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Roger D. Simon. *The City-Building Process: Housing and Services in New Milwaukee Neighborhoods, 1880-1910.* Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1996. x + 163 pp. \$15.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-87169-685-4.

Reviewed by Anthony M. Orum (Department of Sociology, University of Illinois at Chicago)
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1996 was the 150th birthday of the legal establishment of the City of Milwaukee, and, to celebrate the occasion, the publisher of Roger Simon's wonderful 1978 study decided to reissue the book in a revised form. It was an excellent decision, and allows people today to read a monograph that left a big impact on me as well as many other students of Milwaukee and Wisconsin history.

I first visited this book when I was engaged in several years of research on the history of Milwaukee. Then, as now, I found it among the most detailed and informative works I have read on how a city is built. Scholars have written works about urban streetcars, automobiles, housing developments, even public works, but Roger Simon, who is Chair of the History Department at Lehigh University, takes us to the core of what cities are about for their citizens—the construction of residences, who lives in such buildings, how much they cost, and where they are located. By getting down to the grit of these matters, we are removed from the sometimes airy and abstract sphere of urban expansion and taken to their very foundations.

Simon selects three wards from Milwaukee in the period from 1880 to 1910 and proceeds to write about the houses constructed in those wards during the period. Part of his purpose is to inquire into the nature of suburban growth at the time, seeking to test the broad thesis of Sam Bass Warner, Jr., that Americans moved to the areas on the periphery of many cities, in part to capture a rural ideal, in part to take advantage of the resources they had as middle-class citizens. Where Warner wrote of how wealth could facilitate the suburban move, and how it helped to create class segregation in cities, Simon is more probing, wondering about the impact of ethnicity and other facts that can be inferred from who bought where, when and with how much.

Each of the newly-built suburban areas he studied turned out to be very different. One was an area that was composed of a mix of class groupings, but drawing mainly from Milwaukee's very large German population. Another, heavily Polish and on Milwaukee's industrial southside, was considerably poorer but also evidenced a good deal of desire for home ownership by residents. The third, the comparatively posh and beautiful near northeast side of Milwaukee, had far larger lots, was peopled mainly by professional and white-collar workers, and seemed, unlike the rest of Milwaukee, to be primarily native and British.

Thus, the three suburban areas clearly showed considerable diversity and revealed a far more complex story than that of the wealthy moving away from their poor working-class brethren. While a good deal of the picture can be captured by class differences, a good deal also owes itself to a desire by people not simply to capture the rural ideal, or the smell of the crabgrass frontier, but also to settle among those like themselves. In this latter respect, Simon's work partly confirms the earlier work of Kathleen Conzen, who pointed to the importance of an ethnic enclave—long before social scientists called it such—in the development of the German community in Milwaukee. Simon's revised work fleshes out the earlier version by bringing the history well up-to-date and tracing a bit how the neighborhoods have changed since they first were formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We should not be surprised to learn that many of the houses now appear obsolete, especially in the two poorer wards, whereas the well-off area, some of which surrounds the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, remains in fairly good condition. He also manages to trace some of the broad social and demographic changes in the city, drawing, in part, I must add,

on the work I did.

The story of Milwaukee, whether its housing or broader narrative over the past one and one-half centuries, is a difficult one to tell, especially at this moment. Simon provides exemplary detail and makes it possible for us to see how and where people moved, how subdividers created their subdivisions, and what gave rise to differences in the value of lots—e.g. lots in a poor ward across from a lovely park were strategically fashioned so that they could bring a far handsomer price than those on some regular thoroughfares.

The only thing missing from this story is a bit more feel of those people who lived in those houses. Though Simon tells us something about particular individuals and families, culled from Census and other documents, one wishes to get a better sense of whether they thought the house was too small, how much it meant to them, whether it was a way of moving forward, moving out,

capturing whatever smell of rustic America they wanted. Too often we have had to rely on these second-hand documents to recapture the flavor of those early city-building times; how much nicer it would be to have someone's diary to let us really know what they thought and felt about the move, and whether that unpeopled space was all that precious to them.

Yet what Simon has given us is as grounded a sense of city-building as we might want, from among the common and not-so-common people of Milwaukee. I continue to see this work as one of those invaluable documents that tell us how American cities were built, and I thank Roger for allowing me to appropriate and modify the title of his work for the title of my own.

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