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Dreaming of
"the Perfect City"

The Halifax Civic Improvement League 1905-1949

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the Master of Arts (Atlantic Canada Studies)
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September 21, 2000

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Abstract

Dreaming of
“the Perfect City”

The Halifax Civic Improvement League 1905-1949

Andrew Nicholson
September 21, 2000

Research concerning Canadian urban reform in the early 20th century has generally neglected to include the activities in the City of Halifax. While cities such as Toronto, Montreal and Winnipeg were thought to have been the centres of urban reform, Halifax, in fact, also provided a valuable contribution to the debate. From 1905, the Halifax Civic Improvement League worked to raise public awareness of the city’s problems and propose solutions. Working from the premise that the “environment influences behavior,” the middle class membership of the League sought to implement various beautification schemes and gradually broadened their scope to advocate for town planning and municipal reform. Although interest in urban reform waned during the Great War, the Civic Improvement League resurfaced in the mid-1930s on a wave of “New Deal” optimism and increased efforts at promoting tourism. Aiming for “a Perfect City” to celebrate Halifax’s 200th birthday in 1949, the League nevertheless failed to meet such an objective as class biases and war ultimately undermined such efforts.
Introduction
Between 1900 and 1920, Canada was gripped by an urban crisis. Like many other Canadian cities, Halifax faced the innumerable problems brought on by industrialization and population growth. As more and more people moved into the city in search of employment, Halifax civic officials had considerable difficulty in contending with a lack of adequate housing, increasing mortality rates from disease, and a rising crime rate. In response to this drastic situation, the Halifax Board of Trade established the Civic Improvement League in 1905 to raise public awareness of the city's problems and propose solutions. The purpose of this study is to examine the activities of the League and its impact on the urban and social planning of Halifax.

Working from the premise that "environment influences behaviour," the Civic Improvement League initially sought to "beautify" the eyesores of Halifax by advocating more trees, parkland and cheaper, attractive housing. Over time League members widened their scope to support other reform causes including better sanitation and more efficient municipal government. Although the League had only limited success with its housing and municipal reform initiatives, it did make a dramatic impact with its Town Planning schemes. Both the Town Planning Regulations, introduced by the Halifax Board of Control in January 1914, and the adoption of the Nova Scotia Town Planning Act in April 1915, were designed by the Civic Improvement League. Each measure set a Canadian precedent by establishing proper zoning and housing bylaws for cities. Despite the League dissolution before the Explosion of 1917, the reconstructed "Richmond Heights" development was also a product of civic improvement thinking. In many ways, the
building of "Richmond Heights, or the "Hydrostone" as it is better known, was the ultimate achievement of Halifax civic improvement. As the first urban planning experiment of its kind in Canada, "Richmond Heights" proved that quality affordable housing for working people was possible.

While Halifax reformers would divert their attention away from civic improvement in the 1920s to focus on Maritime Rights, the League nevertheless revived in the mid-1930's as beautification, urban planning and the promotion of tourism became inexorably linked. Thus, at a time when "progressivism" was thought to have been extinguished across North America and the cause of urban reform forgotten, the Halifax Civic Improvement League remained a formidable group. Although there would be no more projects on the scale of "Richmond Heights," the League continued to develop plans and advocate reforms all designed to make Halifax "the perfect city" for its 200th anniversary in 1949.

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Over the past three decades, the Canadian urban reform experience of the early 20th century has come under increasing scrutiny. Books such as *Saving the Canadian City* and *Shaping the Canadian City* have added immensely to our understanding of the pressures and reform agitations in such cities as Toronto, Winnipeg and Montreal.¹

Remarkably, however, much of this scholarship has neglected to include urban reform efforts in the Maritime provinces.\(^2\) Despite the fight in Halifax and Saint John for more progressive municipal government, the temperance struggles, and the reconstruction of North End Halifax following the Explosion, few attempts have been made to place such events in the broader picture of Canadian urban reform. One exception is Henry Roper's 1985 article in *Acadiensis* on "The Halifax Board of Control: The Failure of Municipal Reform 1912-1919." Although focusing largely on the fight over municipal government, Roper provides an excellent introduction to Halifax reformers and their opponents. As many Halifax reformers were associated with both the Civic Improvement League and the Board of Control, Roper also provides a good overview of the reform battle in the city. His article is particularly valuable for highlighting the close involvement of the Halifax Board of Trade in the reform cause.

The progressive character of the Halifax Board of Trade was especially crucial for the success of the Civic Improvement League. In fact, David Sutherland's paper on "The Personnel and Policies of the Halifax Board of Trade," illustrates the dynamic character and national perspective that characterized many of the Halifax merchants.\(^3\) Though his focus is exclusively on business activities and effects of the National Policy, it does dispel

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\(^2\) A good example of this neglect appears in Professor Weaver's book. Discussing 'Boards of Control', Weaver mentions their establishment in Ottawa (1907), Hamilton (1910), London (1914), Winnipeg (1906), Calgary (1908), and Montreal (1909). Halifax (1913), however, is not mentioned.

the commonly held notion that the Halifax entrepreneurs were a conservative crowd resistant to change.

In spite of such evidence, many urban historians seem content on dismissing the urban reform movement in the Maritimes in favor of highlighting the reform initiatives in Central and Western Canadian cities. In his widely referenced anthology *Saving the Canadian City*, historian Paul Rutherford justifies this Central Canadian focus by explaining that: "...the theory and tactics of urban reform were primarily articulated by a small group of Central Canadians." ⁴

Regardless of the perception that urban reform was primarily a central and western Canadian phenomena, much of the Halifax reform experience was unique in the Canada’s reform context. Along with “setting the pace” with town planning legislation, the Civic Improvement League also enjoyed support among the leadership of Halifax’s organized labour organizations. Given the widespread fears of potential labour anarchy and even socialism, the Civic Improvement League sought to alleviate class tensions by proposing housing projects, more parkland, trees, etc. Although the middle-class Civic Improvement League frequently adopted a paternalistic tone in their dealings with the “sons of toil”, the local Trades and Labour Council nevertheless seemed to appreciate their help in securing better living environments for their workers. Labour in fact played a prominent role in the ‘civic revival’ and in the League’s various housing schemes. A Labour candidate was also an early favorite to win a seat on the city’s first Board of Control in 1913. Unlike other

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Canadian cities, Halifax might even have enjoyed some degree of class ‘rapprochement’ in the pre-war years, at least on the surface. Nevertheless, as violent labour disputes disrupted wartime Halifax, middle-class reformers and workers became more divided than ever.

Alongside Town Planning and a amicable working relationship with local Labour leaders, the Halifax reform experience was also exceptional in the sense that the Explosion of December 8, 1917 offered an unprecedented opportunity for a large scale experiment in neighbourhood reform. Historian John Weaver elaborates on this at length in his 1976 article in Plan Canada entitled: “Reconstruction of the Richmond District in Halifax: A Canadian episode in Public Housing and Town planning.” Using a combination of publicity and outstanding talent, disciples of civic improvement sought to produce a low cost but attractive working-class neighbourhood as an alternative to the traditional cheap “slum-like” housing that predominated in other cities. The significance of the reconstruction for local reformers is also made clear in two articles published in Ground Zero: A Reassessment of the 1917 Explosion in Halifax Harbour. Ernest Clarke’s “The Hydrostone Phoenix: Garden City Planning and the Reconstruction of Halifax, 1917-1921” lays out the details of the Adams plan and stresses the importance of the architect George Ross and the Halifax Relief Commission in carrying out the vision of a “Garden City”. Janice Miller’s “Halifax, Nova Scotia: A Study of the Effects of Disaster on Urban Morphology” meanwhile provides an examination of the effect of the plan on the city as whole.
The reconstruction of Halifax’s North end also brought Town planner and National Civic Improvement League President Thomas Adams back to the city. As discussed in Michael Simpson’s *Thomas Adams and the Modern Planning Movement*, Adams had already assisted the Halifax Civic Improvement League in 1915 with its town planning legislation and would now be able to impose his English theories of a “garden suburb” in a Canadian setting. Rather than working toward a “city beautiful,” Simpson sees Adams aiming for “symmetry,” a “quiet orderliness” and a “regularity and harmony” which would ultimately result in an attractive living environment for working people.

Although Adams and the Halifax reformers would see their hopes for a comprehensive plan and a reconstruction of the entire city cut short by political and economic considerations, public reaction to their finished product was generally positive. As chronicled in Suzanne Morton’s *Ideal Surroundings: Domestic Life in a Working-Class Suburb in the 1920s*, the first tenants enjoyed all the modern conveniences of the time including electricity, hot water, bathrooms and closet space in every room. Even so, the rents proved to be exorbitant for the average working class wage-earner, especially for the economically depressed Halifax of the 1920s.

Canadian urban historians have generally argued that the urban reform movement had faded out by the early 1920s. Halifax was no exception, as thoughts of ‘civic improvement’ gave way to concerns over Maritime Rights and alleviating the post-war
recession. Unlike other Canadian cities however, urban reform in Halifax experienced a rejuvenation in the mid-1930's as nostalgia for a "Golden Age" emerged and was even encouraged by municipal and provincial authorities to promote tourism. Much of Ian McKay's work examines focuses on this role of myth-making and elaborate commemorations of the past for in order to encourage tourism. Newspapers, for example, would be critical of the woeful condition of the Citadel and the Martello Tower. "What would the tourist think?" was a common remark heard around the city. With renewed public concerns over beautification and town planning, the Civic Improvement League was brought back by popular demand in 1936. Ironically, however, the justifications for promoting 'improvements' had now changed. Though Halifax still faced many of the same problems thanks to housing shortages and social discontent, 'improvements' were now encouraged largely "for the benefit of the passing tourist," rather than the health and welfare of fellow residents.

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Although the use of this secondary literature has been instrumental in providing a local and regional context in which to place the significance of the Civic Improvement League, the extensive primary source material has been critical to preparing this study. As the self-proclaimed 'people's press' played such a vital role in propagating the ideals of civic improvement, newspapers have been especially helpful for keeping track of reform thought. Among the plethora of Halifax's dailies which informed and titillated readers, the

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*Herald* and *Evening Mail* were the most devoted to reform causes, including the Civic Improvement League. In the 1920s and 1930s, Halifax’s brash Labour weekly *The Citizen* also a supporter of reform. Though the paper did welcome the return of the Civic Improvement League, *The Citizen* always remained highly suspicious of the organization’s South end middle-class orientation.

Private correspondence between reformers in Halifax and other parts of North America also proved to be highly useful for placing the Civic Improvement League in a national context. Above all, letters between reformers illustrate that ideas of ‘civic improvement’ were not generated in isolation, and that a certain degree of evolution took place both in ideas and action. Contact with other reformers, particularly from the “Boston States” was particularly instrumental in making Halifax a part of a much wider “progressive” trend which was sweeping North America and parts of Europe.

This study is organized in a chronological manner. As the Halifax Civic Improvement League evolved from a beautification committee to a broad-based reform advocacy group, it was able to adapt to changing political and social circumstances, and to build on ideas garnered from visiting speakers as well as on past reform efforts. Chapter One examines the origins of the Halifax Civic Improvement League. Inspired by the success of 19th century temperance advocates and the ‘City Beautiful’ movement, the Civic Improvement League sought to bring in various “beautification” measures to raise the character of the city. Nevertheless, public apathy and a reluctant, overworked city council only hampered such efforts. Chapter Two examines the crucial week-long ‘civic awakening’ in March 1911 which elevated the Civic Improvement League to a leadership
position in the community. Inspired by Boston Urban reformers, those in Halifax were able to focus many urban issues under one banner of reform. Chapter Three focuses on the League’s support for municipal reform as “the first step in civic improvement.” With a Board of Control now in charge of municipal affairs, the League achieved its highest prominence with the implementation of Town Planning regulations. Chapter Four investigates the League’s other initiatives such as implementing a ‘social survey’ and ‘public housing’. The chapter concludes with the dissolving of the Civic Improvement League in 1917 as the combined effects of war and the failure of municipal reform led to a steep drop in support. Chapter Five encapsulates the tragic Explosion of December 7, 1917 and the resulting reconstruction. Although the League never formally regrouped to take part in the rebuilding, the “Richmond Heights” development nevertheless reflected much of what the League had preached. Chapter Six investigates the fate of Halifax civic improvement in the “two decades of Depression” and the eventual reformation of the League in 1936. By renewing public interest in beautification and town planning, reformers argued, tourism would increase and Halifax could be ‘a perfect city’ for its 200th birthday in 1949.

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The purpose of this study is to illuminate aspects of the urban reform movement as it related to Halifax in the first half of the 20th century. As early as 1984, Peter Rider appeared in Acadiensis and bemoaned the fact that the Atlantic region was poorly represented in the growing historiography of Canadian urban life. Adding that the “shading and texture that must be contributed by the eastern half of the country (east of
Montreal)...is yet to arrive”, Rider hoped that historians in the near future would take up this challenge. Since then, much has been done including the aforementioned Henry Roper article, Judith Fingard’s examination of 19th century urban reform efforts in *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax*, and the excellent revisionist work: *Halifax: The First 250 years*.

Despite such works, however, much still needs to be done. This study of the Halifax Civic Improvement League hopes to add another small contribution to the filling out of Atlantic Canada’s urban historiography. Although this work does not pretend to be the definitive history of “progressive Halifax”, it nonetheless seeks to raise questions and provide answers about the city’s attempts at making ‘improvements’ along environmentally deterministic lines. Moreover, it is hoped that this study will encourage further examination of the progressive impulse throughout urban Atlantic Canada. For example, preliminary evidence suggests that Saint John was as radical and progressive as Halifax and even some Western Canadian cities. Nevertheless, the history of Saint John’s reform movement remains largely unwritten. The progressive impulse in such cities such as Fredericton and Moncton also needs to be explored. Even within Halifax, more research needs to be done on the role of labour, women, charities and various health organizations during the progressive era. The Civic Improvement League was only one

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organization among many pursuing the same objective of "a perfect city." Nonetheless, the ideas and initiatives of the Halifax Civic Improvement League described in the following pages illustrate that Atlantic Canada has indeed much to offer Canadian urban history.
Chapter One
I. Prologue

Through the early part of March 1911, the City of Halifax experienced a ‘civic awakening.’ Organized by many of the city’s leading middle class organizations, the ‘civic revival’ consisted of a series of public lectures and meetings designed to raise greater awareness and propose solutions to the city’s growing problems. The week-long event also marked a culmination of several years of middle class reform agitation aimed at making Halifax a more attractive and healthier city in which to live and work. With the city struggling to cope with rapid population growth, the ‘uplift revival’ brought together the concerns of many middle class Halifax citizens and highlighted the need for reform at almost every level of civic life. The success of this combined effort had the strongest effect on the Civic Improvement League as it now moved to the forefront of urban reform in Halifax. From being a small but dedicated group interested in bringing the ‘city beautiful’ concept to their neighbourhoods, the League would broaden its focus following the “civic revival” to incorporate other reform initiatives including efficient municipal government and improved housing for the poor and working class.

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In the years leading up to the “civic revival,” the city of Halifax was beset with numerous social problems. Like many other Canadian cities which enjoyed strong economic growth and industrialization in the first decade of the twentieth century, Halifax
experienced dramatic population growth. Between 1891 and 1901, the population of Halifax grew by 6.2% from 38,437 to 40,832. By 1911, the population of city had grown to 46,619, an increase of 14.2%.⁹

Accompanying such growth came renewed concerns about the quality of urban life. For much of the latter half of the nineteenth century, many Halifax residents had despaired over the urban ills which threatened the morality and reputation of their city. Public drunkenness, crime, prostitution, and slum housing were all endemic to late Victorian Halifax. In response, citizens and religious groups formed organizations, such as the 'Law and Order League' and the 'Evangelical Alliance' in an effort to sanitize the city. Despite the fact that Halifax was still garrisoned with a large contingent of British soldiers, the temperance cause enjoyed considerable success. With alcohol consumption viewed as the root cause for the worst of Halifax’s ills, reform groups such as the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty (SPC) persuaded many individuals to forego drink. Reformers also succeeded in having the number of licenced establishments reduced and in providing shelter and charity for reformed drunkards, as well as women and children scarred by alcohol related violence.¹⁰

Nevertheless, in the first years of the new century, reformers were beginning to recognize that alcohol was no longer the biggest problem facing Halifax. With the growing influx of people from the countryside moving into the city in search of employment, it was

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⁹ Canada. Census 1911.

becoming clear that more sweeping, comprehensive reform was needed to cope with these new pressures. The problem of adequate housing had become especially acute. In previous years, reformers had demolished stretches of slum housing, particularly along the infamous Barrack Street. Rather than building new homes, however, reformers replaced them with brick buildings to house such progressive institutions as the Salvation Army, the Halifax Academy, and the Jost Mission.\textsuperscript{11} Although these were important and well-meaning institutions for the city, their presence could do little to relieve the serious housing shortage. Newcomers to Halifax had little choice but to find shelter in one of the many overcrowded tenements scattered throughout the city. Faced with overcrowding and exorbitant rents, many people had to live in a continuing cycle of disease and poverty.

The apparent inability of the Halifax City Council to respond quickly and efficiently to the city’s pressing needs only deepened the sense of crisis. Demands for affordable housing and a clean and healthy environment were often met with sympathy from the Aldermen, but very little action. Other issues such as publically owned or regulated water and utilities also confronted a Council which seemed paralyzed by ward politics and a shrinking tax base. Calls for change and a new form of municipal government in Halifax were heard repeatedly throughout the first decade, particularly in the ‘peoples press’.

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\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
As in every large Canadian city, concern over the social and moral decay of the city was echoed loudly in newspapers. Among the half dozen newspapers printed in Halifax, the *Morning Herald* and *Evening Mail* took the lead in reporting the crumbling state of the city and urging the need for reform in almost every area of civic life. The progressive spirit of these papers had much to do with the character and experiences of publisher William Dennis.

As Editor in Chief and President of the *Herald*, William Dennis had in fact been 'pushing the envelope' for progressive thinking in the city for many years. Born in the British Isles in 1856, Dennis had immigrated to Nova Scotia in 1873 and took a keen interest in spreading the temperance message. Working as an organizer for the 'Independent Order of Good Templars,' Dennis impressed the backers of a new daily newspaper to be called “*The Morning Herald.*” Joining the newspaper as a reporter, Dennis quickly rose to become one of the editors and the *Herald* rapidly became the best selling paper in the province with its strong temperance message and calls for political and social reform.12

After missing out on a directorship at the *Herald* in 1881, Dennis decided, like many other Maritime Canadians, to explore the possibilities of Western Canada. The West at this time has been described as a “veritable laboratory of reform,” with local government experimenting with such schemes as a single poll tax, ‘direct democracy,’ ‘bonuses’ and commission governments.13 From his position as City Editor of the

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*Winnipeg Times* and later the *Winnipeg Sun*, Dennis witnessed much of this populist reform agitation as western land developers and local boosters sought to forge an urban environment free of the vice and overcrowding which was so prevalent in Europe and was now becoming a norm in Halifax.

Upon returning to Halifax in 1883 to become Editor-in-Chief of the *Herald*, Dennis strove to give his newspaper the same 'boosterish', reformist zeal that was so much a part of the West. Although his papers supported the Conservative Party, Dennis nevertheless spoke of an end to political partisanship and the establishment of the *Herald* as "the embodiment of sane progressiveness". In fact, both the *Herald* and its sister paper the *Evening Mail*, were promoted as 'the Great Family and Religious Journals.' Dennis also added a streak of sensationalism to his papers, attacking corrupt, patronage wielding Liberal administrations and the need for sobriety, efficiency and industry in one's public and private life.

Over the next two decades, both the *Herald* and the *Mail* would tackle a variety of urban reform issues, focusing on four distinct, but interrelated areas: social welfare (poverty, crime, disease, etc.); the restructuring of municipal government; public ownership or regulation of municipal utilities; and the planning of the physical environment. Interestingly, such issues were initially treated independently of one another in the press and by readers. Associations were formed for each cause often with many of

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14 *Evening Mail*. January 1, 1910.


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the same members. Ultimately, as the issue of planning and the positive effects of a healthy physical environment became better known, reformers soon found that cooperation had the best results.

II. Halifax and the City Beautiful: The Creation of the Civic Improvement League

On September 11, 1905, The Morning Herald introduced readers to the concept of “Beautiful Cities.” Believing that the environment influenced behaviour, urban reformers in the United States and Canada had become interested in the idea of beautifying cities with attractive architecture, parkland, trees, and tidy neighbourhoods. “City Beautiful” followed the assumption that an ugly environment inflicted psychological damage on all those perceiving it. Thus, living in a ugly city would result in a tendency towards vice, crime and depravity. To counter such effects, a city-wide approach to beautification would therefore be socially beneficial for city and individual alike.16

Although the idea of introducing beauty into the urban environment was not a new concept, “City Beautiful” won over reformers for its ambitious scope. Rather than confining beauty to individual buildings and neighbourhoods, where it would be spoiled by ugly surroundings, it should now be applied across the urban landscape to include even industrial and commercial areas.17 Such arguments led middle class reformers all across the United States to form their own village improvement societies with the aim of beautifying


17 Ibid. p.191. Also see Industrial Canada. (September 1909), p.121-123.
their own communities. In 1897 a 'Civic Guild' was formed in Toronto with the expressed intent of bringing the American City Beautiful to Canada. A couple of years later, Montreal reformers created their own Civic Improvement Association with 'City Beautiful' as one of its founding principles.  

Initial reaction to the City Beautiful concept in Halifax was generally positive. Stories of City Beautiful successes in American cities, such as San Francisco and Spokane, were printed repeatedly in the Herald through the fall of 1905; and local reformers felt compelled to ask themselves about starting their own civic improvement group. At a Halifax Board of Trade meeting on November 8th 1905, a citizens' committee for civic improvement in Halifax was established, with the purpose "to be by every means in its power to assist in beautifying the city of Halifax." This included tree planting, suppressing vandalism, and promoting greater cleanliness in the city. Though the committee recognized that it had no legislative power, it hoped at the very least to encourage city officials to act in a progressive manner and enforce by-laws against littering and vandalism. It also hoped to use education in schools to indoctrinate children in the concepts of "city beautiful."  

The formation of a Halifax Civic Improvement committee was greeted with enthusiasm by the local press. The Evening Mail found that "it was hard not to be pleased

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19 For a sample see the Evening Mail. September 30, 1905.

20 Evening Mail. November 9, 1905.
at any prospect of improvement". Nevertheless, the paper maintained that the inaugural
meeting did not go far enough to address the dilapidated appearance of many buildings:

> With proper laws and management, the city would
> now be largely of stone and brick and have the
> appearance of a city instead of an overgrown
> village.\(^{21}\)

Like most of the local groups involved in ‘progressive causes,’ the Civic
Improvement League had a strong middle class orientation. While many of the initial
members came from local business circles, others came from publishing, education and
medical backgrounds. Prominent members of the League in its initial years included
Dalhousie professor D.H. Murray who became the first President of the League, and F.H.
Sexton, the leading proponent of technical education in Nova Scotia. Other members also
included C.F. Fraser, principal of the School for the Blind and architects Herbert Gates
and Andrew Cobb.

Perhaps the two most important members for the League’s ultimate success and
longevity, however, were publisher R. M. Hattie and lawyer R.V. Harris. Born in
Westville, Pictou County in 1876, Robert McConnell Hattie moved to Halifax in 1893 to
attend Dalhousie University. Upon graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in 1897, Hattie
chose journalism as his calling and worked briefly on the editorial boards for the *Atlantic
Monthly* and the Halifax *Morning Chronicle*. Joining the Imperial Publishing Company in
1899, Hattie quickly rose to become Vice-President and Editor of the company’s monthly
boosterish periodicals, the *Maritime Merchant* and the *Industrial Advocate*. Like many

\(^{21}\) Ibid.
other professionals living in Halifax, Robert Hattie was a passionate believer in progress and was involved in numerous urban reform causes outside of the Civic Improvement League. His involvement with the Anti-Tuberculous League and the ‘Citizens’ Free Library Committee’ brought him into contact with other like-minded reformers including Mrs William Dennis, leader of the Local Council of Women. Another influence on Hattie was his older brother William, who was superintendent of the Nova Scotia Hospital.

Though never a member of the Civic Improvement League, William H. Hattie played an important role in promoting health matters to Nova Scotians. He, in fact, became the provincial health officer in 1914 when the Civic Improvement League was at the peak of its power. In many ways the two brothers shared an interest and a passion for the betterment of society and their adopted city.22

When examining the backgrounds of Civic Improvement League members, Reginald Vanderbilt Harris perhaps best represented many of the attributes that were characteristic of progressive minded citizens in Edwardian Halifax. Young, energetic and a profound believer in moral and economic progress, R.V. Harris was the son of a Anglican clergyman and believed that it was a fundamental Christian duty to work for the betterment of society. Only through proper management and the use of experts, Harris would argue, could efficiency and reform be achieved. Along with his religious upbringing, Harris acquired much of his reformist principles as a lawyer in Winnipeg between 1906-08 at a time when that city was aggressively implementing urban reform measures and a Board of Control administration. Returning to Nova Scotia, Harris settled into his Halifax

22 R.M. Hattie Papers. NSARM MG1 Vol.2898.
law practice and began to get actively involved in promoting civic improvement and municipal reform.\textsuperscript{23}

Although there many active women involved in urban reform causes in Halifax, they are conspicuously absent in the early years of the Civic Improvement League. With so many Halifax women involved in reform in the first decades of the century, their absence seems surprising. In fact, it was surprising even to the women of the time. Perplexed by the apparent exclusion of women from the League’s activities, Dr. Eliza Ritchie contacted the League to inquire about membership restrictions. Perhaps taken aback at the audacity of such an observation, League President R.H. Murray replied:

\begin{quote}
I beg to inform you that there is no restrictions as to the membership of the Civic Improvement League. Ladies are eligible as well as men for membership, and personally I beg to say that every effort should be made to get them to join the League, and help out in the work.
\end{quote}

Despite the positive response, Murray nevertheless finished the response with a ‘separate spheres’ caveat which would sidestep any sense of the wider political and social equality which Ritchie and other Halifax women were trying so hard at the time to obtain. Rather than joining the League individually, however, Murray suggested to Ritchie that a separate council for civic improvement be set up:

\begin{quote}
Would you mind bringing to the attention of the Woman’s Council the fact that we would like a committee of that body to be appointed which would cooperate with the League in its efforts to make Halifax brighter and better?\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{23} R.V. Harris Papers. NSARM MG1 Vol. 358.

\textsuperscript{24} Correspondence. R.H. Murray to Dr. Eliza Ritchie. August 7\textsuperscript{th} 1908. NSARM MG1 Vol. 727B.
The issue of equal membership in the League was thus supplanted by the "maternal feminism" which was now defining the fight for women's political and social equality. Women could be allowed to participate but they must do so only in the framework of a woman's traditional role of nurturer. In terms of civic improvement, women were by nature an important part of the effort. This was recognized in a *Evening Mail* editorial which ranked "applied feminine energy as a factor in the cause of a 'more beautiful America'". Nevertheless, any kind of organized group including both women and men was out of the question. After all:

> The beginning of summer is a season when the women of every village and town in the country may well organize work for the preservation and creation of beauty. Streets, commons, schoolyards, cemeteries, all need constant care...In fact, the men who work on the roads too often destroy beauty when they should protect it.

As part of their ongoing negotiation between public and private sphere, the Halifax Local Council of Women took the lead in female participation in reform causes. Supporting such schemes as supervised playgrounds and public health campaigns, the Woman's Council took a strong interest in the League. Nevertheless, interested women had to participate as part of a committee organized under the umbrella of the Local Council of Women rather than joining the Civic Improvement League outright. Following Murray's request, the Council gave its support and cooperation to the League. For both

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organizations, their interests dovetailed into a mutual concern for beautification and the health of the city. Writing to the *Evening Mail*, the Womens’ Council welcomed the League:

> We are glad that Halifax is falling into line with the widespread “forward movement” of home and civic improvement. Already the results of suggestions thrown out and of the literature disseminated by the members of the Civic Improvement League and of the Local Council of Women are being incorporated into the city’s progressive program.²⁷

Cooperative initiatives between the two organizations in the pre-war years included supervised children’s playgrounds, model tenement housing, and the arranging of flower boxes along Lockman Street to impress visitors as they rode into the city from the North Street Railway Station.²⁸

While the Civic Improvement League had no difficulty in finding female support through the Local Council of Women, it had a more difficult time in trying to secure representation from all parts of the city, particularly in the working class districts. Though many of the League’s initiatives were designed ostensibly in sympathy for the working person, support from the lower class was weak if not non-existent. Considering late Victorian society’s obsession with class, respectability, and maintaining one’s own ‘station’, working class membership in the League would have been unlikely. The fact that many members of the League had little or no acquaintanceship with the lower classes in Halifax certainly precluded any kind of close cooperation. This was apparent within

²⁷ *Evening Mail*. February 15, 1909

²⁸ For a sample, see *Evening Mail*. February 15, 1909. Also, August 18, 1910.
months of the League's formation when members traveled around the city to inspect and photograph the "unsightly places which are too numerous too mention." Paternalism followed by ridicule, highlighted one of their first drives through the North end, especially when encountering the African-Nova Scotian community.

At Africville, the league met with a very warm reception, the residents being under the impression that Mr. Climo wished to take pictures of them individually rather than the buildings. Several of the residents attempted to interfere with the taking of the photographs, but Mr. Climo emerged with flying colors...The league regrets that Mr. Climo was unable to embody the frightful odor arising from these untenable shacks.  

Although League members were certainly not immune to the most pervasive prejudices of the day, they nevertheless sought to improve the condition of the North end with tree planting, and the painting of homes. The poverty of Africville would become a particular problem for the League as its location along the railway into the city exposed visitors to a negative first impression of the city. With little representation from the area, however, League members felt compelled to concentrate on more attainable goals in their own south end neighbourhoods. Occasionally, a member of the League would seek to add more members from the North End, but they always had to be of professional or commercial standing. In 1910 for example, E.A. Saunders, accompanied "by a well known citizen of the North end," went door-to-door in order to increase the north end representation in both the Civic Improvement League and the Halifax Board of Trade. Saunders believed that:

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29 Evening Mail. July 26, 1907.
There are some live men in that section who are badly wanted in both these organizations—merchants, professional men, and others—and this enterprising committee of two propose to marshall them at the earliest moment into the ranks of the two organizations which are doing so much to "make things go" in this city.\footnote{Evening Mail. October 4, 1910.}

Nevertheless such efforts were largely futile. From the perspective of the 'North End Observer', who appeared weekly in the Herald and Mail newspapers, the League was basically a south end orientated organization. Despite seeking the League’s cooperation in removing several eyesores near Kempt Road, the 'North End Observer' suggested the possibility of setting up a North End Improvement League. One enthusiastic respondent supported the idea, arguing that:

We need [an improvement league] much more than our fellow citizens in the south end...We have a larger number of new streets and...a cheaper grade of property...we need a searchlight to see that the north end does justice to itself and receives justice from those entrusted from the civic government.\footnote{Evening Mail. June 3, 1907.}

Although such the idea of a North End Improvement League came to nothing in the pre-war years, it nevertheless highlighted to some reformers including members of the League that a greater effort was needed to unite and uplift all of Halifax to fulfill its true potential.

III. The Forward Movement: The goal of a healthy and progressive Halifax.

With the planting of trees throughout the city and the window box project along Lockman street, the Civic Improvement League took its initial steps toward making Halifax a more beautiful city. Within a year, however, the League found that a more
comprehensive approach to civic improvement was needed. Though trees and cleaner streets improved the appearance of the city to some degree it nevertheless did little to relieve the worsening social conditions in which many Halifax citizens lived.

Housing was perhaps the most contentious issue of early twentieth century Halifax. Headlines in the local newspapers reported almost daily on the disease and death which were occurring in the "most squalid surroundings."\(^{32}\) Reports in 1907 of the high mortality rate in Halifax shocked the city. At over 25 deaths to 1,000 people, it was almost double the rate found in American and English cities. Calls for a sweeping reform including new hospitals and better housing became louder. One reader of the *Evening Mail* urged that the city acquire:

...better homes, more sanitary surroundings, cheaper and better food...it is time to wake up from the spirit of indifference to bad conditions which are all of our making, and remain to curse us because of our supineness and neglect.\(^{33}\)

Shaken by the news of yet more needless deaths of children, another reader of the *Evening Mail*, angrily concluded:

...that THE CONDITIONS OF LIFE THAT PRODUCE SUCH WHOLESALE DESTRUCTION BE ERADICATED. A vigorous race can only be grown and perpetuated amongst wholesome surroundings. Children cannot be reared and developed into robust and healthy men and women, while living in squalor and filth. Old and dilapidated tenement houses breeding the germ life of generations of tenants are store houses of disease and death. When we have hundreds -perhaps thousands- of families herded together like cattle amid unsanitary, if not depraved surroundings it is useless to expect a healthy city.

With Halifax having as many as four times the number of families in one or two rooms as any Canadian city, it became clear that some drastic action was needed. When

\(^{32}\) For a sample, *Evening Mail*. February 14, 1906. Also, May 4, 1907

\(^{33}\) *Evening Mail*. February 5, 1907.
considering priorities:

All other public questions shrink in significance beside the great one of preserving the health and lives of the people, but when will...the city council, or our wealthy capitalist merchants and representative citizens find this out and make a move? 34

The Civic Improvement League responded by turning its attention to a model tenement scheme, with the purpose of marrying the ideas of 'city beautiful' to a more practical concept of providing quality affordable housing to the “self-respecting labouring man.” Although a tenement scheme had been proposed many years earlier by the now defunct ‘Citizen’s Moral Reform Association,’ little action had been taken. 35 Among the first League members who were advocating for a “Picturesque Suburb”, F.H. Sexton took the lead. At a public lecture, Sexton argued for “strict building regulations” and “the construction by broad minded, wealthy citizens or manufacturing concerns of model houses for rental.” With trees and well-kept lawns in front and between homes, a street can be made more beautiful and healthy as trees absorb noxious gases and purify the atmosphere by giving out oxygen. In such a neighbourhood, ‘workers cottages’ could be built far back from the street, but would still be affordable to “men of moderate means.” 36

Inspired by the Sexton speech, League member R.H. Brown acquired property between Brunswick and Abelmare Streets for the purpose of constructing “model dwellings” for “the betterment of the workman.” With a frontage of 119 feet and a depth

34 Evening Mail. May 4, 1907. The emphasis is original. This letter appeared on the front page of the Evening Mail under the heading: “Something That Should Arouse the Serious Attention of Citizens.”

35 Evening Mail. March 10, 1906.

36 Evening Mail. March 4, 1908.
of 60 feet, Brown hoped to provide several sanitary, attractive dwellings for selfrespecting, thrifty workingmen. Despite some objections over this charity, the ‘North End Observer’ welcomed the act as “it is the right of the people to have sanitary, wholesome dwelling places.”

Unfortunately, Brown’s housing scheme did little to ease the poor living conditions in Halifax. Many in fact believed that the municipal government should be doing more to provide a healthy and attractive living environment. The League was particularly vigorous in alerting City Council to the situation and requesting immediate action:

...the deplorable conditions of the tenement buildings in different buildings of our city, and the absolute lack of sanitary arrangements in many of these buildings...[is]...threatening the health of the whole community...

Much to the frustration of reformers, Halifax City Council was unable to cope with demands for new and improved housing, utilities and sanitary measures. With large quantities of untaxed military property scattered throughout the city, aldermen were faced with limited tax revenues. As a result, the city council had little choice but to address budget items with extreme caution. Ironically, many of the Halifax reformers wanted to create a more attractive city not only by remedying the existing social problems but also by attracting more industry which would also broaden the tax base. Unwilling to make such expenditures for new housing or to attract industry, the City Council came to be labeled

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37 *Evening Mail.* June 6, 1908. Also June 11, 1908.

38 *Evening Mail,* June 9, 1908.

by the Dennis newspapers as overly partisan, unprofessional, and too influenced by ward politics. As early as 1903, the *Herald* informed readers that civic reform was badly needed. "Men of character" would display "a more careful, intelligent...[and]...economical management of the city's affairs." The 'North End Observer' saw the city needing fearless and independent men in the city council who were not "at the beck and call of a ward boss."

Despite the sometimes unwarranted accusations of corruption that appeared in the press, the Civic Improvement League never formally endorsed municipal reform in its formative years. In fact, there is nothing in the League records to indicate that the issue was even broached at meetings. Although often exasperated by the Council's inability to take corrective action, the League seemed to believe in pursuing a working relationship with the City Council. This was especially apparent in their approach to the Council in regard to possible tax assessment increases if people improved the condition of their homes.

As with its relationship with City Council, the Civic Improvement League also pursued a working association with the Board of Health. Along with beautifying streets and proposing housing schemes, the League became somewhat of a health watchdog. For

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40 *Morning Herald*. January 2, 1903.

41 *Evening Mail*. November 29, 1907.

42 Henry Roper. p.47.

43 *Evening Mail*. August 10, 1906.
example, the League alerted the Board of Health, to the need for proper food inspections, with special attention to cleanliness of sellers, food preparation, and packaging. The League also approached the Board of Health regarding the dangers of acquiring old mattresses and clothes from people dying of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis. The Board of Health, in turn, responded by passing a resolution forbidding the practice.\(^4^4\)

Other health related initiatives included letters and meetings with business owners and even the ICR management about sanitary concerns in their respective premises.\(^4^5\)

Dealing with the dust nuisance also preoccupied League members. Without paved roads, Halifax residents had little choice but to breathe in dust from trams and vehicles during the driest times of the year. From a sanitary point of view, the dust was considered “flying poison.” Timely and efficient garbage collection and regulation of the “noise nuisance” also dominated League discussions.\(^4^6\)

Interestingly, the Civic Improvement League also found itself involved in moral reform. With the Citizens’ Moral Reform Association disbanded, the League sometimes found itself playing the role of moral policeman. Members such as R.H. Murray urged the


\(^4^5\) Correspondence. R.H. Murray to D.Pottinger, ICR Manager. June 17, 1907. NSARM MG1 Vol.727B.

\(^4^6\) *Evening Mail.* March 3, 1910.
Police Commission to clean up the “social Evil” that still plagued progressive Halifax.

Temperance questions even preoccupied some members who were disturbed that the liquor license laws were frequently being violated. 47

IV. Refocusing the Momentum: City Planning for Halifax

After five years of promoting beautification schemes and other reform measures, the Civic Improvement League could claim few substantial successes. Despite planting trees and window boxes in numerous areas and issuing warnings regarding health matters, much of these improvements were largely incremental. While it is true that there was now a greater public awareness of beautification issues and that a consensus was being formed for new and better housing in Halifax, fundamental changes and improvements still seemed unlikely.

Frustrated by the apparent apathy of city council to improving the social and economic conditions of Halifax, Reginald Harris used his own initiative to, almost singlehandedly, intensify the debate on urban reform issues. Beginning in July 1910, Harris began writing his own daily “Halifex Uplift” column in both the Morning Herald and Evening Mail urging readers to make their city “Bigger, Better, and More Beautiful.” Using the pseudonym “Wilfred Y de Wake,” Harris went on to pen over 170 “uplift” articles that covered every aspect of urban reform including city planning, beautification and municipal government.

47 Correspondence. R.H. Murray to W.E. Messervey, Liquor License Inspector. October 6, 1906. Murray was particulary concerned about violations of the “Screen Law” which forbid the concealing any part of the interior of the Liquor premises from the view of persons on the street. NSARM MG1 Vol.727B.
From the perspective of Reginald Harris and other reformers, Halifax was far behind other North American cities in dealing with urban problems and creating a positive, progressive image of itself. Along with his “Uplift” columns, Harris also created his own progressive group entitled “Boosters Unlimited.” Inventing slogans such as “Halifax -the Empire Port: Make it Greater,” Harris and his boosters sought to lift civic pride and create a sense of momentum for great change.48

Such energy and unbending optimism ultimately rubbed off on other Halifax reformers who now came to believe that only through careful planning could progressive change be accomplished. What Halifax needed was a city plan, to be drawn up by experts, so future development could be foreseen and areas of slum housing eliminated. Furthermore beautification and the placing of “garden suburbs” could also be included, thus creating a ‘perfect city.’

Although F.H. Sexton had talked about city planning in 1908, the Civic Improvement League only now began to give the idea serious consideration. In the Fall of 1910, Harris convinced the Civic Improvement League and his “Boosters Unlimited” to jointly invite John Nolen, a New England city planner to Halifax to lecture on beautifying and improving the city. Anticipation for the lecture was quite high, as local reformers offered their automobiles and even a motorboat to take Mr. Nolen around the city. In response, Nolen energized the large audience who gathered to listen about the merits of a “civic awakening”. This...

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...is no vague movement with vague and indefinite aims. [Civic awakening] seeks...the promotion of business. It endeavors to secure the advantages that unfailingly ensue from well-located and well-conceived streets...adapted to serve...transit and transportation facilities, from an orderly, time-saving and beautiful arrangement of public and semi-public buildings.

As a result of a ‘civic awakening’, reformers should then pursue their goals with the aid of a city plan which would remedy existing problems and foresee future ones. To be more specific, City planning:

...is concerned as never before with the problems of health. We are not now satisfied with pure water, a sanitary disposal of wastes, clean and well-paved streets. We want also a more abundant provision for fresh air and sunshine and convenient opportunity for exercise and recreation for all.

To finish his lecture, Nolen urged his listeners to work harder for civic improvement:

...after all it is not a question of whether cities shall make these improvements or not; progressive cities must make them in order to hold their places among cities of that class.49

The audience received Nolen’s lecture with much appreciation and excitement. In fact, Nolen’s message of ‘awakening’ and ‘planning’ dominated discussions of middle class reformers. For the next several months, the ideas of city planning filled the pages of most of the Halifax newspapers. More importantly, the Civic Improvement League seemed re-energized by the excitement surrounding Nolen’s speech. Members began talking seriously about adopting scientific town planning schemes and pressing city council for the establishment of a civic planning committee. Halifax reformers also could not get enough information about town planning. A month after the Nolen talk, reformers gathered at the Halifax Canadian Club to hear distinguished planner and British M.P.  

49 Evening Mail. September 20, 1910.
Henry Vivian discuss Halifax and city planning. Observing that the Halifax slums were even worse than those in London, Vivian added that such conditions would not be tolerated in the United Kingdom. In Halifax, the houses are:

...practically devoid of sanitary arrangements, and in the matter of light and air the provision was scarcely adequate to meet the needs of the lower animals, not to speaking of human beings.

To solve the problem, he suggested:

A code of bye-laws or regulations providing for a minimum standard of health and decency...the adequate enforcement of these bye-laws, including...the closing of dwellings.50

Though Vivian's remarks did not surprise his Halifax audience, they were nevertheless shocked to learn that their housing problems might indeed be worse than anything found in the Old Country. To the Civic Improvement League, the "civic awakening" that Nolen had discussed was needed now more than ever. Writing in his "Halifax Uplift" column, Harris was particularly exasperated with the inaction of City Council, especially after hearing the remarks of a planning expert and a distinguished British M.P.:

No wonder Henry Vivian gave Halifax a black eye. No wonder a model housing scheme can get hundreds of supporters. How in the name of common decency can anyone, whether in the city council or not, oppose improving the conditions existing! Even the city council will not dispute the existing conditions, for they have the report of the city health inspector.51

With a new spirit of urgency, the Civic Improvement League began to take a more confrontational attitude with the city council. In mid-December, the League forwarded a


51 *Evening Mail*. November 22, 1910.
15 point memorandum to the City Council which should be discussed and enacted at once.

Not surprisingly, the first two points dealt exclusively with city planning:

- that a joint committee of the city council and Civic Improvement league...[be appointed]...to prepare a comprehensive plan for the improvement of the city and...the development of the city along lines conducive, not only to the aesthetic, but to the best conditions of life for the citizens.

- In this connection the appropriation of $2,500 to cover the expenses of the joint committee, including the services of an expert.52

Although the Civic Improvement League had gently avoided the issue of municipal reform in the previous five years, other Halifax reformers were now becoming ever more strident in their calls for change. By 1910, Reginald Harris and the Dennis newspapers favoured a complete abolishment of the city council and a new form of municipal government to be put in place.

Despite the memorandum being received by the city council with muted silence, the Civic Improvement League and the Dennis newspapers nevertheless kept the issue alive. Public lectures on civic improvement and city planning continued to be held. In January 1911, Robert Hattie took the podium to stress the need for comprehensive planning:

The city will never develop harmoniously if allowed to grow at haphazard. There must be comprehensive planning. The common complaint is that the south end has been largely beautified, but that not much has been done in the north end where two-thirds of the people live. The best way to assure proper Development is to have a comprehensive plan.53

52 Evening Mail. December 19, 1910.

53 Evening Mail. January 18, 1911.
Some members of the League, in fact, had already started their own comprehensive plan. Architect Andrew Cobb produced several drawings featuring a redeveloped waterfront and gateway to the city. Modeled after the European vistas which were in architectural vogue at the time, the illustrations were printed in the Evening Mail and drew considerable praise from readers.54

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With a daily dose of “Halifax Uplift” messages and the successful visits of planning experts John Nolen and Henry Vivian, the Halifax public was now taking a serious interest in much wider scope of urban reform. Although the Civic Improvement League had been pushing for beautification schemes, better housing, and public health initiatives for over five years, it was only in the 1910-11 period that a momentum for sweeping urban reform began to build. From a relatively quiet start in the November 1905, the Civic Improvement League was now seemingly on the cusp of taking Halifax forward with a comprehensive city plan that would reshape the city along progressive, efficient, and healthier lines. The only apparent obstacle it seemed was a skeptical city council.

Chapter Two
As several Canadian cities enthusiastically embraced both civic improvement and municipal reform in the first decade of “Canada’s Century,” many Halifax residents began to agitate for similar initiatives in their own city. With the establishment of the Civic Improvement League in 1905, Halifax took its first step toward implementing a broader scope of urban reforms. Though the League initially stopped short of endorsing municipal reform, the deteriorating living conditions in Halifax had gradually made members reconsider their “working relationship” with City Council. In 1911, the Civic Improvement League decided to take a much more aggressive stand in pushing for change. From their perspective, housing, health and even municipal reform were now imperitive, but greater public support was needed to achieve it. Seeking ideas and inspiration to rally the public, Halifax reformers turned to their historical and cultural connections with the ‘Boston States’ for influence. Unlike other Canadian urban reform efforts which rarely worked together, Halifax reformers borrowed the “Boston 1915” model to forge a ‘civic awakening’ and unite groups such as the League, the Board of Trade, the Local Council of Women and the Trades and Labour Council to the reform cause. The result was not just a stronger Civic Improvement League, but also a victory for municipal reform and a Board of Control for Halifax.

I. Promoting Reform. Halifax and “Boston 1915”

Although John Nolen’s message of “city planning” and “civic awakening” had excited the Civic Improvement League in the autumn of 1910, his connection with the
"Boston 1915" movement was of particular interest to local reformers. Like Halifax, the City of Boston was in a miserable and squalid state in 1910. One English visitor to Boston commented that there were more refuse filled homes and pockets of unsanitary houses in the city than in the Whitechapel district of London. After growing weary of the inaction, inefficiencies and waste by Boston City Council, many of the leading citizens began to talk openly of urban reform. In their view, Boston's public health, morals, and economic prosperity were all in jeopardy unless action was taken. In March 1909, the Boston City Club responded by establishing the "Boston 1915" movement which aimed to make their city "the finest in the world by 1915." As reported on the front page of the *Evening Mail*, the "Boston 1915" movement had 16 steps to which they would implement to ensure the city's future. These included an efficient public health system, improved relations between business and labour, technical education for life long work, the drawing up of a city plan to illustrate the present and future possibilities of Boston, and a concentrated publicity effort through the use of meetings and public lectures.

After hearing so much about the "Boston 1915" movement, the Civic Improvement League began contemplating their own 'civic awakening' to encourage every citizen of Halifax to embrace reform. After careful consideration and with the advice of "Boston 1915" members, Halifax reformers decided to launch their own "uplift

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50 *Evening Mail*. March 31*, 1909.
campaign” which would be a “a rally of all believers in Civic Betterment.” Scheduled for seven days in early March 1911, the Civic Revival, as it was called, marked a rare moment in progressive Halifax when the numerous organizations came together to work for a greater cause. Although the Civic Improvement League was the prime mover for the “Civic Revival,” the co-ordinating committee also included members of the Halifax Board of Trade, the Board of Health, the Local Council of Women, the schools, labour organizations, and various charity groups. The significance of such cooperation was certainly not lost on the participants who stressed that:

...the resultant impetus will go far to enable them to accomplish more of that [reform] work...undoubtedly nothing so important and so basic and fundamental has even been attempted in Halifax, if in Canada. The movement aims at creating more civic faith and optimism and interesting everyone in some phase or other of the development of the city we live in...  

Given the spirited optimism and feeling of urgency, the “Civic Revival” organizing committee did attempt to reach out to the whole city. With the exception of the Africville community, almost every social group including working people, women, and children were encouraged to attend some or all of the sessions. With two public lectures scheduled daily between March 5th and 12th at locations scattered across the city, the Civic Revival campaign would attempt to fit individual issues into a larger picture of progressive reform. Venues for the public lectures included St. Patrick’s Hall in the North end of the

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57 *Evening Mail*. February 17th, 1911.

58 Ibid.
city, the Masonic Hall, the Board of Trade rooms, and the School for the Blind. A parish hall in the neighbouring town of Dartmouth was also chosen for a discussion on reform and co-operative initiatives between the town and the City of Halifax.

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Perhaps the most significant indicator of support for the Civic Revival was the unprecedented bi-partisan newspaper support. While the William Dennis newspapers, including the *Herald* and *Evening Mail*, predictably and enthusiastically urged the Revival forward, the local Liberal Party papers such as the *Chronicle* and *Echo* also gave the campaign its blessing. Given the antagonism between the Dennis newspapers and the Liberal Party newspapers *Chronicle* and *Echo*, such support was both surprising and uncharacteristic. As the Dennis newspapers prided themselves on being the “organs for social reform,” the *Chronicle* and *Echo* came to represent the voice of the governing Liberal party establishment. Unlike the *Herald*, the *Chronicle* avoided sensationalism in its news coverage. In terms of local news, both the *Chronicle* and *Echo* preferred a dry, matter of fact, approach to reporting on civic affairs, with little analysis or criticism.

Although there will never be a clear explanation for as to why the *Chronicle* and *Echo* supported this rare orgy of civic pride in Halifax, the “Reciprocity” debate was a likely factor. With the Dennis papers attacking reciprocity and the Liberal government (both Federal and Provincial) on a almost daily basis, the *Chronicle* continually defended the idea of “Reciprocity” with the United States as being in the best interests of Canada,
Nova Scotia, and Halifax.\(^59\) Desperate to reverse disappointing circulation numbers and fearful of losing the reciprocity argument, the *Chronicle* took to dressing up the merits of reciprocity in the clothes of civic reform.\(^60\) Stressing the importance of the Civic Revival, the *Chronicle* highlighted the fact that:

Halifax is now confronted with a great opportunity to make or mar its future... We are planted here as the natural gateway of the Dominion on the Atlantic. The timing is coming when this will be... the great point of outgo for the products of a nation which is still in the making. [Once] the new trade arrangement goes into effect and the country begins to reap the benefits, immigration will come by the tens of thousands... It may be slow in coming, but the time is coming when Halifax will realize the hopes of years. It is then in a very practical sense up to the business men of Halifax today to make adequate preparations not merely for the present but for the future... The Civic Revival ought to be of great service in awakening the people to the need of establishing better conditions all around.\(^61\)

Though the editors of the *Chronicle* supported ‘the Revival,’ it nevertheless put its business agenda ahead of any kind of social concern. Supporting the *laissez-faire* view that a strong economy will filter benefits down to the whole of society, the *Chronicle* was quite blunt about its ambitions for what a civic revival would accomplish.

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\(^{59}\) The heated Halifax newspaper wars between the *Herald* and *Chronicle* are examined in: William March. *Red Line: The Chronicle-Herald and The Mail-Star 1875-1954.* (Halifax, 1986). While the “reciprocity” issue is well covered, March neglects to mention anything about Halifax civic affairs, including the civic revival.

\(^{60}\) Combined daily circulation numbers for 1911 revealed a substantial lead for the Dennis newspapers. *Herald-Mail:* 17,738, *Chronicle-Echo:* 13,252. For more figures, see William March; p. 394.

\(^{61}\) *Morning Chronicle.* March 8, 1911.
In the first place, the Civic Revival movement is a business man's movement. [It] will put dollars and cents in our pockets by demonstrating to us the many ways in which we may better our condition as a community and as individuals.\(^2\)

Nevertheless, for the first time the *Chronicle* was supporting the principles of reform including a "reorganization" of the "archaic" municipal government. Both the *Chronicle* and *Echo* also embraced the importance of public health.

The healthy worker is an asset to any community... We have built and maintained costly hospitals and asylums. undoubtedly there is money to be saved in tackling the question from another angle. Preventing disease is unquestionably a better paying proposition than ministering to it, once it has obtained a foothold.\(^3\)

Another important aspect of the revival which the *Chronicle* acknowledged was the working man. For:

...there is money to be made in improving the condition of the laborer. By providing him with a decent house to live in and by allowing him a more equitable return for his work we are merely operating to our own material advancement.\(^4\)

Although the *Chronicle* may have approached the whole idea of reform from a narrow financial perspective, the economic benefits of civic improvement were certainly on the minds of many reformers. To most middle class Edwardian Canadians, social, moral and economic progress were all inexorably linked and self-supporting. This was a view shared by the Halifax Board of Trade which played a crucial role in establishing the Civic Improvement League and pursuing municipal reform.

\(^2\) *Morning Chronicle*. March 6, 1911.

\(^3\) Ibid.

\(^4\) Ibid.
II. The Role of the Halifax Board of Trade: An Economic Justification for Civic Improvement

Given the prevailing stereotype that the Halifax business community was overly conservative in the face of national economic policies and chronic regional underdevelopment, the Halifax Board of Trade appears to be a remarkably progressive institution. Established in 1889 as an alternative to the waterfront dominated Chamber of Commerce, the Halifax Board of Trade sought to be more inclusive in their membership by attracting gentlemen involved in business, law and publishing. Members were in fact noticeably younger (25-45 years old) than their counterparts on the Chamber of Commerce, and displayed an openness to innovation and change that was characteristic with Boards of Trade in Western Canada. Not surprisingly, men such as William Dennis, R.V. Harris, and R.M. Hattie were just a few of the many members who joined the Board of Trade to lobby for various urban reforms.

The involvement of the Halifax Board of Trade in civic improvement, beginning in 1905, came at a time when the city was beginning to enjoy some measure of prosperity. After experiencing an economic downturn in the last years of the nineteenth century, Halifax began to pick up trade and new industry in the first years of the new century. As early as 1900, the Board of Trade noted a positive change in the economic direction of the city. With new industries, such as the Nova Scotia Cotton Factory and the Henderson Paint Works, being established in Halifax, the Board of Trade boasted that the city was

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65 David Sutherland. p.206-207.
"destined to attract a large population and make her (Nova Scotia)...the most important province in the Dominion." Although the withdrawal of the British military presence in 1906 brought some anxiety, many entrepreneurs remained optimistic about the city's future. By shedding the city's military image, it was felt, Halifax would at last emerge as the commercial and industrial centre of eastern Canada.

Nevertheless, while Halifax did enjoy some new employment and population growth, the Board of Trade became increasingly frustrated with the staggered pace of growth in the city. Compared with smaller Nova Scotia centres such as Amherst and Sydney which were rapidly growing and industrializing, Halifax still remained far behind in manufacturing output. In terms of national development, Halifax also appeared to be falling outside the mainstream of national development. Except for Quebec City and Saint John, Halifax experienced a slower population and industrial growth rate.

Optimistic that Halifax could still become a bigger and better city, the Board of Trade decided that further impetus was needed. Realizing that even the city's commercial strength was beginning to erode by the pull of Central Canadian capital, the Board of Trade sought desperately to diversify the local economy. Not satisfied with being the political and commercial centre of the province, the Halifax Board of Trade began to view

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66 *Evening Mail*. January 17, 1900.

67 Murray Hodgins; p.38.

68 Between 1891 and 1901, manufacturing in Halifax grew from $7.2 million in 1890 to $12.1 million in 1910, an increase of 69%. Meanwhile, Montreal and Toronto’s combined manufacturing output increased 194.5%. For more details please see: Canada. *Census*, 1911. Also David Sutherland. "The Personnel and Policies of the Halifax Board of Trade"; p. 216.
civic improvement and municipal reform as keys to a complete progressive renaissance of the city. Civic Improvement would make Halifax a more attractive and healthier city in which to invest, while municipal reform would bring efficiency and accountability to City Hall. The Board of Trade was particularly anxious to bring more and more industry to Halifax through the use of ‘bonuses’ which the City should provide. Despite Halifax struggling to house and feed a burgeoning population arriving from the countryside and overseas in search of employment, the Board of Trade nevertheless pressed the city council for money to attract more industry, housing, and a wide assortment of civic improvements. With declining tax revenues however, the city coffers rarely had enough to justify such expenditures.

Unable to accept the difficult financial position which faced the city, the Halifax Board of Trade began to loudly advocate municipal reform. As early 1903, the Herald began to press for civic reform and the hiring of “business specialists” to run the city. By 1910, the Evening Mail was running daily headlines to parade its opinions such as “An End Must be Put Immediately to the Present Farce at the City Hall” and “Our Wretched System of Civic Government is Antiquated and Behind the Times.” Such views were certainly shared among members of the Halifax Board of Trade who looked on with a

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69 David Sutherland. p.216. The only successful case of Halifax using a “bonus” to secure industry was the Silliker Car Works which moved to the city in 1906 after a fire had destroyed their Amherst works.

70 Herald. January 3, 1903. Also William March. p.70.

mixture of envy and fear at arch-rival Saint John who enthusiastically embraced municipal reform in the shape of a radical Commission Government in 1911.72

Faced with a “more progressive” Saint John, the Halifax Board of Trade became more determined than ever to succeed in securing municipal reform. From their perspective, municipal reform and civic improvement were no longer two separate abstract issues. A new, more progressive mode of civic administration was now seen as an essential precondition for civic improvement and economic prosperity.

III. Getting Together: A Civic Revival for Halifax

Like much of Edwardian society interested in scientific management, the citizens of Halifax had a profound fondness for experts. No matter what the issue, Halifax always welcomed the opinion and help of an expert to help solve their problems. The fact that the expert usually “came from away” only added to his/her mystique and authority. This was certainly the case with John Sewall, the Executive Director of “Boston 1915,” who was invited at the behest of the Halifax reformers to lead their own “civic awakening.” Despite having a number of local individuals who were much more familiar with the problems of Halifax, local reformers sought to bring in an outside expert to lead their “civic revival”. By bringing in a distinguished expert, especially from the “Boston States,” the Halifax Civic Revival was given instant credibility to the press, the wider public, and perhaps more importantly to City Council.

72 With a Commission system of municipal government, Saint John abolished its city council, board of works and police commission in favour of a 3 to 5 member commission composed of salaried experts. Elected by the whole city rather than by ward, each expert-commissioner was accountable through a “recall” process and was expected to run the city in a non-political, efficient, and business-like fashion. Incidentally, Saint John was the only Canadian city to have a Commission government.
Although not as well known as John Nolen or even Henry Vivian, John Sewall was nevertheless given credit for leading Boston onto the path of reform. Despite his American origins, Sewall was seen by the Halifax press as a "earnest student of Canadian development" and "someone who was admirably calculated to give a stimulus and point to efforts for the civic betterment of Halifax." For his part, Sewall noted that the timing seemed particularly ripe for a "civic awakening" as Halifax:

was not wanting in well-informed leaders and that all that now remained was for the people to get together and arrange for the systematic application of the various reforms which they have been agitating for some months back.\footnote{Morning Chronicle. March 3, 1911. Evening Mail. March 6, 1911.}

Nevertheless, John Sewall was given centre stage by the Civic Revival committee for the week’s activities and he chose “The Modern City” as his opening speech. With the Mason’s Hall filled to capacity, Sewall talked of Halifax being like Boston in terms of the hustle and character of its people. Though his speech was a mixture of generalities, Sewall nevertheless stressed the need for a “getting together” of all the voluntary agencies with the municipal government to ensure co-operation and reform.\footnote{Morning Chronicle. March 3, 1911.}

Unlike previous speeches by experts visiting in Halifax, Sewall’s talk had a strong religious component. With the Reverend R.W. Ross now acting as the President of the Civic Improvement League, “civic duty” became part of “Christian duty” and was continually promoted as such throughout League meetings and during the Civic Revival.\footnote{Evening Mail. March 6, 1911.}
In Sewall's opening speech for example, references and proverbs from the Bible were repeatedly used to give the beginning of the "civic awakening" a certain epochal quality.

The importance of religion and civic improvement was also witnessed in many of Halifax's churches that opening day of the Civic Revival. Almost every service for each denomination in the city began with a nod to the importance of civic duty. The most noteworthy sermon on civic improvement came from Archdeacon Armitage, who addressed the large congregation at St. Paul's Church. Believing that the civic duty rests "on the command of Christ," the Archdeacon observed that:

The Civic Revival is in the minds of many. Will it do any good is a question which one hears everywhere...The effort is good in itself, and should lead to larger ideals, wiser plans and more concerted action. If it does no more than arose interest, awaken a proper civic pride and lead to greater enthusiasm that will be a great gain. But like all movements of this kind religious and otherwise, if feeling is stirred up but no action taken, there is an element of danger, and the last state may be worse than the first.

In order to assure that the civic awakening is a lasting success, Armitage urged the people of Halifax to take a larger, deeper, and wider interest in municipal problems. After all:

God calls them to this work for no true Christian can without danger neglect this important duty...[and] there are certain clear civic duties. The first was to plan wisely. There are evidences of a short sighted policy in every street in the city. The second was to build well on solid foundations. The third was to work for the industries of the city, and to endeavor to increase them, thus giving regular and profitable employment to thousands of citizens...Take an interest in our splendid local charities...endeavor to improve the condition of the streets. Give your help to those who are seeking to improve the homes of the working classes.76

With the blessing of the Halifax churches, the Civic revival began with its week long series of lectures and forums. For the first days of the "Awakening", organizers had

76 Acadian Recorder. March 6, 1911.
arranged for discussions on the urban problems afflicting health, municipal government, youth, and housing.

i.) Health

With perhaps the highest infant mortality rate in North America and escalating deaths from tuberculosis, Halifax was described as perhaps the most unhealthy city in North America. Along with John Sewall, several medical doctors were invited to speak. Perhaps the most forceful was William Hattie, who stunned his audience, with the suggestion that the citizens of Halifax were morally responsible for such deaths, as many were preventable under the proper conditions. Although he admitted he was not a man of medicine, John Sewall nevertheless added that health was “a great asset of civic life”. From such discussion, each of the speakers was resolved to urge the Halifax Board of Health to adopt a more stringent inspection of the milk supply for the city.77

ii) Municipal Government

With much of the criticism for Halifax’s problems being directed at the City Council, the Civic Revival included a speech on “Civic Problems and Administration.” Interestingly, however, the meeting steered away from any direct mention of implementing municipal reform in Halifax. With several Aldermen also sharing the podium with him, John Sewall spoke instead about the most serious obstacle to effective civic government in the city: taxation. In Halifax:

when some special expenditure was necessary it is said that no money [is] obtainable. This is not the fault of the civic authorities, but is owing to the fact that the system of taxation was wrong and the money could not be secured without increasing the rate.™

When asked by a member of the audience as to how to correct the taxation problem, Sewall gave a diplomatic response, answering that “it was a problem that the City had to work out for itself.” Nevertheless, Sewall did add that “the Board of Trade should get together and devise some scheme to increase the revenue of the city” to be used for improvements.™

iii) Youth

On the following day, the problems facing the Youth of Halifax were discussed. Rather than relying on the work of the churches, John Sewall believed that the state could do more to aid in the conservation of youth. After listening to a speaker from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty describe the frightful industrial conditions facing child labour, Sewall commented that similar conditions exist in Boston which were slowly being eradicated. Other youth related issues discussed included supervised playgrounds being run by the city, instead of the Local Council of Women; the need for a school for “defective children” and a general improvement in the squalid living conditions which many children in Halifax had to endure.™

™ Acadian Recorder. March 7, 1911.

™ Ibid.

™ Acadian Recorder. March 8, 1911.
iv) Housing

The discussion of living conditions was carried over into the next meeting hosted by the Local Council of Women. The discussion on “Homes and Hovels” in fact drew the largest audience to the Revival with men “well represented” from the “professional and business circles” of Halifax. Once again John Sewall dominated the proceedings and found his topic of “Homes and Hovels” to be:

...in logical sequence with those already discussed. Whatever our cities are or are not -it is certain the modern city cannot be built without money. Without health life is not worth living, while the conservation of youth is of greatest concern if we are going to have the right kind of men and women in the future. We come now to...the women’s chiefest concern...the home.81

After showing some slides depicting the “hovels” of Halifax, Sewall then showed illustrations of what other cities were doing about similar problems, He then wrapped up the lecture with a overview of how the unhealthy home would lead a unhealthy city. The need for pure milk, the dangers of the house fly, the necessity for supervised playgrounds and open air schools for sick children were all addressed. To the Acadian Recorder, the lecture was:

a most comprehensive one, fully covering the entire subject of the healthful conditions necessary around a home that shall make life the beautiful thing it ought to be. Art...does not cost any more than ugliness, and in the matter of its children, it is up to Halifax to give them a square deal.82

81 Evening Mail. March 8, 1911.

82 Acadian Recorder. March 8, 1911.
With the absence of Council President Agnes Dennis, Mrs Charles Archibald closed the lecture by urging everyone "to go down among the "hovels" and take personal cognizance of the existing conditions.

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On Wednesday March 8th, the Civic Revival reached the halfway mark. Up to this moment, the Revival had been receiving extensive and positive coverage in each of the city’s newspapers. Although the upcoming Reciprocity debate had pushed the Revival coverage off the front pages of both the Herald and Chronicle by the second day, they nevertheless continued to lavish praise on the efforts of John Sewall and the other Halifax reformers. Although local participants such as churchmen and leaders of the Civic Improvement League and Local Council of Women spoke at each of the sessions, the John Sewall speeches were printed almost at verbatim. Though Sewall himself rarely provided a critical analysis of Halifax’s problems, audiences seemed to enjoy his generalizations about progress, co-operation, and self-help.

As an event itself for the City of Halifax, the Civic Revival seemed to generate a sense of activism and movement for progressive change. Even the local retailers could not help but take advantage of the Revival. For example, each day that week, Clayton & Sons Clothiers carried a “Spring Revival of New Clothes” adding that

There is one undoubted fact and that is Civic Improvement includes fitting dresses for the Citizens. To dress well is to raise the standard of business.83

83 The Clayton & Sons Advertisement appeared everyday in the Evening Mail between March 5 and 12, 1911.
The Revival message also seemed to have an effect in that many people in Halifax at least began to discuss these urban issues openly and in a holistic manner. Problems such as slum housing, and adequate healthcare were all attached to the need for a broader urban reform approach. With each successive meeting, the public seemed to respond with more enthusiasm. In fact, Wednesday's topic of City Charities attracted the largest attendance of the week so far, despite being held in the middle of the afternoon.

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v) Charities

Conducted under the auspices of the St. Vincent de Paul Society and the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, John Sewall's speech on our "Our City Charities" dealt primarily with the need for co-operative action. Impressed by scope of charitable activities in Halifax, Sewall nevertheless reminds his audience that the United States is farther ahead and was even "running to extremes" in its charities. In Halifax, "the people...would think they were going to great lengths if the city bought land and rented houses to the poor." To change this attitude, Sewall suggested concentrated action and three specific measures. First, a united Charities council, similar to the Local Council of Women, comprising of delegates from all organizations in the city. Second, for the Council to meet once a month to not "merge or organize, but to look face to face at the abnormal and try to make it normal." Third, a Registration Bureau in order to make the Council effective. The Bureau would serve as "a confidential exchange" and help eliminate "unjust conditions."  

84 Acadian Recorder. March 9, 1911.
vi) Women

Along with the Civic Improvement League and the Board of Trade, the Local Council of Women were one of the most supportive and enthusiastic groups involved in the Civic Revival. With reformers believing that women had an inherent interest in protecting and promoting beauty and civic improvement, John Sewall was invited to speak directly to the women of Halifax about their role in "civic housekeeping." Interestingly, the session was arranged as an open forum in which Mr. Sewall would be asked questions. The first issue raised concerned the lack of an institution for the feebleminded. Sewall expressed surprise at this fact and thought greater publicity beginning with the Revival would help.

The problem of "Wayward Girls" was the next issue raised. In keeping with the 'separate spheres' notion of society, Sewall believed that the young girl needed a good mother and good home. The "wayward girl" also needed some "wholesome social recreation" organized by the city or the Young Women's Christian Association.

The question of the "Scientific Domestic Economy" was the next issue broached by the Local Council to Sewall. To the speaker, this referred to the importance of the housewife as "an economic actor in producing national health and national wealth." After a brief applause, Sewall then turned to another important issue facing Halifax: "the Red Light district" which was a problem that "was projecting itself onto all the others." Reminding the audience that he is not a magician, Sewall suggested a flank attack on the "social evil" for:
...the land will become too valuable to be occupied by hovels. They will
go down and new buildings will go up...it is not for me to tell you how
to renovate debased human character -you have other teachers. I am
here to suggest some means by which you may do away with the worst
part of your city. Your attack must be largely indirect and aimed at
conditions.

While Mrs Archibald thanked Mr. Sewall for his talk, some women in the audience felt that
a more direct attack against the conditions fostering such behaviour. Cheap theaters and
amusements should be discouraged and even closed down with the help of the police.
Temperance should also be more stringently enforced to alleviate the poverty which is
debasing the character of Halifax.85

vii) Organized Labour

Previous scholarship on Halifax during the progressive period has generally
discounted the role of labour in the pre-war fight for civic reform.86 According to the
newspapers of the time, however, organized labour was considered to be "the important
factor in the wealth of any city."87 From the first meeting of the Revival's organizing
committee, John Joy and other local labour leaders offered their support and urged that
John Sewall make at least one address pertaining to working men and civic improvement.

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86 For example, see Henry Roper. According to Roper, there was no record of labour involvement
in the Civic Revival or urban reform activities in Halifax.

87 Acadian Recorder. March 10, 1911.
As President of the Halifax Trades and Labour Council which comprised eighteen different unions, John Joy had enjoyed considerable success in pressing for reforms in and out of the workplace. In 1908, Joy was given credit for initiating Nova Scotia’s first Workmen’s Compensation Act and would later succeed in securing a “Civic Fair Wage Law” for Halifax workers.\textsuperscript{88}

Although a sharpened labour militancy would appear following the First World War, Halifax labour did not initially fear a middle class dominated reform movement. Maintaining that the state should be more responsive to the workingman’s economic needs, Joy and other labour leaders encouraged workers to participate in the Revival.\textsuperscript{89} In response, middle-class reformers treated labour’s involvement with a tone of cautious optimism. William Dennis was perhaps the most outgoing of reformers in courting the working man’s support for civic improvement, his newspapers and the Conservative Party. In 1909, the \textit{Herald} suggested that:

\begin{quote}
If the Conservative Party managers are not entirely blind to the sign of the times, they will enlist the sympathy and support of the organized labor masses...\textsuperscript{90}
\end{quote}

Unlike other entrepreneurs in Halifax, Dennis was surprisingly in favour of unions. Believing that the “Sons of Toil” needed a voice in their own affairs, Dennis nevertheless feared the looming specter of international unionism and the role of the professional

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90 Quoted in William March. p.75-76. 
\end{flushright}
organizer. In effort to woo workers away from such threats, Dennis sought periodically to appease labour groups with token gestures of support. For example, both the *Herald* and the *Evening Mail*, endorsed John Joy as the People's Independent candidate in the 1911 provincial election against a Conservative candidate "as a measure of justice and fair play to the ninety per cent population comprising the Sons of Toil." Even though Joy finished last in the election, the *Herald* reminded readers that

...it was the rank and file of the Conservative Party that gave sympathy and support to the Labor candidate. This is entirely in accord with the views expressed by the Herald, and if the Labor party should in future be looking towards affiliation with one of the old parties, the Labor party can have no doubt as to where they should go. "One good turn deserves another"... 91

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Despite being held at St. Patrick's Hall in the north end of the city, John Sewall's talk on the "The wage earner and the better city" attracted a large gathering of both workmen and businessmen. To begin the evening, John Joy decided to enlighten the audience about the purpose and work of the Trades and Labour Council. Like other reform groups in the city, the Council had been seeking to remedy the health, housing, and unemployment issues for a number of years and though the unemployment numbers had declined with the renewed prosperity, it was nevertheless still a "great problem to secure more work for the working classes."

From the perspective of John Sewall, employment was however not a priority for the workingmen living in Halifax. "Increased efficiency" should be stressed, suggested

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91 Ibid. p.76.
Sewall as it "tends to increase his income and bring[s] about the making of a better city."
Repeating his previous themes, Sewall went on to comment on the need for quality milk inspections and cleaner houses, "as the workingman should be able to look to his home as a place of security and rest.", Furthermore, Sewall urged workingmen to consider their health as their "capital" for with co-operation and "thrift" can the necessities of life can be obtained. In conclusion, Sewall closed his talk with the suggestion that "workingmen should keep their eyes open for ways to increase the efficiency of a city.

In thanking Sewall for his speech, Charles Nelson, Vice-President of the Council could not help but remind the speaker and some of the well-heeled members in the audience that "while workingmen realized there were many things that might improve their condition, they were handicapped by a lack of capital. Nevertheless, "the workingmen of Halifax were as one in conjunction with the Civic Revival Committee."^92

viii) Beautification

On the penultimate day of the Civic Revival, reformers turned their attention to "City Beautiful" efforts. Unlike previous sessions, "Beautification" involved all of the city's reform minded organizations including the Civic Improvement League. For the Evening Mail, the attendance was large and most gratifying and "never has Mr. Sewall been heard more helpfully or more truly 'thrown new light'" on the problems of civic improvement.93 Noting that this was almost the last day of the Civic Revival, Sewall thought that

^92 Acadian Recorder. March 10, 1911.

93 Evening Mail. March 11, 1911.
there had been a logical and cumulative progress leading to that day's subject "The Planning of the City." "Our object is to get into line with the modern city" which must be planned according to certain principles, otherwise "there is a tremendous economic waste."

Sewall then went on to discuss the "utility" of the "Beautiful" in the modern city and how the ugliness in parts of Halifax was largely responsible for the moral unattractiveness of the people who lived in these areas. After a long and loud applause after this remark, other speakers took the podium. Robert Hattie was among the speakers, who saw a "Comprehensive City Plan" as evidence that Halifax and the Civic Improvement League was moving with enlightenment and wisdom. Speaking towards the end of the meeting, Hattie addressed the crowd:

We are here, because we believe that Halifax has a future and is destined to be a prosperous, beautiful, and enlightened city. [A city plan would guide us for it has]...a relation to health; to the right of children to play; to our commercial progress. 94

Referring to the "culmination of meetings," Halifax reformers concluded the "city beautiful session with a resolution calling for a new city plan be drawn up as first step in beautifying the city.

ix) Dartmouth

For one of the last sessions of the civic revival, John Sewall and a entourage of Halifax reformers journeyed across the Harbour to address a joint meeting of the Dartmouth Board of Trade and Civic Reform League. Highlighting many of his previous speeches, Sewall stressed the importance of "getting together." Labeling Dartmouth, "the

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94 Ibid.
Brooklyn of Halifax" the speaker could foresee Dartmouth as a prosperous and beautiful suburb of a powerful and prosperous city but only with co-operation and joint planning.  

IV. Conclusion

Following the Dartmouth session, John Sewall and the Halifax reformers brought a formal close to the Civic Revival. Speaking to a mass audience, Sewall reviewed the strong points of all his talks through the past week, particularly emphasizing the need for co-operation and collective action to maintain a momentum for reform. Believing that "the Civic Revival must go on and on," the Halifax reformers responded at this final meeting by creating a "Greater Halifax Central Conference" to provide more co-ordinated action for social and civic welfare.

Though it was only to meet once a year, the Officers of this new organization represented a broad swath of Halifax men and women interested in urban reform. Many were also officers of the Civic Improvement League including Prof. E. MacKay, R.V. Harris, R.M. Hattie and F.H. Sexton. Mrs William Dennis of the Local Council of Women was also a member.

Following the end of revival and the departure of John Sewall, the Halifax newspapers could not help but notice the "signs of revival" around the city. The establishment of a "Greater Halifax Central Conference" was especially welcome. As a new convert to the reform cause and gratified about the formation of "the Conference," the

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96 *Evening Mail*. March 13, 1911. March 14, 1911.
Chronicle recognized that:

Dissatisfaction is always the forerunner of reform, and there appears to be in the City now at least a nucleus around which the desire for reform can concentrate. ⁹⁷

The role of John Sewall in bringing about this development was especially applauded. The Evening Mail believed him “to be a leader and not a driver” of reform. Mr. Sewall’s:

...addresses have been inspirational and a guiding principle; he has sought to direct, and never dogmatized. The amount of work of which he has shown himself capable is remarkable indeed. Morning, noon, and night he has been at; never seeming to become wearied, and remaining courteous, helpful, and encouraging. ⁹⁸

Such encouragement would become especially vital in the weeks to come as the Board of Trade and the Civic Improvement League sought to capitalize on the momentum generated by the revival to bring about urban reform. With the success and optimism of the Civic Revival now behind them, the Civic Improvement League and other Halifax reformers became committed to municipal reform as “the first step in civic improvement.”

⁹⁷ Morning Chronicle. March 13, 1911.

⁹⁸ Evening Mail. March 13, 1911.
Chapter Three
During the week of the Civic Revival, Halifax reformers began to increasingly recognize that municipal reform would have to be their first objective in order to achieve a bigger, better and more beautiful city. Unlike other large Canadian cities which had embraced municipal reform in order to deal more effectively with urban development, Halifax City Council had repeatedly rejected the possibility of change. Although the city’s system of government was becoming increasingly cumbersome and ineffective, most aldermen felt reform was not the answer. Nevertheless, with its Mayor, eighteen aldermen and a plethora of overlapping committees, Halifax City Council could hardly claim to be efficient. For the Civic Improvement League, the prospect of municipal reform was especially welcome. Though individual alderman had often been sympathetic to League initiatives, cooperative action had often been lost in the maze of committees, ward politics, and expenditure tightening. With municipal reform, such committees would be replaced by a small, but elected Board of supposedly non-political, business-minded experts. As a consequence, these individuals would think along progressive lines and would naturally be far more receptive to working with the Civic Improvement League. Although such high expectations were never entirely fulfilled, Halifax’s Board of Control administration nevertheless did help the Civic Improvement League implement its most important reform initiative: town planning.

I. At last! Municipal Reform in Halifax

While the Civic Revival established municipal reform as the essential requirement for more sweeping change, questions still lingered over which reform structure should
replace the present Aldermanic system which had governed the city since 1841. From the perspective of Halifax’s reformers, the idea of retaining or just tinkering with the present system was simply not an option. With its eighteen unpaid aldermen squabbling over petty details and expenditures, Halifax City Council appeared to be hopelessly inadequate for dealing effectively with the city’s problems. Perhaps even more frustrating for groups such as the Civic Improvement League was the ever increasing number of committees which seemed incapable of implementing any substantial changes.99

With almost everyone agreeing that the present system was bad and “conducive to many evils”, reformers began to study alternatives which would place the city on a more progressive footing.100 The William Dennis newspapers were especially instrumental in the debate as they educated readers on the merits of municipal reform and the various progressive alternatives which Halifax ratepayers would (someday) be asked to choose.101 This became especially apparent in April 1910, when Halifax City Council bowed to public pressure and established a committee “to enquire into the system of Municipal Government in other cities in Canada and the United States where they are governed by a Board of Control or Commission.”102

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99 Henry Roper. p.50.

100 Evening Mail. April 28, 1910.

101 British subjects (including unmarried women and widows) assessed city rates were entitled to vote in civic elections. Halifax City Charter, 1910.

102 Minutes of the Halifax City Council, March 14, 1910. Also see Henry Roper. p.48.
Believing that municipal reform in Halifax would be a foregone conclusion for the committee, the *Herald* and *Evening Mail* nevertheless sought to answer the ratepayer’s uncertainty over “What System of Government shall Halifax have in Future?” Appearing in large type on the front page, the article went on to examine four possible alternatives for the city. The first system to be discussed was the present aldermanic system which the *Evening Mail* summarily disparaged “as the worst form of government under which a city ever suffered.” While noting that there was a time when it was productive, the newspaper recognized that it had outlived its usefulness. Quickly moving on to the second system, the *Evening Mail* considered an “Aldermen-at-Large” system which would have a certain number of aldermen elected by all the residents of the city and would be free to act in the interests of the city as a whole. By holding a “balance of power” over regular aldermen, these “aldermen at large”, would be dependent on the support of the whole city and would thus treat each ward equally.

The third system discussed in the article concerned a “Board of Control” system. Elected every two years, a Board of Control would serve alongside the city council, but would replace the 23 committees then serving Halifax. For example, the Board of Works, police commission, and prison committee would be each replaced by a Board of Control with four or five competent men who would do the work “as it ought to be done.” The fourth system which the *Evening Mail* described as the “Most modern of all forms of civic government” was the “Commission System.” Operating according to “business principles”, a Commission would replace the entire city council and each of its committees with a group

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103 *Evening Mail*. April 30, 1910.
of paid experts numbering 3 to 5 individuals. Though autocratic, the Commission members would be subject to recall which would serve as an effective check on their activities. Despite asking readers to "think it over," the *Evening Mail* seemed unequivocal in its support of a Commission system of Government which it predicted "would supplant all others."

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With a City Council committee now studying the possibility of civic reform, the Halifax Board of Trade formed their own committee to study the question of municipal reform and assist their counterparts at City Hall. With members of the Civic Improvement League on the Board of Trade Committee, there was little question that the Board strongly supported municipal reform in Halifax. Needless to say, the City Council committee was much more lukewarm to the possibility of change than the Board of Trade. Reform would mean a scaling down or even the elimination of their positions on city council. Reluctance to deal with such possibilities was reflected in the frequent requests by the City Council Committee for more time to deliberate on the municipal reform question. In fact, it would be ten months before the Committee reported their recommendations back to City Council. Their "majority" report presented to Council in February 1911, recommended only minor changes to the current aldermanic-committee structure, including reducing the number of aldermen from 18 to 12 and the simplification

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104 *Minutes of the Halifax Board of Trade*. March 21, 1911.

105 Henry Roper. p.49.
of the committee system. In other words, a Board of Control or Commission government was not needed in Halifax.

According to historian Henry Roper, the City Council's rejection of municipal reform was predictable. Despite pressure from members of the public and the press, many aldermen appeared insulated to such demands by their age and their long familiarity with the old system. Unlike the youthful reformers sitting on the Board of Trade, aldermen such as Alfred Whitman and A.C. Hawkins had extensive experience on Halifax City Council dating back to the late 1890's.

After having persuading the City Council to even broach the subject of municipal reform, the Board of Trade was not willing to let the matter drop so easily. With the much anticipated Civic Revival a week away, the Board of Trade challenged the Council to hold a plebiscite on the question of municipal government. Once the Civic Revival week got under way, discussions of bringing a more progressive system of municipal government to Halifax soon began to fill the hallways and backrooms before, during and after the meetings. While reaching a consensus that municipal reform must come to Halifax, reformers began to consider which progressive system of government would work best in the city. Rather than endlessly comparing the numerous progressive systems and how they might work in Halifax, many reformers began to feel that they had to decide on the best viable alternative to supplant the present system. A week after the Civic Revival, reformers

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on the Board of Trade settled on a “Board of Control” as their vehicle for change in Halifax. With this difficult choice, reformers could now promote a “Board of Control” to Halifax ratepayers as the best and most progressive option to the “farce” at City Hall.\textsuperscript{108}

The reasons why a “Board of Control” was chosen over a “Commission” system is an interesting and difficult question to answer. Despite agreeing that a “Commission” system was “more modern,” Halifax reformers was clearly concerned that any plebiscite on the issue be won by a decisive margin. Henry Roper maintains that the radical autocratic nature of a “Commission” and its Texan origins would likely have made it unpalatable to the average middle-class Halifax ratepayer. A Board of Control, on the other hand, appeared much more acceptable with its balanced two-tiered approach and successful implementation in many Canadian cities. Not only would a Board of Control have a strong executive composed of non-political experts, but it would be superimposed over a shrunken, weakened city council. In other words, a Board of Control appeared as an effective compromise which combined the best of the old and the new.\textsuperscript{109}

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Following the success of the Civic Revival and the decision to push for a Board of Control in the city, the Halifax Board of Trade moved quickly to introduce municipal reform. With City Council having closed the book on the issue of municipal reform, the Board of Trade had little choice but to act unilaterally. On March 11, 1911, the Board of Trade presented a draft bill for the Nova Scotia Legislature. If passed, the bill would call

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid. p.52-53.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid. p.50.
for a plebiscite on introducing a Board of Control in Halifax. Although the City Council refused to support the bill, they nevertheless reluctantly agreed to hold a plebiscite on the issue of municipal reform. On April 23, 1911, Halifax ratepayers were asked to answer the two following questions:

"Are you in favour of the reduction of the number of aldermen from eighteen to twelve?"

"Are you in favour of a board of control elected by the people?"

In weeks leading up to the vote, Halifax reformers and much of the press urged citizens to vote a resounding “Yes” to both questions. The R.V. Harris “Uplift” columns were particularly strident in urging “the Citizens of Halifax” to vote for a “genuine reform in City Government.” Harris even went as far as devoting a series of columns on each Canadian city with a Board of Control, arguing its pros and cons in that city, and what Halifax would gain by adopting a similar form of government.\(^{110}\)

Writing on the eve of the vote, Harris was clearly concerned about possible voter apathy about the whole issue of municipal government. With so many problems facing Halifax:

> It is hoped [that the citizens] make their vote for [a board of control] so emphatic as to show that they are in real earnest, and that there will be no hesitation on the part of the legislature in making [the] reform part of the new City Charter. \(^{111}\)

To Harris, there was absolutely no reason at all to oppose the introduction of a Board of Control. After all:

\(^{110}\) *Evening Mail*. April 24, 1911.

\(^{111}\) Ibid.
...[it] has given public satisfaction wherever adopted, and the citizens of Halifax should show that they [intend to] get their city into the line of sound, businesslike government, and civic progress.\textsuperscript{112}

Even the Halifax \textit{Morning Chronicle}, a late convert to the reform cause, joined the chorus for change in municipal government.

\begin{quote}
We believe even the most conservative among us will not deny that there is room for improvement in...our civic government...We must not be afraid here to throw our old civic machinery in the scrapheap, if that is good policy.\textsuperscript{113}
\end{quote}

With such bi-partisan backing and afterglow of the Civic Revival still burning, Halifax ratepayers voted in favour of both questions to reduce the number of aldermen and for establishing a Board of Control in the city. Curiously however, only about 1/3 of eligible ratepayers bothered to vote on the plebiscite. Although every ward displayed a clear majority for change, opponents of the reform argued that the light turnout at the polls indicated that a majority were actually satisfied or at least not dissatisfied with the present system.\textsuperscript{114}

Despite the light turnout, Halifax reformers were nevertheless heartened by the magnitude of their plebiscite win. As the municipal reform bill continued to make its way through the Nova Scotia legislature, local reformers continued to stress that they were following the popular will. For example, some months after the official plebiscite, the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{113} \textit{Morning Chronicle}. March 13, 1911.
\item \textsuperscript{114} The official returns on both questions are recorded in the \textit{Minutes of the Halifax City Council}. April 28, 1911.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
reform based “Greater Halifax Conference”, conducted their own unofficial mail-in plebiscite on the Board of Control question. Not surprisingly, the 3000 respondents voted overwhelmingly in favour of a Board of Control.115

Despite such showings, City Council continued to remain opposed to the introduction of a Board of Control and refused to co-operate with the Board of Trade on its bill. Though a Board of Control could be imposed on them by the province, opponents of the change on City Council hoped to persuade MLAs to repeal the bill at the first opportunity. Realizing that such obduracy of the City Council could only be overcome by actually joining the council, a number of reformers decided to run for seats. As perhaps the most outspoken Halifax reformer, R.V. Harris was the first to run for a seat on Council winning easily on the same day as the plebiscite victory in April 1911. Other reformers joined Harris on the City Council in the 1912 elections, including William Dennis, Robert Hattie, and Herbert Gates.

Despite a last minute request by City Council to repeal the legislation, the Board of Control legislation was passed by the Murray Government in May 1912 and proclaimed in April 1913.116 Under the new bill, the city council was reduced in size from 18 to 12 aldermen and also lost its executive function to the Board of Control. The Board of Control would be made up of four controllers and the Mayor. It would meet three times a week to discuss the city’s problems and propose solutions. City Controllers would receive

115 Evening Mail. September 2, 1911.
116 Discussion of a Repeal measure is noted in the Minutes of the Halifax City Council. January 23, 1913. For the bill on a “Board of Control” for Halifax, see Statutes of the Province of Nova Scotia. 2 Geo. V. c. 77.
an annual stipend of $1,000 and would be elected every two years along with the aldermen. From meeting once a week, the city council would now meet at irregular intervals to pass proposals put forth by the Board of Control. A proposal could be brought forward twice by the Board of Control and could only be rejected on the second occasion if two-thirds of aldermen voted against it. Thus, in the unlikely event of a united front of aldermen, the Board of Control held the reins of power in which to impose its wishes on the city council.

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As discussed in Henry Roper’s excellent article on the Halifax Board of Control, municipal reform ultimately did little to meet the high expectations. Almost from the start, the Board of Control was faced with crisis after crisis. In May 1913 within its first two weeks, the newly elected Controllers, including Reginald Harris, had to contend with a violent strike by the Halifax Electric Tramway workers. Much to the disgust of the Morning Chronicle newspaper, the Controllers chose to side with the workers and refused to let the police or military intervene against the rioting workers. With both the Chronicle and the Tramway Company owned by the B.F. Pearson family, the newly minted Board of Control quickly became a daily target for Pearson’s editorial writers. For example, at the height of the tension, the front page of the Morning Chronicle thundered:

Controllers Continued to Dodge the Issue:  
Would not Lift a Finger to Enforce  
Law and Order and Prevent a Repetition  
of the Lawlessness and Violence Which  
Have Disgraced Halifax

117 Morning Chronicle. May 20, 1913.
Predictably, the Dennis papers took a different line. The *Herald* and *Evening Mail* expressed sympathy with the strikers and praised the Board of Control for refusing to call in the military authorities.\(^{118}\)

While the dispute divided the residents of Halifax and hurt the Board of Control's credibility in the city, it was soon revealed that the character of some of the controllers was also in doubt. Apart from Reginald Harris and fellow lawyer W.F. O’Connor, the Board had failed to attract the high-minded professional men which the scheme was designed to attract. Charles Hoben and Matthew Scanlon were the other two controllers elected and both were long time veterans of Halifax City Council. Though both supported the introduction of a Board of Control, they failed to rise above the petty bickering over mundane issues and personal rivalry which had characterized their dealings on the old city council. More troublesome was the re-election by acclamation of Mayor F.P. Bligh. Mayor Bligh had been strongly opposed to a Board of Control and continued to be skeptical of its likely success.\(^{119}\) As expected, the *Morning Chronicle*, with its verbatim coverage of Board of Control meetings, took particular delight in the quarreling of the controllers. Despite the hope for a more dynamic and efficient municipal government, the new Board continued to disagree in "the same cantankerous spirit...that was often in evidence under the old order of things."\(^{120}\)

\(^{118}\) For an example see the: *Herald*. May 19 and 20, 1913.

\(^{119}\) Henry Roper. p.56-57.

\(^{120}\) *Morning Chronicle*. June 6, 1913.
Despite such a negative first impression, the Board’s supporters were still optimistic. From their perspective, the fault lay with the men elected to be controllers, not the system itself. Apart from O’Connor and Reginald Harris, who was considered “the saving salt” of the Board, the other controllers were frequently deemed unfit for the duties as City Controller. Even the *Morning Chronicle* acknowledged this. For:

> ...previous to the introduction of a Board of Control system, the Board of Trade undertook to secure the elements of an efficient council...Perhaps if the leaders of these organization were to offer themselves as candidates for the Board of Control instead of attempting to advise a Board of Control made up of men possessing no particular fitness for their office, the City would be better off.

In response to such criticism, a number of reform organizations including the Civic Improvement League, the Women’s Council, the Trades and Labour Council, and the Anti-Tuberculosis League formed a “Municipal Association” in January 1915. The purpose of the group was to nominate and elect suitable candidates for the 1915 municipal elections. As expected, R.V. Harris was nominated for another term as Controller and O’Connor was nominated by the Association as a candidate for Mayor. Not surprisingly, Scanlon and Hoben were not nominated by the reformers, though each put themselves forward as a Mayoralty candidate and Controller respectively.

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121 *Evening Mail*. June 1, 1914.


123 *Evening Mail*. March 12, 1915. All of the candidates for the Board of Control endorsed by the “Municipal Association” were elected with the surprise exception of R.V. Harris. Election results for the City Council seats were mixed. Four Association-sponsored candidates won, while two were defeated. Also see Henry Roper. p.59.
The creation of the “Municipal Association” reflects in many ways just how far, reform organizations such as the Civic Improvement League had come. From being a group organized in 1905 to promote beautification in Halifax, the Civic Improvement League was now openly dabbling in municipal politics. Since the Civic Revival and the success in establishing a Board of Control in 1913, the Civic Improvement League had become a much more aggressive organization pursuing a variety of schemes for the benefit of Halifax. Though the Board of Control in its first two years had not operated as smoothly as many reformers might have wished, the Civic Improvement League had its most productive years under a Board of Control administration. With the co-operation of the Board of Control, the Civic Improvement League would succeed in securing several beautification schemes, a “Clean up week” and most importantly, town planning legislation.

II. The Civic Improvement League and Town Planning

Although the issue of city planning had been discussed numerous times since the creation of the Civic Improvement League in 1905, relatively little action had been taken by Halifax City Council. Like their counterparts in other Canadian cities, many Halifax aldermen viewed “town planning” as an expensive frivolity which was beyond the immediate needs and social priorities in the city.\(^{124}\)

Nevertheless, following the success of the Civic Revival and impact of John Sewall’s various talks on urban reform, the Civic Improvement League decided to move

\(^{124}\) The changing attitudes toward the cost and utility of “City Beautiful” is thoroughly discussed in Walter Van Nus. “The Fate of City Beautiful Thought in Canada, 1893-1930” *Historical Papers 1975*. Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1975.
from being a purely educative body on town planning to a more active one. In the Autumn of 1911, the League began to aggressively lobby the City Council for the establishment of a Town Planning Committee which would “inaugurate a comprehensive plan for the future development of the city along the most practical as well as most artistic lines.” Attached to the Committee would be a qualified planning expert who would oversee the drawing up of a “thoroughly comprehensive and scientific plan for the future construction of the city.”

Working with the Civic Improvement League in its pursuit of city planning was the William Dennis newspapers. For example, the *Evening Mail* began to publish a series of articles highlighting the need for civic planning and its connection with the broader “civic ambition” which was motivating so many Halifax citizens at the time. Noting that there was too much work for the Civic Improvement League to do on its own, the *Evening Mail* decided that a comprehensive town plan was the only answer. After all:

The only way to obtain a LASTING AND GENERAL IMPROVEMENT of conditions is by arousing an intense civic spirit. Then the individual will not be satisfied until he has removed all evidences of untidiness or ugliness for which he is responsible. To this end nothing could have so much effect as a comprehensive planning project. Citizens would then be made to realize that, under civic auspices, the city was facing in a new direction.\(^{125}\)

For some Town Planning advocates, the North End of Halifax was where the planning was most necessary. To the *Evening Mail*, this was the most neglected part of the city. As part of its daily attacks on the City Council, the newspaper questioned:

...whether there was ever any DELIBERATE INTENTION on the part of City Council to treat the northern section of the city with cold indifference...

\(^{125}\) *Evening Mail*. November 24, 1911.
While the Civic Improvement League had concentrated on beautification plans for the waterfront and the west end of the city, the newspaper sought to ostensibly remind readers that:

The north end is in reality THE MOST POPULOUS SECTION OF THE CITY...the growth and expansion of the city is in that direction...the north end is the industrial center of Halifax...New industries will follow...In the neighbourhood of these factories, houses for workingmen will spring up uninterruptedly.

Planning such development for both economical and artistic lines should be done for the benefit and health of north end residents. After all:

Slipsbod or haphazard methods in dealing with these matters WON'T MAKE HALIFAX A MORE ATTRACTIVE CITY and a better place in which to work and live.\(^{126}\)

While the *Evening Mail* urged the city to “GIVE THE NORTH END A SQUARE DEAL” as regards to town planning, the Civic Improvement League responded by proposing a city plan be drawn to include areas outside of the city limits such as along the Bedford Basin and the west side of the Northwest Arm for tourist travel and eventual suburban development.\(^{127}\)

With the ongoing debate and opposition of many aldermen over the Board of Control question, City Council remained cool to a town planning committee. The request that a expert landscape architect be hired was also frowned upon by the spendthrift Council. Despite the best efforts of League members, many aldermen could not distinguish

\(^{126}\) *Evening Mail*. November 15, 1911.

\(^{127}\) This was the first mention of the “Metropolitan Plan” which would encompass Dartmouth and the whole Bedford Basin. John W. Regan was one of its earliest supporters. Please see, *Evening Mail*. July 5, 1913.
between the economical utility of town planning and the costly adornments which characterized the extreme excesses of the "city beautiful" movement.

Frustrated by the inability of the council to take "planning" seriously, League publicist Robert Hattie decided to run for the 1912 City Council along with William Dennis and architect Herbert Gates. After winning the election for Ward Two, Hattie proceeded to form his own Civic Improvement Committee which, like the League, would advise the Mayor and other aldermen on improvement projects. Not surprisingly, one of its first recommendations in the Autumn of 1912 was the establishment of a permanent town planning board and the hiring of an expert landscape architect or planner.

Realizing how important it was to win this town planning motion, Hattie decided it was important to educate the aldermen, fellow reformers, and the general public about the finer points of town planning. In a long paper presented before a large audience at the Technical College, Hattie sought to correct some of the definitions of city planning. To begin:

The basic principle of city planning is to increase the working efficiency of the city. City planning does not mean street decoration or civic adornment, and it does NOT mean what is called 'the city beautiful'. That unfortunate expression is responsible for endless misconceptions and misunderstandings. To many it implies a desire to...place statues along car lines, fountains in the most congested centres of traffic, and to cap commercial buildings with domes and towers. But this not city planning.

Although Hattie refrained from directly mentioning the prospects for municipal reform in his speech, he nevertheless alluded to many of the arguments used by other reformers in his call for a comprehensive city plan. Like Harris in his arguments for a Board
of Control, Hattie agreed that:

A city is a great working machine, but without wise control and expert guidance it...loses a great part of its efficiency. To restore the equilibrium of parts, decrease friction and stop unnecessary waste of effort, a comprehensive scheme of development is needed. This is called a city plan.\(^{128}\)

For Hattie and other reformers the need for a city plan had become especially crucial by the beginning of 1913. The announcement by the Borden government of a new Ocean Terminals complex for Halifax in October 1912 had been greeted with almost universal applause. In the ensuing months however, doubts began to surface over the location of the proposed terminals in the wealthy south end of the city. Although there was no question that the city badly needed the new facilities in order to boost commercial and industrial activity, many began to feel that the Terminals would be better placed in the expanding North end of the city or on the Dartmouth side of Halifax Harbour. By building the Terminals and a connecting railway in the South end, Halifax’s most beautiful and wealthiest neighbourhood would be ruined or even “turned into a mechanic’s district.”\(^{129}\)

Although some members of the Civic Improvement League opposed the location of the Terminals, many of the city’s reformers reluctantly accepted the decision as long as certain modifications be made. Robert Hattie came to believe that “it would be futile to expect the Government to change its plans.” The policy of the League therefore “should be

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\(^{129}\) Murray B. Hodgins. p. 117.
to secure that the new development would be carried out with the least possible ill effect upon the city's amenity. This should include the appointment of a full time city planner by City Council. The fact that Prime Minister Borden personally assured co-operation between the Department of Railways and a city planner, if one was appointed, appeared to Hattie as an opportunity which Halifax could ill afford to ignore. In his speech before the Technical College, Hattie argued that:

The government will do its best to give [the Terminals]...all the dignity possible. But to achieve the best results it needs the co-operation of the city, and [it] is only possible with the advice of one versed in civic art...Is it possible that we shall let the opportunity slip past us?\(^{131}\)

For Hattie, critics of the Ocean Terminals location were justified to some extent, but only with a comprehensive city plan would the south end be saved from uglification. Aware that the working classes will likely settle in the area in order to work at the new Terminals, Hattie sought to reassure listeners that the:

...laborers [who] will live in the south end won't ruin it -only antiquated methods of city building will do that. But now on the eve of the coming revolution in our city plan, the best advice obtainable should be taken to prevent the establishment of the ugly in our city. Who would not have four thousand dollars spent now to this end?\(^{132}\)

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This was a question that Hattie would be asking his counterparts on City Council in the months ahead. In fact, just two days after his speech, the Council narrowly defeated a Hattie motion for $4000 to hire a city planner. Ironically, one of the reasons given for its defeat was that the incoming Board of Control would suffice. Such confusion over the issue of city planning highlighted the difficulties faced by the Civic Improvement League. Nevertheless, this did not dissuade Hattie from re-introducing his motion another four times before retiring from City Council for health reasons in April 1913.  

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Although Robert Hattie's attempts to persuade City Council proved to be futile, the visit of English town planner Raymond Unwin to Halifax in the fall of 1913 proved to be far more rewarding for the advocates of city planning. As designer of the famous Garden city in Letchworth, England, Unwin was almost universally regarded as the “foremost town-planner in the English-speaking world.” Invited to deliver a paper to the Union of Nova Scotia municipalities, Unwin decided to spend almost a month in Nova Scotia addressing numerous audiences and studying the impact of the Ocean Terminals on Halifax. The presence of such a distinguished expert in the province especially pleased the Evening Mail. Interviewing Unwin at his hotel, the newspaper found the landscape architect to be a “a most genial and pleasant personality with whom obviously, ‘town planning’ is

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133 *Minutes of the Halifax City Council*. January 9, 23, 28, February 6, 1913. Also see the *Herald*. January 10, 16, and 24, 1913.

134 *Evening Mail*. September 6, 1913.
something more than a profession.” Most importantly, added the Evening Mail, Unwin was “a student of life and of the conditions among which men and women live and of the effect of these on life and character.”

Asked about his opinion on the Ocean Terminals project, Unwin replied that the scheme posed “a radical alteration in the city” for it “will undoubtedly mean a great shifting of classes of property.” Echoing the message of the Civic Improvement League, Unwin believed that “now is the time for planning to be done.” Unwin was especially convinced that:

...the new railway and terminals must afford a unique opportunity for taking in hand the very important matter of the development of Halifax.

After holding numerous public meetings with members of the Civic Improvement League, a delegation consisting of Unwin and several Halifax businessmen approached the Board of Control seeking cooperation “in the production of a plan for city improvement.” As expected, Mayor Bligh thought the time was “inopportune” considering the Terminals were a Dominion government matter. Nevertheless, the Controllers allowed Unwin access to plans belonging to the city engineer.

Although Raymond Unwin would not get around to completing a plan of Halifax, his speeches about the importance of planning on the social aspects of the city persuaded both the Halifax Board of Control and the Nova Scotia Government to study the possibility

135 Evening Mail. August 26, 1913.

136 Ibid.

137 Evening Mail. September 8, 1913.
of adopting Town-Planning Regulations to guide future development. In fact, on January 30th, 1914, the Halifax Board of Control passed the first Town-Planning Regulations of any city in Canada. Although the regulations merely set forth the procedures for seeking Board of Control approval for future building in the city, they nevertheless were heralded as a breakthrough in bringing the "Garden City" to Canada. Even the Dominion Government's periodical *Conservation of Life* saw Halifax, Nova Scotia as setting "the pace for others" to follow.138

Following on the work of the Civic Improvement League and the Halifax Board of Control, the Nova Scotia government also embraced town-planning. Passed on April 12th, 1915, "the Planning Act" placed sweeping powers in the hands of a Commissioner who could prescribe by-laws, authorize town-planning schemes, and draw up procedures to be followed to secure the cooperation of owners in following the Act. More importantly, the Act called for the establishment of Town Planning Boards in every urban and rural municipality. No street or subdivision could be laid out without the permission of the Board; and within three years every board must produce a town-planning scheme with appropriate distances between buildings, different zones for dwellings, factories, businesses etc.; and a required number of windows for light and ventilation.139

When first introduced into the Legislature, "the Planning Act" was hailed as an extremely important innovation. Judge Arthur Roberts of the Union of Nova Scotia

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Municipalities saw it as “the most important Legislation of the session...without doubt”.

The Conservation of Life believed that the Act would “revolutionize methods of developing real estate and controlling building operations in that Province. The Act...is in advance of anything of the kind in the world.” The responsibility of the Civic Improvement League in such work was certainly not forgotten in the acclaim. Unlike urban reform organizations, the Conservation of Life looked on the:

Halifax Civic Improvement League [as] one of the most active propagandist bodies in Canada. Its executive is wisely directed and enjoys the advantage of having considerable influence with the legislative and municipal authorities. It does not neglect such work as...securing the “city beautiful” by means of individual action, but, on the other hand it does not so absorb itself its energies that it is unable to find time for the even more important work of promoting legislative and administrative action to deal with the causes of bad social conditions. Nova Scotia leads the provinces of Canada in its housing and town planning legislation, and the work of the league has greatly helped in placing the province in that position.

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While the “Planning Act” was the first of its kind in Canada, its authorship also marked the first collaboration between English planner Thomas Adams and the Civic Improvement League. As an associate of Raymond Unwin, Adams had worked on the Letchworth New Town project and on the “Garden Cities Association” of Britain. Invited by the Canadian Government to take charge of the new Commission of Conservation, Adams moved to Ottawa in 1914 and began to promote the Garden City concept and the introduction of town planning schemes. The first province to take advantage of his services was Nova Scotia. Visiting Halifax, Adams was befriended by members of the Civic

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Improvement League who shared his utilitarian approach to urban problems. As with many reformers of the time, Adams distrusted the laissez-faire approach to society and believed that the greatest good for the greatest number could only be achieved through scientific intervention conducted by experts. With city planning, an emphasis should be placed on "health, economics, and beautification" in that order. In assisting the League and the Provincial government in drawing up the "Planning Act", Adams sought to place a balance and interdependence between city and countryside to control land speculation; and implement "efficiency, economy, and vision" in future urban growth. Although the "Planning Act" was designed as a starting point, Adams and the Civic Improvement League would have a much greater opportunity to experiment with the "doctrine of usefulness" and the "City Scientific" following the tragic Explosion in December 1917.

Chapter Four
With the introduction of a Board of Control in Halifax and the successful passage of the Town Planning legislation through the Nova Scotia Legislature, the Civic Improvement League was seemingly at the height of its influence in developing a more progressive city. The goal of a "bigger, better, and more beautiful" Halifax appeared closer now than ever before. Reformers still wished for a cleaner city and more suitable housing, but with municipal reform and increasing public support, Halifax appeared to be moving toward the same progressive footing that was defining urban life in other North American cities. Nevertheless following the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, the Civic Improvement League found it increasingly difficult to focus public enthusiasm on continued "improvements." Although the League tried to carry on as before, demands for the war effort soon supplanted any narrow civic concerns. New initiatives such as a "social survey" and a public housing project in Halifax were indefinitely postponed. In fact, by 1917 with many League members now involved in the fighting in Europe, the executive of the Civic Improvement League decided to seek out new reform supporters by joining forces with the Halifax Commercial Club. Ironically, such a move coincided within weeks of the city's greatest disaster and perhaps the Civic Improvement League's greatest opportunity.

I. A Social Survey for Halifax?

With the Civic Improvement League deeply involved in the establishment a Board of Control and the push for Town planning legislation, it is easy to overlook their other reform initiatives. Despite an increasing involvement with municipal politics, the Civic
Improvement League had never neglected its original objectives. For example, annual clean up campaigns, and neighbourhood beautification projects continued to be promoted. Nevertheless, such schemes became increasingly overshadowed by larger more ambitious projects aimed at eventually eradicating the "evil" conditions which plagued Halifax society. The Town planning initiative was perhaps the most important project for reshaping Halifax along more progressive lines, but to compliment such work, the Civic Improvement League also took a strong interest in having a "social survey" conducted in the city.

With its reliance on experts and statistics, "social surveys" were becoming an increasingly fashionable tool for identifying unhealthy social conditions in North American cities. Rather than reacting haphazardly to unsanitary and dangerous living conditions, "social surveys" would be able to stringently pinpoint the cause of the problem and deliver "intelligent remedial measures" for the betterment of the community.

Although a "social survey" for Halifax had been discussed as early as 1910, it was only in the summer of 1913 that the Civic Improvement League began to actively pursue such a study. After spending several weeks in the city, Bryce Stewart, a social scientist attached to the Methodist and Presbyterian churches presented a report to the Halifax Civic Improvement League stressing the value of a social survey to Halifax. Along with providing:

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142 For example: "Clean Up Campaign Launched Last Night" *Herald*. May 6, 1914.

...the facts necessary for intelligent social action...[The survey]...takes account of social assets as well as social liabilities and on the basis of the data secured formulates a program for a better community life. {Moreover}...it takes the attention of each worker from his own particular field...and centres it upon the whole social problem...Learning thus by actual experience the greater effectiveness of working together and finding, too, that in much they stand on common ground, association and *esprit de corps*...¹⁴⁴

With its emphasis on cooperative action, the "social survey" seemed like a natural progression for the Civic Improvement League and other civic reform groups. Following the success of the Civic Revival in 1911 and the continued work of the "Greater Halifax Central Conference," a social survey for Halifax seemed like a natural step on the way to securing a better and more beautiful city. In fact, the Conference agreed that "the time was ripe to hold a social survey in the City of Halifax." Forming a "social survey" committee, reformers such as Robert Hattie, F.H. Sexton, and E.J. Kelly of the "City Improvement League", City Controller R.V. Harris, John Joy of the Local Labor Council and Mrs Dennis of the Local Council of Women began to "investigate and inaugurate the work." ¹⁴⁵

Seeking to win public support and funding, Committee members would meet frequently over the next year with the press to explain the merits of having a "social survey" in the city. As with its support of municipal reform in the 1911-1913 period, the *Herald* and *Evening Mail* once again played a key role in advocating the "social survey" initiative. This was even acknowledged by F.H. Sexton who believed that:

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ *Evening Mail.* July 12, 1913.
The press can do no finer public service than to stand for the social survey, for the social survey means the revelation to the general public of the causes of many of the most perplexing evils with which today we are burdened. It will show us where we are actually fostering evil by our apathy, our inaction, where action could speedily bring about the things which are just now only dreams.\(^{146}\)

A “social survey” for Halifax was especially important for reformers who wished to win over more supporters and convince the opponents of reform that civic improvement was a worthwhile and achievable cause. The *Evening Mail* was especially direct in advocating a social survey in Halifax as:

> There are many people in Halifax who are reposing in the comfortable opinion that such reforms as are advocated by our public spirited men are merely vain dreams with nothing in local conditions to call for any particular indignation or...combative energy. The most effective answer to the position taken by these people is found in presenting them with facts.\(^{147}\)

Such a sentiment was shared by the Civic Improvement League. Rather than continuing to lure new supporters with speeches and letters full of reform rhetoric, the League could now use the results of a social survey to provide irrefutable evidence linking criminal and immoral behaviour with an “evil” environment. With such evidence, the opponents of reform would at last be won over to the merits of a sweeping civic improvement and Halifax could then emerge as a truly progressive city.

Nevertheless, with the Halifax Board of Control and City Council unwilling to fund and implement such a study, the Civic Improvement League and other survey advocates

\(^{146}\) *Evening Mail*. February 25, 1914.

\(^{147}\) Ibid.
found they had to continually define, explain and justify the need for a survey. F.H. Sexton of the Civic Improvement League believed that the “social survey” would bring:

...public disclosure of the relation between disgraceful housing conditions and juvenile delinquency...It will disclose wherein we are failing in our duty to the children and what is the result of the failure.148

Following up on the success of the civic revival and the formation of the “Greater Halifax Central Conference”, a “social survey” appeared to the Evening Mail as:

...the best possible means of rousing the community, of forming public opinion, by the excellent means of disclosing facts. Ignorance of the facts is at the bottom of public indifference.149

Perhaps the most eloquent spokesperson on behalf of the “social survey” cause in Halifax was League Secretary Robert Hattie. Speaking in February 1914 on the eve of a national Social Service Congress in Ottawa, Hattie urged that a survey of Halifax be carried out. After all:

We shall have no difficulty about getting experts for the survey and it will be worth to the city many times the money it will cost. Personally I regard it as of the utmost importance and as the most effective means...of creating the public opinion which must be behind reforms.150

Despite pressure on the Board of Control and City Council, the social survey never materialized. Although Controllers R.V. Harris and W.F. O’Conner approved of the plan, it remained a difficult sell to the other members of the Board of Control as well as the pernicious City Council. Paying an outside expert to study Halifax’s problems seemed superfluous, when Controllers were being paid $1,000/a each to do supposedly the same

148 Ibid.
149 Ibid.
150 Herald. February 26, 1914.
thing. Needless to say, the “social survey” episode only further blighted the reputation of the Board of Control. While Mayor Bligh and the City Council had always been opposed to a Board of Control, the failure to secure a social survey for the city also alienated many local reformers who had strongly supported the introduction of a Board of Control in Halifax. Seeking to put their Board of Control on a more progressive path, reformers would use the “social survey” issue as a pretext for forming the “Municipal Association” which would endorse reform-friendly candidates for the 1915 municipal elections.

II. Public Housing for Halifax?

Despite a sense of frustration over the “social survey” failure, Civic Improvement League members turned to other “improvement” initiatives. With the new Ocean Terminals slated to open by 1920, many reformers became concerned over housing the expected influx of “mechanics” and commercial men who would emigrate to Halifax. Making the situation particularly worrisome was the already existing housing shortages which were becoming ever more acute each year. Early in 1914, a gentleman wrote into the *Evening Mail*:

...to call attention to what appears to me to be the great crying need...[for] proper housing of the mechanic and the laboring class, with their families. At the present time, it is next to impossible to secure a flat or decent living rooms anywhere within a mile of the post office at a rental that the ordinary workingman can afford to pay. The conditions under which...many families in the center of the city are living are indeed deplorable, and...a disgrace to civilization...it is little wonder that children brought up in such environments are easily led astray, and every man through crime, become a burden to our city.\(^{151}\)

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\(^{151}\) *Evening Mail*. February 14, 1914.
While the letter writer hoped to “get the ball rolling” in coaxing the Halifax business community to provide “better homes for the respectable, industrious workingman,” the Board of Control and the Civic Improvement League patiently waited to see the Town Planning Act passed before addressing the housing issue. Many people were also convinced that with the Ocean Terminals project now underway, private enterprise would step in and provide the necessary housing for both present and future needs. For example, shortly after the Terminals announcement, property developers bought vacant land in the North and Western parts of Halifax for the construction of a “new high-class residential district” at a very moderate price. With a “mechanics district” expected to develop in the south end around the Terminals, “high-class” residents could then move to new developments on the western side of the city.

The perception that all classes would benefit from new housing was especially evident in the rising number of building permits in Halifax. From only $471,140 in 1910, the figure almost doubles to $839,635 in 1913 following the Terminals announcement. Nevertheless, such numbers were misleading as many people, including the displaced residents of the south end, could not afford the new housing. As a result, rental accommodation became even more difficult to secure, especially following the outbreak of the war in Europe when thousands of servicemen passed through the city.

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154 The quality of rental accommodation was very poor and the rents were exorbitantly high throughout the war years. Bulletin Illustrating the Extent of the Housing Problem. 1915-16. R.M. Hattie Papers. Vol.8789.
Following the successful passage of the Town-Planning Act in April 1915, the Civic Improvement League once again began to study the Housing question. With so many more people now residing in the city as a result of the war and the Terminals construction, Robert Hattie found that the Housing issue was of “fundamental importance” for Halifax.

Writing to the Daily Echo, Hattie urged readers that:

...something more fundamental needs to be done than a few sporadic efforts...Instead of the authorities being moved to action once in a while by some public statement that reflects on their care of the situation, there should be a definite civic policy looking to the radical cure of these housing evils and the prevention of their recurrence. \(^{155}\)

Realizing that “we have never been able to place a definite picture of our housing conditions before the people”, the Civic Improvement League proposed that a “Housing Survey” be conducted which would then be followed by a “Housing Law” to make the improvements a permanent fixture. \(^{156}\) Despite the more ambitious “social survey” failing to win approval, League members hoped that a relatively inexpensive, more specific survey would still provide the information needed to secure public opinion and eventually proper housing legislation.

After playing a large role in the success of the Town-planning Act, Thomas Adams was also asked to assist the Civic Improvement League on the housing question. Invited for a six week stay in Nova Scotia to bring the Town-planning Act into “more active operation”, Adams spoke to several public meetings in the province in to stress “the need

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\(^{155}\) *Daily Echo*. January 16, 1916.

\(^{156}\) *Morning Chronicle*. January 14, 1916.
for health and cleanliness as a foundation for beauty” in the city. For Adams, Town Planning and Housing went hand in hand as:

Canada has slum conditions but worst of all it is allowing new slums to grow up today in growing suburbs of towns...Bad housing conditions directly cause disease and death to the poor and indirectly cause disease and death to the rich. Town Planning prevents bad housing conditions in new suburbs, and housing legislation deals with the remedy of existing bad conditions.157

As discussions over a “Housing Survey” continued, many members began to question the timing of such a study. With the war now stretching the city’s already thin supply of housing, more direct and immediate action was suggested in the form of creating a Housing Company with the purpose of providing “better houses and cheaper rentals for the working men of Halifax.” Although the records do not mention the individual who conceived the idea, it seems clear that the speeches and League meetings with Thomas Adams certainly influenced the decision. For example, in a speech before the Technical College, Adams highlights the fact that the new Ocean Terminals will make Halifax a:

...portal of Canada for all the year. It will become increasingly so in the future when it will be the only dock where the greatest lines can find entrance. The creation of the docks requires that provisions be made in the near future for the mass of workers who will be engaged in connection with them. This...means a provision of houses...The time is ripe for creating a model suburb of Halifax to provide homes with gardens for the better paid workers. Land appears to be available at reasonable prices and rents are high enough to make such a scheme practicable. It could be carried out as an object lesson to the whole Dominion.158

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158 Ibid.
With the support of Adams, the Civic Improvement League formed a special committee to study the procedures necessary for establishing the “Halifax Housing Company.” The League also approached the Board of Control and City Council for guarantees regarding bonds for the Housing Company. Noting that the Company was organized to improve the housing situation and was not for “big profits”, the League hoped that the City of Halifax would take over supervision of the Company, its land, and tenants. More importantly the League urged that the Board of Control adopt the Nova Scotia Tenement Act so that “houses built for working people shall have all those future essentials for wholesome living.”

Despite the urgency of the housing crisis, the proposal for a “Halifax Housing Company” appears to have been completely ignored by the Halifax Board of Control. Nevertheless, such treatment was perhaps not entirely unexpected. Although the Great War had relegated municipal issues to the back pages of the local newspapers, City Controllers were being confronted by problems which had been completely unforeseen by the Board of Control advocates in the pre-war years. Along with the housing shortages, city controllers had to contend with rapid inflation, manpower shortages, and ever shrinking tax revenues.

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159 Evening Mail. March 2, 1916.

160 There is no mention of the “Halifax Housing Company” in the Minutes of the Halifax Board of Control or the Minutes of the Halifax City Council, 1915-1916-1917.

161 Henry Roper. p.60.
With the City of Halifax unable to devote the necessary resources to the Housing scheme, the Civic Improvement League and various Labor organizations decided to start the project on their own initiative. This decision was made especially easier when an unnamed individual purchased a three acre property and then donated it to the “Halifax Housing Company.” Located on the North slope of Needham Hill in the working class Richmond district of Halifax, the property had sufficient space to erect fifty double cottage tenements, each designed by architect and League member Andrew Cobb. Unlike much of the shabby housing which characterized the north end of Halifax, the Cobb Tenements would be “modern, sanitary four room cottages” with plenty of “light and air space.” Indoor plumbing and a outdoor backyard were also envisaged as adding to “the health and enjoyment of the tenants.” Due to wartime shortages, the first cottages would be constructed of wood rather than the fireproof materials as was originally planned. Nevertheless, it was hoped that:

...the high standard with which the scheme is started will be maintained, and by the very force of competition its influence will be to tone up the general standard of housing in the city.163

The formation of the “Halifax Housing Company” was greeted with almost “unqualified approval” in the local press. Local reformers, social workers, and other professionals were particularly impressed by the idea of a housing scheme for the working men of Halifax. Professor Eben McKay of the Civic Improvement League believed that the

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162 Quoted in the “Prospectus of the Halifax Housing Company Limited.” 1917. Robert Hattie was the Secretary of the Company. John Joy of the Trades and Labour Council and John McKeen of the 1915-17 Board of Control were also Company Directors.

163 Ibid.
creation of the Halifax Housing Company attacked the root of the housing problem in the city. The unsanitary and overcrowded tenements are:

...a condition which no city can afford to tolerate...to say nothing of the unhealthy moral atmosphere which it fosters, it is directly responsible for the lowered efficiency of workmen who are the victims of it...The...Company in proposing to provide sanitary houses at a cost which any workmen can afford to pay...is helping to remove a condition which is a deep disgrace to Halifax and a standing menace to its future.164

The housing initiative also had other backers. Ernest Blois, the Superintendent of Neglected and Delinquent Children, believed that the Company would, with public support, foster better housing conditions throughout the City. Blois was especially keen on the location for the first set of Company cottages, as:

The site is admirably adapted for the class of houses contemplated and the demand for this type of house is so great that many applications have already been received.165

William Hattie, the Nova Scotia Health Officer was particulary pleased with the plans of the Housing Company. The scheme has:

...my whole hearted approval. In practically every community where improved housing conditions have been secured, the first incentive has come through some such plan as that which is proposed for Halifax. The results elsewhere have been characterized by notable diminution of sickness and deaths. Our infantile death rate and our tuberculosis death rate are deplorably high...I am convinced that they are largely due to bad housing and that both would be greatly bettered if general improvement of our housing conditions could be secured.166

165 Ibid.
166 Ibid.
With such high profile supporters and the urgency of the housing problem in the city, the Halifax Housing Company appeared capable of achieving at least some success. By mid-1917, the Company Directors, including R.M. Hattie of the Civic Improvement League, released their prospectus which showed the company had $50,000 capital, which was divided into 1,000 shares at $50.00 a share. Acknowledging that more capital was needed, the Company hoped to acquire an additional $90,000 through a mortgage for a total of $140,000 which would be sufficient for housing approximately one hundred families at an estimated cost of $1400 per house. Rental fees would be set at “not more than $160 per year” with investors getting back about 6% return on their investment, “which is a fair return...but not to the disadvantage of the tenant.” Noting that the Halifax Housing Company was not about “making profits over and above a reasonable return”, the prospectus reminded potential investors that the purpose was to “provide good housing for a class of people deplorably in need of such at the present time.”

Despite the urgency of the housing situation and the available land, the Halifax Housing Company nevertheless struggled to win investors. With the war making resources and funds extremely limited, the ultimate success of the Company always remained uncertain. By the time of the Explosion which leveled the existing neighbourhoods surrounding Needham Hill, Andrew Cobb’s Tenements still remained unbuilt. When the Halifax Relief Commission expropriated the property for its own housing plan, the “Halifax Housing Company” had little option but to cease operations.

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167 “Prospectus of the Halifax Housing Company Limited” 1917.
III. Progressivism in Decline: The Demise of the Civic Improvement League

After achieving so much success in helping to initiate municipal reform, town planning and a new housing strategy for Halifax, the Civic Improvement League seemed to be reinforcing its role as vibrant force in civic affairs. Nevertheless by the middle of 1916, many individuals were beginning to lose interest in “civic improvement.” With the war entering its third year, discussions concerning “beautification” and “civic improvement” began to look increasingly irrelevant to the war effort. Although most members of the Civic Improvement League remained in Halifax during the war years, many opted to devote their evenings and weekends to the war effort in the form of local militia service or voluntary charity work. After conducting their own business interests and individual contributions to the war effort, most League members simply did not have the time nor the energy to work on “civic improvements.” This waning interest in the Civic Improvement League was especially noticeable in the newspapers. The longer the war dragged on, fewer and fewer Civic Improvement League items appeared in the press. By 1916, the Civic Improvement League was hardly ever mentioned. When items concerning the League did appear in the newspapers, it was usually as a plea such as “Help To Make Halifax the City Beautiful” or “Give Your Support.”¹⁶⁸ Perhaps as sign of desperation, the League also began to ask for financial support as well as volunteer support. After all:

¹⁶⁸ For example, see Evening Mail. May 3, 1916.
The league is always alive to matters affecting the improvement and welfare of the city, and considering the fact that it has no paid executive, but must depend on voluntary efforts, it does a remarkably large amount of work. In view of this, the league certainly deserves the support of the citizens in a financial way as well as otherwise. 169

From the perspective of the Halifax Board of Control and City Council, the Civic Improvement League also seemed to appear as a diminished force. From over a dozen index entries in the 1913 City Council minutes, the Civic Improvement League was mentioned just once in the 1916 records. 170

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Although the Civic Improvement League would become a “casualty of war,” public disappointment with the supposedly progressive Board of Control had also jaded many people to the idea of further reforms and progressive activities. 171 Despite the efforts of the Civic Improvement League and the “1915 Municipal Association” to nominate suitable candidates, the Halifax Board of Control was now widely regarded as a joke and disaster for the city. Instead of orderly and rational government, the Board of Control had simply become a distorted version of the old style. In many ways, the Board of Control had simply become a large standing Committee, similar to the ones attached to the old council, but whose greater powers only amplified the animosities between members. 172 Although

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170 *Minutes of the Halifax City Council.* 1913. 1916.

171 In his incomplete and unpublished work on the history of the Halifax Civic Improvement League, Robert Hattie maintained that the League ceased operations because it became a “casualty of the war”. He neglects to mention any merging with the Halifax Commercial Club. R.M. Hattie Papers. Vol. 8789.

172 Henry Roper. p.64.
demands placed on the city as a result of the war effort had put the Board of Control in a very difficult position, critics would continue to attack the Controllers’ general lack of character, “million dollar budgets,” and incompetence in governing the city. Even the staunchly pro-reform Herald and Evening Mail had joined the chorus of criticism. By 1919, public disgust with the Board of Control led to a plebiscite calling for its abolition. Although there was a brief discussion of replacing the Board with a Commission Government of three experts, it is perhaps indicative of the reform fatigue in Halifax that a large majority of the public chose to return to the old style of municipal government with 18 Aldermen and a Mayor.173

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With dwindling public enthusiasm by 1917 for further civic reforms and improvements, the Civic Improvement League had little choice but to reconsider its future role. After having accomplished so much over the past ten years, the League executive was determined to carry on the work in some form or another. More members were clearly needed as was reliable financial backing. With public pleas in the local press having little result, the Civic Improvement League began to consider the option of joining with another socially committed group. In October 1917, the Halifax Commercial Club was approached by the executive of the Civic Improvement League with the view of the Club taking over the League’s charter, franchises, and work.174 After discussion among the executive of the

173 Ibid.

174 The Halifax Commercial Club was founded by League member R.V. Harris in 1913 as “an association of business and professional men.” Its primary purpose was “to have addresses of interest to all, pertaining to business and public welfare. Partisan and religious subjects excluded...” Evening Mail.
Commercial Club, the League was formally dissolved on November 22, 1917. The League’s remaining members were granted Commercial Club membership and became the “Civic Committee” of the Club.\textsuperscript{175}

\textsuperscript{175} Commercial Club. \textit{Program}. November 22, 1917.
Chapter Five
When tracing the activities of the Civic Improvement League, it seems tragically ironic that the city’s greatest opportunity for constructing a “garden suburb” occurred just over two weeks after the League’s demise. The Explosion of December 6th 1917 destroyed much of Halifax’s predominantly working class north end; and set in motion Canada’s first town planning and public housing project. Although the Civic Improvement League would not be directly involved in the reconstruction of “Richmond Heights”, many of their ideas concerning housing, town planning, and environmental determinism would at last be implemented. For many years, the League had maintained that the construction of a clean and low-cost “garden suburb,” would produce a healthier and morally improved individual. With the new and attractive “Richmond Heights” development, a working person could live a comfortable and healthy life. In becoming a “more reasonable human,” the worker would thus be more productive and resistant to radical ideas and action. Although local reformers sought to expand the “Richmond Heights” plan into a broad reconstruction of the city, the Halifax Relief Commission limited such ambition by restricting planning to the devastated area. Nevertheless, the ideals first espoused by the Civic Improvement League a decade earlier and enacted in the Richmond Heights development would reemerge in the 1930’s and 1940’s as Halifax became “a bigger, better and more beautiful city.”

I. The Explosion

On December 6th, 1917, the ships Mont Blanc and the Imo collided in the narrows of Halifax Harbour. Carrying munitions, the Mont Blanc caught fire and exploded at 9:06
am. The disaster was the worst in Canadian history, with 1,635 deaths, 5 to 6 thousand wounded, and according to one conservative estimate approximately 28 million dollars in damage. The Richmond district, which lay in the city's north end, was the hardest hit area with over 325 acres of working-class and waterfront industrial land completely destroyed by the force of the blast and flying metal. Over 750 families were left homeless by the disaster, and more than half of those lived and worked in the devastated area. Within two and half hours, an emergency meeting was convened at Halifax City Hall where the Board of Control, City Council and leading citizens formed a "Halifax Relief Committee." After four days of coordinating relief measures and establishing temporary housing around the city, the Committee met to discuss the reconstruction of the devastated area. Perhaps realizing that the reconstruction was also an opportunity to alter the character of the city, the Committee approved "a recommendation...to the effect that Thomas Adams, Town Planning Expert of the Conservation Commission, Ottawa be asked to come to Halifax at once."  

II. Relief and Reconstruction: Thomas Adams and the Halifax Civic Improvers

After having spent so much time in Halifax working on the Town planning legislation and housing initiatives, Thomas Adams was a natural choice to advise in the reconstruction of the Richmond district. In fact, before Adams had even received the emergency request from the city; he was already writing to Robert Hattie to enquiry:

176 Correspondence. Ralph P. Bell to Adams. December 10, 1917.
...that you and your family have escaped injury in the terrible disaster which has befallen Halifax...In the face of the immediate horrors of the disaster I suppose it will be impossible to get people to think much of using the opportunity...to try and improve the housing conditions of the class of people who were chiefly affected...It will surely be a monstrous thing if temporary and unsanitary buildings were rushed up and afterwards left as permanent homes.177

Perhaps anticipating a request for advice from the city or even from Robert Hattie himself, Adams already began to offer recommendations as to how the city should proceed with the rebuilding:

I think the great thing would be to urge the military authorities to provide...temporary homes close together on some piece of land which could be afterwards cleared off when more permanent buildings were available. As soon as this temporary provision was made the work should then be started to erect strong and healthy cottages in concrete or brick and gradually to transfer the people from the temporary to the permanent buildings...Halifax does not want to be burdened with a whole lot of shacks put up to meet an immediate need and allowed to remain after the need has been dealt with.178

Although Adams could not reach Halifax until March 1918, he nevertheless followed the relief and reconstruction efforts closely from his office in Ottawa. Writing in the Conservation of Life a month after the disaster, Adams believed the "great calamity" to be a "great opportunity to improve the industrial facilities and housing conditions of Halifax."179

Despite the utter devastation, Adams’ optimism was also shared by the new Halifax Relief Commission which was created by the Dominion and Nova Scotia


178 Ibid.

Governments to take over responsibilities from the Halifax Relief Committee. Unlike the Committee, the Relief Commission was composed of just three men who had absolute powers to decree rehabilitation and reconstruction measures within the devastated area. The Halifax Relief Commission was made up of two Halifax judges: Chairman T. Sherman Rogers and William B. Wallace. The other member was Frederick L. Fowkes, a former Mayor of Oshawa, Ontario.

Public pressure to provide urgent relief in the form of proper housing, food, and clothing was balanced by the Commission’s belief in moving forward toward an “ideal” new city. By August 1918, the Commissioners were even discussing the Explosion as “a splendid opportunity...to improve the character of the city.” In discussing their hopes for a new Halifax, the Relief Commissioners sounded much like members of the now disbanded Civic Improvement League:

We are hoping for Halifax, clean, smooth streets, beautiful and commodious homes, adequate public buildings; in short, a city constructed in such a way as to harmonise with its beautiful situation and surroundings.

With the Halifax Relief Commission open to ideas of town planning and beautification, the time may have seemed opportune for the Civic Improvement League to reemerge and participate in the redevelopment of the city. After all, the League had been advocating the need for clean and healthy neighbourhoods for well over a decade. As the Town planner appointed to oversee the reconstruction of “Richmond Heights”, Thomas Adams was especially keen on having his friends in the Civic Improvement League participate in the work. Writing in the Conservation of Life, Adams pointed out that:

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180 The Halifax Relief Commission was made up of two Halifax judges: Chairman T. Sherman Rogers and William B. Wallace. The other member was Frederick L. Fowkes, a former Mayor of Oshawa, Ontario.

the greater part of the work to be done will be performed by the Government Agencies...the general body of citizens...[would]...make a mistake if they do not take hold of the Civic Improvement League of the city, strengthen its membership and make it a really live force in the community...Constructive suggestion is needed and the views of the citizens should be represented through the channel of a voluntary organization.¹⁸²

Much to the disappointment of Adams, the Civic Improvement League never did formally regroup during the relief efforts. Although former League members, such as Robert Hattie contributed to the relief efforts through activities sponsored by the Commercial Club, there never seemed to be a consensus about reorganizing the League. One possible reason why the League never re-formed during the crisis was the fact that there were already a large assortment of experts in the city to help with the relief operation. Historian John Weaver in fact credits the Halifax Explosion for creating a training ground for a hundreds of Canadian and American professionals in such occupations as medicine, social work, engineering, and town planning.¹⁸³ Nevertheless, the presence of so many experts determining their futures would offend many residents of the devastated north end. With no representation on the Relief Commission, north end residents requested that aid be restricted to the “paying out of sums to individual householders for their losses, and to leave the citizens alone to work out their own salvation.”¹⁸⁴ With the North End residents


¹⁸⁴ Herald. April 22, 1918.
having a distrust of outside experts, it was unlikely they would appreciate the paternal assistance of a perceived South end middle-class organization such as the Civic Improvement League.185

III. "Richmond Heights"

Despite the absence of the Civic Improvement League, Adams nevertheless found on his arrival in March 1918, that the whole city had “for a time at least” become an undeclared Civic Improvement League.186 More importantly, the Relief Commission had been granted sweeping powers to provide rehabilitation and reconstruction. One such power was the ability to expropriate land and enforce zoning regulations in the devastated area, thus allowing Adams to set about planning a “garden suburb” with uninhibited scope. Rather than following the previous grid plan, Adams drew up a plan featuring diagonals, contour roads and a central square. With the expensive ornate ideas of the “City Beautiful” no longer viable, especially in wartime, Adams was careful to avoid placing elaborate public buildings and fountains in the new North end. As early as 1914 Adams believed that such decorations may be “essential in the life of a great community...but only...after you have seen after the real essentials of the home life of the people.”187 As such, Adams and his

185 It was claimed that even local relief workers had insulted North end sufferers. Minute Book. Halifax Relief Commission. January 14, 1918. Also John C. Weaver; p.45.

186 Thomas Adams. “Civic Improvement in Canada” (April 1918), p.46.

planning protégée Horace Seymour aimed for a working class development with a “symmetry”, a “quiet orderliness” and a “regularity and harmony” which “will produce beauty without seeking beauty as end in itself.”

In order to address each of these qualities, Adams sought to incorporate six tenants of the “Garden City” ideal. These included: local commercial space, public parkland, traffic design, varieties of housing design, high density in low rise buildings, and integrated land use.¹⁸⁸

Local Commercial Space

On the Young Street frontage of “Richmond Heights”, commercial space was assigned for local businesses. Architecturally, the commercial block was to resemble the housing in order to make it a “full partner” with the neighbourhood. By placing a small park across the street and apartments overtop of the commercial space, a successful integration of space is achieved and a attractive street scape is the result.

Public parkland

Prior to the Explosion, the Richmond district of Halifax had been poorly served with parkland. The Civic Improvement League had for years tried to persuade the city to redress this deficiency with little success.¹⁸⁹ In the Adams’ plan for “Richmond Heights”,

¹⁸⁸ The following points are a summary of those made in Ernest Clarke. p.394-405.

¹⁸⁹ As early as 1909, the Civic Improvement League had attempted to persuade the city to convert part of Needham Hill into a North end version of the “Public Gardens.” NSARM R.M. Hattie Papers. Vol.8788.
more than 10 acres of public open space would be made available, including Fort Needham Park. As Ernest Clarke argues, the inclusion of so much parkland rooted the “Richmond Heights” redevelopment in the English New Town tradition.

Traffic Design

As living environments had to be preserved from deterioration caused by hazards, noise, and pollution of traffic, Adams sought to regulate traffic flow. In order to ensure the quiet orderliness of the “garden suburb,” a hierarchy of streets were assigned. These included arterial roads, major & minor collector roads, local streets, and service lanes. Nevertheless, Adams faced serious limitations in trying to regulate traffic. Despite many streets being erased from the map by the Explosion, their underground services remained intact and economic constraints faced by the Relief Commission could not permit their abandonment. As a result, many pre-explosion streets had to used, however Adams did fix the widths and other details of the old streets to best meet the needs of the new neighbourhood.

A Variety of Housing Design

In order to complete the “Ideal Surrounding,” working people also needed functional, yet attractive housing. Rather than replacing the destroyed houses with cheap frame dwellings, Adams, along with architect George Ross, sought to create a model of modern housing development. Quality fireproof materials would be used for the construction and each home would have all of the modern conveniences. Relying on “Hydrostone” as his building material, Ross constructed 326 dwellings from six different types of four-unit homes. Each unit would have electricity, modern bathrooms, and kitchen
sinks. Moreover, minimum standards were set for room sizes, window areas, and storage space. Careful to avoid the sterile sameness as displayed in housing construction in other Canadian cities, Ross also altered roof designs to blend diversity with green space.

Density & Rise

At a time, when town planners debated the merits and faults of accommodating high density living in high rise buildings, Adams sought to create a low rise development to meet similar demands. High rises were viewed by Adams to be inhumane and a menace to public health. A low rise development, on the other hand, could meet the same high density levels without sacrificing the necessary light, air, and open space which were at the heart of the “garden suburb.” As such “Richmond Heights” proves Adams theory that a high density of people at 50 persons per acre could be comfortably accommodated in a low rise development.

Integrated Land Use

Unlike later subdivisions where buildings often seemed disconnected to their surroundings, “Richmond Heights” served to reinforce notions of social cohesion and livability. The integration of commercial, housing and parkland into one area complemented each other and helped create the “Ideal surroundings.”

IV. Limiting the “Ideal Surroundings”

With the reconstruction of north end Halifax providing a rare opportunity for a complete urban and social planning experiment, Adams reveled in the unbridled scope for his ideas and expertise. Upon taking the assignment, Adams believed that “a serious effort
should be made to prepare a sound scheme of development worthy of the city."  

Although the Relief Commission's mandate covered only the devastated area, Adams took it upon himself to lay a plan for the future development of the entire north end, including previously undeveloped tracts of land. With no buildings in this area which lay north of Duffus Street, Adams felt inclined to mark down a series of curving streets and diagonal arteries. To Adams, this area "was more important than even the land nearer the city." Nevertheless the Commission insisted that funds and authority be limited to immediate relief measures, not innovation for its own sake.

The decision of the Relief Commission to restrict development to the devastated area was condemned by many of the local reformers. With the distinguished planner Thomas Adams ready and willing to complete a comprehensive plan of the entire city, some reformers thought this was an ideal time to properly redesign the port, rail facilities and city streets. New planning and housing measures, if instituted, throughout the city would also ease nagging fears of potential labour and social unrest. Although never expressed in any explicit form, what some reformers really desired was further class segregation. With the Ocean Terminals being established in the wealthy south end, fears of "mechanic's districts"

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191 Quoted in John C. Weaver; "Reconstruction of the Richmond District in Halifax: A Canadian Episode in Public Housing and Town Planning, 1918-1921" p.42.

192 Ibid. p.44.

193 John C. Weaver; "Reconstruction of the Richmond District in Halifax: A Canadian Episode in Public Housing and Town Planning, 1918-1921" p. 45.
or slums being created were rampant. The *Evening Mail* was especially concerned about the "strikes and bloodshed" which may result without a broad reconstruction of the city. If the Commission used its ample funds to rebuild Halifax, the city would be blessed with "fine new residential areas, with big gardens and cheap, well-designed cottages for workers."\(^a\)

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Despite the manpower and supply shortages imposed by the war, the construction of Halifax's new "garden suburb" began in the summer of 1918 and proceeded swiftly until the Spring of 1919 when a series of labour disputes halted work. Like the complaints of Explosion sufferers regarding the intrusion of "Experts", the Halifax unions were also getting perturbed by the arbitrary manner of the Relief Commission. Labor protests over poor wages, the use of non-union staff, and 'straight time' on Sundays were met by the Commission's retort that the emergency circumstances permitted the waiving of the Halifax Trades and Labour Council guidelines. When the Labour Council disagreed, the Commission turned to the local press and promptly vilified the unions by labelling them as being "unpatriotic," "greedy," and "monopolistic."\(^b\) Such a hostile and unconciliatory reaction by the Commission merely highlighted how much attitudes had changed and hardened between middle class reformers and working-class labour groups. This was

\(^{ab}\) *Evening Mail*. April 12, 1918.

\(^{b}\) Suzanne Morton. "The Halifax Relief Commission and Labour Relations during the Reconstruction of Halifax, 1917-1919." *Acadiensis* 

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especially illustrative in their differing perception of experts. While reform groups such as the Civic Improvement League had great faith in the non-elected, professional expert to manage urban affairs, Labour organizations preferred to stress the value of a wider scope of public opinion before making decisions. While such a divide was present in the pre-war years, wartime psychology had only exacerbated the gulf between the middle class professional and the labouring class. Before or even early in the war, the dictatorial measures of the Halifax Relief Commission with its pleas for sacrifice might have been met with acquiescence and quiet grumbling. In wartime, post-Explosion Halifax, however, such paternalism was resented more than ever and was met by ever louder demands for representation and public input into the construction of the new homes.

V. Completion and Aftermath

In mid-1921, “Richmond Heights” was complete. Although the demands for public input and better benefits for Labour were never entirely satisfied, the Explosion sufferers were generally pleased with their new homes. Nevertheless, not all homes had access to the planned amenities. More significant was the fact that the 326 units were no enough to accommodate all of the Explosion sufferers and their families. War veterans returning home to Halifax to find that their houses had been obliterated by the Explosion also needed accommodation. The Relief Commission responded to demands by building more homes of


cheaper quality on the extension streets which lay just off “Richmond Heights” or “the Hydrostone” as it became popularly known.198

After completing his plan, Adams returned to Ottawa and other town planning projects. While seeking to improve and redefine Halifax as the Relief Commissioners had originally intended, Adams had become frustrated by the increasing limitations placed on him as he carried out his work. In the end, Adams could only call “Richmond Heights” a small success. While the town plan of “Richmond Heights” produced an attractive model of what could be achieved, the power of the Halifax Relief Commission ultimately infringed on any possible benefits. Along with placing restrictions on the scope of the reconstruction and scuttling some of Adams’ proposals, the Commissioners also acted as landlord for the new properties and raised rents periodically often beyond the residents ability to pay, thus defeating the entire notion of affordable housing for working people.199

Despite a shortage of housing in Halifax and across Canada throughout the 1920s and 1930s, “Richmond Heights” would remain the only example of a public housing project in Canada. Although the relief and reconstruction in the wake of the war and the Explosion posed considerable challenges, the “Richmond Heights” development represented a considerable success for both the Commissioners, experts, and the Labour organizations which worked on the project. Nevertheless as John Weaver writes, the Dominion, provincial and municipal governments had little inclination to follow the

198 John C. Weaver; “Reconstruction of the Richmond District in Halifax: A Canadian Episode in Public Housing and Town Planning, 1918-1921” p.43.


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“Richmond Heights” example and embrace a new housing policy. Apart from allowing a few benevolent housing corporations, and the drafting of some town plans, governments would remain committed to their pre-war *laissez faire* policy of private enterprise to finance housing construction. The priorities of the Dominion government with respect to housing were made abundantly clear in January 1921 when the Commission of Conservation was abolished and its powers transferred to the National Parks Division.

With governments still reluctant to adopt a public housing platform and class tensions running high, it is perhaps little wonder that the Halifax Civic Improvement League would remain moribund throughout much of the next two decades. Although local reformers welcomed the building of “Richmond Heights,” as the beginning of a new era for Halifax, decision makers particularly in Ottawa had other ideas. Rather than fostering “a more reasonable human”, the Halifax reconstruction was viewed as a practical exercise in providing adequate homes in an emergency situation, but had little application in peacetime. Only with the demobilization of thousands of Canadian men and women at the end of World War II would all three levels of government return to consider the ideas of public housing, town-planning and the “Richmond Heights” example. Planners in post-WWII Halifax even cite the ideas of the Civic Improvement League and the work of Thomas Adams in their work on the Westmount subdivision in the western extremities of the city.

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200 John C. Weaver; “Reconstruction of the Richmond District in Halifax: A Canadian Episode in Public Housing and Town Planning, 1918-1921” p.44.

201 Thomas Adams’ exasperation with the Dominion Government over the abolition of the Commission of Conservation is well chronicled in Michael Simpson “Thomas Adams in Canada” p.6.

Evidence of the "garden suburb" still remains especially along Chebucto Road as planners rejected the tradition gridiron and adopted curvilinear streets, a variety of housing types, playgrounds, and a plethora of trees and playgrounds.
Chapter Six
Between 1905 and 1917, the Civic Improvement League was at the forefront of progressive action in the City of Halifax. Believing in the importance of efficiency and scientific management, the League advocated numerous reform causes including beautification projects, town planning legislation, and municipal reform. Despite its demise shortly before the Explosion, the League reemerged in 1936 in response to a housing crisis and continuing neglect of the Town Planning Act. Believing that Halifax could become "a perfect city" by its 200th anniversary in 1949, the Civic Improvement League renewed its support for better housing, town-planning, and beautification measures. Nevertheless with Halifax experiencing its "two decades of depression," the Civic Improvement League adopted a new publicity strategy. Rather than justifying its actions to the public with scientific theories of environmental determinism, the League now frequently espoused improvements for the sake of assisting the growing tourist trade in the city. Though it appeared from this change in rhetoric that the Civic Improvement League was now appealing to commercial interests, it was merely trying to appeal to a broader cost-conscious (middle-class) audience that viewed tourism as Halifax's last opportunity to escape the depression.

I. Halifax and the 1920s

With the end of the war, the abolition of the Board of Control, and the reconstruction of "Richmond Heights" in Halifax in 1918, there was a general feeling among local reformers that the Civic Improvement League had fulfilled its mandate and had little utility in the new post-war Halifax. Moreover throughout its 12 year existence, the
League had achieved almost all of its 1905 objectives. The most successful initiatives included the Nova Scotia Town Planning Act, which passed in 1915; and the establishment of a Halifax Town Planning Board, which seemed to assure future development would follow strict zoning guidelines. With separate areas designated for residential, industrial, or commercial use, slums in Halifax would be a thing of the past. Such sentiment was best expressed in late 1918 by Adams protégée Horace Seymour, who summed up the success by stating that: "Halifax is capable of looking after itself."

In regard to Housing issues, the Civic Improvement League had more limited success. While the plans of the "Halifax Housing Company" had been derailed by the Explosion, the rebuilt "Richmond Heights" did provide a cleaner and healthier housing alternative for the working class family. Nevertheless, only 324 units were available which was clearly not enough to meet the needs of Explosion survivors and returning war veterans. Despite local reformers supporting the planner Thomas Adams in drawing up a much larger "Richmond Heights" as well as a new city plan, the Halifax Relief Commission cited political and financial considerations in shelving such ambitions.

Perhaps the Civic Improvement League's most disappointing failure was in its objective of municipal reform. The Board of Control had been designed to resolve urban problems and plan new initiatives with a professional, city wide focus. Yet when the Board failed to deal firmly with the Power and Tramway monopolies, and reverted to the squabbling ways of its predecessor; the reform quickly lost favour with the press and the

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203 Quoted in the Evening Mail; December 21, 1917.

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ratepayers. Although the League attempted to correct the situation by nominating several professional reform-minded candidates for the Board of Control through the "Municipal Association," the new Controllers could do little about the wartime crisis of rapid inflation and labor shortages. By 1919, the ratepayers of Halifax had voted to abolish the Board of Control and return to the old system of 18 Aldermen.

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After having all of the Civic Improvement League's issues addressed in one form or another between 1905 and 1917, it was impossible to imagine that the organization could still play a role in the new post-war Halifax. Linking up with the Commercial Club was thought to have been a positive step in sustaining the idea of "civic improvement" and attracting new followers. Nevertheless, it mattered very little as the mood of post-war Halifax was now very different from that of 1906. The heady optimism of prosperity and social improvement characteristic of the Edwardian era had been lost in the horrors of war and the Explosion.

A crippling recession beginning in late 1919 only darkened spirits further. While Halifax had never had a large manufacturing or industrial base, what little remained after the Explosion faced difficult times. Between 1920-1930, the city lost half of its manufacturing jobs as a wave of business mergers further concentrated jobs in Central Canada. Many of the factories destroyed in the Explosion were never rebuilt, and those that did survive were closed early in the 1920's. The much heralded Ocean Terminals in the south end, which had opened during the war, remained virtually unused. Even the new
Halifax Shipyards, opened with much anticipation in 1918 were forced to lay off workers at the end of the war. The workforce shrank from almost 2,000 employees to just 100 by 1922. The recession also affected the region’s resource industries; coal markets lost during the war never returned, European fish products competed fiercely with Maritime goods; and lumber from British Columbia saturated the market. As a result, the city commercial life was also severely depressed.204

With war and recession, the relationship between the Halifax improvers and the working classes was also now strained. In the pre-war period, the Civic Improvement League and the Local Trades and Labour Council enjoyed an uneasy, but co-operative relationship. Activities such as the Civic Revival and the various housing initiatives all enjoyed Labour support. Nevertheless, North end representation on the Civic Improvement League remained weak and the absence of working class members in the League was a particular setback during the pre-war years.

During the war years, it became increasingly clear that the capital-labour relationship was becoming more strained and politicized. The violent Electric Tramway Strike of 1913 had wounded the credibility of the Civic Improvement League and its instrument the Board of Control. More significant, was the 1919 strike of 2,000 men working in the Building trades. Seeking an eight hour day, higher wages, and straight time for Sundays, labourers were accused by the once worker labor-friendly Herald of being unpatriotic and monopolistic.

With the upper and middle classes resorting to hostile rhetoric and even violence to settle labour disputes in other parts of the province and the country, the working class person could only view the middle class reform agenda with suspicion. It was clear that the old Edwardian “top-down” paternalistic approach to class relations was no longer sufficient for dealing with urban problems. Though the League had sought to provide a clean and healthy environment to foster a productive and respectable workers, there was always an implicit assumption that cleanliness, comfort, and green space would quietly dissuade the working family from radical ideas and action.\footnote{Michael Simpson, \textit{Thomas Adams and the Modern Planning Movement.} (London, 1985), pg.12.} In 1919, a newly established workers’ paper, the Halifax \textit{Citizen} suggested another possible motive:

\begin{quote}
...under the Town Planning Act now in force, no subdivision can be opened up for sale unless streets are laid, sidewalks concreted, and sewers put in. This means a more beautiful city, but if not watched a more expensive city...in addition they will add a profit to the cost of the improvements insisted on by the Act and this profit is going to make it harder than ever for the people to get homes.\footnote{\textit{Citizen} (Halifax); September 12, 1919}
\end{quote}

To the working class reader living in the new Hydrostone district, there would have been little argument with this editorial; rents were exorbitant even for the rare person taking home a living wage in the 1920s.\footnote{Suzanne Morton, \textit{Ideal Surroundings: Domestic Life in a Working-Class Suburb in the 1920s.} p.10.} Thus, the reformer’s wish for the betterment of the working class, for whatever motive, now seemed particularly hollow and paternalistic.


\textsuperscript{206} \textit{Citizen} (Halifax); September 12, 1919

\textsuperscript{207} Suzanne Morton, \textit{Ideal Surroundings: Domestic Life in a Working-Class Suburb in the 1920s.} p.10.
The working classes were not the only people disillusioned and suspicious of urban reform rhetoric. Even during the peak of the Civic Improvement League's power in 1912-13, some people, particularly those attached to city council, had doubts over its social priorities and the cost of "beautification" projects. With Halifax entering its "two decades of depression" and with money becoming tight even for the "well to do" any kind of improvement, even new quality housing for low income people, was likely to be seen as an extravagance.

For the most fervent enthusiastic reformer it was impossible not to be affected by the tumultuous changes of war and economic dislocation. Robert Hattie, the former secretary of the Civic Improvement League and most enthusiastic of the Halifax "improvers," was simply exhausted by 1920. Having worked with Adams and other reformers in planning "Richmond Heights" and a new city plan, Hattie was overcome with illness and was forced to convalesce in the West Indies for three months.

With Hattie now retired from "civic improvement", there were others who had the interest and inclination to possibly re-form the Civic Improvement League. Nevertheless, with the economic recession cutting deep into the Halifax commercial interests, it was clear that new priorities had to be addressed. With so many former League members now part of the city's Board of Trade and Commercial Club, attention soon focused on a more desperate cause: Maritime Rights. Before reforms could be considered at home, it was now

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208 Walter Van Nus, p.199.

209 R.M. Hattie papers. NSARM, MG 1 Vol.2898,
clear that reforming the political and economic inequities with central Canada had to take priority. Commercial Club meetings and lectures were now dominated with Maritime Rights issues. Even civic improver William Dennis and his Halifax Herald took to the campaign for Maritime Rights to the exclusion of all other issues.\(^{210}\) One Commercial Club speech in particular seemed to sum up a new hardline attitude:

\[
...that the necessity for closer union of the Maritime Provinces, the utter exclusion of all political partizanship and the need for presenting nothing but a united front the pressing of Maritime Claims are paramount.\(^{211}\)
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With urban reform issues and 'progressive' improvements now sidelined in favour of political and economic agitation aimed at the Dominion Government, there was little place for the Civic Improvement League in the 1920's. Nevertheless, the lessons and booster strategies adopted by the League came to play a useful part in developing the city's best economic hope.

II. Halifax & Tourism

Tourism has always been part of the Maritime and Halifax economy. With daily trips between Maritime and New England ports, Halifax had always drawn a large number of visitors particular for business and family visits. With the opening of the Inter-Colonial Railway following Confederation, tourist traffic became a increasing concern for the Board of Trade. In the late 1890s, the Board established a Tourism subcommittee to study ways


\(^{211}\) *Evening Mail*, June 9, 1921.
at “boosting” the tourist flow through the city.\textsuperscript{212} The resulting pamphlets offered two dichotomous views of the city and were clearly aimed at two different readers. One type of pamphlet, aimed at the industrialist, usually portrayed a flourishing port city bursting with industry and prosperity; the second type, aimed at the tourist, usually omitted all illustrations of urban life and focused on fishing and sailing.\textsuperscript{213} While interested in the tourist traffic, it was clear that attracting more industry and manufacturing was still the priority among members of the Board of Trade.

With the economic dislocation of the early 1920's, the Board of Trade had little alternative but to re-evaluate their priorities, at least for the short term. Tourism had been underappreciated, they reasoned. The Board’s weekly newspaper, the \textit{Commercial News} summed it up for the entire province in 1921:

Nova Scotians take their woods and rivers, hills and lakes and their tourists for granted, considering that natural beauty and historic attractions are the sole factors in developing an extensive tourist trade, but the New Englander considers this traffic as a business proposition and has organized to develop it on lines that will yield far reaching returns.

It is asserted that the business men in Boston alone profit to the amount of $5,000,000 in one year solely through its advantages as a convention and travel city.

The time is opportune for us to encourage visitors to come here and to render such efficient service as will enable the visitor to not only enjoy his visit but carry away with him a friendly feeling. The psychology of the visitor to Nova Scotia should be a matter of careful study that...the community may benefit.

Tourist traffic to Nova Scotia properly developed should be one of our prime industries.\textsuperscript{214}

\textsuperscript{212} Halifax Board of Trade. \textit{Annual Report}, 1897.

\textsuperscript{213} Such pamphlets included, \textit{Fishing All Summer in Lake, Dream and Sea} (1905); \textit{Halifax: the City by the Sea} (1911); \textit{Interesting Facts and Figures, Halifax, Canada} (1913).

\textsuperscript{214} \textit{Commercial News}; April 7, 1921.
Attached to the desire to build a tourist industry through promotion and advertising was a desire to boost the city spirit. Rather than boosting for civic or moral improvement as in the past, this new civic boosterism aimed to make Halifax a more attractive place to visit and invest. The *Commercial News* summed up the new attitude:

...by effective community advertising at home and elsewhere; by teaching the people that they can make themselves attractive to themselves and therefore attractive to outsiders.\(^{215}\)

While boosting tourism may have been the primary motivation for such advertising, it also served in H.S.Congden’s publicity campaign to correct the myth of Maritime backwardness. Working with the Maritime Rights protests, Congden realized that sympathy for the plight of the Maritimes would only be forthcoming if the rest of Canada realized that the Maritimes was, in fact, a open and vibrant society interested in progress.\(^{216}\)

By 1925, the Board of Trade was now aggressively pushing tourism as means for economic growth. Taking over the Publicity Bureau of the Halifax Tourist Association, the Board was soon advertising the city in newspapers and magazine across the country and New England. In announcing the takeover, the *Commercial News* reported that:

One of the functions of a live Board of Trade is to carry on an advertising campaign to bring prominently before the public both at home and abroad the advantages of the City.\(^{217}\)

\(^{215}\) *Commercial News*; December 19, 1921.

\(^{216}\) Ernest Forbes; pg. 105-106.

\(^{217}\) *Commercial News*; July 6, 1925.
Such civic boosterism was perhaps best exemplified in the “Forward Movement” which was established by the Board of Trade in 1926. Operating as a special advertising fund, the “Forward Movement" had the primary goal of “boosting" Halifax as a place for tourism and business. It had hundreds of supporters who donated precious funds. When the local economy enjoyed a small recovery in the late 1920s, the “Forward Movement” naturally took the credit in this advertisement:

Did you ever stop to consider what has brought about the change for the better in Halifax?

There must be a propelling force to put anything in motion—from the first expenditure from this fund when the exporting and importing houses of Canada were canvassed to use this port...Reduction of freight rates and better transportation rates obtained. Capitalists have been attracted and...business generally has much improved

We do not claim all, but we do take credit for bringing about a great share of the improvement. Indications are that the summer tourist season will be a banner one. Halifax will be advertised in leading American and Canadian newspapers, telling the beauties and historic charms of this City. 218

With the opening of two modern hotels in downtown Halifax in 1928, the tourism industry now seemed to be on at least equal footing with other industrial and manufacturing sectors. The Board of Trade and the Commercial Club still continued to pursue other industry, but tourism now appeared to be the most stable, even if it was seasonal. Even the Citizen noted that:

“The tourist industry” is a new phase of business, but it is big. Its success is based upon what might be termed “allurement”, that is, the extent of the business is measured by what attractions we can offer. 219

218 Advertisement in the Commercial News; May 8, 1928.

219 Citizen; June 3, 1927.
With the tourism industry now growing, Halifax became increasingly self-conscious over the state of its “allurements”. In one editorial, the Citizen shouted: “What would the tourist think of our people if we permitted them to be shabby and uncared for!”220

Such sentiment was echoed in all of the press. The City and Dominion Governments were singled out as neglecting such landmarks and heirlooms of the past as the Martello Tower and the Citadel. Even the new CNR Railway Station was criticized for being a cheap and inferior structure with the surroundings little more than a “dump.” The Citizen was particularly strident:

Why does not our business clubs, our parliamentarians, our Board of Trade and our City Council take this matter up, and thereby not only assist the tourist business, but at the same time remedy an unsightly condition that reflects upon our city and the character of our people.221

Though the Citizen did welcome the tourist trade in its editorials, the paper always stressed that it should be a “two-fold blessing” with labour as well as capital enjoying the benefits and spinoffs.222 The Lord Nelson Hotel for example, was built with local labour and used materials from the Shaw Brick works and steel from Cape Breton’s Dosco works.223 Refurbishing the Citadel was also another project which the Citizen promoted. Cleaning up and preserving the Citadel as a ‘peace memorial’ would mean:

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220 Citizen; June 3, 1927.

221 Citizen; June 3, 1927.

222 Citizen; September 9, 1927.

223 Judith Fingard et al. pg. 149.
...an expenditure of money, but it would be money well spent. Not only would it refresh and refashion this monument of the past, but it would mean a lot of work for a class of citizens who find things mighty dull in Halifax today.\textsuperscript{224}

The \textit{Citizen} even began using the term "beautification" to describe various preservation projects. From a time when beautification was applied to improving environments and promoting healthier lives for people, it was now being used to promote allurements.

\section*{III. Beautification, Tourism and the Halifax Civic Improvement League: The road back}

The new interest in "beautification" was also expressed by the Board of Trade. In 1929, they contacted former Civic Improvement League Secretary Robert Hattie to chair a "Civic Division" to advise the Board on "beautification" projects. Though the potential improvements were discussed, Hattie found that much of his time was taken up with mundane issues such as a better means of collecting garbage and street sweeping. Attempts to revive interest in Town Planning were met with indifference. Writing in the \textit{Commercial News}, Hattie stressed:

\begin{quote}
...that Town planning could be used for manufacturing, business, and residential purposes, all giving promise to a bigger and brighter ... city.\textsuperscript{225}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{224} \textit{Citizen}; September 9, 1927.

\textsuperscript{225} \textit{Commercial News}; October 12, 1929.
Hattie's continued interest in town planning was, in large part, due to the failure of the City to follow the Town Planning Act. Though proclaimed in 1915, the Act was rarely followed by the City Council. This was especially reflected in the City's neglect of its own Town Planning Board. Writing to Horace Seymour in 1937, Hattie summed up his exasperation:

A good Town Planning Scheme killed by official neglect! But there has been neglect nearer home. In ten years out of the nineteen which the Halifax Town Planning Board has been in existence, the Mayor has neglected to even organize it. Ten whole years without a single meeting, and no effort made to get any action.\textsuperscript{226}

With the legacy of the Civic Improvement League in jeopardy, Robert Hattie continued to wait for an opportune time to arouse interest in the issue. Curiously as the publisher of the \textit{Maritime Merchant}, it was not until 1935 that Hattie tried to sell the concept of Town Planning with Tourism. In an effort to convene the town planning board, Hattie wrote to Mayor Cragg to inform him:

...that the Tourist Bureau is endeavoring to increase the interest in Halifax and vicinity as an objective of tourists, and the fact that it is endeavoring in this connection to encourage improvement and beautification of the city, it may be that the town planning board will be called upon to take certain steps... \textsuperscript{227}

Before Cragg could respond however, the issue of Town Planning became a major issue when a neighbour of Hattie on Coburg Road was granted a permit to convert his home into a shop. Disgusted with the favoritism shown by the city and appalled that the permit was granted without even a public hearing, Hattie and many of his neighbours

\textsuperscript{226} R. M. Hattie to Horace L. Seymour, May 12, 1937. NSARM MG1 Vol.2899 #33;

\textsuperscript{227} Correspondence. R.M. Hattie to Mayor E.J. Cragg, January 23, 1936. NSARM MG1 Vol.2899 #33
appealed to the Residential Areas Act and had the permit overturned. As the controversy gained considerable press coverage, the public began to take an interest in the importance of planning, and Hattie won much support for his cause. While the public support surprised Hattie, the battle over preservation of buildings was part of a much larger phenomena which included a romanticism for the so called “golden age” and a growing alarm about the impact of modernity in the city.

With the victory, Hattie came under increasing encouragement to revive the Civic Improvement League and reassert the beautification and town planning schemes. Buoyed by this unexpected development, Hattie conceded that: “...it seems absurd that what was thrashed out a quarter of a century ago should have to be argued all over again.”

Nevertheless the local (middle-class) press supported the idea. The Evening Mail urged readers to “Give Your Support” as “Halifax has a real need of an organization with the aims of the Civic Improvement League.” Ultimately, on the evening of April 20th, 1936 the Civic Improvement League reconvened after almost a twenty year hiatus. With at least 60 people at that first meeting the composition of the League was quite different from its 1905-1917 incarnation. Along with holdovers Hattie, and E.J. Kelly, the previous Secretary; the League consisted of predominately middle class citizens living in the South

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228 For a sample, see the Evening Mail, April 6, 1936.


230 Evening Mail, April 6, 1936.

231 Evening Mail; April 20, 1936.
and West ends of Halifax. Like the first Civic Improvement League, North end representation was conspicuously absent. Women however, had a prominent part in the new League, taking key roles on the Housing and Education Committees. While many members came from business professions, several also came from engineering, religious and medical professions. Perhaps the most noteworthy member was Dr. Samuel Prince who was also serving on the Halifax Housing Commission. As author of *Catastrophe and Social Change: Based Upon A Sociological Study of The Halifax Disaster*, Prince had studied the effects of the Explosion and the distribution of relief to the survivors. As a member of the Housing Commission, Prince was now deeply involved in securing more adequate housing in the city.

After the "Richmond Heights" development, there was no other affordable housing built for low income citizens. Numerous studies and reports were commissioned to look at the problem in Halifax, but for various reasons there had been little action. In reorganizing the League, Hattie reaffirmed that providing housing was a priority. In a sense:

...housing was at the beginning of the whole scheme.

Unfortunately every citizen effort that has been made to improve housing conditions in Halifax has been received coldly by the very people who ought to have initiated the effort. This will not always be so. We believe the time is at hand when City Hall will realize that its first duty is to see that every citizen has a decent home.

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233 The politics of social housing in Halifax during the 1930s is discussed in: John Bacher, "From Study to Reality: The Establishment of Public Housing in Halifax, 1930-1953" *Acadiensis*; (Autumn 1988) pgs.120-135.

The Housing Committee of the Civic Improvement League, with Dr. Prince as Chair, was in many ways the only remaining “progressive” characteristic of the new League. It is in fact the only group where the environmental determinism of the old League was still prevalent. In a letter announcing the formation of the Housing Committee, Hattie and Prince summed up their approach:

The places where the people dwell are at the very root of a city’s quality. “Mean streets make mean people”....Mean streets are made up of mean houses. A city cannot be a perfect city if any of its houses are unfit for human habitation.  

Among the other committees, aiding the tourist industry appeared as the primary motive. The Citadel Restoration Committee, for example, was particularly concerned with what the visitor thought of the fortification. In fact, the committee was only formed after a group of American tourists expressed amazement at the neglect of the fortification. One tourist from Buffalo, N.Y. told the Morning Chronicle: “The Citadel you have here would most certainly be a greater tourist attraction if properly restored.”

Another committee particularly designed to foster the tourist trade was the “Metropolitan Committee” which was drawn up to look at further means of co-operation between Halifax, Dartmouth, and surrounding communities which would:

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235 Letter sent to all members “Committee on Housing and Slum Clearance” NSARM MG1 Vol.2898 #9.

...add tremendously to the attractions of Halifax as a tourist centre and will contribute immensely to the lives of people in an area embracing Halifax Harbour and (the) Bedford Basin.

In the committee's preliminary report, they were even more explicit:

The tourist traffic is a matter of practical interest to the country surrounding Halifax and Dartmouth as well as to Halifax and Dartmouth themselves. While the city is an objective of tourist travel, the surrounding country benefits by the industry to the extent that it occasions a demand for produce to feed the visitors and creates an avenue for the sale of other goods and services that people in our countryside may have to sell.

If our countryside is developed with eye open to the entertainment of tourists it will lengthen the stay of visitors. Halifax city is soon seen and good roads lead the visitors away. It is rather characteristic of tourists nowadays that they keep on the move unless there is something to hold their interest. If there were several interesting drives in the vicinity of the city, particularly if they afforded interesting ocean views, visitors would be encouraged to remain longer.

The Halifax press applauded the League's suggestion of closer cooperation and the building of scenic drives in Halifax and the surrounding area. In a private letter, Herald Editor Andrew Robb commended Hattie and League for their Metropolitan Report:

I was particularly interested in the suggestion for scenic drives around Halifax. I think this is something that is greatly needed, and...would add greatly to the enjoyment of visitors to Halifax.

Even the Citizen, which had ignored the League's second coming, was positive:

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237 "The Civic Improvement League"


239 Correspondence. Andrew Robb to R.M. Hattie. August 5, 1938. NSARM MG1 Vol.2899 #38.
...unity of action has long been the slogan of Organized Labor, and it is encouraging to see governmental bodies and progressive citizens taking the same attitude in respect to preserving and improving the beauty spots of Halifax and surrounding districts.  

A special League report on the impact of the Ocean Terminals Railway on Civic Improvement was concerned about tourist element. While the issue of the Ocean Terminals and the railway "cut" had divided the League in 1912, there was now general consensus that the Dominion Government should follow through on its commitments and complete the necessary work at the Terminals. The "cut" which went through the wealthiest and picturesque Halifax neighbourhoods should also be beautified for the pleasure of the passing tourist.  

Perhaps the most interesting League committee in terms of tourism was the "Northwest Arm Conservation Committee." While discussions centered on beautifying particular areas, dredging the head of the Arm, and removing derelict buildings and boats, what made this group especially noteworthy was its membership. For instance, one meeting attracted over ninety citizens including several alderman, Mayor Mitchell, the local M.P., the President and several faculty of Dalhousie University, the provincial Minister of Highways and even Premier Angus L. MacDonald.  

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240 *Citizen*; November 18, 1938.


In light of Ian McKay's work on Angus L. MacDonald and his role on promoting a Scottish centric tourist culture in Nova Scotia, it is not surprising that MacDonald was involved in the Civic Improvement League. With MacDonald popularly seen as a "reform minded" leader, Hattie felt little hesitation in trying to interest him in "beautification" and town-planning. Within weeks of the League's revival, Hattie began sending magazine articles that dealt with civic improvement to the Premier. For his part, MacDonald was especially interested in the concept on a provincial level which would include a conference of municipal civic improvement committees. With the Premier's encouragement, Hattie wrote to other Nova Scotia municipal leaders for support. In a letter to Judge Arthur Roberts living in Bridgewater, Hattie was quite frank in justifying the need for civic improvement:

We have arrived at a time when town planning and civic beautification are of increased interest in view of the importance we attach to the tourist traffic as well as a disposition to satisfy a growing refinement of feeling in these matters.

With MacDonald's declared interest in the "beautification" idea, Hattie also tried to interest him in town planning. Knowing that MacDonald cherished his hereditary connections with the British Isles and was seeking to transplant something of the Scottish character to the province, Hattie was blunt:

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243 Ian McKay. "Tartanism Triumphant" p.5-47.

244 Correspondence. Angus L. MacDonald to R.M. Hattie, April 12, 1937. NSARM MG1 Vol.2899 #15.

245 Correspondence. R.M. Hattie to Judge Arthur Roberts, June 15, 1937. NSARM MG1 Vol.2899 #15.
It is a pity we cannot have the benefits of town-planning so apparent in the old country... I trust the Government will entertain the idea of a new Town-planning Act which will embrace the promotion of civic art and civic improvement as well as the fundamental of planning. 246

From such correspondence, MacDonald became involved in the League’s North west Arm Committee and was largely responsible for securing the authority to dredge and remove some of the “eyesores” from the water and shore. Nevertheless, the provincial civic improvement conference never materialized as an election and then world war scuttled such efforts.

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Along with efforts to secure powerful allies such as MacDonald, the Second Civic Improvement League also wished to indoctrinate the local children with the gospel of civic improvement. With Halifax’s 200th birthday in 1949 as a goal in which to establish “a perfect city”, the League realized that the next generation was critical for this success. In a letter to the librarian of the American Planning and Civic Association to obtain educational material, Hattie writes:

Our League is desirous of securing that the fundamentals of civic patriotism should be inculcated in the schools so that the rising generation will be imbued with a regard for the City beautiful. 247

To achieve such an objective, the League went as far as to draw up pamphlets to distribute to children and to offer assistance to teachers in the principles of a better civic

246 Correspondence. R.M. Hattie to Angus L. MacDonald, July 13, 1937. NSARM MG1 Vol.2899 #15.

247 Correspondence. R.M. Hattie to Dora Padgett, August 13, 1938. NSARM MG1 Vol.2899 #38.
life. Working with the Halifax Junior Board of Trade, the League even had school children signing pledge cards and writing songs about civic improvement. The League also launched a publicity blitz including advertisements, press releases, and daily “New Deal-esque” announcements on CHNS radio.248

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With the Civic Improvement League having success in winning over friends in high office and the schoolyard, their influence on the city’s working class residents was practically non-existent. Unlike the first Civic Improvement League which had some appeal among all classes, the working classes did not involve themselves with the League in the late 1930s. This is not to say they were not interested in civic improvements as the Citizen and the North end community were heavily involved in promoting annual clean up campaigns. On the surface it is puzzling that the League’s Street Tree and Clean Up Committees did not interest working class residents. At the time, the Citizen was urging City Hall to take up a massive Clean up project to provide some employment. Badly needed street repairs for the tourist trade and employment were also issues which the Citizen pressed in the late 1930s.249

While both the League and the working class approved of the need and purpose of “civic improvements” they differed on the justification of such action. Both groups argued


249 Citizen; for example, see February 1, 1935.
for improvements to boost tourism, however, working class residents also wanted to implement improvements as a means of providing employment and better working conditions. Also, with virtually no working class North End representation in the second Civic Improvement League, it would have been easy to conclude that this new League was the same as the old “aristocratic” south end middle class organization. Memories of the League’s failure to intervene and stop the violence in the Tramway strike were also an obstacle to a rapprochement. Despite approval of the Metropolitan Commission, the Citizen had a ambivalent and sometimes hostile attitude towards the Civic Improvement League. Demanding that a small portion of Oxford Street be paved, the Citizen chided the League:

Let’s have no discrimination in this matter. Why should a small coterie of selfish people impose their will and wish on the City Council? That particular piece of roadway needs paving; its present condition mars...the program of the “city beautiful” about which we hear so much. By the way - WHERE IS that League for Civic Improvement? Let’s get on to the job. Make Halifax beautiful. Show no favoritism.250

With such animosity it is difficult to imagine how the League could possibly believe in its 1949 goal of “a perfect city”. In 1946, the class and city divide which was so apparent in the Civic Improvement League became formally recognized with the formation of a North End Improvement League. The remnants of the 1936-39 Civic Improvement League then reformed into the Halifax South Improvement Association.251

250 Citizen; May 26, 1939.

251 Miscellaneous R.M Hattie Papers. NSARM MG1 Vol.2898 #16.
Without broad support from all parts of the Halifax, the Civic Improvement League’s achievements, if any, were always going to be limited in scope. Nevertheless, the second Civic Improvement League did have some success in promoting its “beautification” ideas. For example, the League managed to persuade the Dominion Government to finally clean up and restore Citadel Hill as an Historic Monument.\textsuperscript{252} With Premier MacDonald’s influence, the League also managed to clean up the Northwest Arm area and provide more public (tourist) access. The establishment of the Metropolitan Commission examining inter-municipal relations and tourist traffic also opened up discussion which would continue well into the future. From the perspective of the League’s “progressive” aspirations however, very little had been accomplished. The Housing Committee met only sporadically over the three years. Like the Board of Trade and the Labour Council, the League did provide support for the Halifax Housing Corporation whose goal was to build low income housing; nonetheless, as with past housing schemes, the Corporation never materialized as funding promised from the Dominion Government was cancelled.\textsuperscript{253} The Town Planning Act would also continue to be neglected, despite the League’s best efforts to revive interest.

\textbf{IV. Conclusion}

Although Hattie and his Civic Improvement League remained true to their “progressive” ideal of a “quiet and orderly” city, their rhetoric of selling the idea to the public changed to best suit their objectives. With the weary public now living in and promoting a nostalgic Golden Age, there was little interest in reviving the “progressive”

\textsuperscript{252} \textit{Evening Mail}; July 26, 1938.

\textsuperscript{253} John Bacher; p. 127.
society ideals of a “quiet and orderly” city. Nevertheless, as “beautification” became increasingly used as means to boost the city’s image for tourists, Hattie and the Civic Improvement League adapted “the tourist” justification as a means of promoting the “progressive” ideals of beautification and town planning for a better environment. Although they enjoyed limited success using their “tourist” justification, the League’s south end, middle class orientation ultimately undermined their attainment of a “perfect” city.
Conclusion
On June 21st, 1949, the City of Halifax celebrated its 200th birthday. Although many Halifax residents marked the occasion with numerous parties and celebrations, Robert Hattie was too disheartened to participate. Now aged 73 and a charter member of the Halifax South Improvement Association, Hattie had hoped for many years to use the 200th birthday event as an opportunity in which to showcase “the perfect city.” With clean streets, attractive housing, and a harmonious social environment, Halifax would be the envy of every Canadian city. Ultimately for Hattie, such aspirations remained unfilled. Writing on the eve of the celebrations, Hattie observed that there was still “too much squalor” in many places. Moreover, Halifax still needed “more civic spirit” to put it back on the progressive track. After all:

If our slum areas were to be cleared out and proper housing provided, health would be improved, crime lessened, and “civic beauty” enhanced...children would grow up in an environment that would be conducive to good citizenship.²⁵⁴

Despite Hattie’s belief that Halifax had fallen short of being “a perfect city” in 1949, there was little doubt that the ideas of environmental determinism still remained current in the post-1945 era. In fact as early as 1946, Halifax civic officials began planning a comprehensive urban renewal which would take over two decades to complete. Ironically, much of this development had actually been proposed by the Civic Improvement League before the First World War. The razing of Africville and the destruction of the neighbourhood around Ablermare and Starr Streets were two of the most notorious examples which were ostensibly designed to improve the “environment” and eliminate

²⁵⁴ Chronicle-Herald; June 20, 1949.
poverty in the city. In a more positive development, town planning in Halifax, particularly in
the western suburbs of the city, followed many of the same "light and space" guidelines
advocated by Thomas Adams and the Civic Improvement League. More recently, the
creation of the Halifax Regional Municipality was in fact foreshadowed by the League's
Metropolitan Commission in 1937 which had called for closer ties between Halifax and the
surrounding communities.

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As one of the leading middle-class organizations in the city, the Civic Improvement
League placed Halifax in the mainstream of the North American urban reform effort. With
its environmentally deterministic message, worship of experts, support for municipal
reform, and public pledges to improve housing and social conditions, the Civic
Improvement League sought to raise the moral and commercial character of Halifax. The
fact that the League had only mixed results is not as important as the fact that these middle-
class professionals were eager to bring the "science of progressivism" to Halifax. At a time
when the city was experiencing fundamental changes with the departure of the British
garrison and the establishment of the Ocean Terminals, the Civic Improvement League
sought to use such changes as an opportunity to redefine Halifax's character.

With many Civic Improvement League members sitting on the Halifax Board of
Trade, one cannot overlook the fact that commercial self-interest played a part in the
promotion of "improvements". The idea of new Halifax emerging as the commercial and
industrial capital of eastern Canada was always a strong sentiment. From the perspective of
the Civic Improvement League, however, such a goal could only be met with the cooperation of other groups, particularly organized labour. After all, “a perfect city” could not be obtained without labour peace, and only with beautification and better housing could such a peace be achieved. Nevertheless, reformers could never reconcile themselves to having working-class representation in the Civic Improvement League. A respected labour leader, such as John Joy, did take part in League meetings and participated in the “uplift” revival and the “Halifax Housing Company,” however such incidents became fewer during the war years. In the 1930’s, organized labour had little interest in the Civic Improvement League even though they had shared many of the same interests including beautification and promoting tourism. Ultimately, the long-held perception of the Civic Improvement League as a South End orientated organization hindered any attempts at “a perfect city.”

While class differences encumbered much of the Civic Improvement League’s work, the Halifax reformers were also limited by their preconceptions of what progressivism, reform, and the “City Beautiful” were about. Their uncritical approach to the use of experts and the new doctrines of scientific management, particularly as it pertained to regulating society, could not solve the underlying problems facing the city and the region as a whole. Industrial underdevelopment, for example, could not be cured by pledges of better efficiency. Even the offering of “bonuses” to potential manufacturers was unlikely to serve as a panacea, especially when these same manufacturers were established in other parts of the Maritimes. Despite all the talk of a more progressive Halifax, reformers had a difficult time acknowledging unpleasant news, such as the eroding commercial base. Although local banks and businesses were either folding or moving to
central Canada, the Civic Improvement League and even the Board of Trade never formally discussed the problem. One issue which was frequently discussed was the city’s shrinking tax base, which was made even worse by the construction of the Ocean Terminals. Nevertheless, even the Board of Control could not persuade the Dominion Government to contribute to the tax coffers, even though it occupied much of the prime real estate in the city.

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Despite the best efforts of the Civic Improvement League, Halifax never quite achieved its perfect city objectives. In truth, few cities in Canada with Civic Improvement organizations could claim such a label. Although every city had a different set of circumstances with which to contend, the Halifax Civic Improvement League was not any less successful than those in Montreal or Toronto. Reformers in those cities experienced many of the same difficulties with reluctant city officials, a hostile labour force, and fluctuating tax revenues. The notions of civic improvement also changed to meet the needs of the city. In Montreal, for example, the Civic Improvement Association became closely aligned with concerns over sanitation and health. In Halifax, the Civic Improvement League also experienced this same evolution moving from strictly beautification schemes to those encompassing health issues, municipal reform and housing for the working class. Nevertheless, the Halifax Civic Improvement League came to define itself with its support

255 David Sutherland. p.215.

for Town Planning in both the Edwardian years and the 1930s. By pressuring the Halifax Board of Control and the Nova Scotia Government to adopt the country’s first Town Planning Guidelines, the Civic Improvement League enjoyed a degree of respect and influence that other reform organizations in the city envied. This was illustrated in the 1930s, when public opposition over the city’s attempts to open up a commercial zone in a residential area, provoked the rebirth of the Civic Improvement League. With the promotion of a “progressive Halifax” in the time of the “New Deal”, the Civic Improvement League had a remarkable opportunity and a second chance to forge a “perfect city”. Nevertheless, despite the support of even Premier Angus L. Macdonald, the Civic Improvement League could not overcome its middle class assumptions over what a city should be. In other words, “The Perfect City” would have to wait.
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