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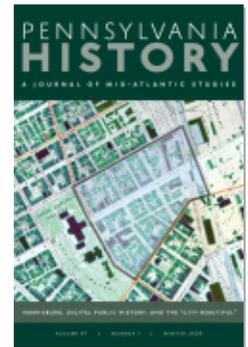
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## Mira Lloyd Dock and the City Beautiful Campaign

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## MIRA LLOYD DOCK AND THE CITY BEAUTIFUL CAMPAIGN

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**ABSTRACT:** Harrisburg voters' support for a bond issue to fund municipal improvements in 1902 is now recognized as a turning point in the City Beautiful movement. Mira Lloyd Dock was among the citizens who led Harrisburg's City Beautiful campaign and consistently advocated the need to clean up the city. While Dock did not have the political clout of her male allies, she served as a bridge leader who recruited women to the cause and engaged in important grassroots work.

**KEYWORDS:** Mira Lloyd Dock, Civic Club of Harrisburg, Harrisburg, City Beautiful Movement, J. Horace McFarland

Harrisburg businessman J. Horace McFarland was jubilant on election night in February 1902. City residents had elected reform candidates to several key positions, including mayor. Best of all, voters had approved a million-dollar bond issue to fund city improvements. Harrisburg residents would soon benefit from water filtration, flood control, paved streets, and an expanded park system. Within a few days of this triumph, McFarland penned a letter to his friend and fellow reformer, Mira Lloyd Dock. "I don't know whether any of us could have accomplished anything had not the Civic Club paved the way. Back of the Civic Club is your own effort and enthusiasm, and I think, when this thing is hunted down to its sources, you will have to stand as the sponsor of the whole movement."<sup>1</sup>

The flurry of reform activity in Harrisburg during 1900–1902 is now recognized as a turning point in the City Beautiful movement. Harrisburg was the first small American city to adopt this particular set of reforms. Thereafter it served as a model for other small and medium-sized communities interested

in municipal cleanup and beautification. Harrisburg's City Beautiful campaign has been well documented by historians.<sup>2</sup> And along with McFarland and Harrisburg mayor Vance McCormick, Dock has been credited as one of the movement's key players. McFarland gained much national recognition as the long-time president of the American Civic Association. McCormick served valuable roles in the national Democratic Party. Dock, however, remained a behind-the-scenes reformer. Who was Mira Lloyd Dock? And how did she become such an effective leader in the City Beautiful movement?

To an extent, reform and public service were part of Dock's family heritage. Both of her grandfathers held local political office and were involved in charitable and civic affairs. Dock's parents, while less politically active than their fathers, were considered "broad [minded] on all subjects and tolerant and charitable towards persons."<sup>3</sup> From her sportsman father and her flower-loving mother, Dock also learned a deep love for the natural world. Trips to the American West heightened her appreciation of nature. A year of study at the University of Michigan added a scientific perspective to Dock's work.

As a professional lecturer in the late 1890s, Dock spoke frequently about the need to clean up Pennsylvania cities and to bring natural beauty into them. Much of Dock's passion for municipal improvement grew out of her own experiences in Harrisburg. As a leader of Harrisburg's Civic Club, she harbored deep concerns about Harrisburg's flood-prone neighborhoods, its unpaved streets, and the garbage and sewage that clogged its waterways. She worried as well about the lack of outdoor recreation available to city residents, particularly those in poorer neighborhoods (fig. 1).

The Civic Club had obtained permission to plant trees along the streets in Harrisburg in 1898 and had set up a summer playground program in 1900. But club members, who were disenfranchised women, failed to interest city politicians in larger municipal improvements. This changed on December 20, 1900, when Dock delivered a lecture, "The City Beautiful," to the Harrisburg Board of Trade at McFarland's invitation.

Dock had recently returned from Europe, where she had studied municipal improvements. Illustrated with stereopticon lantern slides, Dock's lecture left the Board of Trade aghast by contrasting the green and clean cities of Germany and England with Harrisburg's blighted landscape and garbage-strewn riverbank. As members of the city's business and professional elite, the board accepted Dock and McFarland's not-so-subtle challenge: they would now take the issue of municipal improvement to Harrisburg's government.



FIGURE 1. Portrait of Mira Lloyd Dock, ca 1900. From MG-43, Mira Lloyd Dock Papers, Pennsylvania State Archives.

When Harrisburg's elected leaders still proved reluctant, Board of Trade members initiated a grassroots campaign. Central to this crusade was the 1902 ballot initiative dealing with the bond issue. If the measure passed, Harrisburg would borrow money to fund municipal improvements.

As Harrisburg's business leaders drummed up support for the bond issue, Dock once again proved to be an invaluable ally. She delivered a number of municipal improvement lectures during 1901 and early 1902.

Dock mailed literature to city residents and wrote press releases for local newspapers. She also mobilized her fellow Civic Club members, who wrote letters to the editors of city newspapers and visited the local sheriff to explain how the proposed flood-control measures worked. Civic Club members also visited Harrisburg schools to explain the proposals to the children they'd already served in the playground program. These women hoped that enthusiastic children would help working-class fathers see the benefits of clean streets, pure water, and recreational opportunities.

Throughout the City Beautiful campaign, Dock served as a "bridge leader," recruiting women to the cause and performing important tasks at the grassroots level.<sup>4</sup> As a woman, and therefore unable to vote, Dock lacked the overt political power of McFarland and McCormick. Still, as McFarland's 1902 letter indicated, Harrisburg's male leadership fully understood her value to the municipal improvement campaign.

Dock, however, never fully reaped the benefits the City Beautiful movement brought to Harrisburg, nor did she participate in the plan's implementation. She had bought a large property in Fayetteville, Franklin County, in 1900. In 1902 Dock moved into the renovated stone farmhouse and began planting an experimental tree nursery where she could "practice what I've been preaching."<sup>5</sup> Living in Fayetteville enabled Dock to also visit and lecture at the Pennsylvania State Forest Academy at Mont Alto, which opened its doors in 1903.

During the bond issue campaign in 1901, Governor William A. Stone had appointed Dock to the Pennsylvania State Forest Commission. She became the first woman in the world to sit on a public forestry commission, where she served for twelve years. As a commission member Dock not only helped establish the Forest Academy and the Mont Alto Sanatorium, but also worked to reforest Pennsylvania's woodlands and educate the public about conservation.

Dock's role in the City Beautiful movement also propelled her into a leadership role in the Conservation Department for the General Federation of Women's Clubs. Here she continued to advocate for clean water, pure air, and outdoor recreation. Using what she'd learned in Harrisburg, Dock helped other groups develop municipal improvement projects, and she helped pass the federal National Parks Bill in 1916. Her reputation as a "civic leader, conservationist, and activist," which began in Harrisburg, is richly deserved.<sup>6</sup>

## PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY

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### NOTES

1. J. Horace McFarland to Mira Lloyd Dock, Harrisburg, February 21, 1902, Mira Lloyd Dock Papers (hereafter MLDP), Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
2. See Ernest J. Morrison's *J. Horace McFarland: A Thorn for Beauty* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1995); Susan Rimby, *Mira Lloyd Dock and the Progressive Conservation Movement* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012); William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).
3. Mary M. Roberts, "Lavinia Lloyd Dock: Nurse, Feminist, Internationalist," *American Journal of Nursing* 56 (1956): 176.
4. For a more thorough explanation of bridge leadership see Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long? African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
5. Mira Lloyd Dock to Louisa W. Hackney, Fayetteville, PA., May 23, 1925, MLDP.
6. George R. Beyer, *Guide to the State Historical Markers of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2000), 144.