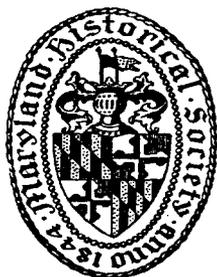


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THE BALTIMORE FIRE AND BALTIMORE REFORM

By JAMES B. CROOKS

THE great Baltimore fire of February 7, 1904 generally receives credit among Baltimoreans for stimulating the reforms of the Progressive Era. John Powell writing his essay on the "History of Baltimore, 1870-1912" in the latter year may have started the impression when he observed:

The boldness with which Baltimore in the very moment of its devastation [following the fire], planned and put into execution a great scheme of public improvements, seemed to act as a charm to dissolve the spell of ultraconservatism, and to inspire the people with a confidence in themselves and in the future of the city which increased in strength with every step it took. A splendid audacity, resting upon a basis of intelligent comprehension, replaced the old-time hesitancy with which large projects had been received. To create rather than to be created became the dominant impulse of the community.¹

¹ Clayton Colman Hall, ed., *Baltimore, Its History and Its People* (New York, 1912) I, p. 357.

Powell substantiated his thesis by describing the rebuilding of the burnt district, the construction of a sewage system, the smooth paving of cobblestone streets, the enlarging of the park system, and numerous other major public improvements undertaken following the fire. Subsequently the impression took hold in the popular mind that the fire instigated the reforms.² It is the purpose of this article, based on a fresh examination of the evidence, to raise the question: to what extent did the fire spur reform?

The progressive movement at the turn of the century can be broken down into four categories. In Baltimore, as throughout the nation during the era of Bryan, La Follette, Roosevelt and Wilson, there were essentially four kinds of reforms: political reform, economic reform, social reform and city planning, or the planning of new buildings and public improvements relative to the growth of cities.

Political reform focused on electing honest, efficient and capable men to office; broadening and strengthening the franchise by support of direct primaries, woman's suffrage and the direct election of United States Senators; and ensuring that elections were honest. Political reform also sought to oust corrupt or dictatorial political machines and to keep them out in ensuing years.

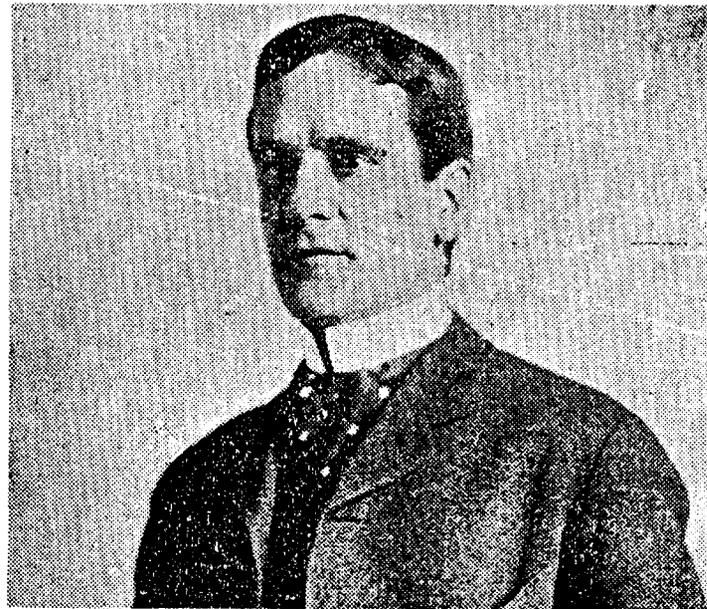
In Baltimore, the old Gorman-Rasin Democratic machine was defeated in 1895, nine years before the fire. The Republican city governments which succeeded it, however, were very little improvement. Frustrated by the lack of progress through either major party, and yet realizing that a third party probably could not win, the reformers organized themselves as a pressure group holding the balance of power between the two major parties. Their purpose was to force the major parties to accept their programs as the price for election victories. In the mayoral election of 1899, the new policy worked as the reformers persuaded the Democratic organization to put forward a reputable candidate and Thomas G. Hayes was elected.³

² To the point that when the author was preparing to talk to a group of Baltimoreans the day after this paper was presented to the Maryland Historical Society in November, 1968, one well educated, intelligent hostess remarked, "oh yes, the fire did result in a great many reforms here." Similarly, Hollins College students from Baltimore frequently link the fire with urban reform.

³ James B. Crooks, *Politics and Progress: The Rise of Urban Progressivism in Baltimore, 1895-1911* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1968), p. 98.

H. L. Mencken described Hayes as "a very shrewd lawyer, an unreconstructed Confederate veteran, a pious Methodist, and a somewhat bawdy bachelor."⁴ As mayor, Hayes picked first-rate men to run the city government. One of several such appointments was that of Joseph Packard to be School Board President. Packard initiated the reform of the city's very backward school system.

When Hayes began to try to organize his own political machine looking toward re-election in 1903, reformers again cooperated with regular Democrats to elect the young, competent Robert McLane. McLane died tragically four months after the fire, but his successors carried on honest, efficient, and enlightened city government. By 1906, Charles Grasty, the editor of the *Baltimore News*, and one of the leaders of the reform movement, could refer to Baltimore as a city without graft, adding that "good and faithful service has become the



Robert M. McLane. 1815-1898.
Maryland Historical Society.

⁴ H. L. Mencken, *Newspaper Days 1899-1906* (New York, 1941), p. 41.

standard requirement that the community habitually and automatically exacts of its public officials."⁵

In sum, political reform began substantially before the fire in 1895. Not only had city government been made honest and efficient, but the city had a new charter drafted in 1898 and direct primary elections introduced in 1902 to choose party candidates. Additional reforms followed the fire, such as the direct election of United States Senators and legislation to abolish corrupt campaign practices. But the momentum had begun well before 1904 and the relationship between the fire and political reform in Baltimore was minimal.

The second area of urban reform in Baltimore during the progressive era was economic reform. Actually, economic reform was minimal because of the restricted powers of city government to tax itself or control operations of corporations within city limits. By 1901, Americans were beginning to realize that not even state governments had the power to regulate big business corporations, and the function of corporate regulation was shifting to Washington. Still, there were inequities in property assessments and taxation. There were lucrative franchises available to the local public utilities. And there was the need to regulate child labor, factories, dairies, slaughter houses and bakeries in the interest of public health.

In Baltimore, attempts to close loopholes in property taxation began with the Hayes administration in its appointment of two reformers to the Appeals Tax Court in 1899. The regulation of factories, slaughterhouses, dairies and bakeries also began in the 1890's and evolved over the next twenty years in both sophistication and effectiveness. Efforts to regulate the public utilities began in the first Republican reform administration in 1895, but progress was blocked until 1910 due to the influential opposition of the utility companies as well as the city's own lack of authority to act. State legislation was required and the rural-oriented, machine-dominated General Assembly refused to cooperate. To a lesser extent, the delay was also due to the fire as reformers turned their attention to rebuilding the burnt district, rather than combatting the utilities. In short, in the area of economic reform as in the area of

political reform, the fire probably had little effect as a catalyst.⁶

Social reform was the third area of urban progressivism and included provision for child labor legislation, public health reforms, playgrounds, compulsory school attendance and juvenile courts. Again, reforms began before the fire and continued afterwards. In 1892, Dr. William H. Welch of the Johns Hopkins Medical School challenged Baltimoreans to provide pure water, food inspection, clean streets and a sanitary sewage system to correct urban environmental deficiencies. Welch's colleague, Dr. William Osler, helped to found the Maryland Public Health Association in 1897 to improve environmental conditions, especially for the urban poor.

Reforms helped all Baltimoreans, but it was the urban poor who were most susceptible to the diseases caused by garbage-strewn alleys, contaminated foods and crowded housing. Moreover, once incapacitated by sickness, the poor also lacked the resources to obtain adequate medical care. Mary Richmond of the Charity Organization Society estimated in 1898 that one-fourth of all urban poverty could be traced to sickness and disease. In addition, it was the poor child who lived in a tenement, worked in a factory, missed school, and was forced to play in the streets. While doctors like Welch and Osler, and social workers like Miss Richmond voiced concern for the urban poor, James Cardinal Gibbons spoke similarly in behalf of the enlightened churchmen of Baltimore in 1903 in attacking the iniquities of the sweatshop and later the unjust discrimination of Negro disfranchisement.⁷

Not only were there spokesmen for social reform before 1904, but there was action too. Before 1904, either the city council or General Assembly passed laws to regulate child labor and sweatshops, required compulsory school attendance, established juvenile courts, and financed public baths. Enforcement of the child labor and sweatshop reforms came after the fire as did city subsidies for playgrounds and recreational programs and efforts to reform the housing code.

Of particular significance was a major campaign to combat tuberculosis, which reached a climax with a week-long exhibit attended by an estimated 50,000 people at the Johns Hopkins

⁶ Crooks, *Politics and Progress*, 108 ff.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 155 ff.

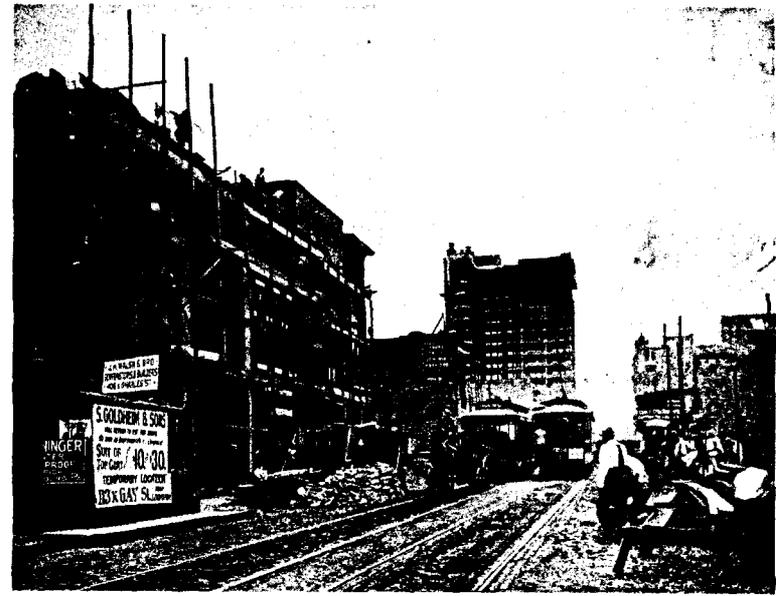
⁵ Baltimore News, December 22, 1906.

University in January, 1904. The exhibit dramatized the history and nature of the dread disease, presented statistics on its prevalence and rate of mortality, displayed models of proposed dispensaries and sanitarium, and sponsored daily lectures on the subjects. Among the displays were a series of photographs of Baltimore tenements and sweatshops showing overcrowding, inadequate ventilation and poor sanitation which were all conducive to the spread of tuberculosis. Speakers urged employers to limit working hours for children and provide sanitary workshops; philanthropists to build model tenements and sanitarium; and cities to build sanitarium and public housing similar to those in Glasgow, Scotland.

The effect of the educational campaign was limited. The Baltimore Fire followed within a week of the exhibit's closing, diverting attention from the issue. Instead, attention focused upon rebuilding the burnt district and therefore disrupted reform efforts in behalf of the crusade against tuberculosis. In effect, the relationship of the Baltimore fire to social reform was similar to its relationship with economic and political reform. The results were minimal in stimulating progress. If anything, the fire retarded reform diverting attention from the social, economic and political problems already at hand.

Still, the fire is associated with a vast program of public improvements in Baltimore, and correctly so. These public improvements are perhaps the progressive era's counterpart to today's urban renewal and urban planning programs, and it is to this aspect of urban progressivism and its relationship to the fire that must be examined.

The whole tradition of city planning, so rich in the histories of Ancient Rome and Louis XIV's reign, was revived in France under Louis Napoleon in the mid-nineteenth century when Baron von Haussmann rebuilt Paris. In the United States, planning revived with the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 and the erection of the Great White City on the shores of Lake Michigan. From Chicago, the impetus spread to Cleveland's monumental civic center, to Washington where L'Enfant's original plans for the Mall were finally completed, and to Baltimore, where in 1899—the same year that Mayor Hayes and the reform Democrats came to power—Theodore Marburg organized the Municipal Art Society.



View of Baltimore Street looking west from Frederick Street.
Photograph by Eduard Löllmann.
Maryland Historical Society Graphics Collection.

The Municipal Art Society's first efforts were in the area of urban beautification: commissioning a mural for the new courthouse, two statues for Mount Vernon Place, and interior decoration in dreary school classrooms. Of greater long-term importance, however, was the formation of two committees: one to implement the recent reports of the Baltimore Sewerage Commission, and the other to propose plans for the development of the recently annexed area north of North Avenue.⁸ The sewage committee worked to remedy Baltimore's somewhat dubious reputation as the nation's largest unsewered city, persevering through the partisan finagling of both Democrats and Republicans in city council and General Assembly. The annex committee hired Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., of the famous Olmsted Brothers landscape architectural firm, to plan

⁸ Minutes of the Municipal Art Society of Baltimore City, April 27, 1900 and January 9, 1901 (in possession of Douglas H. Gordon of Baltimore).

the development of the recent additions to the city. Unfortunately there was as yet no topographical survey of the annexed area, and Olmsted was forced to limit his planning to developing a coordinated park system.

The park plan, however, was a masterpiece that served as a basis for park development for two generations.⁹ In it Olmsted compared Baltimore to Boston, New York, London and Paris to determine the city's needs in total park development. He analyzed the function of parks relative to population density and terrain. Basically he urged the development of three kinds of parks. First, the city needed neighborhood parks and squares to be opened in the densely populated areas to provide recreational facilities for children, youths and adults. Baltimore was particularly lacking in these. Second, the city required large wooded parks on its outskirts, like Baltimore's Druid Hill Park, to provide a complete contrast to the city's sights and sounds. Third, the city needed attractively landscaped parkways or roads radiating out from the heart of the city. Some would be primarily for the carriage trade, but others were planned for commercial traffic in order to combine the advantages of beauty and utility.

In his report delivered to the Municipal Art Society in November, 1903, Olmsted proposed a comprehensive plan of park development. He recommended the acquisition of thirty-six small parks and squares, averaging between four and five acres in size in the densely populated areas of Baltimore. He proposed adding to the five existing suburban parks—Wyman, Druid Hill, Clifton, Montebello and Patterson—plus the creation of a new waterfront park at the mouth of the Middle Branch in southwest Baltimore. He also suggested the acquisition of what he called "outlying reservations" in anticipation of future metropolitan growth. These lands would be along Back River by the bay, Loch Raven, the Patapsco River gorge, Curtis Creek and in the Green Spring Valley. His parkways followed two approaches. First, he took advantage of the city's hilly terrain with its many streams running through to propose parks and scenic drives along Gwynns Falls, Jones Falls, Stoney Run and Herring Run. Second, he sought to widen and make

⁹ Olmsted Brothers, *Report of the Development of Public Grounds for Greater Baltimore* (Baltimore, 1904), pp. 11-50 *passim*.

attractive commercial highways that fanned out in all directions from downtown Baltimore.

While Olmsted studied the intricacies of park development, Baltimoreans began to realize that partisan politics was delaying construction of a sewage system and other city improvements. In the mayoral election of May, 1903, both candidates promised to support a nonpartisan sewage commission. In November, Governor-elect Edwin Warfield offered to sign any sewage bill upon which the city leaders agreed.¹⁰

Following the city elections Grasty began a newspaper campaign in behalf of public improvements in the Baltimore *News*. Reporters interviewed Baltimore architect J. B. Noel Wyatt upon his return from Europe. Wyatt, a director of the Municipal Art Society, criticized Baltimore for "idly resting on its old-time reputation as an attractive place on account of such agreeable, but superficial and transient elements as hospitality, sociability, low rents and cheap food markets." European cities, in contrast, gave an impression of having good order and being well kept. Streets were well paved; parks and public gardens were used and enjoyed by all classes of society; and there was an appreciation of and willingness to pay for public art and architecture. Even in the United States, Wyatt saw "towns all over the country . . . spending millions in complete sewer systems, street paving and various other improvements on a vast scale," while Baltimore stagnated. Cardinal Gibbons agreed that Europeans in contrast to Baltimoreans took pride in their cities: "They interest themselves very earnestly in civic improvements and in every measure that tends to beautify the city and render the country attractive."¹¹

City officials responded energetically to the calls for public improvements. Mayor McLane endorsed sewer construction and asked city department heads to determine the cost of providing adequate schools, paved roads and fire engine houses. City Solicitor Williams Cabell Bruce began drafting enabling acts to provide bond issues to finance the public improvements.

Initially provision for park development was omitted from the mayor's plans. In December, 1903 Municipal Art Society representatives called upon McLane in behalf of the Olmsted

¹⁰ *News*, April 30, August 21, and November 14, 1903.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, November 13, 14, 17, 1903.



Dr. William Henry Welch. 1850-1934.
Maryland Historical Society Graphics Collection.

plan, and after some initial hesitation the Board of Estimates on February 2nd agreed to approve a park loan along with the other proposed public improvements. Four days later and one day before the Fire, Baltimore's delegation to the General Assembly announced its readiness to support the bills to provide sewers, street paving, schools, parks, and engine houses for the city. Baltimore's major program for public improvements was ready to begin, and just in the nick of time. Further delay might have buried the program in the ashes of the Baltimore fire.¹²

Baltimore progressives had gotten a program of planned public improvements off the drawing board and partly approved *before* the Fire had begun. Still to be decided would be the vote in the General Assembly, and more important, the vote of Baltimoreans in the referendum that would follow. One wonders if the fire had come first whether there would have been

¹² *Ibid.*, January 19, February 2, 6, 1904.

the time to make the plans and gain the support of local officials for the program that Mayor McLane submitted to the General Assembly.

The great Baltimore Fire of February 7, 1904 began on a quiet winter Sunday. A spark from a discarded cigar or match burst into flame in the basement of a downtown dry goods store, igniting the blankets and cotton goods stored there. The fire spread rapidly and within minutes was blazing out of control. The flames leaped from building to building and overcame efforts of more than 1200 firemen to extinguish them. The fire raged for thirty hours. It threatened residential East Baltimore, but the wind shifted and drove it into the harbor. Seventy blocks, 1,526 buildings and more than 2,500 business enterprises were burnt out. Twenty banks, eight hotels, nine newspaper plants, and nine transportation offices, including the home office of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, were gutted. Fortunately, no one was killed, and few homes were destroyed.¹³

No one knew how Baltimoreans would react to the destruction of the commercial heart of their city. The last disaster to cripple Baltimore had been the Civil War. Before 1861 the city had been the financial and commercial capital of the South. In 1850, it was the second largest city in the country. The war, however, completely severed the economic bonds between the city and the South.—It led to a military occupation and to imposed political conformity. Perhaps worst of all, it tore families asunder as brothers and cousins joined the Confederacy to fight against brothers and cousins loyal to the Union. The disaster of the war sapped the vitality of an entire generation. Economically, Baltimoreans became more conservative; politically, they became apathetic; and psychologically, they became less daring and less willing to take a chance.

In 1904, however, a new generation was taking control. Grasty had stimulated journalistic reform; Charles Bonaparte had led the political reformers; and men like Alexander Brown had spurred a dynamic policy of financial consolidation in the railroads and utilities. Yet leaders like Grasty worried about how Baltimoreans would respond to this latest disaster. Many

¹³ For a detailed description of the fire see Harold A. Williams, *Baltimore Afire* (Baltimore, 1954).

of the Civil War generation still dominated segments of Baltimore life. Their apathy or the cautious response of the generation could result in a slow rebuilding with few improvements. A dynamic response could stimulate the entire city to become truly progressive. The nature of the response would depend largely upon the city's leadership and upon the willingness of its citizens to follow.

Grasty identified the challenge in a *News* editorial issuing a call to greatness for all Baltimoreans:

To suppose that the spirit of our people will not rise to the occasion is to suppose that our people are not genuine Americans. Chicago dates her greatness from the great fire of 1871; Boston's fire in 1872 . . . stimulated Boston's improvement and development; even little Galveston, overwhelmed by a flood which seemed calculated to wipe out all hope and courage in that town, rose up after the calamity more vigorous and more aggressive than ever. Baltimore will do likewise. We shall make the fire of 1904 a landmark not of decline but of progress.¹⁴

On the Friday following the fire, Mayor McLane appointed a sixty-three member Citizens Emergency Committee to advise him on rebuilding the burnt district. Comparable committees had been formed in Chicago and Boston following their fires. All of the men were professional and business leaders in Baltimore. Their response would determine in large measure Baltimore's reaction to the fire. By choosing the dynamic Willam Keyser as chairman of the committee, McLane contributed substantially toward ensuring that the response would be progressive.

Keyser immediately divided the group into subcommittees to solve the problems of devastation, reconstruction, legislation and finance. Over the weekend they met to begin their plans. By Monday, the subcommittee on legislation was ready with drafts of a bill to create a Burnt District Commission to supervise the reconstruction of the area. The subcommittee on street improvements met at Theodore Marburg's home, and with the advice of Olmsted, planned the widening of eleven major traffic arteries in the district. Olmsted also recommended the purchase and rebuilding by the city of all the wharves

¹⁴ *News*, February 8, 1904.

along Pratt Street. He believed that if municipally owned, the docks could be reconstructed for beauty as well as utility and would have space set aside for purposes of recreation. Other proposals included laying sewer connections in anticipation of a city-wide system, smoothpaving the streets, a park in Marsh Market, and a limitation on the height of new buildings in the area to 150 feet. The improvements would cost \$9 million, \$5 million of which would be financed by a bond issue and the remainder from the proceeds of the city's recent sale of the Western Maryland Railroad. A few committee members opposed spending such large sums, but Keyser, who lost nine warehouses in the fire, urged that all necessary improvements be made without regard to costs and the committee approved the plans.¹⁵

The momentum of the initial response by the press, mayor and Citizens Emergency Committee carried to the General Assembly which quickly passed legislation enabling the city to carry out its plans. These included a six million dollar modernization of the harbor. Mayor McLane appointed a Burnt District Commission to execute the plans, and the voters of Baltimore endorsed the harbor loan in the elections of May.¹⁶

Opposition to the plan came from the Republican-dominated Second Branch of the city council, which blocked the proposed widening of the city's major thoroughfare, Baltimore Street. Baltimore Street property owners and their agents objected to the widening as unnecessary. They claimed the proposal would mean smaller property lots and buildings, lower valuations and higher taxes. Grasty, Keyser and Theodore Marburg disagreed. Keyser and Grasty also owned property fronting on Baltimore Street and offered to donate strips of it to facilitate the street widening. Marburg argued that the widening of Baltimore Street was "one of the most important features of the improvement plan. If Baltimore is rebuilt with that thoroughfare at the present width, the most conspicuous instance of congested traffic will remain." The Republican councilmen backed by the property holders remained adamant

¹⁵ Citizens Emergency Committee Minute Book, MS. 237, Md. Hist. Soc.; and *News*, February 17, 22, 23, 1904.

¹⁶ *News*, March 11 and May 18, 1904.

and excluded Baltimore Street in their approval of the plan to rebuild downtown Baltimore. The result was as Marburg predicted.¹⁷

The opposition to widening Baltimore Street slowed the momentum of civic renewal. In its wake, the Board of Estimates eliminated the Marsh Market park as well as Olmsted's proposed recreation pier. Harbor renewal continued, however, streets were widened, smooth-paved and graded in the burnt district, and a height limitation was placed upon new construction. Private interests rebuilt rapidly in the burnt district, and within two years few scars remained from the fire. Unfortunately no plan coordinated the private reconstruction in terms of form or function. City planning had not yet reached that stage of control. The result was a renewed business district in Baltimore, but also a lost opportunity to rebuild in the city's center with coordination, imagination and style. The results also showed that those who supported reform before the Fire responded with imagination, but many Baltimoreans remained unchanged in the way of the Baltimore Street property owners. In effect, the fire's immediate influence or stimulus to urban reform does not seem to have been very far-reaching.

But what about the long-term influence, particularly with regard to support for the planned public improvements endorsed by the mayor and legislative delegation before the Fire?

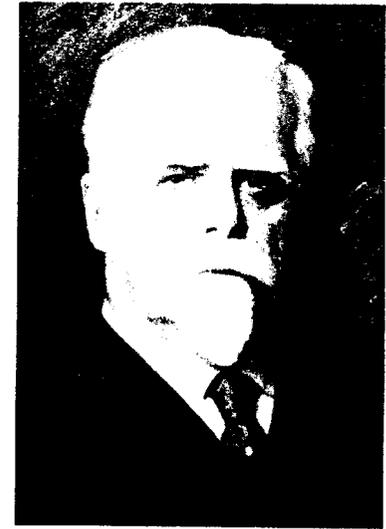
While Baltimoreans responded in varying ways to the fire, the city's other plans for public improvements awaited action. City solicitor William Cabell Bruce ensured their authorization by the General Assembly following the fire, but they also needed the support of the public in an election referendum. Delays resulted, first from the attention devoted to rebuilding the burnt district and then from the tragic death of Mayor McLane in June, 1904.¹⁸

His successor, Clay Timanus, president of the city council's Second Branch, was neither a planner nor a reformer, but fortunately he picked his advisors wisely. Closest to him were Solicitor Bruce and the new president of the Second Branch, George R. Gaither.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, March 23, 24, and April 1, 8, 18, 19, 21, 22, 1904.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, April 4 and May 31, 1904.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, May 31 and June 8, 1904.



Edwin Warfield. 1848-1920.
Maryland Historical Society

It is not clear whether Timanus, Gaither or Bruce originated the idea for the General Public Improvements Conference that the mayor called in December, 1904, but the idea caught the imagination of Baltimoreans. Delegates came from all sections and all classes of the city. From Old Town, East Baltimore and South Baltimore came local businessmen representing their sections of the city. The coal exchange, lumber exchange, tobacco board of trade, clothiers' board of trade, and like groups sent their representatives as did the neighborhood improvement associations from Walbrook, Peabody Heights, Waverly, Homestead and other areas of the city. City-wide business groups like the Chamber of Commerce, Board of Trade, and Merchants and Manufacturers' Association sent delegates along with the Federation of Labor, German-American Independent Citizens Union, Charity Organization Society and Municipal Art Society. Two hundred men, some planners, others seeking special improvements such as good roads for commerce, and still others seeking neighborhood schools, joined together in a united effort to improve Baltimore. Even partisan politics was put aside as Democrats and Republicans endorsed the conference.²⁰

²⁰ *Ibid.*, November 21, 23, 25, and December 3, 1904.

At the conference Gaither organized subcommittees responsible for each category of public improvements such as streets, schools and water. To coordinate the programs, the subcommittee chairman and secretaries were formed into an executive committee to set policy. Once organized, the committees met to assign priorities to public improvements. Three projects were endorsed for election referenda in May, 1905: a ten million dollar sewage loan, a one million dollar park loan, and a two million dollar Annex loan to conduct a topographical survey, open and pave new streets, bridge streams, and extend city services of garbage collection and street cleaning. Shortly after the new year began, committee members began their campaign to stir up public opinion to support the loans. All the committee members carried the program to their local trade, business and neighborhood associations while political leaders put pressure on ward politicians to secure their support. One of the most energetic of the evangelists for planned public improvements was Francis King Carey, a corporation lawyer. He argued that a half-hearted program would not suffice and that \$30 million should be spent if necessary. To the Shoe and Leather Board of Trade on the first anniversary of the Fire, Carey stressed the need for cooperation to promote a healthy, progressive city and urged the nurture of civic pride. "A city," he said, "will be great or small in direct ratio to the greatness or smallness of the character of its people." In April, Republicans and Democrats co-sponsored public improvement rallies. The result was the passage of the three loans by substantial majorities in all of Baltimore's wards.²¹

The success of the General Public Improvement Conference in behalf of the sewage, park and Annex loans persuaded Mayor Timanus and his advisors to keep the committees active in succeeding public improvement campaigns. During the following six years, its members (and successor groups under Mayor J. Barry Mahool) supported and secured ratification of loans to build new schools and engine houses, pave streets and enlarge the water supply. Developments did not always proceed smoothly, but between May, 1905 and May, 1911, Baltimoreans endorsed 11 of 12 bond referenda.²²

²¹ *Ibid.*, December 6, 8, 14, 1904; January 14, February 6, 7, 8, March 29, and April 4, 15, 29, 1905.

²² *Ibid.*, December 27, 1905, and January 4, 10, 11, 1906.

Doubtless the Baltimore Fire, and particularly the aftermath when Baltimoreans found themselves with the task of rebuilding the burnt district, contributed to the success of the program for planned public improvements. The shock of the fire followed by the strong leadership of Mayor McLane, Keyser and others, supported by the press, had extraordinary educational value for the citizenry. When the General Public Improvements Conference was called later in the year, it built on the momentum of the post-fire efforts.

Still, there were other factors involved. The fire gave civic leaders a chance to lead, but in all areas of urban reform, they were active before the fire. The fire contributed to preparing the man in the street for further programs of public improvements, but so had the recent suburban expansion into Walbrook, Peabody Heights and across the Annex. Suburbanites and citydwellers already wanted improvements and were ready to cooperate on a city-wide plan.

Similarly, the average voter had shown considerable political sophistication to vote Republican in 1895 and 1897, shift to the Democrats in 1899, split his ticket in 1903, and vote Democratic again in 1907—in part in the interest of urban reform. For this voter, the fire was but one of a variety of influences over a fifteen-year period that persuaded him to support progressivism in Baltimore.

Finally, one might conclude that where the fire was a factor contributing to awakening Baltimoreans to the need for planned public improvements, it was also a factor in diverting attention from, and thereby slowing, economic and social reform. Or, to put it another way, compared to the leadership provided by Baltimoreans like Bonaparte, Marburg, Garret, Keyser, Osler and Welch; compared to the educational influence of the progressive *Baltimore News* and later the *Sun*; and compared to the energies expended and reforms accomplished by organizations like the Baltimore Reform League, Charity Organization Society, Municipal Art Society and other groups, the fire played a comparatively minor role in the rise of urban progressivism in Baltimore.