

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Driggs, Sarah Shields; Richard Guy Wilson; Robert P. Winthrop.
Richmond's Monument Avenue. Chapel Hill: University of
North Carolina Press, 2001. Pp. xi, 280. Colour and black and
white illustrations, appendix, index. US\$39.95 (cloth)

Elizabeth Macdonald

Volume 31, Number 2, Spring 2003

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1015765ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1015765ar>

[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

Macdonald, E. (2003). Review of [Driggs, Sarah Shields; Richard Guy Wilson; Robert P. Winthrop. *Richmond's Monument Avenue*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001. Pp. xi, 280. Colour and black and white illustrations, appendix, index. US\$39.95 (cloth)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 31(2), 43–44. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1015765ar>

the latter view. Naquin's wonderfully written text conveys an immense amount of information and offers trenchant analysis, which only whets the appetite for even more extended discussion. Researchers will mine this book as a historiographic milestone and basic source for detailed information and reference materials for some time to come. It will be a touchstone for all future work on Peking and Chinese cities as a whole. However, the book may prove especially valuable for readers outside the field. By crafting a theoretically informed and richly detailed, yet almost encyclopedic, study of Peking, Naquin has made this amazing city and the general history of late imperial Chinese cities newly accessible to non-China specialists. This contribution should help correct the Western myopia of much comparative research and theoretical discussion by bringing the urban experience of late imperial China into dialogue with ongoing debates on the nature of civil society, popular religion, and state power in the early modern and modern periods.

Peter Carroll
Department of History
Northwestern University

Driggs, Sarah Shields; Richard Guy Wilson; Robert P. Winthrop. *Richmond's Monument Avenue*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001. Pp. xi, 280. Colour and black and white illustrations, appendix, index. US\$39.95 (cloth)

Richmond's Monument Avenue is a beautifully produced book, with a large format and many well-printed color photographs. Produced with the support of local historical associations, it represents, in a sense, a celebration of Monument Avenue's 1998 designation as a National Historic Landmark.

For a book of this type, basically an architectural history, the subject matter is unusual: a single streetscape rather than an architecturally significant building or historic district. True, it is an elite streetscape, built by, and for, wealthy people, but no famous architect designed its plan and most of its buildings were designed by little-remembered local architects. Such a study is a welcome addition to the cultural landscape literature.

Within this context, however, Monument Avenue is a difficult subject matter. True to its name, it is a street of monuments, four out of six of which depict confederate civil war heroes – Robert E. Lee, J.E.B. Stuart, Stonewall Jackson, and Jefferson Davis. Erected at successive street intersections by local civic groups between 1890 and 1919, they were meant to celebrate the memory of the "Lost Cause." Not surprisingly, Monument Avenue had a long history of deed restrictions against black ownership or tenure. Interestingly, the most recent statue, erected in 1996, depicts and celebrates the life of the black tennis star Arthur Ashe, who was born in Richmond. These potent facts demand a sensitive and critical approach to historical analysis and documentation. The authors do the former well, particularly in the discussion about the circumstances surrounding the Ashe monument and the goals associated with it, but not the latter, pointing instead to cultural studies done by others. While social

criticism may not have been the project the authors set for themselves, the book would have benefited from a broader social focus within the bounds of an architectural history.

That being said, the book has much to offer. It is organized into five thematic chapters: Origins; The Statues; Building a Neighborhood; House, Styles and Architects; and Influence, Decline and Rebirth. Each provides a succinct, mostly chronological discussion of its subject matter.

A detailed story is told about the processes by which the statues were designed – how the sculptors were selected, who they were, and, most interestingly, how the statue designs were modified to meet public expectations.

For readers interested in the history of city planning and the development of American urban form, the book provides an informative account of the street's subdivision, which illuminates how such processes occurred in American cities in the late 19th century and early 20th century subdivision. We learn that three different families owned consecutive tracts of land through which the street passed and each subdivided their land differently. This had both major and subtle impacts on what was built.

The book provides a rich description of the buildings along the street and biographical detail of the architects who designed them, effectively showing how a cohesive whole was achieved through what was in fact great variety, as the more eclectic responses of local, often self-trained architects mixed side-by-side with the more academically correct styles of several big name New York architects.

We are told, as well, of what lies behind the house facades. We are taken into the great halls, with their lavish stairways in dramatic entrances, and formal public rooms. However, we learn little of the rear servants quarters and outbuildings. This is an area where a broader focus would have enriched the study, especially since a plan of the street indicates that part of Monument Avenue shared the unusual alley-block configuration of the adjacent Fan District neighborhood where block centers housed black communities.

There are other stories that are not told. A feature that sets Monument Avenue apart is the wide tree-lined mall that runs down its center. More contextual discussion of the origins and evolution of streets of this type would have been useful. Commonwealth Avenue in Boston, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, is cited as the precedent. But that street was much wider and its central mall was designed with a pedestrian walkway intended for promenades, whereas Monument Avenue's mall was planted with grass. There were strong community-making goals as well as aesthetic goals associated with Olmsted's design that may not have been fully translated to the Richmond context.

A more conspicuous missing story is what the public space of the street was like and how it was used. It would be helpful to know such things as the dimensions of the street's cross-sectional elements, how the roadways and sidewalks were surfaced, and the types of trees and their spacing.

The 1880s to 1920s, when the street was laid out and developed, was a time of rapidly changing transportation technologies.

Was Monument Avenue the scene of carriage promenades as were other great tree-lined boulevards and avenues in the late 19th century? Were there conflicts over use of the street space as bicycles and then autos appeared on the scene?

Subsequently, the 1930s through 1960s were a time when traffic engineers in American cities were developing citywide transportation plans, designing freeways and expressways, and classifying existing inner city streets as arterials and then widening them or reconfiguring traffic flows to improve their through-moving performance. It would be interesting to know how such plans affected Monument Avenue. Changes in traffic flow patterns, from two-way to one-way are alluded to, but we are not told how long this arrangement has been in effect and what the impact has been in terms of traffic counts, noise, or congestion.

And what of daily life? The book has a lot in it; it could have more.

Elizabeth Macdonald
Assistant Professor in Urban Design
University of British Columbia

Morisset, Lucie K. *La mémoire du paysage. Histoire de la forme urbaine d'un centre-ville : Saint-Roch, Québec*. Québec : Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2001. Pp. 286. Illustrations, bibliographie, index.

À la lecture de ce livre, on conçoit facilement qu'une future monographie consacrée à la ville de Québec pourrait s'intituler *A Tale of Two Cities* ou encore plus correctement *Deux solitudes*. Dès les premières pages, l'auteure annonce que, par son histoire, le quartier Saint-Roch ne s'est jamais confondu avec la Haute-Ville. C'est même souvent un antagonisme entre les deux parties qui marque cette histoire. Aux origines de Québec, les successeurs de Champlain abandonnent son projet d'ériger dans la plaine de la rivière Saint-Charles une ville à la gloire du roi et, tout au long du XVII^e siècle, concentrent leurs efforts sur la formation d'une cité sur les hauteurs du cap Diamant. Au XVIII^e siècle, les projets de fortifications maintiennent Saint-Roch hors des limites de la ville et ce faubourg se développe beaucoup plus lentement que le faubourg Saint-Jean aux portes du Vieux-Québec. Le siècle suivant fait bien miroiter de beaux projets d'embellissement pour Saint-Roch, mais c'est l'industrie et le commerce qui façonnent son image pendant que la nouvelle capitale établit ses quartiers à la Haute-Ville. Quant au XX^e siècle, l'auteure le présente sous le signe de la concurrence entre Saint-Roch et la Haute-Ville jusqu'au terrassement final du premier ou jusqu'à ce que la cité institutionnelle vienne à la rescousse de la ville industrielle et commerciale en faillite.

Quand Lucie K. Morisset a entrepris son étude de Saint-Roch en 1995, cette renaissance était déjà bien amorcée et les résultats avaient commencé à susciter de l'enthousiasme parmi ceux que ce *no man's land* avait affligés durant plus de trente ans. Touchée, comme plusieurs, par les progrès de cette vaste entreprise, elle se réjouit de voir ce quartier renouer avec son passé ou, comme elle dirait plutôt, avec sa tradition. Son objectif déclaré, en effet, était « de retrouver la cause et la cohérence [au-

rait-il plutôt fallu lire : la cause de la cohérence?] de la forme urbaine actuelle ».

Le résultat de son travail est un précieux instrument apte à susciter un long débat non seulement sur l'objet particulier de son étude mais aussi sur la vie des villes en général. Si Saint-Roch a conservé sa mémoire (c'est le titre de son ouvrage), on peut tout aussi adéquatement soutenir qu'il s'est constamment renouvelé en se défaisant de ce qui l'avait marqué. Il n'existe plus une seule trace de son industrie navale. Il a perdu aussi toute son industrie du cuir, même si plusieurs de ses bâtiments servent maintenant à loger des lofts. Si des projets inspirés de la *City Beautiful* ont paré le quartier à la fin du XIX^e siècle, cela se voit bien peu aujourd'hui. Le parc Victoria, qui en fut la principale réalisation, sinon la seule, est moins que l'ombre de lui-même. Les promenades aménagées il y a quelque trente ans sur les berges de la rivière Saint-Charles, après qu'on en eut détourné le cours, sont en voie de subir le même sort. Saint-Roch n'a jamais été non plus un quartier institutionnel, contrairement à ce qu'il est en train de devenir depuis qu'on y a transféré la bibliothèque municipale, le palais de justice ainsi que des facultés universitaires. L'industrie et le commerce ont toujours été le moteur de son développement et rien n'indique qu'il retrouvera la vitalité commerciale de jadis. Alors que le quartier s'est toujours développé par ses propres forces jusqu'à son déclin, il lui faut maintenant une aide externe pour se remettre sur pied. Sa population aussi change. Les petits artisans du XVIII^e siècle puis les travailleurs de l'industrie au XIX^e sont remplacés par les *yuppies* de l'an 2000.

À l'opposé de ce portrait d'une évolution discontinue, Saint-Roch conserve toutefois des traces de son passé architectural et plusieurs de ses édifices sont aujourd'hui remis en valeur. Plus encore qu'à sa tradition architecturale, il est demeuré fidèle à sa trame urbaine. Et c'est ici que se situe le principal sujet d'étude de Lucie Morisset. Relater la formation, pendant longtemps lente, de la résille du plan de Saint-Roch constitue le fil conducteur de son ouvrage. La rue De Saint-Vallier qui sillonne le quartier de part en part suit le même parcours depuis l'époque de Champlain. Quant au tracé orthogonal qui a laissé son empreinte à la grandeur du quartier, il tire son origine des premiers plans de Dubois Berthelot de Beaujours pour son aménagement au début du XVIII^e siècle. Les rues qui s'écartent de cette grille, comme la rue Dorchester, et d'autres artères majeures, tel le boulevard Langelier, s'alignent sur les limites mêmes des domaines cédés en 1663, comme preuve que Saint-Roch a bien conservé dans le tracé de ses rues la mémoire des premières interventions humaines.

Que l'auteure ait réussi, pour notre bénéfice, à mettre en lumière ces deux perceptions opposées de l'histoire de Saint-Roch, soit celle de la continuité et celle de la discontinuité, en dépit de son objectif de faire la démonstration de la première, témoigne du riche contenu de son ouvrage et de l'objective rigueur avec laquelle elle traite son sujet. Par le biais d'une analyse minutieuse de nombreux plans, elle suit à la trace l'apparition puis l'évolution du moindre tronçon de rue et de ruelle. Cette monographie s'appuie en effet sur une connaissance pointue du sujet. Elle fut précédée d'une étude complète du parcel-