

and Venturi themselves, paid more attention to the design quality of mass housing.

Like the race riot in 1957, the gas riot of 1979 demonstrates that Levittown was far from being disconnected from the “real world.” The immediate cause of the gas riot, Chad M. Kimmel explains in “No Gas, My Ass,” was the second OPEC oil boycott, which led to high prices for gasoline and diesel fuel, along with fuel shortages and long lines at the pump. But other issues, like the massive layoffs at the local steel plant and an overall unraveling of the American economy, made many residents pessimistic about their futures, in contrast to the optimism of residents a generation before. The gas riot, which drew over 1,000 protestors and scores of police to a large intersection with four service stations, only deepened this pessimism in a community that depended on their automobiles and cheap fuel to maintain a suburban way of life. Kimmel concludes by comparing Levittown to a barometer, “marking the fluctuations of the changing social, economic, and political climates in American history” (353).

In a final chapter by Peter Fritzsche, called “The Suburbs of Desire,” the author reviews the “moments that define[d] a community” over half a century (354). He ends with a somewhat sad reflection on how the community has become an occasion for nostalgia: “Associated with childhood, wrapped in the recalled innocence, the suburban artifacts become the indexes of twentieth-century loss” (362).

Anyone who reads *Second Suburb* will come away with a new understanding of Levittown, Pennsylvania, and of postwar suburbs in general. The book will doubtless spawn new researches into America’s suburbs, and itself stand as a high-water mark in the evolution of urban studies.

DAVID R. CONTOSTA

Chestnut Hill College

David R. Contosta and Carol Franklin. *Metropolitan Paradise: The Struggle for Nature in the City—Philadelphia’s Wissahickon Valley, 1620–2020* (Philadelphia: St. Joseph’s University Press, 2010). 4 vols. Paperback in cardboard case. pp. xxii+902. Illustrations, notes, index. \$85.00.

Edgar Allan Poe wrote “the Wissahiccon is of so remarkable a loveliness that, were it flowing in England, it would be the theme of every bard, and

the common topic of every tongue.” (See Diana Royer, “Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘Morning on the Wissahiccon’: An Elegy for His Penn Magazine Project,” *Pennsylvania History* 61 (1994): 318–31, quotation on 326.) David Contosta and Carol Franklin have produced a book (I will call it that for convenience) as beautiful as the Wissahickon itself. Historians have written about oceans (the modern trend in Atlantic history), seas (Fernand Braudel’s monumental three-volume history of the Mediterranean), and rivers (Susan Stranahan on the Susquehanna). But if there has ever been a four-volume scholarly (yet popular) 900-page history of a creek, with hundreds of illustrations, many in color, I have missed it.

The four volumes proceed in chronological order and are called “Wilderness,” “Park,” “Valley,” and “Corridor.” The authors begin with the Valley’s flora, fauna, and spectacular landscape (gorges, caves, hills) before talking about the light use made by Native Americans of a space they considered sacred. After serving from 1694 to 1708 as the home of Johannes Kelpius, who with a small band of followers awaited the end of the world (The Society of the Woman in the Wilderness), the Wissahickon, like nearly every stream with running water in eastern Pennsylvania, became the site of numerous mills. The Rittenhouse Paper Mill, the first in America, founded about 1700, is the only one that still stands (greatly reconstructed) as part of Rittenhouse Town. Later wealthy Philadelphians built summer cottages and mansions in the Valley. A colonial home on Lincoln Drive and Gypsy Lane has been one of the United States’ most attractive police stations since at least 1899.

Only in the nineteenth century did the park become appreciated more for its beauty than its economic value. Thomas Moran and other artists praised it in oils as Poe did in words. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Valley became part of Philadelphia’s Fairmount Park, the largest urban park in the world. Much of the Valley, especially the part on either side of the creek, was left in its pristine state: as the creek runs below the nature trails alongside, strollers are walking at the level of treetops. This volume also moves south and takes in all of the Park, showing its many glories from preserved colonial mansions, the Greek Revival Fairmount Waterworks, “Forbidden” (to automobiles but not horses and pedestrians) Drive, and how nearby attractive residential areas in many instances act as extensions of the park.

Volumes 3 and 4 deal with development and conservation. Conservationists fought to save the Valley from developers, dumping, periodic floods, stagnant water during droughts, damages from storms, loss of biological diversity,

and the increasing need for traffic to traverse the park as Philadelphia and its suburbs grew. The friends of the Valley won in many, although not all, instances. The New Deal put a great deal of effort into improving and maintaining the park, with volunteers, community groups, foundations, and the City of Philadelphia doing most of the work since. The authors offer biographical sketches of people who loved and made a significant difference in the Valley through their work for its preservation. In fact a main purpose of this book is to encourage the continued support of the Valley as a necessary "paradise" for a modern metropolis.

In conclusion, we are left with a breathtaking visual and written study of one of the most beautiful urban landscapes in the world. The lesson to be learned is that natural beauty cannot survive naturally, it requires the labors of those who love it. Few have labored more worthily than Contosta and Franklin, and it is only fitting that their own biographical sketches appear at the end of the volume to accompany the others.

WILLIAM PENCAK

Editor, Pennsylvania History; Ohio State University