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**IN GOTHAM'S SHADOW:  
BROOKLYN AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF GREATER NEW YORK**

by

**STEVEN A. LEVINE**

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York**

2002

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5/28/2002  
Date

  
Chair of Examining Committee  
Thomas Kessner

5/28/2002  
Date

  
Executive Officer  
James Oakes

Joshua Freeman  


Carol Berkin  


Gerald E. Markowitz  
Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

## THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

## Abstract

IN GOTHAM'S SHADOW:  
BROOKLYN AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF GREATER NEW YORK

by

Steven A. Levine

Advisor: Thomas Kessner

This dissertation analyzes the consolidation of Greater New York in 1898 and its effects on the borough/city of Brooklyn. America's fourth largest city, Brooklyn grew rapidly in the 1890s, but lacked the financial resources to build the infrastructure necessary for its expansion, especially a plentiful water supply and extensive transit system. Its political separation from Manhattan also slowed development by increasing competition between the region's two largest cities. Consolidation alleviated these problems by giving Brooklyn access to Manhattan's larger tax base and reducing regional conflicts. These changes made it possible to construct the Catskills water system for all five boroughs and a large mass transit system which physically connected Brooklyn and Manhattan. This, in turn, led to the arrival of hundreds of thousands of immigrants in Brooklyn, increasing social tension within the borough. Consolidation also brought tenement house reform and zoning, ideas that originated in

Manhattan, across the East River to Brooklyn. The creation of Greater New York replaced Brooklyn's decentralized educational system with a centralized system that increased funding and modernized the administration and curriculum of the city's schools.

This centralization of power meant that Brooklyn had to acknowledge its secondary status within Greater New York and accept rule from Manhattan. The fate of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences (BIAS), the borough's preeminent cultural institution, is an example of this changed relationship. After consolidation BIAS gained access to Manhattan's tax base, but found itself on the region's periphery, where it received less attention and support from civic and governmental leaders. This dissertation concludes with a comparison of the consolidation of Greater New York with those in other metropolitan areas, showing how consolidation was an important tool for urban development nationally. It suggests that the failure to expand the size of cities in the twentieth century has led to poor regional planning, increased racial and economic polarization, and central cities cut off from the greater wealth and prosperity in neighboring suburbs.

## **Preface**

My parents, grandparents and great-grand parents lived or grew up in Brooklyn, but my parents followed the post-World War II path out of New York City into the rapidly developing suburbs of Nassau County on Long Island. For me, Brooklyn was an alien place where my grandparents, aunt, uncle, and cousins lived. A twenty-seven mile trip on the Long Island Expressway, Cross Island and Belt Parkways took my parents, my brother and me to Marine Park, a neighborhood of semi-attached single family homes on the outer edges of Brooklyn. Arriving at my grandparent's house on Ryder Street, it seemed to my young mind to be neither part of New York City, nor a suburb. Our family gatherings rarely left Marine Park and this neighborhood became my vision of Brooklyn.

Only after I graduated from college in 1988 and worked and later lived in Brooklyn did I begin to understand the borough's diversity and its urbanity. Brooklyn was different from the other outer boroughs of New York City. It was older and had a stronger sense of identity and more developed civic institutions and organizations. After moving to Brooklyn in 1993, I adopted it as my hometown, a separate world from Manhattan.

Despite my attachment to Brooklyn, it did not occur to me to write about it until the Spring of 1996. It began with a paper on Andrew H. Green, New York City's master planner in the nineteenth century and the "Father of Greater New York," in Professor Lou Masur's seminar in the Spring of 1996. During my research on Green's life, I became curious about the widespread opposition to consolidation in the city of Brooklyn and its relationship to Manhattan. After I completed my oral examinations the following year, I began my search for

a dissertation topic and looked at Brooklyn again. I wanted to know what happened to Brooklyn, a city of over a million people, when it lost its independence. In other words, what did consolidation do to Brooklyn?

After deciding on this topic, I began the long process of completing this dissertation, one that would not have been completed without the help of many people. While writing this dissertation, I benefitted from the advice and criticism of three dissertation writing groups. The first, a monthly luncheon led by Ann Fabian helped me formulate my chapters. The second was a larger group that endured the criticisms of my advisor Thomas Kessner. During this time I was able to finally create a framework for my research and organize my chapters more coherently. During David Berger's seminar, I was able to use this roadmap to revise my chapters and complete my dissertation.

Like so many other graduate students, the number of people who helped me during this process are too numerous to mention, but in keeping with tradition I would like to mention a few. Angelo Angelis, despite his devotion to the Yankees, has been a good friend to this diehard Mets fan through course work, teaching at Baruch, and completing our dissertations. His wit, criticism and baseball analysis helped me finish this dissertation and maintain my sanity. Cindy Lobel, Kathy Feeley, Julie Miller, with me and provided helpful criticism. Jeff Gold has been a stalwart friend who read many chapters and edited the entire manuscript before my defense, providing invaluable advice.

Nine years ago I took my first class with Thomas Kessner and quickly realized that I had found my dissertation advisor. His incisive criticism and questioning sometimes deflated

my ego, but made me a better historian and greatly improved the quality of this dissertation. I cannot thank him enough for his willingness to read and re-read chapters, and then edit my final draft. I only hope that my work has lived up to his high expectations.

Carol Berkin's tutelage was integral to my training as a historian and I was honored to have her as a member of my dissertation committee. Equally important were the social activities she organized, such as the cinecrappè movie club, and the help she gave to me and many other graduate students in surviving this arduous process.

I would also like thank Joshua Freeman and Gerald Markowitz for sitting on my dissertation committee. Josh read some of the early drafts of the dissertation and gave good guidance. During the defense, both he and Jerry gave useful criticism of my dissertation that will aid me in transforming it into a book.

My chapter on the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences would not have been possible without the help of Deborah Wythe, chief librarian at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, and Sherry Hunter of the Brooklyn Academy of Music Archive in directing me to sources on the Institute, as well as providing a roadmap to understanding its complex organization. Much of my research took place at the Municipal Archive and Library, I want to thank the staffs of these two city agencies, especially Ken Cobb, the director of the Municipal Archives. The New York Public Library was another important repository and access to a seat and shelf at the NYPL's Wertheim Room made my research easier and more pleasurable. I can now tell Wayne Furman at special collection that I will not imminently need to renew my pass for the Wertheim Room.

My parents, Melvin and Vera Levine, encouraged my love of history from a very early age, even taking their ten-year-old son to Civil War battlefields. In retrospect this may not have been their first choice for a vacation, but they have never faltered in their support and belief in me. They also showed good judgement, discretion and patience, asking only infrequently when my dissertation would be finished. I cannot thank them enough for their support and love throughout my life.

My wife, Michele Mark Levine, a person not known for her patience, demonstrated her deep love by never threatening divorce while I wrote my dissertation. She had greater faith in me than I did in myself and I would not have finished without her support. She read many chapters in their early stages and withstood my sometimes harsh responses to her editing suggestions. I cannot thank her enough for her love and support.

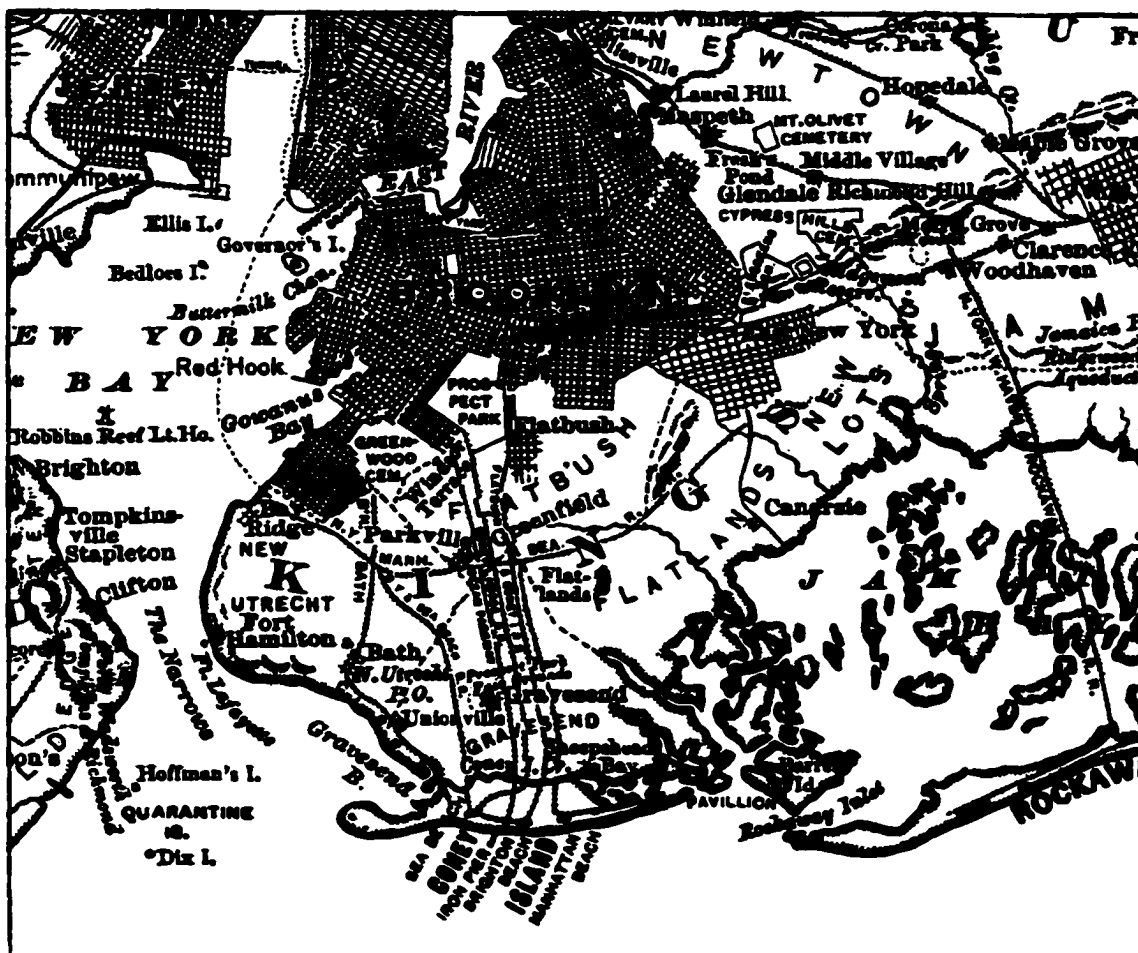
Last, but certainly not least, I thank my son Nathaniel. He has not directly influenced this dissertation and his arrival into our family three and a-half- years ago slowed my work. More important is the joy he has brought to my life and how he inspired me to finish my dissertation before he is old enough to read it. I only hope that he enjoys living in the Brooklyn of the future as much as I have enjoyed writing of its past.

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Detail of a map from Appleton's Dictionary of New York and Its Vicinity, 1884  
 From *Brooklyn Almanac*, edited by Margaret Latimer (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Educational  
 & Cultural Alliance, 1984) Collection, Elliott Willensky.

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

Urban leaders in the late nineteenth century believed that cities needed to grow in size and population to prosper. They viewed the annexation of territory as a necessary strategy for extending urban development and creating more effective governance. Bigness was a virtue in its own right and a city's boosters measured progress by the size and population of a city and its level of economic diversity. Supporters of consolidation also believed that a larger city could be run more efficiently through greater economies of scale and improved regional planning, and that its expanded tax base would make a larger pool of capital available for public investment. By the end of the nineteenth century many American cities, including the-four largest, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia and Brooklyn-had grown by consolidating greater territory and population under their control.

No consolidation was more ballyhooed than the creation of Greater New York in 1898. When New York City annexed its neighbors and brought the five boroughs of what would be called Greater New York under a single government, the city assured its dominance over all other American metropolises. My dissertation analyzes the effects of consolidation on the city/borough of Brooklyn, Manhattan's partner and rival across the East River. It shows how Brooklyn, America's fourth largest city, developed as Manhattan's satellite and how the consolidation of 1898 affected it economically, culturally and politically. This study provides insight into Brooklyn's character and the effect of this Progressive Era centralization of power on its economic, political and social development. Much of the literature on the Progressive

Era describes it as a time when government, the economy and culture became more national in scope. Brooklyn's experience, as both an independent city and a borough of Greater New York, demonstrates the existence of contradictory trends in the process of urban amalgamation. Brooklyn's self-image and its resistance to consolidation, sustained by local newspapers, cultural institutions and government, shows that local identities continued to play an important role for individuals and communities despite the change in political boundaries. Simultaneously, the growth of the metropolitan region demonstrated the need for the increased political and economic coordination that consolidation could provide, challenging the viability of Brooklyn as an independent city<sup>1</sup>

In *Crabgrass Frontier The Suburbanization of the United States*, Kenneth T.

Jackson refers to consolidation as a form of urban imperialism. Many Brooklynites from the late nineteenth century to the present have described the creation of Greater New York in similar terms.<sup>2</sup> Many of Brooklyn's citizens viewed Manhattan's annexation as a bold attack on the independence, civic culture, and traditions of their city. In Brooklyn the opposition to consolidation was led by the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, its largest newspaper, and wealthy Protestants, who formed the League of Loyal Citizens in 1894. They saw annexation as an

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<sup>1</sup>See Alfred D. Chandler, *The Visible Hand The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge: MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977); Martin Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism, 1900-1916: The Market, the Law, and Politics* (New York, 1988); Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York, 1967).

<sup>2</sup> The most recent broadside was John Tierney's "What if Brooklyn Hadn't Surrendered?," *New York Times Magazine*, December 28, 1997. In his article Tierney blames consolidation for almost every conceivable problem Brooklyn has suffered.

attempt to overwhelm their neighborhoods with immigrants, destroying “the city of houses and churches” they aimed to preserve. Although their opponents in the Consolidation League of Brooklyn correctly argued that the creation of Greater New York would lead to reduced property taxes, this was of secondary importance to them. The Loyal Citizens believed annexation would make Brooklyn too much like New York City, with its Tammany Hall, tenements and immigrants.<sup>3</sup>

In many respects the Loyal Citizens were right. Although Brooklyn was more heterogeneous than they suggested, consolidation accelerated the transformation of Brooklyn from a haven for middle and upper class Protestants into a more heterogeneous borough that included the immigrant masses arriving in great numbers from Eastern and Southern Europe. This borough of immigrants, romanticized in documentaries, films and novels, was brought into existence in part by the infrastructure and development fostered by consolidation and the greater planning powers inherent in a larger city. But for New York City’s tax base which funded the public works necessary to support a rapidly growing population, these immigrants and their children might not have been able to settle in Brooklyn.

In contrast to the Brooklyn separatists, consolidation’s leading proponent, Andrew H. Green, saw little benefit to local control. He ridiculed his opponents as parochial Sachems (a reference to Tammany Hall politicians)

who cling to the traditions of barbaric times, and seek to preserve their clans and

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<sup>3</sup>David C. Hammack, *Power and Society Greater New York at the Turn of the Century* (New York: 1982), p. 210-214.

clanships by fencing them out upon little lines of narrow demarcations against the gathering strength of popular dominion. . . .<sup>4</sup>

Green saw only progress in the creation of Greater New York. The unification of the metropolis meant greater efficiency and the elimination of barriers to development. He cared little for what his opponents saw as Brooklyn's unique character, focusing on the benefits that consolidation would bring to the entire region.

Anti-consolidationists before and after 1898 did not necessarily dispute this point. In some ways, a larger, more powerful city could accomplish more than its individual parts, but they worried that the countervailing costs were too high.<sup>5</sup> Brooklyn's loyalists, past and present, have derided the annexation as the "Great Mistake," arguing that Greater New York ignores the needs of Brooklyn leading to its economic and cultural slippage.<sup>6</sup>

Like many historical debates, this one lacks any empirical basis for such assessments. Earlier studies have looked at the political process, describing why different groups and individuals supported or opposed consolidation. These studies give us a better understanding

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<sup>4</sup> Andrew Haswell Green, *Communication on the Subject of a Consolidation of Areas About the City of New York Under One Government*. Reprinted in John Foord *The Life and Public Services of Andrew Haswell Green*. (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1913) p. 294.

<sup>5</sup>Interestingly, with the benefit of salient examples, such as the policies of Robert Moses and Jane Jacob's powerful critique of twentieth century urban development, a more complex understanding of consolidation has developed that views it more critically. See Robert Caro *The Power Broker Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1974) and Jane Jacobs *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961).

<sup>6</sup>See Robert E. Murphy. "The Great Mistake of 1898" *Brooklyn Bridge*. January 1998.

of why consolidation occurred and the arguments for and against them, but they fail to investigate and analyze its effects. Supporters of consolidation cited better regional planning, centralization of political resources, reduced squabbling between the different parts of Greater New York, and more efficient government. Their opponents had a different list: neglect of the outer boroughs, an increase in Tammany's power and loss of local control.<sup>7</sup>

This dissertation discusses the impact of consolidation on Brooklyn's municipal, cultural, and economic landscape. Stating baldly that consolidation was good or ill is too simplistic, implying that you can total up complex forces on a single axis. But the more expansive function of consolidation provides the basis for a dispassionate history of Brooklyn and its modernization in the early years of the American Century.

What is clear is consolidation changed certain things. This dissertation looks at how it affected Brooklyn in four areas: public works, planning, education and the aspirations of Brooklyn's civic elite. Chapter Two places consolidation in historical context. It describes the political, social and economic development of Brooklyn before 1898. The rapid growth of New York City in the nineteenth century spilled over to Brooklyn transforming it from a small agricultural village into the nation's third largest city before the Civil War. Brooklyn's spectacular growth continued into the 1890s, but by then it confronted limits: a shortage of tax

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<sup>7</sup>See Harold Coffin Syrett, *The City of Brooklyn, 1865-1898; A Political History* (1944; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1968); Hammack, *Power and Society*; George Alexander Mazaraki "The Public Career of Andrew Haswell Green" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1966); Barry Jerome Kaplan "A Study in the Politics of Metropolitanization. The Greater New York City Charter of 1897" (Ph.D. Dissertation, SUNY Buffalo, 1975).

revenue and an inability to borrow money caused by its political separation from Manhattan, where the bulk of the region's tax base resided. Brooklyn's inability to access Manhattan's larger tax base meant that its property tax assessments were twice that of New York's. At the same time, as the needs of the city exceeded its borrowing power and it assumed the existing debt of the outlying towns it annexed, Brooklyn approached its state-mandated debt limit.<sup>8</sup>

Chapters Three, Four and Five show how the creation of Greater New York allowed Brooklyn to escape from this predicament and finance and plan its development and infrastructure. Chapter Two investigates how consolidation made it possible to finance Brooklyn's most vital resource, a clean and reliable freshwater supply. Increased demand for water plagued Brooklyn prior to consolidation.

In 1891 the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* wrote of a "water famine" after a water main break at Brooklyn's main pumping station. The following year a municipal water engineer declared that "Brooklyn, of all the great cities, stands alone in the fact she has no reserve pumping machinery." Brooklyn needed to repair and expand its water supply. Six years later Brooklyn had largely tapped its existing system and was unable to finance an expansion or gain access to a new watershed. The absence of a larger water supply threatened to increase the cost of fire insurance and limit economic and population growth. Consolidation, and the increased tax base and unified government it created, promised to create a water supply for all of Greater New York and to relieve Brooklyn's thirst.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Hammack, p. 198.

<sup>9</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 24, 1891, February 14, 1892, August 4, 1892.

Aside from water, Brooklyn's greatest need was a modern, well-integrated transportation system between Brooklyn and Manhattan. The two cities had earlier collaborated in the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge, which was completed in 1883. After the bridge opened Brooklyn's population and the numbers of commuters skyrocketed, but the companies that ran trains over the bridge failed to create a seamless commute between Brooklyn and Manhattan. Trains and trolleys from Brooklyn were unable to continue into Manhattan. Commuters were forced to take an additional train to their Manhattan destination. After the Brooklyn Bridge opened, the two cities failed to build new bridges or tunnels, even as commuters overflowed the Brooklyn Bridge's walkways and tramways. Brooklyn lacked the ability to finance a new bridge, while New York City's government faced strong opposition to a new bridge from uptown landowners who saw no reason to subsidize Brooklyn.

Consolidationists claimed that a larger and better planned city would lead to a well organized and efficient transportation system. Chapter Three will show how consolidation indeed transformed the unplanned and dysfunctional system of 1898 into a transportation network. These new transit connections changed the character of the entire region by dispersing Greater New York's immigrant population away from Manhattan and into the outer boroughs.

Tenement house reformers and progressives generally had been concerned about the plight of immigrants packed into overcrowded buildings in Manhattan and the potential this situation created for political and social upheaval. Concern about the living conditions of the "other half" led Manhattan reformers to support controls on land use to improve conditions in

tenement neighborhoods. Chapter Four will show how supporters of consolidation extended those ideas to all of Greater New York. Through tenement house reform and zoning legislation, they planned the size and configuration of the housing that immigrants in Brooklyn would live and later segregated middle and upper class neighborhoods from the borough's new immigrant neighborhoods.

Another goal of consolidationists was to centralize political power, believing that a single government could better administer managerial functions. They succeeded in changing the political structure of the region in 1898, creating a single government from five counties and forty municipalities. To insure passage of the charter, consolidationists accepted a decentralized government, which gave Brooklyn and the other boroughs a high degree of autonomy and control over portions of their capital budgets. This was the first battle over where power would lie in Greater New York, an issue that has continued to roil political waters for more than a century: the city educational system.

New York City had centralized its school administration in 1896 and education reformers wanted to use consolidation to extend their reforms to the other boroughs. Brooklyn loyalists and outer borough Republicans organized to maintain local control of schools. They believed that a centralized system would be controlled by Tammany Hall instead of the reformers, and locally controlled schools were more responsive to the needs of the community. During the negotiations over Greater New York's first charter, they successfully lobbied for a decentralized borough-based school system. This victory was only temporary, and progressive educators who supported consolidation almost immediately began a campaign to centralize

control of Greater New York's schools. Chapter Six examines how consolidation changed Brooklyn's public school system to create a better funded, more efficient system for Brooklyn's exploding population.<sup>10</sup>

Chapter Seven assesses the effect of consolidation on Brooklyn's civic elite by examining the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Science (BIAS) and attempts to develop a Brooklyn University. BIAS, which became Brooklyn's leading cultural institution in the 1890s, operated the Brooklyn Museum, Academy of Music, Botanic Gardens and Children's Museum. It emerged out of a growing optimism in Brooklyn's future, and its elite's desire for an arts and science institution to match their city's emerging stature. With the financial support of the City of Brooklyn, BIAS began construction on what would have been the largest museum in the world. This grandiose vision was something Brooklyn's boosters thought was necessary to establish their status as a great city and outdo their rival across the East River. Brooklyn issued construction bonds in the 1890s and completed the museum's first section in 1897, but plans for further expansion stalled when Brooklyn reached its debt limit.<sup>11</sup>

BIAS's plans proceeded after Brooklyn lost its political independence, but it was no longer the cultural centerpiece of a great city. The Brooklyn Museum was an institution in the center of Brooklyn, but consolidation placed BIAS and its plans on the geographical and political periphery. While building BIAS, Brooklyn's civic elite also attempted to create a Brooklyn University to provide opportunities for higher education to Brooklyn's middle and

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<sup>10</sup>Hammack, p. 223-227.

<sup>11</sup>The Brooklyn Museum today encompasses only one sixth of its planned design.

upper class Protestants. The outcome of these two efforts will show how consolidation changed the status and place of Brooklyn's elite in Greater New York and how they coped in this new environment.

Chapter Eight offers a broader discussion of the significance of consolidation and how it shaped Brooklyn and other satellite cities in the twentieth century. Many similarly situated metropolitan areas remain divided by municipal and/or state boundaries, including Minneapolis/Saint Paul, San Francisco/Oakland, and Philadelphia/Camden, NJ. In other cases, Los Angeles/San Fernando Valley, Cleveland/Ohio City and Pittsburgh/Allegheny, smaller cities have been absorbed by their more powerful neighbors. I contrast Brooklyn's experience with other satellite cities to assess the role of consolidation in urban development.

The dissertation closes with an examination of the meaning and legacy of consolidation in a modern context, addressing critiques of consolidation and of large governmental entities more generally. Consolidation represented, at once, the promise of regional planning and resource redistribution, and the danger of centralized power that ignored the needs of local communities. The conclusion treats the relevance of consolidation for today, as metropolitan areas continue to expand, while poor planning hinders economic development, ecological balance and social equity in the megalopolises that have grown around American cities in the twentieth century.

**Chapter Two:  
Consolidation: A Path to Prosperity or Prostration?**

“The Greater City is an object worthy of the highest civic pride; it would attract the wealth and culture of the continent, and would make us in time the greatest city in the world.”<sup>1</sup>

Albert Henschel, Secretary, Greater New York Commission, November 30, 1893

“It is a question whether good government is possible in such an immense, shifting, heterogeneous population of three million . . . with a large proportion of recent immigrants, and into which the political sewage of Europe is being dumped every week.”<sup>2</sup>

Rev. Dr. Richard S. Storrs, Church of the Pilgrims, Brooklyn Heights, January 1896

Two ceremonies took place on December 31, 1897 to commemorate the consolidation of Greater New York. In front of New York City’s Hall an overflow crowd gathered in a “cold, stinging rain” to celebrate New York’s annexation of its adjoining territories: the boroughs of Queens, the Bronx, Richmond (Staten Island) and Brooklyn. The revelers witnessed a huge fireworks display with “ceaseless showers of fire and stars of all the colors of the rainbow and huge fountains of shining silver and gold . . . with the crash of cannon and the roar of exploding bombs.” At midnight Greater New York was born and its flag was unfurled over City Hall. New York became the world’s second largest city and it was unequivocally the largest in America. The newspapers reported no dismay in New York City, (except among

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted from *Recorder* November 30, 1893 in “Municipal Program Conference Address on “Greater New York,” delivered by Albert E. Henschel, May 24<sup>th</sup>, 1894” (New York: 1894) p. 67-68.

<sup>2</sup>“Remarks at an anti-consolidation mass meeting, January 13, 1896,” in League of Loyal Citizens Pamphlet no. 6, p. 10. Quoted in David Hammack, *Power and Society Greater New York as the Turn of the Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) p. 211.

reformers and Republicans disturbed by the Tammany sweep in November's elections) and reports described consolidation as confirmation of New York's greatness and a sign of its hegemony.<sup>3</sup>

Brooklyn's City Hall was the scene of a more somber ceremony that characterized America's fourth largest city's ambivalence toward its demise. Anti-consolidationists had wanted no celebration, while pro-consolidationists feared a funeral. They compromised by calling it an "observance," but the mood was grim that evening. When Frederick Wurster, Brooklyn's last mayor, made a speech extolling the accomplishments of Brooklyn, he received his loudest applause when he announced "I could see no way clear but to veto the Consolidation Bill."<sup>4</sup> The evening closed with the reading of Will Carleton's mournful poem, "The Passing of Brooklyn."

We are aggrieved that a maiden of sweetness,  
Full of life's vigor and joy and completeness,  
With the rich charms of young womanhood laden,  
We are aggrieved that this fair, comely maiden,  
At midnight must die.

The poem ends on a more positive note with Brooklyn being reborn as the "soul of the great coming city," but Carleton and the speakers that evening were giving grudging acceptance to a fait accompli, not an affirmation of Greater New York's bright future.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>*New York Times*, January 1, 1898, p. 1-2.

<sup>4</sup>New York State's Constitution gave mayor's of Class A cities (250,000 or more) the power to veto bills affecting their city. For the bill to become law both houses of the legislature would have to pass the bill again (by a conventional majority) to override the Mayor's veto.

<sup>5</sup>*New York Times*, January 1, 1898, p. 2.

A different mood pervaded Brooklyn on April 25, 1834 when residents celebrated its incorporation as a city with “a civic procession, and public exercises in the First Presbyterian Church.” A year earlier Brooklyn attempted to gain a city charter from the State Legislature, but New York City “with the spirit of the dog in the manger” blocked the legislation. New York opposed this change because it planned to eventually annex Brooklyn, and its uptown property owners feared that if Brooklyn became a city it would siphon off development from their properties. Brooklyn overcame this opposition by forming alliances with upstate legislators.<sup>9</sup>

From 1800 to 1834 Brooklyn had grown from a small village facing lower Manhattan to a burgeoning bedroom community often described as the “first commuter suburb.” Its growth was integrally related to Manhattan’s, but its rapid development required a technological advance; the steam ferry. After Robert Fulton successfully tested his steam ferry, the *Clermont*, in 1812, he proposed that New York City establish steam ferry service between Manhattan and Brooklyn. Two years later regular service began between streets in New York and Brooklyn that would later be renamed Fulton. What had been a slow journey between Long Island and Manhattan by sail or horse powered ferry became a regular and relatively quick passage (five to fourteen minutes depending on conditions) that made commuting across the East River a realistic possibility. Shortly after its introduction, steam ferries dominated East River traffic. The Fulton Ferry Slip added additional boats and Brooklynites later demanded

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<sup>9</sup>Henry R. Stiles, *The Civil, Political, Professional and Ecclesiastical History and Commercial and Industrial Record of the County of Kings and The City of Brooklyn, N.Y. From 1663 to 1884*. (New York: W.W. Munsell & Co. Publishers, 1884) p. 145-147.

and got a South Ferry to meet the increased demand.

The greatest beneficiary of the steam ferry was Hezekiah B. Pierrepont, one of many transplanted New Englanders who would settle in Brooklyn during the nineteenth century. Pierrepont had originally made his money speculating on the national debt and in the 1790s invested his profits in mercantile pursuits in France. He returned home in 1802 and married Anna Marie Constable. Her father, William Constable, one of the largest landowners in the state, gave them a half million acres of land as a wedding present. Pierrepont used his wealth to buy sixty acres on Clover Hill, a bluff that overlooked the Fulton Ferry Slip and Brooklyn village. The Fulton Ferry, which Pierrepont invested in, provided the means for New York's affluent classes to live in Brooklyn and work in Manhattan. He planned to subdivide the property and build homes for wealthy merchants and professionals. Using his political clout, Pierrepont successfully petitioned the State Legislature for a village charter in 1816. The trustees of the village then laid out new streets, built sidewalks, installed water pumps, established a watch and created the amenities necessary to attract New York's professional and business classes across the East River. When a Yellow Fever epidemic struck New York City in 1822, Pierrepont's efforts paid off as he and other property owners in Brooklyn made huge profits subdividing their land to build homes for frightened New Yorkers who could afford to flee the city. Pierrepont advertised in the *Long Island Star* in 1823, "Gentlemen whose business or profession require their daily attendance in the city cannot better, or with less expense, secure the health and comfort of their families." Clover Hill, soon renamed Brooklyn

Heights, would remain Brooklyn's most exclusive neighborhood for decades to come.<sup>7</sup>

As Brooklyn grew in the 1820s, its leadership organized new institutions, such as the Brooklyn Apprentices' Library in 1825, as well as temperance and tract societies to proselytize residents. Another sign of growth was the consumption of alcohol. By 1832 Brooklyn had 178 taverns for 12,302 residents, explaining the nascent reform movement's interest in social control.<sup>8</sup>

The main impediment to Brooklyn's growth was the fight over "water rights." The colonial Dongan (1686), Cornbury (1708) and Montgomerie (1730) charters gave New York City control over Brooklyn's waterfront up to its low water mark, allowing New York to decide if and how many ferries could operate between them. New York also used this power to charge high fees to the ferry companies which passed them on to Brooklynites using the ferries. When the Fulton Ferry and its rival, the South Ferry ran into financial problems in 1839, New York allowed them to merge only after extracting a \$12,000 fee for a five year contract. (New York City continually tried to slow the expansion of ferries because it drew population away from Manhattan and diminished its tax base. It also unsuccessfully tried to recoup these losses by lobbying the Legislature for the power to tax the property of commuters

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<sup>7</sup>Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham A History of New York City to 1898* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p. 449-450; *Long Island Star*, December 25, 1823, quoted from David Ment *The Shaping of a City: A Brief History of Brooklyn* (Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Educational & Cultural Alliance, 1979) p. 31; Henry R. Stiles *The Civil, Political, Professional and Ecclesiastical History . . . .* p. 126-130.

<sup>8</sup>Stephen M. Ostrander *A History of the City of Brooklyn and Kings County Volume II* (Brooklyn: 1894) p. 68. Burrows and Wallace p. 532-533.

in Brooklyn.) Throughout the early 1840s, citizens held mass meetings calling for the creation of new ferry terminals, specifically the Montague Terminal to connect Montague Street in Brooklyn to Wall Street. The *Long Island Star* and *Brooklyn Eagle* supported these efforts and editorialized against New York's overbearing power. Finally in 1845, Brooklynites sent Judge John Greenwood to lobby the Legislature for a Ferry Commission to regulate the number of ferries and terminals. He succeeded in getting the law passed, only to have the commission be found unconstitutional because it violated New York City's rights. Not until 1851 did New York relent and allow the Montague Ferry and three others to open. When these new services also ran into financial problems, they merged with the Union Ferry Company creating a monopoly along the East River waterfront. The expansion of ferries was but one of many political and economic conflicts that dominated relations between the two cities.<sup>9</sup>

While starting from a smaller base than New York, Brooklyn's population increase was meteoric. In 1835, a year after its incorporation as a city, Brooklyn numbered 24,319 residents. Five years later it had increased to 36,233 and by 1850 had risen to 96,838. As Brooklyn's population grew, it also became more diverse. In the eighteenth century, Kings County was populated by Dutch and English farmers and their servants and slaves.<sup>10</sup> Urbanization changed the demographic balance in Brooklyn and its eastern neighbor

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<sup>9</sup>Jacob Judd "The History of Brooklyn, 1834-1855. Political and Administrative Aspects" diss. (New York University, 1959) p. 174-182.

<sup>10</sup>In the second half of the eighteenth century African-Americans comprised approximately a third of Kings County's population. Kenneth T. Jackson, editor *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995) p. 149, 922.

Williamsburg. Many New Englanders like Pierrepont left their declining farming communities to search for greater opportunities in New York City, settling in Brooklyn. They would become the dominant population in Brooklyn Heights. The New Englanders brought with them Protestant churches. Among these were two Congregational Churches, Henry Ward Beecher's Plymouth Church and Richard Storrs' Church of the Pilgrims, and the Unitarian Church of the Savior. New Englanders and their descendants rapidly formed Brooklyn's elite in business, society and politics.

Brooklyn became not only a bedroom community but also a center of manufacturing and shipping. Just as New York City's population growth had led to the development of Brooklyn Heights as a suburb, its growth as a manufacturing city led to similar changes across the East River in the 1840s and 50s. Overcrowding and dilapidation on New York's waterfront led merchants to look for new locations to bring their goods into New York Harbor. They turned to the South Brooklyn neighborhood of Red Hook, where Stranahan, Voorhis and Company dredged swamps to build piers and warehouses attracting the overflow from New York. Another manufacturing center was the U.S. Navy Yard bordering Wallabout Bay. The workers taking jobs in these and other manufacturing centers would arrive from Europe, especially from Ireland and Germany.<sup>11</sup>

A similar process was occurring across Wallabout Bay in Williamsburg. What had been a sparsely populated section of the Town of Bushwick saw rapid growth in the 1820s

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<sup>11</sup>Burrows and Wallace, p. 743, 746.

with the beginning of ferry service to Manhattan. In 1827 Williamsburg became an incorporated village, but its weak charter and the opposition of large property owners prevented the village from laying out streets and raising taxes for public improvements. Speculators used the uncertainty created by this situation to purchase land through taxation and assessment sales. "The corporation, indeed, became the cats-paw for domestic speculators in these matters, much to the detriment of the village, inasmuch as it gave rise to great uncertainty as to the titles of land."<sup>12</sup> These developments slowed but did not stop the development of Williamsburg, which saw its population grow to 3,314 in 1835, double what it had been only five years earlier. In 1837, the state reconstituted its government by expanding its boundaries, but the Panic of 1837 delayed Williamsburg's development and the village would not recover until 1843.<sup>13</sup>

After the economic recovery, Williamsburg's population rose dramatically. By 1850 its population was 31,000, nearly triple its population only five years earlier as ferries crisscrossed between the village and Manhattan. The following year Williamsburg became a city. Banks and insurance companies organized in the new city, as well as a Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) to protect vulnerable youth.<sup>14</sup> The basis of Williamsburg's wealth and

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<sup>12</sup>Quoted in Henry R. Stiles *A History of the City of Brooklyn : Including the old town and village of Brooklyn, the town of Bushwick, and the village and city of Williamsburg* Volume 2 (Bowie, Md. : Heritage Books, 1867-1870, 1993), p. 391.

<sup>13</sup>Stiles, *A History of the City of Brooklyn . . .*, Volume 2, p. 383-394; John V. Jewell *Historic Williamsburgh Commemorating the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of The Williamsburgh Savings Bank* (Brooklyn: 1926) p. 18.

<sup>14</sup>Ostrander II, p. 104.

growth was the rise of industry. Williamsburg, like Brooklyn, depended on many small manufacturers of finished products, but also became the center of sugar refining in the United States. Initially five companies opened their businesses on Williamsburg's waterfront, until William Havemeyer, twice elected Mayor of New York City, consolidated them into a sugar monopoly under his control.

Williamsburg's status as an independent city was short-lived. Unable to provide adequate services, its leaders looked to consolidation to solve the city's financial problems. Both Williamsburg and Brooklyn expressed some ambivalence toward merger, the former because Brooklyn's higher taxes would fall on Williamsburg, the latter because it feared tax increases to pay for Williamsburg's improvements. Supporters of consolidation, who wanted to create a city large and powerful enough to prevent future encroachments by New York. They succeeded in 1854, when the State Legislature enacted a consolidation that merged Brooklyn with Williamsburg and the Town of Bushwick, collectively called the Eastern District.

On the eve of the Civil War Brooklyn barely resembled the small village nestling the East River in 1800. With a population of 267,000 in 1860, Brooklyn was the nation's third largest city. Manhattan's prosperity spilled over to Brooklyn, creating a bedroom community for middle and upper class commuters living on the high ground. Manufacturers and merchants sought out less expensive property on Brooklyn's waterfront, where it was still possible to buy large contiguous plots of land. Brooklyn built public works to provide for the growing population, including a reservoir system in Queens County that opened in 1862. Steam railroads ran from the junction of Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues connecting Brooklyn to

various parts of Long Island, while horse drawn rail provided passage from the suburbs to Brooklyn's center and to Manhattan's ferries. Brooklyn projected its new status in its stately Greek Revival City Hall, whose marble-covered walls and pillars looked down on the Fulton Ferry and the commerce and industry that had developed around it.<sup>15</sup>

Brooklyn was diverse as it was large. Known as the "city of churches," it was proud to view itself as a refuge from the social upheavals of immigration and poverty, but was, nonetheless, almost as diverse as Manhattan. In the mid 1850s, forty seven percent of Brooklyn's population was foreign born, compared with Manhattan's fifty one percent. The 1865 census reported that Brooklyn's population included 57,000 Irish immigrants (many fleeing the potato famine), 26,000 from Germany and 18,000 from England.<sup>16</sup>

Brooklyn's native born residents did not always welcome the newcomers with open arms and often reacted with hostility to the aliens among them, especially those of Catholic origin. A meeting of "Native American Democrats" in 1844 led by George Hall, Brooklyn's first mayor, tried to limit Catholic political power, calling on Congress to increase residence requirements to "check the advancement of Popery in the United States so far as Popery is a political engine." Nativism eventually led to violence on April 14, 1844 in the midst of a national outbreak of anti-Catholic agitation. A vigilante group of fifty to sixty men armed themselves and threatened to attack Catholic Church properties. Mayor J. Sprague pleaded with the group to disband, but instead they began battling with Irish residents. The melee was

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<sup>15</sup>*Ibid*, p. 110; Judd, p. 61-65.

<sup>16</sup>Ment, *The Shaping of a City*, p. 39.

not broken up until the militia was called out to restore order.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to nativist vigilantism, Irish workers also had to fear economic competition with German immigrants. Two years after the outbreaks of nativist violence, Irish immigrants found themselves competing with newly arrived German immigrants at the Atlantic Docks in Red Hook. Brought in by the Docks' owners, Stranahan, Voorhis and Company, the Germans were willing to working at half wages for longer hours. Irish workers responded by rioting sporadically throughout the month of April, while the Whig dominated Common Council took no action to end the violence. Not until contractors agreed to keep the ratio between Irish and German workers at a fifty-fifty quota did the violence subside. Despite its reputation as a tranquil refuge from the problems of New York, Brooklyn simmered with many of the same ethnic, religious and class conflicts as its neighbor.<sup>18</sup>

Brooklyn grew rapidly in the years leading up to the Civil War, but it remained a satellite of its larger, wealthier, and more powerful neighbor. Henry R. Stiles, a nineteenth century historian of Brooklyn and Kings County described its dilemma in 1855 after the consolidation of Williamsburg and Brooklyn.

Although Brooklyn had thus, at a single bound jumped from the seventh to third position among the cities of the American Union, it could by no means claim the same relative position in point of wealth, business or commercial importance . . . . Candor certainly compels the acknowledgment that it was chiefly attributable to the overflowing prosperity and greatness of its giant neighbor, New York.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Judd, p. 25-27.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.* p. 28-29.

<sup>19</sup>Stiles, *History of Brooklyn*, Volume 2, p. 420.

Brooklyn's dependence on New York was a two edged sword. It was blessed with the prosperity of the nation's great metropolis, but stood in uneasy relation to its larger and more powerful neighbor. While New York needed Brooklyn as a bedroom community and as a manufacturing and shipping center, it also resented Brooklyn's growth, especially since it meant that a portion of the region's economic development and population was allocated to Brooklyn's tax base. So for Brooklyn, it was the nation's third largest city, but much of its citizenry earned their wealth across the East River and invested it in Manhattan real estate and banks, which Brooklyn could not tax.

The challenge to Brooklyn's leaders was how to provide the basic infrastructure, cultural institutions and amenities that were the hallmarks of a great and expanding city. These costly improvements had to be built and financed in the context of a limited tax base and a rapidly growing population. Brooklyn's boosters saw growth as a symbol of greatness, but it also lay a burden on the city to pay for a wider array of services, such as transportation, education, sewers, gas and water to a larger and more geographically dispersed population. The question remained whether Brooklyn could be a great city in its own right, or if it needed to merge with New York to achieve its goals.

After the Civil War, Brooklyn, like the nation, directed its efforts toward new public works and a reorganization of public institutions. Some of these projects had begun before or during the Civil War. The Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn's center of high culture on Montague Street, was completed in 1863, where the Brooklyn and Long Island Sanitary Fair used it to raise money for the U.S. Sanitary Commission during the war. Only when the war

ended did Brooklynites gain access to the large performance space in which music and theater could be performed in a “legitimate” venue for the first time. The Academy also served as a public arena for political and social events and became the nucleus of an array of cultural institutions that included the Brooklyn Art Association, Mercantile Library and the Long Island Historical Society.<sup>20</sup>

In 1857 New York State created a Central Park Commission, removing it from local control, to oversee construction of a world class park in Manhattan. The Commission chose Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux to design the park space. Heading the Commission was the mercantile lawyer and anti-Tammany Democrat Andrew H. Green, who was involved in almost every major public works in New York City from 1857 until his death in 1902. Green, former Board of Education president and law partner and political ally of Samuel Tilden, used the Commission to plan the park and the region around it. Brooklyn sought to duplicate this achievement with its own Prospect Park. In 1866 the Legislature appointed a Prospect Park Commission, which purchased land in Brooklyn and Flatbush and hired Olmsted and Vaux as designers. The Commission also oversaw the construction of Eastern and Ocean Parkways. Leading the Commission was the lawyer and merchant James S.T. Stranahan of Stranahan, Voorhis. Known as Brooklyn’s “First Citizen,” Stranahan played a similar role to Green in Brooklyn and used his wealth and political skills to gain funding for the park from Brooklyn’s parsimonious government. When it was completed in the 1870s, Olmsted and

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<sup>20</sup>David Ment *Building Blocks of Brooklyn A Study of Urban Growth* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Educational and Cultural Alliance, 1979) p. 36-44.

Vaux considered Prospect Park to be superior to Manhattan's Central Park.<sup>21</sup>

Even as construction began on Prospect Park, Brooklyn faced an impending threat to its independence from Andrew H. Green's vision. As President of the Central Park Commission he had been given authority to plan all of Upper Manhattan and extended his power into what would later be the Bronx, but Green's vision encompassed the entire region. "It is not intended now," he wrote in a planning document, "to do more than direct attention to the important subject of bringing the City of New York and the County of Kings, a part of Westchester County and a part of Queens and Richmond, including the various suburbs of the city within a certain radial distance from the centre, under one common municipal government."<sup>22</sup>

Consolidation between New York and Brooklyn had been proposed earlier by Kings County State Senator Cyrus P. Smith in 1855, unsuccessfully trying to build upon the consolidation of Williamsburg and Brooklyn. Perhaps a more important precedent for Green was the state commission that ran a regional Metropolitan Police Department from 1857-1870, followed by the health and fire commissions in 1866 that played similar roles in their arenas.

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<sup>21</sup>Stranahan was also responsible for the construction of the Atlantic Docks in Red Hook, was on the Board of Trustees of the Brooklyn Bridge, and the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences which organized and constructed the Brooklyn Museum. Green and Stranahan would come together in 1890 to lead the Municipal Consolidation Commission that initiated the consolidation of Greater New York in 1898. M. M. Graff *Central Park Prospect Park A New Perspective* (New York: Greensward Foundation, 1985) p. 110-111

<sup>22</sup>*Communication of the Comptroller of the Park on the subject of Improvements in Westchester County and its Connection with the City of New York by Bridges or Tunnels* (New York: 1868), republished in John Foord *The Life and Public Services of Andrew Haswell Green* (Garden City: Doubleday Page & Company, 1913) p. 290.

The collapse of the Tweed Ring in 1871 led to government retrenchment and put consolidation on the back burner, but New York's proto-urban planner believed that the time for consolidation would arrive when "the facilities of intercommunication are developed."<sup>23</sup>

Before New York and Brooklyn could be united by law, they would first be bridged by stone and steel. Brooklynites had clamored for years for a bridge that would speed their way across the East River and end the delays created by a shortage of ferries and inclement weather. In 1867, during the Tweed Ring's spending spree, the State Legislature authorized the creation of the New York Bridge Company, a private corporation to build a bridge connecting the two cities. To ease passage of the legislation, the Company greatly underestimated the cost of the bridge, calculating that only five million dollars would be needed to build it.

After the Company received its charter, New York City balked at purchasing shares of the Bridge Corporation's stock. To get New York to invest in the bridge required the approval of the New York Board of Aldermen. To win their assent, the Corporation turned to one man, "Boss" William M. Tweed, multiple office holder and Grand Sachem of Tammany Hall. Tweed had taken New York's Democratic political machine to new levels of power and influence in the City and State governments through the political lubricants of bribery and kickbacks. According to Tweed, New York's Board of Aldermen authorized the spending only after

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<sup>23</sup>*Ibid: A Volume Commemorating the Second City of the World by the Consolidation of the Communities Adjacent to New York Harbor under the New Charter of the City of New York* (New York: The Republic Press, 1898) p. 21-22.

Tweed arranged for the New York Bridge Company to make a payment of \$55,000 to \$65,000 to bribe its members.

The two men behind this arrangement were Tweed and Henry C. Murphy. Murphy was the son of a Brooklyn judge, the founding editor of the *Brooklyn Eagle* and a leading Brooklyn patrician politician who spent years as both a congressman and state senator. The two men agreed that Brooklyn would buy three million dollars of stock and New York one and a half million, but according to the corporation's charter neither city would have voting rights in the corporation. The remaining \$500,000 was to be sold to the public with Tweed and his confederates, Comptroller Richard Connolly, City Chamberlain Peter Sweeny and Hugh Smith receiving large percentages of the shares. On the Brooklyn side, William C. Kingsley, the politically influential contractor, was the single largest shareholder. Kingsley also purchased Tweed's shares as part of the Bridge Company agreement with him. The Tweed Ring wanted to use its shares to gain control of the entire bridge operation and use its construction contracts to enrich themselves. Corruption clearly occurred in the deals struck with Tweed, but who did what remains murky and the motives of Kingsley and Murphy remain unclear. Tweed later accused Kingsley of having purchased the stock for him and his allies. In return Kingsley was to receive a fifteen percent commission on all materials purchased. The only sure conclusion is that Tweed's cooperation was required to build the bridge and that Brooklyn's boosters did what was necessary to seal the agreement.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>David McCullough *The Great Bridge* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972) p. 129-138; Harold Coffin Syrett *The City of Brooklyn, 1865-1898*, p. 148-149.

When the Tweed Ring collapsed in 1871-72, due to its extravagant spending, the depth of its corruption, Thomas Nast's cartoons and revelations published in the *New York Times*, the Bridge Company became a subject of investigation. Rumors swirled of padded contracts and kickbacks. The scandal led to the removal of Tweed and his allies from the Board and the reorganization of the Bridge Company. In 1875 the municipal governments of Brooklyn and New York removed the old board, and by purchasing the private stock transformed the Bridge into a public project accountable to their elected leadership. The outlandish corruption of the Tweed Ring had ended and the Brooklyn Bridge would be completed in 1883 under the direction of Washington Roebling, whose father John had begun the monumental undertaking only to die in an accident in 1869. The Bridge would be the last major public work initiated by Brooklyn and New York for many years, due to economic depression in the 1870s and fear of a repeat of Tammany's malfeasance. Despite the problems associated with the bridge, it would bind the two cities together and transform the landscape of Brooklyn.<sup>25</sup>

The Bridge reconfigured the centers of urban growth in Downtown Brooklyn. Before it opened in 1883 Brooklyn's businesses, hotels, warehouses, office buildings, and financial institutions were clustered around the Fulton Ferry where commuters transferred from horse drawn rail to the ferry. The Bridge was several blocks inland at Sands and Washington Street, pulling commuter traffic away from the Ferry. This change created new business and commercial districts around City Hall that supplanted the older district. Financial institutions

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<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

like the Real Estate Exchange and the Brooklyn and People's Trusts Banks moved to Montague Street and the *Brooklyn Eagle* moved from Fulton and Front Street near the waterfront up to Washington and Johnson Street next to the Bridge. The success of the Brooklyn Bridge turned much of the area around it into a large switching area for trains, and yards to store them. The Bridge helped push Brooklyn's population from 566,663 in 1880 to 806,343 ten years later. Soon enough so many people were using the bridge that demand quickly outstripped its limited capacity and many commuters complained of overcrowding.<sup>26</sup>

Another development that encouraged Brooklyn's growth in the 1880s was the development of an elevated rail in 1888. The first elevated traversed Fulton Street beginning at the Fulton Ferry or the Brooklyn Bridge and continued eastward until it reached East New York. The Fulton Street El and others that followed helped transform areas far from the Brooklyn Bridge into viable commuter suburbs. Park Slope, Prospect Heights, Fort Greene and Bedford all grew into middle class communities as a result of the El. Many people moved into these new neighborhoods to avoid the shadows, noise and pollution created by the Brooklyn Bridge and the els connected to it. As these people fled their old residences, retail businesses quickly replaced them attracted by the high volume of commuters traversing Brooklyn on the trains. Retail businesses like Abraham & Strauss left the Ferry district and

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<sup>26</sup>Eleanora Schoenebaum, "Emerging Neighborhoods: the Development of Brooklyn's Fringe Areas, 1850-1930." Unpublished Dissertation (New York: Columbia University), p. 55-60; Campbell Gibson "Population of the 100 Largest Cities And Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 TO 1990, Population Division Working Paper No. 27 (Washington, DC: Population Division U.S. Bureau of the Census, June 1998), <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027.html>.

settled in the new retail district on Fulton Street between City Hall and Flatbush Avenue, continuing south down Flatbush Avenue to Hanson Street.<sup>27</sup>

Much of Brooklyn's growth continued to be related to its role as a bedroom community for its middle and upper classes, but its workforce and population also grew because of the scarcity of waterfront space and manufacturing property in Manhattan. More ships docked in Brooklyn's piers in 1881 than in New Jersey and Manhattan combined, not including the 3,000 canal boats that arrived in Erie Basin each year. Brooklyn had a monopoly of the port's grain trade and was the entrepot for molasses, sugar, coffee, oil, hides and wool. Not only did the city dominate shipping, it was a manufacturing powerhouse, employing over 47,000 people working in 5,201 factories in 1880. Sugar refining in the Eastern District was the single largest industry, but most manufacturing took place in small factories in industries like iron, oil refining, glass, pharmaceuticals and chemicals. This diversity and the large number of companies made Brooklyn more economically stable than cities where a single industry dominated like Pittsburgh's steel or Akron's rubber.<sup>28</sup>

Like other mid-nineteenth century American cities, Brooklyn struggled to keep up with the consequences of growth. Poor housing conditions and disease and malnutrition plagued a large proportion of its population. Government lacked accountability, and corruption and kickbacks were often a cost of public works. The limited government of Brooklyn could not

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<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 61-65.

<sup>28</sup>Syrett, p. 140; Joshua Brown and David Ment *Factories, Foundries and Refineries A History of Five Brooklyn Industries* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Educational & Cultural Alliance, 1980).

adequately deal with these problems. Brooklyn's charter gave much power to the state government and the city did not have the will or the tax base to adequately finance city improvements or meet the needs of the urban poor. Government alternated between the corruption of the Willoughby Street machine led by Democratic Party leader "Boss" Hugh McLaughlin and reformers like Seth Low, whose wealthy Brooklyn Heights family had made its fortune importing tea from China. Slowly Brooklyn began to develop institutions to confront the problems of a large city, professionalizing its Fire Department in 1869.<sup>29</sup>

Low, who was mayor from 1882-1885, increased funding to education and gained a stronger charter with more mayoral power and accountability, but Brooklyn's budgetary limitations remained and there was little regional planning due to the competition between New York City and Brooklyn. By 1887 the New York State Chamber of Commerce began engaging in what the newspapers called "Green's Hobby"; the creation of an enlarged New York City that would encompass the communities that bordered Manhattan, including Brooklyn.<sup>30</sup>

What had changed in the nineteen years since Andrew H. Green had first proposed the creation of a Greater New York was the immense population growth in Brooklyn and the significant growth in other areas bordering Manhattan. Greater integration had occurred, especially between Brooklyn and New York, since the completion of the Brooklyn Bridge, and

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<sup>29</sup>See Syrett for a discussion of the reform versus machine battles of Brooklyn politics in the 1870s and 1880s.

<sup>30</sup>Syrett, p. 246-247; Foord, p. 170-181??

it had become clear to Green that government had to take a more active role in planning the region. The Tweed Ring's excesses and corruption, followed by the Panic of 1873 and the depression of the 1870s, resulted in austerity and limited government. But by the late 1880s this was an inadequate response to the region's problems. Tenement neighborhoods in Manhattan had reached levels of overcrowding approaching 250,000 per square mile. At the same time services and infrastructure necessary to the functioning of the region, mass transit, the waterfront, water supply, bridges and education suffered from overcapacity, disrepair and poor administration. Green believed that the only solution to this problem was a Greater New York that could more rationally allocate resources and end the divisions between local governments that prevented necessary improvements from occurring.

Green was the main advocate for the consolidation of Greater New York, but he had a sponsor. In 1887 the New York Chamber of Commerce had lauded Mayor Abram Hewitt's call for a large public improvements program to make the city more competitive and use mass transit to disperse the population of the overcrowded tenements to new uptown development. The Chamber's annual report closed with a call for consolidation. The *Real Estate Record and Builder's Guide* and the *New York Times* quickly hopped aboard the bandwagon.<sup>31</sup>

In March 1889 Green asked the Legislature to create a Greater New York Commission to consider the question. His proposal failed when opposition from uptown New

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<sup>31</sup>Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York, *Annual Report, 1888-1889*, p. xxix. Quoted in David C. Hammack, *Power and Society in Greater New York Greater New York at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 193

York real estate interests and their ally Mayor Hugh J. Grant combined with Brooklyn's senate delegation to kill the legislation. The following year, Green returned to Albany with a new set of arguments published as an Assembly document. He laid out an expansive vision of a Greater New York that could regulate the harbor and better plan and finance improvements.<sup>32</sup> He emphasized the importance of the harbor based on his own experiences as a mercantile lawyer, the interests of the Chamber of Commerce and its centrality to the entire region.

There are some spheres of administration whose proper regulation is most vitally important to the common welfare and which cannot be apportioned out among different territorial authorities. The navigable water system of the port belongs in common to all the cities and towns and counties of the port. Its development and protection is the concern of all, but under existing arrangements is the duty of none.<sup>33</sup>

Green's proposed borders, which included present day Manhattan, Brooklyn, Bronx, Queens and Staten Island, included every body of water that could challenge New York's domination of trade in the harbor.

He also used progressive rhetoric to rail against the rise of monopoly capitalism in transportation, describing how "Parasite companies, usurping the name of giant corporations, stake broad lines out in this common domain and bid the waters come no further, and they obey." Through control of routes, they prevented the development of competing rail lines and used their monopoly powers to work against the interest of the region's population. Divided

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<sup>32</sup>Green included all areas on the New York State side of the harbor that could potentially be developed into a competitor with New York City, such as Jamaica Bay on the south shore of Brooklyn and Queens.

<sup>33</sup>*Communication on the Subject of a Consolidation of Areas About the City of New York Under One Government*, (Albany: 1890). Reprinted in Foord, p. 295.

governments could not do battle with these new corporations. "All society . . . may be considered as classified in regular forces, which, animated by intelligence, move in concert upon fixed plans to definite purpose; and guerilla bands, which, without design or concert or ultimate aim, skirmish weakly and vainly against the advance of superior organization." Corporate powers were the regular forces, while "our divided municipalities, though invested with responsibility of protecting all that belongs to the people in the sphere of civil administration, represent the guerillas." Green saw the necessity of reorganizing municipal forces to fight this battle against corporate power.<sup>34</sup>

Corporations wreaked similar havoc upon the planning of Greater New York. "Ignoring city plots, grades, or topographical outline which mark adaptations to other business than their own, they force their way through, above, below, or around, as cheap instinct may best prompt, forecasting forever lines of abnormal development or desolation." Disjointed governments could not prevent corporations from usurping control, nor could they plan transportation and infrastructure to connect the region. Only a unified government could prevent monopolies or the market from further disfiguring the region's economy. Green and the Chamber of Commerce had concluded that what was good for the individual corporation was not necessarily good for the populace. Only government power could provide a remedy.<sup>35</sup>

Competition between the region's governments also slowed development, most notably in Brooklyn. The Brooklyn Bridge, Green noted, "was an enterprise of Brooklyn's initiation,

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<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 296-297.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 298.

and constructed mainly at her expense.” Brooklyn desired to have other bridges, but lacked both the money and approval from New York City to begin such a project. “Had the cities been one, communication between its different wards, by bridges or tunnels across or under the East River would have been established years before it was effected, all would have been reciprocally benefitted, and points and places which yet wait the forming touch of progress would have been brought into the circuit of established improvement.”<sup>36</sup>

Underlying the economic and political arguments for consolidation was the imperative that New York remain the largest city in the United States. A city that boasted rapid population growth could advertise this to the world and make the city and its businesses attractive to investors. The 1890 census showed New York City with 1.5 million people, 400,000 more than Chicago or Philadelphia, but Chicago had doubled its population over the previous ten years and in 1889 had annexed 133 square miles in what would become the far South Side and added 225,000 people to its population..<sup>37</sup>

The *New York Times* stated the matter plainly: “unless [New York] extends her borders at once, she will be outstripped by Chicago . . .” and asked its readers “Shall New-York remain the foremost city of the United States, or must it give way to Chicago and fall back into second place?” Consolidation provided a simple solution to the problem. By

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<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 300-301.

<sup>37</sup>Kenneth T. Jackson *Crabgrass Frontier The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) p. 142-143; Campbell Gibson Bureau of the Census “Population of the 100 Largest Cities and other Urban Places in the United States 1790 to 1990.”

combining the populations of New York, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx and Richmond, Greater New York's population would balloon, according to the 1890 census to over 2.5 million people, placing it beyond the reach of Chicago or any other American city.<sup>38</sup>

With these arguments Green and his backers convinced the Legislature to create a Greater New York Commission in 1890. Governor David B. Hill appointed five of the six commissioners that Green recommended and most of the other appointees chosen by the Mayors of Brooklyn and New York, the Boards of Supervisors of Westchester, Kings, Queens and Richmond Counties also supported consolidation. At its first meeting the Commission elected Green president and Brooklyn's James S.T. Stranahan vice-president, and at its second meeting endorsed the consolidation of Greater New York. Disagreement, however, broke out over how the new government should be structured and how to convince voters and legislators to support the measure, especially in Brooklyn where opposition was strongest.<sup>39</sup>

Green argued that Brooklyn needed Manhattan and the wealth that emanated from across the East River. Its bedroom communities included "bankers, brokers, journalists, laboring men, truckmen and all other variety of employment" who earned their incomes in Manhattan. According to Green, the two cities had become so interdependent that it made no sense to keep them apart. If Brooklynites relied on Manhattan for employment, and

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<sup>38</sup>*New York Times* October 30, 1894, p. 5; November 4, 1894, p. 2; National Municipal League Committee on Metropolitan Government *The Government of Metropolitan Areas in the United States*, (New York: 1930), p. 146-147.

<sup>39</sup>Hammack, p. 195-196.

Manhattanites largely owned the waterfront of Long Island from Astoria to Bay Ridge, it made little sense to keep them separate.<sup>40</sup>

These arguments made economic and political sense, but consolidationists needed to overcome the political and social divisions between the two cities to succeed. Many New Yorkers, when they thought about Brooklyn, had a sense of superiority toward their smaller and less cosmopolitan neighbor. The weekly paper *Town Topics* displayed these feelings in its description of a “young blade of Gotham” who traveled to the “City of Churches to pay a visit to a particularly pretty girl.” He fell asleep while traveling over the bridge and lacking directions to the woman’s address, asked instructions from conductors on street cars, invariably taking the wrong car. On his final attempt,

Ensnocing himself in the corner seat, he proceeded to give his injured feelings balm by the most copious soliloquy of oaths that had assaulted the goody-goody atmosphere of Brooklyn in many a day. Fragmentary bits of this philippic were overheard by a clerical-looking gentleman opposite, who presently leaned over and said, in a firm but kindly tone: “My young friend, do you know you are on the road to hell?” “Great Gawd!—*in the wrong car again!*” roared the New Yorker, making a grab at the bell strap, and never stopping in his mad flight until he had bought his return bridge ticket back to Gotham.<sup>41</sup>

True or not, this story represented the sentiment of many New Yorkers about their neighbors. Brooklyn might be a nice place to live, but it was a cultural backwater, dominated by conservative Protestant ministers and cut off from the wealth, power and glory of New York.

Attitudes in Brooklyn were even more problematic. New York, as the imperial city of

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<sup>40</sup>*Communication on the Subject of a Consolidation . . .* Quoted in Foord, p. 300-301.

<sup>41</sup>*Town Topics The Journal of Society* January 2, 1890, p. 5.

the region, gave little thought to Brooklyn, but the City of Churches defined itself against New York. Brooklyn was either an upstart competitor that would overtake its rival, or a city that upheld morality and decency, a city that lacked both the great wealth *and* poverty that afflicted New York. Many in Brooklyn feared political domination by New York City and opposed consolidation even if it had economic benefits for Brooklyn. The center of opposition rested in its Anglo-Protestant population, whose presence led some to refer to Brooklyn as the “Puritan City.”

In fact Brooklyn could have been seen almost anywhere else in the world as a highly diverse community. Approximately forty percent of its population was non-Protestant compared to fifty three percent in New York. Over seventy one percent were foreign born or had one foreign born parent, only slightly lower than New York’s eighty percent. But Brooklyn perceived its own identity in the shadow of Manhattan. If New York was the immigrant city, Brooklyn saw itself as more stable, upholding Protestant values; a city of churches. From this perspective they looked at a Manhattan metropolis too diverse – too overtaken by immigrants. Neighboring Brooklyn Protestants believed that Manhattan was at once too rich, poor and materialistic. Despite this construction of Brooklyn’s identity, the two cities were more alike than many Brooklynites wanted to admit.<sup>42</sup>

Green and the Commission promised real economic benefits to convince Brooklynites to support consolidation in a referendum. Their vehicle was the 1891 pamphlet, “How Taxes

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<sup>42</sup>Hammack, p. 209-213.

in Brooklyn Can Be Reduced One-Half by the Consolidation of the Cities of New York and Brooklyn,” by Brooklyn attorney Edward C. Graves. Brooklyn’s property tax rates had risen over the last decade as it struggled to finance its public improvements, while New York’s had decreased during the same period. By 1890 Graves claimed that Brooklyn’s rates were twice that of New York’s, (but its relative property values were still considerably lower than New York’s.) If consolidation equalized tax rates between the two cities, Brooklyn’s property owners would see a fifty percent reduction in their taxes.

The reason for the higher tax rates according to Graves was that Brooklyn lacked the commercial base to finance its government and had to rely primarily on residential property taxes to raise revenue.

[A]ll of its great railroad and steamship company properties, are situated in New York, and the millions of dollars paid as taxes on those great properties are paid to New York, and not to Brooklyn, and yet the rents of those miles upon scores of miles of gigantic office buildings, store buildings, bank buildings, railroad and steamship company buildings, warehouses and other large tax-paying properties, which compose New York below Twenty-third Street, are nearly one-half of them paid by Brooklyn men.<sup>43</sup>

Because it was a dormitory of New York it deserved the same equalization of taxes that any residential areas north of Fifty-ninth Street already had and proportionately the same degree of investment in public improvements. To broaden the appeal of this argument to the working classes Graves claimed with less evidence that tax cuts on property owners would reduce rents

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<sup>43</sup>Edward C. Graves “How Taxes in Brooklyn Can Be Reduced by One Half by the Consolidation of the Cities of New York and Brooklyn. An Appeal to Reason” (New York: 1895) p. 6.

and make homes more affordable to those with lower incomes.

The financier for Graves' pamphlets was the Brooklyn Consolidation League. Organized in 1892 after Brooklyn's state legislators cast key votes to defeat a consolidation referendum, it was led by some of Brooklyn's wealthiest businessmen, merchants and bankers, including Alexander E. Orr, the president of the New York Chamber of Commerce, Darwin R. James, president of the Board of Trade and Transportation, three vice presidents of streetcar lines, and Abraham Abraham of the Abraham & Strauss department store. These men possessed considerable political and economic capital and used their resources to gain access to the press and publish over two million copies of Graves' pamphlet in Brooklyn.<sup>44</sup>

Tax relief was a critical component to the Consolidation League's argument, but it was not the only one. Consolidation took on the aura of a step that would solve almost all of the region's woes, and its advocates made grandiose claims of what it could accomplish. A single government for Greater New York would promote the geographic and political integration of the region. It would expand business, create a knowledgeable municipal service, stamp out corruption and foster metropolitan grandeur.

New York State's Constitution limited a city's debt to ten percent of its assessed valuation. By the early 1890s Brooklyn was approaching that ceiling. After the Panic of 1893 Brooklyn found the bond market looking askance at its paper. When Brooklyn's boosters achieved their goal of annexing the county towns of Flatbush, Gravesend, New Utrecht and

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<sup>44</sup>Hammack, p. 197-198.

Flatlands between 1894 to 1896, the profligate borrowing of these suburbs prior to consolidation only added to the city's overall debt burden. The creation of a "Greater Brooklyn" had expanded the city's boundaries, but placed its treasury in jeopardy.<sup>45</sup> Department store magnate Abraham Abraham bluntly stated the problem to the Joint Assembly-Senate Committee on Cities in January 1896.

Brooklyn is near its debt limit, her taxable resources are about exhausted, real estate being in many instances assessed at higher figures than the actual value, and notwithstanding the high rate of taxation, the revenue derived is insufficient for actual requirements and improvements necessary to a city covering so much territory as does Brooklyn.<sup>46</sup>

Consolidation with New York and its larger tax base and higher debt limit offered a solution to this problem. Leaders of the pro-consolidation coalition believed that a larger city could be run more efficiently through greater economies of scale, and that its expanded tax base would create a larger pool of capital for public investment.

The breakdown of political barriers would also integrate the region, especially Brooklyn and New York where the demand was most pressing. Albert Henschel, the secretary of the Municipal Consolidation Inquiry and a confidante of Green, laid out his vision of consolidation in "An Address on 'Greater New York'" in 1894.

Had the cities been one, communication between its different wards, by bridges or tunnels across or under the East River, would have been established years before it was effected, all would have been reciprocally benefitted, and points and places which yet

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<sup>45</sup>Hammack, p. 198-199.

<sup>46</sup>*In the Matter of the Hearing in relation to "The Greater New York," held before the Sub-Committee of the Joint Committee on the Affairs of Cities.* (Albany and New York: 1896) p. 63.

wait the forming touch of progress would have been brought into the circuit of established improvement.<sup>47</sup>

The Brooklyn Consolidation League and pro-consolidation newspapers, in response to Jacob Riis' recently published *How the Other Half Lives*, claimed that consolidation would be a means to disperse population from the densely packed neighborhoods of New York to suburban areas outside Manhattan via new bridges or tunnels connected to mass transit.

Consolidation offered the promise of breaking up Manhattan's notorious congestion. Many articles and pamphlets noted the connection between high population densities and mortality rates in the great cities of Europe and the United States. New York with the highest population density of these cities had the highest mortality rates. Moving further northward in Manhattan or the Bronx was seen as impractical because of the long commutes. The obvious path was to consolidate Brooklyn and Kings and Queens Counties, "forever blotting the East River from the traveler's path through new bridges and connections."<sup>48</sup>

Brooklyn's rural areas were ripe for development. They were already beginning the transition from rural truck farming communities to burgeoning commuter suburbs in the 1880s. Intensive vegetable farming remained profitable in the late nineteenth century, but rising land values created incentives for many landowners in southern Kings County to make large profits selling their properties to developers. New connections to Manhattan would hasten this

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<sup>47</sup>*Communication on the Subject of a Consolidation of Areas About the City of New York Under One Government*. Quoted from Foord, p. 301.

<sup>48</sup>*New York Times* May 4, 1891, p. 4.

transformation.<sup>49</sup>

Greater New York would also allow the government to be more efficient and plan in a more rational fashion. Government would be more efficient because it would reduce the number officeholders and agencies. “Perplexities, conflicts of jurisdiction, and diverse and cumbrous systems of taxation, largely unintelligible to the people,” Henschel wrote, “will be abrogated and a simple system substituted.” This streamlining would make it possible to treat the region as a whole to “prevent the laying out of narrow, crooked and inadequate streets and highways according to temporary whims of present proprietors. and no waste of energy, time, or money will be necessary in tearing down structures to provide proper streets and parks.” Regional planning was a key goal of the consolidationists. Green had stressed the problem of unfettered development on New York’s waterfront. Henschel expanded Green’s ideas to the entire city, believing that government needed to plan all aspects of land use, especially in undeveloped areas where future population growth would occur.<sup>50</sup>

In addition to bridges and tunnels connecting New York to Long Island, consolidationists saw the development of integrated sewer systems, and most crucially of regional drinking water supplies as one of the potential benefits of consolidation. Poor planning

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<sup>49</sup> See Marc Linder & Lawrence S. Zacharias *Of Cabbages and Kings County: Agriculture and the Formation of Modern Brooklyn* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999). Chapter 10 “What Was the Dutch Farmers’ Price? Profits, Taxes, Land Prices and Incomes.”

<sup>50</sup>*New York World* October 18, 1894; *New York Herald*. October 15, 1894. Quoted in Albert Henschel “Municipal Consolidation: Historical Sketch of Greater New York” (New York: 1895) p. 63, 65-66.

and lack of funds had placed Brooklyn in a bind and only access to Manhattan's wealthier tax base could alleviate this problem, especially in the area of drinking water. A prominent banker who played a leading financial role in the development of Brooklyn testified before the Joint Committee on Cities that "Ten million dollars, if not more, must be spent immediately after the close of the century for the enlargement of Brooklyn's water supply. Bonds can be issued for enlargement of water facilities, to be sure, but after the debt limit has once been passed, money for bridges will no longer be available. . . . Can you, gentlemen of the committee, see how Brooklyn can do all this without help?" Brooklyn could not grow without an increased water supply.<sup>51</sup>

Boosters also looked to consolidation to raise the cultural and political atmosphere of the region. A congenial optimist, Henschel believed that a larger population under one government would spark a cultural renaissance. "The environments of city life should be such as to stimulate the higher and nobler endeavor, to develop the taste for art, to cultivate the sense of the beautiful, and to encourage moral and educational institutions." What he did not state was where the new cultural institutions would be located and whether Brooklyn would gain a share of them. New York had already developed a nucleus of arts, music and cultural institutions, while Brooklyn's were still in their developmental stages.<sup>52</sup>

Green's Consolidation Commission and the Brooklyn Consolidation League organized

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<sup>51</sup>*In the matter of . . . Greater New York*, p. 96; Leon Wexelstein *Building Up Greater Brooklyn with Sketches of Men Instrumental in Brooklyn's Amazing Development* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Biographical Society), p. 15-17.

<sup>52</sup>Henschel, p. 32-33.

a well run propaganda machine. They had built an effective coalition of bankers, Brooklyn property owners, and supporters of municipal efficiency. Despite this support, they could not overcome the interests opposed to consolidation. Municipal and legislative elections in 1893 changed the balance of power toward consolidation. Brooklyn's consolidationists backed the victorious Republican/Fusion mayoral candidate Charles A. Schieren against the anti-consolidation McLaughlin machine. Along with Schieren, several pro-consolidation Republicans and reform Democrats were elected. When the Legislature met in 1894, both houses overwhelmingly approved a non-binding referendum of the population. Twenty six years after Andrew H. Green had first proposed consolidation, it would finally go before the voters.<sup>53</sup>

Green had skillfully negotiated the wording of the referendum to broaden the coalition and enhance its chances of victory. He made it less contentious by removing any specific wording about the type of government or the issue of tax equalization. While a non-binding referendum appeared less consequential, victory was critical for the consolidation forces. If they lost in any of the significant sections of the proposed city, they could not make a credible case for their cause. Because opposition was strongest in Brooklyn, it held the key to victory.<sup>54</sup>

Surprisingly, no organized opposition to consolidation developed in Brooklyn before the referendum. Although strong opposition existed among Protestants of New England ancestry, who feared domination by Tammany Hall, they did not play an active role in fighting

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<sup>53</sup>Hammack, p. 203-204.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*

the referendum. Boss Hugh McLaughlin's Willoughby Street Machine also opposed consolidation to prevent Tammany Hall from meddling in or dominating Brooklyn politics, but it also stayed out of the debate. Brooklyn's newspapers all opposed consolidation, but only the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, the city's largest newspaper, led a campaign against it. St. Clair McKelway, the *Eagle's* editor, was an independent Cleveland Democrat and a fierce Brooklyn partisan, and the newspaper reflected his views. Previously a supporter of Seth Low, the newspaper had supported reformer Charles A. Schieren in his successful mayoral campaign in 1893. An opponent of Brooklyn's political machine, McKelway loathed Tammany even more and feared that the City of Homes and Churches would become a bastion of Tammany and tenements.

During the referendum campaign in the Summer and Fall of 1894, the *Eagle* regularly editorialized against consolidation. Typical was an editorial on November 5, 1894, just prior to the referendum.

Brooklyn is a city of homes. New York is a city of palaces and tenements. The very rich and the very poor make up its characteristic population. The very rich are robbed with their own consent by its political thieves. The men in middling circumstances in New York have no more chance for comfort and for betterment in existing political conditions over there than a cat without claws has in Hades.<sup>55</sup>

McKelway overstated the difference in character between the two cities, ignoring that Brooklyn also had many immigrants, entrenched poverty, overcrowded tenements and its own political machine. The *Eagle's* rhetoric raised fears in a segment of Brooklyn, especially after the

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<sup>55</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 5, 1894, quoted from *In the matter of . . . Greater New York*, p. 82-83.

Lexow Committee revelations earlier that year of Tammany corruption, but the newspaper's crusade came up against the well organized pro-consolidation forces in Brooklyn and throughout Greater New York.

The Brooklyn Consolidation League continued its campaign on a promise of lower taxes, although the referendum made no mention of it. Green enlisted the support of the Manhattan press, including the *World*, the *Herald*, the *Sun*, the *Tribune* and the *Times*, which published the Consolidation Commission's press releases and broadsides. The *World*, the most popular paper south of 14<sup>th</sup> Street, published a pro-consolidation statement on its front page every day in the two weeks before the referendum. Good government groups also endorsed consolidation, adding their respected voices to the campaign.<sup>56</sup>

Election day in November 1894 brought victory for the consolidationists. Final results in all of Greater New York were 176,170 for consolidation to 131,706 opposed. Manhattan had voted 96,938 to 59,959. All areas to be annexed voted in favor of the referendum by significant margins with the exception of Kings County (Brooklyn) which had given consolidation the narrowest of victories: 64,744 to 64,467, a majority of only 277 votes, only slightly more than the 255 defective votes. The margin was so close that it took several weeks before a final tally could be ascertained. This narrow but decisive victory, created a mandate for consolidationists to proceed with their endeavor.<sup>57</sup>

This vote shocked and awakened anti-consolidation forces in Brooklyn, who formed

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<sup>56</sup>Hammack, p. 204-205.

<sup>57</sup>Foord, p. 191.

the League of Loyal Citizens (LLC). They declared the referendum illegitimate because of the narrow margin in Brooklyn and the high percentage of voters (33%) who failed to vote at all and called for a “resubmission” in which Brooklyn could vote again on whether to support consolidation. Like the Brooklyn Consolidation League, the LLC was composed of Brooklyn’s elite, but its members were more insular in character. Key figures included businessmen A.A. Low, wealthy merchant and father of Seth Low, and William C. Redfield, a Democratic politician who would later serve in Congress and as Woodrow Wilson’s Secretary of Commerce. Protestant Ministers, like Richard S. Storrs of the Church of the Pilgrims, Bishop A.N. Littlejohn of the Long Island Episcopal Diocese, and Theodore L. Cuyler of the Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church, were also central players. Other prominent spokesmen were Truman J. Backus, headmaster of the Packer Institute, a private girls’ finishing school; tenement house reformer Alfred T. White, Mayor Schieren’s Public Improvements Commissioner, and St. Clair McKelway.<sup>58</sup>

What these men all had in common was their image of Brooklyn as a refuge from the problems of New York City. New York was a center of vice; Brooklyn was a city of churches. Tammany Hall dominated New York City; Brooklyn was blessed with a model charter and a reform government. New York City was gathering the “sewage of Europe,” while Brooklyn remained a Protestant stronghold upholding the traditions of its New England forebears. All of these were half-truths used by the LLC used to slow a process that had

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<sup>58</sup>*In the matter of . . . Greater New York*, p. 198; Hammack, p. 209.

begun earlier in the century.<sup>59</sup>

H.G. Schumann, an Eastern District businessmen was optimistic about what the Loyal Citizen's feared most. "We want the working people to come over here and we will make them comfortable. We want consolidation so that we can have bridges that will enable the people to come over here. If we are consolidated we will surely get a bridge." Many of the people arriving over those bridges were the immigrants that the LLC feared. The consolidation of Greater New York not only would end Brooklyn's status as an independent city, but destroy their illusion of a homogeneous Brooklyn dominated by New England Protestants. Resubmission was the last hope of preventing Tammany and immigrant domination of this "American City."<sup>60</sup>

After the referendum, the politics of consolidation moved to Albany where Republicans controlled both houses of the Legislature and Republican Levi P. Morton, a New York banker, had just taken office as governor. This change in power pushed Green's mostly Democratic mercantile forces to the side. Leadership passed to U.S. Senator Thomas C. Platt known as the "easy boss" of the State Republican Party. Platt was a pragmatic upstate Republican, who guided policy in the state through his control of corporate and government patronage. He supported consolidation as a means of increasing his own prestige and power, despite opposition from independent New York and Brooklyn Republicans. He also believed that consolidation might make Greater New York a Republican stronghold, based on Republican

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<sup>59</sup>*Ibid*, p. 212.

<sup>60</sup>*In the matter of . . . Greater New York*, p. 96; Hammack, p. 211.

victories in New York and Brooklyn from 1893-1895, further enhancing his and the Republican party's power.<sup>61</sup>

The Republican Party, unused to political dominance, was unable to pass legislation in 1895 due to faction fights between Platt's regular forces and New York and Brooklyn reformers, including New York's newly elected Fusion Mayor William L. Strong. The initial dispute was over Morton's bill to replace Green's consolidation commission with one of his own choosing. Further bickering occurred, according to the anti-Platt *New York Tribune*, when the senator attempted to use consolidation as means of weakening the mayor's power and reducing his patronage. Reform forces opposed this centralization of power in Platt's hands. The Senator backed down and agreed to support Governor Morton's consolidation bill, adding Andrew H. Green's name to the Commission, to show consolidation was more important than politics. By the time that he made this decision, the League of Loyal Citizens had made their assault on consolidation, describing it as a coup for Tammany Hall. An alliance of convenience formed between Tammany senators, Kings County Democrats and a Brooklyn Republicans, who defeated the bill in 1895.<sup>62</sup>

Platt redoubled his efforts in 1896, determined to pass consolidation legislation. The debate and negotiation that followed was over how Greater New York's government would be structured, while the Legislature drafted a new charter. Platt and his allies, New York County leader Edward Lauterbach and Rockland Senator Clarence Lexow, the chairman of the Senate

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<sup>61</sup>Hammack, p. 215-217.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*

Committee on Cities, wanted “adinterim commissioners” appointed to replace incumbent officeholders in “the great Departments of Police, Fire, Health and Public Works. in the new territory.” They supported this ostensibly to allow for a smooth transition for the new mayor of the greater city, but Governor Morton opposed this plan because it provoked the ire of Republicans allied with Mayors Strong and Wurster of New York and Brooklyn, who saw this as an attack on their power and a patronage ploy of Platt’s. The adinterim commissioners turned many former allies of consolidation into opponents, including the Union League Club, the City Club, and even the Chamber of Commerce, which had first broached the idea in 1887.

The consolidation bill succeeded because other supporters held firm. The Brooklyn Consolidation League gathered new allies among merchants, manufacturers, bankers, architects, builders, realtors and street railway owners. It successfully sparred with the League of Loyal Citizens in a special Joint Senate-Assembly Committee on Cities meeting at Brooklyn City Hall in January 1896. While Green and his consolidation commission continued to lobby in Albany and the *Times*, *Sun* and the *World* supported the legislation, Tammany was forced to remain on the sidelines.<sup>03</sup>

Platt, convinced that he had enough support to pass the legislation, chose Lexow, whose reform credentials included his sensational investigation of Tammany Hall in 1894, to guide the bill through the Senate. The bill was similar to the one that Morton had proposed in 1895. The governor would appoint nine people to a new commission that would also include

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<sup>03</sup>*Ibid*, p. 216-223.

the Mayors of Brooklyn, New York and Long Island City, the state engineer, the state attorney general and Andrew H. Green. The commission was to draft a new charter for a Greater New York that would encompass all the territory envisioned by Green, and would come into existence on January 1, 1898. No mention of adinterim commissioners was made in Lexow's bill, but Tammany Senator Jacob A. Cantor, who often allied himself with the Chamber of Commerce, forced two small amendments explicitly forbidding them from the charter. With Tammany's belated support, the bill passed easily in the Senate and Assembly.<sup>64</sup>

When Mayors Wurster and Strong vetoed the legislation, the Senate passed the override without problems, but in the Assembly Manhattan independents and the League of Loyal Citizens convinced some upstate legislators and a large bloc of Brooklyn Republicans to vote no. They were joined by twenty Tammany Democrats who wanted to embarrass Platt. But the Boss was no amateur. He used his political power to hold upstate Republicans in line, and forced the measure through on April 22<sup>nd</sup>. The bill then went to Governor Morton, whose main fear was that Platt would use the legislature to appoint special commissions to investigate city departments and perhaps take them over. Reassured by Platt, Morton signed the bill into law on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 1896.<sup>65</sup>

Adinterim commissioners did not come to pass, but the debate over where power would lie in Greater New York formed the main subject of debate in the drafting of the charter. When he published his ideas in 1890, Green, supported by the mercantile interests he

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<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*

represented, assumed Greater New York would have a strong centralized government that could override local opposition. Reformers followed his lead, with a series of proposals for the structuring of the enlarged city. They called for a powerful City Council elected in staggered six year terms by proportional representation. This would increase the number of elite men in government. They also supported a strong mayor who could direct the policy of government.

To advance their ideas, reformers needed significant representation on the Charter Commission, but Governor Morton appointed only one reformer, Seth Low, the former mayor of Brooklyn and president of Columbia University. Green was ill at the time and had little influence on the Commission. The remainder of the Commission was composed of Platt Republicans, regular Democrats that Platt's supporters could work with and unaffiliated lawyers. The charter was to be a compromise document that would have a little bit for each interest group, melding the charters of Brooklyn and New York with little harmonization.

The charter did much to placate the demands of Brooklyn. With four Brooklynites on the Commission and Mayor Wurster sitting ex officio, they had the power to significantly influence decisions. Platt was also interested in mollifying Brooklynites to strengthen the Republican Party in that city. To achieve this, the new charter equalized taxes and assessments throughout Greater New York, fulfilling the main goal of the Consolidation League.<sup>60</sup> The charter also created a borough system of government to decentralize power and give the Republican minority in Greater New York the opportunity to hold some power when they were

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<sup>60</sup>Hammack, p. 223.

out of office. Each of the five boroughs (Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island) would elect a borough president who represented the interests of his borough and sat on the Board of Public Improvements.<sup>67</sup> To appease the League of Loyal Citizens and their fear of Tammany domination, the Charter centralized funding of the school system, but left administrative power largely under the control of each borough. For Manhattan and the Bronx that meant a centralized Borough Board of Education; in Brooklyn a large Borough Board with local control would administer its education system.

The new charter maintained a strong mayor with powers of appointment and dismissal of commissioners, an elected comptroller to oversee finances, and a Board of Estimate to approve spending and taxation. The Board of Public Improvements, consisting of the mayor, corporation counsel, comptroller, borough presidents and commissioners responsible for infrastructure, decided which public works would be built and who would receive the contracts to build them. A Municipal Assembly was empowered to pass laws and regulations for the city, but could only cut specific budget items and could not increase taxes or spending. This two house legislature was composed of the City Council, elected in large multiple member districts, and the Board of Aldermen, elected in smaller single member districts.<sup>68</sup>

When the new government took power on January 1, 1898, it had much to accomplish. The laws, taxes, debt, and administrative functions first had to be harmonized and brought

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<sup>67</sup>The 1901 charter revision increased the power of the Borough Presidents by making them members of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment.

<sup>68</sup>Hammack, p. 222-227.

under the authority of the new government. More importantly it was a vehicle to achieve the consolidationists' vision of Greater New York. On the top of their agenda would be the problems and promise of cash starved Brooklyn, the borough best prepared to absorb the rising tide of immigrants because of its open land and already significant level of development.

Brooklyn would be affected by attempts to reform government and make it more efficient and responsive, but the need for a borough system showed that the creation of a single government could not erase local identity. The League of Loyal Citizens had lost its battle to keep Brooklyn independent, but that spirit carried on for many decades after 1898.

The chapters that follow examine the impact of consolidation on Brooklyn and whether the results of consolidation matched the claims of its boosters in the 1890s. They argued that consolidation could provide the capital and infrastructure to provide vital services for the city. The single most important and pressing issue was Brooklyn's water supply. While not in the headlines as often as transit, the need for new water supplies was critical to the future of the growing city. As population flowed out to the outer boroughs, fresh drinking water had to travel with them. When consolidation occurred in 1898, Brooklyn faced a water crisis as demand outstripped the limited supply available. As Brooklyn's leaders searched for a solution to the water crisis, consolidation was seen as a means to replenish Brooklyn's diminishing supplies by ending competition between the different jurisdictions over potential water sources and infusing Manhattan's capital into the system.

Consolidation also addressed the pressing issue of transit expansion. Its effects are investigated by comparing the building of the Williamsburg Bridge, begun three years before

consolidation, to the expansion of the subway system into Brooklyn between 1903 and 1920. While they are two very different processes, the comparison will show how consolidation changed the way that transportation could be planned and constructed. The construction of transit connections to Manhattan was a critical goal for Brooklyn's consolidationists and the success of their project hinged on a quick and rational integration of connections between the two cities.

Occurring simultaneously were attempts to confront the overcrowded conditions in tenement districts. Tenement house reformers in conjunction with supporters of consolidation wanted to impose land use regulations in New York's newly annexed territories to create safer and less crowded dwellings for the large poor populations living in tenement districts. Building transit connections to the outlying areas of Greater New York was insufficient. Reformers believed that rational development could occur only if the city regulated land use. This led to Tenement House Law of 1901 that transformed the patterns of development in Brooklyn's newly developed immigrant neighborhoods.

As subway expansion proceeded in the teens, reformers, who feared overdevelopment around the new subway stations, supported the Zoning Act of 1916, an effort to restrict building heights and what types of development (residential, mixed or industrial) would be allowed within certain districts of Greater New York. Like tenement house reform, zoning was an attempt to learn from the lessons of earlier development in Manhattan and prevent what reformers perceived as the mistakes of unregulated development.

Another claim of the consolidation coalition was that government could be made more

efficient and better run under consolidation. Centralization of government services was difficult under the new charter, which gave significant autonomy to its constituent parts, but education presented a case where it could be tested. Education reformers led by Nicolas Murray Butler, president of Teachers College and later Columbia University, saw consolidation as a means to expand New York City's 1896 centralization of education under a powerful superintendent and a non-political Board of Education to all of Greater New York. The debate that ensued centered on the autonomy of Brooklyn's school system and whether its own decentralized Board of Education should oversee the schools or whether New York City's centralized system administered by professionals should replace it. Many Brooklynites of varying social and political stripes defended Brooklyn's system. In New York City the debate over centralization that took place in 1896 was cast as a battle between reformers and machine politicians. In Brooklyn the debate was less clear, with many reformers joining forces with regular Democrats in favor of Brooklyn's decentralized system to prevent a Manhattan takeover of Brooklyn's educational system.<sup>69</sup>

The alliance of machine Democrats and Republicans in the debate over school centralization was not surprising given the Brooklyn elite's attitude toward consolidation and the protection of Brooklyn's cultural prerogatives. Brooklyn's cultural institutions were not as well developed as Manhattan's, but they began to take shape in the 1890s, especially the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, which became the umbrella organization for an educational

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<sup>69</sup>See Hammack, p. 258-299 for the history and analysis of the centralization debate in Manhattan in 1896.

institute, museum, children's museum, and botanic garden. Albert Henschel had argued that consolidation would lead to a flowering of the arts in Greater New York, but he did not say who would control the institutions or where they would be located. The League of Loyal Citizens feared that Brooklyn's institutions would suffer neglect under consolidation because of their distance from the center of power. The fate of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences says much about the locus of power in Greater New York and how Brooklyn's elite fared after the City of Churches became part of the new metropolis.

### Chapter Three

#### **“You never miss the water till the reservoir runs dry.”**

#### **Consolidation and the Search for Money and Water**

“The annexation of the cities will mean the annexation and joinder of the water systems as well, whereby Brooklyn will save many millions of dollars and at least five years’ time in obtaining an abundant supply of water.”

Edward C. Graves, Brooklyn Consolidation League, July 7, 1894<sup>1</sup>

The Brooklyn Real Estate Exchange, the *Eagle*, and many other Brooklynites viewed Graves’ claim with skepticism, questioning whether Manhattan would finance an ample water supply for Brooklyn and the other boroughs. The Exchange argued in 1896 that Brooklyn must make plans for its own water supply before consolidation because “New York . . . will take good care that [it] will be amply supplied throughout her present limits before Brooklyn gets any benefits in that direction.”<sup>2</sup>

This was not an academic issue for Brooklyn, which needed to expand its water supply to assure its future growth and prosperity. Brooklyn, with a population exceeding one million, had tapped its known reserves and needed to plan a new watershed for its future needs.

Without an adequate supply, Brooklyn faced the threat of water famines, uncontrolled fires and the higher insurance costs.

A series of water shortages in the 1890s increased these fears. Many in Brooklyn had opposed consolidation out of a concern that it would lose its independence and still fail to access New York City’s tax base. Would consolidation result in a metropolis that looked

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<sup>1</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 7, 1894, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, December 11, 1896 p. 5.

beyond the parochial interests of its individual parts and address the needs of the entire city?

In fact, it did. Greater New York used Manhattan's larger borrowing power to plan an expansive new reservoir system, while it extracted more water from existing supplies to meet immediate shortages. Brooklyn and New York ended their competition for new sources and together formed a municipality so essential that its needs could not be ignored, even by a hostile state government. The new metropolis leveraged this power to plan and build the Catskills water supply system, a move that disproportionately benefitted Brooklyn and the other outer boroughs.

### **The Thirsty City**

Both Brooklyn and New York faced strains on their water supplies in the 1890s, but Gotham had significant advantages compared to its neighbor across the East River. The first was its proximity to the mainland. New York's Croton system, begun in 1837 in neighboring Westchester and Putnam County, was one of the great engineering feats of its time, but it was a much simpler and cheaper project to bring water from Westchester County across the narrow Harlem River to Manhattan than to transport it across the East River to Brooklyn. With its larger tax base New York continued to build the Croton Reservoir from the first stage in 1848 and throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

Not until the early 1850s did the Brooklyn government negotiate a contract to bring

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<sup>3</sup>See Gerhard Koeppel, *Water for Gotham: A History* (Princeton, NJ : Princeton University Press, 2000) for a description of the construction of the Croton Water System.

water from the Long Island Water Supply Company, but the privately owned water company failed to gain public support in referenda in 1853 and 1854. The following year Brooklyn and Williamsburg consolidated into a single city. This reduced the competition between the two cities and increased interest in a joint water supply for the former rivals, a step that became all the more important because its “wells were becoming annually more impure” and the city had no water “supply for fires except that of 157 public cisterns.” Not surprisingly, Brooklyn insurance rates were forty percent higher than those of New York, which had the benefit of Croton water.<sup>4</sup>

Brooklyn purchased the capital stock of the water company in 1856. The following year it began construction of a municipally owned water system. The city tapped into the nearest large supply: the rivers, streams, lakes and groundwater of Queens County (consisting of the present day Borough of Queens and Nassau County). Because the water came from low elevations, it had to be transported by an expensive pumping process to a storage reservoir in Ridgewood, Queens on the border of Brooklyn. For service in high elevations, Brooklyn built a reservoir on Mount Prospect at Flatbush Avenue and Eastern Parkway. This supply then required further pumping to deliver water to the homes and businesses of Brooklyn.

Completed in 1862 the Ridgewood system initially provided twenty million gallons of water a day to Brooklyn. The city’s rapid population growth soon made this supply

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<sup>4</sup>Samuel McElroy, “A Paper on the Original and Present State of the Brooklyn Water Works; read before the Constitution Club of Brooklyn” (New York: George F. Nesbitt & Co., Printers, 1885) p. 6.

inadequate. Only nine years later Brooklyn was searching for new sources. To meet immediate needs, the city built temporary stations at Watt's and Smith's Ponds and began construction on a Hempstead storage reservoir, which increased the supply to thirty million gallons a day. Unable to complete the desired extensions in a timely fashion, Brooklyn constructed driven wells in 1882 in various locations throughout Kings and Queens Counties. By 1890 Brooklyn had completed the Hempstead reservoir and increased capacity to 57 million gallons a day. Two years later Brooklyn completed plans to increase capacity by twenty million gallons to its daily capacity by tapping streams at East Meadow, New Bridge, Wantagh and Massapequa.<sup>5</sup>

Despite these improvements, Brooklyn's water supply, at best, barely met the demands of a rising population. A real estate broker recounted the water department's struggle to keep pace with increased demand.

In 1889 the supply and demand were about equal at 50,000,000 gallons daily and after an expenditure of about five million of dollars, an additional supply of 25,000,000 daily was secured; we find we are to-day practically in the same condition as we were in 1889 as the consumption in 1893 averaged 75,881,700 gallons.

The results of this "hand to mouth water" policy, as Brooklyn's chief water engineer I.M. de Varona described it, were a series of fires that could not be extinguished due to a lack of water pressure.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Brooklyn City Works Department, "History and Description of the Water Supply of the City of Brooklyn" (Brooklyn: Commissioner of City Works. Division of Water Supply, 1896).

<sup>6</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 22, 1894, p. 7; Brooklyn Board of Water Supply Vol. 3, p. 92, "In the matter of the application . . ."

The consequences of Brooklyn's water shortage became clear during the drought of 1894. During the hot summer rainfall dropped from an average of 11.88" to only 1.96" and the Hempstead storage reservoir's levels dropped from a capacity of nineteen feet to only four feet, eight inches. The crisis was so dire that the *Eagle* reported in August that "if the condition of things continues all that can be had from this reservoir will be the natural flow from the streams leading into it, and the water of some of them is not the best." Brooklyn reduced consumption and immediately began constructing a pumping station in Freeport, Long Island that would supply ten million gallons a day. This step did nothing to resolve Brooklyn's long term needs.<sup>7</sup>

Suburban development in and around Brooklyn's watershed also threatened the city's water supply. Throughout the 1890's and into the 1900's, the *Eagle* regularly reported that increased development and poor sanitary protection were polluting Brooklyn's watershed. An *Eagle* editorial expressed the fear that "retention of sewage in the soil is liable to poison all the water for some distance around. Places like Horsebrook in Hempstead have been found especially dangerous for this reason, yet the water of that brook is directed into one of our reservoirs and Brooklyn people drink it."

With little or no excess capacity, Brooklyn continued to rely on these questionable sources. The *Boston Standard*, an insurance paper, concluded that the poor quality of Brooklyn's water was because "every available source must be continued in constant use to eke out the meager total which can be realized when the entire available machinery of storage

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<sup>7</sup>Brooklyn *Eagle*, August 20, 1894, p. 1; August 21, 1894, p. 10; September 7, 1894, p. 7.

and transmission is operated to its practical maximum.” The city needed to find new sources of water and protect its existing watershed from increased development in the surrounding areas. Water shortages were not unique to Brooklyn, but its lack of alternatives would become particularly bleak as the nineteenth century came to a close.<sup>8</sup>

Two important studies examined Brooklyn’s future water supply in the late 1890’s. The City Work’s department published “Report on the Future Extension of Water Supply for the City of Brooklyn” in January 1896, followed by a report from the Manufacturers’ Association of Kings and Queens Counties in 1897. Each study looked at how Brooklyn would supply water to its citizens, while unsure of how consolidation would affect future plans.

The first plan looked at three potential supplies: Long Island ground water, the Housatonic River in New York and Connecticut and the Ramapo River in New York and New Jersey. According to the study, each watershed was able to provide over 100 million gallons a day, a supply estimated to meet Brooklyn’s needs for the next twenty years. I.M. de Varona, the chief author of the study, supported an expansion of Brooklyn’s existing system into Suffolk County, which would eventually provide an additional 214 million gallons a day. Pumping groundwater was more expensive than a gravity based system, but de Varona believed that Brooklyn lacked the borrowing capacity to build a new system on the mainland and meet its other demands. Long Island’s watershed could be constructed in stages, allowing Brooklyn to

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<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, March 23, 1896, p. 7; August 18, 1896, p. 6; July 20, 1896, p. 6; September 10, 1896, p. 4.

expand its supplies more gradually and borrow money over a longer period of time.<sup>9</sup>

With consolidation in the offing, the decision was delayed. City Works Commissioner Alfred T. White acknowledged in the report.

When the accompanying surveys were begun it was not expected that the selection of a new water shed would be immediately necessary, and it has fortunately so proved, for a conclusion before the question of consolidation with New York is settled would be plainly undesirable for many reasons. Every factor of the problem would be affected if such a consolidation should be enacted.

Even before the State Legislature enacted consolidation legislation, Brooklyn's future became tied to the potential union of Greater New York. In response, the Report proposed a "conference . . . with the authorities of New York City as to their plans and as to the possibility of joint action in developing larger and more distant sources of supply." In the meantime, Brooklyn continued with plans to extend its Long Island water supply into Suffolk County.<sup>10</sup>

In the year between the two reports, Brooklyn's future water supply was put in greater jeopardy. In 1896 the State Legislature passed the Burr Law to prevent Brooklyn from tapping Suffolk County's watershed without the approval of its Board of Supervisors. Suffolk's leaders did not want their rural county to suffer the same fate as Queens, whose environment had been damaged by Brooklyn exploitation of its watersheds. An *Eagle* editorial admitted "there is more water there, but it would be a crime to bring to Brooklyn that which is

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<sup>9</sup>Brooklyn City Works Department "Report on the Future Extension of Water Supply for the City of Brooklyn" January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1896 Submitted by City Works Commissioner Alfred T. White to the Brooklyn Common Council, p.p. 7-9

<sup>10</sup>"Report on the Future Extension of Water Supply for the City of Brooklyn," p. 10-11.

needed for the present and future population of Suffolk County.” Limited to its Queens County watershed, Brooklyn needed to find new sources. Brooklyn Water Department Chief Engineer Peter Milne believed in two or three years the issue would become serious, but this was a short period of time considering the importance of the water supply to Brooklyn and the length of time to build a new water system.<sup>11</sup>

The Manufacturers’ Association of Kings and Queens Counties published another influential report in 1897 on Brooklyn’s water needs and possible future supplies. The Association, like White’s report, did not advocate a single plan. Instead it analyzed a number of possibilities, concluding that

beneath the sands of Long Island is stored a large supply of pure and abundant water which may be obtained by the intelligent and persistent development of the deep-driven well system,

The Association did not preclude the use of other sources, but argued that in the near term Brooklyn’s only major water source lay beneath Long Island and it must be maximized. With imagery of burning buildings, summer water famines and health epidemics, Brooklyn’s manufacturers wanted relief soon. What the Association presciently recommended was that water debt (as a self sustaining investment) be separated from the city’s constitutional debt limit and future water supplies be planned for all of Greater New York.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 25, 1896, p. 6; May 29, 1896. p. 6

<sup>12</sup>“Report of the Special Committee of the Manufacturers’ Association of Kings and Queens Counties, New York, Upon the Water Supply of the City of Brooklyn. March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1897,” p. 3-4, 15-16; Charles H. Weidner, *Water for a City: A History of New York City’s Problem from the Beginning to the Delaware River System* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1974), p. 132-133.

The Burr Law and Brooklyn's debt limit made consolidation a more appealing prospect, but it did little to change the views of anti-consolidationists. The *Eagle* acknowledged the need for cooperation between Brooklyn and New York beginning in 1895, but it opposed the political consolidation of the two cities. The newspaper argued that "both economy and common sense suggest that the cities co-operate in whatever is done." The two cities were sure to reach a water crisis within the next ten years, and Brooklyn "has been so near a water famine within the last three years that the men in power were afraid to let the public know the exact condition."<sup>13</sup>

The *Eagle's* proposal for joint development of a new water supply made logistical and economic sense. Ironically, Andrew H. Green supported consolidation to accomplish exactly this kind of coordination. What Green recognized and the *Eagle's* McKelway did not, was that New York had little incentive to cooperate without consolidation. If Gotham opened the Croton system's waters to Brooklyn, it would only take water that the larger city needed to supply its growing population. With consolidation, Manhattan would develop a vested interest in Brooklyn's future and its leaders would look at its needs differently.

McKelway refused to accept this logic. After the passage of the Consolidation Act in May 1896, he skeptically wrote that "New York will be pretty certain to hold Brooklyn to the performance of all her own duties, to the supply of all her own needs, to the carrying of all her own burdens and to parting with most of her own advantages and privileges." Water was

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<sup>13</sup>Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, June 29, 1895, p. 6.

certainly one of the things that he expected Brooklyn would have to supply for itself.<sup>14</sup>

If, as McKelway and other opponents of Greater New York believed, consolidation would do nothing to alleviate Brooklyn's water crisis, the city had to conceive of new ideas to supply water. The debt limit left Brooklyn with little money to borrow and the Burr Law left Brooklyn without an easily accessible watershed to exploit. The *Eagle's* solution was privately supplied water. In October 1896 the newspaper editorialized that

everybody knows that the debt of the city is already so large that it is not possible to issue bonds enough to pay for building an aqueduct from new sources of supply or to buy the sources themselves. There seems to be but one course which can be pursued with safety, and that is the purchase of water from a private company that will bring it to the city limits and turn it into the public reservoirs and water mains.

The weakness of this plan was trying to find investors able to raise the capital necessary for a massive long term project for a city whose independent existence was about to end. Public Works Commissioner White opposed it because it would be more expensive in the long term and the city could not assure the quality and quantity of the supply.<sup>15</sup>

Despite its potential pitfalls, without consolidation a privately owned water system seemed Brooklyn's only way to escape its debt limit and geographic isolation from the mainland. Otherwise the rapidly growing city would either run dry or be forced to limit its growth. Neither was a pleasant thought for Brooklyn's boosters and its political leadership, not to mention its residents. Brooklyn's attempts to significantly increase its existing water supply

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<sup>14</sup>Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, May 29, 1896, p. 6; New York State Legislature *In the Matter . . .*, p. 455.

<sup>15</sup>Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, October 8, 1896, p. 6; "Report on the Future Extension of Water Supply for the City of Brooklyn", p. 9-10.

system had been stymied by the Burr Law, while its debt limit prevented any attempt to create the reservoir systems proposed by the City Works Department or other experts.

Opponents of consolidation were not the only people concerned about Brooklyn's water supply. As the debate over both consolidation and water supply continued in Brooklyn in 1896, threat of a water shortage weighed heavily on Brooklyn's business community and insurance companies. Abraham Abraham, owner of the Abraham & Strauss department store, stated the problem clearly when he delivered a "businessmen's petition" for an increased water supply to the Board of Aldermen.

As to the sufficiency of supply, the fire insurance companies representatives say there is not enough water in Brooklyn and they declare that this would be a serious matter in the event of the breaking out of a great conflagration. None of the great establishments in this city would be safe if there should be a big fire and none appreciate this fact more than the proprietors of these stores.

The water crisis was so acute that he proposed a suspension of all other public improvements to "get a good water supply." As a leading member of Brooklyn's business elite he believed that a plentiful water supply should be the prime responsibility of Brooklyn's government.

Abraham was a supporter of consolidation, but he believed that the water shortage was so dire that it could not wait two years for consolidation.<sup>16</sup>

The *Eagle* continued to warn that Brooklyn "will get no water supply increase by consolidation with New York, none from the state and none for ourselves unless we arrange for local action for it before consolidation is effected." De Varona, a less partisan voice, also feared

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<sup>16</sup>Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, December 16, 1896, p. 7.

that it is not reasonable to expect that the wants of our city will be more diligently or efficiently attended to when it forms only part of greater New York than they can by ourselves while we have exclusive control of our own affairs and are in a position to adopt the course of action that we may deem most advantageous to our interests.<sup>17</sup>

Could Brooklyn prosper as part of Greater New York? This was the question that Brooklyn's politicians faced not only on the water supply, but also in all areas of infrastructure development. Brooklyn took no major actions to increase its water supply in the two years before consolidation. Instead its future would be left in the hands of the new city.

The creation of Greater New York on January 1, 1898 did not immediately solve Brooklyn's water shortage. Consolidation changed the political boundaries of Greater New York, but it would take many years to unite the city's infrastructure and meet the demands that its advocates had argued it could. The attempts to shore up Brooklyn's existing water supply showed the path that a cash poor Brooklyn likely would have taken alone. Consolidation combined Manhattan's economic resources with the increased political clout of Greater New York. This led to the construction of the Catskills system which would meet the needs of the entire city for another generation.

Prior to consolidation New York City (Manhattan and the Bronx) had planned an expansion of the Croton water system. In 1883 the state government gave New York City authorization to build the New Croton Aqueduct, three times the size of the first. Completed in 1891, it alleviated one of New York's periodic water shortages. Following the new Aqueduct's construction, the city continued to expand its capacity by directing all of the

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<sup>17</sup>Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, March 17, 1897, p. 6.; Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Brooklyn From January 1 to March 31, 1897 (Brooklyn: 1897) p. 704.

untapped streams and rivers of the watershed into it. Consumption rose in 1891 from 110 to 165 million gallons per day and by 1895 had risen to 183 million gallons. By 1910 New York had fully exploited the Croton watershed, creating a supply of 336 million gallons a day for Manhattan and the Bronx to supply a population over 2.7 million.<sup>18</sup>

This system did nothing to benefit Brooklyn, which continued to rely upon its Long Island watershed. Just prior to consolidation de Varona had estimated that “we might continue to obtain our water supply for the present watershed up to the end of the year 1900.” The 1890s had been a decade of much talk and little investment in Brooklyn’s water supply. Greater New York needed to replace much of Brooklyn’s existing infrastructure, and construct new driven wells and larger water mains. Unfortunately little was done in 1898 because of delays that occurred as the new city merged and organized the finances of its antecedents.<sup>19</sup>

De Varona’s prediction came true by 1899. Water shortages became so acute that the borough’s water department proposed tapping polluted water previously considered unacceptable. In January 1900 the *Eagle* reported that the water department intended “to pump from Baiseley’s and Springfield Ponds . . . [whose] water has been thought to be polluted for several years and its use was once condemned by the State Board of Health.” The State Board of Health forbade the use of these sources. Insurance companies threatened to cancel fire insurance policies. Two cartoons published in the *Eagle* illustrated the dire nature of the water shortage. The first one showed a man taking a mud bath with a caption that read “Will

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<sup>18</sup>Weidner, p.68-84.

<sup>19</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 26, 1897, p. 4.

Brooklyn be reduced to this?" The second was a woman representing Brooklyn opening a dry faucet to the Brooklyn Reservoir. The caption read "You never miss the water till the reservoir runs dry." On February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1900 after 255 days of below average rainfall Brooklyn was within one day of exhausting its supply.<sup>20</sup>

Greater New York responded to the water crisis by expanding Brooklyn's existing water supply, reducing leaks and filtering polluted water. Political chicanery by members of the Municipal Council, who sought to exact tribute for their votes delayed passage of the legislation. When the city finally took action on November 21, 1899, it borrowed \$6.25 million to complete the leaky Millburn reservoir,<sup>21</sup> and create new driven wells and a larger water main to connect this supply to the Brooklyn water system. The creation of a new main was critical. The *Eagle* reported in 1899 that average consumption was 110 million gallons per day, well above the safe maximum of 86 million because of the limited capacity of Millburn's aging brick conduit. These improvements, estimated to be completed in two years, would supply an additional twenty five million gallons a day.<sup>22</sup>

While waiting for the completion of the Millburn conduit. Brooklyn's water crisis

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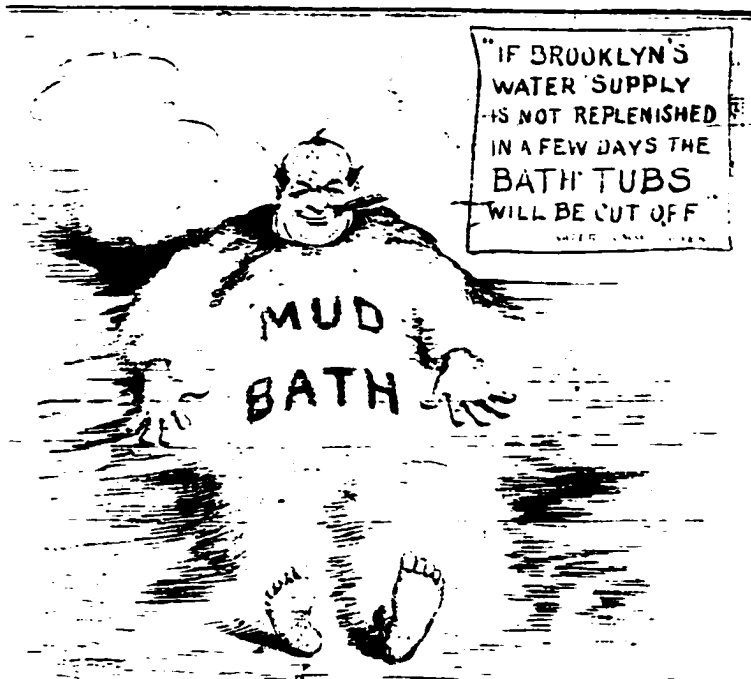
<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.* January 12, 1900; January 13, 1900; *An Inquiry into the Conditions of the Water-Supply of the City of New York* by the Merchants' Association of New York, August 1900, p. 47-48.

<sup>21</sup>The Millburn reservoir, which received water from streams in Wantagh, Massapequa and East Meadow, could not hold water because it was embedded in the sandy ground of Long Island. The city eventually abandoned it and concentrated on supplying water through ground supplies.

<sup>22</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, February 14, 1899, p. 12; November 22, 1899, p. 1.



You never miss the water till the reservoir runs dry.  
*Brooklyn Daily Eagle, January 13, 1900*



Will Brooklyn Be Reduced To This?  
*Brooklyn Daily Eagle, January 12, 1900*

continued with reservoir levels reaching new lows. Fire Chief Croker reported in early 1900 “that the scarcity of water now prevailing in Brooklyn is a serious menace to property interests and in case of fire might bring disastrous results.” Deputy Water Commissioner Moffett of Brooklyn responded to the water shortage by ordering conservation efforts, including the closing of public water fountains, water troughs and water to livery stables. He described the “waste of water under the present circumstances [as] almost a criminal act.”<sup>23</sup>

For some Brooklynites, the drought and Greater New York’s inability to expand the borough’s water supply showed the failure of consolidation. A local businessman lamented that “It was a sad day when we were consolidated with New York for public sentiment finds it hard to convince officials who have so little in common with us or our needs.” Brooklyn’s condition made his distress understandable, but its root cause was decades of inadequate investment by Brooklyn, not two years of Greater New York. Consolidation was too recent to pass judgement on its efficacy and it remained unclear whether it would provide a solution to Brooklyn’s water crisis.<sup>24</sup>

Without any new supplies, Greater New York turned to Suffolk County’s watershed again, trying unsuccessfully to repeal the Burr Law. The *Eagle* forgot its concern for eastern Long Island’s future “demanding [that] the way should be cleared into Suffolk County by

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<sup>23</sup>*Ibid* January 7, 1900, p. 18; January 9, 1900, p. 18; New York City Board Water Supply, Gas and Electricity *Annual Report 1904* (New York: 1904) p. 192

<sup>24</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 11, 1900, p. 1; January 12, 1900 p. 1-2, 9; Merchants’ Association of New York *An Inquiry into the Conditions of the Water-Supply of the City of New York* (August, 1900), p. 47-48.

legislation for water there.” Brooklyn capitalists responded to this possibility by buying ponds and streams in Suffolk in anticipation of a change in the law, hoping to capitalize on the borough’s need for water. The State Legislature disappointed these water speculators when it failed to overturn the Burr Law, siding with the voters of rural Suffolk County and speculators in other watersheds who wanted to force Greater New York to use their water supplies.<sup>25</sup>

Mayor Van Wyck’s Tammany government proposed the first plan to create a water supply for all of Greater New York while creating new opportunities for graft. Their instrument was the Ramapo Water Company. The genesis of the Company was a September 4, 1886 article in the *Scientific American* that showed how water from the Catskills could supply water to New York City. Ramapo used its political influence, in likely collusion with the state Republican Party, to receive a charter from the State Legislature in June 1895. The charter gave the company land and water rights for the most easily accessible areas of the Catskills watershed and the authority to bring that water to New York City.<sup>26</sup>

The State Legislature had further strengthened the company’s position by eliminating

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<sup>25</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 10, 1900, p. 8; Greater New York would make one last attempt to tap Suffolk’s waters in 1908, when it argued that tapping the county’s ground water would not violate the Burr Law because it referred to protection of ponds and streams. Its lawyers argued that pumping ground water would not have deleterious effect on these waters and was in compliance with the law. Suffolk County won this case and New York ended its fight for to access the county’s water. See “Before the New York State Water Supply Commission In the matter of the application of the City of New York to the State Water Supply Commission for the approval of the report of the Board of Water Supply of the City of New York to the Board of Estimate and Apportionment of the city of New York, dated June 8, 1908, recommending the development of the underground sources of water supply in Suffolk county, Long Island, New York, etc.”

<sup>26</sup>Weidner, p. 140-149.

other possible water sources. The Burr Law and the City Charter of 1897 had limited not only Brooklyn's access to Suffolk County water, but also prevented New York from extending the Croton system northward into Dutchess County. This gave Ramapo the rights to supply water from the region's only easily available watershed. With water shortages looming for all five boroughs, Ramapo was in a position to profit.<sup>27</sup>

The company used the centralized authority created by consolidation and the power of a sympathetic government to abuse its monopoly. The company brought its proposal before the Board of Public Improvements for approval. On August 16, 1899,<sup>28</sup> Ramapo went before the Board of Public Improvements with the backing of William Dalton, Commissioner of Water Supply. At the Board meeting Ramapo President Maurice Holahan proposed to supply 200 million gallons of water per day at cost of \$70 per million gallons over forty years, more than twice the cost of the municipally supplied Croton system. Holahan used the dire water crisis in all five boroughs to justify quick approval of the plan and accused his opponents of delaying needed action.

Opposition on the Board arose from Comptroller Bird S. Coler and Bridge Commissioner Patrick J. Shea. Coler and Shea arranged a two week delay on the vote to more closely investigate the Ramapo proposal. Coler, a supporter of municipal ownership and a Brooklyn politician without ties to Tammany, led the campaign against Ramapo. After he

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<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup>Quick passage of major legislation in the dead of summer is often a ploy to limit debate of something unseemly.

publicized details of the Company's scheme, opposition grew quickly. Newspapers denounced the proposal as "an unholy alliance of Boss Platt's Republican machine which controlled the Legislature and Boss Croker's Tammany Democrats who ruled the city."<sup>29</sup>

Taxpayers filed suit to stop the Ramapo Company's sweetheart deal, and on August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1899 the court served an injunction that prohibited the Board from taking action on the Company's proposal. Coler carried the fight to Albany with the support of William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* and the powerful Merchant's Association of New York. The Association opposed all private schemes to supply New York with water, seeing it as commodity too vital to leave to a private monopoly. The State Supreme Court agreed with Ramapo opponents and granted Attorney General J.C. Davies the authority to commence action "to dissolve the corporation and forfeit its corporate rights." A little over a year later the Legislature dissolved the Ramapo Water Company's charter. When it took effect in March 1901, the Company lost control over Greater New York's future water supplies. Ramapo's machinations had confirmed that private interests could not be trusted to supply water, but where and how Greater New York (and Brooklyn) would expand its water supply remained unclear.<sup>30</sup>

After the Ramapo scheme failed, the city's business and reform forces focused on the

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<sup>29</sup>Nelson Manfred Blake, *Water for the Cities A History of the Urban Water Supply Problem in the United States* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1956), p. 278.

<sup>30</sup>Weidner, p. 148-149. After the revocation of its charter, the Ramapo Water Company tried to prevent the city's completion of the Catskill Reservoir, claiming that it had prior franchise rights to the watershed. On March 8, 1915, the U.S. Supreme Court dismissed its suit, ending the company's legal battle.

problem. A report by the Merchants Association report concluded that

The creation of Greater New York projected a new element into the problem of supplying water to the inhabitants within the enlarged City. . . . [T]he uniting of these communities into a single municipality, with common aims and interests, demanded a large plan and a long look ahead both as to the sources of the additional supply and as to the manner in which it should be obtained.

The Association looked away from Long Island's watershed and toward sources that would supply the entire city. It examined watersheds in the Catskills, the Ten Mile River/Housatonic in Dutchess County, Massachusetts and Connecticut, the Wallkill River in Orange County and filtered Hudson River water. The Association rejected the Ten Mile River/Housatonic and Wallkill River because both required interstate cooperation. It looked favorably upon both the Catskills and Hudson River because of their potentially large supplies, but favored the Hudson River because of its potential supply of 1.5 billion gallons per day.<sup>31</sup>

Coler also contributed to this change of focus. After blocking the Ramapo Water Company's proposal, the comptroller commissioned a report on the water supply by John R. Freeman, a nationally recognized water engineer, who investigated New York's current water supply systems and possible new supplies. Freeman was the first engineer to thoroughly investigate new sources and their water yields and feasibility, while looking at the needs of Greater New York instead of its constituent parts. Like the Merchants Association, he examined the Ten Mile River/Housatonic, filtered Hudson River Water, and the Catskills. For economy alone he favored the first choice, but he also did extensive research on the Catskills

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<sup>31</sup>"An Inquiry Into the Conditions Relating to the Water-supply of the City of New York, by the Merchants' Association of New York" August 1900, p. 4.

and the city's political leadership began to look in that direction.<sup>32</sup>

What was most important about these studies was not their particular recommendations, but that they recognized that consolidation required the creation of a water system to supply all of Greater New York. The great metropolis had eliminated the regional competition for water supplies and the financing problems of Brooklyn. This change coincided with an increased role for government and the development of professional management systems that came into being during the Progressive Era. Coler's choice of Freeman, an outside professional who would make recommendations based on merit instead of politics, was an example of this change.

Freeman participated in a larger report commissioned by the City of New York in 1903 which contributed to this trend. Its purpose was to assess the long term water needs of New York's five boroughs. The Commission looked at methods of reducing water waste, future sources of supply, and development of temporary water supplies. The goal of the report was to create support in the State Legislature for the expansion of New York City's water supply.

Joining Freeman were Rudolph Hering, an American born, German educated civil engineer and Professor William Hubert Burr, a Rensselaer Polytechnic graduate (unrelated to the author of the Burr Law). All three were experts in civil engineering and large scale public projects. Their report, hundreds of pages long, succeeded in its goal. Released on November 30, 1903, it painted a dire picture of Greater New York's water supplies. Queens' situation

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<sup>32</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 23, 1900. p. 4.; Weidner, p. 150-158.

was “the most immediately pressing,” because its local ground water was “insufficient in quantity and supply.” Staten Island’s ground water was of similarly poor quality. Manhattan’s supply was not in danger of contamination, but two years of drought could strain it to its limits and the infrastructure of the original waterworks was in very poor condition.<sup>33</sup>

The report described Brooklyn’s supply in stark terms. Pollution endangered surface waters so much that they would probably have to be removed from the supply, and “the demands of this Borough have already exceeded the present supply.” Much of the infrastructure was also in need of upgrading. Construction was already underway at the Millburn Conduit in Nassau County, but this increase would only give short term relief for Brooklynites. The report recommended the use of Suffolk County water, but the Burr Law continued to prevent expansion of Brooklyn’s water supply eastward.<sup>34</sup>

The Commission recommended the exploitation of the Catskills watershed because of its size and because politics ruled out other potential sources. The corporation counsel had advised the Department of Water that it was unwise to obtain additional water from interstate sources, ruling out the Ten Mile River and Housatonic watersheds. Based on this restriction, the Commission proposed to exploit the watersheds of the Catskills and Dutchess County and to use filtered fresh water from the Hudson. When Dutchess County learned of the Commission’s plans, it successfully demanded increased protection of its watershed. The

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<sup>33</sup>William H. Burr, John R. Freeman, Rudolph Hering “Report of the Commission for Additional Water Supply for the City of New York, 1903” p. 4-5.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*

following year the Legislature passed the Smith Act preventing the city from tapping Dutchess County's water supply. The Commission gave qualified approval to Hudson River water (north of Poughkeepsie), but this proposal did not receive serious attention from water engineers and New Yorkers, who did not look favorably at drinking river water.<sup>35</sup>

The Catskills alone met the water demand estimates of the report, based on a projected population of seven million in 1930 and a per capita consumption of 150 gallons daily. New technology made it possible to construct aqueducts large enough to transport sufficient water (approximately 500 million gallons a day) from the Catskills to meet these needs. This supply, combined with the Croton System's 330 million gallons a day, would provide water for all the boroughs of Greater New York, integrating the water system.<sup>36</sup>

Burr, Hering and Freeman had outlined a plan for alleviating the City's water shortages, but it remained to be seen how such a reservoir system would be financed and constructed to meet the needs of America's largest city as its population grew at record pace. The solution was found in a recognition of Greater New York's growing financial needs and the use of progressive management techniques for the building of the City's water supply infrastructure. These ideas came together in 1904. The former would occur by changing how the city's debt limit was calculated. New York's city debt limit continued to rise in the early twentieth century as the city's assessed valuation increased, but its increased borrowing capacity was unable to keep up with the demand for new public improvements, including the subways, bridges and

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<sup>35</sup>Weidner, p. 166-167.

<sup>36</sup>It is unclear whether these estimates also included Brooklyn's existing system.

tunnels that were physically consolidating the cities. The city's growing population necessitated these improvements, but the metropolis lacked the borrowing power to finance a large and expensive system in the Catskills.

Consolidation had created a great metropolis whose needs could not be ignored. New York City was the economic engine of the state and the nation's financial capital. Rural legislators often blocked initiatives to benefit New York City, but with its population and water consumption rising, the City's needs could not be ignored. Greater New York's water shortage made it necessary to create new formulas to calculate the city's debt limit, overriding the fears of an expansive city government dating back to the Tweed Ring scandals. To accomplish this goal, the voters of New York State approved an amendment to the state constitution in November 1904 which treated water supply debt as self sustaining and separate from the overall limit, allowing the City to borrow \$200 million for construction of the Catskills reservoir.

Not surprisingly, this increased borrowing power came with strings attached. New York's Governor Frank W. Higgins, elected in 1904, and the upstate dominated State Legislature were not going to give the city (and Tammany Mayor George B. McClellan) unrestricted control of that much money. The McClellan Act passed in 1905, authorized the organization of a state water commission that would oversee and approve the condemnation of land and the building of all new water supply systems. This meant that New York City would not be able to construct the Catskills reservoir system without the oversight of an independent board, preventing the great metropolis from overstepping its power in its negotiations with the

individuals and governments of the Catskills and the gross corruption that had occurred in other large public works.

Along with the protection of a State Board was the City's Board of Water Supply. In the tradition of the Central Park and Prospect Park Commissions, an independent board appointed by the mayor would oversee the construction of the new reservoirs instead of a city agency. To obtain the endorsement of business and good government interests, McClellan agreed to choose the three appointees from lists provided by the New York State Chamber of Commerce, the Manufacturers' Association of Brooklyn and the Board of Fire Underwriters. Tammany may have elected the mayor, but the reservoirs would be managed by representatives of Brooklyn and Manhattan's business and financial interests.<sup>37</sup>

The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* supported the McClellan Act and the structure of the new water authorities, but stressed Brooklyn's interests. An editorial following passage by both houses of the Legislature made clear that the water of the Catskills belonged to all of Greater New York, and Brooklyn must get an early share of the water. "There is a situation on this side of the river that needs close and comprehensive examination and after that such relief as public sentiment here shall be able to exact from the city." McKelway, the *Eagle's* editor, had opposed consolidation, but once the die was cast he wanted Brooklyn to extract as much as possible from Greater New York. Because of its size and political power, Brooklyn was in a relatively strong position to negotiate. Mayor McClellan's decision to choose a member of the Board of Water Supply from a list assembled by the Manufacturers' Association of Brooklyn

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<sup>37</sup>Weidner, p. 176-181.

showed the borough's importance.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, consolidation had created the idea that the city's constituent parts had to be united into a single whole. If any candidate or political party wanted to be successful they could not rely on the votes of a single borough and had to make a broader appeal. Political success was contingent upon bringing the diverse interests of the different boroughs together.

In the case of water, the argument was clear. Greater New York had already committed millions of dollars since consolidation for the construction of infrastructure connecting Brooklyn to Manhattan. If the city hoped to expand and grow, it needed to assure developers, insurance underwriters, manufacturers, and the residents of newly built neighborhoods in Brooklyn that their homes and businesses would have a clean, reliable water supply which could protect their property from fire. This brought disparate elements together into a coalition that convinced upstate legislators, Tammany pols and Brooklyn developers alike that the future prosperity of the city and the state rested on an increased water supply.

The turning point for the construction of a new water supply was 1905, when the State passed legislation creating the Board of Water Supply, but the large scale nature of the project meant that Brooklyn would have to rely on its existing supply until the completion of the project. Construction on the Catskills system would begin in 1907, but it would not supply water to the city until 1917. Before its completion, Brooklyn's short term needs would have to be met by its existing watershed. To meet the increased demand, the Department of Water Supply would use a variety of means to increase Brooklyn's water supply. These measures likely mirrored

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<sup>38</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 23, 1905, p. 4.

what an independent Brooklyn, albeit with fewer funds, would have done without consolidation.

One of the first solutions was to filter already existing water sources, including the polluted Baiseley's and Springfield Ponds, which provided an additional seven million gallons per day in 1904. The same year the Department of Water Supply signed contracts with the privately owned Queens County Water Company to provide Brooklyn with three million gallons a day. Another source of supply came from the wells of the "water wizard" Cyrus W. Titus, who had tapped deep sources at Jameco, Forest Park and in Brooklyn itself. By driving wells deeper than previously tried, he was able to supply Brooklyn with fourteen million gallons a day in 1909. Seeing the success of Titus, the Water Department drove deep wells on Long Island in search of more water for Brooklyn. One hundred driven wells already provided Brooklyn with thirty-six million gallons a day in 1907 and the city planned to drive two hundred more wells the same year to double this supply. Brooklyn was consuming 126 million gallons a day that year and the chief water engineer John W. McKay estimated that population growth would increase consumption by ten million gallons a day.<sup>39</sup>

Brooklyn's supply continued to increase and by 1910 the borough consumed 159 millions gallons a day, but its supply was not "yet sufficient to safely meet the demands of consumers during periods of exceptionally low rainfall." Brooklyn continued to explore for more water in deep driven wells and its supply remained adequate, though not plentiful. in the years before the completion of the Catskill system. In the waning years of Brooklyn's water system conservation became an important method of preventing water shortages. With dozens

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<sup>39</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. January 7, 1907. p. 2; July 20, 1909, p. 12.

of inspectors finding leaks, Brooklyn lowered its per capita consumption to under eighty gallons per day, the lowest in the city. By 1913 the borough reduced its consumption to 110 million gallons day, rising to only 143 million gallons as Brooklyn's population approached two million in the late 1910s.<sup>40</sup>

While Greater New York sought to rebuild and expand Brooklyn's watershed, construction continued on the massive Catskills reservoir system to meet the demand created by the city's rapid population growth. Between 1907 and 1917 Greater New York spent over \$175 million dollars and hired thousands of workers to build four reservoirs, 126 miles of aqueducts, and eighteen miles of tunnels. In the process the city displaced two thousand people in eight villages. In 1917 the city opened the valves to the Catskill system. The new reservoirs initially supplied 250 million gallons of water a day (eventually expanded to 650 million gallons). Most of this water went to Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island, while the Croton system continued to supply water to the Bronx and Manhattan. The new supply allowed Brooklyn to shut its Long Island system and place it in reserve in case of drought or excessive demand during the Summer. Catskill water also saved two million dollars annually in 1920 because it did not require expensive pumping like Brooklyn's old Long Island system. Catskill water, unlike Long Island ground water, was very pure and not threatened by development and the pollution it created. Eventually Brooklyn would completely abandon its

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<sup>40</sup>Department of Water Supply Gas and Electricity *Annual Report 1910*, p. 54; *Annual Report 1916*, p. 50; *New York Times*, November 30, 1913, VIII, p. 1. Brooklyn water department, which retained significant autonomy after consolidation placed greater emphasis on conservation because of Brooklyn's population growth and water needs.

Long Island water supply and rely solely on the Catskills (and later the Delaware) watershed.<sup>41</sup>

### **Consolidated Water**

When Brooklynites voted narrowly in favor of consolidation in 1894, they had just survived a summer of drought that taxed their water supply to its limits. During the next two years Brooklyn would search for new water supplies, but constrained by limited finances it did little more than increase already existing supplies. With the passage of the Burr Law in 1896, Brooklyn found itself burdened with a water system that was expensive to maintain, due to the high costs of pumping ground water, and geographically constrained. Brooklyn lacked the capital to create the large scale waterworks necessary to build a new water supply and continued to rely on the more expensive driven wells of Long Island whose long term ability to supply Brooklyn with water was questionable. If it had remained independent, the needs of New York's second largest city might have forced the Legislature to repeal the Burr Law to prevent possible water shortages and fires, but it would have saddled Brooklyn with a water system threatened by the pollution from suburban development, and created conflicts with the growing population of Long Island.

Consolidationists had argued that a larger city could solve this conundrum. Albert Henschel believed that Greater New York was so important that "the interests of the Greater City will be so large, surpassing those of many States of the Union . . ." With a population approaching five million in 1910. Greater New York's population was approximately half of

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<sup>41</sup>Weidner, p. 191, 272, 280-281; Department of Water Supply Gas and Electricity City of New York Annual Report for 1919, p. 38; Annual Report for 1917, p. 6-7.

New York State's population and larger than all but three states. Its importance as a center of banking, commerce and manufacturing were unparalleled in the United States. Brooklyn's marriage to Manhattan created a larger entity whose needs could not be ignored, even by a Legislature dominated by rural interests. Despite the opposition of angry upstate farmers, the legislature gave the city the authority to buy thousands of acres and borrow unprecedented amounts of money to finance the building of the Catskills reservoir.

A joint New York-Brooklyn water system, as the *Eagle* periodically advocated, was a possibility before consolidation, but Brooklyn had already shown its inability to finance the much less expensive Williamsburg Bridge in 1896-97.<sup>42</sup> A Brooklyn independent of Manhattan would have been a beggar at the doorstep of its wealthier neighbor struggling to make payments to provide water for its citizens. Privately supplied water remained an option, but the potential drawbacks were high. Although Brooklyn would have avoided the high borrowing costs of a public system, the long term costs would have been greater given the possibility of corruption like the Ramapo and/or the higher long term costs of paying a profit making enterprise.

Unlike more affluent suburbs around New York City that developed later, Brooklyn was not an economically homogeneous community. It had to provide services to a diverse population, whose poorer residents had to be subsidized by those with greater wealth to pay for their public improvements. Brooklyn certainly had its share of wealthy residents at the turn

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<sup>42</sup>See Chapter Three "The Brooklyn Crush: Rapid Transit and the Transformation of Brooklyn."

of the century in neighborhoods like Brooklyn Heights, Fort Greene, Park Slope and Clinton Hill, but they were far outnumbered by the population of working-class neighborhoods in Red Hook, Williamsburg, Brownsville and East New York. Brooklyn developed as a city at a time when the middle and upper classes had segregated themselves spatially from the poor and the working classes, but their homes remained within city lines. With the Progressive Era's greater concern for the "Other Half" and their potentially destabilizing effects on society, Brooklyn's elite could not have provided water only for wealthy enclaves as future suburbs did.

In the 1890s supporters of consolidation argued that Brooklyn should turn to Manhattan to provide the capital for water and other public services through consolidation. They confidently dismissed their opponents' fears that Manhattan would not share its wealth with Brooklyn. Fortunately for Brooklynites, consolidation's opponents were wrong in their assumptions about Manhattan, which simultaneously financed a water supply for all five boroughs and through this project advanced its imperial ambitions.

## **Chapter Four**

### **The Brooklyn Crush: Rapid Transit and the Transformation of Brooklyn**

“Consolidation will bring about a harmonious system of development; it will give us bridges, tunnels, canals, and other means of approach and communication, rendering accessible all parts of the Greater New York by an adequate system of rapid transit; it will effect a tremendous saving in time and energies, and add largely to the wealth and comfort of the community.”<sup>1</sup>

Albert E. Henschel, Secretary, Municipal Consolidation Inquiry Commission, 1895

As early as 1868, Andrew H. Green had argued that consolidation could end the internecine conflicts of the competing governments of Greater New York and rationally plan the development of the region. Thirty years later his dream became reality when the city celebrated the inauguration of Robert Van Wyck as the first Mayor of Greater New York. His mayoralty, dominated by Boss Richard Croker and Tammany Hall, was one of few accomplishments and notorious corruption, but Van Wyck also faced a challenge that none of his predecessors had or his successors would. He was the overseer of an experiment to integrate three cities, five counties and a plethora of local governments.

Van Wyck understood the importance of achieving this goal. In the 1890s supporters of consolidation made many claims about what a larger city could accomplish, creating great expectations for the new administration. Foremost among them was the development of a transit system that would bind the city together, allowing people to travel from one part of Greater New York to another and connect the residential, business and manufacturing centers

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<sup>1</sup>Henschel “Municipal Consolidation: Historical Sketch of Greater New York,” p. 55-56.

of the region. The *New York Times*, a staunch supporter of consolidation, made this point in an editorial during the consolidation debate in 1894. “Bringing the two cities of the East river [Brooklyn and New York] into one municipality will make little difference, if the means of crossing the river are not increased and made easier. We shall not only need more bridges before the benefit is much felt, but bridges that make communication over the united areas continuous, instead of breaking it at each bank of the river.” When consolidation occurred, the new government gained the power to plan the development of infrastructure in all the boroughs and use its increased tax base and borrowing power to pay for these improvements. The question was whether the leaders of Greater New York could overcome the powers of local interests and private monopoly to bring the region together.<sup>2</sup>

Green, Henschel and other boosters of consolidation had claimed that the creation of Greater New York would quickly and inevitably lead to better regional planning, but a simple expansion of city boundaries was insufficient to achieve this goal. Regional politics did not disappear in 1898, but were placed in the context of a single government whose ability to plan came up against the power of private transit interests, machine politics and the limited capabilities of the early twentieth century municipal government. For consolidation to be successful, Greater New York’s politicians, civic leaders and businessmen needed to overcome these hurdles and create a mass transit system to link Manhattan to the other boroughs.

The conditions at the Brooklyn Bridge made these goals self-apparent. Since the

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<sup>2</sup>*New York Times*, October 17, 1894, p. 4.

bridge's opening in 1883, the rapid transit corporations of Brooklyn and New York had colluded in a "gentlemen's agreement," described by the *Brooklyn Eagle* in 1910 as "the convenient and natural arrangement under which the traction companies have kept out of each other's territory. . . ." Trains from Manhattan did not enter Brooklyn, while trains from Brooklyn went over the bridge and terminated on Manhattan's Park Row next to City Hall. The two cities were unable to coordinate their mass transit systems, preventing most Brooklyn riders from taking a single train for their daily commute. Without a strong central government, little could be done to prevent this monopolistic practice.<sup>3</sup>

The "gentlemen's agreement" led to unbelievable levels of congestion at Manhattan's Park Row terminal; what the *New York Times* called the "Brooklyn Bridge Crush." Park Row represented all that was wrong with divided regional government. The evening rush hour was a chaotic nightmare as commuters converged by foot, trolley and elevated rail to board trains heading into Brooklyn. "The people rush for Brooklyn," wrote the *Eagle* in 1896, "as if they were pursued by the police or a mad dog or some other unpleasant thing."<sup>4</sup> Most evenings passed without serious injuries; other times the newspapers reported more dire consequences, such as this 1902 *New York Times* report.

It is estimated that there were about 200 people gathered at this one track alone and when the Flushing Avenue car came in there was a tremendous rush to get to the car. . . [Charles] Jacob was picked up by the rush and swept off his feet . . . Then there came a surge of the mass of people, and Jacob fell down to the pavement through an opening, striking, it is thought, his head and before any one could assist him to his feet

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<sup>3</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. February 9, 1910, p. 1; January 26, 1910, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. January 24, 1896, p. 4.



He had killed Lions in Africa—



—and Polar Bears among the Arctic Wastes.



He had put to flight a crowd of Italian Brigands.



He had fought a band of Apaches, single-handed.



He had boarded the Gorilla in its Native Haunts.



But when he was asked to ride in the Brooklyn Bridge Cars during the "Rush Hour," he refused. He didn't dare to try it.

© Ottavio Lebi, Co. 1890-1891

**THE CAREER OF A BRAVE MAN:**  
And how He Finally Found Something He Was Afraid Of.

**The Career of a Brave Man: And How He Finally Found Something He Was Afraid Of.**  
*Puck*, n.d., Circa 1890s. (Courtesy of the Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn Collection)

he was trampled upon by scores of people.<sup>5</sup>

Amazingly, Jacob suffered only a broken leg, but his and many other commuters' experiences showed the critical need to rethink Greater New York's transportation system.

Nowhere was this more pressing than between Brooklyn and Manhattan. Manhattan's overflowing population had been spilling into Brooklyn for decades, but density levels in Manhattan's tenement districts had reached crisis proportions at the turn of the century. According to the 1890 census, population density in the Tenth Ward on the Lower East Side had reached 522 persons per acre or upward of 330,000 per square mile. Jacob Riis wrote in *How the Other Half Lives* that

It is said that nowhere in the world are so many people crowded together on a square mile as here. The average five-story tenement adds a story or two to its stature in Ludlow Street and an extra building on the rear lot, and yet the sign "To Let" is the rarest of them all.

Consolidationists saw Brooklyn and its suburban regions as the potential salvation for the overcrowded masses living in Manhattan's tenements. To make this possible Greater New York had to bridge and tunnel the East River and create a web of subways and elevated rails in Brooklyn that would carry its population to Manhattan. Mass transit to the suburbs was also a weapon in the attack on overpopulation in the tenements and the resultant spread of diseases like cholera and tuberculosis.<sup>6</sup>

In the decades following consolidation, Greater New York was able to build this mass

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<sup>5</sup>*New York Times*, February 6, 1902, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup>Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (New York: Dover Publications, 1890, 1901, 1971), p. 85.

transit system and depopulate Manhattan's tenements. As a result of this mass transit expansion Brooklyn's population would rise from 1.16 to over 2.5 million between 1900 and 1930, transforming its vegetable farms into subdivisions of apartments buildings and homes. The largest part of this population increase were immigrants arriving from Eastern and Southern Europe or pouring out of Manhattan tenements to new ghettos in Brownsville and Bushwick or to better conditions in neighborhoods like Flatbush and Bensonhurst.<sup>7</sup>

Many Brooklynites mourned the demise of their city in 1898, but consolidation did not initially create a more unified Greater New York. Instead, it was a prerequisite for effective transportation planning, while relieving cash starved Brooklyn from having to rely on its own tax base to build the connections to Manhattan its population desperately needed. Decision-making also became simpler, requiring the approval of only one government with taxation and borrowing powers centralized in the Board of Estimate. Bi-city commissions, like the ones that built the Brooklyn and Williamsburg Bridges, were no longer necessary, removing the greater opportunities for corruption and inefficiency that multi-layered authorities allowed. Centralized authority did not guarantee more efficient government, but did increase accountability in an era dominated by machine politics.

Consolidation created a larger palette and the potential authority to plan and build rapid transit at the beginning of the Progressive Era. when urban planning and population dispersal were central goals for reformers. Consolidation could not eliminate the squabbling of regional

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<sup>7</sup>Jackson, *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, p. 921.

and borough interests or the power of large corporations that slowed the process of integration, but when conditions forced Greater New York's government and state regulatory bodies to take action, consolidation made it easier to plan and construct the rapid transit that connected Brooklyn (and the other boroughs) to Manhattan.

The effects of consolidation can be seen by comparing the construction of transportation infrastructure between Brooklyn and New York, specifically the Williamsburg Bridge, built between 1895 and 1903, and the subway system from its conceptual stages in the 1890s through completion of the Dual System after World War I. The Williamsburg Bridge will show the problems in planning and building rapid transit between the two cities before consolidation and in the years immediately following. Conversely, the construction of the subway system will show how consolidation, aided by Progressive Era ideas on the role of government, made it possible to use rapid transit to integrate Brooklyn and Manhattan and transform Brooklyn into Greater New York's most populous borough.

### **The Williamsburg Bridge: "A Factory in the Wilderness."**

The construction of the Williamsburg Bridge underlined the weakness of government planning before consolidation and the precarious state of Brooklyn's finances. Brooklyn's Eastern District needed the Williamsburg Bridge to connect it to Manhattan's business district and end that section's dependence on the ferry. A new bridge was also seen as a relief valve for the Brooklyn Bridge Crush by diverting Eastern District passengers away from the overcrowded bridge. The People's Bridge Association in Williamsburg spurred the Legislature to action in April 1895 by organizing large public meetings in Brooklyn and sending delegations

to Albany to lobby for the construction of a new East River bridge. They cited the overcrowding on the Brooklyn Bridge and the inadequacy of Williamsburg's ferries as evidence of the need for a new bridge. Also interested in a new bridge were New York's housing reformers who believed it could be used to resettle hundreds of thousands of immigrants from the Lower East Side into the City of Churches. To succeed in this goal the bridge would not only have to be built, but connected to the transit systems of the two cities.<sup>8</sup>

The Legislature responded to the lobbying of the People's Bridge Association by creating the New East River Bridge Commission in April 1895, a bi-city authority to oversee the construction of the Williamsburg Bridge. The legislation required Brooklyn and New York to finance the bridge on a fifty-fifty basis and reform mayors, Charles A. Schieren and William L. Strong, to each appoint three members to the Commission. The Commissioners then appointed Leffert L. Buck Chief Engineer.<sup>9</sup>

The bridge was to be built at the foot of Broadway in Brooklyn and connected to Manhattan's Lower East Side. But construction could not begin until the Bridge Commission purchased a franchise given to the East River Bridge Corporation (ERBC) by the State Legislature three years earlier to build a span on the same site. Frederick Uhlmann, the owner of the ERBC, hoped to use this leverage to extract cash from the Commission and gain exclusive rights for the Brooklyn Elevated, which he also controlled, to run elevated trains from

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<sup>8</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. April 11, 1895, p. 10; January 5, 1896, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* June 18, 1895, p. 1; April 12, 1895, p. 1.; April 13, 1895, p. 1; April 14, 1895, p. 1., 6; May 3, 1895. p. 1; August 3. 1895, p.1.

Brooklyn's Broadway over the new bridge. After negotiations and a lawsuit Uhlmann sold his franchise to the Bridge Commission for \$200,000 in May of 1896, but failed to gain concessions for the Brooklyn Elevated.<sup>10</sup>

What was left unclear during these negotiations was something that consolidation was supposed to address: how and if Uhlmann's elevated trains would utilize the new bridge and would their tracks be extended into Manhattan. The legislation creating the Bridge Commission gave it authority to build the bridge, not plan its connections. Without consolidation that decision would have been left to Brooklyn's and New York's governments to each negotiate with their cities' transit corporations. This created a strong possibility that the "gentlemen's agreement" and the Brooklyn Bridge Crush would have continued into the future.

Before that decision could be made, Brooklyn and New York had to pay for the bridge, something made more difficult by the money spent to purchase the ERBC franchise. The financing of the bridge confirmed the arguments of consolidationists by showing that an independent Brooklyn could not meet the needs of its population. The city needed the new East River bridge, but in 1896 Brooklyn's financial situation was so desperate that an *Eagle* editorial suggested that the city should "postpone any contemplated expenditure until next year, so that money can be raised for the new East River Bridge." Brooklyn's leaders took great pride in living in a "City of Homes," but homes could not provide the tax base to fund

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<sup>10</sup>*Ibid*, December 18, 1895, p. 1. 6; August 22, 1895, p. 12 ; January 5, 1896. p. 5; March 16, 1896, p. 1-2; May 28, 1896, p. 1; Williamsburg Bridge Souvenir Program (Brooklyn, 1903), p. 16.

Brooklyn's improvements.<sup>11</sup>

Brooklyn's smaller tax base meant that it could only borrow money in a hand to mouth fashion. The tax base that Brooklyn's government needed to finance the city's development lay across the East River in Manhattan and could be accessed only through consolidation. An anonymous bridge commissioner reported in November 1896 that "Brooklyn has reached her debt limit. There would be no trouble in selling bonds now if the City of Brooklyn had any to sell. It is to be hoped that when the assessors get through with their work for the coming year it will be shown that the real estate value has been higher than it is expected at present." Brooklyn's financial situation did not improve the following year when it could borrow only an additional \$500,000. "Here we are," complained a bridge commissioner to the *Eagle*, "carrying on a cumbersome office, a large engineering corps with expenses going on every day and yet we can do nothing because we can't get money." For the Bridge Commissioners, consolidation might have seemed the only way to complete their project.<sup>12</sup>

Brooklyn's lack of capital was not the only problem caused by the two cities' jurisdictional divisions. Differing laws on accepting contract bids also delayed the construction of the bridge in 1897. New York's Charter automatically awarded contracts to the lowest bidder, while Brooklyn's allowed the government to award a contract to the most trustworthy bidder, based on the quality of the company's work and its ability to complete projects on time and within budget. The Commissioners chose to observe the Brooklyn law and in September

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<sup>11</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 19, 1896, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, November 25, 1896, p. 2; November 18, 1896, p. 1; February 10, 1897, p. 3.

1897 unanimously awarded the contract for the Brooklyn anchorage to the Degnan-McClean Construction Co. at a cost of \$721,850. Tammany Hall leader John J. O'Brien, who had made the lowest bid at \$687,611, then made unsubstantiated bribery charges. O'Brien sued the Commissioners, arguing that under New York City law his bid had to be accepted. The Court decided against O'Brien a month later, ruling that the bi-city commission could choose which law to observe. Although this was a short delay, the lack of uniformity between the two cities' laws might have created future opportunities for contractors to delay construction and gain financial advantage. These needless jurisdictional divisions ended the following year when consolidation created the City of Greater New York.<sup>13</sup>

### **A Bridge For a Single City**

Consolidation created an opportunity to centralize power around a single mayoral administration and end the delays caused by Brooklyn's lack of money and the political separation of Brooklyn and New York. It also created a city large and powerful enough to override the power of the transit corporations which had prevented the integration of the region's transportation systems. Robert Van Wyck, Greater New York's first mayor, embraced centralization, but not necessarily with the goals that consolidationists had in mind. Reformers had not expected Tammany Hall would return to power so quickly after the victories of reformers in Brooklyn and New York and use Greater New York's unified administration to

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<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, June 17, 1897, p. 2; July 21, 1897, p. 7; September 30, 1897, p. 1; September 30, 1897, p. 1-2; October 1, 1897, p. 2, 6; October 6, 1897, p. 1; October 7, 1897, p. 6; October 30, 1897, p. 16.

increase its patronage. On January 19, 1898 Van Wyck fired all six of the commissioners appointed by his Republican/Fusion predecessors, replacing them with new commissioners tied to Tammany Hall.<sup>14</sup>

Van Wyck's administration showed that a larger and more powerful government could accomplish more, but what government accomplished depended, in part, on who controlled it. With Tammany in power, consolidation became an invitation to increase patronage. Nonetheless, Van Wyck's appointment of his own commissioners meant that he had to take greater responsibility for the progress, or lack thereof, in the construction of the Williamsburg Bridge.<sup>15</sup>

The new Commission's first problem was the raising of capital. Consolidationists claimed that Greater New York would unify the tax bases of the two cities and relieve Brooklyn of this onerous burden and the restrictions created by its debt limit. The new Bridge Commissioners requested \$4.14 million for expenses in 1898, only to find that funds had dried up. On March 11<sup>th</sup>, the *Eagle* reported that work on the bridge had come to a standstill and a week later discovered that the Bridge Commission owed \$700,000 and had only \$946 in the bank.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 20, 1898, p. 11; January 19, 1898, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup>Future bridges would be built without the need for any commission. Shortly after consolidation, Greater New York would begin construction on two new bridges; the Manhattan Bridge connecting Downtown Brooklyn and Canal Street in Manhattan and the Queensborough Bridge connecting Long Island City, Queens and Manhattan's 59<sup>th</sup> Street. Both would be completed in 1909. *Ibid.*, January 23, 1898, p. 1, 32; January 27, 1898.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, February 26, 1898 p. 7; March 11, 1898, p. 2:

Ironically, the consolidation process prevented the Commission from getting the needed funds. Comptroller Bird S. Coler was unwilling to approve any borrowing until he had examined the indebtedness of all the counties, cities, towns and villages that were now part of Greater New York. He feared that their combined borrowing, especially the reckless borrowing of some rural localities before consolidation, would send the new city perilously close to its debt limit. Coler's decision delayed work on the bridge and it became necessary to issue \$200,000 in special revenue bonds in May to prevent "the deterioration or destruction of work already performed on the New East River Bridge."<sup>17</sup>

Only when Coler sorted out the budgets and debt of the defunct governments of Greater New York could the city begin borrowing again. At the end of July the Commissioners received two million dollars from the city to continue their work. This was slightly less than half the amount they had asked for at the beginning of the year and nearly five hundred thousand dollars less than their revised request in June. Work continued on the bridge, but the city's borrowing needs would place stress on its capital budget. This limited the amount available for the Williamsburg Bridge and delayed its completion. Money came in 1899, but the Commissioners considered the appropriation of \$2.5 million insufficient and asked for an additional \$2 million to speed construction. On January 11<sup>th</sup> 1899, the Board of Estimate authorized \$1.5 million for the bridge with an additional \$500,000 available from the previous

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<sup>17</sup>*Ibid* March 19, 1898, p. 7; March 25, 1898, p. 18; May 13, 1898, p.2; May 28, 1898, p. 12; June 5, 1898, p. 9; June 7, 1898, p. 1.

year's bond authorizations.<sup>18</sup>

After Coler had sorted out the finances of Greater New York, consolidation made it easier to finance the construction of the Williamsburg bridge, but New York did not have unlimited borrowing power and Van Wyck had to make political choices on which projects to fund. Competing with the Williamsburg Bridge were other priorities, especially Manhattan's subway system and the city's overcrowded schools. Van Wyck declared that only public schools would have a higher priority. The bridge was obviously an important project for Brooklyn (and Greater New York) and Van Wyck's decision to fire the old Commission meant that he had much riding on its quick and successful completion.<sup>19</sup>

Eighteen-ninety-nine was the year that work consistently began on the Williamsburg Bridge. In mid-February the contractors had completed work on the bridge's foundations and they were ready to build the steel towers. After tax assessments had been recalculated, more borrowed money became available for bridge construction. In July, the Board of Estimate authorized \$4 million in bonds to continue construction based on the statement of Lewis Nixon, the Commission's president, that the bridge would be completed by 1901, the end of Van Wyck's term.<sup>20</sup>

Van Wyck did not complete the bridge during his term, in part, because consolidation

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<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.* November 18, 1898, p. 13.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.* October 21, 1898, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.* February 11, 1899, p. 2; February 19, 1899, p. 34; February 2, 1899, p. 2; July 13, 1899, p. 16; August 29, 1899, p. 14.

did not prevent corruption in the city. Albert Henschel had argued that a larger city would limit corruption by linking the outer boroughs' more wholesome electorate to Manhattan's, but Van Wyck's tenure quickly disproved this theory. After the Board of Estimate approved another \$4 million for the bridge in May 1900, the Board of Aldermen rejected the Board's action by a vote of 37 to 9 on June 12. The *Eagle* suspected foul play and editorialized accusingly that

There have been aldermen who have held up appropriations for public work until they had forced the contractors to present to them convincing reasons [i.e. bribes] why they should withdraw their objections.

Whether New York's aldermen were paid cash directly by contractors or received indirect benefits later is unknown, but the municipal legislature remained a fact of doing business with city government. Corruption where the government and private supplier met, still existed. Reform-minded outer borough voters, if they existed, were not able to overcome the chicanery of Greater New York's political machines. It was not until June 25<sup>th</sup> that the Board of Aldermen relented under pressure from party leaders and voted to approve the appropriation.<sup>21</sup>

Scandals would continue as the press and reformers questioned whether the contract for the bridge towers had been fixed to give it to the Pennsylvania Steel Co., followed by a lawsuit over the legality of a prevailing wage clause. These delays pushed the completion date until after the 1901 election won by the Fusion Republican candidate Seth Low, who had

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<sup>21</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle* May 1, 1900, p. 2; June 12, 1900, p. 2; June 13, 1900, p. 4; Daniel T. Rodgers *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998) p. 156-158.

become president of Columbia University after his tenure as Brooklyn's mayor in the 1880s.<sup>22</sup>

After Low's election, he instituted changes to the administration of the Williamsburg Bridge that advanced the goals of consolidation. The new 1901 city charter eliminated the Bridge Commission and centralized power under the Mayor and Bridge Commissioner Gustav Lindenthal, the bridge engineer who would later be responsible for the Hell Gate Bridge. Despite the changes, delays continued during Low's two year term caused by Roebling & Sons slow work manufacturing the bridge's suspension cables. The city responded to this delay by suing the company for violating its contract. The process of buying and condemning property necessary to the construction of the bridge also stalled construction. Finally, as the bridge neared completion in 1902, a fire broke out pushing back the project's completion.<sup>23</sup>

More damaging than the delays in the long term was the government's failure to integrate the span with Brooklyn's and Manhattan's transportation system. If the city had utilized the latent powers of consolidation, the Williamsburg Bridge would have allowed a commuter to travel on a single train from an outlying area of Brooklyn to lower Manhattan. But when the Williamsburg Bridge finally opened on December 18, 1903, the city had done little to make it an effective means of transportation. No contracts had been signed to begin trolley or elevated rail service and the Manhattan side lacked even a bridge plaza to ease the passage of

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<sup>22</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 9, 1900, p. 2; August 20, 1900, p. 6; August 28, 1900, p. 14.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, November 11, 1902, p. 1; December 1, 1902, p. 20; December 30, 1902, p. 6.

Brooklyn trolleys.<sup>24</sup>

*Brooklyn Times* editor, Thomas P. Peters, would later compare the planning of the Williamsburg Bridge to “the man who placed his factory in the wilderness and had neither river, highway nor railroad by which to get his raw material or upon which to ship his product.”<sup>25</sup> The cause of this problem was that Greater New York, like other city governments in the United States, had adhered to a laissez-faire policy that prevented it from effectively regulating or operating rapid transit. For consolidation to be a successful policy, it needed a government willing and able to challenge private interests. When Low took office in 1902, he lacked the threat of public ownership or strong regulatory power, giving him little control over the Brooklyn Rapid Transit (BRT), Brooklyn’s transit monopoly, or the Metropolitan, the trolley monopoly in Manhattan. Just prior to the bridge’s opening Lindenthal and Low were considering having the city run trolley cars over the Williamsburg Bridge with terminals on either side of it because the traction interests in Manhattan and Brooklyn refused to make proposals for running trolleys over the East River span.<sup>26</sup>

When Low’s successor, George McClellan, Jr., took office the following year, he had a finished bridge with no trains running on it. The BRT and Metropolitan refused to negotiate in

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<sup>24</sup>The two boroughs trolley’s had to run on separate tracks because of design differences. Brooklyn’s trolleys were powered by overhead wires, while Manhattan’s received power from an underground system. These pre-consolidation choices prevented the integration of their trolley networks.

<sup>25</sup>“Williamsburgh Bridge Souvenir Program” September 16, 1908, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup>*New York Times*, 1/18/1903, p. 2.

an attempt to extract better terms with the city that would allow them to charge an additional fare for the trip over the bridge. McClellan's response showed the potential for strong government action. He threatened to prevent the BRT from running trains over the Brooklyn Bridge, something that could be done on three month's notice. This pressure eventually worked and the Metropolitan and the BRT came to the table and negotiated an agreement to run trolleys over the Williamsburg Bridge. The companies agreed to pay the City an annual rent of \$10,000 and five cents per trolley car that went over the bridge. Their passengers would pay no additional fare to cross the East River.<sup>27</sup>

In November 1904 full trolley service began on the Williamsburg Bridge and passengers quickly filled the cars to capacity. This victory, however, could not hide the fact that Brooklyn's trolleys ended their journey on the Manhattan side of the bridge and Manhattan's trolleys came to an end at the Brooklyn side, forcing Brooklyn commuters to pay two fares and transfer trains to complete their journeys. Lying in the middle of the bridge were the roadbeds for two tracks of elevated or subway trains. It would not be until 1908 that the Broadway elevated, now owned by the BRT, would be connected to the Williamsburg Bridge, opening Brooklyn's Eastern District to more rapid development. Even then the tracks were underutilized. The Congestion of Population Commission of 1911 compared the facilities of the Williamsburg Bridge to the Brooklyn Bridge and concluded that

the same conditions are repeated, with the exception that underground terminals are provided for surface cars at the New York end of the bridge, and that an extra set of

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<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 3/4/1904, p 2; 3/16/1904. p. 5; 6/4/1904, p. 16; 11/5/1904, p. 16.

tracks enables New York cars to cross the bridge to the Brooklyn plaza, it seems almost a criminal waste of public money.<sup>28</sup>

Despite its larger capacity the Williamsburg Bridge carried only seventy percent as many passengers as the Brooklyn because its trains stopped at Delancey Street and were unable to continue their journeys into Manhattan's business district.

Consolidation had initially failed to prevent a recurrence of the mistakes made on the Brooklyn Bridge, but it was not for lack of plans. Government agencies, railroad corporations, and good government groups had many ideas to end the Brooklyn Bridge crush and to truly connect the two boroughs. Most advocated creating an underground or elevated rail connection between the Brooklyn and Williamsburg Bridges to eliminate the former's Park Row Terminal. The *Eagle* noted that "Heretofore there have been as many bridge plans as there were persons of imagination and desire for notoriety to propound them." Typical of these was a proposal by BRT President Greatsinger to construct an elevated loop running down Centre Street that would connect the Williamsburg, Brooklyn and (when completed) Manhattan Bridges. What was missing from all of these plans was an overall vision of how to best organize all of these projects and the power to implement them. Work finally began on an underground Centre Street loop in May 1908, but Mayor McClellan suspended it to begin construction of the Municipal Building. The city began construction on the loop again in 1911,

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<sup>28</sup>"Report of the New York City Commission on Congestion of Population February 28, 1911" (New York: 1911), p. 79.

but did not complete it until 1913.<sup>29</sup>

Consolidation theoretically made planning the region in a rational fashion possible, but could not as long as the city allowed private owners to set the city's transit agenda. As Daniel Rodgers noted in *Atlantic Crossing Social Politics in a Progressive Age*, America's business and political elite, unlike their British, French, and German counterparts, had organized their transit systems by giving franchises to private companies with little or no government regulation over them. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these companies consolidated to create large monopolies to control their markets.<sup>30</sup>

This was most obvious in the lack of integration of Brooklyn's and Manhattan's trolleys. The Metropolitan, which was later purchased by the Interborough Rapid Transit, had no interest in letting the BRT operate trains that would travel into Manhattan or vice-versa. The transit companies maintained their "gentlemen's agreement," guaranteeing each of them a territory *and* a profit. As long as private owners controlled the transit system, consolidation would be an ineffectual planning tool.

Seth Low had seen the weakness of this system in 1902 and proposed that the Rapid Transit Commission, which was building the first leg of Manhattan's subway, should plan the connections for the Williamsburg, Manhattan, and Queensborough Bridges. He set "forth a scheme which shall treat all the East River Bridges and tunnels as parts of a great central rapid

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<sup>29</sup>*Eagle*, February 19, 1902, p. 13, April 25, 1902, p. 4; *New York Times*, January 10, 1903, p. 16; March 4, 1904, p. 2; "New Subways for New York: The Dual System of Rapid Transit" June 1913, p. 54.

<sup>30</sup>See Rodgers, Chapter 4, "The Self Owned City, p. 112-159.

transit system.” Unfortunately Low’s idea was not accepted by the Legislature and New Yorkers would have to wait another decade before integration of the city’s transit systems would finally begin.<sup>31</sup>

### **Transit and State Power**

Judged by the goals of consolidationists in the 1890s who foresaw the creation of a vast transit network, the Williamsburg Bridge was a failure; little more than a plank across a river. After the beginning of elevated rail service in 1908, it created a path to Bushwick, Brownsville and East New York, but did little to open up Brooklyn’s rural areas (Flatlands, Flatbush, New Utrecht and Gravesend) for development and provided no means for Brooklynites to continue their journeys into Manhattan. To truly integrate Brooklyn and Manhattan, Greater New York needed to plan the development of its transit system and wrest a significant amount of power away from its traction interests. This change would occur during the development of the subway system.

In contrast to the lack of organization in constructing and connecting the Williamsburg Bridge, subway planning and building was much better organized. Prior to the subway, elevated and surface rail (omnibuses, horse drawn rail and trolleys ) had been built by private interests who purchased franchises from Brooklyn or New York. The two cities used this system to build their rapid transit networks, but the slow speed of the els (twelve miles per hour), their coal burning engines and damage to the urban landscape, led to negative attitudes

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<sup>31</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. April 25, 1902, p. 4.

toward their expansion. The logical alternative was to build a subway, something accomplished by London earlier in the century. In 1891, the State Legislature passed a law giving New York City the authority to award a subway franchise, but the costs of subway building were much greater than street and elevated railroads. Private corporations lacked either the desire or the borrowing power to take on such a large project.<sup>32</sup>

The New York State Chamber of Commerce broke this logjam by turning to the public sector to finance subway construction. The Chamber followed the lead of Abram Hewitt, iron manufacturer and former Mayor of New York, appointing a commission led by Alexander E. Orr, a produce merchant and leader of the Brooklyn Consolidation League, which argued that only the government would take the risk to build a subway. The eventual formula was for a subway to be publicly financed and owned, but constructed and operated by the private sector. In response to the lobbying of the Chamber, the influence of Hewitt, and the severity of Manhattan's transit congestion, the State Legislature passed and Governor Roswell Flower signed into law the Rapid Transit Act of 1894. In November of that year, New York's voters ratified the Act in a public referendum. This law gave New York City the authority to finance the construction of a subway system that would be publicly owned, but constructed by and leased to a private operator. Overseeing the construction of the subway system was the Board of Rapid Transit Commissioners (RTC). Its members included five businessmen named in the Act, including Orr who would head the Commission, and three ex officio members: the

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<sup>32</sup>Clifton Hood *722 Miles The Building of the Subways and How They Transformed New York* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993) p. 56-57.

president of the Chamber of Commerce, the mayor and comptroller.<sup>33</sup>

Because of political and legal wrangling and its large price tag, the RTC was unable to implement its initial proposal of two lines to serve the East and West Sides. The RTC compromised on a smaller subway in 1896 that would start at City Hall, go under Fourth Avenue to Grand Central Terminal, cross 42<sup>nd</sup> Street to Longacre (now Times) Square and then under Broadway to 96<sup>th</sup> Street splitting into two branches with one continuing under Broadway and the other going up Lenox Avenue. After the plan received the necessary approvals, the City awarded the contract to the Interborough Rapid Transit (IRT), owned by August Belmont, Jr., the wealthy financier and representative of the Rothschild banking interests in America. On October 27, 1904 the IRT began service on New York's first subway system.<sup>34</sup>

The subway was a great success, but it was an enterprise of Manhattan that failed to meet a basic goal of consolidation; physically uniting the boroughs. New York City began planning the subway before 1898 and, at that time, lacked both the political interest and the legal authority to borrow capital to benefit Brooklyn or other parts of the region. The creation of Greater New York changed this equation. Manhattan was the United States' financial capital and the dominant borough, but its leaders could not rule Greater New York unilaterally. To retain power, they needed to address the needs of the different boroughs and communities. The subway system could not be confined to Manhattan and the Bronx because the government

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<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.* p. 68-74, 91.

needed the cooperation of outer borough politicians, especially the large Brooklyn contingent, to function. State and City officials understood these new political dynamics and took action to plan and later build rapid transit to unite the entire City.

Two years after consolidation, the State Legislature took the first steps toward uniting the enlarged city by expanding the authority of the RTC. The Rapid Transit Act of 1894 gave the RTC authority to build only in Manhattan and the Bronx, legally preventing it from building in other parts of Greater New York. Consolidation ended this limitation. On April 23, 1900 Governor Theodore Roosevelt signed a bill into law extending the powers of the RTC to all of Greater New York, eliminating the East River as a barrier to rapid transit construction and planning. Alexander E. Orr, president of the RTC, described the new goals and spirit that developed after consolidation in the Spring of 1902. "It is, therefore, clear that the public now has a right to expect from this Board the preparation of a general and far-reaching system of rapid transit covering the whole city of New York in all its boroughs."<sup>35</sup>

The first borough to benefit from this expansion of power was Brooklyn. In 1902, the City entered into Contract Two with the IRT, extending the subway southward from City Hall down Broadway to Bowling Green, across the East River to Brooklyn with stations beginning at Borough Hall and extending to the Atlantic Avenue terminal of the Long Island Railroad. (The IRT completed construction of this section in 1908.) For the first time Brooklynites could take a single train to lower or midtown Manhattan and avoid the Brooklyn Bridge crush.

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<sup>35</sup>Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York, *Rapid Transit in New York City and Other Great Cities* (New York: 1906), p. 175-176.



Ceremony to Commemorate the Opening of the Brooklyn Borough Hall IRT Subway Station. Circa 1907. (Courtesy Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn Collection)



Fulton Street Elevated at Borough Hall Station. Circa 1900. The train in the station has just crossed the Brooklyn Bridge. (Courtesy Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn Collection)

Unfortunately, only a fraction of Brooklyn's population was within walking distance of the train terminal in downtown Brooklyn. Others would have to take a train or trolley and transfer to the subway or more likely stay on an elevated train that crossed the Brooklyn or Williamsburg Bridges.<sup>36</sup>

But the RTC had much more elaborate plans to expand the subway system that would encompass all the boroughs, except for distant and lightly populated Staten Island. In Manhattan, it planned two extensions, one to go up Lexington Avenue from Grand Central Terminal, the other south from Times Square along Broadway and into Brooklyn. New elevated lines would go up in the Bronx and be integrated into the overall system. In Queens a loop was planned to connect the Williamsburg and Queensborough Bridges and an elevated train from the Williamsburg Bridge to Jamaica. If completed, these additions were supposed to create full length subways lines running on the east and west sides of Manhattan that would continue into the rapidly growing Bronx.<sup>37</sup>

The RTC's proposed expansions in Brooklyn would have been a major step in creating connections to Manhattan and extending service within Brooklyn. In addition to the earlier mentioned connections to Queens, Brooklyn would gain a loop line connecting the Williamsburg Bridge to Brooklyn Borough Hall via a tunnel through Manhattan. Other proposed lines included: a Fourth Avenue subway to Fort Hamilton, a line from Grand Army Plaza down Eastern Parkway to East New York Avenue and a tunnel from the Manhattan

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<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 175-190

Bridge down Flatbush Avenue Extension to connect with the other proposed lines at Atlantic Avenue. If completed, whole new sections of Brooklyn would be opened to development. However, left out of the RTC's plans were large portions of Flatbush and Flatlands through which the BRT already had elevated or surface railroads. If the RTC's proposal had been implemented, the BRT's rail lines would have been isolated from the proposed new connections, leaving these areas without a seamless commute to Manhattan and retarding their development.<sup>38</sup>

Consolidation had simplified the process of mass transit construction by eliminating the need for multiple governments to each approve and raise their share of capital, as occurred with the Williamsburg Bridge. The only stumbling block within the government was Greater New York's Board of Estimate and the ability of the enlarged city to raise capital. Manhattan's borrowing power could now finance the subway expansions, but before construction could begin government and business leaders would have to negotiate the shape of the new system.

The first casualty of this process was the RTC. In the 1890s the RTC's elite makeup had reassured investors by creating a body that was insulated from the corruption of Tammany Hall. Public sector financing and private sector control was another mechanism to create security for New York's business elite. What Orr and the Chamber of Commerce did not consider when they conceptualized the RTC was the conflict between private and public interests and the power of a transit monopoly.

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<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*

Brooklynites would come to understand this when the IRT opposed subway expansion. The IRT reaped huge profits by packing passengers like sardines into its subway and elevated trains. The corporation had little interest in expanding the system because this would reduce overcrowding and increase operating costs. Even more threatening to its profits were the RTC's proposed extensions into less populated sections of Greater New York. Rapid transit expansion into the densely populated sections of Manhattan and Brooklyn created a large passenger base, but extending into rural areas would mean higher costs that outweighed the long term possibility for increased revenues at the fare box. The RTC's plans upset a status quo that guaranteed continued profits for the IRT.

To prevent subway expansion, the IRT bought its competitors in Manhattan, eliminating them as potential partners with the RTC. When the RTC turned to the Manhattan Elevated Railway as a potential subway partner in 1902, Belmont acquired its four elevated rail lines. Three years later the Metropolitan Street Railway met the same fate when the RTC began negotiations with Manhattan's trolley monopoly. After the merger with the Metropolitan, the *New York Tribune* declared that "Belmont is Traction King; Belmont Now In Position to Sandbag City." Negotiating from a position of strength, August Belmont had little reason to agree to an expansion of rapid transit. The RTC's plans to knit the fabric of Greater New York together had been halted by the very monopoly it had given to the IRT.<sup>39</sup>

If homes and apartments were to be built on the plains of western Long Island as

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<sup>39</sup>Hood, p. 121-126; *New York Tribune*, December 23, 1905, Quoted from Hood, p. 124.

consolidationists and housing reformers had envisioned, the city's leaders would have to do more than plan new transit lines. They needed to break the monopoly of the IRT and transform the city's bridges into integral parts of underground and elevated railways that would physically bind Greater New York into a single city. The RTC's leadership lacked the insight of progressives that a private transit monopoly required an overseer, not a partner. The businessmen that ran it had seen no conflict of interest between the goals of Belmont and that of the Commission. Their failure to confront Belmont's power and the IRT's refusal to build new lines caused a revolt in 1906 among subway riders, real estate developers and progressive reformers, leading to the Commission's demise.<sup>40</sup>

### **Progressives and the Subways**

The failure of the RTC and the arrogance of Belmont allowed progressives to pick up the cudgel of state regulation to open up new subway lines in Greater New York. The IRT's delaying tactics stood in the way of opening undeveloped land and ending the overcrowding on already existing transit lines. Reformers saw its power as a dual threat. Not only was it an impediment to the construction of new subways, but another example of a monopoly run amok.

As early as 1890, Andrew H. Green had thought of consolidation as a countervailing force against the power of corporate monopolies. He believed that as they grew in influence the City would have to expand geographically so that it would not be controlled by these new behemoths. Belmont, Manhattan's "traction king," certainly represented such a threat to the

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<sup>40</sup>Hood, p. 121-126.

independence of the City. The demand for subways would come up against this power and the success of consolidation would hinge on the ability of the City to build these new subway lines. Progressives believed that corporate monopolies, especially public utilities, had to be effectively regulated by the state or local government. Socialists and other radical reformers supported municipal operation and ownership as the solution to this problem.

Progressives did not directly talk about consolidation when they started their attacks on Belmont's IRT and his friends on the RTC, but their goals had become a possibility because of it. The expansion of the city's authority to the outer boroughs and the use of Manhattan's borrowing power had made it possible to build and plan subways. Standing in their way were the traction companies that had monopolies in their respective boroughs. A regional government had been created in 1898, but progressives needed more power to challenge these monopolies.<sup>41</sup>

The push for that power began in 1903 when progressives introduced the Elsberg Bill in the State Legislature to regulate rapid transit. The bill separated the contracts for construction of the subway from their operation, reduced the term of the operating lease from fifty to twenty-five years and made it easier to revoke future contracts. It engendered opposition from the RTC, but passed in 1906 in response to the IRT's purchase of its rivals. The Elsberg Bill was important as a first step in regulating the IRT and future subway operators, setting a

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<sup>41</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle* February 9, 1910, p. 1; January 26, 1910, p. 1.

precedent that government could challenge the prerogatives of transit monopolies.<sup>42</sup>

The New York gubernatorial race of 1906 reflected the changing nature of transit politics. The election pitted the Democratic candidate and newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst, who boldly advocated municipal ownership and operation of rapid transit, against Republican reformer Charles Evans Hughes, who had made his reputation as an attorney investigating the insurance industry and a local gas utility. Hughes won a narrow majority and signed the Page-Merritt Bill into law in July 1907, which created the Public Service Commission to regulate and plan public utilities in New York State, including transit. The legislation set up two districts, one for Greater New York, the other for the rest of the state. All decisions of the PSC would have to be approved by the Board of Estimate giving the municipal government ultimate control over transit decisions.<sup>43</sup>

The PSC sought to regulate private transit operators, but did not seriously advocate government operation. Its powers consisted of all the old powers of the RTC to plan new transit lines and extensions, make contracts for construction and added the right to oversee and regulate the enterprises that operated them. The Public Service Commissioners and their chairman William Willcox were more skeptical of Belmont and the IRT than their RTC predecessors, but because the PSC rejected government operation of the subway, it could not

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<sup>42</sup>Hood, p. 129-130. The Elsberg Bill unintentionally delayed future transit contracts because the shortening of the lease term scared off corporations that believed they could not recoup their investments in the twenty-five year period. The creation of the PSC ended this problem by giving it power to negotiate the length of a lease.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid*, p. 131-132.

proceed without a partner to build and operate the new subway lines.<sup>44</sup>

To entice a suitor, the PSC created the Triborough Subway Plan in 1908, a series of subway and elevated trains completely separate from the IRT, to compete with Belmont's system for passengers and break its monopoly. The Triborough's strength was that it sought to extend subway lines to the far reaches of Brooklyn and the Bronx to alleviate Manhattan's housing crisis. One route, the Broadway-Lexington, would go up the East side of Manhattan into the Bronx and split in two with one section terminating at Woodlawn Cemetery and the other in Pelham Bay Park, opening the East Bronx up to the Westchester border for development.

More important to Brooklyn were the two other sections. The Triborough proposed a loop that "would run from Canal Street to Delancey Street, across the Williamsburg Bridge, through Brooklyn via Broadway, Lafayette Avenue, and Flatbush Avenue, over the Manhattan Bridge, and then back to its starting point at Broadway and Canal." This loop would give Brooklyn's Eastern District access to Manhattan and prevent a recurrence of the Brooklyn Bridge crush. The other Brooklyn component was the Fourth Avenue line already under construction that would split and terminate in Bay Ridge and Coney Island, connecting Brooklyn's southwestern quadrant to Manhattan. Missing from this proposal was the line down Eastern Parkway that was likely being reserved for the IRT, which the PSC believed would

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<sup>44</sup>New York State Public Service Commission, *Utility Regulatory Bodies in New York State 1855-1953 An Outline of the Development and Scope of Regulation* (Albany: 1953), p. 15-17; Hood. p. 144-145.

come to the bargaining table when faced with a competitor.<sup>45</sup>

The PSC designed the Triborough to meet two goals of consolidation: using the enlarged city's power to break up the monopoly of the IRT and to disperse the population of the city. But it had little initial success because of opposition from Tammany politicians on the Board of Estimate, including Mayor George B. McClellan, Jr. and Comptroller Herman Metz. They opposed the Triborough because the Republican dominated PSC had proposed it and because of Tammany's political ties to Belmont.<sup>46</sup> This changed in the 1909 municipal elections when a Republican-Fusion slate elected six of eight members of the Board of Estimate, including Comptroller William A. Prendergast, and President of the Board of Aldermen John Purroy Mitchel. Tammany gained the mayoralty, but it was a pyrrhic victory because a weak Tammany had elected Judge William Jay Gaynor, an independent Democrat from Brooklyn, who owed little loyalty to the machine that nominated him. Prospects for new subway construction also brightened after the 1909 elections when voters approved a constitutional amendment that removed self-sustaining debt like waterfront investment from the city's debt limit. This increased the city's borrowing power by approximately \$120 million.<sup>47</sup>

The Triborough now had the backing of a majority of the Board of Estimate, but the

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<sup>45</sup>Hood, p. 136-137.

<sup>46</sup>Democrats in Brooklyn and New York had traditionally supported municipal home rule and opposed State government interference, especially from Republican governors and legislatures.

<sup>47</sup>Hood, p. 143-144; New York State Public Service Commission for the First District, "New Subways for New York The Dual System of Rapid Transit" June 1913. P. 73.

PSC received no bids for a proposal backed by progressives to build it with private funds with a formula for a possible public buyout. An alternate plan for building it with public financing received twenty three bids. This provoked fierce opposition from conservative businessmen at the Chamber of Commerce and the Merchants' Association who claimed to be concerned about irresponsible city borrowing, but may also have been protecting the IRT. The PSC had the power to take strong action, but its chairman William Willcox took no position, caught between PSC members who supported municipal construction and business leaders who opposed it.<sup>48</sup>

While the debate over the Triborough took place, Belmont's IRT remained in the catbird seat. While negotiating in bad faith with the PSC it hauled in huge profits, waiting for the Triborough proposal to fail. It then planned to force unfavorable terms upon the City for extensions to the original system. Belmont wrote to Gardiner M. Lane, a Boston banker. "If we handle it properly we will ultimately have the use of the city's credit, as we had before." Belmont wanted a limited expansion of the IRT that would go only through densely populated areas, assuring it of a large ridership and quick profits. This had the potential to slow the growth of Brooklyn and stymie the process of consolidation.<sup>49</sup>

The Triborough failed because the city would not raise the funds for it and the PSC and the Board of Estimate were divided over the proposal, but Belmont did not anticipate the proposal of William G. McAdoo's Hudson & Manhattan Railroad in November 1910 to

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<sup>48</sup>Hood, p. 144-145; "New Subways for New York," p. 74-75.

<sup>49</sup>As quoted in Hood, p. 148.

create a subway system that would connect Manhattan, the Bronx and Brooklyn with his own Hudson tubes to New Jersey (the present Port Authority Trans Hudson (PATH) system).<sup>50</sup>

His scheme had the potential to create a new regional constellation by physically consolidating New Jersey's suburbs with Manhattan and Greater New York with only limited expansion of service in Brooklyn. This had the potential to cut Brooklyn out of much of the region's urban growth and redirect it towards New Jersey, but McAdoo was also unable to put together the financing for his proposal. Nonetheless, his proposal changed the terms of debate by creating a serious competitor to the IRT, forcing it to negotiate in earnest with the PSC for the first time.<sup>51</sup>

In response to McAdoo's proposal, T.P. Shonts, president of the IRT, proposed to extend his system by adding an East Side branch up Lexington Avenue from Grand Central Terminal and a West Side branch down Seventh Avenue and into Brooklyn through a new tunnel. The IRT also planned expansions in Brooklyn with an Eastern Parkway line that went to East New York and a branch down Nostrand Avenue into Flatbush. It also agreed to add express tracks to its elevated trains in Manhattan and connect the Second Avenue El to the Queensborough Bridge. The IRT offered to pay \$75 million of the costs of construction for its new plan, with the City contributing \$53 million. The PSC worried that this proposal would deplete the City of available transit funds and prevent it from spreading transit to the other boroughs, especially Brooklyn and Queens. Instead of making a decision, they dropped the

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<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 145-150.

<sup>51</sup>Hood, p. 145-150; "New Subways for New York, p. 75-76.

problem into the hands of the Board of Estimate. With Gaynor favoring the IRT proposal and Mitchel and Prendergast still holding out for the Triborough, the Board of Estimate remained deadlocked.<sup>52</sup>

Shonts' offer to the city was an important step in expanding subway mileage, but it showed how the interest of the subway monopoly worked against the goals of consolidation. If the IRT proposal had been implemented alone Brooklyn would have gained relatively little and much of the borough would have remained isolated from Manhattan. Most of the IRT's expansion would have been in Manhattan and the Bronx, which were both part of pre-1898 New York City, leaving Brooklyn with two tunnels and limited trackage. Consolidation would have been a failure from the vantage point of Brooklyn's boosters if this had occurred, severely limiting its population growth and development.

Prospects brightened in 1911 when the new bridges and subway lines built after consolidation spurred the Brooklyn Rapid Transit (BRT) to enter the fray. The BRT was an amalgamation of elevated and surface railroads which dated back to the era after the Civil War, when railroads were first built to transport people to Coney Island. After creating a holding company to purchase most of Brooklyn's railroads and trolleys, the BRT needed to bring this disjointed system together and connect it to Manhattan. The recently completed Manhattan Bridge and the Fourth Avenue and Centre Street Loop lines that were already under construction would allow the BRT to reduce its reliance on the overcrowded Brooklyn Bridge

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<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*

and expand its service to Manhattan. The BRT's entry gave the Board of Estimate two proposals to consider.<sup>53</sup>

Manhattan Borough President George McAneny had the foresight to combine and expand them, using the bridges and tunnel built since 1898 to end the separation of the Brooklyn and Manhattan transit systems. The "gentlemen's agreement" that had characterized rapid transit before consolidation could be broken. When the Dual System, as it would be called, came into operation it would bring almost every section of Brooklyn into Manhattan's orbit and turn its farms into bedroom communities to house the region's overflowing population.

On June 13, 1911, a joint Board of Estimate/PSC subcommittee chaired by McAneny approved the Dual System. The City had met a goal of consolidation by combining the Manhattan and Bronx centered IRT with the Brooklyn based BRT. By extending both systems into Queens, the City would create an expansive system that would connect all of the boroughs but Staten Island.<sup>54</sup> Brooklyn would gain the most from this expansion. When completed (see accompanying maps), subways and elevated trains would fan out into Brooklyn from three bridges and four tunnels. To speed travel, the BRT agreed to create express tracks on its existing lines and elevate ground level tracks throughout the preexisting system. Together the IRT and the BRT would give most of Brooklyn access to Manhattan via elevated or subway

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<sup>53</sup>Hood, p. 150-161.

<sup>54</sup>The PSC had plans to build a tunnel between Staten Island and Brooklyn to connect the isolated island to the Fourth Avenue Line which never came to fruition.

trains.<sup>55</sup>

The City would build eighty-seven miles of Dual System subway track at a total cost of \$249.4 million with the City providing \$123 million, the IRT \$75.8 million and the BRT \$50.4 million. The revenues of the new system would be distributed first to the BRT and IRT to pay for interest and sinking fund expenses, then the City would receive revenues to pay for its fixed costs. The City and companies would divide the remaining surplus equally. To reward the BRT for integrating its elevated tracks into the subway system, the City gave it a preferential (an additional subsidy) based on the Corporation's net profits before the new system began its operation.<sup>56</sup>

The BRT quickly endorsed this proposal, but the IRT balked, hoping to get its own preferential for pooling the receipts of its original subway with the new dual system lines. Because the IRT was already very profitable and its existing subway line had been financed by the City, the PSC did not want to give a preferential to the reviled Belmont. The IRT initially rejected the Dual System, but it could not ignore the new reality that the BRT would become a competitor, whatever decision it made. Belmont played a waiting game and eventually received a preferential from the McAneny Committee worth \$6.3 million for its earlier subway contracts and six percent of the capital invested in the Dual Contracts. Reformers opposed this agreement because of the subsidies given to the IRT, but the PSC approved the Dual Contracts

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<sup>55</sup>Hood, p. 150-161.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid*; New York State Public Service Commission for the First District "New Subways for New York. The Dual System of Rapid Transit" (December 1913) p. 10-11, 36-43.

by a three to two vote on March 4, 1913 and the Board of Estimate followed suit on May 24 with only Board of Aldermen President John Purroy Mitchel dissenting.<sup>57</sup>

The Dual System was not perfect, but the decision to award the contracts had come as Brooklyn's demand for transit had skyrocketed. A PSC study of transit conditions reported that elevated train ridership in Brooklyn rose eighteen percent from 1908 to 1913 and that some lines were reportedly at 250% of seating capacity. Some of this was due to the BRT's failure to run as many trains as possible, but the study's recommendation that the Fulton Street Elevated increase service from every three minutes to every two and a half minutes during the morning rush hour showed that there was little excess capacity. The report wisely concluded that the only long term solution was the Dual System expansion.<sup>58</sup>

The new lines transformed Brooklyn's outer regions as consolidationists had imagined they would. In the nineteenth century most of Brooklyn's urban development had been concentrated along the East River in close proximity to Manhattan's wealth and commerce. The subway lines opened after consolidation changed the nature of space by increasing the speed that commuters could travel, turning farmlands on the fringes of urban development into integral parts of the burgeoning metropolis. A prime example of this change was Flatbush. In 1884, *Lippincott's Magazine* described a Flatbush relatively untouched by the urbanization to its north.

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<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup>New York State Public Service Commission for the First District "Survey of Transit Conditions on the Brooklyn Rapid Transit System" Submitted by Joseph Johnson, Chief of Transit Bureau (New York: 1914) p. 2. 50.

[Y]ou have only to drive half a mile away on either side [of Flatbush Avenue] to forget that you are in a world where horse-cars exist. There are long and leafy lanes which look very much as they must have looked when British riflemen marched through them a hundred and eight years ago this August, past farm houses which even then were old, and of which many are still standing.<sup>59</sup>

This idyllic Flatbush faded away in the decades following consolidation and vanished after the completion of the Dual System that consolidation had made possible. In 1920 the BRT Brighton Line was connected to the Manhattan Bridge and New York's Broadway Line and the IRT completed the branch that extended to the Nostrand and Flatbush Avenue junction. Flatbush commuters could avoid the unbearably congested Brooklyn Bridge and make direct trips to both lower Manhattan and the new business district arising in Midtown.<sup>60</sup>

A description of these changes can be found in Leon Wexelstein's *Building Up Greater Brooklyn, with Sketches of Men Instrumental in Brooklyn's Amazing Development*, published in 1925. Wexelstein, a journalist and Brooklyn booster, described the period after World War I as the "awakening" of Brooklyn and lauded the developers who built homes in areas made accessible by the Dual System. He wrote in the style of a real estate advertisement, but the changes he described were real.

Take Flatbush once more. . . . Look at its residential sections and look at its business thoroughfares. Kings Highway, Avenue J, Avenue U, Coney Island Avenue—would you recognize them, if you had seen them ten years ago, and if you came off-guard upon them without detecting the nameplates at the corners. . . Flatbush is a picturesque,

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<sup>59</sup>"Some Suburbs of New York," p. 124-125. Quoted from Linder & Zacharias, p. 261.

<sup>60</sup>Peter Derrick, *Tunneling to the Future: The Story of the Great Subway Expansion That Saved New York* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2001), p. 284-285.

open and delightful place in which to make one's home, but because, also, it now has its own shopping centers which can cope adequately with the demands of its population.<sup>61</sup>

The population increase in Flatbush was staggering, rising from 79,846 in 1910 to 394,215 thirty years later. Flatbush had been on the edge of Brooklyn's urban development before consolidation, but the Dual System placed it in the heart of Greater New York's explosive post-World War I expansion.

Consolidation even brought Brooklyn's most distant areas into communication with Manhattan. The opening of the Fourth Avenue Line in 1916 and its connection to the BRT's Culver, Sea Beach and West End Lines accelerated the transformation of Bay Ridge on Brooklyn's southwest shore. Wexelstein described the effects of these changes in *Greater Brooklyn*.

The passing of the Fourth Avenue subway had wrought a desired havoc with Bay Ridge values, but Bay Ridge's growth had not ceased with the completion of that event. In the public fancy Bay Ridge had made tremendous strides in the last few years, and the actual amount of building it has had in this period is simply amazing. I have in mind especially one-and two-family houses in its southern end, near the shoreline.<sup>62</sup>

This process occurred in other areas that came within reach of the Fourth Avenue Line, including Borough Park and Bensonhurst. By the 1930s, farming had almost vanished from all of Brooklyn and in 1934 only nine percent of the borough's land remained vacant. While some

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<sup>61</sup>Leon Wexelstein, *Building Up Greater Brooklyn, with Sketches of Men Instrumental in Brooklyn's Amazing Development* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Biographical Society, 1925), p. xxvii.

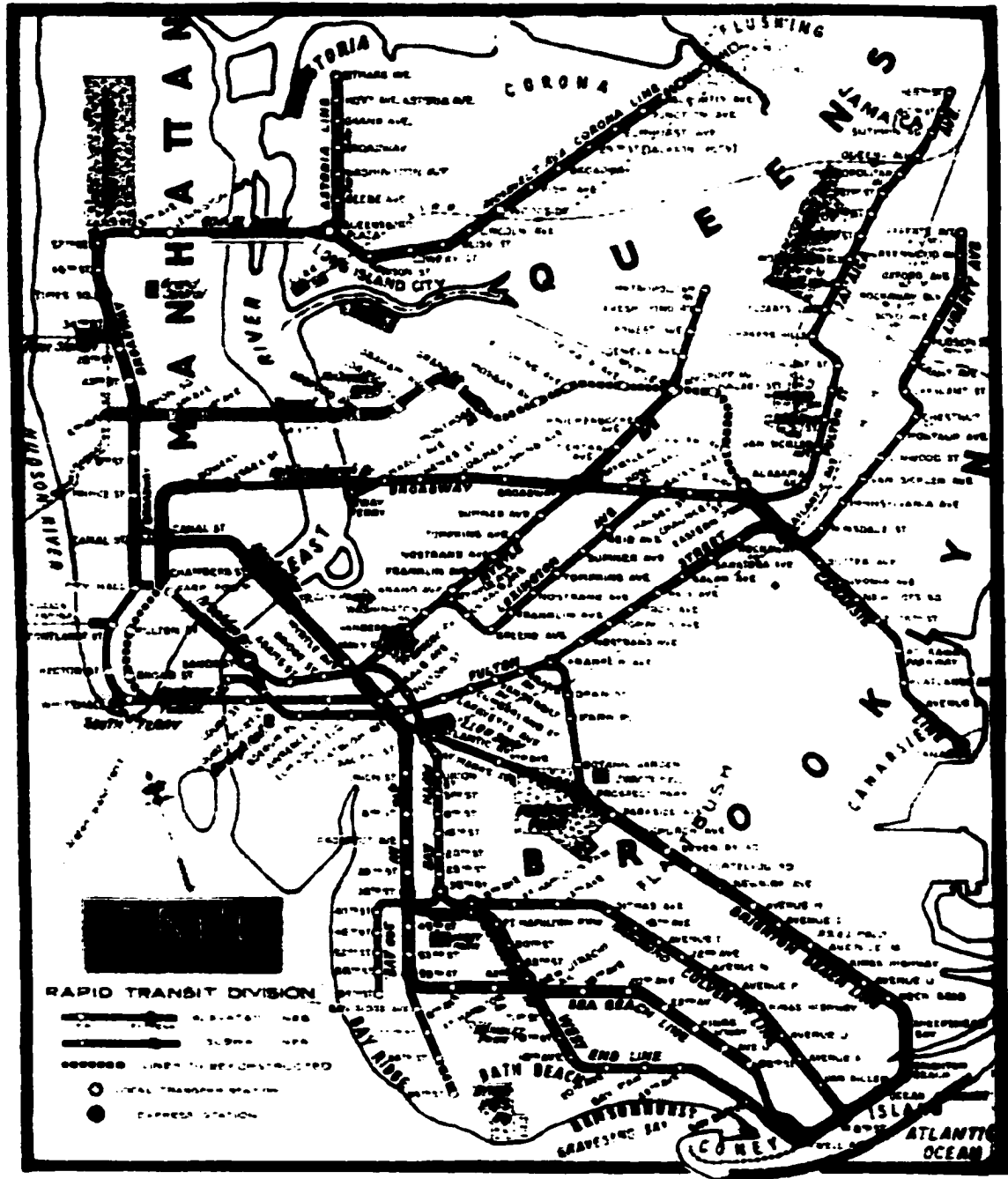
<sup>62</sup>*Ibid*, p. xxxi.

critics have questioned whether the elimination of farming was good for Brooklyn,<sup>63</sup> this transformation certainly met the dreams of Brooklyn's boosters, such as the *Brooklyn Eagle*, which predicted in 1914 that the borough would have to sustain a population of five million people.<sup>64</sup>

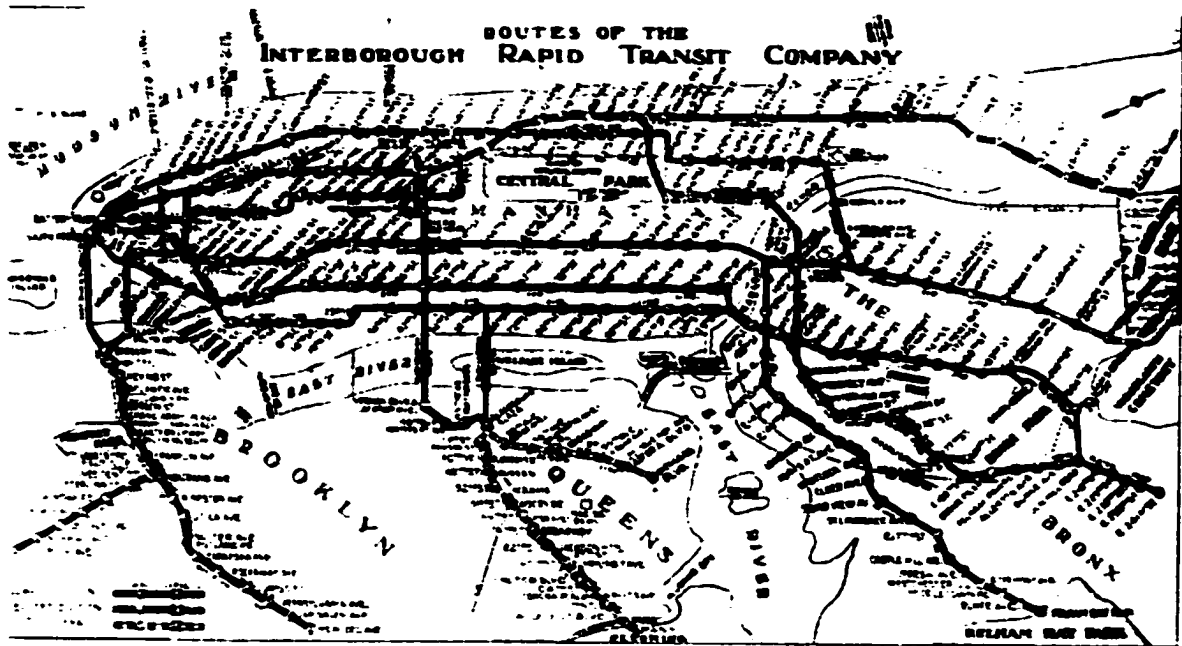
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<sup>63</sup>See Linder & Zacharias *Of Cabbages and Kings County*, p. 280-299, for an argument against the elimination of agriculture from Brooklyn/Kings County.

<sup>64</sup>E.H. Bennett, "Report on General Plan for the Borough of Brooklyn." (Chicago, n.p., 1914, typescript at Cornell University Library) Quoted in Linder and Zacharias, p.21.



1924 Brooklyn Manhattan Transit Subway and Elevated Map showing Dual System expansions.



Interborough Rapid Transit Map including subways, elevated trains and Dual System expansions.

### **Does Political Independence Equal Economic Independence?**

Opponents of consolidation in the 1890s had valued Brooklyn's independence because they feared domination by New York City. They were correct that Brooklyn could have remained politically independent, an island protected from the behemoth across the river, but Brooklyn could not have grown or prospered without the political unity and financial resources needed to build its transportation infrastructure.

Contrary to their arguments, consolidation gave Brooklyn a greater voice and control in the construction of rapid transit. For years, Brooklyn's citizens had benefitted from the economic growth that radiated from Manhattan, but had no voice in the distribution of Manhattan's tax base and borrowing power. The creation of Greater New York established a federated government that gave representation to each of the boroughs on the Board of Estimate, which controlled decisions on taxation, spending and land use. The 1901 charter gave three votes each to the mayor, comptroller and Board of Aldermen President and one vote to each borough president. In addition to the Brooklyn borough president's vote, the political parties usually reserved the comptroller's position and its three votes to a Brooklynite during the first decades of Greater New York, placing the borough in a strong bargaining position on the Board of Estimate. As the second largest borough, its voters could easily swing a close election if its interests were being ignored. This political reconfiguration made it impossible for Manhattan's political representatives to ignore Brooklyn's demands as they had

before 1898.<sup>65</sup>

Consolidation could not force politicians to make wise decisions, but it gave them greater power to organize and unite the five boroughs. Progressive era reforms further strengthened the power of government to plan Greater New York's transportation system. How effectively the centralized government used this increased power can be seen in the contrast between the construction of the Williamsburg Bridge and the subway system. The Bridge began as a bi-city project in 1895 that suffered from financial shortfalls due to Brooklyn's debt limit. Consolidation made it easier to finance the costs of the bridge, but initially did little to improve regional planning. Robert Van Wyck's main contribution as Greater New York's first mayor was to replace a commission appointed by Brooklyn and New York's reform mayors with a commission stacked with Tammany appointees. Seth Low's reform administration took direct control of the project and completed it before he left office in 1903, but was unable to place the Williamsburg Bridge into a larger transportation network. Low's successor, George B. McClellan, Jr., negotiated with the BRT and Metropolitan to initiate trolley service, but did not challenge the Gentlemen's Agreement between New York's and Brooklyn's transit companies. After millions of dollars spent over eight years of construction, the Williamsburg Bridge could not provide a direct single ride to Manhattan's business district.

The elite Rapid Transit Commission laid out plans for subways that would unite the enlarged city, but lacked the vision and power to challenge the prerogatives of the IRT transit

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<sup>65</sup>Anna May Lanahan "Brooklyn's Political Life, 1898-1916" (St. John's University, Dissertation, 1977), p. iv; Jackson, *Encyclopedia of New York City*, p. 206.

monopoly. The creation of the Public Service Commission in 1907 and the election of a reform dominated Board of Estimate two years later changed this situation. It was not until these changes that the latent powers of consolidation could be used to set the City's transportation priorities. The greatest beneficiary of this policy was Brooklyn, which gained the most connections to Manhattan and the greatest expansion of subway and elevated tracks of the outer boroughs. Between 1898 and 1920, Greater New York built two bridges and four tunnels connecting Brooklyn and Manhattan. Through the Dual System these were then linked to a large network of subway and elevated trains that transformed Brooklyn's remaining farms into houses and apartments buildings. Many of the people moving into these new homes were the new immigrants of Eastern and Southern European background, who would benefit from the five cent subway fare which subsidized the costs of their longer journeys into Manhattan.

Consolidation was part of the economic and social changes of the early twentieth century. Its advocates, led by Andrew H. Green, saw it as a way of organizing the region in a more rational fashion by eliminating political boundaries. This single step was a precondition for effective transportation planning, but it had little effect without changes in the role of government. The regulatory state that arose during the Progressive Era made it possible to plan Greater New York and restrict the power of private capital to make planning decisions. While unwilling to take direct control of the mass transit system, the PSC and the City government made it possible to plan and build mass transit system that largely met the needs the of Greater

New York's (and Brooklyn's) residents.<sup>66</sup>

With hundreds of thousands of immigrants arriving in New York City annually in the early twentieth century, the expansion of the subway system decreased population density in Manhattan's overcrowded tenement neighborhoods as consolidationists promised. But there was no guarantee that tenement conditions would not be replicated in the new neighborhoods in Brooklyn and the other outer boroughs, unless the city regulated building design and land use, another goal of consolidationists in the 1890s. Brooklyn and the other boroughs would provide the open land, government regulation would prevent the future construction of unsafe tenements, and the city would use its power to plan development in a rational fashion.

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<sup>66</sup>New York City's subway system would not come under the control of the city government until 1940. See Joshua B. Freeman, *In Transit The Transport Workers Union in New York City 1933-1966* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), Chapter 9 and Hood, Chapter 9 for analysis of the public sector takeover of New York City's subways.

## Chapter Five

### Planning Brooklyn: Regulating Land Use in Greater New York

“As the space upon the island for residences is becoming more and more limited, rents are correspondingly increasing. We know that space occupied by business property can secure a much greater rental than space used for residences. It would be well, therefore, while the fields and farms that constitute the present suburbs of New York and Brooklyn, and which are destined to become populous in the not far distant future, are free and open, that a comprehensive system of streets, parks, and all other city accommodations be mapped out and defined for the proper housing and convenience of the future population of the Greater New York.”<sup>1</sup>

Albert Henschel, Secretary, Greater New York Consolidation Commission, 1894.

Andrew H. Green’s primary rationale for consolidation was to create a larger city with the power to plan the development of the region. Mercantile lawyers like Green had long decried the results of the unplanned private development of the railroads and on the waterfront. Railroad corporations had developed facilities that benefitted them individually, but led to great inefficiencies in the transfer of goods by creating delays in the delivery of goods. Planned development of rail and marine terminals, according to Green, would force the corporations to work together to end shipping delays and lower shipping prices.<sup>2</sup>

Green’s protege, Albert Henschel, extended this logic to land use and the regulation of tenement house conditions in his pro-consolidation polemics. Tenements made large profits for their owners, but the congestion created by overcrowding led to high social costs for both the individual and to the city. Tenement house reformers

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<sup>1</sup>*New York Herald* October 15, 1894. Quoted from Municipal Program Conference Address on “Greater New York.” delivered by Albert E. Henschel, May 24<sup>th</sup>, 1894, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup>See *Communication on the Subject of a Consolidation of Areas About the City of New York Under One Government*, Reprinted in Foord, p. 291-310.

believed that government regulation could prevent the construction of unsanitary and overcrowded tenements. Consolidation aided this goal by expanding the boundaries of Greater New York which opened up new lands outside Manhattan and the urbanized sections of Brooklyn for development. This change gave the enlarged municipality power over land in all five boroughs. The first attempt to apply these ideas was Tenement House Reform Act of 1901, an explicit goal of consolidationists. Zoning legislation followed fifteen years later, an extension of the planning rationale that consolidation's supporters used to justify their endeavor. The success of these two groundbreaking laws would test the ability of Greater New York's leadership to organize the great metropolis created in 1898. They would also show how consolidation exacerbated existing social cleavages in Brooklyn.

### **Consolidation and Tenement House Reform**

The State Legislature chartered the Greater New York Consolidation Commission in 1890, the same year that Jacob Riis published *How the Other Half Lives*, his muckraking expose on the conditions of the poor. The exact timing may have been coincidental, but it is not surprising that the two movements arose in the same time period. As Manhattan's tenement neighborhoods reached previously unimaginable levels of population density, reformers realized that their populations would have to be dispersed to other parts of the region in newer and safer buildings. The tenement reformers, who organized the movement that led to the Tenement House Act of 1901, wanted to mandate new housing regulations for New York's working class dwellings that would improve conditions in the lightless, unsanitary tenements in which the "Other Half" lived. Consolidationists linked their cause to the tenement house reform

movement, making it an integral part of their campaign for Greater New York.

Supporters of consolidation saw the undeveloped sections of Greater New York as a fresh canvass to create new patterns of development for working class housing in areas with lower property values. They sought to prevent a repetition of the dangerous and unhealthy tenements that dominated the poorer neighborhoods of New York and Brooklyn by passing legislation to mandate basic health and safety standards for new tenements.

When reformers searched for solutions to tenement conditions, they could look to the regional commissions created by New York State in 1857. That year the Republican dominated Legislature attempted to limit the powers of Democratic Mayor (and future Copperhead) Fernando Wood. They passed legislation to replace the municipal police forces of New York and Brooklyn with a Metropolitan Police force, governed by a commission of five gubernatorial appointees and the Mayors of Brooklyn and New York City. The new force would patrol New York, Kings, Westchester and Richmond Counties. This abolition of home rule led to persistent violence between the Municipals, whom Wood refused to disband, and the Metropolitans. Only the arrival of the State Militia restored order. When the State Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the Metropolitans, Wood backed down and accepted them as New York's legitimate police force.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Burrows and Wallace, p. 837-841. This model was also used to organize the Central Park Commission headed by Andrew H. Green, who would use its powers to formulate regional plans and advocate for the consolidation of Greater New York.

A regional response to overcrowded tenements arose from the Draft Riots of 1863 in New York City. The origins of the riots were white workers' fear of competition from emancipated southern blacks, opposition to a draft that allowed the wealthy to opt out, and the desperate living conditions of many German and Irish immigrants. Their bloody aftermath convinced many reformers that the needs of the urban poor could no longer be ignored. Reformers formed a Council of Hygiene in response to the uprising that included some of New York City's most powerful men, including John Jacob Astor, Jr., William Astor, Peter Cooper, Hamilton Fish and August Belmont, Sr. In 1864 the Council petitioned the State Legislature to form a separate health department for New York City. When this effort failed, it began an investigation of New York's tenement districts. Using the report from this investigation, the Council of Hygiene successfully lobbied for the creation of a Metropolitan Board of Health in 1866 and the following year secured passage of tenement house legislation to be enforced by the Board. The Board's jurisdiction was the same as the Metropolitan Police force and included Brooklyn, despite its relative quiet during the Draft Riots and the Council's failure to investigate conditions in the City of Churches.<sup>4</sup>

The Legislature imposed the Board and its regulations on Brooklyn when addressing the problems of Manhattan because tenements and epidemics were a public health problem on both sides of the East River. The Board of Health wanted uniform

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<sup>4</sup>Robert. DeForest and Lawrence Veiller, editors *The Tenement House Problem, Volumes 1 & 2* (1903; reprint, New York: Arno Press & *The New York Times*, 1970) p. 94-97; Roy Lubove *The Progressives and the Slums Tenement House Reform in New York City 1890-1917* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962) p. 12-28; Adrian Cook. *Armies of the Streets: The New York City Draft Riots of 1863* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1974) pp.50-151.

standards for the entire region to address these issues. Unfortunately, the standards set by the Tenement House Law of 1867 were so weak and vague that they were almost meaningless. For instance, a wooden ladder qualified as a fire escape. Despite its inadequate standards and enforcement, the law was important because it showed the possible power of a regional government and was the first time that government had used its power to create codes for tenement housing.<sup>5</sup>

Whether the Metropolitan Board of Health could have succeeded as a regional agency will never be known. Three years later when the Democrats regained control of the governorship and the legislature, they restored home rule and abolished the Metropolitan Boards of Police, Parks, and Health. Shortly after their demise, the revelation of the Tweed Ring's corruption became public and support for government regulation diminished.<sup>6</sup>

The dissolution of the Metropolitan Board of Health meant a divergence of New York's and Brooklyn's tenement and health laws. The State Legislature periodically passed legislation to expand the scope of tenement reform legislation in New York City, but as late as 1888 merely reenacted the 1867 law in Brooklyn. The lack of uniformity of the two cities' laws was significant, but neither city's regulations were adequately enforced. Even if enforcement had been stronger, the regulations themselves were

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<sup>5</sup>DeForest and Veiller p. 94-97; Lubove, p. 12-28.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

inherently flawed because they did not challenge the supremacy of the 25' x 100' lot set in place at the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

In New York City a Street Commission appointed by Mayor DeWitt Clinton laid out the street grid for the island of Manhattan in 1811, creating 25' x 100' lot sizes for the entire island up to 155<sup>th</sup> Street. (Brooklyn adopted a similar lot size to divide property in Kings County.) Developers of tenement houses used the 25' x 100' lot as the basis for tenement construction and built five or six story rectangular buildings that used up to 90% of the property to maximize profits. A central staircase divided the two sides of the building with two apartments on either side. Each family had a room facing the street or the backyard from which they received limited sunlight and ventilation. In tenements built before 1879, center rooms were in total darkness with no windows. In 1879 the State Legislature enacted a law mandating the “dumbbell tenement” for all new construction in New York City that created air and light shafts with a two foot recession in the center of the tenement. The dumbbell was, at best, only a marginal improvement over existing designs by providing minimal ventilation and light through its narrow shaft. Unfortunately, the shaft was also a place through which fires could spread from one floor or one building to another and a convenient garbage disposal for many tenement residents.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Lubove, 30-31; DeForest and Veiller, Appendix VI; The greatest significance of the 1867 regulations was that they established the legitimacy of state involvement in tenement conditions to ensure public health.

<sup>8</sup>Burrows and Wallace, p. 419-422; DeForest and Veiller, Appendix VI, p. 339. The “dumbbell tenement” narrowed in the center to create air shafts for the middle room in a tenement giving it the appearance a dumbbell from the above. This flawed design did little to alleviate the problem of the tenement dweller. Ironically it was chosen

The State Legislature's failure to include Brooklyn in most of the changes to the Tenement House Law was due to its lower population densities and smaller tenements, often only three stories tall, but density would increase as Brooklyn's population grew rapidly after the 1883 opening of the Brooklyn Bridge. John C. Gebhart, a progressive era housing reformer graphically described the conditions in a nineteenth century Brooklyn tenement.

The apartment of such a family would in all probability be found in a veritable fire-trap of an old-law tenement, often built entirely of wood and never adequately protected against fire. . . . The public hall leading to the apartment is cold in winter, hot in summer and unsanitary at all times. . . . The apartment itself consists of three very small bedrooms and a large kitchen, the latter used also as a dining and living room. The kitchen and one bedroom open either on the street or yard; the other two bedrooms admit only such light and air as find their way through the doors, which are constantly open and through the sash windows placed in the partitions. . . . The toilets are either in the hall where they render the atmosphere almost unbearable, or in the yard where they freeze and overflow in winter or breed flies in the summer. In either case they are shared in common by several families, and are both an aid to the communication of disease and a menace to morality and decency.<sup>9</sup>

Most of Brooklyn's old law tenements lacked the light shafts that New York's dumbbell tenement provided, leaving their interior rooms with less ventilation and light. The smaller size of the buildings led to densities that were lower than Manhattan's, but high

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because it won first prize in a contest in *Plumbing and Sanitary Engineer* for best model tenement on a 25' x 100' lot. Dumbbell tenements were not legally mandated in Brooklyn, but their use in New York led many developers to export the design to Brooklyn.

<sup>9</sup>John C. Gebhart "Housing Standards in Brooklyn An Intensive Study of the Housing Records of 3227 Workingmen's Families" (Brooklyn: 1918) p. 57-58. The Old Law tenements that Gebhart described had benefitted from improvements mandated by the Tenement House Reform Act of 1901. Conditions in these tenements during the 1890s were probably worse than he reported with most water closets or privies in the yard and fire escapes that were grossly inadequate.

compared to other cities. By 1895 the Legislature had passed laws bringing Brooklyn's regulations into closer alignment with those of New York's as the two cities prepared to merge. This meant some minor improvements, such as mandating a water supply in every apartment, but it did not lead to any great change in the quality of housing.<sup>10</sup>

Brooklyn's tenements had poor conditions, but their density paled in comparison to New York's and tenement house reform was a response to conditions in New York where the sense of crisis and need for reform seemed greater. New York's reformers in the 1890s sought to solve Manhattan's tenement house problem by using government's power to improve conditions in existing tenements and more importantly create new housing patterns in undeveloped areas outside of Manhattan.

Consolidation was a key component in solving the tenement house problem by bringing undeveloped land in Brooklyn and the other boroughs under the control of a single government and connecting it to Manhattan. This provided new land for working class dwellings, but consolidation alone could not stop the construction of unsafe tenements. To succeed, reformers would have to replicate the designs of model tenements that had been built by philanthropists in the late nineteenth century. The first American examples were the Brooklyn tenements constructed by the philanthropist Alfred T. White. White, born into a wealthy Brooklyn family in 1846, observed the abysmal conditions of tenements in Brooklyn and Manhattan. He found a solution in the model tenements built in London by the philanthropist Sir Sydney Waterlow in 1863.

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<sup>10</sup>DeForest and Veiller, Appendix VI

Based on the philosophy of “philanthropy plus five per cent,” he designed these buildings to make a profit, but a smaller one than a conventional tenement.

White’s first model tenements at Hicks and Baltic Street in South Brooklyn (present day Cobble Hill) were built in 1877 on multiple lots with exterior metal stairwells to allow people to escape during a fire. The apartments were only two rooms deep to provide adequate ventilation and light. To improve sanitary conditions, each included a water closet and sink. White next developed a group of attached cottages facing an interior courtyard on nearby Warren Place and completed his foray as a developer with the Riverside buildings in Brooklyn Heights in 1890. His model tenements were successful, but could not be built on a mass basis. Housing was an unregulated private market and most tenement house developers were small scale capitalists who could not afford the higher cost of building on multiple lots and had no philanthropic motive to accept the lower profits produced by model tenements. Driven by a need for profit and not the “philanthropy” of the wealthy, most developers continued building narrow lightless tenements. White, in his writings and speeches, boasted of the success of the model tenement and urged other philanthropists to invest in them, but he also acknowledged that they served as a prototype for what legislation should mandate.<sup>11</sup>

Model tenements could not solve the problems of tenements because of the voluntary nature of the enterprise, but their architectural designs showed the way toward new tenement regulations. These innovations would be adopted by housing reformers in

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<sup>11</sup>Lubove, p. 34-38.

the 1890s when the separate but related movements of housing reform and consolidation gained support. Spurred on by Riis' *How the Other Half Lives*, the activities of settlement house workers and the Tenement House Committee of the Charity Organization Society, a radical revision of tenement house laws became a possibility in the late 1890s.

A state commission in 1894 had investigated housing conditions utilizing the new science of germ theory to highlight the need of the urban poor for better living conditions. It focused on the threat of tuberculosis to the rest of the population, due to the lack of sanitary facilities, ventilation and clean water. Conditions were so poor that Lawrence Veiller, a leader in the tenement house reform movement, fantasized in an apocalyptic moment that New York City would "be purified by fire, [so] that whole sections might be thus destroyed." Lacking that authority, he and other reformers proposed to increase sanitary and ventilation standards by mandating improved lighting in center rooms, a toilet on each floor of a building (typically shared by four apartments) and fire escapes connected to each apartment.<sup>12</sup>

The other part of the solution was the creation of new dwellings in the undeveloped land of Greater New York. The closest place for such development was across the East River in the City of Homes and Churches, whose farmland was already being turned into subdivisions. An earlier generation of consolidationists, typified by Andrew H. Green, looked only to the economic benefits of political unification. A younger generation made common cause with housing reformers and believed

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<sup>12</sup>Quoted from Lubove, p. 135; Lawrence Veiller "The Housing Problem in American Cities," p. 249.

consolidation was a critical component in the building of healthier and more wholesome tenements. Albert Henschel, the Secretary of the Greater New York Consolidation Commission, made a direct link between consolidation and the solution to the problems of tenements.

The Greater New York, by opening up large tracts of fine land for homes, will greatly benefit the laboring man. It will tend to hinder the extension of the tenement-house system with its unclean, vicious, and unhealthy surroundings. For these reasons every workingman, and every man who desires that the people should live in comfortable homes, should vote for municipal consolidation.<sup>13</sup>

Edward Bradford Anthony wrote a pamphlet in 1894 for the Consolidation League of Brooklyn making a similar point. He cited the work of tenement house reformers, including Riis, arguing that "New York had succeeded in growing northward, and solely northward by dint of crowding in each house three families, and twice as many persons as any other American City does or should, with the result of creating 'slum' districts whose extent amazes . . ."<sup>14</sup> His solution to this problem was to annex Brooklyn and the adjoining counties and connect them to Manhattan through a series of bridges, tunnels and a railway network.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Henschel "Municipal Program Conference Address on "Greater New York," p. 63. Quoted from the *New York Herald*, October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1894.

<sup>14</sup>Edward Bradford Anthony "Great York An Inquiry into the Relation of Rapid Transit and Consolidation to Past and Present Poverty, Disease, Crime, and Mortality and Their Remedy." (Brooklyn: 1894).

<sup>15</sup>William C. Redfield, a Brooklynite opposed to consolidation and later a Congressman and Woodrow Wilson's Commerce Secretary, feared the tenements of Manhattan and the effect that such a populace would have on Brooklyn. He quoted the *New York Times* of May 8, 1892, "[New York City has the] 'ill pre-eminence as the costliest, wickedest and deadliest city of America' Does the fair City of Brooklyn need, much less desire, to take such a partner?" William C. Redfield "Against Consolidation, Taxes and Tenements: A Study of Municipal Conditions " No. 3 League of Loyal

The Greater New York Charter Commission of 1897 recognized this possibility and saw the creation of the new metropolis as an opportunity to develop a revised and uniform building code for all five boroughs. Their charter gave the municipal assembly the power to change the existing building codes and “appoint and employ a commission of experts; and provided further that upon the establishment of such codes [the existing] acts shall cease to have any force or effect . . .” Consolidation gave reformers the opportunity to strengthen and unite the tenement laws that had been divided since the 1870 charter.<sup>16</sup>

The flaw in this plan was the choice of voters in the 1897 municipal elections that gave Tammany Hall control of Greater New York’s first government. The Tammany dominated Municipal Assembly appointed a commission in January 1899 that catered to the interests of developers. The draft building code permitted eight story tenements, two stories taller than the existing code and the construction of wooden tenements and dumb-waiter shafts, creating new fire hazards in Greater New York’s dense neighborhoods that could be immolated by a fire in any individual tenement.

The new code outraged housing reformers including Veiller, the Charity Organization Society, the Citizens’ Union, and the City Club. Reformers had seen consolidation as an opportunity to create a uniform code that would improve conditions for the entire city. Instead building interests had gained the upper hand through the

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Citizens (Brooklyn, 1895) p. 45-46.

<sup>16</sup>*Brooklyn Eagle Library No. 19 The Charter of the City of New York Chapter 378 of the Laws of 1897 with Complete Index, Maps of Borough Districts, and Supplementary Acts* (New York: Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 1897) p. 68.

machinations of Tammany, which had excluded tenement house reformers and architects from the American Institute of Architects or the American Society of Civil Engineers from the commission. The legislation passed in October without any serious debate. If the Tammany building code had remained law for an extended period of time, the housing patterns of the Lower East Side, East Harlem, Hell's Kitchen, Williamsburg, and Red Hook might have been repeated in Brooklyn's undeveloped sections as Greater New York prepared to absorb its largest influx of immigration during the next two decades.<sup>17</sup>

The new building code showed that consolidation did not guarantee positive results, but was a tool that could be used by whatever interests controlled the reins of government. To overturn this legislation, reformers had to bypass the power of city government and go to Albany where the state government could override the city's power to regulate housing conditions. To aid their cause they had a powerful ally, Governor Theodore Roosevelt.

Lawrence Veiller, who had been appointed to the head of the Charity Organization Society's Tenement House Committee (THC) in December 1898, spearheaded this campaign. The Society appointed Veiller to create a movement to pass effective tenement house legislation. He quickly came to prominence through his criticism of the City's new building code during his testimony to the Mazet Committee, a special State Assembly committee to examine political corruption in New York City. After Mayor Robert Van Wyck signed the new building code, the THC organized an

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<sup>17</sup>“Report of the Special [Mazet] Committee of the Assembly Appointed to Investigate the Public Offices and Departments of the City of New York and of the Counties Therein Included.” Vol. III. (Albany, 1900) p. 3453-3466. Lubove, p. 121-122.

exhibit in 1900 to show the conditions within tenement neighborhoods and their relationship to disease, death, crime, prostitution and almost every social evil that existed. One of the most memorable parts of the exhibit was a model of the tenement block on Chrystie, Forsyth, Canal and Bayard Streets. The thirty-nine tenements contained 2,781 people with only 264 water closets and one bathtub. In these buildings they found thirty-two reported cases of tuberculosis in the previous five years and only forty two apartments with hot running water. Six hundred-sixty residents in these buildings had applied for aid to two private charities alone. Veiller's maps, models and figures showed a direct correlation between the ills of the city and the conditions in the tenements. The exhibition did not prove causation and ignored other possible causes, such as general poverty, but it publicized the poor conditions in the tenements and suggested solutions.<sup>18</sup>

Using the favorable press created by the exhibit and the political support of Roosevelt, Veiller drafted legislation to create a state Tenement House Commission. Veiller's political skills and his repeated pressure on Roosevelt got the Commission Bill out of committee and passed by the State Assembly, only to find that the Senate had placed the bill at the end of the session, where it could be vetoed by Van Wyck. The Legislature would not have time to override his veto before adjournment, making the bill a dead letter. Veiller skillfully sidestepped this rule by applying the Commission

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<sup>18</sup>Lubove, p. 122-123.

legislation to all Class A cities (Greater New York and Buffalo), preventing Van Wyck and Tammany from delaying passage.<sup>19</sup>

The Commission consisted of reformers, including Robert W. De Forest of the COS, Alfred T. White, architect and iconographer extra ordinaire I.N. Phelps Stokes and Veiller, who served as secretary. The commissioners held hearings throughout Greater New York and Buffalo in 1900, assessing conditions in tenements. Using their finding, the Commission drafted legislation that became the basis for the Tenement House Reform Act of 1901 (known as the "New Law"). Approved by the Legislature after much debate and compromise in April 1901, the bill was signed into law by Governor Benjamin Odell, Roosevelt's successor on April 12<sup>th</sup>. The equally important task of enforcing the law benefitted from the election of Fusion Republican Seth Low as mayor, who appointed De Forest and Veiller to administer the new Tenement House Department.<sup>20</sup>

Missing in the exhibit was any study of Brooklyn's tenements, emphasizing the Tenement House Commission's focus on Manhattan. Veiller claimed the Commission neglected to examine Brooklyn because of a lack of funds. This may have been true, but it also said something about the nature of tenement house reform and consolidation. Brooklyn expected concrete benefits from its inclusion in Greater New York, while

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<sup>19</sup>*Ibid*, p. 125-126.

<sup>20</sup>*New York Times*, April 13, 1901, p. 5. After Low's brief two year term, Greater New York returned to Tammany rule in 1904 and enforcement became lax, but Tammany neglect and malfeasance could not overturn the basic changes made by the New Law. See Lubove for a description of Veiller's efforts to protect the law after he left office.

reformers looked to consolidation to solve many of Manhattan's problems such as the crisis in the tenement houses. Brooklyn was not devoid of reformers or of tenements, but the Commission devised legislation to address Manhattan, and the New Law imposed this solution on Brooklyn and the other boroughs. To opponents of consolidation, who had feared the onrush of immigrants into Brooklyn, tenement house reform, later coupled with mass transit expansion, must have been a confirmation of their worst fears for the future of Brooklyn. The city of the middle class, both real and imagined, was to be overwhelmed by the immigrants who populated these tenements

### **The New Law and Brooklyn**

Consolidation allowed the ideas of Manhattan reformers to influence the development of Brooklyn by applying their principles of housing design. The immediate effect of the New Law was the upgrading of already existing tenements. "Old Law" tenements now had to have one water closet per two families, and running water on each floor of the tenement. A window between the room with direct light and the dark rooms in the middle provided greater light and ventilation. The New Law also strengthened fire escape regulations for Old Law tenements. The exteriors of these buildings would not look different after 1901, but conditions would improve significantly in older Brooklyn neighborhoods like Red Hook, the Navy Yard, Williamsburg and Bushwick.<sup>21</sup>

The real hope for tenement reformers lay in the construction of new buildings in the rural sections of Brooklyn. Until the 1890s when Brooklyn annexed them, these areas had been the separate towns of Flatlands, Flatbush, New Utrecht, and Gravesend.

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<sup>21</sup>De Forest and Veiller, Volume II Appendix V.

which had provided fresh fruits and vegetables for the populations of Brooklyn and New York. These rural areas in Brooklyn, where street grids did not yet dominate, would be the territory where the New Law would have its greatest impact. “The discredited and horrible ‘dumb-bell’ tenement . . .,” Veiller wrote, “is now a thing of the past. In its place is the new-law tenement, with large courts providing adequate light and ventilation for every room in the building.” New Law tenements had to have an interior courtyard, so that every room in an apartment would have light and air, and required a water closet and running water in each apartment. Buildings also had to be fireproofed or provide each apartment with access to a metal fire escape with stairs.<sup>22</sup>

The only way to build a tenement that met these standards was to build on multiple lots like White’s model tenements, otherwise the interior courtyard would not be large enough. The New Law also mandated height restrictions on new construction, allowing a tenement to be only a third taller than the width of the street it faced, excluding corner lots which received greater light and ventilation. Enforcing these rules and numerous other codes was the Tenement House Department, which had the power to levy fines of up to \$250 and jail violators for up to ten days for each day that a violation continued.<sup>23</sup>

The New Law met great opposition from many quarters, especially from builders in Brooklyn, due to the increased costs that new building codes and larger lot

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<sup>22</sup>For many years all tenements built after 1901 were known as New Law tenements and fetched higher rents than pre-1901 Old Law tenements in the same neighborhood. DeForest and Veiller, Volume I, p. xiv.

<sup>23</sup>De Forest and Veiller, Volume II Appendix V.

requirements imposed on them. In the years immediately following the passage of the New Law, they fought unsuccessfully to overturn it. Instead, it would reconfigure the form and shape of large areas of Brooklyn.<sup>24</sup>

It is possible to understand how this occurred by examining housing conditions in three disparate Brooklyn neighborhoods: Red Hook, Brownsville and Flatbush. These conditions can be traced through John C. Gebhart's study, "Housing Standards in Brooklyn An Intensive Study of the Housing Records of 3,227 Workingmen's Families," prepared for the Tenement House Committee of the Brooklyn Bureau of Charities in 1918. The study analyzed housing conditions in Brooklyn based on thousands of visits of charity workers from the Brooklyn Bureau of Charities, Jewish Aid Society, Tuberculosis Day Camp and District Nursing Committee. Each social service agency took detailed notes on the type of building, sanitary facilities and level of overcrowding in each family's apartment, making it possible to evaluate conditions.<sup>25</sup>

Red Hook, a waterfront manufacturing neighborhood in South Brooklyn, was a densely populated neighborhood dominated by Old Law tenements. Red Hook had been integral to the economic life of Brooklyn since the first half of the nineteenth century when it became the entrepot for barges coming from the Erie Canal. The economic activity generated in Red Hook attracted thousands of immigrants to the neighborhood in the nineteenth century. Initially, Irish, German and Scandinavian immigrants came to Red Hook, but in the late nineteenth century Italian immigrants arrived to take waterfront

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<sup>24</sup>*Ibid*, p. xiii-xiv.

<sup>25</sup>De Forest and Veiller, Volume II Appendix V; Gebhart. p. 32.

jobs and move into its already overcrowded tenements. By the time of the Tenement House Reform Act, Red Hook had little land for new housing development. Heavily built up in the last century, housing patterns could not be changed without razing the already existing housing stock.<sup>26</sup>

Gebhart's study showed the limited effect of the New Law on Red Hook. Seventeen years after its passage, 86.6% of its residents lived in Old Law tenements, and only 1.4% in New Law buildings. The preponderance of old law buildings meant that only 17.5% of residents had toilets within their apartment. Sixty percent of toilets were in public halls and 24% were still found in the backyard. Red Hook's tenements lacked ventilation and light in the interior rooms. The New Law made significant improvements in conditions by requiring the installation of metal fire escapes and running water in each apartment and moving many bathrooms from the yard into the hallway. Red Hook showed that additional improvements could be made to the old law tenement, but reformers could not fundamentally alter the design of these fire prone buildings.<sup>27</sup>

These conditions contrasted greatly with Brownsville on the other side of the borough. This small but densely packed neighborhood of Jewish immigrants had only recently been urbanized in the 1890s when Elias Kaplan, a clothing contractor, moved his

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<sup>26</sup>A change in housing patterns occurred when public housing was built in Red Hook in the 1930s. Slum clearance, construction of the Gowanus Expressway, extensive building of public housing, and the decline of Red Hook's industrial waterfront would greatly change the character of the neighborhood. By the 1960s, most of Red Hook's residents lived in public housing, cut off from the rest of Brooklyn by the elevated Gowanus Expressway with little local employment base. During this time most its white residents left the neighborhood and it became predominately African-American.

<sup>27</sup>Gebhart. p. 8, 32.

manufacturing facilities from the Lower East Side to less expensive property in Brooklyn's Eastern District. Other garment manufacturers followed his lead and population growth continued throughout the 1890s. This growth skyrocketed in the first two decades of the twentieth century after the completion of the Williamsburg Bridge in 1903 and its connection to elevated rail in 1908.<sup>28</sup>

Consolidation changed the development of Brownsville by enveloping it in Manhattan's reforms. The neighborhood was born a ghetto, but it was an improvement over the conditions in the Lower East Side. Wendell Pritchett in his history of Brownsville described it as "offer[ing] much more than the Lower East Side, open (though ramshackle) place for play, and cheaper rents." Because Brownsville's growth as an immigrant working class community began only a decade before the State Legislature passed the New Law, tenement house reform would have a great impact on the neighborhood. New Law tenement buildings would dominate Brownsville's street grid preventing a repetition of the pre-1901 patterns that existed in Red Hook.<sup>29</sup>

Gebhart's study found that one quarter of the families in East New York, which included Brownsville, lived in Old Law tenements. This was too high a percentage for reformers, but it compared favorably to other working class neighborhoods in which a

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<sup>28</sup>Alter F. Landesman *Brownsville: The Birth, Development and Passing of a Jewish Community in New York* Second Edition (New York: Block Publishing Company, 1969, 1971), p. 37.

<sup>29</sup>Wendell Pritchett *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews and the Changing Face of the Ghetto* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002) p. 10. Unfortunately, the speculative nature of Brownsville development led to poorly built tenements that rapidly deteriorated and the neighborhood's population began to decline in the 1920s.

large majority of residents lived in Old Law tenements. By 1918 nearly half of East New York residents surveyed lived in New Law tenements and an additional twenty percent in more middle class two family homes.<sup>30</sup>

Consolidation's proponents viewed Brooklyn as a place to build new kinds of tenements away from the high property values of Manhattan. In that regard, Brownsville can be viewed as a qualified success. Residents benefitted from the New Law's higher standards and paid lower rents than people in the old law tenement neighborhoods in Manhattan. According to Gebhart, Brownsville was "remote from the business and industrial centers, with the result that the land values and rents are comparatively low." The *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide* found similar results in its survey of New York City housing costs. Construction costs in Brownsville averaged \$330 per room in 1915 compared to \$460 per room in Manhattan south of 14<sup>th</sup> Street, leading to lower rents in Brownsville compared to a similar apartment in lower Manhattan. These lower rents made it possible for immigrants living in the tenements of Williamsburg and the Lower East Side to move to the relatively spacious new law tenements of Brownsville.<sup>31</sup>

Brownsville was a different kind of neighborhood because of the New Law and to some extent met the expectations of consolidation's boosters. Brooklyn could provide better homes for the region's working class through tenement house reform and mass

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<sup>30</sup>Gebhart, p. 32. If the study had included only Brownsville, the percentage of two family homes would probably have been lower because of the more middle class character of the other areas within East New York at that time.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.* p. 46; *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide*, June 3, 1916, p .828.

transit links. What it could not overcome were the effects of poverty: overcrowding and disease.

The new law tenement was built to higher standards, but the Tenement House Department could not effectively regulate how many people lived in each apartment. Brownsville, while less crowded than the Lower East Side, became as densely packed as other Brooklyn tenement neighborhoods.<sup>32</sup> The high density of Brownsville may also have contributed to its high rates of tuberculosis which rivaled or exceeded other Brooklyn neighborhoods. In East New York, Gebhart found that 27% of families in his survey had one member of the household with tuberculosis. Regulations could mandate higher quality apartments, but could not stop the overcrowding that the low wages of Brownsville's residents necessitated.<sup>33</sup>

Consolidation had succeeded in expanding the boundaries of New York City, allowing the New Law's standards to apply to Brooklyn and the other outer boroughs, but it could not control the expansion and placement of tenements. The New Law mandated standards for tenement construction and design, but did nothing to segregate tenements from middle class homes. The success of tenement house reform, combined with the dual system subway expansion, raised fears among Brooklyn's elite that their

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<sup>32</sup>Brooklyn's population density in new law tenements constructed in 1915 was 724 persons per acre, more than twice the density of London. Only Manhattan and the Bronx had higher densities.

<sup>33</sup>The rates of tuberculosis in this study were exaggerated by the inclusion of the Tuberculosis Day Camp, whose sole purpose was to aid victims of the deadly disease. *Ibid.*, p. 35; Herbert S. Swan, "The Progress of Housing Reform in Brooklyn; A Report of the Tenement House Committee of the Brooklyn Bureau of Charities and a Study of Land Overcrowding in Brooklyn" (Brooklyn, 1916).

neighborhoods and Brooklyn's rural landscapes would be overwhelmed by immigrants as developers filled the borough with new law tenements. The influx of immigrants, which seemed a confirmation of the fears of Brooklyn's League of Loyal Citizens, led Brooklyn's elite to search for solutions that would segregate land uses and protect Brooklyn's middle class neighborhoods from invasion of tenements and manufacturing. Brooklyn's middle and upper classes looked to zoning legislation to mollify these fears.

Zoning began as a means to address the concerns of merchants on Manhattan's Fifth Avenue, but consolidation provided a context to map the future development of all of Greater New York. Without consolidation, zoning would have remained a limited plan for Manhattan and regional rationalization would have been difficult to achieve. The governments of Brooklyn and New York might have separately zoned their cities, but it would have been exceedingly difficult for the two cities to coordinate their planning activities.

Like other progressive ideas in the early twentieth century, zoning tried to bring order to a society in a state of flux. Ideally experts would decide what were the most rational uses for the various regions and map out land use restrictions that would prevent factories from being built next to homes and tall buildings from blocking the sunlight of smaller buildings and the street below. Zoning also created a mechanism to control population density and segregate single family homes, two family homes and tenements from each other.

Given absolute power progressive planners could have decided on the placement of houses, tenements, businesses and industry for each part of the city, but an inability to change already existing development and the interests within different boroughs and

neighborhoods limited their power. When the zoning of Brooklyn took place in 1916, Brooklyn's homeowners would use their political influence in an attempt to protect their property by restricting businesses and tenements from encroaching on suburban neighborhoods.<sup>34</sup>

Consolidation, through the creation of the subway system, had created the means to depopulate Manhattan's tenement neighborhoods and house their immigrant residents in Brooklyn and the other outer boroughs. The congested neighborhood of Brownsville, housing an alien Eastern European Jewish minority, was an example of what this policy could mean for Brooklyn. Homeowners feared that if they could not control the zoning process, the next phase of consolidation would transform their neighborhoods into replicas of Manhattan with its high population densities, ethnic diversity and overcrowded tenements.

### **The Origins of Zoning**

The free form development of Fifth Avenue was the proximate cause of the first zoning plan. In the early twentieth century skyscrapers rose on Fifth Avenue with great rapidity, blocking out light on Manhattan's premier shopping boulevard. Simultaneously, garment factories and workers relocated to the west of Fifth Avenue to be near the stores that purchased their products, disturbing both customers and department store owner with their lower class presence. In response to these problems, department store owners formed the Fifth Avenue Association to lobby for land use restrictions. Property owners also believed this unregulated land was a cause of

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<sup>34</sup>I use the term suburban to mean a lower density middle class neighborhood connected to the Central Business District, but not necessarily outside city limits.

declining property values. Construction boomed in 1905 and 1906, but declined the following year in response to the Panic of 1907. After a brief rebound in 1909, the construction industry went into decline and vacancies south of Chambers Street averaged 12.5% in 1913. The overbuilding of bulky skyscrapers, like the notorious Equitable Building, that created dark canyons in lower Manhattan's narrow streets convinced the real estate industry to support building restrictions. The first result of their efforts was the formation of a Heights of Buildings Commission in 1911 with a stated mission to limit the heights of tall buildings and to segregate high end department stores from clothing manufacturers. After the completion of the Fifth Avenue Plan, the commissioners reported that "[t]he injury that is being done to Fifth Avenue is not an isolated problem, but part of a problem that confronts the entire city." Greater New York needed to look beyond Fifth Avenue to confront issues of over-development throughout the five boroughs.<sup>35</sup>

The chairman of the Commission was Edward M. Bassett, a lawyer from Brooklyn and a member of the Public Service Commission during the negotiations that led to the Dual System. He believed zoning could moderate the impact of subway expansion in the outer boroughs as rural sections of Brooklyn came into Manhattan's orbit. Under his leadership the Commission devised the legal framework for restrictions

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<sup>35</sup>Board of Estimate and Apportionment of the City of New York "Report of the Heights of Buildings Commission to the Committee on the Height, Size and Arrangement of Buildings" December 23, 1913, p. 3; S.J. Makielski, Jr. *The Politics of Zoning: The New York Experience* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 11-13; Carol Willis "A 3-D CBD: How the 1916 Zoning Law Shaped Manhattan's Central Business Districts" *Planning and Zoning New York City Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, Todd Bressi, ed. (New Brunswick: Center for Urban Policy Research, 1993), p. 13.

in 1913. Restrictions on land use could be found unconstitutional and as a taking of property if the law was poorly constructed, but Bassett argued that the Tenement House Law of 1901 had set a precedent in mandating types of buildings, while other cities and states had already passed legislation restricting the heights of buildings and segregating industrial and residential uses. These laws had been found constitutional and provided the legal basis for a comprehensive zoning plan.<sup>36</sup>

Before zoning legislation, Brooklyn's middle class homeowners had already tried to protect themselves as early as the 1880s through housing covenants designed to prevent unwanted types of buildings or uses.<sup>37</sup> Covenants often required setbacks on the upper floors, a detached residence, or insisted that no business enterprises could operate on the property. The major flaw of these covenants was that they were usually time limited. When covenants in a neighborhood ended, property owners who sold first could make large profits by selling to developers of apartments or businesses. Even if the covenant was in perpetuity, property owners could not control development outside their neighborhood and they could soon be surrounded by businesses or apartments. They could also be undermined by developers who left corner lots unimproved and unrestricted

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<sup>36</sup>Edward M. Bassett, *Zoning: the Laws, Administration, and Court Decisions During the First Twenty Years*. (1936; New York: Arno Press, 1974), p. 23-26; Keith D. Revell "Regulating the Landscape: Real Estate Values, City Planning, and the 1916 Zoning Ordinance" from *The Landscape of Modernity: Essays on New York City, 1900-1940*, edited by David Ward and, Olivier Zunz. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1992), p. 32.

<sup>37</sup>Covenants typically derived their authority from language embedded in property titles. According to Bassett, "the owner of a considerable tract of land will sell portions subject to restrictions enumerated in the deeds. In [this] case the covenants run with the land, as between owners who derive their titles from the same source that imposes the restriction." See *Real Estate Record and Guide*, July 1, 1916, p. 6, 23.

until the rest of neighborhood had been developed and then built tall apartment buildings that would benefit from the light and air of being around single family homes.<sup>38</sup>

The failure to control development in suburban neighborhoods led to a middle class exodus from Greater New York. In his testimony before the Zoning Commission, Bassett claimed that well to do residents of Brooklyn and Queens were leaving the city entirely to avoid the subway riding proletariat. John B. Creighton, President of the Fiske Terrace Association in Flatbush, provided evidence of this problem when he testified that immediately after the Association's housing covenant expired in 1915, two apartments went up on Ocean Avenue. Creighton saw apartments on Ocean Avenue as inevitable, but feared further apartment or business development in his neighborhood of single family homes.<sup>39</sup>

Consolidation, which had led to an integrated subway system, had helped to make Brooklyn the most rapidly growing borough, but it had led to an invasion of tenements and businesses into neighborhoods with single family homes. Opponents of consolidation had earlier made the point that consolidation would bring to Brooklyn the drawbacks of Manhattan, changing the neighborhood quality of Kings County life.

Brooklyn's elite formed the Brooklyn Committee on City Plan in 1914 to fight the metropolitanization of their borough, hiring Daniel H. Burnham, architect of the 1893 Chicago Worlds Fair, and his assistant Edward H. Bennett to create a unified plan for the

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<sup>38</sup>City of New York Board of Estimate and Apportionment "Commission on Building Districts and Restrictions Final Report June 2, 1916" (New York: 1916), p. 82-84, 94. Racial covenants are not mentioned in this or other reports because they would not have been part of a uniform districting, but it is possible that they existed.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

“City” of Brooklyn. Their plan emphasized the unique nature of Brooklyn’s residential climate and the need to prevent it from becoming like Manhattan. The Committee, which included Bassett, sought to place its own stamp upon Brooklyn’s future. Few of their proposals, such as the wide boulevards and parks reminiscent of Hausmann’s Paris, would come to fruition, but their ideas on land use would influence the 1916 zoning map.<sup>40</sup>

Brooklyn’s politicians and leaders had fought for the bridges and tunnels that connected Brooklyn to Manhattan, but sixteen years after consolidation they had to deal with their effects on the borough. Tenements and factories were threatening to overwhelm Brooklyn’s suburban aspect. The *Brooklyn Eagle* addressed this issue on January 18, 1914 (the same day it published the work of the Brooklyn Committee on City Plan).

With a rapid concurrent growth of factories and population, how are we going to prevent factories from being set in a residence section, and how are we to prevent the invasion of crowded tenements and cheap apartments into regions now attractive for single houses? . . . Is Brooklyn to be driven into Nassau and Suffolk Counties and over to New Jersey, or can it so distribute its coming population and manufactures as to preserve itself as a borough of homes? Mr. Bassett believes that this last can be done, and he explains how, by the “zone system” of construction, which his commission has recently favorably reported to the Board of Estimate. The keynote of that report is the conservation of property values. . . .<sup>41</sup>

Zoning provided a means to control the indiscriminate rush of population fostered by consolidation. It also segregated the poorer classes from more affluent

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<sup>40</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 18, 1914, “Brooklyn City Plan: The Story of the Work of the Brooklyn Committee on City Plan with Maps embodying the Details of Architects Bennett’s Recommendations.”

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, January 18, 1914, Section II, p. 4

neighborhoods, preventing undesirable uses of residential properties. Without zoning, claimed Bassett,

No landowner in any part of the city could erect a building of any sort with assurance that in ten or twenty years the building would not be obsolete by reason of an unnecessary and undesirable change in the character of the neighborhood. Sometimes these changes left a blighted district behind. It became apparent that regulations might be adopted that would tend to stabilize some localities for one-family, detached homes, others for apartment houses free from stores, and factories, others for stores and offices, others for light industry, and others for heavy industry.<sup>42</sup>

Unregulated land use meant unplanned development, leading to fearful property owners and declining property values. Bassett led the call for restricting land use to bring order to New York's development.

### **Zoning Brooklyn**

Bassett and the Heights of Building Commission were elites who, like Green, wanted orderly development of the region. The commissioners' report, released in December 1913 was the first step in that process, describing the hazards of tall buildings in detail and explaining how zoning provided a solution. Most importantly, it included a draft bill for the State Legislature to give New York City the authority to pass zoning legislation. Manhattan Borough President McAneny used his political skills to get the bill introduced into the Legislature and it was signed into law in April 1914.<sup>43</sup>

Bassett's commission had only looked at conditions in Manhattan, but consolidation made it possible to zone the entire city. John Purroy Mitchel, New York's newly elected Fusion mayor and the reform dominated Board of Estimate, appointed a

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<sup>42</sup>Bassett, *Zoning*, p. 25-26.

<sup>43</sup>Makielski, p. 11-22.

Commission on Building Districts and Restrictions (the “Zoning Commission”) in June 1914 to achieve that goal. During the next two years the Commission, again chaired by Bassett, gathered information from civic organizations like the Fifth Avenue Association and the Brooklyn Committee on City Plan, government agencies like the Tenement House Commission, and the Heights of Building Commission to create a draft zoning map of New York City. By the end of 1915, the Zoning Commission prepared to release its initial finding and begin public hearings.<sup>44</sup>

The details of the zoning map would be critical for Brooklyn’s homeowners. Consolidation had endangered Brooklyn’s suburban neighborhoods by creating a subway system that encouraged the development of apartment buildings for the city’s working class. Homeowners saw these buildings as a threat to their property values. These high density buildings and the businesses that developed alongside them increased shadows and brought undesirable populations into the neighborhood. As knowledge of the Zoning Commission’s plan became public in February 1916, the *Eagle* viewed it as a means to prevent middle class flight to suburbs outside Brooklyn, due to the influx of businesses and tenements.

For costly homes men now seek the suburbs, although many of them would prefer to live in the city, if they believed that city homes giving suburban space were a safe investment. These instances are enough to show that the object of the new plan [zoning] is the stability and not the destruction of values.

Brooklyn now had the opportunity to use zoning to maintain the suburban character of at least part of the borough.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>*Ibid*, p. 23-28.

<sup>45</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, February 7, 1916, p. 6.

The Zoning Commission submitted a tentative report to the Board of Estimate on March 10, 1916 that used three separate categories to zone the city: use, height and what percentage of the plot could be developed. By combining these three restrictions, the city could determine what types of homes, apartments, businesses or industries could be built in an area. The Commission created four types of use districts: residential, business, unrestricted (i.e. industrial) and undetermined. Residential zones excluded all business and manufacturing, but allowed apartment buildings. Business districts were for retail, wholesale and light manufacturing, excluding a whole series of manufacturing uses such as glue, printing, smelting and incineration, to name but a few. Unrestricted allowed any uses in the area and tended to be waterfront, industrial, mixed use or undeveloped areas. Undetermined districts (eliminated in the final legislation) were undeveloped areas without a clear use. Less restrictive zones could include other uses, i.e. a business district could have residences.

The Commission created five height districts to prevent over building and the shadows it created based upon the presumed use of the district and the width of the street. The most stringent height restrictions allowed a building to rise to a height equal only to the width of the street along the plot line. Other more liberal restrictions permitted ratios of one and a quarter, one and half, two, and two and a half times the street width. To rise above these heights, it was necessary for a building's higher floors to be progressively setback from the street as they ascended toward the sky. These setbacks led to the distinctive ziggurat skyscrapers that came to dominate Manhattan's skyline in the 1920's.

Few skyscrapers were built in Brooklyn where apartments and houses were the primary architectural forms. Area districting was the means to regulate these buildings, placed primarily in residential districts. The Tentative Report created five zoning districts (A-E) to limit how much of the lot a building could use. "A" districts allowed a building to occupy the entire lot and were concentrated in industrial areas near the waterfront and rail terminals. "B" and "C" districts were designed for tenement and apartment districts following the patterns of the New Law. "D" districts required larger yards making them most suitable for single or two family row houses. "E" district regulations were set aside for detached or attached single family homes with plots forty feet in width.

The three zoning restrictions in combination could maintain or set the character of the neighborhoods. An industrial neighborhood would be in an "A" district, zoned as unrestricted, with height restrictions of 2 or 2 ½ times the width of the street. On the opposite side of the spectrum, single family homes would be in an "E" district, zoned residential, with a height restriction of 1 or 1 ¼ the width of the street. Tenements, row houses and semi-detached single family homes were zoned between these two extremes.

This document became the basis for negotiation. Some outright opposition arose to it from developers who wanted no restrictions on what they could build, but most of the debate revolved around how different areas of the city should be zoned. For those who wanted Brooklyn to remain a borough of homes, the question was whether zoning, a

tool of consolidation, could be used to keep metropolitanization, an effect of consolidation, at bay.<sup>46</sup>

The danger of increasing urbanization and unplanned development could be seen in Brooklyn Heights, the borough's oldest residential neighborhood, which had seen "an invasion of the section by business and apartment houses." The Zoning Commission in its tentative report proposed a radical solution to the plight of Brooklyn Heights and other formerly residential neighborhoods that would "disregard existing conditions, require the removal of inappropriate buildings and uses, sacrifice the vested rights of the individual owner for the improvement and beautification of the district and the city." To finance this plan individual owners would have to be compensated for injury and "a method of locally assessing benefits and damages could be worked out."<sup>47</sup>

The Commission's proposal likely gained sympathy from Brooklyn homeowners in neighborhoods that had seen the incursion of apartments or businesses into their neighborhoods, but the process of removing unwanted structures from a neighborhood would have been unconstitutional or prohibitively expensive. Protection of Brooklyn's affluent neighborhoods from encroaching tenements could not be done retroactively. Some neighborhoods like Brownsville would remain "merely suburban repetitions of Manhattan conditions," while in Brooklyn Heights residents would have to surrender some blocks while protecting others. The *Eagle* described Brooklyn as a Turnerian

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<sup>46</sup>New York City Board of Estimate, "Commission on Building Districts and Restrictions Tentative Report," p. 9-31.

<sup>47</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 5, 1916, p. 6; *Standard Union* (Brooklyn), March 10, 1916, p. 11; "Tentative Report," p. 9.

frontier in reverse, where the “civilized” middle class homeowners were being overrun by a proletariat pouring out of Manhattan. “When unpleasant conditions invaded a city neighborhood, the old residents moved on leaving their territory to be despoiled by invaders.” Like the American West, Brooklyn was now running out of empty space for homesteaders and the middle class needed to ‘fight’ for its “comfortable and beautiful home conditions.”<sup>48</sup>

The *Standard Union*, the *Eagle*'s Republican competitor, had similar fears. The newspaper argued that Manhattan should not make decisions on zoning in Brooklyn and that zoning was a local issue that Brooklyn should control without interference.

Brooklyn belongs to the people who live in it; in fact, Brooklyn is the people who live in it. Why should it not decide for itself, in each of its established communities, how the powers so wisely granted by the Legislature should be exercised so far as they vitally concern the fate of those communities?

The *Standard Union*'s editorial, which was reminiscent of the anti-consolidation arguments of the 1890s, neglected to define what group personified “Brooklyn.” The newspaper implicitly excluded Brooklyn’s immigrant population moving into the new apartment buildings, limiting its definition to the middle and upper classes who sought protection from the other Brooklyn. The Zoning Commission had to balance Greater New York’s need to house its growing proletariat with the need to create suburban enclaves for Brooklyn’s middle and upper classes.<sup>49</sup>

Brooklyn’ homeowners could not control the zoning process in the borough, as the *Standard Union* desired, but they could greatly influence its outcome. Underlying

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<sup>48</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 5, 1910, p. 6.

<sup>49</sup>*Standard Union*. April 5, 1916, p. 8.

their calls for lower densities was a fear that without strong zoning restrictions, the mistakes of Manhattan would be repeated in Brooklyn. After the release of the tentative report in March, the Zoning Commission conducted hearings in each of the boroughs to address changes in the zoning maps. When the Commission came to Brooklyn in early April, Brooklynites opposed to high density development and the incursion of businesses into residential neighborhoods marshaled their forces. They lauded the idea of zoning, but argued that “the Commission has not fully grasped its opportunity to limit . . . congestion in this borough.” Civic organizations like the Brooklyn Heights Association and the Brooklyn Committee on City Plan wanted stronger regulations that would transform neighborhoods. An example of these changes was a request that all of Brooklyn Heights be zoned as residential and that the regulations create open space between buildings to reduce congestion.<sup>50</sup>

The most interesting testimony came from tenement reformer John C. Gebhart, who supported the idea of zoning, “but suggested that there be more drastic regulations to prevent congestion. He suggested more yard spaces and smaller tenement houses, and showed how crowded the classrooms in public schools are by reason of congestion.” Gebhart supported these measures in order to improve public health, yet under questioning admitted that existing less stringent regulations to reduce congestion were unenforceable. He was sincerely concerned about the welfare of the poor, but Gebhart’s and other reformers concerns about high density housing did not acknowledge that the low wages paid to Brooklyn’s working class immigrants forced them to live in higher

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<sup>50</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle* April 5, 1916, p. 6; *New York Times* April 5, 1916, p. 9.

density housing. Consolidation had helped to provide access to Brooklyn by facilitating the development of a mass transit system. Progressives expanded its potential to land use, but consolidation was not a tool to reduce the income inequalities that necessitated high density low income housing.<sup>51</sup>

The failure to fully comprehend the problems of overcrowding did not prevent Brooklyn's reformers from meeting their larger goal of segregating single family homes. The *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide* found "Manifestations of a marked desire for the extension of the 'E,' or detached private residence zones" to stabilize neighborhoods and preserve property values. Bassett agreed with this sentiment stating that "where a district desires a certain class of restrictions, its desire should be granted." This attitude pervaded the Zoning Commission which, according to the *Standard Union*, "adopted a cordial attitude to the expressions of Brooklyn desires."<sup>52</sup>

Brooklyn homeowners lobbied for stricter zoning restrictions and gained significant concessions from the Zoning Commission. An example of this process was in the neighborhood of Ditmas Park West in Flatbush, where one hundred residents signed a petition to change their neighborhood from a C to an E zone. The Bay Ridge Zone E Association made similar demands in order to prevent apartments from entering their

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<sup>51</sup>*New York Times*, April 5, 1916, p. 9; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 5, 1916, p. 6.

<sup>52</sup>*Real Estate Record and Builders Guide*, May 27, 1916, p. 798; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 20, 1916, p. 16; *Standard Union*, April 5, 1916, p. 8.

neighborhoods. Throughout the borough, homeowners in other neighborhoods organized similar campaigns to make their neighborhoods E districts.<sup>53</sup>

These efforts had some success. On May 30<sup>th</sup> the *Eagle* reported that the Zoning Commission had doubled the number of E districts from six to twelve and expanded the boundaries of the first six neighborhoods. Concentrated in Flatbush and along Brooklyn's south and southwestern shores, these changes insured homogeneous lower density housing for these neighborhoods. The *Eagle* viewed these changes as positive, but inadequate. Similar neighborhoods in Flatbush remained unprotected by zoning and left "to the uncertain and limited protection of their title deeds." According to the newspaper, Brooklyn needed more E districts to retain its middle class. Nonetheless, the new zoning map "afford[ed] a distinct recognition that that sort of development is desirable and to be guarded by law."<sup>54</sup>

This pressure also convinced the Commission to make other major changes in Brooklyn's zoning map by reducing the number of unrestricted areas and creating more business and residential districts. Of the dozens of changes made by the Zoning Commission, only six in Bushwick, Bay Ridge and Paerdegat loosened restrictions. Even working class Williamsburg saw reductions in the number of industrial and business districts. Similar changes occurred in height restrictions. The Real Estate Record and Builders Guide reported that "These suggested changes have been practically

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<sup>53</sup>*Standard Union*, June 21, 1916, p. 2. *Brooklyn Daily Times*, June 20, 1916, p. 16.

<sup>54</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle* May 30, 1916, p. 6.

all in the direction of a lower maximum height.” These changes made Brooklyn more residential and less dense than the original plans of the Zoning Commission.<sup>55</sup>

The Board of Estimate accepted the recommendations of the Zoning Commission and passed legislation on July 25<sup>th</sup>, 1916 after consulting “with representative of various groups, such as builders, fire insurance men, savings banks, real estate developers, owners of high buildings, and factory owners” and holding “conferences with interested property owners in the different boroughs of the city.”<sup>56</sup> The Board passed the legislation quickly “to offset the actions of builders who had been rushing the filing of plans . . . so as to escape the new building district law.” Brooklyn’s real estate interests reacted positively to the passage of the zoning law. The Brooklyn Board of Real Estate Brokers supported the law, wishing only that it had been enacted earlier. The *Standard Union* was the only major Brooklyn newspaper that opposed the bill, worried that restrictions on property rights would lead to a decline of property values. *The Brooklyn Daily Times* and the *Eagle* wholeheartedly supported zoning legislation. The *Times* reported that “Brooklyn homeowners were well pleased to-day in the action of the Board of Estimate” The *Brooklyn Citizen*, the voice of Brooklyn’s Democratic machine, worried about the effects that restricting the building of skyscrapers in Manhattan would have, but wrote that “there is no question of the desirability of separating residential and business districts and business and factory districts.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>*Real Estate Record and Builders Guide* May 20, 1916, p. 758, 764.

<sup>56</sup>Bassett, *Zoning*, p. 34.

<sup>57</sup>*Standard Union*, July 26, 1916, p. 8; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 27, 1916, p. 4; *Brooklyn Daily Times*, July 26, 1916, p. 4, 5; *Brooklyn Citizen*, July 26, 1916, p. 3, 6.

Zoning was not a panacea for Brooklyn's homeowners to protect their property from tenements and businesses. Consolidation had helped to connect Brooklyn to Manhattan, making it and the other boroughs into parts of a great metropolis. Along with these benefits of consolidation came changes that threatened the homogeneity of Brooklyn's suburban neighborhoods. Like opponents of consolidation in the 1890s, Brooklyn's homeowners could not stem the tide of immigrants arriving on Brooklyn's shores from Manhattan or more distant addresses in Europe. Zoning was an attempt to separate those groups from Brooklyn's homeowners by preventing tenements from invading their neighborhoods. An E or a D district combined with residential zoning could functionally keep out tenements and businesses and create a homogeneous neighborhood protected from the social changes affecting other parts of Brooklyn.

Two interrelated forces limited attempts to segregate through land use: the need to house New York's immigrant population and the power of real estate interests who wanted higher density development to secure larger profits from their investments. Brooklyn's planners wanted it to remain a borough of homes; a dormitory for the metropolis's middle classes. Conflicting with that goal was the need for Brooklyn to house immigrants in lower cost apartments. The Zoning Commission had to balance these two contradictory agendas, zoning enough of the borough for apartment buildings, while mandating lower density housing for regions developed for single family homes.

Brooklyn's homeowners had made much progress in protecting their investments, but these could be overturned by changing the zoning map. Speculators would buy property in E districts. After allowing the building to deteriorate, they could convince the Board of Estimate to weaken the zoning standards by claiming the properties were

not profitable when zoned for single family homes. This occurred on Shore Road in Bay Ridge, which had been zoned as an E district in 1916, but thirteen years later speculators lobbied to have this waterfront boulevard turned into a C district. Bassett denounced this scheme, arguing that “If a Chinese wall of C district apartment houses is built on Shore Road fronting the Narrows, the hinterland is irreparably injured. If the Bay Ridge E district is gradually destroyed, the entire city is hurt for generations to come.” Despite the opposition of Bay Ridge homeowners, the Board of Estimate, including Brooklyn’s borough president, supported this change, creating the wall of apartments that Bassett feared.<sup>58</sup>

Consolidation reduced the ability of Brooklyn’s elite to control the zoning process because of the dilution of Brooklyn’s political power. Unlike the subway system, which required Manhattan’s tax base, zoning was something that Brooklyn could have accomplished independently. Under these circumstances, it might have created stricter zoning restrictions for more neighborhoods. Whether this was a positive outcome, depended on the views of the individual. John Creighton decried the construction of apartments on Ocean Avenue, but to a working class family leaving the tenements of Williamsburg, Red Hook or Manhattan’s Lower East Side, these buildings represented an opportunity to improve their quality of life. A new law tenement in Flatbush, combined with the nickel subway fare on the BMT Brighton line was what advocates of consolidation promised for Greater New York’s immigrants. If Brooklyn had been zoned

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<sup>58</sup>Thomas Adams “The Character, Bulk & Surroundings of Buildings” in *Buildings: Their Uses and the Spaces About: Regional Survey of New York and its Environs*, Volume VI (1931; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1974), p. 158-159.

primarily for single family homes, it could not have served the needs of immigrants unable to afford them.

Zoning did create enclaves for single family homes away from businesses and apartment dwellers, but it could not stop the development of apartment buildings into Brooklyn's suburban areas. "E" districts would have their place, but most of Brooklyn's new development was in "C" and "D" districts, making them suitable for apartment buildings or attached two family homes. This medium density development would dominate in Flatbush, New Utrecht, Gravesend and Flatlands, creating the housing stock that would allow Kings County to be a receptacle for two and half million souls in 1930. This population growth and demographic change would increase the need for new infrastructure and aggravate social tension in the transformed borough.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Modernizing the System: Consolidation and School Centralization**

“I think the Brooklyn system will be effective to the degree that it is under Brooklyn control, in distinction from Manhattan control, and from state interference as far as may be. As a citizen and a public man I am willing to prefer and commend the party that favors the largest Brooklyn control of the Brooklyn schools and their largest freedom from despotic theorists. I believe in Brooklyn teachers familiar with and fond of Brooklyn wants and Brooklyn homes, for Brooklyn schools.”<sup>1</sup>

St. Clair McKelway, Brooklyn Training School for Teachers Commencement, June 28, 1900

Consolidation provided Brooklyn with the infrastructure to function as part of a great city, but along with these benefits came demands for increased social and political integration with Manhattan. When Andrew H. Green began his campaign for consolidation in 1890, he looked at it, not only as a way to speed the physical integration of Greater New York, but also the mechanisms of government. This call for centralization confirmed the fears of Brooklyn’s “loyal citizens.” During the consolidation debate they had argued that integrating into New York’s empire would prevent Brooklyn from pursuing its own priorities in education, culture and politics.

After Governor Levi Morton signed the consolidation legislation in 1896, the argument shifted from whether Brooklyn would remain independent to how much autonomy the borough could retain within Greater New York. Education was a central focus of this battle and Brooklyn’s loyalists successfully argued in favor of a decentralized system against the wishes of

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<sup>1</sup>St. Clair McKelway Papers, New York Public Library, Manuscript and Archives Division. Box 8 Addresses 1900 no. 8, “Unanswered Questions” Address of St. Clair McKelway, Brooklyn Training School for Teachers Commencement, p. 18-19.

education reformers and consolidationists. But this was only the first battle to centralize Brooklyn's school system and bring it under the control of progressives. Three years later, reform forces allied with Tammany Hall would try again to dismantle Brooklyn's independent and decentralized educational system and force the borough to accept prevailing progressive ideas of centralized and professionalized education and with them Manhattan's hegemony in Greater New York.

The central figure in Greater New York's educational system in the early twentieth century was William H. Maxwell, the superintendent of the City of Brooklyn's schools from 1887-1898 and of Greater New York's from 1898-1916. Maxwell was a Scotch-Irish immigrant and son of a Presbyterian minister. Born in 1852, he received his Bachelor's degree from Queens College in Galway, Ireland in 1870 and his M.A. in philosophy and political science two years later. Finding teaching opportunities limited in Ireland, he emigrated to the United States in 1874, but could not gain a job as a teacher because of his status as a "foreigner," and, he believed, his lack of political connections. Instead he worked for a series of newspapers including the *New York Herald* and *New York Tribune*. He eventually rose to become the managing editor of the *Brooklyn Daily Times* and used his position there to write on educational issues and ingratiate himself to leading educators and politicians in Brooklyn. He received his first teaching appointment in 1881 to lecture in Brooklyn's evening high schools in history and civil government. That same year, the school board considered him for the post of superintendent only to give it to Calvin Patterson, a principal in the public schools favored by

the Brooklyn Teachers Association.<sup>2</sup>

His failure to gain the superintendent's position only slowed his rise to power. Using his connections on the school board and in Brooklyn's political machine, Maxwell became associate superintendent of evening schools in 1882. Ironically his path to power would be paved by the very political influences he would later decry when he became superintendent. During his tenure at the *Brooklyn Times*, Maxwell made many friends in the political world who would aid his rise to power, including Boss Hugh McLaughlin, the leader of Brooklyn's Democratic machine. As associate superintendent, Maxwell created more rigorous standards, reduced class sizes from twenty-five to twenty-three, increased the length of study in the high schools, and introduced German and Spanish into the curriculum.

When the superintendent's position opened again in 1887, Maxwell used his tenure as associate superintendent and his political skills and influence to gain the appointment. The need to use political connections and his experience as Brooklyn's superintendent would color his view of how public education should be organized and make him a strong advocate for the centralization of Brooklyn's and later Greater New York's public education system.

The roots of Brooklyn's decentralized system dated back to 1851 when the city first organized a Board of Education to administer its growing public school system. Like other cities of the time Brooklyn chose a decentralized system, where ultimate authority lay in a large Board of Education (forty-five members) appointed by the mayor. The Board appointed a

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<sup>2</sup>Samuel Philip Abelow, *Dr. William H. Maxwell, the first superintendent of schools of the city of New York* (Brooklyn: Scheba publishing co. 1934), p. 1-9

superintendent, created examinations to certify teachers, approved their licenses, and provided general supervision. The Board of Education also created standing committees to administer particular responsibilities, but real power lay in the local committee.

A unique Brooklyn institution, the local committee consisted of three members of the Board of Education who oversaw a local public school. Theoretically their decisions were advisory, but by the 1880s the Board of Education generally rubber stamped the decisions of the local committee which hired principals, appointed, promoted and suspended teachers and authorized repairs. The local committees had little accountability to a central authority and the uneven quality of their members made them targets of reformers.<sup>3</sup>

Decentralized educational systems were common in the late nineteenth century and the debate over Brooklyn's educational future was part of a larger discourse in late nineteenth century America, when cities transformed their education systems as they adapted to rapid immigration, population growth and industrialization. During this time period, politicians and educators abandoned the ungraded, single room schoolhouse with minimally trained teachers administered by a board of education whose members came from the local community. Reformers replaced this system with graded schools and teachers trained in normal schools. Professional educators oversaw the system with limited input from a board of education

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<sup>3</sup>Archie Emerson Palmer, *The New York Public School Being a History of Free Education in the City of New York*. (New York: The MacMillan Company 1905), p. 216, 243; Joseph Connolly, "The Centralization of Professional Administration in the Brooklyn, New York Public Schools 1887-1902." (Ed.D. diss, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1971), p. 11-14.

composed of the local elite. Progressives believed these changes were necessary to take political power away from politicians and local communities who lacked the knowledge for this responsibility, or sought political or personal gain from their positions. These reformers advocated new educational methods and curriculums to meet the needs of a more complex economy and the corporations that came to dominate it.

In *The One Best System A History of American Urban Education*, David Tyack credited the group he calls “administrative progressives” for centralizing control of schools and placing power in the hands of superintendents minimally guided by school boards made up of professionals and businessmen. While sympathetic to many of their aims, Tyack criticized their “one size fits all” notion of public education and acknowledged the benefits of local political control that preceded centralization. Tyack described the terms of the debate that ensued at the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in this fashion.

Defenders of the ward system argued that grass-roots interest in the schools and widespread participation in school politics was healthy, indeed necessary, in large cities, but centralizers saw in decentralization only corruption, parochialism, and vestiges of an outmoded village mentality.<sup>4</sup>

In the late nineteenth century these administrative progressives began their assaults on decentralized school systems throughout the United States, including Brooklyn and New York. Supporters of centralization attacked the City of Brooklyn’s public education system in the mid-1890’s, which they believed the Willoughby Street Democratic machine dominated. The

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<sup>4</sup>David B. Tyack, *The One Best System A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 126-127.

corruption of the local committees came to light in January 1895, when the *New York Times* uncovered the chicanery of two brothers-in-law, Commissioners Courtes T. Hubbs and William Ferris, on the Brooklyn Board of Education. The two machine Democrats sat on seven local committees together, and separately on another eight, giving them influence or control over fifteen schools. Hubbs and Ferris along with A.G. Aubery, a Republican, were members of the P.S. 26 local committee. When the principal of the school died in 1894, the three men met at the Bushwick Democratic Club to choose a successor. Aubery claimed that Hubbs and Ferris prevented him from leaving the meeting until he approved their candidate. Aubery rejected him and said he intended to write a minority report. Hubbs and Ferris responded by physically threatening Aubery.

At the close of the meeting I put on my overcoat and started to leave the room. I was at the door when Hubbs jumped from his seat, using vile language. Ferris at the same time jumped at me, grabbed me, dragged me into the room and roughly shoved me into the corner. . . . They kept me locked in the room until a late hour at night and I was only released after I had made and signed a copy of the minutes.

Despite his status as chairman of the committee, Aubery also claimed that he was not “given the privilege of making any appointments in School 26.” The influence of Hugh McLaughlin’s Willoughby Street Democratic Machine had, according to a Board member appointed in 1894 by fusion Republican Mayor Charles A. Schieren, given Hubbs and Ferris “a practical monopoly of a very large share of the patronage of the public schools.”<sup>5</sup>

Other sources confirmed that Hubbs and Ferris had turned their local committees into

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<sup>5</sup>*New York Times*, January 10, 1895, p. 1.

patronage mills. Miss Bessie C. Allen, a prospective teacher, reported that she had received an appointment from Aubery, but Hubbs and Ferris rejected it because her father was a Republican. The *New York Times* described a process in which teachers understood that the only way to get a job in many schools was to use influence with the local ward boss or at Willoughby Street headquarters. An anonymous teacher reported to the *Times*: “no young woman can obtain an appointment as a public-school teacher without the assistance of influential friends of the ‘machine’ Democratic faith . . . . [and] openings are actually held up for candidates [with political influence] who have not yet passed their first examinations.”<sup>6</sup>

As superintendent, Maxwell also attacked Brooklyn’s decentralized system and its local committees. In his 1891 Annual Report he expressed frustration with patronage, and indirectly criticized the local committees that controlled hiring and promotion. Aside from the overcrowded schools, with student to teacher ratios over 70:1 in the lower grades. Maxwell’s main complaint that year was the overabundance of department heads and the “wire-pulling” necessary to gain teaching appointments and promotions.<sup>7</sup>

The allegations of corruption and inefficiency led Mayor Schieren and other reformers to organize a campaign to centralize the school system and eliminate the local committees. Schieren appointed a committee that included J. Edward Swanstrom, president of the Board of

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<sup>6</sup>*Ibid*, January 14, 1895, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup>*Department of Public Instruction. Thirty-Sixth Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the City of Brooklyn for the Year Ending December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1891* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Board of Education, 1892), p. 10-14. (Hereafter Brooklyn SAR).

Education, educators from the private schools, prominent businessmen, and former members of the Board of Education. Teachers College President Nicholas Murray Butler, a prominent reformer and future president of Columbia University, reported that “all the appointees represent the progressive, non-political element in school affairs.” Like other progressive educators, the committee members sought to “separate the business and scholastic administration of the public schools.” They proposed a fifteen member Board of Education with overlapping three year terms and a Commissioner of Education, appointed by the Mayor. The Commissioner would appoint a superintendent to administer educational aspects of the system. The committee and Schieren hoped that an education commissioner appointed by the Mayor would take education out of the hands of the local committees and make the mayor directly accountable for the performance of the schools. Opponents argued that an appointed commissioner would increase the politicization of education by allowing a mayor to make partisan appointments and that a smaller board could be dominated more easily by corrupt political forces.<sup>8</sup>

Opposition to Schieren’s proposal arose in familiar quarters: Principals, Heads of Departments and Teachers Associations, the Willoughby Street Machine, and the Board of Education. The three Associations formed a joint committee which effectively lobbied Brooklyn Republicans who defeated the bill in the Legislature.<sup>9</sup>

As Maxwell tried to strengthen his control over Brooklyn’s schools, he needed to cope

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<sup>8</sup>Flora, p. 48-56.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

with other problems, including the development of a new and more rigorous curriculum based on new progressive theories, training more teachers and erecting new school buildings to accommodate rising enrollment. At the same time education reformers, including Maxwell, sought to expand public education beyond grammar school by creating manual training schools, high schools and kindergartens. Maxwell had to make these changes within Brooklyn's limited budgets.

Overcrowding in Brooklyn's schools in the 1880s and 1890s was intense with 37:1 student-teacher ratios in 1892. These shortages were most apparent in the lower grades with average class sizes of 76 and some classes as high as 140. Shortages of teachers and classroom space forced Maxwell to institute half day sessions in many of the overcrowded districts. This allowed more students to be educated, but reduced the amount of time spent in school. Despite continued school construction, the student register exceeded the number of seats by nearly 5,000. Over a four year period from 1889-1892, Brooklyn built new schools or additions that added 24,513 seats, but during the same period its school population grew by 17,084. The city created more seats than additional students, but some of the construction replaced older schools or sought to reduce overcrowding. These efforts did not keep up with the increasing enrollment, especially in the newly developed areas of Brooklyn that had recently been rural areas with few schools.

In the 1892 *Annual Report of the Superintendent*, Maxwell found that the number of classes with more than sixty students rose from 360 to 389. Overall, school enrollment during Maxwell's tenure as Superintendent of Brooklyn's schools almost doubled from 75,290 in

1887 to 141,920 in 1898. In the latter year Brooklyn's school system had 1,381 more students than seats in classrooms, in contrast to Manhattan's 7,742 excess seats. This shortage of space meant that 20,275 (14%) of Brooklyn's students attended school half time compared to 4,769 (2%) of students in Manhattan and the Bronx. Maxwell accounted for this shortage of seats by noting that Brooklyn's government "during the two years preceding consolidation . . . was unable to provide the buildings necessary to accommodate the constantly increasing population."<sup>10</sup>

Maxwell was unable to solve these problems because of financial shortfalls.

Overcrowding was worst in the first grade because parents entered their five year old children who were unprepared for school and had to repeat the grade the following year. The solution was to forbid these young children from attending the first grade and build kindergartens for them to attend. But Brooklyn lacked the funds to create new kindergartens in the 1890s and parents continued to place their young children into the schools early.

Teacher shortages were also problematic. In 1890 Brooklyn's teachers had some of the lowest annual salaries among U.S. urban schools, ranging from \$300- \$575 in contrast to New York's much higher salaries of \$504 - 900. Even accounting for higher living costs in Manhattan, Brooklyn paid its teachers considerably less than New York. Brooklyn greatly increased its salaries the following year, but it still could not compete with Manhattan's higher

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<sup>10</sup>Brooklyn SAR (Volume 38), 1892, p. 20; New York City Education Department *New York City Superintendent of Schools Annual Report Volume 1 1898/99*, p. 34-36. (Hereafter New York City SAR.)

salaries in the long term. Maxwell also believed that Brooklyn's decentralized educational system encouraged a low ratio of administrators to teachers, leading to featherbedding and teacher shortages. Teachers and administrators received salary increases through promotion and lobbied to create supervisory positions to improve their chances of promotion. Brooklyn's Board of Education encouraged this trend by using attendance to decide how many heads of department were necessary instead of the number of teachers supervised. (Large class sizes meant that heads of departments supervised a small number of teachers who taught in overcrowded classrooms.) Maxwell believed that local committees awarded these non-teaching supervisory positions to politically connected "wire pullers," who had influence with the local committees that oversaw their individual schools. When consolidation occurred in 1898, the teacher administrator ratio in Brooklyn was 11.8 to 1, compared to 14.5 to 1 in the Manhattan and the Bronx.<sup>11</sup>

Unlike their counterparts in Brooklyn, New York's education reformers succeeded in reorganizing and centralizing the larger city's educational system. Prior to reform, New York had a twenty-one member Board of Education appointed by the mayor which set general educational policy. The Board appointed a weak superintendent, described by David Hammack as a "glorified clerk and general inspector of the Board." More important were the ward trustees, appointed by the Board to administer their local districts. These trustees, who controlled the hiring and promotion of teachers and principals, selected school sites, and

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<sup>11</sup>Brooklyn SAR (Volume 36 )1890, p. 7-8, 14, 74-75; (Volume 37) 1891, p. 10-11, 14; (Volume 38), 1892, p. 6; New York City SAR (Volume 1), 1898/99, p. 39.

negotiated construction contracts, became the targets of education reformers. Nicholas Murray Butler, who led the pro-centralization coalition, believed that New York's schools were controlled by "a small clique of individuals who derive either prestige, power, or patronage, from the existing system." and were "anthropologically . . . savages and barbarians."<sup>12</sup> Racist hyperbole aside, many ward trustees were Tammany pols, especially in the downtown districts, but ward leaders were also representatives of their communities and came from Protestant, Catholic and Jewish backgrounds and a broad array of occupations.<sup>13</sup>

The pro-centralization leadership consisted largely of the leadership of New York's Protestant charities. A largely Republican group, they also recruited anti-Tammany Democrats who had supported Mayor Strong's successful 1894 Fusion campaign. After failing to pass legislation in 1895, the coalition reorganized into a Committee of One Hundred the following year which included some of New York's most prominent leaders in business, charity and civic organizations. To gain Boss Platt's acquiescence, Butler began a concerted public relations campaign, asked newspapers to stop attacking Platt and convinced Republicans that education reform would weaken Tammany Hall. The new legislation that passed in April 1896 eliminated the ward trustees and transferred power to a Board of Education appointed by the mayor which hired a greatly empowered superintendent.<sup>14</sup>

The success of education reformers in New York set the stage for a battle over the

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<sup>12</sup>As quoted in Hammack, p. 262-263.

<sup>13</sup>See Hammack, p. 259-270.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid*, p. 281-293.

future structure of Greater New York's public education system when the charter commission began its work in 1896. Butler and other school reformers wanted to use consolidation to dismantle Brooklyn's decentralized system and extend their success to the rest of Greater New York. Despite the appointment of Butler's ally, Seth Low, as chairman of the commission's education subcommittee, the reform forces were unable to counter the power of Brooklyn's political machine and its educators. Many Brooklynites took pride in their separate education system and its local committees. They believed their schools were superior to New York's and opposed ceding control of their schools to a centralized system based in Manhattan. Brooklyn's political machine also wanted to retain local control and patronage that a central board might have curtailed.

Maxwell had initially opposed the consolidation of the city's school system during the State Legislature's consolidation debate in March 1896. Centralization of New York's schools was a month away, and Maxwell believed that the Brooklyn public school system was superior to New York's existing decentralized system. The *New York Times* described him as "one of the most earnest opponents of consolidation in Brooklyn," who "fear[ed] that if the cities are placed under one municipal government, the New-York public school educational system will be imposed upon Brooklyn, and the public schools of that city will degenerate to the level of the New-York schools." In that article he lauded Brooklyn's higher teacher standards, its public high schools and the relatively less corrupt system that administered it.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>*New York Times*, March 15, 1896, p. 2.

He made a sudden volte-face when New York centralized its system and eliminated its ward committees in April. Maxwell then became a strong supporter of consolidation and opposed the unanimous opinion of the Brooklyn Board of Education to maintain its independence. As negotiations continued over the new charter, the Brooklyn Board appointed a committee in September 1896, made up of board members Franklin W. Hooper (Director of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences), Horace E. Dresser, Colonel John Y. Culyer, George H. Fisher, John McNamee, James R. Bouck, and Max Brill, to support their case for home rule. They defended the local committees because they allowed members of the board

to become personally familiar with all the workings of our schools; with their own eyes they see the defects and by their own experience learn the good and the bad that exists therein, and are, thereby qualified to legislate for those schools far more intelligently than if they depended on reports of subordinates, whether called by the name trustees or inspectors.

They worried that the inferiority of New York's schools would bring down the quality of Brooklyn's. The committee noted New York had no high schools and feared that a centralized system would slow the growth of high schools in Brooklyn. Self interest undoubtedly influenced their position since continuation of the existing system meant that power would remain in the hands of the current Board members and the political forces that placed them there.<sup>16</sup>

The only board member to speak out against this proposal was Maxwell, who sat *ex officio*. He saw the centralization of Greater New York's schools as a means of ridding Brooklyn of the local committees that he had criticized during his tenure as Brooklyn

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<sup>16</sup>*New York Times*, September 2, 1896, p. 10

superintendent. Maxwell believed that Brooklyn schools were better run than New York's, but power was too diffuse and needed to be controlled by professional administrators. An ambitious educator, he likely saw himself as superintendent of Greater New York's schools or believed that another reformer would gain that position.

Despite the lobbying of Butler, Maxwell and other reformers, the charter commission supported a decentralized borough based system in 1896. To bring the disparate communities of Greater New York together required compromise. Consolidation's most adamant foes were from Brooklyn and the charter commission placated them to smooth the process. A *New York Times* editorial on the school debate analyzed the situation well noting that "Among the things that will have to be treated as of local concern in a great measure is the administration of the school systems which can hardly be blended at once into one."<sup>17</sup>

Consolidation supporters like Seth Low compromised because they did not want the organization of the education system to delay or prevent the creation of Greater New York.

Low's subcommittee admitted that

Each [educational] system, in its way, is expressive of the characteristics of the community in which it exists. . . . Clearly, a proposition to consolidate the various school systems of the three cities and the outlying towns that are to be consolidated into the greater New York involves considerations that do not appertain to any other part of the problem.

The education subcommittee's initial proposal closely resembled the charter's final draft: a central board to coordinate funds and construct schools and borough boards to oversee

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<sup>17</sup>*New York Times*, September 5, 1896, p. 4.

educational policy, the schools and staff. Brooklyn's members of the subcommittee successfully lobbied to allow the borough to retain its forty five member Board of Education and its local committees.<sup>18</sup>

The Brooklynites won the day when the supporters of centralization agreed to let Brooklyn maintain its local committee system, but this was only a provisional victory in a debate that continued in the newspapers. A *New York Times* editorial accepted that a diversity of opinion made these compromises necessary, but believed that "they will mark the beginning of a transition the end of which will be a complete unification of the Greater New York school system, with one controlling and directing authority." In contrast, the *Eagle* applauded the victory of Brooklyn's interests in an editorial claiming that the consolidation commission "recognize[d] the fact that the differing character of the population in the various parts of the consolidated city would make a rigidly uniform system of school management practically impossible."

The anti-consolidation *Eagle* supported Brooklyn's right to educational home rule, but it did not give unbridled support to the city's existing educational system. The editorial indirectly criticized the power of local committees by supporting Brooklyn Board of Education President J. Edward Swanstrom's call to take teacher and principal appointments away from the local committees, create neutral eligible lists for teachers and have promotions based on merit. The *Eagle* looked with trepidation at New York's encroaching power, but its editor St.

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<sup>18</sup>*New York Times*, January 1, 1897, p. 1; January 3, 1897, p. 16.

Clair McKelway, a member of the state Board of Regents, did not believe that all was well in the management of Brooklyn's public schools.<sup>19</sup>

Greater New York's first charter in 1897 was a lost opportunity for education reformers. Consolidation was supposed to centralize government functions, but Brooklyn's politicians and educators defeated the reformers. Butler described this defeat in *Educational Review*, the magazine he edited.

Thus far the changes are a distinct victory for Brooklyn's group of political principals and for their allies in the Board of Education and among the ward workers. But, from another point of view, the situation is not so hopeless as at first appears. While the evils of the present Brooklyn system are not removed, yet no step can be taken by Brooklyn in the future save in the direction of the present New York law; and when such are steps taken. they are irrevocable.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the defeat of progressive educators, he believed that Brooklyn's system could not survive as an island in Greater New York.

After the Legislature approved the Greater New York charter, the new central Board of Education's first major decision after it took office in 1898 was to choose a new superintendent. This decision was important because the first superintendent could use his limited powers to advance the goals of consolidation and encourage centralization or allow each borough board maximum control. The two initial front-runners John Jasper, the Superintendent of the Manhattan and Bronx system, and William H. Maxwell represented opposite poles in this debate. Jasper, supported by Tammany Hall, would likely have continued his role as a glorified

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<sup>19</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 6, 1897, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 4, 1897, p. 12; *Educational Review*, March 1897, p. 305.

clerk, while Maxwell, whose support came from reformers in Brooklyn and Manhattan, was a supporter of centralization and a powerful superintendent.

Newly elected Tammany Mayor, Robert Van Wyck, opposed the nomination of a progressive, but was legally unable to fire reform members of the Board of Education. This left the decision with the existing Board. Complicating this conflict was the inclusion of other candidates, including Andrew S. Draper, President of the University of Illinois. Draper, a reformer and frequent contributor to *Educational Review*, received fourteen of nineteen votes, but he had not sought the position and withdrew his name. (According to the *Review*, Maxwell had stood aside in deference to his fellow reformer during the first round of voting when Draper's name entered the contest.)

After his poor showing against Draper, Jasper dropped out of race and remained the borough superintendent for Manhattan and the Bronx. Maxwell then reentered the fray and seemed the clear favorite against the other candidates, Henry M. Leitziger, Superintendent of the Free Lectures of the New York Board of Education, Seth T. Stewart, assistant superintendent of Brooklyn's Schools and Walter B. Gunnison, principal of Erasmus High School in Brooklyn.<sup>21</sup>

Maxwell's reform credentials were good and his Brooklyn roots played well in his own borough, where many remained suspicious of control from Manhattan. He also had the critical backing of his friend, Nicholas Murray Butler, who used his influence to assure Maxwell's

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<sup>21</sup>*Educational Review*, April 1898, p. 414-416.

election. After Draper withdrew, Butler convinced his friend to write letters in support of Maxwell to board members including the president of the Brooklyn Borough Board, J. Edward Swanstrom. To solidify the reform vote around Maxwell, Butler made sure that Draper's name would not appear on a new ballot. *The New York Times* also endorsed Maxwell, believing his victory would be seen as a sign of the weakness of Jasper and Tammany Hall.

Maxwell won the election on March 15<sup>th</sup> with eleven of nineteen votes. *The New York Times*, *Brooklyn Daily Times* and the *Eagle* welcomed his victory, but the *Eagle* worried that Van Wyck would replace the old Board and that he would soon find himself working with a hostile Tammany Board. In addition, it noted that Maxwell was "pushful [sic], aggressive and alternately invasive and obstinate." Greater New York's schools needed a firm hand to guide them, the question remained whether Maxwell had the finesse to bring together the disparate forces necessary to expand and improve the Greater New York's educational system.<sup>22</sup>

### **An Interregnum: Brooklyn under the Borough Board**

When Maxwell became superintendent he had considerable power in some areas of oversight and administration, but he was unable to change educational policy without the support of the borough boards. The superintendent could enter the schools at any time and inquire into their methods, but he could not actually change any of their policies. He had to approve, but could not dictate the standards for teaching in each borough. His appointments to

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<sup>22</sup>John V. Mooney, Jr., "William H. Maxwell and the Public Schools of New York City" (Ed.D diss, Fordham University, 1981), p. 34-44; Abelow, p. 62-68; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 16, 1898, p. 6.

the Board of Examiners, which certified teachers, had to oversee four distinct school systems (a single board administered Manhattan and the Bronx) each with its own separate borough board. These boards could dictate their own educational policies, hire teachers and principals, set salaries, create licensing standards and oversee the day to day operations of the schools in their boroughs. Little wonder that Maxwell wanted to unify Greater New York's school systems.<sup>23</sup>

As he took the helm of Greater New York's schools in 1898, Maxwell faced the challenge of meeting the new demands placed upon education in the Progressive era such as the development of high schools and kindergartens, and new courses in art, music, home economics, and vocational training. Simultaneously he needed to build schools for the tens of thousands of additional students arriving in New York City, while at the same time attempting to reduce class sizes. Many of these students came from immigrant backgrounds and required English language immersion. As the borough seeing the greatest absolute growth in the decades following consolidation, Brooklyn would face the heaviest load in the city.

Prior to 1898, advocates of consolidation in Brooklyn had argued that it would bring an infusion of revenue into the borough and in the case of education they were proven correct. Consolidation had an immediate salutary effect upon Brooklyn's schools through a new financing formula, which created a general school tax for all of Greater New York. From that revenue a borough received \$100 for each full time teacher with the remaining funds to be

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<sup>23</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 20, 1898, p. 34.

distributed based on school attendance. Brooklyn's overall education spending in 1898-99 rose to \$3.7 million, an increase of \$278,450 over the previous year. The borough benefitted from the largesse of this new formula, but also from counting its half day sessions as full days of attendance, while Manhattan counted its two half day sessions as one whole day class. This gave Brooklyn additional funds to give overdue salary increases to teachers, whose salaries had been frozen before consolidation to save money for school construction. An *Eagle* editorial saw this as historical justice, arguing that Manhattan had been "fleecing" Brooklyn for years by relying on it as a residence for the "officers and employees" of its businesses without having to contribute to its well-being. New Yorkers had merely stepped into a trap of their own making by pushing consolidation and now had to compensate Brooklyn for its zeal, and refrain "from talking about the burdens which consolidation had put upon them."<sup>24</sup>

Despite the increases in Brooklyn's school budget made possible by consolidation, the borough's school board would still have difficulty meeting the needs of its students and teachers. Greater New York set in motion increases in the education budget and school construction to meet these needs, but Van Wyck appropriated significantly less than what the Board of Education requested. Between 1898 and 1902 Brooklyn's enrollment increased from 173,256 to 197,188 (14% increase) and in 1898 it faced the most critical shortage of seats because the borough had spent proportionately less in school construction than New York City before consolidation. In 1898 nearly 142,000 children attended Brooklyn's schools.

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<sup>24</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 16, 1897, p. 6; April 11, 1898, p. 16; September 5, 1898, p. 6.

1,381 more than the available seats. Over 20,000 Brooklyn students attended school half time because of this shortage. This compared to an excess of 7,742 seats in Manhattan and the Bronx and only 4,769 students attending half time.<sup>25</sup>

Despite its more plentiful resources Greater New York could not fully meet the needs of Brooklyn's schools. Brooklyn's 1898-99 school budget was three million dollars for the general budget, (dedicated to educational expenses), \$610,000 for the special budget (building maintenance) and only \$171,000 in borrowed money toward the capital budget. The small amount for the capital budget was undoubtedly related to the City of Brooklyn's inability to borrow money in its final years. Brooklyn opened only five new schools in its first year as a borough compared to Manhattan and the Bronx, which spent \$2.77 million in their capital budget and built eleven new schools. This pace picked up in over the next two years as Greater New York's borrowing power benefitted Brooklyn. Between 1899 and 1901, the Board of Education built 19 buildings in Manhattan for a total of 200 schools and eleven buildings in Brooklyn bringing its total to 142.

Despite these increases, Brooklyn's half time students continued to rise with slightly over 36,000 students attending half-time. The demand for new schools was so great because Brooklyn had to build schools in its newly developed suburban areas and deal with the increased congestion in older neighborhoods crowded with immigrants. In 1900-01 Annual Report, Maxwell reported that "It is true that during September over 10,000 sittings were

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<sup>25</sup>New York City SAR. Volume 1 (1898-99), p.34-36; Volume 5 (1902-03) p. 35-36.

added to the Brooklyn schools, but unfortunately, as these sittings were for the most part in houses built in sparsely settled suburbs, they have had but little influence in reducing the number of part-time pupils." The inability to build schools to deal with overcrowding in neighborhoods like Williamsburg and Brownsville and for the future development of suburban districts clearly frustrated Maxwell, but the city's rapid growth and great needs made it difficult to find the necessary resources.<sup>26</sup>

The new administration was unable to meet the Board of Education's capital needs, but it did increase the general budgets after consolidation both in general terms and on a per capita basis, though significantly less than what the Board of Education requested. The 1898-99 budget allocated \$9.3 million for the general budget \$2.5 million for the special budget and \$3.16 for the capital budget. These totals rose respectively in 1902-03 to \$15.1million, \$4.3 million and \$6 million. Assuming that Brooklyn received a proportionate share based on the number of students on register, its budgets had risen respectively to \$5.13 million, \$1.46 million, and \$2 million. Per capita spending for Greater New York had risen (excluding the capital budget) from \$32.89 to \$44.24. This increase in funding led to a significant decrease in Brooklyn's student to teacher ratio. Based on average attendance, the ratio was 44:1 in 1898-99, five years later the ratio had dropped to 37:1.<sup>27</sup>

Much of the increase in the general budget can be tied to increased teacher salaries.

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<sup>26</sup>New York City SAR, Volume 1 p. 153-154; Volume 3, 26-27; Palmer, p. 293.

<sup>27</sup>New York City SAR Vol. 1, p. 41, 153-154 ; Vol 5 p. 35, 121. 133-134. Unfortunately, the 1902-03 SAR did not itemize by borough.

Maxwell had long been an advocate for greater teacher training and higher salaries and he attempted to implement these ideas as superintendent. In addition, the number of students in both the kindergartens and high schools increased along with the total number of schools. Vacation and evening schools expanded their programs and the Board of Education expanded its free lecture series.

Consolidation had provided additional money for cash strapped Brooklyn schools, but their governance had not changed. How Greater New York's schools should be organized became the main educational issue until its resolution in 1901. Maxwell and other education reformers wanted to increase the power of the superintendent and centralize and modernize the administration of the public schools.

A year after consolidation Senator Nathaniel Elsberg, a Manhattan Republican, sponsored legislation challenging Greater New York's tenuous educational compromise. He proposed the creation of a central board of education appointed by the mayor with board members from each borough acting as a borough board. The bill increased the power of the superintendent by giving him authority to appoint all associate superintendents. With Manhattan and the Bronx controlling a majority of the seats, the *Eagle* feared that the interests of the "old City of New York" would dominate the Board of Education and that the other boroughs would be locked out of power. Elsberg's bill died in the legislature, but it was clear to advocates of Brooklyn's autonomy that this would only be the first attempt to centralize power.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.* February 3, 1899, p. 4; February 17, 1899, p. 4.

The next attack on borough autonomy and the local committees came in the Superintendent's Annual Report published in October 1899. Maxwell lacked the power to change Brooklyn's system, but he used the Report to attack the "wire pullers" in Brooklyn who had stymied attempts to reform Brooklyn's schools for years. The Superintendent laid out his list of complaints. These included the political influence needed to be hired and promoted in the Brooklyn schools and the micro-managing of schools by local committees that took authority away from principals and other trained professionals. According to Maxwell, the best board members resigned because they lacked the expertise to appoint teachers and assign them to positions for which they were best qualified. In his concluding remarks, Maxwell attacked the decentralized system for its

superfluous machinery, which leads to unnecessary and expensive duplications of administrative and clerical work by the borough and the central authorities. These overlapping structures prevented the harmonious cooperation of the several boroughs with one another. . . and of the authorities of one or other borough with the central authorities.

In frustration, Maxwell issued a futile call for Brooklyn's Board of Education to voluntarily disband its local committees.<sup>29</sup>

Maxwell's criticisms were more effective than he probably expected. When the Board of Education learned of his comments, the Brooklyn contingent, led by the recently elected Borough Board President Charles E. Robertson, attempted to suppress Maxwell's comments by delaying the printing of the Annual Report until the Brooklyn Board could respond. This

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<sup>29</sup>New York City SAR, Volume 1, p. 86-88, 155-156.

attempt at censorship played directly into the hands of their opponents. Both the *New York Times* and the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* defended Maxwell's right to publish his opinions in the Annual Report. The *Eagle* also wavered slightly in its support of the local committees admitting that they might lead to undue political influence in appointments, but tried to argue that a teacher who had "friends who are willing to exert themselves in his or her behalf is much better qualified to instruct the young than the teacher who is so little developed socially that he or she must stand or fall on the Superintendent's examination alone." The *Eagle*, traditionally an anti-machine newspaper, betrayed its reform principles to support Brooklyn's local committees, but its criticism of the Board of Education's censorship showed that it would not give uncritical support.<sup>30</sup>

Across the East River, the *New York Times* used this scandal to editorialize twice in two weeks against Brooklyn's local committees arguing that "the plan is bad in theory and has given rise to bad results. Mr. Maxwell's description of these results, emphatic and severe as it is, is mild in comparison with the facts as they exist." The *Times* stressed the progressive ideals of expertise and efficiency. It argued that democracy did not have a place in the hiring of teachers and principals, and should be left in the hands of experts who better understood the educational needs of children. Not surprisingly, these views mirrored those of education reformers led by Nicholas Murray Butler and of progressives generally. Progressives advocated non-partisan solutions for city governments, like the city manager or city commission

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<sup>30</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. October 12, 1899, p.7; October 23, 1899, p. 8.

plans to take politics out of the administration of city governments. Education reformers similarly wanted to limit public input, leaving experts to manage a seemingly non-political educational system. This ideal may have been illusory, but the Brooklyn borough board was an effective target for their attacks.<sup>31</sup>

The Board of Education finally agreed in mid-December to publish the Annual Report after the City Club threatened to bring criminal charges against board members who attempted to suppress the document, but they had given greater notice Maxwell's criticisms than they would have received otherwise. Opponents of the Borough Boards used this publicity to begin a campaign to fully centralize the public education system and complete the consolidation of Greater New York's public schools.<sup>32</sup>

The forces arrayed against decentralization were powerful. They included both reformers, who wanted a strong superintendent to centralize and control educational policy, and Tammany Hall leaders, who realized that Manhattan and the Bronx, the machine's base, would control a majority of the appointments to the Board. This unlikely alliance meant that Brooklyn's representatives in Albany would find it hard to defeat a centralization measure unless they could bring State Republicans into their camp.

Reformers used the weaknesses in the existing system to strengthen their case for centralization. In addition to accusations of cronyism and corruption, they stressed the

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<sup>31</sup>*New York Times*, October 13, 1899, p. 6; October 24, 1899, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 23, 1899, p. 18; November 24, 1899, p. 8; December 4, 1899, p. 8.

consequences of inadequate funding for both teachers and students. John G. Agar, a former member of the Board of Education, highlighted these problems in a special edition of the *New York Times* published in January 1900, which proposed ideas to improve Greater New York's government. He attacked Tammany cutbacks during Van Wyck's administration and argued that the school system needed a dedicated property tax to give the Board of Education greater control over its finances.<sup>33</sup>

Among the most pressing issues that Agar addressed was the need for uniform salary schedules. When the five boroughs unified in 1898, old New York City, Brooklyn and the many local districts of Queens and Staten Island all had their own salary schedules. Brooklyn's salaries lagged far behind those in Manhattan and the Bronx.. In June 1898 the Board of Education responded to this wage inequality by introducing the Pettengill Salary Schedules, which created a minimum salary of \$600 and maximum salaries that began at \$825 in the lower grades and rose to \$1400 in the contemporary equivalent of the eighth grade. The schedules went into effect in September, but they became meaningless in December when the Board of Estimate refused to finance these increases.

The State Legislature's first attempt to legislate minimum salaries suffered a similar fate. The Ahearn Law, passed in April 1899, mandated minimum salaries of \$600 for new teachers, rising to \$900 after ten years service, and \$1200 after fifteen years. Brooklyn's Board of Education opposed the Ahearn Law because it transferred control of salary increases from the

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<sup>33</sup>*New York Times*, January 14, 1900, p. 21.

Local Committees to the Board of Superintendents. The borough board circumvented the law by creating a separate and more generous schedule for Brooklyn teachers that allowed the Local Committees to decide who would receive salary increases and prevented the Brooklyn Board of Superintendents from deciding who deserved salary increases. If the Superintendents decided that a teacher was unworthy of a salary increase under the Ahearn Law, the Local Committee could give him or her a more generous increase. Maxwell refused to make payments based on the borough board's schedule, arguing that teacher merit had not been decided by the Board of Superintendents. This became a moot point when the Board of Estimate failed to fund the increased salaries of the Ahearn Law past December 1899. The following year salaries returned to their unequal and chaotic schedules, creating widespread discontent among teachers in all the boroughs.<sup>34</sup>

School decentralization had been a necessary compromise to gain passage of consolidation, but it now hindered the creation of equal salaries for teachers across borough lines. If consolidation were to have meaning in public education, salaries had to be equalized. This finally occurred in 1900 when the Legislature passed the Davis Law, which created uniform salary schedules for the entire city based upon years of service and certification from the Board of Superintendents. The legislation mandated an increase in the amount provided by the City for each teacher from \$100 to \$600 and a dedicated city property tax of 0.4% for education. The Davis Law sidestepped the authority of the Board of Estimate and gave the

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<sup>34</sup>*Educational Review*, October 1899, p. 307-309; Flora, p. 88-90; New York City SAR Volume 2, p. 59-67; Volume 1, p. 147-151; Palmer, p. 279-283.

schools an income stream to increase and equalize salaries. To give the Board of Education greater independence, it also took the financial management of the schools out of the Comptroller's office and created a separate treasurer's office for the Board of Education.

Mayor Van Wyck, Comptroller Bird S. Coler, the central Board of Education and the Brooklyn and Manhattan Borough Boards all opposed the Davis Law as another example of State Republicans meddling in city affairs, despite the obvious benefit to teachers. Maxwell and the *New York Times* supported the Davis Law because uniform salary schedules and much needed raises would reduce discontent and the potential for patronage abuses. An *Educational Review* editorial stated that "One good result already apparent is that the teachers of Brooklyn have broken loose from the control of the local committees. Having once found freedom, it is not likely that the teachers will again return to slavery."<sup>35</sup>

This was only the beginning of a campaign for school centralization. When a state appointed Charter Revision Commission proposed to centralize Greater New York's public schools in November 1900, Charles Robertson, the president of the Brooklyn Borough Board, promised "The most bitter contest ever waged in school affairs will be fought over this proposition, and I believe that the people of Brooklyn will be a unit on it."<sup>36</sup>

Brooklyn school autonomy became a battleground to decide the meaning of consolidation and where authority would lie in Greater New York. This debate raised the

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<sup>35</sup>New York City SAR, Volume 2, p. 59-67, Palmer, p. 279-283; *New York Times*, February 18, 1901, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 28, 1900, p. 2.

question of what kind of city Greater New York would become, a federation of boroughs that functioned through a central taxing agency or a centralized administration that gave minimal local authority to its constituent parts. Two bills in the State Senate framed the debate: a centralization bill sponsored by Senator Elsberg and an autonomy bill written in consultation with local school authorities, sponsored by Brooklyn Republican Senator George F. Waldo, chairman of the subcommittee on legislation.<sup>37</sup>

The supporters of both bills believed that the system instituted in 1898 was broken, but disagreed on solutions. Advocates of centralization believed that the diffusion of power and the lack of uniformity in curriculum and hiring were the problems. The Elsberg Bill addressed these concerns by eliminating the Borough Boards and centralizing control under the Superintendent. It created a single Board of Education with forty-six members, and an equal number of advisory community school boards. The supporters of home rule proposed further decentralization, blaming the central boards for delays in school construction and for creating an extra layer of school bureaucracy. They proposed that the borough boards' power should be expanded to school construction and all decisions over hiring teachers and setting salaries.<sup>38</sup>

As this debate began, the *Brooklyn Eagle* broke ranks with the supporters of autonomy. The newspaper shifted to a position of neutrality in an editorial on January 28, 1901 that called for "the widest possible discussion" of the two bills. The *Eagle* had opposed

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<sup>37</sup>*New York Times*, March 29, 1901, p. 5; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 28, 1901, p. 4.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*

consolidation and had consistently supported greater autonomy for Brooklyn in all areas of government until this issue. The editorial page never explained its shift on this position, but it may have been related to St. Clair McKelway's position on the State Board of Regents or to an unstated admission that home rule was not functioning well in this instance. Whatever the reason, Brooklyn's largest paper would be missing from the movement for education home rule.<sup>39</sup>

Like the earlier debate over consolidation in Brooklyn, opposition to school centralization crossed party lines and included social groups whose counterparts in Manhattan had supported centralization. One of these groups was the elite and staunchly Republican Union League Club, which organized a meeting on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1901 to discuss the issue. The club only invited speakers who supported decentralization, including Borough Superintendent Edward G. Ward, Borough Board President Robertson, and Democratic machine pol and future City Comptroller Herman Metz. The Club did not invite a single supporter of centralization. Although some Brooklyn Republicans supported the Elsberg Bill, many, like the Union League, made alliances with local Democrats to expand educational autonomy. What drove these politicians and civic leaders was not partisan battle, but fear of Manhattan domination.<sup>40</sup>

The Union League meeting was only the beginning of a campaign to retain and expand Brooklyn school autonomy. The entire educational establishment arrayed itself against

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<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle* February 2, 1901, p. 2.

centralization, including the Board of Education and the Borough and Associate Superintendents', Teachers' and Principals' Associations. The only education official from Brooklyn missing was Superintendent William H. Maxwell. Politicians and civic and business leader of all political stripes formed a citizens committee to plan a mass meeting at the Brooklyn Academy of Music on April 2<sup>nd</sup>. Their goal was to convince the Republican dominated legislature to oppose the Elsberg Bill. Local Republican support was critical to this effort and the committee sprinkled its list with Republicans including Charles N. Chadwick, the leader of the Manufacturers' Association and future water czar, Franklin W. Hooper, the Director of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, and an assortment of senators and assemblymen.<sup>41</sup>

The organizers wanted to demonstrate support for maintaining and expanding autonomy in Brooklyn's schools. Brooklyn teachers and principals led the charge on Albany. Edward P. Crowell, principal of P.S. 36, lauded the local committees and their authority to appoint teachers and principals claiming that "in Brooklyn they [the community] know the members of the local committees. This comes not only from the fact that the local committees make the appointments, but these committees visit the schools and look after their interests." Under centralization he argued that "All interest in teaching will give way to a hard mechanical supervision of tasks. The teacher who most blindly follows instructions issued by the central authority and who ceases to have any plans or opinions of her own will stand best with the authorities." The limited attempt at centralization begun in 1898 had also been a failure

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<sup>41</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle* March 30, 1901, p. 10; *School Devoted to the Public Schools and Educational Interests*, January 25, 1906, Vol. XVII, No. 21, p. 1



according to James McCabe, principal of P.S. 23. He compared the conditions of Brooklyn's schools "to those of a man in excellent health, upon whom some unfriendly physicians are determined to experiment." Brooklyn was already sick from taking the "partial dose" of centralization against its will, and was now being asked to take the "full dose."<sup>42</sup>

Despite their claims that no one in Brooklyn supported centralization, some reformers backed the bill. Like opponents of consolidation in the 1890s, opponents of centralization portrayed themselves as representing all of Brooklyn, and ignored the divisions within the borough. The Charter Revision Commission of 1901 had four Brooklynites who supported school centralization, including former Mayor Charles A. Schieren. James McKeen, another member of the Commission argued that centralization would benefit Brooklyn and that its opposition was due "entirely to the officials of the borough school system." Support also came from the Hamilton Club of Brooklyn, a Republican club.<sup>43</sup>

Opponents of centralization organized a rally at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) on April 2, 1901. Both the *Times* and the *Eagle* described the audience as large and enthusiastic. The rhetoric at the meeting denounced "Manhattanization" and the raised the fear of "central tyranny." They revived the anti-Manhattan rhetoric of the consolidation debate of the 1890s, but this became harder to justify now that Brooklyn was financially dependent upon Manhattan. Thomas P. Peters, editor of the *Brooklyn Daily Times*, unintentionally acknowledged this in his speech at BAM.

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<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.* March 31, 1901, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.* April 2, 1901, p. 20.

Controller Coler has often called out attention to the fact that Brooklyn raises about \$17,000,000 annually in taxes while Greater New York spends some \$22,000,000 annually [in the borough]. These extra \$5,000,000 . . . come from Manhattan. Therefore Manhattan meets part of our bills and this good Republican Senator [Elsberg] would devise a school board in which Manhattan and her consort, the Bronx, would have the absolute mastery over Brooklyn schools . . . .<sup>44</sup>

Peters wanted to have both home rule and the financial infusions from Manhattan to relieve the borough's overburdened schools. Brooklyn had successfully tapped into the core's greater wealth, but he and other opponents of centralization were unwilling to acknowledge its dominion over them.

Brooklyn had been unable to meet the demand for public improvements and infrastructure in the 1890s and had accepted consolidation as a means of financing them, while trying to maintain as much autonomy as possible in the borough. School autonomy had been part of the compromise in 1897. Three years later both sides believed it had been a failure. At the BAM meeting, Assistant District Attorney and future borough president Martin W. Littleton condemned the current system for "the many and vexatious delays and hindrances [that] have arisen." He blamed the delays on "rule from the Board of Education rather than from the various school boards in the boroughs." Instead of taking a scalpel to the borough boards, he aimed the blade directly at the central Board of Education.<sup>45</sup>

The demand for local control and fear of central tyranny had roots dating back to the War for Independence and the advocates for home rule played to those sentiments, but, like

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<sup>44</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 3, 1901, p. 7; *New York Times*, April 3, 1901, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*

many opponents of increasing concentrations of power in the Progressive Era, their voices fell upon deaf ears. Even in the editorial pages of St. Clair McKelway's *Brooklyn Eagle*, the calls for home rule rang hollow.

The meeting demanded complete Brooklyn control of Brooklyn schools. That cannot be secured. . . . One cannot make five boroughs into one city and of one city make five cities more out of as many boroughs. Consolidation is to blame for that. . . . There are those who maintain that without consolidation Brooklyn was bankrupt and that from it Brooklyn has received more than by it Brooklyn has lost. The inevitable permanence of consolidation makes that a calculation more interesting than important.

The editorial closed with the hope for return to the status quo proposed by Borough Board Member Henry W. Maxwell, but McKelway was not optimistic. His rhetoric resonated with the themes of the South's Lost Cause. Brooklyn fought a good battle against consolidation, but defeat was inevitable. Now that the war was over, Brooklyn must accept the consequences of consolidation and build its future in that context.<sup>46</sup>

McKelway had analyzed the situation correctly.. The consolidationists had failed to centralize Greater New York's educational system in 1898, but, as Butler predicted, they had created the preconditions for its implementation. Centralization and professionalization of education were the dominant ideas in education during the Progressive Era and consolidation provided the means to impose them on the Brooklyn, the borough most resistant to central control. The next morning the leaders of the movement traveled to Albany to lobby the leaders of the Senate and Assembly. When they arrived in the afternoon, they discovered that the Legislature had already passed the Elsberg Bill and it had become part of the overall Charter

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<sup>46</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 3, 1901, p. 4.

Revision Bill. Lieutenant Governor Timothy Woodruff, the leader of the Kings County Republican Party, received the Brooklyn delegates and explained that “he had done everything he could . . . [and] that if the bill were still in the hands of the Senate or Assembly it might have been recalled. But it was too late, he said, and Brooklyn must suffer.” Three weeks later Governor Odell signed the charter revision into law. Beginning in February of 1902, the local committees that had governed schools in Brooklyn since 1851 would cease to exist.<sup>47</sup>

Reformers had gained most of the changes they desired. The new charter placed control over curriculum, hiring, and organization into the hands of Maxwell and the Boards of Superintendents and Examiners he appointed. Reformers saw only one major flaw in the new system, the large size of the forty-six member Board of Education, but an Executive Committee of fifteen mitigated this problem. Reformers could no longer blame the politicians for the failures of the public school system. Experts now had the responsibility to manage the tremendous task of educating the children of New York City, including the flood of immigrants who would swell New York’s school population in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Consolidation had allowed the Legislature to fundamentally change the structure of Brooklyn’s educational system. While opponents futilely tried to prevent centralization, Maxwell reorganized the Board of Education’s structure to adhere to the new charter. He replaced “politics” with professional expertise and management, all under his authority. The

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<sup>47</sup>*Ibid*, April 5, 1901, p. 16.

*Eagle* described the situation well.

[B]oard meetings are to be held during this administration in William H. Maxwell's hat . . . For two years [the length of Seth Low's term] our schools will be Maxwelled. In the widest public recognition of that fact is the best hope for the efficiency. If the schools work badly the new system of school consolidation and the Superintendent will die together. If the system is workable Mr. Maxwell will make it work and if he fails under a system which gives him absolute authority he will have demonstrated his uselessness to the schools of New York.<sup>48</sup>

### **Brooklyn's Schools in the Centralized System**

Consolidation and centralization led to radical changes to Greater New York's public schools, largely wiping away the parochialism of Brooklyn's school system. Maxwell used his increased power to implement a program based upon the progressive ideals of the time within the constraints of the city's budget and the agenda of the Board of Education and city politicians.

He tried to carry but six chief lines of policy namely (1) to bring about modern educational methods in the classroom instead of the prevailing and outworn systems of instruction; (2) to remove the striking discrepancies between various schools and to bring all schools in the system up to at least a minimum standard of excellence; (3) to encourage promotion for merit instead of for influence by requiring the higher licenses for the better-paid positions; (4) to establish and encourage a well-organized system of secondary education; (5) to introduce into the elementary school course some of the newer studies, particularly manual training; and (6) to build up kindergartens as adjuncts to the elementary-school system.<sup>49</sup>

Maxwell had made incremental progress during his years as Brooklyn Superintendent and during his first three years as Superintendent of the decentralized Greater New York system.

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<sup>48</sup>*Ibid*, February 5, 1902, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup>*Educational Review* January, 1904 "City Superintendent Maxwell of New York" p. 6.

Until his retirement in 1916, he would use his enhanced powers to change the character of New York's public schools.

Centralization gave Maxwell control over the licensing of teachers, the appointment of principals and the development of curriculum. One of his first acts was to eliminate politics and patronage from the hiring of teachers. Under the new charter, the Board of Examiners prepared an eligible list of teachers from those who passed state mandated examinations. The Board of Superintendents nominated the top three teachers from this list and sent them to the Board of Education for appointment. The Board could only appoint teachers from these lists, unlike the local committees which often used political pull to nominate their favored candidates. Exemplifying the ideas of progressive education, this system set up clear standards for hiring and removed the prerogatives of individuals in hiring matters. The new system addressed the fears of reformers by preventing the lay Board of Education from having any major input into the hiring process.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, the new system increased standards for teaching licenses, requiring teachers to graduate high school and complete two years of professional training. The City College of New York, Normal College (renamed Hunter College) and the Brooklyn Training School for

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<sup>50</sup>William H. Maxwell "School Achievements in New York," *Educational Review*, October 1912, p. 279. Attempts to reform the hiring process may also have been influenced by anti-Catholic feeling. Maxwell wrote that the new hiring process "has led to the independence of thought and action on the part of teachers as they have gradually come to feel emancipated from dependence upon the favor either of politicians or of churches." As Brooklyn's superintendent, Maxwell, the son of a Presbyterian minister, had issued regulations to give first preference for high school admissions to public school graduates over their Catholic School counterparts.

Teachers all increased the length of their studies to meet these new demands. The only exceptions to this rule were teachers from outside New York, who were required to have five years of experience and certification by the Board of Examiners.

Maxwell also used his new power to take ideas he pioneered as Brooklyn superintendent and apply them on a larger scale. As superintendent he created a highly specialized educational system that increased the role of schools in society, despite opposition from educational traditionalists. Critics of Maxwell, including Low's successor George McClellan, opposed spending more money on what they derided as fads, wanting schools to return to the "three R's."

In describing his philosophy at the 1905 meeting of the National Education Association, Maxwell declared that "Education for efficiency . . . [was] the development of each citizen first as an individual and second as a member of society." He argued that "efficiency demands highly differentiated types of schools." These included manual training schools, kindergartens, high schools, special elementary schools and classes for foreign born students, and a diversified curriculum that included music, arts and industrial education. During his tenure, kindergartens and high schools became established parts of the public schools. By 1911 over 30,000 children attended kindergarten. A similar increase occurred in secondary schools, where enrollment increased from 9,400 in 1898 to 49,000 in 1911. Equally important to Maxwell and other progressives were specialized high schools that would train students for various trades and professions after they graduated. He also sought to universalize school instruction and created schools and classes for the "crippled", deaf, blind, tubercular and other "defective"

children.<sup>51</sup>

### **Building Brooklyn Schools in Greater New York**

Curricular and structural issues drove Maxwell and the progressives he appointed to administer Greater New York's schools, but their reforms meant little if they could not build a sufficient number of schoolhouses to educate the city's children. When Maxwell took control of the centralized system in 1902, the situation in Brooklyn required not only coping with population growth, but the years of neglect prior to consolidation. The superintendent reported that "Brooklyn stands in need of new school accommodations more than any other borough." In September, 1902 Brooklyn had 163,579 seats in its schools and an average register of 171,914, a shortage of 8,335 seats. The Brooklyn borough board had confronted this problem by "continuing to admit to a class until the teachers had enough pupils to fill all the seats during the forenoon session with one set of pupils, and all the seats at the afternoon session with another set of pupils." Over thirty thousand Brooklyn students attended school in these split sessions because of these shortages. This system meant overworked teachers and shortchanged students, especially those in the afternoon session who received only one and a half hours instruction..<sup>52</sup>

Using his new powers, Maxwell eliminated the split session in 1902 and developed new approaches to the problem. He first tried to transfer students in overcrowded schools to less

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<sup>51</sup>*New York Times*, July 4, 1905, p. 3; Maxwell, "School Achievements in New York" *Educational Review*, October 1912, p. 283-286, 299-303.

<sup>52</sup>New York City SAR Volume 4 (1901-1902), p. 36, 37; William H. Maxwell "School Achievements in New York" *Educational Review* October 1912, p. 292-93.

crowded ones. Failing that he created a part time system that had morning and afternoon sessions of three and a half hours each. A single teacher would teach each session assisted by the teacher of a part time class from the other session for an hour and a half. Compared to the split session, this system created a longer school day for students and greater support for teachers. While not ideal the part time plan created a system that logically confronted a difficult problem.

The long term solution was to build enough schools in the areas plagued by overcrowding, especially Brooklyn. Maxwell understood the depth of the problem and reported that "larger provisions ha[d] been made for that borough than for any other in the matter of new buildings." Even as the city allocated more money for school construction, the need only increased because of transportation infrastructure planned and built as a result of consolidation. In 1905 Brooklyn's average register had risen to 197,971, leaving it a shortage of 15,172 seats. In the other boroughs, no such shortage existed. Not surprisingly, Brooklyn had more students attending part time (27,838 or 14.8% of registered students), than any other borough, including the more populous Manhattan. Maxwell reported that

it is manifest that Brooklyn is much more poorly provided than any other borough with school accommodations at a time when, by reason of improved transit facilities, existing or projected, it was evident that the population of Brooklyn was about to received large accessions, the increase should have been anticipated, sites should have been secured, and building erected.<sup>53</sup>

The Williamsburg Bridge, opened in 1903, already had exacerbated the situation. The

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<sup>53</sup>New York City SAR Volume 4 (1901-1902), p. 36, Volume VII (1904-1905), p. 38-39.

processes of consolidation (see chapters two and three) had led to rising population densities that would wreak havoc in Brooklyn's Eastern District. In 1907 the weekly *School* described these changes as a "*hegira* to Brooklyn." Like the advocates of tenement house reform and zoning, Maxwell in his 1904-05 Annual Report decried the results of unfettered development in Brooklyn and its effects on school overcrowding.

The opening of the Williamsburg Bridge brought into sections of Division V. where school accommodations had already reached their limit, a large increase of pupils. The result was many part-time classes. Nor has this influx yet ceased. The two-story house of former days is being rapidly replaced by large tenements; some of them for forty families. It is evident that prompt increase in classrooms must be made, or the evils of part-time classes be greatly increased.

Transportation infrastructure that had fulfilled the promises of consolidation, created the preconditions for higher densities and larger school age populations. Maxwell was right to worry about future overcrowding in Brooklyn as consolidation made it possible to plan and fund the Dual Contracts that would make it possible to empty Manhattan's Lower East Side and move that population into Brooklyn.<sup>54</sup>

The overcrowding in Brooklyn's schools was not something that could be solved in a year or even five years. The Board of Estimate annually increased its borrowing for school construction, but appropriated significantly less than Maxwell and the Board of Education requested. From 1902 to 1905, the Board of Education spent nearly 39 million dollars on new school construction and built or expanded schools to provide an additional 150,000 seats, but

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<sup>54</sup>*School*, June 27, 1907, p. 424; New York City SAR, Volume VII (1904-1905), p. 162-163.

this effort was unable to meet the demands of Brooklyn's overflowing population.<sup>55</sup>

Consolidation had made it possible to plan the development of a large region, coordinating the levels and placement of school construction with expected population increases due to transit improvements, but that did not mean that officials would use these new powers effectively. Maxwell blamed the city's administration for many of these delays.

During the past few years the Finance Department delayed in many cases the purchase of sites until the accumulated delays produced the deplorable condition described above. In some cases the delays have been such that the sites selected were covered with expensive buildings before even an attempt to effect a purchase was made and it became necessary to select other sites and to begin a new series of delays. Brooklyn is not the only borough that has suffered in this way, but it has suffered more than any other.<sup>56</sup>

New York would concentrate more of its resources toward school construction in succeeding years but the failure to take initiative during the years immediately following consolidation made it more difficult to reduce the high levels of overcrowding and part time classes in Brooklyn's schools.

Overcrowding would continue into the 1920s. School construction would ebb and flow during this period depending on economic conditions and the political priorities of the city government, but it would never be able catch up to the levels of population growth that the city experienced. In Brooklyn overcrowding would peak in 1913 when 40,229 students were attending school part time, nearly half the part time population in Greater New York. The

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<sup>55</sup>New York City SAR Volume 4 (1901-1902), p. 36, Volume VII (1904-1905), p. 38-39.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*

increase in students in the outer boroughs would bring slow relief to Manhattan's schools, where the student population growth would slow and eventually decline as families moved from crowded Manhattan tenements into New Law apartments in the other boroughs. By 1916 Manhattan and Brooklyn had the same number of children enrolled in school (approximately 342,000) and in the years that followed Brooklyn's student population would exceed Manhattan's, fulfilling the desire of housing reformers that consolidation would depopulate Manhattan's tenement districts. But these reformers did not predict the strains on Greater New York's resources to meet the demands of this population growth. An independent Brooklyn would not have had the means to provide schools for this population, but Greater New York was unable to fully meet Brooklyn's education needs.<sup>57</sup>

### **Teachers and Consolidation**

Consolidation also affected how teachers organized themselves and related to the central bureaucracy. Prior to centralization, the power to set salaries resided in the borough boards of education. In Brooklyn that meant that the Borough Board of Education set salaries and the local committees hired and promoted teachers. After the charter changes took effect in 1902, the central Board of Education controlled hiring and with the State Legislature had the power to increase teacher salaries.

This change forced Brooklyn's teachers and their organizations to become more cosmopolitan in their outlook. This became apparent in a battle for gender equity. After much

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<sup>57</sup>New York City SAR 1912-1913, p. 53; 1915-1916, p. 31.

debate in 1901, the Charter Revision Commission enshrined the Davis Law into the educational chapter of the City Charter, maintaining a steady source of revenue for teachers's salaries and uniform salary schedules. The legislation's flaw was that men earned more than women, in contrast to the gender neutral salaries in Brooklyn before consolidation. Under the Davis Law, women teachers in their first year earned \$600, while men earned \$900. These inequalities only increased among more senior teachers. After twelve years of teaching, a woman's salary increased to \$1080 compared to a man's which doubled to \$2160.<sup>58</sup>

By 1906-07 the consolidation and centralization of schools convinced many female teachers to turn away from borough organizations and organize the Interborough Association of Women Teachers (IAWT). More a lobbying group than a union, the IAWT fought for equal salaries between men and women, successfully bridging the divisions between teachers in different boroughs.<sup>59</sup>

The centralization of the educational system in 1902 changed the focus of teachers in Brooklyn from their local committees, where they could influence principals and committee members to gain promotions or salary increases, to working on a macro level to change policy. Five years before the founding of the IAWT, the Brooklyn Teachers Association lobbied against centralization. Now Brooklyn's female teachers worked with teachers from the other

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<sup>58</sup>Grace C. Strachan, *Equal Pay for Equal Work: The Story of the Struggle for Justice Being Made by the Women Teachers of the City of New York* (New York: B.F. Buck & Company, 1910), p. 197, 212.

<sup>59</sup>Wayne J. Urban "Teacher Organizations in New York City, 1905-1920" in *Educating an Urban People The New York City Experience*, ed., Diane Ravitch, Ronald K. Goodenow (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1981), p. 190.

boroughs to change the discriminatory wage patterns put in place by the Davis Law and affirmed in the 1901 charter revision.

The LAWT's first target to gain equal salaries was the Board of Education, but when its efforts failed there it turned to the State of Legislature. Unlike the Board, which had no direct accountability to voters and was also responsible for paying teachers' salaries, the Legislature could be more easily swayed by lobbying and the votes of female teachers' families. Legislators also found it easier to vote for equal pay because they had no direct role in paying for its increased costs. In 1907 under the leadership of its new president, Grace Strachan, the LAWT embarked on a bold campaign to bring the Legislature to their side.

Maxwell and Nicholas Murray Butler were supportive of this proposition in theory, but in practice feared its consequences. Male teachers and principals were paid at much higher rates than women, but were very few in number, especially in the lower grades. The expense of raising women's salaries was enormous. Butler claimed in the *Educational Review* that "the increased cost of teachers' salaries would have been between eight and nine million dollars for the present year [1908]. Owing to the recent disturbances in financial circles, it is now quite clear that the burden thus laid upon the taxpayers would have been greater than they could bear." The only other alternative was to reduce the salaries of men which would drive them out of the teaching professions. Butler and Maxwell saw this change as counterproductive and used Herbert Spencer's writing to explain the importance of having both men and women in the

classroom because their “natures” balanced each other out.<sup>60</sup>

The State Legislature did not agree with either argument in 1907 and passed legislation equalizing salaries in New York City. Mayor McClellan vetoed the bill, but the Legislature passed it again and sent it to Governor Charles Evan Hughes who also vetoed it. Hughes claimed to endorse the principle of “equal pay for equal work,” but believed that the law should be applied to the entire state or not at all. He argued that if New York City wanted to equalize salaries, the Board of Education had the power to do so. Given the financial scare of the Panic of 1907 and the large costs (approximately \$3 million) of implementing equalized salaries, Hughes’ veto message may have been disingenuous.<sup>61</sup>

Although Strachan and the IAWT continued their campaign, they faced opposition from the Legislature and Mayor McClellan. The movement gained momentum from the election of William Jay Gaynor in 1909, a supporter of equal pay, as mayor and a fluid political situation created by charter reform the next year. In 1911 the Legislature passed the equal pay bill and Governor John A. Dix signed it. The law was a great step forward for women teachers, but educational officials often found ways to violate it, necessitating the passage of another equal pay bill in 1923 to close loopholes in the pay schedules.<sup>62</sup>

Even if consolidation had not occurred, women teachers in Greater New York likely would have demanded equal wages. Their efforts would have been centered, however, on

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<sup>60</sup>*Educational Review*, February, 1908, p. 211-213.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.* February, 1907, p. 211-213.

<sup>62</sup>Urban, p. 189-190.

borough or local school boards. Because of the new educational structures created by consolidation, Brooklyn teachers had to make common cause with teachers in the other boroughs. Women teachers in Brooklyn, who had for decades organized themselves into the Brooklyn Teachers Association, now needed to join the IAWT to represent their interests. Educational policy no longer emanated from a local committee or a Brooklyn Board of Education. Wage issues could no longer be resolved by connections to a local machine politician, but had to be resolved through the central Board of Education, the city government or the State Legislature. Regardless of which center of power teachers chose to influence, they needed to organize citywide to be effective.

### **Conclusion**

The consolidation of Greater New York occurred at the same time that progressive educators began to dominate their field and when immigration to New York and the United States peaked. School centralization was a response to both of these movements. When progressives looked at Brooklyn's school system during the debate over consolidation, they saw an archaic and unprofessional structure mired in a web of politics and patronage. After the recent victory of reformers in New York in 1896, Brooklyn's local committees seemed particularly retrograde to reformers. At the same time, the poor pay of teachers and the shortage of classrooms showed that the city of Brooklyn, whatever the intention of its leaders and population, could not meet the needs of its children.

Consolidation provided the opportunity to change Brooklyn's schools on both fronts. The decentralized system created in 1898 was a clear victory for Brooklynites who saw

consolidation primarily as a vehicle to give Brooklyn access to Manhattan's capital. The greater wealth of Manhattan could now be used to increase funding to Brooklyn's school system, while not fundamentally changing its organization.

Sharing the wealth of the region had been a tactic to convince Brooklynites to support consolidation, but it was only one part of the vision of consolidation. Consolidationists also believed that Greater New York would create a more efficient government. Albert Henschel expressed this idea when he wrote that consolidation would "obviate paralleling systems and expenses of administration, friction by reason of inharmonious aims and struggles, and all the unpleasantness arising from running at separate and cross purposes where interests are identical." Nicholas Murray Butler, who had led the campaign to de-politicize and centralize control of schools in New York City in 1895-96, agreed with Henschel and wanted to use consolidation to extend his success in Manhattan and the Bronx to all of Greater New York. He specifically wanted to eliminate Brooklyn's local committees and the political cesspool he believed they represented.

The debate over centralization that took place between 1898 and 1901 was a battle over which vision of consolidation would predominate. In other areas of government, like the Parks Department, local or borough control would remain the norm for many years, but in education central control prevailed from 1902 until the Ocean Hill-Brownsville debacle of 1968.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Little would change in the basic structure of the Department of Education, except for the abolition of the forty-five member Board of Education in 1918. Replacing it was a small

Centralization was not without its problems. Historians and educators later criticized this model for its top-down framework and failure to provide input from the grassroots. Despite these flaws, the centralized system imposed on Brooklyn made it possible to increase teacher salaries, raise standards and provide educational opportunities for students through secondary school. For Brooklyn, centralization also meant access to Manhattan's capital to finance school construction and pay the salaries of the larger faculty necessary to educate Brooklyn's ballooning student population. Greater New York's inability to fully meet Brooklyn's educational needs should not be viewed as a failure, given the incredible strains placed on it by a population that grew by more than 400,000 each decade between 1900 and 1930.

The inability of Brooklyn's elite to prevent centralization was also an indication of where power would be centered in Greater New York. Prior to 1898 they had been powerful in their own bailiwick, but consolidation increased Manhattan's influence in Brooklyn and placed its borough's elite on the periphery of a great city. Brooklyn's physical integration with Manhattan would profoundly affect the ability of Brooklyn's elite to achieve their goals of building cultural institutions that would be symbols of Brooklyn's greatness and their own. As Greater New York entered the twentieth century, consolidation would seem a Faustian bargain to this elite when they found themselves in the shadow of Manhattan's wealth and power.

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board appointed by the mayor and the borough presidents.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Consolidation and the Control of Culture**

**“The Greater City is an object worthy of the highest civic pride; it would attract the wealth and culture of the continent, and would make us in time the greatest city in the world.”<sup>1</sup>**

**Albert Henschel, *Recorder*, November 30, 1893**

Henschel and other supporters of consolidation correlated bigness with greatness in the economic, cultural and political spheres. Annexation would not only give Manhattan control over its periphery, but the prosperity that would develop as a result would firmly establish New York as a center of commerce and culture. Manhattan’s wealth had already allowed it to surpass Boston as America’s center of cultural consumption. supporters of consolidation believed that the creation of Greater New York would solidify its position.

This vision assumed Greater New York’s important cultural and educational institutions would be located in Manhattan and their influence would radiate outward. This contention was anathema to Brooklynites opposed to consolidation, who believed that their city was on the verge of greatness. They believed that consolidation would prevent them from achieving their goals and permanently place Brooklyn in a subordinate status to its cross-river rival.

Brooklynites who wanted to challenge Manhattan’s cultural dominance formed the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences (BIAS) in 1887 to build a museum and educational institute to match their image of the City of Homes and Churches. In this chapter I intend to show how BIAS and later a proposed Brooklyn University encapsulated the aspirations of Brooklyn’s elite and simultaneously showed their inability to fully attain these goals. BIAS

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Henschel, p. 67-68.

succeeded on one level by building and fostering Brooklyn's most important cultural institutions, but it failed to be a symbol of Brooklyn's ascendance. This goal foundered because Brooklyn's government could not afford the cost of this symbol. After consolidation this responsibility passed to Greater New York which would give some funding to BIAS, but did not need the Institute as a symbol of the metropolis. Consolidation would also physically connect Brooklyn to Manhattan. This would give Brooklyn's elite easier access to Manhattan's cultural institutions, diminishing support for BIAS. It would also help bring to Brooklyn new immigrants that BIAS's leadership would be unable or uninterested in engaging. To survive, the Institute needed to adapt its mission to the needs of the larger metropolis and its relationship to Manhattan's cultural institutions.

### **Manhattan Takes the Lead**

Almost thirty years before consolidation, Manhattan's elite and its government had already founded two great cultural institutions. During an era of post Civil War economic growth and optimism, the city chartered and later began construction of the American Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art on opposing sides of Central Park. New York had built antebellum arts and science institutions, but the growing wealth and power within the city created larger ambitions. William Cullen Bryant expressed this imperial vision on November 23, 1869 after his election as president of the Art Committee of the Union League Club.

We are assembled, my friends, to consider the subject of founding in this city a Museum of Art, a repository of the productions of artists of every class, which shall be in some measure worthy of this great metropolis and of the wide empire of which New

York is the commercial center.

For Princeton Professor George Fiske Comfort the museum was to be a sign of not only New York's greatness, but that of the United States. "In the year 1776 this nation declared her political independence of Europe. The provincial relation was then severed as regards politics; may we not now begin institutions that by the year 1876 shall sever the provincial relations of America to Europe in respect to Art.?"<sup>2</sup>

The club's meeting was the genesis of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which elected its first officers the following year. The trustees of the Metropolitan, along with their counterparts at the American Museum, petitioned the State government for a charter and requested city funding for their buildings. Using their economic power and the cooperation of the Tweed Ring, they succeeded in both goals in 1871. At a cost of \$500,000, financed by New York City, the Metropolitan completed the first section of its building on Fifth Avenue between 79<sup>th</sup> and 84<sup>th</sup> Streets within Central Park. When the building, designed by Central Park's landscape architect Calvert Vaux and his partner Jacob Wrey Gould, opened in 1880, the Metropolitan had already built a formidable collection of art and antiquities, most notably the Cesnola Collection of Cypriot Antiquities. In 1888 the museum doubled in size with the completion of its new south wing.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>As quoted in Winifred E. Howe *A History of the Metropolitan Museum of Art with a Chapter on the Early Institutions of Art in New York*, Volume I (New York: 1913) p. 106-107, 112.

<sup>3</sup>Howe, Volume I, p. 171-180; Calvin Tomkins *Merchants and Masterpieces The Story of the Metropolitan Museum of Art Revised and Updated Edition* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1970, 1989) p. 40-41, 75.

The Metropolitan's growth in size mirrored the donations to its endowment and its collection. As Manhattan became the center of Gilded Age wealth, the Metropolitan benefitted from the largesse of America's *nouveau riche* seeking status and respectability in New York society. "Almost overnight," according to a historian of the museum, "it seemed, giving or bequeathing one's treasures to the Metropolitan had become fashionable."<sup>4</sup> When the Board of Trustees elected J. Pierpont Morgan president in 1904, it represented the ascendancy of this new wealth in the city's most prestigious cultural institution. Morgan set the museum on a new path of acquisition and expansion, placing a coterie of millionaires on the Board, including Henry Walters, Henry Clay Frick, John G. Johnson, George F. Baker and Edward S. Harkness.<sup>5</sup>

A similar process took place on the other side of Central Park during the development of the imperiously titled American Museum of Natural History. Chartered by the state in 1869 the American Museum gained the authority to construct a building on Manhattan Square between 79<sup>th</sup> and 81<sup>st</sup> on Central Park West in 1871. The Museum completed construction on the first wing of its headquarters, also designed by Vaux and Mould, in 1877. By the 1890s, the American Museum was an important center of scientific research and education.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Tomkins, p. 69.

<sup>5</sup>Tomkins, p. 95-100.

<sup>6</sup>Lyle Rexer and Rachel Klein *American Museum of Natural History 125 Years of Expedition and Discovery* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. in association with the American Museum of Natural History, 1995) p. 21-29; Geoffrey Hellman *Bankers, Bones &*

While New York City's ever wealthier elite built America's leading arts and science institutions, across the East River Brooklyn lagged behind Manhattan. The smaller city's later development and lesser wealth delayed work on a cultural institution that would be a testament to its growing stature and importance. This changed in the 1890s, when the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences (BIAS), the city's leading cultural institution, planned the construction of an all encompassing arts and science museum. By attempting to build a neoclassical museum larger than any existing at that time, Brooklyn's elite challenged the conception that Manhattan was the center of the region. While possessing less wealth than their Manhattan counterparts, they viewed themselves as morally superior, because of their Anglo-Protestant roots. Their sense of difference revealed itself in many ways. The most extreme example was the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher's question to his Plymouth Church congregation, "Who owns the city of New York?" and his answer "The Devil." To Beecher, Satan's influence was found in the corruption of Tammany Hall, the Irish Catholic immigrants who supported it, and the more cosmopolitan life of New York.<sup>7</sup>

Brooklyn's challenge to Manhattan's cultural supremacy occurred in the late 1880s as Andrew H. Green began his campaign for consolidation, forcing Brooklyn to reassess its relationship with and dependence on Manhattan. Brooklyn's inability to finance improvements necessary for its growth placed BIAS's plans in doubt. The creation of Greater New York

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*Beetles The First Century of The American Museum of Natural History* (Garden City: The Natural History Press, 1969) p. 16-30.

<sup>7</sup>As quoted in Syrett, p. 19.

potentially gave the Institute greater resources, but challenged the Museum's *raison d'être*. The Museum, built on Eastern Parkway near Grand Army Plaza, was in the geographical center of Brooklyn, but far from Manhattan where Green and other consolidationists wanted to centralize power. As America's fourth largest city, Brooklyn could justify the building of a great cultural institution as a necessary component of a great metropolis. After 1898 Brooklyn was no longer a city in its own right, but a borough with an unclear relationship to the center.

### **Origins of the Institute**

The Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences came into being in the late nineteenth century, but its roots lay in the early part of that century. Master mechanics in the Village of Brooklyn, likely inspired by Benjamin Franklin's Apprentices' Library of Pennsylvania, met in August 1823 to create the Brooklyn Apprentices' Library. Brooklyn was a rapidly growing village and local mechanics concerned about the unregulated activities of apprentices formed a library to create a more wholesome outlet for them. They were "desirous of extending the benefits of knowledge to that portion of our youth who are engaged in learning the mechanic arts, and thereby equalizing [*sic*] them for becoming useful and respectable members of society." Legend has it that Brooklyn's leading citizens got out their wheelbarrows and collected books from their friends. Six months later they had created a library of 724 books, 150 pamphlets and fifty readers, housed in a building at 145 Fulton Street.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Rebecca Hooper Eastman "The Story of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences 1823-1924" (Brooklyn: 1924), p. 3-4; D. Littlejohn "Records of the Brooklyn Institute 1823-1873" (Brooklyn Museum Library), p. 5

On Independence Day in 1825, the Marquis de Lafayette placed the cornerstone of a new Brooklyn Apprentices Library's at Henry and Cranberry Street in Brooklyn Heights, but its presence there was short-lived. After the death of its first president in 1833, interest in the library declined. Three years later the Library sold the building to the city of Brooklyn for \$11,000, its young acting librarian Walter Whitman helped pack the books for safekeeping.<sup>9</sup>

The Library reopened in 1838 and led a nomadic existence in a series of different buildings until 1841 when it rented space from the Brooklyn Lyceum at Concord and Washington Streets, together with the City Library and Hamilton Literary Society. When the Lyceum defaulted on its mortgage in 1842, Augustus Graham, a founder of the Apprentices' Library and now its leading benefactor, bought the building with \$18,000 cash and a mortgage of \$12,000. Five years later Graham made a donation to erase the remainder of its debt. The Library reincorporated and changed its name to the Brooklyn Institute

as they [the Board of Trustees] considered the present one of Apprentice's Library, as conveying too limited an impression of its usefulness, custom having nearly done away with apprentices as a distinct class of society.<sup>10</sup>

As apprenticeship went into decline and wage labor came to predominate, Brooklyn grew from a village to one of the nation's largest cities. Not surprisingly, its wealth, commerce and cultural interests also increased. The Institute broadened its purpose, organizing lectures, displaying art and conducting courses in the arts and sciences, along with continuing to operate its free library.

The Brooklyn Institute grew with the city, but its success depended largely upon the

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<sup>9</sup>Eastman, p. 5; Littlejohn. p. 10

<sup>10</sup>Littlejohn, p. 14.

generosity of Augustus Graham, who left \$27,000 to support the Institute's activities when he died in 1853. From 1835 until 1867, the Institute was an important center in Brooklyn's literary, scientific and cultural life. Prominent ministers, scientists and political figures (mostly of a Whig, Republican or abolitionist bent) came to speak at the Institute. These included William Lloyd Garrison, Edward Everett, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Ward Beecher.<sup>11</sup>

In the 1840s and 50s the Institute was the only major cultural institution in Brooklyn, but in the 1860s the Institute went into decline because of changes in Brooklyn's geography. The city's growth was moving away from the Institute's Washington Street address towards Brooklyn Heights. Newer public buildings, like the Brooklyn Academy of Music and the Long Island Historical Society, opened in the more prestigious neighborhood overshadowing the Institute's work. To compete with these new and better situated institutions, the Institute borrowed \$30,000 in 1868 to modernize its building, but its new debt then made it impossible to expand its activities. A fire in 1881 damaged the Institute's building and further reduced its ability to broaden its audience. By the late 1880's, it was only able to maintain its library and organize an annual Washington Day Address and appeared to be an organization that had outlived its usefulness.<sup>12</sup>

Instead of collapsing, the Institute was reborn. Liberated from its mortgage in 1887, the Institute's leadership attempted to make it the center of Brooklyn's cultural and scientific

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<sup>11</sup>Rebecca Hooper Eastman, p. 6; Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences Yearbook, 1889-90, no. 1, p. 93.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid*, p. 94; Littlejohn, p. 49.

life. At that time only New York, Chicago and Philadelphia were larger than Brooklyn, but the City of Churches had not built a large art or science museum like these and other smaller cities. The Institute's Board created a new organization, the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences (BIAS), into which the old Institute was to be merged, to remedy this deficiency. BIAS's 1889-90 Yearbook recounted its founding.

It was determined to make the property of the Institute the nucleus of a broad and comprehensive Institution for the advancement of science and art . . . for the education of the people through lectures and collections in art and science. It was observed that while Boston has the Lowell Institute, a society of natural history and an Art Museum; while Philadelphia has the Franklin Institute, an Academy of Fine Arts, and while New York has the Metropolitan Museum and American Museum, yet that Brooklyn has nothing corresponding to these institutions.

BIAS intended to build not only a natural science or art museum, but an education department for the benefit of its citizenry. Because of its lineage as a public institution of education and self-improvement, BIAS placed greater emphasis on education than the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It expanded the lecture classes that the old Institute had carried on for many years and brought existing Brooklyn clubs in the humanities, sciences, and arts as separate departments. The Linden Camera Club, for instance, became the Department of Photography. BIAS also created a series of new departments including Physics, Zoology, Political and Economic Science, and Painting.<sup>13</sup>

Beginning with a membership of only eighty-two people in 1888, the Institute grew rapidly to 1,118 in 1890 under the leadership of its new President, General John B.

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<sup>13</sup> *Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences Yearbook 1888-1889 #2* (Brooklyn 1889) p. 95-96.

Woodward, a long time Trustee of the Institute and a philanthropist with a reputation for “rescuing languishing institutions,” and its new Director Franklin W. Hooper, a professor of biology at Adelphi College in Brooklyn. The new leadership breathed money and life into the Institute. Annual attendance at lectures rose in the same period from 6,900 to 46,950.<sup>14</sup> The Board of Trustees represented different sectors of the City of Churches’ elite, including the wealthy civic leader and “first citizen” James S.T. Stranahan, Church of the Pilgrims Pastor Richard S. Storrs, and businessman and future mayor David Boody. The Institute was so successful that other organizations, including the Long Island Historical Society and the Brooklyn Ethical Association abandoned their own lecture series. By 1898, the *New York Times* reported that the Institute “ha[d] now almost a monopoly of the lecture field in Brooklyn.”<sup>15</sup>

Initially, BIAS created twelve departments, but this number would rise to more than two dozen over the next decade. Each department organized lectures, courses and exhibits attended by members of BIAS (and in some cases the general public), and the Music Department organized most of the concerts at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. The Institute also opened a biological laboratory in Cold Spring Harbor on Long Island, combining a lecture series and biological research. BIAS members joined both the general organization and a

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<sup>14</sup>*Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences Yearbook 1916-1917*, #29 (Brooklyn, 1917) p. 220-222.

<sup>15</sup>*Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences Yearbook 1912-1913* #25 (Brooklyn: 1913), p. 233-239; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 12, 1891, p. 18; Eastman, p. 9; *New York Times Saturday Review of Books and Arts*, July 8, 1898, p. 451.

specific department. Each department was semi-autonomous with its own leadership elected by its members. A typical department scheduled monthly or bimonthly lectures by guest speakers of repute in their field and courses led by one professor usually meeting once a week over a period of three to six weeks.

As BIAS developed its educational programs, it also planned to build an unparalleled Museum of Arts and Sciences that would establish Brooklyn as a great cultural center and bolster the work of its educational departments. On December 5, 1889, a subcommittee of the Institute held a public meeting to marshal support for a Museum of Arts and Science in Brooklyn. Reverend Dr. A.J.F. Behrends explained why Brooklyn deserved a great museum.

[He] spoke of the rapid growth of the city, the fact that the city was no longer looked upon simply as a suburb of New York, that it was gaining the power of self-consciousness, was developing commercial interests and educational institutions of its own, second to no others of their class in the country.<sup>17</sup>

Brooklyn's growth as a city had created a large educated population desirous of a museum of "high culture," but its location next to New York City meant that BIAS had to compete with New York's cultural institutions for funds and attendance. Although smaller cities had fewer resources to draw on, their elite also had fewer competing outlets for cultural philanthropy.

Despite the need to compete with the wealth and power of Gotham, BIAS's Trustees believed their plans would succeed because of a sense of their racial or ethnic superiority. They emphasized their New England roots and that region's purportedly more cultured ways, and

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<sup>16</sup>*Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences Yearbook 1912-1913* #25, p. 233-239; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 12, 1891, p. 18; Eastman, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup>*Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences Yearbook 1912-1913* #25, p. 177.

wanted BIAS to express these values. Brooklyn's leading boosters argued that their city's greater homogeneity and sense of community could compensate for its lack of immense fortunes. An 1895 editorial in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* lauded the work of the Institute and Brooklyn's superior culture.

Brooklyn is an American city. Because of that it is a city of homes, churches and schools. Its society preserves the traditions of a Puritan ancestry not in asceticism, narrow faith or illiberal living, but in the love of right, the hope of advancement, the intent to make its children good and wise beyond their fathers. That is the noblest altruism that fits men for the work they do or that they might do.<sup>18</sup>

Brooklyn's Anglo-Protestant clergy and its elite civic leadership stressed their intellectual and religious ties to New England and the "American" values they represented. In stark contrast, in their eyes, was the un-American city across the East River, filled with political malfeasance and the corrupting values of the immigrants streaming into it. Little wonder that BIAS's leaders believed their more wholesome and superior ancestry would create cultural institutions to rise above those of New York.

The early 1890's confirmed their optimistic predictions. The Institute continued to grow and its space became inadequate for its expanded activities. In 1890 the old Institute building suffered a fire, and in 1891 was sold to the city and demolished to create a new Brooklyn Bridge approach. The lack of a home did not hinder the Institute which rented space from other cultural organizations, including the Brooklyn Academy of Music and the Brooklyn Art Association on Montague Street, and the YMCA building on Fulton Street, to maintain and

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<sup>18</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle* December 14, 1895, p. 6

expand its programming.<sup>19</sup>

BIAS's leaders adapted to the loss of the old Washington Street building, but they still needed to build a museum. In April 1891, the State Legislature authorized Brooklyn to set aside land on Prospect Heights, just east of Prospect Park, to build the new museum. The City of Brooklyn would issue \$300,000 in museum bonds when BIAS's assets exceeded \$200,000. It reached that sum in January 1892 and the following year organized an architectural competition to design the museum. The Museum building had to accommodate the unique structure of the Institute and its educational functions. According to the *Eagle*, "It should accommodate the work of each and every part of its organization. The active educational work of the institute is carried on by some twenty-five departments or subdivisions of its members." The layout of the Museum included separate sections to display each department's collection and lecture halls and auditoriums for its classes.<sup>20</sup>

The competition was won by McKim, Mead and White in May of 1893. The city agreed at the end of that year to lease BIAS the twelve acres reserved for the Museum on Eastern Parkway for a dollar a year for one hundred years. However, the question remained whether Brooklyn's government could finance the construction. As early as 1892, Kings County was experiencing difficulty selling its bonds on the open market, and by the time the Institute was ready to construct the first wing of its Museum, the Panic of 1893 had further

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<sup>19</sup>Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, July 29, 1891, p. 4; Eastman, p. 11.

<sup>20</sup>Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, December 19, 1891, p 1; January 2, 1892, p. 1; January 12, 1893, p. 2; Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences Yearbook 1897-1898, #10, p. 96-97.

dampened demand. The following year Brooklyn annexed the outlying towns in Kings County and absorbed their accumulated debt. This pushed Brooklyn near its state mandated debt limit. Just as BIAS's plans for a great museum were laid out, the City of Brooklyn was losing its ability to realize them.<sup>21</sup>

Despite Brooklyn's limited borrowing powers, the leaders of BIAS knew they needed to begin construction quickly. By 1894, the Legislature had authorized a consolidation referendum and placed Brooklyn's independent existence in doubt. BIAS's leaders feared that if construction did not begin on the museum soon, a government based in Manhattan might be less interested in financing it. At a meeting of the Board of Trustees in February 1894, Franklin Hooper reported that

Should the proposition to unite the several towns and cities in the vicinity of New York into a greater New York be carried into effect, it may be that our museum interest may be overlooked for a time.

While he remained optimistic that Brooklyn would, like the West End of London, become the center of a number of cultural institutions, he believed that BIAS needed to begin construction before New York City annexed Brooklyn. To accomplish this Brooklyn's government had to borrow \$300,000 or ten percent of its total borrowing for that year.<sup>22</sup>

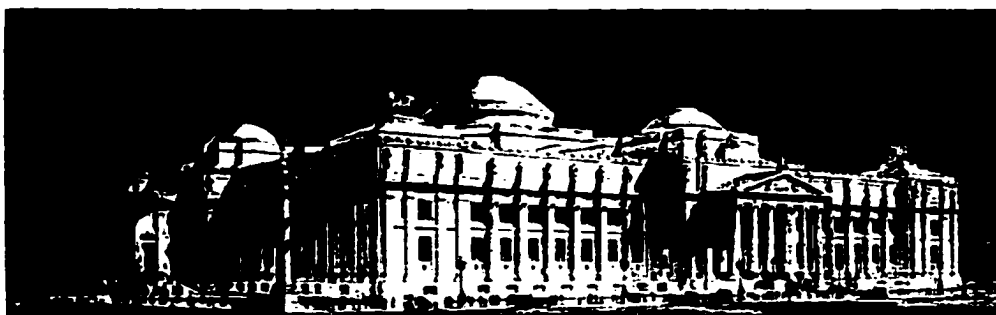
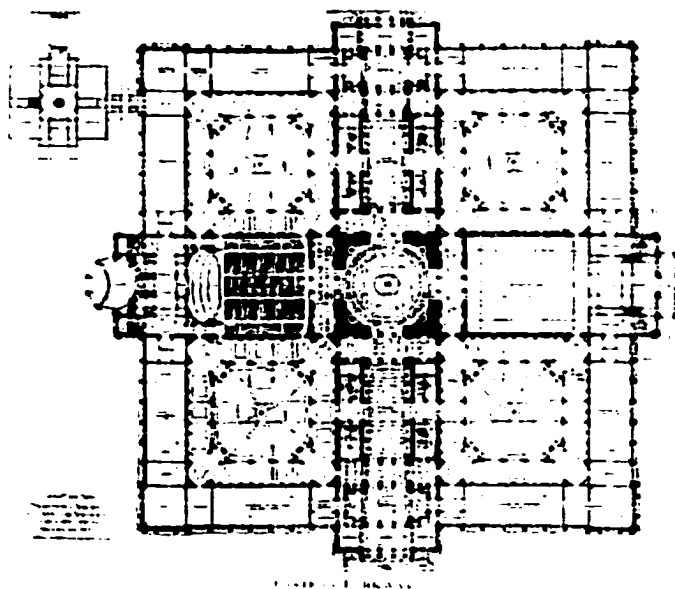
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<sup>21</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle* May 25, 1893, p. 8; December 24, 1893, p. 20; Hammack, p. 198-199.

<sup>22</sup>Under the agreement to build the Museum, BIAS would operate the Museum and purchase its collection, while the city would own the building, finance its construction and pay for its maintenance. Like its counterparts in New York City, Brooklyn's museum was to combine the resources of its public sector and its philanthropists. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, February 9, 1894, p. 6.



Brooklyn Museum. Circa 1910. (Courtesy Brooklyn Public Library. Brooklyn Collection)



Floor plan and model of the Brooklyn Museum from Darragh, Joan, ed. *A New Brooklyn Museum The Master Plan Competition*. New York: The Brooklyn Museum: Rizzoli, 1988.

It was not until January of 1895 that Charles A. Schieren, the new reform Mayor of Brooklyn and past trustee of BIAS, agreed to issue the Museum Bonds. That September ground was finally broken on the first wing of the Museum, and in December the cornerstone was laid before a broad array of Brooklyn's elite. In the midst of the debate over consolidation it was not surprising that the construction of the Museum became a focus for Brooklyn separatism. On that occasion, St. Clair McKelway, editor of the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle* and consolidation's leading opponent, made a forceful speech proclaiming that the Museum

was needed to preserve and to augment the distinction for sound culture which Brooklyn early won and has never wholly lost. It was needed to protect the homogeneous and Americanized million here--soon to be millions-- from the contagion of cupidity and the worship of Mammon, which grow more instead of less just across the river.

McKelway exaggerated Brooklyn's homogeneity, but it is likely that many of the people speaking on the dais were sympathetic to his vision. All but one of the nine participants was Protestant and three were ministers, including the Rev. Richard S. Storrs, the First Vice President of BIAS and a prominent opponent of consolidation. Seth Low, former Mayor of Brooklyn and President of Columbia University, was the only proclaimed supporter of consolidation who spoke at the laying of the cornerstone. BIAS's Board of Trustees included supporters of consolidation, but its most active members were opponents like reformer and philanthropist Alfred T. White and its director Franklin W. Hooper.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle* March 3, 1895, p. 21; December 14, 1895, p. 1-2. See *In the Matter of the Hearing in relation to "The Greater New York . . ."* p. 122 for Hooper's support of resubmission of the consolidation referendum.

The Museum formally opened on October 2, 1897, only three months before Brooklyn's incorporation into Greater New York. The organizers of the dedication connected the museum to New England Protestantism by inviting Harvard President Charles W. Eliot to the ceremony. Other speakers continued to stress Brooklyn's more upright and moral character. Nonetheless, it must have seemed incongruous to dedicate a symbol of Brooklyn's greatness as Manhattan prepared to envelop it. A. Augustus Healy, who had succeeded Woodward as president of BIAS, tried to reassure his audience that the Museum and BIAS would continue to thrive within Greater New York.

We do not permit ourselves to doubt that the incoming administration of the government of Greater New York . . . will speedily grant the means, already authorized by the Legislature, for the completion of the north front of the building, the whole of which will soon be needed for occupation.<sup>24</sup>

Healy had little choice but to be optimistic since Brooklyn's future had already been decided. Ironically, given Brooklyn's financial situation, BIAS's short term prospects seemed better within Greater New York. Without consolidation BIAS had little hope of continuing construction of the Museum. Mayor Frederick Wurster admitted as much in his speech at the dedication.

This city has not been able to do as much in the way of erecting fine public buildings as many other municipalities, owing to the lack of resources. The character of this city as a place of residence, rather than of business, has made it practically impossible to do more than raise the revenue needed to provide an ample water supply, good sewerage, pavements for our many miles of streets and park facilities for a population of more than a million souls.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, October 2, 1897, p. 1-2.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

As the city of Brooklyn prepared to close its books for the last time, the Institute asked for \$18,000 in bonds to be issued out of the initial \$343,000 set aside for it in 1894. Wurster had to turn down the request because “the city had reached its debt limit. . . .” Consolidation seemed BIAS’s best hope to continue its plans despite the risk that a larger Manhattan centered government would ignore its needs.<sup>26</sup>

When Greater New York came into existence on January 1, 1898, BIAS’s prospects seemed promising. Its membership had risen to 4,704, who could attend over 500 lectures sponsored by the Institute. Total attendance at lectures and exhibitions in 1897-98 was 334,670, while attendance at the Museum in its inaugural year was 126,046. Its receipts had risen to \$99,058 in 1897-98 from \$67,983 the previous year. Brooklyn had lost its independence, but Greater New York’s new charter provided some reassurance by including \$20,000 a year for the maintenance of the Museum and the possible use of Greater New York’s borrowing power. One of the few negative signs was that BIAS’s endowment in 1898 was only \$228,000, an increase of merely \$22,000 since 1891-92.<sup>27</sup>

Not only was attendance growing, but the Institute was expanding its horizons. In 1897 the Institute made plans to create branches in other parts of Brooklyn and in Queens. These branches would each have their own series of lectures and courses in their communities. The Institute held meetings in Williamsburg where the “Extension of the Institute to the Eastern

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<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.* December 2, 1897, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup>*Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences Yearbook*, 1909-1910, #22, p. 88-90; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, October 2, 1897, p. 1-2.

District [was] Warmly Indorsed.” BIAS created a special committee to formulate a plan for the extension of the Institute, which proposed that branches be formed in Williamsburg, Flatbush, East New York, Greenpoint, Jamaica and Flushing. At one of the meetings, Williamsburg resident Joseph C. Hendrix,

referred jocularly to the marriage of Williamsburgh to Brooklyn and the prolific results in churches and institutions of learning, and urged that as the two were soon to be wedded to New York their citizens should strive to make Brooklyn the unquestioned seat of education of the great metropolis.<sup>28</sup>

The Institute’s eastward expansion was indicative of Brooklyn’s designs on its hinterlands. Just as New York for many years had imperial designs upon Brooklyn, the latter had looked to annex areas of Kings and Queens Counties. BIAS sought to make itself the leading educational institution for both Brooklyn and Queens and intended to do so before Manhattan institutions had the opportunity.<sup>29</sup>

If the Institute revealed an obvious weakness, it was a failure to broaden its membership, something that would hamper its growth in later years. BIAS was designed by a Protestant elite to serve the middle and upper classes. Their notion of a City of Homes and Churches was coming up against the reality of a Brooklyn that included a larger numbers of immigrants and tenements. At a conference in January 1898. Barr Feree, President of BIAS’s Department of Architecture, spoke of the Institute’s problem in widening its audience. Feree explained to the group that

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<sup>28</sup>*Ibid*, March 9, 1897, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup>BIAS would eventually form branches in Nassau and Suffolk County as well.

It is an unfortunate fact that the masses are indifferent to education in the broadest sense, they do not care to learn, they hate study, they abominate the examination. . . . [T]hey care more to be amused than to be educated; they are interested in things that interest them, rather than in those that might benefit them.

Feree concluded that the way to educate the masses was to present knowledge “in the guise of amusement.” His approach, while condescending in tone, at least acknowledged the Institute’s difficulty in reaching out to a broader populace, but the Institute, which generally disdained the masses desire for amusement, did not adopt it. This unwillingness to adapt, coupled with Brooklyn’s changing demography, made it more difficult for an insular BIAS leadership to increase and broaden its membership.<sup>30</sup>

### **Consolidation and the Integration of Greater New York**

Despite these trends, BIAS gained from consolidation in the short term. Membership in the Institute continued to grow steadily, as did total attendance in its educational programs and museums. In its 1898-99 season the Institute developed plans to open the first Children’s Museum in the United States at its Bedford Park building in Prospect Heights, and to develop a School of Pedagogy to train teachers. The following year the Children’s Museum opened and Greater New York issued \$300,000 in bonds to finance the second (central) section of the Museum. When the ground was broken in June 1900, St. Clair McKelway declared that the expansion of the Museum was “one of the compensations of consolidation, if it be not one of the justifications of it. I know of no result that is more benign as the consequence of

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<sup>30</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 16, 1898, p. 16; See Lawrence W. Levine *Highbrow, Lowbrow The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

consolidation.” McKelway, Brooklyn’s most vocal opponent to consolidation, recognized its positive effect upon BIAS, which would experience reasonably steady support from Greater New York in the years before World War I.<sup>31</sup>

As the Institute grew in size and function, the city increased its appropriations toward the maintenance of the buildings. In 1901-02, Greater New York financed \$150,000 for the building of a Power House and Power Plant for the Museum’s electrical and heating needs, and \$300,000 for interior work in the central (second) section of the Museum. The following year, the City issued \$450,000 in bonds for the third section and the last part of the Museum’s front facade. The third section and the front steps were completed in 1906-07. Also of great significance that year was an agreement between the city and BIAS calling for “the establishment and maintenance of a Botanic Garden and Astronomical Observatory in Institute Park,” and a state law authorizing “the city to erect a new fire-proof Children’s Museum building and provide for the care and maintenance of the same by the Institute. . . .”<sup>32</sup>

In less than ten years’ time, the Museum had tripled in size and had gained consistent support from Greater New York for its expansion efforts. Franklin Hooper often complained in his letters about difficulties with the Board of Estimate, but during this time period BIAS gained most of what it wanted from Greater New York. This could be seen relatively early during a Board of Estimate vote to appropriate additional money for the Museum in August

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<sup>31</sup>*Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences Yearbook 1909-1910*, #22 (Brooklyn, 1910) p. 59-82; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, December 7, 1900, p.15.

<sup>32</sup>*BIAS Yearbook 1909-1910*, #22, p. 59-82. The new building for the Children’s Museum was long sought by the Institute, but would not be built until the 1970s.

1901. Hooper was at his Summer home in Walpole, New Hampshire and unable to attend the meeting. After the Board approved the appropriation, he wrote to the curator of the Museum.

It is somewhat remarkable that the Board of Estimate should vote to appropriate \$300,000. for the continuance of work on the Museum Building without a word of comment from anyone. . . . I am very glad indeed that I did not go to New York, as it is evident that it was not necessary that anyone should be present at a hearing.<sup>33</sup>

BIAS had gained enough political support that it was not even necessary for its representatives to make its case in person before the Board of Estimate. Although the completion of the Museum's grandiose building seemed far in the future, New York's political leadership demonstrated a commitment to completing it. In June 1906, the Board of Estimate borrowed \$50,000 to build a model of the finished Institute Museum, a sign of its commitment to the project.<sup>34</sup>

In the early decades of Greater New York, political consolidation had made it possible to finance BIAS's museums and later its Botanic Garden. Given Brooklyn's financial situation in the late 1890's, BIAS's leaders could not legitimately complain about the level of support they were receiving from Greater New York. However, consolidation was not an unalloyed good for BIAS. As we have seen, the creation of links between New York and Brooklyn had altered the demography of Brooklyn and it changed the relative geography of the Brooklyn Museum. Planned for the center of a city, it was now on the edge of Greater New York. With

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<sup>33</sup>Hooper to Charles T. Goodwin, August 31, 1901 (Franklin W. Hooper Papers, Brooklyn Museum Archives)

<sup>34</sup>Hooper to Michael J. Kennedy, Brooklyn Park Commissioner, June 9, 1906 (Franklin W. Hooper Papers, Brooklyn Museum Archive).

new transportation links being created, Manhattan's cultural institutions became more available to Brooklyn's population. Unlike the Metropolitan and American Museum of Natural History, Brooklyn's museum remained far away from the borough's elevated trains and the subway system would not be extended to it until 1920.

BIAS's director, Franklin Hooper, vividly described these problems in his letters. Hooper's letters give the impression of a dedicated, driven and deeply frustrated man. Born in New Hampshire and graduated from Harvard in biology, he was a professor at Adelphi College in Downtown Brooklyn when the Brooklyn Institute hired him as director in 1887. He remained in that position until his death in 1914. Unlike his counterparts in New York, Hooper had no large endowments to rely upon. William H. Maxwell spoke of Hooper's predicament at his memorial service.

No Carnegie or Rockefeller poured forth his millions to erect imposing buildings and to endow schools of learning. There was no great student body to help defray expenses by the payment of large annual fees. I once sat on the stage at the mid-winter commencement of the University of Chicago, when President Harper casually remarked toward the close of the exercises: "Oh, I almost forgot to tell you that Mr. Rockefeller has sent the University his customary Christmas gift of one million dollars." No such aid or encouragement ever came to Professor Hooper during the twenty-seven years he toiled and gave his life for the Institute.

Like other cultural institutions, BIAS had its regular subscribers and a core of philanthropists who supported it, but unlike the Metropolitan Museum of Art, there was no Morgan to fund its collections or programming.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>"A Memorial Meeting in recognition of the services of the late Franklin W. Hooper" Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Sunday Afternoon, November First Nineteen hundred and fourteen at 4:00 (Brooklyn, N.Y. : The Institute, 1914),

Despite the lack of a large endowment for the Institute's activities, Hooper, like the elite he served, had an outsized vision for the Institute and for Brooklyn. William Henry Fox, who became Director of the Museum shortly after Hooper's death, said that "his plans had no limit and his ideas were colossal" and were responsible for convincing the Legislature to authorize construction of the five hundred foot square Museum building. An example of his boundless optimism for the Museum was the hiring of Daniel Chester French, who would later sculpt the great statue of Lincoln at the Memorial in Washington DC, "to furnish life-size figures of the great artists, philosophers and scientists of civilization for a frieze to go around the outside of the entire building." Each image would be a marker "to indicate the origin of exhibits immediately within and directly under them." Hooper explained to Fox that a visitor could find Assyrian art by looking for the Assyrian figure on the outside. Fox made clear the conflict between Hooper's vision and the Museum's reality by protesting, "We have no Assyrian art."<sup>36</sup>

Because of its roots in nineteenth century self-improvement, BIAS's leadership, and Hooper in particular, believed that BIAS was first and foremost an educational institute for the people of Brooklyn and eventually for all of Long Island as well. Its museum was not merely a repository of objects, as other museums were becoming in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but a conduit for the educational programs of the Institute. These lectures would uplift and educate the people, rather than entertain them, as the theater and later the

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p. 14-15.

<sup>36</sup>"The Memoirs of William Henry Fox, 1858-1952," (unpublished; Brooklyn Museum Archive. n.d.) p. 294-295.

motion pictures increasingly did.

Unfortunately, the needs and desires of the people BLAS served were different from those of its leadership. In his private letters Hooper could not restrain his contempt for the population attending BLAS's concerts and lectures. He complained that

The difficulty with the people in our community is that they wish to be entertained rather than to take part in uplifting the community. They will go to hear a lecture which is entertaining in large numbers, and to hear a lecture that is calculated to do some good in comparatively small numbers.<sup>37</sup>

In contrast to Barr Fereé's ideas, Hooper constantly fought efforts to popularize its programming. Working against this was both technological change (i.e. the motion picture) and the rise of new forms of popular culture.

Also working against his vision was the transportation network that consolidation helped to create. Brooklyn's middle and upper classes now had much easier access to entertainment in Manhattan, while the immigrants in Manhattan's overcrowded tenements used the same bridges, trolleys and trains to settle in Brooklyn. The Protestant elite of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Science found itself ill-suited to reach out to the tens of thousands of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe that had arrived at their door.

Prior to consolidation, their claim that Brooklyn was starkly different from New York was questionable. As World War I came to a close, there was even less basis left for it. From 1900 to 1920, Brooklyn's Protestant population rose from 606,000 to 708,000, while

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<sup>37</sup>Hooper to Mrs. Anna Garlin Spencer, January 10, 1913, BLAS Letter Press Book #32 (Brooklyn Academy of Music Archive) p. 92-94.

Brooklyn's overall population had risen from 1.16 million to slightly more than two million. During the same period the Jewish population expanded from 161,000 to 604,000 (mainly due to East European immigration) and Catholics from 399,000 to 899,000. While the more diverse origins of Catholics makes it more difficult to identify their ethnicity, given immigration trends of that time most of this increase came from Southern and Eastern Europe. These sharp demographic changes reshaped the relative proportions of Brooklyn's population. At the beginning of the century, Protestants of all backgrounds were 51.9% of the population, twenty years later they composed only 33.4%. The Jewish population rose from 13.8% to 30%, while Catholics remained at one-third of Brooklyn's population, but the Italian born portion alone had grown from 37,200 to 138,245.<sup>38</sup>

The effect of these changes on BIAS were most apparent in the Eastern District where stark demographic changes occurred after the opening of the Williamsburgh Bridge in 1903. In November 1913, Hooper received a letter from the Managing Editor of the *Brooklyn Times* inquiring about BIAS's reduced advertising in his Eastern District newspaper. He explained this by noting the "Marked change that has taken place in the population of the Eastern District of Brooklyn." As a consequence, BIAS's membership had declined from four thousand to one thousand since 1898 in that area. Due to low attendance Hooper believed "it would be

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<sup>38</sup>Walter Laidlaw *Population of the City of New York, 1890-1930* (Cities Census Committee, Inc., 1932), p. 275. Although a significant majority of Jews were of Eastern European origin, a minority were of German/Central European background. Catholics were largely divided between Irish, Germans and Italians. While Protestants were predominantly of British origin, they also included both Germans, Scandinavians and African-Americans.

impracticable” to conduct lectures there now.<sup>39</sup>

Hooper wrote of this problem even more bluntly in his correspondence with Dr. William Felter, principal of the Girls’ High School and a member of BIAS’s Department of Pedagogy. When Felter inquired about eliminating the initiation fee for BIAS membership, Hooper explained that BIAS could not afford to because of its limited pool of possible members. The first reason given was “The deterioration in the population in that part of Greater New York, from which the Institute draws its members.” He noted that “we are having an immense influx of people representing a lower grade of civilization.”<sup>40</sup>

These new immigrants could not afford or were uninterested in what the Institute’s Education Department had to offer. They were certainly not a base to build the permanent endowment needed to fund its programs. As a not-for-profit institution, BIAS frequently ran up against its bottom line and needed regular donations from its benefactors to continue to run its programs. In the Spring of 1913 when Hooper wrote to Felter, BIAS was running a deficit in its education programs and he was writing letters appealing to seemingly every possible donor. His failure to raise enough money would lead to cuts in the Education Department’s budget the following year.<sup>41</sup>

The inability to draw in Brooklyn’s new immigrants was only one problem BIAS faced.

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<sup>39</sup>*Ibid*, Hooper to W.H. Oestreicher, November 20, 1913, BIAS Letter Press Book, (Brooklyn Academy of Music Archive).

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid*, Hooper to William L. Felter, April 14, 1913, BIAS Letter Press Book #35,(Brooklyn Academy of Music Archive), p. 285-287.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid*, Hooper to Herman Stutzer, April 3, 1913, #35 , p. 116-117; Hooper to Charles H. Schieren, April 26, 1913, #36, p. 43.

Another was the failure to garner enough support from its traditional base. Hooper complained bitterly that "Manhattan has a thousand men abundantly able to give to educational institutions where Brooklyn has one. Brooklyn men are continually giving to institutions in Manhattan, but it is very rare that a Manhattan man gives to Brooklyn."<sup>42</sup>

Hooper's conclusion is borne out by the museum's annual reports. In 1909, 1911 and 1912 (years for which addresses are available) a large majority of its donors came from Brooklyn. In 1912 New York philanthropists represented twenty five percent, but in 1909 and 1911 the percentages were eighteen and fifteen respectively. Manhattanites donated even less than this percentage indicates, since the museum's stalwart Brooklyn supporters made larger contributions. William Henry Fox concurred with Hooper's analysis based on his later efforts to gain support from Brooklyn's bourgeoisie. These efforts

provided [him] with an insight into the social aims of Brooklyn people who esteemed themselves 'society' and whose eyes were eternally fixed on social doings in Manhattan. In the end, many of these people shook the dust of Brooklyn from their feet and migrated to Park Avenue.

Brooklyn society would take advantage of Brooklyn's increased access to Manhattan and became less willing to support their own borough's art and educational institutions.<sup>43</sup>

While Hooper complained of declining support for the Institute's educational programs, the support the Museum received from the government of Greater New York also diminished.

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<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.* Hooper to President John Finley, LL.D., College of the City of New York. May 13, 1913, #36, p. 179-182.

<sup>43</sup>*Report Upon the Condition and Progress of the Museums of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences for the Year Ending December 31, 1909*, p. 65; 1910, 1911, p. 73; 1912, p. 85.

One of the last acts of the City of Brooklyn was the opening of the museum's first section. Over the next ten years, Greater New York would provide funding for the next two sections and the museum's grand stairs, completing the front facade of the building. Unfortunately it was a facade in both meanings of the word: "the front of a building" and "a false, superficial or artificial appearance or effect." The museum resembled one of the finest examples of Beaux-Art architecture if viewed only from the front. The rear view was the bare brick face of a largely unfinished building. A vast expanse lay behind it, where the Institute had planned to expand the museum.<sup>44</sup>

Consolidation had made it possible for Brooklyn to tap Manhattan's wealth, but it had also made it part of a city which had wealthier and more impressive museums. The Brooklyn Museum was not a priority of the city and the Board of Estimate lost interest in financing it. Construction on sections F and G of the museum (on the eastern side of the building) began in early 1913, but the following year work stalled and the city government did not provide any new money to complete construction. Without any additional funds, the Museum boarded up the structure to protect it from deterioration. The Institute convinced the Board of Estimate to appropriate \$400,000 in 1916, but wartime inflation reduced the value of the appropriation making it insufficient to complete construction.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>*Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged*, ed., Philip Babcock Gove (Springfield, MA: Merriam Webster, Inc., 1993) p. 811.

<sup>45</sup>*Report Upon the Condition and Progress of the Museums of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences for the Year Ending December 31, 1913*, p. 7; 1914, p. 7-8; 1915, p. 8-9; 1916, p. 7; 1917, p. 7; 1918, p. 7.

The postwar era did not bode well for the completion of this one addition of the Brooklyn Museum's overall plan. Because of the pressing need for schools, transportation, and other infrastructure, Mayor John Hylan decided that money would not be expended on what he considered luxuries. While the Institute waited for funding, the partially completed structure began to deteriorate. William Henry Fox, the director of the Museum, reported in 1921 that "Sections F and G are leaking badly and show other evidences of disintegration." The failure to open this space also limited the museum's ability to display its growing collection of objects "with more than one-half of the material available for exhibition . . . piled up in the storerooms."<sup>46</sup>

Sections F and G of the museum remained in their half completed state until June 1923, when Mayor Hylan agreed to survey its conditions on a crowded Sunday. The obvious need for expansion finally convinced him that the Museum deserved funding, despite his earlier call for austerity. With the mayor's assent, the Board of Estimate approved one million dollars for completion of the new wing.<sup>47</sup>

The new section of the Museum, completed in 1927, nearly doubled its previous space, but it was the final section completed of Charles McKim's architectural plan. Two years later the Great Depression began and the Institute suffered like the rest of the country. It garnered funds from New Deal public works programs to reorganize its existing space, but none for new

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<sup>46</sup>*Report Upon the Conditions . . . For 1919*, p. 7; *For 1921*, p. 7.

<sup>47</sup>*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 5, 1923, p. 1; June 6, 1923, p. 8; *Standard Union*, June 6, 1923, p. 8.

construction.<sup>48</sup>

At the same time the Institute encountered difficulty fund raising. A confidential memo by Edward C. Blum, president of BLAS and Abraham & Strauss, in the late 1930's, reported that "the Museums and the Botanic Garden require portions of this amount [\$50,000 a year] to supplement their annual collection funds which in recent years have dwindled. The Institute at the Academy of Music desperately requires supplementary income."<sup>49</sup>

Once again the Institute's location on the periphery and the lack of interest in Manhattan negatively affected the museum. The only significant source for both philanthropy and membership lay in Brooklyn. Like Hooper nearly twenty five years earlier, Blum reported that "repeated tests have demonstrated that it is nearly impossible to interest Manhattan persons in Brooklyn institutions." Consolidation had made it easier for Brooklynites to travel to Manhattan, but Manhattanites would not patronize and support a distant institution in Brooklyn. The annexation of Brooklyn into Greater New York also made it more difficult to reach a Brooklyn audience. As Brooklyn became more closely integrated into New York City, its newspapers became less effective instruments for reaching the borough's population. The Institute concluded that "Brooklyn newspapers do not adequately reach the population [and]

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<sup>48</sup>The only funds provided by the federal government were to destroy the stairs of the building and to build a new foyer to adapt the ideas of modernism into McKim's Beaux Art structure.

<sup>49</sup>Joan Darragh, editor *A New Brooklyn Museum The Master Plan Competition* (The Brooklyn Museum, 1988) p. 52-62; "Confidential A Preliminary Memorandum On One Aspect of the Institute's Financial Program By The President" (Brooklyn: 193?) Brooklyn Museum Archives, p. 1

Manhattan newspapers devote little space to Brooklyn affairs. . .” Consolidation had simultaneously pulled Brooklyn more closely into Manhattan’s orbit, but the center was less interested in the affairs of Brooklyn. By the late 1930’s, Brooklyn had only one remaining newspaper, the *Eagle*, which would cease publication in 1955.<sup>61</sup>

The decline of city support and an inability to attract an audience or philanthropy from Manhattan coincided with BIAS’s failure to recruit new members within Brooklyn. “A high degree of loyalty to the Department of Education exist[ed] among a number of persons who have continued over a term of years,” but the Institute was having difficulty recruiting new members and donors. There had been “a derogation of adapting policies to present a program, and a publicity technique, easily attractive to persons who know nothing about the institution.” Unable to afford an expensive advertising campaign, the Institute struggled to adapt to the larger universe of Greater New York and the changing means of communication and education.<sup>62</sup>

The Institute’s fortunes contrasted greatly with that of the Metropolitan, which prospered as wealth and power became more concentrated in Manhattan. The museum expanded twice in the late nineteenth century (1888 and 1894) to provide space for its expanding collection and began the twentieth century building a grand neoclassical wing on Fifth Avenue. Designed by Richard Morris Hunt, this addition hid the earlier more humble buildings behind a marble palace. At a cost of one million dollars, Greater New York’s government had

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1, 7.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4, 10.

financed what the *New York Evening Post* called “the only public building in recent years which approaches in dignity and grandeur the museums of the old world.” McKim, Mead and White would design another wing financed by Greater New York which opened in 1909. Thirteen years later, as BIAS struggled to convince Mayor Hylan to fund the completion of Sections F and G, the Metropolitan used the fortune of Robert and Emily de Forest to build, without city money, its American Wing to display decorative arts. The Metropolitan had succeeded in establishing itself as New York City’s and the country’s wealthiest and most important art institution as the Brooklyn Museum struggled in its shadow.<sup>63</sup>

### **City College of New York or Brooklyn University**

The competition between Brooklyn and Manhattan institutions also occurred in higher education. Fifty years before consolidation, New York City established what became the City College of New York (CCNY), offering free higher education to its students. Consolidation made it possible for Brooklynites to attend CCNY *and* potentially expand its services into Brooklyn. The increased demand for higher education in Brooklyn after 1898 led to demands for CCNY’s expansion into Brooklyn and a debate about the benefits of consolidation within the borough. Those who accepted consolidation and wanted its benefits supported the creation of a Brooklyn branch of City College. Opponents of this proposal believed a CCNY branch represented the invasion of a Manhattan institution that might prevent the development of a Brooklyn University by the borough’s private educational institutions, including BIAS.

The elite of Brooklyn divided over this issue. St. Clair McKelway, editor of the *Eagle*

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<sup>63</sup>Tomkins, p. 87, 166, 199-201.

and Chancellor of the State Board of Regents, supported the creation of a branch of CCNY in Brooklyn that would provide its residents with the same educational opportunities as Manhattan's. Once consolidation was a fact, McKelway decided that Brooklyn must reap as many of its benefits as possible. CCNY could not handle the increased demand for its services due to Greater New York's rapidly increasing population and the College's distance from Brooklyn. McKelway and CCNY's leadership wanted the college to expand into Brooklyn to meet the needs of students in the borough.

Agitation for a municipal college in Brooklyn began in 1906. The following year the Legislature passed a bill to create a college in Brooklyn, but the governor vetoed the legislation in part because of opposition from President Nicholas Murray Butler of Columbia University. In a letter to President John H. Finley of CCNY, Butler declared a Brooklyn College "preposterous in the last degree." and suggested that only a branch of City College be opened in Brooklyn.<sup>64</sup>

After the Governor's veto, the issue remained dormant until 1913 when McKelway became Chancellor of the Board of Regents. At his installation he called for the expansion of CCNY to enable it to serve the entire city.

This system is wholly municipal. It is not a borough system. This plant is in the greatest borough, but it will have branches in all of them. The City College will broaden to the City University. That will follow from the very law of material expansion and of economic consolidation. That law of development and unification cannot be accused of monopoly in restraint of learning.

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<sup>64</sup>Quoted from S. Willis Rudy, "The College of the City of New York: A History 1847-1947" (Ed.D., Columbia University: New York: The City College Press, 1949) pp. 382-338.

McKelway had accepted the logic of consolidation in higher education, like he earlier had for the Brooklyn Museum. If Brooklyn and the other boroughs were to be part of Greater New York, they should benefit from that relationship. Joining McKelway in the campaign to expand CCNY was Finley, who saw the building of CCNY branches as part of the process of creating a united city.

We have long been in theory a college for the whole city, but in fact we have chiefly been able to exert ourselves for the benefit of Manhattan alone. Limitations of transportation and accessibility have made it so. Now, we can begin first time to plan to reach out and take in our own to the uttermost boundaries of the city.

This logic made perfect sense to McKelway and Finley, but it caused fear and anger in Brooklyn's educational leadership led by Franklin W. Hooper.<sup>65</sup>

Hooper did not want the benefits of consolidation, a municipal college, to prevent Brooklyn from building its own institutions. Brooklyn no longer lacked a museum, but unlike other large cities of the United States it had no private university. Its only colleges were Adelphi, a woman's institution, Polytechnic Institute, an engineering school, and Saint John's College, a Catholic school. Without a Brooklyn University, a local Protestant student had "no place to which he can go." Hooper wrote to Finley, "We do not want established in Brooklyn branches of institutions located in Manhattan that will prevent us from establishing our own institutions."

His experience as director of BIAS had convinced him that "Manhattan men, as a rule, do not recognize Brooklyn as a part of the City and look at Brooklyn as something to be used by Manhattan rather than as something to serve." McKelway's attempt to garner a fair share of

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<sup>65</sup>New York Times March 17, 1913, p. 7.

city resources was seen as an attack on Brooklyn's independent institutions and threatened their plans to build a private university. Hooper wrote to Charles N. Chadwick of the Brooklyn League, an organization representing the borough's business interests, that the borough was at a critical juncture and "that those who are interested in creating a better Brooklyn should act wisely and quickly to prevent the carrying out of the plans of creating in Brooklyn branches of Manhattan Institutions."<sup>66</sup>

As the director of BLAS, Hooper had a vested interest in keeping CCNY out of Brooklyn. For many years prior to 1913, the Institute had run a School of Pedagogy and two thousand teachers were at that time taking special courses to meet New York City Board of Education and State Board of Regents requirements. This was a significant source of income for the Institute that it could ill afford to lose. If City College opened its doors in Brooklyn, a lower cost educational option would become available to Brooklyn's teachers and it "would take away the larger part of the work that we are doing for the teachers . . ." at the Institute. His concern about finances was magnified by the deficit that BLAS's programs were running for that season.<sup>67</sup>

Hooper responded to this incursion by organizing the Citizens' Committee on Brooklyn University. He described the Executive Committee as "several of our strongest men in Brooklyn both from point of view of citizenship and also of ability to contribute, who are very much interested in the University plan." Still viewing themselves as largely independent of New

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<sup>66</sup>BLAS Letter Press Book #37 Hooper to S. Parkes Cadman June 6, 1913, p. 257-258; #36 Hooper to Finley, May 3, 1913, p. 179-182. #34 Hooper to Chadwick, March 20, 1913, p. 410-412.

<sup>67</sup>Hooper to Brush, May 3, 1913, BLAS Letter Press Book, #36, p. 171.

York, this portion of Brooklyn's elite wanted to create institutions outside of the control of Manhattan. Threatening their plans was the increasing integration of Greater New York. The Anglo-Protestant Brooklyn they envisioned was disappearing before their eyes and new Brooklynites were not greatly interested in their vision of a Brooklyn University. Hooper acknowledged this change when he wrote to Herbert Gunnison of the *Eagle* that

An immediate danger may be found in the fact that our Hebrew friends in the Eastern Section of the City, who are very eager for an education and who desire to get everything possible for nothing, will try to precipitate a plan for a branch of the City College in Brooklyn.

Hooper's insularity made him more concerned with the needs of Brooklyn's elite than the needs of its growing immigrant population for higher education.<sup>68</sup>

CCNY President Finley spoke in favor of Brooklyn branch on May 12, 1913 at a meeting of the Adelphi College Associates, again expressing the notion that he was working for the educational interests of the entire city. Prior to his speech, Hooper wrote letters to John F. Coar of Adelphi, William Felter of Girls High School and Charles Fuller of the Brooklyn League saying that if Finley raises the issue "those who follow him should be prepared to state Brooklyn's position in a courteous and conciliatory way." His assumption was that Brooklyn's voice was monolithic and could be represented by himself, Coar, Felter and Fuller. This was not true twenty years earlier, but by 1913 they hardly represented the multiplicity of voices in Brooklyn. To Hooper the Eastern and Southern European immigrants were not "Brooklyn." Indeed, the older Irish immigrant population was not fully included in his vision, despite the

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<sup>68</sup>Hooper to Herbert F. Gunnison April 25, 1913, BIAS Letter Press Book #36, p. 24-25.

presence of Irish Catholics on BIAS's Board of Trustees.<sup>69</sup>

The new immigrants did not control the outcome of this particular debate. Hooper was right that a branch of City College could be forestalled that year. The Committee he organized convinced Finley that

if private institutions could serve Brooklyn in such a way that there could be no occasion for the City College to go out of its way to arrange a branch here. That he for one would then be able to see no reason why a branch should be established in Brooklyn.

This victory would be a hollow one for Brooklyn's educational leadership. The proposed Brooklyn University did not come to pass, and four years later CCNY established a branch in Brooklyn to meet the overwhelming demand for higher education in the borough. After much debate and lobbying, Governor Alfred Smith signed legislation in 1926 creating the Board of Higher Education, whose goal was to coordinate public higher education in New York City and create a publicly supported Brooklyn College. Four years later the college was born.<sup>70</sup>

The University Club and Chamber of Commerce renewed the campaign for an independent Brooklyn (or Long Island) University in the 1920s, but its leaders were more diverse and did not conceive their institution as a haven for Protestant youth. The Board of Trustees of the embryonic Long Island University (LIU) included Protestants who had been involved in the earlier efforts, but its chairman was Ralph Jonas, a Jewish manufacturer and President of the Chamber of Commerce. Jonas, who contributed \$500,000 to LIU in 1927,

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<sup>69</sup>Hooper to Charles H. Fuller May 6, 1913, BIAS Letter Press Book #36, P. 222-223.

<sup>70</sup>Hooper to John F. Coar, May 14, 1913, BIAS Letter Press Book, #36, p. 385; Rudy, p. 382-388; Elliott S.M. Gatner "Long Island University: The History of a Relevant and Responsive University 1920-1968" (Ed.D. diss., Columbia University, 1975), p. 49-66.

used his financial clout to ensure a non-discriminatory admissions policy for the University. The new Board of Trustees, with pledges of several million dollars, “received authorization to merge or consolidate any professional institution on Long Island or in the City of New York and vicinity with the Long Island University.” This plan and the growth of LIU generally would be slowed by the Great Depression, but its new admissions policy was an acknowledgment of the changing face of Brooklyn fostered by consolidation.<sup>71</sup>

### **Adapting to Consolidation**

During Hooper’s quest for a Brooklyn University in 1913, he laid out his vision of Brooklyn’s educational and cultural future.

Brooklyn cannot develop properly and strongly by leaning on Manhattan or any other community. . . . The time has now arrived when Brooklyn will assert her intellectual and educational independence, and will maintain that upon her rests the responsibility for creating and maintaining the educational institutions which will serve future generations.<sup>72</sup>

Hooper and the supporters of a Brooklyn University wanted to “develop our own university, our own college in our own way, with our own board of trustees, and our own public spirit.”

The creation of Greater New York impinged upon this vision. Consolidation solidified Manhattan’s dominance over Greater New York economically and culturally. During Brooklyn’s existence as an independent city, an elite developed who believed it was important to build their own centers of education and culture.<sup>73</sup> These institutions were unable to compete with Manhattan as a cultural center and their leaders discovered that many Brooklynites would

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<sup>71</sup>Gatner, p. 51-69.

<sup>72</sup>*Eagle* April 3, 1913, Picture Section, p. 3.

<sup>73</sup>This was in contrast to the other “outer boroughs,” which were largely rural (Staten Island and Queens) or were already part of New York (The Bronx).

redirect their philanthropy across the East River. Consolidation saved BIAS from the borrowing and budget constrictions of the City of Brooklyn, but could not end its isolation from the wealthy philanthropists of Manhattan.

Brooklyn stalwarts did not easily accept this dependence. Franklin Hooper wrote to CCNY's President Finley "We have unfortunately surrendered our political independence. We do not desire to surrender our intellectual and educational independence,"<sup>74</sup> but by relinquishing the former, the latter became more difficult to sustain. To build the Institute Museum, Brooklyn's elite needed access to capital that Brooklyn's government could not borrow. Prior to consolidation, Brooklyn's Protestant elite opposed incorporation into New York out of fear that Brooklyn would become more like New York. These fears were not unfounded. Consolidation accelerated the transformation of the "City of Homes and Churches" into a borough of Catholic churches and Jewish synagogues. BIAS's Education Department needed to adapt its mission to appeal to these new groups, something that an insular and increasingly isolated Protestant minority found difficult to do. For Brooklyn's elite, consolidation was a bitter pill that partially cured one malady (lack of capital), but simultaneously changed the nature of the patient.

Despite these trends, BIAS's Education Department, unlike the Brooklyn Museum, benefitted from not being in direct competition with Manhattan institutions. Charles D. Atkins, who succeeded Hooper after his death in 1914, continued to administer the broad array of courses and concerts. Atkins reduced the costs of the Institute by eliminating some of the

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<sup>74</sup>Hooper to John Finley, May 3, 1913, BIAS Letter Press Book, #36, p. 179-182. (Brooklyn Academy of Music Archive)

extravagances that led to deficits under Hooper, leading to modest growth in the 1910s and 20s. During his tenure, membership peaked at more than ten thousand in 1921 and monthly attendance of classes and concerts exceeded fifty thousand. Concerts included regular appearances by the New York Symphony Orchestra conducted by Walter Damrosch and the Boston Symphony Orchestra at the Opera House of the Brooklyn Academy of Music and many smaller ensembles in BAM's Music Hall or in its smaller venues. The courses and lectures continued as well, and rivaled those of a large continuing education program.<sup>75</sup>

The Department of Education continued its activities into the 1950s, when, with the advent of television and the expansion of higher education, it lost much of its audience. Even in the late 1920s membership was declining. By 1928 its membership had dipped to 8,527. The Institute's classes, lectures and concerts had developed a dedicated following, but its leadership was unable to expand their audience. By the late 1930s, Youtz commented "that unless [the Department of Education] serves the whole crosssection of the community it rests on a precarious base." While responding positively to its program for rejuvenation, he acknowledged the limited audience for the Institute's programming and the need to implement Hooper's worst fears. "I would be particularly pleased if it proves practical to include a larger general public, although I suspect that this group can be better served by a popular lecturer and by a program which includes elements of entertainment." Atkins had refined a successful

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<sup>75</sup>Minutes of the BIAS Board of Trustees and Governing Committee Department of Education 1915 to 1924, No. 14" November 10, 1921 p.490; *The Bulletin of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences*, February 6-24, 1924. p. 169-171 (Brooklyn Museum Library).

formula, but was unable to greatly expand the base of membership.<sup>76</sup>

Attendance rose dramatically at BLAS's museums and Botanic Garden during the early twentieth century. The Central Museum's attendance was 94,878 in 1898 and increased over time, especially after the opening of new additions of the museum or easier transit access to the building. In 1908, the year after the opening of the eastern wing of the museum, attendance rose to 203,955, a twenty-one percent increase (35,000), over the previous year's attendance. In 1921, after the IRT began service to the museum, attendance increased to 370,576, another twenty one percent (65,000) increase over the previous year. The Museum's attendance peaked in 1925 at 422,598, but suffered modest declines in later years. Attendance recovered during the Great Depression, due to the increased "leisure time" of the unemployed, peaking at 900,000. Similar increases occurred in the Children's Museum and the Botanic Gardens.<sup>77</sup>

The Museum's attempts to expand were less successful. Construction on the northeast gallery of the Museum began in 1913, but the death of Franklin Hooper, the Institute's strongest advocate, in 1914, and the impact of World War I delayed its completion. It was not until 1927 that construction was completed. This was the last section of the McKim, Mead and White architectural plan completed, and the Museum remains a partially finished structure. Some of the wealth of Brooklyn did flow to BLAS as many of its wealthy merchants died. This included a \$200,000 gift from Colonel Robert B. Woodward, BLAS's first vice president, in

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<sup>76</sup>Minutes of the BLAS Board of Trustees and Governing Committee Department of Education 1924-1931, No. 15" November 8, 1928 p. 222; Phillip N. Youtz Papers, BLAS (6) Trustees Dir 1936-37, Youtz to Mr. Robert Alfred Shaw, April 28, 1937.

<sup>77</sup>*Report Upon the Conditions . . . For 1906, p. 13; For 1908, p. 13; For 1920, p. 20; For 1921, p. 13; For 1925, p. 28; For 1933, p. 48.*

1915, a bequest valued at one million dollars from W.H. Merriman, a Brooklyn businessman and art collector in 1921, and \$120,000 from A. Augustus Healy, the Institute's president for twenty five years, in 1923.<sup>78</sup>

When William Henry Fox became Director of the Museum in 1913, he realized that it could not be the broad institution envisioned by its founders in the 1890s. Looking back at his career, Fox described the Brooklyn Museum as "the poorest in funds of any in Greater New York." Its natural history department was respectable, but it paled in comparison to the American Museum, which was receiving "getting one rich bequest after another." The Museum did not "have the means to compete nor did I believe we had the good will of the city in making the effort."<sup>79</sup>

Fox's solution to this problem was to slowly access its science collection to the Children's Museum and to create a niche for the Museum to survive. He convinced BLAS's Trustees that "we might avoid copying the excessive old master atmosphere of the Metropolitan Museum by starting exhibitions by contemporary artists." He created an impressive collection by emphasizing modern art and ethnology. The latter included the Museum's renowned Ancient Egyptian collection, the first exhibit of African art in the United States and a wide variety of art from countries throughout Asia. He even proposed to Robert W. DeForest,

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<sup>78</sup>To contrast the overall wealth of the Brooklyn Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in 1918 the Brooklyn had thirteen donors who gave more than \$100,000 and twenty one who donated more between \$25,000 and \$100,000. The Metropolitan had fifty-two donors who contributed at least \$50,000 that included among other millionaires, three Morgans and two Vanderbilts. Report on the Condition . . . for 1918, p. 50; Metropolitan Annual Report, 1918, p. 65.

<sup>79</sup>Memoirs of William Henry Fox. p. 302-303.

president of the Metropolitan, that they “divide the Museum Field in Greater New York.” The Metropolitan “with its superb collection of works of the past [would] put its full emphasis on this phase of art and deposit its contemporary exhibits with us.” The Brooklyn Museum would then deposit its “outstanding Renaissance pieces” with the Metropolitan. DeForest rejected Fox’s proposal, but the Brooklyn Museum’s director envisioned his institution becoming the center of contemporary art in an era before the Museum of Modern Art. This change in emphasis also led BIAS eventually to sever its ties to the Cold Spring Harbor biological laboratory in the early 1920s<sup>30</sup>

In 1887 when a small elite organized the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, they saw it as an all encompassing cultural organization that would be an agent and symbol of Brooklyn’s greatness. The creation of Greater New York eventually transformed the Brooklyn Museum’s function and meaning. No longer was it an institution for Brooklyn alone, it now needed to meet the needs of the entire city. Fox began this process when he admitted that the Brooklyn Museum could not compete with the Metropolitan, but full acceptance of this change would not occur until its leadership passed to a new generation.

When Philip N. Youtz took the helm of the Brooklyn Museum in 1934, he changed both the appearance and the function of the museum. He ordered the removal of the Museum’s deteriorating grand stairs to increase access to the public and simultaneously diminish the Museum’s Beaux Art grandeur. He also rethought the function of the Museum within Greater

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<sup>30</sup>Darragh, p. 44-46; Eastman, p. 9, 21; *New York Times* September 9, 1915, p. 7; November 21, 1915, Section II, p. 19; December 18, 1921, Section II, p. 1.; March 10, 1923, p. 13; April 29, 1934, IX, p. 7; “Memoirs of William Henry Fox,” p. 417-418.

New York. Youtz concluded that "The Brooklyn Museum is one of four great museums supported by New York City. After Brooklyn was changed from an independent municipality to a City Borough, the Brooklyn Museum gradually ceased to be a local institution and has come to serve a city-wide constituency numbering one million visitors a year."

Youtz's pronouncement was a public admission, thirty-six years after consolidation, that the Brooklyn Museum was part of Greater New York and could no longer be viewed as an all-encompassing institution symbolizing the borough's greatness. It needed "to avoid duplication with other city-supported museums [and] enter a distinctive field of service not covered by the other three museums." The Metropolitan dominated the fine arts, the Museum of Natural History specialized in the sciences, and the Museum of the City of New York dominated local history. The Brooklyn would specialize in "aboriginal American art." "the field of art and industry" "and the "arrange[ment of] its collection in an educational sequence" to emphasize its strength in pedagogy.<sup>81</sup>

Youtz tried to reorient the museum by relocating the Museum of Science and Industry from its temporary quarters in the Daily News Building to a proposed addition in the Brooklyn Museum. With the backing of Edward C. Blum, president of BIAS and Abraham & Strauss, Frederic Pratt, chairman of the Museum of Science and Industry, and financier Felix Warburg, Youtz entered into negotiations with Parks Commissioner Robert Moses and Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia to combine the two museums. The Museum of Science and Industry would gain a new home in an already established museum and the Brooklyn Museum would expand its

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<sup>81</sup>*Report Upon the Conditions . . . for 1934*, p. 5.

programming to an field not addressed by the Metropolitan and the Museum of Natural History.

Even this conception of the Brooklyn Museum could not gain the attention of Manhattan's politicians or philanthropists. Brooklyn Borough President Raymond Ingersoll reported that "some members of the Board of Trustees of the Museum of Science and Industry are so Manhattan-minded that they think all museums should be in Manhattan and would be pleased to have the City buy a site for them there." The architect William Lescaze drafted plans for a new wing of the Brooklyn Museum, but the Board of Estimate never appropriated the \$1.2 million dollars necessary to construct it. After the failure to build the new wing and absorb the Museum of Science and Industry, Youtz would complain of the Museum's ill-treatment in comparison to its Manhattan counterparts.

The Metropolitan got a complete new roof and the American Museum of Natural History a very substantial improvement. He said that our request for a new roof and power plant was not brought up because of the hostility of the Park Department. I feel very much discouraged the way Mr. Moses has let us down . . .

LaGuardia accelerated the centralizing tendencies set in motion in 1898. Brooklyn would gain its share of resources for new infrastructure, but Manhattan would remain the repository for commerce and culture in the metropolis.<sup>82</sup>

In *The Search for Order 1877-1920*, Robert H. Wiebe wrote of "island communities" "that had been premised upon the community's effective sovereignty, upon its capacity to

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<sup>82</sup>Raymond Ingersoll to F.H. LaGuardia, February 27, 1935. ( LaGuardia, F.H., Mayor Dir. 1933-36); Youtz to Blum April 17, 1936 (Blum, Edward, C. (01) Dir 1936-37) Philip N. Youtz Papers. Brooklyn Museum Archives.

manage affairs within its boundaries, [but] no longer functioned.”<sup>83</sup> Brooklyn’s Protestant elite lived in a large metropolis, but believed their city was an island community protected from the evils that existed in New York City. This was a chimera that they attempted to protect in the 1890s by opposing consolidation.

The Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences was an expression of that island community’s stature and importance. When Brooklyn was independent, its elite could justify but not afford its grandiose ambitions. Consolidationists recognized that Brooklyn lacked the wealth for such symbols and presented an alternate means to support the Institute. This worked in the short term, providing BLAS with the funds to build parts of its museum and the Botanic Gardens. But Brooklyn’s philanthropy was no match for Manhattan’s and Greater New York’s government lost interest in financing the grand vision of the Institute’s founders. As a borough of Greater New York, that vision lost its rationale and the Brooklyn Museum became an outpost, albeit an important one, in the dissemination of culture in America’s great metropolis.

Whether or not consolidation was detrimental to Brooklyn cultural horizons depends on one’s perspective. The inability of Brooklyn’s elite to expand the Brooklyn Museum or create a Brooklyn University must be placed in the context of the benefits that consolidation brought to the borough. A City College branch became Brooklyn College, providing public higher education to tens of thousands of Brooklynites. The creation of Greater New York’s subway system made Manhattan’s museums, colleges, and concert halls more accessible to the

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<sup>83</sup>Robert H. Wiebe *The Search for Order 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967) p. 44.

**borough's population. Brooklynites lost an unattainable vision, while gaining access to Manhattan institutions and the unique and important cultural nexus created by the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences.**

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Consolidation: An Unfulfilled Agenda?**

In the second half of the nineteenth century boosters, reformers, and business interests formed coalitions to expand the boundaries of cities, creating room for population growth and economic development. Consolidation was an important tool for urban development which reformers coupled with the progressive ideals of planning to ameliorate pressing social problems and rationalize the organization of urban areas. New York's was the largest and most ambitious of these amalgamations. By enveloping its neighboring cities and farms, New York had to make sense of a diverse collection of peoples and governments and meld them together into a single city.

When the citizens of what would become Greater New York debated whether to merge into a single municipality, the Brooklyn Consolidation League and the Greater New York Consolidation Commission made brash claims about what a larger city would accomplish in Brooklyn. These included improved transit and schools, lower taxes, a clean reliable water supply, better run government and a cultural renaissance for the entire city. Looking back, some of Brooklyn's contemporary loyalists have replaced the Consolidation League's sometimes overly optimistic view of consolidation with a counterfactual gloom, depicting consolidation as the mistake of 1898. Typical of this view is journalist John Tierney's article, "Brooklyn Could Have Been A Contender," published in the *New York Times Magazine* on the centennial of the consolidation of Greater New York. Tierney supposes that "The subway system, constructed mainly by private transit companies in Brooklyn and Manhattan, could

have been built without merging the cities, perhaps with coordination by a regional agency,” ignoring the problems Brooklyn had financing any major projects in 1898 or opposition in Manhattan to investing money in their rival city. Blaming consolidation for Brooklyn’s decline in the post World War II era is also a convenient way of ignoring the economic and social changes that most large cities faced: de-industrialization, suburban flight, and the migration of hundreds of thousands of poor migrants and immigrants. Tierney also asserts that an independent Brooklyn with over two million people would avoid the development of large unresponsive bureaucracies or that state agencies, like the one he proposed for Brooklyn-New York transit, would not develop similar problems. It is arguable whether consolidation can be blamed for policies engineered by a mixture of policies created by city, state and federal governments and agencies such as the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority and the Port Authority.

Instead of engaging in counterfactual arguments, the effects of consolidation should be analyzed based on its first three decades when they can be more easily traced. On the eve of consolidation, Brooklyn’s infrastructure was unable to meet the needs of its growing population. Inadequate space forced Brooklyn to turn away students from its schools. Overcrowded trains took commuters over the Brooklyn Bridge and dumped them into Manhattan’s Park Row to continue their journey. Brooklyn’s citizens and businesses strained the city’s water supply to its limits, but its government was unable to raise revenue to increase supply or gain access to new water sources in Suffolk County. The Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences opened the first wing of its museum that year without any idea of where money would come from for future

additions.

After World War I consolidation had transformed the borough. Brooklynites gained access to the Catskills water supply in 1917 and no longer worried about contaminated water and periodic shortages. The borough's development could proceed without concerns of inadequate water pressure, foul tasting water and the danger of uncontrollable fires. The spokes of the transit system made Manhattan accessible to almost all of Brooklyn in the 1920s, ending the illogical and unplanned and insufficient transit system that plagued Brooklyn before 1898. Subways and elevated trains could carry the borough's growing population from its most distant sections to Brooklyn's downtown and into Manhattan's business districts. Population densities in Brooklyn declined as access to its undeveloped areas increased and tenement house reform and zoning prevented repetition of earlier housing patterns. Zoning raised issues of class segregation, but it did create a stock of affordable and better constructed housing.

The loss of local control has a more ambiguous legacy in the areas of education and culture. Consolidation enriched Brooklyn's education system through the construction of more schools, increased teacher salaries and training, and a modernized school curriculum. Brooklynites could lament the creation of a centralized educational system that allowed minimal local input, but even critics of the new system could not deny the flaws and corruption inherent in Brooklyn's local committees and their lack of oversight and accountability.

The fate of BIAS and the Brooklyn Museum showed how the interests of the larger city were at odds with those of Brooklyn's elite. By the time of consolidation Manhattan's immense

wealth had already established it as the center of culture in the region and the country.

Consolidation initially helped Brooklyn gain a cultural foothold through increased investment in BIAS's different units, but it eventually accelerated the forces that centered high culture in Manhattan. Brooklyn philanthropists, who lacked the wealth to similarly support institutions in their own borough, were also attracted to the museums and performing arts institutions of Manhattan and many directed their resources across the East River. Brooklyn's consolation was that its residents could partake of the cultural riches of Manhattan and claim a part of it through their identity with Greater New York.

The sum total of these changes was a more logical organization and integration of a disjointed region. Consolidation was not a panacea for all the problems of Greater New York and Brooklyn or even for those its boosters claimed it would address. Nonetheless consolidation made Brooklyn a more prosperous and desirable place to live for a diversity of classes, relative to other opportunities available at that time.

### **Comparative Consolidations**

The consolidation of Greater New York was unique in its scope. New York was the largest and most important American city, and the total population of the areas it annexed were larger than the city of Philadelphia, the nation's third largest city at the time. Despite Brooklyn's larger size, its needs and outcomes were similar to other satellite cities annexed by a larger neighbor. These mergers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century included: Cleveland/Ohio City, Philadelphia and its suburbs across the Schuylkill River, Portland and East Portland and Albina, and Boston and Charlestown. These suburbs/cities, like Brooklyn,

wanted not only the improved services promised by the central city, but the end of the divisions created by the rivers dividing them from their larger neighbor.<sup>1</sup>

In each case consolidation led to an increase in the number of bridges or ferries connecting the primary city and its satellites. Ohio City saw rapid improvement in its access to Cleveland when the two cities became one in 1854. The new metropolis quickly built two new bridges across the Cuyahoga River. Following the Civil War in 1872 construction began on a viaduct over the valley separating the two districts. The Superior Viaduct, completed in 1878, became a symbol of "a United Cleveland."<sup>2</sup>

Philadelphia annexed all of Philadelphia County in 1854, but the Panic of 1857 and the Civil War delayed the construction of bridges across the Schuylkill River. As the war ended, Philadelphia renewed efforts to connect its suburbs, spending six million dollars to construct five bridges between 1864 and 1877. Portland followed this pattern after the consolidation of 1891, quickly purchasing the ferries and bridges over the Willamette River. The new city, as boosters promised during the consolidation campaign, increased communication between the communities by eliminating tolls on the ferries and replacing one of the bridges. Boston gained support for its annexation of Charlestown in 1874 by promising a new bridge across the Charles River. The Warren Street Bridge, completed in 1883, made good on that promise and was followed by the Charlestown Bridge in 1899.

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<sup>1</sup>National Municipal League Committee on Metropolitan Government *The Government of Metropolitan Areas in the United States*, p. 120-122.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

Like Brooklyn, other outlying areas accepted consolidation based on their inclusion in the central city's new water system. Chicago invested resources in a municipal water supply in the 1880s and later expanded its supply to provide additional water for a larger population. Residents in Chicago's suburbs supported annexation in 1889 to gain access to the city's water system. Philadelphia combined its own water system with those of its annexed districts in 1854 and added over 336,000 feet of water pipes between 1855 and 1859 primarily to its outlying districts. The City of Allegheny received immediate benefits from its incorporation into Pittsburgh in 1907 when it began to receive water from a filtration plant completed by Pittsburgh in 1900.<sup>3</sup>

Along the banks of the Cuyahoga, a more symbiotic relationship developed. Cleveland had the financial resources to build a new water supply, but Cleveland's side of Lake Erie received the polluted and undrinkable waters of the Cuyahoga. Ohio City's waters were cleaner and could be used to supply water. The two cities combined their complementary resources in 1854, creating benefits for both. Los Angeles effected a similar marriage to the San Fernando Valley in 1915, through its control of the Owens River Valley watershed. The immense new water system went through the Valley and needed new customers. Annexation and land speculation followed, transforming the desert valley into an enclave of small farmers and suburbanites.<sup>4</sup>

Consolidation led to transit improvements in other annexed districts. Chicago's new

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<sup>3</sup>*Ibid*, p. 105-110.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid*.

areas immediately benefitted when they came under the city's control in 1889. The city's elevated railroad companies, which were about to begin construction, had charters which allowed them to build rail lines only within city limits. The enlargement of the city's borders allowed companies to extend their tracks out to new neighborhoods, giving the city's new residents a five cent fare into the heart of Chicago. In Cleveland the annexation of the West Park territory in the 1920s led to an increase of streetcar service and a harmonization of the streetcar fares at the lower city rate. The inclusion of Hyde Park into Boston in 1911 led to the elimination of the suburb's two fare zone, allowing its residents to commute to the business district at half the cost.<sup>5</sup>

The consolidation of Greater New York presented larger hurdles. Its population was larger, the East River was wider and the infrastructure necessary to complete the task even greater. The integration of the Bronx was the simplest. The Southeast Bronx had been part of New York since 1873 and only the narrow Harlem River separated it from Manhattan. Elevated trains began traveling to the Bronx in the 1880s and New York had made plans to extend its subways into the borough prior to consolidation. Next to follow was Brooklyn, Manhattan's most populous neighbor, which presented more daunting problems. In other cities consolidation could be considered a success by extending trolley lines and building a few bridges. Brooklyn required more expensive bridges and tunnels to connect it to Manhattan and its larger population needed more schools than any other borough in Greater New York or

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<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.* p. 124-126

annexed area in the country.

To accomplish this, consolidation needed to be more than a way to redistribute resources, but a tool to improve the quality of government and its ability to plan. Government leaders needed an overarching vision for consolidation to effectively plan the city. The need for infrastructure forced both Tammany and reform governments to look beyond immediate concerns to plan for the future of the entire city. Mayor George B. McClellan's Tammany administration organized the legislation and financing for the city's Catskills water supply. The reform administrations of William Jay Gaynor and John Purroy Mitchel used the borrowing powers and the planning capabilities of Greater New York to negotiate the Dual Contracts and pass zoning legislation to plan the development of the city.

A different type of consolidation occurred after World War II, under the leadership of Robert Moses that went beyond the boundaries of Greater New York. Like Andrew H. Green before him, Moses believed a multiplicity of governments was contrary to the goals of regional planning. The consolidation of 1898 had eliminated local governments that stood in the way of development in the early twentieth century, but the enlarged metropolitan region after World War II had "1,400 cities, boroughs, counties, townships, villages, sewer districts, fire districts, police districts, water districts in the New York metropolitan area."<sup>6</sup>

In contrast to the consolidation of Greater New York, which retained a relatively democratic form of government, Moses created public authorities with the financial and political

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<sup>6</sup>Robert A. Caro *The Power Broker Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974) p. 631-636.

assets to overstep the authority of politicians and local governments. Moses' power and authoritarian methods were effective at "getting things done," but showed that consolidation could be a two edged sword. Enlarging the size of a city can make it easier to build infrastructure or reform and restructure government. At the same time centralized planning can force changes on often unwilling communities, theoretically in the name of a greater good. The planning of transportation through densely populated Brooklyn became more complex and problematic in the 1940s and 50s. Unlike the subways built before World War II, the automobile age spurred the construction of large highways that divided and demolished neighborhoods instead of attracting development. Robert Moses would drive Brooklyn's most notorious highway, the Gowanus Expressway, through some of the borough's most densely populated neighborhoods in 1941. His vast highway and urban renewal projects would displace thousands of residents, or house them in massive and alienating public housing projects.<sup>7</sup>

Robert Caro, Moses's biographer, denounced the destruction wrought by these and the other expressways of New York City and its environs. Jane Jacobs in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* challenged Moses' vision with an alternative that viewed neighborhoods as organic entities that did not benefit from planners' attempts to impose their visions on existing communities. Using her Greenwich Village neighborhood as a template,

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<sup>7</sup>*Ibid*, p. 520-525. p. 961-976. Lawrence Orton, a long time member of the City Planning Commission, estimated that Moses' slum clearance and highway programs displaced 170,000 people over a seven year period.

Jacobs lauded the strength of community members to improve and shape their environs and scathingly attacked top-down urban planners as ignorant of how a city functioned. According to Jacobs, urbanity could not be planned, but grew out of existing resources in communities. She contrasted her vision with the failure of New York's public housing and its large highway projects.<sup>8</sup>

Jacobs made trenchant criticisms of Moses and the policies of American post-war urban planners, but a neighborhood is also part of a larger entity whose future cannot be divorced from the needs of the whole. The power to plan should be understood as a means not a goal, and its outcomes are often a function of the prevailing ideas of the time, and the economic and political actors who shape them. In the first part of the twentieth century consolidation created the infrastructure that integrated the city and gave outer borough residents the means to travel to Manhattan, educate their children and generally improve their quality of life. After World War II planning perspectives changed in New York and the nation. Brooklyn, like other cities, would be ringed with expressways and parkways. Its poorer neighborhoods, including Red Hook and Brownsville, became sites for public housing that quickly became racially segregated.

The prospects for consolidation waned in the early twentieth century, reducing the possibility for effective urban planning. Kenneth T. Jackson argued in *Crabgrass Frontier The Suburbanization of the United States*, that this occurred, especially in northern and mid-

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<sup>8</sup>See Jane Jacobs *The Death and Life of American Cities*. (New York: Random House, 1961).

western cities, for three reasons: “(1) sharper racial, ethnic and class distinctions, (2) new laws that made incorporation easy and annexation unworkable, and (3) improved suburban services.” As cities went into decline, suburbanites walled off their communities and dissociated themselves from the city and its problems. The village government became a tool to enforce racial and class exclusivity, while county government or special service districts provided the municipal services that cities used to provide. In the nineteenth century cities were symbols of progress and civilization and expanded their boundaries to control and develop their hinterlands. By the mid-twentieth century, the middle class and the affluent were fleeing the city’s borders leaving behind a poorer and racially stigmatized population.<sup>9</sup>

Brooklyn suffered fates similar to other cities, but it was not consolidation that caused Brooklyn’s decline. Other satellite cities that remained independent experienced problems similar to Brooklyn including Oakland, California, and Camden, Newark, and Jersey City, New Jersey and East Saint Louis, Illinois. These cities and most other American cities declined in population after World War II. By failing to expand their boundaries, as New York did in 1898, declining cities were unable to benefit from the prosperity that existed in suburbs outside their jurisdictions. The municipal boundary between affluent Cherry Hill and Camden meant that the wealthy suburb bore little responsibility for the fate of its poorer neighbor. Bronxville, New York borders the borough of the Bronx, but does not have to share resources or plan its

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<sup>9</sup>Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, p. 150.

community in regard to the needs of its larger neighbor.<sup>10</sup>

The need for consolidation has not diminished since the early twentieth century, only the balance of power has shifted. When consolidation was commonplace, the central city was the producer of wealth that could finance the needs of the region. The creation of Greater New York allowed Brooklyn to develop, expand its population and meet many of the goals set by its boosters. After World War II suburbs, benefitting from state and federal subsidies grew rapidly, outpacing the economic and population growth of their urban neighbors. Cities did not generally benefit from regional revenue sharing, and state and federal governments planned regions by directing resources towards suburban interests.<sup>11</sup>

Consolidation is politically difficult in most metropolitan areas, but the idea has not lost its salience. In the late twentieth century the revenue sharing and planning potential of consolidation have taken on new forms. *Metropolitica A Regional Agenda for Community and Stability*, by former Minnesota state legislator Myron Orfield, develops an alternate formula for regional government. Based on his own experiences, Orfield calls for an alliance between the central cities and inner ring suburbs that would redistribute resources to those parts

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<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.* p. 151-156. See Daniel Lazare "Collapse of a City: Growth and Decay of Camden, NJ" *Dissent* (Spring, 1991) for analysis and description of satellite city cut politically separated from Philadelphia, the dominant city, and hemmed in by its affluent suburbs.

<sup>11</sup>Consolidation and annexation after World War II was successful in many of the rapidly growing cities of the southwest. Cities like Houston, Phoenix, and Albuquerque lacked well developed suburbs to contest their expansion, making it possible to expand their boundaries to accommodate rapid urban growth in their regions. See Michael H. Ebner "Re-Reading Suburban America: Urban Population Deconcentration, 1810-1980" *American Quarterly*, Volume 37, Issue 3 (1985), 368-381.

of the region most in need. With the power to override local zoning and control transportation policy, a new regional government can develop affordable housing in the more rapidly growing outer ring suburbs to keep people's homes closer to their employment and end state subsidies for the expansion of sewers and highways to encourage development within and closer to the central cities. The new rationale for regional government seeks to make development ecologically sustainable and address the race and class divisions that plague American cities.

Orfield does not address the consolidation of cities a century ago, but his solution to planning and resource distribution issues are similar. He and other advocates of regional governments see planning as a tool to allow all parts of the metropolitan region to benefit from the growing prosperity on its fringes. Their success in expanding the power of the Twin Cities region's Metropolitan Council provides a contemporary roadmap to addressing the racial and economic polarization of urban areas and carrying on the ideas of consolidation in a new form.<sup>12</sup>

The New York metropolitan area needs to be organized along similar lines today, a region which is larger and more divided than Greater New York was a century ago. The hinterlands of 1898 were the outer boroughs of Greater New York. Now they extend into Putnam, Dutchess and Orange Counties north of the city, southwestern Connecticut, Suffolk County on Long Island and into the suburbs and exurbs of New Jersey to the west. The

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<sup>12</sup>See Myron Orfield *Metropolitica A Regional Agenda for Community and Stability* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press and Cambridge: The Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 1997).

metropolitan area is larger, but the Regional Plan Association's call for coordination closely echos the views of Andrew H. Green.

The Region is composed of 20 million people living in 13,000 square miles governed by over 2,000 units of government, including counties, cities, towns, service districts and authorities. These political entities are funded primarily through the property tax, and the majority of them control their own budgets independently. The result is fiscal imbalance, inefficient duplication of services, degradation of natural resources, cumbersome land use regulatory processes and land use decisions which create sprawl and undermine both our economic performance and our quality of life. Our few regional institutions such as the MTA and the Port Authority are under attack from competitive political jurisdictions which perceive themselves ill-served and short-changed.<sup>13</sup>

Many of the challenges are the same. Water resources remain a pressing problem throughout the region, especially for Long Island which seeks access to New York's water supply.

Housing the poor remains a problem, but planners must also confront issues of low density suburban sprawl and economic and ecological sustainability. A hundred years ago Brooklyn needed seamless transportation into Manhattan. With the dispersal of population and employment throughout the entire region, seamless mass transportation must be extended on a much broader basis. These new priorities have been addressed by organizations like the Regional Plan Association and the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, which have long advocated coordinated responses to these problems.

Like the consolidationists of a century ago, today's planners do not possess unlimited resources or perfect vision. Planners must address the needs of the whole without ignoring the needs of local communities. Consolidation did not make Brooklyn a shining city on a hill or

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<sup>13</sup>Regional Plan Association website: Governance. See <http://www.rpa.org/governance> (Online: April 25, 2002).

resolve all the economic and social problems that its residents have endured in the last century.

Central authorities have and will continue to make poor decisions. Nonetheless consolidation brought the metropolis as it existed in the first half of the twentieth century under the control of a single government that addressed many of the problems faced by Brooklyn and Greater New York in a period of unprecedented population and economic growth.

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