

Philadelphia: *The History of a History*

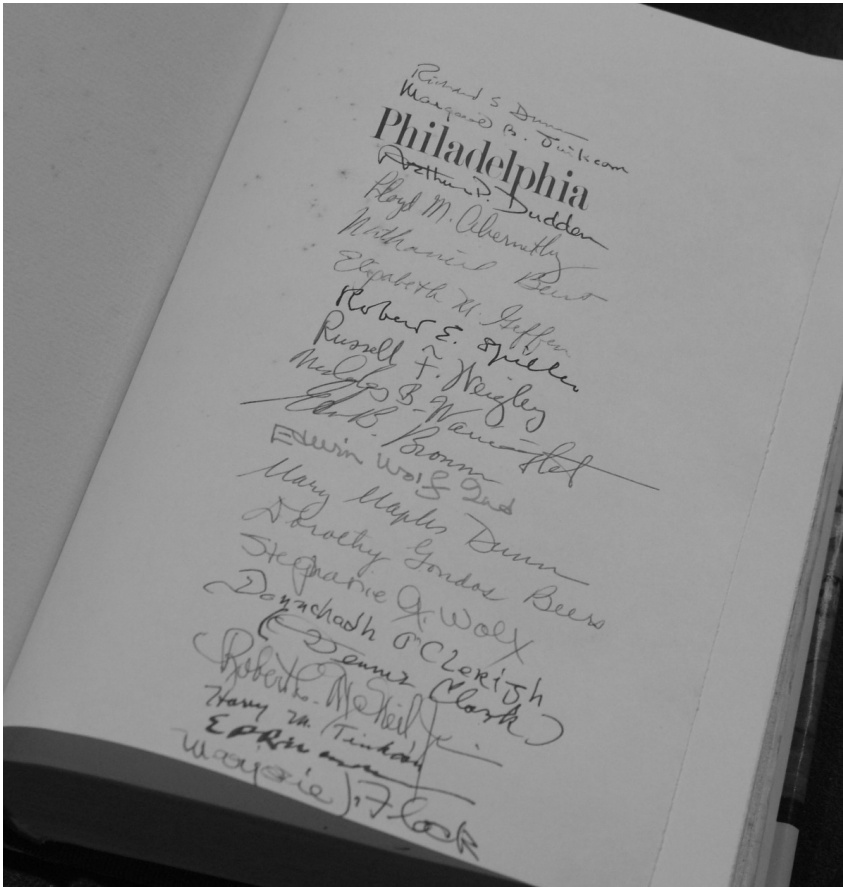
IN 1966, THE LIBRARIAN of the American Philosophical Society, Whitfield J. Bell Jr., formulated a concept that changed the course of Philadelphia history. It certainly changed the lives of a great many Philadelphia historians and, most importantly, it gave Philadelphians ready access to their city's past. Bell, looking ahead to the nation's bicentennial in 1976, proposed that Philadelphia mark the occasion with a new narrative of its own history—the first fully developed history of the city since Ellis P. Oberholtzer's *Philadelphia: A History of the City and Its People*, published in 1912.¹ Soon, an editorial committee was formed with the support of Robert L. McNeil Jr. of the Barra Foundation.

Thus began the sixteen-year historical odyssey that eventually produced *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*, edited by Russell F. Weigley, which appeared in time for the city's three hundredth birthday.² The Historical Society of Pennsylvania celebrated the long-anticipated publication with a champagne reception on September 30, 1982. Twenty-five years later, the volume remains an indispensable guide to the city's history.

A project of such long duration required the effort of many individuals. In the beginning, Roy F. Nichols of the University of Pennsylvania served as chairman and editor-in-chief, with Lois Given Bobb as managing editor and an editorial committee consisting also of Bell, Margaret B. Tinkcom, Nicholas B. Wainwright, and Edwin Wolf 2nd. Relying heavily on Nichols's wide-ranging network of colleagues, former students, and professional acquaintances, the project recruited authors for the individual chapters that would comprise the book. An editorial statement guided the individual authors toward a consistent narrative. In marked contrast to the urban unrest occurring in Philadelphia and other American cities in the 1960s, the editorial philosophy advocated consensus: "This history—

¹ Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer, *Philadelphia: A History of the City and Its People*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia, 1912).

² Russell F. Weigley, ed., *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History* (New York, 1982).



Title page of Russell F. Weigley, ed., *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History* (New York, 1982), signed by the surviving contributors upon publication. Photo by Lou Mehan.

a portrayal of the evolution of the city in the course of three centuries—is to picture the city fundamentally as an exponent of the middle way, eschewing extremes, a consensus of many diversities.” Rather than following the trends of specialists in urban history, who were embracing quantitative methods and emphasizing social conflict, Philadelphia’s new history strove for “narrative flow and a sense of development.” The authors were provided with a list of suggested topics to consider, such as population, politics, and society, and they were encouraged to provide “an interpretive analysis illuminated by facts, not a compilation of facts in

themselves.”³

The writing of *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History* proved to be such a monumental task that some of the original editors and authors did not live to see its completion. Following the death of Roy F. Nichols in 1973, the project was reorganized and Russell F. Weigley, a military historian at Temple University, stepped in as editor and “enforced discipline in his platoon of historians,” as John Maass described it in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.⁴ While the project missed its target of publishing for the bicentennial, another important and even more appropriate commemoration loomed—the three hundredth anniversary of the city. By that time, the book required a new last chapter, to bring events up to 1982.

On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania invited as many of the participants in this landmark project as possible to gather to reflect on their work. The participants in the discussion, which took place at the Historical Society on April 23, 2007, were:

- Mary Maples Dunn and Richard S. Dunn, authors of the chapter “The Founding, 1681–1701.”
- Lloyd M. Abernethy, author of the chapter “Progressivism, 1905–1919.”
- Arthur P. Dudden, author of the chapter “The City Embraces ‘Normalcy,’ 1919–1929.”
- Stephanie G. Wolf, author of the chapter “The Bicentennial City, 1968–1982.”
- Susan Gray Detweiler, illustration researcher.
- Gail H. Fahrner, Senior Program Officer, the Barra Foundation.
- Emma Weigley, widow of Russell F. Weigley, editor.

Also present during the interview were Tamara Gaskell Miller, director of publications, and Melissa M. Mandell, program assistant, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Whitfield J. Bell Jr. and Robert L. McNeil Jr. were unable to participate. Richard G. Miller, author of the chapter “The Federal City, 1783–1800,” was teaching and traveling in Europe at the time of the interview. (The other authors and editors are deceased.)

³ “History of Philadelphia” Editorial Committee, Editorial Statement, n.d. (ca. 1968). Thanks to Gail H. Fahrner of the Barra Foundation for supplying this document.

⁴ John Maass, “20 from Phila. Collaborate in Writing the City’s History,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Oct. 10, 1982.



Participants in the April 23, 2007, roundtable discussion on Russell F. Weigley's *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*. Back row, left to right: Stephanie G. Wolf, Lloyd M. Abernethy, Gail H. Fahrner, Susan Gray Detweiler, Richard S. Dunn. Front row, left to right: Mary Maples Dunn, Emma Weigley, Arthur P. Dudden. Photo by Lou Mehan.

Charlene Mires, associate professor of history at Villanova University and an editorial board member of the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, posed questions for discussion, indicated below in bold. Melissa Mandell transcribed the tape-recorded discussion, which has been condensed for publication.

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We're all aware, of course, of the origins of this concept [with] Whitfield Bell and the early meeting of historians in the late 1960s to talk about the feasibility of this kind of a project. So I first want to ask if any of you were at the original meetings and if you recall any of the pros and cons of setting forth on this sort of project for Philadelphia?

Gail Fahrner: I think I'm probably the only one that was at the original meeting. It was comprised of Whit Bell, Roy Nichols, Bob McNeil, and myself, taking notes. That was in late '66. . . . Whit Bell's concept was the genesis of the whole project. So we took it home and we stewed about it for several weeks and then met again in 1967, early, in either January or February, with a slightly enhanced group. There were probably six or seven people there, and out of that meeting was formed the editorial committee. . . . Roy Nichols of course was the editor-in-chief. The editorial statement was developed by this editorial committee of six with the aid of Lois Bobb, who was the managing editor and who was very instrumental in organizing and getting it set up. It was feasible thanks to Roy Nichols. He then sent out letters to . . . all of the authors. Some of them had been his students, who were experts in a particular era of Philadelphia history. We had an incredible response. People were just dying to be part of it—perhaps *dying's* the wrong word. [Laughter.] Anyway, so it started to take off and we had given them a deadline, the first deadline to get the chapters in—what was it?

Lloyd Abernethy: January 1, 1968.

Fahrner: Sixty-eight, yes—well, forget that! Although I must say [about] the Dunns, your chapter was, I believe, the first one received because I remember I wrote the checks for you. [Laughter.] . . . Each author of a chapter signed a contract with the Barra Foundation. The authors were paid by the foundation. Subsequent to that, Roy Nichols's health deteriorated, and then he died, unfortunately, and the project almost foundered at that point.

. . . Many of the people who came into the project were students or colleagues of Roy Nichols, so I want to ask all of you here whether you were associated with Dr. Nichols. What brought you into the project? Why did you decide to get involved?

Richard Dunn: I was not Roy's student, but he hired me [at the University of Pennsylvania], so I was certainly connected to him in that way.

Mary Maples Dunn: I wasn't connected to him, except through marriage. [Laughter.]

Emma Weigley: Russ was one of his students.

Arthur Dudden: I knew Roy through a mutual friend . . . also, I think what struck Roy about me with this project in mind was that I published an article on Lincoln Steffens—his chapter on Philadelphia, the “corrupt and contented”—and so that's why I got attached to this program.⁵

Weigley: Betty Geffen was a Roy Nichols student, I think.⁶

R. Dunn: Several of the others were, too.

Abernethy: I was not a student, nor had I ever met Roy Nichols before. I got the letter forty years ago, April the twenty-first [1967]. Forty years plus two days. I really think that Lois Bobb probably had [gotten] me involved, because she was editor of the Historical Society journal, and I had recently published an article on the gas war of 1905, and there were very few historians working in the twentieth century.⁷

M. Dunn: I already published at least some articles . . . and my book on William Penn was just about done. So I think I was added on because I knew something about William Penn. . . .⁸

Stephanie Wolf: . . . I was brought in about a year a half before the book came out [to write the new last chapter, “The Bicentennial City”]. . . . Bob [McNeil] called me frantically. I don't know who he was thinking could have dealt with that field—it wasn't me. It was the first time I ever dealt with anything but dead people. [Laughter.] . . .

⁵ Arthur P. Dudden, “Lincoln Steffens' Philadelphia,” *Pennsylvania History* 31 (1964): 449–58.

⁶ Elizabeth M. Geffen wrote the chapter “Industrial Development and Social Crisis, 1841–1854.”

⁷ Lloyd M. Abernethy, “Insurgency in Philadelphia, 1905,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 87 (1963): 3–20.

⁸ Mary Maples Dunn, *William Penn: Politics and Conscience* (Princeton, NJ, 1967).

The reviews pointed out [that] this book upheld the tradition of historical narrative writing about cities, more than it was trying to follow the scholarly trend, whatever it might have been at whatever time you began.⁹ . . . One thing a lot of you shared with Roy Nichols was an interest in storytelling, rather than a quantitative history, which an urban historian might have done at the same time. Am I right about that?

M. Dunn: Well, quantification was getting in there, but this was started in the early sixties when I think the narrative was still predominant.

Fahrner: There's also attached to the editorial statement . . . a list of topics that were to be considered by each author for each chapter. That list of topics was developed by Roy Nichols and Lois Bobb, a checklist for each chapter.¹⁰

As authors, did you find yourselves following the instructions, or did they evolve over time for you as you produced these chapters?

R. Dunn: I think it depends some on where you were in the chronology—we were at the beginning [“The Founding, 1681–1701”], so a great many of things on the checklist didn't really apply, we just had twenty years to get Philadelphia started.

Abernethy: Arthur [Dudden] and I were much affected by one big change that took place. Remember, Margaret Tinkcom was to write a chapter on “how they lived” during the twentieth century, which meant a lot of social-cultural aspects would be in that chapter, and I emphasized the political, and she was going to do the social-cultural. But then they dropped that idea and she did one of the other chapters [“Depression and War, 1929–1946”], so I had to go back and incorporate much more social-cultural history—baseball, things like that—in my chapter.

Fahrner: And part of . . . the reason for that change was when the new editorial committee took over [from Nichols]—which was Russ Weigley

⁹ Michael Frisch, review of *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*, in *Journal of American History* 70 (1983): 641; David C. Hammack, review of *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*, in *American Historical Review* 89 (1984): 878–80.

¹⁰ The “topical suggestions” were: physical appearance; population; politics; movements; economics; society; culture; religion; recreation; personalities; and “the outsider's view.”

and Nick Wainwright and Ed Wolf—they worked as a trio, and finally realized that they needed one guy in charge, and that was Russ. And without his expertise, and without Bob McNeil's stubborn perseverance and dedication, the book would not have materialized. It's very difficult to do a publication with [multiple] authors.

Let's pick up then with that period in the early 1970s . . . when there was some doubt arising about the future of the project, in part because of Dr. Nichols's illness. I wonder if any of you shared those doubts by that period of time and if so, what if anything changed your minds about the future of the project?

R. Dunn: I think we were already done [with the first chapter].

M. Dunn: We didn't really worry about it again until we were asked to revise it.

R. Dunn: But actually, if we had written our chapter when the other people wrote their chapters, it might have been better, because by that time we were getting involved in the papers of William Penn so we probably knew a good deal more about early Philadelphia in the late '70s and early '80s.

M. Dunn: But we revised quite a bit.

Dudden: My problem is that I was under contract for two other books when this came along . . . the biography of Joseph Fels . . . and manuals to accompany a big textbook.¹¹ . . . I just couldn't get started with this other stuff that I'd promised, so if you go through this file of mine, you'll find all of us authors listed as what they've accomplished so far, where their article is, and I'm in that group of about four that hasn't started yet.

But yet you stuck with the project—why?

Dudden: Well, I guess I hoped to extend it long enough to finish it. I was not the only guilty party.

¹¹ Arthur Power Dudden, *Joseph Fels and the Single-Tax Movement* (Philadelphia, 1971); textbook supplements for Richard Hofstadter, William Miller, and Daniel Aron, *The United States*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1972).

Fahrner: There was some heavy arm-twisting going on.

Dudden: Money was part of it. I notice in my file here that I got a check for two hundred dollars [from the Barra Foundation] after submitting an outline of what I intended to do. And then I said, could I have the other two hundred dollars—it was a four-hundred-dollar commitment at that point—because I needed the money. And later on when I finished I got a check for a thousand dollars after all that. . . .

Abernethy: I actually submitted a chapter in early '68, but they sent it back and said it was too political. At that time I guess they were deciding to drop [Margaret Tinkcom's] "how they lived," and so I went back and included a lot more social and cultural material and sent it back in.

Dudden: Wally Davies died and he had already forty pages written in manuscript. [Wallace E. Davies's chapter, "The Iron Age, 1876–1905," subsequently was completed by Nathaniel Burt.] . . .

Wolf: . . . I wrote a whole a chapter on the bicentennial city, which hadn't intended to be a chapter in the first place anyhow. . . .

Abernethy: The project carried on so long it *became* a chapter. . . .

The authors recalled that doubts and differences of opinion about the project emerged as early as 1968, prompting a conference of authors and editors in Chestnut Hill.

Abernethy: Initially I was assigned 1905–1916, and then at that conference . . . they decided to tack on the war years to mine, which is a good thing. . . . The one other big change [was] that originally Ed Wolf was going to write transition chapters in between each of the major chapters, and at some point that idea was dropped, which I think was probably a good idea.

R. Dunn: I think there was a considerable tension between Ed Wolf and Weigley—well, I don't know if it was *tension* between Wolf and Weigley, but they certainly had different views of how the book should be put together, because Ed was very critical of chapters such as the one Mary and I wrote, as being very dull and boring.

M. Dunn: Which he very kindly told us. [Laughter.]

R. Dunn: I think what Russ stuck to [was] thoroughly documented, scholarly, detailed history. It was really Russ's conception.

Abernethy: He made the transition between chapters himself without doing anything specific to them, except helping the authors do it.

M. Dunn: I do vaguely remember one meeting at the Library Company, Ed and Russ were certainly there, and it was clear that they didn't have the same ideas about how this should go forward. . . .

Fahrner: Even after the conference . . . out in Chestnut Hill, and we had all the authors with Bob Spiller, who was credited in the acknowledgments as bringing the whole thing together.¹² . . . All of the authors came, and it was kind of, "Are you going to do this, or aren't you?" . . . It was held, I believe, because so many authors had not submitted chapters [laughter], and Bob McNeil was beginning to wonder if it's a go or not.

So, there was doubt about whether to proceed with the project at all, and if proceeding, what form would the book take? Did the difference about the conception of the book have to do with whether it was a scholarly book versus a popular book? . . .

M. Dunn: I think that was some of it. . . .

Wolf: He [Weigley] had his own conception of how each chapter should be written, and I don't know if it followed a scholarly/nonscholarly point of view. But it was his own idea of how that should be interpreted.

Fahrner: The two-word phrase that I remember . . . was that the book was written for the "scholarly public."

M. Dunn: Where did they go?

Dudden: That's a non sequitur.

¹² Robert E. Spiller, professor emeritus of English at the University of Pennsylvania, became an editorial consultant for the Barra Foundation and recommended ways to revitalize the project.

Wolf: An oxymoron! [Laughter.]

Dudden: Context had a lot to do with the [editing], at least in my case. My first version of my chapter on the 1920s, I centered around the sesqui-centennial. That almost disappeared by the time Weigley got through with it.

. . . One common characteristic of Whitfield Bell, Roy Nichols, Russell Weigley, and I think many of you, was a commitment to writing history and being involved with history not just within academic walls, but outside as well. . . . How important is it for historians to reach out to the public?

Abernethy: Well I don't think we were writing for other scholars, we were writing for the educated public, the literate public, because a book of this sort is not going to break much new scholarly ground as the books and articles for the historians are.

Dudden: But you know it came out at a time when history of cities was becoming a big specialization . . . and so this played a part in pulling together for the first time in a long time, since the late nineteenth century, the history of Philadelphia.

Fahrner: Remember that the book was originally supposed to be published in the bicentennial year as a celebration.

R. Dunn: I think 1982 was actually a better date.

Wolf: I don't think today that any publisher, even if it was Bob McNeil and he was . . . paying for it out of his own money or foundation money, would even consider for minute a book like this, as even a semi-trade book, as even the book to celebrate the bicentennial. I just think that's a change in the world and I think that's what we would be doing then, but it's just not the way you do it anymore. . . .

At the turning point in the early 1970s, Russell Weigley was obviously a well-known military historian who stepped into this role as editor. Was this largely to carry out the legacy of his teacher?

Emma Weigley: Definitely.

Could you talk a little bit more about the relationship he had with Roy Nichols?

Weigley: I think there's something in the acknowledgements about the "firm but kindly manner" in which Roy Nichols worked, I think he [Russell Weigley] admired that, I think he felt fortunate to have worked with Roy Nichols, and it really was to honor his mentor that he took over the editorship.¹³

R. Dunn: Don't you think it's also fair to say that Russ had an unusually strong interest in the history of Philadelphia, independent of this book, he was that kind of a person, he loved the history of the town he was living in?

Various participants: Yes!

[Due to technical difficulties with the tape recording, the following section has been reconstructed from notes taken while the conversation continued.]

A review by John Maass in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* stated that Weigley "enforced discipline in his platoon of historians."¹⁴ Was that the case? How?

R. Dunn: He was an excellent editor, and he preserved authors' individual styles. There may have been other ways to arrange the book, but he knew that a topical arrangement wouldn't work.

Emma Weigley, what was it like having Russ working on two books at the same time? [Weigley's *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944–45*, was published by Indiana University Press in 1981.]

Weigley: Our children were also born in '73 and '76, so there were

¹³ See Russell F. Weigley, "Roy F. Nichols: Teacher," *Pennsylvania History* 38 (1971): 44–50.

¹⁴ Maass, "20 from Phila. Collaborate in Writing the City's History."

tensions, but I knew how much it meant to him.

. . . The attention given by many of the authors to African American history is striking, for that time. Was that a conscious or collective decision?

R. Dunn: We were all conscious of the [African American] population, of the civil rights movement; we couldn't *not* include it.

M. Dunn: We missed the women, though; the women's movement came a little too late for the book.

Dudden: "Society" came to mean *all* groups, to include ethnicity, race. We were the first generation to include them.

Wolf: Race, ethnicity, all of these questions from the 1960s came into the research; you couldn't live through the sixties without being affected by it. . . .

[Following a break in the discussion, taping resumed.]

Susan Detweiler, will you talk about your work in locating the illustrations? They have been such an asset to those of us who study and teach about Philadelphia. . . .

Detweiler: Bob McNeil had asked me to hurry up and round up some photographs and pictures. I had something like a month to do it—it was very tight, and I can remember [and] my children certainly remember this too, every night after dinner saying well, "Goodbye, I have to go off and write ten captions." But my real discovery was the richness of the repositories in Philadelphia of the pictorial material. And of course, this institution, many of the pictures came from the Historical Society and the *Philadelphia Record* morgue of the newspaper that's here, and many of the early prints, and the Library Company. The Free Library has a very wonderful picture and print department, and many things came from there. I was very lucky, I walked into the *Evening Bulletin*, and met George McDowell. This was of course in '82, just as the *Bulletin* was closing, shutting down, and he said, go in, take what you want, take anything. . . . It was really a fun, intense month. And I don't know why

pictures hadn't been thought of before, I guess all the articles had to be finished in a way. But I didn't so much read the articles and then get pictures specifically, I went around and just tried to get wonderful pictures and then we'd see if any of them would fit. . . .

[To Stephanie Wolf] What was it like being a colonial historian brought in to tackle this chapter on bicentennial Philadelphia?

Wolf: Like I say, it was very difficult working with live people. I love working with dead people, now all of the sudden these people can tell me you don't have that right. . . . No, it was fascinating to learn how to do that kind of history, which I had not known how to do, really, before. I had never been called on to do it, so that part of it was extremely interesting. And what I did was I used what Mary [Dunn] had taught me and what I had learned by myself in relation to "the new social history"—which now is the old, old social history—in trying to reconstruct a very modern period in the ways we did older periods in history. So that part of it was very interesting. . . .

Does that period look very different to you today than what you wrote, or does it seem to hold up?

Wolf: . . . I think it holds up pretty well. Any little predictions I made at the end about how things were going to go down hill, a lot of it came true, sadly. But I think it worked out okay. The biggest part of the problem for me was Bob [McNeil], who was really anxious about the book by then . . .

Fahrner: No kidding!

Wolf: . . . We went up to [Cape Cod], and we had an unlisted phone number because whenever we did go up there, we didn't want anyone to bother us . . .

Fahrner: He found you!

Wolf: . . . He certainly did. He found us, he knew my in-laws, and he finally got in touch with them and he called me at the Cape. And I was

outraged! [Laughs.] I was on schedule for what I was supposed to be doing, and I said if I had wanted anyone to know where I was, I would have given them my number, I don't think anyone had ever said that to Bob before, and I regretted it afterwards!

So this new period of anxiety is after the bicentennial had passed, and you were eager for publication by 1982?

Fahrner: 1982 at the very latest.

Wolf: . . . And so I had like six months to research and write a chapter about which I only knew what I read in the newspapers. . . . I talked to a lot of people, I called City Hall, I got some inroads, and I did do a lot of discussing. . . .

At last, in 1982, Philadelphia: A 300-Year History, was published by W. W. Norton, with support from the Barra Foundation. The project conceived in the 1960s, intended for publication in the 1970s, came to fruition in time for the city's three hundredth anniversary.

Was there anything about this project that influenced your later work as historians, whether it was the content of the piece, the type of writing that this was, or the collaborative nature of this project—did any of that carry forward into your later work?

Detweiler: I did some more picture research jobs. This was a new field for me and I thought, oh this is fun. And we [turning to Wolf] became friends . . . and we've been involved with Germantown and some other things. I did the picture research for Bill Moyers's *Report from Philadelphia*, do you remember that?¹⁵ And another project for the Michener Museum up in Doylestown, picture research for a project on famous artists who had lived in Bucks County. So I wouldn't say it influenced, but it led to other work. . . .

Abernethy: I did some more research in Philadelphia. I did a biography

¹⁵ Bill Moyers, *Moyers: Report from Philadelphia: The Constitutional Convention of 1787* (New York, 1987).

of a Philadelphia artist, Benton Spruance. . . . There was a book published about groups in Philadelphia [*Invisible Philadelphia*] . . . I did a political overview chapter for that.¹⁶ I think mostly because of this book publication, I did some scripts for radio. One I did on political reform in Philadelphia, and then they did a biographical series and asked me to suggest some names . . . and I put in [Mayor] Rudolph Blankenburg, the "Old Dutch Cleanser," and actually Benton Spruance, because he was a real leader in Philadelphia art circles for many years. And when they asked me to do that, that set me in motion to do the biography of Spruance because if there was that much interest in him, he was worthy of a biography. . . .

We've touched on this throughout the conversation, but let me ask if there are any further thoughts: If such a book [as the *300-Year History*] were attempted today, what kind of book might it be? I'm thinking in terms of the direction scholarship has come in these last twenty-five years, what sorts of topics, or would it be possible to do a single-volume history of Philadelphia today?

Wolf: A scholarly one, probably not—I mean, there's so much theory and so much talking to each other [among scholars]. . . . You could have a coffee-table book, obviously, with a page on each decade, and all Sue's wonderful pictures, and you could do something like that which would probably have a lot of popular resonance. You can probably do a single biography of the city where you could have the footnotes, maybe have suggested readings at the end, and do something a lot more easygoing than this was. But to do this kind of thing again?

Fahrner: The one thing I've heard about this book over and over from people and from some of my friends who are not scholars by any means, the reason they love the book is because you can pick it up, [and] if there's a particular chapter or time that you're interested in, you can just read that chapter. You can read what interests you, it's not like . . . you have to go through and pick out or read the whole thing.

¹⁶ Lloyd M. Abernethy, *Benton Spruance: The Artist and the Man* (Philadelphia, 1988); Jean Barth Toll and Mildred S. Gillam, eds., *Invisible Philadelphia: Community through Voluntary Organizations* (Philadelphia, 1995).

Wolf: They *are* stand-alone essays.

Fahrner: Absolutely.

So, if we could sum up, what do you think of as the significance of this book?

M. Dunn: That it got published! [Laughter.]

Weigley: Someone said they could write a book about the writing of the book. . . .

One of the interviews I read with Dr. Weigley quoted him on a couple of his hopes for what the book would achieve.¹⁷ . . . He hoped that this would allow Philadelphians to reflect on a past that was not always admirable; that Philadelphians might see a more complete picture of their past; and also that Philadelphians would see their history as not just today and long ago, but see more of what was in between. . . .

Wolf: Philadelphians certainly don't think of themselves as admirable anymore. Philadelphia has much more of an inferiority complex . . . that "corrupt and contented" [phrase]—I think the corrupt probably still holds, but the contented doesn't hold very much anymore. . . . You know, one way that shows the change, is that the most popular tourist things [were] the Powel House, or the Morris House, now it's Eastern State Penitentiary! And I think that shows an enormous change in the way people want to see things. . . .

That's that middle period of history.

Wolf: That's right. Well, first of all we've moved up into the nineteenth century, that is only as far back as we can wrap our heads around.

M. Dunn: But still the majority of tourists come down to Independence Square. . . .

¹⁷ Carlin Romano, "Explaining 300 Years of Phila.," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jan. 3, 1983.

Weigley: Something that Russ commented on—and I got the book out to look at it, and found a clipping that illustrates this—when someone’s writing an article for the *Inquirer*, say, that has to do with Philadelphia, they’ll look in the book, and then comment on what the book says, and not infrequently chastise the book for not including enough about their particular topic of interest. I happened to find [criticism] of the book for mentioning Octavius Catto only twice . . . and this has happened other times. People have their own hobbyhorses, not realizing that a book that covers three hundred years is not going to devote page after page to their particular thing.

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According to Gail Fahrner of the Barra Foundation, *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History* has gone into its seventh printing with W. W. Norton. As Fahrner explained during the roundtable discussion: “Norton, to its eternal credit, is willing to keep it going. . . . Barra is paying the up-front publication costs, but [Norton is] willing to market it, to store it, and they call me every time they get down to five hundred copies and say, ‘Okay, we need another infusion,’ and they’ll do another printing. And they will keep it going, to their credit. It has been discussed several times, with Russ Weigley and with others and with Norton whether we should do an update, and everybody has said, ‘no way’—just leave it alone as a stand-alone book. It was a mammoth undertaking as it was, and just leave it alone, with all of its warts.” To date, more than 37,000 copies have been sold.

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