As scholars, we can accept the validity of Heath’s argument that “cultural weathering” does not end at some arbitrary point in the past, and his study certainly demonstrates the value of seeing buildings as they are rather than as they were, and of searching for explanations about how they came to their current use and appearance. For as historic preservationists the argument is a bit harder to accept, since the concept of cultural weathering seems to suggest that all evidence of age (that is, physical patina) can be wiped out, and that we should not make an effort to forestall such an occurrence. Heath recognizes the difficulty: “Obviously, the patination process of human beings, as with nature, can be viewed as either a positive or destructive force depending on one’s point of view” (184). The problem is that cultural significance and historical significance are often at odds. The altered three-deckers of New Bedford are without a doubt culturally meaningful, but are they historically significant? Heath’s response to this dilemma is eloquent. He argues, in part, that change is inevitable, and that tying an architect’s or builder’s hands with design constraints that rest in outdated perceptions of use and acceptable aesthetics is counterproductive, and can even result in the erasure of a significant segment of a neighborhood’s history. Heath’s argument must be considered by anyone studying the recent past; for example, post–World War II housing developments or 1960s strip malls. It must also be weighed by historic preservationists who now clamor for saving original fast-food restaurants, but blanch at the thought of arguing for the preservation of the local half-empty strip mall. Heath does not say that all change is good, only that we must understand a place before we claim that it lacks merit. This work will stand with Chris Wilson’s The Myth of Santa Fe as an important contribution to what we might call activist history—histories that lay bare the biases through which we view the past and that have determined preservation decisions. Ultimately, recognition of these new perspectives will lead to institutional change and to more-informed decisions concerning the preservation of our built environment and our cultural heritage.

At the very least, The Patina of Place presents excellent historical research and will reward any reader interested in the industrial landscape. But the implications of Heath’s work reach beyond the immediate topic and will appeal to anyone engaged in the study or preservation of the cultural landscape.

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Alex Krieger and David Cobb with Amy Turner, editors
Mapping Boston

Over four centuries, Boston has quadrupled its landmass. By cutting down the hills of the original Shawmut Peninsula, colonial Bostonians gained ground with which to fill in the coves as more land was required. “Wharfing out,” a process by which the area between harbor and bay swamis was filled, was another common pattern. Throughout the nineteenth century, substantial districts were created in the Back Bay, South End, South Boston, East Boston, and Charlestown to accommodate new residential, industrial, and commercial uses. Wooden pilings, reinforced by swelling due to the high water table, were pounded into the gravel fill. As James Carroll comments in Mapping Boston, “the landfill history alone makes Boston a city that walks on water, a city that moves mountains—biblical images of the miraculous” (235).

The winner of the 2001 Philip Johnson Prize from the Society of Architectural Historians for the best architectural exhibition catalogue of the year, Mapping Boston “presents the most extensive graphic presentation of maps of Boston and New England yet assembled under one cover” (xii). This remarkable compendium was the brainchild of the storied Boston real estate developer and voracious map collector Norman B. Leventhal. Over more than a quarter century, he has assembled probably the finest collection of maps of the city and region now in private hands. He has generously shared these objects with the public, first through displays in the halls and lobbies of the buildings he developed and then through a series of museum and library exhibitions. The more permanent record is this publication, which ambitiously pursues multiple goals.

“Mapping Boston is three books intertwined: a collection of essays, a series of illustrated vignettes written to be accessible to a general audience, and a collection of plates of important maps accompanied by technical descriptions” (xii). Not all components blend easily. For the architectural historian, there is rich material to be found, mixed with information of peripheral importance. Indeed, the scheme of organization of the disparate parts becomes at times so complex that the reader needs a map to read the text.

For the map collector and connaisseur, three essays explore the story of mapping Boston and New England. Barbara McCorkle reviews the chronology of New England maps to 1800. She divides her topic into three broad periods of mapmaking—the primary, transitional, and modern eras. The primary phase involves pre-settlement maps that depict New England during the period of initial European exploration—voyages of discovery from the late fifteenth century onward. The transitional or descriptive period began with William Wood’s 1634 map of New England, which provided the earliest “graphically accurate appearance of Boston and Massachusetts Bay” (24). Warfare between the French, English, colonists, and Indians in the 1750s inaugurated an explosion of mapmaking at an increasingly small scale, which accelerated into the nineteenth century. Also tangential to the work of architectural historians, but nevertheless fascinating, is the review of the map trade in eighteenth-century Boston detailed by
David Bosse. Here we learn about the evolution of the principal mapmakers, map sellers, and their products, interlarded with biographical anecdotes that bring to life the entrepreneurship of colonial graphic artists.

By far the most useful of the cartographic essays is the one by David Cobb, one of the editors of the volume, on cadastral maps in the nineteenth century and later. Cobb explains the great importance of land surveys, insurance maps, and atlases and the map-making activities of the federal government, especially the U.S. Geological Survey. His discussion of the background and value of the Sanborn Insurance atlases should be required reading for any student of American architecture or urbanism. Similarly, his brief description of electronic atlases and various electronic mapping programs provides an accessible explanation of issues all architectural historians need to know.

A section called “The New England Plates” follows these essays. The selection of twenty-three plates begins with a 1486 map projection of the world, as envisioned originally by Claudius Ptolemy in the second century A.D., and ends with the Boston quadrant of the U.S. Geological Survey published in 1900. An extensive caption explains the significance and context of each map. A vignette, providing one or more related graphics and an expanded discussion, explores a central issue related to the map. The words and images attempt to ground the reader in the history of Western mapmaking and the history of New England through the end of the nineteenth century. The vignettes, in particular, represent the mission of making the charts in this anthology more accessible to a general audience. The multiple layers of organization, however, work against this attempt at accessibility.

As promised in the title, the book then turns to the topic of mapping Boston. Nancy Seasholes details closely the process of land making from the original terra firma to the current and projected configuration of Greater Boston. Her careful analysis of each campaign of land shaping is a marvelous contribution to the scholarship on the city. We learn here about the administrative, economic, and physical process of “gaining ground.” Thirty well-chosen figures provide us the graphic and photographic record of these campaigns. Why and how Boston came to take its current form is explained here more clearly and fully than ever before. One footnote promises a larger monograph on this topic, but the essay is packed with essential information in highly readable prose.

Alex Krieger, also an editor of the volume, has contributed an essay that takes us from the two-dimensional world of maps to the experience of characteristic places. His chapter is an excellent introduction to the feel of Boston. A planner and architect, he thinks about the three-dimensional realm, reading key environments with the eye of a historian and designer. Not surprisingly, his text is most insightful when it turns to the reshaping of Boston since the mid-twentieth century. A student of city form, he shares his deep knowledge of what we see today, what might have been, and what may evolve in the near future.

As with the section on New England, the essays on Boston precede “The Boston Plates,” twenty-five maps and an aerial photograph that lead us through the expansion of “the city on a hill” from the early eighteenth century until today. A vignette that explores the life of a mapmaker, a related historical event, a landmark building, or a dominant Boston personality accompanies each principal map. Sometimes these relationships are obvious and convincing, sometimes they seem tenuous. Even though Osgood Carleton’s 1795 plan of Boston appears to have no connection to the China Trade, we still learn about the importance of opium sales in lining the pockets of leading Boston shipowners. Publishing the most important maps of Boston in chronological order provides an effect somewhat akin to that of an animated cartoon, as we flip through the sequence and watch the city expand and grow. The captions direct our attention to those sections of the city that have emerged since the previous map was drawn. In combination with the Seasholes essay, the comparative maps allow us to experience three centuries of physical change.

Texts on the history of Boston and on the human dimension of the current city bracket the map-oriented core of this volume. Sam Bass Warner, dean of American urban historians, has written an overview of what we need to know about Boston and Bostonians. His discussion of the geology and topography of the Boston Basin provides particularly important background for the text and images that follow. James Carroll, a columnist for the Boston Globe and a keeper of the city’s conscience, reminds us of the glories and challenges of Boston’s recent past. Appropriate as a coda, his essay emphasizes that “a shared future, not a common past” ultimately defines all Bostonians and all Americans.

Not wanting to leave any stone unturned, the volume concludes with a chronology of significant events in the history of the city and with a comparative timeline of land making in twelve principal sections of the city. The chronology, appropriately peppered with the dates of the most important maps, offers an immensely helpful quick reference to the benchmarks in Boston building. The comparative chart of development campaigns, however, would have been significantly more useful if the actual dates of specific landfill operations had been included. Both elements symbolize the richness and the frustration of this monumental publication. Everything we might possibly want to know or see has been provided. In attempting to cover so many bases, the book becomes a rather daunting read. Frequent cross-references direct us from the discussion of the moment to the illustration in a previous chapter and a vignette within a forthcoming set of plates. At times, the collection feels like a Venn diagram—certain sections overlap while others remain disjointed. These complaints, however, sound like
the indigestion of a man treated to a banquet. For the feast of new information on and analysis of one of America’s defining cities, we are grateful.

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Surveys

Christine Stevenson

**Medicine and Magnificence: British Hospital and Asylum Architecture, 1600–1815**

New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000, viii + 312 pp., 96 illus. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 0-300-08536-2

Samuel Johnson observed in 1761 that “Those antient nations who have given us the wisest models of government, and the brightest examples of patriotism... have yet left behind them no mention of alms-houses or hospitals, of places where age might repose, or sickness be relieved” (89). Pliny the Elder, for example, had urged the curative power of long country walks. The advent of purpose-built charitable hospitals in England in the seventeenth century, emerging from the private houses and monasteries that had long served the sick and needy, confirmed to many of Johnson’s contemporaries that the ancients had finally been surpassed and that the modern, Christian era had come of age. For both symbolic and functional reasons, therefore, ancient architectural models were found unsuitable to hospital design. The use of antique columns and pediments gave hospitals a meaningless air of antiquity, and in the case of their use at the notorious Bedlam (St. Mary of Bethlehem), appeared to celebrate civilization’s weakness rather than its strength. For functional reasons (the spread of diseases in wards), and no doubt also for practical ones, Thomas Jefferson in 1787 hoped that no hospitals would be built in Virginia, and that paupers would be boarded with charitable farmers and that in sickness they would be cared for by their neighbors. Designers of the first purpose-built hospitals for the state—Bruant in France and Wren, Hooke, and Hawksmoor in England—were therefore faced with the dilemma of expressing charity through an ornamental language whose rhetoric was ill-suited to it. It follows that they emphasized their projects’ role in royal magnificence, and chose the palace type as its most natural expression. But almost from its inception, Greenwich hospital was out of step with the new, constitutional mood. Nicholas Hawksmoor observed to Lord Carlisle in 1734 that “I once thought it wou’d have been a publick Building but it will sink into a deformed Barrack[,]” while in 1763, according to James Boswell, Dr. Johnson “remarked that the structure of Greenwich hospital was too magnificent for a place of charity” (84, 253 n. 6).

Christine Stevenson’s excellent study of British hospital design charts the questioning by patrons and physicians alike of the appropriateness of decoration and of hints of luxury in charitable works for the poor. Chapter one describes the hospital ideal; chapters two and three deal with Bedlam, Chelsea, and Greenwich; and chapter four with the limits of charitable display. Where Greenwich was decorated with Corinthian pilasters, later hospitals and asylums were ostentatious in their plainness and celebrated their utility through the self-conscious avoidance of the classical orders (such as the royal hospitals at Haslar, built between 1746 and 1762, and Plymouth, between 1757 and 1762). Stevenson presents the hospital as among the most potent building types for the Enlightenment’s questioning of the validity of the orders as a necessary part of architecture. In pitching ornament against function, for example, the architect James Bevans had emphasized to a parliamentary committee investigating asylums that the shade of the immense Ionic portico at New Bethlehem in Southwark thrust some rooms into gloom (206).

In chapters five to seven, Stevenson analyzes the rise of other manifestations of ornament, or what might be termed “useful magnificence,” in the form of spacious and well-ventilated wards, fireplaces, and good drainage. These innovations were, however, driven not by the architect but by the men and women of science, of whom Florence Nightingale is the most notable. In the eighth volume of the Encyclopédie published in 1765, Denis Diderot wrote that in hospital design the “architect must subordinate his art to the opinions of the physicians” (202). The architect’s loss of control over salubrity parallels the impact on Renaissance architectural theory of the rise of descriptive geometry, as outlined by Alberto Pérez-Gómez (*Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* [Cambridge, Mass., 1983]). Indeed, this parallel is dramatically underlined in the case of the later-eighteenth-century hospitals designed in the form of a panopticon, or centralized wheel, a scheme born from the need for utility and control introduced by the arch-utilitarian Jeremy Bentham. While during the eighteenth century hospital design replaced the country house as the focus of charity and debates concerning its appropriate display, in the nineteenth it came to rival that most functional of buildings, the fort, as the purest expression of geometric regularity.

In the later chapters of Stevenson’s book, hospitals emerge as a modern building type par excellence. Where previous historians have emphasized the similarity in appearance of the eighteenth-century hospital to the country house, Stevenson points to its novelty: their requirement of undifferentiated floor levels over that of a *piano nobile*, for example, and their need for high-ceileded wards. Her study makes clear the link between medical advances and changes in hospital plan and form, and the growth in the idea that hospital and asylum architecture could itself promote health through internal galleries and external colonnades. Her early account of London’s first Bedlam, with its grills for peering at the inmates, sets the scene for outlining these reforms. The conditions