

**Adams, Annmarie. *Architecture in the Family Way: Doctors, Houses and Women, 1870–1900*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996. Pp. xxi, 227. Illustrations. \$39.95 cloth**

Jayne Elliott

---

Volume 25, Number 1, October 1996

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1016101ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016101ar>

[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 review

Elliott, J. (1996). Review of [Adams, Annmarie. *Architecture in the Family Way: Doctors, Houses and Women, 1870–1900*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996. Pp. xxi, 227. Illustrations. \$39.95 cloth]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 25(1), 63–64.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1016101ar>

suburb. The neighbourhoods are classified according to measures of diversity: degree of mixed land use and the age of buildings, length of blocks and density. They are rated according to their ability to "create a constant dialogue between our public and private lives." (88) The survey is based on observation of the activity patterns and physical features of the neighbourhoods. It also involved some 300 interviews. The author concludes that not only do mixed, high-density neighbourhoods perform better environmentally, they are also superior from a social point of view. The survey suggests that by comparison with other areas, such neighbourhoods are characterized by more interaction between residents, higher satisfaction, a more conducive environment for political activity, and less crime. This conclusion is in total agreement with that reached by Jane Jacobs thirty years ago.

A problem with the book is its casual approach to methodology. The distinction between statements that are tied to primary or to secondary sources could be clearer, more importantly the association between resident satisfaction and the features of the surveyed neighbourhoods rests entirely on interview segments quoted in the text. The reader has no way of evaluating how representative these segments are of all the interviews because nowhere are their results tabulated. Accordingly, no hypothesis is truly tested in this book. Another difficulty is a nearly exclusive focus on government and big business as agents of sprawl and standardized development. Undeniably these are important factors, but the author gives insufficient consideration to consumer preference which also fuels current forms of urban development. A final comment concerns the title. McGill-Queen's University Press seem to be in the habit of giving titles that suggest a broad field of interest to works whose object is in reality more focused. *Housing the North American City* published in 1991 relates the history of housing in Hamilton, Ontario and, as seen, *Building Cities that Work* is a study of resident satisfaction in Toronto neighbourhoods.

Despite these shortcomings, the book remains a valuable source of information on emerging urban planning perspectives and living conditions in Toronto neighbourhoods. It distils guidelines for urban planning in the future from a careful observation of these neighbourhoods.

Pierre Filion  
School of Urban and Regional Planning  
University of Waterloo

---

Adams, Annmarie. *Architecture in the Family Way: Doctors, Houses and Women, 1870–1900*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996. Pp. xxi, 227. Illustrations. \$39.95 cloth.

This investigation into the domestic architecture of late Victorian England offers a fascinating perspective on the literature of

health and sanitary reform of the period. Adams describes this age as a "time of intense turmoil and experimentation" (p.168), when sanitarians were tantalized by the apparent promise of scientific principles and systems to conquer the illness and disease that continued to plague the population. Despite mounting evidence to support the new germ theory of contagion, she explains how the older beliefs of disease transmission through foul air and "animate contagia" hung on and helped focus attention on the immediate spatial environment as a potential problem source.

Adams uses the urban middle-class house as the locus of study. She draws on a diverse literature, including technical architectural drawings, catalogues, plumbing manuals, advertisements, and books and pamphlets of "family advice", to provide the basis for an examination into the prescribed regulation of domestic space. Within the context of women's emerging political consciousness, she illuminates the gendered perspectives of doctors and women, both key players in the Domestic Sanitation Movement, and her work clearly points out that what is often considered private space was indeed very much contested public terrain.

The opening chapter of the book is devoted to the International Health Exhibition, held in London in 1884, which illustrated in a concrete fashion the relationship between health and disease in both public and domestic spaces. The lavish public display of clean water in fountains and drinking taps from the newly revamped water supply contrasted sharply with the model of the Insanitary dwelling to demonstrate to the public the ever-present unhealthy dangers lurking within domestic spaces. In particular, improperly plumbed and ventilated houses, exposing middle-class Victorians to sewage and sewer gas, were implicated in transporting disease. Adams surveys the work of the 'building doctors', those physicians connected with the Domestic Sanitation Movement who actually designed and sometimes built houses on the principles of 'scientific' ventilation and drainage systems, and who diagnosed and treated unhealthy houses as they did unhealthy bodies. The perceived authority to diagnose housing ills, she suggests, derived from this comparison of the workings of the house to the physiology of the body. The physicians' public condemnation of Victorian architects, while sparking a severe defensive reaction from the architects themselves, was otherwise widely supported by others concerned about middle-class health.

Adams also examines the ambiguity in the relationship between the medical sanitarians and women's role in the domestic realm. Medical 'experts' conscripted women as their allies, not to 'cure' sick houses, but to prevent disease through the proper regulation and maintenance of many of the hidden aspects of the house. Doctors not only endeavoured to make it women's responsibility to test for drainage, air quality and other potential architectural problems that could affect the health of their families, but set down specific 'scientific' principles for the location and furnishing of the sick room and the lying-in room. Further

consolidation of women's position as home regulators "gave rise to several new occupations for middle-class women, including interior decoration and architecture, but it also represented the association — seldom explicated at the time but widely understood — that control over domestic space represented a form of feminism." (p.145)

Adams points out, however, that women who were educated in the proper functioning of a home could now be blamed for their own and their families' poor health; the consequences of lax attention or defective judgement became evident where there was improper implementation of sanitary controls. Medical advisors, unable to control or completely understand the 'enigma' and perils of pregnancy and childbirth, held pregnant women particularly responsible to provide a space for their confinement that isolated their potentially polluting bodies from the rest of their families.

Although the author's stated interest for this project was on the literature of health and sanitary reform, it is always a problem for social historians to determine how much of an effect prescriptive literature had on the everyday lives of ordinary people. While Adams has acknowledged that she turned to non-traditional sources, especially for architectural history, the lack of more personal materials, if indeed such exist, makes it difficult for us to know for instance, how closely middle-class women followed the ideal sick room arrangements, or if they really did inspect their homes in the ways that were suggested. Did women really employ hydrochloric acid and copper foil to detect arsenic in wallpaper? Nevertheless, the developments Adams traces between women's growing involvement in interior decoration, feminist political activism, and housing developments for single women suggest that, if only for a brief time, some women were finding creative uses for 'expert' advice.

While many historians have concentrated on middle-class interest in the health of the working class, much less consideration has been given to the improvements thought necessary to correct the health of the middle class itself. Adams' use of the urban middle-class home and the links she finds there among houses, women, and the medical community draw our attention to a part of material culture that has been neglected by both women's and medicine's historians. She has effectively contributed to an expanding body of work that challenges the pervasive ideology of domestic space as private space, and her work also stands as an fine example of what can be accomplished when historians expand their horizons beyond circumscribed boundaries.

Jayne Elliott  
Department of History  
Carleton University

---

Papayanis, Nicholas. *The Coachmen of Nineteenth-Century Paris: Service Workers and Class Consciousness*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1993. Pp. xvi, 247. Illustrations, bibliography, index.

The point of departure for this study is the observation that Parisian coachmen managed to stage crippling strikes at every Paris exposition of the nineteenth century, inconveniencing Frenchmen and foreigners just when the capital was trying to put on its best face. The strikes thus brought into confrontation not just workers and employers, but low-paid laborers with the well-to-do. In telling the story of Parisian coachmen, Papayanis hopes to fill a gap in literature on the working class, male service workers have been ignored. What captures his imagination about Parisian coachmen is that they were not "traditional" members of the working class, in part because they had varying relationships to the means of production: some owned their own cabs, others belonged to coachmen's cooperatives, and many worked for cab firms whose size ranged broadly. Thus the structure of the industry and the ethic that prevailed within it provided for a good deal of autonomy, and held out the hope of cab ownership for all coachmen, undermining the development of a class consciousness based on wage labor.

In order to portray the lives and mentality of coachmen, this book examines the structure of the cab industry and the multifarious rules governing it, offers a statistical profile of the social and family status of cabbies, analyzes the formation of unions and the development of class consciousness, and compares the strikes of 1878 and 1889 to examine the evolution of a "revolutionary ideology" among coachmen. The period covered extends from the middle of the nineteenth century to 1907, a watershed year in the history of urban transportation with the introduction of the automobile.

Coachmen were predominantly migrants from rural areas who chose their occupational path because they believed it would lead to upward mobility. Although many drove cabs seasonally, coachmen exhibited an "intense desire" for social integration into Parisian life and constituted a social group "poised at the edge of the next higher class in the social hierarchy" (p. 67). But in the second half of the nineteenth century cab ownership became more difficult as larger cab firms gained more control over the industry at the expense of single-cab owners and hired coachmen. But by 1889, coachmen had abandoned a corporate mentality and adopted a rhetoric like that of other Parisian workers. Rather than insisting on a share of daily cab receipts, they demanded a fixed salary for a determined number of hours of work and no longer expressed common values and interests with small or large owners.

Papayanis argues that the transformation from corporate to working-class mentality resulted from increased surveillance by the police and employers, and from the continued concentration of ownership in one segment of the cab trade, intensified by the severe economic crisis of the 1880s. The economic cri-