

Andrew Haswell Green

Highlights of his Life and Public Career

For more information about A.H. Green, including a reading list, please visit andrewhgreen.net.

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| <p>1820 Andrew Haswell Green, one of eleven children, is born near Worcester, Massachusetts.</p> <p>1835 Green moves to NYC where two of his sisters run a school for young girls.</p> <p>1845 Green becomes a lawyer under the tutelage of railroad attorney and future Democratic governor and presidential candidate, Samuel J. Tilden.</p> <p>1854 Green is elected to the NYC Board of Education. He will soon become its president.</p> <p>1857 The Republican-led NYS legislature begins to institute measures to control the municipal affairs of the largely Democratic metropolitan region. One act creates the Central Park Commission (the "CPC"). Green is appointed to the CPC, eventually becoming its head.</p> <p>1858 Olmsted & Vaux's Greensward Plan for Central Park is chosen by the CPC thanks largely to Green's influence. The CPC's work will proceed under Green's leadership, despite resistance from resentful local Tammany politicians who have little control of the project.</p> <p>1859 With Green's coaxing, the legislature begins to expand the CPC's authority, transforming it into the city's first comprehensive planning body. In the next decade the CPC will plan and/or propose improvements in northern Manhattan, the Harlem River and today's Bronx. Projects include Riverside, Morningside and Ft. Washington Parks; the street plan above 155 Street; a widened and straightened Broadway; a Grand Circle at 59 St. & Eighth Ave., and more.</p> <p>1868 Green proposes municipal consolidation of the entire metropolitan region to aid city planning, but his idea is viewed as premature. (Others had suggested various consolidation schemes as early as the late 1820s.)</p> <p>1869 Envisioning Central Park as the cultural center of NYC, Green gets approval for the CPC to create the American Museum of Natural History, then the Metropolitan Museum of Art, two prototype public-private institutions.</p> <p>1870 A new home-rule ("Tweed") charter ends the state-run CPC. However, the city's Departments of Public Works and Public Parks will eventually execute most of the Central Park Commission's unfinished plans.</p> <p>1871 The Tweed Ring corruption is exposed. Green is made Comptroller to sort out the ring's crippling theft and graft. He uses his personal credit to obtain funds to cover the city payroll. He cuts waste and halts most public works to spare the city from bankruptcy. Critics claim his retrenchment policy is too arbitrary and severe. Green serves until 1876.</p> <p>1874 NYC formally expands beyond Manhattan Island: the western portion of today's Bronx is annexed from Westchester County, and is referred to as the Annexed District.*</p> <p>1883 Brooklyn Bridge opens. There is much public talk of formally uniting NYC and Brooklyn, but nothing comes of it.*</p> <p>Niagara (Falls) Park Commission is created to establish New York's first state park and defend the falls. Green soon becomes president of the commission and will continue to serve until his death.</p> | <p>1886 Samuel J. Tilden dies, leaving a vast fortune to create a public library for NYC. But his will will be broken by relatives. The executors – Green and two others – will try to make do with fewer funds. Green will propose consolidating the Tilden Trust with the Astor and Lenox Libraries.</p> <p>1889 The Washington Bridge, a span over the Harlem River that Green had long championed, is completed.</p> <p>Sentiment builds in the business community for municipal consolidation of the metropolitan region to protect the mismanaged port. The New York State legislature creates a commission to explore consolidation, with Green at its head. Green immediately proposes an ambitious consolidation plan that will be rebuffed a number of times, mostly by Brooklynites who refer derisively to the movement as "Green's hobby."</p> <p>1894 Changing his approach, Green gets a nonbonding consolidation referendum on the ballot. Most surrounding municipalities vote in favor of consolidation, but Brooklyn's pro-consolidation majority is razor thin – only about 0.2%! Alarmed by the results, opponents will lobby to thwart subsequent bills by Green and others.</p> <p>Green rallies preservation-minded New Yorkers against the proposed destruction or removal of NYC's City Hall (constructed 1803-1812, and now the oldest in the US). The next year he will form the city's first formal preservation and conservation group, to be called the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society. The society will create parks and rescue endangered sites throughout New York City and State before folding in the 1970s.</p> <p>1895 Eastern portion of today's Bronx annexed by NYC.*</p> <p>Boosted by support from the Boone and Crockett Club, Green secures a charter for the New York Zoological Society / Bronx Zoo (now the Wildlife Conservation Society). For years Green had been trying to win approval for a new grand zoological park, probably as a means to remove the old Central Park menagerie which he never favored. Green becomes the society's first president, but soon resigns due to health concerns.</p> <p>Motivated by politics, Republican Party boss Thomas C. Platt embraces Green's consolidation plan. He pushes the measure through the legislature in 1896. A Greater New York charter is passed in 1897.</p> <p>1898 Consolidation takes effect January 1. New York City expands from approximately 60 Square miles to over 300, and becomes the "World's Second City," behind only London in population.</p> <p>An island at Niagara Falls is named for Green.</p> <p>1902 Cornerstone is laid for the New York Public Library.</p> <p>1903 Green is murdered in a tragic case of mistaken identity. He is buried in Worcester. In 1905 his family estate in that city is turned into a public park.</p> <p>1929 The Andrew H. Green Memorial Bench is dedicated in Central Park. It is surrounded by five trees, representing the five boroughs. In the 1980s the bench will be moved to another hill, and new trees will be planted in 1998.</p> <p><i>* Included to provide a historical context for Green's work.</i></p> |
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