

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Reps, John W. *Cities of the American West: A History of Frontier Urban Planning*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. Pp. xiii, 827. Illustrations. \$75.00 (U.S.)

Gerald Friesen

Volume 10, numéro 3, february 1982

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019087ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019087ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Friesen, G. (1982). Compte rendu de [Reps, John W. *Cities of the American West: A History of Frontier Urban Planning*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. Pp. xiii, 827. Illustrations. \$75.00 (U.S.)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 10(3), 72–73. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019087ar>

theme of "international transfers," and the book concludes with a disappointingly brief review of the anti-planning debate. Planners, at least, are not likely to find much that is fresh or disturbing in this last essay, which suggests that urban historians are not yet familiar with the large, critical literature spawned by the planning movement over the past ten or fifteen years.

On balance, problems of selection and arrangement aside, I am strongly of the view that it was right to publish these books. As in all collections culled from conference proceedings, the editors cannot escape a stream of criticisms – that their material is uneven, in various senses; that it lacks unifying conceptions (what is "planning history"?); and that the purpose of the collection is unclear. Yet I, for one, am pleased to see most of these particular essays in print; and even more pleased to see the series launched.

P.J. Smith
Department of Geography
University of Alberta

Sutcliffe, A. *The History of Urban and Regional Planning: An Annotated Bibliography*. London: Mansell, 1980. Pp.284. £12.95.

When the Planning History Group was established in 1974 a decision was made to compile and publish a comprehensive bibliography listing all major contributions to the study of the history of urban and regional planning. Anthony Sutcliffe prepared a bibliography for the inaugural meeting of the group, and in 1977 published an expanded bibliography in monograph form with some 650 citations (see review of this bibliography in *U.H.R.*, October, 1980).

The History of Urban and Regional Planning: An Annotated Bibliography is an updated and expanded version of the 1977 bibliography. It contains some 1,400 citations, all of which are briefly annotated. The annotations are generally one or two sentences long, and they provide useful information which supplements the title of the work.

Though it is a very large bibliography, it is very well organized and, therefore, very easy to use. The material has been divided into eight major subject categories. An index of names (people and places) and an index of authors is provided. The introduction contains a concise review of the history and historiography of urban and regional planning.

The eight subject categories are:

1. Planning history: definitions, methods and objectives.

2. Encyclopaedias, guides and bibliographies.
3. Planning as a world movement.
4. Planning in individual countries.
5. Planning in individual towns and cities.
6. Individual planners.
7. Nineteenth-century antecedents (e.g., utopian tradition, model communities, garden cities).
8. Aspects of urban and regional planning (e.g., urban renewal, transport, zoning, new towns, regional planning).

It appears that all the Canadian planning history literature published prior to early 1980 has been included. The general section on Canada contains eighteen citations and the section on individual towns and cities includes eleven Canadian municipalities.

The bibliography is also very easy to use because a great deal of discretion has been exercised over what qualifies for inclusion. This is clearly a planning *history* bibliography. It is not a general planning bibliography with a lot of history citations. Sutcliffe has only included material which has for its main purpose the study of planning over a period of time or material which studies some specific event after it has occurred. This excludes general planning literature and works in which historical references are only incidental. Primary material, such as published collections of letters, documents or plans, have also been excluded. Unpublished university theses have been included.

This is and will remain for a long time to come a very important reference work. One could not ask for a more thorough or better organized bibliography.

J.D. Hulchanski
Centre for Urban and Community Studies
University of Toronto

Reps, John W. *Cities of the American West: A History of Frontier Urban Planning*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. Pp.xiii, 827. Illustrations. \$75.00 (U.S.)

John Reps will be familiar to specialists in urban studies as the dean of city planning historians. His work, *The Making of Urban America* (1965), is a landmark in the field and his more specialized studies on Washington, on colonial Virginia and Maryland, and on mid-western cities are well-known. His interest in western America has already resulted in *Cities on Stone: Nineteenth Century Lithograph Images of the Urban West* (1976), which he published in association with the Amon Carter Museum, but the present volume is the full-scale production for which the former was preparation.

The thesis of *Cities of the American West*, which is supported by such a wealth of detail as to be incontrovertible,

is that, contrary to the views of F.J. Turner, cities preceded rather than followed the settler into the West. Moreover, these western cities did not grow haphazardly from chance beginnings but rather developed according to premeditated designs, often as a consequence of surveys and plats prepared by ambitious entrepreneurs. They were, in short, the result of conscious "urban planning." In a series of chapters whose very organization is a valuable contribution to urban study, Reps distinguishes among the styles and eras of city development, including the eighteenth-century French, English and Spanish colonial heritage and the nineteenth-century western American variations. In the latter, he describes Mormon cities, central plains and pacific northwest cities, mine towns, railway centres, and the instant towns of Oklahoma. In these chapters, the founding of literally dozens of cities is examined, each in turn, within the larger economic and political context.

Organization and scope are strengths of the book, but so too are the illustrations. Indeed, the more than 500 surveys, sketches, pictures, plats and promotional plans, including thirty-two beautiful colour plates (half of the latter are bird's eye views) make the volume a collector's item.

Reps has firm views on what constitutes sensible urban planning and is generally dismayed by the absence of "proper" values in the creation of western towns. Though he does not outline his criteria in systematic fashion, they can be discerned from his use of adjectives and his distribution of praise and criticism. The chapter on Nebraska towns illustrates his perspective. The "unimaginative" plats of the Missouri River towns which were created in the 1850s were based upon monotonous rectangular grids and did not provide for parks, vistas, or other urban amenities: "None exhibited much skill in town design.... Speed and speculative advantage were the two principal criteria in the design of towns in this region and period – not beauty or monumentality." By contrast, the plat of the state capital, Lincoln, was an "interesting design, by all odds the most successful adopted for a Nebraska community...."

In its generous provision of public sites and open spaces; its recognition that major public buildings could be so located as to provide vistas down major streets; its differentiation of lot sizes between those intended for business and those to be used for residential purposes; and its variation of street widths depending on proposed functions, this plan ranks high among those of western America. Moreover, and more important, the three-dimensional city that developed on this two-dimension plan became one of the most impressive and pleasant communities of the country.

Reps believes that urban planning necessarily has social consequences. And he seems to have concluded that, despite the infinite opportunities of the frontier where thou-

sands of communities were waiting to be called into existence and to have their character defined, the story of western planning is one of challenges failed. Only the Mormons and Spaniards receive high marks for interest in planned congenial communities. The establishment of most towns was marked by speculation, haste, and monotony.

The text is dotted with such contemporary observations as the 1869 story of a rail construction camp. These supply centres, including buildings and people, often moved with the track-laying crews. When one such centre arrived in Cheyenne, Wyoming from Julesburg, Colorado, it filled an entire freight train – frame houses, furniture, tents and "all the rubbish which makes up one of the mushroom 'cities.'"

The guard jumped off his van, and seeing some friends on the platform, called out with a flourish, 'Gentlemen, here's Julesburg.' The next train probably brought some other 'city' to lose forever its identity in the great Cheyenne.

Reps' volume is difficult to fit into a category: it is at once a picture book, a survey of urban planning, an encyclopedia of town plats and a narrative on western urban history. It is not notably theoretical; its conclusions can be summarized in a few brief sentences; its contribution to the science of urban planning is apparently confined to a list of past mistakes. But to stop here is to miss the virtues of a lifetime devoted to methodical research on a single important subject. The strength of Reps' work lies precisely in its scope. He has collected between two covers all the attempts to plan "new" towns between the Mississippi and the Pacific. He has described the process of site selection, the basis of physical design and the evolution of streetscapes in the early years of several hundred urban centres. For an introduction to any given western town, the student need go no further. And, for a perspective upon the urban development of a quarter of a continent, every scholar will start first with this volume.

Gerald Friesen
Department of History
University of Manitoba

Hirshorn, Paul, and Izenour, Steven. *White Towers*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979. Pp.viii, 190. \$9.95 (U.S.)

Few of the Canadians who made pilgrimages to the glittering cities of the Northeast and Midwest of the United States in the 1940s and 1950s could fail to notice the White Tower chain of fast-food restaurants. They seemed to embody so much of what made American cities a magnet in those days: their bright white facades and plate glass windows bespoke shiny modernity; their fast service typified the frantic pace of life that made slow Canadian