

Morgan Park: Duluth, U.S. Steel, and the Forging of a Company Town

Arnold R. Alanen

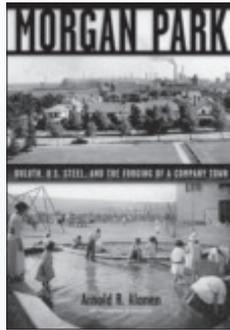
(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. 339 p. Paper, \$24.95.)

Arnold Alanen's documentation of Morgan Park is a very readable exploration of the life of that community. His study of the socio-economic context in which it developed makes this a valuable resource for scholars everywhere while also providing local historians with a deeper understanding of the company town. The comparison of Morgan Park to other company towns highlights its significance and argues for its preservation.

Alanen investigates the inner workings of the U.S. Steel Corporation, its subsidiary Minnesota Steel, and the political pressures of the day, providing insight into the machinations of corporate and governmental power that are still with us today. At the same time, the immense societal changes that have occurred since Morgan Park was conceived, built, and run by the paternalistic steel company are starkly outlined. This book imparts a real sense of what it was like to live in that time and place. The dangers of working in a steel plant are made plain, as is the brutal intolerance for anyone who dared question the prevailing authority, not to mention the negative attitude toward African Americans. The book also has humorous bits, exposing the foibles and boosterism of the local press as it tried to present the behind-the-scenes decisions that led to Morgan Park and prospects for the city of Duluth as a whole.

The plans developed for the company town by Morrell and Nichols, a Minneapolis landscape architecture and planning firm, were remarkable in their integration of new concepts, which Alanen documents thoroughly. Likewise, the author illuminates the influence of the then-new Prairie School style on the homes designed by Dean and Dean, Morgan Park's Chicago architectural and planning firm, demonstrating the broader significance of this Duluth neighborhood. Good background information on both of these firms is included, which substantiates their stature and Morgan Park's architectural importance.

The treasure trove of detailed drawings and photographs of the various buildings in Morgan Park, as well as of other company towns, provides architectural historians with valuable material for comparisons. Alanen completes the physical picture by tracing the gradual, inevitable changes in Morgan Park over time as it evolved from a company town



where all services were provided by the private corporation to a distinctive Duluth neighborhood where ongoing maintenance and services are a municipal responsibility. This aspect of the story makes the book an object lesson and a must-read for students of city planning and for architects who subscribe to the idea that design is a determinant of social interaction. A complete and up-to-date social history of Morgan Park residents brings this unique company town to life.

The broad scope and careful detail that Alanen brings together in this document is a delight to discover. It would be a valuable addition to any historian's reference shelf as well as a meaningful gift to anyone with ties to Duluth, the Upper Midwest, or the steel industry.

Reviewed by Jill Fisher, AICP, principal planner, Larson Fisher Associates Historic Preservation & Planning Services, Woodstock, New York and preservation planner for the City of Duluth from 1988 to 1999.

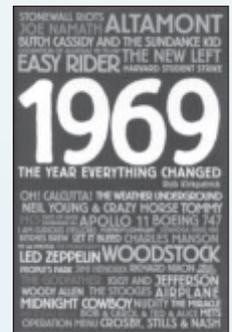
1969: The Year Everything Changed

Rob Kirkpatrick

(New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009. 302 p. Cloth, \$24.95.)

Rob Kirkpatrick, an editor (not at the press that published this volume) and author of a book on Bruce Springsteen and another on baseball, is the latest in an ever-lengthening lineup of historical discoverers eager to plant a flag in a particular year and claim that this is the one when "everything changed," or that "rocked the world," or "changed the world," or "made us who we are." Those last three epithets are from titles of books or special magazine issues about 1968, a far more frequent nominee in the Oscar race for historical significance. (Full disclosure: I am the curator for a forthcoming exhibition at the Minnesota Historical Society on the year 1968; www.the1968project.com.)

Kirkpatrick is fully aware that 1969 usually takes a back seat to the previous year, and he makes a sometimes persuasive argument that "his" year at least deserves a shot at the title of world-changer (though with the exception of the increased American involvement in Southeast Asian conflicts, he rarely ventures outside of U.S. borders for evidence). A short list of 1969 events virtually makes the argument for itself: Nixon's inauguration, Chappaquiddick, the moon landing, the Stonewall riot, blissed-out Woodstock



and nightmarish Altamont, the Manson murders, the bombing campaign in Cambodia, the My Lai revelations, People's Park, the Moratorium, and the largest antiwar demonstration ever. It was the peak year for student strikes and campus conflicts—at Harvard, Swarthmore, Cornell, and many others (though the University of Minnesota's January 1969 Morrill Hall takeover doesn't make the cut here). With *Portnoy's Complaint* in the bookstores, *I Am Curious (Yellow)* in the movie theaters, and *Oh, Calcutta* on Broadway, it was also a year of radical challenges to censorship.

Kirkpatrick covers all of this and more—much more. And that's the problem: this is not a particularly long book, but the author seems to be packing everything into it. There is little here that most people will think of as new, with few analytical or insightful comparisons or perceptions. (It's also completely free of images, surely a budget decision, but an unfortunate one.) Rather, the book feels like a series of summary narratives that are by now familiar, some of which are quite lengthy: 20 pages on Woodstock, for example. Occasionally, there are some nice juxtapositions of cultural markers and headline events, such as a discussion of works of science fiction (including Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading*) that appeared in 1969, adjacent to a nine-page summary of the Apollo 11 mission. The Manson murders in southern California are paired, in alternating sections, with the nearly simultaneous Zodiac killings in northern California.

The book is organized by seasons, with four major sections, rather than a strict, month-by-month chronology. This works well, although it also means that some subjects appear in two or even three sections. Kirkpatrick recounts, for example, the entire baseball season, from spring opener through the summer and on to the fall World Series, and, given the author's evident love of the sport, it sometimes feels like we're reading a play-by-play (“But then Blair singled, stole second, and scored on a Brooks Robinson single.”) The author also pays a good bit of attention to football, delivering a lengthy (well, it felt long to *me*) replay of Super Bowl III, starring Joe Namath and the New York Jets *vs.* the Baltimore Colts, with more breathless replays.

On the other hand, Kirkpatrick does not deal with any other sports or with sports as a broader cultural phenomenon. Similarly, he's interested in music, but only in music that fits his “revolutionary” model: two pages on the Detroit band MC5, for example, and even more space for Iggy Pop and Led Zeppelin.

A walkthrough of a single year, of course, is bound to feel at once both compendious and arbitrary. Kirkpatrick sets out to do something more than a Wikipedia-like compilation, to actually present an argument: 1969 was the year that gave birth to modern America. “Turning point” argu-

ments are tailor-made for endless sophistical debate and counterfactual speculation. This seems especially true when the proposed “turning point” is not a point at all but rather a whole, messy year. Can a year really be decisive? In a book as intellectually unambitious as this one, such an argument remains unsupported.

Reviewed by Brian Horrigan, an exhibit developer at the Minnesota Historical Society, whose essay “Pictures from an Exhibition, Lessons from a Generation” appeared in the Spring 2009 issue of this magazine.

City of Parks: The Story of Minneapolis Parks

David C. Smith

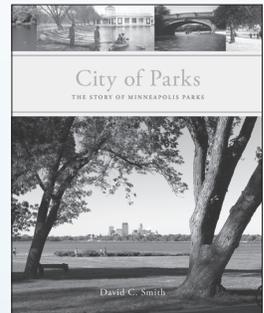
(*Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. 243 p. Cloth, \$39.95.*)

In 2006 the nonprofit Minneapolis Parks Legacy Society reprinted *Minneapolis Park System, 1883–1944*, authored in the mid-1940s

by Theodore Wirth, the most influential park superintendent in the city's history. Reprinted in celebration of the 100th anniversary of Wirth's arrival in Minneapolis, the book offers a thorough and interesting history and is a resource all Minneapolis park users should consider perusing, for it reveals not only the difficulty of creating this unique system of parks and parkways but also the remarkable foresight of those who labored to do it.

Now, a new history, *City of Parks: The Story of Minneapolis Parks*, joins this book, commissioned in celebration of the 125th anniversary of the founding of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board. Virtually everything about this new book is first-rate. The handsome hardcover work is filled with both black-and-white photographs and several color illustrations, such as maps and postcards. Many of the photographs feature detailed captions. Most important, the book is an enjoyable read.

Author David C. Smith, a freelance writer and Minneapolis resident, has enjoyed the city's park system for three decades. With an easy, fluid writing style, Smith carries readers through a story anchored by visionary personalities, prominent individuals who played substantial roles in the formation of the Minneapolis park system. Landscape architect Horace William Shaler Cleveland, businessman Charles Morgridge Loring, and the first president of the University of Minnesota, William Watts Folwell, are all prominently



featured in *City of Parks*. In fact, Smith treats each of these tireless park promoters, as well as Theodore Wirth, with a substantial biography. To a lesser degree, Smith also addresses other figures important to the creation and evolution of the park system.

As with Wirth's history, Smith's *City of Parks* discusses the challenges the Minneapolis Board of Park Commissioners faced as it created a system of groomed open spaces, playgrounds, and attractive lakes, many linked by a network of parkways encircling the city and commonly known as the Grand Rounds. In addition, both authors offer observations of the social and political climate within which the largely independent park board has operated. Smith's views are more thoroughly fleshed out, however. Perhaps Smith has the advantage of writing at a time distant from the happenings he describes. In any event, his social and political analysis of the major players and actions that shaped the Minneapolis park system is fascinating.

With *City of Parks*, Smith brings the story of the system up to date; much has happened in the 60 years since Wirth

completed his history. New challenges to the park system, such as the rise of suburbs and freeways, forced the park board in new directions. For instance, park officials began to view the Minneapolis park system not only as a city resource but as a metropolitan resource. Today, the vast numbers of park users from outside the city is ample evidence this view is shared. To meet growing usage demands, the park board forged new relationships and created new strategies for maintaining the city's parks and parkways.

The challenges to the Minneapolis park system will continue, but Smith assures us that future generations of park managers and park users will meet each test, occasionally peering to the past for guidance and inspiration from those farsighted individuals who labored to create one of the finest park systems in the country.

Reviewed by Denis P. Gardner, author of Minnesota Treasures: Stories Behind the State's Historic Places (2004) and Wood, Concrete, Stone, and Steel: Minnesota's Historic Bridges (2008).



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