the commission, as it was expending huge amounts of taxpayer money to acquire new park land while it could not maintain existing land.⁴² Fortunately, for the commission, the Wharton family dropped their suit.

By April 1931, the city controller’s office introduced a bill to the legislature to completely abolish the commission. The bill provided for a new municipal department of parks, headed by a director who would be a member of the mayor’s cabinet. Again bringing up the financial crises facing the city, the main criticism leveled at the commission was “based on its policy of condemning land for park purposes without taking into consideration whether there is money to pay for the property or not. As a result the city is laboring under a heavy burden placed upon it by a body that is responsible to no one but itself.” This argument was not lost on Mayor Mackey, who agreed with the controller that the cost of acquiring park land, by now totaling \$12

⁴¹ Ibid., 8 May 1930.

⁴² Ibid., 12 June 1930.

million dollars in taxpayer funds, was a “huge deficit for 1931 ... and not a small part of our troubles have been caused by the piling up of mandamuses. Here we are again faced with the evil of decentralization of government.” The remarks of the mayor were followed by the controller: “I wonder what the taxpayers of Philadelphia think of the city’s extending its park system at a cost of \$53,000 an acre in view of the difficulty confronting them in paying their taxes in this period of depression?”⁴³ The press printed the expenditures of the park commission, alongside other expenditures detailing the cost the commission was laying on the taxpayer.

Declaring that the city was facing a budget crisis, the mayor continued his onslaught of the commission, stating that there would be no more funds for parks since some of the land purchased by the commission had yet to be paid for. By October 1931, the financial epidemic reached such levels that a large homeless encampment sprung up within sight of the recently completed Philadelphia Museum of Art. No amount of debate within the halls of political power could have made a stronger statement against the expenditures and power of the commission than the headline: “Homeless Idle Camping Like Hoboes in Shadow of City’s \$18,000,000 Museum,” with accompanying image showing the encampment directly south of the building.⁴⁴ While the commission would continue to exist for almost eighty more years, it never regained the power it enjoyed before this time period. As the city sank further into depression during the 1930s, the Works Progress Administration did provide much needed improvements to existing parks such as Wissahickon Valley Park and Pennypack Creek Park, but the commission would never again control the development of entire sections of the city, ceding its power to

⁴³ *Record* (Philadelphia) 27 May 1931.

⁴⁴ *Ibid* 13 October 1931.

acquire and plan parks to planning and zoning bodies fully under the control of city government.

Conclusion

Prior to the creation of an official city planning agency, park advocates, including the Fairmount Park Commission and the private, citizen-led City Parks Association (CPA), were the de facto planning body for the city of Philadelphia. Between 1854 and 1929, park planners navigated the perils of Philadelphia's political system, successfully pressuring the city and state governments to acquire open public spaces for Philadelphia residents. As the majority of these protected spaces surrounded the city's rivers and creeks, park planners were also proto-environmentalists, reclaiming vital industrial land in an attempt to protect the city's water supply from pollution. The planning of Philadelphia's park system in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had a tremendous impact on the spatial layout of the city and the interaction of its citizens with the natural world. In a time of rapid industrialization and population growth — when Philadelphia was known as the “Workshop of the World” due to the scale and diversity of its industrial sector — park planners, convinced that the growth and development of Philadelphia necessitated a large park system, were the primary group involved in the nascent form of city planning.

By the 1930s, the park-focused planning of Philadelphia touched every section of the city except the heavily industrialized and developed Delaware River wards. This was a result of several generations of citizens working to create a park system accessible for every city resident. In many respects, park planners followed founder William Penn's vision of a green country town, in opposition to the rapid industrial development of once open lands. Convinced that government owed citizens, especially its most vulnerable ones, a right to escape the gritty city and connect to nature, park activists reclaimed the

rapidly disappearing natural world for both environmental and humanitarian reasons, shaping the modern city of the twentieth century in the process. Philadelphia's park system remains unique among American urban park systems because of its early emphasis on environmental protection.

The earliest attempts to develop a large-scale public park in Philadelphia resulted from state intervention in Philadelphia's affairs. The development of the park system, with its emphasis on environmental protection, was never a priority for members of City Council. It simply would not have occurred were it not for elite Philadelphians gaining considerable power in Harrisburg. Early park planners Eli Kirk Price and Morton McMichael, responsible for the consolidation of Philadelphia in 1854 by an act of the state legislature, immediately capitalized on their newfound control over the area formerly known as the Spring Garden District, located along the east bank of the Schuylkill River. They utilized the existing Lemon Hill estate, set aside in 1844 to protect the city's water supply from industrial pollution north of the Fairmount Water Works, as the site of Philadelphia's first large-scale public park. Although blocked on many fronts by unwilling politicians on council to acquire a large-scale public park, they successfully held a competition for a park design in 1859. Much of this original plan was never implemented as council members lacked political will to properly fund land acquisition and improvements. For this reason, park planners again relied on the state legislature to create the Fairmount Park Commission, the independent agency that would control Philadelphia's park system from its creation in 1867 until 2010, a period of 143 years. In addition, early park planners relied on their influence with the state legislature to set the original boundaries of Fairmount Park, much of which was actively used industrial land.

By casting aside any interference from council, which they believed would seriously undermine the process of acquiring valuable industrial land along the banks of the Schuylkill River and Wissahickon Creek, the early planning of Philadelphia's park system was insulated from local political influence.

The first generation of commissioners and their staff found abundant success as they utilized their skills in real estate law, engineering, and landscape design to begin the massive undertaking of creating Fairmount Park. The first president of the commission, Morton McMichael, owner and editor of the progressive newspaper the *North American*, continuously advocated for the importance of park planning. However, the problems of implementing improvements once land was acquired always revolved around budgetary matters. By removing council from the park planning process, while relying on its allocation for all funding, all park improvements past the planning and acquisition stages remained a struggle. For this reason, later generations of park planners, led by the CPA, and learning lessons from the park's creation, attempted to stay politically neutral. This tactic paid off, and by the early twentieth century the major success for the CPA was the placement of three large, watershed parks on the city plan: Cobbs Creek, Tacony Creek and Pennypack Creek, all of which would complement the original mission of the park: to protect the environmental resource of the water supply while secondarily connecting citizens with nature. In addition, the CPA was also instrumental in the development of the Fairmount (Benjamin Franklin) Parkway and the Northeast (Roosevelt) Boulevard.

The Benjamin Franklin Parkway cemented Center City's relationship to the park, allowing residents ease of access to not only Fairmount Park but also Wissahickon Valley Park all the way to the county line, thereby connecting the downtown area with the

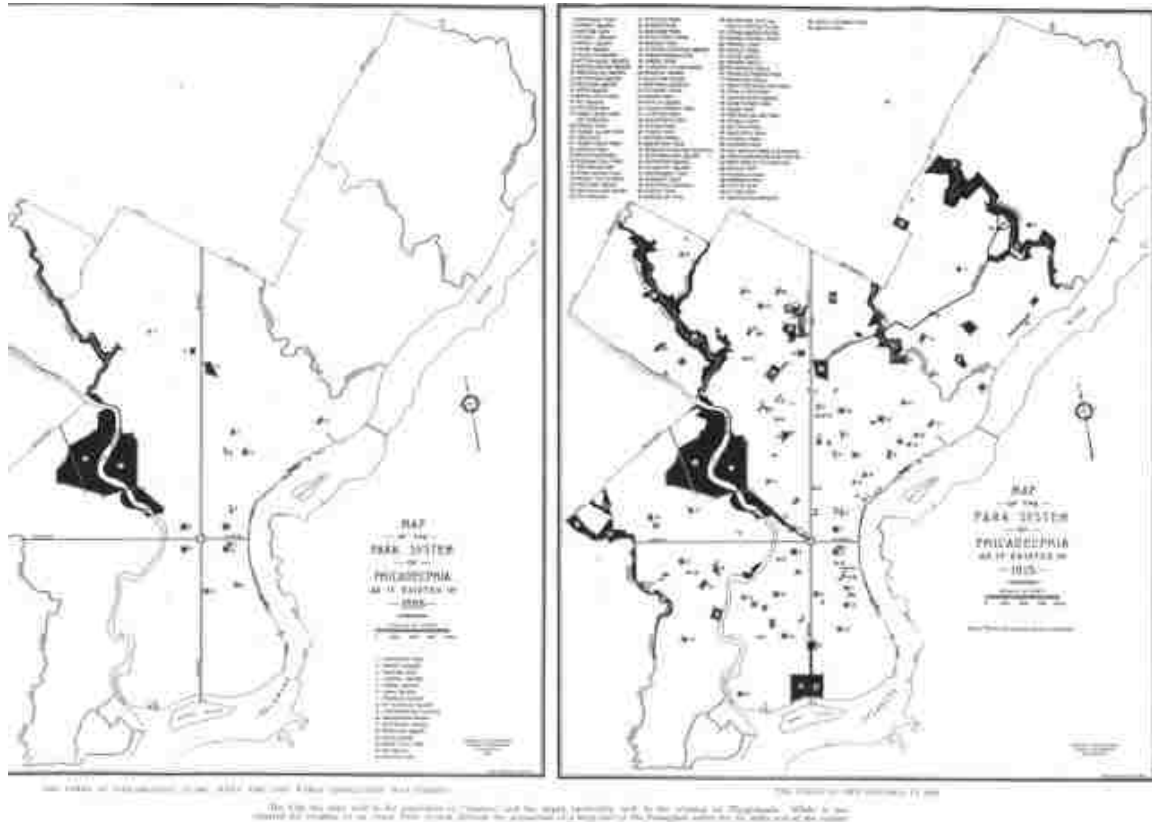


Figure 66. Map comparing Philadelphia's Park system in 1888 (16 parks), when the City Parks Association formed, with 1915 (83 parks). The 1888 map shows Fairmount Park on the banks of the Schuylkill and Wissahickon Valley Park to the north. The 1915 map shows recently acquired watershed parks of Cobbs Creek (southwest border), Tacony Creek (lower Northeast) and Pennypack Creek (central Northeast). In addition, the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, connecting the heart of center city to Fairmount Park and the Roosevelt Boulevard, connecting Hunting Park in North Philadelphia to Tacony Creek and Pennypack Creek is shown as a park boulevard (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

reclaimed natural world through the two largest parks in Philadelphia. Indeed, Wissahickon Valley Park, given National Natural Landmark status by the Department of the Interior in 1964, is one of the few nationally recognized natural areas connected directly by park drives to the seat of a major municipal government and the majority of a large urban population.

For much of its history, the usage of the Parkway languished as the automobile dominated the alignment; while it was certainly used for special events and public gatherings, it did not always function as the original planners envisioned. However, by the early twenty-first century major improvements were undertaken by the City, the commission, and the private, Center City District (CCD), with funding from the federal, state and local government, to complete the vision of the parkway. These improvements included the revival of Logan Circle's Aviator Park and Sister Cities Plaza; the relocation of the Barnes Foundation from suburban Lower Merion Township to the parkway; the restoration of the Rodin Museum; improvements and additions to the Central Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia; the opening of the Perelman Building, the Philadelphia Museum of Art's annex; improvements to JFK Plaza (LOVE Park); and a complete streetscape improvement project, with new trees, landscaping, traffic calming, and sidewalks, to enliven the parkway as Philadelphia's center of civic space. In addition, with the revival of bicycling for both commuting and recreation in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the parkway became an important and meaningful connection between Center City, Fairmount Park, and Philadelphia's northwestern neighborhoods of East Falls, Roxborough, Manayunk, Mt. Airy, and Chestnut Hill. The vision of connecting City Hall, the center of political power, to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the center of cultural power, with Fairmount Park remains a goal the City continues to strive to achieve in the twenty-first century.

Meanwhile, the Roosevelt Boulevard effectively changed the entire development of much of Northeast Philadelphia from an open area of farms, small communities, and single family homes to an automobile-centered community, connected by a main

roadway originally intended to connect residents to large watershed park space. The planning of the great



Figure 67. The Benjamin Franklin Parkway, 1999. Logan Circle, one of William Penn's original squares, appears in the center of the image while the Philadelphia Museum of Art rises on Fairmount, the former site of the reservoirs of the Fairmount Water Works. The green, open spaces of Fairmount Park span out behind the museum, allowing citizens access to continuous green space all the way to the edge of the city through Wissahickon Valley Park (Greater Philadelphia Tourism and Marketing Corporation).

northeast boulevard would not have occurred were it not for the acquisition of the large, watershed parks of Tacony Creek and Pennypack Creek. Originally, those park spaces were intended to anchor the communities surrounding them, providing residents of a growing metropolis with connections to the natural world, while protecting the water supply. Park planners envisioned the boulevard and the watershed parks of the northeast as a way to reverse the dominant grid-patterned development of Philadelphia by protecting two large creek valleys from being filled in and built upon. They believed that they could correct the problems associated with the gritty, overcrowded neighborhoods surrounding the Delaware River by utilizing open spaces and parks to encourage development. Once the boulevard was completed from North Philadelphia's Hunting Park to Pennypack Park in the central Northeast, the park commission gained control over its management and did not allow mass transit on the boulevard. In an effort to keep the boulevard free from the perceived nuisance of trolley tracks and overhead wiring, the park commission encouraged the development of Northeast Philadelphia as an automobile-centered community. While park space would unite the planning of Northeast Philadelphia, in practice the area would be developed somewhat disconnected from their park spaces as access into them from an auto-centric neighborhood was poor.

The development of the automobile-centered neighborhoods surrounding the boulevard mirrored much of the post-World War II city as planned by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission. Under executive director Edmund Bacon (1949-1972), the planning commission focused on the redevelopment of older sections of the city, the creation of new automobile-centered communities such as Eastwick in the Southwest and Parkwood in the Far Northeast, and the development of an expressway system. In many

respects, Bacon ignored the parkway and boulevard ideals of the earlier generation of park planners, replacing it with an expressway system, part of which utilized the largest piece of open space in the city, West Fairmount Park. In fact, the Schuylkill Expressway



Figure 68. The Roosevelt Boulevard near Tacony Creek Park, 1931. Note the new housing along the border of the outer lanes, while an older farmhouse still stands to the right. The park space with entranceway is to the left of the image, disconnected from the automobile-centered development occurring along the boulevard (Fairmount Park Historic Resource Archive).

(I-76) from City Line Avenue to the Fairmount Water Works is almost completely within the confines of Fairmount Park, essentially reversing the earlier goals of park planners of using parkways to get people into the park. Instead, post-war planning used city owned park land to get people through the park as quickly as possible, connecting suburban communities to Center City's employment centers, restaurants and nightlife, West Philadelphia's University City, or South Philadelphia's airport and sports complex.

The legacy of this era in many respects is the dominance of an automobile-centric city, only partially built as Bacon planned it.

In the early twenty-first century, thousands of Philadelphians and residents of suburban communities are in Fairmount Park at any given time of the day or night, perhaps without even realizing it. More than likely, they are stuck in traffic along one of the two main north-south traffic arteries of the region. This is the legacy of the failures of post-war planning, which in many respects ignored or was in direct opposition to earlier park planning. To Bacon, park planning always centered on the automobile first as he envisioned parks in planned communities to serve the needs of the surrounding residents, not the entire city. The triumph of an automobile-centered society has partially been the triumph of the individualistic society removed from shared communal values necessary for cities to thrive. The expressway system through Fairmount Park not only removed citizens from the natural world with which early park planners tried so desperately to reconnect them, but also effectively removed the interaction of the city's residents with one another, something necessary for a city's survival. Like Robert Moses in New York City, Bacon envisioned a city dominated by the automobile. Fortunately, several of the expressways were never constructed, or the human scale of the city, which attracts so many in the present day, would have been permanently altered or even removed.

The dominance of the planning commission in the twentieth century effectively removed the park commission and its advocates from their original role as city planners. Instead, the era between 1930 and the demise of the commission in 2010 would be marked by minimal land acquisitions while the poorly funded commission struggled to

maintain its existing land. Although the federal government contributed many improvements to the park system, such as trails, pavilions, and picnic areas in the

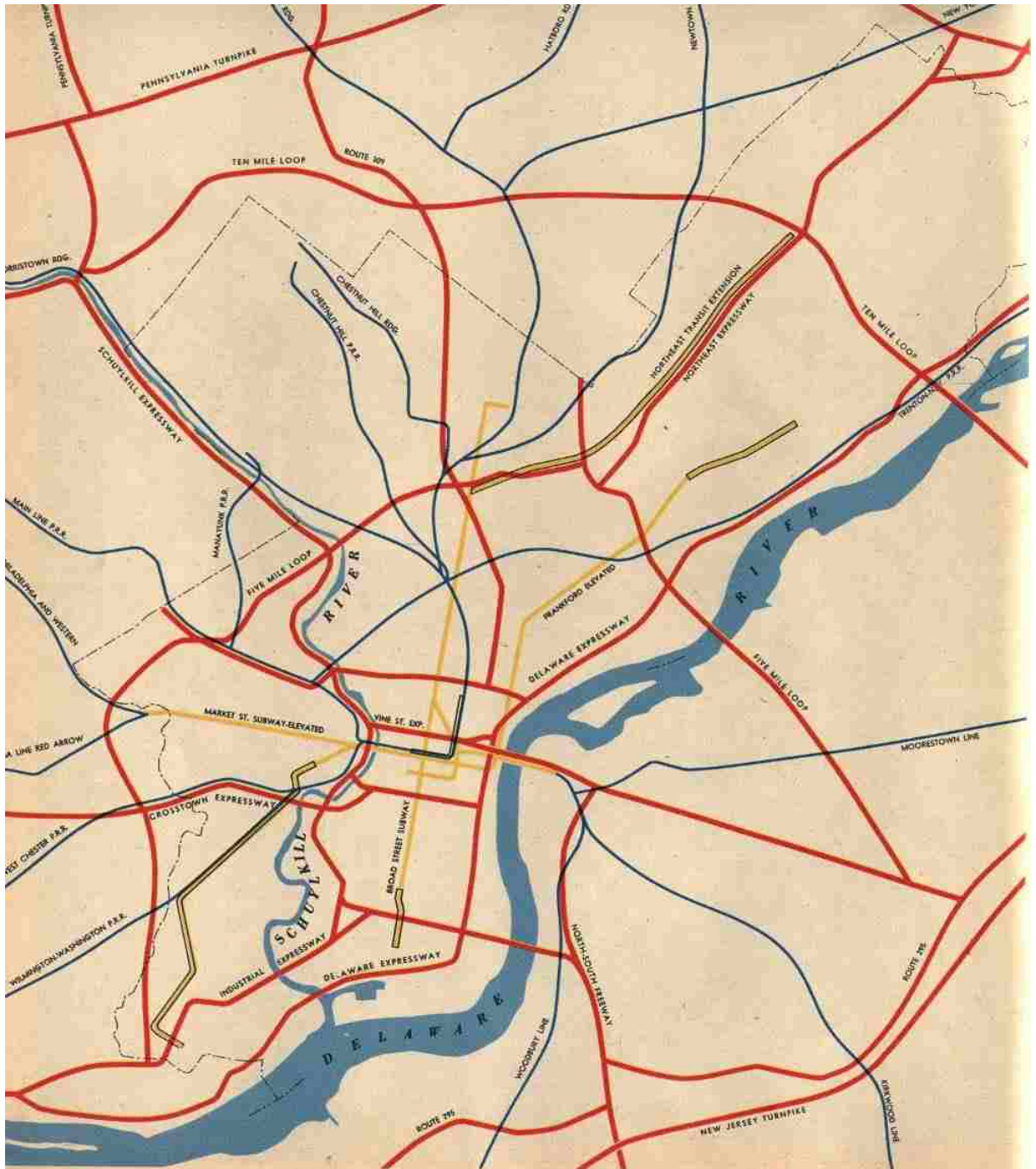


Figure 69. 1961 Expressway Plan, Philadelphia City Planning Commission. The existing Schuylkill Expressway, to the west of the river, enters the city just north of the planned Five Mile Loop, which connects to Roosevelt Boulevard, and remains within the confines of West Fairmount Park until just north of the Vine Street Expressway. Note the Roosevelt Boulevard is now also an expressway as planned by Bacon (Philadelphia City Planning Commission).

watershed parks during the Works Progress Administration (WPA) era of the 1930s, the park commission continued to be starved by council on much needed budgetary allocations for the remainder of their existence.

The Philadelphia Home Rule Charter of 1951, intended as a reform measure for a corrupt city government, placed the powers and duties of the Fairmount Park Commission under the newly chartered Philadelphia Department of Recreation. Although the commission still retained power over park lands, they were further removed from making any decisions regarding public spaces with this political maneuver. The era from the early 1950s to the late 1970s was the pinnacle of the recreation movement in Philadelphia, as new recreation centers and pools opened across the city's neighborhoods, presenting council members with opportunities to directly serve their constituents. Meanwhile, the maintenance of the park system became problematic as staff and monetary resources dwindled. In 1972, the independent Fairmount Park Guard were merged into the Philadelphia Police Department by former Police Commissioner and then Mayor Frank Rizzo, effectively ending the long standing tradition of direct police supervision over park lands. This led to the perceived and sometimes correct view of park spaces as dangerous, and in many neighborhoods park usage waned. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the *Philadelphia Daily News* began to criticize the park commission, accusing them of overseeing "acres of neglect." It was hard for the commission to be held completely responsible for this as staffing levels and funding for the park system peaked in 1971, never rebounding.

To overcome those obstacles, park advocates, commissioners, and staff began relying on sources of outside funding, including federal and state grants and increasingly, private funding, to fill the gaps in their budget. With the creation of the Natural Lands Restoration and Environmental Education Program, partially funded by the private William Penn foundation in 1997, park staff began to work to restore park lands, particularly those large, natural areas of the original watershed parks and aimed to reconnect citizens with the park's vast natural resources through volunteerism, clean-up efforts, native species restoration, and education efforts.

In the early twenty-first century, as environmental awareness, bicycling, physical fitness and a desire to reconnect to natural areas continued to grow, the park system was poised to undergo a rebirth. Concerted efforts by park staff to improve the large watershed parks took shape as park advocates and the commission began to form public-private partnerships to restore existing park land, acquire new park space, and reconnect citizens to existing parks in the process. The completion of much of the Schuylkill River Trail in Philadelphia, part of a regional recreation trail connecting Philadelphia to Schuylkill County, encouraged park usage along the river, drawing new residents to Center City and the neighborhoods bordering the river. The park undertook efforts to improve all watershed parks, Cobbs Creek, Tacony Creek, Pennypack Creek, and Wissahickon Valley Park, with new trails and gateways into the park, encouraging citizens to once again connect to the natural world. All of this was a legacy of the vision of not only the original park planners and advocates of the park system but, indeed, echoed the "green, country town" vision of William Penn, to make Philadelphia's public

spaces true green spaces within the gritty city and connect its citizens with the natural world within the heart of the nation’s fifth largest, and one of its oldest, urban centers.



Figure 70. Recreation along the Schuylkill River Trail, 2011. This space, the area which the CPA worked to “redeem” in the 1920s, is now part of Schuylkill Banks, a park created in 2001. This park space is cooperatively managed for the City by the non-profit Schuylkill River Development Corporation and Philadelphia Parks & Recreation, an example of successful public-private partnerships needed to fill gaps in the park’s budget (Schuylkill River Development Corporation).

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