

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Dennis, Richard. *Landlords and Rented Housing in Toronto, 1885-1914*. Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, July 1987. Pp. iv, 57. Maps. \$6.00

Harris, Richard. *The Growth of Home Ownership in Toronto, 1899-1913*. Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, July 1978. Pp. iv, 35. Maps. \$5.00

Choko, Marc H. *The Characteristics of Housing Tenure in Montreal*. Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, November 1987. Pp. iv, 31. Maps

Randall White

Volume 17, numéro 1, juin 1988

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1017705ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017705ar>

[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

White, R. (1988). Compte rendu de [Dennis, Richard. *Landlords and Rented Housing in Toronto, 1885-1914*. Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, July 1987. Pp. iv, 57. Maps. \$6.00 / Harris, Richard. *The Growth of Home Ownership in Toronto, 1899-1913*. Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, July 1978. Pp. iv, 35. Maps. \$5.00 / Choko, Marc H. *The Characteristics of Housing Tenure in Montreal*. Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, November 1987. Pp. iv, 31. Maps]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 17(1), 49–50. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017705ar>

All Rights Reserved © Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine, 1987

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

éerudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

rooms in which furniture was moved from place to place to accommodate the various daily activities of eating, sleeping, entertaining and working.

Rybczynski describes a typical household in the 17th century and the emergence during that time of the earliest characteristic of a home, privacy. The development of a more "nuclear" family, consisting of a married couple, their children and a few servants, combined with a growing sense of privacy and private intimacy, he argues, led to the more familiar family household. A fundamental change in domestic design followed this evolution, resulting in separate rooms for family members and servants.

In dealing with the next characteristic of "home", the author turns his attention to events in the Netherlands. Dutch laws limiting the hiring of servants resulted in family members assuming increasing responsibility for home maintenance. This presaged the more recent era in North America, when servants for the middle-class became virtually non-existent, their function taken over by over by labour-saving technologies. Invariably, housework became the responsibility of women, for at the same time, according to Rybczynski, the male-dominated workplace became separated from the home. The neat, tidy homes of the Dutch, with their modest dimensions and tasteful, uncluttered ornament, is, for Rybczynski, the bridge between the the middle ages and modern idea of the home. Uncomplicated, but comfortable furniture, low-maintenance decor (because of the lack of servants) and simple appearance reflected two key developments: the feminization of the home and the view of the home as the serene, refuge of comfort and family recreation.

In discussing the evolution of the modern home, one cannot avoid the subject of furniture and appliances. Rybczynski addresses these in chapters that deal with the evolution of domestic decoration and

design and with the development of "home economics" or "domestic engineering."

These changes emerged with the transition between the western European household and the nuclear family of middle-class America, where technical entrepreneurialism combined with a democratic distaste for servants facilitated the development of labour-saving devices and the professionalization of the homemaker.

Furniture design and interior decoration were both influenced by the increasing functionalism and efficiency of the modern home. The "form follows function" adage of Le Corbusier and other modernists brought about the clean, uncluttered lines and smooth curves of Art Deco. The home became an efficient machine, entering the modern era. In his treatment of the "machine age" house Rybczynski comes full circle. In the final chapter, he posits the need for a renewed sense of "bourgeoisie tradition" in the design of our homes.

While he does not reject modernism, Rybczynski seeks to soften it with a deeper understanding of comfort. To do this he draws from traditions that he might say were too readily abandoned with the coming of the machine age. Many contemporary practices must be questioned and some lost traditions must be adapted to modern life, he argues. For instance, the frugal spaces and simple materials of 17th century Dutch bourgeois homes tell us much about our own small, single-family homes and the style of life in them; and homes of Victorian design are instructive in regard to the provision of privacy and the inclusion of innovation without loss of comfort. (Rybczynski claims that modern trends toward open-concept design provide us with less privacy than any other time since the medieval period.) His argument establishes a middle ground between the uncritical adoption of change and unrealistic attempts to revive the past that are no longer workable. The criterion for accepting a design principle is how much it contributes to human comfort, not whether it

is traditional, modern or post-modern in origin.

Home : A Short History of an Idea is an abundantly readable book in the tradition of Lewis Mumford or Jane Jacobs. While it may lack the rigour that follows from the use of original data, preferring instead to pick and choose from secondary sources, its argument is compelling and eloquently made. The author's style is most pleasant and the work is a thought-provoking reinterpretation of history. This is the broad stroke at work.

Bruce Krushnelnicki
Urban and Environmental Studies
Brock University

Dennis, Richard. *Landlords and Rented Housing in Toronto, 1885-1914*. Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, July 1987. Pp. iv, 57. Maps. \$6.00;

Harris, Richard. *The Growth of Home Ownership in Toronto, 1899-1913*. Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, July 1978. Pp. iv, 35. Maps. \$5.00;

Choko, Marc H. *The Characteristics of Housing Tenure in Montreal*. Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, November 1987. Pp. iv, 31. Maps.

These three papers, based on presentations at a housing tenure workshop sponsored by the Centre for Urban and Community Studies in February 1987, pursue a common discussion. The point of departure is succinctly set out in Harris's paper on the growth of home ownership during the Toronto boom period in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In round numbers, the percentage of owner-occupied housings units in the city increased from slightly more than 25% in the 1890s to nearly 50% by the eve of World War I. Harris and Dennis offer different though not

incompatible views to explaining the trend. To provide comparative depth, Choko looks at the different experience in Montreal, which has traditionally had a notably lower percentage of owner-occupied housing.

Dennis, who teaches at University College, London, was at the time of the conference, a visiting research associate at the Centre. As he put it: "Given my own background, I have chosen to compare the market in Toronto with that in Britain, rather than, as is currently fashionable, to examine parallels and contrasts with the United States." Like other of his colleagues in the New World, both past and present, Dennis is skeptical about the apparent Anglo-American bias towards owner-occupied housing. (One also has the impression that his skepticism has been strengthened by Margaret Thatcher's recent efforts to import the bias into the United Kingdom.) He notes that a key variable in the home ownership boom of the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Toronto was an unusually short supply of rental housing in a rapidly growing city. In pursuing this explanation, he points a finger at the broader "business strategies" of a small and integrated group of large landlords, whose partnerships included financial and familial elements.

Harris, on the other hand, sees Toronto under the more general rubric of the the "North American City." He too observes the tight rental market at the turn of the century, but stresses the demand rather than the supply side of the home ownership boom. For several different kinds of families in the rapidly growing city, the owner-occupied "home and the domestic economy it contains" held out advantages that rental housing could not match. He is particularly good at showing the different advantages that the home ownership boom offered different elements in the urban social structure. He illustrates how "self-building" on cheap lots at the suburban fringes of the city (especially by working-class immigrants from Britain) made the boom much more than a traditional middle-class phenomenon. He

also links this side of the story with early suburbanization trends in the Toronto manufacturing sector.

Choko's paper deals with both the narrow question of why Montreal did not experience the same boom in home ownership during this period, and the broader question of why home ownership has played a comparatively modest role in the 20th century growth of the city. Choko expresses pronounced skepticism towards explanations stressing French/English Canadian cultural differences. He notes that the experience of Montreal, not Toronto, has the most in common with that of New York, London and Paris (as opposed to Halifax, Winnipeg and Vancouver). He suggests "it may be as much through an analysis of why Torontonians became owner-occupants to such a large extent, as through explaining why Montrealers did not, that we will start to properly understand the different processes involved."

All three papers, in their own way, stress the crucial importance of additional comparative research regarding trends in Canada, the United States and Europe. All three make it clear that there are several "different processes involved" that must be taken into consideration before a full explanation can be posited. Each presents interesting data, that, when taken together, point convincingly at some important examples of the relevant processes at work. There may be others, however. Harris, for instance, while considering the role of the emerging urban, middle-class (without servants), omits discussion of the cultural ties between them and the American agrarian/frontier democratic tradition. None of the papers explicitly considers the extent to which the North American owner-occupied single family home is the urban successor of the rural family farm of the frontier era.

Such questions will have to be addressed before the whole story is told. Until then, Dennis, Harris and Choko have defined some provocative research questions and

have shed light on an intriguing aspect in the growth of Canadian cities.

Randall White
Toronto, Ontario

Whitehand, J.W.R. *The Changing Face of Cities: A Study of Development Cycles and Urban Form*. The Institute of British Geographers Special Publication Series. No. 21. Oxford: Blackwell, 1987. Pp. viii, 189. Figures and Index. \$68.75.

The landscape of the city reflects the way of life of its inhabitants. In contemporary Canadian cities, for example, the separation of home from work embodies a separation of paid from unpaid labour and a marked division by gender. Cities both reflect and facilitate our way of life, so it is not surprising that most urban historians and geographers have long shown at least passing interest in the subject. Only a few, however, have treated the development of city form as a matter to be examined in its own right.

The Changing Face of Cities is an attempt to systematize thinking on the subject. The author, a geographer in Birmingham, England, builds on a tradition of morphological research that originated in Germany and that has been most prominently developed in English language literature by M.R.G. Conzen. This branch of urban geography emphasizes the uniqueness of place. While acknowledging this, Whitehand extends the tradition by attempting to discern general patterns and processes in landscape development.

Cities do not grow steadily, but in more or less regular bursts of activity. Accordingly, Whitehand builds his framework upon an analysis of building cycles (Chapter 2). Using evidence from a variety of countries, he shows that such cycles often complement rather than mirror more general economic trends, and that they are themselves composed of discrete elements. Booms and