AN URBAN LOOK AT
PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY

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hat is presently called urban history originated as a sub-discipline in response to the so-called urban crisis of the 1960s. In 1932 scholars of Pennsylvania history interested in exploring Philadelphia's past turned to Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott's 1884 *History of Philadelphia* or Horace Mather Lippincott's tome. Leland Baldwin produced a somewhat similar albeit more popular urban biography of Pittsburgh in 1937. Before 1968 scholars like Frederick B. Tolles and Struthers Burt did write about Philadelphia Quakers; Edwin Wolf and Maxwell Whiteman; about Philadelphia Jews; while Richard Wade and Carl Bridenbaugh (in the vein of Frederick Jackson Turner) strategically situated both Pittsburgh and Philadelphia on the cultural frontier of the young American civilization. None of this announced the emergence of a new historical discipline.[1]

Sam Bass Warner changed all that. Warner's pioneering 1968 *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of its Growth* made "The City of Brotherly Love" a laboratory ("scaffolding") for the

quantitative analysis of the "process of urbanization." Influenced by the social and political turmoil of the 60s, Warner branded "privatism," i.e. capitalism (the primary force he found historically shaping the American urban culture) insufficient to equitably distribute scarce resources in a city increasingly divided by "class, race, and ethnicity." Following the British labor historian E.P. Thompson (and armed with stacks of IBM cards) Warner probed the history of Philadelphia from the bottom up, attempting to uncover the importance of the lives of ordinary actors lost in most political history. Warner stood in the vanguard of a growing band of cliometricians, many located at the University of Pennsylvania, who utilized the computer (the giant IBM mainframes-not the desk and laptops of today) to analyze census data, tax records, city directories, and other quantifiable data that might bring ordinary, working-class lives more into historical focus. Led by among others Theodore Hershberg, Bruce Laurie, Claudia Goldin, and Michael Haines what became the Philadelphia Social History Project (funded by the Metropolitan Center of the National Institutes of Public Health) produced a landmark data base for exploring "work, space, family and group experience in 19th-century Philadelphia." These historians together with Stuart Blumin, Lynn Lees, John Modell, Stephanie Greenberg, Billy Smith, and Gary Nash, to name a few, launched significant and in many cases path-breaking studies of Philadelphia "from the bottom up." In Blumin's case the search extended to the origins of the middle class. More recently John Hepp skillfully extended Blumin's study by looking at how this middle class re-ordered urban space through department stores, transit, and the use of newspapers. Meanwhile, Simon Newmann revisited Philadelphia's back alleys, expanding Billy Smith's portrait of the city's 18th century "other half." J. Matthew Gallman's superb *Mastering Wartime: A Social History of Philadelphia During the Civil War* is in the same historiographic tradition, as is John K. Alexander's *Render them Submissive: Responses to Poverty in Philadelphia, 1760–1800*, Gary Nash's *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia Black Community, 1720–1840*, and Ron Schultz's *The Republic of Labor: Philadelphia Artisans and the Politics of Class, 1720–1830*.[2]

While hardly in the cliometric vein, Roy Lubove's seminal study of Pittsburgh, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh*, deftly probed the urbanization process in the Steel City, and, like Warner, Lubove discovered that over time privatism, while achieving supreme technological efficiency, produced social failure manifest in racial and ethnic segregation and squalid living condition.

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This theme of a racially and ethnically divided urban Pennsylvania spawned numerous edited works and monographs (note William Cutler's and Howard Gillette's *Divided Metropolis*, 1980; Allen Davis and Mark Haller, *The Peoples of Philadelphia: A History of Ethnic Groups and Lower Class Life, 1790–1940*, 1973, and for Pittsburgh, John Bodnar's, Mike Weber's and Roger Simon's *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900–1960*; Peter Gottlieb's *Making their own Way; and* Klineberg's *The Shadow of the Mills: Working Class Families in Pittsburgh, 1870–1907* (1989)). Not necessarily in the Warner or Lubove tradition, Russ Weigley's bi-centennial history of Philadelphia incorporated much of the "new urban history."[3]

But, Warner's "urban scaffolding" begged an even deeper penetration into what Louis Wirth in the 1920s described as the "urban mosaic." Indeed, Chicago School sociologists like Wirth beheld the city as an organism, a biologically functioning complex whose parts or segments, like the human body, could be scientifically analyzed. Social historians in the 1960s, like the University of Pittsburgh's Samuel P. Hays, likewise understood the city as an organism shaped by myriad social, political and economic forces. In their scholarship Pennsylvania cities with their rich archives became laboratories for the meticulous study of social, economic, and political processes. This scholarly dissection of the urban organism has impelled much of the recent (and some earlier) work on Pennsylvania urbanism. What, therefore, can the Philadelphia experience tell us about the economic and social impact of textile industrialism? See Phil Scranton's work *Figured Tapestry: Production, Markets, and Power in Philadelphia, 1855–1941* and *Proprietary Capitalism: The Textile Manufacture at Philadelphia, 1800–1885*. How did the economic trauma and the political transformation of the Great Depression impact Pittsburgh? See Bruce Stave's *The New Deal and the Last Hurrah*. How did race and renewal reshape the social, political and physical landscape of postwar Philadelphia or Lancaster, Pennsylvania? See Bauman's study of Philadelphia and David Schuyler's monograph on Lancaster. What role have gays and lesbians played in the shaping of Philadelphia? See Marc Stein's excellent *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945–1972* (Chicago: 2000). How did urban planning as part of the city decision-making process shape the urban-industrial landscape of Pittsburgh? See John F. Bauman's and Edward K. Muller's *Before Renaissance: Urban Planning in Pittsburgh, 1889–1943*.[4]

However, since the 1990s, eclecticism (more than Warner's scaffold) has dominated Pennsylvania urban history. Indeed, Timothy Gilfoyle has concluded that recent urban history rejects a set paradigm. Increasingly, historians treat the city as a spatial arena for the study of a host of social, political and economic phenomenon from race relations explore how over time the city's elite contorted historic memory to its uses. Peter McCaffrey's challenge to Robert K. Merton, *When Bosses Ruled Philadelphia: The Emergence of the Republican Machine, 1867–1933*, is also in this vein. Philadelphia and Harrisburg have likewise been subjects of studies of industrialization, see Gerry Eggert's excellent *Harrisburg Industrializes: The Coming of Factories to an American Community*, and James Farley's *Making Arms in the Machine Age: Philadelphia's Frankford Arsenal, 1816–1870*, and Harry C. Silcox, *A Place to Live and Work: The Henry Disston Saw Works and the Tacony Community of Philadelphia*.[5]

This eclecticism is especially visible in recent articles published in *Pennsylvania History*. In the past half-dozen years urban-oriented articles in the journal have focused on the highly contextualized image of Philadelphia's Independence Hall (Mires), Dwight Moody's late 19th-century revivals in Philadelphia, the location of passenger railway terminals in Philadelphia, the management of Philadelphia movie theatres during the Great Depression, Charter reform in late 20th Wilkes-Barre, World War II African-American activism in Philadelphia, and fire companies in ante-bellum Philadelphia.[6]

Scaffolding or no scaffolding, because of the extraordinary richness of urban archives found in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, and elsewhere in the state, the future of urban history in Pennsylvania is secure for the next seventy-five years.

NOTES

1. Thomas J. Scharf and Thomas Westcott, *History of Philadelphia, 1609–1884* (Philadelphia: L. H. Everts, 1884); Frederick B. Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House*; Horace Matther Lippincott, *Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Macrae Smith, 1926); Struthers Burt, *Philadelphia: Holy Experiment* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1945); Edwin Wolf and Maxwell Whiteman, *The History of the Jews in Philadelphia from Colonia Times to the Age of Jackson* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1957); Richard C. Wade, *The Urban Frontier: Pioneer Life in Early Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Lexington, Louisville, and St. Louis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt: Urban Life in America* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1968).

2. Sam Bass Warner, *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of its Growth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968). Many of the historians noted above are represented in Theodore Hershberg, ed., *Philadelphia: Work, Space, Family and Group Experience in the 19th Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); for how the Philadelphia Social History Project informed the writing of history, especially Philadelphia history, see also Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979); Billy G. Smith, *The 'Lower Sort:' Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750–1800* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); J. Matthew Gallman, *Mastering Wartime: A Social History of Philadelphia During the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); John K. Alexander, *Render them Submissive: Responses to Poverty in Philadelphia, 1760–1800* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980); Gary Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720–1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Ron Schultz, *The Republic of Labor: Philadelphia Artisans and the Politics of Class, 1720–1830* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

3. Roy Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh: Government, Business, and Environmental Change* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995); William W. Cutler and Howard Gillette, eds., *The Divided Metropolis: Social and Spatial Dimensions of Philadelphia, 1800–1975* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980); Allen F. Davis and Mark H. Haller, *The Peoples of Philadelphia: A History of Ethnic Groups and Lower-Class Life, 1790–1940* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1973); John Bodnar, Roger Simon, and Michael Weber, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900–1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982); Peter Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way: Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Susan J. Kleinberg, *In the Shadow of the Mills: Working-Class Families in Pittsburgh, 1870–1907* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989); Russell Weigley, ed., *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982).

4. On the Chicago School, see Richard Sennett, ed., *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1969); Samuel P. Hays, "The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 55 (October 1964); Philip Scranton, *Proprietary Capitalism: The Textile Manufacture at Philadelphia, 1800–1885* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Philip Scranton, *Figured Tapestry: Production, Markets, and Power in Philadelphia Textiles, 1855–1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Bruce Stave, *The New Deal and the Last Hurrah: Pittsburgh Machine Politics* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970); John F. Bauman, *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal: Urban Planning in Pittsburgh, 1920–1974* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987); David Schuyler, *A City Transformed: Redevelopment, Race, and Suburbanization in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1940–1980* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945–1972* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); John F. Bauman and Edward K. Muller, *Before Renaissance: Planning in Pittsburgh, 1889–1943* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006).

5. Timothy Gilfoyle is quoted in C. Dallett Hemphill's review essay, "Whose City? Whose History?: Three Class Histories of Philadelphia," in *Journal of Urban History*, 33 (2006):118; Peter McCaffery, *When Bosses Ruled Philadelphia: The Emergence of the Republican Machine, 1867–1933* (University

Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993); James J. Farley, *Making Arms in the Machine Age: Philadelphia's Frankford Arsenal, 1816–1870* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Park, 1994); Harry C. Silcox, *A Place to Live and Work: The Henry Disston Saw Works and the Tacony Commuity of Philadelphia* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); Gerry G. Eggert, *Harrisburg Industrializes: The Coming of Factories to an American Community* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

6. Articles by these authors appeared in *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* during the six years, 2000–2005 inclusive.