

**Georges B. Tatum, *Philadelphia Georgian: The City House of Samuel Powel and Some of its Eighteenth-Century Neighbors*, Photographs by Cortland and Van Dyke Hubbard, Middletown, Conn., Wesleyan University Press, 1976. 187 + xvii pp., 65 illus., \$17.50**

Lynne Delehanty DiStefano

Volume 4, Number 2, 1977

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1077369ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1077369ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (print)

1918-4778 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

DiStefano, L. D. (1977). Review of [Georges B. Tatum, *Philadelphia Georgian: The City House of Samuel Powel and Some of its Eighteenth-Century Neighbors*, Photographs by Cortland and Van Dyke Hubbard, Middletown, Conn., Wesleyan University Press, 1976. 187 + xvii pp., 65 illus., \$17.50]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 4(2), 113–114.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1077369ar>

Rome's magnificent architectural heritage is recorded in the large and excellent reproductions. Piranesi's etchings, based on direct observation, contain minute details of the monuments and demonstrate his love and knowledge of ancient Roman structures. At the same time, his inclination to infuse the scenes with a sense of fantasy and grandeur is equally evident in his modifications of the scale of the buildings. Vignettes of everyday life give a sense of the pace of the city: people are seen in the streets and buildings, conversing, working, and, in a delightful view of the Temple of Vesta (Fig. 1), hanging newly-washed clothes on a line attached to the structure.

Levit's photographs and comments complement the early views, revealing both the continuity and the changes that have occurred since Piranesi's time. While modern excavations and restorations have cleared many of the sites shown by Piranesi, modern incursions have replaced the eighteenth-century washerwomen: the ever-present car appears throughout the photographs, driving past or parked next to the old monuments. Despite these intrusions, the reproductions and the brief histories of the monuments reveal the ability of the beauty and heritage of Rome to survive through history.

The quality of the reproductions and the modest price make this book a useful introduction to historical and contemporary Rome for the general reader, but a few problems must be noted. A topographical rather than a chronological organization might have been more valuable in providing a sense of the various quarters of the city, particularly since the views often contain buildings begun in one era but often substantially modified in subsequent years. There are minor inaccuracies and oversimplifications in the historical accounts. These are, however, minor problems in a book devoted to providing high-quality reproductions with a limited text. In general, the book is to be commended for being yet another contribution to the series of reissues of major works of graphic art being published by Dover.

BARBARA DODGE  
York University  
Toronto

GEORGE B. TATUM. *Philadelphia Georgian: The City House of Samuel Powel and Some of its Eighteenth-Century Neighbors*. Photographs by Cortland and Van Dyke Hubbard. Middletown, Conn., Wesleyan University Press, 1976. 187 + xvii pp., 65 illus., \$17.50.

In *Philadelphia Georgian*, George B. Tatum focuses on the design, construction, renovation, and restoration of a typical Middle Georgian town house in Philadelphia — the Powel House (Fig. 1) — and describes the eighteenth-century families who occupied it. Not content to concentrate on the Powel House as a unique manifestation of colonial ingenuity, Tatum commits himself to exploring the larger issues of architectural design and practice in pre-revolutionary Philadelphia.

Tatum divides his study into two parts: "The Owners" and "The Fabric." In the former, the author presents a tightly woven history of the two families most involved with the Powel House — the Charles Stedman family, for whom the house was built in 1765–66, and the Samuel Powel family, who purchased the house in 1769 and subsequently renovated it. Both Charles Stedman (1713–1784) and Samuel Powel (1738–1793) were Philadelphia gentlemen whose wealth and position necessitated a style of life which found suitable expression in the house at 244 South Third Street. Samuel Powel, as Tatum demonstrates, was the wealthier of the two; this, coupled with his prominence in the community, would help to explain the extensive renovations that he made.

In concluding this part of the book, Tatum briefly discusses the later owners of the house. One, Wolf Klebansky (an owner from 1904 to 1931), sold the interiors of the two principal rooms on the second floor. The rear room was acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1917 and the front room was purchased by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1925. The Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks, which was formed to purchase the Powel House in 1931, still owns and maintains the property today.

At the beginning of the second part of the book, Tatum offers a concise and knowledgeable history of the Georgian style in America. The author illustrates his commentary with key examples of Philadelphia architecture. He designates Mount Pleasant (begun 1761), Woodford (begun ca. 1759), and Cliveden (begun 1763) as "the extant country seats that parallel Charles Stedman's town house on Third Street and together with it represent the best domestic examples of the Middle Georgian style in the Philadelphia area."

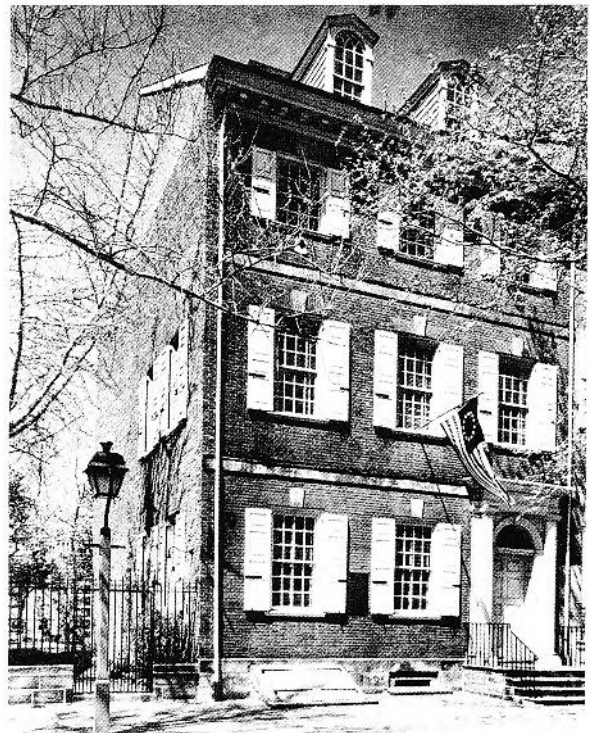


FIGURE 1. The Powel House. Tatum, frontispiece.

With this general stylistic background established, Tatum proceeds to discuss two of the major sources of information for his study: early insurance surveys and Samuel Powel's ledger. By comparing insurance surveys made at different times, the author is able to establish the probable appearance of the exterior and interior of the house as it was built by the Stedmans and the general nature of the changes made to the structure by the Powels. Additional information on the renovations by Powel is contained in the ledger. It reveals, for instance, that Robert Smith, a noted carpenter-builder of the period, was under contract for major renovations. This suggests to Tatum that Smith might well have been the initial builder of the house.

Preliminaries completed, Tatum begins his detailed investigation of the structure with an analysis of the plan and elevation (Fig. 1). With respect to the red brick front of the three-storey, three-bay structure, the author observes that "in essence, all of the foregoing features were duplicated in varying scale and quality on the façades of hundreds of Philadelphia houses in the eighteenth century." It is at this juncture that Tatum addresses himself to the severe exterior of the Philadelphia town house. His contention is that the restraint of the façade is less a reflection of Quaker influence than a conscious reliance on contemporary domestic architectural modes in London — a reliance, Tatum infers, that would have been regarded as both agreeable and appropriate by men of affairs such as Samuel Powel.

Tatum next investigates in detail the various rooms and parts of the Powel House. The common thread is the consideration of what is original (built by Stedman), what was renovated (changed by Powel), and what has been restored (particularly those restorations made by Fiske Kimball and Louis Duhring in the early twentieth century). Tatum explores the original uses of the various rooms and parts of the house, and wherever possible he draws upon historic evidence to support his interpretations of usages. For example, in discussing the most handsome room, the large front chamber on the second floor, he writes that it was probably here that John Adams ate the lavish meal he vividly describes in his diary under the date of 8 September 1774:

Dined at Mr. Powells. . . . A most sinfull Feast again! Every Thing which could delight the Eye, or allure the Taste, Curds and Creams, Jellies, Sweet meats of various sorts, 20 sorts of Tarts, fools, Trifles, floating Islands, whipped Sillabubs etc., etc. — Parmesan Cheese, Punch, Wine, Porter, Beer.

Tatum also comments upon the furnishings of the town house, noting that because no detailed inventory was taken at the time of Samuel Powel's death (1793), there is no way of ascertaining either the full extent of the furnishings or their probable arrangement in the house. The author also mentions that the garden, as presently developed, is conjectural, although it "may well capture something of the spirit of the original."

George B. Tatum's excellent study of the Powel House concludes with a "Reappraisal" in which he points out that part of the importance of the town house lies in the fact that it is fairly typical of its class. Tatum further suggests that the structure is important as an example of the process of restoration and preservation. He argues "that, like any other restoration, the Powel House is not only a monument to the period that first built it, but also in some degree to the

period that preserved it." Tatum concludes his reappraisal with a plea for preservationists and planners alike to consider the validity of the gradual evolution of neighbourhoods through time, and to protect, as a consequence, the best of each period, whether it be from the eighteenth or the nineteenth century.

LYNNE DELEHANTY DISTEFANO  
*Brescia College*  
*London, Ontario*

JEAN LIPMAN and HELEN M. FRANC. Introduction by JOHN I.H. BAUR. *Bright Stars: American Painting and Sculpture since 1776*. New York, E.P. Dutton, 1976. 150 illus., \$40.25.

*Bright Stars* is essentially a book of colour plates with accompanying commentaries. The 150 plates present what the authors call "outstanding examples" of the painting and sculpture produced in the United States over the last 200 years. Each object reproduced is discussed in a brief commentary. The authors also provide a preface in which they state their intentions, one of which is to "look hard and critically" at the given examples. An illustrated introduction by John Baur gives an overview of American art since 1776, and a short survey of pre-Revolutionary painting illustrated with a number of black-and-white plates sets the stage.

The flavour of the opening pages of *Bright Stars* tends towards good-naturedness and patriotic self-congratulation, but when the authors get down to business, which they do very quickly, the writing is lucid, informed, and informative. The commentaries provide the reader with a background for the production of the work and an explanation of the subject matter. Despite a greater inclusion of folk art than is customary, the choice of works coincides with general expectations and, if predictable, is agreeably acceptable. The colour plates are good and the book is pleasant to look at. Given its numerous virtues, however, the book as a whole poses some problems.

The book is not a survey, we are told. The criterion for selection is the quality of the individual object, not the reputation of the artist. This is the new approach which Baur describes as "pragmatic, non-historical and aesthetic"; but the book cannot, of course, avoid being an historical survey when the arrangement of objects is made chronologically and the individual entries refer to preceding and succeeding ones as part of an ongoing continuum. The authors also tacitly admit as much by including Baur's survey introduction to help the reader tie things together into an historical fabric. The book then becomes an historical survey on two levels: first in terms of the highly condensed and abstracted introduction, and secondly in terms of the succession of plates which point out the highlights or "the places worth a special visit" (the authors parallel their "star" idea to that of the *Guide Michelin*).

As a textbook, *Bright Stars* is not adequate. Baur's survey is too cursory and the plate material too limited. The commentaries themselves, because of their lack of full