H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Jerry A. McCoy, Silver Spring Historical Society. *Downtown Silver Spring*. Then & Now Series. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2010. Illustrations. 96 pp. $21.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7385-8631-1.

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Commissioned by Mary Beth Corrigan

Development Illustrated

Jerry A. McCoy's latest book *Downtown Silver Spring* is an Arcadia Then & Now pictorial book with distinction. This book focuses on buildings, progress, and change in downtown Silver Spring, Maryland, unlike his first book *Historic Silver Spring* (2005), which explored the people and events of this Washington suburb. The scholarship and research evident in McCoy's new book sets it high above the usual pictorial volume.

Arcadia Publishing, long known for its Images of America series, began its Then & Now series in 2007. These books present photographs of buildings from the past alongside images of the same site in the present. The images show how a community has changed over time as the present-day photo can depict the same building, a new building, a park, or a vacant lot. Although captions place the images in context, the reader uses visual cues to interpret these changes. This approach conveys the change of a community over time that fosters a sense of history and perhaps even a sentiment in favor of preservation.

Downtown Silver Spring has the standard format of a "then" and a "now" photo on each page, the "then" photo in sepia tone and the "now" photo in a gold frame. It differs from other books in this Arcadia series in that it has a preface as well as a foreword; a keyed list of contributors under acknowledgments; and the unique, but always welcome, addition of an index.

It is always good to have a famous person write a preface to your book, but McCoy surpasses all expectations. George Pelecanos, a native of Silver Spring, is a well-known writer of mystery novels and the writer and producer of the popular HBO series *The Wire*. In his extraordinary introduction, Pelecanos reminisces about life in the community, talks about its changes, and concludes: "Don't call it nostalgia. It is an appreciation for the past, with anticipation for what comes next" (p. viii).

This preface and the foreword by McCoy set the tone of the book. It is not a complaint about progress destroying the past, but instead about the future building on the past. The images demonstrate the tremendous growth from a rural town to a vibrant city with skyscrapers and the preservation of important icons in the midst of Silver Spring's transformation.

McCoy carefully organizes and selects photographs that enhance their interpretation. Unlike other Then & Now books, *Downtown Silver Spring* is arranged by streets rather than by theme, a format that helps the reader locate the sites. It follows a street in one direction sequentially switching from one side to another, going first from one main street to another, and then to the side streets, somewhat like a walking tour. In addition, McCoy has tried to match the sight-view of the photographer of the old image with the contemporary image, even down to matching aerial views. Such careful selection effectively draws out the contrast. McCoy has meticulously identified the people in the photographs when possible, information that is also often missing in similar books.

There are only two mistakes that I found in the book, and these have to do with the placement of the pictures and so may not be the fault of the author but of the publisher. The "then" and "now" photos on page 39 and on

page 91 are reversed, but can easily be distinguished by the modern clothing and store names in the "now" photos.

Downtown Silver Spring illustrates the transformation of Silver Spring in a way that newcomers to the city can appreciate. The preface and foreword, the index, and the skilled documentation of the photographs in addition to its organization–all combine to form a book that is both a pleasure to peruse and a contribution to the growing scholarship on metropolitan Washington, a rare occurrence for a pictorial book.

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