Past Matters
Heritage and Planning History—Case Studies from the Pacific Rim

Edited by

Caroline Miller and Michael Roche

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Caroline Miller
Michael Roche
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

CAROLINE MILLER AND MICHAEL ROCHE

For almost two decades an ever expanding group of Australian and New Zealand urban and planning historians have met at a biannual conference that has done much to advance and support the development of both disciplines. The genesis of the chapters in this volume, were papers presented at the Eighth Planning History/Urban History Conference held at Massey University’s Wellington campus, New Zealand in 2006. Those papers variously addressed the theme of ‘Past Matters’, focusing on the cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions of city life, which provide important inputs to heritage identification and management. It is a testament to the growth of this group that the conference now attracts papers from across the Pacific Rim. One of the strengths of the conference that flows on to this book is the range of participants, both academics and practitioners, that it attracts from history, planning, architecture, and heritage management. Consequently the chapters in this book will appeal to a wide spectrum of readers and assist both researchers and practitioners.

The papers selected for revision and expansion as chapters, engage with the history and heritage aspects of the Conference’s theme, and in so doing bring together novel ‘New World’ perspectives grounded on Australia and New Zealand experiences but reaching out to include other examples from the wider Pacific Rim. The resultant chapters can be grouped into three sub-themes. The first traces the almost inevitable transfer, in the late 19th and early 20th century, of the new town planning ideas and models, from Great Britain and USA to Australia, New Zealand and beyond where they were adopted and/or adapted. Ultimately this process of adoption and/or adaptation helped to shape and give meaning to the urban fabric of both countries.

The second sub-theme considers ways in which the built environment has been celebrated and contested by those who sought to use it to make a statement about the perceived triumphs of their society. Unremarkably, such attempts generated alternative interpretations of that history or triumph and with it
inevitable and often irreconcilable disputes. The relative immediacy of European settlement in Australia and New Zealand also ensures such debates can and do take on a significance that they might not demonstrate in a different milieu.

The third theme looks at the intersection of memory, housing, and heritage. Where we live for many people is likely to be the part of the urban built environment and these surrounding to which we frequently have the greatest attachment are likely to contribute substantially to our concepts of place. However, it is also the part of the built environment to which individuals are most highly sensitised about change especially as it is expected to deliver the greatest utility and the highest levels of amenity. Thus there is almost an endless opportunity for conflict and debate in this arena. The three sub-themes are integrally related and each adds to the understanding of the other. The chapters explore the creation, celebration, and contestation of urban contexts. The two final chapters return to questions of valuing and protecting the urban heritage.

A number of contributors have adopted a case study approach with the examples chosen spanning from Western Australia to Japan and to Canada. This Pacific Rim coverage gives the reader an appreciation of how planning has manifest itself within the broader region and how in particular it has impacted on the historically highly urbanised countries of Australia and New Zealand. These high levels of urbanisation in both countries, since European settlement, produced a complex urban fabric and the need to address the challenges of suburbanisation (Hamnett and Freestone 2000).

Those who are located closer to the Antarctic than Europe, are often amused that when a book or television drama wishes to dispense with a character, they inevitably send him or her to Australia or New Zealand. An exit to the other side of the world, once the most distant part of the far flung British Empire can simultaneously suggest similarity and difference. This juxta-positioning of similarity and difference lies at the heart of any understanding of the transfer of planning ideas and models across time and space. Planning and urban design development ideas have long been diffused, often surprisingly quickly, from the metropolitan core to the periphery. This is no better illustrated than in the adoption of City Beautiful concepts in New Zealand and Australia in the early 20th century when both countries, not withstanding rural export dependent economies, were also highly urbanised. Miller revisits the origins and spread of the City Beautiful and looks for signs of its imprint in New Zealand. Her work points to the central role of beautifying societies, and the specific New Zealand adaptations of this American planning ideal.

Freestone also considers the City Beautiful in Australia as it related to the creation of public space in Brisbane and Perth, both cities which due to their later development were in a position to utilise such ideas. He highlights the
tension between aesthetic and utilitarian values in the planning of Forrest Place in Perth and Anzac Square in Brisbane, both developed as civic squares. The case studies juxtapose the government building focus of Forrest Place with the state war memorial function of Anzac Place. Not unsurprisingly this created compromises and concessions in design and execution. Freestone postulates that the garden city dimension of both the civic squares has been somewhat lost sight of, leading him to pose some wider questions about public space, city development and heritage in urban Australia.

Whereas the chapters by Miller and Freestone draw out the successes and limitations of the transfer of Anglo-American planning concepts and models to New Zealand and Australia, Petrow moves beyond design to the organisational form of public utility development in Hobart. At a time when surviving tramways system are heritage attractions in a number of cities, and indeed Christchurch in New Zealand has actually reconstructed a small loop line for tourists with an ‘authentic’ tram, it is useful to ponder the philosophical and day-to-day political debates that attended the development of city infrastructure in the second half of the 19th century. Of particularly interest in the manner in which some of the issues Petrow discusses, based on a meticulous search of newspaper and official documents, have resurfaced in more recent times in the context of road user charges and public-private partnerships. The past may not provide clear guidance for present day action but it does serve as reminder that some of today’s debates are not as novel as may be believed.

In contrast Boseman’s chapter concentrates on the much more recent past, in her focus on planned development on the fringes of Adelaide in the period from the 1980s to early 21st century. This development was a pioneering joint venture between private interests and the State Government, and was intended to create a better suburban environment and act as a template for other developments. In short it was urban design by demonstration rather than regulation and was underpinned by the idea that ‘good’ communities could be created by ‘good’ urban design. Informed by Foucault’s ideas Boseman seeks to make clear the means by which particular ideas of community have been contested. While Golden Grove is lauded as having created a successful community through design, in reality she suggests it ‘succeeds’ by privileging chosen socio-economic groups while excluding, marginalizing or denying others.

Gordon and Osborne (2004, 618) are able to identify and discuss Canadian identity through a war memorial and square, which is ‘a national place in the City Beautiful style’. Our examples are not so spatially or temporally focussed but include both war memorials and civic squares from the early and late 20th century. War memorials have been notably studied in detail in Australia by Ken Inglis (2005) and in New Zealand by Chris MacLean and Jock Phillips (1990). Both focus on the initial conditions that gave rise to memorialisation, the form
of the memorials and other controversies attached to their construction as well as the place that they were seen to occupy in a post war ANZAC world. Stephens’ chapter adds an architect’s eye to these discussions by focussing on a single and modest local, rather than singularly important memorial in Western Australia, following it through the intervening decades. This attention to the life history of the Canning War memorial introduces a new perspective to the literature as he concentrates, not so much on the planning and erection of the memorial, but on its subsequent place in the community and how it remains as a visible means of connecting with a past era.

The street is very much a ‘taken for granted’ element of the built environment. Regulation to remove obstruction, to prevent vending, and to maintain speech via movement through the streets has similarly been seen not to be without problems (e.g. Ehrenfeucht and Loukaitou-siders 2007). Focussing largely, but not exclusively, on the inter-war period in New Zealand, as well as moving from Auckland, the largest city, to smaller provincial centres, Matt Henry draws on ideas from cultural studies to show how streets are much more than empty spaces between buildings. Consequently, he demonstrates how movement, access, and what may be uttered on streets has been highly politicised, even when coated in a veneer of liberal sentiment.

Melbourne has long attracted attention from urban historians given its relative size and early foundation (e.g. Newnham 1956; Davison 1979). Present day Melbourne, reflecting some present day planning and urban preoccupations, represents itself as an eminently liveable city. Some dimensions of this ‘liveability’ are probed by de Jong using the contrasting examples of ‘natural’ space such as the Yarra River, and Birrarung Marr, a riverside park as well as more overt efforts at creating a symbolic civic space, in the form of Federation Square.

Most of the chapters in this collection have an urban focus. As a reminder that the urban can also be shaped by the broader political and wider geopolitical circumstances of a time, Amati and Parker offer a novel interpretation of the green belt in Japan. Planning approaches using green belts to contain and shape urban expansion were well understood in the post World War II world in Britain and were most famously employed in the planning for London. In Japan, its utilisation, or more properly its adaptation, was shaped by rural power blocs and the designs and ambitions of the post-war US occupation administration.

Housing is a major component of the urban environment. Arguably housing, representing shelter in the urban context, is in its most basic form an essential human need, though it can easily become a want. In any case housing policy studies, as opposed to urban history have not always made effective use of historical perspectives (Jacobs 2001). Against this backdrop, Ryan Walker examines the genesis of a public housing programme in Canada. A distinctive
and central feature of his account is its focus is on the emergence of indigenous housing programmes across Canada in the mid 1980s as part of the moves toward greater self-government by indigenous Canadians. Drawing strongly on oral testimony his chapter explores the challenges faced by native housing associations such as the Kinew Housing Incorporation, as they struggled to achieve both better housing and community outcomes for their people. This chapter is a valuable addition in making indigenous urban history, as Sandercock (1998) would suggest, more visible and reflective of all group’s experience of the urban environment.

The indigenous past and present in the urban environment has, as Walker shows until recently, tended to be marginalized in mainstream accounts of a city’s development (for New Zealand see Lees and Berg, 1995). Even where the new city rises on the foundations of older settlement, these origins are easily overlooked, particularly if they are not embodied in a physical form. Greenop and Memmott through a case study of Brisbane, Queensland’s state capital, seek to recover something of the district’s pre-urban aboriginal past, particularly in terms of significant places. The also suggest that Aboriginal pressure restricted and shaped the early expansion of the Brisbane, as well as pointing to some present day features (Boundary Street) that recall this period. Their discussion is not centred solely on an Aboriginal past but pays considerable attention to the ongoing Aboriginal presence in the city; looking in particular at older places whose significance has been reinforced and others that have become important in the twentieth century. Their work very much reflects the sense of place which is derived from associations harking back to the Dreamtime, a concept of place which is consciously rejected in assimilationist models. Nevertheless, such concepts of place are an integral part of indigenous culture and their rejection as Greenop and Memmott observe, threatens the legitimacy of the beneficiaries of the colonial past.

Grand public buildings of national significance have typically attracted early attention in any discussion of heritage values, albeit that some of the sites and episodes that they celebrate may not be shared by all communities within that country. Such elements of tension, often preserving symbols and site of conquest and oppression, are much more potent in the recently settled and largely colonial societies of the Pacific Rim (e.g. Frost 2005). Heritage, however, also has its less contested domestic face in the form of the everyday residential architecture of the 20th century. In this arena there may simultaneously be a desire to protect an attractive part of the urban fabric and a perceived need to better use increasingly scarce, developed urban land. Doedhar considers local heritage values of this sort within a council area in Sydney, Australia’s largest and still growing city. Employing non market valuation techniques, she produces an estimate of the economic benefits, to the
community, of an improved heritage programme. In so doing she demonstrates how a rigorous economic analysis can assist in producing the type of justification that is now often essential in any attempt for provide protection to larger scale heritage areas.

This volume opens with chapters dealing with the City Beautiful in New Zealand. The City Beautiful movement, diverse as its forms were, was a major piece of ‘progressive thinking’ that emerged as town planning was coalescing into a profession. At its height and in its purest forms, it was of a scale that overshadowed the more residentially focused ‘garden city’. However, both movements rapidly moved to more manageable and achievable scales with some of the greatest triumphs of the garden city movement being demonstrated by its companion concept of the garden suburb. Thus is it appropriate that this volume closes with an analysis of the application of a heritage policy to Colonel Light Gardens, a model garden suburb built in Adelaide, South Australia in 1917. Garnaut makes the point that the heritage significance of Colonel Light Gardens lies less in the architectural values of particular houses, than in the plan and design elements of the scheme. As such in tandem with Deodhar’s chapter it offers useful insights into the practicalities of instituting measures to protect urban heritage and history, the dominant themes of this volume.

While the themes may be neatly tied together through the chapters, the ambiguities of the title ‘Past Matters’ as it relates to planning and heritage were recognised from the outset. A variety of questions spring to mind—the past matters for whom, which of a number of potentially contested pasts matter, and why should they matter, are just a few? Some of these issues have a particular bite in the broader Asia Pacific region where former white settler colonies are beginning to appreciate that some of the old certainties need to be challenged. Such appreciation is often forced rather than voluntary, giving an uncomfortable edge to both the process of recognition and to the outcomes. Communities in New Zealand, Australia and to a lesser degree, Canada, live on a daily basis with the conflicts, often place and land based, and uncertainties created as an indigenous people such a Maori in New Zealand, rigorously and consistently assert their right to be both heard and seen. In time this will inevitably alter our sense of what and who’s past matters, a process which we hope in some small way this book will contribute. There is also desire to share some of the challenges of thinking more expansively about the past, as it survives in the present in terms of both artefacts and practices, with a wider audience of Anglo American readers, in the hope that something of our local experiences, can in a small way start to chip away at the hegemony of metropolitan theory.
References


CHAPTER TWO
THE CITY BEAUTIFUL IN NEW ZEALAND: MYTH OR REALITY?
C. L. MILLER

For most of the developed or western world the first two decades of the 20th century seemed to offer unparalleled opportunities for social and economic advancement. This, combined with an optimism derived from the arrival of a new century, created the potential for a substantial step forward in what at the time would have been unashamedly labelled as ‘progress’. For the United States, Australia and to some degree New Zealand the 1890s had been a difficult decade marked by economic downturns that limited the potential for growth and development. For a small country such as New Zealand, dependent as it was on farm based exports, economic hardship was always just around the corner. Any such downturn, moreover, could be guaranteed to have wide effect in a country with only a developing economy. New Zealand was one of Britain’s last systematically founded colonies with settlement, which would bring conflict with Maori, the existing inhabitants, officially commencing in 1840. This left the country by 1900 with the basics of transport and other infrastructure and a modest population of 816,000 which would only rise to 1.4 million by 1926 (New Zealand Yearbook 1957).

However, from the rather unpromising years of the 1890s there emerged, in the United States and Britain primarily, but also in Australia, a plethora of movements and organisations which had the sole aim of improving life in the city. For the 20th century was the century when urban living, with all its complexities and contradictions, saw its fullest flowering. It was a period when there seemed to be a desire, in many countries, to make cities more than centres of economic activity and instead to make them the centres of culture, sophistication and beauty which they had always had the potential to be. For countries in the New World, this desire seemed all the more achievable given that most were still in the city building phase rather than the city renewal stage of the Old World. From this enthusiasm to make the city a better place, emerged the City Beautiful movement. Commencing in the United States where it
The City Beautiful movement had its roots firmly in the cities of the United States. It was not a long lived movement, being influential essentially from 1897 to about 1910 when it was overtaken by the more practically focused City Functional movement. One of the two authorities on the City Beautiful movement in the United States, William Wilson, characterises the movement as being derived from 'a cultural agenda, a middle class environmentalism, and aesthetics expressed as beauty, order, system and harmony' (Wilson 1989, 1). For the other authority, Jon Peterson, the City Beautiful was more than 'an episode in the history of architectural taste and urban design' (Peterson 2003, 98), rather it was part of a more encompassing civic awakening 'centred on an ideal of service and hopes to realize the public good’ it was ‘also expressed a new found optimism that the nation and its cities might be remade’ (Peterson 2003, 101). Thus, while much of the City Beautiful movement’s achievements were in architectural or the wider urban design areas, it was essentially a planning movement, combining as it did, design, social concerns, and a belief that the physical environment could have a major impact on the lives and nature of the urban dweller. It was also a movement which was based on collective action by individuals to achieve some greater good for the community, using practical solutions. As Wilson observes this was not a revolutionary movement but was rather a response by the liberal-capitalist middle classes to the perceived shortcomings of the city. The City Beautiful solution involved ‘transforming the city into a beautiful, rationalized entity’ which would be achieved ‘within the existing social, political, and economic arrangements’ (Wilson 1998, 78). If this also swept away the political corruption that had dogged the 1890s, then it could be regarded as a beneficial side effect.

The ideology or philosophy of the City Beautiful movement was never promulgated in a comprehensive manner. There is no equivalent of that single ‘touchstone’ of the Garden City movement, Ebenezer Howard’s *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* (Howard 1901); rather it is largely derived from the varied writings of its proponents and from their actions. Of the City Beautiful proponents one of the most influential was Charles Mulford Robinson. His book *The Improvement of Towns and Cities* of 1901 is regarded as one of the most successful works in promoting City Beautiful ideas. Central to the movement
was a concept of beauty which was not specifically defined but appeared to involve harmony, symmetry, and an appropriateness of scale. It was, however, a practical concept of beauty or what Robert Freestone, writing of the Australian City Beautiful movement calls ‘beautility’—‘reform that was useful as well as beautiful’ (Freestone 2000, 31). Equally the civic improvements which expressed this concept of beauty would be achieved not through piecemeal improvements but rather through a comprehensive plan that ‘expressed everybody’s dream—that is to say, the civic or public interest as opposed to the ethnic, neighbourhood or vested interest’ (Peterson 2003, 130). Wilson, more pragmatically defines the movement by its characteristics. He identified a number of criteria, which can be summarized as:

- The City Beautiful was a solution to urban ills and would transform the city into a better and more beautiful entity.
- The movement would recognise and correct the aesthetic and functional shortcomings of the city.
- The movement would involve an environmentalist concept of the ameliorative power of natural beauty.
- Beauty and utility had to be synthesized to create an economically better city.
- Civic efficiency could be achieved by better design.
- Better urban solutions require the use of expertise.
- The movement’s ideologues recognised class divisions and the potential for class unrest arising from it.
- Europe was regarded as the source of design and aesthetic excellence.
- The movement both welcomed and admired the city (Wilson 1998, 78-86).

Equally, despite the City Beautiful’s lofty aims, its grass roots movement ‘commonly pursued piecemeal programmes, sometimes favouring big projects, but often stressing small feasible goals’ (Peterson 1996, 41). It was, thus, largely a pragmatic movement that adapted itself to place and circumstance. The publication of Mulford’s The Improvement of Towns and Cities, which was subtitled ‘The Practical Basis of Aesthetics’ won widespread approval and helped to make Robinson one of the most prominent of the City Beautiful leaders. In 1901 a national City Beautiful organisation emerged in the form of the National League for Civic Improvement, later renamed the American League for Civic Improvement, with Robinson as secretary. The creation of a national organisation seemed to propel the movement and its ideas on to the broader canvas of comprehensive city planning. From 1900 to 1910 there emerged a wide range of civic design and redesign plans including McMillan’s plan for Washington and Burnham’s plans for San Francisco and Chicago. Cities such as New York, inspired by the movement, set up City Improvement
Commissions to upgrade their cities, and many smaller cities achieved their more modest goals. The movement was however relatively short lived and by 1910 it was being displaced by the more broadly based city planning movement. Its proponents had roundly criticised the City Beautiful adherents at the First National Conference on City Planning which was held in 1909. From that point onwards the movement slipped into an irreversible decline.

**Spreading the Word**

If the 20th century was the era in which city life came to prominence, then it was also the century where communications also markedly improved. Even New Zealand, stuck as it was at the very bottom of the world, could be relatively speedily connected to the rest of the world. Newspapers of the time carried up-to-date news from around the world and books and magazine sales thrived. This enhanced communication also provided a conduit for the transmission of planning ideas from one country to another. In the case of a colony ideas could be transmitted through the exercise of imperial powers as is explored by Robert Home (1997). This however was less likely with a self governing colony such as New Zealand. Of more relevance is the work of Stephen Ward (Ward 1997; 1999) who has comprehensively addressed the processes and mechanisms of diffusion of planning ideas and concepts. Ward observes that diffusion can take a number of forms, from uncritical borrowing through ‘good practice models’, to more complex forms of borrowing and adaptation to local conditions and concerns. From this he derives a simple typology of diffusional episodes based essentially on the power relationships between the ‘importing’ and ‘exporting’ nations (Ward 1999, 58).

Even for self-governing colonies such as Australia and New Zealand, Britain inevitably remained the primary exporter of new ideas and more importantly models of appropriate practice. Nevertheless, it was also true that these two countries, in a development sense, often had more in common with the United States than they did with the older and more developed urban cultures of Britain and Europe. This was well illustrated by the concern, approaching angst, to identify in New Zealand that leitmotif of early town planning movement, ‘the slum’. For without the slum, such a potent symbol of urban adversity, there may be no need for the cure in the form of town planning and its associated legislation. Achieving town planning legislation was a central concern for New Zealand’s town planning enthusiast from 1904 onward when the first legislative proposals emerged. While Charles Reade, an expatriate New Zealander, produced the well circulated pictures of slums in Auckland, the reality was something less. Dr Makgill the District Officer of Health for Auckland, the country’s largest city, reported that ‘slums did exist in scattered spots in
Auckland’ (Makgill 1911). Later, in the Report on the 1918 Influenza Epidemic, most of the deaths were put down to poor nursing and domestic practices rather than poor housing (Influenza Report 1919). But in short there were not huge tracts of slums in New Zealand that could justify or provoke a town planning response. If slums and large scale urban ills were not available to inspire civic improvement, then where did the motivation come from?

The influence of being a settler society, and as was the case of New Zealand, one of relatively new foundation, brought different perspectives and motivations. Both Australia and New Zealand shared with the United States a comparable history in the struggles to establish settlements and all had developed into largely urban based societies. By 1911 more New Zealanders lived in urban areas, albeit small in international terms, than in rural areas despite the economy remaining largely rural based. By 1926 64% of people lived in towns, though as Table 2-1 shows even the four main centres, of Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin, were relatively small, even by comparison with neighbouring Australia.

Tab. 2-1. A Comparison of the Populations of Selected Australasian Cities in 1921

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auckland</td>
<td>157,757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christchurch</td>
<td>118,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellington</td>
<td>121,961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunedin</td>
<td>72,255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanganui</td>
<td>26,388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>899,059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>766,465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>154,873</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: New Zealand Yearbook, 1926

Most towns and cities in New Zealand in fact remained small and many did not grow until after World War II. New Zealand was however reluctant to see itself as an urban society. As Miles Fairburn (1975) has observed the image New Zealanders have of themselves is as a rurally derived and rooted society. Thus, any movement that promoted or advocated the moral and physical benefits of open space and other environmentally derived concerns was likely to find a receptive audience in a society which saw its moral and physical health being derived from its ‘oneness’ with the land. The nation in turn had to be
safeguarded against the evils that marred the British Victorian city from which many had only recently departed, given settlement did not really accelerate until the late 1850s. Therefore both Australia and New Zealand appear to exhibit some characteristics which would make them open to the ideas prompted by the City Beautiful movement.

Australia is New Zealand’s closest neighbour, and movement between the two countries has been common for since the settlement of both began. Given this it is inevitable that the acceptance or enthusiasm for a concept in one country might reasonably be expected to be carried to the other. In Australia as Robert Freestone notes ‘improvers were clearly impressed and influenced by the efforts of the United States to come to grips with the problems of rapid urbanisation’ (Freestone 2000, 31). Unifying the concerns of the City Beautifiers into their concept of beautility, Australian adherents created the ‘the first coherent encapsulation of the enduring environmentalist values associated with the town planning movement’ (Freestone 2000, 31). It also helped to link the concept of city improvement to the improvement of the physical and moral health of the urban dweller. In Australia the urban improvers such as architect Sir John Sulman helped to promote City Beautiful ideas and they scored a major coup when a Royal Commission for the Improvement of Sydney and Its Suburbs was established in 1908, with the beautification of the city as part of its brief. The competition for the design of the new federal capital (Australia only became a federation in 1901—New Zealand was invited to join but politely declined) of Canberra, extended the influence of the movement. These large projects were complimented by an array of smaller projects as ‘the city beautiful movement seemed to best express the aspirations of urban reformers and progressive civic authorities’ (Freestone 2000 45). Thus in Australia there is clear evidence of the influence of the City Beautiful movement, which in Australia’s case appeared to have currency into the 1920s.

New Zealand and the City Beautiful—some ideological relationships

It is evident from the discussion above that New Zealand was, as a result of the history of its development alone, likely to be receptive to the aims of the City Beautiful movement. For Peterson the City Beautiful movement in the United States was characterised by three components, which are themselves reflective of the characteristics of the movement, identified by Wilson. These three components were:

1. An unshakable faith in social progress achieved in a linear fashion and marked by energetic advancement of the city.
2. A conviction that this progress would only be achieved through the
individual committing and working for the common good.

3. A belief that there was a rational discernable public interest that could be used by experts to ‘as part of a ‘science’ of applied social intelligence’ (Peterson, 2003, 142).

These components were expressed in the way the individual fulfilled his or her civic duties. Conjunctively they contributed to assist in transforming the city into a better physical and moral entity. The latter concern with the negative affects of the city on its dwellers, particularly the burgeoning working classes, was a common theme in the early planning movements. It is certainly a central element in the Garden city/suburb movement that was vigorously promoted in many corners of the British Empire. The Australasian Town Planning Tour of 1914, conducted by William Davidge and the ubiquitous Charles Reade, complete with lantern slides to illustrate the evils that town planning would cure, had visited every town and city of any size in both countries. Thus civic minded New Zealander’s would have been effectively ‘primed’ to be receptive to the ideas that flowed from the City Beautiful movement. New Zealand had, moreover, independently begun to develop a discourse on the issue of civic duty, which was often linked to the bigger questions of citizenship and imperial responsibilities.

New Zealanders were certainly sure that the city was a source of moral and physical decay. In 1900 a group of Wellington inner city residents wrote to the Wellington City Council to complain about the ‘unsatisfactory state of Haming Street’ which presented a ‘scene of open vice’ (Wellington City Council 1903). They were equally sure they knew the solution—‘if the occupants were sent to the outskirts of the City their new surroundings might improve their present mode of life’ (Wellington City Council 1903). Given the size of the city and its relative youth, it would only have been established for some 60 years, it is difficult to believe that it had descended so quickly into moral and physical decay of the type suggested by the letter writers. This concern with the supposed impact of slums and the city on the moral character of its citizens was paralleled with the promotion of ‘civic citizenship’, which was derived from and reinforced the well established concepts of national and imperial pride. In an address to the New Zealand Conference of the Methodist Church in February 1911, George Fowlds, an active participant in the early town planning movement, focused on this concept of civic citizenship. He defined civic citizenship as ‘the duties and responsibilities of the people to the city or the district in which they dwelt’, and would produce a ‘model National and Imperial citizen’ (Fowlds 1911). This concept of civic citizenship is close to the civic duty underpinned by progressivism that was such a feature of the American movement.

The City Beautiful movement was well served by men such as Robinson
who produced several books traversing the aesthetic underpinnings of the movement which were in turn practically illustrated by the designs of Burnham and others. This highlights the necessity of developing some philosophic or ideological underpinnings for such movements. Perhaps, surprisingly, there is evidence in New Zealand of the development of what was at the very least a conceptualisation of urban aesthetics. They are found in the work of Samuel Hurst Seager, an architect and tireless worker for town planning, civic design and to a lesser extent housing. These were concepts presented first to a meeting of The Christchurch Beautifying Association and were published as a pamphlet in 1911—*Our Beautiful World: Man’s Work in the Making and Marring of It* (Hurst Seager 1911). For Hurst Seager the pleasure or enjoyment invoked by a city was derived from its ‘halo of romance’ (Hurst Seager 1911, 3), itself a product of the cities historic experience and the cumulative remnants in buildings, monuments, etc left from that experience. New Zealand cities lacking age and historic remnants would clearly be short of such romance and hence the pleasure one might derive from living in a European city. Instead in New Zealand he believed ‘our natural scenery is capable of giving as great a pleasure to those who see it with the “seeing eye” ’ (Hurst Seager 1911, 3). This aesthetic elevation of nature is important as brings together two concerns. The first was to bring nature into the city, ensuring that urban development was in harmony with nature and the second was to conserve areas of scenic beauty, an issue that will be returned to. As Hurst Seager summed it up ‘the environment and the work shall mutually assist in producing a pleasing whole’ (Hurst Seager 1911, 7) and the marring of nature by the works of man could be remedied by adopting the aim: ‘always so to create our homes and our cities that what we take from Nature, we give back in art’ (Hurst Seager 1911, 16).

Having established this aesthetic concept he then proceeds to provide examples of what might be regarded as ‘good practice’. Unsurprisingly, these included mainly historic British examples and reference to Bournville and Port Sunlight, which are inaccurately labelled ‘garden cities’. Hurst Seager was a regular traveller overseas and seemed to have an unlimited collection of photographs and lantern slides which he used with his lectures. His treatise then advocates the control of advertising hoardings, good urban and architectural design and respect for the natural elements of the urban landscape. In his discussion of the scourge of advertising hoardings, which takes up a significant part of this work, he refers admiringly to the successes in controlling advertising billboards in America. This suggests that he was well aware of the work of the City Beautiful movement. However, Hurst Seager’s writings also reveal the diversity of influences that have shaped his view. There is the intense aesthetic environmentalism of the City Beautiful movement, which is blended with what might be called the suburban aesthetic of the Garden City movement. The
mixing of the two is reflective of the ideas that were swirling around in New Zealand prior to World War I and demonstrate an adaptive reception of those ideas to create a New Zealand interpretation. How widely disseminated this pamphlet was, is not certain; however the publishers, Whitcombe and Tombs, were also booksellers with branches throughout the country.

**The Role of the Beautifying Societies**

If these concepts of civic citizenship and urban aesthetics were to be realised in practical and concrete form, then there was a need to create a new organisation dedicated to the ideal or at the very least to influence the work of an existing organisation. New Zealand had just the organisations in the various beautifying societies that sprang up from the late 1870s onwards. Many had a relatively short flowering, fading quickly and leaving no written records. Others like the Christchurch Beautifying Association survive to this day, though it has transformed itself into a gardening club. The first beautifying society was founded in Dunedin in 1887, emerging out of an attempt by two prominent citizens Thomas Brown, a merchant and First Church (Presbyterian) elder and Alexander Bathgate, a barrister and company director, to create a new park to commemorate the jubilee of Queen Victoria. The Dunedin and Suburbs Reserves Conservation Society, which duly became the Dunedin Amenities Society before renaming itself the Dunedin Amenities and Town Planning Society in 1915, primarily involved itself in planting and improving Dunedin’s reserves (the New Zealand term for parks) and Town Belt, work that often involved the members in quite substantial heavy labour.

Their appreciation for nature soon drew them into other areas and the society vigorously lobbied the city council over a variety of matters, including advertising hoardings, and central government over scenery conservation. In 1915 the objects of the society were extended to include ‘the conservation of the natural beauties and the development of the outdoor attractions of Dunedin and its neighbourhoods, including town planning and the management of the means of healthy and elevating recreation for its inhabitants’ (*Otago Daily Times* 1915). Members were also treated to talks about all manner of issues that included beautifying and later town planning topics. These were often illustrated by the speakers’ own lantern slides. Part of the Dunedin Society’s success stemmed from their co-operative relationship with the Dunedin City Council, which in turn Vine (1973) believes stemmed from Bathgate’s ability to engage the support of the city’s financial and social elites. The society which still existed in the 1930s became a less effective body as its founding members aged. From 1920 the society tended to drift, partly due to the poor economic conditions in the city at the time. By that time, as the Depression gripped the
country, it was effectively a discussion group rather than an active society.

The Christchurch Beautifying Society, founded in 1897, was inspired by the
work of the Dunedin Society and at this time and later there is evidence that the
various groups maintained an unstructured communications system amongst
themselves. As in the case of Christchurch an existing society often gave
assistance to those seeking to set up a society in their own town. The aims of the
society were unambiguous—‘in the first place to beautify, by suitable landscape
gardening, the various waste or partially improved spots within our city and its
immediate suburbs, and in the second place (and this we take to be one of its
most important functions) to influence by example, suggestion and assistance,
others to help in making our city beautiful and attractive, for instance through
better and more artistic cultivation of their gardens, or the removal or masking
of unsightly objects’ (Chilton 1924, 11-12). The society grew quickly and
attracted a veritable ‘Who’s Who’ of Christchurch Society. Albert Kaye a
prominent businessman and local politician and Dr James Irving a local doctor
convened the first meeting, at which the Mayor, Mr Louisson was elected
President with Kaye as Vice-President. The Association also quickly attracted to
its ranks and committee, the pioneer botanist Leonard Cockayne, prominent
politician (he was a city Member of Parliament) and conservationist Harry Ell,
and the city’s leading architect Samuel Hurst Seager.

It was a true meeting of the elites that provided great benefits for the
Association. It ensured co-operation and financial help from the City Council,
corporate membership and a sound financial footing, which would allow the
Association in 1924 to launch its own national journal City Beautiful. The
Christchurch Beautifying Society was the largest and most successful of all the
societies and its members work tirelessly on planting projects such as street tree
planting on Moorhouse Avenue and beautification of Mill Island, propagating
and distributing native plants, and lobbying the City Council and other
organization on matters of civic design and the evils of advertising posters. The
Association was the only one, which attempted, with limited success, to
establish civic amenities such as the Peacock Fountain that was installed in 1911
after a long saga (Strongman 1999, 18-19). They also ran a design competition
discussed in detail below, in 1912 to improve the circulation of tram traffic
around Cathedral Square, the iconic heart of the city. Less strenuous pursuits
included lectures, often given by its own members, and open to the public. This
approach assisted in recruiting further members for the Association.

Auckland, despite being the country’s largest city, was rather less successful
in sustaining an active beautifying society. The Auckland Scenery Conservation
Society (ASCS) was founded in 1899 but had ceased to function by 1905. Like
the societies in the South Island, it attracted membership of the local elites. Its
President, Sir John Logan Campbell, is often referred to as the ‘Father of
Auckland’. The main focus of the Society was the conservation of scenic areas and in 1904 they sent a deputation to the Scenery Preservation Commissioners to bring to their notice ‘a number of places which should be acquired for reserves’ (ASCS 1904, 5). In the following year they were lobbying to preserve the Waitakere Ranges (ASCS 1904, 5), a prominent range on the edge of the city. The ASCS has left negligible records so it is impossible to identify what caused its demise by 1905, a time when many other groups were being successfully established in much smaller towns.

In 1915 in the wake of Australasian Town Planning Tour by Davidge and Reade of the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association, the Auckland Town Planning League (ATPL) was established. Again, it was a collection of the local political and business elites with C.J. Parr, MP being the President. It did however, include a number of women—Mrs Baume and Mrs Ferner and Miss Ellen Melville who had been the first woman elected to the Auckland City Council in 1913 (ATPL 1915, 1). The objects of the League were diverse and were much concerned with housing and town planning issues. However, they also included ‘the improvement of civic architecture and (the) environment of residential and manufacturing areas’ and the ‘preservation of mountains, beaches, native bush and other natural beauties’ (ATPL 1915, 2-3). Further, one of the four committees established was on ‘Parks and Playgrounds’ and proposed a full agenda of street tree planting, playground and park improvements and the creation of new reserves (a New Zealand term for parks). Unfortunately no records of the League have survived, though it was active in the 1920s focusing on protecting the volcanic cones that dotted the city, from quarrying. They were successful in achieving legislation to protect those volcanic cones, which recently lead the national road authority, Transit NZ, to redesign a road to avoid disturbing one of those volcanic cones. They also lobbied consistently to save the Waitakere Ranges from development, something that has been largely successful.

This interest in civic beautification was not, however, confined to the country’s larger cities. Wanganui was a prosperous provincial town with, as Tab. 2-1 shows, a modest population. However, it managed to sustain an active and successful beautifying society that survived well into the 1930s. It left the now city, with an attractive legacy as Fig. 2-1 illustrates. The Wanganui Scenery Preservation and Beautifying Society (WSPBS) was formed in April 1910 with a strong focus on preserving scenery, historic site and the bush on the banks of the Whanganui River, street tree planting and beautifying of public reserves. Wanganui itself was located near the mouth of the Whanganui River, one of New Zealand’s largest rivers. The town spread over both riverbanks and steamers were a common sight on the river, which was navigable for some distance. Much of the land adjoining the river was steep and clad with bush
(indigenous vegetation), which was largely unmodified. As usual the Wanganui Society had the support of those prominent in business, including ferry owner Alex Hattrick and politician and later mayor, Hope Gibbons. The Society eventually forged links with the Wanganui Borough Council and appears to have worked co-operatively with them after some early disputes.

Like the Christchurch Association the Wanganui Society was an activist society and members both fund raised and undertook physical works such as planting. A major and on-going project was Virginia Lake in the suburb of St Johns (see Fig. 2-1). It began as no more than a shallow lake surround by cleared land. The Society with many years work transformed it into an attractive area with plantings, a winter garden, children’s playground and various walkways. The plaque erected in front of the Wintergardens (see Fig. 2-2) essentially sums up the motivations of the movement. It remains today as one of the showpieces of the city.

They established a nursery in 1912 to propagate native and exotic plant that they used in to improve local parks and for street tree planting. In 1914 for instance 600 native pohutukawa (a crimson flowered tree which flowers at Christmas and is commonly known as the New Zealand Christmas tree) were planted along the tramline from Castlecliff to town (WSPBS 1914). A number of these trees still exist and have been supplemented by later plantings, as Fig. 2-3 illustrates. The Society also took its educative role seriously and in 1918 one Miss Blennerhasset formed and ran a juvenile society (WSPBS, 1918). The Society was also active in lobbying the Borough Council on the design of the Alexander Museum and the new (now Sarjeant) Art Gallery (WSPBS 1918). In 1922 the Society launched an unsuccessfully attempt to be legally constituted as a Domains Board, allowing them to control all of the town’s reserves (WSPBS 1924). Like other beautifying societies the Wanganui Society kept up a constant effort to lobby for the preservation of native bush on the Whanganui River and in 1913 a ‘vigorous letter was sent to every member of Parliament asking that legislation be at once introduced to conserve the whole of the remaining bush’(WSPBS 1913). However, as with the Christchurch Society the vigour of the Wanganui Society waned as their membership aged and it appears to have drifted into becoming more of a gardening/horticultural society in its later years.
The Larger Scale Projects

While much of the work of the beautifying societies focused on planting and general beautifying, the Christchurch Beautifying Association tackled several larger projects which could best be described as civic improvement schemes. The most substantial of these schemes related to the Cathedral Square tram shelter. Cathedral Square, which as its name suggests was bounded by the magnificent Gothic Revival Christchurch Cathedral, is generally regarded as the centre of Christchurch. The area has been ‘redesigned’ a number of times but has always retained a range of commemorative statuary including the Godley statue which commemorates one of the Canterbury province’s founders. The arrival of one of the symbols of civic progress, the electric tram in 1907, resulted in a passenger shelter being erected in Cathedral Square, obscuring the Godley Statue.