

Roy Lubove – 1934-1995

Edward K. Muller
University of Pittsburgh

On March 9, 1996, scholars, former students, local preservation activists, friends, and family gathered for a symposium at the University of Pittsburgh to celebrate the brilliant, scholarly career of Roy Lubove, who died a year earlier on February 17, 1995. Entitled "Shaping the Urban Society of Twentieth Century America," the symposium featured five social historians, presenting commentaries on different aspects of Lubove's scholarship. A sixth speaker recounted Lubove's recent and passionate advocacy of preserving Pittsburgh's historic landscape. At a reception following the symposium, the University of Pittsburgh Press unveiled Lubove's sixth and final book, the posthumously published *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh: The Post-Steel Era*.¹ The five symposium papers and Raymond Mohl's extended review of *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh: The Post-Steel Era* are collected in this issue of *Pennsylvania History* as a testimony to Lubove's scholarly achievement. For not only were his prolific writings during the 1960s significant for the development of American social history, but he also became the preeminent historian of twentieth-century Pittsburgh.

Lubove's interests ranged broadly from the history of social welfare policy and the emergence of the social work profession to housing reform, landscape design, urban planning, and the history of Pittsburgh. Yet, these seemingly disparate topics of his writing were tied together by a central theme: America's efforts to address the social problems accompanying the nation's transformation from a rural society to an urban industrial one at the end of the nineteenth century.² Lubove delineated the inadequacies of traditional private, voluntary institutions for resolving the poverty and degraded environment of the emerging mass soci-

1. Roy Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh: Vol. II, The Post Steel Era* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996).

2. See Edward K. Muller, "Tribute to Roy Lubove, 1934-1995," *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 22, No. 6 (1996), 675-86.

ety, and traced the struggles of progressives to develop professional institutions and governmental interventions, which could, they believed, fashion more appropriate and successful social welfare responses and environmental reforms. That five scholars each focused on a different part of Lubove's work speaks to the impressive breadth of his scholarship. That each scholar found Lubove's work important to his own intellectual development in the 1960s underscores its exceptional quality and significance.

Lubove was born on September 3, 1934, in Jackson Heights, Queens, New York to a family of Polish immigrants. He was the grandson of a Talmudic scholar, and the son of a small laundry owner³ As David Schuyler points out in his essay, there is reason to believe that his childhood experience of apartment living in densely developed Jackson Heights influenced his lifelong interest in neighborhood structure, urban planning, and landscape design. Perhaps the fact that he grew up during the Great Depression and World War II similarly explains his concern with poverty and social welfare. Lubove matriculated at the competitive Bronx High School of Science, went to Columbia University on a scholarship, and after graduating in 1956 entered Cornell University for graduate study in American history. His doctoral advisor, David B. Davis, remembered him as a brilliant and independent student, who finished his doctoral degree in only four years.⁴

Lubove accepted an appointment to the Department of History at Harvard University in 1960, and joined Oscar Handlin's Center for the Study of Liberty in America. Handlin later wrote introductions to two of Lubove's books. While at Harvard, Lubove submitted his dissertation to the University of Pittsburgh Press, which published a revised version of it in 1963 entitled *The Progressives and the Slums: Tenement House Reform in New York City, 1890-1917*. Acquisition of this book was nearly as pleasing to the Press's associate editor and soon to be its new director, Frederick A. Hetzel, as it was to the author, for it represented a step in broadening the Press's horizons. Under the aggressive leadership of Chancellor Edwin Litchfield, the University of Pittsburgh was emerging as a major research university. Discussion of manuscript revisions with the press brought Lubove to the attention of historian Samuel P.

3. Interview with Carole Klein (Roy Lubove's former wife), August 24, 1995.

4. Letter from David B. Davis to Professor Arden E. Melzer, December 10, 1995. The letter is in the possession of Professor Melzer, a close friend and former colleague of Lubove's at the School of Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh.

Hays, who having been attracted by the university's ambitions, was rapidly rebuilding the Department of History into a leader in the new sub-discipline of social history. Recognizing the close fit of Lubove's scholarship with his social history vision, Hays recruited the young scholar to the university. However, concerned by reports that Lubove might be a difficult colleague, Hays secured a primary appointment for Lubove in 1963 in the School of Social Work with a joint appointment in the Department of History. Over the more than three decades of his tenure at the university, Lubove increasingly bridled at the belief that his historical and intellectual scholarly approach was not fully appreciated by Social Work's more applied and professional orientation.

Lubove was a publishing dynamo in his initial decade at the University of Pittsburgh. He wrote five books, edited five more, and published more than a dozen chapters and articles [see Bibliography in this issue]. In both monograph and essay form, he produced seminal works in the history of housing reform, the social work profession, and social welfare policy. In 1967, he laid out an influential approach to urban history, itself an emerging subdiscipline, which called on scholars to view urbanization as a "city-building process" understood through the interrelationships of social patterns and the built environment. In 1969 he illustrated what that meant with a monograph on Pittsburgh.⁵ While busily researching and writing the monographs and articles, he carefully selected documents and essays for three edited collections on housing, planning, poverty, and social welfare, and urged successfully the reprinting of two books, H.W.S. Cleveland's *Landscape Architecture as Applied to the Wants of the West*, and Jacob A. Riis's *The Making of an American* for which he added insightful introductions.

In this first and clearly most productive phase of his career, Lubove communicated with important historical figures when it was feasible. He always cherished his personal interviews with the aging giant of early twentieth-century housing reform, Lawrence Veiller. He corresponded with other leading figures like the architect and town planner Clarence Stein. But, undoubtedly the most important correspondence to him was an intermittent, decade-long exchange of letters with Lewis Mumford, Lubove's model of the intellectual-at-large writing on American life,

5. Roy Lubove, "The Urbanization Process: An Approach to Historical Research", *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (1967), pp. 33-39; and Roy Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh: Government, Business, and Environmental Change* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1969).

especially the city. Lubove posed questions to Mumford about housing reform and the Regional Planning Association of American, movements in which Mumford participated and about which he also wrote. Mumford answered at great length, adding reminiscences of key individuals, sharing his own writing, and at times taking issue with Lubove's interpretations. He heartily encouraged Lubove's endeavors, including the book on twentieth century Pittsburgh, and lavishly praised his finished work. After reading Lubove's manuscript of *The Progressives and the Slums*, the master wrote, "You have done your job so thoroughly, so sympathetically, and with such critical discernment that there is very little indeed that I can add...: I can only wish that more monographs of this order, dealing with matters equally important, were now being written."⁶ By early 1962, Mumford's salutations became more personal and warm. The two men never met in person, though they tried; but the young assistant professor in Pittsburgh must have found Mumford's interest, encouragement, and praise immensely exhilarating and satisfying.

All of Lubove's work in the 1960s explored historical aspects of current issues that were generating considerable political concern. Federal social welfare policies enacted in the 1930s and the progress of labor unions after World War II addressed problems of economic insecurity, inadequate savings, and poverty. Nonetheless, unions and welfare policy remained hotly contested political issues, while poverty persisted in rural areas, inner cities, and among the elderly. The political rediscovery of poverty at the end of the 1950s set off a national debate, resulting in legislative efforts to end this embarrassment at a time of economic prosperity. At the same time urban renewal, public housing, and highway building programs were America's primary means of attacking central city slums in the post-war period. Drawing on the longstanding, though simplistic and misguided belief that a good environment would create healthy and productive citizens, planners, local officials, and federal bureaucrats sought to clear away the slums and replace them with large residential and commercial developments designed on the principles of modernistic architecture. The resulting massive slum clearance projects eviscerated the social fabric of city neighborhoods, while the expressways, public housing projects, and office complexes that replaced the neighborhoods offered little for those displaced. Lubove's historical

6. Letters from Lewis Mumford to Roy Lubove, Roy Lubove Papers, Archives of Industrial Society, Hillman Library, University of Pittsburgh. The quotation is from September 10, 1962. See also, Kermit Carlyle Parsons, ed., *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein: Architect of the Planned Community* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 628.

examination of poverty, social welfare, social work, low-income housing, urban planning, and the urban landscape provided much need perspective on these persistent problems. As Professor Andrew Achenbaum notes in his essay, Lubove's work was innovative and relevant to policy issues, and therefore, he might be considered one of the first historians doing public history.

Lubove illuminated America's struggle to find the proper balance among individualism, volunteerism, and collectivism. His own stance on the proper balance changed during the 1960s. At first he argued that the private, volunteeristic tradition not only failed to address poverty and health problems at the turn-of-the-century, but also constrained the ability of professionals and government to shape successful policies. Social welfare laws, housing reforms, and planning proposals all reflected ideological compromises with proponents of individualism, private enterprise, volunteerism, and laissez-faire government. Lubove's historical assessment sympathized with governmental intervention on behalf of the poor and elderly, neighborhood-strengthening housing and community projects rather than dependence on housing regulations, and planning that promoted aesthetics and amenities over the chaotic development resulting from the unrestrained private market. By the end of the turbulent decade, however, he showed signs of having second thoughts about relying too heavily on governmental bureaucracies.

Lubove's great burst of writing ended in the middle of the 1970s. Other than book reviews and two contributed chapters, more than a decade elapsed before he resumed serious scholarly writing. Personal problems certainly played a major role in his withdrawal from scholarly engagement. First a divorce, caused in part by his intensive devotion to scholarship, left him dejected and lonely. Then, lung cancer nearly cost him his life. During these years Lubove turned his obsessive tendencies towards Chinese cooking, classical music, and photography. His apartment became cluttered with music albums and cassettes, slide file boxes, books (of course), and clippings from newspapers, magazines, and reports, which reflected his continuing interest in current issues.

Besides the transition in his personal life, Lubove completed the transformation of his political outlook. The concern he first evinced in *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh* for governmental bureaucracies grew into a libertarian philosophy by the 1980s. He no longer trusted government to provide only supportive roles that helped individuals and families succeed. Nor did he trust government to make wise decisions for shaping the urban landscape. Federal bureaucracies, he believed, intruded too heavily into people's lives and through excessive regulations and rules

impeded the creative energies of small businesses and community groups. Moreover, he saw government as another interest group among many; that is, he wrote, "the first purpose of government...is to serve government...to promote the power and welfare of officialdom."⁷ Lubove's earlier trenchant commentary on the failures of business, private market ideologues, and voluntary associations evolved into acerbic, withering blasts at governmental meddling and control, and at the failings of nearly all bureaucracies, whether public and private.

Despite his lack of participation in academic conferences and diminishing output, Lubove remained a respected scholar, who received frequent requests for book reviews and other scholarly contributions. One of the two chapters he agreed to write in this period of his life drew upon his early social welfare research to evaluate current claims of a "right" to health care. He expressed strong skepticism about the possibility of good national health care policy, perhaps in part reflecting his own recent encounter with the medical establishment. Rights, he argued, were only claims on the society, which had to be backed up with the power to obtain them. Further, any policy that might emerge around health care would inevitably reflect the "American strategy of social reform, which can be termed competitive collectivism." That is, significant elements of a program would be allocated to the private sector. And finally, were a well-conceived national health policy to emerge, Lubove believed, his "Iron Law of Social Legislation" would obtain, whereby "changing political and bureaucratic imperatives" would alter, detrimentally no doubt, the policy's original integrity.⁸ The other chapter Lubove wrote in this interim period demonstrated the shape of work that would come in his last years. In his 1980 essay entitled "Alternative Futures for Older Metropolitan Areas," Lubove attacked the idea that governmental policy could successfully prop up declining cities while ignoring broad demographic and market forces affecting the fortunes of cities.⁹ Moreover, federal governmental transfer payments that became permanent components of municipal budgets stifled local ini-

7. Roy Lubove, "The Right to Health Care: Ethical Imperatives vs. Enforceable Claims," in Ronald L. Numbers, ed., *Compulsory Health Insurance: The Continuing American Debate* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), p. 153.

8. Lubove, "The Right to Health Care," 153-154.

9. Roy Lubove, "Alternative Futures for Older Metropolitan Areas," in Edward W. Hanten, Mark J. Kasoff, and F. Stevens Redburn, eds., *New Directions for the Mature Metropolis* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1980).

tiatives aimed at adapting city economies to the new realities. While he discussed Pittsburgh at some length, the chapter was focused more generally on declining northern industrial cities. But, clearly he was already pondering his adopted city's encounter with deindustrialization and its consequences.

The combination of Lubove's persistent interest in public affairs, especially in Pittsburgh, the respect that colleagues held for him, and his new libertarian inclinations drew him back into the scholarly fray, albeit this time with a more local focus. Colleagues Samuel P. Hays and Andrew Achenbaum invited Lubove to pen two more pieces on social welfare in the 1980s, but these chapters involved little, if any, additional research.¹⁰

At the request of University of Pittsburgh Press Director Frederick Hetzel, who had just reprinted Lubove's *The Struggle for Social Security* and later asked him to provide an introduction to a reprint of John A. Fitch's famous volume in the 1909 Pittsburgh Survey, *The Steel Workers*, Lubove set out to write an epilogue for a reprinted edition of his 1969 *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh*.¹¹ His extensive clippings files and interest in the drastically changed circumstances of the city led to a new book that consumed his remaining years. Besides this work, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh: The Post-Steel Era*, he wrote three other essays on the city. Much of this writing elaborated the themes found in his 1980 chapter on "Alternative Futures for Older Metropolitan Areas." In *The Post-Steel Era* he did not just ignore important contributions of government to urban revitalization in the 1980s, he belittled federal bureaucrats. Instead, he praised the new, more inclusive public-private partnerships and extolled the work of community development corporations, which in his view respected neighborhood communities and their built environments in ways that bureaucratic experts, politicians, planners, and developers did not. Lubove stated more than once his belief that a century ago entrepreneurial-driven city-building filled the vacuum of an extremely pluralistic society that searched in vain for community cohe-

10. Roy Lubove, "Pittsburgh and the Uses of Social Welfare History," in Samuel P. Hays, ed., *City at the Point: Essays on the Social History of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989); and a new conclusion to the reprinting of his book, *The Struggle for Social Security, 1900-1935* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986; originally published by Harvard University Press in 1968). Andrew Achenbaum recommended to the University of Pittsburgh Press that it reprint this pathbreaking work.

11. Roy Lubove, "John A. Fitch: *The Steel Workers* and the Crisis of Democracy," introduction to a reprinted edition of John A. Fitch, *The Steel Workers* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989).

siveness and distrusted governmental control. Now he espied a more hopeful trend of government-supported, locally-based community groups taking on larger roles.

The 1980 chapter on "Alternative Futures" also signaled Lubove's resurgent concern for planning and design. He had written extensively in the 1960s about planning and landscape architecture as tools to improve society through environmental control and design, an integral part of the progressive reform tapestry. In pilgrimages to historically significant planned communities such as Sunnyside Gardens (New York City) and Pullman (Chicago), and through his photography and book reviews, he maintained this interest in landscape design. In the 1980 chapter he blamed some of the mistakes of urban redevelopment on the failure to consider adequately the social dimensions of architectural, landscape design, and planning environmental interventions. Three articles in the early 1990s, two of them on Pittsburgh, explored the importance of good landscape design for cities in the past and present.¹² Indeed, his conviction that political expediency, developers' profit fixations, and the trivial architecture of corporate marketing strategies (such as standardized McDonald restaurant architecture) were destroying the positive features of urban built environments led him into a public activism, which he had avoided in his life-long role as the dispassionate scholar.

Since Lubove's writing in the 1960s on cities, historic preservation had emerged as a new force shaping the urban landscape. In *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh: The Post Steel Era* and a 1992 essay, he traced the evolution of historic preservation in Pittsburgh in a generally favorable light. But the University of Pittsburgh's demolition of an historic building located one block from his office thrust him into the unlikely company of preservation activists.¹³ Outraged at the university's malicious disregard for the city's historic architecture, especially in the Oakland civic center district, Lubove worked with the new advocacy organization, Preservation Pittsburgh, to heighten the sensitivity of bureaucrats and public officials toward the larger issue of good landscape design. Writing letters to the newspaper and testifying at public hearings, he worked assiduously, for example, on behalf of an ordinance regulating

12. Roy Lubove, "Landscape, Landscape Architecture and Community Development," *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (1990), 143-152; Roy Lubove, "City Beautiful, City Banal: Design Advocacy and Historic Preservation in Pittsburgh," *Pittsburgh History*, Vol. 75, No. 1 (1992), 22-36; and Roy Lubove, "Pittsburgh's Allegheny Cemetery and the Victorian Garden of the Dead," *Pittsburgh History*, Vol. 75, No. 3 (1992), 148-156.

13. Lubove, "City Beautiful, City Banal," *Pittsburgh History*.

the size and location of billboards. He proclaimed to anyone willing to listen that oversized and inappropriately located billboards had become a "pestilence" on the landscape. He was amazed at his fondness for Pittsburgh, a city he viewed as provincial when he arrived in 1963. This affection led him to such passionate activism, although he bemoaned the time this activism took from his writing *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh: The Post Steel Era*. Little did he realize how precious that time was; his lung cancer returned in May 1994, and he died nine months later. Lubove spent the last few months of his life practically tethered to an oxygen supply feverishly completing revisions in the manuscript of this final book.

Although the intensity and commitment which Lubove had brought to his scholarly agenda in the 1960s had waned by the 1980s, he still discussed the topics of his scholarship, as well as those of current interest, with passion, surveyed the contemporary scene with a mixture of skepticism and cynicism, and peppered friends with reprints, xerox copies, and clippings of his writings. His mind was as sharp as ever; he demanded one's full attention in conversation. Older social historians across the nation still recognized Lubove's importance to their field. However, for the younger generation of scholars trained since 1980 his writings were simply early parts of the canon being superseded by the flood of subsequent research, new approaches, and shifting topical fads. Lubove's withdrawal from professional engagement and active research in the mid-1970s had removed him from the academic stage. His return to research in the 1990s did not restore his presence because the work focused on Pittsburgh and had only begun to be published when he died. Thus, Lubove's death came twenty years after he had made his mark on historical scholarship.

This special issue of *Pennsylvania History* honors this outstanding scholar and draws attention to his remarkable body of work. Each of the six authors casts a critical eye on Lubove's writing that falls within his own area of expertise. Lubove's work was immensely influential for the development of social history, and his scholarship holds up well decades later. Many scholars today are aware of one or more aspects of Lubove's work; however, few recognize that his writing on so many topics fit integrally together to form a coherent and insightful picture of a society engaged in the deadly serious process of sorting out its philosophical contradictions in order to address pressing social problems that endure as current issues. Lubove's body of work truly represents one of those instances when the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.