

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Ziskin, Rochelle. *The Place Vendôme: Architecture and Social Mobility in Eighteenth-Century Paris*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Pp. xvi, 224. Black-and-white illustrations, bibliography, index. US \$74.95 (cloth)

D. Gillian Thompson

Volume 29, Number 1, October 2000

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1016434ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016434ar>

[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

Thompson, D. G. (2000). Review of [Ziskin, Rochelle. *The Place Vendôme: Architecture and Social Mobility in Eighteenth-Century Paris*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Pp. xvi, 224. Black-and-white illustrations, bibliography, index. US \$74.95 (cloth)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 29(1), 71–72. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016434ar>

personal and professional achievements to much a wider audience.

Many people have some notion that Stein was an architect, regionalist, and community planner. A closer look at his career reveals just how important his contributions were in these interrelated fields. Stein was born in 1882 and benefited from a progressive education in New York City. After studying at the prestigious *École des Beaux Arts* in Paris in 1911, he returned to New York and began a lifelong architectural practice. Stein's interest in planning grew in this period, leading him to accept the chair of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) community planning committee. In the early 1920s his interest in new towns and regionalism found expression in the planning of Sunnyside Gardens and Radburn, as well as his participation in the Regional Planning Association of America. In 1951 he published his single major work, *Toward New Towns for America*, and enjoyed growing professional admiration for a lifetime of innovative professional practice. The 1960s found Stein enjoying a working retirement that included being awarded the AIA's Gold Medal. He passed away in 1975 and was honoured by tributes from his wide circle of friends and colleagues.

There are deeper, more intangible aspects to Stein's contributions. In many ways he was the glue that held the disparate membership of Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA) together. He was a close friend of Mumford and MacKaye, maintaining a decades-long bond with his colleagues through often-daily correspondence. His relative wealth helped to underwrite many of the activities of the RPAA. Stein's marriage to actress Aline MacMahon dusted him with the glamour of Hollywood, and the couple's posh apartment overlooking Central Park added an exotic dimension to gatherings of insurgent intellectuals. It was Stein who best translated the British concept of the Garden City into the language of North American culture. Perhaps his most remarkable achievement was simply to have survived personal mental-health challenges that beset him in mid-life.

Kermit Parsons has done us all a great service. In this post-modern age it is no longer adequate to simply write biographical sketches based on a particular interpretation of another person's life. Although works such as *Lewis Mumford: A Life* (1989) by Donald Miller are useful, one always wonders through what filters the details of the biographical subject were perceived. There is no such questioning with this volume. While there may be quibbles that this or that document was not included, there is no question that a balanced view of Stein emerges from the careful layering of Stein's own words.

On an organizational level, Parsons has also got it right. He provides a minimum of introductory material, heads each chapter with equally limited comment, and then lets Stein speak for himself. Contextual information on the women, men, and events that Stein writes about is provided on the page where the references occur. For added background, an ample variety

of photos are included, as is a chronology of the key events in Stein's life. The whole package is prefaced with transparent explanation of the editorial decisions that Parsons made to modernize spelling, smooth syntax, or to omit superfluous passages. The hand of Parsons' hand is evident throughout the work, but the reader is given ample evidence of where and why this intrusion occurs.

This is not a volume to read from cover to cover. In the finest sense of the word, it is a reference source, an inspiration to be brought out again and again for review and reflection. For both mainstream and radical planners, the words of Clarence Stein provide a touchstone. His articulate vision for creation of ecologically sustainable and socially just cities remains vital in the new millennium. As many of us continue to struggle with the challenges of transforming contemporary cities and regions, there is comfort in knowing that we walk in the footsteps of such a remarkable predecessor.

Doug Aberley
School of Community and Regional Planning
University of British Columbia

Ziskin, Rochelle. *The Place Vendôme: Architecture and Social Mobility in Eighteenth-Century Paris*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Pp. xvi, 224. Black-and-white illustrations, bibliography, index. US \$74.95 (cloth).

The Place Vendôme, still a major landmark in the fashionable financial district of Paris, owes its origins and much of its present appearance to the military failures of Louis XIV. Originally planned as a royal square to commemorate the king's victories and accommodate a massive equestrian statue of the king by the sculptor François Girardon, it was reconceived at the end of the seventeenth century, to be built by private investors according to the design of the superintendent of royal building, Jules Hardouin-Mansart and subsequent royal architects (most notably Robert de Cotte), as a residential square in the tradition of the Place des Vosges. The original entrepreneurs were drawn from the ranks of upwardly mobile royal financiers, whose enthusiasm for investing in lots on the Place Vendôme increased when their natural patron, the new controller general, Michel Chamillart, built a magnificent residence bordering on the square. The loss of the War of the Spanish Succession, the Regency, the *chambre de justice* of 1716-7 and the rise of John Law, not to mention other changes in sovereign and royal ministers, may have influenced the development of royal finances, but they did not diminish the significance of the Place Vendôme as the residence of the king's financial agents. Throughout the eighteenth century, royal financiers and their descendants would build and rebuild the fine *maisons* (not *hôtels*) of the square. In doing so, they would reflect their bourgeois social origins, marriage strategies, and noble aspirations; relations between the sexes and the place of women in the social hierarchy of households; and the ways in which the financiers

and their successors wished to represent themselves to the world. By the end of the eighteenth century, the families of bankers as well as of financiers would live in the square and be involved in such processes. On the whole, while seeking to substantiate their claims to noble status, the financiers would avoid attracting the spiteful attention of their political opponents and social betters by not overstepping the bounds of decorum.

Rochelle Ziskin's study of the social mobility and domestic architecture of the eighteenth-century residents of the Place Vendôme is based on an exhaustive knowledge of the full range of pertinent secondary sources and extant primary documentation. The author makes good use of the work of French and other authorities of the 1960s and 1970s—including that of the Canadian historian, John Bosher—in explaining the services rendered to the king and his administration by the royal financiers. She also effectively employs the techniques of the more recently developed cultural history to elucidate the dozens of architectural drawings and contemporary engravings that she herself has assembled and to establish the significance of the location of public and private rooms and of other space within the financiers' homes. She demonstrates that the position of women was paramount of women in determining domestic arrangements, and effectively links such examples to social class. She uses a case-study approach to measure developments in other houses and households for which adequate documentation exists against the examples provided by the *maisons* of the financier Antoine Crozat and his descendants. In her descriptions of the furnishings of her subjects' homes, including a model of the Girardon sculpture, her subjects come to life. Rochelle Ziskin has combined financial, social, cultural, and architectural history in new and exciting ways, and her study will be of interest to a wide readership, including students in standard advanced courses in eighteenth-century French history. Visitors to the Louvre who have read the book may wonder, as this reviewer did, whether the model of the Girardon sculpture now to be seen in the entrance to the Richelieu Wing is the same as the one that was once in a private residence of the Place Vendôme.

This is a very good book that have been an outstanding book. But it is flawed. It lacks basic scholarly apparatus: the reader looks in vain for a list of the archives and archival collections consulted. Any scholar attempting to reconstruct such a list from the endnotes faces a tedious task, for there are many complicated archival references, yet separate collections are inadequately identified in the notes. Moreover, much of the book is written in unidiomatic language that obscures the author's meaning, and a number of the translations from the French are patently absurd. University presses ought to employ editors capable of rectifying—or encouraging authors to rectify—these kinds of faults and shortcomings in such otherwise distinguished works of scholarship.

D. Gillian Thompson
Department of History
University of New Brunswick

Caulfield, Jon, and Peake, Linda, eds. *City Lives and City Forms: Critical Research and Canadian Urbanism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996. Pp. x, 347. Maps. \$60.00 cloth, \$21.95 paper.

"Key current themes in the urban field are explored through a representative cross-section of the preoccupations and perspectives of 'critical urban researchers' in Canada." And, as "urban researchers are sometimes less conversant than they prefer with the breadth of interest and activity in the field, . . . [the book seeks] to familiarize researchers in different branches of urban study with a least a fragment of the work of their colleagues."

In pursuit of these two aims, fifteen disparate essays from universities across Canada provide the core of the book. They are introduced by six papers on the social and physical fabric of the city that emphasize features different from the generally accepted morphological situation of urban land-use models, and present difficult if not controversial issues in the formulation of public policy. This sequence begins with an essay by David Ley (Geography, University of British Columbia), which focuses on the costs and benefits of gentrification in the inner city, especially Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. The author emphasizes the bifurcation of this change, placing the reduced availability of affordable housing for the lower-income groups against the close relationship between inner-city investment, including the arts policy, of the city.

Alan and Josephine Smart (Anthropology, University of Calgary) consider the incursion into Vancouver of monster homes built by rich immigrants from Hong Kong. This movement reverses the common assumption that in-movers are of lower social status than those being invaded, and conflicts with existing attitudes towards social and physical space.

Evelyn Peters (Geography, Queen's University) examines the role and status of aboriginal people in the city through the eyes of four nonfiction authors who represent the idea of "aboriginality" in Canada: Mark Nagler, *Indians in the City* (1970); Edgar Dosman, *Indians the Urban Dilemma* (1972); Larry Krotz, *Urban Indians: The Strangers in Canada's Cities* (1980); and Larry Shorten, *Without Reserve: Stories from Urban Natives* (1991). She raises questions about the compatibility of aboriginal culture and urban life, and how Natives fit in with the current urban mosaic when they are socially marginalized.

Jeffery Hopkins (Geography, University of Western Ontario) interprets Toronto's extensive underground street system. The corridors—legally public space—are not public property but space shared among the principal land-owning corporations, the hundreds of businesses that rent space, and the public agencies that operate subway stations, and train and bus depots. "The problem of how to distribute the benefits and burdens of spatial control . . . is a morally charged, ideologically laden question of social justice the resolution of which has immense economic, legal, political, and social consequences."