Deep in the night, the riverside town of Hartford was roused by the ringing of church bells. The sleepy people who stumbled outdoors found the streets lit by the frightening glow of fire from the direction of Trinity Church, the Roman Catholic church on Talcott Street. By the time the night watchmen had discovered the fire and called out the volunteer fire companies, the flames had spread so rapidly through the old wooden building that nothing could be done to save it. The blaze soon leapt to the roof of the parsonage next door, and the firemen busied themselves by drowning it with streams of water to prevent the rest of the city from catching fire.

The Trinity Church fire, which broke out between midnight and 1 A.M. on May 11, 1853, was a blow to the growing Irish Catholic community of Hartford. Though they had built an expensive brownstone cathedral less than two years before, the Catholics still used the old church for weekday services, for Sunday school, and for the day school that served some four hundred boys and girls. Just as important, the disaster
was further proof that Hartford had lost any semblance of small-town unity. Everyone knew the fire was no accident. It was widely believed to be the work of anti-Catholic arsonists acting out through terrorism and destruction the nativist hatred that had been building up for the past twenty years.1

The Rev. Horace Bushnell, the Congregationalist pastor who lived a few blocks away on Winthrop Street, must have been appalled by the torching of Trinity Church. True, Bushnell had been an early and outspoken enemy of Catholicism, but by the early 1850s he saw greater danger in the fragmentation of American society than in any Papist plot. National unity had been shattered by the issue of slavery, rich and poor were separated by widening class divisions, and religious factionalism divided even the town where he made his home. In this light, the burning of a church could only seem another sign of approaching anarchy.

This fear of the collapse of community lay behind the ambitious civic project that Bushnell publicly launched later in 1853. In an attempt to bring back what he fondly recalled as the harmony of his rural youth, he persuaded the authorities and citizens of Hartford to create a landscaped park in the heart of the city. Though hostility and estrangement might thrive in the hurried, complicated new urban environment, Bushnell hoped the park would be a place where all could come together in peace and happiness. The park would unite people and spread kind feelings throughout the city, just as the middle-class Protestant home did for the family on a smaller scale. Bushnell extended these ideas the following year in a treatise on city planning in which he proposed urban vistas that would create the feeling—and thence the reality—that the city was a coherent unit. There was an inherent but unacknowledged tension within Bushnell’s ideas. While he hoped to reunite a divided people by reforming the urban environment, a crucial part of this reform would involve segregating the use of public space—creating a park, a space distinct from the surrounding city, where more refined behavior and values would prevail. This tension emerged more clearly a generation later, as Hartford reformers divided over whether to spread middle-class values throughout the entire urban environment or to concentrate on saving certain carefully segregated spaces.

The Pastor from Arcadia

The city-planning work that consumed much of Bushnell’s energy in 1853 and 1854 followed a decade of intense creativity in which he wrote the books and sermons that made him one of the most prominent American theologians.1 During that period, he also lamented the growing divisions within American society and reflected on the preindustrial life whose final years he had glimpsed during his childhood. While welcoming the urban growth and industrialization that were radically transforming New England, Bushnell longed to recapture the values of what he remembered as the “Puritan Arcadia.” Bushnell’s revision of Congregational theology, his ambivalence about industrial capitalism, and his distrust of the individualistic ethos of Jacksonian America led him to emphasize the importance of the home and of social unity. On this intellectual foundation he built his ideas of city planning.

Bushnell, who was born in 1802 in the Litchfield County hills of northwestern Connecticut, grew up working on the family farm and in his father’s wool-carding mill. He attended college, attempted careers in teaching and journalism, returned to Yale to study law, and finally entered Yale Divinity School in 1831. After completing his studies he received a call in 1833 to the North Congregational Church of Hartford,
his first and only pastorate, in which he served until poor health forced him to resign in 1859. Whether or not Bushnell deliberately chose his words to appeal to the merchants who dominated his fractious congregation, his sermons and other writings celebrated material progress and sought to reconcile Calvinism with the new romantic aesthetic of the urban middle classes.4

His central work was the one he first published in 1847 as Discourses on Christian Nurture. Originally presented as two sermons to his congregation in 1846, Bushnell’s discourses minimized the value of religious revivals, denying that an individual’s entrance into Christianity is best achieved through a cataclysmic conversion experience. Instead, Bushnell argued, the proper goal of Christian education is that “the child . . . grow up a Christian” and feel his moral character blossom under the benign nurturance of his parents. Elevating the importance of emotion and the teachings of the heart, Bushnell argued that the child begins his spiritual development even before he understands language: “At first the child is held as a mere passive lump in the arms, and he opens into conscious life under the soul of the parent streaming into his eyes and ears, through the manners and tones of the nursery. . . . Farther-on, the parents begin to govern him by appeals to the will, expressed in commands, and whatever their requirement may be, he can as little withstand it, as the violet can cool the scorching sun, or the tattered leaf can tame the hurricane.”5

By emphasizing the religious importance of child rearing, Bushnell shifted the focus of the Christian experience from the individual’s interior struggle to the process of socialization, and from a church dominated by men to a home shaped by the influence of women. Further stressing the feminine qualities of true Christian faith, he criticized contemporaries whose piety was a masculine one of “conquest rather than of love. A kind of public piety that is strenuous and fiery on great occasions but wants the beauty of holiness, wants constancy, singleness of aim, loveliness, purity. . . . and—if I may add another term not so immediately religious, but one that carries, by association, a thousand religious qualities—wants domesticity of character.”6

Bushnell’s feminization of religion was in harmony with the romantic ideas of womanhood developing among the American urban middle classes in the 1830s and 1840s. In sentimental fiction and advice literature, as well as in the works of Bushnell and Catharine Beecher, the ideal middle-class woman was defined by the four cardinal virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Removed from economic production, sequestered within the home, and relegated to the role of consumer, the true woman was still far from useless. She exerted a subtle yet powerful influence within her domestic sphere. Morally superior to men and protected from the contaminating touch of their worldly struggles, she was ideally suited to uplifting her family members and bringing them to God.7

Yet in Bushnell’s view, this new feminine role was but a makeshift substitute for the home life of preindustrial New England. In an 1851 address at the Litchfield County centennial celebration, he indulged in a nostalgic evocation of the “Puritan Arcadia,” when people were “closer to nature and the simple life of the home.” He defined life in early New England as “the Age of Homespun,” whose essential characteristic was subsistence production within the family unit—particularly the household production of cloth—and whose central figure was the mother. Social as well as economic life revolved around the home. Neighbors might drop by in the evening to join the family around the fireside and discuss theology while the children played. That way of life had now vanished and would soon fade from memory, Bushnell told his audience. “It was a society back of the world, in the sacred retreats of natural feeling, truth and piety.” The worldly influences of textile mills and commercial exchange had ended the Age of Homespun. “This transition from mother and daughter power to water and steam-power is a great one, greater by far than many have as yet begun to conceive—one that is to carry with it a complete revolution of domestic life and social manners.”8

Woman’s new role was just part of the deep socioeconomic change produced by industrialization and free-market capitalism, Bushnell continued. The people of early New England “had no capital, no machinery, no distribution of labor, nothing but wild forest and rock.” Economic change had replaced the socially unifying struggle of men against nature with new class divisions and a host of social problems. But it was pointless to be hostile to industrial capitalism. The continued growth of manufacturing was essential for the prosperity of America’s cities, and “prosperity, great as its dangers are, is yet the condition of virtue,” Bushnell argued in an 1847 sermon. A decaying city became a place of decaying morality,
where churches fell into disuse, and drinking, gambling, and whoring raged out of control. If instead people united for the good of their city, economic progress would go hand in hand with “social warmth” and “fellow spirit.” Locally funded public-works projects would stimulate local prosperity. Economic self-interest would thus discourage internal social strife in favor of intercity competition. Capitalism did not have to be socially divisive.9

Instead of trying to bring back the Puritan Arcadia, Christians should salvage what they could of its values and attack a second cause of the problems in American society: an alarming trend toward individualism that had been initiated by the more radical thinkers of the American Revolution.10 At issue, as Bushnell explained in Discourses on Christian Nurture, was whether society was a collection of separate individuals held together only by rational choice in a social compact. Regrettably, “the state, the church, the family, have ceased to be regarded as such, according to their proper idea, and become mere collections of units. A national life, a church life, a family life, is no longer conceived, or perhaps conceivable by many.”

Despite this mistaken way of thinking, the truth was that “all society is organic—the church, the state, the school, the family,—and there is a spirit in each of these organisms peculiar to itself, and more or less hostile, more or less favorable to religious character, and to some extent, at least, sovereign over the individual man.”11

The Christian home was more than a refuge for the values of the Puritan Arcadia, more than a nursery where children would grow strong enough to resist sin in their adult lives, and more than a daily source of inspiration for men troubled by the worries and temptations of the world. The Christian home was in fact a microcosm of the organic society, the mustard seed from which harmony could grow even in the rough world created by Jefferson and Jackson. Just as the child was shaped by parental influence, so did members of society develop a sense of unity through their daily interactions. Adults as well as children were deeply affected by the “unconscious influence” that they exerted on each other, Bushnell declared in an 1846 sermon with that title. Their sympathtic powers were sensitive to emotions and feelings conveyed unintentionally by those they saw and heard, and through this unconscious influence they became part of the larger society. “Being thus made common to each

other voluntarily, you become one mass, one consolidated social body, animated by one life.”12

This was a comforting thought at a time when Bushnell saw American society so desperately in need of unity. Controversies over slavery repeatedly threatened to tear the nation apart. The Compromise of 1850 only papered them over. Workers no longer lived under the same roof or shared meals with their employers, as the Bushnell family’s farmhands had done in New Preston. Instead they were becoming a separate and even antagonistic class. The various religious sects were vying with each other for adherents in an increasingly contentious manner, Bushnell warned:

Nothing is more undignified, or more opposed to the real object of society, which is to open the heart to man as man, and breed a state of courtesy and mutual regard between those who have different opinions. . . . Nothing could be more fatal to anything like public spirit, or to any practical unity of force, in behalf of the common interest. We cannot flow together, — no warmth of feeling can be kindled for the public good. Society is divided, even down to the root. We are not people of Hartford, but we are Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Baptists, Methodists.13

Bushnell hoped that new, common institutions could extend the nurturing power of the home into the broader society and unite a divided people. Despite a deep hostility toward Catholicism, he called in early 1853 for compromise between Protestants and Catholics in order to ensure that both groups would support the common schools. Unlike Horace Mann, who hoped public schooling would produce a more fluid, egalitarian society, Bushnell hoped simply to prevent social conflict. Public schools, he argued, were needed “for the common training of so many classes and conditions of people. There needs to be some place where, in early childhood, they may be brought together and made acquainted with each other; thus to wear away the sense of distance, otherwise certain to become an established animosity of orders.” Even Catholics could be assimilated into American life if they chose. Unfortunately, Bushnell acknowledged, the Catholics seemed stubbornly intent on keeping separate, so the common school alone was not an adequate solution.14

By 1853 Bushnell had identified disunity as the central problem of
American society and had developed the intellectual basis for his attempts to restore harmony. The perception of disunity lay behind his major project of that year, the new urban institution that came to be known as Bushnell Park.

A Pleasant Little Town

Bushnell had expressed a desire for a park in Hartford as early as the 1830s, perhaps only a few years after arriving in the city, and he began seriously planning one in 1849 or 1850. The intervening years had marked a momentous change in the character of the city. In the mid-1830s, Hartford was a river port of barely ten thousand people. It was, one man recalled, "a small commercial town . . . dealing in lumber and smelling of molasses and old Jamaica, strongly impressed with a plodding, mercantile, and mechanical character." Located near the head of navigation for seagoing vessels, it quietly prospered from its trade with the rich farming villages of the Connecticut Valley and with port cities up and down the Atlantic seaboard. Small steamboats towing flat-bottomed barges pushed the river trade as far north as Wells River, Vermont, 220 miles away, returning to Hartford with loads of corn, lumber, and wool. In the 1840s, however, railroads and canals undercut the river trade, allowing Boston, Albany, and New York City to rob Hartford of much of its hinterland. Businessmen in the mid-1840s worried that the city was stagnating and that it would soon be eclipsed by such rivals as New Haven and Springfield.

But while river commerce was fading away, manufacturing, banking, and insurance enterprises were prospering, giving Hartford a solid economic foundation for what would be a century of growth. The city had begun in the 1820s and 1830s to develop into a major publishing center, with more than thirty small firms specializing in textbook publishing and subscription publishing. The late 1840s and early 1850s saw the opening of several important manufacturing firms, including gun factories producing Sharps' rifles and Colt's revolvers, which supplemented the existing iron foundry, tanneries, and other industrial plants. Insurance companies and banks were also growing in size and number in the late 1840s and early 1850s, as the prestige of Hartford insurance firms soared after their successful payment of claims from the 1845 New York City fire. By 1849 the city was visibly prospering again and had built or was building railroad links in all directions. "In the mechanical department, particularly, a striking change has taken place, and now, early and late, the hum of business from hundreds of busy workmen may be heard, where only a few years since every thing wore a quiet and village-like aspect," the Hartford Daily Courant reported in 1852. Despite earlier fears of stagnation, Hartford's population had grown to about 18,000 by 1850 and would exceed 29,000 by 1860.

The city's geography was changing as quickly as its economy. The center of economic life was shifting away from the riverfront toward the new downtown business blocks along Main Street and the new manufacturing district that was beginning to form along the Little River, a sluggish stream that flowed into the Connecticut River south of the city center. Housing was also spreading away from the Connecticut River, and a new pattern was becoming apparent: the poor and the working classes were increasingly concentrated in a belt of slums that ran along the swamps south to the Little River and then west along that river. Joining the influx of working-class and poor people were many hundreds of Irish immigrants, whose neighborhood the nativist Courant called "Pigville." There were also significant numbers of blacks and Jews (the Jews were numerous enough by 1843 to organize their first congregation). As the prosperity of the older riverfront neighborhoods declined, brothels and gambling saloons opened up. Wealthy families attempted to sequester themselves from the working class and the increasingly obtrusive manufacturing in the central city by building houses in new outlying residential areas: on Asylum Hill to the west of the old city, and in the Charter Oak, South Green, and Washington Street neighborhoods to the south. Unfortunately for those seeking to escape the smells, the noise, and the Irish, a belt of notorious slums lay between the new southern neighborhoods and the central city. The seclusion from urban hubbub that could be felt on a Charter Oak street, therefore, was mitigated by the regular necessity of passing the Little River hovels on the way downtown.

Growth, industrialization, and immigration had produced class and ethnic divisions in Hartford's geography, yet the city had not entirely lost the appearance of a country town. Hartford in the 1850s was still small enough that every part of the city was within walking distance of the countryside. The developed area extended little more than a mile from
the steamboat docks at the foot of State Street. Beyond that stretched pastures and farms on all sides. Even within the developed part of the city, backyards and tracts of vacant land broke up the urban appearance. Only the East Side, the declining neighborhood of tightly packed buildings east of Main Street, looked overcrowded. Travelers visiting Hartford noted its rural setting. "The town is beautifully situated in a basin of green hills; the soil is rich, well-wooded, and carefully improved . . . it is a lovely place," wrote Charles Dickens, who visited in 1842. Anthony Trollope, who visited in 1861 in the midst of a boom produced by Civil War military contracts, called Hartford "a pleasant little town, with English-looking houses, and an English-looking country around it." Though growing, Hartford was certainly not an unrelieved urban landscape. It was obvious, however, that the continuing growth would only add to what was already a twenty-five-minute walk from the riverfront to the countryside and would effectively cut parts of the city off from its rural environs.\(^\text{19}\)

The Outdoor Parlor

If urban growth meant the loss of easy access to the countryside, Hartford's people would have no alternative to the meager recreational opportunities within the city. Residents had grumbled for years about the lack of a promenading ground like the New Haven Green. They made do instead with the South Green, a little public square at the south end of Main Street crowded with women pushing baby carriages, and an even smaller and shabbier green at Village and Windsor streets where boys played ball. The opportunity for what would be Hartford's first major park project came in 1849, when the old railroad station, located near Main Street at the end of a short spur, was replaced by a new one on the main line west of downtown. With the opening of the new railroad station at the corner of Asylum Street and Union Place, the old spur fell into disuse except for freight deliveries.\(^\text{20}\)

The roughly thirty-acre site surrounding the neglected railroad spur was by all accounts a stinking hole. It was a shallow valley through which flowed the filthy Little River, derisively termed the Hog River, where dead cats and garbage rotted in muddy backwaters. Upon first considering the site, Bushnell was "appalled by the god-forsaken look of the premises." A cluster of mill buildings stood at the western end near the railway junctions. "Around the mill," Bushnell recalled, "were grouped eight or ten low tenements, with as many pig-sties, that appeared to have been dropped there by accident. On the north side, into the low bend of the river . . . all the garbage and truck of the city were dumped as in a Gehenna without fire—shavings, leather-cuttings, cabbage-stumps, rags, hats without tops, old saddles, stove-pipes rusted out." Heading east on the south side of the river, the two converging arms of the spur passed over ground so marshy that the tracks were raised on earthen embankments. A service yard with an engine house, repair shops, a water tank, and a woodshed stood along the tracks, and ashes and cinders were dumped into nearby pits. "There were besides on the premises two old tanneries—one falling to pieces, the other barely managing to stand upon a slant; and on a high clay-bank . . . was a little African Methodist chapel, looking out for
prospect on the general litter of the region. And, finally, there was a backside frontage of filthy tenements, including a soap-works, that ran completely round upon the east and north-east bank of the river, and projected their out-houses over it on brackets and piers.\textsuperscript{21} 

The area that eventually became the park had at least 222 people living in it in 1850, about three dozen of them African-Americans who clustered around the African Methodist Episcopal Zion church near what was then the corner of Bliss and Elm streets. Many of the other residents were unskilled Irish laborers and their families. In general, inhabitants tended to be poor; many of them rented rather than owned their dwellings.\textsuperscript{22} As his description of the area suggests, Bushnell saw such people as scarcely more desirable than the cabbage stumps and ash piles, as he shared the common Yankee middle-class distaste for the Irish and for blacks. Bushnell's description also betrays his continued ambivalence about the productive functions of the nineteenth-century city. Although he regarded urban economic life as a necessary evil, he recoiled from the unsightly reality of it. Uncomfortable both with ethnic minorities and with industrial capitalism, he would seek solutions to urban problems while saying as little as possible about the disagreeable details. Rather than grappling directly with the miseries of the industrializing city, his solutions would involve creating countervailing strongholds of virtue and beauty—first and foremost, the park.\textsuperscript{23} 

From Bushnell's public comments in 1853, it appears that he began seriously planning a park within a year or so of the opening of the new railroad station. Bushnell later noted that the opening of the station facilitated the park project by making the New Haven Railroad eager to get rid of its old buildings. He may also have been inspired by the proposals being made by 1850 for a park in New York City, although his ideas about public space were developed independently from those of the eventual builder of Central Park, his former parishioner Frederick Law Olmsted.\textsuperscript{24} 

Bushnell started work on the park project by contacting some of those who owned large parcels of the future park site. He found that the railroad and the mill owners were willing to sell, but the others were not. He then persuaded one of his parishioners who served on the Common Council to support a charter revision letting the city take land by eminent domain. The council and legislature approved the revision, and voters overwhelmingly gave final approval in July 1853.\textsuperscript{25} This enabling legislation set off a flurry of competing proposals for park sites in the summer and early fall of 1853. At least five different sites were suggested in outlying parts of the city, mostly by wealthy property owners who would benefit from such an improvement in their neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{26}
Certainly it might be cheaper to build a park in the outskirts of town, but Bushnell argued that it was crucial to choose a central site. The site he recommended was near the growing central business district, on land that had been settled since the founding of Hartford. “Common grounds should be internal, not outside of a city,” he declared while presenting his proposal at a special Common Council meeting on October 5, 1853 (as paraphrased in the press). “They should be convenient for the mass of the people, who may enjoy their free air. The gentleman of wealth, with his carriage, may drive out and enjoy the beautiful in nature, but those who are not able to do this need a central common. Then if the common is on the outside, it has little to do with the city; but if it is central it gives an air and pleasant aspect to the whole place.”

Bushnell said that the park would “add to [Hartford’s] health and comfort, but more particularly, act favorably on the taste and manners of the citizens, and, by presenting constantly before the eye a beautiful object, accustom the minds of all to relish beauty, and thus be the means of ennobling and purifying all.” The park, in other words, would exert an unconscious influence of its own. Bushnell further told the council that the park was needed “on account of the manners and morals of the people. It was important to bring people together. It has a humanizing influence.” A central location was more than a matter of convenience—it was essential to the success of a park in creating civic unity. Evidently uncertain that this reason was persuasive enough, Bushnell tossed in a few others: The park would correct Hartford’s inelegant appearance, would give train passengers a favorable first impression, and would raise both property values and the reputation of the city. It would also offer a good site for a new statehouse on its small southern hill, strengthening Hartford’s claim to be the proper capital of the state. If the city did not act soon, the land would become a more densely developed slum.

Bushnell’s plan for the park embodied some of the ideas that he developed in his later speech on city planning. The main goal was to make the inner part of the park a visual focal point that passersby could see from surrounding streets, and to which they would be drawn. Bushnell proposed that, after clearing away the railroad spur and the buildings, the city should create easy access by building two or three light footbridges over the river and a broad avenue from Main Street into the park’s heart. “Little fencing is needed.” He proposed placing a fountain in a spot where it could be best seen from the streets. The higher southwestern corner of the park would afford views into picturesque central lowlands. Some grading would be needed, but the natural appearance would be maintained by keeping the existing trees and by using the river as a gently curving northern boundary, perhaps with a drive along the river’s edge. Throughout his presentation, Bushnell emphasized the views of the park to be had from the surrounding city, and the views of the city from the park.

After hearing Bushnell’s speech and looking at the plan he had prepared, the council set up a committee to study the proposal. The committee members worked closely with Bushnell and allowed him to write their whole report except for the part related to the cost estimates. In the November 14 report, Bushnell linked the park project even more explicitly to his hopes for civic unity:

Nothing, we are sure, will serve the purpose demanded, but an opening in the heart of the city itself, to which the citizens will naturally flow in their walks and which they will naturally cross in passing on foot from one side or quarter to another . . . a green carpet of ground . . . a social exchange, where friends will meet and to which they will naturally find their way in their strolls of pleasure and exercise; where high and low, rich and poor will exchange looks and make acquaintance through the eyes; an outdoor parlor, opened for the cultivation of good manners and a right social feeling. It must be a place of life and motion, that will make us more completely conscious of being one people.

Bushnell’s choice of metaphor is intriguing: the park was to be “an outdoor parlor,” a specialized room in a city that (as he would write a year later) should be viewed as a house. Bushnell’s readers would have understood this metaphor as richly evocative of the social atmosphere he desired. The parlor, once found only in the large houses of the very wealthy, was by 1850 becoming common in middle-class homes throughout urban America. Just as the land by the train station might be seen as the front room to Hartford, the parlor was the front room to the home. The parlor was a semipublic place between the openness of the street and the privacy of the back rooms reserved for the family, a place where certain strangers might be admitted as well as old friends. Though the
parlor often doubled as a sitting room for the middle-class family, its primary importance was as a social stage. A wide variety of activities took place there, from friendly visits to teas, formal calls, theatricals, small concerts, weddings, and funeral receptions. All these interactions demanded careful attention to etiquette, sometimes to the point of highly stylized ritual. Any emotional conflicts were carefully suppressed. The decor reflected this purpose—the carpeted floors, upholstered chairs, and heavily draped windows softened the harsh lines of the architecture just as the mild conversation prevented or soothed away disagreements. Moreover, the parlor was the place where the family showed its aesthetic taste and cultural sophistication by displaying objets d'art, book collections, souvenirs of travel, and pianos or other musical instruments. In the words of the historian Karen Haltunen, "The parlor was the arena through which the aspiring middle classes worked to establish their claims to social status, to that elusive quality of 'gentility.'" Most important, the parlor was a female-dominated space, the place where the values of domesticity reigned supreme and in which the true woman exerted her influence on society.35

These values would not be lost in a parlor floored by a carpet of grass instead of an oriental rug, Bushnell’s report indicated. The power of “unconscious influence” would uplift and unify the people who came to the park, just as it improved those within the home. The park not only facilitated random social encounters between friends but also allowed total strangers of different socioeconomic classes to make acquaintance through the nonverbal means that Bushnell believed were even more important than speech. It would be a way for the lower classes to absorb the values and refinements of their betters and to shed their rude ways. The park would be a feminized form of public space, a way of extending female values outside the home.36 In this respect, the park’s function harmonized with the well-established romantic association of women with nature in its tamer and more cultivated forms. Bushnell himself had linked femininity and nature in "The Age of Homespun": "It is the greatness of woman that she is so much like the great powers of nature, back of the noise and clatter of the world’s affairs, tempering all things with her benign influence only the more certainly because of her silence, greatest in her beneficence because most remote from ambition, most forgetful of herself and fame."37

Bushnell eventually got the park that he wanted. The project roused some controversy as opponents complained about the cost, the principle of taking land by eminent domain, and the ugliness of the location.36 But the idea of a park won support from all classes. Factory workers submitted a petition as soon as the first park proposal was made, and the socially prominent poet Lydia H. Sigourney penned an ode to the vision of beauty and harmony. The central location, as one of the park supporters pointed out, made it possible to get voters from all sections of the city to support the proposal. Hartford residents approved the project heartily on January 5, 1854, by a vote of 1,005 to 682.37
The people who lived in the park were quietly evicted, but construction was delayed by lack of funds and by flaws in the initial designs. The sickly Bushnell had little to do with the actual construction of the park, although he helped defend the project against opponents who wanted it abandoned. He also served on the committee overseeing the park design. The park was finally completed about 1867. As Bushnell noted in 1869, it was similar to his original plans. The final designs by landscape architect Jacob Weidenmann kept the park partly open to the street by lining its border with widely spaced deciduous trees. The interior, bisected by Bliss Street, was primarily open lawn dotted with irregular clumps of trees and shrubs; there were no dense woods to block the views. A network of paths converged on a central pond, a drive looped around the park’s western edge, and a terrace offered views of Asylum Street and the passing trains. Bushnell Park was considerably less isolated from the urban environment than was Central Park, which despite its name was originally on the outskirts of New York. Explaining his own design philosophy in 1871, Olmsted described a park as a place where “people may stroll for an hour, seeing, hearing, and feeling nothing of the bustle and jar of the streets, where they shall, in effect, find the city put far away from them. . . . We want depth of wood enough about [the park] not only for comfort in hot weather, but to completely shut out the city from our landscapes.”

In the early twentieth century, Hartford park officials sympathized more with Olmsted than Bushnell. Finding openness objectionable, they planted a wall of shrubs and trees along Bushnell Park’s northern border.

The most immediate tangible effect of Bushnell’s park project was to reconfigure Hartford’s class and ethnic boundaries. No longer bordered by slums, the genteel areas south of the Little River now grew quickly, with the construction of elegant town houses on the south side of the park and opulent mansions on Washington Street. Those who located there found a more effective separation from the poor than had previously been possible. Deliberately or not, Bushnell disregarded this effect. He chose to believe that the park’s true importance lay in its healing effect on class divisions, as he showed in an 1872 speech proclaiming its success. Not only had the park provided a place of beauty—“one of God’s smiles”—but, he claimed, it had unified the classes. “Children of the poor going there have seen the children of higher families of the city, and there has been an associated feeling excited. The rich have seen the condition of the poor and good has come out of this association.” Four years later, as Bushnell lay dying, the Common Council voted to name the park after him.

City Planning

In larger issues of city planning, too, Bushnell was guided in the 1850s by the metaphor of house and home. Olmsted would later use this metaphor to justify the functional segregation of the city, arguing that “if a house to be used for many different purposes must have many rooms and passages of various dimensions and variously lighted and furnished, not less must . . . a metropolis be specifically adapted at different points to different ends.” In keeping with this philosophy, Olmsted designed suburbs that, like the parks, were both separate from and complementary to the urban environment. Bushnell, in contrast, sought to minimize the divisive aspects of the urban landscape. Instead of reflecting the divisions within industrial urban society, he believed, the urban landscape should be carefully designed to create the illusion of civic unity, in the hope that the illusion might become reality. Bushnell suggested that the entire city should become like a well-constructed and tastefully decorated home that encouraged friendly socializing. The architecture and ornaments of the city, like those of the home, should evoke uplifting associations. Above all, people should feel gathered together within their city, much as family members felt in their home.

Bushnell began considering questions of comprehensive urban design soon after winning voters’ approval for the park in 1854, and he announced the formation of a local Society for Public Improvement that autumn. “The great and principal object of the society is to advance the public taste of our citizens in matters relating to the attractiveness and ornament of the city,” he wrote in a letter to the Courant. The society planned to do this by inviting prominent citizens to present lectures on such topics as “Economy of Taste,” “Public Parks,” “Public Architecture,” “Street Architecture,” “Color,” and “Trees and Shrubbery.” Bushnell himself was scheduled to present a lecture on “Planning of Cities.” The society would also meet to discuss specific ways to improve and beautify Hartford, which Bushnell hoped would have the added benefit
of making members identify more closely with their city. Before Bushnell
could deliver his lecture, his health deteriorated seriously; he was forced
to cancel the talk and sail to Cuba in early 1855 to convalesce. Not until
1864 did he have the lecture published in an anthology of his writings
on secular topics.\textsuperscript{41} Regardless of the ten-year delay in its publication, the
essay “City Plans” shows how Bushnell had expanded his ideas about
parks into a set of both broad and specific guidelines for urban design,
recommendations that were still fresh when they appeared in print.

The first requirement of a good city plan, Bushnell argued in this
essay, was that it should remind the inhabitants that they were living to-
tgether in a city, a separate manmade world discrete from its natural sur-
rroundings. As in the walled cities of Europe, the urban environment
should create a sense “of being gathered into city life . . . that associates
the feeling of art and community.” At worst, a city would be like so many
in the American West, a grid of straight streets offering views in every
direction into the empty countryside. Ideally, a city should be built around
a valley, so that its various parts would all look in toward one another.
“The center now will be the chief point of show or impression; for every-
thing looks into it, and all the motion of the central crossings will be visible
from the surrounding slopes, or summits.” The importance of the vistas
should also guide the siting of public monuments and buildings, symbols
of civic identity that should be placed for maximum visibility in open
spaces at the convergence of major streets. “The city, in short, will be most
perfectly planned, other things being equal, when it makes a world for
itself and reveals its ornaments most effectually to itself. Like the inside
of a house, it is to be planned for inside show, completeness and beauty.”\textsuperscript{42}

Bushnell’s allusion to home interiors, like his earlier reference to the
outdoor parlor, was charged with meaning. Members of the Victorian
bourgeoisie self-consciously used interior decorating as a symbolic voca-
ulary. Objects were selected for their cultural and historical associa-
tions, in order both to uplift the character of family members and to
display the family’s refinement. The eclectic objects displayed in the
home—the books and pianos, the engravings of George Washington, the
Gothic knickknacks, the busts of Shakespeare, and so forth—were in-
tended to be evocative of aesthetic sensibility and of a morally uplifting
past that could guide present aspirations.\textsuperscript{43}

Like a house, Bushnell’s ideal city would display its history not only in
its “ornaments” (its monuments and public buildings) but in its basic
architecture—the layout of its streets. “As a house will be most pleasing
when it looks as if it grew up with the family, by successive enlargements
and room by room. . . so a city will be most pleasing when the history is
told by the plan.” In European cities, he explained, history was told by
the crowded little streets in the ancient core, by the broad boulevards and
parks that replaced what were once city walls, and by the more spacious
outlying sections of modern development. In the United States, New Ha-
ven displayed its history in the pleasing contrast between the colonial
grid at its center and the new neighborhoods along what were once con-
verging country roads. Washington, D.C., on the other hand, showed
only a cold and ahistorical design by a single planner.\textsuperscript{44}

Bushnell suggested that properly designed vistas would accentuate
the appearance of bustling activity and social interaction. “The life and vi-
cacity of the park will be graduated by the general show it makes of the
multitudes walking, driving or at play upon it.” For that reason it was
particularly important to place parks in valleys, where this activity could
be seen easily. Similarly, the street plan should heighten the sense of
urban closeness. Most streets should be no more than fifty to eighty feet
wide, and blocks should be narrow. Otherwise, the city plan “spreads the
business and population over too large a surface, introducing magnifi-
cent distances where you want the sense of density and a crowding, rapid,
all-to-do activity—which is one of the principal attractions of a city.”
Street layouts should incorporate the contours of the natural topography,
not to replace the urban grid with imitations of winding country roads
but to improve views within the city and enhance the visibility of the
busiest streets. Ideally the skeleton of an irregular street grid would be
formed by natural ridges along which would run dignified thoroughfares
like New York’s Broadway. In most cases, a street climbing to meet a
ridge-top route should terminate at that intersection instead of crossing,
so that the view up the street would end at an elegant architectural facade
instead of in an empty sky. On the other hand, a street that dipped down
into a valley should always continue straight through a number of inter-
secting routes, so that “everything moving in [the hollow], from one end
to the other, will be visible at a glance, and a scene of perpetual, ever
shifting, vivacity will be maintained.” In short, he sought a compact,
legible, bustling cityscape.\textsuperscript{45}
Utilitarian considerations were of secondary importance to Bushnell, but he did not ignore them. Hidden in the text of the essay is an offhand declaration that “primarily cities are for use — only for show or beauty afterward.” The essay touches on the need for major crosstown thoroughfares, for street widths adequate for smooth traffic flow, for an ample sewer system, and for street layouts designed to expose buildings to more sunlight. Yet Bushnell’s statement about the primacy of function is undercut by the fact that the bulk of the essay focuses on matters of “show or beauty.” Urban planning, he suggested, should aim for higher goals than efficiency and comfort; it should create an environment that would nurture a refined, harmonious society. City planning was not simply a matter of engineering; it demanded both artistic and practical judgment, and it was a matter of great social importance. The rapid creation and growth of cities throughout the United States presented an opportunity for urban design that should not be squandered by leaving the matter in the bungling hands of amateurs and philistines. “We want therefore a city-planning profession, as truly as an architectural, house-planning profession. Every new village, town, city, ought to be contrived as a work of art, and prepared for the new age of ornament to come.”

In his campaign for the park and his essay on public space, Bushnell pioneered the idea of solving Hartford’s social problems by improving its physical environment. In Bushnell Park he had created a new, segregated environment, which, like his idyllic Litchfield County, was a natural place, “buck of the world, in the sacred retreats of natural feeling, truth and piety.” But unlike later reformers who drew on both his ideas and those of Olmsted, Bushnell did not intend to create a replacement for the social life of the streets. He intended instead to create a place like the home, where kind feelings could be encouraged and then spread to the rest of the city. The sacred retreats of the home and the park were not embattled refuges from a hopelessly corrupt urban environment; they were intended to nurture harmony.

Bushnell saw the segregation of public space as a step toward the more important reunification of an organic society. Suspicious of the dominant currents of romantic reform that sought to perfect America by liberating the potential of the individual, Bushnell based his reform campaign on a concern for community that resonated among later reformers and thinkers more strongly than among his contemporaries. But the Hartford reformers who drew on his and Olmsted’s ideas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries found that Bushnell had left a bifurcated legacy. Some of his more optimistic successors sought to spread the feminine values of the park and the home throughout the city and to purify the urban environment in both a physical and moral sense. Drawing on the metaphor of municipal housekeeping and on the rhetoric of maternal nurture, female reformers in the Civic Club, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Hartford Equal Franchise League attacked dirty streets and prostitution. But the limited success of their reforms left it obvious that the male world of the streets could not be so thoroughly purified. Unable to reform the entire city at once, moreover, these women came up against the problem that Bushnell had sought to deny in his 1872 celebration of the park’s success: the purification of part of the city, though intended as a step toward a broader transformation that would produce “social warmth” and “fellow spirit,” might ironically serve the interests of affluent people seeking to buffer themselves from urban unpleasantness.

Other reformers, less inclined to pursue the agonizing quest for social unity, chose the second half of Bushnell’s legacy. They unabashedly welcomed the idea of segregating public space, viewing it not as a necessary antidote to the morally troublesome division of society, but as a welcome extension of the logic represented by new middle-class neighborhoods. They understood that the urban environment as a whole could never nurture genteel morality, at least not in a multiethnic industrial city where middle-class Protestants were a shrinking minority. In contrast to Bushnell, this group of reformers accepted both the social divisions created by industrialization and immigration and the fact that competing classes and ethnic groups had different ideas about the use of space. They came to view segregation as the model for a pluralistic society: divided but at peace.