

Wright, Gwendolyn. *Moralism and the Model Home: Domestic Architecture and Cultural Conflict in Chicago 1873-1913*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980. Pp. viii, 382. Illustrations, figures, index. \$17.50

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and household management, religion, and folklife further develops the theme that alley residents led well-integrated and well-adjusted lives. They turned the alley into a commons where children could play at a safe distance from the traffic and where adults could lounge and talk. The community transmitted its values to the young, the children being relatively impervious to the school experience. One child wrote:

For, School, is, Just, A,
Place, For, Fools, and Fools,
Don't Only, Go, I Go,
And I, Am, not, A Fool.

Borchert believes that outsiders exaggerated the extent of juvenile delinquency and adult crime. Many "crimes," like numbers, craps, and drinking, were forms of recreation. Fighting reflected the tough yet proud life of alley dwellers. In alley culture the secular merged with the sacred. Worship, rituals, and the pervasive influence of music were interwoven with folk beliefs and practices.

Borchert's sources include the 1880 manuscript census, city directories, newspapers, photographs, and, most importantly, social surveys and participant-observer studies. Most of the latter were completed in either the Progressive era from 1896 to 1914 or the New Deal period of the late 1930s. The author disarmingly acknowledges the deficiencies of these source materials, but he cannot altogether dispel the doubt they cast on his conclusions. For example, in the chapter on childhood 80 per cent of the references are to four studies, three of which were completed in 1938 and the other one in 1941. Yet the generalizations apply to alley life from 1850 to 1970.

Borchert has taken the evidence contained in social surveys and used it to testify against the conclusions reached by the authors of those surveys. All of these earlier students of alley life had either obtained or were in the process of obtaining middle-class and professional positions. They looked for social disorder in the alley, and, of course, they found it. Borchert's criticism of these people, who had the advantage of being able to observe alley life first hand, is reminiscent of the work of Jacques Donzelot and Christopher Lasch. They also take to task do-gooders, social workers, and middle-class reformers. While it may be satisfying to reprimand those who presume to discipline and instruct the poor, it is also possible to romanticize an ugly situation. Borchert knows this. He wants to unearth the "beauty" of alley life without forgetting that the stench of pain is never far away. Some of his comments, however, give one pause. Did alley dwellers really consider fighting a form of recreation and vigorous exercise?

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Wright, Gwendolyn. *Moralism and the Model Home: Domestic Architecture and Cultural Conflict in Chicago 1873-1913*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980. Pp.viii, 382. Illustrations, figures, index. \$17.50.

Domestic architecture affects everyone, and spurred on no doubt by the recent Canadian Centennial and U.S. Bicentennial celebrations, interest in historical housing styles is on the increase in North America. For the most part, however, books on the subject are elitist in focus – only the "best" architectural specimens are worthy of discussion. Richly illustrated and slickly produced coffee-table volumes abound for both Canada and the United States. Analyses of the ordinary houses of the middle and working classes are rarely encountered. In *Moralism and the Model Home* Gwendolyn Wright takes great strides to fill this lacuna. This is not simply another picture book of houses, rather it is a careful study of the dynamics of change in ordinary domestic architecture that pays particular attention to the several contexts (philosophical, social, and economic) within which this change occurred. Taken as a whole, this study represents a remarkable synthesis of materials and ideas. There is considerable food for thought here for scholars of many stripes including students of labour history, the women's movement, economic history, the history of education, urban history, urban reform, and architectural history. Architectural change was not, as Wright shows, the sole preserve of the architectural profession. Style is but one component of a city's housing stock.

Moralism and the Model Home is a well and imaginatively researched book. Wright's analysis,

relies primarily on three kinds of media, each dealing with housing as form and as social setting, each written by and for a different group; architectural books and periodicals, or the professional press; builders' trade journals and pattern books of house designs, or the more resolutely practical press; and domestic guides and home magazines for women, as well as other middle-class family literature, or the popular press (pp.4-5).

Other sources, such as the records of civic clubs and philanthropic organizations are also drawn into the analysis. Documentation, in the form of footnotes, runs to over fifty pages. The more than fifty diagrams and photographs are all used to complement points that are raised in the text, which is itself remarkably free from typographical errors.

Wright's book is no mere parochial study of domestic architecture, even though it is set in Chicago. The author pays particular attention to the influences exerted on Chicago housing by architectural and planning trends in other U.S. cities and in Britain and Europe. Important subjects such as furniture styles, house ornamentation, and

both the City Beautiful and Garden City movements are given full coverage. Moreover, the influence of many famous Chicago architects, such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Daniel Burnham, on the architectural world is explored.

As a temporal focus for her analysis Wright selected the years between 1873 and 1913. The former marked the year in which a grand Inter-State Exposition devoted to "Home Culture" was held in Chicago. In 1913 the Chicago City Club, a local progressive group "organized a competition for an entire model suburb in which individual dwelling 'units' were considered less important than a rational, balanced plan for the whole" (p.4). This was a time of great change in attitudes towards both the home and architectural styles. It was during these four decades that

the form of the ideal middle-class dwelling underwent a major transformation: from an exuberant, highly personalized display of irregular shapes, picturesque contrasts, and varieties of ornament, supposedly symbolizing the uniqueness of the family, to a restrained and simple dwelling, with interest focused on its scientifically arranged kitchen (p.3).

To fully comprehend these changes Wright had to come to grips with everything that served to influence popular images of the home and its role in society, as well as all the important changes in house building and the economics of home construction and furnishing. Structurally, the book is divided into three sections, each of which examines these issues for parts of the study period; namely, the Victorian Cultural of Domesticity, 1873-1893; Reorientation, 1893-1903; and a New Order, 1903-1913.

A prominent theme throughout the book relates to the role of architects in the entire field of housing and the constant tension between these professionals and ordinary builders of homes. As Wright notes,

builders' pattern books of the nineteenth century celebrated the eccentricities of middle-class American dwellings with great pride. Professional architectural journals and texts, with equal fervor, condemned the exuberant display and complex variety of the untrained builders (p. 79).

For much of the study period the architects paid little attention to the homes of the middle and working classes, preferring the larger commission associated with homes for the elite or for non-residential projects. Later, the scale of development for more modest dwellings increased as subdivisions came to be "planned" and "a few large developers ... hired architects to design their basic model houses and help with site planning, hoping to attract more customers with quality design" (p.280). The role of comprehensive planners for large metropolitan and suburban areas appealed to many architects by the end of the study period. This change in scale from the design of one

house to the creation of entire neighbourhoods was brought about by the shift towards simpler, often smaller, houses for all classes. In fact,

the shared aesthetic of the early twentieth-century minimalist house relied on five principles.... The technological system became more complex, more costly, and more important as a criterion in house design. The kitchen became a central focus for the designer, and a different kind of room. Houses became simpler in outline and ornament, inside and out. Square-footage was dramatically reduced and, as the number of rooms and partitions declined, the floor plan opened up. Finally, houses became more alike in their plans and their general appearance, as the individuality of each dwelling (and, supposedly, that of the occupant) became less frantically emphasized (pp.234-35).

Many of these features have lived on into the post-1945 era.

Wright provides considerable insight into the changing nature of dwelling construction during her study period. Technological breakthroughs resulted in the "industrialization of home-making" (p.8) during these decades. Factories began to mass produce decorative trim, window sash, doors, and plumbing and heating fixtures of increasing variety and sophistication. New processes for producing bricks, plaster, and plate glass also emerged at this time. These changes all helped to increase the speed at which houses were erected and eventually contributed to the emergence of large-scale development companies that were able almost instantly to convert vacant fields to new and complete subdivisions. By 1900 prefabricated houses could be ordered from the Sears catalogue. All of this served to erode greatly the skills and standing of residential construction workers. The sheer cost of the new technology almost dictated that houses had to be smaller if they were to remain affordable.

If *Moralism and the Model Home* has any shortcomings, at least from the reviewer's perspective as an historical geographer, they relate to the lack of spatial context in the analysis. No clear sense of what happened to the shape and expanse of Chicago is presented here. To note that "attracted by lower insurance rates, more tolerant building codes, and cheap, undeveloped land, real estate development had focused on the outlying areas, rather than on the central city for some thirty years" is not sufficient (p.259). More attention could have been paid to the locations and environmental aesthetics of particular suburban areas. In fact, a few detailed case studies of actual subdivisions might have provided useful examples for many of the themes explored in this volume. At the very least the book should have contained two maps, one to provide an orientation for Chicago and the other to illustrate those areas that were developed during the study period. These, however, are rather minor criticisms.

Space has not allowed me to mention all of the themes in *Moralism and the Model Home*. Perhaps its greatest contribution to our understanding of urban housing is the analysis of public perception of the roles to be played by homes and housing in society. It is here that Wright is at her synthetic best, skillfully interweaving the images and attitudes of workers, professionals, reformers, and others to uncover the dynamics of popular opinion. While the image of the role of the home, indeed even of household management, changed dramatically between 1873 and 1913, some of the attitudes formulated then remain important today. Victorian builders,

suggested a vision of America filled with independent, attractive homes, each economical enough to be owned by its occupants. That vision had been an integral part of the American dream for countless immigrants from many countries. It would continue its hold for future generations (p.45).

Not only was this image important, but housing also came to be viewed as "a direct way to stabilize the society" (p.294).

Moralism and the Model Home is a first-rate book. It deserves a wide readership. A similar study for Canada would be useful, since it could shed considerable light upon the Canadian identity. In our country too, housing is deeply entrenched in middle-class dreams. We like to believe that our experience has been different from that of our American neighbours. A detailed study of Canadian images concerning housing could be very revealing in this regard.

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Book Notes/Notes bibliographiques

Ivonoffski, Vrenia and Campbell, Sandra, eds. *Exploring Our Heritage: The Ottawa Valley Experience: Proceedings of a Heritage Festival, Arnprior, October 21-22, 1978*. Toronto, 1980. Available from Ontario Government Bookstore, 880 Bay Street, Toronto, M7A 1Y7.

Discovery and conservation of heritage is a governmental growth industry. Some of its product is revealed in this 144 page volume, itself an outcome of a town and gown festival in the heart of the Ottawa Valley. The volume is not urban. Nor is it professional from cover to cover. Nor was it intended to be. Town and country; professional and amateur met in Arnprior in 1978 and meet in this collection. Of interest to urban historians or to professional historians or to both might be the following among the 33 articles:

Marilyn Miller, "The Opeongo Road: A Unique Historical Resource;" Julian Gwyn, "The Irish in Eastern Ontario: The Social Structure of Huntley Township in Carleton County, 1851-71;" Gaetan Vallières, "Franco-Ontariens in the Ottawa Valley;" C. Grant Head, "Nineteenth Century Timbering and Sawlogging in the Ottawa Valley...;" David Knight, "The Ottawa Valley and the Selection of Canada's Capital City;" and Carol Sheedy, "Aspects Professionnels et Socio-culturels de la Population de la Côte-de-Sable [Ottawa]."

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Morris, David and Hess, Karl. *Neighbourhood Power: The New Localism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1975. Pp. 180.

This book is rapidly becoming a popular guide for the proponents of re-creating communities from the bottom up. It describes and recommends a variety of actions to be taken to re-establish human scale organization through building a community's sense of identity and returning political and economic power to the neighbourhood level: block parties, local ownership of neighbourhood media, co-operative businesses and housing, urban food production, etc. It recognizes limits to neighbourhood self-sufficiency, but the discussion of the inter-neighbourhood cooperation necessary to overcome these limits is weak and detracts from the general plausibility of the rest of the book.

Joy Woolfrey
Ottawa

Cockburn, Cynthia. *The Local State: Management of Cities and People*. London: Pluto Press, 1977. Pp. 184.

At the turn of the century corporate growth and capital reorganization precipitated and at the same time provided models for new forms of municipal organization. This book is about the efforts of British local governments to respond to the crises created by the most recent wave of capital reorganization through the implementation of modern corporate management techniques. Popular scepticism about electoral politics has led to an increase in extra-parliamentary militancy. Local governments have expanded their corporate management strategy to try and encompass this through community development programmes and the creation of neighbourhood councils. Although it has too limited an historical perspective, this book is valuable for its insights into the role of the local state and for its attention to the efforts of workers to combat the reduction of the social wage (public expenditures on housing and collective services) through struggles at