

## Herbert Brown Ames: Political Reformer and Enforcer

Mélanie Méthot

Volume 31, Number 2, Spring 2003

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1015755ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1015755ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Méthot, M. (2003). Herbert Brown Ames: Political Reformer and Enforcer. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 31(2), 18–31.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1015755ar>

Article abstract

To make a distinction between political and social reform may appear simplistic, especially when one considers that many turn of the century social reformers were advocates of prohibition, temperance, child welfare and they turned to the pursuit of female enfranchisement, to achieve their goals. Yet, for social reformers contemporary critics, there was a distinction between political and social reforms, and in their eyes, the ones that needed to be urgently implemented were the latter. The review of social reformer Herbert Brown Ames' municipal career shows that he chose to focus on political reform. He did not envision reforms that would radically transform society. Instead, he asked those with means to assume what he believed should be their moral and financial responsibilities towards the less fortunate. He still believed in the hierarchy of classes. He emphasized the importance of honest businessmen holding positions of potential authority, stressing that the key to a better society resided in the establishment of a professional, accountable, and "scientific" municipal government made up of men like himself. His attempt at professionalizing the municipal government should be seen as a first effort at creating a bureaucracy. Ames should be remembered as a paternalist philanthropist businessman who advocated political reforms.

## Herbert Brown Ames: Political Reformer and Enforcer

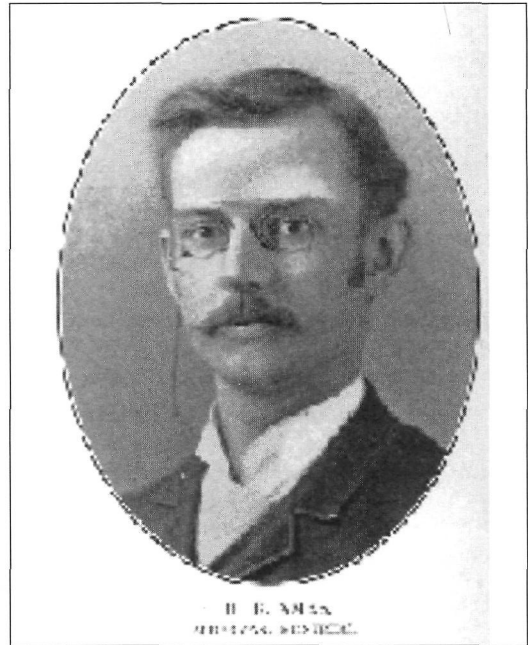
Mélanie Méthot

### Abstract

To make a distinction between political and social reform may appear simplistic, especially when one considers that many turn of the century social reformers were advocates of prohibition, temperance, child welfare and they turned to the pursuit of female enfranchisement, to achieve their goals. Yet, for social reformers contemporary critics, there was a distinction between political and social reforms, and in their eyes, the ones that needed to be urgently implemented were the latter. The review of social reformer Herbert Brown Ames' municipal career shows that he chose to focus on political reform. He did not envision reforms that would radically transform society. Instead, he asked those with means to assume what he believed should be their moral and financial responsibilities towards the less fortunate. He still believed in the hierarchy of classes. He emphasized the importance of honest businessmen holding positions of potential authority, stressing that the key to a better society resided in the establishment of a professional, accountable, and "scientific" municipal government made up of men like himself. His attempt at professionalizing the municipal government should be seen as a first effort at creating a bureaucracy. Ames should be remembered as a paternalist philanthropist businessman who advocated political reforms.

### Résumé

Il peut sembler simpliste d'effectuer une distinction entre les réformes politiques et sociales, en particulier si l'on tient compte du fait qu'au tournant du siècle, de nombreux réformateurs sociaux réalisaient leurs objectifs en se montrant partisans de la prohibition, de la tempérance, de la protection de l'enfance et, par la suite, du droit de vote accordé aux femmes. Pourtant, les critiques contemporains des réformateurs sociaux distinguaient ces deux types de réformes et trouvaient qu'il devenait urgent de mettre en œuvre des réformes sociales. Un examen de la carrière municipale du réformateur social Herbert Brown Ames démontre qu'il a choisi de se concentrer sur la réforme politique. Ames n'a pas envisagé des réformes pouvant transformer radicalement la société. Il a plutôt favorisé celles qu'il croyait susceptibles d'entraîner une responsabilisation morale et financière à l'égard des démunis. Parce qu'il adhérait au principe de hiérarchie des classes sociales, Ames a privilégié le rang des hommes d'affaires honnêtes détenant une certaine autorité, tout en insistant sur le fait que la clé d'une meilleure société reposait sur la mise sur pied d'une administration municipale professionnelle, responsable et "Éscientifique", constituée d'hommes de sa trempe. De ses tentatives en vue de professionnaliser la direction municipale, il faut percevoir les jalons d'une bureaucratie naissante. On se souviendra d'Ames comme d'un homme d'affaires humanitaire et paternaliste qui a mis de l'avant des réformes politiques.



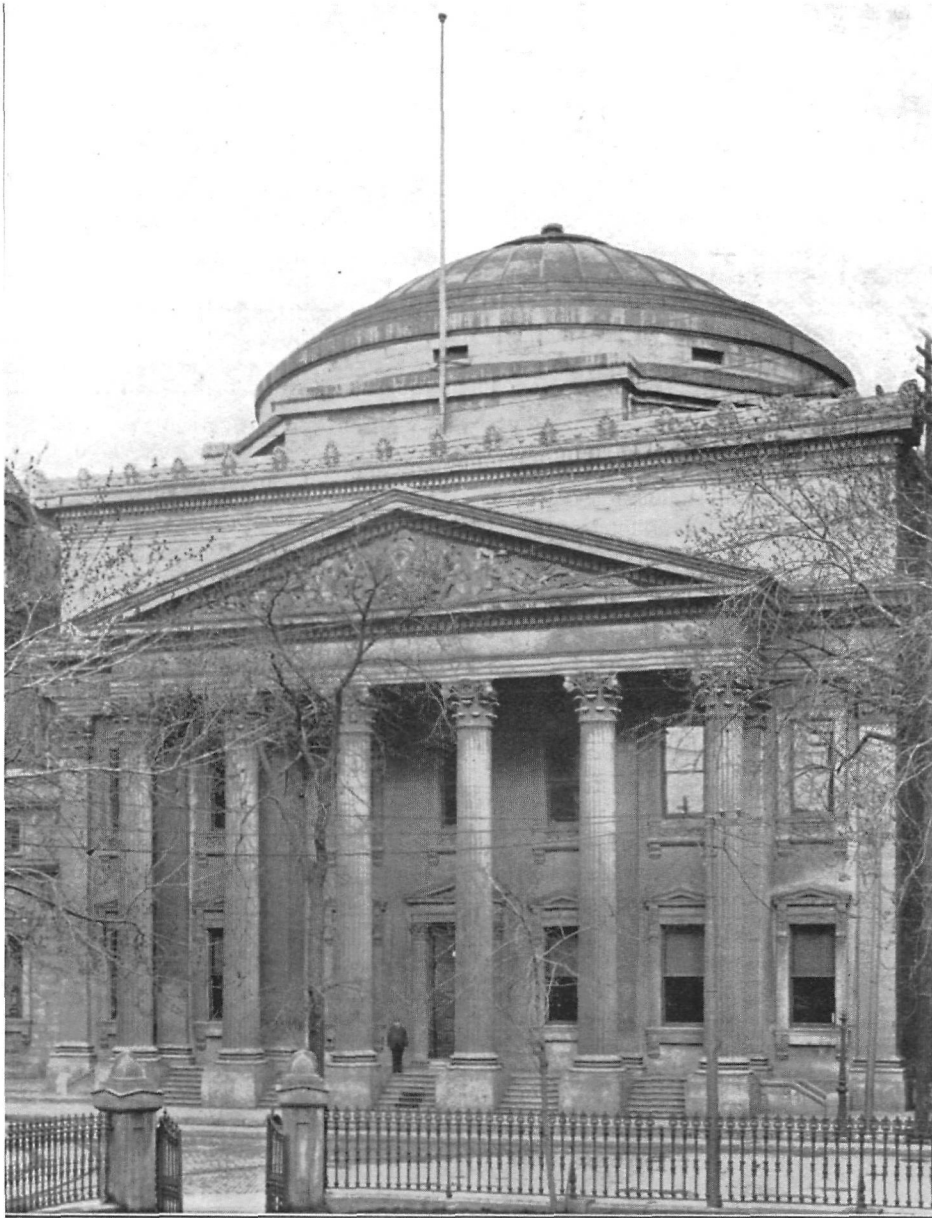
H.B. Ames. Source: John A Cooper, *Men of Canada 1901-1902*

To a great many people Montreal has always represented the *big city* with everything that those two words evoke. It is easy to imagine how it must have been for sons and daughters of farmers, families who left their little villages in rural Quebec, or immigrants coming from abroad, to see, smell, hear, and feel Montreal in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Arriving by boat, train, carriage, or on foot, they could not avoid the sight of the city's majestic buildings: the splendid Gare Bonaventure, the aesthetic Notre-Dame Church, the divine Montreal Cathedral, the gigantic bank buildings or gleaming department stores. Neither could they ignore the buzzing activities in the streets and markets, nor escape the smoke steaming out of the numerous factory chimneys. Montreal was indeed the Canadian metropolis. "Its magnificent situation, its historic riches, its commercial activity, the cosmopolitan charm of its division of languages and population," commented W. D. Lighthall in 1892, earned Montreal the title of the "Alexandria of the West."<sup>1</sup>

Yet, densely populated areas, overcrowded tenements and small apartments, lack of proper ventilation, inefficient sewers, filthy courtyards, and putrid alleys contributed to Montreal's notoriously high mortality rate. Montreal's elite citizens naturally worried about public health conditions since the city possessed no real emergency powers, nor proper health structures. During the winter of 1885-86, the city was struck by a smallpox epidemic that took three thousand lives. The following year, Dr. Israël Desroches produced a highly critical pamphlet on the sanitary state of the city, opening with a crystal-clear statement: "Notre ville est malsaine, c'est incontestable; les chiffres de mortalité nous en donnent une preuve irréfutable."<sup>2</sup>

Social and economic conditions had indeed changed tremendously since the incorporation of the city in 1832. New problems

*Herbert Brown Ames: Political Reformer and Enforcer*



BANK OF MONTREAL

emerged and old ones were exacerbated. Demographic growth forced the municipality to adapt and expand the services it offered. Sewer systems had to be set up, streets needed to be built and paved, tramway lines to be installed, telephone poles erected. The municipal officials were thus very busy awarding contracts. Alan Gordon refers to the "Gang of 23" who, headed by Alderman Giroux, "monopolized city contracts and subsidies."<sup>3</sup> The era was marked by the emergence of monopolies that were making huge profits at the expense of citizens. Christopher Armstrong and H. V. Nelles report that: "Montreal came to symbolize monopoly."<sup>4</sup> The great sums of money circulating at City Hall often excited the covetousness of certain elected representatives. Corruption and bribes played a major role in deci-

sion-making. Montreal's leading newspapers, *La Presse*, the *Star*, *La Patrie* and the *Daily Herald* were vociferous in their attacks against extensive corruption, whether in the judicial system, the municipal government, or the police force. Winnipeg and Toronto newspapers often focused on the latest Montreal scandal. Indeed, Montreal was known for its less-than-incorruptible civic administration.

In addition to editors and reporters, many other men and women raised their voices against urban conditions they found unacceptable and worked to create a better society. Paul Rutherford suggests that urban social reformers were "imbued with a reforming zeal and a singular sense of mission."<sup>5</sup> He specifies, however, that reformers' motives were not all altruistic:

## Herbert Brown Ames: Political Reformer and Enforcer

They [urban reformers] were all motivated by a generalized sense of crisis, founded on a variety of fears, such as the spread of moral decay, the threat of class hatred, and the growth of vested interests. They were inspired by the possibilities of improvement, by a belief in their ability to create a humane, rational society.<sup>6</sup>

Although Rutherford mentions the "variety of fears" that prompted men and women to advocate reforms, the emphasis, nonetheless, remains on the reformers' desire to do good. Analysing their discourse, he reveals their idealism and establishes how "they slowly moved towards a new conception of the public interest, founded upon the pre-eminence of the community, a commitment to social order and social justice, and a firm belief in the twin ideals of economy and efficiency."<sup>7</sup>

Trying to draw a national picture of urban reform, and relying exclusively on the writings of prominent reformers, Rutherford not only disregards the possible incongruence between their words and their action, but he ignores local reformers who might have had other motives than a commitment to social order and social justice. In a revisionist approach, John Weaver claims that:

A critical assessment of urban reform, if it is to go beyond an examination of reform rhetoric, must deal with local perspective rather than national or international ones, it must examine motive (other than idealism) and consider continuity instead of change.<sup>8</sup>

Weaver also maintains that municipal and social reform would be understood better if "the actual practices and achievements of the economic and political groups engaged in campaigns for better civic government across Canada"<sup>9</sup> were closely analysed. Hence, considering the reforms themselves instead of reformers' rhetoric, Weaver rejects Rutherford's claim that the reformers' main goal was to regulate the city for the benefit of all.<sup>10</sup>

It is only by linking reformers' words to their actions that one can fully grasp their true motives, since intentions, especially political ones, are not always attainable nor do they invariably reflect real aims. Furthermore, to evaluate the success of reformers in achieving their objectives, to measure their impact on society, one has first to know their ideals, their motives. Even if historians have moved away from this debate,<sup>11</sup> I feel that we have not come to a clear understanding of social reformers. Businessman, philanthropist and municipal politician, Herbert Brown Ames witnessed the social and economic problems that marked Montreal at the turn of the century. The analysis of his municipal career sheds some light on the old debate.

Among the various social urban reformers of the period, Ames is certainly one who has penetrated the *histoire-mémoire*. Canadian and Quebec history textbooks as well as monographs mention him, or at least refer to his pioneering sociological survey, *The City Below the Hill. A Sociological Essay of a Portion of the City of Montreal, Canada*.<sup>12</sup> In fact, this detailed 1896 study that surveyed one of the older industrial quarters of Montreal has been used extensively as a primary source, especially by labour historians.<sup>13</sup>

Some historians have ventured an interpretation of his social philosophy. They classify him either as someone who simply had an organic conception of society which translated into a need to address the problems that touched the lives of all, such as public health, or, as a man who questioned the existing social order. Kathleen Jenkins argues that *The City Below the Hill* "was a strangely modern document, too advanced in its thinking, in fact, to achieve any great results."<sup>14</sup> She suggests that Ames's *avant garde* conception of society, and the solutions he put forth to alleviate the ills of city life, simply could not receive the attention they deserved. In *Montreal: From Mission Colony to World City*, Leslie Roberts also perceives in Ames's discourse "the sense of the need for changes." He adds that:

"Ames' sociological study was regarded by labour as an effort to get the real facts regarding the lives of working people and to induce capitalists to erect better dwellings for workers."<sup>15</sup>

He, too, implies that Ames questioned the values of his society. Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond and John English assert that Ames "introduced practical reforms which significantly enhanced public health conditions."<sup>16</sup> Mariana Valverde points out that Ames understood that "drinking was generally a symptom or effect, not a cause of poverty."<sup>17</sup> Paul Rutherford went further when he indicated that Ames foresaw that the industrial proletariat was to become the backbone of the new Canada.<sup>18</sup>

Ramsay Cook, by contrast, referring to an expression Ames liked to use ("philanthropy and 5%"<sup>19</sup>), contends that Ames advocated reforms for "ambivalent reasons."<sup>20</sup> John Dickinson and Brian Young report that his reform strategies for a better municipal government did not find an echo in the popular classes, mainly because of his social and ethnic origins.<sup>21</sup> Paul-André Linteau, though he states that Ames played a determinant role among the reformist group at city hall, adds that Ames did not propose great solutions to solve the urban problems. Linteau emphasizes that Ames underlined that it was the health of all, the rich as well as the poor, that was in danger.<sup>22</sup> This historian stresses that the interests of Ames's own social class were at the forefront of his thinking rather than the exercise of pure philanthropy.

Ames was clearly a notable figure, described in many secondary works, and thus someone who ought to be known outside Montreal. My aim is to draw a picture of the reformer taking into account not only his discourse, but as Weaver suggests, to analyse his actions. It is possible to measure the congruence between his action and his words via his *City Council Diaries*. Between the months of February 1898 and January 1903, Ames recorded every motion he presented and position he held at Council meetings and committee meetings he attended (I labelled them "interventions"). A thorough review of his municipal career allows for the construction of a table of analysis which includes seven themes, four lying in the scope of political reform (electoral fraud, public office candidate, meritocracy, and scientific management); and three dealing with social reform (public health, working class welfare, and social ethic).<sup>23</sup> The distinction between political and social reform may appear simplistic, espe-

cially when one considers that many advocates of prohibition, temperance, and child welfare were turning to the pursuit of female enfranchisement, decisively a political reform, to achieve their goals. Yet, for contemporary critics of Ames, there was a distinction between political and social reforms, and in their eyes, the ones that needed to be urgently implemented were the latter. Thus, although this kind of categorization might seem rigid, especially considering that social reformers like Ames believed that political reforms would lead to social improvements, it has its place since it lays out a reformer's priorities.

Ames' municipal action centred foremost on political reform. Nearly seventy-two per cent of his interventions as an alderman and chairman of various municipal committees were oriented toward political reforms, while only twenty-eight per cent toward the cause of social reform.<sup>24</sup> Also, his contemporaries identified him with political reforms predominantly.<sup>25</sup>

Born in 1863 in Montreal to American parents, Caroline Brown of New York City and Evan Fisher Ames of Massachusetts, Herbert Brown Ames enjoyed a long and rich life, dying at the age of 90. His father was educated in the rural town of Amherst where he learned the mercantile business. For many years he was a merchant in Conway, and represented the town in the legislature for two years. In 1855 he moved to Montreal where he built the very successful Ames-Holden Company, a manufacturer of boots and shoes.

Young Herbert received a B.A. from Amherst College in 1885. Afterwards he went to France to learn French and study French literature. Back in Montreal, he joined his father's firm, where he remained until December 1893. One biographer wrote at the time that Ames "deliberately withdrew from all commercial pursuits to devote himself, through good or ill fortune, to public affairs."<sup>26</sup> Involved in countless charity organisations, Ames was definitively a philanthropist. He was as generous with his time as he was with his money.

Ames officially started his municipal career in 1892 when he participated in the creation of the Volunteer Electoral League (VEL), an organisation mandated to insure that municipal elections were honestly and openly conducted. The year 1894 was a particularly fruitful one for Ames as he contributed many articles to newspapers and magazines, and was invited to give lectures on municipal government and Canadian political history. He was appointed a member of the Protestant section of the Council of Public Instruction in 1895 although he did not have children. The following year he was elected President of the Montreal Young Men's Christian Association. The same year he financed his well-known sociological survey on the living conditions of the working-class district of west-end Montreal. He was elected to the municipal council in 1898 and occupied the position of alderman until 1906. Ames ran in the constituency of Montréal-St-Antoine and won a seat to the Canadian House of Commons as a Conservative in 1904 and served in federal politics until 1920. Late in 1919 he was appointed a financial director to the Secretariat of the League of Nations in Geneva. It could be argued that, from 1904 onward, his energy shifted from the municipal field to the national and international scenes.

Ames offered his own solutions to alleviate social ills, concentrating his efforts in two spheres: municipal administration and social welfare. Although his municipal career was relatively short (1892–1904), especially when compared to that of Jules Helbronner (1884–1921),<sup>27</sup> he wrote copiously on issues that preoccupied him. The Constitution of the VEL and the subsequent reports of the association<sup>28</sup> can be considered Ames's first texts that dealt directly with municipal reform. Articles, courses, lectures, and conferences also form parts of the record of his thinking about social and political questions.<sup>29</sup> His *magnus opus*, *The City Below the Hill*, completes the discourse under study.

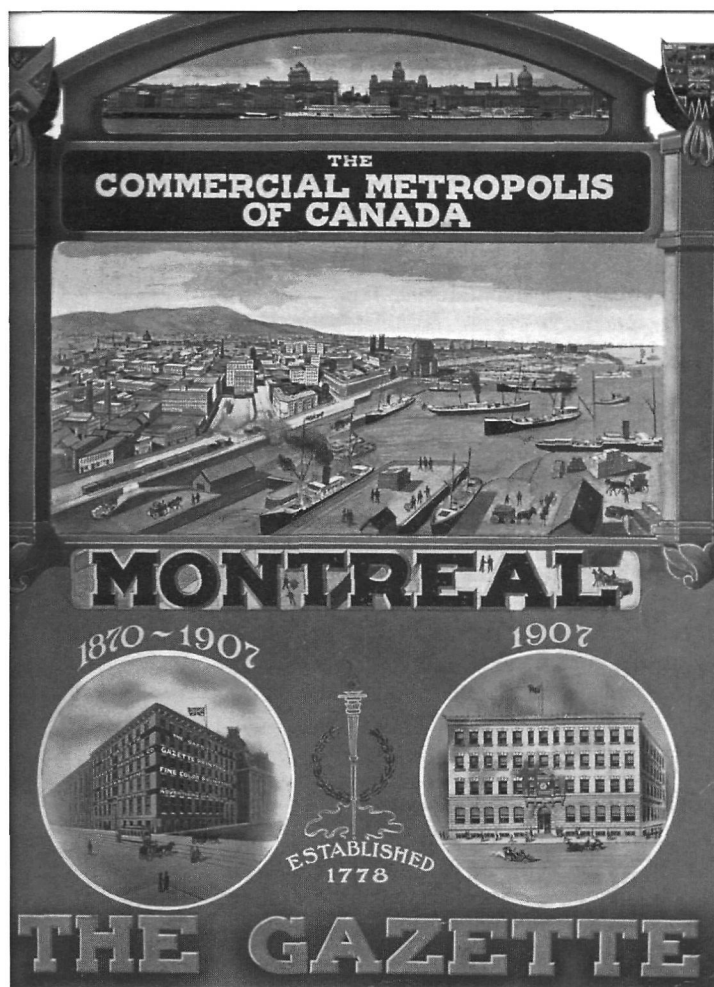
Ames was above all a businessman, but one who happened to be also a philanthropist and who emphasised political reform. The nature of his reform strategies and the limitation of his actions suggest that Ames had a profound respect for the existing social order. As a man belonging to the monied elite, he had not only the resources necessary to devote himself to improving the social welfare, he also seems to have felt a responsibility to do so. He chose not to engage in reform of the traditional social and political structures of Montreal, but rather to enforce the existing rules that regulated society. Shaped at a particularly impressionable period by Amherst College and greatly influenced by American middle-class municipal reformers, Ames never questioned the capitalist system, nor democracy (although he had his own conception of democracy).

### **Ames's Political Reforms**

Ames focused his energy on ameliorating the effects of components of the democratic system: the electoral mechanism for one, and the quality of candidates for municipal office, for another. He also worked ardently at the operational level of municipal government. His aim was to introduce principles of meritocracy and scientific management into the municipal administration. He attacked the way electoral lists were compiled, to ensure more honest elections, and to see that the electoral law was applied more strictly. He asserted that corrupt practices, even if used to elect an honest man, were simply unjustifiable.<sup>30</sup> Ames denounced all types of electoral corruption, from adding fictional voters to electoral rolls and "telegraphing" (usurping votes), to electoral bribes.<sup>31</sup> For him, "corruption and a plentiful fund for election expenses were synonymous terms."<sup>32</sup>

His writing takes resolute stands against assorted abuses of democratic forms. The quantitative analysis of his *City Council Diaries* reveals, however, that only 2.5 per cent of his four-hundred-and-forty-six interventions dealt with electoral fraud. One should not automatically conclude that his discourse and action were not one, since some of the measures he advocated to eradicate electoral fraud were ratified a few years before he was elected alderman.<sup>33</sup> In fact, Ames's first involvement in municipal politics was through the VEL, and it was in this context that he worked zealously to eliminate electoral corruption. To counter telegraphing, the VEL initiated an identification card system. Men surveying electoral districts wrote a physical description of each eligible voter on a card which was then used on election day.<sup>34</sup> In 1897, Ames proposed an amendment to the city charter that would allow the city to sue telegraphers and the men that employed them.<sup>35</sup> He also asked that the legal depart-





ment be consulted on the legality of aldermen paying the water tax of their electors.<sup>36</sup> For Ames, democracy would work best if rules were followed, such as making sure that only qualified voters voted. By qualified voters, Ames meant those who had paid their taxes themselves, not those who had been bought by unscrupulous aldermen. It becomes evident that Ames never questioned the value of the electoral system itself; what he challenged were fraudulent practices. He was consistent with his rhetoric: he denounced electoral corruption, conceived of ways to purify elections, and tried to apply these ways.

For the most part, his electoral reform strategies were well received. Many prominent men showed their support by contributing substantial sums to the VEL's fund.<sup>37</sup> The *Montreal Star* showed the new organisation and its president with praise.<sup>38</sup> Others commented favourably on his achievements.<sup>39</sup> W. D. Lighthall wrote to a Mr. Paine of Boston that:

Party machines live by the spoils, and the spoils inevitably introduce corruption, so that any means of exposing and putting down corruption is doubtless important, and a very perfect system which worked effectively here some years ago was the Volunteer Electoral League of Mr. H. B. Ames,

M.P. of Montreal which eliminated that element for the time.<sup>40</sup>

When the VEL was created, there was a desperate need for electoral reform. *La Presse* observed:

La corruption électorale, la fraude, l'emploi de ce qu'on appelle vulgairement les *télégraphes* est devenu non seulement un scandale, mais a pris des proportions que l'expression de l'électorat en est faussé.<sup>41</sup>

The editor of the French daily, like Ames, was asserting his faith in the democratic system by condemning electoral fraud. The newspaper suggested the use of an electoral card where the name, age, occupation and residence of the voter would be identified.<sup>42</sup> This system resembled the one Ames would later adopt, but was not as extreme as that one would be. It was reported in *La Patrie* that VEL men knocked at doors and took notes, but never mentioned why.<sup>43</sup> The paper portrayed the VEL as an elite organisation which did not have to explain its actions.<sup>44</sup>

The space that both the *Montreal Star* and *La Presse* devoted to the VEL testifies to the importance of electoral reform at the time; however, the reforms suggested did not seem to surprise anyone. Ames's electoral reform strategies were not departing from the traditional framework of intervention. "There was law enough" he once said, "but no one seemed willing to undertake its enforcement."<sup>45</sup> Ames thus funnelled his energy towards the enforcement of the law. He never questioned the inherent value of electoral law, nor of the democratic system of the time; he only laboured to apply the law, so democracy could truly win the day.

When *La Presse* first mentioned the VEL, it offered mixed congratulations, stating it was an excellent institution which would have the newspaper's support if it remained loyal to its program and was content with insuring that elections were honest.<sup>46</sup> But in the same issue, the French daily reported:

Les employés du département du greffier de la cité se plaignent plus que jamais de la peine que leur cause la Ligue des Volontaires municipaux. Il ne se passe pas de jours sans qu'une cinquantaine de gens s'adressent à eux pour faire corriger l'inscription de leur nom sur les listes électorales, et quarante-neuf fois sur cinquante on découvre que l'erreux n'existe que dans l'imagination des volontaires.<sup>47</sup>

A week later, publishing a letter from Ames concerning the aims of the VEL, the editor affixed next to it his reservation towards the League:

La Ligue n'a raison d'être que si elle prend en main la défense des électeurs, qui faute de temps ou d'argent, ne peuvent se défendre eux-mêmes, et c'était certainement vouloir, au contraire, fausser les listes électorales que de mettre les ouvriers ayant travaillé et travaillant pour la corporation dans l'obligation de perdre une journée de travail pour comparaître devant les réviseurs ou de se voir rayer des rôles municipaux.<sup>48</sup>

## ***Herbert Brown Ames: Political Reformer and Enforcer***

Jules Helbronner, *La Presse's* labour columnist, always on the lookout for any form of exploitation or injustice towards workers, revealed his fear that the VEL was just another elite organisation trying to impose its own conception of social order on the labouring classes, a conception that did not recognize that working men had a legitimate place in government and a role to play.

*La Presse* was not alone in its early denunciation of the VEL. Some thought that the systematic revision of electoral lists was an excessive expense and an overly arduous task for the reviewers.<sup>49</sup> A small group questioned the legality of Ames identification cards, but on this issue, the *Star* quickly retorted that only the corrupt elements of society would refuse to endorse identification cards.<sup>50</sup>

The fight against electoral fraud illustrates how Ames and most of his contemporaries kept faith in a democratic system where eligible citizens elected their representatives. Ames insisted that electors who tended to neglect their civic duty should be strongly encouraged to go to the polls, since if they voted, they would make good choices.<sup>51</sup> He declared "the heart of the people is right."<sup>52</sup> The VEL stated that it would intervene only when a "bad" and a "good" candidate faced each other, implying that under normal circumstances, citizens would elect a just and honest man.<sup>53</sup> Ames was definitively convinced of the rightness of the established democratic electoral process. But there is reason to believe that he was not entirely trusting of democracy.

As much as Ames was concerned with honest elections, he was consumed by the "quality" of candidates for public office as he thought that once elected, they became the best ramparts against corruption. He declared in a conference speech:

If I were forced to choose between permitting the angel Gabriel to frame the laws, leaving it for Satan to enforce them, or the reverse, I should certainly say let Satan do its worst at legislation, provided Gabriel has the interpretation and the enforcement.<sup>54</sup>

Ames attributed many virtues to the perfect candidate. On different occasions, he mentioned honesty, worth, loyalty, uprightness, and honour. The desirable candidate had already proven himself, his name was honourable, his integrity unattackable, and his reputation stainless.<sup>55</sup> It is clear that in this context of public recognition, a rich man had more chance to prove himself of worthy reputation than a labourer would.

Ames manifestly preferred businessmen as candidates for municipal honours. All the candidates supported by the VEL in the 1893 municipal elections belonged to the business world.<sup>56</sup> When Ames agreed to his nomination in 1898, he specified that it was because two businessmen promised they would be candidates at the next municipal elections.<sup>57</sup> Ames did not think that everyone was fit to become alderman or mayor. He firmly believed in property qualification.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, he took the initiative to propose an amendment to the charter that aimed at increasing those qualifications.<sup>59</sup>

Ames revealed that he believed that successful businessmen, such as himself, not only were better equipped to administer the city but they also had a duty to do so. He championed a hierar-

chical society where the elite would handle the affairs of the working class. In his words:

The strong shall bear the burdens of the weak, for this joint stock company [the municipal government], unlike all others, should be run on the principle that the smaller the stockholder and the greater his hardships, the stronger his claim for consideration and help.<sup>60</sup>

Not all shared Ames's idea of who was best suited to administer the city and to see that the interests of citizens were served. Not surprisingly, the ones who were welcomed to City Hall embraced his conception. For instance, the editor of *The Star* subscribed to the idea.<sup>61</sup> *The Pen*, a literary weekly, advised electors to get informed on the business credentials of candidates.<sup>62</sup> All the municipal candidates sponsored by *La Patrie* were "indépendant[s] de fortune" or businessmen.<sup>63</sup> And although Helbronner had a different conception of who belonged to city hall, he still welcomed Ames's candidacy to public office, citing the very same attributes Ames found essential in a candidate:

C'est avec plaisir que la Presse verrait siéger M. Ames au conseil de ville. Riche, instruit, intègre, connaissant à fond les questions municipales, pouvant consacrer aux fonctions d'échevin tout le temps qu'elles demandent, M. Ames a toutes les qualités nécessaires pour faire un bon échevin.<sup>64</sup>

But if a certain part of the population supported Ames's strategies, those who were excluded from the decision-making process using Ames's criterion, objected to being relegated to the status of mere observers.<sup>65</sup> *La Patrie*, for one, attacked Ames for his elitism:

Il a daigné descendre des hauteurs où il trônait avec orgueil appuyé par le Star et les grands propriétaires qui ignorent la puissance du vote et qui croient que les ouvriers qui contribuent pour une très large part au trésor civique, n'ont pas le droit de se protéger en envoyant au Conseil de Ville des échevins pour y défendre leurs intérêts."<sup>66</sup>

A known Tory, Ames was not particularly liked by the Liberal newspaper. Some of his colleagues reproved him for being too dictatorial: "We don't want any dictators in our committee, like Ald. Ames with his high dignity," blurted Ald. Lamarche, while Ald. Quimet "thought the chairman had taken too much on his shoulders, and was inclined to go too fast. He had not called a meeting for three weeks and seemed to act without the aid of the committee."<sup>67</sup>

Ames's "elitist" views were not shared by the Montreal Central Trades Council which presented to the city council a resolution requesting the abolition of property qualification.<sup>68</sup> "A Tenant" simply asked: "Why should it be an impossibility, as it is at present, for a tenant, who is not a proprietor, to be nominated as an alderman?"<sup>69</sup> Perhaps more to the point were W. D.'s comments:

It is surprising that the young men composing the Electoral League are not more progressive. Surely they must have seen by this time that the fact that a man owning \$2,000

## **Herbert Brown Ames: Political Reformer and Enforcer**

worth of property did not make him more honest than a man who had nothing. Yet they have to support wealth instead of worth.<sup>70</sup>

W. D. went even further, advocating universal suffrage:

The laboring classes of Montreal want to throw the gates of the Council open, as they ought to be for every qualified men (and female too for that matter), voter of the city, for then and not until then, shall we have a truly representative council of the people.<sup>71</sup>

In sum, the "excluded" wished for a restructuring of the electoral system that would institutionalize their presence on the municipal scene and give them a voice and a political role at the local level. Their requests clearly illustrated that they had a new conception of what the social order should be, a conception that Ames and his peers did not share.

Contrary to what Michele Dagenais notes, Ames and his Reform Party advocated more than the presence of honest men in government.<sup>72</sup> They also championed a reform of the municipal administration. In this sense, Ames was really of the first generation to try to reorganize Montreal government. He supported a meritocracy where patronage and its consequence, corruption, would disappear.<sup>73</sup> He unambiguously stated that: "Public office is a public trust and to the victor does not belong the spoils."<sup>74</sup> This was, in a way, a departure from current practices.<sup>75</sup> In New York, ward bosses apparently had no shame in admitting that "Tammany is for the spoils system and when we go in we fire every anti-Tammany man from office that can be fired under the law."<sup>76</sup> They were, however, being challenged by reformers who advocated civil service reforms. For Ames, patronage led to:

The distribution of public offices among "heelers" and incapables whose only claim for recognition is that they brought in so many votes at the last election.<sup>77</sup>

He was distressed that positions were sought in the health committee "by aldermen more interested in the distribution of patronage than in the protection of public health."<sup>78</sup> In a course on municipal government, he told his students:

If the public service is looked upon merely as an asylum for an alderman's poor relations and broken down friends, it is not surprising that the dignity of public office and the title such as Mayor and Alderman, or head of a civic department, once regarded as an honor, becomes a reproach.<sup>79</sup>

For Ames, it was time that the municipal administration recovered its honour and distinction, and, in his view, this could be done by implementing a meritocracy. Over thirty-per-cent of his interventions in committee meetings and in the Council were directed towards the elimination of patronage and the eradication of corruption. His actions were many and diversified. He proposed two strategies to reduce "spoils practices". Civic contracts were to be tendered and awarded to the lowest bidder "responsible and trustworthy", and the civic administration was to pro-

mote the capable employees and fire the useless.<sup>80</sup> He also suggested the introduction of a committee in charge of studying job applications and recommending the best candidate for the position. When there was the question of policemen purchasing their positions, he asked for an investigation of the registry of police employees.<sup>81</sup>

Ames's constant interventions to counter the efforts of patronage "addicts" made him the watchdog of the Council. The Health Committee waited for a day when Ames was absent to adopt a resolution allowing them to award their friends coal contracts.<sup>82</sup> After exposing the difficulty in "purifying" the municipal administration because of the stubbornness of some of his colleagues, Ames urged people to "kindly remember the limitations under which reformers serve and be as charitable with us as you can."<sup>83</sup>

Even though not all aldermen agreed with Ames's meritocracy (for instance, Alderman Roy publicly complained of the lack of patronage in the Police committee and in the Health committee,<sup>84</sup>) most people heartily welcomed Ames's concept. The *Star* supported the principle of a meritocracy stating time and time again that public-function positions should be awarded according to merit.<sup>85</sup> *La Presse* also took this position, backing a system of promotion based on merit,<sup>86</sup> while the Knights of Labor officially condemned patronage practices.<sup>87</sup>

If most believed in a meritocracy, they did not necessarily think that Ames was the man to enforce the principle. *La Patrie*, accusing him of "practising intrigue" and of being zealous for the Tories, advised its readership to always be wary of him.<sup>88</sup> If *La Presse* did not hesitate to support Ames's candidacy in 1898,<sup>89</sup> in 1901 the daily reported that:

L'échevin Ames n'a pas dit à ses auditeurs de Rochester, que le népotisme, le favoritisme règne à l'hôtel de ville depuis l'avènement de la Réforme, et que lui, l'échevin Ames est le plus ardent défenseur de ce système injuste.<sup>90</sup>

But six months later, the editor specified:

Il a surgi sous le nom de réforme un parti que la presse a fortement combattu. Nous avons dénoncé ses méthodes, que nous trouvons trop étroites, mesquines et trop lentes. Mais c'est déjà un bonheur pour la ville que de pouvoir dire que nos chefs n'ont jamais cessé, un instant de ce conduire en honnêtes gens [...] bien que nous n'approuvions pas la manière de gouverner, nous ne voudrions pas les faire sortir du Conseil. Leur présence y est nécessaire, parce qu'elle protège la cité contre les coups de main et qu'elle crée autour du Conseil de Ville une atmosphère de sincérité et de droiture qui valent bien d'autres qualités."<sup>91</sup>

The principle of a meritocracy was thus widely accepted, but Ames was not always perceived as its defender, despite the fact that he was one of the chief exponents of the concept at meetings and in Council where he argued for the elimination of patronage and corruption. Could he have been misunderstood or was he perceived as a perpetrator of patronage by advocating that members of his own class were the only worthy candidates



## ***Herbert Brown Ames: Political Reformer and Enforcer***

for municipal government? After all, it is true that his conception of what the municipal administration ought to be certainly called for the presence of experts at city hall, and where else except in business and professional circles (thus among his friends) could one recruit civil servants?

Closely linked with the concept of a meritocracy was the principle of scientific management.<sup>92</sup> "Taylorism", concern with efficiency as advocated by Frederick Taylor, permeated every branch of society. By the turn of the 20th century, there arose new accounting and inventory procedures in municipal departments, as well as planning departments. William Scott argues that scientific management created an elite aristocracy with powers vested in administrative technicians.<sup>93</sup> Ames certainly fitted the profile of American city planners who believed that their expertise and skills made them more qualified to plan urban development than the average citizen. They also believed that their "professionalism" would eliminate political conflict and inefficiency. Ames believed that the city should be in the hands of "men of expert training and high professional skill."<sup>94</sup> Reflecting on Paris' system of public health, he stressed that Paris was second to none because of its "executive emphasis" and the presence of experts in committees.<sup>95</sup> In other words he appreciated a government by a commission of experts who enjoyed wide powers.<sup>96</sup>

Ames conceived of municipal government as a business which should observe the same sound financial principles that big companies followed. More precisely it should be seen as a "joint stock or cooperative enterprise" in which citizens were shareholders, and in this capacity had the responsibility to elect the best administrators.<sup>97</sup> In turn, aldermen had a duty to ensure that the municipal enterprise was not buried under the weight of a debt which it could not assume. The debt was indeed one of Ames's constant preoccupations. He deplored that the municipal government was in a position of "a householder who has mortgaged his property so that it demands half of the revenues to meet the annual interest charges."<sup>98</sup>

His discourse on scientific management indicates that he was not against municipalisation of public services. He contended that "municipal socialism" was advancing<sup>99</sup> and he praised the Australian system of state ownership and operation of public utilities.<sup>100</sup> The civic organisation filled with experts, like himself, could certainly take on those responsibilities, he believed, and it would offer the best services at a minimum cost. His action matched his words. Nearly forty percent of his interventions at City Hall dealt with management questions. His presence in the municipal council itself illustrates his commitment to secure a competent civic administration. Ames was after all an experienced businessman. He was for many years one of the directors of the successful Ames-Holden Co. Ltd. of Montreal, and he sat on the boards of other companies, such as the Dominion Guaranteed Company, the Great West Life Insurance Company, and the Royal Victoria Life Insurance Company.

In council, Ames focused his energy on saving money. He showed his expertise when he scrutinized the municipal budget. Looking to avoid budget catastrophes, he was concerned about each dollar spent.<sup>101</sup> He did not always advocate government

control of public works *per se*, but instead he favoured a system of choosing the lowest tenders. But when the health committee considered asking for tenders to collect the garbage, Ames opposed the move.<sup>102</sup> In this case, he favoured municipalisation of services because he presumed it was cheaper and would lead to better results than a private company.

Ames's conception of "municipal business" corresponded with the thinking of those who supported his aldermanic candidacy. They specified that only professionals should be elected to office. His supporters described him as an honest man who knew the business of the city.<sup>103</sup> *La Presse*, though often criticising how Ames's reform party worked, still expressed faith in his administrative judgement.<sup>104</sup> The editor noted that Ames worked hard and achieved a lot. Both civic finances and municipal administration were improved. Still, the editor argued that the reform party had not done enough; social reforms were still in waiting.<sup>105</sup>

A debate around the pay for aldermen and mayors that arose in the last decade of the 1800s, illustrates that at least some citizens thought in new ways about the civic administration. A seat at the Council was no longer automatically considered as leisure or an act of charity. It was considered a full-time job. But for Ames, since his salary was never an important issue (he was ready to sacrifice his own salary if the need for money was urgent<sup>106</sup>), public office was still the work of an elite, with the exception that it should be an elite of experts. Buying into "Taylorism", most social reformers, and citizens in general, agreed that the new reality of the city called for the presence of experts at city hall, but these experts were not necessarily thought of as philanthropists. This was Ames's view alone.

What can be said about Ames's political reforms? First, their relative importance should be noted. His council interventions were the basis of more than seventy per cent of his reform efforts. Also, his electoral reforms did not part from the past in the way the social order was conceived. To provide honest government, citizens should be able to vote freely; they need to count on the presence of honest and righteous candidates who would be approved by the reformists; and finally, elections should be honestly conducted. These conditions ensured, according to Ames, the democratic nature of municipal elections. Ames, like John Stuart Mills, conceived that good government was made up of the elite, of those who alone could decide the goodness of a candidate and judge the honesty of electoral practices. Ames was less concerned about modifying social rules than in ensuring the application of existing ones.

Who did Ames believe would benefit from improved morality in civic affairs and of the professionalisation of the public function? Ultimately, he believed, everyone would. With a government of experts, the finances of the city and the services it offered could only improve. But more particularly, it was those who were familiar with the administrative wheel, who had a business sense, and had already proven they were capable that would find a career in the new bureaucracy. These men were worthy of positions at city hall. It is doubtful that the motive of Ames, to actuate a meritocracy, was merely to assure himself and his peers a place in government. A rich and successful business-

man, he did not need to carve out a position for himself in politics. His involvement in municipal politics was obviously motivated by his high sense of duty. As a member of the intellectual elite, he felt a responsibility towards his fellow citizens. Nevertheless, in the grand scheme, the "excluded" from the municipal government were to remain excluded. Ames's political reforms consecrated the hierarchy of social classes.

### **Ames's Social Reforms**

In Montreal at the turn of the twentieth century a large part of the population experienced discomfort, unhealthiness and poverty – in other words, misery. It was in this context that Ames conducted his 1896 sociological survey. In his report, he discussed three inter-related concerns: public health, working-class welfare, and social ethics. He thought that public health and public morals would improve once the living and working conditions of the labouring classes were upgraded. Indeed, he imputed the deterioration of public health to the lack of knowledge on the part of the poorest elements of society.<sup>107</sup>

Ames directly associated high mortality rates with the presence of privy pits and rear tenements. He thought it was necessary to pass housing regulations, since he believed that if workers lived in decent tenements it would have a positive impact on their health.<sup>108</sup> When he raised the issue of privy pits, his words took the form of a ferocious attack. "That insanitary abomination, the out-of-door-pit-in-the-ground privy, is still to be found in the densely populated heart of our city [...] The privy is a danger to public health and to morals," he wrote.<sup>109</sup> His action outshone his words. When first elected as alderman, he requested an appointment to the health committee.<sup>110</sup> The quantitative analysis of his aldermanic diaries indicates that sixty-eight of his one-hundred-and-twenty-six interventions concerning social reform dealt with public health. So seriously he did take his work, that he did not even cancel a meeting when Queen Victoria died since "there were questions of public health which could not be delayed."<sup>111</sup>

Ames proposed motions to abolish privy pits,<sup>112</sup> worked extremely hard on the civic hospital project,<sup>113</sup> and intervened in favour of compulsory vaccination.<sup>114</sup> He went to Paris to study services protecting public health.<sup>115</sup> As alderman-member, and later president of the Health Committee, Ames started a crusade against privy pits. He inspected whole areas, investigated their number and their state, consulted experts, and wrote letters to local newspapers.<sup>116</sup> He was responsible for the amendments aiming at the elimination of privy pits and rear tenements when the city charter was revised.

But his action did not bring about great changes. The qualitative analysis of his action shows that he was not ready to go all the way to safeguard public health. He categorically refused to endorse a municipal debt. He often repeated his insistence that the health committee had to adhere to the budget already voted on. He was well aware of the extensive powers of this committee: "Entre tous les services municipaux," he asserted, "ce département est le seul qui puisse, en cas d'urgence comme une épidémie, par exemple, outrepasser les lois en prenant les mesures qu'il jugerait à propos, quelques soient les dépenses, et le Conseil doit fournir les fonds, bon gré, mal gré."<sup>117</sup> But Ames

still acted within the limits of municipal appropriations. He preferred to suspend garbage collection than to spend money that the committee did not have at its disposal,<sup>118</sup> even if his expert, Dr. Laberge, pleaded that it needed to be done immediately.<sup>119</sup> Ames pointed out instead that money could not be taken from the reserve fund "since the new charter specifies that this is for *unforeseen expenses* and there is nothing unforeseen about the present exigency." He added that the committee could also not borrow from the annual loan, commenting that "We have, I hope, put an end to borrowing for current maintenance."<sup>120</sup> He asserted that the department of health could collect garbage with the money that it received only if there were no further distributions of patronage.<sup>121</sup>

This attitude is consistent with his efforts to implement scientific management. From the minute he was elected alderman, he fought to have the charter interpreted strictly. He believed the situation had to end where aldermen "created" emergencies so they could draw money from the public fund. Ames was definitively first an administrator and second a social reformer. To him, it was more important to straighten out the management of municipal affairs than to clean the streets and perhaps deter the spread of diseases. However, his efforts to improve public health were greatly publicised. *La Patrie*, although a fervent opponent of Ames, recognized that he had suggested many ways of improving public health that would be of great benefit to the people.<sup>122</sup> The *Montreal Star* extensively covered his initiatives for the construction of the civic hospital.<sup>123</sup> Both the *Star* and the *Gazette* showered him with praise.<sup>124</sup> *La Presse* also applauded his initiatives in matters of public health.<sup>125</sup> "A Practical Plumber" wrote a letter to the *Star* to congratulate Ames for his efforts.<sup>126</sup> Another citizen thought that "The public should be grateful for the courageous actions of Ald. Ames in introducing a by-law to abolish the privy-pits from houses within the city."<sup>127</sup> The principal labour organisations also supported Ames's efforts to eradicate privy pits.<sup>128</sup> And the Municipal Association voted by a majority of eighty-eight percent in favour of their elimination.<sup>129</sup>

Although he seemed to enjoy great support, among those who raised their voices to enhance public-health conditions, many hoped for more radical and immediate interventions. Helbronner was especially sorry that nothing substantial was being done in the matter of the horribly high infant mortality rate.<sup>130</sup> He would have liked to see milk distribution municipalised.<sup>131</sup> The feeling among certain people was that the end justified the means, thus anything should be tried to improve public health. Already in 1894, one alderman stated that the dangers of contamination justified not only the cost associated with the construction of a civic hospital but the means to gather the revenue.<sup>132</sup> Money should not be an obstacle to achieve better public health: "La question de dépenses est celle qui préoccupe le moins les citoyens, l'excellence du service passe dans leur esprit avant toute autre considération," asserted *La Presse*.<sup>133</sup> Dr. Laberge, commenting on the difficulty of forcing "poor" owners to change their privy pits for water closets, suggested that the city pay for the modification.<sup>134</sup> There was thus a sentiment that whatever the cost, all possible means should be considered to improve Montreal's public health. To these people, Ames's priorities pe-

## ***Herbert Brown Ames: Political Reformer and Enforcer***

rhaps represented an obstacle to public health, as Ames, the skilled administrator, always preferred to work within the municipal budget and to remain conservative in the interpretation of the rules.

Ames's concern for public health was directly related to his preoccupation with the welfare of the labouring classes. He particularly aimed his public-health reform strategies toward workers, and when advancing his political reforms he specified that he wanted to provide better social benefits to workers.<sup>135</sup> In fact, the investigation that formed the basis of the *The City Below the Hill* can be perceived as a strategy specifically aimed at improving the living conditions of workers. Ames was after all trying to convince businessmen to invest in model tenement houses for the labouring classes,<sup>136</sup> a scheme that had been proven successful in England and in some American cities.

Aside from his preoccupation with improving working class housing, Ames also concerned himself with the salaries and working conditions of wage earners. He indicated that the perfect municipal system would be one where employees worked eight hours, a minimum wage was fixed, and there was a proper resting place for off-duty workers. As well, the municipality should provide relief works and labour bureaus in times of depression.<sup>137</sup> Deliberating on the Australian system, he stated:

"le manufacturier qui bénéficie du tarif de la république doit charger un prix raisonnable au consommateur, payer des salaires raisonnables et ne faire faire son travail que dans des conditions raisonnables."<sup>138</sup>

If Ames addressed working-class issues, he did not necessarily adopt a pro-workers' attitude. The term "reasonable" is after all elastic. In fact, his discourse reveals a tendency towards *laissez-faire*. Ames thought that employers should be allowed to adjust salaries according to the market. He sympathised with workers who received famine wages, but indicated that he did not want to see the municipality, nor any other level of government, meddling with the laws of economics.

We cannot interfere with the inscrutable law of supply and demand to raise the workingman's wages. We may feel, I know I do, that the pittance for which many toilers slave is far from sufficient or right. But wages will ever rest at the mark just above the requirements of absolute subsistence.<sup>139</sup>

He believed so much in the "invisible hand" of *laissez-faire* that he could not contemplate any interference to raise the standard of living of the working class above mere subsistence.

His career at city hall substantiates his social philosophy. Around ten percent of his interventions as alderman dealt with the welfare of workers. One of the first motions he presented after he was elected was the institution of a minimum wage for civic employees.<sup>140</sup> The same year he proposed that entrepreneurs who received contracts from the city pay workers a wage not less than twelve and a half cents per hour, that they do not ask their employees to stay more than ten hours out of twenty-four, and that they pay them weekly.<sup>141</sup> Ames once again

brought the question of the length of working day in front of the council by proposing that garbage collectors work no more than twelve hours, including an hour for lunch and rest.<sup>142</sup> Perhaps the most progressive motion was one where he proposed that "when permanent employees were injured or sick, when duly certificated by a medical man, they should be given half pay for a period not exceeding fifteen days."<sup>143</sup> It was an innovative social reform proposal.

Although he was trying to legislate working conditions, he was certainly not responding to the demands of labour. Despite all his motions dealing with working conditions, Ames's sphere of action was rather limited. He insisted that the municipality should have more freedom in firing employees.<sup>144</sup> When his colleagues suggested increasing the salary of the employees of the Health Department, he vigorously protested, stating that the committee did not have the resources available. He opposed artificially setting municipal salaries or wages, trusting supply and demand. If it is true that Ames, the philanthropist, was concerned about the welfare of the working class, Ames, the administrator, always prevailed, concerned as he was with the limits of the municipal budget.

What did people at the time think of his initiatives? The *Star* underlined the importance of his sociological study by dedicating half a page out of sixteen, nearly every week for a period of three months. *La Presse* simply praised him for having undertaken this wonderful study.<sup>145</sup> This work alone, the reporter wrote, should draw the vote of workers.<sup>146</sup> The French-language daily supported Ames candidacy, because it thought Ames would bring to the table a number of projects aiming at improving the material and moral conditions of the labouring classes.<sup>147</sup> Ames's minimum wage and maximum hours motion was seen as a measure that would ensure that entrepreneurs did not exploit poor labourers.<sup>148</sup> But, compared to some reformers of his day, Ames's strategies in the realm of working conditions appeared very limited. Mr. Griffiths, for example, asked that the different levels of government create permanent jobs, and went on to advocate reducing the number of hours of each employee to better distribute work among the working-class population.<sup>149</sup>

Ames's strategy to improve the working-class standard of living was ultimately conservative. In more socialist circles, the solutions really departed from past attitudes. Already in 1890, Helbronner mentioned the concept of "worker's houses." He reported that in some countries the government cut taxes so workers could become owners.<sup>150</sup> A *Star* journalist suggested low-income housing financed by the municipality,<sup>151</sup> and the *Montreal Gazette* applauded the London (U.K.) municipal government for having made "large purchases of land for the erection of workmen's dwellings."<sup>152</sup> They were promoting a kind of welfare state where the municipality came to the rescue of the less fortunate. Ames did not share this vision. Rather than the municipal government, it was the responsibility of charity associations, or rich philanthropists like him, to save those who could not help themselves.<sup>153</sup>

If Ames was associated with the labour cause, he was manifestly not a representative of the working class. Workers did not raise formal objections towards Ames's strategies, but it is clear

that his initiatives did not correspond to their demands. The twelve-hour workday that Ames proposed was far from the eight hours that labour organisations were demanding.<sup>154</sup> He did not address the problems of the sweating system (piece work), nor of compulsory primary education and child labour, all issues discussed by labour unions. What all this illustrates is that Ames conceived strategies from his own study of the conditions of the working class, and his own preoccupations rather than from the claims of workers. Ames, the privileged citizen, was aware of his social responsibility towards the less fortunate and assumed that the best means to fulfill that responsibility was to take them under his charge.

Ames addressed social ethics in his writings both on public health and on working-class welfare. In the "Housing of the Working Classes," he specified that he was interested in the physical [health], material [living and working conditions], and moral welfare of workers.<sup>155</sup> He believed that honesty and morality were impossible without a minimum of comfort. Promiscuity and insalubrity brought vices that nourished depravation. To forget their misery, unemployed workers sometimes fell into the abyss of alcoholism.

Ames's interventions at city hall reflect his lack of preoccupations with public moral issues. Only sixteen of his 446 interventions dealt with alcohol or gambling houses. He did draw attention to newspaper articles dealing with gambling houses and even asked that the police chief receive instructions to take all possible measures to immediately close these establishments.<sup>156</sup> He also favoured a rule of demoting police captains if saloons were open on Sundays in their districts.<sup>157</sup> But he never tried to ratify propositions forbidding the sale of alcohol beverages. However, as a good administrator, he taxed the liquor parlours.<sup>158</sup> If this move can be perceived as a measure to limit the number of saloons or liquor establishments, it can also be seen as a source of revenue for the municipality.

Among his social-reform strategies, temperance or gambling houses were not a priority. For him, public morals would be better served when the living and working conditions of labourers were improved. It is true, though, that his lack of initiative could have been dictated by the fact that there was already a strong movement against prohibition in Montreal. *La Patrie* published many articles against prohibition: "La prohibition ne ferait pas disparaître l'alcoolisme et enlèverait à notre gouvernement 7 à 8 millions [sic] de revenus" it reported.<sup>159</sup>

The analysis of his social reforms indicates first that they count for only twenty-eight per cent of his intervention. They were definitively not the main focus of his reform plan. As *La Presse* concluded: "La Réforme a fait de très bonne besogne à l'hôtel de ville; mais uniquement dans la partie administrative."<sup>160</sup> Ames did not accomplish much for the welfare of workers. So respectful of the social order was he, and such an ardent believer in the virtues of the capitalist system, that as a successful businessman he could not conceive of the possibility of changing the economic system or even modifying it greatly. Capitalism was not fundamentally bad; what was bad was the abuse of those who in positions of power did not recognize, nor accept,

their social responsibility to challenge the morality of the economic system.

### **Conclusion**

H. B. Ames was definitively a reformer since he tried to enforce a better course of action. Can he be labelled as a social reformer? Even if Ames himself did not see a dichotomy between social and political reform, probably thinking of them as two sides of one coin, others, such as Helbronner, noted that Ames achieved only administrative reforms. They were clearly Ames's priority. The review of his career shows that he did not envision reforms that would radically transform society. He should be remembered as a paternalistic philanthropist businessman who advocated political reforms. His attempt to professionalise municipal government should be seen as a first effort at creating a bureaucracy. Although he worked relentlessly to inculcate a meritocracy at city hall, old practices of patronage, though temporarily reduced when he was in office, did not disappear. While his peers supported his vision of a professional municipal government, he encountered resistance from the old guard and from workers' organisations that felt excluded.

Ames has been portrayed either as someone who had an organic conception of society or, as a man who questioned the existing social order. His reform strategies reveal that he did not support any reorganisation of society; instead, he asked those with means to assume what he believed should be their moral and financial responsibilities towards the less fortunate. He still believed in the hierarchy of classes. He emphasized the importance of honest businessmen holding positions of authority, stressing that the key to a better society resided in the establishment of a professional, accountable, and "scientific" municipal government made up of men like himself. In other words, he de-emphasized the involvement in politics of workers, the poor, and the less successful.

Even if social reform were not the focus of his action, Ames was very successful in publicizing the horrible conditions under which working-class people lived. He was also responsible for formulating city by-laws against the privy pits. He was less successful, however, in his model tenements venture since no one followed his example.

To leave aside the old debate of reformers' motives and impact, and embark on the new historiography of social reform, let me suggest that Ames's municipal career fits in Daniel Rodgers' assessment of American social reformers. They, as Ames was, were the recipients of a cross-Atlantic transfer of ideas.<sup>161</sup> Ames's "research" trips to France, England, Australia, and the United States and his subsequent commentaries indicate that ideas were imported.

### **Acknowledgement**

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their pertinent observations and suggestions.

## Herbert Brown Ames: Political Reformer and Enforcer

### Notes

1. W.D. Lighthall, *Montreal after 250 years* (Montreal, 1892), p. 11.
2. Dr. Israël Desroches, *Quelques Réflexions sur le Bureau de santé et sur l'assainissement de Montréal* (Montréal, 1887), Canadian Pamphlets, p. 6–8.
3. Alan Gordon, "Ward Heelers and Honest Men: Urban Québécois Political Culture and the Montreal Reform of 1909," *Urban History Review* (March 1995), pp. 21–22.
4. Christopher Armstrong and H.V. Nelles, *Monopoly's Moment. The Organization and Regulation of Canadian Utilities, 1830–1930* (Philadelphia, 1986), p. 100.
5. Paul Rutherford, *Saving the Canadian City: The First Phase, 1880–1920* (Toronto, 1974), p. xi.
6. Paul Rutherford, "Tomorrow's Metropolis: The Urban Reform Movement in Canada, 1880–1920," in G.A. Stelter and A.J. Artibise, eds., *The Canadian City. Essays in Urban History* (Ottawa, 1984), p. 217.
7. Paul Rutherford, "An Introduction", *The City Below the Hill* (H.B. Ames) (Toronto, 1972), p. vii.
8. John C. Weaver, "'Tomorrow's Metropolis' Revisited: A Critical Assessment of Urban Reform Movement in Canada, 1890–1920," G.A. Stelter and A.J. Artibise, eds. *op. cit.*, p. 457.
9. John C. Weaver, *Shaping the Canadian City. Essays on Urban Politics and Policy 1890–1920* (Toronto, 1977), pp. 55–56.
10. John C. Weaver, "'Tomorrow's Metropolis' Revisited" *op. cit.*, p. 470.
11. Harold Kaplan, *Reform Planning, and City Politics. Montreal, Winnipeg, Toronto* (Toronto: 1982) Michèle Dagenais, *Des pouvoirs et des hommes: l'administration municipale de Montréal 1908–1950* (Montreal-Kingston, 1999). Alan Gordon, *op. cit.*
12. Robert C. Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada 1896–1921. A Nation Transformed* (Toronto, 1978), p. 128. René Durocher, Paul-André Linteau and Jean Claude Robert, *Histoire du Québec contemporain. De la Confédération à la crise (1867–1929)* (Québec, 1979), pp. 187–88. Fernand Harvey, "L'histoire des travailleurs québécois : les variations de la conjoncture et de l'historiographie", *Le Mouvement Ouvrier au Québec* (Montreal, 1980), p. 16. David Jay Bercuson and Jack Granatstein, *The Collins Dictionary of Canadian History. 1867 to the Present* (Toronto, 1988), p. 6. Desmond Morton, *A Short History of Canada* (Toronto, 1994), p. 152. John A. Dickinson and Brian Young, *Breve histoire socio-économique du Québec*, (Quebec, 1995), p. 279. Douglas Francis, Richard Jones and Donald Smith, *Destinées. Canadian History Since Confederation* (Toronto, 2000), p. 179.
13. Terry Copp based his first chapter on Ames's *The City Below the Hill. The Anatomy of Poverty* (Toronto, 1974), pp. 15–29. Jean de Bonville also used this study profusely. *Jean-Baptiste Gagnepetit: Les travailleurs montréalais à la fin du XIXe siècle* (Montreal, 1975), pp. 40, 55, 98, 108, 115, 120, 121, 125, 130, 131, 137, 147, 215, 216 and so did Paul-André Linteau, *Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération* (Montreal, 1992), pp. 47, 78, 98, 102, 103, 116, 211, 215. To a lesser extent, others have used the 1896 survey to document their study: Leslie Roberts, *Montreal. From Mission Colony to World City* (Toronto, 1969), pp. 254, 255, 256; Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada 1896–1921. A Nation Transformed, op. cit.*, p. 128; Fernand Harvey, *Révolution industrielle et travailleurs. Une enquête sur les rapports entre le capital et le travail au Québec à la fin du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Montreal, 1978), pp. 32, 239; Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families. Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal*, (Toronto, 1993), pp. 71, 108, 131; Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water. Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885–1925* (Toronto, 1991), pp. 131, 133.
14. Kathleen Jenkins, *Montreal Island City of the St-Lawrence* (New York, 1966), p. 435.
15. Leslie Roberts, *Montreal. From Mission Colony to World City* (Toronto, 1969), pp. 263, 264.
16. Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond, and John English, *Canada 1900–1945* (Toronto, 1990), p. 101.
17. Mariana Valverde, *op. cit.*, p. 133.
18. Paul Rutherford, "An Introduction", *op. cit.*, p. xvi.
19. Trying to convince businessmen to invest in model tenement houses, Ames used the phrase "Philanthropy and 5%." Although investing in the construction of apartments destined for the working class was seen as a philanthropic venture, it would still yield a 5% profit according to Ames.
20. Ramsey Cook, "Triomphe et revers du matérialisme" in P.A Linteau, ed., *Histoire générale du Canada* (Québec, 1990), p. 476.
21. John A. Dickinson and Brian Young, *op. cit.*, p. 278.
22. Paul-André Linteau, *Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération, op. cit.*, pp. 127, 215, 106, 213.
23. See, Mélanie Méthot, "L'événement-revu: les stratégies de réforme socio-politique proposées par Herbert Brown Ames à Montréal au tournant du 20e siècle, 1892–1903." mémoire de maîtrise, Université de Moncton, 1995.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Henry James Morgan, *Men and Women of the Time: A Handbook of Canadian Biography*, first and second edition, p. 20 and p. 21; John Kennedy, *Who's Who and Why in Canada and New Foundland* (Vancouver, 1912), p. 150 (John Kennedy was his father in law); C.W. Parker, *Who's Who and Why* (Vancouver, 1914), p. 18. W.H. Atherton, *Montreal From 1535 to 1914. Biographical*, Vol.III (Montreal, 1914), p. 619.
26. Albert R. Carman, "Canadian Celebrities: Herbert Brown Ames", *Canadian Magazine*, Vol. 23, 1904, p. 308.
27. Chief editor of *La Presse* for many years, Jules Helbronner started at the newspaper writing a column on labour issues.
28. Volunteer Electoral League, *Constitution of the Volunteer Electoral League (Montreal: 1892); Election Frauds. How Can They Be Prevented? Preliminary Constitution of the Montreal Electoral Purity Association (Montreal: 1892); Constitution of the Volunteer Electoral League of Montreal (Montreal: 1893); Annual Report of the Volunteer Electoral League (Montreal: 1893).*
29. Ames, Herbert Brown, "Christians in Politics", *Montreal Star*, 20 February 1892; "The Machine in Honest Hands", *Canadian Magazine*, Vol. III, no. 2, January 1894, p. 101–9; "The Advantages of Good Municipal Government", *Montreal Star*, 1 October 1894; "Political Parties", *Montreal Star*, 30 November 1894; *Abstract of a Course of Ten Lectures on Municipal Administration in Montreal. Delivered in Connection with the Young's Men Christian Association of Montreal* (Kingston, 1896); "The Duties and Limitations of the Municipal Board of Health" (reprinted from the *Montreal Medical Journal, June 1900, Ames Papers*, MS644, Rare Books and Special Collections Division, McGill University Libraries; "La Santé Publique. Le nouveau Président expose son programme," *La Presse*, 23 February 1900; "Sur la question sanitaire à Paris," *La Presse*, 13 August 1900; "La lutte contre les maladies contagieuses à Paris," *La Presse*, 1 September 1900; "Some Problems of Municipal Government", *Proceedings of the Canadian Club, Toronto*, Vol. 1, 1903–4, p. 89–91; "A Canadian in Australia", *Proceedings of the Canadian Club, Toronto*, 1911, pp. 218–26.
30. H.B. Ames, "Christians in Politics".
31. H.B. Ames, "The Machine in Honest Hands", p. 102.
32. *Ibid.*
33. "Electoral League Charter Changes", *Montreal Star*, 26 December 1894.
34. The description of each voter, obtained by personal visitation, included: name, registered residence, qualification, occupation, height, build, complexion, whiskers, colour of eyes, age and peculiarities. H.B. Ames, "The Machine in Honest Hands", p. 103.
35. "Election Act. Police Court Given no Power to Act", *Montreal Star*, 19 May 1897.
36. "Conseil Municipal", *La Patrie*, 19 December 1899.
37. "Subscribers to the V.E.L. Fund 1895–96", Ames Papers, MS644.
38. *Montreal Star*, 1 February 1894; "The Volunteer Electoral League", *Montreal Star*, 21 October 1895.
39. "Mr. G.A. Cross' Lecture Yesterday Evening" and "A Popular Testimonial for Ames" 8 February 1896, 31 January 1898.



## **Herbert Brown Ames: Political Reformer and Enforcer**

40. W.D. Lighthall, Letter to Robert Treat Paine", *Canadian Union of Municipalities Papers* MG29D93, Vol. 1, Correspondence 1908–1919, National Archives of Canada.
41. "La Carte électorale", *La Presse*, 4 February 1893.
42. "La Carte électorale", *La Presse*, 9 February 1893.
43. *La Patrie*, December 1895.
44. It should be noted that *La Patrie* supported the Liberal Party.
45. H.B. Ames, "The Machine in Honest Hands", p. 102.
46. "La Volunteer League", *La Presse*, 3 January 1894.
47. "La Ligue des Volontaires Municipaux", *La Presse*, 3 January 1894.
48. "La Volunteer League", *La Presse*, 10 January 1894.
49. "Electoral League Charter Changes", *Montreal Star*, 28 December 1894.
50. "At the Polls To-Day", *Montreal Star*, 1 February 1896.
51. H.B. Ames, "The Machine in Honest Hands", p. 106.
52. H.B. Ames, "Some Problems of Municipal Government", p. 91.
53. Volunteer Electoral League, *Constitution of the Volunteer Electoral League*, (Montreal: May 1892).
54. H.B. Ames, "Political Parties".
55. H.B. Ames, "The Machine in Honest Hands", p. 103, 107, 108; "Christians in Politics", Political Parties, VEL; *Electoral Frauds. How Can They Be Prevented?*, pp. 5, 8; *Constitution of the Volunteer Electoral League*, p. 1.
56. He also said that "a businessman of recognized ability and sterling integrity" received his support in 1894. H.B. Ames, "The Machine in Honest Hands", p. 104.
57. "Mr. Ames Is a Candidate", *Montreal Star*, 17 January 1898.
58. In Montreal, for a man to be elected mayor or alderman he had to possess property worth \$10,000 (mayor) or more than \$2,000 (alderman).
59. H.B. Ames, *City Council Diaries*, 30 September 1898; *Ames Papers*, MS644.
60. H.B. Ames, "The Advantages of Good Municipal Government".
61. *Montreal Star*, 18 October 1892, 26 October 1892, 17 January 1894, 10 January 1896.
62. "The Municipal Struggle", *The Pen*, 14 January 1898.
63. "Candidatures municipales", *La Patrie*, 29 January 1898; "Candidatures municipales", *La Patrie*, 29 January 1898.
64. "Élections municipales", *La Presse*, 14 January 1898. The editor reiterated his support on 17 January 1898.
65. *Montreal Star*, 13 January 1893, "Aldermanic Qualifications"; Central Trade and Labor Council, no title; "Another Assembly of Knights of Labor Decides to Fight for the Abolition of Property Qualification"; "Would Have Large Labour Representation in Montreal Council", in *Montreal Star*, 14 January 1893, January 3, 1894, August 27, 1895, August 22, 1902.
66. "Quartier St-Antoine", *La Patrie*, 21 January 1898.
67. "The Civic Loan", *The Montreal Gazette*, 26 February 1901.
68. "Conseil fédéré", *La Presse*, 8 April 1902.
69. A Tenant, "Tenant's Rights", *Montreal Star*, 15 January 1898.
70. W.D. "Electoral Reform League", *Montreal Star*, 4 January 1894.
71. W.D., "The Electoral League and Property Qualification", *Montreal Star*, 11 January 1894.
72. Michele Dagenais, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
73. Michèle Dagenais has documented the debate between city's elected officials and the senior bureaucrats. She illustrates how the change in the form of government in the first decade of the twentieth century brought a new climate in civil service work. *op. cit.*
74. H.B. Ames, "Christians In Politics".
75. "Spoils to the Victor" and "The Spoils System", *Montreal Star*, 12 November 1892 and 24 February 1893.
76. William Riordon, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall. A Series of Very Plain Talks on Very Practical Politics* (New York, 1963), p. 12.
77. H.B. Ames, "Christians In Politics".
78. H.B. Ames, "The Duties and Limitations of the Municipal Board of Health", p. 3.
79. H.B. Ames, *Abstract of a Course of Ten Lectures on Municipal Administration in Montreal. Delivered in Connection with the Young's Men Christian Association of Montreal*, p. 8.
80. H.B. Ames, *City Council Diaries*, 11 October 1899.
81. *Ibid.*, 6 December 1898.
82. *Ibid.*, 21 September 1900.
83. H.B. Ames, "The Duties and Limitations of the Municipal Board of Health", p. 15.
84. "He Has No Patronage", *Montreal Star*, 27 September 1900 and "L'hygiène de la ville", *La Patrie*, 25 February 1898.
85. *Montreal Star*, 11 February 1893, 26 October 1894, 26 March 1896, 17 January 1899.
86. "À l'Hôtel de Ville. La Promotion", *La Presse*, 4 December 1896.
87. *Montreal Star*, 1 August 1898.
88. "M. Ames", *La Patrie*, 11 December 1899.
89. "Les Canadiens n'hésiteront pas à se prononcer pour M. Ames. dont la droiture bien connue nous promet un échevin honnête, conciliant et prêt à rendre justice à tous, sans distinction de race, religion . . . ou de quartier" in "Les élections municipales", *La Presse*, 29 January 1898.
90. "Un discours regrettable", *La Presse*, 13 May 1901.
91. "Le futur conseil de ville", *La Presse*, 17 January 1902.
92. H.B. Ames, *Abstract of a Course of Ten Lectures on Municipal Administration in Montreal. Delivered in Connection with the Young's Men Christian Association of Montreal*, p. 9.
93. William Scott, "Organization Government: The Prospects of a Truly Participative System", *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 29, no. 1, 1969, pp. 43–53.
94. H.B. Ames, "Some Problems of Municipal Government", p. 90.
95. H.B. Ames, "La santé publique", *La Presse*, 1 September 1900.
96. H.B. Ames, "La santé publique", *La Presse*, 13 August 1900.
97. H.B. Ames, "The Advantage of Good Municipal Government".
98. H.B. Ames, "The Duties and Limitations of the Municipal Board of Health", p. 14.
99. H.B. Ames, "The Advantages of Good Municipal Government".
100. H.B. Ames, "A Canadian in Australia", pp. 221–22.
101. H.B. Ames, *City Council Diaries*, 12 September 1898.
102. "No Scavenging By Contract", *Montreal Star*, 11 February 1899.
103. "H.B. Ames. Citizens Want to Make Him a Candidate to the City Council", *Montreal Star*, 13 and 14 January 1898.
104. "La sortie de l'échevin Smith", *La Presse*, 13 January 1902.
105. "La Réforme", *La Presse*, 26 January 1903.
106. H.B. Ames, *City Council Diaries*, 15 May 1899.
107. H.B. Ames, "A History of Plumbing in Montreal" in *City Council Diaries*, 7 March 1898.
108. H.B. Ames, *The City Below the Hill*, p. 45 and 22.

## ***Herbert Brown Ames: Political Reformer and Enforcer***

109. *Ibid.*
110. H.B. Ames, *City Council Diaries*, 25 November 1898.
111. "Two Little Bills", *The Montreal Gazette*, 26 January 1901.
112. H.B. Ames, *City Council Diaries*, 21 March 1898, 20 March 1899, 20 March and 6 April 1900.
113. *Ibid.*, 7 July 1902 and 20 October 1902.
114. *Ibid.*, 5 May 1902.
115. H.B. Ames, "La santé publique", *La Presse*, 13 August 1900.
116. H.B. Ames, *City Council Diaries*, 16 March 1898.
117. "La santé publique", *La Presse*, 23 February 1900.
118. H.B. Ames, *City Council Diaries*, 17 October 1898; "Train Milk Inspection", *Montreal Star*, 7 October 1898.
119. Dr. Laberge, *Montreal Star*, 7 October 1898.
120. H.B. Ames, *City Council Diaries*, 15 May 1899.
121. "Le service des vidanges", *La Patrie*, 29 November 1898.
122. "L'hygiène public", *La Patrie*, 24 November 1897.
123. "Determined to Have an Hospital"; "Come Soon or Late Hospital Shall Be Built, Says Alderman Ames"; "Ald Ames Again Appealed to the Finance Committee for Funds for Hospital"; *Montreal Star*, 8 September, 8 July, and 12 July, 1902.
124. "Workingmen for Ames", 31 January 1898; "Health and Fire" *Montreal Star*, 25 January 1901; "The Civic Hospital", "Ames' Efforts Fail", *The Montreal Gazette*, 16 February and 11 April 1901.
125. "Questions importantes" and "Affaires civiques", *La Presse*, 3 and 7 May 1898.
126. "A Practical Plumber's View", *Montreal Star*, 22 December 1900.
127. Citizen, *Montreal Star*, 9 May 1898.
128. "The Sanitary Measure" and "Labor Answer", *Montreal Star*, 28 June 1898 and 28 August 1899.
129. *Montreal Star*, 29 October 1897.
130. "La mortalité infantile", *La Presse*, 16 July 1907.
131. Editorial, "Les bébés et la municipalisation", *La Presse*, 31 July 1906.
132. "Diphtheria, Scarlet Fever", *Montreal Star*, 15 November 1894.
133. "La question des vidanges", *La Presse*, 23 March 1893.
134. "La santé publique", *La Patrie*, 8 August 1899.
135. H.B. Ames, *Abstract of a Course of Ten Lectures on Municipal Administration in Montreal*, p. 10.
136. H.B. Ames, *The City Below the Hill*, p. 9 and 30.
137. H.B. Ames, "Municipal Government".
138. "Employés et employeurs sont unis", *Le Devoir*, 25 October 1911.
139. H.B. Ames, "The Housing of the Working Classes", p. 114.
140. H.B. Ames, *City Council Diaries*, 28 February 1898.
141. *Ibid.*, 9 December 1898.
142. "The Board of Health", *Montreal Star*, 27 April 1898.
143. H.B. Ames, *City Council Diaries*, 23 September 1902.
144. "Charter Committee Talks it Over", *Montreal Star*, 20 November 1902.
145. "Affaires civiques", *La Presse*, 2 October 1897.
146. "Les élections municipales et le fanatisme", *La Presse*, 26 January 1898.
147. *Ibid.* and "Elections municipales", *La Presse*, 14 January 1898.
148. "Affaires civiques", 14 March 1898 and "Notes de l'hôtel de ville", 4 August 1898, *La Presse*.
149. Griffiths, "Poverty, Its Cause and Cure", *Montreal Star*, 9 April 1894, p. 2.
150. "Habitations ouvrières", *La Presse*, 22 March 1890.
151. "Municipal Lodging Houses", *Montreal Star*, 29 December 1900.
152. "Social Legislation", *The Montreal Gazette*, 28 February 1901.
153. H.B. Ames, *The City Below the Hill*, p. 78.
154. "The Civic Charter", *Montreal Star*, 12 November 1898.
155. H.B. Ames, "The Housing of the Working Classes", p. 103.
156. "Les maisons de jeux", *La Patrie*, 13 April 1899.
157. "Reform to Follow", *The Montreal Gazette*, 11 April 1901.
158. H.B. Ames, *City Council Diaries*, 22 November 1898.
159. "Ennemi de la prohibition", *La Patrie*, 28 July 1898.
160. "La Réforme", *La Presse*, 26 January 1903.
161. Daniel Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings. Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), p. 59.