

1986

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### Recommended Citation

Crooks, James B. (1986) "Jacksonville in the Progressive Era: Responses to Urban Growth," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 65 : No. 1 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol65/iss1/5>

## JACKSONVILLE IN THE PROGRESSIVE ERA: RESPONSES TO URBAN GROWTH

by JAMES B. CROOKS

**I**N the first two decades of the twentieth century, Jacksonville, Florida, became a substantial southern city. Its population more than tripled from 28,428 to 91,558, as it jumped from the nineteenth to the twelfth largest city in the Southeast. Construction, after the great fire of 1901, of skyscrapers, a new city hall, court house, library, high schools, modern department stores, and a palatial railroad station created a cosmopolitan downtown. Expanding suburbs in Riverside, Murray Hill, Springfield, and across the St. Johns River in South Jacksonville provided the physical and social separation of work and home life that characterized cities across America. Wholesale and retail trade, transportation, banking, and insurance expanded rapidly as the private sector took advantage of business opportunities.<sup>1</sup>

The rapid physical and economic growth of Jacksonville produced both prosperity and problems requiring political responses. New wealth enabled an increasing number of people to buy automobiles. Cars were a novelty on city streets at the beginning of the era, but by the outbreak of the First World War, they were causing traffic jams. Growth also meant suburban residents demanding the extension of street car lines, purchase of park lands, and the construction of new schools. Of major concern was fear for the health of a community which had often suffered yellow fever, typhoid, and malaria epidemics in the past. Thus, a major test of the effectiveness of Jackson-

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1. James B. Crooks, "The Changing Face of Jacksonville, Florida, 1900-1910," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 60 (April 1984), 441-45; T. Frederick Davis, *History of Jacksonville, Florida and its Vicinity, 1513-1924* (St. Augustine, 1925), 244-45, 356-57; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, October 22, 1912, September 25, November 11, 16, December 3, 1919; Blaine A. Brownell, "The Urban South Comes of Age, 1900-1940," in Blaine A. Brownell and David R. Goldfield, eds., *The City in Southern History* (Port Washington, N. Y., 1977), 128.

ville's government during the progressive years lay in its response to the problems accompanying urban growth, particularly in the transportation, education, and public health of the community.

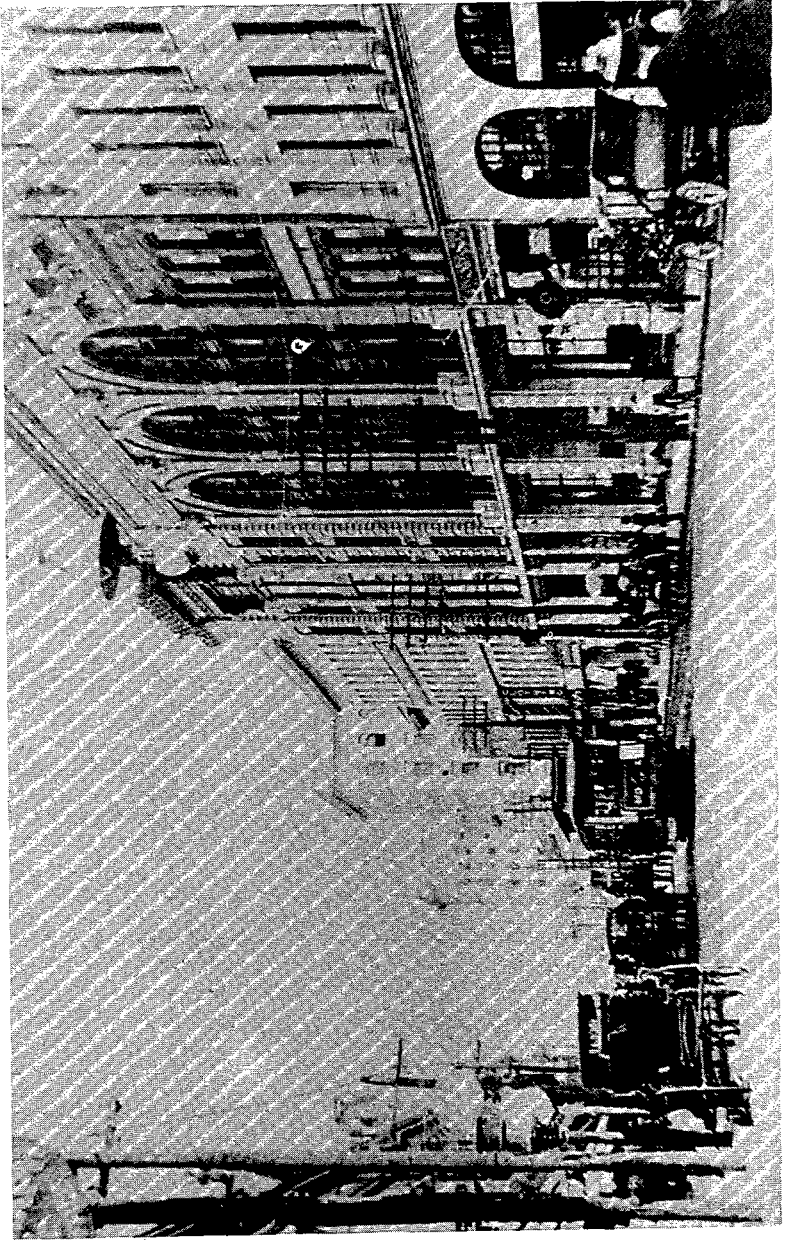
In transportation, electric street cars replaced mule-drawn "hay-burners" in Jacksonville during the 1890s. After 1900, street railway lines fanned out in all directions from downtown: west to Brooklyn and Riverside; northwest through LaVilla and Hansontown; out Main Street to Springfield; and east to East Jacksonville, Oakland, Fairfield, and the Ostrich Farm. In 1902, Stone & Webster of Boston took over the Jacksonville line, adding it to holdings which included systems in Houston, El Paso, Tampa, Savannah, and Columbus, Georgia. The following year, the predominantly black-owned North Jacksonville Street Railway began operating a line to Mason Park, the leading black resort just outside the city limits. In 1906, when this line defaulted, Stone & Webster's Jacksonville Electric Company petitioned city council for a franchise to consolidate all of the city's street railway holdings.<sup>2</sup>

Council's response was to prefer municipal ownership. The city owned its waterworks and had built its own electric power plant in the 1890s. Run by a board of municipal bond trustees, which essentially was an independent authority, the electric plant produced cheap electricity, provided profits for the city treasury, and served as a model for municipal ownership nationally. In contrast, the privately-owned Jacksonville Electric Company, according to an earlier council report, had failed to provide frequent service, maintain its tracks, or keep its cars clean.<sup>3</sup>

Council proposed an amendment to the city charter to take over all public utilities, including the street railways, but the state legislature refused to pass it. Eventually council granted the Jacksonville Electric Company a franchise requiring voter approval. It set a three per cent gross receipts tax, a five cent fare, and minimal standards of service. Voter approval, how-

2. Davis, *History*, 373-75; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, April 22, June 27, 1902, August 22, 23, 24, 1903, February 22, 1905.

3. City Council minutes, October 15, 1901, February 7, 1905; J. M. Barrs, "Municipal Ownership in Jacksonville, Florida," *Proceedings of the National Conference for Good City Government*, 1906 (New York, 1906), 257-65. City Council minutes in bound volumes are located at the city council offices in City Hall, Jacksonville, Florida.



Bay Street looking east from Laura Street. Photograph courtesy of Douglas Milne, Jacksonville.

ever, did not end complaints about street car service which continued throughout the era. Whether Jacksonville, given the legal authority, would have run the street railways better than Stone & Webster is unknown. The state prevented the locally preferred response for coping with urban growth.<sup>4</sup>

City council fared better in other transportation matters. It forced the railroads to build viaducts or overpasses at company expense on East Duval Street and at Myrtle Avenue to separate vehicular and rail traffic. It gained the support of the State Railroad Commission in forcing the Jacksonville Terminal Company (a corporation comprising the city's major railroads) to build a new passenger depot. The old brick station completed in 1897, was in council's words, "small, incommodious, poorly arranged . . . inefficient . . . and inadequate." Mayor J. E. T. Bowden complained about the embarrassment of the old station. It was the busiest train station in the South, he claimed, with 4,000,000 people passing through it in 1914. Yet it was "an eyesore to every traveller" and a disgrace to Jacksonville. Political pressures from mayor and council locally, and at the state level, finally resulted in the construction of a handsome new station which opened for use in November 1919.<sup>5</sup>

The automobile was another problem, although congestion in downtown traffic preceded the arrival of the internal combustion engine. As the auto increased in popularity, the mayor proposed, and council passed in 1904, an ordinance regulating the use and speed of automobiles. Cars must be licensed and have a "good horn," and two head lamps. No one under sixteen could drive in town, and the maximum speed downtown was ten miles per hour.<sup>6</sup> Five years later, council passed legislation to regulate the use of streets. Vehicles must keep to the right and pass on the left. Drivers were to use hand signals, and emergency vehi-

4. City Council minutes, April 18, 1905, July 10, 1906, March 19, May 7, 1907, September 1, 1908, October 30, 1912, May 28, 1918.
5. Council's description of the station can be found in its minutes of January 16, 1909. For Mayor Bowden's complaints, see Council minutes dated November 11, 1911. See also City Council minutes of January 16, March 6, 1906, August 17, 1915; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, March 3, August 13, 1916, November 16, 17, and 18, 1919.
6. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, May 4, June 19, 1904; City Ordinance H-19, passed June 17, 1904. Newspaper copies of city ordinances are on file in the city council offices at City Hall, Jacksonville, Florida.

cles had the right of way. Subsequent laws licensed automobile drivers, limited downtown parking to thirty minutes, and regulated parallel parking to within six inches of the curb. By the end of the era, council had budgeted funds for traffic police to improve vehicular flow. Local government had begun to respond effectively to the impact of the automobile on the city.<sup>7</sup>

Rapid population growth also put pressure on the local school system. In Jacksonville, public education was the responsibility of the Duval County Board of Public Instruction which supervised an urban school district as well as a network of rural schools. State government, however, severely hampered the authority of local school boards by setting a maximum tax rate of seven mills for education, constitutionally prohibiting state aid to local schools, and making no provision for bonding to build new schools. To make matters worse in Jacksonville, tax revenues for education were diverted to rebuild three downtown schools destroyed by the 1901 fire. Subsequently, population pressures forced the building of new schools in Murray Hill, Fairfield, and Springfield, as well as a new Duval High School. The school system teetered on the brink of insolvency during the first half of the Progressive Era. Teachers were underpaid, classrooms overcrowded, and buildings inadequately maintained.<sup>8</sup>

In 1900, J. L. M. Curry of the Peabody/Slater funds, and a leading advocate for public education in the South, came to Jacksonville at the invitation of the Woman's Club. He toured the city schools and pronounced them "a failure." Three years later, members of the Woman's Club, leading the fight to increase school taxes, acknowledged that the schools were "far behind what they should be." In 1910, Francis P. Conroy, president of the Board of Trade, described the schools as "simply appalling. . . citizens here should be ashamed of themselves that such conditions exist." Two years later, Jacksonville's fire chief

7. City Ordinances K-22, passed November 22, 1909; K-68, passed November 1, 1910, and N-26, passed June 7, 1915; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, November 29, 1919.
8. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, March 26, 1903, February 6, May 5, 1905, March 14, 1910, April 20, 1911; Duval County School Board minutes, September 20, November 19, 1906, March 7, 1907, January 28, 1908, September 7, 1910. The minutes in bound volumes are located in the superintendent's office of the Duval County School Board, Jacksonville, Florida.



Masonic Temple completed in 1913. Home of Anderson, Tucker and Company, bankers, and other black businesses. Photograph courtesy of the Eartha White Collection, University of North Florida.

inspected the schools and found that all the frame schools, including the black schools and the white schools in Springfield, Riverside and LaVilla, were “fire traps and need to be replaced.” A city-wide consensus was building on the need for better schools.<sup>9</sup>

The Woman’s Club began advocacy on behalf of the schools early in the Progressive Era. The Board of Trade also became involved, as did the suburban neighborhood associations. The black community repeatedly asked for improvements at the segregated Stanton School. Substantial changes began in 1910 when the county commission, following a Board of Trade resolution, endorsed a school board request for a \$400,000 bond issue to construct new buildings. The following spring, the legislature passed a constitutional amendment authorizing bonding. Florida’s voters ratified it in 1912, and the legislature voted to allow counties to bond up to five mills.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile in December 1913, the school board appointed as superintendent of schools, Fons A. Hathaway, the thirty-six year old principal of Duval High School. Born in the Florida panhandle, and a graduate of the University of Florida, Hathaway had been principal of Orlando High School before coming to Jacksonville in 1909. A professional educator active on both the state and national levels, Hathaway began a major effort to modernize the Duval County schools just at the time the state was authorizing increased funding to Florida localities.<sup>11</sup>

Hathaway began by focusing on instruction, reintroducing the summer training school, and encouraging his teachers to attend. Job entry standards were raised with high school teachers required to have a college or normal school degree. Elementary teachers were expected to have at least one year of training beyond high school. At the elementary level, Hathaway hired supervisors to work with poor and mediocre teachers. He

9. For excerpts of Curry’s speech, see Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, March 23, 1900; for the Women’s Club estimates, see Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, April 3, 1903; for Conroy’s remarks, see Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, May 13, 1910; for the fire chiefs remarks, see City Council minutes, June 4, 1912.
10. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, April 3, 1903, October 6, 1910, May 6, 1911; School Board minutes, October 8, 1910.
11. School Board minutes, December 20, 1913; Pleasant Daniel Gold, *History of Duval County* (St. Augustine, 1928), 539.



also raised minimum and maximum salaries three times over the next six years, introducing the system's first pay scales and across-the-board increases.<sup>12</sup>

The school board supported Hathaway's proposals, expanding the curriculum with music, art, manual training, home economics, commercial courses, and special education classes for "backward or retarded pupils." Also introduced were civics classes for elementary students and teacher training in the high school. The board extended the school year to nine months, and following state legislative authorization, implemented compulsory education. To fund these new programs, the board depended upon the expanding tax base of the county, plus a special one mill tax for the urban district.<sup>13</sup>

New buildings were funded by a \$1,000,000 bond issue passed early in 1915. Almost ninety per cent of the money went for building new or expanding older white grammar schools in the county. The board, however, did replace the frame structure at Stanton with a modern brick building, as well as replace three other black elementary schools. The board also recognized "the tendency in the more progressive cities . . . to make the school the center of community life . . . and introduced a policy to allow buildings to be used by civic, literary and school improvement associations."<sup>14</sup>

Much of what Hathaway and the school board accomplished during the Progressive Era was an attempt to catch up with other school systems across the nation. Despite their substantial efforts, the schools barely kept pace with the rapidly growing city. The influx of war contracts and war workers in 1917- 1918 pushed up enrollments by ten per cent a year, once again crowding facilities. The growing popularity of secondary education at Duval High School led to plans for two new junior high schools. Inflation squeezed salaries during the war prompting a delegation of teachers to appeal for a twenty-five per cent increase in 1918. Still, the school board with its professional superinten-

12. School Board minutes, January 21, May 25, 1914, May 15, 1915, April 22, 1916, May 30, 1918.

13. *Ibid.*, June 16, 1914, June 26, 1915, April 22, May 20, 27, June 24, 1916.

14. *Ibid.*, June 20, 1914, February 20, 1915, March 2, 1918.

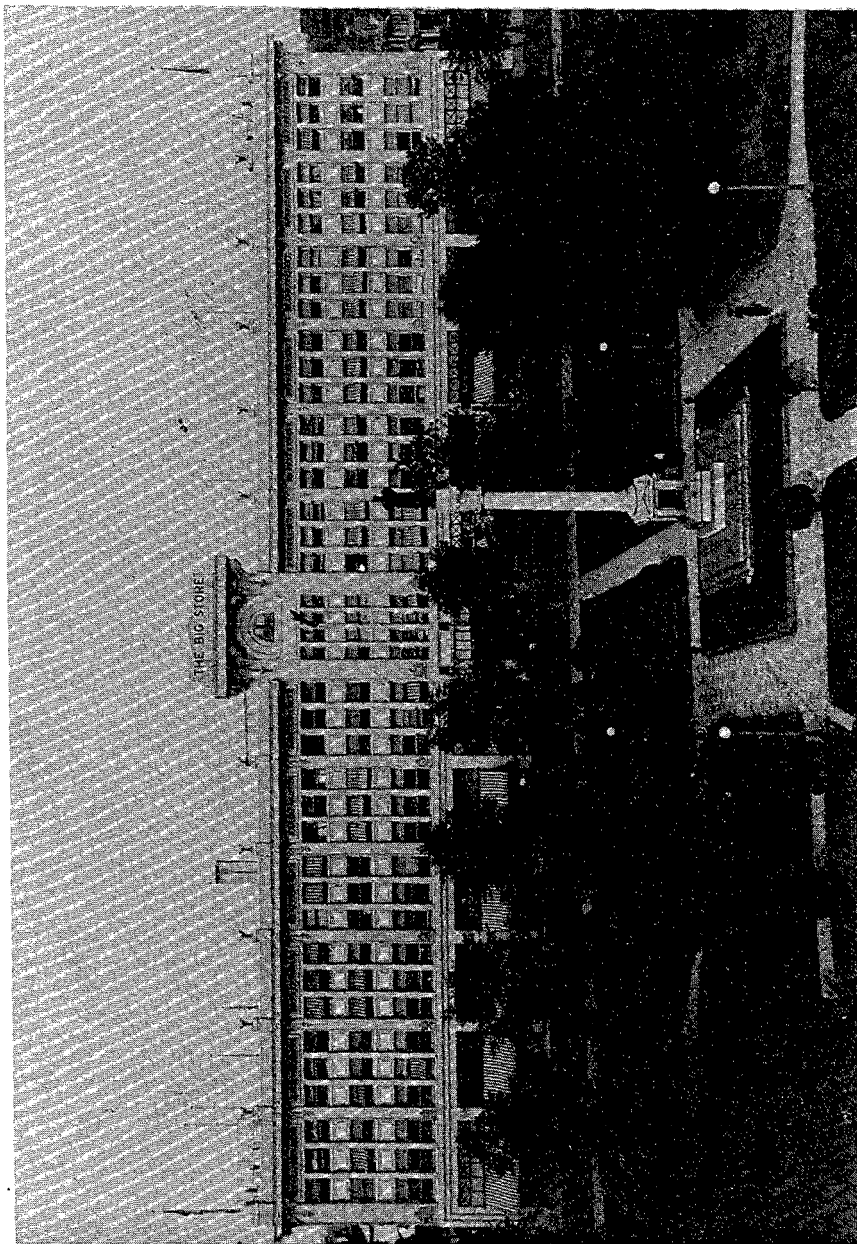
dent, supported by community groups, managed to upgrade substantially the city schools after 1913.<sup>15</sup>

Public health improvements in Jacksonville became one of the most significant and lasting achievements of the Progressive Era. Modern medical science paved the way, and civic leaders in both the private and public sectors working with public health professionals responded to the needs. Jacksonville as a southern port city with a large poor black population had a high mortality rate in the range of twenty-eight deaths per 1,000 population at the turn of the century. In contrast, the more progressive city of Milwaukee had a death rate of fourteen per 1,000, while Boston, New York, Newark, Philadelphia, and Baltimore had death rates of nineteen or twenty per 1,000.<sup>16</sup>

By 1920, Jacksonville had lowered its mortality rate to 16.7 per 1,000 compared with Newark's sixteen per 1,000 and Milwaukee's 11.6 per 1,000. Whites in Jacksonville fared even better; their rate of twenty per 1,000 in 1900 declined to 14.1 per 1,000 in 1920. Black mortality rates were roughly fifty per cent higher. The local press claimed that tourists who died while visiting Jacksonville inflated the rate. In 1920, health officials determined a white residential mortality rate of 10.3 per 1,000, making it comparable to Milwaukee, then known as "The Healthiest City" in America.<sup>17</sup>

Statistics aside, a coalition of private and public interests made substantial progress in improving Jacksonville's public health in the Progressive Era. New construction and the expansion of the sewer system after the 1901 fire began the process. In 1905, news of a yellow fever epidemic spreading eastward from New Orleans to Pensacola prompted a local war on the

15. *Ibid.*, April 21, 1917, May 4, 1918; *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Florida for the Two Years Ending June 30, 1920* (Gainesville, 1921), 446-50; David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, 1974), 182-98.
16. City of Jacksonville, *Annual Report of the Board of Health for the Year 1913* (Jacksonville, 1914), 4; Judith Walzer Leavitt, *The Healthiest City: Milwaukee and the Politics of Reform* (Princeton, 1982), 28; Teaford, *The Unheralded Triumph, City Government in America, 1870-1900* (Baltimore, 1984) 246; Stuart Galishoff, *Safeguarding the Public Health: Newark, 1895-1918* (Westport, Ct., 1975), 164.
17. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, January 1, 1921; Leavitt, *Healthiest City*, 28; Galishoff, *Newark*, 164; *Report of the City Commission of the City of Jacksonville, Florida, Covering the Years 1917 to 1920* (Jacksonville, 1921), 157-60.



St. James Building, Cohen Brothers Department Store, circa 1914. This was the site of the St. James Hotel prior to the 1901 fire. The St. James building was designed by Henry John Klutho. The Park is named for Charles C. Hemming, who gave the money for the Confederate Monument. Photograph courtesy of Robert Broward, Jacksonville.

mosquito. City council passed enabling legislation, and health authorities began to drain all standing waters, mow tall weeds, drain ditches, and pour oil on ponds to destroy breeding grounds. The epidemic did not reach Jacksonville, and the following year the city health department renewed its attack.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, Dr. Francis D. Miller, city health commissioner, began a crusade for a clean city. During the summer of 1906, health inspectors canvassed the city checking the condition of fruits and vegetables in the markets, meats at the butcher shops and milk on the delivery wagons. In December, the city Board of Health authorized monthly inspections of all restaurants, cafes, and saloons. The following summer, sanitary patrolmen also checked livery stables and dairies for general cleanliness. Throughout the decade, private groups like the Board of Trade, Woman's Club, and Ministerial Alliance supported the mayor, council, and health authorities in their crusade for a clean city.<sup>19</sup>

In 1910, a new health commissioner, Dr. Charles E. Terry, carried the public health crusade several steps further. With support from city council, civic groups, and local newspapers, he introduced bacteriological tests to pave the way for milk pasteurization. He secured legislation to regulate and enclose the 8,000 "earth closets," or outhouses, in the slums and outlying districts of Jacksonville, in order to control the flies and other insects which might carry typhoid. Fears of a small pox epidemic in 1911 led to the mass vaccination of 20,000 residents. News of an outbreak of bubonic plague in Havana, Cuba, prompted a local campaign to exterminate rats. Reports of rabies in Jacksonville resulted in a severe leash and muzzle law, and the shooting of 5,476 stray dogs over a two-year period.<sup>20</sup>

In 1913, Dr. Terry began a campaign against infant mortality. He claimed that seventy per cent of the deaths in the city were of children under the age of two, many of whom died

18. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, February 20, July 27, August 19, 31, 1905, June 23 to September 1, 1906.

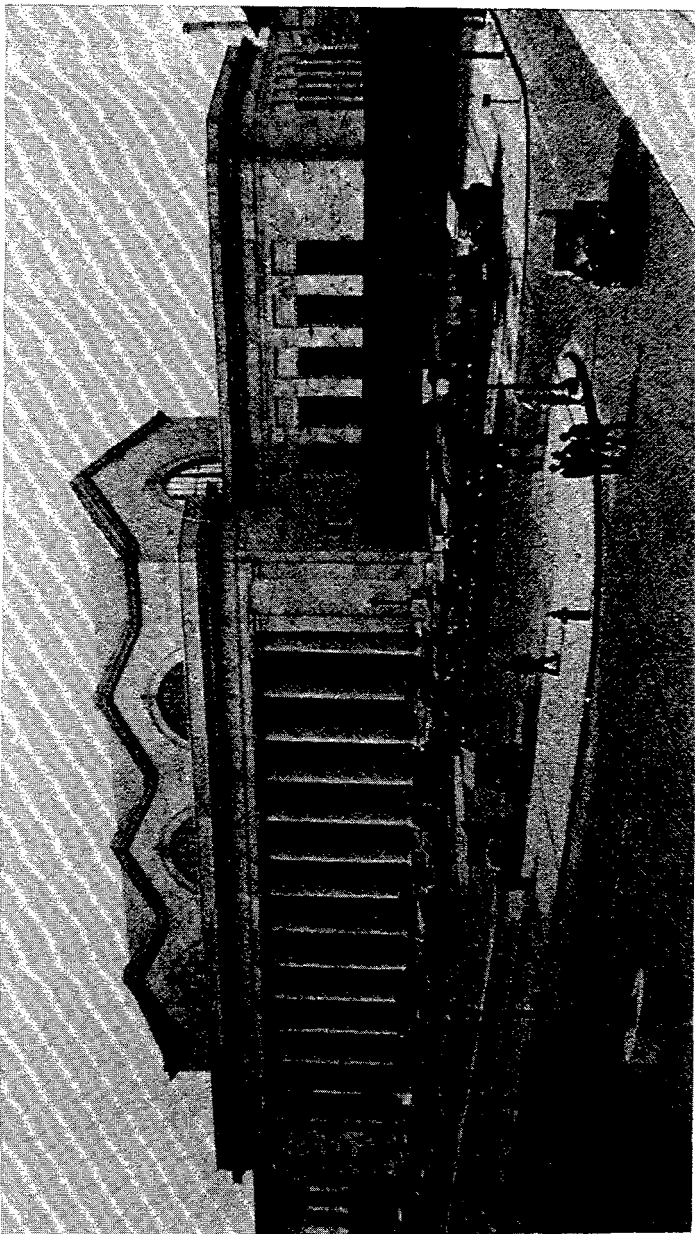
19. *Ibid.*, July 10, 13, August 14, 28, September 4, 1906, November 20, 1907.

20. *Ibid.*, February 10, April 15, May 17, 18, September 5, 1910, March 17, July 14, 1912, March 15, 1913; City of Jacksonville, *Annual Report of the Board of Health for the Year 1910* (Jacksonville, 1911), 8; *Annual Report of the Board of Health for the Year 1911* (Jacksonville, 1912), 21.

without medical care. Enlisting the help of the Woman's Club and several churches, Terry organized the Infant Welfare Society to provide visiting nurses to care for poor white and black children. He estimated that ninety to 100 local midwives delivered over half the babies born in Jacksonville and were responsible for the high rate of accidents, sickness, and stillbirths. In December, Terry persuaded city council to pass a midwifery bill to raise standards of birth care, and the following January, he began classes to provide basic instruction in obstetrics to enable midwives to meet the new standards. That spring, Terry opened a free baby clinic. By mid-1915, he could report that Jacksonville's infant mortality rate was lower than that of New York City, and the lowest in the South. When Terry moved to New York at the end of 1916, he had achieved a national reputation for his public health accomplishments in Jacksonville.<sup>21</sup>

The war, with its great population influx, brought new health problems to Jacksonville. The major threat came late in the summer of 1918 when the Spanish influenza epidemic spread across the United States. In Jacksonville, Dr. William W. McDonnell, city health official, acted decisively when the epidemic arrived in late September. By October 7, he had persuaded the school board to close all schools. Local theaters and movie houses voluntarily closed on October 8. The next day, the city council ordered all places of public assembly closed. Furchgott's Department Store postponed a sale celebrating fifty years in business. That Sunday church doors remained closed except for the Union Congregational Church which opened a soup kitchen for families without food. Jacksonville women formed a Health Relief Association to provide food and other necessities at additional sites for needy black and white families. The epidemic lasted about a month, infecting an estimated one-third of the population and causing about 464 deaths. Comparisons with other cities are difficult. Philadelphia and San Francisco had particularly virulent attacks of the flu. Tampa's scourge came later in November. What stands out is the quick, decisive action of the professionals in Jacksonville's health de-

21. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, March 2, December 18, 1913, June 29, 1915, December 14, 1916; City of Jacksonville, *Annual Report of the Board of Health for the Year 1913*, 23.



Jacksonville Terminal Station completed November 1919. Photograph courtesy of Douglas Milne.

partment, as well as the community's quick response to the threat.<sup>22</sup>

The improvement in Jacksonville's health during the Progressive Era's rapid growth was impressive. Health professionals Miller, Terry, and McDonnell, supported by the city government and private groups like the Board of Trade, Ministerial Alliance, and Women's Club, initiated major advances in health care resulting in declining mortality rates. The war-induced population growth and the influenza epidemic temporarily increased mortality rates. The decline in 1920, however, continued the longer-term trend toward better health care in Jacksonville.

The fourth area of response to urban growth lay in the reorganization or structural reform of city government. Across the South, beginning with Galveston, Texas, at the turn of the century, cities adopted commission, and later, city manager forms of government. Motives for city commissions varied, but a serious goal was the pursuit of greater economy and efficiency by combining legislative and executive functions into one governmental body. Jacksonville changed to the commission form in 1917, but with a difference. City council continued as the legislative branch, and the commission became only the executive arm of local government.<sup>23</sup>

Jacksonville's different approach to structural reform began with the return to local control of city government in 1893. The newly-elected mayor, Duncan U. Fletcher, secured a \$1,000,000 bond issue for public improvements, including the construction of the municipally-owned electric power plant and expanded water works. City council established a board of bond trustees to oversee the bond issue, and it subsequently broadened its responsibilities to include running the power plant, water works, and fire department. In 1911, the legislature placed the Board of Public Works and Board of Health under its control. The

22. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, September 24, October 1 to November 14, 1918; Davis, *History*, 272-74; *Report of the City Commission of the City of Jacksonville, Florida Covering the Year 1917 to 1920* (Jacksonville, 1921), 157-60; Alfred W. Crosby, Jr., *Epidemic and Peace*, 1918 (Westport, Ct., 1976), 86, 114.

23. Bradley Robert Rice, *Progressive Cities: The Commission Government Movement in America, 1901-1920* (Austin, 1977), xi-xix.

mayor, meanwhile, held executive power only over the city's police department along with veto power over city council. Structurally, Jacksonville had a weak mayor-council system, supplemented by a strong independent, non-elected authority, the board of bond trustees.<sup>24</sup>

Efforts to change city government's structure began in 1903. City council proposed a charter amendment giving it authority to appoint the bond trustees. Heretofore, the governor had appointed the trustees for staggered nine-year terms, and the trustees chose their successors. Jacksonville civic leaders, however, distrusting council, petitioned for direct elections, and Jacksonville voters endorsed the petition in a citywide referendum. The legislature, however, ignored the petition and gave council the power to appoint the trustees.<sup>25</sup>

Two years later, veteran council leader Pleasant A. Holt endorsed the direct election of the "Board of Kings," as he called the trustees. He claimed they were an unelected oligarchy with most of the power in the city. Holt acknowledged that generally they had not abused that power; in fact, they had managed the city pretty well. But Holt felt the people should have the right to choose. The Jacksonville/Duval County delegation in Tallahassee subsequently secured legislation making all major city offices elective, but the governor vetoed it.<sup>26</sup>

Over the next decade at each biennial session of the legislature, the Duval delegation proposed charter amendments. In Jacksonville, citizen groups formed to advocate reform. People recognized the need to modernize the city's charter, which dated from 1887. In 1913, the Central Civic League, a coalition of neighborhood associations, proposed the Galveston-Des Moines commission form, which vests both lawmaking and executive powers in a commission of three to five members. Other individuals endorsed a strong mayor-council. At one point, city council passed a charter amendment transferring to itself all the administrative powers of the board of bond trustees. Such a

24. Wayne Flynt, *Duncan Upshaw Fletcher: Dixie's Reluctant Progressive* (Tallahassee, 1971), 32; Davis, *Jacksonville*, 289-90; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, April 11, 1905, July 1, 10, 1911.

25. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, January 20, 24, March 4, 5, 6, 8, April 1, September 25, 1903.

26. *Ibid.*, April 11, May 13, 18, 20, 1905.



transfer would have combined all legislative and executive powers in that body. Critics feared a return to the old style of ward politics with increased patronage powers at the expense of good government, and persuaded voters to defeat the proposal in a referendum. Finally in the fall of 1914, Mayor Van C. Swearingen called another charter convention which resulted in the compromise council-commission form. It maintained ward representation in the legislative branch while electing the executive commission on a city-wide basis. The Duval delegation secured its passage in the 1915 session, but Jacksonville voters rejected it, 2,224 to 753. Opponents claimed it was an unnecessarily complicated form of commission government with inadequate safeguards. Finally in 1917, the legislature simply amended the charter without providing for a referendum, and Jacksonville acquired its council-commission government.<sup>27</sup>

Seen from the perspective of the late twentieth century, after the consolidation of Jacksonville with Duval County in 1968, and the replacement of the council-commission government by a strong mayor and council, the Progressive Era efforts may appear misdirected. Yet at the time reformers were pragmatically trying to reconcile the difficult political conflict between the people wanting greater efficiency in government and those who wanted to assure adequate democratic representation. The bond trustees ran city government efficiently, but they were not elected. Simply substituting an elected commission for the board seemed to make sense, assuming elected commissions functioned as well as appointed ones. The *Florida Times-Union*, however, had its doubts and argued that elected commissions worked well only as long as voters chose capable commissioners.<sup>28</sup>

In recent years historians have analyzed the unrepresentative character of many Progressive Era commission governments. By combining the legislative and executive functions, and electing commissioners at large, urban commercial-civic elites

27. *Ibid.*, May 14, 16, 23, 1907, March 9, 12, 23, 27, 31, May 4, 14, 15, 16, 18, 21, June 6, 1909, August 21, 23, 26, 28 October 19, 25, 1913, April 3, 5, 11, 12, 19, June 12, 17, July 25, August 8, 10, 22, September 6, 12, 1914, August 26, 27, 28, September 8, 1915, April 1, May 27, 29, 31, 1917. Also City Council minutes, August 20, 1913.

28. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, May 29, 1917.

often consolidated power in city government at the expense of minority, ethnic, or working class groups. In Jacksonville, however, the maintenance of a separate elected council assured white voters at the ward level of continued representation.<sup>29</sup>

While Jacksonville generally proposed workable responses to urban growth problems in transportation, education, public health, and governmental organization, it responded to the increase in black population— from 16,236 in 1900, to 41,520 in 1920— with policies which worked to their disadvantage. It had not always been that way. In his autobiography, educator, author, diplomat, and civil rights leader James Weldon Johnson described the Jacksonville of his youth in the post-Reconstruction era “as a good town for Negroes.” Local voters in the election of 1887 elected a Republican mayor and city council which included five black aldermen. By 1889, one historian has written, “blacks had made impressive strides in gaining a semblance of equality,” with an elected municipal judge, police commissioner, and thirteen of thirty policemen.<sup>30</sup>

That year, however, conservative whites began their counter-attack. They sent a delegation of white Democrats to the Florida legislature, which introduced a bill to abolish elected government in Jacksonville, giving the governor the power to appoint city council members, who in turn chose the mayor. The bill passed, and the governor appointed an all-white city council. At the same session, the legislature also enacted a poll tax to limit poor black and white voter participation. When the legislature returned elected government to Jacksonville in 1893, white

29. The Jacksonville approach was not unique. Atlanta seriously considered the council-commission form in 1911. Richmond adopted it for a short time in 1912. See Thomas Mashburn Deaton, “Atlanta During the Progressive Era” (Ph.d. dissertation, University of Georgia, 1969), 376-86; Christopher Silver, *Twentieth Century Richmond: Planning Politics and Race* (Knoxville, 1984), 75-86. Historians identifying the undemocratic character of commission governments include Samuel P. Hays, “The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 55 (October 1964), 157-69; and James Weinstein, “Organized Business and the City Government Management Movements,” *Journal of Southern History* 28 (May 1962), 166-82.
30. Edwin N. Akin, “When a Minority Becomes a Majority: Blacks in Jacksonville Politics, 1877-1907,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 53 (October 1974), 130-36; James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way* (New York, 1933), 45; and Davis, *Jacksonville*, 299-300.

Democrats were firmly in control with the exception of the predominantly black sixth ward. In 1901, the introduction of the all-white Democratic primary further limited black participation in choosing candidates for office. The gerrymandering of the sixth ward's boundaries in 1907 completed the political exclusion of Jacksonville's black voters.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to disfranchisement, increased segregation characterized race relations during the era. Schools, hospitals, theaters, and jails already were segregated at the turn of the century. City ordinances in the first decade added saloons, streetcars, and even city government. In 1910, a city council decision required the removal of blacks from all supervisory positions in local government. Except for menial jobs, city employment became all white.<sup>32</sup>

White supremacy led to vigilante violence in Jacksonville at least twice during the era. On July 4, 1910, following heavyweight champion Jack Johnson's defeat of Jim Jeffries, white gangs roamed the streets attacking jubilant blacks. The mayor and police responded quickly to the disturbances and no deaths occurred, but a number of blacks were beaten and black-owned property was destroyed.<sup>33</sup>

Jacksonville's only lynching during the era occurred during the tumultuous post-war year of 1919. Two blacks allegedly killed a young white man. Police arrested them on September 6, but two nights later a vigilante band of whites overpowered the jailer, took the blacks from their cells, drove them north of town, and shot them to death. One body was then tied to an auto, dragged back into Jacksonville, and deposited in front of the fashionable Windsor Hotel across from Hemming Park.<sup>34</sup>

Mob violence, however, was the exception to the rule of white supremacy in Jacksonville during the era. Newspaper

31. Akin, "Blacks in Jacksonville," 137-39; J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restrictions and the Establishment of the One Party System, 1880-1910* (New Haven, 1974), 91-103; Edward C. Williamson, *Florida Politics in the Gilded Age, 1877-1893* (Gainesville, 1976), 160; and Crooks, "Changing Faces," 461.
32. *Ibid.*, City Council minutes, June 21, 1910. For a discussion of the regional shift, see Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York, 1984), especially part two.
33. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, July 5, 6, 1910.
34. *Ibid.*, August 21, September 8, 9, 1919.

editorials attacked violence, as did the Kiwanis and Rotary clubs, Real Estate Board, Bar Association, Chamber of Commerce, and Ministerial Alliance. Local boosters realized it gave the city a bad image. Instead of violence, Jacksonville's white leaders responded to the black population growth by strengthening the bonds of white supremacy through disfranchisement and segregation.<sup>35</sup>

For blacks in Jacksonville, the strengthening of white supremacy in the public sector was clearly not a functional response to urban growth. But as a result, their efforts of necessity lay primarily in the private sector, though they did continue to press for better schools, parks, playgrounds, and police restraint. Black residents supported entrepreneurs from their community who started banks, life insurance companies, and real estate ventures. With outside help, they re-built church-related schools destroyed by the fire, started a hospital, and built a new campus for Edward Waters College. They supported a YMCA, Colored Health Improvement Association, an orphans home, and an old folks home. They had their own Negro Business Men's League, weekly newspapers, labor unions, teachers association, NAACP chapter, vaudeville and movie houses, and neighborhood associations. A handful of Jacksonville blacks became affluent. A small minority in business and the professions achieved middle income status, but for the great majority, urban growth meant little more than increased crowding in the unpaved, unsewered, unpiped, and unwired slums of Hansontown. For black Jacksonvillians, whites in power failed to respond to their needs in the city's growth.<sup>36</sup>

The responses of both the public and private sectors to urban growth in Jacksonville were complex. Private institutions like the Board of Trade, Woman's Club, and churches played a major role in cooperation with the school board and city govern-

35. *Ibid.*, September 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 1919.

36. Crooks, "Changing Faces," 462; Johnson, *Along This Way*, 45; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, June 25, 1911, August 28, September 1, 1912, November 2, 25, December 17, 1913, May 6, December 31, 1914, May 28, 1918; City Council minutes, June 18, July 16, 1912, October 31, 1917; *Annual Report of the Board of Health for the Year 1912* (Jacksonville, 1913), 16-17.

ment. National and regional influences in educational policy, public health, utility regulation, governmental reforms, and race relations helped shape local policies. Local political conditions also shaped responses. The war, however, accelerated urban growth and increased urban problems. Through it all, Jacksonville responded to urban growth, and in the process sought to catch up with progressive cities across the nation.