The Urban West at the End of the Frontier

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The West offered an opportunity for urban environmental experimentation. A blending of the latest eastern architectural styles with Spanish and Indian designs held great hope. The missions of the Southwest, the haciendas of Santa Fe, the cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde, and the pueblos of Taos combined beauty with forms that followed functions suited to the climate and the topography. Technological progress in Victorian America freed builders from the height and engineering restraints of ante-bellum days. During a period in which flux and innovation marked architecture, dramatic developments seemed within reach. Just as exciting was the possibility of major breakthroughs in urban planning. A golden opportunity existed to escape from the monotonous grid so prevalent in eastern cities. The hilly surface of the San Francisco Peninsula, the stark plains of Texas, and the foothills of the Colorado Rockies challenged the talents of planners. Few older communities had undertaken concerted efforts to design parks. The showcase projects that existed—Central Park in New York, Prospect Park in Brooklyn, and Fairmont Park in Philadelphia—had recent roots. The wide-open spaces in the West provided cheap land for meaningful and pleasing vistas aimed at enhancing the quality of life. Unfortunately, the same kind of commercial considerations that superseded esthetic factors in the Northeast, Midwest, and South prevailed west of the ninety-fifth meridian. And, no one seemed to care about another problem of everyday life: the condition of the streets. With few ex-
exceptions the parks were undistinguished, the planning poor, the architecture mundane, and the thoroughfares muddy.

Westerners sought to build cities that looked as much as possible like those in the older sections. They wanted to make Galveston another Mobile, Denver another Indianapolis, and San Francisco another New York. To achieve these goals cities used a progression of different architectural configurations that had no relationship to indigenous patterns. No place paid attention to the Indian experience; “Anglos” erected few structures in Texas or Southern California that even casually resembled Spanish architecture. San Antonio, despite its venerable missions, wore what one local writer called an “Anglo-Saxon skirt.” He claimed that the city had “more of the appearance of an old world town than any in the Union—Boston not excepted.” A dramatic negation of native cultural patterns occurred in Los Angeles, which had impressed a visitor in 1879 as “still a mere village,—mostly Mexican.” By the start of the real-estate boom of the mid-eighties, downtown Spring Street looked much the same as College Avenue in Appleton, State Street in Madison, and Wisconsin Avenue in Milwaukee.¹

During their early days, what passed for architecture in western towns was very primitive. Fur traders in Kansas City and St. Joseph lived in log cabins. Some of the first buildings in Leavenworth and Atchison were prefabricated structures transported from the East. Tar-paper shacks and clapboard stores with false fronts were familiar sights on the Great Plains. Tents sufficed in the mining towns; because there was a sudden influx of settlers building materials were scarce, and entrepreneurs were reluctant to invest in permanent construction until economic foundations were stable. A Sacramento leader, recalling gold-rush days, said, “While merchants, bankers, and corporations would hazard nothing in architectural ornament, gamesters were erecting magnificent saloons at enormous cost. A few poles stuck in the ground and covered with a wind-sail constituted the first gaming rendezvous. In the summer the famous ‘Round Tent’ was put up, where every species of gambling was carried on in its most seductive aspect.”² A tent city was of short duration. Sometimes the tents literally folded, swept away by winds; a fire in a tent city was disastrous.

Successful communities gradually acquired more substantial
buildings patterned after those in the East. While single-family dwellings of one and two stories predominated throughout the section, a combination of high land values and topography in San Francisco led to the construction of low wooden row-houses reminiscent of brick ones in Baltimore and Washington. Local versions of Greek Revival and Romantic architecture predominated in Galveston. Two- or three-story buildings made up "business blocks" in western cities that were similar to main thoroughfares in the rest of the country. Some of the more ornate business districts contained arcades. Kansas City, San Francisco, and Portland had several impressive mercantile houses with cast-iron façades fabricated in James Borgardus' New York factory. The large packing houses in Omaha had counterparts in Chicago. Every western town had stone warehouses, pretentious brick hotels, elaborately decorated opera houses, magnificent churches with spires thrust toward the heavens, fine stores, and the beginnings of special sections for the wealthy containing rows of large mansions designed in the latest styles.

Several localities had metropolitan trappings. The five-story Tabor Block in Denver was as impressive as any structure of its kind in the country. Built with money made in the Colorado mineral fields, it reflected the varied sources of commercial architecture in America. So did the three-story Pico House hotel and the neighboring Merced Theater in Los Angeles. Many stately Victorian Gothic mansions graced the bluffs above the Missouri River at Atchison. The business district in Leavenworth reminded visitors of those in northeastern centers. Of particular interest was the "mammoth" three-story Robert Keith & Co. building, which housed a furniture company. In Kansas City three- and four-story buildings of yellow and red brick housed commercial establishments on busy Delaware Street. The block-long Board of Trade symbolized community progress; the Pacific House Hotel hosted a generation of cattlemen, speculators, and gamblers. The city's leading hotel, the Coates House, stood a short distance away on Broadway in the heart of the theatrical district. Along prestigious Ninth Street, northeastern concerns had either built or planned to build gigantic offices; New York Life hired the nationally known firm of McKim, Mead, and White to design a regional headquarters. Because of their newness, many cities were in the forefront of the more eclectic aspects of the Romanesque Revival
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movement, pioneered by Boston’s Henry Hobson Richardson. Portland was so much like a New England city that a critic concluded that the town seemed old even in youth. A spokesman disagreed, stating it had “a metropolitan appearance unlooked for in a place of its size.” While other places made similar claims, there was really only one great western metropolis: San Francisco.

By the last stages of the frontier, San Francisco had numerous ornaments of urban aggrandizement. The imposing Bank of California dominated Market Street; the Lick House enjoyed a reputation throughout the West as a first-rate hotel. The Palace Hotel, constructed in 1876, sprawled over two and a half acres. The luxurious facility had 750 rooms, most of which opened on a large court. An English visitor called it a combination of the Louvre and the Grand Hotel of Paris. Most tourists saw the mansions on Nob Hill, the Seal Rocks from the multi-story Cliff House, and the clogged lanes of Chinatown. A resident said, “The Chinatown dwellings were old business blocks of the early days; but the Chinese had added to them, had rebuilt them, had run out their own balconies and entrances, and had given the quarter that feeling of huddled irregularity which makes all Chinese dwellings fall naturally into pictures.” San Francisco already had a reputation as an interesting place to visit. Unlike its later cosmopolitan image as a “Paris on the Bay,” the view in the eighties was that of an aggressive and flamboyant city; a western Chicago where the rich and poor toiled to create an urban center that evoked brute strength as its finest virtue. A foreigner caught some of the flavor in 1881, when he described the new city hall, considered by residents to rank with the guildhalls of Brussels and Amsterdam, as “an awkward pile of red bricks, with a huge tower somewhere, the whole caravansary having somewhat the appearance of those gigantic breweries to be found in the great cities of the Northeast.”

Western cities had an opportunity to advance the art of urban planning. Attempts at designing communities had started in the colonial period. William Penn produced comprehensive plans for Philadelphia; Williamsburg’s design blended together landscape gardening and Georgian architecture. Later attempts ranged from Thomas Jefferson’s proposals for “checkerboard” towns with squares laid aside for recreational purposes to the systematic plats prepared by paternalistic Boston capitalists for industrial “cities
in nature” throughout New England. Almost always economics dictated the course of events; buildings covered Penn’s projected parks, and Jefferson’s plans never gained popularity. Inadequate zoning thwarted the desires of manufacturers in the Massachusetts mill towns of Lawrence, Lowell, and Holyoke. Williamsburg remained beautiful, because it stayed a small governmental and educational center. More emblematic were the identical grids used by the Illinois Central Railroad for communities along its route. The printed maps contained a blank for the name of the town. Urban planning in America was often done by drunken fur traders over a bottle of whiskey, who might draw a map for St. Louis based on their recollections of their native New Orleans, or by promoters, who crowded as many lots as possible into a small tract in the middle of a vast, uninhabited valley.

Commercial and exploitative reasons had determined the locations of the western frontier cities. Despite promotional claims of “natural advantages,” geographical considerations were secondary. Leadville and Portland were cases in point. The “natural advantage” of Leadville over its rival, Independence, Colorado, was the proximity of mineral deposits. The flow of commerce favored Portland over Vancouver, Washington. Leadville’s mining district had a radius of from fifteen to twenty miles, embracing the west slope of the Park Range and the east slope of the continental ranges. Leadville smelters treated and reduced ore from throughout the area. In addition, the town acted as a distribution point for food, tools, and other necessities. Portland was at the head of a valley 150 miles long in which over half the people in Oregon resided. While the founders of Leadville and Portland had attempted to find the best spots possible, taking under advisement the flatness of the site, the compactness of the underlying soil, the natural drainage, and the accessibility of drinking water, economics had predominated from the first. So, Leadville rested on the sloping and bleak treeless side of an alluvial plain at the foot of the Park Range, almost two miles above sea level, while Portland, high above the Willamette River, perched on basalt rocks covered with soil and trees. Both places had spectacular mountain views. The Colorado Rockies surrounded Leadville; persons in Portland could see the snow-capped summits of the Cascades.

The sites lent themselves to such design concepts as winding
roads, spacious open areas left in a natural state, and buildings set back on large lots to capture the best features of the surroundings. On the stark slopes high in the Rockies and in the hills of the Columbian basin, no planner designed western versions of Williamsburg, fitted the city into the environment, related the architecture to the beauty of the region, or fashioned new concepts of urban living. Both places lost the promise of pioneering new modes of planning. Leadville emerged as an almost rectangular town of small square blocks and undersized lots, split down the middle by a single main thoroughfare. The street plan was much like that of any number of older cities; Leadville appeared misshaped and jammed together. While lost opportunity in Portland did not lead to ugliness, it resulted in an attempt to apply eastern concepts to a western location. With a great deal of determination, the men who platted Portland laid the streets out in a gridiron pattern, running them as straight as possible up the hills, creating a compact community in the wilderness. A map of Portland in 1880 resembled that of Des Moines. The difference was that the Iowa city occupied a relatively flat prairie. Portland retained a high degree of natural beauty, a circumstance that had absolutely no relationship to the planning process. A lack of vision prevented a different course.

Several western cities were on level land far removed from hills, mountains, and lush vegetation. All owed their existence to entrepreneurs who had overcome many disadvantages. The hard give-and-take and high risks of town promotion had made major design expenditures impractical; survival took precedence over esthetic considerations. As might have been expected, none of the places emerged with imaginative, well-formulated, or interesting plats. Austin was on the Colorado River in country without marshes, ponds, or lakes. The town consisted entirely of rectangular blocks, with the principal streets running south toward the river. Houston’s features were just as pedestrian. Dallas, by the Trinity River, on flat and sloping prairie, had an irregular layout because of new subdivisions built in the 1870s after the coming of the railroad. Prior to that the grid was a conventional one adjacent to the river. The opposite happened in San Antonio. “Although the modern business blocks and fine residences, with all their adjuncts in the way of the conveniences of civilization so largely predominate,” stated an observer, “yet the
ancient looking houses here and there, the crooked streets and alleys, the plazas, the relics of an older and altogether different dynasty—lend the city a venerable air that is particularly pleasing to the visitor's eye so used to straight, wide streets and compact blocks laid out in the mathematical precision of a chess board."

The inconsistent features of the old Spanish districts contrasted with the American sections laid out in gridiron fashion.

Lincoln had an uninviting location, which the founders failed to improve. Only the grounds of various state agencies interfered with the gridiron street arrangement. Topeka had an even squarer lineament, cut by the Kansas River. Although a booster declared that the city stood "upon high ground, commanding a fine view of some of the most charming prairie-landscape scenery of the West," the site, near the edge of the tree line, was bleak and generally flat. Denver, with an elevation varying 125 feet from the lowest to highest points, which belied promotional claims that it occupied a "series of plateaus," had a commonplace outline. Sacramento and Oakland had unexceptional plans, but they seemed almost like masterpieces of planning when compared to Stockton. The town was absolutely square, eleven blocks by eleven blocks, for a total of 122 blocks. Only the sloughs cut through the design. Seldom had the art of city planning fallen to as low a level. While Stockton was not altogether characteristic, the lackluster design further indicated the failure of westerners to do much more than the obvious in placing towns on level ground.

A number of frontier communities presented interesting planning possibilities. Galveston's island was low and almost level, being three to nine feet above sea level. Fine, sandy soil posed few construction problems. The loess prairie at Omaha rose gently away from the Missouri River bottom. Hills surrounded Atchison, transversed from west to east by White Clay Creek. Leavenworth, St. Joseph, and Kansas City were on tree-covered bluffs high above the Missouri River. Lawrence was in a wooded area in the Kansas River valley, at its juncture with the Wakarusa valley. Inside the city, Mount Oread rose 175 feet. The Wasatch Mountains towered above Salt Lake City. Mountainous Virginia City had an undulating surface. Luxuriant valleys set San Jose and Los Angeles apart from neighbors with fewer blessings.

Unfortunately, the quality of the planning had little relationship to location. Galveston, despite the curve of Galveston Island,
had an almost square grid. Straight streets and rectangular blocks stretched away from the river at Omaha. Railroad tracks and factories occupied the bottom lands; then came the downtown, and farther to the west most of the dwellings. In Atchison, which featured a grid, the main effort was to reduce grades and to flatten the White Clay Creek valley. Kansas City faced a more complex problem; the bluff dropped sharply to the bottoms from the hilly central business district. Land clearance projects facilitated the platting of a regular gridiron; earth machines made straight cuts through the bluff. Leavenworth and St. Joseph had streets that were as straight as possible, given the topography. At Lawrence, city fathers used a square plat with rather large rectangular blocks. Streets ran straight up precipitous Mount Oread. Salt Lake City had what an official called "an irregular and broad-faced L" design, with large square blocks and very wide streets. Virginia City sprawled across Mount Davidson in no particular order. San Jose and Los Angeles had comparatively square contours.

San Francisco, which contained hills over four hundred feet in height, personified the failings of urban planning in the West. So intent were the builders on developing a square design that they ran streets up and down Telegraph and Nob hills with no regard to the grades, creating serious access difficulties for heavy vehicles. A New England tourist observed, "The early comers, having begun wrongly on the American straight line and square system of laying out the city, are tugging away at these hills with tireless energy, to reduce the streets to a grade that man and horse can ascend and descend without double collar and breeching help; but there is work in it for many a generation to come. They might have better accepted the situation at the first, made Nature engineer and architect in chief, and circled the hills with their streets and buildings, instead of undertaking to go up and then through them. Such a flank attack would have been more successful and economical, and given them a vastly more picturesque city. Boston had the advantage of cow-paths to establish its streets by; but no estray cow ever visited these virgin sand-hills of San Francisco, as innocent of verdure as a babe of sorrow or vice." A local observer admitted, "The hills are steep beyond conception. Where Vallejo street ran up Russian Hill it progressed for four blocks by regular steps like a flight of stairs. It is unnecessary to say that no teams ever came up this street or any other like it, and grass grew long
among the paving stones until the Italians who live thereabouts took advantage of this herbage to pasture a cow or two. At the end of four blocks, the pavers had given it up and the last stage to the summit was a winding path. In the thirty years prior to 1880 the city spent $30,000,000 to level sand dunes and gullies. The projects involved the filling in of over three hundred acres of San Francisco Bay.

The cities that blossomed in the eighties repeated the earlier design mistakes. At Tacoma a subsidiary land company of the Northern Pacific Railroad, which hired landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted to formulate plans and then ignored his proposals, attained little success in trying to achieve orderly settlement. Rudyard Kipling, after visiting Tacoma in 1889, wrote, "The town was thrown like a broken set of dominoes over all . . . . hotels with Turkish mosque trinketry on their shameless tops, and the pine stumps at their very doors . . . houses built in imitation of the ones on Nob Hill, San Francisco—after the Dutch fashion." Seattle went a step further and actually used hydraulic mining machines to regrade hills in order to make conventional square blocks. An even more bizarre failure occurred in the Los Angeles area, where developers deliberately followed a policy of real-estate decentralization intended to bring residential and commercial dispersal. The aim was to avoid congestion and to create a metropolis that blended together the best features of urban and rural life. The result was totally uncoordinated growth after idealism vanished and economic values became paramount.

Most of the western frontier cities did an inadequate job of providing parks, places of amusement, and grounds for leisure activities. Private interests often furnished the last two: Dallas had a forty-acre race track, and the Winter Palace amusement center operated in Galveston. Parks, almost always under public control, were a relatively new innovation in the United States. Several colonial cities, in particular Philadelphia and Boston, had parks; the original plans for Washington had called for landscaped malls. Praised at the time, they soon lost their original forms. Buildings occupied land originally set aside for recreation in Philadelphia, cows grazed on the Boston Common, and real-estate interests thwarted the Washington proposals. In the 1830s and 1840s four factors stimulated renewed interest in parks. First, Baron Von Haussman's beautification of Paris through boulevards
and park squares captured world attention. Second, cemeteries outside northeastern metropolises—Philadelphia's Laurel Hill, New York's Greenward, and Boston's Mount Auburn—featured landscape gardening, mowed lawns, and winding roads. These "cities of the dead" became tourist attractions and stimulated interest in similar projects for the living. Third, in an era before the acceptance of the germ theory of disease, anticontagionist medical authorities argued that parks purified the air by acting as "lungs" in congested sections. Fourth, popular writers, capitalizing on a nostalgia for the country shared by many city residents, argued that parks recaptured rural values in an urban setting.

In the 1850s the "City Beautiful" aspects of the park movement in the United States began with a prize competition to design Central Park in New York. The co-winner, Frederick Law Olmsted, directed construction and afterwards became the recognized national expert on park design. Projects that he directed in the 1870s, including Back Bay Park in Boston and Fairmont Park in Philadelphia, added to his reputation and generated interest in a number of other cities. By 1880 Baltimore and Washington had fine park systems; Detroit and Milwaukee had extensive plans. While most people recognized the need for parks, obtaining them was another matter: costs for land, plans, and beautification ran high, usually requiring the expenditure of tax dollars or the issuance of city bonds. Many medium-sized communities had no parks. Among these were Gloucester, Woonsocket, and Scranton in the Northeast; Alexandria, Norfolk, and Chattanooga in the South; and Fort Wayne, Youngstown, and Oshkosh in the Midwest. Numerous other places had inadequate facilities: Reading had a 5-acre unimproved tract, Covington a small grass plot, and Dubuque two squares covered with shade trees. In the West the frontier cities did little better or worse than their older counterparts.14

There were no parks in Atchison, Leadville, and Houston; several other places had hardly any worthy of the name. Austin's system consisted of four 1.7-acre plots and 23-acre Pease Park. They remained in a natural state; the city council balked at appropriating money for maintenance. Dallas had some small public picnic grounds. Galveston boasted 15 acres of squares regulated by the three aldermen of the Committee on Public Squares and Esplanades. Officials at Lincoln expended between
$50 and $100 per year on a 10-acre tract. Seventy-four acres designated as park land in Lawrence remained unimproved. The fencing of 6 acres donated at St. Joseph had cost about $200. Denver residents generally avoided two small untended spaces. Each of the seven designated parks in Stockton were 300 feet square. Los Angeles, with 6 acres of municipal pleasure grounds valued at $800, and Oakland, which had six squares “visited very little,” claimed that numerous attractive lawns and gardens made any further action unnecessary. The mayor of Los Angeles said, “Our city is 6 miles square, contains 10,000 acres of orchards and vineyards, which answer for public parks.” An Oakland official commented, “There are no large parks in Oakland, and, as most of the houses are surrounded by gardens, their want is not felt to any appreciable extent.” While the arrangements may have dissatisfied many plain people—few probably found much recreational enjoyment looking at vineyards owned by farmers or the lawns of the wealthy—they were better than those in Kansas City. There, what had been done was as good as nothing at all. A bureaucrat admitted, “The city has one small park or block of ground, containing 2.11 acres, used originally for a cemetery, of which it retains possession from the fact of its still containing the remains of persons buried therein. There is no attempt at maintenance except mowing the grass.” Families picnicked and little children played games among the gravestones.

A number of frontier communities had better than average parks. Salt Lake City had four squares in different parts of town. Brigham Young reserved three squares in the original plat; officials later purchased another for $5,000. Fences, trees, and walks cost $10,000. Fifty-acre San Pedro Park was the largest of three in San Antonio. At Portland, a 40-acre $32,000 park, half a mile away from town on high rolling hills covered by fir and dogwood trees, annually attracted more than 35,000 patrons. Professional engineers planned Omaha’s Hanscom Park. Sacramento and Leavenworth used grounds belonging to and maintained by other public agencies. The state of California owned Capitol Park in Sacramento, which contained 30 acres of terraced lawns, shrubbery, patent-stone walks, and shade trees. At Leavenworth the United States Army allowed access to the military reservation. “It is provided with graded and public ways, with romantic drives, with smooth grass plots, and shady and cleanly kept ground,”
Leavenworth's mayor stated. "It is a much finer, better, and far more extensive park and pleasure-ground than the municipality could afford to maintain, and being within 15 minutes' walk of the center of the city, it completely supplies the demand for public pleasure-grounds, and obviates the necessity of such a place maintained by the city."

The most magnificent parks in the West were in San Francisco. Among them was the nationally known Golden Gate Park of 1,050 acres, which was three miles long and half a mile wide. It had many roads and foot paths, plus thick foliage and thousands of trees not indigenous to the San Francisco Peninsula. The attendance figures for 1879 attested to the park's wide use; 748,000 persons entered in carriages, 826,000 on foot, and 35,000 on horseback. On an average, every San Francisco resident visited the grounds at least six times annually—a tribute to a lovely facility that remained in the ensuing decades a magnificent example of the better aspects of park planning.15

In keeping with national norms, many cities had undertaken concerted efforts to beautify their thoroughfares. Dallas fostered tree planting by paying a two dollar bounty for any that reached two years of age. Authorities in Houston advocated planting, leaving the matter to "individual taste." Galveston did better—the municipality set saplings along most streets. The city of Lincoln planted trees, requiring that lot holders pay all the expenses. Omaha requested citizens to place box elders, soft maples, or other rapidly growing species in front of houses. St. Joseph provided shade trees for the "better" districts; Kansas City placed maples and elms on "improved" property. Measures enacted in the late 1860s in Topeka promoted the planting of shade trees, with the aim of creating "a city in a forest." City ordinances in Salt Lake City required the placing of houses twenty feet back from the front line of lots, the intervening space designed for trees and shrubbery. In Denver abutters had almost universally put trees in front of their premises. Oakland authorities planted trees along most major avenues. Most homes in Stockton had some foliage. Portland encouraged trees; San Francisco discouraged them. An official in the California city reported, "The climate here is such that sunshine is preferable to shade, and, owing to the strong and continuous winds from the ocean, it is difficult to keep growing trees in an upright position." Trees failed to take
root in Leadville and Virginia City. Where practical, city govern­ments nurtured the planting of trees for shade and beauty, usually asking householders to accomplish the task at their own volition.\textsuperscript{16}

The streets beneath the mulberries, elms, maples, and oaks were uninviting. In 1880 few western cities had more than a small percentage of paved streets; officials made no attempt to improve upon eastern practices. In Austin a stretch of a main artery, Congress Avenue, had a broken stone finish. The other 72 miles of streets remained untreated on the grounds that the “mostly gravel” soil negated the necessity for improvements. “The streets become muddy under heavy rains,” an observer contended, “but a few days of sun and wind restore them to good condition.” Lincoln and Houston had no pavement at all. A Houston editor said that black mud was “a proverb in the mouths of people who stop in or pass through the city’s precincts.” Omaha attempted to improve only 0.4 of a mile out of 118 miles of roadways. During rainy periods the streets became virtually impassable. “Generally the water wanders around at its own sweet will,” a functionary admitted, adding that the municipality planned to concentrate efforts on the construction of elevated wooden sidewalks. The 58 miles of Lawrence’s streets were unpaved except for 1 mile surfaced with a combination of wood and broken stone. None of Denver’s 200 miles of streets had any pavement. Kansas City, which had 89 miles of roadways, had 16.4 miles coated with broken stone and 1,500 linear feet surfaced with stone blocks. Work gangs in Leadville threw slag on muddy thoroughfares and hammered sidewalks out of worn-out pit timbers. None of the uniformly 137-foot wide streets in Salt Lake City received any treatment. Stock­ton’s municipal force regularly shoveled fresh gravel on 1 out of 99 miles of roads. Los Angeles used broken stone on approximately 10 percent of 200 miles of streets, leaving the rest in a natural state. San Francisco spent an estimated $15,000,000 between 1856 and 1880 constructing 500 miles of streets. Cobblestones covered 20 miles, stone brick 20, asphalt 5, wood 31, and broken stones 57.\textsuperscript{17}

No one knew what substances worked the best; all existing types had drawbacks relating to cost, durability, traction, and cleanliness. Only a small percentage of American streets had any veneer other than gravel or broken stones. Many places experimented with entirely paved surfaces, including the city of Port­land. There, over $100,000 expended in 1879 on macadam, con-
sisting of broken stones cemented by bituminous material, went for naught. It melted on hot days and wore out in less than a year. Technology was not advanced enough to solve such problems, and the streets of Portland and other western towns continued to become quagmires when it rained and dusty traps when it did not.\textsuperscript{18} 

The urban frontier West failed to lead the nation in creating architectural masterpieces, designing cities, laying out parks, or building streets. Of course, not every town had as poorly tended thoroughfares as Omaha, as tedious a plat as Stockton, as undistinguished buildings as Los Angeles, and as inadequate parks as Kansas City. Outstanding mansions graced Atchison. A beautiful natural setting overcame design vagaries at San Jose. The parks of San Francisco were of a distinguished character. Portland made commendable attempts to improve streets. Yet there was no new society. The western towns borrowed basic concepts from the East, whether or not they suited the environment.