

reelected 1972, Saylor offered a declaration that represented the role that he himself had played for many politicians when he said: "Wayne and I have disagreed more times than I like to recall. Nevertheless, I like to think that our differing points of view on the great issues that have faced our committee, helped to mold legislation that was beneficial to the whole nation" (p. 308).

Through Smith's fine telling of these political stories, readers learn that John Saylor is a most deserving member of Pennsylvania's pantheon of environmental heroes, which includes Howard Zahniser, Edward Abbey, and, of course, Rachel Carson.

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*Metropolitan Philadelphia: Living with the Presence of the Past.* By STEVEN CONN. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006. 274 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$19.95.)

In *Metropolitan Philadelphia: Living with the Presence of the Past*, Steven Conn provides an incisive, learned, and proudly unconventional portrait of the Philadelphia region. This richly textured and well-written volume attempts neither an exhaustive historical synthesis nor a focused examination of a particular time period or topic. Instead, Conn successfully strives for something different and distinctive—a deeply personal look through the prism of socioeconomic, cultural, religious, and environmental lenses at how Philadelphia's past and present interact with and shape each other. What emerges from this undertaking is an invaluable work that joins the ranks of Nathaniel Popkin's *Song of the City* (2002) and Buzz Bissinger's *A Prayer for the City* (1997) in helping us understand the essence of what Philadelphia is now and how it got that way.

The conception and organization of *Metropolitan Philadelphia* is shaped at every turn by the author's multifaceted engagement with the region as a professional historian, a native son, and an op-ed-writing, walking tour-giving critic, advocate, and public intellectual. The book consists of an unusually provocative prologue and five discrete essays—on William Penn and his utopian Quaker legacy, on the region's complex historical consciousness, on Philadelphia as an archetypical American middle-class metropolitan area, on the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers, and on how local artists and cultural institutions have shaped the region's conception of itself. But in *Metropolitan Philadelphia* Conn finds in every subject an opportunity—and indeed a creative compulsion—to push beyond the expected parameters of analysis. So, for example, the chapter on historical consciousness predictably enough touches on Benjamin Franklin, Independence Hall, and Valley Forge. However, it links these icons of local history to such disparate topics as the contours of contemporary tourism, early

post-World War II urban redevelopment plans, the filmmaker M. Night Shyamalan, and the giant residential development firm Toll Brothers' use and abuse of historical sites and landscapes. Similarly, the chapter on the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers provides Conn the excuse both to explore those rivers' past and current uses as industrial power sources and sewers, transportation links, economic engines, ecological repositories, and recreational resources and also to relate the rivers' roles in the region to the railroads and highways that have shaped and been shaped by the Philadelphia metropolitan area in so many comparable, critical ways.

Choosing to cover this much territory in a comparatively short space perhaps inevitably comes with some downsides. Many readers of *Metropolitan Philadelphia* with some expertise in or personal experience with the region will probably stumble on the stray explanation that seems to them a bit too reductive or the opinion that seems a bit too flippantly offered. But Conn's choice was a smart one that yields enormous benefits. Particularly insightful is his varied understanding of the place and function of the Philadelphia area's history. In *Metropolitan Philadelphia*, the city sometimes stands out for its famous American 'firsts' such as its first American hospital, first zoo, first lending library, and first municipal water system. In some ways, the region's history proves important because of its influence—such as the influence of suburban Philadelphia-raised Bayard Rustin's Quaker ideas on the national civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Other realms, such as the metropolitan area's historical sensibility, Conn finds exceptional: "it is the city and region's role in the founding of the nation . . . that have created a dialogue between local and national, and between past and present, unique in the country" (p. 73). And, of course, in still other ways such as the form of Philadelphia's twentieth-century suburban development, it is a merely ordinary, familiar American metropolis.

If Conn's unapologetic disinterest in shoehorning his exuberant thinking into neat arguments or frameworks comes in part out of his intellectual temperament, it also derives from his approach to understanding the region. In *Metropolitan Philadelphia*, the region cannot be simply defined as the city and its suburban counties. How could it, Conn posits, when discussing how Philadelphians play necessitates a trip down to the Jersey Shore and another up to the Poconos? How could it, when demographic, architectural, transportation, economic, and ecological definitions of the region also all differ from one another? Combining such a fluid, capacious regional sensibility, fertile historical vision, and sharp-edged contemporary assessments, Conn arrives at a clear-eyed appreciation of his book's opportunities and limitations and its place in the intellectual landscape. As he explains in the final words of his prologue: "There are indeed a million stories in the naked city and just as many about it too. This one is simply mine" (p. 28).