The Public Baths of Philadelphia

That a large city like Philadelphia should make such a poor showing in the number of free public baths may perhaps be explained by the fact that it is more than any other city, a "City of Homes" with comparatively few tenement houses and with a bath tub in nearly every home.

—WILLIAM PAUL GERHARD

In 1900 Philadelphia was the third largest city in the United States. Its population of 1,293,697 was exceeded only by that of New York City and Chicago. Despite its size, Philadelphia never established a municipal year-round bath system, and it was only through the philanthropic efforts of a group of wealthy and prominent citizens that some public baths were constructed.¹

This sin of omission on the part of the municipal government was usually attributed, as in the above quotation from Gerhard's Progress of the Municipal Bath Movement in the United States, to the fact that Philadelphia was a "city of homes" and that therefore it had little need for public baths. This rationale, however, was only partly sustained by facts. The Bureau of Labor investigation in 1893 of Philadelphia's most congested slum districts discovered that only 16.9 percent of families and 18.05 percent of individuals lived in houses or tenements with bathrooms. Although this was a much greater percentage than the approximately 3 percent with bathrooms in New York City's and Chicago's slums, it still
indicated a need for public baths. Further evidence of this need was supplied by the treasurer of Philadelphia's Public Baths Association, who estimated in 1899 that in the city's slum districts not one in twenty families had access to a bath. And in 1902, by actual count, the Public Baths Association found that in a typical slum block adjoining its Gaskill Street Bath there was "but one bathtub for each 155 people." Thus although the poor of Philadelphia were not as deprived of bath facilities as those in other great cities, there was certainly not a bathtub in almost every home as some reformers assumed.  

Although there is no doubt that Philadelphia's slums lacked bathing facilities, the fact that the city had a smaller immigrant population than New York City, Boston, and Chicago may also explain its failure to act. In 1900 about 23 percent of Philadelphia's population was foreign born, as compared to about 35 percent in the other three cities. As has been noted, almost all public baths were located in immigrant neighborhoods.

The political situation in Philadelphia from 1890 to 1915 also played a role in the failure of the municipal government to build year-round baths. Lincoln Steffens in 1903 called Philadelphia "corrupt and contented" and asserted that "other American cities, no matter how bad their own condition may be, all point with scorn to Philadelphia as worse—'the worst governed city in the country.' " Delos Wilcox agreed, maintaining that it had "the reputation of being more inseparably wedded to the idols of corruption than any other great American city." Whether or not the worst, the government of Philadelphia was most certainly mired in corruption, graft, inefficiency, and fraudulent elections under its Republican political machine and bosses. One of the problems of potential progressive reformers, though, was that most of them were Republicans and strong supporters of Republican policy on the national level, especially the high tariff. They were usually unwilling to unite with Democratic reformers and had to form independent reform parties, thus splitting the reform vote. Most of the time the Republican machine and Philadelphia's "best men" coexisted comfortably.

In spite of its reputation, however, Philadelphia had gone through several periods of reform during this time. In the 1870s the Committee of One Hundred had broken the notorious Gas Ring and achieved a model city charter in 1885, but the machine had returned to power in the late 1880s. In 1904–05 the Committee of Seventy succeeded in electing a reform mayor who, however, soon returned to the regular Republican
organization. Again in 1911 the reformers elected a reform mayor, but many of the reforms he instituted (such as a new housing code) were opposed by the city council, which refused to appropriate the funds needed for enforcement. By the end of his term most of Philadelphia's progressive reformers had returned to the Republican party ranks.  

Philadelphia's progressive reformers, in their brief periods of success, were concerned mostly with structural and political rather than social reforms. The Republican machine, as Delos Wilcox noted, was in many ways "extremely negligent of the poor and unfortunate." And Philadelphia clung to its tradition of dependence on private religious and charitable organizations to solve social problems, and of resistance to the expansion of government's social welfare responsibilities.

Although Philadelphia's municipal government, whether controlled by bosses or reformers, provided no municipal year-round baths, it did make ample provision for summer bathing, which was very popular among all classes of citizens. In 1885 the city had opened the first floating river bath and others followed, but they proved to be too polluted; so instead the city began to build outdoor swimming pools. By 1899 Philadelphia had 8 such swimming pools, approximately 40 by 60 feet in size, open during the summer months five days per week for men and boys and two days per week for women and girls. By 1912, the number of swimming pools had increased to 23 and the city had spent nearly $1 million in their construction.

More than likely, the machine-controlled municipal government of Philadelphia built these swimming pools because of their popularity with the people but refused to build year-round baths because of the lack of popular demand for them. Reformers, with their interest in efficiency and economy, also showed no interest in year-round baths. But, if the city would not build these baths, public-spirited citizens would do so, for as Delos Wilcox cynically noted, "Philadelphia cares more for its reputation for philanthropy and Christian charity than it does for a good name for civic justice and political honesty."

The public bath movement in Philadelphia began in the early 1890s almost by chance and, as in Chicago, was initiated by a woman. Sarah Dickson Lowrie, an upper class young woman who conducted a sewing class for girls in the mission building in one of Philadelphia's worst slums, was informed by her students that there was no way for them to take a bath in winter. She promptly became a public bath advocate and
at a dinner party succeeded in interesting Barclay H. Warburton, editor and publisher of the Philadelphia *Daily Evening Telegraph*, in the cause of public baths. He assigned a reporter to investigate the bath situation in Philadelphia's slums in early 1895. His newspaper ran a feature article on the lack of bathing facilities in the poorer sections of Philadelphia, and Warburton proposed the raising of $50,000 for the building and equipping of public baths and washhouses for Philadelphia. He urged that a responsible group of Philadelphia citizens organize themselves to inaugurate and carry out this enterprise.9

The response to Warburton's proposal was the formation of the Public Baths Association of Philadelphia, which was incorporated on March 18, 1895. The purpose of the association as stated in its charter was to establish and maintain "public baths and [afford] to the poor facilities for bathing and the promotion of health and cleanliness." The association planned "to erect one or more Bath Houses and Laundries, where for a small fee persons of both sexes can obtain hot or cold baths every day of the year, and where women can do their family washing." The charter of the association did not express the hope that the bath or baths they proposed to build would serve as a model which would encourage the municipal government to build year-round baths. A few years later the treasurer of the association, however, did state in a journal article that the building of a bath through private effort would provide "a practical object-lesson" which would "do more than an attempt by mere argument to force the city councils to accept their [the bath advocates'] ideas."10

The Public Baths Association of Philadelphia was managed by a twelve-member board of trustees who were elected by the membership of the association for a one-year term at the annual meeting. The officers were chosen from among the trustees, who met monthly and appointed a superintendent who was responsible for the day-to-day operation of the baths. Membership in the association was restricted to any person of good character who was endorsed in writing by two members in good standing and was elected by a two-thirds vote of the members present at the annual meeting.11

The charter subscribers and members of the Public Baths Association, the majority of whom were on the first board of trustees, were for the most part socially prominent, wealthy, upper class Philadelphians. A few examples of the membership will illustrate this point.

The president of the first board of trustees was Eugene Delano, who
was born in Utica, New York, in 1844 and had received B.A. and A.M. degrees from Williams College. Delano had started his career as a merchant but had joined the investment banking firm Brown Brothers and Company in 1880 and was made resident partner in Philadelphia in 1894. In 1895, still with Brown Brothers, he moved to New York City, where he resided until his death in 1920. Delano was active in numerous charitable endeavors in addition to the Public Baths Association, including trusteeships of the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, the Presbyterian Hospital, the New York City Mission, and the New York Institution for the Deaf and Dumb. Although Delano moved to New York City in 1895, the year of the founding of the Public Baths Association, he continued as president of the board of trustees until 1902. As a New York City resident, Delano also served the cause of public baths as a chairman of the Public Bath Committee of the AICP.  

The chairman of the Finance Committee of the board of trustees and later vice-president was Barclay H. Warburton, the editor and publisher of the *Daily Evening Telegraph*, who had originated the public baths campaign in his newspaper. Born in 1866 in Philadelphia, Warburton was educated at the University of Pennsylvania and Oxford University. In 1884, when his father died, he assumed control of the newspaper that his father had founded. Warburton was married to Mary Brown Wanamaker, the daughter of John Wanamaker, the department store founder.  

The treasurer of the board of trustees and later chairman of the Finance Committee was Franklin B. Kirkbride. Born in Philadelphia in 1867, he was a graduate of Haverford College and son of a leading psychiatrist. Kirkbride was assistant secretary and then treasurer of the Pennsylvania Company for Insurances on Lives and Granting Annuities in Philadelphia. In 1905 he moved to New York City, where he established the Franklin B. Kirkbride Management Corporation. Kirkbride, like Delano, was active in many charitable endeavors. He played an important role in the establishment of Letchworth Village, the New York state school for the feeble-minded, and was a trustee of the Milbank Memorial Fund and the AICP (and, like Delano, a member of its Public Bath Committee). In the late 1890s and early 1900s Kirkbride wrote several journal articles on Philadelphia's public baths and lectured frequently on the subject.  

Delano's successor as president of the board of trustees was Edward B. Smith, a prominent Philadelphia banker and financier who was head of
his own investment banking firm. Born in Philadelphia in 1861, he was a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. Smith too was involved in many charitable enterprises, most notably the Pennsylvania Society to Protect Children from Cruelty and the Tuberculosis Camp, and was a director of the City Trusts, which managed the Girard Estates.\textsuperscript{15}

Kirkbride's successor as treasurer of the board of trustees was his nephew Arthur V. Morton. Morton was born in Philadelphia in 1874 and was a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. Morton was employed by the Pennsylvania Company for Banking and Trusts and eventually became its president in 1924. His charitable activities include trusteeship of the Pennsylvania Hospital.\textsuperscript{16}

Sarah Dickson Lowrie was also a member of the original board of trustees. "One of Old Philadelphia's more famous spinsters," she was born in 1870 and attended the Farmington School in Connecticut. Throughout her long life (she died in 1957) she was involved in many varied activities. She was a founder of the Philadelphia Junior League and the Lighthouse Settlement. She was a columnist for the \textit{Philadelphia Evening Ledger} and on the staff of the \textit{Ladies Home Journal}. A leader in the Philadelphia movement for women's suffrage, she led the first women's suffrage parade in that city. She was also interested in historic preservation and headed the restoration of Pennsbury, William Penn's country home, and wrote a book on the history of Strawberry Mansion, a Philadelphia home from the colonial period. When she resigned from the board of trustees of the Public Baths Association in 1908, the trustees noted in their minutes that it was "owing greatly to Miss Lowrie's untiring efforts that the money was raised to build the first bathhouse."\textsuperscript{17}

Probably the best-known member of the board of trustees of the Public Baths Association and the wealthiest (he was on the \textit{New York Tribune}'s list of American millionaires in 1901) was Charlemagne Tower. Tower, whose money was inherited from his father of the same name, was a diplomat, author, and lawyer-businessman. Born in Philadelphia in 1849, he was a graduate of Harvard University. After a career in business and law, he served as ambassador to Austria, Russia, and Germany between 1897 and 1908. In all these posts he lived and entertained on a very lavish scale. Tower's avocation was history, and he was president of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and the author of a number of historical essays and one book, \textit{The Marquis de Lafayette in the American Revolution}.\textsuperscript{18}
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Other members of the board of trustees were equally prominent and were members of Philadelphia's leading families. Names such as Drexel, Wanamaker, Weightman, Paul, and Harrison appear as either trustees or donors. It is obvious that Philadelphia's public bath advocates were patrician reformers who were active in a variety of charitable enterprises, as well as the Public Baths Association. Until 1910 the board of trustees also usually, but not always, included, in addition to Sarah Lowrie, three or four women who cannot be further identified. From that year forward all the trustees were men. One or two physicians and a minister were also frequently members. Generally the trustees contributed generously to the association with yearly gifts ranging up to $1,000. Money was also raised by staging benefits, such as a theatrical event at the New Century Drawing Rooms in 1902 which netted $300.  

With the incorporation of the Public Baths Association and fund raising under way, plans proceeded for the construction of the first bath. A site on Gaskill Street in Southwark, one of the oldest and most thickly populated sections of the city and "one of the vilest Jewish immigrant neighborhoods," was purchased for $5,750. Plans for the bath itself were strongly influenced by the AICP's People's Baths in New York City because some of the trustees inspected those baths as well as a bathhouse in Yonkers, New York, built in compliance with New York's mandatory bath law. As a result they decided that no swimming pool would be included. Originally a large bath with 57 showers was planned at a total cost of about $29,000. However, such a large bath could not be built for that price so ultimately the association had to settle for a smaller one. They did decide to include a public laundry in the bath, which was an innovation, for whereas many European baths had laundries, none in the United States did at this time.

The Gaskill Street Bath was formally opened on April 20, 1898, with several hundred of Philadelphia's "best and most distinguished citizens" present. The two-and-one-half-story bath contained 26 showers and 1 bathtub for men, 14 showers and 3 bathtubs for women, a public laundry in the basement, and living quarters for the superintendent on the second floor. Located on a 40 by 60-foot lot, it was in colonial style of red brick trimmed with dark mortar. The total cost of lot, bathhouse, and equipment was $29,903, quite close to the original budget.

There was no question in the minds of the trustees of the Public Baths Association that a fee should be charged for the use of the bath. A five
cent fee was charged for a shower bath, ten cents for a tub bath, both with towel and soap; children under ten with their parents were admitted free. The fee for use of the laundry was five cents per hour. The association pointed out that it cost five cents for a glass of beer and declared that “the poor man liked to be clean even to the extent of denying himself a glass of
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beer in exchange for a bath." It also stated that the small charge prevented "the humiliation that arises in the self-respecting poor when receiving alms" and would not "'pauperize' its beneficiaries" as "each one pays for what he gets." The association expressed the hope that the fees would eventually make the bathhouse self-supporting and this hope did become a reality in 1910. The bath was open every day of the year, including Sundays and holidays.  

The Public Baths Association deemed the Gaskill Street Bath an immediate success, noting expansively that it was "patronized by all nationalities, Hebrews, Italians, Germans, Irish, English, Japanese, Hungarians, as well as Americans, black and white." The majority of patrons, however, were Jewish. The total number of bathers in 1898 was 21,656, or an average of 88 per day, although the capacity of the bath was over 900 per day; only 256 persons patronized the laundry. As in other cities, the patronage also varied greatly between winter and summer; in July 1898 there were 4,945 bathers and in November the total was 787.  

The Public Baths Association, although pleased with the modest success of the bath, took steps to increase patronage. In 1899, it had posters printed advertising the bath and requested that neighborhood stores, barbershops, saloons, and charitable organizations display them. Thousands of cards were distributed from house to house and in the streets. In addition, "an advertising wagon with descriptive signs and a large bell attached was kept on the streets thirty days during the early summer." These efforts apparently were effective, for in 1902 the number of bathers at the Gaskill Street Bath had increased to 62,377, or an average of 170 per day, and laundry patrons totaled 1,156.  

The association was very proud of its public laundry equipped with hot and cold water, washtubs, drying closets, ironing boards, and irons. Its treasurer, Franklin B. Kirkbride, remarked that the laundry's patrons ranged "from the men who come on Sundays to wash their only set of under-clothing, to the small shopkeepers who send their servants to do the family washing and ironing." The association also was gratified to report that the Gaskill Street Bath had "visitors from St. Louis, Chicago, New York, Baltimore, and other leading cities, with the result of stimulating the bath-house movement throughout the country."  

In 1900 the Public Baths Association noted that the Gaskill Street Bath was becoming more self-supporting, with fees covering 64 percent of the expenses. Because of this they felt that "with a clear conscience funds
may be asked for the building of Public Bath No. 2,” and a fund-raising campaign was begun. In urging support of a second bath the association observed that “the bath house movement throughout the country” was growing rapidly and expressed the hope that “Philadelphia will not only keep abreast, but lead in this very important branch of moral and material progress.”

Fund raising and plans for the second bathhouse proceeded, and land was purchased at 718 Wood Street for $2,328 in 1901. The neighborhood
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around this bath, Northern Liberties, was a slum that was home to Russian and Austro-Hungarian Jews and Irish immigrants. The Wood Street Bath, which formally opened on March 30, 1903, was somewhat smaller than the first bath, having 24 showers for men and 6 for women as well as a public laundry. It too was built in colonial style and cost approximately $20,000. The opening reception and tea for contributors and members of the Public Baths Association was, like the first one, a lively social affair and caused quite a stir in the neighborhood as the Philadelphia Press reported: “Broughams, with liveried coachmen and footmen on the boxes, arrived in the rain through streets they never traveled before and deposited women prominent in social circles at the quaint little colonial building. The inhabitants looked in amazement from front windows at the procession.”

Also in 1903 the Public Baths Association built a separate laundry and small bath exclusively for women opposite the Gaskill Street Bath, which thereafter was reserved for men. The reason was that women patrons of the Gaskill bath objected to the increasing use of the bath and especially of the laundry by vagrant men. This one-story bath was also of colonial design and cost, with land, $8,998 to build and equip.

With the opening of these two new baths in 1903 the association continued its widespread advertising of the public baths. Calendars, posters, cards, and free tickets were liberally distributed to individuals in the street, to private houses, places of business, and charitable organizations. The local press, especially Barclay Warburton’s Daily Evening Telegraph, also cooperated with the baths association by printing numerous feature articles as well as free advertisements for the public baths.

This policy of advertising achieved results, for in 1907 bath patronage had increased to 149,160, or an average of 408 baths per day, in the three baths in operation, although this patronage did not begin to tax the baths' capacity. Laundry patronage also increased to 4,993. By this year also, the three baths were almost self-supporting: 92 percent of the operating expenses of $10,416 were met by the fees charged. Encouraged by decreasing costs and continuing increases in patronage, the Public Baths Association of Philadelphia built another bath for the poor, which opened on November 12, 1912. This bath, located at 1203 and 1205 Germantown Road, was larger than Philadelphia’s other public baths, with 62 showers for men and 8 for women. It was “in the heart of a poor district” in Kensington, a working class industrial area predominantly inhabited by
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Irish and English immigrants but also home to many other ethnic groups. Nearly 400 persons contributed to the building fund for this bath in amounts ranging from $1 to the $2,500 donated by two officers of the association, Edward B. Smith, president and George L. Harrison, Jr., vice-president. 30

As the fees charged for the baths made them self-supporting and contributions to the association continued, in 1915 the trustees were able to enlarge the Wood Street Bath to contain 70 showers. 31

Whereas bath reformers in other cities felt that their work was completed by 1920 and built almost no more baths after that date, the Public Baths Association of Philadelphia built two more public baths during the 1920s. Why they did this is not entirely clear, although they continued to believe that public baths were needed. A most important reason, however, was their financial success. In 1915 they received a $5,000 bequest from Elizabeth Shippen. By that year the existing baths were not only self-supporting but also had begun to show a profit of $281. By 1921 the surplus of revenues after expenses had increased to $20,818. Contributions had also grown steadily, reaching a peak of $10,332 in 1916 and averaging $6,000 to $7,000 per year in the 1920s. 32

In 1921 the Public Baths Association opened a large public bath at Passyunk Avenue and Wharton Street, containing 96 showers, at a cost of $74,344. This bath was located in South Philadelphia in a neighborhood inhabited mainly by Italian immigrants. Even after building this bathhouse, the association recorded in 1922 that it held investments totaling $59,000 in value. In 1924 it therefore decided to build another bathhouse in Kensington, a major manufacturing area where its Germantown Avenue Bath was well patronized. This bath, located at 1808-14 Hazzard Street, opened in 1928 and was the largest and most expensive bath built by the association. It contained 107 showers and cost $108,798. 33

Although Philadelphia had a sizable African-American population—62,613 people, who made up almost 5 percent of the total population in 1900, and 134,229, or 7.4 percent, in 1920—the Public Baths Association constructed no baths in African-American neighborhoods. But the Gas-kill Street Baths were on the border of a major African-American district. Like bath reformers in other cities, the association focused its efforts on immigrant neighborhoods (see map 4). 34

As these new baths opened, patronage reached a peak of 530,964 in 1928, as did the surplus of revenues over expenses of $15,339. Never-
1. 1808-14 E. Hazzard St.
2. 1203-05 Germantown Ave.
3. 718-20 Wood St.
4. 410-12 Gaskill St.
413-15 Gaskill St.
5. Passyunk Ave. & Wharton St.
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theless, beginning in 1929, both patronage and surpluses began to decline and by 1932 the surplus had become a deficit of $10,667. The trustees attributed declining patronage to the widespread unemployment caused by the Great Depression and did their share to help in 1930 by hiring unemployed men in the bathhouses to paint and do small repairs and in 1931 by contributing $1,000 to the Committee for Unemployment Relief. Throughout the 1930s patronage declined, deficits mounted, and contributions diminished, although the association urged contributors to increase their donations.³⁵

In 1942 the trustees considered the question of whether the Public Baths Association should be liquidated but decided to carry on for a while longer, although in that year they closed the Gaskill Street Baths. In their fund-raising efforts they cited the 1940 census, which revealed that 14.3 percent of dwellings in Philadelphia still lacked private bathing facilities, but to no avail. Yearly contributions dwindled to a few hundred dollars. In 1943 they closed the Hazzard Street Bath, "which [had] shown continuing deficits in each year since it opened in 1928." In 1944 and 1945 the trustees sold the bathhouses which had closed, and in 1946 they voted to cease operations, stating that there was no longer a need for "this charitable enterprise." They closed the two remaining bathhouses in 1948 and sold them to the city of Philadelphia. After arranging for pensions for bathhouse employees and donating their assets of $69,632 to the Philadelphia Foundation, the Public Baths Association of Philadelphia ceased to exist on January 11, 1950.³⁶

Although the city of Philadelphia built no public baths for its poorer citizens, the city's patrician bath reformers cannot be faulted for lack of sustained devotion to the cause. From its inception in 1895 the Public Baths Association raised large sums of money, built public baths, and continued to build them after the movement had lost vigor in other cities. Philadelphia's bath reformers were also active in the national movement; the superintendent of the baths or a member of the association usually served on the board of directors of the national organization, the American Association for Promoting Hygiene and Public Baths. Some trustees' interest in the cause of public baths spanned generations and lasted a lifetime. The last president of the board of trustees was Edward B. Smith, Jr., who served from 1929 to 1950. His father had been president from 1902 to 1918. Arthur V. Morton was treasurer from 1905 until his death in
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1949, and Barclay H. Warburton, one of the founders of the association in 1895, voted with the other trustees to dissolve it in 1950.37

The Public Baths of Baltimore

Our economy of management of baths and laundries, our freedom from political or personal influence in making appointments of employees, our careful sanitary regulations as to cleanliness, and withal the large success resulting, have given our city a national reputation in this department.38

—FREE PUBLIC BATH COMMISSION OF BALTIMORE

Although Baltimore was somewhat later than other American cities in establishing its small municipal bath system, once the system was founded it compensated for its late start by the efficiency of its operation and the continuing and unflagging interest of its bath advocates. The leaders of the Baltimore public bath movement not only strongly urged the city to build municipal baths in the early 1890s but served as charter members of the Free Public Bath Commission, supervising Baltimore's baths while they were being constructed and after the system was completed.

In Baltimore the public bath system was not a clear-cut result of urban progressive reform or of simple private philanthropy. Although reformers controlled the municipal government between 1895 and 1910, they were not responsive to the demands for municipal baths by the leading bath proponents, some of whom were themselves progressive leaders. Instead, Baltimore acquired a public bath system largely through the generosity of its wealthiest citizen, Henry Walters, who donated four public bathing facilities to the city, which then agreed to operate them.39

The public bath movement began in Baltimore in 1893, when the Reverend Thomas M. Beadenkopf, pastor of the Canton Congregational Church, located in a poorer section of East Baltimore, saw the need for a summer bathing beach in the area. He solicited funds from his wealthier parishioners and other interested citizens and opened a "bathing shore" at Canton in July that was Baltimore's first public bathing site. The next year Beadenkopf convinced Baltimore officials that the city should take over and operate Canton Beach, and $500 was appropriated for this purpose.40

Also in 1894 Beadenkopf approached some of Baltimore's prominent citizens and persuaded them that there was a need for year-round baths
as well as a summer bathing beach and asked them to join him in urging city officials to establish permanent baths. Mayor Ferdinand Latrobe's response was the creation of a Bath Commission to study the question and make recommendations. He also requested that Beadenkopf and the others serve as members. The Bath Commission, as it finally was constituted, included the presidents of the first and second branches of the city council; William H. Morriss, secretary of the YMCA; James Carey Thomas, a physician; Beadenkopf, who was appointed secretary; and Eugene Levering, who was president. Since ultimately the leadership of both Beadenkopf and Levering was crucial to the success of Baltimore's public bath movement, it is appropriate to review their respective backgrounds.41

Beadenkopf, of German descent, was born in 1855. A graduate of Johns Hopkins University in 1880 and Yale Divinity School in 1885, he became pastor of the Canton Church in Baltimore in 1891. Once the bathing beach at Canton was established, Beadenkopf became a staunch advocate of municipal baths, both summer and year-round, and devoted the rest of his life to that cause. He was a member of Baltimore's first Free Public Bath Commission and in 1902 was appointed by the commission to be superintendent of Baltimore's municipal baths, a full-time, salaried position. He served in this capacity until his death in 1915. He was also one of the founders of the American Association for Promoting Hygiene and Public Baths and was elected vice-president of the association at its first meeting in 1912.42

Born in Baltimore in 1845, Eugene Levering was the descendant of German immigrants who came to America in 1685. He did not attend college and instead went to work in his father's grocery and importing business. He moved from this business to banking and eventually became president and chairman of the board of the National Bank of Commerce of Baltimore. Levering was listed in the Baltimore Social Register but was most active in educational, religious, charitable, and philanthropic endeavors. He was a deacon in his Baptist church and treasurer of the Maryland Baptist Association. He also served as director of the Charity Organization Society and as president of the Baltimore Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor. He was one of the founders of the American Red Cross and a member of its board of directors and was a trustee of George Washington and Johns Hopkins universities. He donated Levering Hall to Johns Hopkins and in 1893
established Levering House for Men in Baltimore, an institution similar to the Mills Hotels for homeless men in New York City. In addition to his activity in many of the reform movements of the day, Levering was a strong proponent of public baths and was appointed president of the Free Public Bath Commission of Baltimore when it was created in 1900 to administer the Baltimore baths. He served in this post until his death in 1928 at the age of eighty-two.43

Baltimore’s first Bath Commission, of which Levering was also the president, began its work in 1894. At its urging the city opened two other bathing beaches to the public in 1894 but took no action on the recommendation that permanent year-round baths be established. In 1895 Beadenkopf toured Europe to study the bath systems there, especially those in Germany and England, and reported to the Bath Commission on his findings. Again in 1896, 1897, and 1898 the Bath Commission urged the municipal government to construct all-season baths but to no avail.44

It is unclear why the city government was reluctant to build municipal baths. In 1895 the Reform League, which had been established in 1885, finally succeeded in overthrowing the Democratic machine that had controlled the city since 1867. Although there was no large-scale corruption or scandal during the reign of the Democratic boss, Isaac Freeman Rasin, the city of Baltimore was poorly governed. For example, the school system was one of the worst in the country, and Baltimore, with its population of over one-half million people, had no sewer system. The mayor was usually a member of Baltimore’s upper class, which was friendly to the machine but not subservient to it. Ferdinand Latrobe, a member of an old Baltimore family, served seven terms as mayor from 1875 to 1895. The chairman of Baltimore’s Reform League was Charles J. Bonaparte, a Progressive Republican and friend of Theodore Roosevelt, who later appointed him to his cabinet. The Reform League, which was a Republican-reform coalition, succeeded in gaining control of the city council in 1894 and of the mayoralty in 1895, when a Republican businessman, Alcaeus Hooper, was elected.45

Thus, when the Baltimore Bath Commission made its recommendations in the late 1890s, the city’s municipal reformers had achieved victory over the machine. But the Baltimore reform movement in general was not as sympathetic to the cause of municipal baths as the movements led in New York City by Mayor William L. Strong and in Boston by Josiah Quincy.
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One reason for the lack of response from Baltimore's progressive-reform government may be that the need for other urban services was more pressing. And in fact the need for municipal baths was not as great in Baltimore as in other cities. Next to Philadelphia, Baltimore had more residents living in single-family houses than any other major city. However, the federal Bureau of Labor investigation of slum conditions in Baltimore in 1893 had revealed that only 7.35 percent of the families and 9.21 percent of individuals in slums had bathrooms in their houses or tenements. Although these percentages were higher than for most other cities, they still indicated a real lack of bathing facilities.46

Another reason may have been Baltimore's comparatively small immigrant population. In 1890, its foreign-born population comprised less than 16 percent of its total population, while in New York, Boston, and Chicago the foreign born reached or exceeded 35 percent of the total population. However, in 1890 Baltimore did have the largest African-American population of any city except Washington, D.C. The preponderance of African Americans among Baltimore's slum population may also account for the city's official reluctance to build public baths; when it was later suggested that a public bath be constructed for "colored people," city officials were opposed and revealed their prejudice by maintaining that they "would not use the baths, that their maintenance would be a waste of the city's money."47

Joseph L. Arnold has also pointed out Baltimore's tradition of privatism, wherein residents or building contractors often paid for various urban amenities, such as public squares, police and fire call boxes, fountains, sidewalks, and even school buildings, which would then be maintained by the municipal government. Finally, there is no evidence of demand for public baths on the part of those citizens of Baltimore for whom the baths were intended, and this may also account for the municipal government's indifference.48

Although Baltimore's Bath Commission under the presidency of Eugene Levering was rebuffed by the municipal government, it did succeed in arousing public interest in the question of municipal baths and in securing the support of the Maryland Public Health Association.49

In November 1898, at a state conference on charities and correction, the Maryland Public Health Association sponsored an open meeting on public baths. The main speakers were Mayor Josiah Quincy of Boston and Franklin Kirkbride of the Public Baths Association of Philadelphia.
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Each spoke on the progress of the public bath movement in his city. Eugene Levering also spoke on the necessity for year-round baths in Baltimore and urged their immediate establishment either by the municipal government, as was done in Boston, or through public donations, as was the case in Philadelphia.  

The response to this public meeting was disappointing, producing no reaction from the city government and few donations from the public. The Bath Commission then determined to solicit the editorial support of Baltimore’s newspapers as well as to advertise in them for the cause. The following notice appeared in Baltimore’s daily newspapers early in December 1898:

PUBLIC BATHS
Shall Baltimore Have Them?

The recent meeting at McCoy Hall at which Mayor Quincy of Boston and F. B. Kirkbride of Philadelphia showed what is being done in those cities in the matter of Public Baths, aroused great interest. Baltimore’s showing was almost grotesque in contrast.

The question is “Shall Baltimore continue to occupy this position?”

Boston spends $35,000 annually for public baths; New York, $48,000; Philadelphia, Chicago, Buffalo, Detroit, and even Wilmington spend large sums for this purpose. Baltimore appropriates $500 per year toward maintenance of summer baths. Baths open all the year round, equipped with hot and cold water, and accessible to all who are now deprived of these privileges, are a necessity. In some sections of our city, bathrooms are not provided in 90 percent of homes.

The Baltimore Commissioners are ready to open such baths if money is provided. They have secured in cash and pledges about $600 but it will take $2,000 to carry out even the most modest plan.

Subscriptions to this fund are earnestly solicited and may be sent to Eugene Levering.

By Order of the Commission

At the same time, editorial support was also forthcoming. The Baltimore Sun, for example, endorsed the advertisement and the idea of municipal baths. It felt that if Baltimore could not raise as large a fund as New York City or Boston “through public appropriations or private subscriptions, it ought to be entirely feasible to make a beginning without further delay and to lay the foundations for a more elaborate system in the future.” It hoped that “civic pride, as well as civic interest, may make prompt and generous response to the commission’s appeal” and noted that “public
baths may be regarded in the light of home missions for the improvement of physical and moral conditions."\textsuperscript{51}

In spite of the advertisement and the editorial endorsements, again there was little response on the part of the citizens of Baltimore and none from the municipal government to the pleas of the Bath Commission. The Bath Commission then began to approach Baltimore's wealthier citizens individually for contributions. It found Henry Walters, the railroad magnate, very receptive and much interested. Walters, who had been contacted by Beadenkopf, asked for detailed information on public baths. The Bath Commission sent Beadenkopf to Boston, New York City, and Chicago to study the bath systems of these cities.\textsuperscript{52}

On February 1, 1899, the Bath Commission submitted its report to Henry Walters. The commission recommended that four baths be established in Baltimore's most congested areas and listed the proposed sites in order of their importance: Southeast Baltimore, Old Town, Southwest Baltimore, and South Baltimore. It asserted that the purpose of the baths should be cleanliness only and that they therefore should be equipped with showers and tubs, but not swimming pools. At the suggestion of Dr. Edward M. Hartwell, the Boston bath reformer, they stated that the baths should be modeled on the small, simple German volksbaden and estimated that this type of bath would cost about $12,000 to build and $1,500 per year to maintain.\textsuperscript{53}

On February 2, 1899, Walters responded to the commission's report by advising that he was "willing to erect three baths in Baltimore at a cost not exceeding $15,000 each, the baths to be known as the 'Walters Public Baths.' " When these baths were completed, they were to be turned over to the municipal government for operation and maintenance. Walters requested that the Bath Commission secure lots for the baths and prepare plans and specifications for his signature. Thus, the Baltimore bath advocates, after five years of agitation, had found a benefactor who would provide the city with the nucleus of a public bath system.\textsuperscript{54}

Henry Walters had been born in Baltimore in 1848. A Catholic, he received a B.A. and an M.A. from Georgetown University in 1869 and 1871. After two years' study at Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard, he was awarded the B.S. degree. Already wealthy through inheritance, Walters became a railroad capitalist who through consolidation gained control of 10,000 miles of railroad. Chairman of the board of the Louisville and Nashville line, he was "said to be the richest man in the South." He
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was a major art collector and he went to Europe every year to buy art of all kinds. As his father had done, Walters bequeathed his collection, galleries, and one-quarter of his estate as an endowment for maintenance of his collection to the City of Baltimore, and the resulting Walters Art Gallery remains a major cultural force in the city.55

Walters was not involved in progressive reform either in Baltimore or on the national level and attributed his interest in public baths to a trip he had taken to Egypt, where he had become aware of the relationship of cleanliness and sanitation to public health. He said:

I was greatly impressed with the filth and squalor in the poorer sections of the towns, and it was pointed out to me that these sections were the places where the greatest epidemics started. On returning home I made some investigation, which disclosed the fact that in the poorer sections of Baltimore, especially in the neighborhoods where the foreign peoples dwelt, there was room for great improvement in sanitary conditions. When you consider that in some houses from 100 to 150 people are congregated without means for keeping clean you can realize, as I did, what a boon a public bath house would be.56

Once Walters had made his offer to donate three baths to the City of Baltimore, the Bath Commission acted quickly to produce the required plans and specifications. They dispatched two of their members, Beadenkopf and William H. Morriss, to Philadelphia to study its year-round baths. Their report, coupled with statistics on the cost of baths in other cities, forced the Bath Commission to revise its estimated cost of the baths upward to $20,000–$25,000 each. The commission, therefore, went to Walters and asked him to donate two baths instead of three. Walters agreed to do so and increased his gift to $50,000 for two baths. The study of the Philadelphia baths also probably convinced the Bath Commission that public laundries should be included in public bathhouses, as they were in Philadelphia.57

The City of Baltimore passed ordinances agreeing to accept the lots and buildings for the baths and laundries and to maintain them. The city was to be allowed to dispose of the buildings and lots, if necessary, but must use the money obtained for the erection of public baths and laundries.58

Plans proceeded quickly for the construction of Walters Bath No. 1, and it was formally opened on May 18, 1900. At the opening ceremony Henry Walters presented the keys and deed to the bath to the acting

mayor, expressing the hope that the city "will run the bath houses on the good old democratic principle of the greatest good to the greatest number." The gift was accepted with pleasure and grateful appreciation.59

Walters Bath No. 1 was located at 131 South High Street in an old and crowded section of the city inhabited mostly by Jewish immigrants and close to the waterfront. A "simple but elegant structure" built on a 46 by 70-foot lot, it was equipped with 18 showers for men, 5 showers and 2 tubs for women, and a public laundry in the basement. The opening of the bath was hailed editorially by the *Baltimore Sun*, which declared the bath to be complete in every way. It asserted that "the thanks of the whole city are due to the benefactor and his intelligent and experienced advisors in the matter." The bath was popular with the city's transient male population, especially with seamen and fishermen. Eventually, the Bath Commission restricted use of its laundry to men only, and the bath became a
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place where itinerants could bathe and wash their clothes, usually the ones they were wearing.  

With the opening of Walters Bath No. 1, the city established the Free Public Bath Commission of Baltimore to replace the original Bath Commission, first organized in 1894. The new commission had seven members appointed by the mayor who were to serve without pay. They were empowered to maintain and operate all public baths, which included the outdoor beach baths as well as the new indoor bath, and to make rules and regulations regarding them.

Three members of the original Bath Commission were appointed to the new commission, so that the bath advocates had the opportunity to administer the facilities they had worked so long to obtain. The president of the new commission, as of the old, was Eugene Levering. Also retained from the original commission were William H. Morriss, who was appointed vice-president and treasurer, and Thomas M. Beadenkopf, who was appointed secretary. The new members included three physicians, John S. Fulton, Joseph Gichner, and Mary Sherwood. The latter, who was active in many Baltimore reform groups, had been educated at Vassar and the University of Zurich and was on the staff of the Evening Dispensary for Working Women and Girls in Baltimore, which maintained a small public bath. The seventh member was George W. Corner, Jr., a member of the city council.

Rather ironically, one of the first decisions which the Free Public Bath Commission made was that the new baths should not be absolutely free. Instead, as in Philadelphia, small fees were charged for the use of the baths and the laundry—three cents for soap and towel, one cent for young children with a parent, and two and one-half cents per hour for laundry privileges. The Bath Commission felt that a small charge was more satisfactory to the bath patrons and rendered them "more self-respecting."

While Walters Bath No. 2 was under construction in 1901, the Bath Commission began to urge the city to build outdoor swimming pools in its public parks. It reiterated this recommendation until 1905, when the first outdoor swimming pool was opened. The Baltimore Bath Commission, therefore, was not unconcerned with the recreational aspects of bathing but believed that they should be separated from the hygienic.

Also, in 1901 the Bath Commission appointed Beadenkopf to the full-time salaried position of superintendent of the public baths and secretary.
of the commission. He was replaced on the commission by Morris Soper, a young Baltimore-born lawyer and judge who was active in the Reform League and various charities. A majority of the members of the Bath Commission were associated with various charitable and reform groups, although only Soper was active in the Reform League (the reform coalition that had won control of the municipal government in 1895).  

During 1901, patronage of the Walters Bath No. 1 was 70,000, a number which the Bath Commission believed indicated that the facilities met “a real need felt by many persons in our city.” It expressed concern, however, over the disparity between summer and winter patronage, noting that usage for January 1901 had been 1,855 as opposed to 8,449 the following June, an inevitable problem to public bath advocates.

In 1901 Henry Walters offered to build the city a third public bath at a cost of $25,000 upon the completion of Walters Bath No. 2. There was a delay, however, in the construction of bath no. 3. Beadenkopf recommended that this bath should be for the use of “colored people” on the assumption that the white people of Baltimore would not be willing to use a common bath with African Americans, and that “our colored Americans should have an equal chance with white people for cleanliness and recreation.” But city officials felt that African Americans would not use the bath and that its maintenance would be a waste of the city’s money. Beadenkopf’s point of view, however, ultimately prevailed, and in 1903 land was purchased in the most crowded and unhealthy black section of Baltimore for bath no. 3. James B. Crooks has pointed out that this public bath was one of the few exceptions to the general discrimination against African Americans in the reforms instituted in Baltimore during the Progressive Era.

In the meantime, Walters Bath No. 2, located in a manufacturing neighborhood, was opened in April 1902. Built in “free colonial style,” it had 20 showers for men, 6 showers and 2 tubs for women, and a public laundry for the use of women only. Its patrons were mostly Lithuanian immigrants. In the same year the Bath Commission requested that the city furnish funds for enlarging bath no. 1; receiving no response, they again turned to Walters for aid. The following year he donated an additional $15,000 for that purpose.

Walters Bath No. 3 for Negroes opened in December 1905. It had 15 showers and 2 tubs as well as a public laundry; 12 more showers were added in 1907. However, attendance at bath no. 3 was the lowest of any
of Baltimore’s public baths, and in 1909 the commission arranged for a course of lectures on the value of bathing to be delivered in African-American churches. These efforts apparently did not achieve the desired results, for patrons of bath no. 3 in 1914 numbered 36,466 as opposed to 250,672 for bath no. 1 in the same year. The public laundry of bath no. 3, in contrast, was the most heavily utilized of all the Baltimore public laundries. Although the Bath Commission noted the large patronage, it never stated the obvious conclusion that many of the laundry patrons were washerwomen at work rather than housewives doing their family laundry.\(^6^9\)

The Baltimore public laundries were well equipped with large washtubs with wringers, hot and cold water, a drying room, and ironing boards and irons. After 1918, playrooms were established in the public laundries where small children could play while their mothers laundered.\(^7^0\)

In 1910 Henry Walters donated one more bath to the City of Baltimore. Walters Bath No. 4, which opened in April 1911, was located in South Baltimore to serve immigrant East European Jews and Poles. The largest of the Walters baths and including a public comfort station as well as showers, tubs, and laundry, it had cost over $30,000 to construct. Though the bath was sober in design, the Bath Commission stated that an attempt had been made “to give an architectural expression to the exterior, becoming the dignity of the city, and work of a public character.”\(^7^1\)

Baltimore’s last municipal bath was constructed by the city itself and opened in 1912. It was probably Baltimore’s most elaborate bath, for it was built in an adaptation of Spanish mission style architecture of gray-green stucco with stone trimmings and a heavy canopied cornice covered with glazed green tiles. It was located in a predominantly East European Jewish immigrant area. Henry Walters was prepared to donate a fifth bath to the city and did donate the land and three old buildings on Eastern Avenue in East Baltimore, a section that was home to several immigrant groups. However, this bath was never built, although one of the buildings was remodeled into a small bath with showers (see map 5).\(^7^2\)

In addition to the supervision of the completion of the Baltimore public bath system and the administration of the existing baths, the Free Public Bath Commission of Baltimore was active in recommending and implementing improvements, innovations, and additions to the existing facilities. Although the city authorities were not usually immediately
1. Walters Bath No.1, 131 South High Street
2. Walters Bath No.2, 900 Columbia Ave.
3. Walters Bath No.3, 1018 Argyle Ave.
4. Walters Bath No.4, Corner of West St. & Marshall St.
5. Greenmount Ave. Bath, Corner of Greenmount Ave. & Harford Rd.
6. Walters Bath No.5, 1521-1525 Eastern Ave.
responsive to the commission’s recommendations, the commission was very persistent in its demands and eventually they were met by the city.

As early as 1903 the Bath Commission, under the leadership of Beadenkopf and Dr. Gichner, had suggested the establishment in the public schools of baths that would be open to the public after school hours. Year after year the commission worked toward this goal until in 1913 the first school bath was constructed. However, because of conflict with the school board this bath was not open to the public until 1916, when the Bath Commission agreed to pay all expenses in connection with its operation. By 1924, shower baths were in operation in eleven schools after school hours with a total attendance for that year of 323,061.73

In 1904 the Bath Commission began to urge that the city build public restrooms, and in 1906, $20,000 was appropriated for this purpose. Members of the commission visited Washington, Philadelphia, and New York City to study similar buildings, and Baltimore’s first public comfort station was opened in 1908 under the supervision of the Bath Commission. Three more were built by 1915 in addition to those located in the bathhouses.74

The Bath Commission also did not ignore outdoor recreational bathing facilities, although it was opposed to the location of swimming pools in the year-round baths. Besides continually encouraging the city to build outdoor swimming pools in every section of the city because of the increasing pollution of the beach baths, the commission also urged the city to buy beach-front property for recreational use in less polluted sections of the waterfront. It also instituted swimming lessons at the beaches and swimming pools in 1909. In 1918, however, the outdoor baths and swimming pools were transferred from the jurisdiction of the Bath Commission to the park board.75

An innovation in the municipal bath movement introduced by the Baltimore Bath Commission was the portable shower bath. Thomas Beadenkopf was the originator of this idea, which was inspired by an article in the magazine *Charities and the Commons* that suggested public baths should open their water mains in the summer to offer spray baths to children. Beadenkopf carried this suggestion one step further and “visualized a gospel tent which could be quickly rigged up close to a city fire plug, and in which shower equipment could be installed.” Baltimore established its first portable shower bath in the summer of 1908. A tent with four showers, it cost $150. This first portable bath was such a success
that new portable baths were designed with light wooden framework, galvanized iron sides and partitions, and a wooden floor. A wooden lean-to on the side contained a coal stove which heated water for a 75–100-gallon water tank. It could be disassembled and moved by two men. These portable baths cost between $600 and $650 to construct and about $30 per week to maintain. In 1910 Baltimore was operating six of these portable baths (one for African Americans) and they were kept open year-round. However, once the school baths were opened to the public, the portable baths were no longer necessary and were discontinued after 1923.\textsuperscript{76}

The Free Public Bath Commission of Baltimore, like the Public Baths Association of Philadelphia, was also active in the national and international municipal bath movements. Some of its members played an important part in the founding of the American Association for Promoting Hygiene and Public Baths. Doctor Joseph Gichner served as president of the association and both he and Beadenkopf served as vice-presidents. Beadenkopf was selected by the City of Baltimore to attend the International Conference on Public Baths and School Baths held in 1912 in the Netherlands, where he spoke on Baltimore's portable baths. In addition to being involved in these formal activities, members of the Bath Commission lectured informally on the subject in various cities in the United States and Europe. The Bath Commission received frequent inquiries from all over the United States and even one from Tientsin, China.\textsuperscript{77}

Baltimore's baths enjoyed higher patronage than those of most cities that had baths for cleanliness only without recreational facilities. Attendance grew steadily from 48,827 in 1900, the year Walters Bath No. 1 was opened, to a peak of 753,899 in 1914. After this, patronage at the public baths began to decline slowly, leveling off at about 600,000 during the 1920s, although the Bath Commission was able to report increases by including the number of showers taken in the school baths in the total. The Bath Commission attributed the decline in use of the public baths to the extension of Baltimore's sewer system and the more general installation of bathtubs in homes.\textsuperscript{78}

The net expense of maintaining and operating Baltimore's bath system was, like that for Philadelphia's, very modest because the small fees charged for the use of the baths and laundries helped to defray operating costs. In 1912, with all Baltimore's five permanent baths (as well as six portable baths) in operation, the net expense was $24,675.\textsuperscript{79}

Baltimore's public bath movement was unique, however, in its com-
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bined private-public character and like Philadelphia’s in the sustained interest of its bath reformers in the bath system. Although Henry Walters donated all the baths except one, the municipal government operated them. Thomas Beadenkopf advocated public baths from the beginning, served on the Bath Commission from its inception, and was superintendent of the baths until his death in 1915. Eugene Levering was president of the commission from 1895 until his death in 1928, and Dr. Mary Sherwood served on the commission for over twenty-five years.

Baltimore’s municipal baths became the target of an economy drive in the 1950s as their patronage dwindled and the expense of maintaining them rose (the maintenance appropriation for the baths in 1959 was $291,676). As a result, the baths were closed in 1960.80

In Philadelphia and Baltimore, private philanthropy provided public bath systems when the municipal governments of these cities failed to do so. As we have seen, bath advocates urged wealthy individuals to donate baths to their cities and some did. Andrew Carnegie in *The Gospel of Wealth* favored such gifts as libraries, parks, concert halls, museums, and baths which would serve the able and industrious as “ladders upon which the aspiring can rise.” Even Washington Gladden, before his concern with “tainted wealth,” included public baths as suitable projects for wealthy benefactors. Public baths, like museums and libraries, would extend to the city’s poor some of the amenities of urban life but, unlike museums and libraries, were located in poor neighborhoods, thus conforming to the progressive ideal of neighborhood level reform. The upper class members of Philadelphia’s Public Baths Association and Henry Walters were providing their cities with facilities that they felt all cities should provide for the health and moral well-being of their poorer citizens. In doing so they improved the status of their cities as civic communities and brought them closer to the urban ideal in the Progressive Era.81

Having achieved success in the five cities under discussion as well as in other cities throughout the United States, either through municipal action or through private philanthropy, the bath reformers in 1912 formally organized themselves in a national association.