

Roosevelt in pushing him at the last moment into a race foredoomed by the fact that Roosevelt had a four-year head start.

Moses saw at once that the effort was hopeless. "The Smith movement never had a chance," he was to recall. "It started very late, and really had no organization to speak of." He never let himself be deluded by those reminders of past glories which gave Belle Moskowitz, Henry Moskowitz, Judge Proskauer, Herbert Bayard Swope and George McLaughlin flashes of hope: the rallying of Walker and Tammany to Smith's side after Roosevelt had authorized Samuel Seabury to investigate corruption in New York City; the defection to Smith's banner of big-city organizations and the consequent raising of his delegate count to 201; the wild cheers of the tremendous throng that lined his route from the La Salle Street Station in Chicago to the Congress Hotel, where a Smith-for-President headquarters had been hastily established. But practical realities did not weigh with Moses where Al Smith was concerned. Moses was one of those who struggled to the end in convention maneuvering so bitter that Ed Flynn called it "a fight to the death," who fought to hold together an alliance of dark horses that denied Roosevelt the nomination until the fourth ballot, who thought for a few brief hours that they actually had Roosevelt stopped and would be able to force the party to turn to Smith, and whose hopes were finally dashed when the ex-Governor's old adversary, William Randolph Hearst, used his influence with California's William G. McAdoo and John Nance Garner, Governor of Texas, to force the California and Texas delegations to switch to Roosevelt. Moses was one of the small group of friends who sat down with Smith in front of a radio in the Congress Hotel to listen to the last ballot, who watched the former Governor haul himself wearily out of his chair as soon as McAdoo began the speech that signaled the California switch and with a wave of his hand direct them to start packing so they could leave Chicago. He was one of those who sneaked out of the Congress Hotel by a side door with Smith at the moment that crowds were jamming the front entrance to greet the arriving Roosevelt, who listened to the ex-Governor, cornered by reporters, refuse to say he would support his party's choice and who watched anxiously as Smith sat silent on the long train ride home with his face marked by what one observer called a "tired sadness." And if Moses accepted Smith's defeat with his mind, he never accepted it with his heart. A month after the convention, with "Happy Days Are Here Again" drowning out the strains of "The Sidewalks of New York" forever in the Democratic Party's consciousness, Smith's campaign staff held its first and only reunion, complete with a menu featuring "Nuts McAdoo," "Celery Farley" and "Branchless Olives Roosevelt" in the Empire State Club in the Empire State Building. And Moses' contribution to the occasion reflected his bitterness. It was a quotation from Shakespeare that he selected for an epigraph on the menu's cover:

*Politics is a thieves' game.*

*Those who stay in it long enough are invariably robbed.*

## 18. New York City Before Robert Moses

NOW ROBERT MOSES' EYES were turning again to the city around which, as a youth, he had wandered "burning up" with ideas for its improvement.

Nowhere had America's Great Depression struck harder than in America's greatest city.

New York in 1932 was half-completed skyscrapers, work on them long since halted for the lack of funds, that glared down on the city from glassless windows. It was housewives scavenging for vegetables under pushcarts. It was crowds gathering at garbage dumps in Riverside Park and swarming onto them every time a new load was deposited, digging through the piles with sticks or hands in hopes of finding bits of food. New York was the soup kitchens operated from the back of army trucks in Times Square. It was the men, some of them wearing Chesterfield coats and homburgs, who lined up at the soup kitchens with drooping shoulders and eyes that never looked up from the sidewalk. New York was the headline, "the worm that walks like a man."

New York was the postman handing you the registered letter that you both knew was the eviction notice. It was the long queues that formed in the early afternoon at the Municipal Lodging Houses, and it was the desperate haste of the men turned away to get to one of the nearby bars which allowed customers who purchased even a single drink to sleep on the floor as long as there was space. Subways were truly for sleeping, and when patrolmen walked along station platforms rapping on soles, the men lying there arose without a protest, carefully gathering up their pallets of newspapers, shuffled onto a train and rode to the next station, where they spread their papers and lay down again.

More than 10,000 of New York's 29,000 manufacturing firms had closed their doors. Nearly one of every three employables in the city had lost his job. An estimated 1,600,000 New Yorkers were receiving some form of public relief. Many of thosefortunates who had kept their jobs were "underemployed," a euphemism for the fact that they worked two or three days a week or two weeks a month—or, if they worked full time, were paid a fraction of their former salaries; stenographers, earning \$35 to \$40 per

week in 1928, were averaging \$16 in 1933; Woolworth's was paying full-time salesladies \$7 per week.

Parents skimped for their children—by December 1932 many parents could hardly remember a time when they *hadn't* been skimping—but skimping was only forestalling the inevitable. There was meat on the table twice a week and then once—and then not at all. Then there were no eggs. Parents could make their children feel it was an honor that they didn't have to drink milk any more and could drink coffee instead, but the lack of proper diet took a toll. "Looking back, we can see quite a change," said one schoolteacher. "The children haven't any pep; they don't seem like the same youngsters they were a year ago." They seemed tired; they didn't seem to learn as fast. Said a school nurse: "When you go into a classroom you notice a different expression on [their] faces. . . . There is a strained, anxious look not natural in children at all."

Sometimes the things that outsiders didn't see were worst of all. Teachers didn't see the children whose families were poorest; such children had dropped out of school because they had no money for carfare, lunches or suitable clothes. Staffers at the city's free health clinics were encouraged by the fact that the number of malnutrition cases they handled was rising only gradually (although by 1934 such cases nevertheless would account for 60 percent of all clinic work). Then the staffers realized that many people suffering from malnutrition simply weren't going to the clinics because they knew perfectly well what was wrong with them—and also knew that they would be unable to do anything about it. And no one could see a state of mind; all one could do was try to describe it, as Martha Gellhorn did: "Everywhere there seemed a spreading listlessness, a whipped feeling. . . . I find them all in the same shape—fear, fear . . . an overpowering terror of the future."

The city's government did little to help its people.

The will to help was not the force that drove that government. That force was greed. During the fifteen years in which Red Mike Hylan and then Beau James Walker had been Chief Magistrate of America's greatest city, the Tammany leaders who served under them had seemed motivated primarily by the desire to siphon the city's vast resources into a vast trough on which they could batten.

Former Judge Samuel Seabury's investigation of corruption in the city, which had begun in 1930, had revealed how successfully this siphoning had been accomplished, exposing the bank accounts, running into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, of literally dozens of city officials, who followed one another to the witness stand in a seemingly endless procession that was dubbed "The Tin Box Parade" after one testified that he had found \$360,000 in his home in "a tin box . . . a wonderful tin box." Then Seabury turned to the Magistrates Courts. Witnesses revealed that hundreds of innocent housewives and working girls had been framed as prostitutes and, if they could not raise the cash to buy their freedom, had been jailed, sometimes for months, by a

cabal of crooked vice-squad policemen, court clerks and magistrates. Shocked by the strangling in Van Cortlandt Park of one scheduled female witness—her teen-age daughter committed suicide a week later—the city listened in horror to the others Seabury paraded to the stand. One told of helping vice-squad patrolmen trail a young married woman as she inspected houses with a male real estate agent. When they had returned to her home and were waiting for her husband to arrive and conclude the transaction, the police broke in, frightened the real estate agent out of testifying and arrested her. Other witnesses testified that, when business was slow, the vice squad simply "raided" flats in Negro Harlem and made wholesale arrests at random. When Mayor Walker took the stand—"Don't look him straight in the eye," warned a Seabury aide familiar with Beau James's charm, and the former judge stood sideways to Walker as much as possible while questioning him—Seabury revealed that the Mayor had personally accepted more than a million dollars in "beneficences" from firms doing business with the city. On September 1, 1932, while Governor Roosevelt was pondering whether or not to remove Walker from office, the Mayor resigned and sailed for Europe to join Betty ("Monk") Compton, last and loveliest of his paramours, thereby following a traveling precedent established by Robert C. Van Wyck, the first mayor (1898–1901) of the consolidated city, who had died in Paris, and the man who had hand-picked Van Wyck for the job, Tammany boss Richard Croker, who had died in England. Surrogate John Patrick O'Brien won the special election to fill the remaining year of Walker's term, but he proved to be as much a creature of Tammany as his predecessors. While Tammany leaders were trying to persuade the electorate that they had no control over him, O'Brien was replying to reporters who asked him who his Police Commissioner would be, "I don't know. They haven't told me yet." And during O'Brien's administration local Tammany relief administrators would siphon off a big chunk of federal relief payments before they reached their intended recipients—and the city would continue to do nothing to supplement federal programs, although a supplement would have been helpful, since federal payments averaged seventeen dollars per week per family. Tammany would try to use federal payments to build its political power, putting ward heelers on relief payrolls under several different names so that they could draw several salaries for themselves. And the federal payrolls did not show whether the men receiving its money were the men who most needed it. In New York City under Tammany Hall, the test for employment on a federal project was generally politics rather than need; most applicants had to be cleared by their local Tammany leader; one leader boasted, "This is how we make Democrats."

Even had the city wanted to help its people, it would have been unable to. The Depression had forced New York to total up at last the cost of its Rake's Progress under the Hylan and Walker administrations.

When Hylan became mayor of New York on January 1, 1918, the city's population was 5,872,143. Fifteen years later, when Walker resigned, it

was 6,930,446—an increase of 15 percent. During that same period, the city's budget rose from \$240,519,858 to \$631,366,298—an increase of 250 percent. The per capita cost of the budget increased by 200 percent. Year in and year out between January 1, 1918, and December 31, 1932, the city's debt increased at a rate equal to \$100,000 per day, until, on the latter date, it had reached the staggering total of \$1,897,481,478—a figure that was almost equal to the combined debt of the forty-eight states and that required an annual appropriation for debt service (the payment of interest and amortization) of \$209,960,338, almost a third of the entire budget.

Since jobs were the fuel of Tammany's political machine, a disproportionate share of the rest of the budget went to purchase that fuel; between the day Hylan entered office and the day Walker left it, the number of city employees almost doubled, and their salaries, paid as political rewards at levels far above those paid for similar work in private industry, almost tripled. In 1932, they totaled \$311,937,199.

City officials acted as if they believed that the budgetary gyre could go on widening indefinitely. They based their optimism on the fact that the value of taxable real estate in the city, the base of the city's tax structure, was increasing almost as fast as city expenditures. As a result, even while the city's budget soared, there was only a slight increase in the real estate tax rate. If the Hylan and Walker administrations had erected a huge superstructure of city expenditures, that superstructure was nonetheless resting on a base that they thought was steadily broadening.

Even before the Depression, however, the rate of increase in the base had begun to slow down ominously. The annual percentage of increase in the value of taxable real estate in the city was 12 in 1927 but only 9 in 1928 and 8 in 1929. The Depression forced this key percentage down to 6 in 1930, 3 in 1931, 1 in 1932. And the Depression forced *up* another key percentage, the percentage of real estate taxes which the city was unable to collect; in the years between 1928 and 1932 this percentage was, successively, 11, 13, 15, 18, 26. The uncollected balance of the 1932 real estate tax, the tax which had to finance the bulk of the city's debt service and current expenditures, was \$137,613,213. The base on which the top-heavy superstructure of city finances teetered was shrinking, and it was shrinking fast. The superstructure began to topple.

In desperation the city deferred its required annual payments to the Teachers Retirement Fund and expropriated Sinking Fund surpluses already obligated for small-scale public improvements. Unable despite these expedients to meet even its ordinary day-to-day expenses, it was forced to borrow to pay them—at interest rates set higher and higher by bankers increasingly leery of the city's ability to repay. By 1931, even Jimmy Walker was talking about "economizing."

But the city's economizing capacity was limited because one-third of its budget was allocated for an all but irreducible debt service and because of political realities: the city payroll had become the payroll of the Tammany political machine, and while a city might reduce the number of its employees

or their salaries, it was less easy for a political machine to throw its retainers off the payroll or substantially reduce their stipends. City construction contracts had become the main ingredient of the rich swill of graft to which the palate of Tammany leaders—including those party leaders who held high city office—had become accustomed; city officials could reduce a city's appropriations for construction, but men accustomed to feeding at a well-filled trough were far less ready to reduce their own portions. Even while talking economy, city officials made clear that they would not economize on construction appropriations or salaries. (There was one exception: one group of city employees—schoolteachers—were not part of the Tammany machine. In 1930 and 1931, the city fired 11,000 schoolteachers.) The 1932 city budget was the highest ever. The city proposed to finance it with a record increase in the real estate tax rate.

But the day of reckoning for fifteen years of Tammany rule was at hand. When, in January 1932, the city attempted to float new loans to meet the payroll coming due at the end of the month, bankers, convinced that the loans could not be repaid if the city spent money during the coming year at the rate it proposed, refused to make them unless the budget was reduced. The city complied by virtually halting all repairs to its physical plant. It refinanced a quarter-billion dollars of subway bonds, which the city had planned to redeem out of current revenues, by selling long-term bonds in their stead—an expedient which loaded future generations of city taxpayers with a monstrous rapid-transit debt.

Still the city's balance sheet reddened. By December 1932, it was forced to go hat in hand to the bankers again, and when new loans were made contingent on further budget reductions, it had no choice but to cut the salaries of city employees by 6 to 33 percent. And hundreds of millions of dollars in short-term revenue notes would be coming due in 1933 and there was no money in sight to pay them.

Although Walker and O'Brien attempted to do so, it was a misleading oversimplification to blame the Depression for all of New York's problems. The truth was that the city had been falling further and further behind in the race to meet the needs of its people in good times as well as bad, and under reform as well as Tammany administrations.

The city's failure was most apparent, and the problems largest, in those categories of municipal responsibility in which the betterment of its people's lives required the construction of public works on a scale commensurate with the city's size. The concern of the people's tribunes during the Low and Mitchel reform administrations had been for the people's welfare, but that welfare had been conceived of primarily as a lessening of the burden on taxpayers through governmental economy rather than through the construction of civic improvements whose cost would increase that burden. And while Tammany administrations had spent the taxpayers' money with a lavish hand, the taxpayers had received in return surprisingly little increment in

life-improving steel and concrete, because the disproportionate amount of the city's budget funneled by Tammany into salaries—into patronage—left little money available for construction contract appropriations.

The quality of men added to the city payroll, moreover, did not match the quantity, thanks to Hyman's destruction of civil service safeguards. If there was a man less devoted to the merit system than Red Mike, it was his successor; when Beau James departed for Europe, he left behind him, on the rosters of the engineering staffs of the borough presidents, the staffs which alone under the existing City Charter were empowered to draw the plans for major public improvements, a group of "engineers" of whom a substantial percentage lacked a high school diploma. And the city's resultant lack of technical expertise crippled its ability to carry out, or even conceive, complicated public works.

So did the amount of graft, the grease which kept the Tammany machine moving smoothly. From condemnation awards—"Every time the city built a school, a politician went into the real estate business," La Guardia growled—to certificates of completion, every step toward a public improvement required a payoff. Since contractors had to include the cost of such payoffs in their estimates of the cost of city construction work, their bids had to be inflated accordingly. The amount of steel and concrete that a city dollar purchased was correspondingly reduced, and the size of contracts the city awarded was not matched by improvements to the civic estate. "The city did not get what it paid for," commented Fusion financial expert Joseph D. McGoldrick. "Although it certainly paid for what it got"—several times over. For its single major public improvement, the construction of the Independent Subway System, the Walker administration paid \$800,000,000—approximately twice what outside experts said the job should have cost. And when the \$800,000,000 had been spent, substantial portions of the subway were still uncompleted.

And since the hands which city inspectors held out, palms up, to contractors could not easily be doubled into hard fists of regulation, the quality of public works in New York City was more than slightly suspect. No fewer than forty public schools constructed during Walker's administration had to be closed for major repairs—for ceilings that fell, roofs that leaked, stairways that collapsed and plumbing that didn't work at all—within a year of opening.

The gap between the city's physical plant and the increasing needs of its expanding population had, then, been widening in virtually all areas of municipal responsibility. The total accomplishment of the Walker administration in public housing, for example, consisted of the rehabilitation of *some* of the tenements on *one* block, and the number of public hospital beds when Beau James left office was precisely the same as when he entered it. But because of the sudden burgeoning in the use of the automobile and in the desire for active recreation, the city's failure to produce for its people was especially galling in precisely those areas in which Robert Moses had already produced, just outside New York City, so much: highways, bridges and parks.

New York was strangling on its traffic. In 1918, when Hyman took

office, there were 125,101 motor vehicles in the city; in 1932, there were 790,173. In all those fifteen years not a single usable mile of arterial highway had been constructed within the city's borders. Motorists were forced to travel through or around New York in 1932 on the same local streets that had existed in 1918, streets complete with intersecting traffic, traffic lights—and traffic jams reporters had long since run out of adjectives attempting to describe.

In 1913, Robert Moses had stood on a high bluff overlooking the muddy wasteland that was Riverside Park and had envisioned a great parkway running through it. In 1932, there was still no highway. The city had begun construction in 1927 of a West Side Elevated Highway running along the waterfront from the Battery as far uptown as Seventy-second Street, the park's southern border. But the pace of construction had been so slow that, when the Depression brought it to a halt in 1931, substantial portions of the highway had not been built—not that that mattered much, since neither had the entrance and exit ramps that would make it usable. And since there were no plans to extend the highway through Riverside Park, motorists heading for Westchester and New England still had to make their way through—and add to—the congenital traffic jams of Manhattan and the Bronx before they could reach the broad Saw Mill River Parkway, which Moses had built down to the city line.

Queens had once been the only borough with adequate through roads. Manhattan families heading for Nassau and Suffolk counties, once past the East River bridges, had not encountered serious delays until they reached the city line and the narrow roads beyond. But with the construction beyond the line of Moses' parks and parkways, the situation was now reversed; the lure of his creations had steadily increased the traffic flow through Queens, and its boulevards were inadequate to handle it. Furthermore, none of the boulevards linked up with a parkway, so drivers wanting to use one had to endure local streets before they got to it.

As for Brooklyn, borough of churches, its inhabitants had been praying for a way out of it for decades. There was, in the entire borough, not a single major through thoroughfare. There was no way out of its vast center, no way to reach Manhattan or Queens or Nassau County, except via local streets. And the streets of Brooklyn, like those of Queens, were becoming more clogged every year; the population of the two boroughs increased by more than a million between 1920 and 1930.

As for connections for automobiles under or over the water which separated the city's boroughs, there hadn't been one built in a quarter of a century.\* Manhattan motorists bound for the Bronx, Westchester or New England, after crawling uptown through Manhattan's congestion, found when they reached Manhattan's northern boundary, the Harlem River, that the only way to cross it to get to the congested streets of the Bronx was the

\* Two connections had been built, by the Port of New York Authority, between the city and New Jersey: the Holland Tunnel, which opened in 1927, and the George Washington Bridge, which opened in 1931.

Broadway drawbridge, only three lanes wide and so crammed with pillars that traffic tie-ups at either end often extended for blocks. On an average day in 1932, the bridge was raised fourteen times to permit the passage of ships. When one of these raisings occurred at rush hour, the tie-up could extend for miles.\*

The population of Long Island, concentrated in Brooklyn and Queens, was more than four million in 1932—greater than all except eight states. But except for a few small and ancient ferries that plied the East River, the only way on or off Long Island for motorists was the same quartet of “East River bridges” that had existed in 1909. Long Island still didn’t possess a single vehicular link with the mainland United States. The Island didn’t possess a single vehicular link with Manhattan Island north of Fifty-ninth Street, where the Queensborough Bridge touched down. The Queensborough, in fact, was the only link with Manhattan north of Corlears Hook, where the Brooklyn, Manhattan and Williamsburg spans debouched traffic onto the already jammed thoroughfares of the Lower East Side.

On an average weekday in 1933, 238,277 trucks and cars, three times what they were built to handle, poured onto the East River bridges. The Queensborough carried more cars than any other span in the country.

The inadequacy of the approaches to these bridges was matched by the inadequacy of their roadways. Built for horses, not automobiles, they were too narrow for cars and so slippery that, according to a police report, on the Brooklyn Bridge alone, “a dozen accidents were not uncommon on a rainy day.”

City officials had been talking for years about repaving the bridges, but no repaving had been done. They had been talking for years about widening their roadways, but no widening had been done. Although in 1932 the Queensborough Bridge had been open for a quarter of a century, the city had not yet gotten around even to marking lanes on it. At either end of the bridge were traffic lights; when they were red, bridge traffic stopped completely. A 1931 police study found that during rush hours the average driver, frantically shifting gears while trying to keep his car in an unmarked lane, spent forty-three minutes negotiating the 1,182 feet of the Queensborough span. The city had created two additional lanes on the Queensborough upper roadway in 1931, but when the lanes were opened, it was discovered that there had been a slight miscalculation: the lanes were too narrow; cars were constantly skinning their tires on the granite curbs. The lanes had to be closed while workmen laboriously chipped away the edges of the curbstones—and the workmen would be chipping, and the lanes would be closed, for three years.

The lack of new interborough bridges and tunnels wasn’t due to a lack of ideas; New York was littered with evidence to prove that there had

\* Northbound motorists could, of course, cross the Harlem River on one of seven bridges that had been built years before—the newest was finished in 1910—miles to the south. But these bridges debouched into the most congested section of the Bronx, miles from the parkways and other broad roads of Westchester.

been plenty of those. But the evidence also proved how difficult it was, in New York, for ideas to become reality.

In a weed-filled vacant lot in Riverdale just north of the Harlem River stood a marble column a hundred feet high with a strangely unfinished look about its top. There was supposed to be a statue up there, a statue of Hendrick Hudson, for the vacant lot had been purchased by the city as the northern bridgehead of a “Hendrick Hudson Bridge” that was supposed to ease the congestion on the Broadway drawbridge, and a statue of the Great Navigator was supposed to look down on the span that bore his name. But although the lot had been purchased, and the column erected, in 1909, in 1932 work had still not started on the statue—or the bridge.

On the shoreline in Brooklyn’s Bay Ridge section, at the edge of the Narrows, stood two rude wooden palisades, rotting from a decade’s exposure to sea spray. The palisades had been erected to keep children from falling into two huge holes, each ninety-six feet deep. Directly across the Narrows, dug into the Staten Island shoreline, were two similar holes. The four holes had been the start of the shaft heads for a great “Narrows Tube” designed to link Brooklyn with Staten Island. Work on the tube had begun in 1921. The city had spent more than \$7,000,000 on it. But digging had been stopped in 1923 and never resumed, and in 1932 the project was dead—the four empty holes the only evidence of the money spent on it.

And marching across low-lying Ward’s Island in the East River were seventeen massive masonry piers, each of them forty feet thick, eighty feet long, more than a hundred feet high. These piers had been erected to support the central span of the “triborough bridge,” first proposed in 1910, that would link together at last Manhattan, the Bronx and Queens. But in 1932 the piers had been standing for more than two years, and there was still no bridge for them to support—and hope that there ever would be was rapidly fading.

As for New York’s parks, they were scabs on the face of the city.

Parks were the city’s legacy from reformers who had fought against long odds for their creation; under Tammany they had become fiefs administered for private gain. The Brooklyn Park Department paid for hundreds of thousands of cubic yards of landfill that it never received. It constructed a large restaurant and for a yearly rental of ten dollars turned over its keys to a restaurateur who was allowed to keep all profits. When a Brooklyn brick manufacturer needed ten acres for a new storage area, the department allowed him to rent ten acres of Dyker Beach Park—for a rental of \$2.50 per year. And during his term as Brooklyn Park Commissioner, James J. Browne banked \$1,071,713.

Some of the city’s choicest public beach front—in Wolfe’s Pond Park on Staten Island and at Orchard Beach in the Bronx, for example—was rented to political insiders, who, for a fee of fifteen dollars, were allowed to erect private bungalows on it, and to form “civic associations” that promulgated regulations closing the beaches to the public.

Because parks were a handy place to conceal drunks and loafers, Tammany staffed the park departments with the dregs of its barrel of ward

heelers. Because skilled laborers' higher salaries would reduce the amount of patronage that could be distributed, Tammany balked at hiring skilled workers even for those jobs that required skills. So that most of the park department budgets could be devoted to salaries, Tammany scrimped on materials and equipment, spending exactly \$225,000 of the total park budget of \$8,576,319 on such luxuries in 1932—and in that year 90 percent of park department vehicles were still horse-drawn.

By 1932, the paths, walks and roadways in New York's parks were miles of broken pavement. The lawns, seldom mowed, sometimes looked more like meadows. So many trees were dying that some of the loveliest tree-bordered walks were bordered mostly by stumps—the result of allowing unskilled and unsupervised workers to prune trees by simply climbing up to the top of their ladders and sawing trees off at that height, since they were reluctant to risk their own limbs by climbing out on trees'. According to a Park Association survey, there was not a single structure of any type in any park in the city that was not in need of immediate repair.

What the city called a playground was an open space—equipped with slides and a swing or two, sometimes equipped with nothing at all—around which chicken wire had been strung. Most "playgrounds" were not surfaced; rain turned them into mud holes. Others were surfaced with cinders spread loosely over the dirt, and mothers hated to let their children play in them because they knew the children would come home covered with cuts.

If one of the hundreds of statues in the parks was undamaged in 1932, the Park Association couldn't find it. The faces of the statues were masses of bird droppings. Obscenities had been written on—and never erased from—their chests. Their identifying plaques had been torn off. Swords were missing from sheaths, laurel wreaths from brows. Poets plucked at broken harps, saints stood on cracked pedestals. An Indian hunter had lost his bow. The tiger in Central Park was slipping off his rock. The bayonets had been stolen off the rifles of the soldiers in the Seventh Regiment Memorial on Fifth Avenue.

The ironwork that could be seen in the parks—the fences, benches and playground equipment—was pitted and caked with rust. The condition of the ironwork that couldn't be seen was indicated by the rarity of the comfort stations whose plumbing worked.

Since park concessions were handed out to anyone who could raise the necessary payoff, pushcarts and ramshackle booths crowded park paths—there were nineteen along one short path in Battery Park, each with its own carnival-type barker—and since many sold substandard food, there were recurring reports of sickness among children who ate the hot dogs they sold.

Bryant Park, six priceless acres of green amid the concrete masses of midtown, had been allowed to become a haven for drunks and idlers. In 1932, the city obligingly trucked away two of the park's principal ornaments, eight-foot-high statues of Washington Irving and James Marion Sims, founder of the first women's hospital in New York, and allowed a "George Washington Bi-Centennial Celebration Commission" (debonair Grover Whalen, one of Walker's police commissioners, was chairman) to erect a flimsy reproduc-

tion of Federal Hall, the building in which Washington was inaugurated, in the park and then fence it off and place turnstiles at its corners so that the public would be forced to pay admission to see the hall. When the public declined in great numbers to do so, the commission went out of existence without funds to demolish its creation. After picking up the demolition tab, the city discovered that it had managed to lose the Irving and Sims statues. Possibly because the omission of five tons of granite and metal would not be easily concealed in a reconstructed park, Bryant Park was not reconstructed—and in January 1934 it was a weed-filled vacant lot.\*

Central Park, most famous and beautiful of the city's open spaces, "the most noble, the most praiseworthy, the most philanthropic of all our public works," according to an 1876 New York *Herald* editorial, had been the creation of Calvert Vaux and the genius of urban landscape, Frederick Law Olmsted, who, in 1857—with Olmsted still an unknown young park department employee—had won a nationwide contest with their design for the park. Olmsted had driven thousands of men to plant half a million trees and shrubs on its 840 rocky, barren and arid acres and to create bowers, mazes, lawns and vistas, revolutionary sunken transverse roads (that were criticized because people said there would never be sufficient traffic across the park to justify them), bridle paths (that were criticized because few New Yorkers

\* The Bi-Centennial Commission was one of the more hilarious episodes in the city's history. Its "board of directors" contained a number of well-meaning DAR types who had lent their names to what they thought was an attempt to honor the Father of the Country, but the presence of Whalen, an intimate of some of Tammany's most greedy insiders, was the tip-off to the fact that the celebration was intended as a public-scalping party—a suspicion confirmed when food-selling concessions at the "celebration" were handed out to Tammany favorites. First, the commission announced that it would finance the construction of "Federal Hall" by "allowing" citizens to sign a "patriotic roll call"—for a fee of one dollar per signature—designed to raise \$150,000. Despite parades beginning, or ending, at Washington Arch, and led by Jimmy Walker himself, that were designed to whip up public enthusiasm, the roll call was answered by only 18,629 patriots. Sears, Roebuck & Co. then announced that it would lend the commission the money against turnstile receipts—but the finished structure into which that firm's money was sunk turned out to be a plaster and papier-mâché structure that swayed alarmingly and looked barely strong enough to withstand a good wind.

On some days total attendance in the park was so low that only twenty persons paid their twenty-five cents to see it. Whalen then conceived the idea of combining the exhibit with "patriotic movies"—which turned out to be Mickey Mouse cartoons. When interest remained low, Italian opera was tried. The commission couldn't even raise enough money to demolish Federal Hall and restore Bryant Park to its original condition, as it had promised to do in its contract with the city. It announced that "a large part of the population feels that this patriotic shrine should be retained" and went out of existence, leaving \$76,254 in largely unexplained "expenses," and Sears, Roebuck holding the bag for its contribution. The "Hall" stood, crumbling around the edges, in the huge vacant lot that Bryant Park had become until the city, embarrassed by the screams of rage from the Park Association, tore down the structure at its own—or rather at its taxpayers'—expense.

The Bi-Centennial Celebration did, of course, provide Whalen with valuable experience in running a public exposition. He put it to use in running the 1939 New York World's Fair—which lost \$200,000,000.



owned saddle horses), delicate and colorful gardens (that were criticized because people said there would always be enough room in New York for private gardens). Then, his vision completed as he wanted it, Olmsted had fought Tammany for a decade to preserve it, his health and spirit breaking in the fight. Finally ousted as Park Commissioner after a series of worsening nervous breakdowns, he had had to watch hordes of Tammany laborers tear the ivy from the Arsenal walls, "clean up" his beloved "wildernesses," sweep moss and ferns out of all the rocky crevices with house brooms and hack down thousands of trees and shrubs along Fifth Avenue so that park strollers could better view the mansions being built there. And, in 1932, Central Park showed the ravages of the sixty years of neglect that had followed Olmsted's ouster.

The park's lawns, unseeded, were expanses of bare earth, decorated with scraggly patches of grass and weeds, that became dust holes in dry weather and mud holes in wet. Its walks were broken and potholed. Its bridle paths were covered with dung. The once beautiful Mall looked like the scene of a wild party the morning after. Benches lay on their backs, their legs jabbing at the sky. Trash baskets had been overturned and never righted; their contents lay where they had spilled out. The concrete had been stripped off drinking fountains so completely that only their rusting iron pipes remained. And nine out of every ten trees on the Mall were dead or dying.

The red brick of the Arsenal at Fifth Avenue and Sixty-fourth Street had been stuccoed over and painted, and when the stucco had flaked away, the bare spots had been repainted in what was supposed to be the same color but wasn't. The building's turrets, which had made it so quaintly medieval, had been covered with striped wooden cupolas, which were supposed to make it gay, but the wood had broken and caved in and had never been repaired. The ground floor was used as a park department garage; the three upper floors were used mostly as a warehouse to store department records.

Around the Arsenal squatted the twenty-two ancient wooden animal houses of the Central Park Menagerie, crumbling away beneath their yellow paint. So rotted were their walls that park department officials feared that a single charge from a large animal, perhaps maddened by fire, might tear the cage bars right out of them. Instead of rebuilding the animal houses, the department had stationed keepers in front of the lion and tiger cages with rifles and had instructed them to shoot the big carnivores if fire broke out.

The Menagerie was filled with surprises. Because it gratefully accepted any gift that would fill a cage, and people therefore donated their unwanted family pets, it was housing in 1932, alongside the hyacinth cockatoos and the vulturine guinea fowl, several dozen canaries, and, in a cage between the mountain lions and the leopards, an Airedale. Because the Menagerie did not adequately care for its animals or dispose of them when they grew old, its exhibits included such old pensioners as a senile tiger, a puma with rickets and a semi-paralyzed baboon. Its most fearsome exhibits were rats, which roamed it in herds and had become so bold that they were stealing food from the lions' feeding pans. The most vivid memory carried away by many

visitors was of the sickening stench that rose from the dung-heaped Barbary-sheep pen.

Almost directly across the park, off Central Park West, was Jacob Wrey Mould's sheepfold, considered by some critics the finest existing example of the full-blown architecture of the mid-nineteenth century, and from a distance the sheep who grazed opposite it on the Green or Sheep Meadow, under the care of a resident shepherd who twice a day held up traffic on the park's West Drive to herd his flock across, made a picture as pretty as Olmsted had envisioned. But a closer look disclosed that, because for generations the sheep had been allowed to inbreed, every one of them was malformed.

Unlovely as the scenery in the parks might be, there was little to do in the parks except contemplate it. Provision for active sports was so inadequate that although Tammany reserved permits for the city's 162 baseball diamonds for teams which had the blessing of its aldermen—Negro teams from politically powerless Harlem seldom got one—there were still 942 teams *with permits* waiting to use the diamonds on a typical Sunday. Waiting time at tennis courts was measured in hours, and the city's one modern golf course was so crowded on weekends that, the *Herald Tribune* reported, "a player standing on line at dawn is lucky if he gets through his rounds by sunset."

New York was a city of islands, a city surrounded by, permeated by, water. But with Orchard Beach and Wolfe's Pond Park handed over to Tammany insiders, the only acquaintance that most of the city's lower-income families, who did not own cars and thus were virtually barred from Jones Beach, made with the ocean surf was at Coney Island, where a million people, treading gingerly among broken glass and filth that seemed never to be cleaned up, jammed the beach so full on a Sunday that one could hardly see the sand. The beach at Jacob Riis Park in the Rockaways was used only sparsely, but there was a reason: there was no way for a family without a car to reach it, and families with cars could reach it only after a tortuous trip. Swimming in one's own neighborhood, moreover, was all but unheard of; in the entire city, there were in 1932 two tiny outdoor swimming pools. Children who wanted to wade and splash in an outdoor shower could wade in the gutters after they unscrewed fire-hydrant covers; no one had ever heard of wading pools in playgrounds.

The men who worked in the parks complemented the scenery. Even in an era in which every city department was staffed through patronage, the five borough park departments were something special. Recalls one observer: "You couldn't tell the difference between a park employee and the bums hanging out in the parks." The weight of the rheumy-eyed drunks who served as lifeguards at Jacob Riis Park, Rockaway Beach and Coney Island was as excessive for their job as were their ages. "The first time I saw those guys lined up in their swimming costumes, I could hardly believe it," recalls Samuel M. White, who was later put in charge of them. "Some of them ran 225 or 250 pounds. And there were guys there sixty years old." Even on summer Sundays, they used the lifesaving dories for fishing. Not all the lifeguards would go out in the dories, of course. Some of them were afraid to; they

didn't know how to swim. Parents who took their children to city beaches on Sundays learned not to allow them near the shacks on the beach labeled "First Aid Station." The shacks were invariably filled with prostitutes sleeping off the effects of their Saturday-night parties with the lifeguards. ("Those whores were as unbelievable as the guys," White recalls. "They were some of the ugliest women I have even seen.") The aged biddies in charge of park comfort stations were widows of Tammany ward heelers and they understood that no work was required of them. According to one reporter: "Some had curtained off all but, say, two of the eight toilet compartments, had imported chairs, tables and hangings into the cozy space, and frequently had in their friends to afternoon tea." The lady in charge of the comfort station perched on a rocky bluff overlooking the Metropolitan Museum of Art spent her time there removing much of the plumbing and then building herself a cozy little sitting room, in which she had installed a grand piano. The chords of a Chopin nocturne startled more than one woman who entered the comfort station in good faith.

The Depression added its own touches to the parks: the shack towns named, bitterly, "Hoovervilles," in which homeless men sought refuge. One of the largest was a collection of more than two hundred hovels of old boards, flattened gasoline tins and pieces of sheet iron and cardboard in the dried-out bed of the abandoned Central Park Receiving Reservoir behind the Metropolitan Museum of Art; at night its inhabitants ate birds they caught in the park's bird sanctuary.

It wasn't what the Depression did to existing parks that most worried New York's reformers, however; they were more concerned about its effect on the city's plans to acquire new ones.

Nothing was more disturbing to reformers than the city's lack of park land. In 1932, only 14,827 acres, or 7.28 percent of its area, had been set aside for the recreation of its citizens, a percentage smaller than that set aside for recreation in any of the other ten largest cities in the world or in America. And almost half the 14,827 acres were not really parks but only land intended for parks: 3,256 of those acres, for example, were contained in the two "marine parks" in Brooklyn and Staten Island, and these two parks were nothing but utterly undeveloped marshlands under water part of each day.

There was least park land, moreover, in those areas that needed parks the most. For generations, reformers had been attempting to nerve city officials to buy up tenements, tear them down and thereby shatter with shafts of sunlight the solid shadows of slum streets. But the difficulties of relocating tenement families, the veto power over city policies exercised by powerful Tammany district leaders who didn't want Democratic voters removed from their districts, and the lack of will to civic improvement had kept the Hylan and Walker administrations from taking the leap. And the economy-minded Low and Mitchel administrations, led to the brink several times, had always shied away at the last moment because of the sheer enormity of the cost in-

volved. As a result, after nearly a century of agitation for the creation of "breathing spaces" in slums (Moses' grandfather, Bernhard Cohen, had been one of the agitators during the 1870's), there were on the Lower East Side—in an area a mile wide into which were crammed more than half a million people—exactly two small parks, neither of which contained a single piece of play equipment. With the exception of a block-square dirt- and weed-covered vacant lot owned by the city at Corlears Hook just to the east of this area, there was not another clearing in the wilderness of tenements stretching away from the massive granite piers of the Brooklyn Bridge all the way to Tompkins Square—thirty-one blocks to the north. And if one stood, atop the Upper West Side's high ridge, in Morningside, St. Nicholas or Colonial Park and looked down to where the ridge fell suddenly into an alluvial plain once known as Harlem Flats, which in 1932 contained the city's Spanish, Negro and Italian slum areas, he would see nothing between the end of Central Park on 110th Street down to his right and the beginning of Coogan's Bluff at 155th Street down to his left but a vast expanse of the asphalt gray of streets, the tar-paper gray of tenement roofs and the dingy brick red of tenement walls stretching endlessly eastward until it was at last mercifully cut short by the East River, an expanse in which, except for a poignant hint on the rocky slopes of Mount Morris Park at 124th Street, there did not exist a single patch of green. Wrote one reformer: "In the winter months, when the sun is most needed, it is no uncommon sight to see herds of children blocking the streets in sections where a little sun has been allowed to penetrate because there happen to be a few low buildings on one side of the street."

If slum children could not have parks, reformers had pleaded, at least let them have the tiny, pathetic, chicken-wire-fenced, cinder-paved substitute known as playgrounds. But in 1932, after generations of such pleading, there were only four playgrounds on the Lower East Side and two playgrounds in Harlem. In all Brooklyn, there were only thirty-six playgrounds. In all New York, a city which in 1932 contained approximately 1,700,000 children under twelve years of age, there were only 119, or one for every 14,000 children.

"Children's gardens" in playgrounds were the only places in which most slum children could engage in that most precious of childhood activities: digging. So few were the playgrounds—and their "gardens"—that they could accommodate no more than a handful of those who wanted to use them. Playground supervisors made children stand on line with their pails and shovels until a spot in the gardens was open, and the lines were so long that most of the little girls and boys could see at a glance that they were unlikely to get a turn. Most of them stood on the line anyway; childhood, after all, is the time of hope—and there was, after all, little else for them to do.

Reformers had at least hoped that the difficulty of obtaining park land in areas of the city that had already been built up had taught city officials the necessity of reserving land for parks in other areas before they were built up. But all during the 1920's, as they watched with horror, the city allowed developers to devour its open spaces without making more than a few gestures



in this direction. Before the reformers' eyes, the red bricks that had walled out the sun in the Lower East Side and Harlem were cemented into place on the hills and meadows of the Bronx and Queens. "It looks as though all sunshine will soon be crowded out and dark shadows take its place," one reformer wrote in despair.

While campaigning for mayor in 1925, Jimmy Walker had promised to spend money lavishly to renovate Central Park. And no one could accuse him of a complete breach of faith. For not four hundred yards beyond the Sixty-fifth Street Transverse Road which formed the northern border of the Menagerie, visible from the Barbary-sheep pen when winter stripped the leaves from the park's trees, was dramatic evidence that, in at least one location in Central Park, Walker had more than kept his word. Not four hundred yards beyond the Transverse Road stood the Central Park Casino, a legend in its time.

The Casino was the brain child of restaurateur Sidney Solomon, front man for a cabal of socialites and Tammany officials who felt the need, as Walker euphemistically put it, of a sanctuary in which they might "entertain visitors without being molested." He asked the Mayor to let him establish one in the Casino, a low, rambling brick-and-stone building that had been built in the park in 1864 as a "Ladies Refreshment Salon" and had since been turned into a quiet little night club.

Walker owed Solomon a great debt. The restaurateur had introduced him to his favorite tailor. Throwing out the night club's previous owner, the Mayor turned it over to Solomon—for a rental of \$8,500 a year, a sum which turned out to be equal to one night's receipts.

"The Casino will be our place, Monk," Walker reportedly said to his mistress, Betty (Monk) Compton. (Mrs. Walker's place was apparently Florida, the state to which she had been packed off for an extended vacation.) Although Solomon retained the celebrated Viennese interior decorator Josef Urban, who announced that he would strive for "a feeling of wind among young leaves," none of Urban's sketches was executed until Jimmy and Monk approved. The Mayor, whose disregard of city affairs was legendary, dedicated himself to making the Casino perfect in every detail. When it had been renovated—at a cost to Solomon and his backers of \$365,000—and the restaurateur was about to announce its opening, Walker noticed that one of the bandstands blocked the headwaiter's view of the main entrance and thus deprived him of time to screen his guests and decide how important they were and where to seat them. He insisted that a new entrance be constructed—and it was, at a cost of \$22,000.

When it opened, the Casino was hailed by one well-qualified observer as "the swankiest restaurant New York has yet seen." The dining pavilion was silver and maroon; the ballroom, except for Urban's flowing golden murals, all black glass; the dayroom fumed knotty pine. Emil Coleman's popular society orchestra played in the pavilion, Leo Reisman's in the Black and Gold Room. Spelling the orchestras were two pianists, the famous Nat

Brandwynne and a handsome youngster, unknown, on whom Solomon had decided to take a chance: Eddie Duchin.

But the Casino was more than a restaurant or a night club. The Casino was Jimmy Walker's Versailles. Friends joked that the Mayor spent more time there than he did at City Hall. When his limousine pulled into view, the doorman would scurry inside and signal the orchestra, so that when Beau James and Betty entered, it would be to strains of "Will You Love Me in December?" Holding hands with Betty, sipping champagne while she sipped beer, the Mayor would receive the parade of visitors to his table with careless ease, and sometimes, when Betty asked him to dance, he would even arise, pinch-waisted and slim in the tuxedo with the shiny lapels that people were beginning to copy, and glide with her around the floor, and the Mayor's friends would know that he was feeling very good indeed, for although he was so graceful a dancer that he had once wanted to be a professional, for years before he met Betty he had refused to dance a step, for reasons he never told anyone.

The regulars at Walker's court played their parts well. They brought their own champagne, their chauffeurs cooling it outside in the Rolls-Royces lined up along the dark paths until the doorman signaled that another bottle was wanted at table. Their wives and girl friends crowded around the bandstands so Reisman and Coleman and Brandwynne could autograph their slippers. Their spending was in character; one insurance man always announced his arrival by handing a thousand-dollar bill to the bandleader. At closing time, the bills fluttering down onto the hat-check girls' little silver trays seemed to one observer to be mostly hundreds. Reisman and Coleman were offered fabulous fees to play on after closing at private homes, and when the society crowd discovered Duchin, there was no limit to their generosity; a member of the Grace steamship family once paid him \$20,000 to play at a party. The Depression? What Depression? "Until La Guardia came in, we never had a losing day, panic or no panic," Solomon was to say. And in a duplex upstairs retreat, closed to the public, its very existence concealed by the building's lowering mansard roof, Tammany politicians were entertained by Broadway chorus lines—rushed to the Casino *en masse* by motorcycle escort. And all the while, in a small adjoining office, its walls covered with green moiré and its ceiling with gold leaf, its heavy door carefully soundproofed, Walker held court for favor seekers and politicians, and it was there, insiders said, that much of the city's business was transacted.

Moses' attention had been drawn back to New York even before the Depression. Realizing in 1926 that city officials were not following through on promises to plan a new Queens road network to feed the Long Island parkways he was building, he had, during a solid year of conferences, all but begged the officials to widen Queens, Northern and Conduit boulevards and other major east-west thoroughfares in Brooklyn and Queens, to link Queens Boulevard with the Northern State Parkway, to make good on the promise given to him in 1924 and widen the two-mile stretch of Central

Avenue, the narrow winding farm road that was the only route to the Southern State Parkway. Disturbed that Bronx and Westchester residents could reach his Long Island parks only by driving down into Manhattan and across the Queensborough Bridge, he had persuaded Al Smith to urge a start on construction of the long-talked-about "triborough" bridge.

But in 1932, six years later, not even a start had been made on building these thoroughfares (with the exception of Queens Boulevard, on which work was proceeding so desultorily that its completion was nowhere in sight), and the farms that in 1926 could have been acquired cheaply for the right-of-way had become subdivisions the city could no longer afford to buy. Central Avenue was still unwidened; six years after the opening of the most modern highway in the United States the only approach to it was still a farm road. And as for the Triborough Bridge, the ring of the pile drivers hammering in its foundations after Mayor Walker had broken ground on October 25, 1929, had a distinctly hollow undertone, for while city officials were proclaiming that New York's traffic problems would be largely solved on the day that cars could speed up its mighty ramps, Moses was asking the project's chief engineer, a Tammany hack who had entered city service in 1886 as an axman, where the cars were going to go when they came down—and was learning that no one had thought to plan even a single approach road at any one of the bridge's three termini. And upset as Moses was at that, he soon realized that it was likely to be of no consequence. October 25, 1929, was a Friday, the Friday after "Black Thursday," the day of the stock-market crash. The proximity of the two days proved significant. The city's \$5,400,000 initial allocation, largely wasted on extravagant condemnation awards, counsel fees and other items of Tammany graft, ran out after the Ward's Island piers had been built, and the city was prevented by the Depression from raising any additional funds for the project; in 1932 it had been at a complete standstill for two years.

Moses' plans for New York were not confined to Queens. The city's prestigious Park Association, inspired by his Long Island work to attempt again to save the city's fast-disappearing open spaces, had formed the Metropolitan Park Conference and made him its chairman. Assigning selected State Parks Council staffers to city problems (without the knowledge of the Legislature, of course), he furnished the reformers with the ingredient their efforts had been lacking: the expertise of engineers, landscape architects, draftsmen and surveyors experienced in park work. There were plenty of ideas for park acquisition floating around the city; some had been floating around for decades. Now Moses firmed up these ideas, made them concrete, codified them in terms that enabled the reformers to present specific demands to the Walker administration.

And Moses gave the reformers something as valuable as his organization. He gave them his vision. No sooner had he become chairman of the Metropolitan Park Conference than he began driving endlessly around New York. The big black Packard that had once been pulled up in the yards of Long Island farmhouses was parked now at the edge of the lonely marshes on the shore of Jamaica Bay; in the empty, rocky fields on a deserted Bronx

peninsula known as Ferry Point; and at the spot on Riverside Drive to which, twenty years before, he had taken taxicabs while he was conceiving his great highway along the Hudson. And while his chauffeur waited in the car, he was walking around, with the same long, restless strides with which he had covered Long Island, lost in concentration, occasionally making sketches on a yellow legal note pad.

On February 25, 1930, before five hundred civic leaders gathered in the Grand Ballroom of the Hotel Commodore for the Park Association's annual dinner, Robert Moses, dressed in tuxedo and black tie (tied by Mary), rose to his feet and tugged a cord which dramatically pulled the drapery from a huge map of New York City hanging behind the dais. Running across the map were heavy red lines. One, which started in Brooklyn at the Brooklyn Bridge, ran along the borough's western and southern shores, skirting Jamaica Bay, and then, in Queens, headed north along the city's eastern boundary. The shore-front portion, Moses said, was a "Marginal Boulevard"—he had not yet named it the "Belt Parkway"—which would provide a quick circumferential passage around Brooklyn. The portion that ran north along the city boundary was a "Cross Island Parkway." A third of the way up its length, it crossed and linked up with the Southern State Parkway. Two-thirds of the way up, it crossed and linked up with the Northern State and with the proposed Grand Central Parkway. And at its end was a bridge—a "Ferry Point-Whitestone Bridge," he called it, not yet having named it the "Bronx-Whitestone"—that would enable motorists to speed across Long Island Sound. And then . . .

The audience's eyes followed the pointer in Moses' hand. At the northern end of the Ferry Point-Whitestone Bridge was another line, heading northeast to link up with the Hutchinson River Parkway that he had already built in Westchester County almost as far north as the Connecticut border. This, Moses said, was a "Hutchinson River Parkway Extension."

The audience, most of whose members had been concerned for years about the city's traffic problems, grasped at once the significance of what Moses was showing them. If the Marginal Boulevard, the Ferry Point-Whitestone Bridge and the Hutchinson River Parkway Extension were built, they saw, motorists would be able to leave Manhattan Island on the Brooklyn Bridge and then proceed over broad modern roads, unhindered by a single traffic light, all the way around Brooklyn to the Long Island parkways and parks. In addition, Manhattan and Brooklyn motorists would be presented with a through route to the Bronx, Westchester and New England—and so would motorists from Nassau and Suffolk counties. And, looking at it in reverse, the Bronx, Westchester and New England would suddenly be brought within easy access of the Long Island parks.

Moses' pointer reversed itself, tracing the Marginal Boulevard backward around Brooklyn. When it got to the Narrows, at a point opposite Staten Island, it stopped. Planners had long dreamed of a crossing between Brooklyn and Staten Island, Moses said; the Narrows Tube had been only one of several abortive attempts to make that dream reality. Now it was time to finish the tube. As soon as it was built, it could be linked with a parkway

system on scenic Staten Island—more red lines rimmed the shoreline there—and, via a parkway straight across the island, with the Goethals and Outerbridge Crossing bridges on its western shore. And on the other side of those crossings, the audience realized with a start, was New Jersey! Moses' plan would give the city at last the long-discussed "northeastern bypass," the route, so long vaguely dreamed of by planners, that would enable traffic to and from New England and points south of the city to avoid crowded Manhattan Island and stop jamming its streets, that would free Manhattan forever from tens of thousands of cars and trucks that flooded into it every day although it was not their destination.

And there wouldn't be only one bypass route. The pointer flicked back across the Narrows and then eastward and northward along the Marginal Boulevard until it reached its intersection with the Grand Central Parkway. The western terminus of the Grand Central was no longer Queens Boulevard, the audience saw; now the parkway extended westward all the way to the point where the Triborough Bridge was supposed to touch down in Queens. And from the proposed Bronx terminus of the Triborough, red lines radiated out northwestward along the Harlem River to the Saw Mill River Parkway he was building in Westchester County and northeastward along Bruckner Boulevard to the Hutchinson River Parkway Extension. These, Moses said, would be other parkways—and as he said it, the reform leaders sitting on the dais suddenly realized that the lines behind Moses formed a whole series of rough but concentric rings that would provide a whole series of possible bypass routes around the city and at the same time would make the parks and parkways Moses had built on Long Island easily accessible to any family in the city with a car. Manhattan motorists would be able to drive all the way to Jones Beach without ever being slowed by a traffic light or intersecting traffic. Turn those red lines on Moses' map into concrete, they realized, and motorists in great sections of the city would be largely freed from the trap of local streets in which they had been so long confined.

There were other lines on the map, too. One ran along the western shore of Manhattan Island all the way up to the Harlem River, over the river and up through the Bronx. If the West Side Elevated Highway was extended up through Riverside Park, Moses said, and if it was carried across the Harlem by the Henry Hudson Bridge, and if it then ran north to the city line, its northern terminus would be within three miles of the southern terminus of the Saw Mill River Parkway the state was constructing. If the city built the parkway—the "Henry Hudson Parkway," he called it—he would see that the state extended the Saw Mill River Parkway south to meet it, and there would be a continuous through route from the bottom of Manhattan Island to Westchester County.

A Henry Hudson Parkway would provide further advantages, Moses explained. It would give the city a fast, modern route to the George Washington Bridge. On the other side of that bridge was Palisades Interstate Park. It would no longer be difficult to reach it. All New Jersey, in fact, would be opened to motorists from the west side of Manhattan. And if the

Henry Hudson Parkway was built properly and a great park created alongside it on what was now the mud flats of Riverside Park, the city's residents would not even have to leave the city to find beauty. They would be able to drive along the water, the river stretching to one side of them, the green of the park to the other, above the park the spires of Manhattan. It would be a public improvement unequaled in the world!

Before he finished talking about parkways, Moses said, he had a final point. The plan he proposed was admittedly somewhat ambitious. But it was realistic—and it was realizable. The dream of opening to the residents of New York City the beauty of the lands around it was in reach. After all, he said, much of it was already reality. The Southern State, Northern State and Hutchinson River parkways were already built, the Saw Mill River Parkway begun. Much of the rest of it was begun: the State Council of Parks was committed to building the Saw Mill River Parkway and Hutchinson River Parkway extensions; at least a start had been made on the Triborough Bridge and the West Side Highway. All that needed to be done was to knit these elements together.

Now, he said, he wanted to discuss parks. His listeners, who had noticed that the park along the Henry Hudson Parkway was colored green on the map, saw that much of the land bordering the other parkways Moses was proposing was also green.

All along the parkways, he said, there should be small parks. The parkways' right-of-way itself should be "ribbon parks" similar to those along the parkways on Long Island. Obtaining the necessary land would be easy along much of the Marginal Boulevard and Cross Island Parkway, and along all the parkways in Staten Island, because the areas these parkways ran through were still largely undeveloped and land there was cheap. It would be expensive to buy land along some of the other parkways. But it was never going to become cheaper. It would only become more expensive. It should be bought now.

The larger green areas on the map, he said, represented larger parks. Specifically, he said, they represented a substantial portion of the last areas of natural beauty remaining in the city. The corridor parks he was proposing in eastern Queens, for example, running roughly along the route of the proposed Grand Central Parkway, represented the last undeveloped portions of the heavily forested hills of the glacial moraine. The parks he was proposing along the north shore of Jamaica Bay represented the last chance to preserve from commercial exploitation the bay's wild marshes and abundant animal and bird life. The park he was proposing on the meadows at Flushing Bay represented the last chance to preserve a portion of that bay from development. These parks, he said, should be purchased at once. His engineers had compiled estimates of their cost, and it was \$30,000,000. A bond issue for that amount should be authorized at once by the Board of Estimate. Admittedly it would take a hard fight to persuade the Board to do what had to be done. He invited the people listening to him to join in that fight.

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The reformers stood up and cheered when Moses had finished, but the reaction of city officials was somewhat less satisfying. For all the cooperation he received from them he might still have been the starry-eyed idealist of 1914 arguing in the language of a Yale bull session for the construction of mothers' shelters in Central Park.

The scale of his plans was too big for them. Not one city official, he would recall, seemed capable of comprehending a highway network on the scale he had proposed—a fact which would not have been surprising even if the officials had been men of vision, since no highway network on that scale had ever been proposed for any city in America, or, for that matter, any city in the world.

The scale of the money involved was too big for them. The total cost would obviously be in the hundreds of millions of dollars, and they felt there was no sense in the city even considering such an amount.

What the city officials could comprehend about Moses' plan they didn't like. The relocations involved for his highways would be on a scale almost unknown in the city: the Whitlock Avenue approach to the Triborough Bridge in the Bronx would alone require the condemnation of buildings containing more than four thousand apartments—voters' apartments.

Moses' general plans for his parkway system were turned over for analysis to city engineers, who, sensing the attitude of their superiors, did not rush to begin working on them. Try as he would, Moses could not get the city to move on them. And once the Depression began to tighten its hold on New York, there was no longer much sense in trying to get the city to move. In 1932, the city had not even begun seriously considering any of the parkways he had proposed at the Hotel Commodore dinner two years before.

Walker's administration did agree in 1930 to issue \$30,000,000 in bonds to buy new park land. In 1930, the city acquired 2,530 acres that would be known as Great Kills and Willowbrook parks on Staten Island; Highland, Alley Pond and Kissena parks in Queens; and Owl's Head Park in Brooklyn. But, by the end of that year, it was becoming apparent that the city's people had needs even more pressing than the need for parks, even if there had still been any market for the bonds that had to be sold to buy them. In 1932, with only \$4,000,000 of the \$30,000,000 spent—and exactly one tenement-area park acquired—even most reformers were agreeing that acquisition of park land was a luxury that New York would have to postpone to some other, happier, decade.

When Roosevelt, under Moses' prodding, agreed to fight the Depression with a state public works program of unprecedented size, Moses saw the agreement as a chance to make the city move. The state had never spent any money on roads in New York City, but Moses persuaded Roosevelt to authorize the state's Temporary Emergency Relief Administration to pay the construction costs of the Grand Central Parkway and the Central Avenue linkup with the Southern State Parkway, and of another, "Interborough," parkway, long proposed but never built, that would provide

access into and out of central Brooklyn. The city would have to pay only for the right-of-way. The Legislature, having learned the inadvisability of giving Moses an opportunity to drive the opening wedge for a project that would later turn out to cost many times what he had estimated, gave Moses only \$5,000,000, payable at the rate of a paltry \$1,000,000 per year. All other expenses, the bill provided, must be paid by the city. But in the city Moses had no political leverage. The Board of Estimate kept delaying approval of the route, the allocations for right-of-way kept getting involved in endless snarls and at the end of 1933 Moses could look back and see that it had taken him as long to build a total of two miles of the parkway projects in Queens as it had taken him to build twenty-two miles of the Southern State Parkway.

Roosevelt's successor as Governor, Herbert H. Lehman, deeply respected Moses. Says one man who served as an adviser to both: "Roosevelt saw Jones Beach in terms both of people swimming and in terms of the political gains that could come from those people swimming. Herbert Lehman thought only of helping people to go swimming and be happy. And he felt that no one could do that job better than Robert Moses."

Within a month after Lehman took office in January 1933, he handed to Moses even more power than Roosevelt had given him. In 1932, Congress, at President Hoover's request, had created the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to help self-supporting public works projects. Lehman set up a State Emergency Public Works Commission to screen such projects and determine which should be submitted to Washington, and named Moses its chairman. This post gave Moses the power to get work under way on his huge park and parkway plan for the Niagara Frontier; a Niagara Frontier Bridge Authority was established, received \$2,800,000 in federal funds and constructed bridges that linked both the north and south ends of Grand Island, near Buffalo, to the mainland. A Thousand Islands Bridge Authority built the international bridge to Canada. Under his direction, a New York State Bridge Authority was established to purchase—through agreements he negotiated—the Bear Mountain Bridge from the Harrimans and its other private owners. A Saratoga Springs Authority began refurbishing and expanding the spa. Negotiating in Washington with the RFC, Moses obtained funds for the Port of New York Authority to construct the Lincoln Tunnel and for the city to construct Hillside, Knickerbocker and other housing developments. And he persuaded Mayor O'Brien to ask the Legislature to establish a Triborough Bridge Authority that could issue its own bonds, secured by toll revenues, and that would therefore be eligible for aid from the newly formed federal Public Works Administration, and the PWA granted a \$44,200,000 combination loan and grant to the Authority on condition that the city make certain additional token contributions. But hardly had the Tammany-controlled Authority gotten its hands on the first installment of the grant than it blew it on inflated condemnation awards and counsel fees; in addition, the city proved unable to make even the first installment of its token payment. The PWA thereupon cut off funds and announced that no more would be forthcoming until the city paid up and the

Authority cleaned up—and in 1933 there were no immediate prospects of either development.

In vain, Moses pointed out to the Board of Estimate that the money the TERA and PWA were prepared to spend in New York would create vast improvements in the city—at virtually no cost to its taxpayers. In vain, he pointed out that the money would put thousands of hungry men to work for salaries that would feed their families. Such considerations were not of interest to the Tammany-dominated Board. And those that were of interest, Moses, outside the city's power structure as he was, could not offer them.

All through 1933, the city's financial situation worsened. In May, City Comptroller Charles W. Berry informed Mayor O'Brien that the city would be unable to pay \$100,000,000 in short-term revenue notes coming due in June. The bankers agreed to extend the notes only after the city agreed to an almost doubled interest rate and budget cuts so stringent that they made it all but impossible for the city to keep its physical plant in repair. And, despite the extension, in September Berry told O'Brien that the city would be unable to meet its October 24 payroll.

After nine days of frantic meetings in which a worried Governor Lehman participated, the bankers agreed on September 27 to further extensions—after the city agreed to accept even more stringent repayment provisions, and to balance its 1934 budget.

The city's worries were still not over. It required legislative authorization to meet the bankers' demands, but the Legislature's Republican majority saw the city's plight as a lever they could use to pry various concessions from Lehman, and a long, tense bargaining session ensued. Not until October 18, just six days before the city would, by all common business definitions, enter a state of bankruptcy, was the authorization given. And a look ahead was hardly reassuring. The amount of short-term revenue notes coming due in the next two years was \$500,000,000.

Nevertheless, in the summer of 1933, Moses was convinced that events were moving for, rather than against, him. For during that summer, over a period of several weeks, he was convinced that he was going to get a chance personally to move the city—as its next mayor.