

Revisiting the Urban-Rural Continuum

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Jackson Heights, where historian Roy Lubove grew up in an Orthodox Jewish household, is precisely the kind of community he later delighted in exploring and writing about. Located in northwestern Queens, it was farmland thrust into the path of urbanization in the early twentieth century. In 1908 a real estate syndicate, the Queensboro Realty Company, purchased land in Jackson Heights, and in the following year, when the Queensboro Bridge opened to traffic, development began in earnest. The realty company platted the area as a rectangular grid, and over the next two decades it erected two-family houses and five and six story apartment buildings that continue to define the neighborhood. The development company prospered as the population of Queens soared from 152,999 in 1900 to 469,042 in 1920 to 1,079,129 in 1930. Jackson Heights, home to 3,800 residents in 1923, grew to 44,500 in 1930, an increase of 1,300 percent. In 1933, a year before Lubove's birth, the Independent subway extended to Roosevelt Avenue; with midtown Manhattan only an eighteen to twenty minute train ride away, the population of Jackson Heights would continue to rise dramatically.¹

Almost overnight what had been rolling farmland – “the cornfields of Queens,” in Mayor William J. Gaynor's words – had become streets and building sites. The physical fabric of Jackson Heights included the garden apartments Andrew J. Thomas had designed for the Queensboro Housing Corporation in the 1920s, which employed the block rather than the lot as the basic building unit and which, through greater economy in land use, allowed the creation of spacious courts and gardens. In *Community Planning in the 1920s* Lubove would praise Thomas's garden

1. Kenneth T. Jackson, et al., *Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven, 1995), s.v. “Queens” and “Jackson Heights”; Daniel Karatzas, *Jackson Heights: A Garden in the City* (privately printed, 1990), p. 117

apartments for moderate income residents and his contributions to the better-known work of Clarence S. Stein and Henry Wright. By the end of the 1930s, however, "the green space that had made Jackson Heights so suburban was rapidly engulfed by a frenzy of new construction." As a result, the landscape of Lubove's childhood was urban, a densely built area without the benefit of large parks and other landscaped amenities that graced the older boroughs of Manhattan and Brooklyn. Perhaps it is fitting, given Lubove's mature interest in the designed landscape, that the largest open spaces in the vicinity of Jackson Heights were cemeteries originally located in Queens because of its distance from the center of population.²

Not far from Jackson Heights, just a mile or so to the southwest, was Sunnyside Gardens, a modified garden city community designed by Stein and Wright and developed by Alexander Bing's City Housing Corporation, a philanthropic development company that attempted to create affordable dwellings by limiting dividends paid to investors. The most prominent resident of Sunnyside Gardens in the year of Lubove's birth was Lewis Mumford, the leading proponent of garden cities and community planning in the United States, and an individual who would become a significant influence on Lubove's career. Mumford had been born almost forty years before Lubove, and his youth, like Lubove's, was urban. Mumford's neighborhood was the upper west side of Manhattan, between Central and Riverside parks, open spaces that provided relief from the densely built streets. "I hate to think how depressing the total effect [of my childhood landscape] would have been," he wrote years later, "had not Central Park and Riverside Park always been there to gladden my eyes and to beckon my legs to a ramble."³

If Mumford's earliest scholarly exploration of public parks – the chapter "The Renewal of the Landscape" in *The Brown Decades* (1931) – grew out of childhood experiences, the young Lubove couldn't stroll a few blocks to an Olmstedean park. It is tempting to speculate that the absence of parks in Jackson Heights struck Lubove when, as a postdoctoral fellow, he lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and experienced the appeal of large, naturalistic open spaces within urban areas. Whether or not he linked his childhood landscape with the social and environmen-

2. Edward K. Muller, "Roy Lubove 1934-1995," *Journal of Urban History* 22 (Sept. 1996): 675-86; Works Progress Administration, *The WPA Guide to New York City* (1939; reprint ed., with a new introduction by William H. Whyte, 1982), pp. 566-67, passim; Karatzas, *Jackson Heights*, p. 133.

3. Lewis Mumford, *Sketches from Life* (New York, 1982), p. 10. On Sunnyside Gardens see Clarence S. Stein, *Toward New Towns for America* (3rd ed., Cambridge, Mass., 1966), pp. 21-35, and Daniel Schaffer, *Garden Cities for America: The Radburn Experience* (Philadelphia, 1982), pp. 119-33.

tal themes he would later explore as a historian, in 1985 Lubove wrote: "My original interest in landscape architecture was greatly stimulated when, during the Harvard years [1960-1963], I used to drive past Mt. Auburn [Cemetery] every day."⁴

Lubove's scholarship is in part a mirror of the author's personal and professional journey. The child of Polish immigrants who grew up amid the bricks and pavement of Jackson Heights, his earliest professional writing investigated reformist efforts to eliminate tenements and slums. As he pondered alternatives to contemporary housing conditions, he developed an enthusiasm for landscape architecture and city and regional planning, fields that might at first seem distant from his urban and ethnic roots but which, in retrospect, represent a logical progression of ideas and interests. Indeed, it was precisely while transforming his dissertation into *The Progressives and the Slums* that Lubove recognized the importance of the humanly created landscape as a major force in the shaping of human society. Two themes of that book, the reformist crusade of Lawrence Veiller and other New York Progressives, and the efforts of the City and Suburban Realty Company in erecting brick cottages for the working class in the New Utrecht section of Brooklyn, involved questions of ideology, culture, and the conscious manipulation of space to promote humanistic ends. If the city was "an artifact, a physical container within which complex human and institutional relationships" take shape, as Lubove wrote in 1967, landscape architecture and planning became a powerful set of lenses, a different historical perspective, that would contribute to a better understanding of the social and spatial development of metropolitan America.⁵

Before leaving Cambridge for Pittsburgh in 1963, Lubove had sketched the first of his writings on landscape architecture, a new introduction to an edition of Horace William Shaler Cleveland's *Landscape Architecture as Applied to the Wants of the West* (1873). Cleveland and other landscape architects of the post-Civil War generation, Lubove wrote, "worked to substitute the ideal of the urban-rural continuum in lieu of the traditional view of the city as a man-made environment

4. Lubove to David Schuyler, Nov. 23, 1985.

5. Lubove, *The Progressives and the Slums: Tenement House Reform in New York City 1890-1917* (Pittsburgh, 1962); Lubove, "The Urbanization Process: An Approach to Historical Research," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 33 (Jan. 1967): 33-39.

Two of the principles Lubove learned from Lawrence Veiller and other Progressives were the influence of physical surroundings on behavior and the importance of planning in achieving true environmental reform. The condition of tenements contributed directly to the high incidence of poverty, crime, and disease in New York City, Veiller asserted in 1899; "So much of the solution to the tenement-house problem," he wrote, "lies in the scientific planning of the buildings." Veiller, "The Tenement-House Exhibition of 1899," *Charities Review* 10 (1900-1901): 19-25.

which subdued and obliterated nature." In a letter to Frederick A. Hetzel of the University of Pittsburgh Press, Lubove explained the importance of Cleveland's modest book. Cleveland and his contemporaries who were engaged in park planning held out an alternative urban form to that of the gridiron, a "radical revision of traditional views of urban form and structure." Their designs for comprehensive metropolitan park systems were precursors to modern planning, their approach the beginnings of regional thinking.⁶

Lubove's introduction to *Landscape Architecture as Applied to the Wants of the West* is a prescient essay. At a time when the small handful of scholars studying the American landscape were principally folklorists and geographers tracing the evolution of vernacular building types, usually in areas remote from cities, Lubove recognized in the work of Cleveland a heroic attempt to humanize the urban environment. The post-Civil War generation of landscape architects "conceived of the city as an artifact which best served human biological and social needs when it both incorporated and improved upon nature." They envisioned a new physical form for the nation's cities, a "new relationship between mass, space, and nature" that Lubove described as the "urban-rural continuum, or the continuous city-park-garden." Whereas the pervasive and mechanical gridiron represented "antinaturalism" and the commodification of real estate, the parks and open spaces created by landscape architects brought curvilinearity and the organicism of nature into the urban fabric and attempted to promote human well-being rather than the "speculative prerogatives" of the developer.⁷

Cleveland, Frederick Law Olmsted, Charles Eliot, Sylvester Baxter, and their contemporaries who worked in landscape architecture were more than designers of space. They perceived the need for different types of recreational areas, from the grounds of public buildings and small neighborhood parks to large naturalistic open spaces and enormous scenic reservations, all linked by tree-lined boulevards or parkways. Conceding that municipal boundaries were an impediment to

6. Lubove to Frederick A. Hetzel, Feb. 8, 1963. When Lubove informed Lewis Mumford that the University of Pittsburgh Press would be publishing an abbreviated edition of *Landscape Architecture as Applied to the Wants of the West*, Mumford expressed delight that "Cleveland's important essay" would again be available: "I almost kick myself at not having suggested this to the John Harvard Press when I was an editor," he wrote, and speculated that it "might have gone rather nicely with that other neglected work," Olmsted's *Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns* (1870). (Mumford to Lubove, Feb. 20, 1964, Roy Lubove Papers).

7. Lubove, "H.W.S. Cleveland and the Urban-Rural Continuum in American Landscape Architecture," in H.W.S. Cleveland, *Landscape Architecture as Applied to the Wants of the West* (1873; Pittsburgh, 1965), pp. x-xiv, xxi. Lubove reiterated these themes, in much abridged form, in "The Roots of Urban Planning," his introduction to *The Urban Community: Housing and Planning in the Progressive Era* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1967), pp. 3-6.

comprehensive park planning, these men turned to metropolitan systems that could be acquired and planned to structure the processes of urban and suburban growth and to meet the recreational needs of an expanding metropolitan population. Their work, Lubove concluded, "anticipated to some degree the garden city of Ebenezer Howard, the regionalism of Patrick Geddes, the community planning program of the Regional Planning Association of America," and ultimately pointed the way toward intergovernmental planning and cooperation on a regional scale.⁸

The greatest achievement of the post-Civil War generation of landscape architects was not their contribution to civic beautification but their understanding of what Lubove termed the "social function" of parks and open spaces. In words that reflected his own political convictions, Lubove described Cleveland and his generation of park makers as individuals who were "deeply concerned with the consequences for the social condition and health of the low-income population. They pioneered in efforts to integrate physical and social change, to relate physical planning to social organization in the metropolis" Ultimately, Lubove concluded, "the landscape architect was a social reformer who sought to universalize the country estate and suburb, to transform the city itself into an extended park and garden, thus insuring for every inhabitant amenities hitherto reserved for the rich." A decade later he would describe landscape architecture as an important manifestation of the "expansion of municipal welfare and service functions" and the designer as a "social reformer, seeking to change the conception of the social welfare role of government."⁹

In effect, Lubove found in the work of these landscape architects a concern for the city as physical space and a commitment to social reform that reflected his own interests and ideals. Over the next three decades he would often return to the urban-rural continuum and to ideas he first expressed in his introduction to *Landscape Architecture as Applied to the Wants of the West*. Although his subsequent writings on landscape architecture were few in number, and generally limited to review essays, Lubove invariably emphasized two themes: that the history of landscape architecture was a "more significant topic than the benign neglect of social historians would suggest"; and that it involved more than a narrow concern for aesthetics or stylistic development, that in determining the physical setting in which human activity took place, landscape archi-

8. Lubove, "H.W.S. Cleveland and the Urban-Rural Continuum in American Landscape Architecture," pp. xi-xviii.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. xviii-xxi; Lubove, "Social History and the History of Landscape Architecture," *Journal of Social History* 9 (Winter 1975): 272.

ecture *was* social and cultural history. He dismissed Norman T. Newton's *Design on the Land: The Development of Landscape Architecture* (1971), for example, as an encyclopaedic compilation of facts strung together without adequate interpretation. Contrasting Newton's description of Versailles with Mumford's penetrating analysis, in *The City in History*, of the relationship between Baroque design and a culture predicated upon authoritarian power, Lubove defined what he considered the historical significance of landscape architecture: "the translation of ideology and cultural and social norms into environmental and design choices."¹⁰

Broadly construed, then, Lubove's interest in landscape architecture expressed a concern for the humane shaping of space to meet human purposes. Even before publication of *The Progressives and the Slums* he realized that the reliance on legislatively mandated minimum standards for housing was inadequate to the task of radically improving the physical environment of urban America. At that time he turned with admiration to the work of Lewis Mumford, who had praised Olmsted and the landscape architects of the post-Civil War era for their efforts to naturalize the city, and whose assessment of the importance of H.W.S. Cleveland may well have contributed to Lubove's decision to pursue republication of *Landscape Architecture as Applied to the Wants of the West*. Lubove wrote freely to Mumford, asking questions and expressing ideas, and the older man replied in a series of letters that expressed enthusiasm for Lubove's scholarly endeavors. In correspondence that Lubove clearly cherished, Mumford readily shared his recollections of the history and personalities associated with the Regional Planning Association of America, offered correctives to Lubove's nomenclature or interpretation of several points, and suggested future research projects. Mumford, a kindred soul whom Lubove admired as a fellow New York intellectual, activist, and social critic, became an inspiration for the younger man's writings: Mumford, the articulate publicist of the goals of the RPAA, united Lubove's reformist agenda and his belief in the power of the physical environment to influence human behavior. The solution to the problems of urban America, Mumford had argued, lay not in centralization or unplanned suburbanization, both of which remained tied to traditional metropolitan development, but in regional planning and the creation of new towns appropriate to twentieth-century technology and emerging patterns of work and leisure. Lubove expressed his enthusiasm for these ideas, and his deep admiration for Mumford, in *Community Planning in the 1920s*. What Mumford taught him, and what so deeply influenced Lubove's scholarship, was an appreciation of the landscape as

10. Lubove, "Social History and the History of Landscape Architecture," pp. 268-71.

part of social and cultural history. The "importance of land increases with civilization," Mumford wrote in *The Brown Decades*. "'Nature' as a system of interests and activities is one of the chief creations of civilized man."¹¹

Landscape architecture and planning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries exemplified, for Lubove, the "quest for an environmental container which would provide civic order and stability in American life." He described Forest Hills Gardens, Queens, a community constructed by the Russell Sage Foundation that was designed by architect Grosvenor Atterbury and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., in terms of its "self-contained, pedestrian scale, low-density environment of winding streets, visually stimulating if derivative Tudor architecture, and a kind of urban-rural continuum of park-like landscape, gardens and spacious dwellings." Lubove's admiration for Forest Hills Gardens stood in striking contrast to his disdain for surrounding neighborhoods, such as Kew Gardens and Rego Park, which had been developed by speculators following the tenets of international modernism. These he characterized in terms of "massive, high-rise apartment blocks, congestion, a cacophony of unceasing traffic along Queens Boulevard and the side streets, paucity of recreational and open space."¹²

11. Mumford, *The Brown Decades: A Study of the Arts in America 1865-1895* (1931; New York, 1955), pp. 59, 79-96; Lubove, *Community Planning in the 1920s: The Contribution of the Regional Planning Association of America* (Pittsburgh, 1963), passim; Mumford to Lubove, April 2, 6, 21, 1961; Aug. 14, 24, 1961; Feb. 2, 12, 1962; Mar. 12, 1962; Sept. 10, 15, 18, 22, 1962, Oct. 12, 1962, and Dec. 2, 1962, all in Roy Lubove Papers.

Lubove expressed his admiration for Mumford in a 1967 essay, "The Urbanization Process: An Approach to Historical Research": "It is disappointing that such seminal works by Lewis Mumford as *Technics and Civilization* (1934) and *The Culture of Cities* (1938) have exerted so little influence in the writing of urban history." The great deficiency of historical writing about cities, he asserted, was that it "largely fails to explain the city-building process in relation to technology and social organization" (p. 34).

When Lubove sent Mumford an inscribed copy of the University of Pittsburgh Press edition of *Landscape Architecture As Applied to the Wants of the West*, Mumford praised Lubove's introduction as "a valuable contribution in its own right." He conceded that when he first read Cleveland's book "some forty years ago I missed many important points that pop out of the pages now, like his use of parkways to delimit neighborhoods" (Mumford to Lubove, Jan. 3, 1965, Roy Lubove Papers).

I am indebted to conversations with Donald L. Miller for an acute assessment of Lubove's relationship with Lewis Mumford and to Edward K. Muller for generously providing copies of the Mumford-Lubove correspondence.

12. Lubove, "Landscape, Landscape Architecture and Community Development in American Life," *Journal of Social History* 24 (Fall 1990):143-52. This is a long essay that reviews the author's *The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore, 1986) and John R. Stilgoe's *Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb, 1820-1939* (New Haven, 1988).

In this essay Lubove denounced Stilgoe's interpretation of Forest Hills Gardens as the physical embodiment of a company town, which he described as "partly a product of imaginative leaps in the wrong direction, partly a consequence of failure to ask the right questions." Above all, Stilgoe was guilty of "a misguided perspective," one that failed to see the difference between the humanely scaled domestic landscape of Forest Hills Gardens and the "environmental pestilence which surrounds it" (p. 146).

Lubove's assessment of Chatham Village, a residential development in the hilly Mount Washington section of Pittsburgh designed for the Buhl Foundation, echoed many of the characteristics he found praiseworthy in Forest Hills Gardens. In what he termed a "brilliant experiment in residential site-planning and design," Stein and Wright followed the precedent they had established at Radburn, New Jersey, the use of the superblock as the basic planning unit, the reversal of the orientation of the attached dwellings, which faced an interior park rather than the street, and the reservation of ample space for parks, playgrounds, gardens, and wooded walks. Here was a site plan that demonstrated a "commitment to ecological values: the natural topography was regarded as a precious asset, one to be protected and utilized for scenic and recreational purposes." Chatham Village was a community, a residential subdivision designed to human scale, that Lubove contrasted with the "anti-historical, anti-naturalistic bias and the Radiant City pestilence of Corbusier" and other modernists. He chose community, and celebrated the works of architects and planners who created landscapes appropriate to human needs, over the "urbanicide" he attributed to modern design and urban renewal.¹³

Lubove's perception of the importance of place and landscape, the physical environment as a shaper of human experience, increased over the years. Throughout most of his professional career he had identified his work as social welfare and social history. Significantly, in 1992, when he published two articles in *Pittsburgh History*, he described his writings on landscape architecture and planning as "environmental studies." In the first of those articles, "City Beautiful, City Banal," Lubove expressed admiration for two long overlooked achievements in physical planning. One was the City Beautiful vision as realized in the Oakland Civic Center area of Pittsburgh, which had been developed according to a master plan prepared by F. E. Nicola. This "model multi-nucleated suburban community" included civic, cultural, and educational institutions as well as a residential neighborhood. Schenley Park provided the open space so essential to the urban environment, while handsome Beaux Arts buildings defined a humanely-scaled streetscape. The other achievement was the Shade Tree Commission, established in 1909, which strove to transform Pittsburgh's streets into "miles of boulevards and broad avenues" lined with handsome trees. Here, in many respects, was the fulfillment of the urban-rural continuum Lubove

13. Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh: Government, Business, and Environmental Change* (New York, 1969), pp. 70-82; Lubove, "City Beautiful, City Banal: Design Advocacy and Historic Preservation in Pittsburgh," *Pittsburgh History* 75 (Spring 1992): 31-32. See also Stein, *Toward New Towns for America*, pp. 75-85.

described thirty years earlier in his assessment of the post-Civil War generation of landscape architects — a cohesive neighborhood carefully planned and developed, the product of responsible capitalism rather than rampant speculation, a “civic environment” with broad, tree-lined avenues that stood as an “antidote to the squalid industrial city.”¹⁴

Lubove’s admiration for the civic spaces that defined Oakland led him to become an activist for historic preservation during the last decade of his life. When a private development corporation, acting on behalf of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, announced plans to demolish the Shriners’ Syria Mosque, an enormous City-Beautiful era concert auditorium it had recently acquired, Lubove defended the structure as an integral component of Oakland’s civic landscape. Here was an attractive alternative to the gritty industrial city, an urban landscape that reflected “a time when creative architecture and design in every detail — civic, commercial, residential — were endowed with a moral and social mission.” Lubove became an outspoken critic of the university’s plans and one of the founders of Preservation Pittsburgh. Although the attempt to save the mosque failed, Lubove energetically continued to support Preservation Pittsburgh’s efforts to preserve the historic urban fabric and to prevent the construction of intrusive, out-of-scale, or inappropriately designed buildings.¹⁵

Perhaps fittingly, Lubove’s last publication devoted to landscape architecture was a long review essay, “Pittsburgh’s Allegheny Cemetery and the Victorian Garden of the Dead.” The occasion for this essay was the publication of Walter Kidney’s handsomely illustrated *Allegheny Cemetery: A Romantic Landscape in Pittsburgh* (1990). Established in 1844, Allegheny Cemetery was “one of Pittsburgh’s most significant cultural legacies,” Lubove asserted, “a singular and irreplaceable civic treasure.” Kidney’s text, however, was descriptive, “not social or cultural history” as Lubove conceptualized it, and so Lubove turned the review into a long essay that explored the historical and cultural significance of one of his longstanding interests, the rural or romantic cemetery. The essay analyzed the evolution of the English or naturalistic landscape garden, the aesthetic debates over the beautiful and the picturesque, and the

14. Lubove, “City Beautiful, City Banal,” pp. 26, 28-30; Lubove, *Twentieth-Century Pittsburgh: The Post-Steel Era* (Pittsburgh, 1996), pp. 238-39. Six months after publishing the article on the City Beautiful Lubove ranked the Oakland Civic Center with H.H. Richardson’s Allegheny County Courthouse and Jail and Allegheny Cemetery as three of Pittsburgh’s “most significant cultural legacies.” Lubove, “Pittsburgh’s Allegheny Cemetery and the Victorian Garden of the Dead,” *Pittsburgh History* 75 (Fall 1992): 153.

15. Lubove, “City Beautiful, City Banal,” p. 30; Lubove, *Twentieth-Century Pittsburgh: The Post-Steel Era*, pp. 237-40; Muller, “Roy Lubove,” p. 684



Butler Street Complex

Constructed 1848

Allegheny Cemetery Association

social, cultural, and environmental factors that accounted for the development of the rural cemetery in the Europe and America. In the notes appended to this gracefully written essay Lubove reviewed the extensive literature on the subject that had been published in the previous decade.¹⁶

The rural cemetery, which emerged in the United States in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, was "an extraordinary cultural icon during its brief hegemony because its picturesque landscape and moral tutelage offered the living guidance on the qualities of a benign environment and social order, one which contrasted favorably with the emergent industrial capitalism." What Lubove found so fascinating in the landscape of consolation was not simply the work of the designer or engineer, the location of roads and the disposition of trees, shrubs, and other plant materials, or the funereal architecture. Important though these were, of far greater concern for him was the translation of ideas and values into physical form in the landscape. The rural cemetery testified to a "powerful need for communality and moral order," he asserted; in an age that tolerated the environmental devastation wrought by industrial capitalism, that celebrated the commercial spirit and

16. Lubove, "Pittsburgh's Allegheny Cemetery and the Victorian Garden of the Dead," pp. 148, 153-54.

rewarded the speculative development of congested cities, the cemetery "represented an alternative community, a planned environment which would nurture family unity, religious idealism and community cohesion."¹⁷

As this analytical yet affectionate exploration of the rural cemetery demonstrates, Roy Lubove found in the designed landscape a compellingly important personal and professional interest. The achievements of landscape architects and planners represented successful attempts to restrain rampant capitalism, to reform the physical environment of metropolitan America. The parks, boulevards, and communities they planned, the neighborhoods constructed on a human scale, held out the promise of a more civilized community. Forest Hills Gardens and Chatham Village consisted of smaller scaled buildings than Lubove recalled from the Jackson Heights of his childhood or that he saw being erected in the Pittsburgh of his last years, and may well have struck him as a more successful physical achievement because of the sense of belonging he observed in the people who lived there, the human connectedness he attributed to the urban-rural continuum. The designers, reformers, and visionaries who created these more civilized environments, such as Olmsted, Stein, Wright, and Mumford, represented the models Lubove adopted for his own role as scholar, activist, and social critic.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 148-53.