

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Crooks, Harold. *Dirty Business: The Inside Story of the New Garbage Agglomerates*. Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 1983. Pp. 257. Illustrations. \$9.95

Gerald Bloomfield

Volume 13, Number 3, February 1985

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018109ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018109ar>

[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

Bloomfield, G. (1985). Review of [Crooks, Harold. *Dirty Business: The Inside Story of the New Garbage Agglomerates*. Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 1983. Pp. 257. Illustrations. \$9.95]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 13(3), 253–254. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018109ar>

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

Archibald, Margaret. *By Federal Design: The Chief Architect's Branch of the Department of Public Works, 1881-1914*. Studies in Archaeology, Architecture and History. Ottawa: National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, Parks Canada, Environment Canada, 1983. Pp. 55. Illustrations.

Produced more in the manner of an illustrated typescript, this publication is a successor to the previous lavishly produced volumes in the occasional Papers in Archaeology and History series. While the earlier format with its colour illustrations and generous expanses of white space may have been sacrificed in this era of fiscal restraint, we can note happily that quality of scholarship has not. Archibald's thesis is that the design and stylistic homogeneity of federal buildings during the pre-war period of confederation was less the result of a single personality, the Department of Public Works Chief Architect, and more the result of a system of hiring policies and administrative practices within the Chief Architect's Branch. The focus of research places extant structures and architectural plans in a much wider context of interdepartmental memos, verbatim records of royal commissions, legislative assembly journals and reports of the Auditor General. A particular test for the thesis is provided by following the career of Thomas William Fuller, son and apprentice of T. Fuller the second chief architect, and himself chief architect between 1927 and 1936. Despite the volume's title, the years 1871 to 1968 are adequately discussed. What emerges is a pattern of growing bureaucratization from the early 1871 division of engineering and architecture roles within the branch and the appointment of T.S. Scott to the standardized production of the 'design by policy' period of post-World War II under Gardner. Yet despite this a number of factors including the long tenure of junior technical staff, a system of task specialization within the office, general immunity from political patronage with respect to staff appointments, and an organizational hierarchy allowing effective and efficient design control by the Chief Architect provided the opportunity for what might be called an identifiable "design ethic" to emerge and be maintained over a period of some 60 years. T.W. Fuller served a fourteen year apprenticeship within an unbroken 53 year career with the branch. As a result, design formulae emerged for categories of buildings, linking specialization by function with a wider national identity. Post offices, customs houses, penitentiaries, armories, drill halls received categorized stylistic treatment, subject to period and location, but were unmistakably "federal."

A number of significant side issues emerge from the material. One for instance is the nature of political influence on design and the architectural "complexion" of different administrations. According to Archibald, Conservatives seem to have been more willing to play a leadership role in the

country, especially in matters of the modernity and quality of public buildings. The Liberals in the mid 1870s preached restraint in public building, and over the years since have emphasized a more functional and economical approach. Between 1880 and 1890, Tupper and Langevin enunciated a clear policy on "high standards of design" and "use of public architecture to create an imposing government presence across the country." This was not done unsympathetically, however, as Langevin himself consistently applied his policy of "appropriate reflection." A building design should be appropriate to the best facades in the vicinity, and compromises in scale and style should be made accordingly. Archibald's final observation is that relating to the demise of the Chief Architect's Branch is a result of its own ongoing pursuit of effective design control and efficient construction management. This was ultimately achieved in the standardized formula plans of the 1960s which obviated the need for a large in-house design capability and at the same time had paved the way for the privatization of creative design work.

This slim volume is well written and adequately illustrated; the footnotes and bibliography are complete, but despite limited size the lack of an index is unfortunate.

Martin Segger
Department of History in Art
University of Victoria

Crooks, Harold. *Dirty Business: The Inside Story of the New Garbage Agglomerates*. Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 1983. Pp. 257. Illustrations. \$9.95.

Garbage generation and disposal constitutes one of the subsidiary elements of the urban environment, which has become a significant public issue in the past fifteen years. The problems are greatest in the metropolitan cities where, in the 1970s, each resident was producing an annual average of 1,300 pounds of waste. While the volumes of household rubbish have increased with the "packaging revolution," the greatest growth has been in the waste products of industry and the construction business.

Dirty Business is largely concerned with the collection of industrial waste which was traditionally ignored by municipal household refuse collection operations. Since the late 1960s, the private collection of industrial waste has been transformed in scale from small local operations, using a few ordinary trucks, to well capitalized international firms operating large fleets of highly specialized vehicles.

Harold Crooks, a Montreal journalist with a background in economics, describes the evolution of the large firms and considers the major issues. He compares *Dirty Business* to the "the exposés . . . of the brief golden age of muckrakers early in the century, [in its] focus . . . on a young industry whose power and freedom from regulation raises far-reaching questions" (p. 3).

The book is organized in three parts. Chapters one and two outline the nature of the garbage problem and describe the profitability of integrating collection and disposal of waste. Cheap landfill sites, notably old gravel pits, are very important in the operation of the garbage business.

The second part of the book considers the growth of the four large corporations: Brown Ferris Industries of Houston; Waste Management Inc. of Chicago; S.C.A. Services Inc. of Boston; and, Laidlaw Industries of Hamilton. Laidlaw Industries, under the ownership of Michael De Groote, evolved from a Hamilton trucking enterprise into a continental corporation deriving most of its business from waste collection. A final chapter in this section describes the role of big unions, especially the Teamsters, in the concentration of the industry.

"Garbage Wars," the title of the third and final part of the book examines the ruthlessly competitive growth of the large firms in Winnipeg, Toronto and Montreal. These chapters discuss the ways in which the large corporations achieved market dominance and sought dumping grounds for the vast quantities of trash. The battle over the Maple disposal site raises many questions of waste and environmental management.

While *Dirty Business* is not in the academic tradition of the volumes written by Martin Melosi,¹ it does describe contemporary organizations and issues. The scale of garbage generation, collection and disposal, especially in metropolitan regions, is now probably past the era of *laissez-faire*. Given the virtual monopoly power of large corporations in some cities, a measure of public supervision is necessary. The most controversial issues are those relating to the disposal of hazardous waste materials, mostly produced by the chemical industry. Southern Ontario's drinking water is threatened by inadequately treated toxic waste dumped in landfill sites. This major problem is being tackled by a provincial Waste Management Corporation, but no community wishes to have a disposal site. As with many contemporary urban issues, waste management is something much larger than the individual city. While private corporations have provided a larger scale of operation, their activities need to be supervised in the public interest.

Gerald Bloomfield
Department of Geography
University of Guelph

NOTES

1. Martin V. Melosi, *Pollution and Reform in American Cities 1870-1930* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979); Martin V. Melosi, *Garbage in the Cities: Refuse, Reform and the Environment 1880-1980* (College Station: Texas A & M, University Press, 1981).

Mollenkopf, John H. *The Contested City*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984. Pp. xii, 328. Tables, index. \$27.50 cloth, \$6.95 paper.

This compact book alters the fundamental equation that scholars, journalists, and politicians have used to explain American urban development of the past half century. John Mollenkopf, a political scientist and director of the Public Policy Program at the Graduate School of the City University of New York, accepts as a given the "second urban revolution," which has occurred since 1920. This revolution, the "dependent variable of the equation, has involved a post-industrial transformation of American cities, including disinvestment in old industries, growth of service sector institutions, diffusion of older urban populations, and central-city dominance by recently-arrived, lower-status minority groups." But instead of listing traditional economic forces — technology, land costs, personal incomes, labour costs, decisions by private firms, etc. — to explain the transformation, Mollenkopf asserts that "politics and government are independent driving forces which can override economic 'functional necessities' " (p. 8). Government intervention, he says, rather than private interests have been responsible for the urban patterns that have emerged since the 1930s.

Mollenkopf rests his thesis on two key concepts: "pro-growth coalition" and "political entrepreneur." The creation of progrowth coalitions, both national and local, originated with the Democratic party, usually during periods of economic and political crisis. These coalitions consisted of various public and private interests brought together by a government program which gave them all benefits and powers that none of them could have obtained or exercised on their own. The 1949 Housing Act exemplifies such a coalition-building measure. It won wide support with compromises and vague language that provided something for everyone. Political entrepreneurs are the architects of these coalitions; they are the people who gather and risk "political capital or support in order to reshape politics and create new sources of power by establishing new programs" (p. 6). Democratic entrepreneurs have succeeded in fashioning progrowth coalitions that changed the face of the urban environment, but their success generated conflicts that have undermined their effectiveness. First, federal programs initiated by Democrats provoked counter-movements from conservative