

Kathryn E. Wilson. *Ethnic Renewal in Philadelphia's Chinatown: Space, Place, and Struggle* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015). Pp. 278. Illustrations, appendix, notes, index. Cloth, \$84.50; paper, \$29.95.

Kathryn Wilson's recent work traces the origin and (re)development of Philadelphia's Chinatown from the late nineteenth century to the present. Despite its relatively small size, the neighborhood has survived decades of urban transitions, retaining a historic core while adapting to community needs. In addition to archival materials and newspapers, Wilson's book draws heavily on oral interviews with local activists and personal observations of the neighborhood. As the author notes, Chinatown has long been a site in which the role of exotic "other" was consciously performed for outsiders. The presence of particular types of businesses such as laundries and restaurants helped fulfill that role. Yet the area has simultaneously served as a home for residents of Chinese and other Asian descent. The tension between these neighborhood roles put Chinatown in a precarious position as public officials and private developers reconfigured the Philadelphia landscape.

Chinatown's built environment retained a mixed-use orientation while the surrounding city first departed from, and more recently returned to, such a design. Chinese settlement began concentrating around the 900 block of Race Street in the late nineteenth century. Many of the area's buildings housed businesses on the ground level with the second and third stories devoted to residential or social club use. Structures dating from the early and mid-nineteenth century received cosmetic updates, especially through the addition of second-floor balconies similar to those found in southern Chinese cities. On Sundays in particular, these sites served as gathering spaces for Chinese throughout the region.

Over the years, the neighborhood faced a succession of threats to its integrity or existence. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Chinatown had a dangerous reputation due to racialized notions of crime and the overwhelmingly male population wrought by immigration policies and labor migration patterns. By the Great Depression, the physical condition of Chinatown's aging building stock began to concern policymakers. The commonly held notion that Chinatown was simply a business district combined with its proximity to Center City resources to make it a likely target for urban redevelopment in the postwar period. Some outsiders regarded the area as a slum with a preponderance of bars. So too, policymakers and residents had different perceptions of the neighborhood's boundaries. Various

projects—most of them transportation or tourism-related—thus advanced on Chinatown. An expressway, a commuter rail tunnel, a convention center, and a major retail and office development impacted local business climate and neighborhood life in addition to claiming physical space.

Chinatown's postwar population was relatively stable in comparison to the marked decline in other city neighborhoods. Demolition of existing structures met comparatively little resistance during the early sixties from community groups fragmented by religious affiliation, language, and class. Yet over time grassroots organizations more effectively mobilized neighbors against the threats posed to Chinatown's spatial boundaries and lifestyle. The activists guiding groups such as Yellow Seeds were students and young professionals with working-class roots and sufficient knowledge of Chinese culture to build rapport with fellow residents. Their strategy combined formal political appeals with symbolic physical demonstrations. In one iconic moment of resistance, young protesters perched atop a building's rubble with a large banner demanding "Homes Not Highways!" Mindful of their small numbers and relative lack of political clout, these groups built multiracial coalitions with other groups across the city. Their activism won some significant concessions, such as preserving Holy Redeemer Chinese Catholic Church and School. Moreover, the energy marshaled by residents and their allies raised the neighborhood's public profile.

As they won small victories in the fight to defend Chinatown's boundaries, some activists turned their attention to community development. As elsewhere, affordable housing projects became the domain of nonprofit organizations such as the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC). The construction of rowhouses, apartments, affordable senior housing, and a mixed-use development allowed more existing residents to stay in the neighborhood. Concerned about encroachment by adjacent development, PCDC worked with city planners to obtain a special zoning designation for the neighborhood. In more recent years, the area faced financial pressures and cultural tensions from gentrification in nearby Callowhill.

Previously, activists avoided pursuing historic designations at the neighborhood level for fear that it would raise rents and displace residents. More recently, historic preservation of select structures has become a greater focus of Chinatown's community development strategy. As Chinatown continued to reinvent itself, community members also engaged in debates over defining a "Chinese" aesthetic and cultural experience. But the necessities of a functioning residential area usually took precedence. These debates gained

complexity as newer waves of immigration and shifting city demographics continued to increase residential diversity.

Wilson's book sheds light on a small but longstanding ethnic enclave that has received little attention from other scholars of Philadelphia. Her textured account of the neighborhood offers a well-rounded combination of ethnography, oral history, and history of the built environment. Though the chapters are decidedly weighted toward the past forty-five years, Wilson draws useful connections to area's development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The activists that Wilson profiles scored impressive, if small, victories in an era of tight budgets and market-oriented development. Overall, Wilson's story shows how Chinatown residents cannily negotiated development not only to preserve particular landmarks, but even to expand the residential character of Chinatown. At many moments, the neighborhood's future seemed uncertain, but the historic core weathered repeated threats to its existence and reinvented itself in the process.

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Ryan K. Smith. *Robert Morris's Folly: The Architectural and Financial Failures of an American Founder* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014). Pp. 360. Illustrations, notes, index. Cloth, \$40.00.

Robert Morris was a Founder. He signed the Declaration of Independence. He secured loans from international bankers and with them sustained the Continental army. Pennsylvanians celebrated his success in moving the federal capital from New York to Philadelphia while the Federal City could be built. He served Pennsylvania as representative to Congress. But our view of Founders, Ryan Smith suggests in *Robert Morris's Folly*, needs to be "rounded" (216 n. 12). This Founder's business dealings, friendships, and personality unfold as we meet him at the pinnacle of his mercantile wealth and political service, then follow him to an infamous failure that triggered a rash of bankruptcies in the young nation.

Smith also aims to "push material culture under the noses of even the most object-averse historians," and he interweaves the rise and demise of Morris's financial fortunes with those of the spectacular but unfinished mansion he engaged French engineer Peter L'Enfant to design and superintend.¹ *Folly* is