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Introduction

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Introduction

Richard White

Let me begin this special issue by considering briefly what "planning history" is and, this being a journal of urban history, exploring how planning history and urban history relate to one another. The simplest answer to the first question is that planning history is, at its root, the history of what people thought was right and good for cities and their surrounding regions. As such it is a stream of the history of thought, or of intellectual history. One of the field's standard overviews, Peter Hall's *Cities of* Tomorrow, now in its fourth edition, comes with the subtitle *An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design.*[1] And indeed many of the most basic questions of urban planning, past or present, come down to ideas of this sort: are cities better when land uses are separate or mixed, when residential streets are straight or curved, when buildings are surrounded by more or less green space? Is an urban region better as a continuous, uninterrupted carpet of urbanized land or with isolated urban "satellites" dispersed throughout rural land? Or to take another tack, are cities and regions better when all of these physical elements simply take the form their creators wish them to take, unconstrained by state regulations? Answers to these questions, considered at certain points or over periods of time in the past, form the foundation of planning history.

But there is much more to the field than this, because planning's forward and backward linkages—to steal a concept from economics—are also important elements of its past. Since planning ideas are shaped by the cultural matrices from which they emerge, planning history often considers prior intellectual or political context—backward linkages, in a sense—in order to understand the genesis of those ideas. Ebenezer Howard's Garden City concept, for example, was spawned amid widespread concern over London's late nineteenth-century slums; participatory planning emerged from 1960s counterculture and New Left politics.[2] This aspect of planning history, in which planning is seen as an expression of the prevailing zeitgeist, is what drew me, personally, into the field, and it remains for me an essential element. And of course planning ideas were meant to be acted on or somehow put to use, not just thought, so the exploration of whether, when, and how plans were implemented—that is to say, its forward linkages—forms another part of the field, invariably leading into questions of power and politics. So planning history, though a specialized field, is very much linked to the physical and intellectual world around it.

This answer to the first question partly answers the second. Planning history is the history of the ideas and policies that shaped cities, not of the cities themselves. It does not concern itself with the function or structure of city governments, with the ethnicity or class of a city's population, with its economic base, or even with buildings or public spaces that define a city—except insofar as these aspects intersect with planning. In this sense planning history might be considered a subset of urban history. Yet this would not be entirely accurate. For one thing, planning history includes the history of *regional* planning, a subject that goes well beyond urban history into the history of large-scale state interventions in economic affairs. Furthermore, in some ways planning history seems larger, or broader, than urban history when it engages with intellectual movements such as international modernism or postwar utopianism.

My own first exposure to planning history came over fifteen years ago when I attended a conference of the Society for American City and Regional Planning History in St. Louis. I was employed at the time by a fledgling research foundation in Toronto striving to become a voice in local urban and regional affairs, and I had begun a tentative and rather scattershot research program into the history of local planning. I had long had some interest in planning history, but had done no serious work in it and knew next to nothing about it as an academic field. I came across the conference on the internet and persuaded my employer that my attendance would benefit our activities.

I was blown away by the conference. Within hours I had learned there were hundreds of academics researching and writing about the very things I was uncovering in my own research but had not known what to make of. Pedestrianism, which I had unexpectedly found permeating Toronto planning in the 1950s, I

discovered at the first session I attended, had been an element of modernist urbanism everywhere. Suddenly I had an intellectual community. But I was struck, as well, by the absence of Canadians. I recognized the names of one or two Canadian geographers among the presenters, but did not see them. I was also discovering, in other words, that Canadian planning history barely existed. There was no shortage of interest in the subject among the American scholars. Indeed almost every attendee I spoke to, on learning I was from Toronto, was anxious to engage in discussion (usually because of Jane Jacobs, I later realized). There was obviously work to be done. But nobody seemed to be doing it.

That initial impression about Canadian planning history turned out to be close to the mark. In 2011 three leading international planning historians published a historiographical survey of the discipline over the previous two generations.[3] Of the 275 entries in its bibliography, 9 are by Canadians, of which 3 are on Canadian topics, of which 1 is a planning textbook and 1 an edited collection (over thirty years old[4]). That is to say, in the opinion of these authors just one significant book of Canadian planning history (Richard Harris's *Unplanned Suburbs*[5]) and not a single significant scholarly article (those in the edited collection are not itemized) had been published in the thirty-some years prior to 2011.

This overstates the situation somewhat. Significant Canadian planning history has been published since 2011 that is not, of course, included in their survey. It also seems possible that what some of us in Canada might consider planning history, such as John Sewell's early work on the politics of planning in Toronto, or some of Edward Relph's studies of urban landscapes, is not specialized enough to be planning history by international standards. But there is also the enduring Canadian problem of Canadian activities occurring "below the radar" of international observers—one cannot help but notice that these British/American/Australian scholars include John Punter's 2005 work on Sydney but not his 2003 book on Vancouver, though perhaps they had other reasons for their choice.

But even with a few additional titles, the list of published Canadian planning history remains short. Why should this be? Why is planning history so under-explored in Canada? Could it be that Canada, or rather Canadian planners, simply have not contributed much to the planning world and so, from an international perspective, there is just not much to say? In *Planning the Twentieth-Century City,* a book with a wide international scope, Stephen Ward presents Canada as essentially a recipient of ideas from elsewhere, in contrast to Germany, France, Britain, and the United States, inventers of the "major traditions."

This is undoubtedly an accurate bird's-eye view, apt for a comprehensive international survey. But to my Canadian eyes it is more of an incentive than a disincentive to research. For one thing, if we accept that Canadian planning history involves receiving ideas from elsewhere, then surely the process of receiving deserves careful study.[6] My own contention, based largely on Toronto, is that the notion of Canadian planning having been dominated by British thinking is accepted without sufficient scrutiny, and that Canadian planning can be better understood as a variant of American planning than a transplantation of British planning, a contention I would be happy to have refined or refuted by research on other cities.[7] There is also the fact that Canadian planning has such a good international reputation—indeed present-day Canadian planners selling services abroad may be drawing on this reputation—suggesting there is a Canadian style of planning that, while perhaps not a major tradition, is not insignificant. Who other than a Canadian planning historian can identify and elucidate this?

Another possible explanation for the lack of research is institutional. Academic history departments have never had much interest in the history of professions as a subject of research or teaching,[8] a disinclination fully entrenched by history's turn towards the "subaltern" in the 1970s. Some professional schools have long had an interest in the history of the profession they teach—historians of medicine at medical schools, historians of education at teacher's colleges—but not many. Historians at such institutions usually have advanced academic degrees in their profession rather than in history and do not always have history as their prime area of research, but they do nevertheless write history. In the case of planning history, this professional school connection seems essential. Though I do not pretend to have studied the matter comprehensively, I have observed that many leading, internationally recognized planning historians, if they have academic appointments, have them at professional schools of some sort, usually of the entire "built environment." But in Canada, for some reason, this seems not to have caught on. Although there are exceptions, Canadian planning schools by and large do not have scholars dedicated to planning history on their academic staff.

What is common in Canada—maybe uniquely so—is a connection between planning history and urban geography, a phenomenon that may be related to the decline of urban history as a field of study in English-Canadian academic history in the 1980s. This curious—and to my mind still largely unexplained—withdrawal left the field of urban history almost entirely to urban geographers and helps to explain both the absence of historians and the prevalence of geographers in Canadian planning history. Indeed, most Canadians I see at planning history conferences are geographers, and most of the Canadian work considered in the Ward, Freestone, and Silver survey is by geographers. What all this means for the substance of Canadian planning history—one might ask whether *history* is the prime focus of work by non-historians—I leave for others to consider. But clearly there is minimal institutional support for the full-on history of urban and regional planning in Canada.

So the response to the call for papers for this issue was no great surprise. Not a single established academic historian responded; one retired academic historian did submit a preliminary paper, but withdrew it, and a few graduate students or recent PhDs in history showed an interest, but most were

working in fields only tangentially connected to planning history. In the end only one person affiliated with academic history carried through to publication, and this author was a recent, not-yet employed PhD. Altogether, of the six individuals contributing to this special issue, including myself as editor, two have academic positions at professional schools (one in planning and one in architecture), the other four are independent scholars, the somewhat euphemistic term for those who, whether "unwaged" or employed outside academia, research and write mostly on their own time and dime. There are, of course, many reasons for established academics not to respond to a call for papers, especially one from a less-than-major journal, but their absence does reflect the state of the discipline.

I would not for a second suggest this has resulted in a lower quality of work, but I do suggest it matters. For one thing, scholars working in fields outside of academic planning history will not be inclined to ground their work in the current literature or thematic concerns of the academic field, and that is the case with most of these papers. In fact the authors make limited use of contemporary academic theory of any sort—a lacuna that some will find disappointing but others refreshing; not that they entirely avoid theoretical concepts, but their work is primarily empirical/descriptive. Nor do the articles here have much to say about planning's "dark side": its presumptuous paternalism, its bed-sharing with capitalists, its blindness towards racialized minorities. Part of the reason for this, and an intriguing point of its own, is that only one of the five papers pertains to post–Second World War history, the period in which planning and planners are most often criticized (yet, curiously, that one paper may be the most uncritical of the five).

Something I was on the lookout for when the papers came in was differences between the French- and English-language contributions. A few appeared, though I cannot see much significance in them. The two French papers are probably the least rooted in academic planning history. This could not be a purely linguistic matter, because there is a substantial French-language planning history literature, and it seems, rather, to be simply a matter of the authors of these two papers being grounded in other fields. The English-language papers do not fully engage academic planning history literature either, although they do make some use of it. Also, the French-language papers explore nineteenth-century topics and the English-language papers twentieth–century topics. This is surely just chance, for it could easily have gone the other way around, but the distinction brings to light that we have here studies of both pre-planning "planning"—meaning "planning" that occurred before planning in the modern sense came into being—and the more fully developed, formalized planning of the twentieth century. Both are important aspects in the field, and it is good to have them represented.

Claudine Déom's article is perhaps the farthest from conventional planning history and might at first seem more architectural history than planning history. It is a study of municipal buildings (i.e., not churches or convents) built in twenty-nine lesser Quebec cities (i.e., not Montreal or Quebec City) from 1870 to 1929—primarily waterworks, fire stations, public markets, and city halls. Just by looking at the mundane and the utilitarian rather than the conventionally significant, and at the secular rather than the ecclesiastic, she broadens our understanding of Quebec's urban landscapes. She finds an important common element in these buildings, not in their architecture—though there is that—but in their importance as signs of maturity, or of "civic capacity." The connection to planning history is not explicit, but it is there. Most of these buildings were erected before formalized planning was adopted, so none of them, or their spatial arrangement, were planned by any who called themselves a planner. But they were not *unplanned,* for they reflect decisions made by public authorities seeking to shape both the physical reality and the public image of their cities.

Alain Roy opens our eyes to a specific, but to most of us unknown, moment in Canadian planning history—the planning of Canada's first, but never built, capital city. The itinerant capital of the United Province of Canada is a well-known curiosity of mid-nineteenth-century Canadian history. British authorities united the colonies of Upper and Lower Canada in 1841 and this new, supposedly unitary colony needed a single capital. The authorities and the elected assembly could not agree where it should be, so it was moved from one city to another, a few years here and a few years there, until the 1850s when Ottawa was chosen as the site for the permanent capital. M. Roy's paper adds a new element to this by showing that a plan for a government precinct was devised at each place the capital landed, in hopes of making the landing permanent, first in Montreal, then in Kingston, and then again Montreal. None of these precincts was built, though the author—whose background is in built heritage—explains that vestiges remain on the landscapes of both cities. The piece touches several larger themes: British colonial power, the concept of a capital city, and the emergence of the modern liberal state, but in conclusion the author argues that the failure of the capital to take root reveals an absence of true national sentiment in this factitious bi-national state.

Another striking and rather intriguing difference between the French- and English-language papers is that the three English papers focus on the works of notable, individual men while neither of the French papers does. Not that they subscribe to Carlyle's famous dictum "The history of the world is but the biography of great men."[9] Carlyle had in mind men like Shakespeare and Napoleon, whose actions undoubtedly affected human history, not men like British housing advocate Henry Vivian, upper-level Canadian bureaucrat Humphrey Carver, or even British planner Thomas Adams. Moreover the essays here tend to do what Carlyle implored us *not* to do: see a great man as a "creature of the time"; doing so, Carlyle claimed, would imply that "Time did everything, he nothing." So these authors are by no means employing the "great man" theory of history, but they do focus on individual men.

Catherine Ulmer's piece on Henry Vivian is a case study in the international transfer of planning ideas, a topic she explores fully

in her recently completed dissertation.[10] Here she tells of one particular attempt at such a transfer—the 1910 cross-Canada speaking tour by British politician, housing reformer, and town-planning advocate Henry Vivian, an undertaking hatched and shepherded along by the governor general of Canada, Lord Grey, who was something of a housing reformer himself. On the basis of meticulous research, Ms Ulmer recounts where Vivian went in the course of two months travelling across Canada, what he said, to whom, and, as far as sources permit, what impact he had. This is a classic case of transnational proselytizing in the foundational years of modern planning, as well as in the peak years of Canadian imperialism. Yet one must look hard to find its lasting impact. It left me thinking, more so than the author, who is cautious in her conclusions, how freely Canadian municipal councils could disregard advice from confident, well-spoken men with English accents, even in Edwardian times. What we might have here is a case study in the impotence of influential men.

Barry Cahill's study of Thomas Adams's work on the reconstruction of Halifax after the 1917 explosion is set in a similar era and addresses a related theme. Mr. Cahill comes to this through his work on the history of the Halifax Relief Commission, the body that oversaw the reconstruction, so he brings extensive knowledge of the big picture. Like Ms Ulmer, he crafts a detailed narrative of events from a careful review of diverse sources. In this narrative we learn that Adams was indeed employed by the commission, though only for a few months, that he did indeed devise a plan for the devastated area, with the help of his Canadian assistant, that he was not employed to oversee its implementation, which irked him, and that in the end only some elements of his plan were implemented. The article pays particular attention to the notion that Adams, well known for his association with the English Garden City movement, applied Garden City principles in his plan—and finds the notion more than a little tenuous. The author may not be doing exactly what Carlyle said not to do, but very nearly. He does not assert that reconstruction was simply a product of "the times" and that Adams himself did nothing, but he does assert that reconstruction was a product of many hands, of which Adams's was just one. The article thus adds nuance to the "great man" approach to planning history, while also implicitly reminding us to question the assumption that any effort at transferring planning ideas from a major to a minor country was bound to succeed.

David Gordon's article on the influence of Humphrey Carver in re-establishing professional planning in Canada after the Second World War might be classed as "insider history." Though now a professor at Queen's University planning school, Mr. Gordon did practise as a planner and is an elected fellow of the Canadian Institute of Planners. So he is unmistakably a member of the professional brethren whose history he chronicles, and his piece has the imprimatur of that: planning is good policy, its postwar revival is a good thing, and Carver was a successful, positive force. A rather uncritical narrative, one might say, but the other side of the coin is that it is written with an earnest commitment to the profession's history that outsiders just do not have. The article's title refers to one man, but in fact a good part of it is about the broad program of planning advocacy that this one man implemented at the CMHC; this is an important matter, for there was plenty of work to do in the postwar years to overcome populist resistance to planning.[11] But even when it does focus on Carver it reveals an important general point: the connection between the pre-war political left and postwar planning. We learn that in the 1930s Carver had married into the League for Social Reconstruction—his wife's family was deeply immersed in the LSR—and before long had espoused the league's views on planning, which he carried with him into his postwar work.

The historiographical article cited above is concerned not with counting numbers of publications, as I used it, but with the more substantive matter of identifying themes and approaches in the literature. The authors note, first off, the popularity of the international diffusion of planning as a subject of study, writing that it "occurs in some form within most recent planning history publications."[12] They go on to identify what they consider the five principal "genres" in the literature: studies of the genesis and evolution of certain planning movements (Garden City being most common), biographies of individual planners, narrative histories of planning individual cities or suburbs, overviews of planning within a particular country or region, and of planning with a particular objective (postwar reconstruction, historical preservation). They observe, and mildly criticize, the body of work they reviewed as having a preponderance of empirical/narrative history, a tendency to focus on plans and planners themselves rather than the external forces that shaped both, and, until recently, a preoccupation with modern, Western planning. Planning history would benefit, they conclude, from more theory, more context, and an eye towards the wider, less-modern world.

How do the essays in this special issue fit into their schema? We have studies of the international transfer of planning ideas (one explicitly and one tangentially), biographical studies (though focused on the work, not the life, of individuals), narratives of particular planning events (more specific than whole cities or suburbs). So the work here might be said to sit comfortably among work already done. But that implies it is not breaking new ground, which is true. Nearly all of the essays here show the preponderance of empirical/narrative history and a corresponding lack of theory that Ward, Freestone, and Silver criticize. I would argue, in defence, that this sort of history of "what actually happened" is valuable, if only to serve as the foundation for broader-brush theoretical studies, but that is another matter. Where these papers might score higher in the historiographers' estimation is in the inclusion of context that, interestingly, appears most in the papers by authors who are not planning historians. Authors working from starting points in architectural history (Déom), built heritage (Roy), and the history of a wide-ranging administrative body (Cahill) have produced essays replete with context—indeed they might have more context than planning history—while Ulmer, and even more so Gordon, the

only author of the five with significant publications in mainstream planning history, are more tightly focused on planning ideas and activities. In any case, however one categorizes them, we have five original essays in Canadian planning history, and all of us involved in this issue's creation hope we have made a small contribution to a badly underdeveloped field.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank, first off, Owen Temby for taking an interest in my work and for hatching the idea of this issue, as well as both Owen and his co-editor of the journal, Harold Bérubé, for trusting me with the job of assembling it and providing me with valuable advice. Harold was especially helpful in advising on the French-language papers. Thanks to all the authors who took the time to write and submit papers, including those whose papers were not deemed right for the issue, and to all the peer reviewers, whose assessments were essential to the process. And I would like to offer a special thank you to my colleague Richard Harris, a scholar with a similar name but a very different, far more accomplished academic resumé, who, promptly and unhesitatingly, provided me with the benefit of his extensive experience at several critical points along the way.

Notes

1 Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design since 1890,* 4th ed. (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2014).

2 The former is widely recognized; the latter is the author's contention, in Richard White, *Planning Toronto: The Planners, the Plans, their Legacies, 1940–80* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016), 264–8.

3 Steven V. Ward, Robert Freestone, and Christopher Silver, "The New Planning History: Reflections, issues and directions," *Town Planning Review* 82, no. 3 (2011): 231–61.

4 They cite G.A. Stelter and A.F.G. Artibise, eds., *Power and Place: Canadian Urban Development in the North American Context* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1986). I would be inclined to cite the older book by the same editors: *The Usable Urban Past: Planning and Politics in the Modern Canadian City,* Carleton Library no. 119 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1979), for it is more directly applicable to planning.

5 Richard Harris, *Unplanned Suburbs: Toronto's American Tragedy, 1900–1950* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

6 Ward has in fact done this in Steven V. Ward, "The International Diffusion of Planning: A Review and a Canadian Case Study," *International Planning Studies* 4, no. 1 (1999): 53–77; the author addresses this in Richard White, "A Case Study in Early Urban Design: Toronto, 1966–1978," *Planning Perspectives* (2018), DOI: 10.1080/02665433.2018.1493394.

7 Richard White, "Toronto, an American City: Aspects of Its Postwar Planning, 1940–1960," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 44, no. 1 (2014): 68–81.

8 One of the most insightful histories of the professions in Canada is R.D Gidney and W.P.J. Millard, *Professional Gentlemen: The Professions in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), written by historians of education associated with the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario (as it was called at the time).

9 Thomas Carlyle, "The Hero as Divinity," in *On Heroes, Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History*, ed. David R. Sorensen and Brent E. Kinse (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 41 and 29.

10 Catherine Mary Ulmer, "Canadian Planning through a Transnational Lens: The Evolution of Urban Planning in Canada, 1890–1930" (PhD diss., McGill University, 2017)

11 The author explores this in Toronto, in *Planning Toronto*, 9–74.

12 Ward, Freestone, and Silver, "New Planning History," 237.

Richard White is an independent Toronto-based historian and author. He received a PhD in history from the University of Toronto in 1995 and has remained associated with the university, working for many years as a sessional instructor in Canadian history at the University of Toronto Mississauga and more recently in planning history at the University of Toronto Scarborough. He also served for a time as research director of the Neptis Foundation, where he began his own research program in planning history. His most recent major publication is *Planning Toronto: The Plans, the Planners, Their Legacies, 1940–80* (UBC Press, 2016), recipient of the 2017 Fred Landon Award from the Ontario Historical Society for the best book on local or regional history in Ontario.

Richard White est un historien et un auteur indépendant basé à Toronto. Il détient un doctorat en histoire de l'Université de Toronto (1995) et est demeuré associé à cette université. Il a travaillé de longues années en tant que chargé de cours d'histoire canadienne à l'Université de Toronto Mississauga, et, plus récemment, d'histoire de l'urbanisme à l'Université de Toronto Scarborough. Il a également œuvré à titre de directeur de recherche au sein de la Neptis Foundation, où il a entrepris son propre programme de recherche en histoire de l'urbanisme. Ses publications récentes majeures incluent *Planning Toronto: The Plans, the Planners, Their Legacies, 1940-80* (UBC Press, 2016) qui s'est mérité le prix Fred Landon 2017 de la Ontario Historical Society pour la meilleure monographie d'histoire locale et régionale en Ontario.