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# The Plant Building: Gender, Urban Reform, and Skyscraper Design in New London, CT

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**The Plant Building:**  
**Gender, Urban Reform, and Skyscraper Design**  
**in New London, CT**

An Honors Thesis

presented by

Allison Louise Cahoon '12

to

The Department of Architectural Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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## Abstract

The City Beautiful and the City Practical movement –a contemporaneous alternative—were architectural and urban planning initiatives that began in the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a response to unprecedented urban growth. More specifically, these two movements were conceived as solutions to the “problem” of women on the street as new urban conditions came in conflict with gender ideals as defined by the Victorian separate spheres of masculinity and femininity. Most often, studies about turn of the century urban planning, as it included the Victorian city, the City Beautiful movement, and the City Practical movement, focus on large cities with dramatic, comprehensive urban planning solutions.

This thesis is generated from the acknowledgment that New London is not simply a lesser version of these major urban centers. Using a range of primary sources, including architectural plans, postcards, fire insurance maps, city directories, newspapers, and the building itself, this thesis analyzes the Plant Building in its physical and social context within New London. Research establishes the 1914 Plant Building, a typical five-story, mixed-use commercial structure, as an implement of the City Practical in the small city of New London, CT. Incorporating aspects of skyscraper design within its construction and framing its identity in newspapers and postcards, the Plant Building aligned itself with the skyscraper, a City Practical building type of choice. This study of State Street highlights that the physical relationship between the street and buildings changed through the Victorian city, the City Beautiful, and the City Practical, in response to how the atmosphere of the street was imagined as a function of society. Contributing to this urban reimagining was both the strategic architectural interventions on the street and the contextualizing media found in newspapers, postcards, and booster literature. Also this argument recognizes that gender is a predominant factor in the imagination of the street and so greatly contributes more to these three urban compositions than is typically recognized in these studies.

Ultimately, this thesis aims to address important historiographical issues. The understanding of the City Beautiful movement and the City Practical movement change if their definitions are expanded to accept the developments of State Street. New London demonstrates the extent that non-architectural materials can empower even a limited expression of architecture to enact social change and so reveals the importance of the studying the small city within the larger scheme of architectural history.

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Foremost, I am especially thankful for the support of my thesis advisor, Professor Abigail Van Slyck. She has encouraged and guided my research on this project, and has helped me find the language that expresses my understanding of the Plant Building, which in the beginning I often described in doodles, sound effects, and hand motions. Over the past four years, her positive influence on my scholarship, perspective, and life has been great.

I would like to offer my immense gratitude to the two readers who helped me to shape and strengthen my thesis in its final stages: my major advisor, Professor Joseph Alcherms, whose edits were vital in producing this final presentation and to Professor Erin Sassin, who as the final editor, furthered the cohesion and development of this thesis.

I was able to draw from an extensive collection of primary sources, thanks to the contributions of many people associated with the Plant Building. I extend my gratitude to Rick Gipstein of LLR Architects in New London, for preserving and sharing the architectural plans of the Plant Building. Thank you to the tenants who currently operate businesses at 300 State Street who guided me through the building and didn't mind my camera and architectural fun facts. I thank Sandy at New London Landmarks, everyone at the New London Historical Society, the librarians at the New London Public Library, and the librarians in the Special Collections Library at Connecticut College, who all helped me to find and understand sources on the Plant Building.

I extend love and gratitude to my family (related and otherwise) who have supported me. I would not be here if it weren't for them; people, like buildings, are inevitably defined by what is close to them.

## Introduction

Early in 1915, the Plant Building opened in New London, Connecticut. The mixed-use commercial structure was the result of approximately two years of planning and construction. Commissioned by Morton Plant, a wealthy businessman, and designed by Dudley St. Clair Donnelly, a prominent local architect, the building's construction was closely followed by the community. A spring 1914 issue of the *New London Telegraph* predicted that, "when completed, in its ornamental Greendale brick, with golden rod effect and terra cotta trimmings, this structure will add tone to the other well designed structures in the immediate vicinity and will be a splendid addition to the city of New London as a business block."<sup>i</sup> Despite the *Telegraph's* enthusiasm, the form of the Plant Building does not seem particularly extraordinary. (Figure 1) The symmetrical façade is consistent with characteristic composition of Beaux Arts style with classical motifs, all of which was popular at the time. Using the relatively new but widespread technology of steel skeleton construction, the building was supported by the frame and enclosed with brick and terracotta cladding.



*Figure 1. Photograph of the northern elevation of the Plant Building (Now Dewart Building)* <sup>ii</sup>

Locating this formally unremarkable building in its historical context and especially in its urban context has much to tell us about the strategies for urban reform used to reshape New London in the early twentieth century. Founded in 1646, New London had experienced substantial growth in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well as the kind of urban compartmentalization Victorians used to bring order to an urban fabric they understood as threatening.<sup>iii</sup> By the turn of the century, New London was participating in a small way in the City Beautiful movement, in an attempt to use classical architecture and formal urban design to tame the city for middle-class leisure. By the interwar period, the City Practical--contemporaneous alternative to the City Beautiful--had beaten out the City Beautiful in popular practice, as entrepreneurs sought to find an integrative balance between commerce and culture.

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Examining the Plant Building in light of these urban reform movements provides insights into the New London landscape and the social forces that shaped this structure. In particular, it reveals the importance of changing notions of gender to late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture. An example of City Practical design, the Plant Building addressed the “problem” of women on the street in ways that differed significantly from its Victorian and City Beautiful predecessors.

Traditionally the scholarly literature about the architecture of the City Beautiful and City Practical has focused on its manifestation in the largest cities in America, especially Chicago and Washington, D.C., while the far greater number of smaller American cities, which also engaged in these movements, have typically been overlooked. There is a tendency to assume that the architectural, technological, and social circumstances in smaller American cities are products of “cultural lag” or a trickle down system from larger cities. Although the idea that any research on Chicago is merely a ten or fifteen year shift from being applicable to any small city is convenient, this proposes that small cities like New London were on the same trajectory as large cities. This thesis acknowledges that New London is not simply a slower, miniature version of larger metropolises. Therefore it will help architectural historians view the City Beautiful and the City Practical differently. This thesis investigates the Plant Building and the society that enlivened it, but it is also a reflective look into the practice of architectural history.

### **The City Beautiful Movement**

The City Beautiful movement was a wave of architectural and urban planning reforms that began in the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in response to unprecedented urban growth. Cities had never been taller, larger, transportation and communication had never traveled faster or further or been accessible to more people. Until the urban planning movements of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, American cities had grown quickly due to unprecedented development, which sprung up



without regulation in singular additive spurts with no comprehensive preparation. While the perceived dangers of downtown had always been a concern of Victorian life, the increase in transportation, communication, and urbanization of American cities in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century overwhelmed the balance of urban middle class social orders and the capacity of cities' infrastructure, which had never been smellier, more crowded, more anonymous, or noisier.<sup>iv</sup>

The genteel classes were overwhelmed especially by the enormous influx of people to the city. They both pitied immigrants for their hapless situation and feared that they would further degrade the city. Characters appeared in contemporary newspapers, like the amorphous rushing crowd, prostitutes, the homeless, street children, beggars, tramps, and loafers while a chorus of racist immigrant stereotypes became part of popular culture and contributed to the threatening urban narrative. An illustration by E. W. Martin from 1868 represents some of the many fears that the middle class had for the people of the urban world. (Figure 2) The image portrays the "Fate of Hundreds of Young Men." The caption enumerated what they believed to be a typical experience: "1) Leaving home for New York, 2) In a fashionable saloon amongst the waiter girls – the road to ruin, 3) Drinking with the 'Fancy' – in the hands of the gamblers, 4) Murdered and robbed by his 'Fancy' companions, and 5) His body found by the harbor police." The decay of the urban environment that included these threatening characters was thought to be self-perpetuating – with initial degradation leading to further decline, which would surely ensnaring every newcomer into the downward spiral. While these doomsday scenarios were exaggerated, they were all the more potent because of the real strain, brought about by overpopulation and economic downturn that cities were experiencing in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>v</sup>

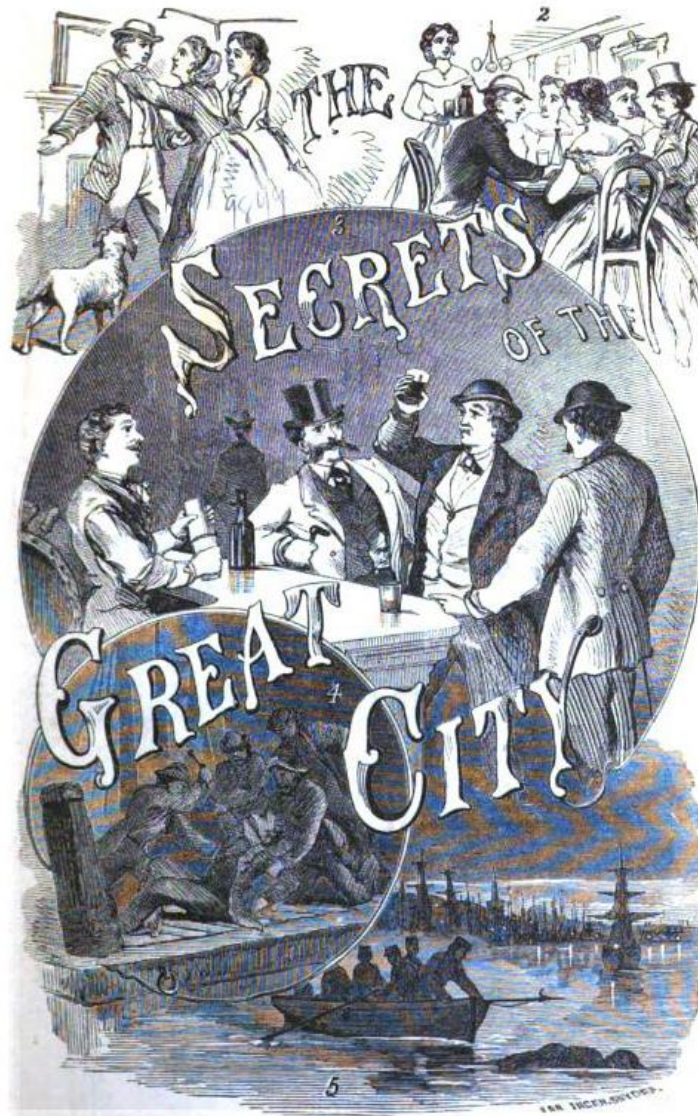


Figure 2. Illustration from *The Secrets of the Great City* 1868.<sup>vi</sup>

Based on what they saw on the street and in illustrations, the genteel classes imagined the atmosphere of the city at its worst as a hard and dark landscape of vice and savage capitalism filled with amoral characters who would perpetuate the circumstances of their own tragic downfalls by transmitting their flawed ethics and patterns of depraved behavior to each new

wave of immigrants. To navigate this treacherous landscape, middle-class men and women relied on strict social and moral codes based on class, race, and gender to govern their behavior in the new, overwhelming city where hierarchy and propriety might otherwise be lost in urban anonymity. The chaotic heterogeneity of modern cities was threatening to middle class reformers, who were quickly leaving for a more homogenized society. Genteel classes in large cities began to migrate to the suburbs leaving the downtown unsupervised by their moral standards. The expanding rail and trolley systems determined suburban growth and served as middle class escape routes. Recovering in their suburban homes, they removed themselves from the direct urban fray and framed a residential haven that they saw in stark contrast with the city, and so heightened their fears.<sup>vii</sup>

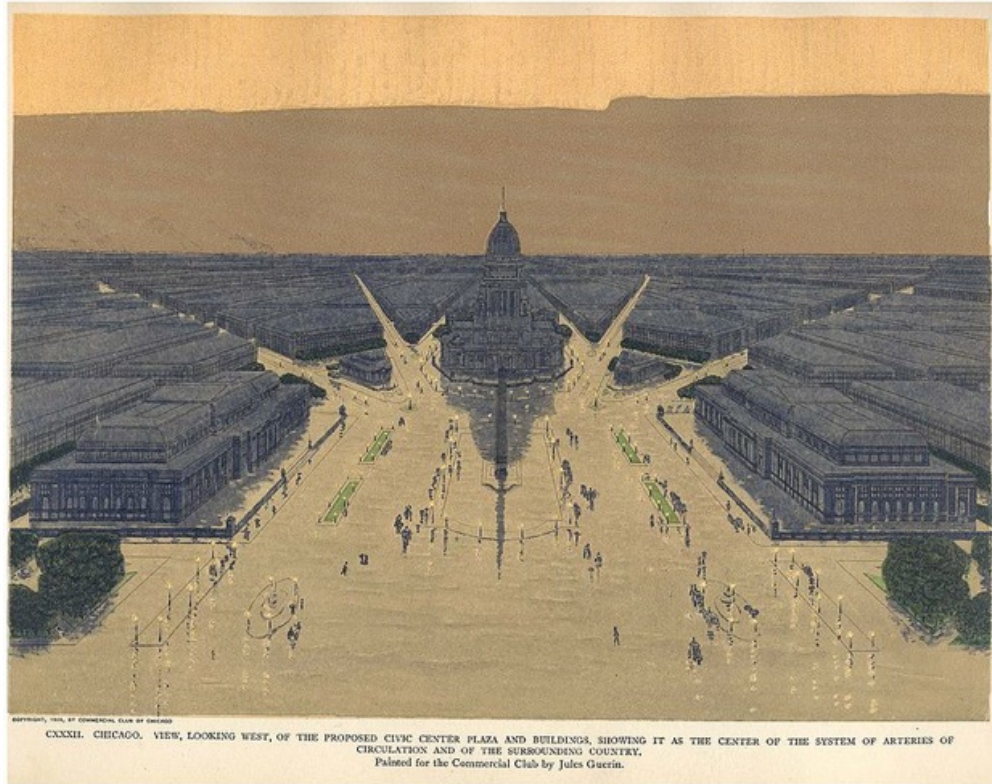
There were two primary responses of the middle class to 19<sup>th</sup> century urban problem. Progressive era reforms focused on areas of the working poor. Women's groups played a large part in these reforms, often labeling themselves as "municipal housekeepers." Living conditions, crime, and economical depression in the 1890s brought intense questioning of the value of industrial growth and the disparity between traditional moral values and the realities of urban life. The progressive approach sought to improve the lives of all people, with cooperative work and civic concern. Progressive reforms in the city included improving sanitation and focused on slum neighborhoods. Although they feared downtown and its characters, many in the middle class saw it their duty as citizens to intervene for the welfare and betterment of those who did not have the power to do so themselves. While progressive reforms focused on improving the lives of the urban poor out of genuine philanthropic concern, the interventions were in response to middle class fears and so were aimed at ameliorating the downtown experience for the middle class as a priority.<sup>viii</sup>

Another approach to 19<sup>th</sup> century urban problems was the City Beautiful movement, which borrowed plans from Progressive reforms but emphasized beautification of streets with art, trees, and parks. The industrial growth of American cities brought economic success to the new middle class and provided a platform for their leisured Victorian society. Often businessmen's groups sponsored these plans, using them as a social antidote that allowed them to pursue their business with cutthroat vigor while maintain a gentlemanly stature. With projects such as cleaning streets, building monuments, and planting trees, ranging in scale from curbside improvements to comprehensive city plans, the City Beautiful movement intended to counteract the negative atmosphere downtown with beauty, for the benefit of all. <sup>ix</sup>

An umbrella term, the City Beautiful encompassed the work of many different organizations each with a different approach to their own particular urban target. What these organizations had in common was their concern for the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Victorian urban environment and their belief that a city could be improved for all by reconstructing it with artistic and architectural interventions. Historians have recognized groups such as the New York City Municipal Art Society founded in 1893 and the national American Society of Municipal Improvements founded in 1894, which focused on encouraging civic pride by introducing public art and beautiful architecture to the lack-luster urban landscape. Other organizations, including the American League for Civic Improvement, founded in 1900, focused on civic improvements to bring moral uplift to the urban public. Founded in 1897, the American Park and Outdoor Art Association brought together landscape professionals who valued the power of nature in the city to mitigate the negative effects of urban life. Although these organizations did not fully collaborate, their purposes overlapped and were encompassed by the City Beautiful. These organizations proposed and enacted a range of separate solutions to urban problems. <sup>x</sup>

Gaining momentum through the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the various middle class urban improvement groups first began to collaborate in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to create the comprehensive urban plans for which the City Beautiful is most famous. One of the most well known plans was Burnham's 1909 plan for Chicago. In *The Birth of City Planning in the United States, 1840-1917*, Jon Petersen writes that the plan was "so stupendous that it literally swallowed up all of the grand civic schemes hatched for Chicago since the World's Fair, integrating them with still other sweeping ideas to create a single, unified, colossal program."<sup>xi</sup> Urban unification stood out as a key piece to City Beautiful plans everywhere. In the most dramatic plans that relied heavily on destroying and rebuilding urban space, as did Burnham's plan, typical components included a civic center, public parks, a gateway railroad, and processional boulevards. City Beautiful architecture was typically classical in style and Beaux Arts in composition. The components of these famous grand programs were commonly implemented in some way on a smaller scale and went along with more common projects that included proper garbage disposal, removal of sidewalk signage, and municipal sculpture.<sup>xii</sup>

Burnham's plan for Chicago demonstrates many of the major interventions characteristic of the comprehensive City Beautiful plans. The plan, illustrated by the watercolor below featured a civic center, defined as a grouping of public buildings with a unifying, harmonious architecture surrounding an open space. (Figure 3) Classical buildings of a uniform height frame a public plaza centered on an obelisk and headed by a grand domed building that could be nothing else but a city hall.



*Figure 3. Jules Guerin's watercolor of Burnham's Plan for Chicago.* <sup>xiii</sup>

Since careful consideration was also given to the various methods of entering the city another characteristic intervention was the construction of a grand gateway railroad station. They were called gateway railroads because they were shaped like giant gates into the city. Also called Union Stations, they were created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a response to the competitive construction of railroads and stations that wastefully cut through the urban landscape. A Union Station unified railroad development in a single station that served as a grand gateway into the city with an architecture that set the tone for each new arrival. <sup>xiv</sup>

For those arriving through the new “gates” of the city, processional boulevards served to carry the beautiful precedent set by the train stations out onto the street. The street was especially important because it epitomized a space for City Beautiful concern within the whole city. The street was the most public, the least controllable, and the most visible urban space that existed. It was also the setting for the most interaction between the middle class and characters

of the city they feared and pitied, a place where their respectability was most vulnerable.<sup>xv</sup> The street displayed the evidence of urban ills where the obvious, loud, smelly, and dangerous realities gathered on the pavement and seeped through the sidewalk. The processional boulevard was the City Beautiful solution that transformed these spaces into mall-like thoroughfares lined with trees. In smaller interventions, trees were planted along existing roads. When built new these grand avenues often cut diagonally through the established grid of the city connecting important social nodes, like civic buildings, park entrances, or patriotic monuments. In Burnham's watercolor of Chicago, these boulevards can be clearly seen converging into the civic plaza connecting it and the city hall with other unpictured and important urban nodes in the distance.<sup>xvi</sup>

A belt parkway or an outer park system provided city dwellers with a refreshing natural escape for the eyes and the spirit. Ideally scattered throughout the urban landscape, these refuges from the cold concrete landscape were designed to provide a moral rejuvenation as well. Stemming from the same motivations that inspired garden cities and the suburbs, parks were used as tools to introduce a moral influence among the decidedly amoral influence of cities. This scattered park system marked a change from the Victorian style of park, which was often massive and laid out in a designated central location (geographic center or center of the community the park served). A prime example of the Victorian park is Central Park in New York City. In contrast, City Beautiful parks were smaller and more widely distributed so that they brought nature to as many people as possible – a strategy that aligns with the progressive influence on the City Beautiful movement.<sup>xvii</sup>

These few interventions were in no way the entire list of urban improvements of the City Beautiful movement; instead they epitomize the cohesive change that was hoped for. Within City Beautiful plans, beauty was not considered to be a superficial quality; in fact it symbolized the



health of cities. City Beautiful interventions injected symbols of beauty into the urban landscape in order to invoke a positive atmosphere on the street.

Along with the unified causes for urban improvement, the City Beautiful is recognized by a style of architecture and design shaped by established architectural traditions that soon became signifiers of the modern, progressive, and successful city. Emphasizing horizontal harmony and bilateral symmetry, the Beaux Arts composition of classical motifs in monumental characterized the City Beautiful. The Beaux Arts method was inspired by classical architecture of cities in Europe, and especially Second Empire Paris, where Haussmann's urban interventions created an ordered city that supported both high culture and middle class leisure. Applied to the new context of the modern American city the classical style invoked civilizing order creating instant visual credibility and encourage both civic pride and moral behavior.<sup>xviii</sup> While the "White City" of the 1893 World's Colombian Exposition in Chicago, was not, as some historians argue, the first chapter of American urban beautification, it certainly was a major inspiration for classical architecture of the early City Beautiful movement.<sup>xix</sup> (Figure 4) Like the Burnham plan for Chicago, the Exposition showcased the unified ordered vision that classical architecture could bring to a space.





*Figure 4. The White City at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. 1893.*<sup>xx</sup>

While in the City Beautiful focused on projects that demonstrated the priority of the middle class to ensure its own well-being and to improve conditions in a city that would support their continued success life. Many City Beautiful interventions were mostly allocated for only the districts in the downtown visited by the middle class people. Rather than focusing on improving poor neighborhoods, comprehensive City Beautiful plans would often demolish these neighborhoods to make way for new boulevards. This eradication tactic has been criticized as a solution that avoided addressing the real problem of low-income housing. However apparently problematic this solution seems now, it would not have been considered as contradictory because the genteel classes believed that they were leading by high-class example and cooperative beautifying spirit would catch on throughout the city encouraging widespread cooperative betterment.<sup>xxi</sup>

### **The City Practical Movement**

While proponents of the City Beautiful asserted that introducing classical beauty into chaotic cities would naturally invoke order, some contemporary critics argued that the City Beautiful plan was superficial, that beauty should not be imposed artificially, but should be the natural result of a productive strategy.<sup>xxii</sup> Designed to be more progressive than the City Beautiful and more beautiful than Progressive reforms, the City Practical promoted meaningful and efficient design as a priority over meaningless beautification. In a review, Harold Howland hailed Fredrick Law Olmsted Jr.'s 1911 report on the city of Pittsburgh as an exemplar of the shift to the City Practical. He wrote, "[A man's] ideal would be the City Practical, and in the Olmsted report such an ideal is put before him, with beauty not neglected, but considered as a by-product of the quest for convenience, economy, comfort, and practicality."<sup>xxiii</sup> In the City Practical, beautification remains a factor but it had been recontextualized as a by-product of a

more economical process. While in theory Howland seems to propose a comprehensive City Practical plan, in practice it was primarily focused on individual commercial developments. The economical focus of the City Practical would open up new urban building types to beautification and would bring businessmen and city planners into the ranks of beneficial civic leaders.

The City Practical had a lot in common with the City Beautiful but it was different in one way in particular. Instead of focusing on municipal buildings and public art like the City Beautiful, City Practical design focused on commercial architecture. There was a realization throughout the successful initiatives of the City Beautiful movement that a clean and inviting street lined by beautiful buildings could be economically beneficial while still perpetuating the moral agenda of the original purpose. Recognizing the contribution that this new way of thinking could have for civic improvement, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century city planner Mulford Robinson remarked, “the business section is the one part of town to which all the residents themselves resort and in which all have a common interest.”<sup>xiv</sup> While City Practical planners argued that they maintained the original purpose of moral improvement, proponents of the City Beautiful would have considered their commercial venture a cheap exploitation of civic beauty.

The incorporation of business and economy into City Practical plans would have been considered problematic to the proponents of the City Beautiful and so marked a sizable social leap. At one point, active moneymaking or ambition was only tentatively acceptable in society because it was most quickly associated with negative attributes like greed and competition. Many believed that the savage capitalism of moneymaking was a primary factor contributing to the deplorable condition of Victorian cities. While City Beautiful projects were considered antidotes to harsh capitalism, the City Practical movement evolved under the belief that capitalism and beauty were not necessarily contradictory.

Businessmen both recognized this opportunity for civic improvement and the advancement of their own economical investments. By the 1920s, “Beauty,” a New Haven newspaper reporter noted, “is described as the new business tool.”<sup>xxv</sup> Clearly this statement demonstrated the growing motivation that economic benefit contributed to the increasing popularity of the City Practical. Both self-serving and civically beneficial, the City Practical provided businessmen with the opportunity to contribute individually to civic improvement through their preferred medium of commercial architecture. This recontextualization was related directly to the contemporary practice of city boosterism.

The City Practical must be understood within the context of Boosterism. Most popular in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, boosting the reputation of a city was meant to develop the local economy, attract new businesses investments’, welcome immigration, and encourage tourism to the city. Local leaders and businessmen invested their own money in towns often through constructing City Practical commercial buildings in order to jump start economic growth. They often called attention to investments through newspapers, advertising, books, and tourism pamphlets. Inflated, inspiring, language was used to describe the past, present, and future of the city.<sup>xxvi</sup> Boosterism contextually repositioned commercial leaders and businessmen into a new and meaningful place as a positive force in local society. Due to social changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, businessmen within the context of civic boosterism were considered honorable characters of society. Boosterism flourished on the notion that moneymaking, tourism, and profit could benefit society as a whole. In this way, the investment of individual businessmen, like Morton Plant who would gain an individual profit was also seen as investing in the city of New London as a whole.

Like the City Beautiful, the City Practical received attention for comprehensive city plans. According to Isenberg, two urban designers John Nolan and Mulford Robinson

“dominated the planning consultant business in the early decades of the century, producing their reports in cooperation with local sponsors to shape commercial goals for cities around the country.”<sup>xxvii</sup> The influence of the City Beautiful on their work is recognized but both men are remembered as practical planners. Like Burnham’s plan for Chicago, the plans by Nolan and Robinson for cities throughout the U.S. were comprehensive and influential. Also like the City Beautiful, in many towns without comprehensive plans, the City Practical often manifested itself in piecemeal interventions like the implementation of a single City Practical commercial building.

Proponents of the City Practical borrowed the Beaux Arts composition and classical style of the City Beautiful to use on commercial buildings. The newest commercial developments arose with more refined materials and harmonizing colors than red brick Victorian commercial architecture. The image of commercial main streets was a characteristic feature of the City Practical and the obsession of businessmen and downtown leaders. The new “commercial beautification agenda,” was characterized by small focused improvements to the developing business districts that included reinforcing curbs, removing power lines, improving trolley lines, paving streets, removing sidewalk signage, and cleaning up trash. Piece-by-piece individual buildings constructed what Historian Alison Isenberg, in *Downtown America* called, “the beautiful commercial corridor.” Reinforced curbs, uncluttered sidewalks, paved roads, and new buildings unified downtown leaving a streamlined corridor that was designed to receive traffic of people and money.<sup>xxviii</sup>

While Isenberg focused on the corridor of the City Practical as a whole, the commercial corridor was constructed as a sum of its parts, with commercial buildings that individually and collectively participated in the City Practical. The beautiful commercial corridor of the City Practical was the cooperative unification of many individual buildings. Besides interventions on

the street itself, the work of the City Practical was almost exclusively embodied by commercial architecture and especially skyscrapers.

Skyscrapers were dramatic additions to the turn of the century urban landscape. The evolution of skyscrapers was a convergence of engineering, architecture, and investment. The height of this evolution was the work and theory of Louis Sullivan, considered the “father of the skyscraper.”<sup>xxix</sup> Working around the turn of the century, Sullivan ascribed to certain guiding principles of architecture that he developed. These guidelines would serve to spark a new modern building type that would come into use in every city in the United States. In an 1896 article titled, “The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered,” Sullivan described the social and technological ingredients of a modern skyscraper as: the growth of business creating the need for offices, the invention of the high speed elevator, the use of steel frame construction, and population growth.

The first steel frame skyscrapers were conceived in the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as masonry buildings with steel reinforcements and maintained a traditional masonry look. As architects gained appreciation for this structural system, they began to treat the steel as a structural skeleton while the masonry elements played the role of fireproof cladding and the steel skeleton became further incorporated into the finished design of the building. Skyscrapers evolved into certain patterns that became characteristic of their design exemplified by the Guaranty Building (1894). (Figure 5) Typically the first floor was designed in a style distinct from the floors above, often with more glass. The mezzanine space formed a transition inside the building from the function of the first floors to the function of the upper floors and often included a grand staircase or bay of elevators. This transitional space was articulated on the outside of the building as a continuation of the first floor. The middle section of floors would rise with a distinct façade that expressed the similar cells of office space inside, stacked on top of

each other like a rectilinear beehive. Vertical ornamentation was emphasized in this middle section in order to express the buildings height. The building was capped with another distinctive top floor and a cornice. Sullivan's trademark treatment of this top floor was a series of arches that he designed to replicate the path of the elevator cables stored in the roofs of the building. In his article Sullivan noted that many of his contemporaries compared the modern skyscraper in form as a kind of column: a base, a shaft, and a capital.<sup>xxx</sup> (Figure 6)

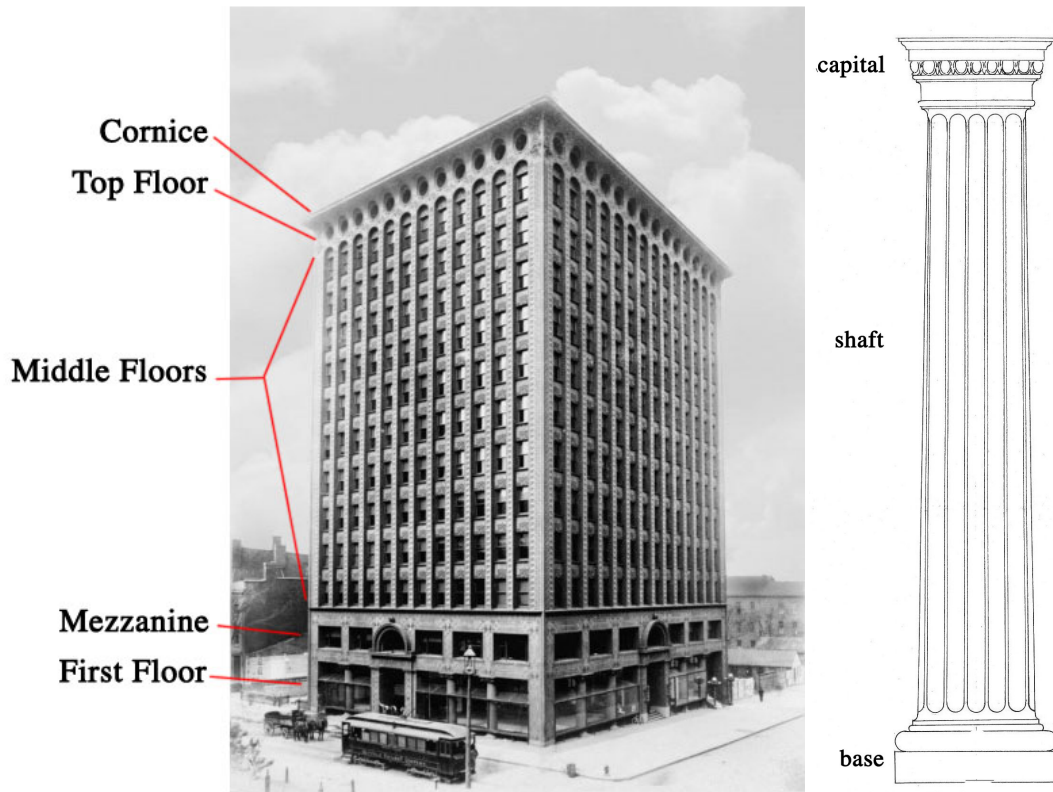


Figure 5 (left). *The Guaranty Building, 1894 by Louis Sullivan.*  
Figure 6 (right). *Illustration of a classical column.*<sup>xxvi</sup>

While buildings like the Guaranty Building appear to be quite substantial compared to current skyscrapers, at the time they were built the openness of the first floor shops and the thinner walls afforded by this new construction technique would have been striking in comparison to older masonry buildings. With their non-load-bearing external walls these buildings were noticeably lighter than their predecessors.

For City Beautiful planners, the first generation of skyscrapers were considered to be imposing structures that crowded the urban landscape. City Beautiful planners would have also found the competitive commercial function of most skyscrapers to be disruptive to moral society as well. According to historian Keith D. Revell, “Skyscrapers violated the City Beautiful aesthetic at almost every turn.”<sup>xxxii</sup> The immense verticality of skyscrapers contradicted the City Beautiful ideal of low-rise horizontal city embodied by the White City at the Chicago World Exhibition. Some even believed that skyscrapers were unhealthy to pedestrians for locking out light and air. To the City Beautiful, skyscrapers could be considered the epitome of problematic urban architecture – crowding streets, blocking light, monuments to capitalism and collectively chaotic.

As skyscraper design began to evolve and their presence grew less shocking, skyscrapers were reconsidered for their civic benefit. Revell continued his essay to argue that through early 20<sup>th</sup> century architectural innovation and zoning laws, there developed a “skyscraper urbanism that retained the City Beautiful’s emphasis on ensemble.”<sup>xxxiii</sup> While like him many historians do not label it, the application of City Beautiful style to commercial architecture signified the City Practical. Often when skyscrapers are described as City Beautiful, historians are using the City Beautiful to describe a style, which could also be considered American beaux-arts. According to theory, the City Beautiful would never be relevant to skyscraper design; that is the work of the City Practical. The growing appreciation for steel skyscraper design marked a transition from the Victorian notion commercial buildings contributed to the degenerate state of cities. Modern technology was used in urban skyscrapers as a tool for respectable society; at the turn of the century, elevators were at first marketed in department stores as a more genteel mode of transportation for women than slogging up the stairs. As consumerism and commerce also began

to be reconsidered as redeemably positive influences in the city, the skyscraper became the building type of choice for City Practical architecture.

### **Gender and Gentility in the City**

In *Downtown America*, Isenberg observed that women initiated many of the formative City Beautiful groups but that the City Practical movement corresponded with the emergence of the mostly male profession of city planning. The earliest interventions of the City Beautiful movement were the Progressive reforms instigated through various women's clubs that organized and sponsored measures such as the installation of trashcans and lampposts and street cleaning. Seemingly superficial improvements when compared to the comprehensive programs like the Chicago plan, these projects were actually the spark that launched the movement. Women's groups ascribed weighty moral symbolism to these relatively minor interventions. They believed that since the physical filth and chaos in cities gave rise to social filth and chaos, these cleansing urban interventions could serve as moralizing totems to encourage moral behavior.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Historians like Jessica Sewell in *Women and the Everyday City: Public Space in San Francisco, 1890-1915*, have also argued that the problems of the Victorian city became more urgent as more women entered the downtown workforce. It seemed that the growing presence of women on the once male-dominated street threw the dangers of the city into high relief. In reality the masculinity of the street was mostly imagined as working-class women had always been on the street as they typically lived downtown and traveled to their jobs and ran errands. The rules of gentility were designed specifically with the middle-class ladies in mind, and so these working women were considered less of a concern simply because of their lower-class status. It was the late 19<sup>th</sup> century increase in middle class women's presence on streets that heightened the problem in the minds of City Beautiful initiators.<sup>xxxv</sup>



Occasionally criticized by the older wealthy “city fathers” as silly feminine meddling in what some considered as their manly and adventuresome domain, the City Beautiful movement nonetheless quickly spread throughout towns in America and drew the attention of other modern businessmen. Businessmen’s organizations became involved with the movement, and because of their elevated status in society, they were able to bring the ideas of the women’s groups’ initiatives into local political and professional arenas. The professionalization of the City Beautiful movement and the evolution of the City Practical generated the establishment of professional city planners who acted as experts in civic improvement. Because the genteel women in these initial clubs were not involved with politics and money, the professional city planners were predominantly male. The gendered social rules that prevented these women from associating with capitalism and politics originated from the same gendered expectations that contributed to their moralized agenda of city beautification.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

The fundamental ideals of the City Beautiful were themselves based on the relationships of masculinity, femininity, and gentility in Victorian society, which changed according to class, age, and location. Gentility was the prescribed manner of behavior that assured that the mechanisms of middle and upper-class social life would continue to function appropriately. Genteel behavior informed others that a person was respectable, regardless of class, though more standards were held for higher classes. For the established middle class that was used to a certain pace and respectable way of life, the speed and anonymity of modern cities were a daily threat. The lower class population was largely made up of immigrants unfamiliar with local, established social practices. In cities so large, overwhelming, and filled with foreigners that a name or a courtesy might be lost in the crowd, strict Victorian genteel rules lubricated the social mechanisms that kept their hierarchies in order.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Both men and women strove to embody gentility, but since women were considered more vulnerable to social mishap, gentility was tempered towards their heightened sensitivity. Gentlemen were still governed by rules of gentility but they were not nearly as strict nor were the consequences so great as for genteel ladies. So even though the City Beautiful was designed to raise the level of gentility for all those who frequented downtown, it was *de facto* targeted toward the bringing about the more precarious acceptance of women on the street. For both men and women, the ultimate goal of genteel behavior on the street was to be inconspicuous, of course a harder task for women who were considered out of place on the street. Men and women were expected to dress, speak, converse, gaze, and walk in carefully subdued manner or else they would be inviting or even deserving of social victimization. Circulated in hugely popular etiquette books, these social rituals and rules of gentility were used by the middle class to support their social interactions within the increasingly disorderly Victorian cityscape.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Catering to genteel women on the 19<sup>th</sup> century street was based in gender associations in Victorian society that linked masculinity and femininity both with particular character traits and with certain spaces. This social division has been widely described as the Victorian separate spheres, a phrase that itself conveys the Victorian understanding that these gender stereotypes operated as related to actual, three-dimensional space where they would have direct effects on aspects of city planning. At least as they were imagined, these spheres of masculinity and femininity were separate and often defined in opposition to each other. Men were seen as naturally more competitive, strong, intelligent, primal, and fast, while women were seen as naturally more cooperative, vulnerable, emotional, moral, and peaceful.

In Victorian society, public urban spaces, and especially the street, were considered masculine and domestic environments were considered feminine. The street charged with all of the extreme attributes of untamed masculinity, was inherently tough, harsh, fast, and aggressive.

It was considered only logical that the more dangerous and competitive environment of the street was a masculine realm. Because homes were ideally warm, comforting, and beautiful, as well as moral centers for raising families, it was thought that women were naturally more suited to the home. The domestic realm was the place where a woman could extend her femininity into three-dimensional space and so the home was therefore, softer, comforting, precious, more leisured, restful, and natural.

Even though these physical places of the street and home were imagined as the distinct realms of masculinity or femininity, men and women commonly had to cross these lines. Obviously men enjoyed the refuge of their own homes, the locus of femininity; the presentation of the domestic environment served to support the physical and moral health of the genteel male owner of the house. Men required moral rejuvenation at home because the dangers and temptations of the brutishly masculine street threatened their gentility. A space of untamed masculinity, the street was wild and dangerous; only through strict behavioral restraint did respectable men rise above their own base instincts and grew into gentility. Women, more frail and vulnerable, needed protection if the occasion required them to enter the street, which it regularly did when she ran errands as part of her role of decorating and maintaining her home. Protection, in the form of a respectable non-threatening male escort or with a protective shell of behavior would allow a woman's presence on the masculine street. The category of non-threatening male included: husband, married host, family member, or butler acceptable because his lower class status neutralized the threat. Another genteel woman in the daytime or a private carriage created a protective shell of femininity that permitted a woman to genteelly navigate the street.<sup>xxxix</sup>

According to Victorian gendered norms, which they fully subscribed, the women of ladies' clubs targeted dangerous cities using their moralizing power as females as a way to

spread middle class values. As imagined by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the chaos and threat of the city occurred within the masculine sphere with its competitive savage capitalism. Through what these organizations called “municipal housekeeping”, middle class women “seized moral authority” of the beautification of the streets that they often feared.<sup>xi</sup> Reflecting on women’s participation in the City Beautiful in her 1915 publication *Woman’s Work in Municipalities*, Mary Beard proclaimed, “There is no doubt that women are the natural leaders for the realization of the city beautiful.”<sup>xii</sup> In the same way a Victorian man restrained his own instinctual masculinity with genteel dress and behavior, City Beautiful initiatives attempted to tame and reconfigure the wildly masculine city and retrain the city (and all of its characters) to emanate a gentlemanly atmosphere. Just as the sign of a genteel man was his ability to interact respectfully with a lady, the successful implementation of the City Beautiful aimed at comfortably accommodating ladies in the street. As a gentleman was expected to hold an umbrella over the head of a lady he accompanied, roofed trolley waiting stations were constructed to offer a comparable shield that would support the woman’s ladylike experience.

Women’s groups used established feminine social roles as housekeepers to market their urban initiatives; in a way this strategy also justified the boldness of their female intervention on the masculine street. In addition to indentifying as socially conscious women as the moralizing wives of the city, women were often depicted in newspaper cartoons as *mothering a municipality*. One in particular shows a middle class woman scrubbing off four young boys each labeled with an urban problem: empty lots, rubbish bins, etc. (Figure 7) As Isenberg argues, these images circulating in newspapers further constructed City Beautiful work to align with the feminine business of mothering children so that they grow up to be genteel people.<sup>xiii</sup> Cartoons like this tapped into the established upper and middle classes notion that immigrants and members of the lower classes were childlike in their ignorance of genteel ways or childish

naive of their social status. The elite both condescendingly pitied lower class people like children for their innocent vulnerability and at the same time feared their destructive potential and susceptibility to temptation. As with the actual work of mothering and housekeeping, the work done for the City Beautiful by these pioneering women's clubs was undertaken with a sense of obligation; done for the greater good and was not seen as a job but as a duty. To be paid as a professional meant handling such a corrupting object as money and was in direct opposition to the tradition of feminine morality.

## A Cartoon Which Helped a Clean-up Campaign

THE ANNUAL BATH



*Figure 7. Cartoon of “Mothering a Municipality” 1913<sup>xliii</sup>*

While the upper/middle class women proponents of the City Beautiful are sometimes dismissed for simply perpetuating Victorian class and gender stereotypes by aesthetically “feminizing” the street, their use of stereotypical feminine ideals actually worked to send a relatable signal that the street was now an acceptable place for women.<sup>xliv</sup> Rather than drawing women back to the feminized haven of their homes, they instead chose to “feminize” the streets and so made a positive step in accommodating their social needs downtown.

The process of adapting downtown to women’s needs unfolded in stages. Just as an upper/middle class lady validated her feminine presence on the masculine street with a protective bubble of a non-threatening male escort, a female escort, or a private carriage, many Victorian urban institutions provided “ladies rooms” to protect women when they ventured downtown. In some instances office buildings were designed with a separate, often hierarchical space for the groups of women entering the work force in clerical positions. The two most architecturally visible accommodations were the “ladies rooms” seen in public buildings and department stores. Incorporated into hotels as tearooms, ladies’ reading rooms in libraries, and ladies public bathrooms, “ladies rooms” would be areas where women could respectably participate in downtown activities unaccompanied by a male escort. These rooms were often distinctively decorated to represent a “lady’s taste.” The department store, a creation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, drew design inspiration from the World’s Fairs, which began in the 1850s. These commercial spaces were created exclusively for upper class women shoppers. Department stores and ladies rooms were designed to whisk women quickly from the street and into a feminine sphere of space.<sup>xlv</sup> These spaces were often located or advertised so their presence was obvious to people on the street who recognized immediately the special accommodation of “ladies” as a marker of greater gentility. While they accommodated women, these feminized nodes also highlighted the danger

of the street and the vulnerability of women reiterated the otherness of women on the street to public attention.<sup>xlvi</sup>

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the City Beautiful reworked Victorian strategies of accommodating women downtown by bringing the interventions out onto the street. City Beautiful initiatives brought beauty and cleanliness out into the street and spread moral feminine influence from City Beautiful interventions throughout the city. While Victorian ladies rooms accommodated women downtown, they also limited their movement downtown. The designation of ladies rooms emphasized how unladylike the street was and called attention to any woman who walked down it. Rather than carving out isolated sanctuaries for women downtown, City Beautiful initiatives were designed to change the entire atmosphere of downtown in order to allow women to enjoy the street.

As it will be seen in New London, strategies of the City Practical shared the City Beautiful sense that respectable women were in danger on the city streets. Yet the 20<sup>th</sup> century women had found more reasons and fewer apprehensions for being on the street. Although still recognized as a risky place for women, the street was no longer the starkly masculine landscape it had once seemed. The masculine danger of cities was no longer considered inherent to streets, but was more a product of human behavior on the streets a new standard way of imagining the street had evolved.

### **The City Beautiful Movement in New London**

While most of the scholarly literature on the City Beautiful and the City Practical focuses on large cities like New York, Washington D.C., or Chicago, small cities like New London also participated in these national movements. Situated on the coast approximately halfway between New York and Boston, New London prospered from its location on one of the major the 20<sup>th</sup> century arteries of industry and travel. New London did not develop along the

same trajectories as these large urban centers that it connected. It cannot be expected that the City Beautiful and the City Practical in New London would exactly follow the traditional large-scale history of these movements. While in some ways the urban developments in New London do conform to the typical understanding of these national movements, in other ways New London provides an example of how the City Beautiful and the City Practical manifested in a smaller setting according to the concerns and aspirations of a small city.

In many ways New London does represent the most broadly diffused understanding of City Beautiful movement. There was the New London Municipal Art Society an organization that characteristically signified local support for the City Beautiful. The presence of a Municipal Art Society in New London provided proof that municipal developments originated from a social atmosphere that was invested in the City Beautiful. In an article from a December 1914 issue of the *Morning Telegraph*, Colin Buell, the president of the New London Municipal Art Society explained the purpose of the organization. According to the above article, of greatest importance was a “comprehensive and intellectual plan of the city” that among other things would guide tree planting and street cleaning.<sup>xlvii</sup> The MAS in New London revealed an attempt at a large comprehensive City Beautiful plan in the style of Burnham’s plan for Chicago. Buell continued to mention two larger goals for the society. First was the proposed annexation of Waterford into New London. The second was the “reclamation, redemption, and resuscitation” of the waterfront. The annexation of Waterford with its many upper and middle class households was presumably an economic move intended to enhance the New London tax base.

As in many towns in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, New London viewed this remnant of earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century development as an outdated eyesore. The second major goal was to improve to the New London waterfront, which included Water Street and Bank Street. Bank Street was the



original commercial street in New London, growing a market from the harbor, parallel to the river. Bank Street contained many of the saloons and other disreputable establishments, and so the Municipal Art Society of New London chose it as a next target for City Beautiful benefit. Buell's comments provided confirmation that New London's City Beautiful approach conformed with that of the traditional movement.

The tendency to think comprehensively, while in reality undertaking relatively small interventions was a City Beautiful practice that New London also followed. There was no proof that a comprehensive plan was ever completed during this time for New London. Waterford was not annexed and the waterfront received no complete redesign. The local MAS also proposed smaller scale projects that were conceivable more attainable. In the same May 1914 issue of *The Morning Telegraph* alerted the public to their intention of constructing a trolley waiting room and public playgrounds. Readers of the telegraph were assured, "The attention of the society was called to the discarded kegs, barrels, boxes, and litter left about the city, and to the waste paper thrown into the grove adjoining the Old Town Mill site." This practice was the result of the City Beautiful Movement's piecemeal beginnings.<sup>xlviii</sup>

Like City Beautiful organizations in larger cities, the New London Municipal Arts Society was faced with an urban fabric that lacked the formal order valued by City Beautiful supporters. New London had taken shape virtually unrestricted by codes or comprehensive planning. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> city, the downtown was not divided into zones according to function like commercial, residential, or civic. Often houses, shops, and civic buildings were more mixed together according to individual preference like convenience of workplace to home-life or tradition. For example, a large quilt factory shared a block with a house on State Street because the owner of the factory wanted to be close to his work. Towards the turn of the century

--in some part due to initiatives of the City Beautiful-- urban areas became more segregated into functional zones. The 1912 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map – used by insurance companies to assess fireproofing –provides an accurate map of New London one hundred years ago. (Figure 8)



Figure 8. 1912 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Downtown New London.<sup>xlix</sup>

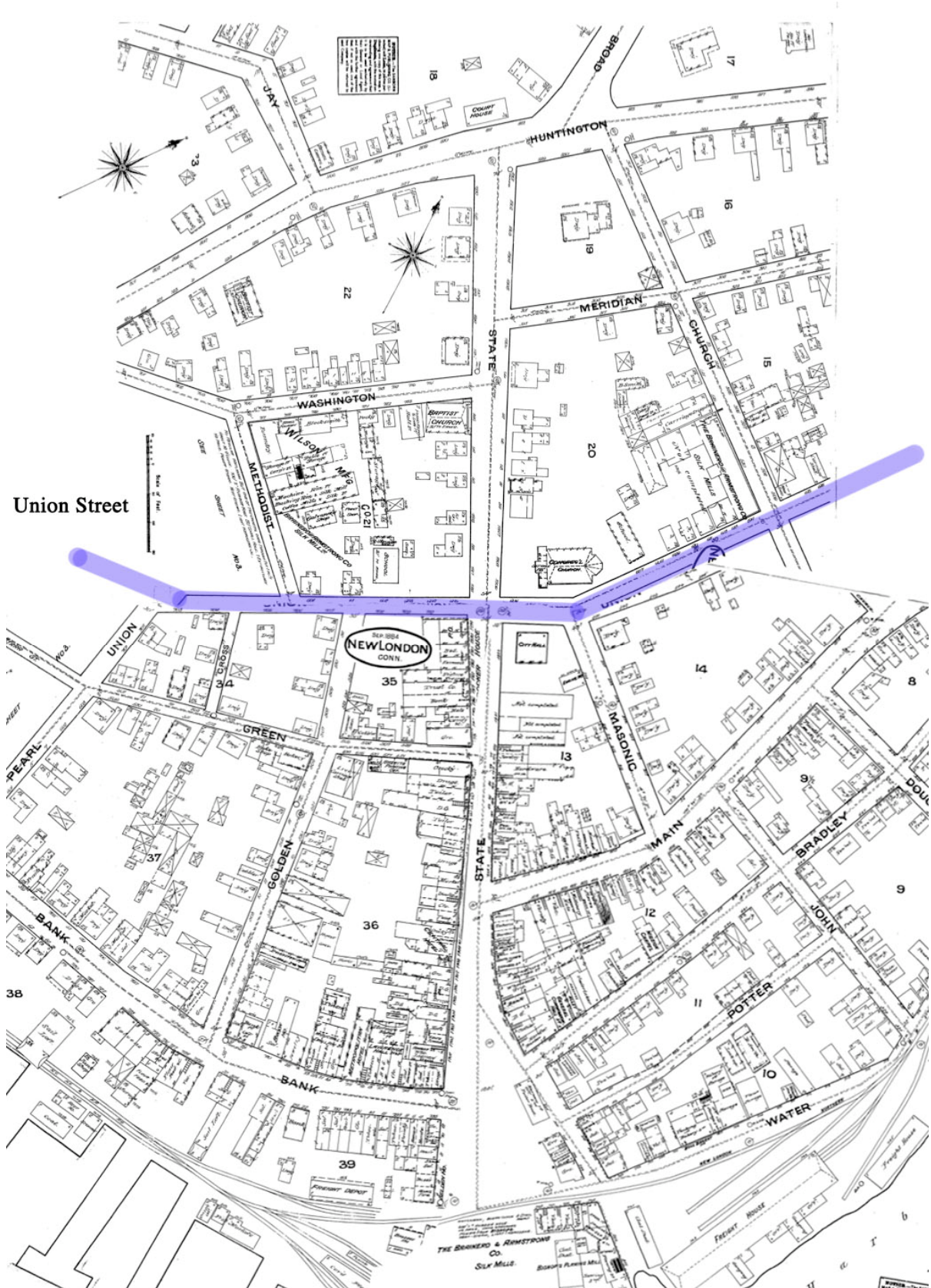
As the map makes clear, the roughly curving north-south arc of Bank Street and the railroad followed the bank of the Thames River. Paralleling the bank of the river that was

integral to the city's early commercial development, Bank Street came to meet State Street at the Parade, a pie shaped opening in the urban fabric at the easternmost end of State Street.

Continuing west for approximately a half of a mile, State Street was a relatively straight path from the waterfront and train station up a slowly sloping hill to a white wooden framed courthouse built in 1784.<sup>i</sup> Closer to the water, a couple blocks north of State Street was a predominantly Polish immigrant community, and the most concentrated area for tenements in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in New London.<sup>ii</sup> Most of the factories around New London were along the bank of the Thames River but up a block to the north and south of middle State Street were two large factories further imbedded in downtown: the Palmer Brothers' Quilt factory and the Brainerd and Armstrong Company Silk Mill.

South of the Parade along the water's edge led to another cluster of immigrant neighborhoods. Past those, around the outside of the mouth of the Thames River was the Pequot Colony, a summer beach community for wealthy locals and families from other large cities. Public travel to and within New London included trains, ferries, and a trolley system. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the western end of State Street and behind the courthouse was the residential area of the upper middle and wealthy classes of New London. An 1884 Sanborn Insurance Map demonstrated the drastic change in atmosphere that occurs at Union Street as State Street transitions from commercial district to residential neighborhood. (Figure 9) Union Street proved to continue to be a kind of threshold that delineated upper and lower State Street even as the whole street became commercial in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



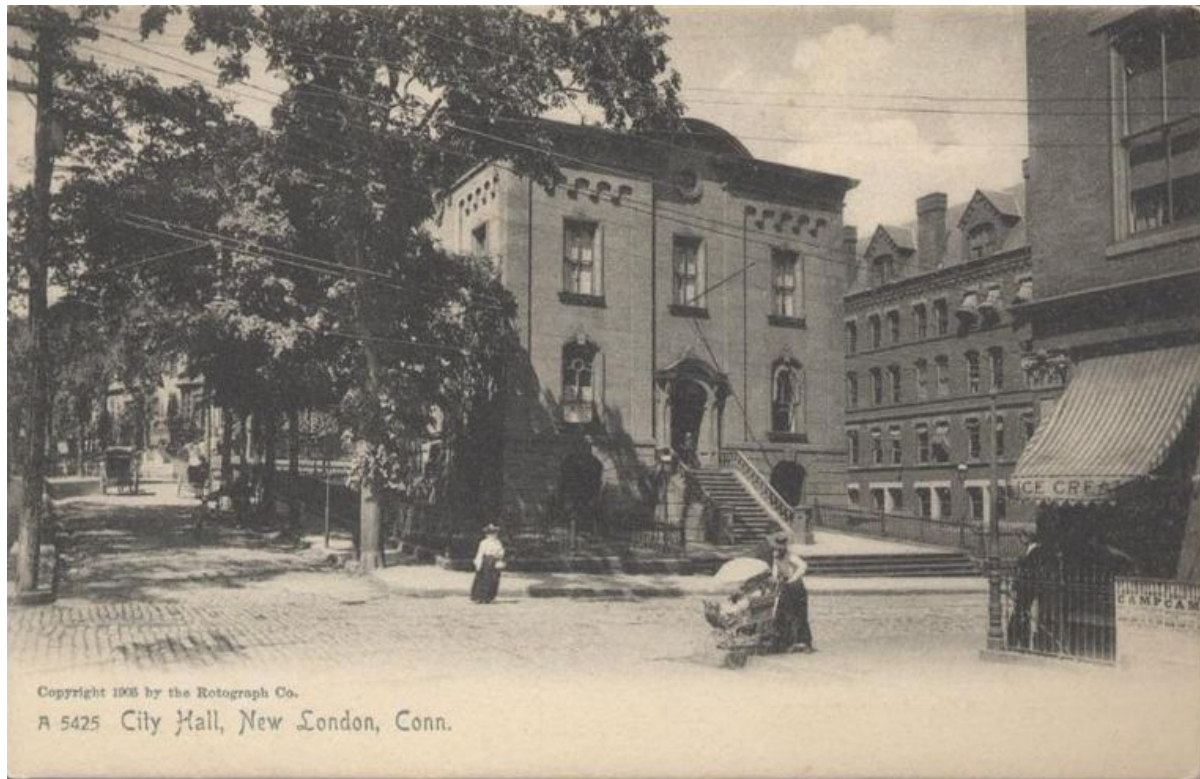


*Figure 9. 1884 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map New London. Blue indicates Union Street.*<sup>lii</sup>

East of Union Street the commercial zone of State Street was tightly compact. The Municipal Building and the First Congressional Church on the corner of Union and State Streets form a buffer and mark the transition to upper State Street. West of Union Street is upper State Street, with residences each surrounded by their own open space. At one time, this elite residential structures extended down almost the full length of State Street but the houses were gradually replaced by commercial architecture that crept up from the Parade and upper middle class neighborhoods retreated from the city. A bit later into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the developments on State Street give physical form to the City Beautiful and the City Practical principles as they were put into practice in New London.

The establishment of the local Municipal Art Society and its planning efforts made clear that New London's involvement with the City Beautiful, the architectural effects of the movement were not obvious. Buildings designed contemporaneously to the movement are concentrated on State Street, but the distinctive Beaux Arts style and comprehensive scope that was characteristic of the City Beautiful were not immediately evident. The City Beautiful vision was clearest in the remodeling of New London City Hall in 1912. Originally designed in 1854, the building was a modestly scaled brownstone structure.<sup>liii</sup> A postcard shows the building, with Italianate style that was typical of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. (Figure 10) Shortly after completion, the building was described by New London historian Francis Manwaring Caulkins as "not deficient in simple grandeur though planned with reference to municipal service rather than ornament."<sup>liv</sup> The original City Hall was a rather modest building, but still worthy of prideful comment, appropriate to the New London for which it was designed, appropriately humble for Victorian society. By 1912, New London had grown in size and ambition, with the result that the City

Hall building was considered too small and too modest to reflect the city's current success and future aspirations.

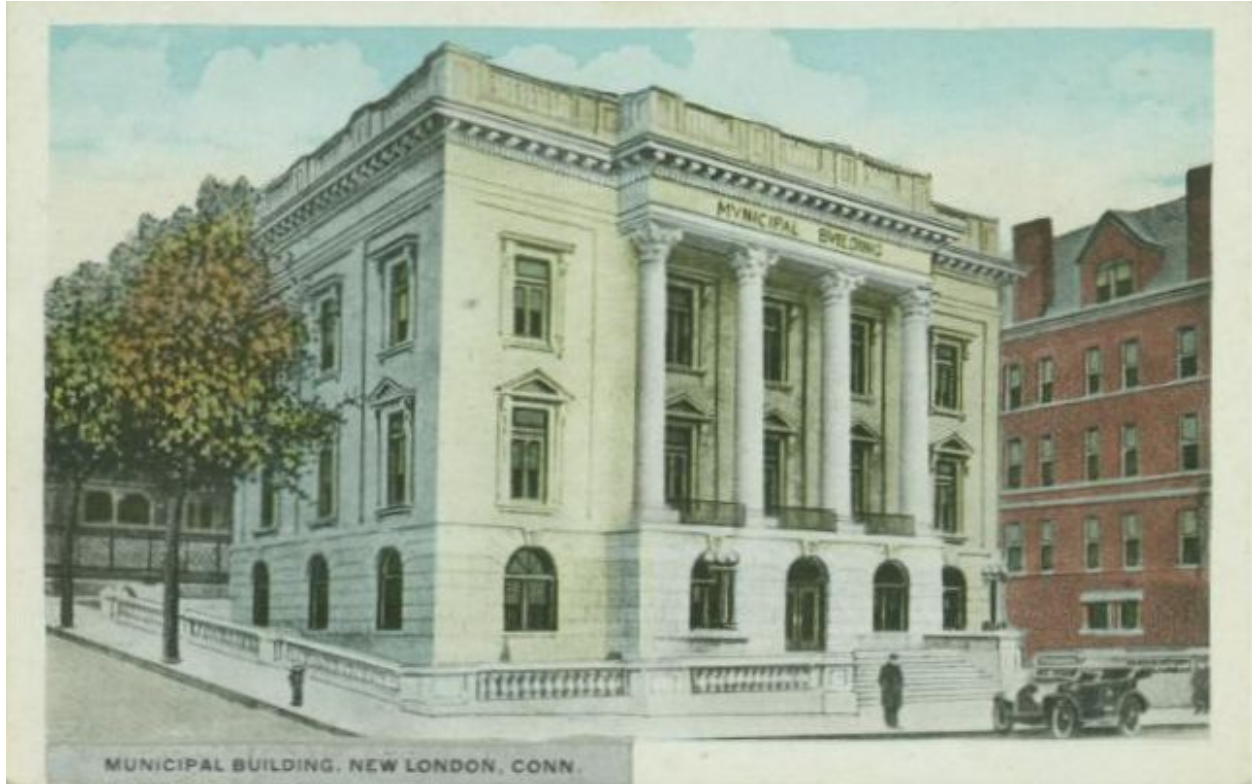


*Figure 10. Postcard of original Municipal Building<sup>lv</sup>*

The remodeling of New London's City Hall was characteristic of the City Beautiful movement. Redesigned and largely rebuilt by architect James Sweeney, the new City Hall was a larger structure with a Beaux Arts façade.<sup>lvi</sup> Another postcard from after the renovations shows the formidable symbolic power that the new columns and stairs bring to the façade. (Figure 11) This postcard also illustrates the new granite treatment of the façade, which would have been considered a finer, more prized material than the dark brownstone. The new cladding made the civic building stand in stark contrast to its red brick neighbors. Although the renovated City Hall was not remarkably larger, it achieved a significant change in scale. The double height columns were a simple but powerful intervention that introduced greater visual importance to the



municipal building. The new City Hall stood as a testament to the success that New London would have achieved in the time since the 1850s.



*Figure 11. Municipal Building after 1912 renovations.* <sup>lvii</sup>

The renovation of New London's City Hall is clearly a development shaped by the City Beautiful movement in two major ways. It was redesigned in the classical Beaux Arts style that was typical of the movement. Its public function as a municipal building the emblem of the city government, made it an ideal subject for City Beautiful intervention. With this redesign, New London was able to present a modern, beautified image to inspire its own citizens and impress visitors from the highly visible and trafficked thoroughfare of State Street. Although the renovation of City Hall stands out as the most obvious City Beautiful project completed in New London, other instances of traditional City Beautiful influence is also evident.



The development of the Parade was critical to City Beautiful progress in New London. The Parade had long been a node of transportation and a locus for downtown activity. Some of the earliest images of the Parade demonstrate its utilitarian beginnings as a horse feeding and watering station with space also provided for vendors, political campaigners, and even performers, as is seen in the images from the 1880s.<sup>lviii</sup> (Figure 12 and Figure 13). These views also picture the Liberty Pole, which marked the center of the space and furnished a spot for displaying public documents as required by law.



*Figure 12. Parade looking west 1880s.*<sup>lix</sup>



*Figure 13. Parade looking east 1880s.*<sup>lx</sup>

A key moment in the development of the Parade was the construction of Union Station in 1888. (Figure 14) While gateway or union stations were a characteristic of part of City Beautiful development, New London's Union Station predated most City Beautiful stations. It differs from the later City Beautiful stations in that it was not designed in the classical style typical of the movement. Union Station in New London was an example of an early implementation of union stations, which through their early success would become popular projects for the later City Beautiful movement. Like all union stations, the train depot in New London put an end to the environmentally destructive competition of railroad companies as they cut tracks through the city. It also gave the New London city authorities the opportunity to make a grand architectural statement. The last station designed by the prominent American architect Henry Hobson Richardson, the station is typical of Victorian era shingle style architecture applied to a large public building. Made out of a standard deep red brick, Union Station was a bold and stately addition to New London's downtown.<sup>lxi</sup>



*Figure 14. Photograph of the Parade. 1900.*<sup>lxii</sup>

While later City Beautiful train stations have been called ‘gateway’ stations, often borrowing forms from triumphal arches to create a grand entrance into the city, Union Station in New London used a more traditionally Victorian method for creating an atmosphere urban gentility. Prior to 1888, the far less substantial train shed was located on the waterside of the railroad tracks. Relocated to the Parade side of the tracks, the new station provided a more genteel access to train travel, eliminating the need for a treacherous crossing of the tracks.<sup>lxiii</sup> The massiveness of the new station in this new location also blocked the view and sounds of the hectic train traffic and busy harbor beyond from the Parade. A typical conceptual urban design

of 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian architecture, Union Station provided a barrier of physical protection from the more threatening tracks. In doing so, it marked the Parade space as non-threatening space by comparison. As a result of this screening, Union Station also served to solidify the space of the Parade as an inclusive triangular unit. Distancing the downtown area further from its utilitarian beginnings, the construction of the station provided a modern and imposingly beautiful backdrop for the reconceived genteel action of the Parade.

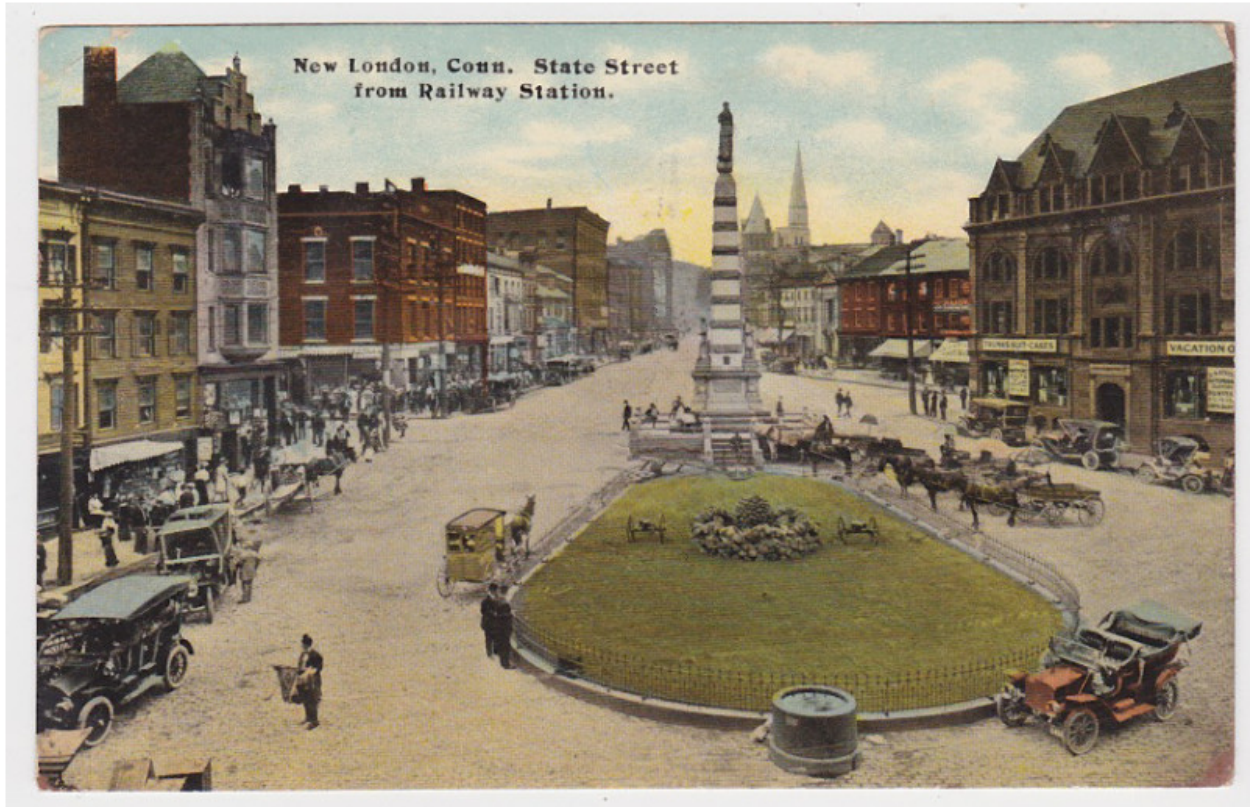
Once a utilitarian public space, around the turn of the century the Parade acquired the new status of a protected urban space with more emphatically defined boundaries. Through this circumstance, it would become a frontier for City Beautiful improvement in New London. The Liberty Pole was replaced in 1898 when the Soldiers and Sailors Monument was erected. As was the case for the grandiose civic center designed for Chicago in the Burnham plan, the new focal monument in the Parade was an obelisk that introduced a more permanent and purposeful formality to the space on the occasion of New London's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>lxiv</sup> Postcards of this monument picture its alternating rusticated and smoothed granite bands, topped with a female figure representing Peace, was an impressive object of public art. (Figure 15) Used also in the renovation of City Hall, granite was a characteristic material of the City Beautiful. The construction of the obelisk was privately funded by a prominent New London whaling family to commemorate the individual military efforts of the citizens of New London. Like Union Station, this monument performed a public service of memorial, while also heightening the significance and beauty of the Parade.





*Figure 15. Postcard of Soldiers and Sailors Monument.*<sup>lxv</sup>

In approximately 1906 the addition of a small oval lawn between the new monument and the train station furthered the beautification of this public urban space.<sup>lxvi</sup> Images like the one from a 1911 postcard capture the view from the train station and show this new green area in a Parade that by this time occasionally included automobiles as well as horse-drawn carriages. (Figure 16) Like the Soldiers and Sailors Monument, the new green space was a beautifying feature with no utilitarian purpose. The spiked cast iron fence added formal ornament to the minimal park, and also defined it as a space for eyes and not feet. Although still present, the function of the feeding and watering station was decentralized as a Parade activity; in its place a new formal park defined a more formal experience.



*Figure 16. 1911 Postcard of the Parade.*<sup>lxvii</sup>

While on the surface these interventions in New London may seem limited for what has come to be considered typical developments for the City Beautiful movement, they still represent the movement's initiatives. The Parade was a preexisting space that was easily redressed to advance New London's City Beautiful image. In this way New London repackaged the Parade as a City Beautiful vessel for genteel society without overextending the city's practical and economic capacity. In large plans like Burnham's for Chicago, civic centers were strictly defined as purpose-designed spaces that were surrounded by grouped public buildings with a unifying, harmonious architecture.<sup>lxviii</sup> Often these comprehensive developments would be contingent upon the destruction of large tracts of urban buildings. Larger cities were so physically overwhelmed with unregulated or unwanted development that often demolition

especially of impoverished neighborhoods was a common option taken by City Beautiful planners.

Developers in New London took advantage of the Parade's existing geometry and symbolic public history, recontextualizing it so that it constituted a City Beautiful civic center. In the process they changed the Parade's image and by association, its social function. Through these few strategic interventions, the Parade acquired a fundamentally new character within the shared mind of New Londoners through seemingly superficial changes. The old utilitarian space was reimagined in the social consciousness of New Londoners. Captured in postcards, the new significance of the Parade was built upon the historical importance of the space, combining with it the civilizing power of the park and the patriotic memorial to spark City Beautiful change in downtown New London. These seemingly superficial changes in the Parade gave the movement to become more achievable to New London than the dramatic and expensive comprehensive City Beautiful plans.

The new character of the Parade was enhanced and widely distributed through the circulation of postcard images that highlighted its City Beautiful features. The improved technology of printing corresponded to the growing popularity of postcards.<sup>lxix</sup> The collectible images they carried made them excellent tools for local consensus-building for the City Beautiful in New London. Like the previously discussed postcard image of the Parade, early postcard images of downtown New London were carefully framed to emphasize the new park and monument. These views always crop out the largest concentration of tenement housing in the poorest area of New London, just a block north of the Parade. By shifting the line of sight of the camera to the left, postcards directed the attention of viewers away from the troublesome proximity of the poorest neighborhood of New London to its City Beautiful Parade. In a turn of the century postcard the Neptune Building screens the parade from the impoverished

neighborhood behind it that all New Londoners would have been aware of. (Figure 17) With an effect similar to the protective screening of the parade by Union Station, these postcard images imposed a mental boundary between the parade and threatening area north of it. There would have in fact been many vantage points within the parade to see into the tenement neighborhood.



Figure 17. 1906 postcard of Parade.<sup>lxx</sup>

In some ways the conception of the City Beautiful in New London as pictured above was analogous to the Chicago imagined in Burnham's plan, in that City Beautiful designs were prioritized much more for the benefit of the middle class than they were for the urban poor. The postcard of the parade from 1903 shows how the view was cropped to the very back edge of the Neptune Building, seen on the left side of the image. (Figure 18) Again the poor area to the North of the Parade was cropped out of this image and so made invisible and marginal part of New London. While virtually eradicated from the paper postcard world of New London, the neighborhood to the north of the Parade remained physically intact. In contrast to demolitions that were part of many comprehensive City Beautiful plans, the eradication of the poor tenements of New London was far more conceptual than physical. The proximity of the civically ceremonial important Parade to such troublesome areas like a tenement neighborhood was a



testament to the power of the City Beautiful atmosphere contained by the Parade's successful repackaging.

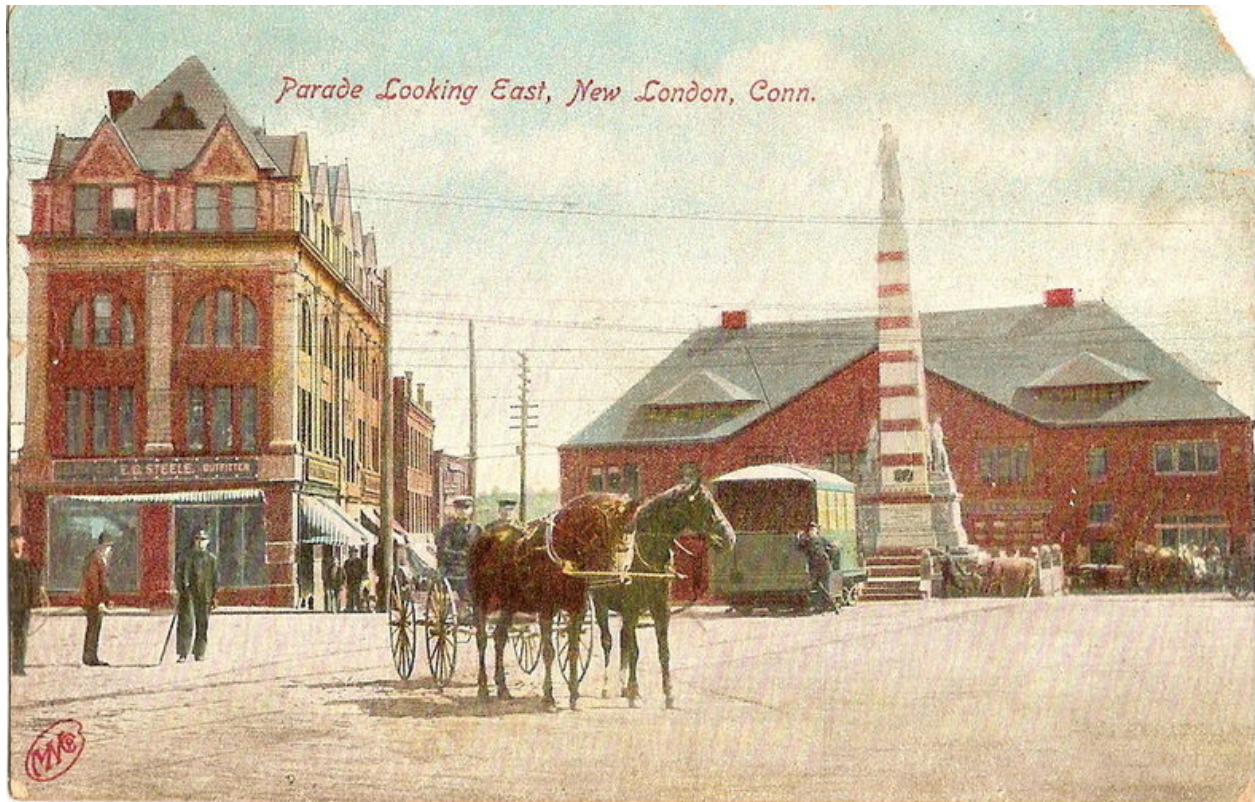


Figure 18. 1903 Postcard of the Parade.<sup>lxxi</sup>

In the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Parade became even more symbolic of New London's identity and a marker for its own success. New Londoners believed in the Parade as a public space embodying the City Beautiful. The following is the lead and first paragraph of an editorial featured in a May 1914 issue of the *Morning Telegraph*, the most popular New London daily newspaper of its time:

Is State Street a public park?

Sunday night, Between Starr Brothers drug store and the policeman on the corner of State and Bank Streets, 75 men at 8:30 p. m., were either decorating with their idle posture the line of curbing or buttressing the buildings and doorways along New

London's main thoroughfare. There were seventy-five by actual count, and probably as many more in motion from one point of fixed loafing to another. These men are not bums. They disturb nobody in any malicious way. They simply stare and stalk and gawk. They form a gauntlet of vulgar curiosity, which every woman who goes down or up the sidewalk has to pass through. The condition on Sunday night is not a particular one. It is the customary condition of every night when the weather will permit.<sup>lxxii</sup>

The roughly seventy-five men habitually surrounding the parklet in the Parade at night were problematic because of their threatening masculinity. As the editorial implicitly states, the gendered aspect typical of urban problems in the Victorian Era, was also a factor in New London. As a group, these loafers "form a gauntlet of vulgar curiosity, which every woman who goes down or up the sidewalk has to pass through." Although these men "disturb nobody in any malicious way," their presence creates an atmosphere that is threatening to a woman's feminine respectability. The condensed narrative, of a vulnerable woman walking down a street filled with threatening male loafers encapsulates the concerns that are fundamental to the gendered construction of the City Beautiful. These men are the 19<sup>th</sup> century masculine street personified – a façade of loafers. Now that the Parade has been brought up to the City Beautiful standard, the loafers were the last remnants of the old New London.

The Parade loafers are cast in contrast to the woman walking, whose presence then becomes representative of New London's gentility. The fact that a woman can walk alone down the street and maintain her respectability was an indicator of the status of New London as a sophisticated modern municipality. A collateral message of the narrative is the reminder to readers of the paper that women were still in need of protection. According to this editorial, it was the responsibility of the city to support the individual woman as she negotiated the reduced but still present perils of downtown.

More than representative of New London's journey of genteel progress, the walking woman of the editorial becomes symbolic of New London itself. As the writer later described "her municipal buildings, her miles of granolithic sidewalks, her well paved streets, her real prides and ambitions" (see passage on pg. 48) New London clearly acquires a feminine character. While the loafers are objectified into problematic 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture, the city of New London was personified into the walking woman. Leaning against the walls of the surrounding buildings, the loafers buttressed Parade with their threatening masculine presence. They acted like residual structural elements of an old social order. The city was presented like the woman in the narrative, as vulnerable to this masculine threat of the loafer population. The writer called upon the citizens of New London to defend the feminized respectability of both the woman and by extension the city itself. The fate of the city and the woman are linked; the ruining of one's respectability spells the ruin of the other.

The casting of the city as feminine seems an unusual occurrence in a world that traditionally masculinized the city and the street. In this instance, the editor linked the vulnerability of the city with the vulnerability of a woman, which set up the need for a masculine force of intervening protection. This force was the protective action of New London's citizenry, who like all good turn-of-the-century gentlemen, were tasked with rescuing the city from its own masculine origins. This abstract narrative of New London came from the established idea that the City Beautiful was a movement for the moralizing beautification of the street. Now beautified (and feminized), New London was in the position of falling victim to masculine influence – characterized by the loafers in the parade.

While these loafers were the main objective of the writer's criticism, they were not the only targets. This editorial supported the gendered reasoning of the City Beautiful but it also criticized some of the traditions of the movement. The editorial continued, City fathers, citizens,

elected officials, improvement societies, and even public parks were targeted because they represented certain aspects of the City Beautiful that the editor found to be outdated. What they had in common was what their wastefulness of the time, effort, and money of New London.

The editorial goes on...

If the southerly side of State Street is to be used as an out-door men's club, and general rallying place for the masculine sociability of the town, by all means the city fathers should fit the locality for the use to which it seems to be in their judgment rightfully dedicated. Let us now have a row of park benches along the walk. Let there be tables and chairs and duly licensed person to distribute refreshments. Let us place a bandstand erected over the middle of the street. Let us have a Morris chair for the chairman of the police commission, and an importation of Nubian slaves during the heated term to fan our perspiring common council. Let there be especial reservations for the various improvement societies of the village, and designated evenings for particular forms of entertainment. Let us do this thing right or not at all. <sup>lxiii</sup>

The editorial presents these secondary targets as unnecessary obstacles to New London's continued progress and changing goals. The city fathers, the mayor, and the city council, are criticized for not taking advantage of their empowered status to rid State Street of its loafer population. To do so would "distract their attention from the baseball bulletins." Similarly the chief of police is asked to "remove from his mind this ancient game of cribbage," and create real change. Finally the editor implores the citizenry of New London to "quit preening in the garments of lazy complacency" and take responsibility for their own downtown.

The editorialist's sarcastic and criticisms of public parks reflect dissatisfaction with the City Beautiful movement. Building on the lead question "Is State Street a public park?" the

writer construes the Parade as a public park, equipped with features he scorns and exaggerates to demonstrate the practical concerns that the editor had with the strategies of a neglected City Beautiful. Filled with benches for loafers and Nubian slaves to fan the city council, this fictional Parade park is rife with both leisured laziness and ostentation, the products of an unkempt City Beautiful attitude. City fathers were criticized for losing progressive focus, and citizens were criticized for allowing it to continue. Within the context of this outrageous parade, the editor aligned the city fathers and the loafers in similar opposition to New London's development. Together in this public park, they combine forces in stagnation, a grave threat to progress.

Concluding the sarcastic narrative of the Parade as a public park, this editorial proposed an alternative, State Street as a street. The editorial continued...

But if State Street is a street and New London aims to be a city with some self-respect and decent opinions for the conventions of a modern municipal life: if New London's standards of public manners and etiquette are to measure up to the refinement of her municipal buildings, her miles of granolithic sidewalks, her well paved streets, her real prides and ambitions, let our chief of police remove from his mind the ancient game of cribbage, and our acting mayor and city council distract their attention from the baseball bulletins, and our citizenship generally quit preening in the garments of lazy complacency long enough to kick the loafers off State Street sidewalks and keep them off. The disgrace a good town with an appearance of slackness that would only be appropriate in some razor-back hog infected hamlet of the unawakened south. If these folks have got to loaf, let them sit on the spikes around the parklet and speculate why one of the old cannons is aimed at Groton's "Yon Granite Shaft" and the other indicated the most direct route to China. When they get sore they can pile up the cannon balls and

carry off the strawberry basket and pieces of newspaper that litter the green grass in that delectable miniature common while these right words are writ.<sup>lxxiv</sup>

The writer's sarcastic dismissal of the parklet downtown proved that this narrative is a warning of counter productive urban beautification. As it was called, the "delectable miniature common" was considered a holdover from the City Beautiful that New London had outgrown. The editor believed that this parklet was pathetic and unkempt urban nature that hindered economic progress because it provided a place for these young men to loaf. The parklet, as said before was a park to look at and not to inhabit unless as the writer said "If these folks have got to loaf, let them sit on the spikes around the parklet." This invitation to sit was meant to prod these young men into productivity.

This editorial is not for a City Beautiful New London, but is for the City Practical New London, where the energy of the street is seen with real benefit. The street, an allowance of movement, forward thinking, commerce, and progressive life must be the center of the city if "New London's standards of public manners and etiquette are to measure up to the refinement of her municipal buildings, her miles of granolithic sidewalks, her well paved streets, her real prides and ambitions." While unabashed ambition would have been taboo in Victorian society, it was now an acceptable force to drive progress.

The wasteful leisure of public parks, loafers, and city fathers are combined in supporting a disgraceful "appearance of slackness." Appearance remained central in the reality of New London as a modern city. Taken as a whole, this editorial combined established urban characters in a narrative to form a criticism of the City Beautiful movement. The dissatisfaction of the City Beautiful held by the editor, who was tasked with representing the views of local

subscribing readers, was representative of alternative ideals around the turn of the century towards the City Practical in New London.

This provocative editorial is rich with criticisms of New Londoners rather than of New London itself. In fact the article explicitly challenges the people of New London to live up to the stately character of the city's architecture. As defined by this editorial, the roles of the street, buildings, women, city fathers, loafers, and the police reveal the ideals that were circulated among New Londoners in the local paper. Both directly and indirectly this editorial captures several key characteristics of New London's City Beautiful movement and marks differences to the City Practical.

### **The City Practical Landscape of State Street**

The solidification of the City Beautiful qualities of the Parade was preceded by other monumental Victorian development on State Street as it was transformed from a wealthy residential neighborhood to a commercial thoroughfare. The original 19<sup>th</sup>-century residential character of State Street emerges in the 1880 photograph of Upper State Street looking east. (Figure 19) It is unrecognizable from present day State Street. Almost completely tree-lined and fully residential, the only landmark that can be easily identified is the spire of the First Congregationalist Church poking out above the trees. Beginning in the 1860s larger, more monumental commercial blocks were taking the place of smaller shops near the parade and houses along State Street. The new commercial structures were built in what had long been an upper class district and appropriated the area's genteel atmosphere.<sup>lxxv</sup> A 1921 Sanborn map illustrated with the dates of important structures on State Street will provide a guide throughout the developments in New London. (Figure 20)



*Figure 19. Photograph of upper State Street looking east. 1880s*



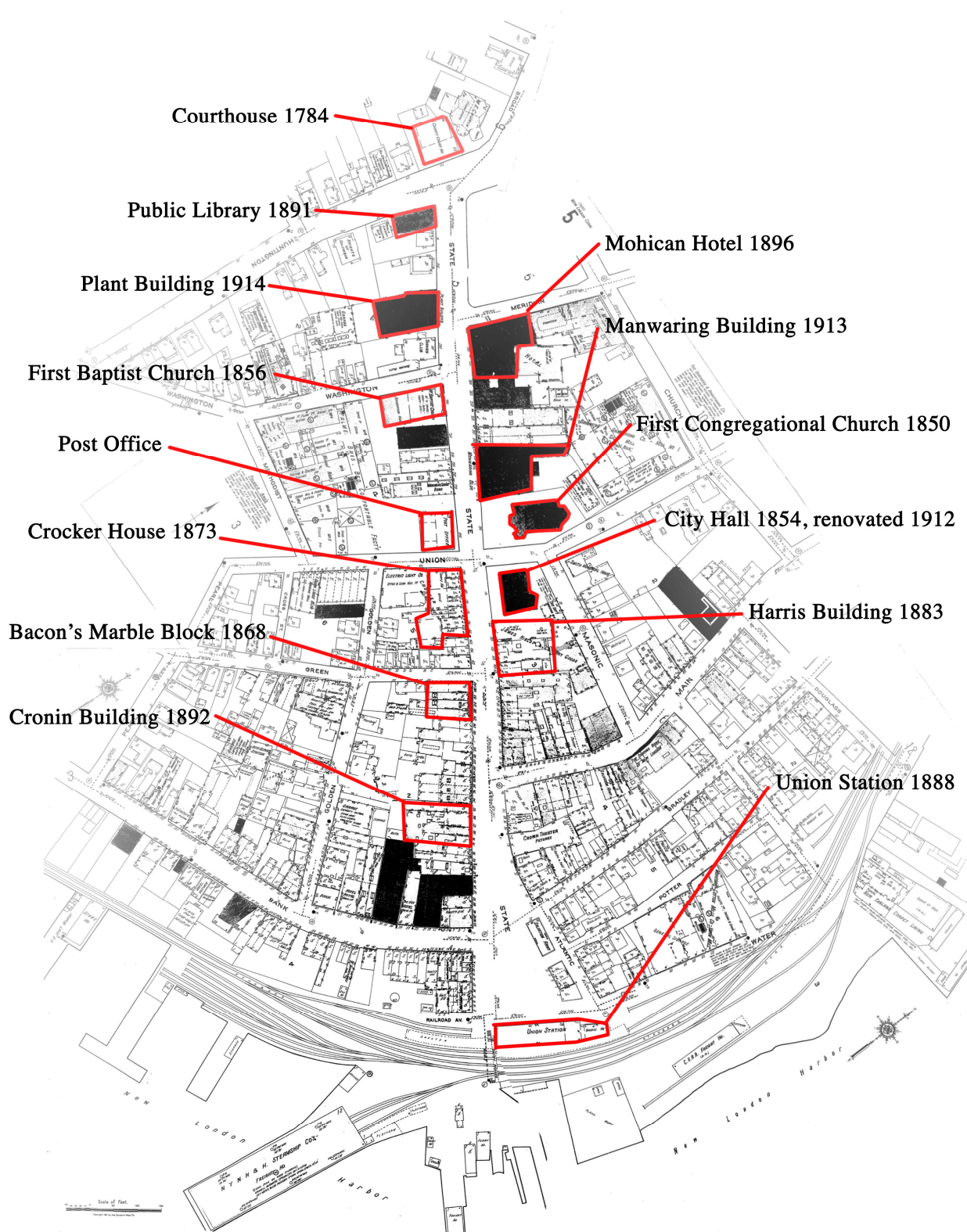


Figure 20. Labeled Sanborn Map of New London. 1921<sup>lxxvi</sup>

New brick and masonry commercial blocks were substantial contributions to the built and imagined landscape of State Street. Beginning in 1868, Bacon's Marble Block was meant to rejuvenate downtown New London with the decline of the whaling industry after the Civil War. Continuing on the precedent of the Marble Block, New London commercial architecture in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by massive three or four story blocks of stone and brick that were representative of the increasing wealth of the city.<sup>lxxvii</sup> State Street was the site where New London's new prosperity took material form. In sharp contrast to the smaller wood framed, vernacular buildings on Bank Street, this new style of building was much more stately and solidly built in accordance with the commercial architecture style of the Victorian era.

Epitomized by three buildings, these Victorian developments built upon and contributed to the grand atmosphere of State Street. Built in 1873, the Crocker House had ground floor commercial shops but also served as a hotel, which "attracted millionaires, U.S. Presidents, famous authors, and actors."<sup>lxxviii</sup> Pictured in a turn of the century postcard, the Crocker House was a five-story red brick building with a mansard roof, that stretched almost an entire block on State Street. (Figure 21) Dwarfing neighboring buildings, the Crocker House clearly sets a precedent as a large commercial building on State Street.



Figure 21. Postcard of the Crocker House around 1900 before mansard roof burned down.<sup>lxxix</sup>

Another Victorian era contribution to State Street was the Harris Building, designed in 1883 with first floor shops and an experiment in apartment living on its upper floors. Pictured in a turn of the century postcard below, the Harris building appears on the directly opposite from the Crocker House. (Figure 22) This postcard highlights the new massiveness that gave the new State Street an atmosphere very different from the character of the early residential neighborhood. J.N. Harris made money in patent medicine, banking and business. Harris, a long time New London resident hoped his building would be “the chief ornament of the city and a source of pride to its citizens,” according to an article in *The Day* from November, 1883.<sup>lxxx</sup>





*Figure 22. Turn of the century postcard. The Harris Building can be seen on the far right.* <sup>lxxxi</sup>

Finally, the Cronin Building was built in 1892 in an attempt to revitalize lower State street. With striking red brickwork, it added prestigious architectural heft to the east end of the Street. In a current image of the Cronin Building, the original brickwork can be seen on the top three floors while the first floor has undergone extensive alteration. (Figure 23) Ornament here relies on the color of the building's structural material, red brick, and the decorative patterns that these bricks are arranged in. The Cronin Building was characteristic of Victorian "architectural honesty." Like the Crocker House and the Harris Building, the Cronin Building used no applied decoration, considered false and misleading. In 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian society the elaborate ornamentation such as was popular in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was considered at best tacky and at worst

degenerate. The honest use of materials in sparingly elegant decoration, embodied by the brick work of the these three buildings reflected refined Victorian culture.



*Figure 23. Current photograph of the Cronin Building. First floor has been modernized.*<sup>lxxvii</sup>

These three similarly massive buildings used deep red brick and stately design to construct a new identity for the commercial district of State Street – one that represented the changing environment of New London. Although not of commercial function, the massiveness and deep red color of the train station in 1888 would have also contributed to this new image of State Street from the Parade to Union Street as it took form in the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These buildings represent a newly prioritized part of downtown that catered more specifically to the middle classes.



These three buildings reflect a how Victorian society imagined the downtown. In many instances the urban environment was described in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as having the physical qualities of water currents. Contemporary writers often described the anonymous and threatening “sea of faces” and the “rush, rush, rush” of “the mighty torrent” of people downtown. Building upon this metaphor, late 19<sup>th</sup> century writers often referred to the urban population of single working-women as “women adrift,” connoting their feminine vulnerability and lack of direction. Single working men were referred to as the “floating population.” (Meyerowitz 1988) These similarly condescending labels describe how the writers saw these two populations differently based on gender. Women adrift were powerless to the urban current around them, likely to end up anywhere. The floating population seemed more actively involved in their situation, leisurely floating to avoid being tied down. Floating men actually could become harmful debris once released into the wild urban current.

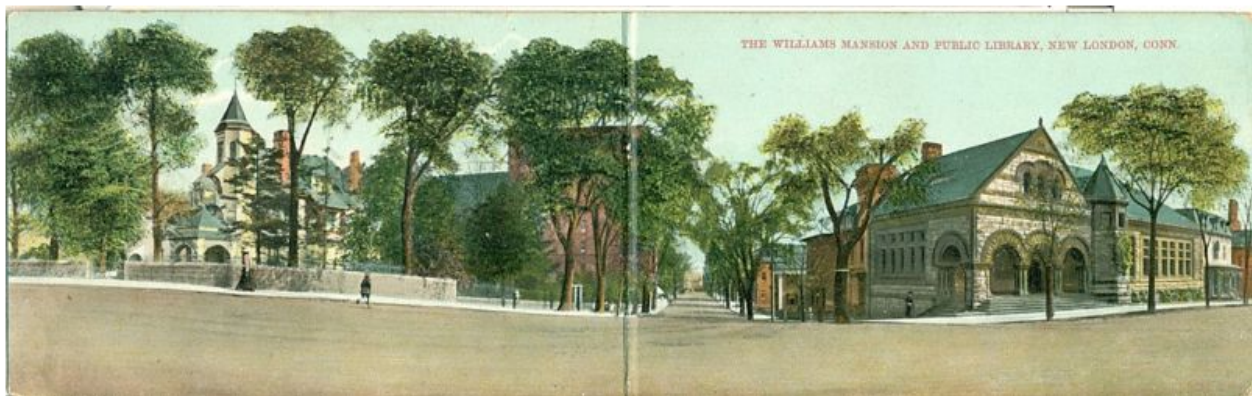
Victorian urban architecture was designed in response to this way of imagining the city. If the street was a rushing sea of people, then buildings like the Harris Building were conceived as refuges from the torrent. Women were siphoned off into “ladies rooms” to get off of the street as soon as possible. The massive, introspective Harris Building was built to resist this surge, as an obstruction to the current of the street like a large boulder in the middle of a river. Built in defiance to the negative atmosphere of the street, the Harris Building actually functioned to cause more friction and turmoil for women downtown. Designed to portray that “ladies rooms” were the only respectable place for a middle class woman to be downtown, buildings like the Harris Building made her presence anywhere on the street more problematic.

The City Practical in New London demonstrated a shift in the imagining of urban beauty and civic success. Unlike the City Beautiful that was designed as an antidote to uncontrolled municipal growth, the City Practical was designed to harness the power of the economic and

urban development and guide it in a beautiful direction. Based on the City Beautiful ideals that municipal beauty was indicative of a respectable city, the City Practical in New London used the same principles and introduced them to New London's commercial development.

Upper State Street had long been established as the more genteel end of State Street. Since 1784, the area was ennobled by the presence of the New London County Courthouse at its western terminus. This white frame building represented the county-wide government and was given an appropriately authoritative place on the hill. Through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, upper State Street was also the location of the last houses that remained from the wealthy residential phase of the areas development. One of them, the Williams Mansion, was at one point perhaps the nicest house in New London on the largest urban lot, filling an entire block. the Williams Mansion was a stronghold in the residential past of State Street. A panoramic postcard from upper State Street provides a clear view of the Williams Mansion on the left and the Public Library on the right.

(Figure 24)



*Figure 24. Turn of the century panoramic postcard of Williams Mansion and upper State Street looking east. Image from web*

lxxxiii

On upper State Street, the City Practical adopted strategies of the City Beautiful and applied them to commercial architecture. In 1896, the Munsey Building was constructed initially to house a publishing business. When labor disputes shut down operations, Frank Munsey

converted the building into the Mohican Hotel, which can be seen in a 1906 postcard. (Figure 25)

Built out of golden-yellow brick and stretching eight stories, the Mohican Hotel was the tallest building in New London, and eclipsed the Crocker House as the city's finest hotel.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> Rare construction photographs of the Mohican's foundation also show the site of the future Plant Building across the street and clearly show the residential character of upper State Street before these buildings were added. (Figure 26)



Figure 25 (left) 1906 postcard of the Mohican Hotel.<sup>lxxxv</sup>

Figure 26 (right) Photograph of the construction of the Mohican Hotel. The original facade of the Thames Club (eastern neighbor to the Plant Building) can be seen in the upper left corner.<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

The next major commercial development to come to State Street was the Manwaring Building, constructed in 1913. (Figure 27) A mixed-use commercial building as pictured in the postcard image below, the Manwaring Building continues use the deep red brick that was typical of the older commercial buildings, but enlivened with the addition of contrasting classical motifs. These classical elements break up the façade of the Manwaring Building in a way that distinguishes it from the earlier large block buildings of lower State Street.





*Figure 27. Postcard from around 1910 of the Manwaring Building<sup>lxxxvii</sup>*

The final City Practical addition to upper State Street was the Plant Building. Constructed in 1914, the Plant Building was a buff brick building with colored terra cotta classical motifs decorating its façade. The westernmost commercial building on State Street, the Plant Building was the most refined representative of City Practical architecture in the city, in decoration, form, and use. (Figure 28)



*Figure 28. Photograph of the northern elevation of the Plant Building*<sup>lxxviii</sup>

These buildings, the Mohican Hotel, the Manwaring Building, and the Plant Building, were developed according to the tenets of the City Practical and were purposefully designed to be distinct from the larger red block buildings on lower State Street. Unlike their Victorian predecessors, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century commercial buildings on upper State Street in the City Practical fashion adopted the style of the City Beautiful and so made genteel business out of shopping. All these City Practical buildings are west of Union Street, and their shared design features demonstrate the developers intention to enhance the gentility of the street. West of Union Street, buildings are larger, further apart, and are shaded by more trees. As lower State Street took shape distinguishing itself from the unmonumental development on Bank Street, upper State Street continued the strategy of differentiation and was defined in higher contrast to lower State Street. Builders on upper State Street sought to evoke an air of greater gentility along entire thoroughfare, creating an architectural mood that harmonized with the upper class

residences in the area. The Plant Building, the last City Practical development on upper State Street, more fully embodied this movement and revealed the motivations of City Practical design as they differed from Victorian and City Beautiful designs.

### **Experiencing the City Practical Movement in the Plant Building**

The Plant Building surpassed the other City Practical constructions of New London conceptually, aesthetically, and functionally. Analysis of its commission, design, advertising, and use reveals that the Plant Building was a marker for the future of New London. As it was commissioned and designed, it made the statement that a commercial building could be a source of civic improvement. The Plant Building demonstrated the 20<sup>th</sup> century acceptance of technology and capitalism as tools of respectability. The speed and convenience of new technologies became appreciated as tools for supporting and presenting a respectable individual rather than that individual's downfall; culture and commerce were no longer considered so opposed.

Before there was a building, there was the businessman who commissioned it, Morton Plant. The Plant Building was an investment, a money-making endeavor yet it was also more than that. Newly justified by the City Practical strategy's enthusiastic relationship with financial profit, the self-fulfilling endeavors of moneymaking and urban improvement allowed Morton Plant to compound his investment in New London.

Captioned in one 1913 Hartford newspaper's cartoon as "New London's Owner," it was clear that Morton Plant had already invested in the city before the Plant Building.<sup>lxxxix</sup> Born on the coast in New Haven, Plant was an avid yachtsman, affectionately called "Commodore Plant" around town. He owned a local professional baseball team called "The Planters" that practiced and played on the local baseball diamond, Plant Field.<sup>xc</sup> He contributed \$1.25 million dollars to found Connecticut College and two of the first dorm buildings, Plant and Blackstone were

dedicated to his father and mother.<sup>xcii</sup> Thanks to these extensive financial contributions to this city, Morton Plant was one of New London's most active boosters.

Plant's boosting investments were contextualized by rich contemporaneous literature of boosterism found in New London and was most explicitly expressed by the 1901 book, *Picturesque New London and Its Environs –Groton, Mystic, Montville, and Waterford—At the Commencement of the Twentieth Century*, which presented “in acceptable style the claims of a city and its neighbors to the favorable consideration of home seekers and progressive enterprises.” This purpose of encouraging immigration and enterprise was characteristic of boosterism. This intention of encouraging immigration demonstrated a direct break with Victorian ideals that sought to control and subdue the masses of immigrants into their cities. Around 200 pages long, the large book continued and described “The commercial spirit of New London is indicative of energy, progress, and justifiable faith in the city's evolution and lively future.” It goes on to describe and picture landmarks, industry, transportation, homes of importance, scenery, banking, commerce, churches and schools, postal and telegraph service, city government, local newspapers, parks, and outing places. Cyclically enthusiastic, *Picturesque New London* continues in great specificity and occasionally in glowing vagueness assuring readers that, “New London has many, very many pleasant places.” While not explicitly naming the producers of this book, the credit for funding was given to the “aid of the business men and liberal subscriptions received for books.” This provides proof that New London businessmen were active boosters and that they were determined to see their economical investments contextualized by boosterism language. It also conveys that the book was intended for a wide audience of New London readers.<sup>xciii</sup>

Plant was in a position to invest as a booster of New London because of wealth inherited from his father Henry Plant who had been successful in railroads and real estate and increased by

his own efforts. In many of the companies he was involved in Morton Plant held directorial positions. He was the Vice President of the Plant Railroad System from the late 1800s to 1902 when the system became a part of the Atlantic Coast Line where he was then made a director. He also was a vice president and a director of the Chicago, Indianapolis, and Louisville Railway Company; a trustee of the Connecticut Trust and Safe Deposit Company; a director of the National Bank of Commerce in New Haven; a chairman of the board of directors of the Southern Express Company; and a trustee of Connecticut College.<sup>xciii</sup>

In all likelihood, Plant discovered New London because of its location between his primary urban home on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, and his country mansion in Groton, Connecticut, neighboring New London across the Thames River to the north. Plant saw the potential of New London as an important developing port city. Strategically located on the coast, it was a hub of transportation, and known to the social elite of New York through the Pequot Colony. New London was a prime target investment by Plant. Once he began investing in New London, it made sense that Plant continue to boost the town as a protection for his investment. The Plant Building, completed in 1914, was one of these later investments in New London. It was built after Plant's most remarkable investment in New London at Connecticut College, which had opened in 1911.

Plant's involvement with the establishment of Connecticut College brought him into contact with Colin Buell, the president of the New London Municipal Arts Society. Buell had collaborated with some female graduates from Wesleyan who, upset that the university was no longer accepting women as students, wished to establish a women's college in Connecticut. Buell, an administrator and educator of young women at the Williams Memorial Institute in New London, had committed his career to furthering education of women and readily became involved with the project. While the correspondence between Buell and Plant focused on the

college and not the Municipal Arts Society, the fact that they knew each other is significant. That Buell convinced Plant to donate over a million dollars to an un-built college reveals that Plant was certainly convinced of Buell's opinions. Plant's investment in Connecticut College was also both a tool for New London boosterism and a civic service. His support for the college, along with his other investments paved the way for the construction of the Plant Building downtown.<sup>xciv</sup>

Once he had decided to build, one of Plant's most critical decisions was to hire Dudley St. Clair Donnelly as architect. Donnelly practiced architecture for almost fifty years, most of them spent in New London. Born in Barbados, Donnelly was educated and settled in the United States. Trained in both New York and Boston, he first came to New London in 1892. By the time that he was hired for the Plant Building, Donnelly had designed many upper class residences in New London but he was best known for his more prominent contributions downtown notably including: the New London Savings Bank on Main Street, The Day Building on Bank Street, and the Manwaring Building on State Street.<sup>xcv</sup>

Plant hired Donnelly to design the Plant Building for a number of reasons. First, they had worked together before. The Plant Building was actually one of nine buildings Donnelly designed for Morton Plant, the first a hunting lodge constructed in 1908.<sup>xcvi</sup> The Plant Building was one of the last works Plant commissioned before his death in 1918 and it was entrusted to Donnelly after he had fully proven his worth. It was consistent with Plant's role as a booster for New London that he advocate for and hire a local architect. In a 1913 statement to the *Morning Telegraph*, Donnelly voiced an optimistic view of New London development, assuring that there was "no better time to build than at the present."<sup>xcvii</sup> When Plant hired a local architect, he was demonstrating his self-confidence in New London and its future. Constructing regional pride

was as important to the City Practical as it was to City Beautiful and the participation of Donnelly as a local architect would have compounded the significance of the Plant Building.

The Plant Building stood as an advertisement of Donnelly's talent, the use of rich materials and the refined style distinguishing it as one of Donnelly's most luxurious designs. Donnelly's high opinion of his own creation was manifested when he designed his own office suite on the fourth floor of the new building.<sup>xcviii</sup> The Plant Building, not the Manwaring Building (located across the street and built by him a year earlier) was deemed architecturally impressive enough to showcase his architectural practice. In this way, Donnelly marked the Plant Building as the epitome of his own professional development as an architect.

Before the Plant Building, Donnelly was already established as a regionally significant architect, and he took advantage of the opportunity to make a grand public statement in the Plant commission. Written on the occasion of the relocation of Donnelly's office's to the Plant Building a March 1915 article in *The Day* praised Donnelly as "New London's leading architect [and the designer of] a number of beautiful buildings which are the chief points of New London's attractiveness." The article describes Donnelly's relocation to the Plant Building to praise Donnelly as an important local architect, while also calling attention to the Plant Building as one of these "chief points."<sup>xcix</sup> Dudley Donnelly coordinated upgrading his offices with the hype of the Plant Building opening. The boosterism literature used to describe both the Plant Building and himself would have given meaning to the built project and his own professional goals.

Besides its material grandeur within Donnelly's architectural repertoire, the Plant Building also allowed him to experiment with a new building type that was both typically urban and had all the ingredients of a modern commercial skyscraper in a shorter package. The Plant Building aligned in form, function, and construction with the contemporary designs of much



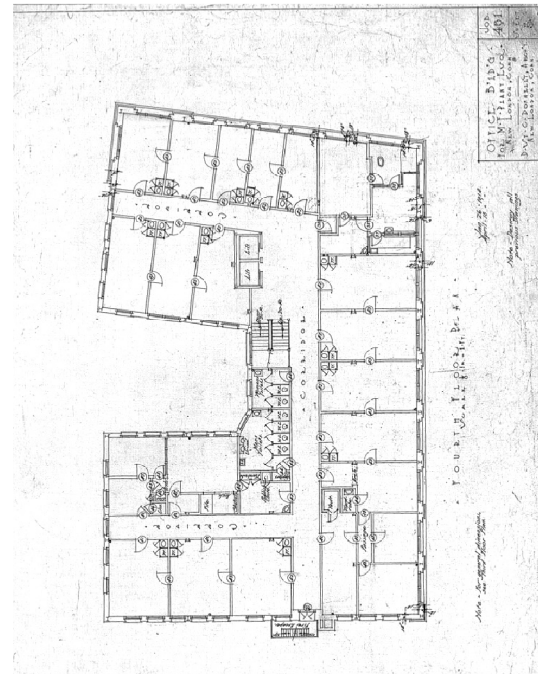


Figure 30. Fourth floor plan of Donnelly's Plant Building in New London (1914)<sup>ci</sup>

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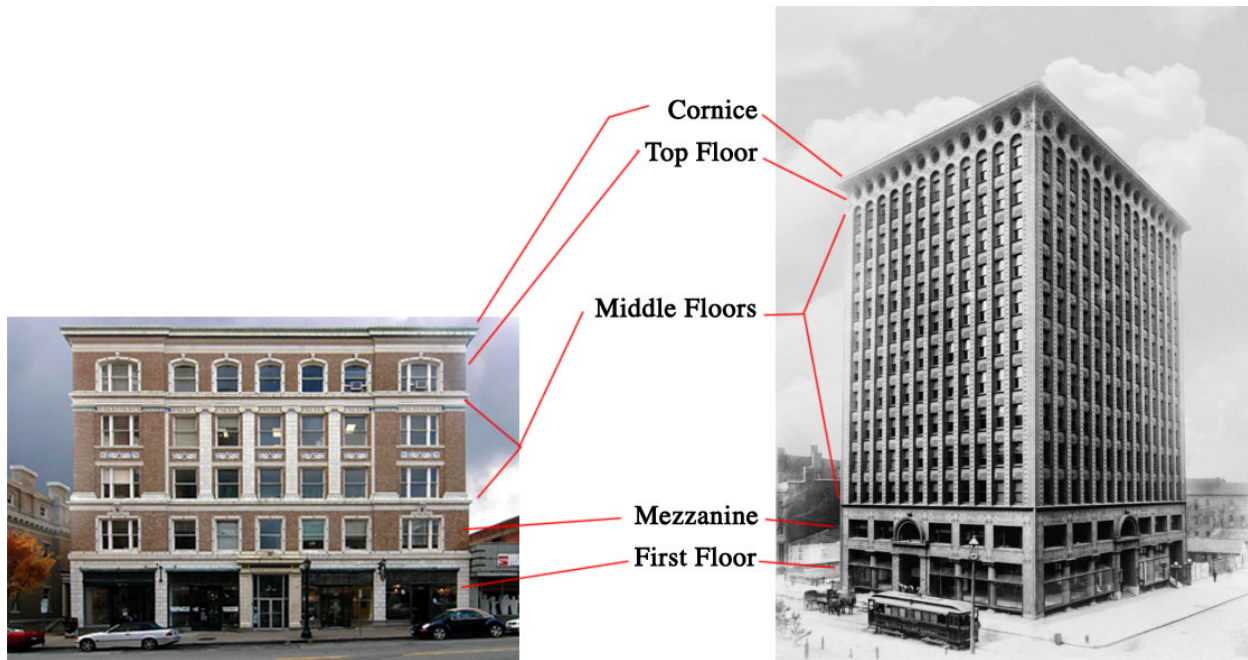


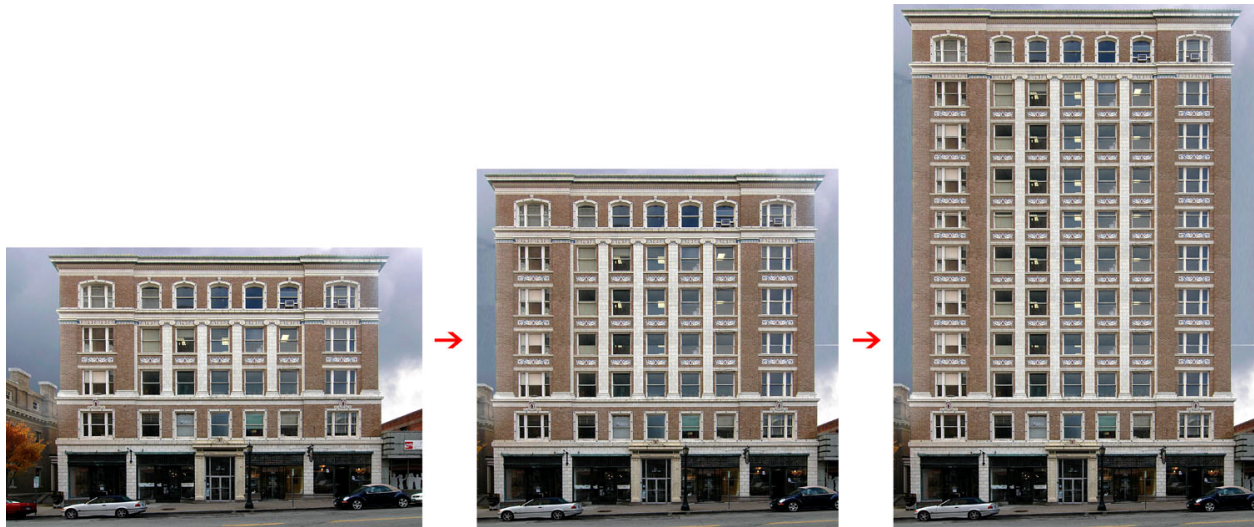
Figure 31. Comparison of the Plant Building (1914) and the Guaranty Building (1894)

With regards to architecture, the term skyscraper was invented sometime during the 1880s and its definition has been contentious throughout architectural history since. The problem most often has to do with height, how tall is tall enough? If a skyscraper was simply a very tall building, then a great number of buildings throughout ancient history could be considered skyscrapers as well. While some consider ten stories of steel frame architecture to be minimum requirements, many reinforced masonry buildings from the 19<sup>th</sup> century stretch well over this limit. Others have asserted that it is the relative height of a building to its surroundings that constitutes a definition of “tall enough”. In *The History of the Skyscraper*, 1929, Francisco Mujica defined a skyscraper as a building with “great height” that was “constructed on a steel skeleton and provided with high speed electric elevators.” Agreeing with the previous assertions of skyscraper design as laid out by Louis Sullivan. The debate has continued throughout the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, in 1986 architectural historian Thomas A.P. van Leeuwen defined it simply but rigidly as a tall commercial building. But would this would not include skyscraper apartments.

The controversy surrounding the definition of skyscrapers opens up this part of architectural history for the Plant Building to be seen as a skyscraper.<sup>cii</sup>

Due to the nature of steel frame construction, an extra floor can be gained by simply tacking on another layer of steel frame to the top of the building and repeating the façade treatment of the middle floors one more time. Compositionally, the façade would simply be extended one middle unit, like adding an extra train car in between the engine and the caboose.

(Figure 32) The masonry Harris Building was not designed or constructed as a stack of repeating units, but as an entire cohesive mass and reveals no seam for easy vertical expansion because readjusting the height of a masonry building would change the entire structure beneath it, its foot print would have to expand in order to support the weight above. The composition and layout of the Plant Building indicated skyscraper style that was symbolic for the City Practical.



(Figure 32 ) Photo illustration demonstrating the simple compositional expandability of the  
*Plant Building.*

The Plant Building was described in local newspapers that framed its City Practical significance. As described in a *Morning Telegraph* article in May, 1914, the building was to be no less than spectacular: “When completed, in its ornamental Greendale brick, with golden rod

effect and terra cotta trimmings, this structure will add tone to the other well designed structures in the immediate vicinity and will be a splendid addition to the city of New London as a business block.”<sup>ciii</sup> While the *Morning Telegraph* was biased in favor of the building that when completed would become its new headquarters, this article suggested much about how the Plant Building was to be received. The “tone” the article described also acknowledged that New Londoners were aware of the special quality that upper State Street possessed.

The Plant Building was designed to reflect a new commercial attitude that was strategically different from its nearby predecessors like the Harris Building. The comparison of these two buildings highlights the changes in design that steel frame architecture instigated. (Figures 33 and 34) Unlike the red bricked Harris Building, buff brick was used in accordance with the City Practical tradition of lighter, more ornamentally styled material that aligned commercial buildings with the City Beautiful architecture, like the renovated New London Municipal Building. Even more color was introduced with colored terracotta elements as pictured below. (Figure 35) Typical of the ornate and classical decorations of the Beaux Arts movements, these motifs included florettes, swans, and other botanicals. While structurally a thinner wall with applied ornamentation, the Plant Building’s decoration created a more outreaching and welcoming visual interaction with the street. The Harris Building with thick walls and structurally integrated ornamentation actually created a more flat-shelled visual interaction with the street. The small-scale ornament and the contrasting colors of the Plant Building also worked to disrupt the mass of the Plant Building making it a less like the Harris Building’s abrupt imposition on the street below. Like interventions of the City Beautiful, the architecture of the City Practical movement sought visual interaction with the street bringing the philosophy and styling of the Victorian “ladies rooms” out from inside onto the street. It was

hoped that through the use of traditionally “feminine” ornamentation on the street, that women would feel more comfortable on the street.



Figure 33. Photograph of the northern elevation of the Plant Building (Now Dewart Building)<sup>civ</sup>

Figure 34. Current photograph of the Harris Building. First floor has been modernized.<sup>cv</sup>



Figure 35. Three images of the terra cotta ornament on the Plant Building.<sup>cvi</sup>

The decoration of the Plant Building would have been problematic in Victorian society. The ornament and color of the Harris Building was achieved through the natural color and articulation of the structural bricks. The Plant Building was ornamented with decorations that were applied to the surface of the building, not part of the structural support. Victorian society would have considered this application of ornament a falsehood and inappropriate. The Harris Building demonstrates the “honest” use of material that was typical of Victorian buildings. Over-ornamentation and eye-catching architecture on the street would have contradicted the idea



of a street being a space that supposed to be passed through. The City Practical found a renewed appreciation for ornament as a tool to interact with the street and enliven its social atmosphere.

The Plant Building was constructed out of a steel skeleton and gave the impression of a visually lighter building that would not have been possible in the older masonry construction of the Harris Building. Thinner steel columns and beams that connect to form a more open grid support the Plant Building's mass. This skeleton is best articulated on the first floor by the wide bays that demarcate the four storefronts and the main door. Those pillars expressed the steel supports beneath that run the entire height of the building. From straight on the Plant Building appears to be held up on six little stilts, which when expanded into a cube was not far from the truth. The Harris Building on the other hand expresses its full visual and structural weight right down to the ground. The Harris Building, made out of masonry, would have been limited in height by the thickness of bricks needed to support its weight. In order to maintain adequate height, the walls were thicker at the bottom and thinner at the top; windows were smaller and further apart to make room for the much larger load-bearing piers of brick.

Besides these structural differences, the Plant Building represents a changed approach to the form and concept of urban architecture. The Harris Building accentuated its three dimensional massiveness and structural weight. Unlike the more modern flat-roofed Plant Building, the Harris Building used a hipped roof to accentuate its shapeliness. Similarly the Crocker House originally was outfitted with a mansard roof that while later burned, would have had a similar effect. The tower of the Harris Building works with the roof to emphasize the three-dimensionality of the building. If it had been a functioning watch-tower it would have marked the location of a corner. Both the tower and the roof signaled to the viewer that you should be able to walk all the way around the building. These features of the Harris Building appeared to be formed for a building centered on an open lot, rather than its downtown location.

The Plant Building on the other hand was much less sculptural in form. It appeared to the viewer as a grouping of façades that were held together at sharply creased corners. The street-facing façade of the Plant Building was designed to articulate the full architectural significance of the Plant Building and its inner workings – with no visual cues that walking around the building would add to the experience.

In conception as a downtown building, the Plant Building was derived from the idea of the street functioning as a commercial corridor. Victorian streets were considered urban negative space that served as a placeholder for massive and impressive buildings. Due in part to the City Beautiful and the City Practical, the 20<sup>th</sup> century street was given more importance, a corridor deserving of decoration and social attention. The facades of these Victorian buildings functioned as protective walls that shielded the action inside from the dangers of the street in all three dimensions. City Beautiful interventions and City Practical buildings in New London were designed to enhance the atmosphere of the street implying that the street was a habitable space with its own architectural and social significance that could be a place for leisured genteel action. First floor shops of the Plant Building were designed with the concave storefronts that increased the surface area for window displays. These little bays also provided window shoppers protection from weather and crowds while funneling them into the store. The change from Victorian flat-faced storefront to the more inviting entrances was due to social changes around the turn of the century. This shift was due in part to changes of merchant strategy due to the successful marketing genius of stores like Woolworth's "5 and 10 cents" stores. Woolworth's stores proved that customers were more likely to buy a product if they were allowed to interact with it before purchasing. Window-shopping would not have been within social respectability in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The acceptance of pausing on the street (at least in respectable neighborhoods) and the

newly engaging activity of shopping was architecturally manifested in the recessed storefront display.

The internal organization of the Plant Building is representative of a new dynamic conception of architecture. From the outside it appeared that each window of the Plant Building represented a distinct office unit while in reality the floors were divided up into suites. A result of its steel skeleton, each floor of the Plant Building was structurally independent of each other. The divisions between suites were flexible and open to change. The Harris Building used a different method for representing inner function, choosing not to demonstrate function by floor categories but by each uniquely individual interior space creating external asymmetry. As the fenestration, or composition of windows, demonstrates it, the rooms within the Harris Building are set. As the picture below shows, windows are organized in unique clusters, especially in the tower, on the right side of the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, and in the center dormer's unique double windows. (Figure 36) While the both City Beautiful and City Practical architecture brought engaging design out onto the street, the City Practical movement brought some of the dynamism up through the internal plans of skyscraper architecture.

Revealed in the Plant Building, architecture of the City Practical drew energy up from the street and brought it into the respectable commercial office space. Concealed within a shell of Beaux Arts ornamentation was a system of moving parts. When they were first invented elevators defied easy definition, caught somewhere between a mode of transportation and a room, and besides "lifts" were sometimes called "elevated rooms" or "vertical rails." As "vertical rails," the two express elevators in the Plant Building were a continuation of the rail system in New London, from train to trolley to elevator. Each floor of the Plant Building had access to a mail chute and a trash chute. These chutes facilitated speed and efficiency for the tenants of the Plant Building. The Plant Building also provided a central vacuum system, with



outlets throughout the building that one could attach a hose to. Another luxury afforded to every office in the building was hot and cold running water. The mail chute, trash chute, central vacuum, and hot water were accessed through the walls of the Plant Building. Unlike stoic Victorian Buildings that sought to conceal the inner workings of their technological systems, the Plant Building incorporated them into the experience of the building. The Plant Building engaged interaction from tenants who tapped into the building and manipulated it like a piece of machinery.



*Figure 36. View of the Harris Building from the southeast.* <sup>cvi</sup>

### **The Plant Building in Newspapers**

The City Practical identity of the Plant Building was completed in the collective imagination of New Londoners. Attempting to represent the collective voice of New Londoners is a difficult task given that few first-person documents record individual reactions to urban changes. Nonetheless, newspapers and postcards that described and pictured the Plant Building

provided insight to how the building was presented to New Londoners. Many of the articles describing the Plant Building were found in the *Morning Telegraph*. While the writers meant to advertise the Plant Building, which would be their new headquarters after it was completed. It was also true that the *Telegraph* was the most circulated New London newspaper of its time, meaning that a large portion of New Londoners supported paper's opinions. Constituting widely circulated and consumed images of the Plant Building and State Street, postcards were also popular in New London and as they were all of the United States during the a time historians now call the "Golden Age of Postcards."<sup>cvi</sup>

The authenticity ascribed to newspapers and postcards made them especially convincing mediums for completing the imagined landscape of the Plant Building. Newspapers like most news media, were believed to be based in fact. Any exaggerated, flattering, or boosting writing about the Plant Building was authenticated by the truth-telling medium of newspapers. Postcards were another medium that were understood to be authentic images. Historian Gross, argued that as Americans traveled and collected memories, postcards allowed them to share their memories through personal messages and on authentic souvenirs of important places.<sup>cix</sup> Postcards of New London that were bought in New London, automatically were recognized as presentations of an authentic image of New London. Through this understanding it was assumed that all postcards were authentic representations of the places they pictured, regardless of their purchase in a specific location. Information about the Plant Building found in newspapers or on postcards was imbued with authenticity that increased the power of their messages in the collective imagination of New Londoners.

Just like the steel frame and masonry cladding that supported the Plant Building, the newspaper was essential to the building's successful reception by the community. Newspaper articles played an important role in framing the Plant Building's symbolic meaning. Because it

was only five stories tall, the Plant Building had to be expressly defined as a skyscraper in the imagination of the public. Although the Plant Building has certain visual connection with other skyscraper designs that would have made it distinctive from the massive Victorian buildings down the street, its written description in the newspaper explicitly informed the reader about how the Plant Building fit into design history of skyscrapers. As it was fully imagined by Morton Plant and Dudley Donnelly, the Plant Building would not have been complete without this supporting literature. Because of its symbolic importance in skyscrapers, the construction method of the Plant Building was fundamental to the identity of the Plant Building.

Contemporary newspapers, which both reflected and informed their subscribers' opinions, prepared New Londoners for the Plant Building, which would combine beauty and technology in an expression of modern architecture. By March 1914, half of the foundation had been laid. In that same month a copy of *The Morning Telegraph*, proclaimed that the Plant Building would "be one of the finest office buildings in New England." Following this line, proof was offered in the description of the beautiful and technical aspects of the materials. "It will be made of Greendale rug brick, the latest thing in the line, with ornamented polychrome terra cotta. The base will be of Westerly pink granite, highly polished."<sup>cx</sup> What this provided was a highly technical description of the aesthetic refinement of the Plant Building's materials. Simultaneously describing the technical and aesthetic quality of the materials, this text proposes that beauty and technology could be partners in defining luxury, a concept that would have seemed contradictory in the City Beautiful movement and paradoxical in Victorian society.

The first image of the Plant Building appeared before it was completed in *The Morning Telegraph*, along with an article describing the proposed structure. (Figure 37) The image below, which was also later turned into a postcard, would have been the first visual introduction that *Telegraph* would have to the Plant Building. According to the article that appeared below it in

the newspaper, this image, “furnishes to the readers of this newspaper an exact likeness of the structure to be erected,” Not only does this image represent an accurate prediction of the architectural features of the Plant Building, it also shows it enlivened with people. The trees to the right of the building signify the residential history of State Street. In the image, the crowd seems to be drawn to the Plant Building as if it were a magnet. Also, in relation to the surrounding environment, the Plant Building is the tallest building. The illustrator of this image hoped to inform New Londoners that the Plant Building would be a place where people wanted to be. This conditioned how New Londoners imagined what kind of place the constructed building would be.



*Figure 37. Halftone image of the Plant Building featured in 1914 newspaper article.*<sup>cxi</sup>

The text that accompanied the first image of the building reinforced that the Plant Building was going to be a modern structure, emphasizing its beauty and its use of steel skeleton construction. The author declared that, “ten carloads of steel, furnished by the American Bridge Company, is being used in the construction of the building.” Utilizing expertise from a bridge company implied that, beyond being an object of simple construction, the Plant Building was a marvel of modern steel engineering. The author added that, “To make it a substantial structure very little wood was used.” Wood was the standard material for smaller vernacular commercial

buildings or houses. The article highlighted that the Plant Building was a permanent and substantive addition to New London. Reading this article, New Londoners were prepared for the Plant Building as a beacon for New London's progress.<sup>cxii</sup>

Newspapers connect the Plant Building's two elevators with the key identifiers of skyscraper design. Journalistic accounts often described the elevators in the Plant Building as the cherry on top of a sundae, "When it is remembered that two express elevators are utilized for the use of the public nothing more can be said."<sup>cxiii</sup> Elevators were a defining characteristic of skyscraper design. The Plant Building was introduced to the public as a product of skyscraper construction, even though it was only five stories tall. At only five stories tall, the Plant Building did not have to use steel frame construction or two express elevators. Victorian buildings were designed taller than five stories using only masonry construction.<sup>cxiv</sup> Five story buildings were also commonly designed without elevators as walk-ups. The use of a steel frame skeleton and an elevator system in the Plant Building was more symbolic than necessary.

This and other articles in the *Morning Telegraph*, emphasize the innovative features and architectural refinements of the new building and link it with the iconic history of skyscrapers in New York City. Two factors contribute to the perceived connection with New York skyscrapers; the personal connection of Morton Plant with New York and the more generalized and widespread association of all of New London with New York. Morton Plant had a house in Manhattan and he would have been aware of skyscraper design being used there. Plant would have encouraged the connection between his building in New London and the tradition of skyscraper construction in Manhattan. Also, throughout the community of New London in newspaper articles, New York was the standard of comparison, the city that New London aspired to become. The Pequot Community represented an established connection with New York social life.

In an April 1914 article from *the Morning Telegraph*, New Londoners were assured that “the building will be erected on the same plan as the great New York skyscrapers.”<sup>cxv</sup> Masonry buildings were constructed; steel frame buildings were erected. Described in another article in the *Morning Telegraph*, the building was described as being “of skeleton construction, which is the plan adopted in the construction of the big office buildings in New York, making each floor independent of the others.” To an audience that would have been unfamiliar with this relatively new construction method, this article makes it seem like the floors are floating or suspended in the air. The Plant Building tightened the link between New London and New York City, exploiting the renown of New York City skyscrapers to aggrandize its image.

### **Postcards of State Street and the Plant Building**

Like newspapers, postcards also contributed to the public’s conception of the Plant Building. While the newspapers focused mainly on the individual building, most postcards were designed to present State Street in its entirety as a unified corridor that embodied the City Practical in New London, a corridor on which Plant Building stood out. New Londoners notion of State Street shaped and was shaped by their imagining of the Plant Building.<sup>cxvi</sup>

Early 20<sup>th</sup> century postcards depicting State Street and the Plant Building attest to New Londoners’ participation in what historians call “the Golden Age of Postcards” from the 1890s to the 1920s. When the mail was delivered more than once a day, penny postcards were one of the cheapest, easiest, and fastest ways to communicate. From the time in 1898 when Congress passed a law that allowed privately printed postcards to be used they rose steadily in popularity. Postcards had great appeal for a public with more desire than ever for travel and leisure. In 1906, over 770 million cards were mailed in the United States. By 1916 more than a billion postcards were purchased in the United States.<sup>cxvii</sup>



The local view of a main street was the most popular subject for postcards. Also common were postcards featuring a single building. The earliest architectural postcards were simply photographic prints. Sometimes these architectural postcards were the only evidence that a building ever existed. At the height of the Golden Age of Postcards, photographs were typically edited, colored, and otherwise enhanced to improve the visual appeal of the street scene. Architectural postcards are very valuable resources for architectural research, at times furnishing the only evidence that a building ever existed. In view of the tendency of artists to alter these photographs, careful interpretation was necessary.<sup>cxviii</sup>

The most frequent view in New London postcards was of State Street with the Parade receiving the most attention. These postcard images of the Parade and State Street display development of the commercial thoroughfare of New London in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Picturing the most beautiful and modern buildings, including the Plant Building, these views document all of the physical evidence of City Beautiful and City Practical success that would invoke civic pride any citizen. Views of the Parade are particularly powerful as iconic imagery because they replicate the view from the train station. Union Station was the threshold into the city, for both locals and visitors. The Parade was a focus of postcard images for the same reason that it was a focus of City Beautiful and City Practical intervention. It was iconic, memorable, open, and the first visual impression of New London. Views of the Parade are also ideal because it is an open space within a dense downtown and its unique shape would be distinctive of New London. The Parade was also appealing as a postcard because it was formalized and beautified by the Soldiers and Sailors Monument.

One of the first of the New London local view postcards depicts the Parade. (Figure 38) This image can be dated from the Liberty Pole clearly still standing and must have been from before 1898. The trolley system that arrived in 1892 is also not visible in this image. According

to postcard historians the date of a postcard was most likely contemporary with its image. The unedited photograph that adorns this photograph also confirms that it is an early manifestation of an architectural postcard. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, this postcard pictured a vastly different Parade than in later scenes. The road is unpaved and much of State Street is closed in with trees. The threshold of trees in the above image serves as a marker for the residential atmosphere of late 19<sup>th</sup> century State Street. A Sanborn Insurance Map from 1891 locates this threshold as the intersection of Union and State Street. (Figure 39)



*Figure 38. Parade looking east 1880s<sup>cix</sup>*



Figure 39. 1891 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map New London<sup>cxx</sup>

As New London architecture on State Street developed, so did New London architectural postcards. The changes both captured the new architectural development in New London and new developments in the creation of postcards.<sup>cxxi</sup> These new changes can be seen below in a



postcard of the Parade from approximately 1906. (Figure 40) Unlike the earlier picture postcard, this newer postcard uses color, particularly evident in the obviously enhanced sky color. This image also is shot from a vantage point (most likely from an upper floor of Union Station) that emphasizes perspective and increases the depth of the Parade space.



*Figure 40. Postcard of the Parade from approximately 1906.<sup>cxxii</sup>*

This postcard proved to be one of the first examples of edited postcard imagery in New London. The photograph of the Parade from 1900 clearly pictures network of telephone lines that circled the space. (Figure 41) A decade and a half later there are still wires sweeping over a view of the Parade in 1914 photograph. (Figure 42) These images make visible the sweeping array of wires in the Parade that postcard does not picture. This removal reveals the common practice of postcard artists editing the images of streets they were rendering to make them look more pleasing.



*Figure 41. Photograph of the Parade. 1900<sup>xxiii</sup>*



Figure 42. Image of the Parade 1914<sup>cxxiv</sup>

Not just the product of an impulse of solitary postcard artists, these edits were part of a cooperative strategy between artists and local leaders who wanted to create a beautified image of their cities. In *Downtown America*, Alison Isenberg described the early 20<sup>th</sup> century attempt to project a postcard image of urban utopia as “the obsession of Main Street businesses, city leaders, and investors.”<sup>cxxv</sup> Photographs were edited by postcard artists to remove crowds of people, carriages, cars, debris, and telephone wires from streets. Color was added to images to enhance the sky and the tint of the buildings. As postcard artists were often not local people and



their work was done offsite, if they did not receive explicit instruction they would color buildings simply according to what to them seemed the most pleasing color.<sup>cxxvi</sup>

Continued development in State Street postcards gave visual form to the businessmen's City Practical plan, exemplified by a 1911 postcard. (Figure 43) This image shows more refined development in the period since the 1906 postcard of the same view. Here too the telephone lines were removed and now harsh shadows are no longer tolerated. The vantage point has been elevated and shifted to imply more symmetrical space captured by this image.



*Figure 43. Postcard of the Parade 1911*

The methodology of postcard editing drew on the tenets of the City Practical movement. Urban development of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and Main Street postcards expressed what Isenberg called “the new commercial vision – a dense streetscape of entrepreneurs presiding over a managed, simplified, and beautiful retail corridor.”<sup>cxxvii</sup> Postcard artists and businessmen used the

same strategies to clean up the urban streets: cleaning up trash, removing wires, developing a unified color scheme, and reinforcing curbs. While not working in the same medium, urban reformers and postcard artists worked together in their mutually supporting work on the urban landscape.

The height of City Practical imagery in New London is captured in a postcard from around 1920. (Figure 44) With brighter colors and a central green space, this is the most enhanced image presented to the New London public so far. The Neptune Building in even closer alignment with the corridor of State Street than it actually was. This is the most symmetrical postcard of the Parade that exists.



*Figure 44. Postcard of Parade, approximately 1920s*

At the start of her analysis of Main Street postcards, Isenberg states “if the panoramic watercolor renderings of City Beautiful reports captured the grandiose schemes of that movement, then ordinary Main Street postcards embodied the beautification approach promoted



first by municipal housekeepers and then by the planners and businessmen who carried the women's designs well into the twentieth century."<sup>cxxviii</sup> Comprehensive City Beautiful plans were the exception and so were the watercolors that illustrated them. Local postcards documented both City Beautiful and City Practical development in New London. The watercolor illustration Burnham's plan for Chicago and New London's City Practical postcards have common visuals and share certain aesthetic qualities. (Figure 45) These images share aspects of symmetry, unified corridors, a monumental focal point, green space, an aerial view, and a strong perspective. The New London postcard, along with many other Main Street postcards adopted visual strategies from the City Beautiful watercolor and applied them to enhance commercial corridors.



*Figure 45. A comparison of Jules Guerin's watercolor of Burnham's Plan for Chicago (left) and a Postcard of Parade, approximately 1920s*

Unlike the watercolors of the City Beautiful that were collected in large, expensive books, Main Street postcards were circulated broadly throughout the public, which increased the public's exposure to the ideas and appearance of the City Practical.<sup>cxxix</sup> Created from edits of photographs that applied City Practical strategy to the far cheaper two-dimensional world, postcards worked like windows into a possible future for New London. The economic and social accessibility of the postcard made it an excellent vessel to spread images of the possibilities of

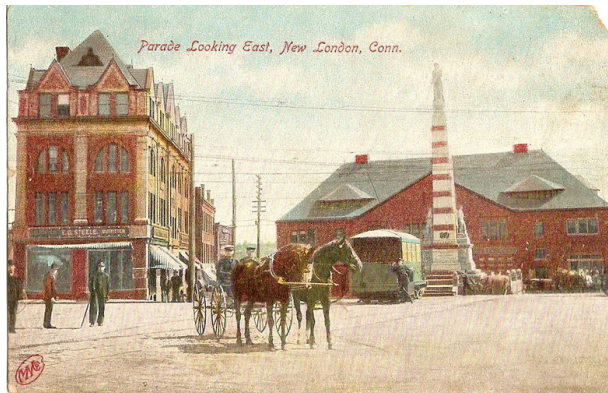
the City Practical. When circulated locally, these images worked to build consensus among New Londoners that the City Practical version of their city was possible.

The topic of widespread and varied research, postcards have had a complex social significance and the meaning of the images they circulate changed depending on which of the many common ways the postcards were used. A postcard could be bought by either a New Londoner or a visitor and was either mailed to a New Londoner, mailed outside of New London, or collected. While local circulation built consensus, the non-local circulation of a New London postcard would spread a beautified and idealized image of the city, which was a tool for New London boosterism.

Postcards of New London, commissioned by New Londoners, and sold in New London, were imagined by the consumer to be authentic two-dimensional representations of the real New London. Historian Gross argues that postcards develop in their earliest phase as products of tourism in America that was fueled by the search for authenticity.<sup>cxxx</sup> According to the authenticity that was expected of postcards, a handful of popular images began to define what was considered authentically New London. These views informed newcomers to New London what they had to see in order to have really seen New London. As it was previously claimed, if the Parade was the first impression that visitors had of New London, then postcards provided a pre-impression. Through the controlled and enhanced images of the postcards, recipients were informed what to notice in the Parade and what to disregard. Postcards conditioned them to see the Soldiers and Sailors Monument and not the telephone wires.

These popular postcard images also influenced how New Londoners themselves imagined their city. Within New London the identity of State Street was being further enriched with local importance by City Practical postcards as the modern thoroughfare. Postcards carrying images of State Street far outnumbered the ones that carried images of Bank Street or any other

street. Within State Street, postcards helped to support the commercial vision of the City Practical corridor. As mentioned before, the social cohesion of the Parade was supported by postcard views that cropped out or angled away from undesirable areas like the tenement settlement behind the Neptune Building – seen in the three turn of the century postcards of the parade. (Figure 46, 47,48) These three postcards created an illusion of a physical barrier that was representative of the social barrier that City Practical designers hoped to maintain. Presented with these images of the Parade, New Londoners were encouraged to imagine the Parade space as physically, visually, socially separate from the proximate tenement neighborhood. Sanborn Insurance Maps, like the one from 1907 below demonstrated how permeable this barrier really was. (Figure 49)



*Figure 46. Postcard of the Parade facing east. Approximately 1900<sup>cxxvi</sup>*

*Figure 47. Postcard of the Parade facing east. Approximately 1910<sup>cxxvii</sup>*



*Figure 48. Postcard of the Parade facing west. Approximately 1905.*<sup>cxxxiii</sup>





Figure 49. Illustrated Sanborn Map 1907. The area in blue represents the point of view the first of the three postcards, the red arrows represents a number vantage points where the tenement neighborhood would have been visible from the Parade.

The fixed vantage point of the postcard also contributed to the sense of State Street as a harmonious City Practical corridor. In New London, interventions of the City Beautiful and the City Practical were concentrated along the organizing spine of State Street. By centralizing the multiple interventions of both of these movements onto one street like on State Street, their collective impact was more powerful because it was arranged into one view. In their first creation in New London, City Practical postcards capitalized on the powerful view of lower State

Street and the Parade that already existed. The edited images of State Street with reinforced curbs and altered coloring continued to emphasize this corridor effect.

This mass circulation of postcards that spread the image of the City Beautiful and City Practical in New London that also spread the image of the City Beautiful and City Practical manifestations of all other cities and towns. Although the views themselves were unique to New London, the style of the postcard images of State Street was influenced by the national standardization of postcard imagery. Due to the overwhelming popularity and mass circulation of Main Street postcards, the postcards themselves began to conform to standards within a national trend. The exaggerated perspective of the Main Street corridor and the harmonization of architecture became formulaic characteristics of these designs. An example of a City Practical postcard from Montgomery, Alabama, shares many characteristics with an early 1930s postcard of the Parade in New London. (Figure 50) Standardization of Main Street postcard imagery was due to the standardization of postcard production and the control production by a few large companies. These images also reflected the standardization of Main Street architecture due to standardized building materials and the formation of national architecture organizations. This is just one example from many images of standardized postcards that were characteristic of this style that had become symbolic of success.<sup>CXXXIV</sup>

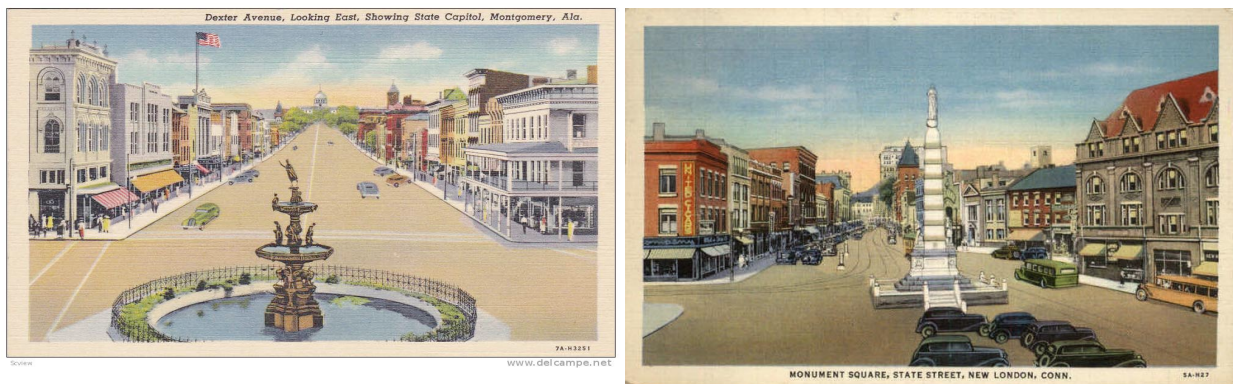


Figure 50. Comparison of 1930s postcards from Montgomery, AL and New London, CT.<sup>CXXXV</sup>

The thorough editing and enhancing of these images could demonstrate City Practical improvements so much faster on paper than projects could be completed on the real three-dimensional street that the postcard images soon outstripped the architecture they represented. The ideal of the postcard Main Street came into its own momentum that, as the above postcard comparison illustrates, developed its own standards of urban presentation.<sup>cxxxvi</sup> The almost utopian idealism chosen complete with glowing sky would have been close to impossible to actually achieve. Evolving from the accuracy of photographic postcards that directly captured the uniqueness of New London, postcards developed beyond the limitations of State Street.

Historians have often argued that the process of creating Main Street postcards imagery has been derived from the visual preferences of City Practical projects, but in New London there was also evidence that the powerful images presented in State Street postcards actually guided physical developments on the street. The idealized conception of the City Practical as a corridor was developed according to the view that exaggerated perspective postcards captured. While interventions of both the City Beautiful and City Practical were concentrated on State Street so that they would be more collectively powerful for the physical viewer, this concentration also created a powerful composition for postcards. The standardization of this postcard view provided a model for comparison for cities to compete with each other. Within the task of the City Practical, the benefit of a postcard image of State Street was that its vantage point was fixed. Like with the careful screening of the Parade from the poor neighborhood with the Neptune Building, postcards of State Street could be oriented so that the entire image contained as much City Practical architecture as possible while blocking out less desirable areas.

With such perfected views, New London boosters could focus all of their energy onto the corridor of State Street. This is practice became evident by walking up and down State Street, which opened up views down side streets that were never pictured in postcards. The beautified

character of State Street quickly dissipates once off of the main thoroughfare; buildings quickly became shorter, less magnificent, and older. This quality remains today as the effect from many turn-of-the-century buildings that still exists, revealed by photographs of State Street compared to Green Street. (Figure 51) Photographs of State Street capture the grand feel of distinguished architecture and wide streets. From the position on State Street, looking down Green Street, it is clear that the grand atmosphere quickly dissipates. A Sanborn Map provides further spatial contextualization of these views. (Figure 52) The change in atmosphere from State Street to Green Street is still palpable today.



*Figure 51. Comparison of State Street (left) and Green Street (right).* <sup>xxxvii</sup>



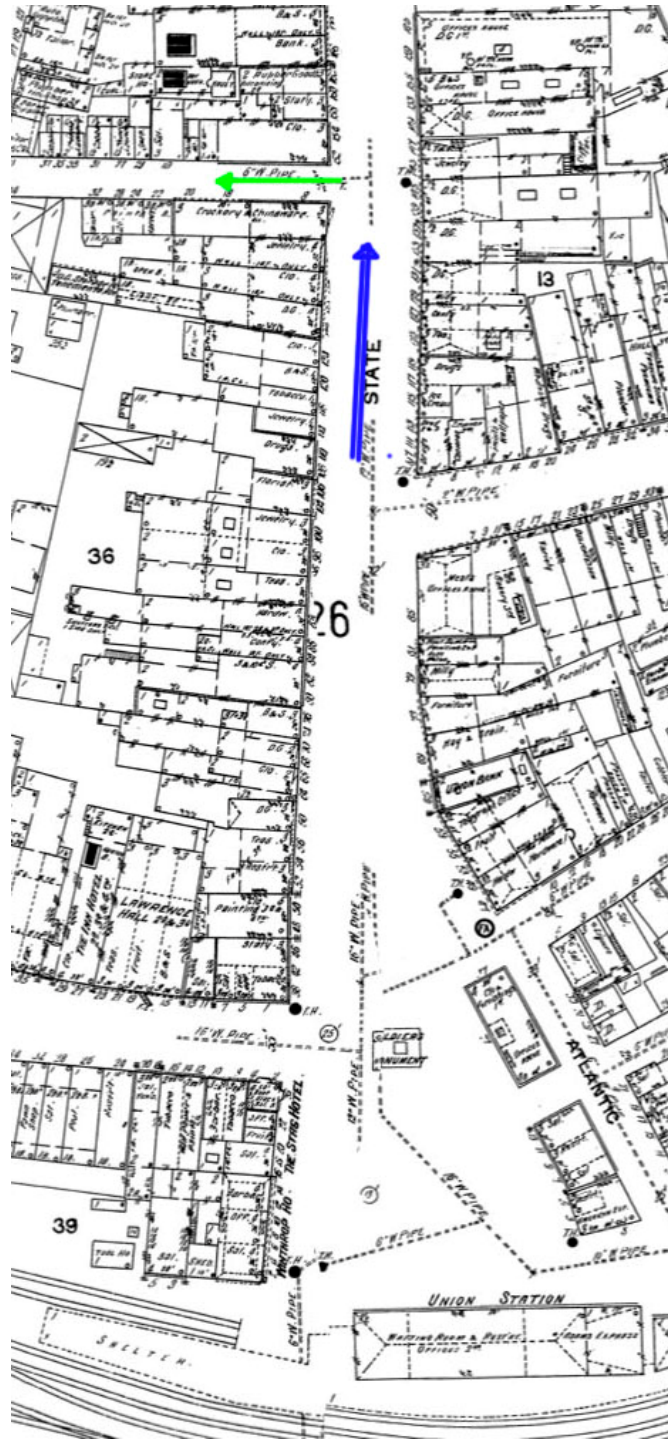


Figure 52. 1912 Sanborn Map. The blue arrow represents the perspective for the photo of State Street and the green arrow represents the perspective for the photo Green Street.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Sanborn Insurance maps reveal the spatial gaps in the corridor of State Street and several proximate problematic areas that the postcard views block out. As previously mentioned,

nowhere were the spatial gaps in the corridor lines of State Street more concealed than in the Parade surrounding the Neptune Building. Perhaps this is also because the Parade holds such symbolic significance and the tenement neighborhood would have been considered a most problematic area. The postcard image below shows upper State Street around 1920. (Figure 53) It is hard to imagine that within the block of both sides of this street were two large factories. These two factories, the Palmer Brothers' Quilt factory, behind the left side of the street and the Brainerd and Armstrong Company Silk Mill, behind the right side of the street, are pictured in the two postcards below from about 1910. (Figure 54 and 55) Both buildings show the typical red factory brick that City Beautiful and City Practical designs purposefully avoided in order to appear more refined. These two massive industrial sites can be located on an illustration of a 1921 Sanborn map. (Figure 56) While factories do not seem to be beautiful subjects for postcards, they connected to the booster purpose of the City Practical. Also featured in *Picturesque New London*, factories were a selling point for New London's successful image as a manufacturing center. While tenement areas would have never been pictured, factories show progress of industry. The postcards of upper State Street and of these two factories do not make obvious their proximity to one another. Through the manipulated images of postcards, New London seems like a much larger place.





Figure 53. Postcard of upper State Street looking west. Approximately 1920.<sup>cxxxix</sup>

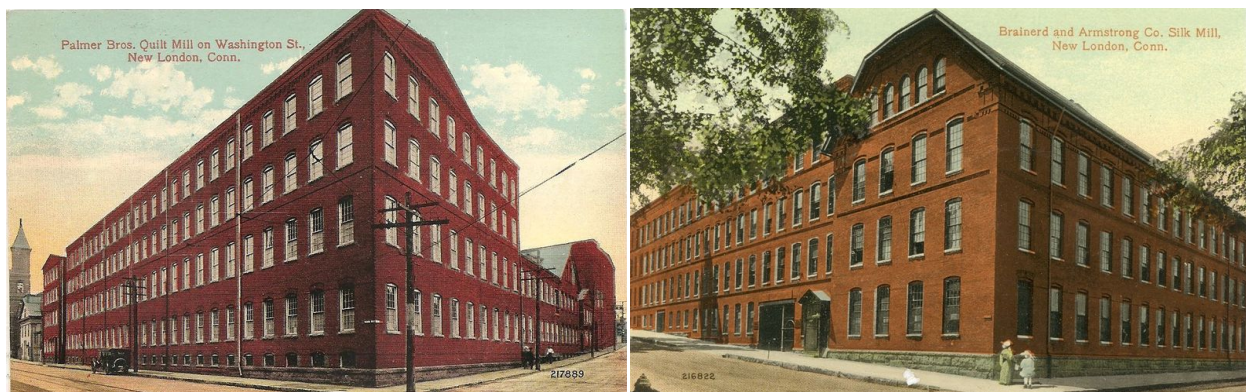


Figure 54. Postcard of Palmer Brothers' Quilt factory from around 1910 (left)<sup>cxl</sup>

Figure 55. Postcard of Brainerd and Armstrong Company Silk Mill from around 1910 (right)<sup>cxli</sup>



*Figure 56. Color-coded 1921 Sanborn map. The blue represents the view of the Figure 53 postcard, the red show the proximity of the two factories and the yellow signifies the location of the Plant Building.*

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The facades of the Plant Building, designed at a moment when the City Practical was well established in New London, present an excellent illustration of what might be thought of as a postcard-influenced design. An ornamental, articulated treatment is typically reserved only for the street-facing façade, with the three remaining facades articulated out of cheaper red brick. The north side of the Plant Building, fronting on State Street, conforms to this pattern. (Figure 57) The west face and continuing around behind the building the southern face, lack ornament



and are constructed of cheaper red brick, following this typical scheme. (Figure 58 and 59)



*Figure 57. Photograph of the northern elevation of the Plant Building.*<sup>cxlii</sup>

*Figure 58. Northwestern corner of the Plant Building*<sup>cxliii</sup>



*Figure 59. Southwestern corner of the Plant Building. The area surrounding the Plant Building has been faded in order to distinguish the edges of the Plant Building from other buildings.*<sup>cxliv</sup>

The eastern side of the Plant Building breaks with the conventional decorative argument and continues the color of the street-facing façade and string-courses around its eastern side. (Figure 60) The eastern façade, facing the train station, was given this special treatment so that the Plant Building turned its best face toward the camera, set in the Parade to capture the traditional prospect westward from the train station. The eastern façade treatment also indicated a certain architectural respect of the Plant Building toward the Thames Club its neighbor to the



east, a prominent businessmen's club. Both the halftone image of the Plant Building in the *Morning Telegraph* and the first traditional architectural postcard of the Plant Building also emphasize this perspective that shows off this unique façade treatment. (Figure 61 and 62) In this way the Plant Building was designed in direct response to the most prolific views of State Street. Including the Plant Building, the new developments on State Street were based upon both the urban precedents of New London and of the imagined postcard ideal.



Figure 60. Northeastern corner of the Plant Building. <sup>cxlv</sup>



Figure 61. Postcard of the Plant Building from halftone image in *The Morning Telegraph*. 1914



Figure 62. (right) Postcard of the Plant Building around 1920.

### **Social Response to the Plant Building**

The façades of the Plant Building reflected the City Practical atmosphere of State Street, the functions served by its interior spaces also speak to key issues and concerns of the movement. The users of the Plant Building consisted of the tenants of the space, workers employed in the building, and visitors/customers. As the northern façade was designed to reflect interior use, the interior use was in part determined by the businesses that chose the Plant Building to frame their work. With several buildings to choose from in New London, including the recently completed Manwaring building across the street, the attraction of the first-generation businesses that resided in the Plant Building revealed how these tenants predicted the building's public reception. Framed by the architecture of the Plant Building, these businesses would then attract workers and visitors who would enter the Plant Building. Once the businesses and respective customer bases were established, the identity of these different users of the Plant Building would feed into the total identity of the Plant Building. In this way commercial buildings are designed to frame the purposes they are expected to serve.

Across the street, the Manwaring Building set a precedent for comparison to prove the especially City Practical identity of the Plant Building's users. Within the City Practical



movement in New London the Plant Building stood out as the clearest example of its kind. The comparison of the Plant Building to the contemporaneous construction of the Manwaring Building, revealed proof of how successful the Plant Building was as an icon for the City Practical movement. More than just sharing a similar address, these two buildings also shared an architect, Dudley St. Clair Donnelly, and were constructed within a year of each other. They can be seen in relation to each other on State Street in postcards of Upper State Street. (Figure 63) This set of circumstances created the perfect means of low-variable comparison for these two buildings.



Figure 63. *Postcard of upper State Street looking west. Approximately 1920. The Plant Building is the last building visible on the left. The Manwarring Building is first on the right.*

The façade of the Manwaring Building adhered to some of the new style of the City Practical, but it also contained remnants of the older more industrial traditions of commercial architecture. Like the Plant Building the Manwaring Building was a mixed-use commercial

building ornamented with light colored classical decorations that were typical of the City Practical. However, the Manwaring Building uses a deep red brick as a major material. Even though it is broken up with classical motifs, it would have been visually connected to the red brick so popular in Victorian commercial buildings and factories. The Manwaring Building, built the year before, provided a City Practical precedent for the Plant Building, but also marked a point of departure for the Plant Building as Donnelly worked to create the exquisite presence of the Plant Building. Most buildings of this kind, at least in smaller cities, reserved the upper floors for offices, of doctors, businesses, insurance companies, and lawyers. The Manwaring Building also proved to be typical for the upper floors as well.

The Plant Building was similar to the Manwaring Building with respect to the architectural treatment of its first floor shops. Employing a similar style of bay window on three of its four storefronts, the Plant Building offered an inviting entry for consumers. The most northern storefront remained in the older style of flat-faced storefront only because it was constructed to be the new home of the *Morning Telegraph*, a popular local newspaper. The flat front of this last bay was meant to indicate that the *Morning Telegraph* was not a retail store and so was less inviting to pedestrian traffic. Aside from this last atypical bay treatment the Plant Building on the first floor remained average. The upper floors of the Plant Building were distinct. While still containing a typical range of commercial offices, the Plant Building was unlike the Manwaring Building in that the businesses of its upper floors catered to an especially feminine or upper class visitor. Also unique was the inclusion of shops among these offices on the upper floors. Drawing upon the standard from Victorian society and the City Beautiful, the accommodation of a lady into the downtown was a marker for overall respectability. Unlike the Victorian strategy of quartering off feminized space within an otherwise masculine building, the Plant Building integrated their presence into the experience of the whole building.

The first tenants of the building revealed the original understanding of the Plant Building as a part of the City Practical atmosphere of upper State Street. The 1917 New London Directory offers a survey of tenants and provided an idea of the kind of visitors the Plant Building was likely to host. Catering to a directly female upper class audience was the Corset Shop, located in room 308 of the Plant Building. Located on the fourth floor was the Bollingwood Studio, a “shop of applied arts” and an interior design studio, where a woman could go to carry out her work of furnishing the home. The second floor was also home to several hairdressers and manicurists which would have been catered to women as well.

The existence of these feminine shops in the upper floors of the Plant Building reveals that the owners of these businesses believed that the Plant Building would be an accentuating frame for their kind of business. This effect was directly utilized in advertisements for the Corset Shop in local newspapers, every one of which from 1915 to 1916 mentioned the elevator service that the Plant Building provided. The most direct of these ads is pictured below from 1915 and encircled the whole ad with the repeating phrase “take the elevator.” (Figure-64) This emphasis of the elevator service was not commonly used in ads for businesses other than the corset shop. The elevator was considered a luxurious and ladylike tool and was marketed by the Corset Shop to customers as a way to attract them. Visitors to these stores would have the experience of attending to their feminine needs within the frame of the Plant Building and so associating the design of the building with the experience of their errand.



Figure 64. Advertisement for the Corset Shop.<sup>cxlvi</sup>

There were also several tenants of the upper floors of the Plant Building that contributed to the more broadly upper class atmosphere of upper State Street. The fourth floor was home to the architectural offices of Dudley Donnelly, the designer of the Plant Building. Although common enough, architects were still very much a luxury for people with enough money to afford them. Also on the fourth floor was the office of the New London Baseball club, which although a democratically accessible spectator sport was, at an organizational level a rich man's game – exemplified by Morton Plant's own investment in the local team.<sup>cxlvii</sup>

Unlike the Manwaring Building, the Plant Building included Plant Hall provided a protected urban space for the public staging of respectable society. Seen in floor plan below, this hall took up much of the fifth floor. (Figure 65) The space was large and column-less and included a stage. In December of 1914 an article in the *Morning Telegraph* informed New Londoners what to expect on the fifth floor of the Plant Building, “which will include one of the handsomest assembly halls in the city.” Accompanying this “space of 80 by 42 feet designed without posts,” a host of architectural accoutrements were designed to support activities in the

hall. Also seen in the floor plan was a lobby, a stage, a smoking room leading to a men's bathroom, a women's retiring room leading to a women's bathroom, and alcove for refreshments, and a coat check. In the same December article a reporter concluded that, "when it is remembered that two express elevators are utilized for the use of the public nothing more can be said."<sup>cxlviii</sup> Like the Corset Shop, the writer of this article expresses how the elevator was conducive to refined society.



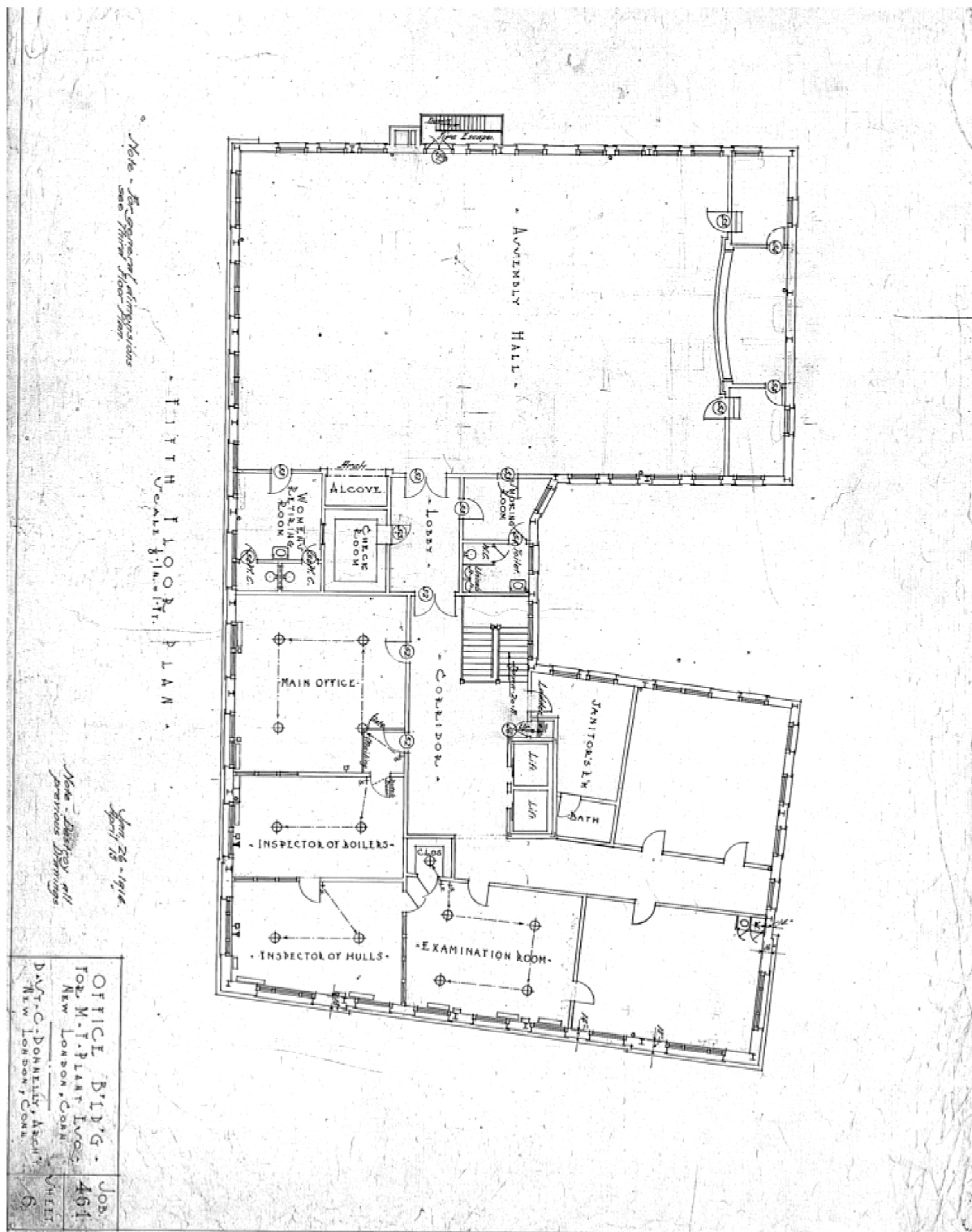


Figure 65. Fifth floor plan of Donnelly's Plant Building in New London (1914)<sup>cdix</sup>

The design of Plant Hall supported respectable activities and encouraged genteel society that would have fit in with the design of the Plant Building as a City Practical construction. An

assembly hall was more flexible to different events and sounded more respectable than a “dance hall”, although dances were often held in Plant Hall. For such dances and other events, social gender barriers were upheld by the careful separation of the smoking room (only acceptable in genteel society for men) and the women’s retiring room (for women.) The construction of these two resting areas also removed the social apprehension with public toilet use. From the publicity of the open hall, a woman entering the “women’s retiring room” was not necessarily going to the toilet and the same would be true for men in the smoking room. By making the restrooms multifunctional as toilets and as smoking room or a retiring room the privacy of the respective users was protected. Within the bathrooms, the toilets for the women were walled off into separate rooms and simple stalls divided the toilets for men. The privacy of women was considered to be more precious than that of men. The architectural support of the social construction of feminine privacy demonstrated to the users of the Plant Building that they were in an upscale establishment. The maintenance of traditional gender roles in this semi-public urban space made it clear that moral values were upheld.<sup>cl</sup>

Plant Hall also proved that the City Practical was not simply a cash-driven departure from the civic traditions of the City Beautiful. This hall was an economical investment for Mr. Plant but it was also his investment in the social wealth of New London. Plant Hall furthered the improvement of the atmosphere of upper State Street by opening up this upper class neighborhood to more people. As with the City Beautiful, the City Practical shared sentiment with the more directly reform oriented Progressive Era. Although the strategies of both the City Beautiful and City Practical were designed to prioritize the upper and middle class areas of town, it was believed that these improvements would both naturally heighten the moral spectrum and would lead by example, encouraging the achievement of all New Londoners regardless of status.

Ascertained through the New London directory and local newspapers, the various users of the Plant Building, including tenants, customers, visitors to Plant Hall, and workers, became a part of the experienced landscape of the Plant Building, contributing to its identity. In this way the City Practical experience gained momentum as more genteel users added to the genteel reputation of the Plant Building with their presence. These users confirm that the Plant Building was successful in creating an atmosphere that catered to middle class citizens and especially women. Compared to the Manwaring Building, the Plant Building was remarkably successful at this purpose. The intended experience of the Plant Building was authenticated and perpetuated by its users, which it achieved by fitting within the built and imagined landscapes of the City Practical.

## **Conclusion**

The formal characteristics of the Plant Building would be considered unremarkable within the larger scheme of architectural history. Perhaps it does not even stand up to the lavish praise in the turn of the century *Morning Telegraph*. It was certainly not architecturally groundbreaking in its use of Beaux Arts architecture and steel skeleton construction, which were regularly used in commercial buildings of its time. Ironically, it is this architectural commonplaceness of the Plant Building that makes it a rare topic for research. Now, having looked further into the social and historical context of Plant Building, there are several things that we learn about Victorian city, the City Beautiful movement, and the City Practical movement as they defined New London in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Gaining insights from New London, this thesis offers two observations.

First, the social structure of gender has probably played a bigger role turn of the century urban forms than is often considered in architectural history, especially as it relates to the City Practical. Second, the changing form of urban the landscape was determined by the social, and

by extension gendered, understanding of the social relationship between architecture and the street.

A determining factor to the disentanglement of these three urban compositions is how they approached and dealt with the “problem” of women on the street. Within the Victorian separate spheres, women were understood as in need of physical protection downtown. A genteel persona acted as a defensive shell that allowed a woman to traverse the urban fray so long as she minimized her vulnerability outside by crossing the threshold of her destination as inconspicuously as possible. The maintenance of feminine respectability in Victorian society was based on the *individual’s* execution of gentility amongst inevitable urban threats. “Ladies rooms” in Victorian buildings provided a protected interior destination, but it was the responsibility of the individual to arrive unscathed. Faced with an increasing number of middle class women downtown, programs of the City Beautiful were conceived to remake the streetscape with genteel design so that the presence of women on the street was not so socially or personally distressing. These interventions were designed in high moral contrast to the Victorian street and business buildings so tainted with commerce; located on the street where they would have the greatest visual impact, focusing on civic buildings and using light colored materials. City Beautiful interventions symbolically made room for women on downtown streets and so took on some of the individual’s responsibility of maintaining her own gentility and embedded it in the street around her.

An example of City Practical design, the Plant Building addressed the “problem” of women on the street in ways that differed significantly from its Victorian and City Beautiful predecessors. The Plant Building perpetuated genteel society that supported women downtown within the context of commercial architecture. While the City Beautiful was designed to combat the existence of commercial architecture on the street, thus partially relying on Victorian

commercial buildings for a point of contrast, the City Practical was designed to integrate beauty within commercial structures and so change the relationship between commerce and culture. Rather than providing an architectural antidote to the ills of street life, the City Practical embodied a new conception of the street that did not simply conditionally allow women into the downtown, but began to accept their presence.

This thesis highlights that urban architecture within the Victorian city, the City Beautiful, and the City Practical, responded to and contributed to the atmosphere of the street and how it was imagined to function within society. Victorian architecture was designed directly in reaction to the same social impulse that described the street as an uncontrolled sea. Responding to this environment, buildings downtown were about creating an interior space, the destination was the most important part of a journey downtown and where women would be safe. In the social imagination of Victorian society, the street was an unconstructed void, the left over area between designed buildings. Through this concept of urban space, the street became an unkempt collecting ground for physical and social trash. The inwardly focusing buildings that bordered the street perpetuated the Victorian urban landscape's atmosphere of neglect.

Unlike the Victorian city, the City Beautiful movement focused not only on the design of urban architecture, but on the design of urban space. The social status of the street was elevated with City Beautiful attention, which changed its function in society from deplorable to respectable. In contrast, the City Practical established greater permeability between the street and architecture. No longer the void of space between buildings, City Practical architecture like the Plant Building, composed unified facades that buttressed the street as a corridor of socially important space. Skyscraper buildings, like the Plant Building, incorporated the dynamism of the street up through their interiors.



Ultimately, this thesis also aims to address important historiographical issues. First, this project was based upon the acknowledgement that New London is not a product of cultural lag from other larger cities, and is deserving of research. The plans of the City Beautiful and City Practical that are most famous are the ones of the largest and most comprehensive architectural scale; however in practice, these plans were the exception to the rule. Over the last few decades, changes within the practice of architectural history have been addressing the historiographical problem of only focusing on the grandest buildings and schemes of architecture. As a part of this movement of questioning, this project presents the City Beautiful and City Practical of New London with new significance.

How does the understanding of the City Beautiful movement and the City Practical movement change if their definitions are expanded to accept the developments of State Street in New London? The experience of downtown, especially for women, was revolutionized in New London because of these improvements, despite the fact that the City Beautiful and City Practical identity of State Street were aesthetically ordinary. The *experience* of the downtown changed according to how it was imagined. Contributing to this urban reimagining was both the strategic architectural interventions on the street and the contextualizing media found in newspapers, postcards, and booster literature. These extra-architectural materials were designed to frame and support the social significance of these buildings. The final question that this thesis grapples with is how other descriptive materials within a movement adjust a person's contemporary experience and historical understanding of architecture and urban space. New London demonstrates the extent that non-architectural materials can empower even a limited expression of architecture to enact social change and so reveals the importance of the small city within the larger scheme of architectural history. Paying attention to these media,

architectural historians are in a better position to understand what buildings meant to the people who built and used them.

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> "How the Plant Building Will Appear When Completed." *The Morning Telegraph* [New London] 21 May 1914. Print.

<sup>ii</sup> Figure 1. Photograph of Northern Elevation of the Plant Building courtesy of Richard Gipstein of LLR Architects.

<sup>iii</sup> Kanzler, Carmelina Como. *New London, a History of Its People*. [New London, Conn.]: City of New London 350th Anniversary Celebration, 1996. Print.

<sup>iv</sup> Descriptions of the conditions and concerns regarding the 19<sup>th</sup> century city are widespread. For further reading see: Gunther Paul Barth,. *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in*

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*Nineteenth-century America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1980. Print.; Paul S. Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1978. Print.; and Jon A. Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States, 1840-1917*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003. Print.

<sup>v</sup> As widespread as the conditions of 19<sup>th</sup> century cities are discussions about the middle class concerns regarding them. Most of the sources listed in the entry above include this information but for more specific reading see: John F. Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-century Urban America*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1990. Print. For a general source book see: Anselm L. Strauss, *The American City; a Sourcebook of Urban Imagery*. Chicago: Aldine Pub., 1968. Print.

<sup>vi</sup> Figure 2. Illustration from James Dabney McCabe, *The Secrets of the Great City*. Philadelphia, Chicago: Jones Bros. &, 1868. Print.

<sup>vii</sup> Barth 3- 28.

<sup>viii</sup> Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004. :13-42.

<sup>ix</sup> Isenberg: 13-42.

<sup>x</sup> Peterson: 29-76.

<sup>xi</sup> Peterson: 216.

<sup>xii</sup> Isenberg 13-42. Peterson: 29-76.

<sup>xiii</sup> Figure 3. Daniel H. Burnham and Edward H. Bennett, *Plan of Chicago* [Chicago: Commercial Club of Chicago, 1909], plate 132

<sup>xiv</sup> Peterson: 29-76

<sup>xv</sup> Kasson 70-110

<sup>xvi</sup> Peterson: 29-76

<sup>xvii</sup> Peterson: 29-76

<sup>xviii</sup> Peterson: 29-76

<sup>xix</sup> Isenberg argues that urban beautification actually began with the progressive reformers: 13-41

<sup>xx</sup> Figure 4. Image from web. White City in World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, 1893.

<sup>xxi</sup> Peterson: 29-76.

<sup>xxii</sup> Isenberg argues that the City Beautiful movement and the City Practical movement were not as different as many historians say. I take much of my information from her, but I argue that the opposite is in fact true. While they look alike, these two movements are philosophically different, and perhaps even opposed in their relationship to commerce. What I believe that she recognizes is that they are mutually beneficial to each other's aesthetic goals. 42-77.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Harold F. Howland, "The City Practical: A City Plan to Relieve and Prevent Congestion and to Regulate the Cost of Living." *The Outlook* [New York] 1911-1914, 97th ed. 394. Print

<sup>xxiv</sup> Charles M. Robinson, *Better Birmingham: A Report to the Mercantile-Press Club of Birmingham, NY*. Cleveland: J. B. Savage, 1911. Print.: 33

<sup>xxv</sup> Quote from Albert W. Atwood, "The Soul of a City," reprinted from the *Saturday Evening Post*, 1928, no.1235.3, JNCP.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Paul L. Knox, *Urbanization: An Introduction to Urban Geography*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1994. Print.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Isenberg: 47.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Isenberg: 42.

<sup>xxix</sup> This is a fairly widespread and ubiquitous label for Sullivan. It can be found also on the website for the film documenting his life and work. "Louis Sullivan: The Struggle for American Architecture." *Louis Sullivan: The Struggle for American Architecture*. Whitecap Films, Inc., 2010. Web. 03 May 2012. <<http://louissullivanfilm.com/>>.

<sup>xxx</sup> Louis H. Sullivan, "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered." *Lippincott's Magazine*, March 1896.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Figure 5. The Guaranty Building, 1894 by Louis Sullivan. Figure 6. Illustration of a classical column. Image from web.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Keith D. Revell, "Law Makes Order: The Search for the Ensemble in the Skyscraper City, 1890 – 1930" in *The American Skyscraper: Cultural Histories*, 2005. Print: 39.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Revell 39

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Isenberg 43-77.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Jessica Ellen Sewell. *Women and the Everyday City: Public Space in San Francisco, 1890-1915*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2011. Print.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Isenberg 43-77.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Kasson 70-110

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Sewell xi-65, and Kasson 70-110

<sup>xxxix</sup> The Victorian separate spheres of masculinity and femininity are widely described. For most of my understanding of these spaces I relied on both Sewell and Kasson's descriptions of these. Sewell xi-xxxiii. Kasson 70-110

<sup>xl</sup> Isenberg: 22, 23.

<sup>xli</sup> Mary Ritter Beard. *Women's Work in Municipalities*. New York: Arno Pr., 1915. Print.

<sup>xlii</sup> Isenberg: 23-26.

<sup>xliii</sup> Figure 7. Appeared in Isenberg: 23. Illustration of "Mothering a Municipality" in *American City*, June 1913, 599.

<sup>xliv</sup> Isenberg 43-77.

<sup>xlv</sup> Sewell: 26-30

<sup>xlvi</sup> For more on purpose of lady's rooms and their location in libraries see: Abigail A. Van Slyck, "The Lady and the Library Loafer: Gender and Public Space in Victorian America." *A Journal of American Material Culture* 4th ser. 31 (1996): 221-42. Print.

<sup>xlvii</sup> "Municipal Art Society's Work For Civic Progress." *Morning Telegraph* [New London] 16 May 1914. Print.

<sup>xlviii</sup> This and the majority of my information on the New London Municipal Art Society is from "Municipal Art Society's Work For Civic Progress."

<sup>xliv</sup> "New London, Connecticut." 1912. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1884-1921. ProQuest LLC., 2008. Print. Ser.

<sup>i</sup> An excellent guidebook published by New London Landmarks on State Street is *Pride of Place: State Street, New London, CT*. written by Heather. Tichenor,

<sup>li</sup> 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century New London demographic information from: Carmelina Como Kanzler., *New London, a History of Its People*. [New London, Conn.]: City of New London 350th Anniversary Celebration, 1996. Print.

<sup>lii</sup> "New London, Connecticut." 1884. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1884-1921. ProQuest LLC., 2008. Print. Ser.

<sup>liii</sup> *Pride of Place: State Street, New London, CT*.

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- <sup>liv</sup> Quoted from Frances Manwaring Caulkins,, and Cecelia Griswold. *History of New London, Connecticut, from the First Survey of the Coast in 1612 to 1860*. New London: H.D. Utley, 1895. Print.
- <sup>lv</sup> Figure 10. Postcard of original Municipal Building. Image from web.
- <sup>lvi</sup> *Pride of Place: State Street, New London, CT*.
- <sup>lvii</sup> Figure 11. Postcard of Municipal Building after 1912 renovations. Image from Web.
- <sup>lviii</sup> *Pride of Place: State Street, New London, CT*.
- <sup>lix</sup> Figure 12. Parade looking west 1880s. Image from web.
- <sup>lx</sup> Figure 13. Parade looking east 1880s. Image from web.
- <sup>lxi</sup> *Pride of Place: State Street, New London, CT*.
- <sup>lxii</sup> Figure 14. Photograph of the Parade. Image courtesy of New London Landmarks.
- <sup>lxiii</sup> *Pride of Place: State Street, New London, CT*.
- <sup>lxiv</sup> John Ruddy,, *The Parade: Gateway to New London*. Rep. New London Landmarks. Print.
- <sup>lxv</sup> Figure 15. Postcard of Soldiers and Sailors Monument. Image from web.
- <sup>lxvi</sup> The year of 1906 was estimated by using postcards as tools for dating it.
- <sup>lxvii</sup> Figure 16. 1911 Postcard of the Parade. Postcard courtesy of New London Landmarks.
- <sup>lxviii</sup> Peterson: 29-76.
- <sup>lxix</sup> Andrew S. Gross, "Cars, Postcards, and Patriotism: Tourism and National Politics in the United States, 1893-1929." *Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association* 1st ser. 40: 77-99. Print.
- <sup>lxx</sup> Figure 17. 1906 postcard of Parade. Image from web
- <sup>lxxi</sup> Figure 18. 1903 Postcard of the Parade. Image from web.
- <sup>lxxii</sup> Editorial, Part 1. *Morning Telegraph* [New London] 16 May 1914. Print.
- <sup>lxxiii</sup> Editorial, Part 2. *Morning Telegraph* [New London] 16 May 1914. Print.
- <sup>lxxiv</sup> Editorial, Part 3. *Morning Telegraph* [New London] 16 May 1914. Print.
- <sup>lxxv</sup> *Pride of Place: State Street, New London, CT*.
- <sup>lxxvi</sup> Figure 20. Labeled "New London, Connecticut." 1921. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1884-1921. ProQuest LLC., 2008. Print. Ser.
- <sup>lxxvii</sup> *Pride of Place: State Street, New London, CT*.
- <sup>lxxviii</sup> *Pride of Place: State Street, New London, CT*: 9.
- <sup>lxxix</sup> Figure 21. Postcard of the Crocker House around 1900 before its mansard roof burned down. Image from web.
- <sup>lxxx</sup> *Pride of Place: State Street, New London, CT*. 10
- <sup>lxxxii</sup> Figure 21. Postcard of the Crocker House around 1900 before mansard roof burned down. Image from web
- <sup>lxxxiii</sup> Figure 23. Current photograph of the Cronin Building. First floor has been modernized. Image courtesy of Allie Cahoon.
- <sup>lxxxiv</sup> Figure 24. Turnoff the century panoramic postcard of Williams Mansion and upper State Street looking east. Image from web
- <sup>lxxxv</sup> *Pride of Place: State Street, New London, CT*.
- <sup>lxxxvi</sup> Figure 25 (left) 1906 postcard of the Mohican Hotel. Image from web.
- <sup>lxxxvii</sup> Figure 26 (right) Photograph of the construction of the Mohican Hotel. Image courtesy of New London Landmarks.
- <sup>lxxxviii</sup> Figure 27. Postcard from around 1910 of the Manwaring Building



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<sup>lxxxviii</sup> Figure 28. Photograph of the Plant Building courtesy of Richard Gipstein

<sup>lxxxix</sup> Though the cartoon was never found in the Hartford Post. "Cartoonist gets Mr. Plant." *The New London Day* [New London] 1913. Print.

<sup>xc</sup> "Morton F. Pant Dies of Pneumonia." *New York Times* 5 Nov. 1918. Print.

<sup>xc i</sup> "A History of Connecticut College: Morton Plant's Ride." Connecticut College. Connecticut College, 11 Feb. 2011. Web. 03 May 2012.

<<http://www.conncoll.edu/news/6820.cfm?var1=centennial>>.

<sup>xcii</sup> *Picturesque New London* is un-authored, which I believe is to benefit the tone of boosterism by attempting to present an "unbiased" description. *Picturesque New London and Its Environs – Groton, Mystic, Montville, and Waterford—At the Commencement of the Twentieth Century*.

Hartford, CT: American Book Exchange, 1901. Print.

<sup>xciii</sup> "Morton F. Pant Dies of Pneumonia." *New York Times* 5 Nov. 1918. Print.

<sup>xciv</sup> Morton F. Plant, Letter to Colin Buell. 1910. MS. New London, Connecticut. and Colin Buell Letter to Morton F. Plant undated but contemporary to other letter. MS. New London, Connecticut Archived in the New London Historical Society

<sup>xcv</sup> "Dudley St. C. Donnelly, 66 Dies; Death Caused by Shock Week Ago; Designed Many Local Buildings." *The New London Day* 6 Mar. 1937. Print.

<sup>xcvi</sup> Discovered on a an application for historical places. Savage, Beth L., comp. *National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet*. 12 Dec. 1988. Application for Historic Landmark status for "Plant, Morton Freeman, Hunting Lodge. New London County.

<sup>xcvii</sup> "No Better Time to Build Than at the Present." *The Morning Telegraph* [New London] Apr. 1917. Print.

<sup>xcviii</sup> *New London Directory*. New Haven, CT: Price & Lee, 1917. Print.

<sup>xcix</sup> "Dudley St. Clair Donnelly." *The New London Day* 11 Mar. 1915. Print.

<sup>c</sup> Figure 29. Fourth floor plan of Adler and Sullivan's Guaranty Building in Buffalo.(1894) from: Joseph Siry, "Adler and Sullivan's Guaranty Building in Buffalo" *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. Vol. 55, No. 1 1996, pp. 6-37

<sup>ci</sup> Donnelly, Dudley St. Clair. "Fourth Story Floor Plan of the Plant Building." *Donnelly's Architectural Plans - Owned by LLR Architects*. Print.

<sup>cii</sup> Joseph J. Korom, *The American Skyscraper, 1850-1940: A Celebration of Height*. Boston: Branden, 2008. Print.

<sup>ciii</sup> "How the Plant Building Will Appear When Completed" *The Morning Telegraph* [New London] May. 1914. Print.

<sup>civ</sup> Figure 33. Photograph of Northern Elevation of the Plant Building courtesy of Richard Gipstein of LLR Architects.

<sup>cv</sup> Figure 34. Current photograph of the Harris Building. First floor has been modernized. Image courtesy of Allie Cahoon.

<sup>cvi</sup> Figure 35. Photograph of ornamental terra cotta of the Plant Building courtesy of Richard Gipstein of LLR Architects.

<sup>cvi i</sup> Figure 36. Current photograph of the Harris Building. First floor has been modernized. Image courtesy of Allie Cahoon.

<sup>cviii</sup> Gross, Andrew S. "Cars, Postcards, and Patriotism: Tourism and National Politics in the United States, 1893-1929." *Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association* 1st ser. 40: 77-99. Print. Also see: Stevens, Norman D. *Postcards in the Library: Invaluable Visual Resources*. New York: Haworth, 1995. Print.

<sup>cix</sup> Gross 77-99

- <sup>cx</sup> "Work on the Plant Building Progressing Rapidly." *The Morning Telegraph* [New London] 24 Mar. 1914. Print.
- <sup>cx<sup>i</sup></sup> Figure 37. Halftone image of the Plant Building accompanying, "How the Plant Building Will Appear When Completed." *The Morning Telegraph* [New London] 21 May 1914. Print.
- <sup>cx<sup>ii</sup></sup> "How the Plant Building Will Appear When Completed." 1914
- <sup>cx<sup>iii</sup></sup> "Plant Building Inspection was Held Yesterday." *The Morning Telegraph* [New London] Dec. 1914. Print.
- <sup>cx<sup>iv</sup></sup> Joseph J. Korom, *The American Skyscraper, 1850-1940: A Celebration of Height*. Boston: Branden, 2008. Print.
- <sup>cx<sup>v</sup></sup> "Plant Building Construction Progressing." *The Morning Telegraph* [New London] Apr. 1914. Print.
- <sup>cx<sup>vi</sup></sup> Isenberg 43-77
- <sup>cx<sup>vii</sup></sup> Gross 77-99
- <sup>cx<sup>viii</sup></sup> Isenberg 43-77, and Gross 77-99
- <sup>cx<sup>ix</sup></sup> Figure 38. Parade looking east 1880s
- <sup>cx<sup>x</sup></sup> Figure 39 "New London, Connecticut." 1891. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1884-1921. ProQuest LLC., 2008. Print. Ser.
- <sup>cx<sup>xi</sup></sup> Isenberg 43-77
- <sup>cx<sup>xii</sup></sup> Figure 40. Postcard of the Parade from approximately 1906. Image from web.
- <sup>cx<sup>xiii</sup></sup> Figure 41. Photograph of the Parade. 1900. Image courtesy of New London Landmarks.
- <sup>cx<sup>xiv</sup></sup> Figure 42. Image of the Parade 1914. Image courtesy of New London Landmarks.
- <sup>cx<sup>xv</sup></sup> Isenberg 43
- <sup>cx<sup>xvi</sup></sup> Isenberg 43-77
- <sup>cx<sup>xvii</sup></sup> Isenberg 42
- <sup>cx<sup>xviii</sup></sup> Isenberg 42
- <sup>cx<sup>xix</sup></sup> "Burnham Plan." *Encyclopedia of Chicago*. Web. 03 May 2012.  
<<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/191.html>>.
- <sup>cx<sup>xx</sup></sup> Gross 77-99
- <sup>cx<sup>xxi</sup></sup> Figure 46. Postcard of the Parade facing east. Approximately 1900. Image from web.
- <sup>cx<sup>xxii</sup></sup> Figure 47. Postcard of the Parade facing east. Approximately 1910. Image from web
- <sup>cx<sup>xxiii</sup></sup> Figure 48. Postcard of the Parade facing east. Approximately 1905
- <sup>cx<sup>xxiv</sup></sup> Gross 77-99
- <sup>cx<sup>xxv</sup></sup> Figure 50. Comparison of 1930s postcards from Montgomery, AL and New London, CT. Images from web.
- <sup>cx<sup>xxvi</sup></sup> Isenberg 43-77
- <sup>cx<sup>xxvii</sup></sup> Figure 51. Comparison of State Street (left) and Green Street (right). Image courtesy of Allie Cahoon.
- <sup>cx<sup>xxviii</sup></sup> Figure 52. 1912 Sanborn Map. Illustrated by Allie Cahoon.
- <sup>cx<sup>xxix</sup></sup> Figure 53. Postcard of upper State Street looking west. Approximately 1920. Image from web.
- <sup>cx<sup>l</sup></sup> Figure 54. Postcard of Palmer Brothers' Quilt factory from around 1910 Image from web.
- <sup>cx<sup>li</sup></sup> Figure 55. Postcard of Brainerd and Armstrong Company Silk Mill from around 1910 Image from web.

<sup>cxlii</sup> Figure 57. Photograph of the northern elevation of the Plant Building. courtesy of Richard Gipstein of LLR Architects.

<sup>cxliii</sup> Figure 58. Northwestern corner of the Plant Building. Photo credit: Allie Cahoon

<sup>cxliv</sup> Figure 59. Southwestern corner of the Plant Building Photo credit: Allie Cahoon

<sup>cxlv</sup> Figure 60. Northeastern corner of the Plant Building. Photo credit: Allie Cahoon.

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<sup>cxlvi</sup> Figure 64. Advertisement for the Corset Shop. *The New London Day* [New London] 1915. Print.

<sup>cxlvii</sup> *New London Directory*. New Haven, CT: Price & Lee, 1917. Print.

<sup>cxlviii</sup> "Plant Building Inspection was Held Yesterday." *The Morning Telegraph* [New London] Dec. 1914. Print.

<sup>cxlix</sup> Donnelly, Dudley St. Clair. "Fifth Floor Plan of the Plant Building." *Donnelly's Architectural Plans - Owned by LLR Architects*. Print.

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