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THE CHIPPEWA VALLEY HISTORICAL PAGEANT:
THE STORY OF *PROGRESSIVISM* IN EAU CLAIRE, WISCONSIN

Senior Thesis
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ABSTRACT

In 1921, Eau Claire put on a production of the *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant*. This pageant, however, was more than just a nice play on a summer evening, it was one of many across the nation, all part of the historical pageantry movement. Historical pageantry was an important aspect of community-based progressive reform, representing the culmination of many social movements of the period, including the city beautiful movement and the playground movement. In these productions, communities reflected upon their past, projected a common identity, and looked with enthusiasm upon their future. Thus, not only does this pageant tell the story of Eau Claire's past, but the story of *progressivism* in the community. This paper examines the impact of the progressive movement in Eau Claire through the lens of the historical pageantry movement and its preceding progressive movements and ideals.

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“The Old Ways and the New”¹

James B. Holden

We had no policeman to walk his beat,
No poles nor wires strung along the street.
And the hello girl was never known
To ring us up on the telephone.

But things have changed from the old to the new,
We have electricity and gas and telephone too.
We have beautiful buildings and a system complete
Of sewer and water on every street.

We have beautiful homes all modern to date,
We have bridges and schools the best in the State.
We have carriages galore and rubber-tire wheels
And our city is flooded with automobiles.

We have beautiful parks of woodland dreams.
A driveway composed of forests and streams.
We have an ideal City all modern and neat.
And a beautiful “Whiteway” to light up our street.

We have railroad and street cars, we have fact too.
We have all kinds of business a man can pursue.
We have watched it progressing it’s with us at last
And the lumbering Industry is a thing of the past.

(...)

We have gathered once more in memory of the past
And for some of us here it may be the last.
Like the dear ones gone at the call of God’s Will
And are resting in peace in their homes on the hill.

So while we are here let us talk of the days
How we passed our young lives in the old-fashioned ways.
Let us join heart and hand, lets be jolly and merry.
We don’t have to holler “Oh Gans bring over the Ferry.”

¹ James B. Holden, “The Old Ways and the New,” in Old Settler’s Association Annual Banquet Pamphlets, 1915. Box 3, Folder 6. William W. Bartlett Collection, 1821-1934, 1944-1962. Eau Claire Mss BY. Special Collections & Archives. McIntyre Library. University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire. Eau Claire, WI.

Note: This poem was composed by an Eau Claire citizen in 1915 for the Eau Claire Old Settler’s Society annual banquet.

Introduction

On a warm summer's night in 1921, thousands of Chippewa Valley citizens gathered in Driving Park downtown Eau Claire to watch the most anticipated community event Eau Claire had ever seen, the first ever *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant*. As the curtain opened to a darkened stage that evening, months of preparation and the efforts of over 2,000 participants came to life. The orator boasted, "O people of the Chippewa Valley! It is good for us to look back to gather upon our past. What heritage is ours!"² The scenes that followed depicted the stories of the Chippewa Valley. As fairies danced across the stage and old Indian chiefs roamed the land, the people of the Chippewa Valley asserted their history as they saw it in the midst of the Progressive Era.

Nearly ninety years later, however, the Chippewa Valley has evolved from the community it was that 1921 summer night. Little remains of this once important event, leaving many questions unanswered. Why was this pageant so important to the Chippewa Valley during this time? What does this event say about the Chippewa Valley in 1921? Where did the community derive their ideas of public history?

This paper attempts to answer these questions, examining the Eau Claire community through the lens of historical pageantry. In actuality, the *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant* was part of growing civic trend. Communities, from New York City to San Francisco, staged such events, which combined forms of recreation, entertainment, and culture. However,

² *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant*, program at Driving Park (Eau Claire, WI: Eau Claire Pageant Committee, 1921).

pageantry was much more than an enjoyable play on a summer evening. Between fanciful interludes and exaggerated dramatic themes, pageants were rich with underlying messages, historical imagery, and social significance.

Historical pageantry is part of the larger story of the progressive movement.³ The historical pageantry movement, as it is called, was the product of various progressive ideals aimed at unifying, culturalizing, and affirming American communities. According to David Glassberg, historian and foremost authority on the historical pageantry movement, pageantry is an important aspect of American culture because it has “contributed to our sense of identity and direction” within our communities in the midst of a massive social transformation.⁴ A later movement within *progressivism*, historical pageantry often represented the culmination of progressive reform efforts within communities.

Today, however, historical pageantry is a neglected subject within the scholarship of history. While pageants like the *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant* were common, very few people have studied them or even know of their existence. Yet, not only do pageants reveal a great deal about local history, but about the way in which these communities dealt with societal transformation within the Progressive Era.⁵

Thus, the *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant* represents something much larger than itself. This event marks the peak of an important economic and social transition within the

³ Lasting roughly from the 1890s through the 1920s, the progressive movement was a broad political and social movement, founded many of the basic ideals which later promoted the pageantry movement. *Progressivism* encouraged the transformation of society through massive reform brought about through various civic programs. Thus, the basis of the historical pageantry movement relies heavily on progressive ideals.

⁴ David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 1.

⁵ David Glassberg, “American Civic Pageantry and the Image of the Community, 1900-1930” (PhD diss., John Hopkins University, 1981), 2.

community. A look into the history of the town provides a tangible link from the town's beginnings as a logging center to a progressive community. The past reveals a place faced with the daunting task of diversifying a single-source economy, managing a changing population, and asserting itself as a viable center of commerce and culture within the State of Wisconsin. The town faced these challenges with ingenuity and enthusiasm, utilizing the ideals of the progressive movement. The *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant* portrays this past while representing the culmination of this process, signifying a time when the community felt confident enough to come together and recall a common history and to project a unified vision of their future.

Background of Eau Claire: Economic Transition

The City of Eau Claire is located in the west-central part of Wisconsin, at the confluence of the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers. The region was originally home to the Chippewa, an Indian tribe that occupied a vast area in the Great Lakes region.⁶ With the arrival of the French in the eighteenth century, the area became a popular spot for fur trading. From the 1830s to the 1850s, the French, with the help of the Chippewa, exhausted the region of most of its wild game.⁷

As wild game dwindled and westward expansion continued, the new settlers to the region turned to logging as a primary means of income. The Chippewa Valley was a prime spot for logging operations due to its location near many rivers and its abundance of timber. In 1845, two

⁶ The Chippewa are also known as the Ojibwa (or Ojibwe). The name, Chippewa, is a mispronunciation of their original name by early English speaking settlers to northern Wisconsin. It from this, that the region derived its name. Source: William W. Bartlett, *History, Tradition and Adventure in the Chippewa Valley* (Chippewa Falls: The Chippewa Printery, 1929), 1.

⁷ Lois Barland, *Sawdust City: A History of Eau Claire, Wisconsin from Earliest Times to 1910* (Stevens Point: Worzalla Publishing, Co., 1960), 1.

settlers, Stephen S. McCann and Jeremiah C. Thomas, constructed a dam just north of the confluence of the Eau Claire and Chippewa River. This was the first step towards large-scale lumbering productions in the area. By 1855, 100 residents lived in the region, most of them working for early lumber barons as mill hands.⁸

During the 1850s, 60s, and 70s, logging companies, such as the Eau Claire Lumber Company and the Daniel Shaw Lumber Company moved into the region. As the logging industry continued to rise, so did the population. By 1880, the City of Eau Claire boasted nine logging companies.⁹ That same year, the city directory recorded a population of over 10,000 inhabitants.¹⁰ Over the next decade, settlers continued to flood into the region. Some were American born from New England, while a sizeable portion emigrated from regions of northern Europe—Ireland, Germany, Norway and Sweden—hoping to take advantage of the opportunities created from logging.¹¹

By 1885, at the peak of Eau Claire's lumber business, the city reached a population of 22,542, becoming one of Wisconsin's fastest growing cities. Newspaper articles and other writings of the period expound on the progress and enthusiasm that surrounded the city, gushing about its premier education system, newly constructed railroad, extensive public utilities, and rising land values. The introduction of the 1885 city directory boasted of its progress:

Eau Claire is a rapidly growing, prosperous, enterprising city... There is no point in the State of Wisconsin that has been so rapidly increasing in wealth within the past ten years as this city... Its numerous manufacturing establishments, which it comprises in the

⁸ Barland, *Sawdust City*, 9.

⁹ Dale Peterson, "Lumbering on the Chippewa: The Eau Claire Area, 1845-1885" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1970), 564.

¹⁰ *Eau Claire City Directory, 1880* (Milwaukee: William Hogg, 1880), 15.

¹¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Census of Population, 1880* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 535.

manufacture of lumber, flour, paper, furniture, wagons, carriages, and machinery amply attest its prominence and headway as a progressive section.¹²

However, even as the city celebrated, fears were beginning to rise among the lumber industry regarding its capacity for sustainability. Historical documents suggest that by 1882 lumber companies had begun speculating whether the timber supply would last until 1890.¹³ By the time the 1885 city directory went to press, the lumber industry was facing serious problems as lumber revenues plummeted to record lows.¹⁴ For the rest of the community, this meant lower wages, massive unemployment, and non-lumber business failures.¹⁵

This problem was not confined to Eau Claire. At the same time, other lumber communities scattered across the state were dealing with similar problems. Many of these towns, such as Star Lake, March Rapids, and Porter's Mills (located just south of Eau Claire), found themselves unable to recover from the timber famine and vanished overnight.¹⁶ To make matters worse, an economic depression, beginning in 1893, compounded these economic woes, leaving many concerned Eau Claire citizens to wonder if the community would burn out with the lumber industry.¹⁷

Fortunately, Eau Claire was able to overcome this most difficult time. From 1890 into the 1920s, the economy transformed itself from an economy based on a primary extractive industry to a diversified manufacturing industry. It did this with the help of the many lumber related industries that grew out of the fledging lumber industry. Many companies, such as McDonough

¹² *Eau Claire City Directory, 1885* (Milwaukee: William Hogg, 1885), 16.

¹³ Peterson, "Lumbering on the Chippewa," 583-589.

¹⁴ Peterson, "Lumbering on the Chippewa," 705.

¹⁵ Robert C. Nesbit, *Wisconsin: A History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), 310.

¹⁶ Randall E. Rohe, *Ghosts of the Forest: Vanished Lumber Towns of Wisconsin, vol. 1* (Wisconsin Rapids: The Print Shop, 2002), 3.

¹⁷ Between 1885 and 1900, the city lost 20% of its total population. Source: Mary Taylor, *Intensive Historic/Architectural Survey to the City of Eau Claire, WI* (Eau Claire: The City of Eau Claire, 1983), 8.

Mann Machinists, Phoenix Man Furniture, Dells Pulp and Paper Company, and Linderman Box and Veneer Company, came in to take advantage of the remaining lumber resources between the 1880s and 1890s.¹⁸ These industries provided a smoother transition between economic bases by giving the community more time to recover and avoiding the panic felt among other lumber-based towns.

As the citizens slowly grew in confidence, other industries soon came to the region. From 1890 into the first few decades of the twentieth century, Eau Claire witnessed an explosion of business and industry. In 1905, the Northwest Steel and Iron Works Company decided to invest in the city, and set up a factory producing small home appliances. A few years later, the Gillette Safety Tire Company also came; producing tires for the burgeoning automobile market, and quickly became the largest employer in the city.¹⁹ Other industries, such as the Libby McNeil and Libby Company, Lange Canning, Johnson Printing, and the Eau Claire Sand and Gravel Company also brought in new types of business.²⁰ In 1909, the city also became a pioneer for the improvement of education with the establishment of a new State Normal School for teachers.²¹ By the end of the decade, Eau Claire emerged as a regional center of Northwest Wisconsin, providing trade and service, government, and educational facilities for the surrounding rural counties.²²

¹⁸ Taylor, *Intensive Historic/Architectural Survey*, 8.

¹⁹ Taylor, *Intensive Historic/Architectural Survey*, 19-20.

Note: The Gillette Safety Tire Company changed its name to Uniroyal, Inc. in 1966. The plant closed in 1991. The Northwest Steel and Iron Works is now National Presto Industries. The company still operates in the Chippewa Valley producing pressure cookers.

²⁰ Lois Barland, *The Rivers Flow On: A Record of Eau Claire, Wisconsin from 1910-1960* (Stevens Point: Worzalla Publishing, Co., 1965), 280-306.

²¹ Barland, *The Rivers Flow On*, 324.

²² In 1910, Eau Claire became the first city in the State of Wisconsin to adopt the commission form of government. This idea was popularized by progressive reformers (such as La Follette) as

This change, from a small logging town to a diversified regional center is an important aspect of Eau Claire's history, affecting the community economically, politically, and socially for decades to come. This idea is still evident in the plot of the *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant* almost fifteen years later, an aspect discussed later in this paper. Most importantly, however, this transition occurred just as *progressivism* was beginning to take hold of the United States. Eau Claire's situation of the past twenty years mirrored the transition occurring throughout the rest of the country, and, as a result, helped to pave the way for the city's involvement in the many national, state, and local progressive reforms of the Progressive Era.

Background of *Progressivism*

Progressivism was a national movement that emerged from a climate of political and social upheaval of the late nineteenth century. According to the progressives, the social and economic changes brought about by the Gilded Age had caused a collapse of society—morally, politically, and economically.²³ Historians typically cite three main factors—industrialization, massive immigration, and urban growth—as the cause of this shift. Still a relatively young nation, the country, just as in Eau Claire, found itself in a situation of increasing economic disparity and social upheaval. A four year depression, beginning in 1893, only exaggerated these

an alternative to the “politically tainted” mayor-council form of government. Source: Taylor, *Intensive Historic/Architectural Survey*, 29.

²³ The Gilded Age refers to the period in United States history, before the Progressive Era, from Reconstruction (1877) to the 1890s. This period is characterized by an immense polarization of wealth and social class through the expansion of industry and population growth. Source: Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 1-10.

problems. Citizens, looking for a change, took this as a sign; the state of the nation required massive national reform.²⁴

Historians continually dispute the details of the development of *progressivism* and its purpose because of its extremely varied nature. Self-identified progressives came from all walks of life—politicians, social workers, scientists, clergymen, artists, businessmen, and more—each with their own agenda for reform.²⁵ Combining elements of socialism, utopianism, the Social Gospel, Social Darwinism, and other social and political idealisms, *progressivism* sought change through a variety of political agendas and sweeping social programs.

Adherents to *progressivism* did away with the typical American standard of Jeffersonian individualism, replacing this idea with a newfound belief in each person’s “collective ability” to reorganize his or her own situation and forge a new destiny. According to Progressive Era historian, Arthur Erich, “progress... was less a philosophic creed or act of faith than a concrete reality that might be speeded by man’s cooperation and determination.”²⁶

By the turn of the century, the United States found itself a very different nation than the one it had been ten years earlier. The economy had improved beyond expectation after a four year depression, and, once again, began experiencing a renewed period of material and cultural expansion.²⁷ As optimism in the human condition grew, so did industrial and technological development, the importance of the city, fair and legitimate governments, social welfare

²⁴ Lewis L. Gould, “Introduction: The Progressive Era,” In *The Progressive Era*, ed. Lewis L. Gould (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1974), 1.

²⁵ Arthur A. Erich, Jr., *Progressivism in America: A Study of the Era from Theodore Roosevelt to Woodrow Wilson* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974), 10.

²⁶ Erich, *Progressivism in America*, 6.

²⁷ Erich, *Progressivism in America*, 6.

programs, and the importance of education and culture.²⁸ These were all important aspects of the twentieth century, and progressives championed these causes with a series of wide-ranging movements. These movements provoked new thinking and incited action on a national, state, and local scale.

Robert M. La Follette, Sr., and the “Wisconsin Idea”

Another reason for Eau Claire’s initial progressive tendencies can be attributed to the fact that the city resided in a leading progressive state. From 1900 to 1915, progressive politicians carried the state, enacting groundbreaking progressive reforms to combat the difficult problems of the period. Historians generally site one man, Robert M. La Follette, Sr., as the most influential progressive reformer in Wisconsin history. Serving as Wisconsin’s governor from 1900 to 1906 and as a Wisconsin senator from 1906 to 1925, La Follette pushed his broad reform agenda, titled the “Wisconsin Idea,” making Wisconsin a national model for comprehensive progressive reform.²⁹

The “Wisconsin Idea,” deemed “the most comprehensive reform program in the history of American State government down to 1933,” is one of the most wide-reaching reform programs enacted by a single politician to-date.³⁰ While a single definition is difficult to concoct, most simply, La Follette’s “Wisconsin Idea” hoped to restructure government so it could better

²⁸ Steven J. Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 7.

²⁹ In the 1912 Presidential Election he ran as a Republican candidate, but was beat out by William Howard Taft.

³⁰ Erich, *Progressivism in America*, 109-110.

respond to the needs and hopes of its citizens.³¹ Reaching into almost all areas of government, his program is most known for its attempts to control the unfair influence of party machines and corporations for the sake of the common man. Some of its other reforms include the Railroad Rate Commission, heavier corporation taxes, state income taxes, the Civil Service Act, conservation acts, anti-lobbying laws, and state banking measures.³²

In recent years, however, other historians have suggested that the “Wisconsin Idea’s” true strength lies in its unprecedented reliance on education. During this time, La Follette looked outside of government, relying on the ideas of experts from the University of Wisconsin. This was a groundbreaking idea, joining both fact and theory with the opportunity to test the findings; in other words, joining the “seminar with the soil.”³³ Later on, this idea of “looking outward” for solutions became an important precedent within community-based social reforms, such as the historical pageantry movement.

Wisconsin, a largely Republican state, supported these reforms with little opposition. The state was particularly susceptible to progressive reform due to its large population of German immigrants, who looked to Germany, a highly liberal nation, for many of their ideas of reform. According to writer, Fred Howe, La Follette was “doing for America what Germany is doing for the world. It is an experiment station in politics, in social and industrial legislation, in the democratization of science and higher education.”³⁴

³¹ Edward N. Doan, *The La Follettes and the Wisconsin Idea* (New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1947), 11.

³² Erich, *Progressivism in America*, 109-110.

³³ Doan, *The La Follettes*, 15.

³⁴ Erich, *Progressivism in America*, 110.

His reforms altered the political, economic, and social lives of every single citizen in the state, and the citizens of Eau Claire were no exception.³⁵ While the economic situation of the past several decades already made the community an easy target for progressive ideals, its high percentage of German immigrants, close proximity to the metropolis of Minneapolis-St. Paul, and situation as Wisconsin's eighth largest city also helped to spur progressive action.³⁶

Voting records demonstrate that Eau Claire was overwhelmingly in support of La Follette. The *Eau Claire Free Press* covered the 1900 governor election in the city. Upon the announcement of La Follette's win, the front page of the newspaper boasted: "VICTORY: Democrats do not get a single office in the county, Entire Republican Ticket from the top to the bottom is elected." Throughout Eau Claire, La Follette won over twice as many votes as his Democratic challenger, Louis Bohmrich.³⁷ These figures show Eau Claire's willingness to accept change, hoping that La Follette and his program of *progressivism* would help them in their struggle to regain their community. However, even before La Follette's win, evidence of local progressive reform appears in the city. These movements allowed Eau Claire to enact progressive ideals within their own community, eventually leading to the *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant* with the historical pageantry movement.

Progressivism in the Community

³⁵ Robert S. Maxwell, *La Follette and the Rise of the Progressives in Wisconsin* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1956), 5.

³⁶ *The Blue Book of the State of Wisconsin, 1899*, Compiled by William H. Froehlich, Secretary of State (Milwaukee: Northwestern Litho Co., 1899), 485-486.

Note: Wisconsin's seven largest cities as of 1895, from highest population to lowest: Milwaukee, La Crosse, Oshkosh, Superior, Racine, Sheboygan, and Green Bay.

³⁷ *Eau Claire Free Press*, November 8, 1900.

Note: La Follette received 2,454 votes, while Bohmrich received only 1,129.

While the progressive movement played out on a national and state scale, it also grew roots within local communities around the nation. After all, much of the progressive movement was strongly embedded in the rejuvenation of the community.³⁸ Communities, like Eau Claire, saw the progressive movement as a way to promote change on a local level, based on their individual values, problems, and goals, while at the same time, using the movement to uphold themselves in the midst of an increasingly interdependent world.

According to David Glassberg, the changing role of the community had a significant impact on progressive reform. He states that much of the historiography of the early twentieth century is based upon the ongoing tension between the smaller community and mass society.³⁹ From their research, social historians state that the Progressive Era witnessed a dramatic shift within the community. Formerly isolated and independent, many small communities throughout the United States suddenly found themselves increasingly dependent upon and integrated within new and spreading regional and national institutions.⁴⁰ Progressives saw this as an undesired effect of globalization and industrialization, and sought the revitalization of the community as a defense against the impersonal bonds of an industrial society.⁴¹

At the same time, however, progressives, taking a cue from Robert La Follette, looked outside of their community for support, utilizing their growing social connections. The work of experts became increasingly important within community-based progressive reform. Experts, from all fields, such as economics, social work, art, science, and planning, informed communities how to play, plan, protect, celebrate, commemorate, and more.

³⁸ Wiebe, *The Search for Order*, 165.

³⁹ Glassberg, "American Civic Pageantry," 2.

⁴⁰ Wiebe, *The Search for Order*, 164.

⁴¹ Glassberg, "American Civic Pageantry," 2.

Thus, community-based reform movements sought to combat current town problems and rejuvenate community pride by looking outward as well as inward. In this way, community progressive movements differed from national or state-based reforms. While many community movements occurred across the country, each movement worked differently within unique communities due to their size, location, and population demographics.

A virtually unified objective of all community reforms, however, was the strengthening of social bonds within communities. Progressives accomplished this through a variety of reforms that provided opportunities for greater physical and emotional connections to the place and the people. This idea is strikingly evident in Eau Claire's historical pageant, where the program refers to the region as "my beloved valley," and community development is the plot.⁴² Yet, how did Eau Claire get to this point? Despite its rebounding economy and location in a progressive state, it does not fully explain Eau Claire's social journey from the 1900 gubernatorial election to the 1921 historical pageant.

From 1900 to 1921, two community-based progressive movements predated historical pageantry in Eau Claire: the city beautiful movement and the playground movement. While the influence of these movements helped to shape the city, physically and emotionally, they also paved the way for the historical pageantry movement. The city beautiful movement was the first progressive movement to create community parks in urban spaces, promoting the idea of beautification and leisure in cities. The playground movement took this idea one step further, organizing these parks by promoting the idea of playgrounds and organized recreational activities within these spaces, believing this would create social cohesion and encourage learning. Eventually, this led the playground movement to use historical pageantry in their

⁴² *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant*

programs, which spawned off into its own unique movement. Thus, elements of these movements make up the foundation of pageantry, and an understanding of their contribution is important to the study of the historical pageantry movement. These movements are evident in Eau Claire and eventually lead to the *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant*.

The City Beautiful Movement

The city beautiful movement was popularized in the latter part of the nineteenth century with the goal of attaining social and cultural rejuvenation of urban areas by beautifying cities. In the Gilded Age, urban areas had become areas of filth and gloom at the hands of uncontrolled industrialization. To planners, architects, artists, and other urban reformers, the degradation of the city represented a lack of culture and spirituality found in a nation in the grips of materialism.⁴³

However, the dawn of the Progressive Era brought both physical and ideological changes to the city. The unprecedented growth of urban areas and a greater distribution of material wealth had facilitated a rise of social activism and a greater affluence among urban dwellers. For the first time, these citizens joined in collective efforts and took control over their evolving urban communities. According to historian, Alan Trachtenberg, citizens felt they could “take control of [their] urban reality, to define it, shape, and order it, according to an evolving urban ideal, a secular Celestial City of shapely boulevard, healthful parks, comfortable and secure private habitations, and elegant public buildings.”⁴⁴

⁴³ Robert W. Winter, “The Arts and Crafts as a Social Movement,” *Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University*, vol. 34, no. 2 (1975), 36.

⁴⁴ Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 104.

The 1893 Columbian World's Fair in Chicago was one of the first events to implement this thinking, jumpstarting the city beautiful movement. This movement focused primarily on proper city planning as a way to evoke social change. At the fair, renowned architects, such as Daniel Burnham, Charles McKim, and Frederick Law Olmstead, attempted to demonstrate the potential positive social influence of urban spaces by creating the "White City," a scenic, clean, and completely white village within Chicago.⁴⁵ The fair impressed upon people that cities could be beautiful, and that communities could use urban planning as a tool to create meaningful spaces that had the power to shape the lives and identities of their inhabitants.⁴⁶ After the fair, communities across the nation began implementing the ideals of the city beautiful movement. They did this primarily by hiring city planners, instituting city improvement commissions, and working with local citizen groups.

A strong advocate for parks, landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmstead, best articulated the ideas of this new movement. He believed that city parks provided a system of control, stability, and equality within the community.⁴⁷ The park would serve as an antidote for the "vile," impersonal streets of the city. In Olmstead's 1870 essay, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," he states, "We want a ground to which people may easily go after their day's work is done, and where they may stroll for an hour, seeing, hearing, and feeling nothing of the bustle and jar of the streets." In a later section, he emphasizes the equalizing nature of city parks, exclaiming that people would assemble in parks

with an evident glee in the prospect of coming together, all classes largely represented, with a common purpose, not at all intellectual, competitive with none, disposing to

⁴⁵ Maury Klein and Harvey A. Kantor, *Prisoners of Progress: American Industrial Cities, 1850-1920* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1976), 422.

⁴⁶ Klein, *Prisoners of Progress*, 423.

⁴⁷ Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 109.

jealousy and spiritual or intellectual pride toward none, each individual adding by his mere presence to the pleasure of all others, all helping to the greater happiness of each.⁴⁸

Three hundred miles away from the Windy City, Eau Claire began implementing the city beautiful movement within their own community. The city began setting aside park land as early as the 1850s, continually adding more parks throughout the remaining century and well into the twentieth century. Prominent early settlers, mostly lumber barons, donated much of this land to the city in the early days of the town's history. Eau Claire pioneer, Adin Randall, was the first to set this trend in 1856, donating a block of land in the fifth ward, just north of Water Street.⁴⁹ Named Randall Park, the area quickly became a beloved spot for socializing by the surrounding neighborhood.⁵⁰ Soon after, the city added Putnam Park, Driving Park, Carson Park, Boyd Park, and Owen Park.⁵¹

While Chicago had Frederick Law Olmstead, Eau Claire had Henry C. Putnam, who actively worked to make Eau Claire a “city of parks” in the fashion of larger cities like New York. While he was not a landscape architect, Putnam was a successful businessman and an avid conservationist, moving to the area in 1857.⁵² In 1887, Putnam began donating pieces of his land for various park projects. That same year, he helped to form a city park committee for the purpose of designating and promoting parks throughout the town.⁵³ Along with the help of John S. Owen, David Drummound, and George T. Thompson, Putnam created his own privately funded park in 1888. With a baseball diamond, football field, nature trails, horse roads, and picnic areas, the park was the most lavish in the city, deemed the “greatest asset Eau Claire has,”

⁴⁸ Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 109-110.

⁴⁹ A. E. Kidder, “City Parks,” In *History of Eau Claire County, Wisconsin: Past and Present*, ed. Judge William Bailey (Chicago: C.F. Cooper & Co., 1914), 440.

⁵⁰ *Eau Claire News*, September 25, 1886.

⁵¹ A. E. Kidder, “City Parks,” 438-440.

⁵² *Eau Claire Insider*, vol. 1 no. 5 (July 8, 1976).

⁵³ *Eau Claire News*, June 5, 1887.

by the *Eau Claire Telegram*.⁵⁴ In 1909, Putnam sold the 200 acre park to the city for one dollar, stating, “Fifty years from now you will be proud, and you will sit beneath or drive past its shady places—drink from its springs of pure water and will rest and be thankful.”⁵⁵ Putnam’s influence had a dramatic impact of the city beautiful movement within Eau Claire, paving the way with new and innovative park use.

By 1914, the city beautiful movement had reached Eau Claire. The city had over 450 acres set aside for the “purpose of recreation and the enjoyment of natural beauty.” In the article, “City Parks,” local activist Augusta Kidder gushes about the city’s many parks with pride, including Putnam Park, exclaiming, “It’s free to all; it can be reached by trolley from any part of the city and once within its sylvan depths you can hardly believe yourself so near a bustling world of labor.”⁵⁶ Throughout the article, she continually refers to the burgeoning city in the highest regard, emphasizing its progressive and modern nature with respect to its parks.

The city beautiful movement paved the way in the belief that new structural environments could reform the morals and attitudes of society.⁵⁷ Like other ideas of the

⁵⁴ *Eau Claire Daily Telegram*, June 15, 1897.

⁵⁵ “Rededication of Putnam Park,” A Bicentennial Pamphlet at the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, May 23, 1976. Box 1. Eau Claire Area American Revolution Bicentennial Committee scrapbook, 1975-1976. Special Collections & Archives. UHC287. McIntyre Library. University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire. Eau Claire, WI.

⁵⁶ A. E. Kidder, “City Parks,” 438.

⁵⁷ Another noteworthy movement that had an important, but less direct influence on the historical pageantry movement was the arts and crafts movement. Originally founded in England and transported to the United States in the late nineteenth century, this movement focused on more on the revival of unique artistic styles. Proponents of this movement believed that traditional art and an appreciation of detail and fine crafts would cultivate the newly formed middle class, making them more rational citizens. The pageantry movement took this idea, incorporating traditional artistic dance, theater, and art into their programs. This movement was widely manifested in the architectural styles of the period, and remains evident today in the third and fifth ward of Eau Claire, where many homes were built from the late nineteenth century into the 1920s constructed using organic and unique architectural styles with steep gabled roofs, overhanging eaves, exposed carters, and “earthy” building materials. Source: Ingolf Vogeler,

progressive movement, this spurred other types of reform. These movements looked at the parks and beautiful buildings and asked, what good are these spaces if most Americans do not understand what they mean or how to use them? It was at this time that playground movement and the historical pageantry movement came into play.

The Playground Movement

No single movement had a greater impact upon historical pageantry, than the playground movement.⁵⁸ Borrowing ideas from the city beautiful movement, this movement began in the 1880s and advocated for the integration of physical activity and play into everyday life. Championed by intellectuals, educators, and social workers, adherents to the movement believed that “wholesome” recreational activities were neglected aspects of modern life, blaming industrialism and commercialism as the root of this problem.⁵⁹ In 1910, social activist, Jane Addams warned, “To fail to provide for the recreation of youth is not only to deprive all of them of their natural form of expression, but is certain to subject some of them to overwhelming temptation of illicit and soul-destroying pleasures.”⁶⁰ Thus, the playground movement set out to provide playgrounds and other organized play activities as a way for youth as well as adults to escape the current ills of modern society.⁶¹

Like the historical pageantry movement, the playground movement advocated for the betterment of society through the use of fun and entertainment. Both movements emphasized the

Settlement Geography of Eau Claire, Architectural Styles (Eau Claire: University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire, 1990), 6.

⁵⁸ This movement is also commonly known as the play movement and the recreation movement.

⁵⁹ Ocean Howell, “Play Pays: Urban Land Politics and Playgrounds in the United States, 1900-1930,” *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 34, no. 6 (September 2008), 961.

⁶⁰ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 53.

⁶¹ Stephen Hardy and Alan G. Ingham, “Games, Structures, and Agency: Historians on the American Play Movement,” *Journal of Social History*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Winter, 1983), 286.

importance of communality and emotional wellbeing. Sociologists of the period deemed that recreation was essential for young adults because it taught them important cooperative skills and attitudes necessary to become healthy, creative, and responsible citizens within their community.⁶² By 1906, playground advocates established the Playground Association of America (PAA).⁶³

With a variety of parks already established, Eau Claire quickly came on board with the movement, turning many of their parks from traditional pleasure parks to reform parks. At the beginning of the Progressive Era, pleasure parks, the type of park structure promoted by the city beautiful movement, provided scenic and natural beauty as a means of escape from the surrounding urban environment. Reform parks implemented the progressive ideal of moral development through an established environment of play.⁶⁴ Driving Park, the site of the *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant*, was a perfect example of this rhetoric at work in the city. Located in the third ward, this park began as simple oasis on the south side of the city. However, in 1902, the city erected a grandstand for horse races, baseball diamond, and playing field.⁶⁵ The area quickly became a popular spot for organized sports games and community gatherings. Previously mentioned, Putnam Park also provided numerous opportunities for organized play.

While the playground movement was nationwide success, the PAA was not satisfied with the incorporation of mere playground areas. They began seeking ways to incorporate their ideals

⁶² Howell, "Play Pays," 989.

⁶³ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 55.

⁶⁴ Thomas E. Will, "Public Parks and Playgrounds: A Symposium," *The Arena*, vol. 10 (July, 1894), 275.

⁶⁵ *Eau Claire Leader Telegram*, June 16, 1920.

within a large setting. Intellectuals, educators, and social workers turned to new forms of civic celebrations as a way to advance their goals.⁶⁶

Looking for a New Form of Civic Celebration

The PAA viewed civic celebrations as opportunities for recreation as well as media through which to publicize their goals. The PAA created a Committee on Festivals that held the sole responsibility of regulating community festivities. The committee hoped to reform the conduct of civic celebrations, believing they had become arenas for commercial amusement. William Orr, an Illinois high school principal and leader of the playground movement expressed the PAA's concerns, stating, "The tastes of the children and the public have been vitiated to such an extent that the longing for accentuated pleasures makes it difficult for those who wish to plan and carry out true festivals."⁶⁷ Thus, the PAA called for its members to seek other forms of civic celebrations that would appeal to the public while upholding quality and promoting moral standards.

The committee, comprised of many educators, believed that the integration of historical perspectives would add "dignity and weight" to new playground celebrations.⁶⁸ This coincided with a renewed emphasis on the importance of history in the United States. Following the teachings of Charles A. McMurry, a well-known progressive educator, playground advocates believed that historical perspectives had the power to "bring the past into manifest relation to the present and to show how historical ideas and experiences are being constantly projected into the

⁶⁶ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 52-55.

⁶⁷ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 55.

⁶⁸ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 56.

present, [and] are, in fact, controlling forces in our social and industrial life.”⁶⁹ In this way, the committee believed history had the power to provide the indirect moral instruction they were looking to convey. In a statement, the committee declared what type of civic celebration they were looking to implement:

The aim of these festivals should be to involve the people in self-amusement and self expression. The festival should be the greatest and most characteristic form of democratic art. It should interpret the ideals of the people to themselves. It should stimulate the creative energies of the people, and bring forth the latent imagination and poetry which is in them.⁷⁰

For many, this idea seemed like a tall order. How could civic celebrations possibly fulfill all those objectives? For this, the PAA looked toward Europe, where many progressive movements received their start. This time, a man by the name of Louis Napoleon Parker, of England, provided them such inspiration. An adherent of the British arts and crafts movement, Parker stressed that pageants were the ultimate form of civic expression. In his model, pageants were not mere carnivals, as in the United States, but could be artistic and social events that “added brightness,” “reawakened civic pride,” “increased self-respect,” and helped to bring a community “back to its old-time innocent gaiety.” Historians credit him with creating the contemporary pageantry structure, and his first notable pageant, *The Pageant of Sherbourne*, in 1905, became a model for all historical pageants to come. The production consisted of several dramatic episodes and incorporated local folk dances. Parker only cast townspeople in the roles to heighten authenticity and foster a sense of “brotherhood” and “common effort” within the community. He also created original props, scenery, and costumes.

According to Glassberg, “Parker’s “pageant” fascinated American reformers because it represented the culmination of the trend of both patriotic societies and recreation workers toward

⁶⁹ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 58.

⁷⁰ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 63.

more artistic, visually instructive, playful civic celebrations,” and, in 1908, the PAA brought this idea to the United States, with their “Safe and Sane Forth of July” movement.⁷¹ The movement campaigned for the ban of private firework sales, hoping to discourage injuries over the holiday. Playground advocates realized that the success of this movement depended upon the cooperation of municipal departments and their willingness to sponsor alternative activities. Historical pageantry provided the perfect alternative. This was the first opportunity for the PAA to promote historical pageantry on a national scale. In a statement, the PAA announced that communities should “replace mere individual noisemaking” with “beautiful and social play,” “pageantry.”⁷²

Despite its promise, the public received the campaign with mixed reactions. Many of the pageants did not meet the PAA’s expectations, deviating from Parker’s more artistic and cultural approach to the production. However, it was the first event that put pageantry in the minds and on the lips of Americans. While the playground movement was the first to bring historical pageantry to the United States, it would take one man to prove its usefulness and champion the historical pageantry movement as part of Progressive Era reform.

William Chauncy Langdon: A Model for American Historical Pageantry

William Chauncy Langdon began his work as a history teacher and dramatist in New York City. However, as the city became increasingly active in political and social reform at the turn of the century, his interests turned to social work and local politics. He began working with education groups and the playground movement, offering a civic course at his school, organizing the Juvenile City League—a civic boy’s club—, and participating in the playground movement’s “Safe and Sane Fourth of July” program. Through his work, Langdon became very interested in

⁷¹ Glassberg, “American Civic Pageantry,” 31.

⁷² Glassberg, “American Civic Pageantry,” 30.

the purpose of civic education and its ability to foster “team spirit” and instill local pride.⁷³ He believed that every person should feel a sense of responsibility for their neighborhood.

In 1908, Langdon’s activism brought him to the work of Louis Napoleon Parker and historical pageantry. This new form of civic celebration greatly interested him, joining his love of history, theater, and civic education. He soon began corresponding with Parker, attending local historical pageants, and collecting any information he could find on the subject. It did not take long for Langdon to become convinced that historical pageantry was the perfect medium in which to advance his civic education reform.⁷⁴ Langdon began touting this idea to reform groups, educators, and philanthropists, hoping to establish a Bureau of American Pageantry, but had little success.⁷⁵ After the PAA’s first attempts, no one was willing to promote historical pageantry on a national scale. If Langdon wanted to advance his reform, he would have to do it himself.

In 1910, an opportunity finally presented itself when Charlotte Farnsworth, a teacher from New York City, asked Langdon for help commemorating the 150th anniversary of Thetford, Vermont. Langdon suggested that the town produce a historical pageant, requesting that he might direct the production. He promised Farnsworth that the pageant would be “a standard in pageantry for the whole country” as well as a “vital and fundamental” asset to the welfare of Thetford itself.⁷⁶

At a town meeting in December, the community of Thetford voted to accept Langdon’s plan, scheduling the pageant for August 1911. They formed a pageant committee of thirteen residents to oversee the event. They, in turn, formally hired Langdon to write, produce, and direct the pageant, agreeing to pay for all of his travel expenses plus one-third of the profits.

⁷³ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 72.

⁷⁴ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 73.

⁷⁵ Glassberg, “American Civic Pageantry,” 50.

⁷⁶ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 74-75.

Additionally, Langdon received \$2,500 from PAA supporters “to demonstrate whether or not the pageant may be used successfully as an agent in social advancement.”⁷⁷ This donation solidified the importance of the pageant. For Langdon and the rest of pageantry supporters, the success of his pageant would determine the fate of the historical pageantry movement.

With a history much like Eau Claire’s, Thetford, Vermont, consisted of a cluster of six small villages on the west bank of the Connecticut River. Originally, the town’s economic base consisted of agriculture; however, in the early nineteenth century, the community turned to saw and grist milling as its primary source of income, causing an economic and population boom. Unfortunately, an economic depression after the Civil War devastated the industry, causing Thetford’s population to decline. Since that time, the community had not been able to recover, with a struggling economy and only a small population of 1,182 year-round residents.⁷⁸

Langdon believed that Thetford was the perfect community in which to prove historical pageantry’s impact. He hoped his pageant would reverse the community’s economic and social decline of the last fifty years. According to Glassberg, he “diagnosed” Thetford’s current problems—“depopulation, isolation, lack of success in marketing its produce”—as the result of each household trying to preserve their economic independence. Instead, he insisted the community must join in “local solidarity and pride,” and to recognize the “larger relations and the economic interdependence of all communities in the present.”⁷⁹

Langdon knew that Thetford could not accomplish this on their own and looked toward progressive ideals for help. He quickly brought in outside experts and organizations to help the floundering community. As he worked on the script, the United States Department of Agriculture

⁷⁷ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 75.

⁷⁸ Glassberg, “American Civic Pageantry,” 76.

⁷⁹ Glassberg, “American Civic Pageantry,” 76.

brought in agricultural experts to help establish farmer co-ops and social clubs, introduce new technology and techniques, and educate farmers on proper business management.⁸⁰ Likewise, Langdon helped to improve the social and cultural life of Thetford, organizing clubs, such as the Boys Scouts, the Thetford Choral society, and public art shows. He also insisted that the community balance recreation hours with working hours to improve their emotional and physical welfare.⁸¹

As the Langdon's pageantry work progressed, he expounded on the purposes of his pageantry to the curious public. He emphasized that the pageant was much more than a play; it was a process that would help form a unique local identity. "In the pageant," he declared, "the place is the hero and the development of the community is the plot." When asked about the script, he stated that its purpose was "not to concoct a pretty entertainment, but to paint a portrait" of the town. It was his mission to help the residents with their current problems and to envision a future solution by following the life of the town, from past to present. In this way historical pageants could depict not only what the community was, but what it could become.⁸² Thus, Langdon had many hopes for his pageantry, not only would it be an artistic expression of country life, but it would also build a sense of solidity and loyalty among the citizens. It would help to overcome current problems and inspire future solutions.

In the months leading up to the pageant, the pageant committee appointed several subcommittees in charge of the cast, costumes, publicity, historical research, set design, choreography, music, and more. Throughout that time the cast grew to 500, nearly half the

⁸⁰ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 75.

⁸¹ Glassberg, "American Civic Pageantry," 56.

⁸² Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 79-80.

population of the community.⁸³ Langdon continually stressed the importance of total town cooperation. He wanted Thetford citizens to be completely involved in the process, insisting this was an important aspect of pageantry.

Finally, on August 12th, after nine months of preparation, *The Pageant of Thetford* began. Langdon's format consisted of a mixture of symbolic artistic expression and realistic historical interpretation. The influence of the playground movement and the new historical education is apparent. Three historical scenes depicted the digression of the town, while symbolic dance interludes served to add emotional substance, artistic expression, and graceful transitions between scenes. He also utilized popular images of townspeople—pioneers, students, and farmers—playing together in traditional pursuits, dancing, and singing.⁸⁴ This mixture of common images, artistic expression, and historical background served to illustrate the town's transition from independence to interdependence.

The pageant consisted of four sections, depicting the founding of the town, its transition from a frontier settlement to a modern community, its downfall, and, lastly, its future. Langdon broke up these scenes into carefully selected episodes, portraying important events from the town's past, such as the founding of Thetford's first church, the county fair of 1835, and the agricultural failure of "Sam Small," the farmer. A musical piece accompanied each episode, such as the "Indian melody," "Yankee Doodle," or a church hymn, setting the mood with a melody. Between scenes, a central symbolic figure, a striking woman called "Thetford" appeared, along with her troupe of nature spirits, foretelling the condition of the town with her appearance and

⁸³ Glassberg, "American Civic Pageantry," 61.

⁸⁴ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 93.

actions. An aesthetic dance team appropriately called the “Spirit of Home,” the “Spirit of War,” and, at last, the “Spirit of Pageantry” accompanies Thetford, transforming her with their dance.⁸⁵

Most of the play skillfully reflected the history of the town, demonstrating themes of communality, despair, and hope; however, the finale reveals Langdon’s true message with heightened emotions and theatrics. It projects all of the transitions of Thetford and suddenly strikes a triumphant note. All of the characters join a vibrant Thetford on stage as the “Spirit of Pageantry,” who has come to rescue the town, watches over her. Suddenly, a scene depicts a thriving community, implementing new agricultural technology, participating in the Boy Scouts and Campfire Girls, and families frolicking in the park, all singing, “Come with a Cheer, Good Neighbors, Come.”⁸⁶

After the pageant, Langdon’s pursuits paid off. Not only did the pageant bring in a great deal of money and tourism to Thetford, but the community continued to work toward Langdon’s social goals. Many social clubs began in the area. The pageant committee also continued, and declared every August 12th a town holiday. Their success proved the practicality of Langdon’s craft. His work appeared in numerous articles, and advocates declared the Thetford pageant a model for all pageants to come.

Many communities, like Eau Claire, related to the plight of Thetford and wanted to share in the community’s success. Over the next decade, others took up the art of pageantry, using Langdon’s pageant as a model. As it spread across the United States, advocates championed the cause as a way for local residents to gain a better awareness of the many social transformations of the Progressive Era and to gain “a clear comprehension of the history of their town as a whole, and therefore of the place of their new undertakings in the whole.” Pageantry advocates saw the

⁸⁵ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 86-88.

⁸⁶ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 86-88.

value of this movement within *progressivism*, and soon began to standardize it, creating yet another new progressive movement.

Pageantry as a Progressive Movement

By the close of 1911, *American Homes and Gardens* magazine declared the country “pageant mad.” Prominent figures, such as G. Stanley Hall, Jane Addams, and Ida Tarbell, promoted the new historical pageantry, as well as schools, businesses, and social organizations. Many of these organizations, from political societies to hereditary clubs, jumped on the historical pageantry bandwagon, promoting this idea as their own to local officials.⁸⁷ These groups saw pageantry as a means to develop their community identity, morals, and a social order as found in their past and formed from emotions they shared in the present.⁸⁸ Within a few short years, not only was pageantry considered highly progressive, but profitable as well, bringing in ticket sales, tourism, and publicity. Across the country, it seemed as though everyone was promoting every form of civic celebration as historical pageantry.

However, as its popularity grew, pageant-masters felt a need to protect their craft, to define it, and to professionalize it. In 1913, the American Pageant Association (APA) was born. With Langdon as its president, the association began funding pageantry classes at universities. They also pushed to certify new pageant-masters, hoping to distinguish themselves as “experts” among the growing group of amateur and commercial pageant-masters.⁸⁹

As the popularity of the APA began to rise between 1913 and 1916, so did historical pageantry, becoming a full-blown progressive movement. Pageant-masters and dramatists fueled

⁸⁷ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 105.

⁸⁸ Glassberg, “American Civic Pageantry,” 90.

⁸⁹ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 107.

this movement, becoming increasingly aware of their professional and social responsibilities to the American public. This fervor evolved into an agenda to reform the civic celebrations that differed from previous attempts by the playground movement or patriotic and hereditary societies.⁹⁰ Like other movements of the Progressive Era, the historical pageantry movement had a distinct goal: to reform community attitudes through historical pageants.

By the mid-1910s, the historical pageantry movement had already swept through many metropolitan cities, with pageants in Washington D.C., St. Louis, and San Diego. At the same time, smaller communities, like Thetford, began to put on many pageants. By 1910, Wisconsin conducted one of its first pageants, put on by the State Normal School in Oshkosh. It was not long after that Eau Claire began to discuss the possibility of hosting its own historical pageant.

Eau Claire: Looking Backward

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, Eau Claire had transformed itself from a small lumber town to a regional center of northwestern Wisconsin. It was also a regional leader of the progressive movement, implementing the reforms of the city beautiful movement and the playground movement. All of these factors are important precedents to the historical pageantry movement. Unfortunately, little evidence exists of the city's first discussions on the possibility of producing their own historical pageant. While it is highly likely that recent pageants in Oshkosh and Madison influenced their decision, a visit by the State Historical Society, urging the city to take action may have provided the encouragement needed to plan a historical pageant of their own.

⁹⁰ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 110.

According to Glassberg, communities had to think critically about their own past before they could begin to interpret it. On December 19th, 1920, Dr. Joseph Schafer, the new secretary of the Wisconsin Historical Society called on Eau Claire to do just that. Speaking before a “fair sized audience,” the secretary commended the city for their current efforts in historic preservation, urging the community to “do things” with their past. His talk articulates the new use of history during that period. In his speech he proclaimed, “Each little community has its story to tell with the local atmosphere, as distinct as communities of colonial days and wars. Why not express this spirit? ... The ideal of history now is the history of civilization in all its aspects and in this, the building up of industry has its part as contribution in the life of a man.” Later he emphasizes, “Life is not lived on a plane, is not of two dimensions, but of three, and History gives us the third. A whole community can be stirred, as can one person, by the inspiration of the immediate locality, if it is given a voice.” In the last part of his speech, Schafer spoke of a little theater in an Irish town that was on the brink of failure. However, when the theater began putting on plays about life in the community, it opened to sold out crowds.⁹¹ This is a crucial point, not only do his ideas of cooperation, identity, remembrance, and celebration closely align with those of the historical pageantry movement, but his example directly promotes historical theater, or pageantry.

Schafer’s words undoubtedly had an impact upon the community. According to the newspaper article, many notable citizens attended the talk that night, including local historian, William W. Bartlett; secretary of the country historical society, Ralph W. Owen; president of the local history society, James T. Barber; and curator of the Wisconsin Historical Society, William

⁹¹ “State Historical Secretary Advises City to Do Things,” *Eau Claire Leader Telegram*, December 1920.

K. Coffin. Only six months later their names would all appear again, this time as the organizers and cast members for the *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant*.

Preparing for Pageantry

By June of 1921, members of the community who were interested in the possibility of staging a historical pageant met with the agents of Thurston Management, one of the largest pageant companies in the nation.⁹² They spoke with Beatrice L. Thurston, a certified pageant-master and head of Thurston Management, regarding their hopes for the civic celebration. In an article in the *Eau Claire Leader*, published a few weeks later, the Eau Claire pageant promoters stated that their intention was not produce a carnival or make a profit, as in previous community celebrations; this would be a special production. Instead, they wanted to produce a “dramatic spectacle, both inspiring and entertaining in which the history of this Chippewa Valley will be portrayed entirely by people of this community. ...a thrilling scene of the glorious history of this valley, so filled with dramatic legends and stories of real life.” Furthermore, the group hoped that the event would break down social differences and make “lasting friendships between people;” “...all the people, young and old, rich and poor, work[ing] together on common ground, for the success of the undertaking.”⁹³ These were all admirable and standard goals within pageantry.

Following Langdon’s model, the community chose a citizen pageant committee by early July. According to the *Eau Claire Leader*, the group unanimously chose Ralph W. Owen, lumber baron and local philanthropist, as president, and Knute Anderson, a war veteran and activist, as the treasurer. Other prominent Eau Claire citizens took up the roles of sub-committee chairs, such as William W. Bartlett as the head of the history committee. Robert K. Boyd, lumber baron

⁹² *Eau Claire Leader*, “Start Work on History Pageant,” July 6, 1921.

⁹³ “Pageant Director Arrives Here from Fond du Lac Show,” *Eau Claire Leader*, July 27, 1921.

and local philanthropist, headed the properties committee. Charles T. Eagles, concert manager of the Eau Claire Philharmonic Society, headed the music committee. Mrs. Shoemaker, wife of local lawyer Arthur H. Shoemaker, was in charge of the cast. Mrs. Victory Linley, whose husband was a partner of Shoemaker's, headed the costume committee. Other committees included publicity, decorations, ticket sales, site, grounds, and souvenirs. The committee also chose the dates of the performance, August 11th and 12th.⁹⁴

With only a little over a month left until the performance, the group wasted no time gathering materials, participants, and selecting a site.⁹⁵ In the July 17th edition of the newspaper, the next public reference of the pageant appeared. Robert Boyd, head of the properties committee, called for the donation of all historical relics, which the properties committee would use as props for the pageant. The article stated that they were looking for various Indian relics, such as bow and arrows, spears, and blankets. The committee also sought clothing from former periods, as well as books, pictures, and an old coach.⁹⁶

The following week, on July 24th, the site committee announced their decision for the pageant location. While they considered many of Eau Claire's attractive parks, including Owen Park, Carson Park, and Randall Park, the committee finally chose Driving Park, located on Eau Claire's east side. Although it lacked views of the river and adequate space for a backstage, the committee chose the location for its grandstand facilities, capable of seating a large crowd of 1,000.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ "Start Work on History Pageant," *Eau Claire Leader*, July 6, 1921.

⁹⁵ One of the reasons why Eau Claire had the pageant when it did, with so little time to prepare, was due to the availability of Thurston Management. At this time, pageant-masters were in high demand. Thurston's fit Eau Claire in their schedule, between other plays in Wisconsin. Source: *Eau Claire Leader*, July 27, 1921.

⁹⁶ "Seek Relics of Local History to Advertise Pageant," *Eau Claire Leader*, July 17, 1921.

⁹⁷ "Committees Line Up Cast for Big History Pageant," *Eau Claire Leader*, July 24, 1921.

The pageant was off to an enthusiastic start. While many Eau Claire citizens were already working on various details of the pageant, they could accomplish little more without the direction of the plot. As excitement began to build, Bartlett and members of Thurston Management concocted over 200 years of Chippewa Valley history into five theatrical episodes.

The Development of the Chippewa Valley is the Plot

According to the newspaper, the plot should display specific themes of “history, destiny, progress, courage, hope, aspiration, education, opportunity, religion, civic institutions, wealth, labor, and savagery,” displaying the transformation of Eau Claire from a primitive Indian village to a beacon of progress.⁹⁸ As the head of the history committee Bartlett compiled the history and worked with Thurston to finalize a script that would contain both history and art worthy of such an event.

Not surprisingly, the plot is very similar to that of *The Pageant of Thetford*, Langdon’s masterpiece of ten years ago. Like the “Spirit of Thetford,” Eau Claire’s pageant contains the symbolic “Spirit of Chippewa Valley” accompanied by the “Spirit of History, Destiny, Progress, Courage, Hope, Aspiration, Religion, Civic Institutions, Wealth, Labor, and Education.”⁹⁹ These figures reflect the chosen themes for the pageant, as stated in the *Eau Claire Leader*. They appear at appropriate times throughout the pageant, symbolizing the various social and economic transitions of the Chippewa Valley.

⁹⁸ *Eau Claire Leader*, July 24, 1921.

⁹⁹ *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant*

Choosing definitive scenes from Eau Claire’s past, the pageant began with its “savage” beginnings as a region of conflict between the Chippewa and Sioux Indian tribes.¹⁰⁰ This ongoing clash between the two tribes lasted for nearly 100 years, producing a long and interesting Indian history in the region. This episode is not entirely accurate and romanticizes native life, depicting the ambush of a Sioux village by the Chippewa. A forbidden love between a Sioux maiden and a Chippewa chief thickens the plot.¹⁰¹

While most of the Indians were gone from the area by this time, pageant-masters felt that American Indians were an integral asset to the pageant story. As a self proclaimed agent of tolerance, unity, and social harmony, the historical pageantry movement believed that it was important to tell the story of the town from a variety of perspectives—natively, locally, and nationally. The progressive movement brought about a new fascination with American Indians as a symbol of “instinct and freedom” of the aboriginal America that was lost at the hands of industry and greed. As *progressivism* attempted to combat these very ideas, the figure of the “noble savage,” became an important symbol of American incompleteness.¹⁰² Thus, by “playing Indian” in the *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant* Eau Claire could fully express a lost but important part of their history.

The next two episodes depict the shaping of Eau Claire as a distinct community, with the coming of the first white settlers and the establishment of the village. According to Glassberg, the disappearance of Indians and the growth of institutions commonly took place after the first

¹⁰⁰ The 1837 Treaty established territorial boundaries for the Chippewa and the Sioux in an attempt to quell fighting. One of the boundary lines is located just below the falls of the Chippewa, in present day Eau Claire. Source: “Early Eau Claire,” 1921-1926. Box 4, Folder 2. William W. Bartlett Collection, 1821-1934, 1944-1962.

¹⁰¹ *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant*

¹⁰² Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 3-4.

scene. These events unfolded naturally, not as white conquest, but as “inevitable progress.”¹⁰³ As part of this progress, Bartlett articulates what core values, such as religion, education, family, and innovation, were important to the community by carefully selecting pertinent events of its past.

The second episode commonly portrays a time of transition between the old Indian ways that remained in the area and the new influence of white culture as it became an early fur trading and logging center. Set in an Indian village in the 1830s, the central character is now Jean Burnet, a French fur trader who, according to Bartlett’s notes, was the “most noteworthy person in Eau Claire history.”¹⁰⁴ One of the first permanent settlers in the region, Burnet was prominent in early lumber and fur trade dealings. He represents the strong spirit and determination that founded the area. The first scene talks of the many original settlers and travelers to the region, such as voyageurs, trappers, and mechanics, and the establishment of the first permanent economic facility, a trading post. The second scene depicts a new year’s party “some years later” at Burnet’s cabin at the Chippewa Falls, representing a celebration of the successful and burgeoning settlement.¹⁰⁵

Episode three continues to show the Chippewa Valley’s steady path towards inevitable material and technological progress, showing the area’s rise from a modest lumbering town to a modern city. The first scene shows the founding fathers, the Randall’s, Jeremiah Thomas, and Stephen McCann, whose influence was still felt among the community, coming into the area for the first time, buying land and investing in the city. It also chronicles many of the first landmark moments in community life, such as the formal establishment of organized religion with the first

¹⁰³ Glassberg, “American Civic Pageantry,” 112.

¹⁰⁴ “Jean Burnet, Chippewa Valley Pioneer,” September 1921. Box 4, Folder 2. William W. Bartlett Collection, 1821-1934, 1944-1962.

¹⁰⁵ *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant*

religious service, and the beginning of new families with the first marriage in the city. The second scene shows Eau Claire settlement in 1855 with the official platting of the village by William Gleason and R. E. Wilson, the establishment of formal education in the city with the first school, and the first issue of the *Eau Claire Free Press*. Once again, the episode concludes with a celebration, as the entire community reflects on the formation of their new and prosperous city.¹⁰⁶

The next two episodes contrast the joy of the previous scenes demonstrating Eau Claire's dealings with war and national crisis. This transitions the plot, moving from scenes of local importance to the community's connection within regional, national, and international networks. According to Glassberg, war scenes were very common, illustrating the themes of "ingenuity, courage, solidarity, and a spirit of self-sacrifice."¹⁰⁷

The fourth episode depicts the first significant time of trial for the community with the coming of the Civil War of 1861. This scene follows the same pattern as nearly every Civil War pageant scene with the departure, sacrifice, and return of local soldiers. It does not focus on the specific issues of the war, but emphasizes the common sacrifices of both sides.¹⁰⁸ In this form, the first scene is patriotic and solemn, with the announcement of the firing on Fort Sumter, the recruiting of Eau Claire soldiers, and the presentation of the flag. It concludes with the departure of the first company, containing many of the young men who had worked so hard to build up the town in its early days.¹⁰⁹

The second scene provides some much needed comedic relief, departing from the seriousness of war, with the Indian scare of 1862. This is when the citizens of Eau Claire took to

¹⁰⁶ *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant*

¹⁰⁷ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 209.

¹⁰⁸ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 210.

¹⁰⁹ *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant*

the streets in fear after hearing rumors of an impending Indian attack.¹¹⁰ Of course the Indians never did attack, allowing Bartlett to make a humorous connection to life in an early pioneer town.

Once again, the fifth and final episode returns to the theme of war; however, this episode is much more symbolic and artistic. For the finale, pageant-masters promised a grand and unforgettable ending. Eau Claire was no exception, claiming that the final episode would be “over-the-top.”¹¹¹

This episode recalls the community’s distant past, in 1914, portraying the Chippewa Valley’s participation in World War I. Skipping nearly fifty years of Eau Claire history, it omits the fall of the lumber industry, a very important aspect of its past. The reason for this lies in a few factors. First, Glassberg notes that pageants tended to stress historical continuities over disruptions and conflicts. He states, “Any lingering doubts over the direction which local life had taken were resolved in the triumphant grand finale depicting the ideal community of the future.”¹¹² Secondly, World War I had a significant impact on the community and remained fresh in the minds of Eau Claire citizens. It also had strong influence on the art of pageantry. Before the war, pageants primarily focused on the development of the community. After the war, pageants emphasized each community’s participation in the triumph of American ideals.^{113 114}

¹¹⁰ *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant*

¹¹¹ “Committees Line Up Cast for Big History Pageant,” *Eau Claire Leader*, July 24, 1921.

¹¹² Glassberg, “American Civic Pageantry,” 112.

¹¹³ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 223.

¹¹⁴ This transition from local identification to national identification came out of the national preparedness movement, which began after the outbreak of World War I. The movement believed that the United States could better respond to crisis if it transformed its individualistic social structure and create tightly integrated networks of unified communities. This had an impact on pageantry after 1916, causing pageants to focus on “fostering the local residents’ sense of identification with the nation.” Source: Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 206.

This episode is similar to the last, in pattern and theme. However, this episode interweaves abstract symbolism within the historical imagery, a common theatrical device utilized in the finale.¹¹⁵ The first scene shows the prosperous city in the midst of a civic celebration, much like the pageant itself, with community folk dances, songs, and games. However, the news of the outbreak of war interrupts their celebration. The scene cuts away to a symbolic and patriotic tableau portraying the United States' entry into the war, which Thurston took directly from Langdon's pageant, *Sword of America*.¹¹⁶ Characters, representing the nations of Europe, joined by the "Spirit of Humanity," appeal to Columbia—the United States—for aid. As Columbia rises to the call, the "Spirit of Community" makes a plea for help to all the communities of the United States. Mirroring the previous episode, Eau Claire must, once again, rise to the call and help its country. In the next scene, the young men of Eau Claire, like their fathers before, enlist for war. The following scene, set "Somewhere in France," shows a courageous Eau Claire soldier in battle.

In the finale, all the images and events of the pageant culminate in a symbolic showing of Eau Claire's triumphant destiny. As the scene shows Eau Claire's young men triumphantly returning to their patriotic and prosperous city, the people and spirits of the pageant form a procession with Columbia and the American Flag in the center. All rise and sing "The Star Spangled Banner."¹¹⁷ ¹¹⁸ The city has overcome yet another conflict and has emerged more prosperous, stronger, and unified.

¹¹⁵ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 217.

¹¹⁶ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 216.

¹¹⁷ *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant*

¹¹⁸ Many pageants after World War I contained popular songs that everyone, including the audience could sing along to. This was a result of the growing popularity of the community singing movement, which emphasized the importance of enthusiastic mass participation with song. Source: Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 220.

Thus, Bartlett and Thurston's plot depicts the Chippewa Valley as never before. It interweaves fact and fiction, celebration and sorrow, and the abstract and the concrete. The plot also contains many of the same story lines and theatrics as other historical pageants of this time. In crafting the plot, it was Thurston and Bartlett's hope that the pageant would inspire the community. With such an elaborate plot, the city promised that it would not fail expectations. As enthusiasm mounted, the community began conducting casting calls and dress rehearsals.

Coming Together in Preparation

With the pageant beginning to take shape, the next task for the pageant committee was getting the community involved in its organization. After all, the pageant's success depended upon its ability to strengthen community bonds during both the preparation and the performance. In the next two weeks, Thurston management and the pageant committee conducted casting calls, costume fittings, set designs, and nightly rehearsals, requiring the cooperation of thousands of local residents.

Thankfully, with good publicity and the backing of many prominent citizens, the committee was not short of help. To round up more support, the publicity committee transformed the downtown business windows into elaborate displays of Eau Claire's past, utilizing the costumes and props in the pageant. Additionally, the *Eau Claire Leader* provided almost daily updates of the pageant's progress. According to the newspaper, it wasn't long before the pageant headquarters telephone, located on the third floor of the City Hall building, began ringing itself "nearly hoarse" with many citizens calling in with questions, comments, and suggestions.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ "City and County Join to Make Historical Pageant Success Here," *Eau Claire Leader*, July 31, 1921

During the preparation, casting roused the largest amount of participation and the most interest among the community. It seemed every citizen wanted their chance to be a part of this memorable event. Occurring the last week in July, the casting committee had the task of filling over 1,000 positions. The casting was open to all Eau Claire citizens, as well as citizens from the surrounding areas, from Altoona to Durand. The committee encouraged children to try out because they possessed the “spirit of happy natural play,” and pageantry advocates believed that the event would be an important educational experience.¹²⁰ It was also their hope that many of the town’s long time residents would portray the roles of their ancestors, linking the past to the present.¹²¹ In the end, Everett Randall played his relative George Randall; George Shaw played his grandfather, Daniel Shaw; Gordon Barland played his grandfather, Jeremiah Thomas; and Adin Randall played himself.¹²²

The most coveted role, however, was that of an Indian, which provided the actors chance to perform in the “most beautiful, dramatic, and spectacular” scene of the pageant.¹²³ The July 29th edition of the newspaper devoted an entire article to the subject, proclaiming that Harvey A. Schofield, president of the State Normal School, had secured the coveted role of the “Big Chief.” The other “wearers of feathers and wampum” included C. W. Brewer, vice-president of the State Normal School; Ivar Anderson, local opera singer; and members of the Knights of Columbus.¹²⁴ Additionally, the committee gave the “most dominant” role of Columbia to Emma Geske, wife of August J. Geske, a contributor to the pageant and partner in Samuelson’s Dry Goods. Other roles went to, local Girl Scout Commissioner, Mrs. A. L. Murray; Judge George Blum, Eau

¹²⁰ “Chippewa Valley Pageant Proves Great Success on First Night,” *Eau Claire Leader*, August 12, 1921.

¹²¹ “Committees Line Up Cast for Big History Pageant,” *Eau Claire Leader*, July 24, 1921.

¹²² *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant*

¹²³ “Work of Pageant Starts Here with Rare Enthusiasm,” *Eau Claire Leader*, July 28, 1921.

¹²⁴ “Cast Committee of Pageant Here Picks Big Chief,” *Eau Claire Leader*, July 19, 1921.

Claire County Judge; and Eau Claire Mayor, John E. Baron.¹²⁵ Members of the Kiwanis Club, the American Legion, and the Women's Club also participated as Indian tribesmen and pioneer women.¹²⁶

On the 28th of July, Theodore Viehman, the pageant-master from Thurston Management arrived from another pageant in Fond du Lac, bringing dance directors, Mary Brown and Gertrude Clarke, and music director, Henry H. Busse, with him.¹²⁷ As evening rehearsals began the first week of August, the cast had little time to prepare, especially for the many difficult dance sequences. The music and dance sequences were a crucial part of the pageant as there were no speaking roles. Instead, the plot depended upon the actions and emotions of the actors and dancers to evoke their messages.

The musical score was extensive, with over fifty selections from a variety of styles that would continually play throughout the pageant, emphasizing every emotion. According to Busse, "The sharp contrasts between the weird Indian music and the severe stately modes of the 17th century expresses more than volumes, the difference between savagery and civilization..."¹²⁸ In a collaborative effort, Busse chose the Eau Claire Liberty Band and the Chippewa Falls Band to play the entire score.

Following APA models, the pageant included many dance sequences, requiring a large amount of people and extensive practice time. Not only did these scenes heighten the artistic and cultural quality of the pageant, but also served to reinforce the concepts represented in the scene and provided a smooth transition between episodes. According to Glassberg, this type of pageant

¹²⁵ *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant*

¹²⁶ *Eau Claire Leader*, July 19, 1921.

¹²⁷ *Eau Claire Leader*, July 19, 1921.

¹²⁸ "Pageant Music Director Here," *Eau Claire Leader*, July 9, 1921.

became popular after World War I, when musical selections grew more prominent and the scenes became increasingly dramatic and action filled.^{129 130}

The *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant* included six dances, which included the “Dance of Gifts and Seasons,” the ballet “Little People of the Night,” the “Flower Dance,” the traditional hoopskirt “Quadrille Dance,” the “Fire Dance,” and the “Dutch Dance.” These dances were elaborate, performed by thirty to 100 dancers, all representing symbolic figures. For example, the “Dance of Gifts and Seasons” contained the figures of “Winter,” “Spring,” “Summer,” “Autumn,” and “Gifts.”¹³¹ With the fluid choreography of Mary Brown, the dancers illustrated the many gifts of nature, found in the Chippewa Valley throughout the seasons. This artistically emphasizes the themes of the prologue, leading into the first scene.

Finally, on August 6th, the first tickets for the event went on sale, along with a multitude of publicity. For seventy-five cents the pageant committee promised spectators “a spectacle of indescribable magnitude, beauty, and impressiveness,” which “promises to revive cherished memories of pioneer and instruct the young in local history and early manners and customs.”¹³² A large advertisement in the *Eau Claire Leader* boasted, “Enjoy the dramatic unfolding of the history of the Chippewa Valley! You will know and love your Chippewa Valley better after this brilliant dramatic presentation of the major points in its history.”¹³³ In keeping with the “spirit of

¹²⁹ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 219.

¹³⁰ Leading up to the pageant, the *Eau Claire Leader* promised the event would be filled with “action, action, and more action.” Source: “Pioneers from Surrounding Towns to Play in Pageant Here Next Week,” *Eau Claire Leader*, August 4, 1921.

¹³¹ *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant*

¹³² *Eau Claire Leader*, August 4, 1921.

¹³³ *Eau Claire Leader*, August 11, 1921.

pageantry,” the pageant committee stated that all the profits from ticket sales would go to the beautification of the celebrated city, planting trees along the new Memorial Highway.¹³⁴

With the community working hard, the day of the performance, August 11th, quickly approached. It was during this time that the dreams of the original Eau Claire pageantry promoters and progressives, such as Bartlett, Boyd, and Owen, saw their dreams come to fruition. As they had promised weeks before, the pageant involved the help of nearly 2,000 citizens, “work[ing] together...for the success of the undertaking,” and they expected thousands more to attend the final event.¹³⁵

The Dream Comes to Fruition

On the night of the first performance, August 11th, an impressive crowd of 2,000 gathered at Driving Park under a starlit sky to witness the event. For two hours, the spectators watched the history of Eau Claire unfold on the open field. As Indians roamed the land, pioneers platted the city, and their ancestors went off to war, they saw the history of Eau Claire as never before. Catching glimpses of relatives, neighbors, and fellow citizens acting and dancing, dressed in feathers, hoopskirts, and civil war uniforms, the community of Eau Claire saw the result of their efforts. The pageant told the story of what the community once was, what it had become, and what it could be. Between times of struggle and progress, the city had emerged a stronger, unified, progressive community within northwestern Wisconsin and the United States.

The next morning, the *Eau Claire Leader* announced the verdict: “Chippewa Valley Pageant Proves Great Success on First Night!” According to the article, the pageant had hit its

¹³⁴ *Eau Claire Leader*, August 4, 1921.

¹³⁵ “Pageant Director Arrives Here from Fond du Lac Show,” *Eau Claire Leader*, July 27, 1921.

mark, and promised the second showing that evening to be all the more magnificent.¹³⁶ Once again, on August 13th, the newspaper proclaimed the results of the final performance, calling it better than the first, growing in both “power and magnitude.” This night, 2,500 attended the event, overflowing the grandstand. The newspaper celebrated the performance and the players, calling the flame dance “spectacular,” the cabin scene “touching,” and the finale “splendid” and “over the top.”¹³⁷

While the entertainment was endless, what was more important was the pageant’s social influence as an agent of recreation, social cohesion, and education. The newspaper does not fail to miss the social significance of the event, confirming its success; “For the pageant was something more than an evening’s entertainment. It was an inspiration and a precious memory.”¹³⁸ The article calls the event a “real community enterprise,” stating,

Best of all was the thought that an entertainment so great in its scope, inspiring in its theme, satisfying to the eye, ear, and soul, was a community enterprise. It provided a spectacle of that for which welfare worker are shouting themselves hoarse—a union of all races, callings, ages, and social preferment in an honest and successful effort to re-create a past of which all are justly proud.¹³⁹

Thus, this event had an important impact on the community. It came along at a unique time in Eau Claire’s history, thirty years after the fall of the lumber industry as the community was attempting to recreate itself as a progressive regional leader. Closely adhering to progressive ideals, the community believed that this event would help them in their pursuit of economic and social well-being, and in a unique fashion, it did. The pageant instilled pride and stirred

¹³⁶ *Eau Claire Leader*, August 12, 1921.

¹³⁷ “Pageant Grows in Power and Beauty on Second Showing,” *Eau Claire Leader*, August 13, 1921.

¹³⁸ *Eau Claire Leader*, August 13, 1921.

¹³⁹ *Eau Claire Leader*, August 12, 1921.

emotions, prompting the community to reflect on its past in order to share in a better future, preparing the community for the years to come.

Conclusion: The Fall of Pageantry and Eau Claire

By the mid-1920s, the progressive movement was beginning to dwindle. While its impact still lingered, the nation had changed a great deal in the past decade. Many of the industries created at the beginning of the twentieth century were growing into maturity, spurring economic growth. The onset of World War I served to accelerate this prosperity, inciting economic and political expansion. As a result, the middle-class continued to grow, allowing more Americans to take advantage of the new benefits of material growth, such as automobiles.¹⁴⁰ What was more important, however, was the changing American culture. Often referred to as the “roaring twenties,” historians characterize this period as a time of modernity and discontinuity. Increasingly, Americans broke away from the traditions of their past, forging a new American way of life. Giving into the grips of commercialism, Americans increasingly rejected the virtues of the past and future, focusing primarily on the present.¹⁴¹ This is what eventually led to the downfall of pageantry.

As the culture began to change, so did the relevance of historical pageantry. Traditionally, the movement had rested on a resistance to industrialization and materialism, believing that a single civic event could foster a closely knit community and a healthy and emotionally fulfilling existence. Historians, recreation workers, and artists promoted this idea throughout the nation, hailing the themes of progressivism, anti-modernism, artistic innovation,

¹⁴⁰ Louis M. Hacker and Helene S. Zahler, *The United States in the 20th Century* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1952), 245.

¹⁴¹ Hacker, *The United States in the 20th Century*, 353.

and civic ritualism.¹⁴² By the mid-twentieth century, however, these ideas no longer resonated with the American public, as historians began to emphasize the discontinuity between generations.¹⁴³ Moreover, the role of the community was changing. New technology allowed for increased communications outside of the community, forming internal divisions and weakening community identity.¹⁴⁴

In the 1920s, the City of Eau Claire underwent a period of prosperity, along with the rest of the country. With a population of 21,000, the city continued to rebound from their decline over thirty years before. The 1923 city directory boasted of its expanding economy, numerous civic groups, beautiful parks, and rich history, stating, “Eau Claire is a combination of commerce and beauty. ... It is a city of progressive ideas and a good place to visit; also a good place to establish a business, and with natural advantages second to none, it has become an ideal residential city.”¹⁴⁵ While the community could not escape the evolving American ideology, it did manage to hold on to some of its progressive roots. With the pageant only a few years behind them, it still deemed itself a progressive city, holding onto the values of history, nature, and civic activism.

In 1926, five years after their first historical pageant, the city held another pageant to commemorate the opening of the Boyd Park athletic field. While this pageant was different from the first, its purpose was still the same—to bring the community together. Celebrating Eau Claire’s athletic achievements and recreational facilities, the production included songs, dances, and athletic stunts, and promised to draw a crowd of 10,000. The children of Eau Claire

¹⁴² Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 282, 284.

¹⁴³ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 288.

¹⁴⁴ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 281.

¹⁴⁵ *Wright’s Eau Claire City Directory, 1923* (Milwaukee: Wright Directory Co., 1923), 32-33.

performed in the event, following the original intentions of the playground movement.¹⁴⁶ While the pageant was not a historical event, it was still part of the historical pageantry movement, which continued in lesser forms until the end of the 1930s.¹⁴⁷

Thus, *progressivism* had a significant impact on Eau Claire. On that summer's night, in August of 1921, the citizens of Eau Claire gathered not only to hear the story of their city, but to celebrate the ideals of *progressivism* at work in their community. In thirty years, the city had pulled itself out of the failure of the lumber industry, becoming an economic, political, and cultural beacon of northwestern Wisconsin. The community did not accomplish this by diversifying their economy alone, but also by adhering to progressive ideals. From 1890 to the 1920s, the town became active in political matters, altered its environment to promote social change, invited experts to speak on community improvement, and created social and civic programs to unite its citizens. All these factors led up to the *Chippewa Valley Historical Pageant*, a community effort that commemorated the town's past, present, and projected a unified future.

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¹⁴⁶ “Pageant and Review to Be Staged at Opening of Boyd Park Athletic Field June 7,” *Eau Claire Leader*, May 27, 1926.

¹⁴⁷ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 289.

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