

as the day went on, trying to kill each other until there were upward of 40,000 men engaged in desperate struggle. What in ensuing years would become a place of reverent memory of those who fought and died there was on that first of July, in the hot sun, a swarming melee, more like a mammoth tavern brawl than an organized battle.

It was the stuff of legend. Pfanz tells it all and, as is his penchant, offers his opinions on long-enduring questions. Among them are why the Army of Northern Virginia failed to follow up on its success; what caused the collapse of the Army of the Potomac's Eleventh Corps; who should be credited with selecting the Cemetery Hill position; what Union regiment was the last to leave the field west of the town along the Chambersburg pike and railroad cut; and why the Confederate General James Archer was not supported in the morning, resulting in his capture, along with hundreds of his men.

Some unexpected conclusions are drawn, and the author supports them with extensive endnotes. They add immensely to the quality of the book. But what stand out above all are the poignant stories of the men on a summer's day long ago. In these trying times when Americans are witnessing again valor borne of tragedy, they remind us that American history is made from the lives of its people. One can only hope that Pfanz's fourth and presumably final volume on Gettysburg is being written. When it is complete it is likely to constitute the best history of an American battle ever written.

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American Towns: An Interpretive History. By David J. Russo. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001. Pp. [xv], 350. Figures, map, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$28.95.)

Throughout much of the twentieth century, scholars attempted to capture the essence of American towns. Their challenge was as much ideological as academic. Since most Americans live in cities and suburbs but say they would rather live in small towns, these communities certainly occupy an important and enduring place in the national ethos. In documenting the character of small-town life, David J. Russo joins that long line of academicians who have sought to explain the character, quality, and appeal of these distinctively American places. From the outset, Russo defines interpretive history as "the *patterns* of life among those who have lived in American towns—what connects them rather than separates them" (p. ix). This book is reminiscent of historian Richard R. Lingeman's *Small Town America: A Narrative History, 1620-Present* (1980) and geographer John A. Jakle's *The American Small Town: Twentieth Century Place*

Images (1982). In the twenty years since those books were published, many more books and articles about American towns have emerged, and many of them are listed in Russo's bibliography. He has made good use of them in his well-documented, sometimes encyclopedic text.

Russo's book is predicated on the supposition that the site and the design of towns are important factors in setting the tone of small town life. Accordingly, he begins by analyzing places in considerable detail. This technique has been embraced by many historians since at least the 1950s and 1960s, when Lewis Atherton wrote *Main Street on the Middle Border* (1954) and Page Smith completed his classic *As a City Upon a Hill: The Town in American History* (1968). Like Smith, Russo begins with New England. Although Russo implicitly uses New England as both the source and yardstick for all subsequent town development, he does acknowledge the importance of the Middle West in the pattern of American town life. He also acknowledges (albeit in fleeting references) earlier Native American and Spanish antecedents to American community life in some areas.

Organized chronologically, *American Towns* treats a number of basic themes, notably politics, economics, society, and culture. To achieve his goal in integrating American culture, Russo cites case studies of particular places throughout the country, including several Indiana communities. He makes very effective use of both primary and secondary sources. Actually, even though the word "interpretation" appears in the title and is the stated goal of this book, it is description at which Russo excels. This is not an underhanded compliment: although description is often denigrated by academicians, it is indeed an art—and clearly an art that Russo has mastered.

American Towns ends with a brief (seven pages) synopsis of the town in myth and reality. Russo concludes that "[t]he impulse for Americans to live in or locate their activities in small local communities was still a vital one" in the late twentieth century—even though "most people, most activities, and most institutions were situated in fast-spreading urban settings" (p. 296). This is not startling news for those who know the American psyche: for more than a century, Americans have praised small towns while moving away from them—much as many praise hardship as a builder of character while avoiding it at all costs. Although Russo does not fully explain why such a longing for small towns persists, he does help us better understand how towns develop(ed) and function(ed) as part of our collective past. Overall, *American Towns* is a solid synthesis of a remarkably rich literature, told in a refreshingly straightforward manner.

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