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Brian C. Black, Michael J. Chiarappa, eds. *Nature's Entrepôt: Philadelphia's Urban Sphere and Its Environmental Thresholds*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012. vi + 367 pp. \$38.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8229-4417-1.



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Commissioned by Monique Bourque (Willamette University)

Brian Black and Michael Chiarappa have edited a fascinating volume of essays on the environmental history of greater Philadelphia. The thirteen authors examine the city from its founding in the late seventeenth century to the present and the works combine to address a great variety of issues in an equally great variety of styles. One of the strengths of this volume is its diversity, as this reflects the broad range of views on the urban environment. For historians and students of Philadelphia (and other cities), it can serve as an effective introduction to urban environmental history.

The title, of course, is a play on William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (1991), the classic look at how Chicago thrived by consuming its region's environment. Although a clever title, it is deceiving as the two volumes are very different, sharing only the environmental history of a large city and its region as a focus. Cronon's book has a single voice, a strong focus and a clear flow. It is one story, one view. Metaphorically it is like a melodic tune by Brahms. This work, because of its many voices, is rather more dissonant; it reads more like a symphony by Stravinsky. The diverseness of the stories, which are told in different (and occasionally jarring) ways, might be viewed as a weakness as there is no single narrative developed by the book. For me, this va-

riety can be advantageous, and it is here, as it allows the reader to see there is no one environmental story that fits all urban situations.

The work begins with a short (thirteen-page) introduction by Brian Black that does an adequate job of setting the stage for what follows. A little more on the evolving literature on environmental history would have helped urban historians a great deal and a little more on the settlement and evolution of the Philadelphia region would have assisted scholars not familiar with the history of the Quaker City, but the introduction does provide a setting for the essays. Its single illustration is the classic self-portrait of Charles Wilson Peale at his museum (and relates to Black's discussion) but a map of the city and its region would likely have been more useful for many potential readers. This book would be of more value to scholars who focus on other cities if the overall arc of the Philadelphia story had been developed in more detail at the outset.

The thirteen essays are divided into four (basically chronological) parts and the logic of the editors' division is explained at the end of the introduction. The divisions are not quite as clear as the editors posit in the introduction and individual chapters often overlap in both space

and time. This is true whether the essays are placed in the same or different sections of the book. This is less a criticism than a warning to the reader that this is a book best read as a whole rather than digested in small parts if one wishes to develop the complete picture. In fact, one could imagine a more thematic organization (for example, a number of the essays relate to traditional urban infrastructure—streets, parks and sewers—and these could have been grouped together).

Part 1 consists of three chapters, which according to Black primarily focus on Philadelphia before 1800 (p. 11), but while that temporal focus is true for two of the chapters, the third ranges far forward into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In fact this part can be better viewed as a foundation to what follows in that the first chapter by Craig Zabel discusses William Penn and Thomas Holmes's grid plan for the city, the next (by Elizabeth Milroy) the development of the city's Fairmount Park (this is the chapter that so wantonly extends beyond 1800), and the final by Thomas Apel is a discussion of yellow fever in the city that looks at twelve years that straddle 1800. These three chapters introduce the reader to the dissonance of the book; the authors do not address each other and the focus of each piece is very different but what links all three is a discussion of an evolving urban environment. Although there is nothing terribly new in these three essays (they all cover ground—the grid, the park, and the yellow fever outbreaks—that has been well covered in the past), the shift of the lens to environmental history allows each author to tell these stories in a new way. For example, all of these essays deal with very traditional urban history issues (grid street plans, parks, and sewers) but looking at how the idealism of a plan-Holmes's classic grid—confronts the reality of a muddy and hilly plot of land full of streams is useful reminder that the basically flat gridiron of Center City took decades to create.

The three chapters in part 2 look at the period of industrial expansion in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Not just the subject of each essay but the voice of each author adds to the variety of this section. Donna Rilling looks in detail at how an early-nineteenth-century noxious industry (bone boiling) can be seen to be (in modern terms) as being green. Michael McMahon deals with an essentially political debate over the private use and public good of Dock Creek in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, again in great detail. This section closes with Carolyn Adams's essay on industrial suburbs that reads totally differently from the detailed narratives of the other two chapters in this part. If Rilling

and McMahon are discussing micro history and examining smells and pollution on a very human scale, Adams has zoomed out for a macro look at the region. For me, the shift in view, although jarring, was very useful; it was a nice reminder of how these many individual pieces need to be fitted together to explain fully the history of the region and how a broad history of the region misses the textures, tastes, and smells of everyday life.

The third part consists of three essays that consider Landscape Transformation in the Growing City and take the book through the nineteenth century into the twentieth. The first essay (by Adam Levine) looks at the issues created by extending Holmes's grid throughout the city and how this idealized system conflicted with the natural topography (and nicely extends Zabel's essay in part 1). It manages to pack three centuries of complex environmental history into a mere twenty pages. Michael Chiarappa's chapter on the Delaware estuary was the part of this work that reminded me most of Cronon's book as it clearly ties the economy of the city to the environmental exploitation of its region. The final essay by Robert Mason considers modern urban sprawl in not just the immediate area around the city but throughout a broader region.

The final part of the book focuses more on the city's current environmental issues and the recent past. The last of the four chapters of this part effectively serve as the conclusion for the book as the editors have not provided one. Anne Whiston Spirn looks at Mill Creek in West Philadelphia and considers the nineteenth-century industrial roots of the neighborhood. The issues engaged here are also considered on more macro levels by Adams and Levine, so this makes for one of the useful juxtapositions found throughout this book. The next chapter by Diane Sicotte is another wonderfully detailed (like Spirn's) look at recent environmental activism in the city but more focused on the nature of the activism than the underlying environmental issues. Domenic Vitiello's essay considers the currently hot topic of urban agriculture and notes the irony that the many nonprofits work hard to develop urban farming while the city government is far more reticent. The final chapter by Ann Norton Green looks at the many competing claims to environmentalism in the amazingly complex issues around deer in the Wisahickon section of Fairmount Park. It is not only the final chapter in the book, but because it considers (but does not resolve) the complex nature of competing environmental claims in an urban park (at its base, what is natural in a natural environment that humans created?) it is a fitting ending to this interesting and nu-

anced set of essays.

Overall this is a very nice introduction to the complexity of urban environmental history for scholars who study the city of Philadelphia and its region. If more time

had been spent developing the urban context of Philadelphia, it would have been more useful for scholars of cities in general but it is a worthwhile addition to our understanding of the environmental history of the large city.

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