
Robert McDonald
viduals supported health reforms and spear-headed the
demand for an extension of services during the Progressive
Years. Her insights concerning the motivations, activities,
and impact of the reformers is carried through into her dis­
cussion of Milwaukee’s attempt to lower infant mortality
and to combat influenza in 1918.

Leavitt concludes her work by presenting an evalua­
tion of the factors which she believes have determined the suc­
cess or failure of health reform in general. She summarizes
her six categories as “the nature of the issue, medical theory
and abilities, economic interests, political pressures, indi­
vidual actions, and social and cultural diversities” (p. 241). Her
conclusions are both convincing and inspiring; convincing
because they so clearly put Milwaukee’s experience into per­
spective and inspiring because they suggest a model for
Canadian and American urban historians to emulate. All in
all, Leavitt’s monograph is an excellent first step towards a
North American overview of public health reform.

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Cranz, Galen. The Politics of Park Design: A History of
Urban Parks in America. Cambridge, Mass. and London,
tions. $25.00 (U.S.).

The Politics of Park Design is the first history of “the
American park movement in one account, not restricted to
one city, one region, or one period” (p. xi). Basing her study
on the assumption that urban parks developed in a “remark­
ably homogeneous” fashion, sociologist Galen Cranz traces
the history of city parks in three centres, New York, Chicago
and San Francisco. The book first examines the evolution of
public parks ideology from 1850 to the present, focussing on
the assumptions and ideals of park promoters and adminis­
trators. The second half assesses the socio-economic position
of park enthusiasts and park recipients, concluding with sug­
gestions for future park development in the United States.

The core of this volume is to be found in Cranz’s typology
of four ideal types of urban parks, each representing a stage
in the park movement’s overall development. Public parks
first took the form of “pleasure grounds,” which dated from
1850 to 1900. Planned according to a coherent body of prin­
ciples based on the artistic concept of the picturesque, the
pleasure ground was meant to draw together families from
all social classes. An institution advanced by middle class
reformers and aesthetic idealists, the “romantic” pleasure
ground, with its curved lines and natural contours, was
intended to serve as a counterpoise to the harsh realities of
urban life. The “reform park” that followed centred more
narrowly on children and, to a lesser extent, working class
men. Built upon the progressive reformers’ faith in speciali­
zation and expert guidance, the park now became a smaller
but more highly structured ground where professional
supervisors would organize play. In so doing it would act as
a vehicle of social progress. But the moral vision and philo­
osophical consistency of early park designs gave way after
1930 to facilities where recreation services, regardless of type,
were to be delivered on demand. The loss of idealism asso­
ciated with this “public service” approach to park planning
led to increasing bureaucratization of park systems and an
emphasis on efficient management at the expense of reform.
Cranz’s final stage of development, the least convincing of
her models, is defined as the post-1965 era of the “open­
space system.” Predicated on an “anything goes” philo­
osophy, parks now took on any shape, size or function, often
embracing elements of popular culture that had previously
been excluded from parks, even in the recent “recreational
facilities” era.

The value of Cranz’s sociological approach is to be found
in the clarity with which new directions in park planning are
isolated and identified. She provides an analytical frame­
work currently missing in the American literature on urban
parks. Such precision also serves to obscure the complexity
of park history, however. Cranz’s model, which emphasizes
the typical characteristics of contemporary thinking in each
period, overlooks the extent to which traditional attitudes
about parks persisted across the sharply-defined temporal
boundaries of her typology. Referred to as “layering,” this
continuity is mentioned but not analyzed. Similarly, by
organizing the book so rigorously into chapters according to
function (principles, promoters, users, beneficiaries, role of
parks), Cranz has isolated from one another her examina­
tion of park principles and the sources that nourished them.
A narrative format might have integrated cause and effect
more fully while sharpening the work’s analytical thrust.

Of more concern is the extent to which The Politics of
Park Design is a comprehensive history of urban parks in
the United States. While the sub-title suggests otherwise, it
is not. One has to question the extent to which metropolitan
trends, evident in large centres like New York, extended
throughout the urban system. In addition, one wonders what
proportion of new parks created during the 1900-1930 period
were “reform parks,” and what proportion were merely utili­
itarian grounds laid out in response to the growing popular
demand for athletic fields. Comments about public use of
parks notwithstanding, The Politics of Park Design is writ­
ten essentially from the top down, focussing on the ideas of
park innovators. But recent literature suggests a different
approach to park history. It stresses that, historically, soci­
ety’s lower middle and working classes had their own views
of how public space should be used, a perspective not encom­
passed in the “four distinct constellations” of ideas about
city parks discovered by Cranz (p. x). Roy Rosenzweig, in
an essay cited in Cranz’s bibliography, argues that in the

If set in this wider context, the historical examination of Canada's urban parks promises important new insights into the nature of the Canadian urban experience. Despite its flaws, Galen Cranz's book can provide a useful starting point for this pursuit. Her work offers a number of hypotheses that can be tested for Canada. In addition, a comparative approach will raise obvious questions about the extent to which the British influence in Canada and the Progressive movement in the United States shaped unique park histories in the two North American countries.

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NOTES


Artifacts and the American Past was read in considerable anticipation and is reviewed with some regret. The anticipation was based upon the promise of the title and the reputation of its author, Thomas J. Schlereth, as an enthusiast for innovative urban history. His previous calls for a historic study of the city, represented by "The City as Artifact" in the AHA Newsletter (February, 1977), characterized the most creative thrust of a multi-disciplinary, integrated urban historicism. "Artifacts and the American Past" suggest an attempt by a scholar interested in urban history to focus the methodologies and perspectives evolved in that field on smaller objects. Whether a subject is a thimble or a skyscraper and whether the context is a button collection or an urban landscape, the material creations of a civilization represent its technological and intellectual endowments. Despite the sustained, disciplined analysis directed at our cities, relatively little parallel attention has been brought to bear upon our smaller material culture. It was hoped that Artifacts and the American Past would channel some of the riches of the one field onto its undernourished neighbour, but regretfully it does not.

The book is divided into three major sections, the first of which deals with graphics as artifacts. Three categories of documentation, photographs, mail-order catalogues and maps, are assessed for their historical potential. In each instance, a good case is made for the use of the specific documentary genre as a source of information, and guidelines are offered to aid converts in their task. While the particular material is American rather than Canadian, the author, in his references and asides, is clearly aware that his statements pertain to this country as to his own. The reader need only substitute "Eaton's" for "Sears, Roebuck and Co." and "Goad" for "Sanborn" to give the chapters a familiar ring. Indeed it is the familiar ring that may cause the reader some apprehension. However apt the points the author is making may be, and however well-documented his train of thought, there is little that is new in these chapters. The real achievement is an admirably thorough review of the American literature, rendering the footnotes a useful guide for further reading. The essays themselves, two of which have been published elsewhere, are distantly removed from the archival frontier, though ably done.

In the second section, "Historic Sites as Artifacts," the author has his greatest opportunity to review the use of small-scale artifacts in historical interpretation. Three types of institutions are considered: historic houses, museum villages and the 1876 Philadelphia International Exhibition. Each has its own chapter, all of which are reprints of previously-published articles. Despite some hints at analytical techniques and references to books actually containing analyses, the treatment of historic houses amounts to a brief review of several strategies for using such institutions in teaching. Schlereth believes admirably that more history can be taught outside the classroom than is currently done, and his approaches are offered in the hope that they will be used, but the ploy of approaching historic houses as teaching devices does not develop the already-established theme of explaining alternate historical sources. Museum villages are also approached as an instructional tool. Included is an apt warning that the image projected may not accord closely to...