

Chapter 3

FROM HOME RULE TO LOCAL AUTONOMY: REJECTING REGIONAL PLANNING

As previously noted, “home rule” is a slippery concept of political theory. A precise definition is impossible, for the term had various meanings when it was in current use during the era of progressive politics. In more recent years, the term has been employed almost generically to mean “local autonomy.” The change is important. California politics surrounding land planning and property taxation from about 1900 to 1929 illuminate some of the issues and goals bound up in home rule and allow one to glimpse the synchronous distillation–dilation process by which home rule has come to mean local autonomy.

In 1911, California voters approved a constitutional amendment which extended to counties the authority to frame charter governments consistent with the state Constitution. Between 1911 and 1950, ten counties adopted charter governments which the Legislature approved: Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Butte, Tehama, Alameda, Fresno, Sacramento, San Diego, San Mateo, and Santa Clara. Non-charter counties remain governed by state general law. In large part, the differences between charter and non-charter county governments are structural, concerning such things as the number of supervisors or the range of public offices. However, considerable legal debate developed between 1911 and 1950 over whether a charter was a grant

or a limitation of power, that is, whether a charter granted a county powers not reserved wholly for the state, or whether a charter limited any county's powers to those expressed in its charter. During this period, some key state legislative debates also focused on what powers the state would reserve and what powers the state would extend to local governments.¹ Debates in two areas, planning and taxation, are especially important because, by 1930, the outcome of those debates transformed selective home rule into catholic local autonomy and established the policy framework for later land conservation issues.

RURAL LAND PLANNING: PRELUDE

In 1926, Thomas Adams, director and principal designer of the New York Regional Plan, forecast that “interspersed between the closely developed areas” of the regional communities of the future there would be “areas zoned and permanently reserved for agricultural purposes.” Adams, who was projecting his vision of the future New York metropolitan area at the time, advocated that agricultural reserves should “lie between the transportation and power corridors and [urban] focal points” to “maintain an efficient and economical balance of development.”² A respected and influential planner, Adams derived his ideas about regional planning from the same source as did many of his colleagues: Englishman Ebenezer Howard.

¹ *California Constitution*, article XI; Jane Gladfelder, *California's Emerging Counties* (Sacramento, County Supervisors Association of California, 1968), 8–10; Joseph D. McGoldrick, *Law and Practice of Municipal Home Rule, 1916–1933* (1933; New York: AMS Press, 1967), 49–54. California was the first state to adopt county home rule.

² Thomas Adams, “Forecast: The Regional Community of the Future,” TS dated September 9, 1926 (8, 10), sent to S.F. Regional Plan Association by Russell Van Nest Black (Records of the Regional Plan Association of San Francisco Bay Counties [hereinafter cited as RPA Records], Ctn. 1, Bancroft Library). Adams, a surveyor by training, was the first secretary of the International Garden City and Town Planning Association, manager of Letchworth, and the first president of the British Town Planning Institute. During the course of the ten years it took to complete the New York Regional Plan (1921–1931), Adams was to depart from Howard's basic garden city concept; and when the ten-volume plan was finally completed, Lewis Mumford criticized Adams for planning for continuous geographic expansion of the city. See Daniel Schaffer, *Garden Cities for America: The Radburn Experience* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 74–77.

In his inspirational work, *To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898), Howard proposed integrating urban and rural areas into constellations of “garden cities.” His ultimate concern was to remedy urban blight, but the ideas he advanced argued for more than decentralizing industry and fanning the urban population out into amorphous suburban conglomerations. Howard observed that urban congestion and industrial pollution were accompanied in rural areas by declining populations, economies, and social opportunities. Both urban and rural conditions, he argued, could be improved if new towns of limited population were established in rural areas and if industry, commerce, and agriculture were integrated to provide a diversified economic base for the entire town–country region. Municipalities, according to Howard’s plan, would own the urban and rural lands within their confines and lease land to their inhabitants, thus capturing the unearned increment so as to preclude land speculation on the one hand and, on the other, provide ample income for municipal improvements and services. A constellation of garden cities would fall under the jurisdiction of a regional administrative unit that could imbue garden city principles with the force of law.

Howard’s utopian quest was to create town–country regions that would foster in their denizens nothing less than health, prosperity, mental acuity, and civic pride. He envisioned urban and rural England as one day interconnected by a network of garden cities; but the experimental communities established according to his principles, Letchworth and Welwyn, remained isolated examples. And as imperfect physical embodiments of Howard’s still-maturing ideas, the two communities inspired critics to define the limits, rather than fathom the possibilities, of his garden city concept, which was destined never to be adopted in its entirety.³

During the 1920s, American city planners embraced the garden city concept in theory, but only a handful of individuals at the core of the Regional Planning Association of America — notably Lewis Mumford,

³ Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-Morrow* (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1945). This edition, with a preface by F.J. Osborn and an essay by Lewis Mumford, follows the 1902 edition published under the same title, but includes selected passages from the 1898 original publication, *To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*. See also Schaffer’s discussion of Howard’s influence in both England and the United States, Chapters 1 and 2, *Garden Cities for America*.

Benton MacKaye, Henry Wright, Sr., and Clarence Stein — ever tried to implement Howard’s concept without entirely sacrificing its essential principles: community ownership of land, greenbelts to foster balanced urban–rural spatial growth, and balanced urban–rural economic growth. These principles, however, mandated a radically different economic approach to land development. In practice, most planners treated open spaces surrounding urban areas either as protective buffers or as sources of new land for expanding cities, not as integral parts of a larger regional community and economy. For example, planning consultant Harland Bartholomew wrote, in a 1925 statement concerning regional planning for the San Francisco Bay Area, that “little attention is ever given to the preservation and full utilization of agricultural areas within or adjacent to metropolitan districts or regions.” Rhetoric notwithstanding, Bartholomew’s ultimate concern was the city; and he therefore argued that zoning be used to prevent “undue withdrawal of land best suited for agricultural purposes in advance of its need for actual urban uses.”⁴

Rural planning in the United States, moreover, developed separate from city and regional planning; and rural land-use planning evolved out of concerns quite apart from those of city and regional planners. In California, especially, rural land-use planners focused, until the 1950s, on issues that had little bearing on land use. In the 1910s, for instance, rural planners in California sought not only to break up large landholdings and to stem the trend of rural-to-urban migration, but also to replace so-called “alien,” particularly Asian, farmers with men and women of Anglo-European extraction. Racially motivated fears, for instance, generated popular support for the state’s 1913 Alien Land Law. Many Californians felt that Japanese immigrant farmers, in particular, were advancing too rapidly up the economic ladder, and there was anxiety that Asians might gain an even greater foothold if large tracts of land suitable for agriculture were opened to settlement.

⁴ Harland Bartholomew, “The San Francisco Bay Region: A Statement Concerning the Nature and Importance of a Plan for Future Growth,” TS submitted to the Regional Plan Association, September 1925, 7, 20 (RPA Records, Ctn. 1). Bartholomew studied civil engineering at Rutgers from 1907–1909 (honorary degree, C.E., Rutgers, 1920). By the mid-1920s he had helped to design plans for about forty American cities, including Washington, D.C.’s 1920 zoning ordinance.

ELWOOD MEAD AND THE LAND SETTLEMENT BOARD

Planners surely played a part in the slow evolution of a state policy regarding California's agricultural lands, but their role is difficult to ascertain with precision because their ideas led them to take widely diverging paths. The state's earliest efforts to direct agricultural land use were for the express purpose of rural development, not land conservation. In 1910, the Commonwealth Club of California, an august body of the state's business, professional, and civic leaders which served as an unofficial advisory body to the Legislature from the turn of the century through the 1920s, took up discussion of natural resources conservation and state aid to agriculture. Its discussions led to the Land Settlement Act of 1917, a state-funded program to promote small-farm land use and development.

When the Commonwealth Club turned its attention to the broad topic of conservation in 1910, a committee was assigned to study and make recommendations concerning legislation for agricultural land. Although the committee considered soil tillage, cultivation, irrigation, drainage, and fertilization to be important, its principal focus was farm size, which then averaged about 320 acres in California. Farms over 160 acres were, the committee held, the major contributors to wasted soil fertility because large farms, they assumed, were inherently subject to "ignorant and ruthless mismanagement." California's agricultural lands could best be conserved, the committee argued, by subdividing large landholdings and by fostering, through education, intensive farming using the most up-to-date scientific techniques. "The small farm well tilled," the committee judged, "is decidedly the factor of first importance in maintaining the soil's productive power."⁵

Proposed legislative measures resulting from the Commonwealth Club's study of natural resources conservation as well as the investigations of the State Conservation Commission, a fact-finding body established in 1911, did not, however, include agricultural lands. Water and, to a lesser

⁵ "Conservation," *Transactions of the Commonwealth Club* [hereinafter cited as *Transactions*] 7, no. 2 (1912): 131-146. The members of the committee were Charles B. Lipman, professor of soils, and Leroy Anderson, professor of agricultural practice, both at the University of California, Berkeley, and Frank Adams, an irrigations investigator for the U.S. government.

degree, forest and mineral development became the foci of a long-term, heated debate. Public utility companies opposed virtually every conservation bill proposed in the Legislature up until 1920. When the state finally established a Department of Natural Resources in 1927, the purview was limited to the state's forest reserves, minerals, and fish and game: it lacked jurisdiction over land and water policies. The Commonwealth Club's discussion nevertheless indicates that at least some Californians believed that privately owned agricultural lands, particularly those held in large tracts, should be subject to regulatory land-use policies.⁶

Although political debate over water and mineral rights ultimately overshadowed natural resources conservation issues, agricultural land-use planning meantime emerged under the guise of a brief but important state-directed effort to rechannel development of California's agricultural industry and rural society. Large landholdings, the legacy of a disreputable nineteenth-century land administration system, still concerned a great number of citizens. During the early twentieth century, muckraking journalists exposed land settlement schemes promoted by landowners whose motives were ethically questionable. Civic and political leaders caught up in the reform fervor of the decade thus determined to break up the remaining large tracts, such as the Miller and Lux cattle empire and the Southern Pacific Land Company.⁷

In 1911, when the Commonwealth Club discussed state aid to agriculture, Edward Berwick, a retired farmer from Pacific Grove, requested information on Australia's land settlement program from Elwood Mead, who was then deeply involved in the Australian experiment. Earlier, in 1907, Mead had accepted a position as chairman of the State Rivers and

⁶ Ibid.; Frank Hichborn, *Story of the California Legislature* (San Francisco, 1911), 137–173; Hichborn, *Story* (1913), 156–168; California Conservation Commission, *Report of the Conservation Commission*, January 1, 1913; California Department of Natural Resources, "Utilization of Natural Resources During California's First Century" (mimeographed report), January 1950.

⁷ See, for example, a series of articles by Bailey Millard published in early 1916 in the *San Francisco Examiner*, especially those of February 20, 1916, "Big Land Holders Keep City Dweller from the Farm He Dreams About: Henry Miller, According to Modest Estimate, Owns at Least 22,717 Square Miles of this Earth," and February 27, 1916, "One-Seventh of State a Government Gift to Railroads; Private Owners Tie Up Empire of California's Forests."

Water Supply Commission in Victoria, Australia. During the next eight years, he supervised thirty-two irrigation projects which were part of a massive, government-financed program whereby the state purchased land, built irrigation systems, planted crops, constructed roads, platted towns, and built homes for prospective colonists. New settlers continued to receive government aid in the forms of long-term government loans; expert farm advice; government-owned nurseries, dairies, warehouses, and slaughterhouses; and government-supported marketing cooperatives. Berwick introduced this concept of government aid to agriculture before the club in 1911. At that time, however, most members preferred instead to see the state monitor farm loan companies and rely on expanded education and university research in agriculture to transform farming into a more efficient, business-like enterprise. Theoretically, farmers would then protect their investments in land by practicing intensive farming and soil conservation. Their goal was to foster the growth of a large class of small-scale, independent farmer-businessmen, managing consistently profitable operations that, in turn, would allow rural communities to support a full complement of social and civic organizations: in short, to replicate the city in the countryside.⁸

Farm market prices remained relatively stable between 1910 and 1915, but land prices advanced steadily. In 1910, the average price for improved land was \$117 per acre; for unimproved land, \$58 per acre. By 1916, the average prices were estimated, at a minimum, to have doubled, although widespread variation existed throughout the state. Many believed California farmland to be overpriced, and prices were higher than those prevailing elsewhere in the country. Rising land prices precipitated concern over whether mortgage adjustments and state-supported agricultural research would be sufficient to keep the small-farm sector healthy. This economic climate helped to create popular support for the state to rescue the independent, small-landholding (Anglo-European) farmer from the market-land price squeeze.⁹

⁸ "State Aid to Agriculture," *Transactions* 6, no. 7 (1911): 407–513.

⁹ *Population Census, 1910*; H.J. Stover, "Annual Index Numbers of Farm Prices, Farm Crop Production, Farm Wages, Estimated Value Per Acre of Farm Real Estate, and Farm Real Estate Taxes, California, 1910–1935," University of California Giannini

Mead's eight years as an integral part of the Australian enterprise convinced him that a similar program could, in California and other western states, "help to break up large holdings," and "increase the rural population" to mitigate effects of a declining rural population nationwide. His secondary mission was, however, to "protect rural civilization from the impending menace of alien ownership." Mead believed that high land prices were driving farmers' sons and daughters to the cities; and he especially feared the combined evils of alien land ownership, non-resident land ownership, and tenant farming: these, he believed, were "politically dangerous and socially undesirable."¹⁰ He was in step with many of his middle-class peers who subscribed to reform causes during the Progressive Era — those who deplored, on the one hand, the economically destructive excesses of monopolistic corporations and, on the other, the supposed threat of social unrest posed by un-Americanized immigrants.¹¹

The remedy, for Mead, was to strengthen the ranks of independent, Anglo-American landowning farmers. His goals were all-encompassing: to replace migrant and alien farmworkers with the once-common but now-vanishing hired man, restore prosperity to small farm operations, rebuild the prestige once attached to farming, and reinvigorate rural institutions and society. All this was necessary "to promote national efficiency, maintain the balance between city and country life, and avert political and social unrest."¹² Mead, as another historian has observed, "dreamed of combining social reclamation with land reclamation."¹³ He was confident that government planning could do what private land settlement efforts had not: "stop the drift of white people away from the land and bring back to the country districts the hopeful independent spirit that marked the early life of this State."¹⁴

Foundation of Agricultural Economics, Report #50, August 1936; "The Land Settlement Bill of 1917," *Transactions* 12, no. 1 (1917): 7–23.

¹⁰ Elwood Mead, *Helping Men Own Farms* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1920), 213, and comments in "Land Settlement in California," *Transactions* 11, no. 9 (1916): 397–407.

¹¹ George E. Mowry, *The California Progressives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 91–102.

¹² Mead, *Transactions* (1916), 397–407.

¹³ Paul K. Conkin, "The Vision of Elwood Mead," *Agricultural History* 34 (1960): 88–90.

¹⁴ Mead, *Helping Men Own Farms*, 29–38, 134.

During a trip to California in 1914, Mead took the opportunity to present his ideas to governor Hiram W. Johnson, who helped him to secure the backing of the Commonwealth Club. The club appointed a committee to study government-sponsored land settlement in Australia, Denmark, and Germany. Finding these programs to be meritorious, the club requested that the state undertake its own investigation. In 1915, the Legislature acted positively on the request and created the State Commission on Colonization and Rural Credits. Mead, returned from Australia that year, was appointed its chairman. Other members of the commission included Mead's good friend David P. Barrows, president of the University of California; Chester H. Rowell, editor of the *Fresno Republican*; Mortimer Fleishacker, a San Francisco manufacturer; and Harris Weinstock, a San Francisco merchant. All the commissioners were prominent members of the Commonwealth Club. Weinstock, in addition, had visited Australia sometime between 1907 and 1910, during which time he observed firsthand the government's land settlement program.¹⁵

The commission held several public hearings, studied over thirty privately developed farm colonies throughout the state, and amassed statistics on farm operating costs, farm tenantry, and the racial composition of farm tenants in California. In the end, however, the commission's recommendations were based not so much on its investigation as on an assumption that the state's rural areas were suffering from "arrested development." They blamed this intolerable condition on "high prices of land, high interest rates, and [the] short terms of payment" extended to prospective settlers. The commission recommended that federal and state legislation be enacted to enable the federal government to "construct and operate irrigation systems" and the state to "direct the subdivision, sale and settlement of the land, inaugurating a system of financial aid and practical advice to the settlers." It further recommended that "the whole development be planned in advance . . . including the provisions of homes for farm laborers, farm units of varying sizes, and plans for towns, roads, and schools."¹⁶

¹⁵ Conkin, 90; "The Land Settlement Bill," *Transactions* 10, no. 5 (1915): 83; Gerald D. Nash, *State Government and Economic Development* (Berkeley: University of California Institute of Governmental Studies, 1964), 344–345.

¹⁶ California Commission on Land Colonization and Rural Credits, *Report of the Commission on Land Colonization and Rural Credits*, November 19, 1916 (Sacramento,

The commission's parent organization, the Commonwealth Club, vigorously debated its report. Several speakers prepared statements in opposition, including two attorneys, the general manager of the Sacramento Valley Development Association, and a realtor. Their arguments against the report and the bill centered on two points. First, they argued against subsidizing some farmers at the expense of taxpayers and other farmers, the latter of whom might suffer the effects of lower market prices because of increased competition. Second, they argued that state-directed land settlement designed, in part, to break up a few large landholdings would absorb the initiative, not to mention jeopardize the profits, of reputable private land colonizers.¹⁷

The opposition did not, however, prevail. The Legislature passed the land settlement bill in order "to improve the general economic and social conditions of agricultural settlers within the state."¹⁸ Governor Johnson once again appointed Mead as chairman of the Land Settlement Board created under the act's auspices. The board received an initial appropriation of \$260,000 in 1918, and an additional \$1 million in 1919. These sums enabled the board to establish two experimental colonies: one of 6,239 acres near Durham, in Butte County, and one of 8,400 acres near Delhi, in Merced County. Durham, launched in 1918, was a colony of 110 farms, ranging in size from nine to three hundred acres, and thirty farm laborers' allotments of about two acres each. It promised to be successful beyond all expectations, a circumstance that propelled Mead into a position with the U.S. Reclamation Service. But Delhi, begun a year later and planned entirely for World War I veterans, was barely under way when the farm recession of the 1920s began: declining farm receipts hindered colonists' ability to repay their shares of the state's costs. Thus, in 1928 the state opted to withdraw after it became clear that the program would probably never be self-supporting. By 1930, colony lands had passed into private ownership.¹⁹

Mead's vision of American society was narrowly idealistic, and it excluded those who were not of Anglo-European descent. Yet his Jeffersonian agrarianism was attractive to many who believed that a long-standing

1916), especially 7, 119–120.

¹⁷ *Transactions* 11, no. 8 (1916): 416–428; *Transactions* 12, no. 1 (1917): 12–51.

¹⁸ *California Statutes*, 1917 (Extra Session, 1916), Chapter 755.

¹⁹ Conkin, 90–92; Nash, 345–356; Mead, *Helping Men Own Farms*, 106–139.

American institution of small farms and independent farmers was degenerating, in California at least, into a system of large landholdings with absentee owners who entrusted husbandry to immigrants considered to be unassimilable. In his new post with the Reclamation Service, Mead worked with Franklin K. Lane, secretary of the interior, to promote a federal land settlement program based on his experiences in Australia and California. His ideas, moreover, influenced New Deal land-use planning programs as well as state land colonization projects in Arizona, Washington, Minnesota, and South Dakota. Californians, however, displayed waning enthusiasm for government-sponsored land settlement and rural land planning.

REGIONAL PLANNING AND THE STATE PLANNING ACT, 1921–1929

In 1927, when California was about to withdraw from its first foray into state-directed agricultural land development, the Legislature passed the State Planning Act. Despite the act's name, it did not really provide for state planning. Instead, it empowered the governor to designate regional planning areas and commissions if existing city or county planning commissions requested them. Any regional planning commission thus established was authorized by the act to prepare and adopt a physical development plan that might include proposals for streets, parks, open spaces, public buildings, utilities, and "the general location of forests, agriculture and open development areas for the purposes of conservation, food and water supply . . . or the protection of future urban development."²⁰

Whereas during the 1910s Mead and the Land Settlement Board promoted rural development without thought of regional planning, the state now adopted a policy of regional planning that looked upon agricultural areas as chiefly valuable for urban food supplies and as urban buffer zones. By the mid-1920s, the difficulties encountered by the Land Settlement

²⁰ *California Statutes*, 1927 (Extra Session, 1926), Chapter 874 [repealed *Statutes*, 1915, Chapter 428, and *Statutes*, 1917, Chapter 735]; see especially Sections 26–28, which pertain to regional planning; William Spangle and Associates, Inc., "The Planning Law of California: An Analysis," preliminary technical report prepared as a component of the California State Development Plan Program, August 1965, 19, 24; Mel Scott, *The San Francisco Bay Area: A Metropolis in Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 199.

Board led those concerned with regional planning to look askance at rural land-use planning and development. Rapidly expanding cities, moreover, seemed to demand immediate attention. Thus, the Commonwealth Club, which once supported the land settlement experiment, now lent its support and prestige to the regional planning movement.

Regional planning is, in some ways, a misleading term for a body of assorted ideas which had been gaining wider acceptance since 1921 in California's two metropolitan areas, Los Angeles and San Francisco. Orderly metropolitan growth was the true goal of those individuals, representing a wide variety of professions and business interests, who sat on the planning commissions in these cities. City planning emerged as a professional field only in the late 1920s: Harvard University established the first American university program in 1929. Architects, landscape architects, and engineers were the principal planners of the 1920s. Aesthetic and technical concerns shaped their planning ideas. Few planners considered the social or economic aspects of their work, although the Regional Planning Association of America was a notable exception.²¹ American city and regional planning, in addition, originated on the East Coast, and West Coast planning commissions were in touch with emerging ideas chiefly through the consultants they hired. So if regional planning seems, in retrospect, to overestimate their undertakings, it is because they were groping, at the time, for a means to direct long-term urban growth; and the young regional planning movement offered them their best guidance.

Most Californians who advocated for regional planning in the 1920s simply had no clear idea of what they meant by it, but their planning impulse clearly had an urban focus. Thus, G. Gordon Whitnall, director of the City Planning Commission of Los Angeles and guiding force behind the Los Angeles Regional Planning Commission, established in 1922, admitted that he was "at a loss to know how to approach this broad subject of regional planning" in a speech before the Commonwealth Club in 1923. He noted, however, that the regional planning movement was a necessary reaction to burgeoning metropolitan centers — namely New York, Chicago, Boston, Los Angeles, and San Francisco — which, "in the normal process

²¹ Eugenie Ladner Birch, "Advancing the Art and Science of Planning: Planners and Their Organizations, 1909–1980," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 46, no. 1 (January 1980): 22–49.

of expansion” had “assumed such proportions as to encroach physically upon the domain of their neighbors.” Encroachment most often took the noxious forms of sanitation problems and traffic congestion, and regional plans were designed principally to alleviate these situations.²²

Urban community interdependency became the theme of 1920s’ regional planning advocates. For example, Hugh R. Pomeroy, secretary of the Los Angeles Regional Planning Commission, asserted in a presentation before the 1924 National Conference on City Planning that “Regional Planning is based upon the conception of . . . inter-community interest, or metropolitan unity.” Regional planning in California and elsewhere was an extension of city planning, although its adherents no longer succumbed to the old “city beautiful” illusions of the previous two decades. Regional plans developed for both the Los Angeles and San Francisco Bay areas reflected this urban bias. Activities of the Los Angeles regional planning body included standardizing subdivision regulations throughout the county; designing a system of major highway arteries; organizing various local governmental agencies, the Auto Club, and chambers of commerce to study rapid transit; educating the public to the benefits of zoning; gathering information necessary to undertake the creation of a park and recreation system; and working with the county surveyor to devise a regional sanitation program. Similarly, the nine-county San Francisco regional planning association’s list of objectives was dominated by projects to remedy urban problems: unifying port and harbor development plans, coordinating several highway systems, connecting regional centers with a rapid-transit system, acquiring and developing recreational areas, and removing the sewage and waste polluting the bay.²³

Both Los Angeles and San Francisco attempted to cope with the very real and menacing problems generated by masses of people living in large areas undefined by local governmental boundaries. Yet, salutary as their

²² “Regional Planning,” *Transactions* 18, no. 8 (1923): 255–256.

²³ Hugh R. Pomeroy, “Regional Planning in Practice,” 16-page TS of paper presented before the Sixteenth National Conference on City Planning, Los Angeles, April 7–10, 1924 (RPA Records, Ctn. 1); Russell Van Nest Black, “A Regional Plan for the San Francisco Bay Counties,” *American City Magazine* 33 (July 1925): 22–23. See also Frederick W. Dohrmann, Jr., “Statement of Purpose of the Regional Plan Association of the San Francisco Bay Counties,” February 10, 1925, and Harland Bartholomew, “The San Francisco Bay Region,” September 1925 report (RPA Records, Ctns. 1, 5).

metropolitan goals were, both planning bodies generally treated agricultural areas adjacent to their cities merely as reserves for future urban expansion. In considering the future of the Los Angeles metropolitan area, the Regional Planning Commission deplored the county's lack of proper zoning authority to control the development of residential, commercial, and industrial areas that steadily chewed away at "the retreating frontier of agriculture."²⁴ A minor objective of the San Francisco group was to secure "regional zoning for the determination of the areas best suited to homebuilding, to industry, and to agriculture." Its major concern was to curb "extensive land speculation" in "large areas of extremely fertile and productive agricultural land" so that these areas would not "be withdrawn from agricultural use and be subdivided into town lots many years before there was any justification for such withdrawal." The San Francisco association advocated regional zoning as a means to segregate and reserve agricultural land "within easy reach of all cities" because "the further afield [agriculture] is driven the greater the cost of living becomes in the cities on account of the long haul required to the city markets."²⁵

As activities progressed, however, Bay Area planners focused their energies on solving traffic and sanitation problems. Agricultural land-use planning, even for the narrowly conceived goals of preventing premature urban development and preserving local produce markets, dropped from the agenda. This shift in perspective occurred, in part, because the magnitude of urban physical problems often required city officials, planners, and engineers to divide as well as narrow their foci. The shift also resulted from a growing awareness that planning for areas outside metropolitan governmental boundaries simply was not feasible.

Both the Los Angeles and San Francisco regional planning bodies evolved from semiofficial organizations. In Los Angeles, an ad hoc group of officials from the county, from various cities, and from special districts, plus private citizens, met voluntarily in several planning conferences

²⁴ Pomeroy, "Regional Planning in Practice," 10.

²⁵ Bartholomew, 7; Guy Wilfred Hayler (planning engineer for the RPA), "The San Francisco Bay Region of the Future: What the Great Regional Plan Means," reprinted from *Daily Commercial News* in its *Annual* (San Francisco, 1926); "Report of Chief Technical Work Prepared for Regional Plan, January–November, 1926" (RPA Records, Ctns. 1, 5).

during 1921 and 1922. At their request, the county Board of Supervisors established, by ordinance in December 1922, the Los Angeles Regional Planning Commission under the authority of its home rule charter. Since the Regional Planning Commission's authority came from the county Board of Supervisors, whose jurisdiction did not extend beyond county boundaries, the commission was, in effect, a county planning commission.²⁶

In the Bay Area, regional planning evolved from the activities of the Commonwealth Club. Its City Planning Section, reactivated in 1922, proposed the creation of a planning body that would include government officials and private citizens from the nine counties fronting the San Francisco Bay. To launch the plan, the club sponsored a regional planning conference in April 1924. The conference duly resolved to create a regional association, and a conference committee handled the details of organizing a formal body and raising the necessary funds to finance its initial activities. From January 1925 until April 1928 the Regional Plan Association of the San Francisco Bay Counties labored, unsuccessfully, to secure an equal commitment to regional planning from each of the nine counties. Various factors thwarted the association throughout its tenuous three-year existence: competition between San Francisco City and Oakland for port dominance in the bay, and a common fear expressed by outlying cities that any plan ultimately would give San Francisco City control of the region's development. When all sources of financial support dried up, the association disbanded.²⁷

The San Francisco and Los Angeles planning commissions nonetheless stimulated interest in regional and county planning among two other politically influential groups: the California Real Estate Association and the League of California Cities. In March 1927, the two organizations co-sponsored the Second Annual California City Plan Conference in Oakland, where Los Angeles and San Francisco regional planning concerns were much discussed.²⁸ The Real Estate Association and the league also

²⁶ Judith Norvell Jamison, *Coordinated Public Planning in the Los Angeles Region*, Studies in Local Government, no. 9 (Los Angeles: University of California Bureau of Governmental Research, June 1948), 130.

²⁷ *Transactions* 18, no. 8 (1923): 252–253; Scott, 185–201.

²⁸ "Official Invitation to the Second Annual California City Plan Conference" (RPA Records, Ctn. 5). Hugh Pomeroy, secretary of the Los Angeles Regional Plan-

worked in concert with the Commonwealth Club to support adoption of the 1927 State Planning Act. The Legislature, however, passed the act with reservations, anticipating that the law would create “new problems of city and county procedure,” and would raise “many new legal questions.”²⁹

The 1927 law, as some anticipated, was repealed two years later because it permitted, rather than mandated, non-charter counties to establish planning commissions and was therefore in violation of the state Constitution, which required county governments to be uniform. In addition, the 1927 act defined “region” in general terms that allowed existing planning commissions to determine regional boundaries and designated the governor as the sole referee to judge whether boundaries so established were justified on demographic, geographic, or economic grounds. A new planning act superseded the old in 1929. This act empowered counties to establish planning commissions and set forth procedures for adopting county zoning ordinances. It also redefined regions more or less as special districts, whereby voters could petition county boards of supervisors with jurisdiction over territory lying within the boundaries of any proposed regional planning district in order to initiate district formation. The state, by virtue of the act, disclaimed any authority over regional planning and vested this power entirely in country governments.³⁰

The Planning Act of 1929 marks the end of one era and the beginning of another. It was the legislative fruit harvested from almost two decades of policy experimentation. During those two decades, the state embarked on an ambitious rural land settlement program that was, to some, a disappointing failure. Regional planning efforts, urban in orientation, were hardly more successful. Bay Area counties would not submit to a regional supergovernment, and regional planning in Los Angeles amounted to

ning Commission, detailed “What Regional Planning Has Accomplished in Los Angeles County”; Frederick Dohrmann, Jr., president of the San Francisco Bay Counties Regional Plan Association, outlined “A Regional Plan for California’s Metropolitan Areas”; and Stephen Child, consultant in city planning, explained “The Regional Planning Organization of the Ruhr Adapted to the Bay Region.”

²⁹ Ralph B. Wertheimer, “Constitutionality of Rural Zoning,” *California Law Review* 26 (January 1938): 178.

³⁰ Wertheimer, fn. 12; *California Statutes*, 1927, Chapter 874, Section 26; *California Statutes*, 1929 (Extra Session, 1928), Chapter 838, especially Sections 15–16 concerning regional planning; Scott, 199; Spangle and Associates, 24.

county planning. Thus, regional planning in California consisted of little more than rhetoric, and rural planning lacked meaningful scope because it neglected cities.

RURAL LAND PLANNING: A POSTSCRIPT

The form of regional planning emerging in Los Angeles and San Francisco during the 1920s reflected a nationwide trend to extend so-called engineered city planning, with its emphasis on physical infrastructures, to the hinterland. But engineered planning competed with another approach, one which Roy Lubove has called “regionalism.” The latter, quite distinct from the more technically oriented regional planning, is associated with the New York–based Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA).

Lewis Mumford, Benton MacKaye, Clarence Stein, and Charles Harris Whitaker, principal luminaries of the RPAA, were not only attracted to Ebenezer Howard’s concept of interlocked rural and urban economies, land uses, and societies, but they also were attracted to Patrick Geddes and his concept of geotechnics, or applied geography. Regionalism, which grew within the loosely structured RPAA, also influenced New Deal projects carried out under the aegis of the Resettlement Administration and the National Resources Planning Board.³¹ Karl Belser, who may or may not have been inspired by the forebears of regionalism, Howard and Geddes, was no doubt introduced, as a student at Harvard, to the ideas of those who were associated with the RPAA; and he definitely was influenced by New Deal land planning projects. It is a slender, but important, tie that binds California’s progressive land settlement experiments to Belser’s post–World War II greenbelt plans.

Benton MacKaye, more so than any other RPAA member, nurtured the ideas he shared with his colleagues into a philosophy of regionalism. A graduate of Harvard (1901, M.A. 1905), MacKaye entered his chosen career of forestry under the esteemed Gifford Pinchot. At Harvard, he was

³¹ Roy Lubove, *Community Planning in the 1920s* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1963), 107; see also Carl Sussman, ed., *Planning the Fourth Migration: The Neglected Vision of the Regional Planning Association of America* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1976) for a thorough discussion of the social reform philosophy and goals of the RPAA.

influenced by the writings of Thoreau, Powell, and Marsh; and during his many years with the U.S. Forest Service, MacKaye further explored the philosophical terrain of conservationism. He first articulated his own ideas in a 1919 report written for the U.S. Department of Labor, "Employment and Natural Resources." In autumn 1915, Assistant Secretary of Labor Louis Post (a single tax advocate) enlisted MacKaye's assistance with the department's "investigation of land as an opportunity for workers."³² MacKaye was impressed by Elwood Mead's achievements at Durham, and he likewise drew inspiration from the inclusive goals of Australia's land colonization program. However, whereas Mead felt that the Australian system could be implemented in the United States through a government-administered financial credit program, MacKaye firmly believed that land colonization undertaken to enhance the general welfare necessitated a different approach to land economics.

The Department of Labor hoped, with its investigation, to give form and direction to the diffuse "back to the land" movement of the time. Labor congestion and underemployment in the agricultural economic sector, which accompanied the rural-to-urban demographic shift, inspired some reformers to search for a quick way to transfer factory workers from crowded urban areas onto idle or undeveloped rural lands. MacKaye, however, eschewed temporary expedients to stabilize the labor imbalance and sought instead to devise a plan for creating permanent employment opportunities along with population decentralization: to achieve, in his words, "true access to land . . . through industrial processes."³³

MacKaye's ideal self-sustaining region encompassed agricultural-industrial communities of limited size utilizing, but not exploiting, the combined productive potential of available land, forest, mineral, and water resources. His report to the Department of Labor, however, focused more narrowly on the practical means by which agricultural and timber areas could be developed profitably for large numbers of people according to sustained-yield conservationist principles. With regard to agricultural

³² From the preface by Secretary of Labor W.B. Wilson to Benton MacKaye, *Employment and Natural Resources* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1919), 3; see also MacKaye, *From Geography to Geotechnics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1968), 35.

³³ MacKaye, *Employment and Natural Resources*, 13.

development, MacKaye considered the garden city concept to be a useful model for joining the rural farm to the city market through a more efficient use of suburban land. But he was keenly interested in the Australian land colonization experiment, particularly because Elwood Mead's first California colony, Durham, then showed so much potential for long-term success, both economically and politically. MacKaye recommended that the federal government establish a national land development board, which would include the secretaries of labor, agriculture, and interior, for the purpose of devising a program similar to Australia's. Arguing that "natural resources are also national resources," he advocated empowering this proposed board to secure (or expropriate, if necessary) requisite land, secure financing to underwrite initial development costs, and make cooperative agreements with states.³⁴

In large part, MacKaye advocated land colonization as a way for the federal government to atone for its former profligacy: the various homestead acts. Land classification and town planning were mandatory first steps to any colonization program, but MacKaye further argued that "the fee-simple title to all lands reserved or purchased by the federal government or by any state should be held permanently by the government or state." Although he avoided single-tax rhetoric in his report, MacKaye nevertheless asserted that "extra values given to land in the vicinity of settlement areas due to improvements made on such areas at state or government expense should be . . . taken to see that these values go where they belong — to the settler and worker in the equivalent of fair wages, to the legitimate investor in a fair return, to the local community in sufficient taxes, but not to the speculator in unearned profits."³⁵

In 1923, the same year that MacKaye joined Mumford, Stein, and Whitaker to found the RPAA, he also met Patrick Geddes for the first time. Geddes, a biologist whose intellect roamed across many fields, including geography, economics, and history, is chiefly remembered for his espousal of geotechnics. He greatly influenced MacKaye, and his geotechnic ideas became part of the philosophy of regionalism that MacKaye fully articulated in his major written work, *The New Exploration*. In this book, he

³⁴ Ibid., 28–29, 102–112.

³⁵ Ibid., 30.

defined three “elemental” environments: primeval, rural, and urban. All three, he postulated, symbiotically sustain modern society and, therefore, must be developed as well as maintained in balanced proportions to create an “indigenous” environment, or regional community, which is necessary to serve equally man’s physical, cultural, and psychic needs. Development of the urban environment to the neglect, or at the expense, of the rural and primeval results, MacKaye concluded, in a struggle between metropolitan environments and a reluctantly dying indigenous host. “Will the framework which the genius of man has woven,” MacKaye asked, “become a terrestrial lacework for the integration of his own terrestrial powers, or will it become a tangled net in which he will be strangled?”³⁶

Although MacKaye did not disdain technological progress, the “collective haphazardness” of metropolitan growth resulted in more than slums of poverty; it resulted in “slum[s] of commerce” as well. He believed that two major technological advances, electric power transmission and motorized transportation, made orderly decentralized population expansion and economic development entirely feasible.³⁷ MacKaye’s philosophy of regionalism did not, however, permeate his practical applications to the degree one might expect. As urban areas began to assume the cancerous metropolitan proportions that so worried him, MacKaye concerned himself more and more with preserving the primeval. The Appalachian Trail, which he designed, remains as his great tangible achievement. Nevertheless, during the 1930s, he lent his expertise to the Tennessee Valley Authority, and the National Resources Planning Board’s regional planning studies, which incorporated land-use analysis and classification, bore the stamp of his influence.³⁸

³⁶ Lewis Mumford, *Sketches from Life: The Early Years* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982), 333–338; MacKaye, *Geography to Geotechnics*, 21–24; MacKaye, *The New Exploration* (1928; rpt. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), Chapter 5, “The Indigenous and the Metropolitan.”

³⁷ MacKaye, *The New Exploration*, 160–165.

³⁸ See, for example, MacKaye, “Tennessee — Seed of a National Plan” (1933) rpt. in *Geography to Geotechnics*, 132–148. Even when the NRPB was directed to shift its focus to postwar urban planning (1941–1943), its studies and coordinated planning projects retained a regional cast; see Philip J. Funigiello, “City Planning in World War II: The Experience of the National Resources Planning Board,” *Social Science Quarterly* 53 (June 1972): 91–194.

Two other RPAA members, Clarence Stein and Henry Wright, applied their architectural and planning skills toward demonstrating a viable alternative to that pursued by Thomas Adams and the Regional Plan Association of New York, which the RPAA criticized as planning for metropolitan expansion, not for regional development. Stein and Wright sought to work out the physical design as well as the economic problems involved in adapting Howard's garden city concept to American aesthetics and institutions. Their most notable success, Radburn (1928–1933), inspired the greenbelt towns of the Resettlement Administration and other New Deal housing projects. But Stein was the first to admit that Radburn failed to meet Howard's ideal because they "sacrificed" an "essential element": the greenbelt. "We did not fully realize," Stein later wrote, "that our main interest after our Sunnyside experience [Sunnyside Gardens, NYC, 1921–1928] had been transformed to a more pressing need, that of a town in which people could live peacefully with the automobile — or rather in spite of it."³⁹

Economic considerations led Stein and Wright to compromise the greenbelt element at Radburn and elsewhere. In Chatham Village (Pa., 1929–32, 1935) the greenbelt became a park strip "insulat[ing the] community from neighborhood depreciation and external annoyance"; at Phipps Garden Apartments (NYC, 1930, 1935), interior garden courtyards; and at Hillside Homes (NY 1932–35), an enclosed commons. Radburn nonetheless stimulated Rexford Tugwell to strive for Howard's garden city ideal with Resettlement Administration community projects. Greenbelt, Maryland, did not achieve his goal, but economically productive agricultural greenbelts were retained and more successfully integrated into the resettlement towns of Greendale, Wisconsin, and Greenhills, Ohio.⁴⁰

The shift from productive rural greenbelts to park-like buffers protecting residential areas from noisome and dangerous motor traffic was a shift of important magnitude. The Radburn idea was incorporated into American new town planning, an approach bearing little resemblance to its progenitor, the garden city. Nevertheless, the Radburn idea is evident

³⁹ Clarence S. Stein, *Toward New Towns for America* (1950; Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1966), 38–39.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 85 ff., 122–132. See Joseph L. Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971), 14–19, for a discussion of the RPAA's influence on Resettlement Administration programs.

in the programmed open spaces and the circulation patterns that separate pedestrian and auto traffic in large-scale planned urban residential developments. New towns, however, such as Foster City in the Bay Area, or Baldwin Hills Village in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, are recognized for what they are: planned, rather than piecemeal, suburban development.⁴¹ Stein, who was the consulting architect for Baldwin Hills Village, played an active role in the transformation; but unlike others who used the Radburn idea, Stein never lost track of the garden city ideal or the philosophy of regionalism. When he later praised the Santa Clara South County plan for its concept of urban centers “united as part of a regional complex” by agricultural greenbelts, he understood the tremendous obstacles confronting Karl Belser.⁴²

The ideas associated with the RPAA represent, in large part, the type of planning that Americans have rejected. Yet, the people-oriented goals they tied to resource conservation and city planning remain attractive. During the 1920s, the RPAA represented an exciting new intellectual current, and it is inconceivable that Karl Belser escaped its grasp when he studied at Harvard. Ironically, for him, the occurrence of these expansive planning concepts coincided with California’s decision to give local governments complete authority over planning.

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⁴¹ Stein documents this shift better than anyone else. See also Eugenie Ladner Birch, “Radburn and the American Planning Movement,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 46 (October 1980): 424–438. Birch argues convincingly that although Radburn “has acted as a permanent reference for generations of planners . . . as an applied pattern, it has failed to be a determining force.”

⁴² Letter dated October 5, 1957, from Stein to Karl Belser (SCCo Plan Dept, Improvement and Development: Planning, South County Study).