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Working for Walpole: Restorative Spaces in the Progressive Era

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“Working for Walpole”: Restorative Spaces in the Progressive Era

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Professor Jensen; Professor Hsieh

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On May 5th, 1916, nine hundred local young boys and girls gathered before an audience of over two thousand fellow citizens of Walpole, Massachusetts to plant the first acre of a newly established town forest. Roughly forty percent of the town population had assembled to celebrate its most recent accomplishment. The town forest, located just south of downtown Walpole, had become the most recent product of optimistic Progressive Era reformers. The town of Walpole owned the forest, and the citizenry who collectively managed it benefited directly from the timber it would provide. As part of a larger town planning reform, the forest embodied the ambition of Charles S. Bird Jr., who orchestrated its fruition from concept to reality. Bird and his fellow reformers had aimed to form an idyllic community molded by the environments and spaces they inhabited. Through careful design and a new “civic consciousness,” a promising future awaited both the town, and potentially the entire nation.

During the opening ceremony of the town forest, speeches emphasized the merits of community spirit, communal ownership, and civic responsibility. “Boys and Girls of Walpole: This town is your home. Everything that affects its welfare is your concern. As the future citizens of Walpole,” Charles S. Bird declared, “you should always remember that the town will develop just as finely as the citizens are ready to work together toward the idea.” These words, among many others that day, praised the community for its commitment to town planning and civic engagement.

2The term “civic consciousness” referred to an awareness among citizens, and especially American businessmen, who valued holistic, utilitarian approaches to social and economic city reforms. Many reformers understood civic consciousness to be central to creating a harmonious society through the appropriate planning and use of municipal space. John A. Murphy, “The Town of Walpole Establishes a Communal Forest of 200 Acres,” The American City 15 (1916), 150.
Within the forest, plans for four miles of roads, an amphitheater, playgrounds, and a swimming pool illustrated the reformers belief in the benefits of outdoor recreation and carefully planned public spaces. The collaboration of Bird and influential city planner John Nolen led to the creation of this town forest as well as a dynamic array of other city wide improvements. From parks to garden villages, Bird and Nolen sought to create “restorative” spaces that would both redefine the role of citizens within their local communities and help mitigate economic inequalities. These restorative spaces, not unique to any single city or state, embodied a collective belief among many reformers in the early twentieth century that through meticulous planning and local participation, a promising future awaited them.

In the first part of this paper, I illustrate the political, economic, and social climate that fostered the implementation of restorative spaces in Walpole, Massachusetts. A discussion of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Walpole establishes the concerns of the reformers who sought to reshape the town. Additionally, I address the backgrounds of the two men who orchestrated most of the Walpole projects: planner John Nolen and local activist and planner Charles Bird. Following the coverage of Walpole specifically, I place the small town in the wider context of the United States during the Progressive Era (1890s to 1920s).

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5Garden villages, a subset to the wider Garden City Movement, were professionally planned residential areas that employed a low population density, centralized control, pragmatic organization, and aesthetic emphases to encourage good health and community prosperity. Charles D. Warren, Introduction to New Towns for Old. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), Ix-Ixiii; Charles S Jr. Bird, et al, Town Planning for Small Communities (New York: D Appleton and Company, 1919), 153-159.

6I have chosen the term “restorative” to describe the spaces and environments created by proponents of Progressive Era city planning in order to highlight their unique qualities and ambitions. The principles behind these spaces derived directly from the notion that local environments could determine the virtue of a community. In believing this, they applied scientific reasoning and worked to create spaces that maximized efficiency, happiness, civic pride, economic growth, and democracy. The latter concept manifested specifically as civic participation and engagement in the processes that could bring constructive reform. Notably, the reformers who designed and implemented these spaces did so with the conscious intent of manipulating and at least in part, controlling the public. The diversity of these spaces, from roads to forests, makes physical distinctions difficult. Considering this, I am choosing to emphasize the intent and ideals of the planners and proponents to characterize these spaces.

The second part of my paper examines the attempted and actual production of restorative spaces within Walpole through the efforts of Charles Bird and John Nolen that took place in the 1910s and early 1920s. I draw on three primary examples to illustrate the uses of restorative spaces. These are the detailed plans for the Neponset Garden Village, the establishment of the Walpole Town Forest, and the rationale behind, and creation of, Francis William Park. Of these examples, only the designs for the Town Forest and Francis William Park were constructed, whereas the plans for the Neponset Garden Village were never carried out.

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Part I

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Why Walpole?

Nestled alongside the Neponset River, and located less than twenty miles to the southwest of Boston, the earliest settlers of Walpole, Massachusetts arrived in the seventeenth century. Over two centuries, the small town had hosted a series of small industries producing items ranging from cotton thread to tools, and roofing materials to high quality paper. By the onset of the Industrial Revolution, the town was poised for massive changes and economic expansion. Due to its close proximity to Boston, the small town would experience vicariously the extremes of industrialization and unparalleled European immigration throughout the Progressive Era. Collectively, local and regional demographic shifts along with the economic

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power of the Bird family set the scene for spatial reform throughout the town.

Census data from the three decades leading up to the 1916 establishment of the Walpole Town Forest illustrate many of the changes the small community experienced that later influenced the priorities of Nolen and Bird. Three critical statistics describing Walpole summarize these changes. First, in 1895, Walpole’s population was 2,994; by 1910, this number would rise by over 61% to 4,892.\textsuperscript{10} Because of both the availability of jobs in the industrial sector and its location just 20 miles away from one of the nation’s most important ports, the town attracted job seeking Americans and immigrants alike.\textsuperscript{11} These newcomers required new housing developments and public spaces to facilitate them. The necessity of the town to grow undoubtedly placed the spotlight on deciding the best way to do so.

Second, of the 4,892 inhabitants of Walpole in 1910, 26.7% of them were foreign born.\textsuperscript{12} While a majority of immigrants in Walpole came from as near as Canada, their identity derived primarily from their status as foreign born. During the early twentieth century, the nation discussed what some, including Bird, considered the “American problem.”\textsuperscript{13} In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt and Congress had approved new regulations on the naturalization of immigrants. By setting specific standards for becoming American, they simultaneously “opened the way for people and ideas to be labeled as ‘un-American.’”\textsuperscript{14} This label carried a profound meaning across the nation demonstrated by the findings of the 1907 Senate appointed

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\textsuperscript{11}The availability of jobs for newcomers is illustrated in the 1905 census. Out of the 4,003 inhabitants of Walpole, only eight were unemployed longer than twelve months. Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor, \textit{Census of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1905}, Vol 1, \textit{Population and Social Statistics}, (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing CO., State Printers, 1909), 326-327.
\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910}, 605.
\textsuperscript{13}Bird, \textit{Town Planning for Small Communities}, 175.
\textsuperscript{14}Flanagan, \textit{America Reformed}, 109.
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Dillingham Commission. Progressive Era historian Maureen Flanagan explains that the commission “concluded that [immigrants] were indeed largely responsible for the country’s problems and recommended implemented literacy requirements in order to protect democracy.” With over a quarter of Walpole’s population having been born in a foreign country, the town’s reformers took these perceived threats to democracy seriously and sought to create spaces that would assimilate them into a more harmonious American society.

![Walpole Population Place of Birth (1905)](image)

*Figure 1: Walpole Population Place of Birth (1905).* Data collected from *Census of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1905*, Vol 1, “Population and Social Statistics” by Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor.

Third, in 1905, manufacturing jobs paid the wages of over 16% of the Walpole population, 10% higher than the next wage earning occupation listed as “laborer” (which at least in part also included mill workers). With an increasing fraction of the Walpole workforce

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occupied in manufacturing, the town’s reformers grew concerned about how a shifting working class might transform the community. Reformers in Walpole feared following the path of many industrial cities who failed to adequately house a quickly growing population because of their lack of residential planning.

Cities such as Chicago, New York, and especially nearby Boston served as the most extreme examples of unregulated economic development for those in Walpole. They faced a wide array of issues ranging from sanitation to crime to a lack of recreational space. Publications across the nation often dedicated entire articles to assessing city wide problems. In a 1909 article titled “Boston Wickeder Than is New York,” the reporter explained that “crimes of violences of all kinds are more rampant than in Manhattan and its four sister boroughs. Boston has more crazy people than New York - and nearly twice as many auto ‘speed-maniacs.'”17 Likewise, in 1898 social worker Robert Woods’ book described Boston’s South End as “a fit haunt for the depraved and vicious,” where “evils of all kinds find congenial soil and produce a rank growth” in “dreary and depressing” streets and “dark squalid courts and alleys.”18 Publications like these created a narrative of the urban environment characterized by immorality and unrest. Boston specifically embodied the ways unprepared urban areas succumbed to industrialization through overcrowding and untamed poverty. Whether from newspapers or other print media such as The American City, reports similar to this one would have undoubtedly reached audiences just twenty miles southwest of Boston in Walpole.19

In 1910 Walpole’s foreign born population was 26.7% and in Massachusetts the number

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18Robert Woods quoted in Daphne Spain, How Women Saved the City (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 189.
19The American City, a source referenced throughout this paper, was a magazine published by the American City Publishing Company throughout the Progressive Era with an intended audience of city planners and municipal authorities. Articles and advertisements alike highlighted the utility of seemingly endless city improvements from efficient snow plows to aesthetically beautiful trash bins and optimized park systems.
was over 31% foreign born. The percentage of the state’s population living in urban spaces had reached 92.8%. The influx of immigrants and the growth of urban spaces characterized the accelerated demand for space throughout the state and led to anxieties over how best to design such spaces. While other Eastern states also experienced the arrival of immigrants and quick urbanization, Massachusetts’s high ratio of urban to rural space specifically drew attention to the importance of city planning. Because of this, city planners throughout the state scrambled to imagine new ways to organize and establish spaces within cities that could mitigate the pressures of industrialization and rapid urban growth.

More than just imagining new spaces, city planners and reformers also needed what the Bird family had to offer the town of Walpole: an abundance of wealth, and a passion for civic improvement. Charles Sumner Bird Jr., head of the Walpole Town Planning Committee, had been born into the wealthy Bird family in 1883. The family’s paper company Bird & Son, with origins dating back to the eighteenth century, employed more people in Walpole than any other industry at the time of the town’s collaboration with city planner John Nolen. As head of the prominent Walpole company, Charles Bird had a strong authority throughout the town and with it, his plans for reform had a lot of backing behind them. In the early twentieth century with the influence gained from economic prosperity, the family business began to promote and finance social and economic reform within the town. In 1903, Bird & Son lowered the workday from twelve to eight hours for their employees and did not reduce their wages. Along the same paternalistic tendencies, the company also donated and contributed to schools, libraries, and loan programs that aimed to provide employees with the opportunity to buy and build homes on

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20 Urban spaces were defined by the authors of the census as cities and towns with populations greater than 2,500. Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910, 571.
“advantageous terms.” The latter of these community minded actions was a response to the cheaply constructed tenement complexes that often poorly housed industrial workers and their families in neighboring cities.

The Bird family’s paternal relationship with the town, illustrated by their constant engagement in enacting changes they saw fit, reflected the way some people of the Progressive Era saw paternalistic patrons as a key source of reform. In his 1916 article discussing the commemoration of the Walpole Town Forest, John Murphy wrote that “the address of the donor was especially illuminating as a demonstration of the new civic consciousness that is being developed among American businessmen: a combination of the practical and the ideal.” While the article highlighted an optimistic view of the role of paternalism in reform, the relationships formed between economically powerful families or corporations and their local citizenry through the financing of civic projects was often very cloudy. The Bird family, who sponsored nearly all of John Nolen’s extensive work with the town from 1913-1930, appear to have cared deeply about the well-being of Walpole and earnestly wanted to contribute to its improvement. However, it is noteworthy that the Birds themselves had plenty to gain through these reforms. Finished projects often carried the Bird family name, providing notoriety to the family and business. Similarly, in many of Charles Bird’s reform proposals, the potential for economic gain was a major selling point and often would have benefited the company.

By contrast, historian Helen Peterson offers a more extreme example of paternalism and social control in her article on Clarkdale, Arizona between 1913 and 1920. The United Verde

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24Here, Murphy is specifically referring to George Plimpton, another wealthy Walpole businessman who had donated about eighty acres of the land the town forest was built on. Murphy, “The Town of Walpole Establishes a Communal Forest of 200 Acres,” 150.
Copper Company designed Clarkdale specifically for social and labor control in close proximity to the adjacent copper mine. Hoping to attract and maintain a better class of workers than typical towns, the company segregated Clarkdale into two completely separate communities based on the desired traits of the inhabitants. At the top and middle of the hill, the professionals, supervisors, and middle class workers lived in the beautiful business district where they enjoyed modern architectural design, scenic views, and parks. Meanwhile, in the lowest section of the town called Patio Park, ethnic Mexican workers lived in small, utilitarian apartments that featured windows intentionally facing the smelter, creating a “constant visual connection between the workers and their employer.” By creating this constant connection between laborer and employer, the designers sought to engrain and remind the workers of their place within the economic hierarchy. This demonstration of social control both highlights the extreme potential of authoritarian city planning and helps to classify the paternalism of the Bird family.

In charge of designing these Bird family projects, John Nolen’s philosophies and talents contributed massively to Walpole. Nolen came to Walpole, Massachusetts in 1912. At the age of 43, the Harvard educated city planner and landscape architect had already published his 1912 text Replanning Small Cities, a book chronicling his early career work in Roanoke, Virginia; Reading, Pennsylvania; Madison, Wisconsin; San Diego, California; and Montclair and Glen Ridge, New Jersey. Nolen arrived in Walpole as an established city planner with ambitions to solve nearly every physical problem the growing industrial town had. Plans for parks, road realignments, playgrounds, public building positioning, zoning, and the town forest illustrated

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26 Peterson, “Clarkdale, Arizona,” 32.
his intentions for wide and encompassing reform.

As a city planner and architect for nearly four decades, Nolen worked at the forefront of the young American City Planning movement, emphasizing functionality and holistic designs. Robert Freestone summarized that “his mission was to correct the ugliness of the American City while advancing other more fundamental causes of efficiency, mobility, shelter, social justice, and an improved quality of life.” It is these additional causes that make Nolen the perfect proponent for what I have described as restorative spaces; by advancing wide social reforms through the creation of space, Nolen’s designs would negotiate a new relationship between the individual and the community. The production of functional public spaces would not just positively influence the character of each person, but the way they perceived their place in the community.

Collectively, the changing demographic and social conditions throughout Massachusetts, the wealth and interest of the Bird family, and the ideas and philosophies of John Nolen all came together in the small industrial town of Walpole, Massachusetts. The combination of these forces led directly to the utilization of space as an instrument of social and economic reform. In order to understand the exact ways they planned to—and did—utilize restorative spaces, it is necessary to explore in more detail the ways Progressive Era reformers understood the problems facing society and the conceptual tools they relied on.

The Progressive Era

Leading the evolution of, and fascination with, the city planning movement of the early

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twentieth century, progressive Americans were driven by the unique and precarious context in which nation entered the new century in. The Progressive Era, spanning roughly from 1890 through the 1920s, materialized as rapid industrialization challenged the social and economic infrastructure of the American experience. At the same time, the demands of a growing economy swallowed up natural resources and increasing numbers of industrial jobs simultaneously lured thousands to cities that were growing at alarming rates. Despite the tumultuous conditions, the challenges facing a developing nation fueled one of the most optimistic and populist-minded movements in American history; the progressives as Flanagan describes them in *America Reformed*, “worked to develop a comprehensive reform program that would save liberal capitalism by eliminating, or regulating, its worst excesses.”

Unlike many of the activist groups and parties that preceded the progressives, progressives did not seek to resolve a single issue or represent a limited group, but aimed to repair and prepare an ailing nation for an unprecedented future.

The broad scope of Progressivism both described and shaped the various means by which reformers attempted to improve the nation. Although progressives took no single path, the practice of implementing holistic solutions to solve society’s mounting problems brought them under the same flag. The progressive environmental movement, for instance, brought together individuals who “all believed in environmental determinism but saw different roads to achieve a good built environment.” During this period, environmental determinism was a belief that the environment around an individual or community wholly or largely influenced the character of its inhabitants. For example, during the Progressive Era, in almost every constructed setting from

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31Flanagan, *America Reformed*, 170. Here, the term “built environment” denotes those spaces intentionally designed and constructed by humans. For clarification, while both a park and a mine are both created by human activity, only the park was planned and created with the intention of permanence and service to a community.
parks to houses to schools, reformers believed that the cleanliness of the environment could have lasting impacts on the personality and character of the families, students, and children in each setting. This common understanding of this concept as a tool for improvement illustrated a wide focus on reforms within cities. They not only sought to rethink and reform the social institutions that corrupted society, but also to reimagine the very spaces they inhabited.

In *How Women Saved the City*, Daphne Spain chronicles the efforts of progressive women within major cities to respond to the vices of industrialization through the creation of “redemptive” spaces. Her research, focused mostly in Chicago, investigated the public spaces that women utilized while participating in voluntary organizations such as the Young Women’s Christian Association, or the Salvation Army. Spain explains that although the motives of these ambitious women correlated with the Social Gospel movement’s aim to save souls, “they also saved the city” from immense pressures deriving from “shifting population dynamics.” In the absence of a civic safety net and through voluntary associations, the work of middle-class women began to attempt to balance the humanitarian needs of an urban population with the capitalist emphasis of growth and profit.32

The spaces that served this purpose ranged from vocational schools to public baths and each individually addressed one or many unique problems of urban environments. Spain’s use of the term “redemptive” suggests both the religious context as well as the notion that these spaces were meant to redeem disadvantaged urban residents - specifically single women, African Americans, immigrants, and the poor - from the evils of a “society in flux.”33 In other words, the space oriented services provided by progressive women worked to reduce the physical threats of crime, promote accessible sanitation, and help educate a poor working class largely consumed by

33Spain, *How Women Saved the City*, 14.
low wages and long hours. Ultimately, the work of progressive women who created and operated “redemptive” spaces exemplified one way some activists of the Progressive Era accessed space to improve urban life.

Other interdisciplinary scholars of the Progressive Era have examined similar ways Americans conceptually created spaces in response to the concerns of the industrial era. As the massive population centers mechanized behind the forces of an industrial economy, many people began to fear that democracy itself was in a perilous position. After all, the traditional image of an exemplary American was the rugged, white, male individual who carved his own life out of an abundant and daunting nature—an image that quickly faded as long and monotonous labor within the confines of factories occupied the time of more and more Americans. In response, progressives generally believed that “a truer democracy required places where ordinary people could gather together and discuss the problems of society.”34 In order to replace the image of the rugged individual as the core of democracy, reformers began to envision a new democratic system of Americanized communities with residents held together by the space they inhabited.

This emphasis on holistic community advancement rejected the popular (although not all-encompassing) tenant of individualism that was a quality equated to the sole pursuit of material gains for a single person in a community. Often, progressive reformers linked these concepts of individualism to the physical spaces of large cities. Further, they attributed the circulating horrors stories of poor sanitation, crime, and poverty from cities like Boston, Chicago, and New York to excesses of individualism. Because of this link, reformers hoped to establish a virtuous and more democratic community that prided itself not solely on material advance, but on the beautiful and shared public spaces they would create. These public

34Flanagan, America Reformed, 39.
environments would in turn foster the character development of community members and emphasize communal bonds.

The city planners and reformers that would create restorative spaces to remedy these concerns over individualism were not the only people troubled by growing urban spaces. In contrast to the community-minded city planners, popular notions leading into and throughout this the Progressive Era held the lone individual in an idealized romantic wilderness as the high-water mark of humanity. With untouched wildernesses as the antithetical spaces to the city, many held the strenuous life amongst a formidable natural environment as a more pure existence.\(^{35}\) Environmental historian William Cronon discussed these notions of individuality and purity found in nature as a “flight from history” due to their condemnation of the society that made such comfortable relations possible.\(^{36}\) In stark contrast, cities, factories, and otherwise human-made environments became blemishes, artificial creations, and the home of vice to a wide audience reading romantic authors and urban horror stories. According to many in the Progressive Era, the industrial space was at odds with a more virtuous natural one.\(^{37}\)

Further discussing the natural environment as opposed to the built one, both Roderick Nash and William Cronon explore the historically fluctuating meaning behind “wilderness,” a space representative of wider conceptions of nature. For centuries, “uncivilized” landscapes harbored void, waste, and even evil. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, wilderness, or virgin, uninhabited land, became intimately glorified and connected with the fleeting yet exalted rugged individualism.\(^{38}\) In Cronon’s *The Trouble with Wilderness*, he

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\(^{38}\)Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 44-84.
describes the American wilderness of the Progressive Era as “the bold landscape of frontier heroism, it [was] the place of youth and childhood, into which men escape by abandoning their pasts and entering a world of freedom where the constraints of civilization fade into memory.”

The conceptualization of wilderness as an escape, like the “redemptive” spaces of the urban environment, again demonstrates how spaces were created, conceptually and physically, in response to rampant city growth. The element of escape was equivocally one of rejection. “Appreciation of wilderness began in the cities,” Nash explains, and it was “the literary gentleman wielding a pen, not the pioneer with his axe, [who] made the first gestures of resistances against the strong currents of antipathy.” Not surprisingly, as urban spaces gradually came to embody the realities of a modernizing nation, so too did wilderness gain devotees in response. This dynamic relationship that linked individualism to the wilderness accentuated the dichotomy between those who sought to reform the city and those who wanted to forsake it. It was this opposition that the Walpole reformers had to confront in order to promote the maturation of a civic consciousness.

Importantly, while wilderness appreciation and city reform inherently were pitted against one another, they shared a common theme: a high regard for beauty. Lying at the core of the wilderness appreciation, beauty has, as a tenet of Western thought, synonymously expressed justice, utility, righteousness, achievement and health. However, while the meaning of beauty has largely remained consistent, its application to city planning and the wilderness has not. Not until the Progressive Era did beauty play such a prominent role in determining city landscapes and resource management in the United States. Beauty, as an instrument of city planners like John Nolen, applied cultural values to places, people and ideas and acted as more than a

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39 Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” 79.
40 Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, 44.
“decorative surface ornament” by offering a “fundamental expression of social values.” These notions of the utility of beauty manifested not for the first time in history, but were revitalized in early twentieth century city planning. A 1913 article in *The American City* written by Richard Olding Beard, a professor of physiology at the time, discussed the role of beauty in carefully designed schools:

The children who spend the hours of their school-day, for nine months of the year, in a school-building of noble proportions, of perfect lines, of beautiful structural material, of ample environment in playground and landscape garden, a building adequately ventilated and comfortably heated, tastefully decorated, chastely provided with the conveniences of toilet, generously equipped with the products of art and of literature, are not merely educated in the studies of their grade, but in the fundamental principles of law and order, of health and beauty, of personal dignity, of family pride, of communal obligation, of civic virtue.[sic].

In this passage, Beard directly addressed the relationship between physical space and coveted virtues. Everything from the proper accessibility of utilities to the shape of the building itself all contributed to a greater aesthetic cause. Although Beard discussed the specific influence of the school building on students, Nolen and Bird applied the same principals in the designs of Walpole. Within the Walpole reformer’s plans, beauty took many shapes including organization that encouraged efficiency, classical art references, cleanliness, the inclusion of natural elements, and standardized design. Together, these beautifully planned spaces were to become instruments of social reforms that responded to the excesses of individualism and the multifaceted influences of industrialization.

While individualism would never be wholly replaced, optimistic Progressive Era reformers hoped to reshape how people viewed themselves within industrial communities and

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aspired to encourage values that promoted the advancing of society as a unit. It was not the individual, but the city that would move the nation into the future. In order to do so, leading thinkers believed that the achievements of the nation originated from the foundation and wellness of small communities. The efforts of the Walpole Town Planning Committee along with planner John Nolen testify to this conceptual idealism of the progressives. They also demonstrate their ability to utilize shared cultural ideas about beauty to advance community reform. By examining the plans for the Neponset Garden Village, the Walpole Town Forest, and Francis William Park and in Walpole, Massachusetts, this paper will explore how progressives combated industrialization and individualism with restorative spaces.

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**Part II**

**Foreword from *Town Planning for Small Communities***

Within the formulaic writing style of historians, the actions and ideas of historical agents can lose their power, emotion, and vigor. In order to address my inability to vocalize the passion of Charles Bird and his fellow reformers, I invite you to become familiar with the message of the Foreword from *Town Planning for Small Communities*. In this nearly five hundred page book, summarized by its title, the first words of the foreword read: “Evolution is like a great wheel relentlessly turning onward, pushing people forward to higher and finer social relations.” Signed on July 1st, 1916, and in the midst of a World War America had yet to join, this passage discussed the direction in which Bird believed humanity was going—a hopeful path toward

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efficiency, “better social relations,” and “the wonderful possibilities of cooperation.”45 These ideal notions of a future promising prosperity and fellowship guided the decisions and methodology of the Walpole city planners by turning their attention forward and upward; instead of just solving problems for today, they sought to solve them for tomorrow.

It was through a hole torn “in the fabric of civilization” by the conflict in Europe that allowed “millions of people of many nations” to “see through it the fields of a world only dreamt of in the past by a few far-seeing idealists.”46 The lure of the time to come not only manifested as words in this forward, but in the priorities Walpole reformers, pushed throughout articles and chapters on the potential of good city planning. Through the organized recreation of children in new and beautiful parks, the next generation would be inculcated with the values of teamwork, fellowship, honesty, and enthusiasm.47 Through carefully planned housing developments, “reasonable cooperation between capital, municipalities and labor” would replace the plight of “selfish and ignorant individualism.”48 And through the establishment of the Walpole Town Forest, the children who ceremoniously planted the first stand of trees would, in thirty years when the trees grew tall, be the first enjoy the labors of the prior generation.

Although Bird and Nolen more often than not cited economic advantage to incentivize the adoption of proposed Walpole plans, an overarching optimistic belief in the coming of a better future undoubtedly shaped his goals and many of the spatial reforms that would outlive their architects across the nation. With the financial power of Bird family and the reform-minded visions of both Charles Bird and John Nolen, these progressive Americans would plan to—and sometimes successfully—create restorative spaces in Walpole in order to pursue a better future.

45Bird, *Town Planning for Small Communities*, v-ix.
46Bird, *Town Planning for Small Communities*, v.
47Bird, *Town Planning for Small Communities*, 86.
48Bird, *Town Planning for Small Communities*, 149-150.
Plans for Housing

As one of the most symbolic structures of the early industrial era, the crowded tenement buildings provided an antithesis to “proper housing” for city planning reformers. Tenements typically ranged from three-to seven-stories tall and earned infamous reputations for unsanitary conditions, cramped living spaces, poor ventilation, little natural light, and often absent or malfunctioning utilities. Bird, who deemed these structures “a serious menace to the future of this country,” and the product of “selfish and ignorant individualism,” instead envisioned the creation of the English inspired “garden village.” As part of the wider replanning scheme in Walpole, The Bird family tasked John Nolen to draw up detailed plans for the Neponset Garden Village. Although the plans never came to fruition after the “changed economy of the prewar years” and the untimely death of the Charles Bird’s older brother, they demonstrated the scope, intent, and paternalistic tendencies of restorative spaces.

Located in the most heavily industrialized section East Walpole, the Neponset Garden Village would have settled on a 160 acre plot near the largest mills of the Bird & Son Company that employed over one-thousand operators. The layout of houses and public spaces promoted low population density, public and private gardens, and close proximity to work and amusements. Additionally, in the planning, “scrupulous attention is given to the development of the general esthetic resources and possibilities of the community.” Had the Neponset Garden Village been built, it would have been the first English-inspired garden village to be constructed

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49 Bird, *Town Planning for Small Communities*, 149.
51 George Grove, “Plans for an Industrial Garden Village,” *The American City* 11 (1914), 442.
52 Bird, *Town Planning for Small Communities*, 155.
53 Bird, *Town Planning for Small Communities*, 158.
in the United States. Within the detailed plans drawn up by Bird and Nolen in 1914, they sought to accomplish three interconnected goals: mitigate the perceived impact of foreign cultures on community life, properly house the growing industrial working class of Walpole, and encourage the development of a civic consciousness amongst the residents.

Figure 2: Perspective Sketch of Neponset Garden Village, East Walpole from Charles S. Bird, *Town Planning for Small Communities* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1919), 169.

Throughout the plans for and discussions of the Neponset Garden Village, interesting contradictions revealed idyllic sentiments mixed with Progressive Era anxieties, especially regarding growing immigrant populations. Similar to cities throughout Massachusetts, by 1910 over a quarter of Walpole’s population was foreign born; a number had been growing since the nineteenth century. In *Town Planning for Small Communities*, Bird discussed the matter of “placing together arbitrarily the homes of heterogeneous people” in relation to establishing the “spirit of equality that is so desirable.”54 While simultaneously advocating for equality, he also

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54Bird, *Town Planning for Small Communities*, 182.
expresses concerns about the “the American problem.” Summarizing “Anglo Saxons,” Bird explained they demanded all “modern conveniences,” “enjoy having gardens,” and “keep their grounds looking well.” By contrast, the Slavs as a rule are “poor tenants and abuse the property they occupy.” Bird used these generalizations, and others like them, to justify the establishment of four unique zones: the first zone nearest the railroad would host stores and apartments; the second nearest the civic center would be reserved for the “best type of dwelling;” the third zone would be used for less expensive houses; the fourth would be home to miniature farms. These four zones would therefore divide people by wealth, occupation, and needs. Strikingly, this plan for a partially segregated residential area recalled the United Verde Copper Company’s design of Clarkdale that designed a highly stratified community in order to manage the socio-economic relationships in the community. Critical to the Garden Village ideal however, these separate zones composed a single entity that was connected by the centralized planning around parks and at least partially, the civic center.

The centrally dictated separation of spaces by an ethnic and economic order illustrates how Bird and Nolen intended to create “a place where good fellowship and an American spirit” is promoted. Besides characteristic differences between races, Bird also explains that both foreign language and cultural practices obstructed the formation of idyllic communities. For example, “A puritanical family, given to the strict observance of Sunday, does not wish to live next to a German family for whom Sunday is essentially a day of social enjoyment.” By dividing people of different ethnic interests, Bird believed that he could mitigate discomforts

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55Bird, Town Planning for Small Communities, 175-176.
56Bird, Town Planning for Small Communities, 176.
57Bird, Town Planning for Small Communities, 184.
58Bird, Town Planning for Small Communities, 180.
59Bird, Town Planning for Small Communities, 184.
between neighbors while still hosting a harmonious community interested in a collective well-being. Additionally, Bird continues to explain that foreign labor “live… as cheaply as they can,” and “their interests are in the old country and it is there that they are providing the home for their old age.”\(^{60}\) In order to resolve this concern of conflicting cultures Bird and Nolen planned to implement two solutions. The first is the previously mentioned zoning scheme and the other was a rule requiring the Owners’ Association approval for new tenants. By requiring the approval of the Owners’ Association—a group consisting of “¼ Holding Company” (Bird and Son) and “¾ Land Holders”—the planners assured centralized control over who could move into the village and where.\(^{61}\)

Notably, race and ethnicity were not the only concerns dictating the Walpole reformer’s zoning of the village, nor was it the only major concern that shaped its design. In an article about the Neponset Garden Village in *The American City* magazine, George Gove explained: “the primary objective of the garden village development is to provide proper housing for wage earners in Walpole at a price within their reach.”\(^{62}\) Providing “proper housing” for a population that had grown by 61% in 15 years, became a major concern of Progressive city planners and the garden village would respond directly to that.

In order to provide proper housing to all wage earners, the planners described plans for a “self-sustaining business enterprise” to oversee the construction and carrying out of all stylistic design and zoning restrictions. For the Neponset Garden Village, Bird & Son would financially support initiatives of the enterprise. This community-minded businesses enterprise would limit dividends to five percent, thus avoiding a “speculative character” that might seek interests out of

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\(^{60}\) Bird, *Town Planning for Small Communities*, 180.


\(^{62}\) Grove, “Plans for an Industrial Garden Village,” 442.
the community’s benefit. All remaining profits would then go toward “public utilities and public buildings and improvements for the benefit of the property and of the community.”

Affordable housing through wholesale buying of materials and the establishment of loan and insurance operations for homebuilders would create opportunity. Through economic incentives, Charles Bird and John Nolen aspired to bring the garden village to American cities and towns across the nation. By opening up better housing options to the working class, they hoped to replace tenement buildings with pragmatically planned environments that would both house workers and influence their behavior. Accessibility was just the first step.

In the plans for the Neponset Garden Village, Bird and Nolen emphasized the importance of creating a beautiful environment that would promote good social habits and community consciousness. Bird specified that “in the character of houses to be erected it is intended to maintain a standard of beauty by holding to simple, straightforward design, and from the use of good and harmonious materials.” He also drew upon the “colonial style of architecture” which both recalled a romanticized past and offered an economy of construction. This standardized and heavily regulated style of the village was the primary method of influencing the behavior of the residents. Just as Richard Beard had stated in 1913 that a “building of noble proportions, of perfect lines, of beautiful structural material” could educate people “in the fundamental principles of law and order” and “civic virtue,” Bird and Nolen attempted to design an ideal environment. Their shared belief in environmental determinism guided both the planning of the project as well as its ambitions.

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63Grove, “Plans for an Industrial Garden Village,” 442.
64Grove, “Plans for an Industrial Garden Village,” 442.
67Bird, Town Planning for Small Communities, 189.
In addition to the design of beautiful spaces, they also arranged plans for authoritative regulations mostly under the jurisdiction of the Owners’ Association. Bird pursued the notion that “thrift and morality are not created but are rather fostered, since everyone has the germs within them.” 69 In regards to planning, fostering these germs meant upholding certain values by placing restrictions on the conduct and design of the village. These restrictions included requiring Owners’ Association approval for new tenants and building plans, structure size limitations in relation to plot size, stylist requirements of houses, a ban on intoxicating liquors and billboards, and specific regulations reflecting the purpose of each zone. 70 The restrictions placed on the community defined the environment they aimed to create; it would be cohesive, functional, intentional, and restorative. Through careful spatial design and a strong element of underlying social control, Bird and Nolen firmly believed an ideal community would take shape.

Ironically, in light of these restrictions, limitations, and persuasive spaces, Bird himself stated, “Any paternalism… is to be deplored.” 71 From a position of authority over the residential area, Bird and Nolen had designed the community in order to mold its residents according to what they believed to be the highest virtues. Although Bird makes the argument that this garden village exemplifies a cooperative effort as opposed to “selfish paternalism,” the continued emphasis on regulations and environmental determinism suggests social control. 72 By discussing people as already having the germs of thrift and morality, the role of the planners became leading them in the correct direction.

Overall, the plans for the Neponset Garden Village reveal how Bird and Nolen used restorative spaces in response to worries over immigrants, population growth, and the rise of vice

69 Bird, Town Planning for Small Communities, 178.
70 Bird, Town Planning for Small Communities, 187-188.
71 Bird, Town Planning for Small Communities, 179.
72 Bird, Town Planning for Small Communities, 181.
Establishing a Town Forest

Until the Progressive Era, Americans had generally paid little attention to the conservation of natural resources. Forests across the eastern half of the nation gradually disappeared as increased demands for timber exhausted a once seemingly endless supply. Fears of following in Europe’s path toward even more thorough deforestation inspired many to consider new ways to conceive of forests throughout the United States. The Conservation movement, an environmental movement dedicated to the proper management of the United States’ natural resources (especially in regards to forestry), upheld the values that “conservation means the greatest good to the greatest number for the longest time,” and “conservation demands the application of the common-sense to the common problems for the common good.”73 These ideas that promoted a systemic approach to natural resource stewardship found an attentive audience among progressives in Massachusetts.

73Gifford Pinchot, the author of these words and one of the leading figures of the Conservation movement, had travelled to Europe and learned from English foresters. In fact, many of the principles governing forest management in the U.S. came directly from lessons originally learned overseas. “Principles of Conservation,” in Conservation in the Progressive Era, ed. David Stradling (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 22.
Just as Bird and Nolen had decided to combat widespread issues of housing and urbanization at the local level, they also called attention to how Walpole could mitigate regional timber shortages. Bird points out that “only 17 per cent of the wood… used in Massachusetts is raised in the state,” a reality he connected to job loss, increased taxes, and an increased cost of living. Additionally, he argued that federal and state efforts to conserve natural resources, “compared with the ever increasing demand for lumber and wood in our varied industries, are never likely to adequately supply our needs.” Considering their situation, Bird drew on his experiences abroad to find a solution. He had travelled through Europe at his father’s request as a young man and while there he had become fascinated with the utilitarian and economic appeal of locally and publically owned forests. He saw how these forests could provide valuable assets to his own community and utilized them in the replanning of Walpole. With the planning expertise of John Nolen, Bird established the Walpole Town Forest in 1916. Not only would this forest seek to supplement valuable resources for the town, but the two reformers also saw the potential for creating a space that could be further used to promote civic consciousness.

The newly established town forest covered a little over 170 acres and bordered the residential area of South Walpole. Nestled alongside the Neponset River and amongst several hills, the area where the Town Forest was located made it “an asset of beauty” according to an article from the American City. Initially, the town forest was not fully planted, but it was planned (and successfully carried out) for “a certain portion of the development work [to] be undertaken each year, thus ensuring orderly progress without entailing any appreciable increase in the burden of the taxpayers.” In addition, some of the roads had already been established at

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74Bird, *Town Planning for Small Communities*, 111-112.
75Bird, *Town Planning for Small Communities*, 102.
76Murphy, “The Town of Walpole Establishes a Communal Forest of 200 Acres,” 150.
77Murphy, “The Town of Walpole Establishes a Communal Forest of 200 Acres,” 152.
the time of its opening ceremony and rows of Douglas Fir, Scotch Pine, and Red Spruce were planted alongside them with the intention “to define the roads and lend value to future landscape effect.” Collectively, the Walpole Town Forest in 1916 was still poised for significant development. Throughout the two articles celebrating the establishment of the Massachusetts’s first town forest, the writers praised the forest for both its initial accomplishments as well as its future possibilities.

In the following years under the supervision of Charles Bird and the Town Planning Committee, the Walpole Town Forest would accomplish many of its initial goals. They planted trees on nearly all 170 acres and succeeded in laying down walking trails that still wind alongside the Neponset River. However, the project failed to reach its full potential as initially designed by Nolen and Bird. Plans had originally called for expansions to reach 600-1,000 acres of harvestable timber, interlaced swimming holes, and an amphitheater for pageants and assemblies. Unfortunately, the advent of World War I inhibited further growth and development as both the town and Bird family had to allocate time and funding elsewhere.

While the ambitions of the reformers were never fully realized in the Walpole Town Forest, the initial successes and plans from the early-twentieth century offer another glimpse into how these Progressive Era activists sought to use restorative spaces to reform their community.

Aside from the economic and scenic characteristics of the town forest, Bird, Nolen, and articles from 1916 heavily emphasized the value of communal ownership. The importance placed on this environment as a shared space illustrates how Bird hoped to challenge the

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78 Murphy, “The Town of Walpole Establishes a Communal Forest of 200 Acres,” 152.
individualism that had “run riot” during industrial development.\(^8^1\) Through the establishment of physical spaces owned by the collective, he hoped to bind material advance with an increasing community consciousness. In *Town Planning for Small Communities*, Bird highlighted European towns in Germany, Sweden, and Switzerland whose inhabitants received annual payments and allotments of firewood corresponding to the production of the local town forest.\(^8^2\) In regards to increasing civic consciousness, this scheme cleverly interwove individual material gain with a community improvement initiative. In this way, Bird and Nolen proposed and planned a public project that promoted community spirit and helped overcome threats of purely individual interests.\(^8^3\) Significantly, Bird directed this proposal not at Walpole’s adults, but at Walpole’s youngest generation.

*Figure 3:* The Planting of the First Acre of the Town Forest by the Children from *Images of America: Walpole* by Deborah Ranaldi, et al (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 1998), 81.

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\(^8^1\) Bird, *Town Planning for Small Communities*, vii.

\(^8^2\) Bird, *Town Planning for Small Communities*, 101-105.

\(^8^3\) Bird, *Town Planning for Small Communities*, 101.
In order to establish a personal connection between the town forest and the young
generation that would reap its material benefits, the opening ceremony included roughly nine
hundred boys and girls planting the first acre of trees.84 In front of over two thousand audience
members, the directed planting went successfully and was followed by a speech by Charles Bird
that included the following:

Boys and Girls of Walpole: This town is your home. Everything that affects its welfare is
your concern. As the future citizens of Walpole you should always remember that the
town will develop just as finely as the citizens are ready to work together toward the
idea… This forest is your forest. You should always remember that. It belongs now more
vitally to you than it does to the older members of this community because in your
lifetime it will grow to maturity.85

Throughout this speech in front of the Walpole audience, Bird drew a connection between the
children to both the future well-being of the town as well as the development and stewardship of
the forest. In declaring this link between the younger generation and the physical spaces around
them, Bird utilized this restorative space to raise an awareness of the importance and benefits
derived from community minded planning. In order to further commemorate this bond, Bird and
Nolen had a stone tablet placed at the entrance of the forest with the names of all the children
who participated in the planting ceremony.86 This strategic addition to the physical space of the
forest memorialized and magnified the meaning of the event as a whole. During the ceremony,
Bird explained that when the children return to the forest and see the tree they planted with their
name on the tablet, “you may always feel a thrill of pride that you played your part in
establishing the community forest idea in the commonwealth.”87 Again, Bird pushed the idea that

84Murphy, “The Town of Walpole Establishes a Communal Forest of 200 Acres,” 151.
85Walpole Public Library, First Acre of the Walpole Town Forest, Planted by 900 of the Boys and Girls of
the Town, May 5, 1916.
87Walpole Public Library, First Acre of the Walpole Town Forest, Planted by 900 of the Boys and Girls of
the Town, May 5, 1916.
the forest not only provided material gain, but also a sense of civic pride among the participants.

Bird’s appeals to promote civic consciousness demonstrated an indoctrination of responsibility onto the town’s youth. His paternalistic address that aspired to guide the youngest generation to take up the ideals of community spirit presented another way the Walpole reformers utilized restorative spaces to influence social behavior. Similar to the way that the United Verde Copper Company in Clarkdale, Arizona visually connected the ethnic Mexican workers’ homes to the refinery, the town forest created by the Bird and Nolen bonded the next generation to the wellbeing of the community. The Walpole Town Forest was their responsibility and only through continued stewardship and protection would they reap its material benefits.

Beyond the continued maintenance of the trees themselves, Bird also stressed the importance of protecting the forest from fire. In order to do so, the planners created “a system of cooperation between the forest fire station… and the pupils in the high school” neighboring the forest. As part of this system, a “company of boys” would—upon receiving a signal from the fire station—reach “any part of the forest in twenty minutes.”88 Just as the planting ceremony symbolically connected the younger children to the forest, the assignment of responsibility for protecting the forest from fire conscripted high school students to become directly involved in its stewardship. Through these two initiatives that enlisted young community members to participate in the creation and maintenance of the Town Forest, Bird and Nolen designed a physical space that directed the efforts of individuals toward a shared, community project. In doing so, they resisted what they perceived to be excessive individualism that “crushes the soul out of communities.”89

88Murphy, “The Town of Walpole Establishes a Communal Forest of 200 Acres,” 152.
89Walpole Public Library, First Acre of the Walpole Town Forest, Planted by 900 of the Boys and Girls of the Town, May 5, 1916.
While diminishing timber resources created the necessity for designing a town forest, Charles Bird and John Nolen’s concerns about unchecked individualism drove its implementation. “We want material advance,” Bird announced during the opening ceremony, “but we must have social and civic progress if that advance is to be worthwhile.” Speaking on behalf of the Walpole Town Forest, Bird clarified that while economic incentives were important to the creation of the forest, it is only meaningful if the community that benefits from them demonstrates a united civic consciousness. The restorative design of the Walpole Town Forest exhibits the way progressive reformers could utilize their local environment to persuade community members to engage in civic projects and activities.

**Parks and Recreation**

In both the plans for the Neponset Garden Village and Francis William Park, John Nolen and Charles Bird gave significant attention to allocating recreational space. Their focus resulted from a growing concern over the safety, health, and education of children. Reflected in the rise of the Playground Association of America founded in 1906, these ideas demonstrated a substantial shift away from post-Civil War policies that had denounced play as promoting “idleness and incorrigibility.” As Americans gradually became more aware of the deplorable conditions adults and children were subjected to during industrialization—especially in larger cities—progressives sought to redefine the environments they inhabited. Although Walpole did

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not have as poor of conditions for children as did Boston or Chicago, the potential for developing positive traits among citizens, assimilating immigrant families, and increasing exposure to natural spaces persuaded Bird and Nolen to pursue restorative park spaces. Notably, professionals within the growing playground movement in the Progressive Era initially observed the advantages of well-designed parks; Bird and Nolen then adopted many of their ideas.

One of these professionals, Henry S. Curtis, Ph.D., helped lead the founding of the Playground Association of America. Cited numerous times throughout *Town Planning for Small Communities*, Curtis’s appeals for recreation heavily influenced the successful creation of East Walpole’s Francis William Park.93 Explaining how the playground movement promoted positive physical and social ideals, Curtis offered a list of six goals of the movement. The first three pertain to “physical health,” “physical strength,” and the “development of vital or organic strength.”94 In order to achieve these goals, planners needed to create spaces that offered exposure “to open air,” facilitated play equivalent to exercise, and allowed for games that would “use old and simple coordinations and the fundamental muscles” to “strengthen the heart, lungs, and stomach.”95 In other words, by providing access to organized play, city planners had the ability to influence community health.

The last three goals applied to the formation of “good” social habits. Recalling the paternalism throughout Bird’s own writing, these objectives hinged on developing the character of malleable children using beautiful space and organized recreation. By providing the proper setting for play, promoters of the recreation movement believed they could influence “habits of courtesy,” “kindness,” and “fairness;” “the development of energy and enthusiasms,” and lastly,

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the development of “a sense of the joy of life and gains bent toward optimism.” By accessing designed spaces in order to promote specific values within the community, Curtis and the Walpole reformers alike contributed to a Progressive Era style of social control. Similar to the ways the Walpole Town Forest would increase community consciousness through activism within the community, Bird and Nolen believed that recreation would encourage the positive development of character and community.

This idea of “character development”, a recurring phrase and theme throughout Bird’s *Town Planning for Small Communities*, was never clearly defined by Bird. Its dispersed use appeared in most sections and prominently in the chapter titled “Outdoor Recreation.” In this section, Bird suggested broad connections between character development and the fostering of “energy and enthusiasm, team work, the spirit of fellowship,” “honesty,” “community consciousness,” “cleanliness,” and “good habits.” The vagueness of these qualities reveals what seems to be an unfamiliarity among the Walpole reformers as to how these spaces would actually shape those within them. The most pointed analysis of the uses of recreation in *Town Planning for Small Community* actually comes from passages taken from Henry Curtis. Considering this, an examination of his arguments for recreation by extension offers insight into how Bird and Nolen sought to bring change through these restorative spaces.

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Influenced by Curtis’s advocacy for organized and directed play in parks, Nolen designed a park to fit those exact ideals. In Francis William Park located in East Walpole Nolen incorporated three large fields for organized recreation, a swimming pool, and tennis courts.\textsuperscript{100}

His park scheme, as Warren summarized, “reflects his desire to integrate a variety of accommodations for sport and leisure activities,” and demonstrates his belief that “the spiritual uplift of nature was complemented by the social benefit of organized physical activities.”\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{100}The plot of land the Francis William Park was built on was originally the land designated for the Neponset Garden Village. Francis William Bird, Charles Bird’s older brother who died in 1918, was memorialized by the Bird family through the financing of the park; Warren, Introduction to \textit{New Towns for Old}, lxiii-lxiv; Nolen, \textit{New Towns for Old}, 39-41.

\textsuperscript{101}Warren, Introduction to \textit{New Towns for Old}, lxiii.
Here, Nolen and Curtis’ principals of park design coincided to display the connection between the production of space and positive character development.

Additionally, both Curtis and the Walpole reformers also emphasized the importance of aesthetic quality in recreational spaces. In his article promoting playgrounds, Henry Curtis explained that under his supervision, his parks in New York had wash basins and towels to scrub clean the children before they began to play. Behind this decision, he rationed that “the child who is dirty and ragged tends to live down to his appearance. The child who is well dressed and clean and feels himself a ‘little gentleman’ tends to act the part.”102 While Curtis isn’t talking about the permanent physical environment of the playground, this emphasis placed on the appearance of the children denotes the importance of the aesthetic attributes of the entire space. Likewise, in Nolen’s description of Francis William Park, he discusses the importance of beauty. He stated that “the general character of the park landscape should be that of the New England meadows and hillsides at their best,” with “wide, uninterrupted views,” and “hilltop plantings” that “increase the apparent height of the knolls.”103 This description was underwritten with an inherent value produced from encounters with beautiful, natural spaces.104 Nolen’s plan even went so far as to recreate picturesque New England meadows and artificially emphasize natural features of the environment. The time, energy, and effort given to the pursuit of natural beauty in this project illustrated how beauty played a definitive role in the character of restorative spaces dedicated to recreation.

At the same time the beauty of parks would help craft character, the processes required to establish these spaces as parks in the first place also contributed to the formation of good

102 Curtis, “The Playground Attendance and the Playground Director,” 130.
103 Nolen, New Towns for Old, 39.
qualities. In her article, “Voting for Play: The Democratic Potential of Progressive Era Playgrounds,” Peterson drew a key link between democracy and the creation of playgrounds in Massachusetts. She described the early playground development in the first two decades of the twentieth century as an “intensely local affair.” Citing the fact that while state governments enacted laws empowering local governments to establish public spaces for play, the cities and towns themselves had to oversee the funding, construction, and maintenance on their own. Further, this meant that the community of a town would have to vote for and likely fund a park, therefore binding the space itself with democratic processes. Peterson continues, “Playgrounds, because they were local public, became one means to achieve a vision of democracy that found effective national citizenship in the preservation and invigoration of the most local and therefore the most inclusive of politics—the neighborhood.” Seen this way, parks not only offered a space where play could promote the social development of children, but could also bring communities together through engagement in the democratic process.

In the same way that parks could promote democracy and community togetherness, so too could the formation of parks address the “American problem.” In an article discussing the effectiveness of playgrounds, Henry Curtis argued that a properly located park could have a powerful influence over the intermingling of different nationalities. With the intent of assimilation through affiliation, Curtis maintained that within a properly managed space both foreign born children and native born children could benefit from play together. He additionally asserted that “it may be best in the end to place a playground where it will draw from different

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*The American City* 9 (1913): 128.
nationalities, so as to prevent the formation of an exclusively foreign colony.”108 Just as Bird detested a community devoid of an encompassing community spirit, Curtis similarly opposed the existence of isolated communities characterized by a foreign nationality. Through the appropriate, intentional, and planned placement and design of parks, these progressive reformers believed they could mitigate social divisions in society caused by the arrival of foreign born immigrants.

While Nolen’s Neponset Garden Village would have housed a growing working class, and the plans for the Walpole Town Forest saw to the material preparedness for the next generation, the Walpole reformers believed a good park design could shape the character development of the same children who would later populate the town. Additionally, through the careful production of public, park spaces, Walpole reformers believed they could also address their concerns over community unity and their perceived impact of immigrants on American society. Initially, the anxieties of progressives regarding the health of youths in large cities had sparked discussions of how to improve their well-being. As those concerns manifested in the form of the playground movement that spanned across the nation, it soon advocated for the creation of restorative spaces that would both mitigate the physical danger children faced as well as develop the character of native born and immigrant communities alike.

Reflecting on Restorative Spaces

Born into the wealthy Bird family in 1883, Charles S. Bird Jr. served Walpole as the town’s most enthusiastic reformer throughout the Progressive Era. Largely because of his

passion and access to wealth, the small but quickly growing town engaged in city planning reform projects directed by the expertise of the highly regarded city planner John Nolen. Bird and Nolen collaborated throughout the 1910s and 1920s in pursuit of establishing a community that could balance the material growth brought by an industrializing economy and a civic consciousness that promoted what the reformers perceived to be the greater good. Driven by an optimistic view of their ability to craft a better future, Bird wrote the following passage in 1917:

“There is too much evidence of an overpowering force in evolution toward a broader human consciousness not to believe that from all the suffering and sacrifice today there must gradually come greater understanding among people, and through progressive social changes, improved social relations.”¹⁰⁹ To reach this greater understanding among people, progressive city planners needed to introduce comprehensive reforms in order to guide communities across the nation into a brighter future.

In order to get there, however, communities themselves would have to band together to remedy the ills of rapid industrialization and unchecked individualism. Large cities like Boston, New York, and Chicago illustrated to the Walpole reformers that without proper leadership and organization, social and economic conditions would deteriorate. It was a “failure to guard against the haphazard location of factories, the herding of work people in unsightly and unsanitary districts and slum tenement sections” that jeopardized the ”health and safety of the people.”¹¹⁰ These concerns compounded with apprehensions over “The American Problem” as thousands of foreign born immigrants arrived in towns and cities up and down the East Coast.¹¹¹ For Progressive Era reformers, threats to the moral and material integrity of American society

¹⁰⁹Bird, Town Planning for Small Communities, ix.
¹¹⁰Bird, Town Planning for Small Communities, 10.
¹¹¹Bird, Town Planning for Small Communities, 175.
appeared all around them.

Charles Bird and John Nolen, in line with other reformers, sought use space as an instrument of change. Adhering to the principles of environmental determinism and commonwealth ownership, they drew up plans for the Neponset Garden Village, the Walpole Town Forest, and Francis William Park. While Bird and Nolen never managed to create the garden village, the plans for these restorative spaces demonstrated how they believed space could influence the entire community. As elites among this community, the two Walpole reformers exhibited a paternalistic approach to improving the town. With the intentions of inculcating a civic consciousness and encouraging specific social behaviors, Bird and Nolen’s projects exemplified the familiar Progressive Era endeavor of social control.

Had the Neponset Garden Village been constructed, Bird and Nolen advocated that its centralized organization and administration would have provided housing for the working class while fostering better social habits. The Walpole Town Forest initially garnered support as a supplemental source of dwindling timber supplies; however, during the opening ceremony Bird used the space to create a direct link between the next generation and the well-being of Walpole. Through the construction of Francis William Park, Bird and Nolen argued that park spaces facilitated community spirit, benefited the health of citizens, and helped assimilate foreign born immigrants. These spatial reforms throughout Walpole and the rationale behind them exhibited how reformers utilized restorative spaces to respond to concerns of the Progressive Era.

In *Town Planning for Small Communities*, Charles Bird not only provided statistics, detailed plans, and guidelines for planning small communities, but also offered a list of twenty-four suggested town slogans.\(^{112}\) Slogans such as “Shoulder to Shoulder for Walpole,”

\(^{112}\)Bird, *Town Planning for Small Communities*, 413.
“Everybody Work for Walpole,” and “All Cooperate for a Bigger and Better Walpole” emphasized the importance of community spirit and cooperation while improving the town. Others like “Watch Walpole Set the Pace,” and “Walpole’s Busy Doing Things” highlighted Walpole’s exemplary reform efforts. Nevertheless, the slogan that best captured the values put forth by Charles Bird and John Nolen returned to their push against individualism. By designing and implementing restorative spaces that contributed to the future development of the community and town, these reformers were truly “Working for Walpole.”
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