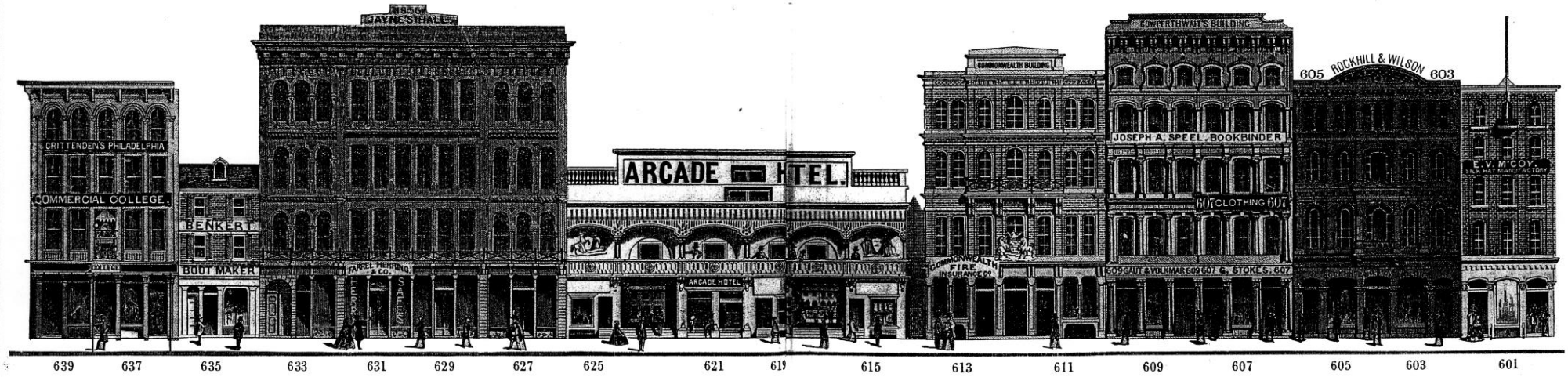
DELL UPTON

Another City

URBAN LIFE AND URBAN SPACES IN THE NEW AMERICAN REPUBLIC



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Cover illustration: *Market Street, from Fifth to Sixth, (South side.),* Philadelphia, 1860 (plate 8)
P. i: W. H. Rease, *James Lane's Stove Store,* Philadelphia, 1847 (fig. 1.6)
Pp. ii–iii: *Chestnut Street, from Seventh to Sixth (North Side.),* Philadelphia, 1859 (fig. 7.17)
Pp. vi–vii: *Stephens Plan of the City of Philadelphia,* 1807 (fig. 6.4, detail)

For Karen

CHAPTER 1

CITIES OF PERPETUAL RUIN AND REPAIR

As cashier of the Bank of Germantown and then secretary of the Germantown and Norristown Railroad, historian John Fanning Watson was immersed in Philadelphia's transformation from a modest-sized commercial port to a large industrial center. Yet, despite his own role in changing the city, Watson was overwhelmed by the result. Shortly before he died he added an urgent coda to the second edition of his *Annals of Philadelphia*, a work that celebrated the "olden time"—meaning the years around 1800, the period of his own youth and the twilight of the Quaker City's preeminence as a seaport. "*Our People are fast changing*," Watson declared in his "Final Appendix of the Year 1856." "All is now self-exalted and going upon stilts." Telegraphing his agitation in staccato phrases that mimicked the mounting urban frenzy, Watson denounced the "*rivalship* of grandeur in houses," the "general clatter from crowds of people and confusion now along the streets—no room now to turn or look about—once it was peaceful—pleasant and safe to walk the streets,—now tall houses, are crowded with numerous working tenants—formerly, they were in smaller houses and in bye places.—'Tis terrible now to sicken and die at [*sic*] crowded streets, where the rattle of omnibuses is unceasing." Watson the railroad executive was dismayed by the anonymity of railroad and steamship travel where "people must go by hundreds [and] where they can only stare at, and scan each other without speaking" and by hotels "where all must keep aloof, and look askance at each other." "To my eye," he wrote, "the whole aspect is changing.—It is indeed, already, another City—*A city building on the top of the former!* All the houses now, above *three* stories—present *an elevation* so manifest, as to *displease the eye;*—and particularly, where several, *go up* so exalted, as to break the former *line* of equality, and beauty. Even such edifices, lately constructed, as the Bank of North America, [and the] Philadelphia and Western Bank, are struck down by the still later, *towering* business houses and hotels, &c., near them." The new Philadelphia offended his senses and his sense of propriety and revealed "Our anti-social character."[1]

Yale University president Timothy Dwight saw things much differently. He marveled at the electric atmosphere of New York in the years after the War of 1812. A vibrant energy "spreads through all classes and is everywhere visible. The bustle in the streets, the perpetual activity of the carts, the noise and hurry

at the docks which on three sides encircle the city; the sound of saws, axes, and hammer at the shipyards, the continually repeated views of the numerous buildings rising in almost every part of it, and the multitude of workmen employed upon them form as lively a specimen of 'the busy hum of populous cities' as can be imagined." New York was the most prodigious of the new urban centers, but all other major American cities experienced boisterous growth on a lesser, but still notable, scale during the fifty years after 1790. Many smaller towns, such as New Orleans, metamorphosed from insignificance to national importance during the same era (table 1). "This city, which we thought so beautiful and large when we arrived in the year 1809, was a mere suburb" compared to the New Orleans of 1831, Jean Boze reported to his former employer.[2]

The new cities were scenes of "perpetual ruin and repair," the *New-York Mirror* reported. "No sooner is a fine building erected than it is torn down to put up a better." The urban architecture of every antebellum decade was taller and more voluminous than that of its predecessors, with striking changes of scale around 1830 and again in the late 1840s and 1850s. At the same time, builders undertook massive projects of "regulation"—cutting down hills, filling low places, draining swamps, building levees, widening streets, and reorganizing their plans—to push urban boundaries outward.[3]

Table 1 Population of Five Major American Cities, 1790–1860

	1790	1800	1810	1820	1830	1840	1850	1860	Rank in 1860[a]
Baltimore	13,503	26,514	46,555	62,738	80,620	102,313	169,054	212,418	4
Boston	18,320	24,937	33,787	43,298	61,392	93,383	136,881	177,840	5
New Orleans[b]	5,037[c]	8,056[d]	17,242	27,176	46,082	102,193	130,565	168,675	6
New York	33,131	60,515	96,373	123,706	202,589	312,710	515,547	813,669	1
Philadelphia[e]	44,096	61,559	87,303	98,193	147,877	198,009	286,087	565,529	2

Sources: Campbell Gibson, *Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990*, Population Division Working Paper No. 27 (Washington, D.C.: Population Division, United States Census Bureau, 1998), www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027.html, downloaded Nov. 22, 2006; Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769–1803* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 22.

[a] Brooklyn, N.Y., third in 1860.

[b] Includes Lafayette (Garden District), 1850–60.

[c] 1791.

[d] 1803.

[e] Includes Northern Liberties and Southwark to 1820; add Spring Garden and Moyamensing, 1830–40; add Kensington, 1850; includes all of Philadelphia County, 1860.

Early republican cities ballooned with growing, diversifying populations. Alongside the western Europeans and Africans and their descendants and the (ever-present but rarely noted) Native Americans who had lived in them since before the Revolution, Irish, German, and West Indian immigrants poured into the coastal ports, accompanied by a smattering of people from more exotic locations. "We have Turkish saloons, and Turkish baths, French coffee houses and French theatres, German Gardens, large bier saloons, opera houses, and reading rooms, Spanish hotels, Italian churches, and Italian newspapers, Chinese boarding houses, inhabited only by the Chinese, and in the lower part of the city, there is a gambling place, we are told, supported principally by natives of Portugal. The Celts, the English, and the natives of 'bonnie Scotia,' have also their especial resorts; so have the descendants of the Africans," boasted a New York journalist in an article entitled "The World in Little."[4]

The frenzy of everyday urban life can distract one from the relatively straightforward order of the largest American cities at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Although their formal plans varied, those cities that had been formed during the colonial period exhibited remarkably consistent patterns of urban development. Most assumed a bell shape draped around an inverted T-shaped armature where the waterfront intersected with a perpendicular axis defined by varying arrays of public buildings, parades, markets, and wharves.[5]

The T-armature was an "informal" (some might say vernacular) practice that may have been implicit but was no less real for that. It was produced by shared principles of siting and orientation, inflected by social and occupational preferences for location near (or apart from) other people or other trades, and the resulting gradients of land and rental values that affected individuals' and institutions' choice of location within the urbanized area. This planning strategy guided colonial port builders no matter what the formal plans of their cities, organizing cities without formal plans (such as Boston) as well as those with preestablished plans (such as Charleston), and it continued to influence American city builders through the early decades of the new republic. Indeed the often-dissonant relationship between formal plans and everyday city-building practices was a central theme of American urban thinking during those decades.[6]

Philadelphia exemplified these patterns clearly. William Penn and his surveyor Thomas Holme intended their new city to fill its grid evenly from the Delaware to the Schuylkill River, but urbanization clustered predictably along the Delaware, the principal access for oceangoing vessels (plate 1). High (now Market) Street, which runs west from the Delaware, accommodated the market sheds built and continually extended from 1693 until they were finally removed in 1859. The Court House (1708), the principal government building,

stood above the first shed, with the Quakers' largest meetinghouse (1696) adjacent to it. The densest urban development followed High Street inland. The renowned Clarkson-Biddle map of 1762 clearly illustrates the bell-shaped settlement pattern that the T-plan generated, with development extending along the river north and south of the city limits long before the original grid had filled, and density dropped radically as one moved away from the center.

By the late eighteenth century this rough-hewn working city was urbanized at a scale and density previously unimaginable in the American colonies. In 1750 Philadelphia's population was slightly fewer than 13,000 people, with about 2,000 more people living just outside the city limits. During the next half century the population of the "city and districts" (Philadelphia plus Southwark and the Northern Liberties) doubled. When the first federal census was taken in 1790, the city proper was home to 28,522 people, while the city and districts together sheltered 44,096. By 1800, over 20,000 of the city's 62,000 residents lived in the districts. When all was said and done, the city's population had grown more than five times in half a century, or about 3.4 percent per year.[7]

While a few more than 2,100 houses were sufficient to accommodate the city's residents in 1750, the city and districts required 6,784 dwellings and more than 400 shops and stores forty years later. By the middle of the nineteenth century, there were an estimated 60,000 houses in the city, a number that had recently been growing by about 3,500 per year. The expansion of the built-up area is evident in the 1794 map published by the geographer A. P. Folie. Folie's work depicted an urbanized area at least two blocks (or "squares," in Philadelphia parlance) deep stretching from Prune Street in Southwark to Brown Street in the Northern Liberties (fig. 1.1). In the city proper, urbanization penetrated to Sixth Street for the entire north-south extent of the city and to Ninth Street in a four-block swath from Race to Walnut streets. Six years later bits of development were beginning to reach the Center Square. Although the urbanized population was nearly three times as large in 1830 as in 1800, and dense settlement reached up High Street three squares past Center Square with outliers stretching to the Schuylkill River, the city retained the bell shape[8] (fig. 1.2; see fig. 6.5).

Within the urban bell, Philadelphia's land use, social composition, and density were heterogeneous. It was very much a "walking city," meaning that it was possible to travel on foot easily from any part of the city to any other part. It had the familiar characteristics of a pre-industrial (or mercantile) city, in the sense that it was not rigidly segregated by social class, economic status, or urban function. Wealthy and poor people, blacks and whites lived relatively close to one another. In 1800, for example, most free blacks lived in white households. Elizabeth and Henry Drinker, who were among the wealthiest Philadelphians in the late eighteenth century, shared their square (between Front and

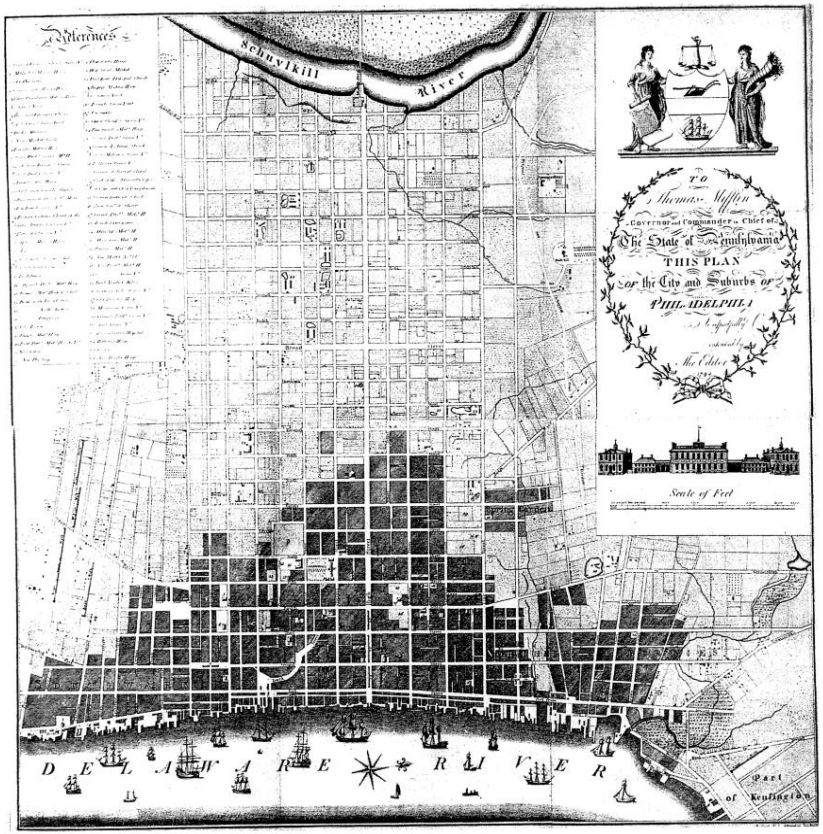


FIGURE 1.1. A. J. Folie, *Plan of the City and Suburbs of Philadelphia*, 1794.
(The Library Company of Philadelphia)

Second, Arch and Race streets) with a German couple named Pantlif who were in the habit of fighting with their neighbors' African American servants and who had trained their dog to attack black people. They were eventually caught with a house full of stolen goods. The Drinkers' neighbors also included "French people" (impoverished refugees from Saint Domingue) and several other poor families.[9]

Nevertheless, the growing city's landscape already showed visible signs of occupational sorting and the hardening of social and economic divisions. During the early nineteenth century, well-off people began to move away from their places of work. Great eighteenth-century merchants such as the Drinkers usually lived behind or above their warehouses, but by the beginning of

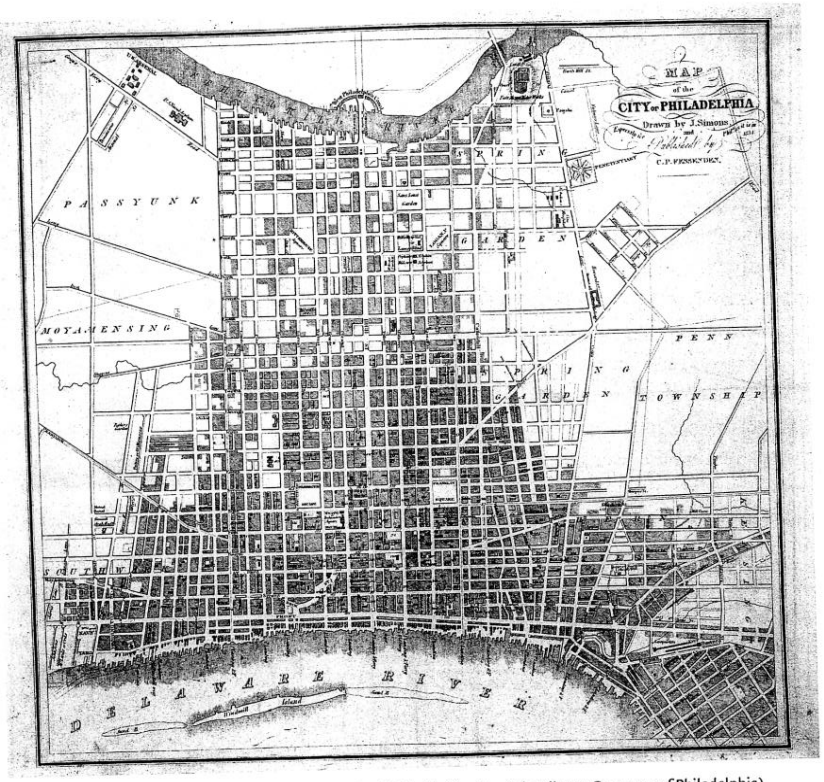


FIGURE 1.2. J. Simons, *Map of the City of Philadelphia*, 1830. (The Library Company of Philadelphia)

the nineteenth century they and their neighbors had begun to move inland, away from the waterfront. "Peggy Wharton came this morning to take leave of us as next-door Neighbours," Elizabeth Drinker wrote in 1796. "They leave us this day, and remove to their new-house in third, near Spruce Street." As the fugitive merchants moved progressively west, John Fanning Watson reported, "Houses . . . of grand dimensions were running up for dwellings above Fifth and Sixth streets even while stores were following close after from Fourth street." All along the urban edge, old and "inconvenient" buildings were replaced by "stately and modernized houses."[10]

The Drinkers lived near lower-class people but not adjacent to them, for while the merchant family's house stood on Front Street, their impoverished neighbors resided in Drinker's Alley on the interior of the block. This was a familiar pattern. Poor Philadelphians inhabited Coombe's Alley, Elfreth's Alley, Loxley's

Court, and a myriad of other spaces hidden off the main streets and behind the residences of their better-off compatriots. As settlement expanded, a clear hierarchy appeared. The largest houses were built on the major east-west streets. Most were three stories tall, but by 1830, four-story houses could be found, "many after the modern style of building," with marble basements. North-south streets also contained impressive houses, but few exceeded three stories. The alleys sheltered small houses of one and two stories, as well as three-story "trinity" houses with a single square room on each floor (fig. 1.3). Many of these were built of wood long after better-off Philadelphians' houses were routinely built of brick. Older-type structures that combined artisans' workshops and living quarters remained scattered throughout the city but were particularly common near the waterfront.[11]

By the end of the eighteenth century some neighborhoods had begun to assume distinctive social characteristics, although none was dominated by a single social class or ethnic group. Poor people were scattered relatively uniformly throughout the city, but they were most conspicuous in the Northern Liberties and especially in Southwark, where few of their economic betters chose to settle. This pattern held throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, as differential tax assessments and the location of mid-century soup kitchens indicated. The northern edge of the city was also the home to many of Philadelphia's Germans. Blacks who did not live in the homes of the whites for whom they worked were likely to be found north of Arch Street and west of Fourth Street or, increasingly, along the southern and southwestern edges of the city. South and Lombard streets were established early on as heavily black districts, and they remained so throughout the nineteenth century. Knowing this, Elizabeth Drinker's daughter and grandchildren "went in our Waggon to South street, to look after a maid."[12]

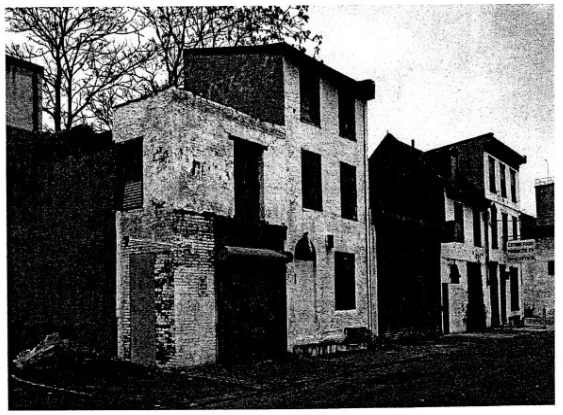


FIGURE 1.3. 800 block of North American Street, Philadelphia. Small early-nineteenth-century houses in the Northern Liberties

To house Philadelphia's growing population, developers erected hundreds of new dwellings. At the beginning of the new century James Mease estimated that 500 new houses had been built in the Quaker City every year since the Constitution went into effect, but historian Carole Shammas calculated an average of 228 per year between 1760 and 1800. The Philadelphia City Council formally counted 345 in 1833. Many of these were built by single developers such as William

Sansom, who Mease claimed had built 200 by 1805. The great rows of houses that line Philadelphia's main streets are the best known and most conspicuous visual evidence of this frenzied house construction, but most developers and landlords built smaller numbers on scattered sites.[13]

Most of the new houses were intended for the upper and middle strata of the population. The 1833 City Council inventory noted that three-story buildings were by far the most numerous; 286 were built in Philadelphia that year. Four-story buildings accounted for 26 houses, and two-story houses for 33 new buildings. Some of the two- and three-story buildings were undoubtedly the tenements (rental houses) that one finds in alleys and, in Southwark particularly, in the back yards of row houses.[14] These tiny houses, with a single square room on a floor, were built by speculative developers and intended for working-class tenants, but not for the poorest among them (fig. 1.4).

Many of the poorest Philadelphians continued to occupy small one-, two- and three-room houses as they always had.[15] By 1790, most Philadelphians resided with 6 other people; workers shared their much smaller residences with 6.5 others. Some were family members, others were outsiders taken in to help meet the rent. Increasingly, poor Philadelphians lived in the cast-off houses of their betters, which had been subdivided into tiny tenements, a pattern established by the time of the Revolution. When Benjamin Loxley assumed the management of two houses that the Carpenters' Company had bought and intended to demolish, he found that they were shared among many tenants (fig. 1.5). One was a four-room house with a shop in the first-floor front room and an office and privy in the yard behind it. The other had a single room on each floor and a hyphen (Philadelphians called it a "piazza") connecting it to a two-room ell or "back building." These spaces were rented to eleven different tenants. Five lived in the main houses: Joseph Alstein and four others "gone or poor." There was one tenant living in each of the two shops (presumably the ground floor of the one-room house was the other shop) and the two kitchens and two in the office. In an era when many workers could hope to make little more than £60 a year, these tenants combined to pay an annual rent of £66. Similarly, among the Drinkers' neighbors were "four families in [a] small house, where are but 4 rooms, one of them the kitchen." A survey of the area east of Front Street between Vine and Sassafras streets, taken for the Councils in 1833, the same year as the census of new buildings, found 92 families living in 64 rental properties, with 55 families, totaling 253 people, living in 30 of them, with no privy to serve any of them. In 1837, "a collection of six or seven" black men and women was found living in a cellar in Mary Street with "no kind of furniture . . . and a heap of shavings was the common bed of the whole party."[16]

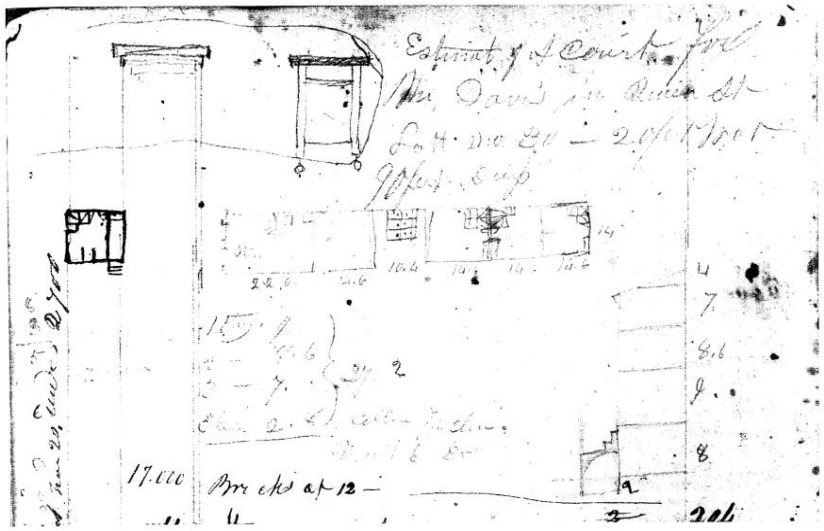


FIGURE 1.4. Thomas S. Stewart, *A Court for Mr. Davi's [sic] in Queen Street Lott no 30*, Philadelphia, ca. 1835, sketch plan. These drawings, typical of the crude sketches found in Stewart's day book, illustrate four 14-by-14 ½-foot single-room, three-story houses, and a three-room building at the alley entrance. The latter includes a store on the street side. The development, which occupies the entire depth of a 90-foot-deep lot, is divided into two blocks, with a six-hole privy between them. (Athenaeum of Philadelphia)

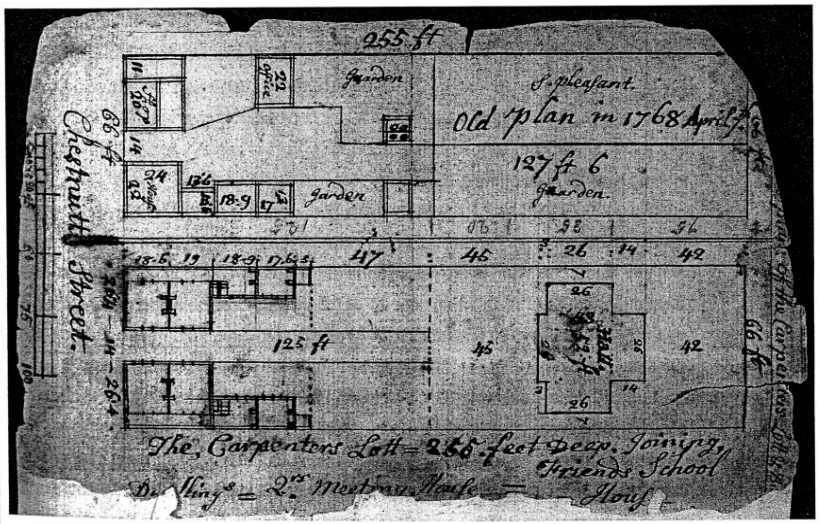


FIGURE 1.5. Benjamin Loxley, Carpenter's Court, Philadelphia, plans before and after redevelopment, 1768. (Benjamin Loxley Papers, Uselma Clark Smith Collection, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania)

Philadelphia's T-shaped armature was reinforced by the city's food-distribution system. Until the public market sheds along High Street were demolished in 1859 and replaced by a system of privatized neighborhood market houses, most Philadelphians obtained their food from the markets that stretched west along High Street, eventually reaching Seventeenth Street, with others running north and south along or adjacent to Second Street. Some durable goods were also sold in the markets, but most were offered by wholesale merchants along Front and Second streets and by artisans whose shops abutted the market area.[17]

In 1794 Joseph Cook erected an elaborate new building at the southeastern corner of Market and Third streets (plate 2). The Shakespeare Building was not the first purpose-built group of retail stores, but it was the first architecturally ambitious one, a three-story structure containing three shops, occupied at first by jewelers, with residences above and below. It was a financial failure that came to be known as "Cooke's Folly." After a few years this "grand Edifice" was stripped of its decoration and let to humbler tenants, but it made a deep impression on Philadelphians, who recognized in it the beginnings of a new kind of merchandising that led to the emergence of separate wholesale and retail districts. By the middle of the century, wholesale businesses could be found as far west as Third Street. Fashionable retail businesses had pushed out High Street, then shifted a block over from Market to Chestnut Street, Philadelphia's tamer version of New York's Broadway.[18]

Nevertheless, the center of the growing city had not lost its mixed character. People still lived in and around commercial buildings. Exclusive shops stood near ordinary ones. Many sellers of clothing, household items, and luxury goods made and sold their merchandise in the same building or on the same lot, so that one was never far from the sights and sounds of small-scale manufacturing (fig. 1.6). Beginning early in the century, heavy industry—ironworks, brickyards, stone works, textile mills, the U.S. Navy Yard—formed a deepening band around the edges of the city.[19]

From the middle of the eighteenth century, Philadelphia's landscape was punctuated by larger-scale buildings that housed hospitals, almshouses, and prisons. Like the monasteries, almshouses, hospitals, orphanages, and other large religious institutions of medieval European cities, which were sited on vacant land just inside or outside the walls, the builders of their secular American counterparts clung to the fringes of the built-up area, where large tracts of cheap land were available. The first such institutions, including the Pennsylvania Hospital (1754–56 and 1794–1804), the Old Almshouse (1760–67 and 1814–15, dem. ca. 1835), and the Walnut Street Jail (1773–74, dem. 1836), were constructed when the urban edge at the head of the bell was Sixth Street, the site of the mid-eighteenth-century State House (Independence Hall) (fig. 1.7; see plate 13). Smaller

institutions, such as the Asylum for Indigent Widows and Single Women (1819–20) and adjacent the Orphans' Asylum (1816; burned and rebuilt 1823–24), the St. Joseph's (Roman Catholic) Orphans' Asylum (1807), the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb (1824–26), and the Institution for the Blind (1834), continued to be built within the city, but by the second quarter of the nineteenth century urban development had engulfed the larger ones (fig. 1.8). Major new institutions, as well as new buildings for older ones, were sited just outside the new urban edge. Now it was not just cheap land that builders sought. They wanted to be near enough to the city for convenience, but far enough away to promote a salutary, contemplative atmosphere separated from the distractions of urban life.

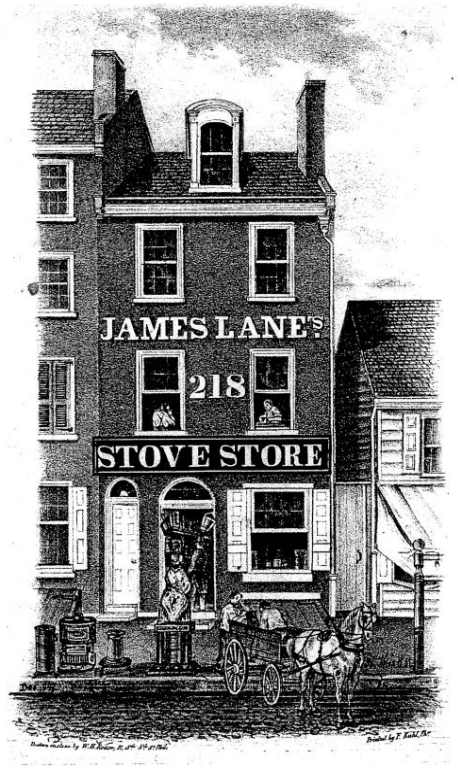


FIGURE 1.6. W. H. Rease, *James Lane's Stove Store*, Philadelphia, 1847. An early-nineteenth-century commercial building. (The Library Company of Philadelphia)

A glance at a nineteenth-century map of Philadelphia would show an arc of large-scale institutions that recalled the circle of fortifications found on maps of Renaissance cities. Beginning at the north with the first-built of these structures, the Friends' Asylum for the Relief of Persons Deprived of the Use of Their Reason (1814–17), the ring ran southwest to the Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane (1835–41) and the Blockley Almshouse (1829–34) on the west side of the Schuylkill River, facing the U.S. Naval Asylum (1826–29) on the east side, then back southeast to the Moyamensing Prison (1832–35) south of the city (fig. 1.9). The arc was anchored by a significant cluster northwest of the city. There a careful observer would spot the Girard College for orphans and the white (1827–28; replaced 1854) and colored (1848–49) houses of refuge (juvenile detention centers), all gathered in the shadow of the Eastern State Penitentiary (1823–36), or Cherry Hill Penitentiary (so-called after the orchard that had formerly occupied its site) (plate 3; see fig. 10.1, plate 12). Although most of these institutions were not directly connected to religious organizations, they exemplified, as their medieval forebears did, the most cherished

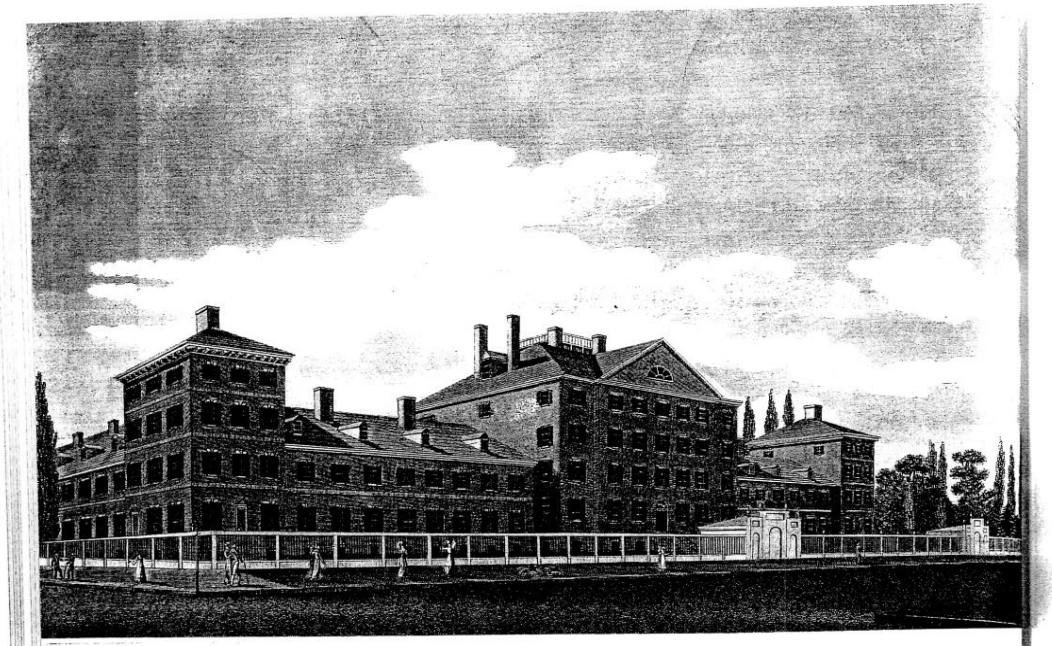


FIGURE 1.7 William Strickland, Old Almshouse, Philadelphia (1760–67, 1814–15, dem. 1834). (The Library Company of Philadelphia)

FIGURE 1.8 Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb (now University of the Arts) (John Haviland, 1824–26), Philadelphia

values of the society that created them. And like the Renaissance fortifications, they offered the city a formidable line of defense, but one directed toward internal rather than external enemies.[20]

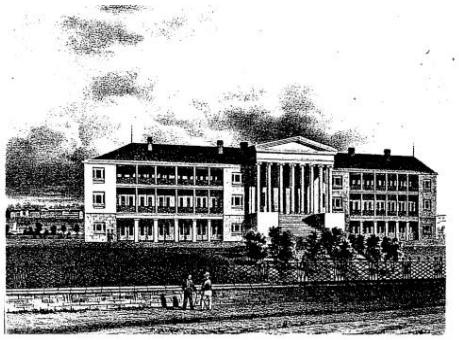


FIGURE 1.9. J. C. Wild, *U. S. Naval Asylum* (Marine Asylum) (William Strickland, 1827–33), Philadelphia, 1838. (The Library Company of Philadelphia)

Philadelphia's pattern was similar to those of other northern cities. In many ways it also resembled that of another of the focal cities of this study, New Orleans, a city laid out on the banks of the Mississippi in 1721 (fig. 1.10). This grid, later known as *le carré de la ville* or the Vieux Carré (old or original square), was only about one mile wide by half a mile deep—a quarter of the size of Philadelphia's plan. The engineer-planmaker Pierre le Blond de la Tour and the surveyor Adrien de Pauger set the cathedral, priests' residence, and prison at the back of

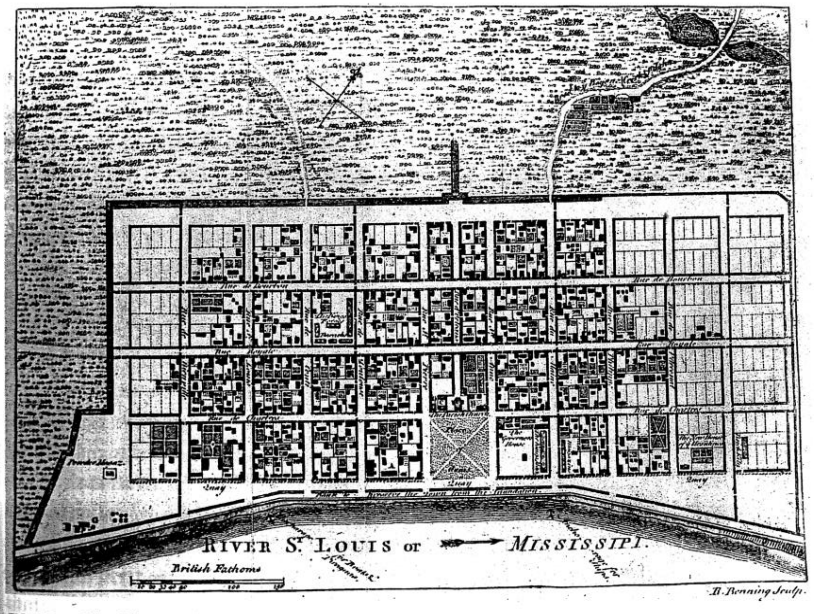


FIGURE 1.10. New Orleans (Adrien de Pauger, surveyor; Pierre le Blond de la Tour, planner/engineer, 1721), 1764. This map shows only the four ranges of blocks initially occupied. (Courtesy Historic New Orleans Collection, Museum/Research Center, acc. no. 1774.25.18.25)

the *place d'armes*, a square that abutted the waterfront at the center of the long side of the grid. The residences of the principal officials, as well as military and governmental barracks and storehouses, flanked two other sides of the square and extended out from them along the river in both directions, creating an urban front whose indented facade resembled that of Louis XIV's near-contemporary palace at Versailles, with its recessed central court of honor. The quay and the place d'armes also accommodated the city's public markets. By the middle of the eighteenth century the urbanized portion of the city had assumed the familiar bell shape, with the apex cut off by a drainage canal and fortifications that ran along the back side of the city. The imaginative power of the armature is evident in Orleans Street, an axial street that runs inland from the rear of the cathedral, giving the T its body but originally dead-ending at the canal.[21]

New Orleans's peculiar topography and its French origins skewed subsequent urban development. The city was laid out on the narrow natural levee of the river, a relatively "high" ground created by centuries of alluvial deposits. As one moved away from the river the land fell away into swamps broken only by the Metairie and Gentilly ridges, about halfway between the river and Lake Pontchartrain. Thus, until twentieth-century drainage systems made the interior inhabitable (by New Orleans standards), urban growth clung closely to the banks of the Mississippi.[22]

As the city grew it was strained through the long-lot or arpent system of land grants. The French and some other European colonizers distributed land in long strips that stretched inland from a river. This ensured that each grantee received some of the best as well as the worst land, although the widths of the strips and thus the size of individual holdings varied according to grantees' wealth or social standing. Since New Orleans occupies an S-shaped curve on the Mississippi River (the source of its nickname Crescent City), the long-lot strips assumed wedge shapes that expanded and contracted like a Victorian woman's fan.[23]

Late in the eighteenth century plantation owners upriver and downriver from the Vieux Carré began to subdivide their plantations into faubourgs, or suburbs. The first was the upriver Faubourg Sainte-Marie, immediately adjacent to the Vieux Carré. It was laid out by Maria Josefa Deslondes and her husband, Bertrand Gravier, in 1788, following a disastrous fire in the old city a few weeks earlier. In 1795 Claude Tremé created a de facto Faubourg Tremé just behind the Vieux Carré when he began selling lots there. After a series of disputes with Tremé, the city purchased his land and formally surveyed it in 1810. In the meantime, the guardians of Bernard de Marigny, then a minor, secured permission to subdivide his downriver plantation into the Faubourg Marigny in 1805. As the nineteenth century wore on, other landowners laid out faubourgs, not

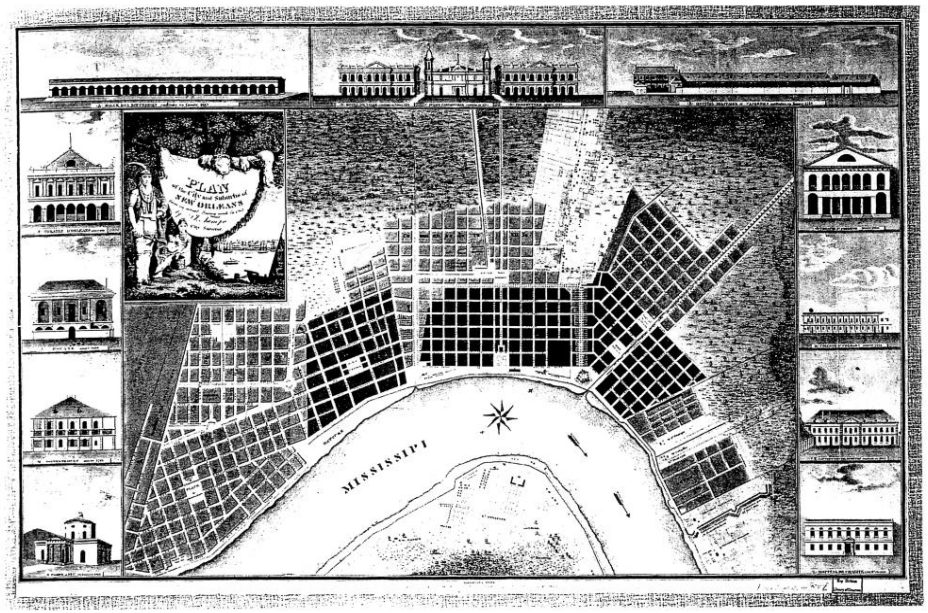


FIGURE 1.11. Jacques Tanesse, *Plan of the City and Suburbs of New Orleans*, 1815. (Library of Congress, Maps Division)

necessarily in order of proximity to the urbanized area. Their grids zigged and zagged at the property lines, fossilizing the old agricultural land divisions in the new city (fig. 1.11).[24]

Unlike Philadelphia, where urban settlement flowed seamlessly into the Northern Liberties and Southwark, New Orleans began as a fortified city, if a haphazardly fortified one. When the faubourgs were laid out the wooden palisades, ditches, and earthen forts at the riverside corners of the Vieux Carré still existed, although all were in ruinous condition. Nevertheless, they stood as barriers to the easy flow of traffic between the old city and its outliers, and after the American acquisition of Louisiana the municipality claimed "the terrain belonging to the City, on which are put forts and batteries constructed under the Spanish Government." Suburban residents also began to agitate for "the continuation of the streets parallel to the river as far as the faubourg." The first American governor, William C. C. Claiborne, refused, declaring the fortifications federal property. After the palisade finally came down, the city council found that it had to defend "the right of the Corporation to the Commons," the wedge of common land that wrapped around the downriver end of the Vieux Carré to the Faubourg Tremé, not only from the federal government but from appro-

FIGURE 1.12. Meat Market ("French Market") (Jacques Tanesse, architect; Gurlie & Guillot, builders, 1813), New Orleans, as restored and enclosed in the 1930s

priation by interlopers such as Daniel Clark, whose ropewalk obstructed the connection of the city streets to the Faubourg Sainte-Marie. These struggles over the nature of public space paralleled the decades-long and more notorious battle over the public's right to the batture, the alluvial soil that accumulated on the water side of the levee.[25]

In the late Spanish-French years, New Orleans was devastated by several major fires. After the March 21, 1788, conflagration, which was estimated to have destroyed a third of the city at the heart of the Vieux Carré, there was another disastrous one on December 8, 1794, that may have destroyed as many as six hundred buildings—possibly half of the existing city. Thus a visitor to the city at the time of the Louisiana Purchase would have seen a townscape that was, on the whole, quite new.[26]

The main market, later known as the French Market, stood on the levee adjacent to the place d'armes. Its 1808 building was destroyed in a hurricane and rebuilt in 1813 (fig. 1.12). The city was still small enough that this market could serve the entire population. When the faubourgs expanded, a vegetable market was added in 1822, but the city began to erect a series of neighborhood markets in the faubourgs, unlike Philadelphia, which held on to its central markets until 1859.[27]

In the late eighteenth century Francophone merchants began to build characteristic kinds of shop houses along Chartres and Royal streets, the second and third streets from the river, respectively. They contained residences above one or two rooms of commercial space, with a lateral carriageway leading to a rear courtyard bracketed on two sides by their own service buildings and enclosed on the third by the adjacent property. This urban type gradually replaced the "low browed dwellings" that John H. B. Latrobe found still standing in parts of the city in 1834. The latter, long, raised houses cloaked by *galeries* (porticoes) and called by architectural historians "Creole houses," were the homes of well-off residents of the eighteenth-century city (fig. 1.13). At the rear of the Vieux Carré and in the adjacent faubourgs Tremé and Marigny there were "entire Squares . . . without a single two story building but composed of rows of one storied dwellings with sheds projecting from the eves over the pavements" (plate 4). As Latrobe observed, these "Creole cottages" (as present-day historians and geographers call them) were set right at the street line, with flared eaves projecting over the sidewalk, or *banquette*. Their four facade openings, often all louvered doors, opened right onto the sidewalk, hence the traditional name "banquette houses." As in the larger merchants' houses and the earlier Creole houses, service buildings set along the rear of the lot or occasionally at right angles to the Creole cottage sheltered slaves and work spaces and delineated rear courtyards that were important elements of the New Orleans cityscape (fig. 1.14). Creole cottages were Afro-European syntheses brought to New Orleans from the Caribbean. A different combination of the same cultural elements, the shotgun house, built for poorer occupants, came to the Crescent City after the Haitian Revolution, but the surviving architectural evidence suggests that they did not catch on until the mid-nineteenth century.[28]

FIGURE 1.13. Madame John's Legacy (late eighteenth century), New Orleans

FIGURE 1.14. Rear courtyard, 917 St. Ann Street, New Orleans. Pre–World War II photograph. The arcaded entry marks an open gallery between rear rooms called cabinets, which were common features in Creole cottages. There are service buildings to the left and right. (Courtesy Historic New Orleans Collection, Museum/Research Center, acc. no. 1978.55)

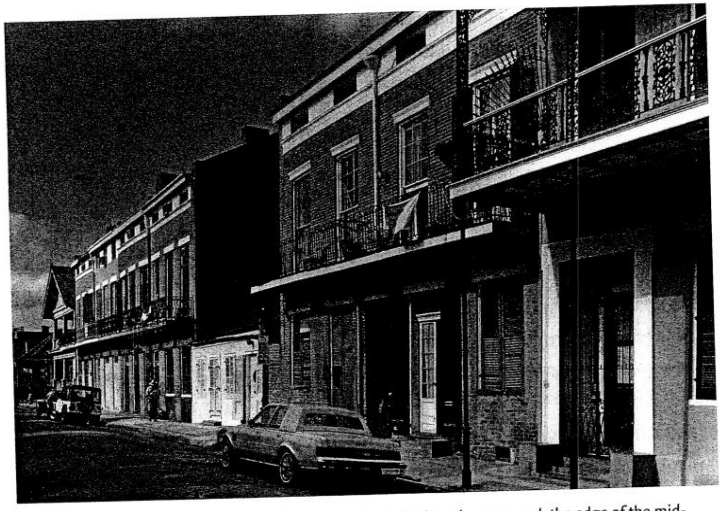


FIGURE 1.15. Row houses, 921–19 Dumaine Street, ca. 1840. These houses mark the edge of the mid-nineteenth-century expansion and densification of the Vieux Carré. A Creole cottage, a survivor of the houses they replaced, interrupts the row three houses from the right of the photograph

Anglo-American immigrants brought a new repertoire of urban buildings. A few tall, narrow, side-passage houses similar to the rows in Philadelphia and New York were built in the Vieux Carré, but most were constructed in the Faubourg Sainte-Marie as that suburb became the favored site of Anglophone residence and work (fig. 1.15). In addition, northerners brought the characteristic commercial buildings that were found in great numbers in cities such as Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. Multistory wholesale stores with arcaded (later granite-piered) ground stories replaced older French and Spanish government and commercial buildings along the levee (now Decatur Street) in the Vieux Carré, and they lined New Levee Street in the Faubourg Sainte-Marie. Up-to-date retail stores were mixed among granite-piered wholesale stores along Canal Street, the dividing line between the old and new cities that split the former Common (fig. 1.16)

New Orleans was very small until "Americans" began to arrive in the 1790s, but like northern cities it was socially mixed from its inception, with people of all stations living in close proximity to one another. However, the Crescent City's mixture took on a distinctive quality owing to the city's racial order. On the eve of the Louisiana Purchase New Orleans was home to 8,056 people, including 1,048 who lived in the upriver and downriver faubourgs and an additional 700 listed as "white persons not domiciled." (Transient seamen and soldiers in the government barracks were not counted.) Of the 8,000 residents,

FIGURE 1.16. Jay Dearborn Edwards, 500 block of Canal Street, New Orleans, late 1850s. (Courtesy Historic New Orleans Collection, Museum/Research Center, acc. no. 1982/167.1)

1,335 were free people of color and 2,773 were slaves.[29] With the post-1803 influx of white Anglophone outsiders (called Americans throughout the antebellum period) and of free and enslaved blacks from the north and from the Caribbean, the racial mix changed, but New Orleans always had a significantly higher proportion of black residents than northern cities did. In 1820, for example, Philadelphia's population was 10.7 percent black and New York's 8.8 percent black, while New Orleans's was half black. Twenty years later the proportions were 11.2 percent, 5.23 percent, and 39.63 percent, respectively (tables 2, 3). A majority of New Orleans's black population was always enslaved, but the proportion both of slaves and of free people of color in the total population declined during the first half of the nineteenth century, partly as a consequence of whites' conscious efforts.[30]

The high proportion of blacks, free and unfree, might seem to distinguish New Orleans's urban landscape radically from Philadelphia's. For example, the racial order might affect the typical residence patterns we observed in the Quaker City. Although there is no estimate of the number of houses in New Orleans at the time of the American accession comparable to the Philadelphia numbers for 1790, if we assume the same ratio of inhabitants to total population as in Philadelphia, there would have been slightly fewer than three thou-

Table 2 Free and Enslaved African Americans in Urban Populations, 1800–1850

	1800	1810	1820	1830	1840	1850
Baltimore	5,614	7,681	14,683	18,910	21,166	28,388
Boston	1,174	1,464	1,683	1,875	1,977	2,424
New Orleans	3,000	10,911	13,592	26,038	33,280	26,916
New York	6,367	9,823	10,866	13,977	16,358	13,815
Philadelphia	4,265	6,354	7,582	9,806	10,507	10,736

Source: Leonard P. Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800–1850: The Shadow of the Dream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 244–45.

sand houses in New Orleans and its suburbs in 1803. In fact, it was estimated that there were only around one thousand. The number of "houses"—separate properties—was relatively small because many enslaved people lived in houses and outbuildings belonging to their masters, although enough slaves lived separately from their masters to provoke the city council to outlaw the practice. Some lived with whites or free people of color to whom they were hired, as did many of Philadelphia's African Americans at the same time.[31]

Blacks made good use of the landscape of domestic courtyards. On the one hand, these spaces were hidden domains within which a lover, a family member, or a colluding white person could effectively conceal a runaway slave only a few yards from a master's own dwelling. On the other hand, urban residents often rented portions of their service quarters to slaves, free blacks, and whites alike, so that the courtyard was a place where the three groups interacted freely and often in ways not legally countenanced. "Salomon negroman" was the slave of a Mr. Dubourg but rented a courtyard room from the sheriff, Mr. Quarles. We meet Salomon in court testifying about a violent encounter between Charles, a slave belonging to a nearby tavern owner, and Joseph Pichon, a Portuguese man. They were rivals for the affections of Sally, a black woman who lived in the same yard as Salomon and Pichon. In short, the relationship between the main house and the back buildings often resembled that between the Drinker house and its alley neighbors more than it did a plantation house and its outbuildings. The institution of slavery and the southern racial order inflected the urban landscape of New Orleans when compared with northern cities, but it did not create a completely different urban world.[32]

The same can be said of ethnic and linguistic differences in the city. New Orleans was always a cosmopolitan place, even when it was tiny. In 1835 the city struck visitor Joseph Holt Ingraham as having been "built by a universal

Table 3 Percentage of Free and Enslaved African Americans in Urban Populations, 1790–1850

	1790	1800	1810	1820	1830	1840	1850
Baltimore	NA	21.17	21.6	23.4	23.46	20.69	16.79
Boston	NA	4.71	4.4	3.97	3.05	2.6	1.46
New Orleans	63[a]	35.29	63.28	50.01	56.5	39.63	23.13
New York	10.47	10.53	10.19	8.8	6.9	5.23	2.68
Philadelphia	19.5	9.2	10.5	10.7	9.8	11.2	8.8

Sources: Leonard P. Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850: The Shadow of the Dream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 246; W. E. B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (1899; rpt. New York: Schocken, 1967), p. 47; Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769–1803* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 139; James Oliver Horton, *Free People of Color: Inside the African American Community* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), p. 129; Kenneth T. Jackson, ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 921–22; Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720–1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 143.

[a] In 1795, 55.5 percent of black population (35 percent of total) was free (Hanger, *Bounded Lives*, p. 139).

subscription, to which every European nation has contributed a street, as it certainly has citizens." When the Americans arrived they found French, Spanish, and African people and their Creole descendants. New Orleans was second only to New York as an antebellum port of entry, and by 1840 almost half its population was foreign born. It had a large Irish population, boasted enough Germans to support German periodicals and a German theater, and constantly exchanged people and goods with the French and Spanish Caribbean islands. Thus the ethnic mix was not unlike that of a northern city such as Philadelphia. Yet the colonial status of the French and Spanish populations and the clash of legal traditions between Americans and Louisianans made language a point of social rupture. Most white Anglophones and Francophones refused to learn one another's language. They sat separately in public assemblies. They maintained their own theaters, their own publications, their own merchants' exchanges, their own first-class hotels, their own business districts, their own cemeteries, their own voluntary associations, and, of course, their own churches.[33]

For a time they even had their own city governments. In 1837 the city was split into three separate "municipalities," each with its own laws and government. The First Municipality, the old Vieux Carré, was dominated by the French and headquartered in the Cabildo on the place d'armes. The Second Munici-

pality encompassed the Faubourg Sainte-Marie, which by that time was often referred to as the American Sector. Its government was eventually housed in the monumental new Municipal Hall (now Gallier Hall) erected just two years before the dissolution of the three municipalities. The Third Municipality, the Faubourg Marigny, was home to a multiethnic population, including white and black Creoles, Irish, enough Mexicans (called "Spanish") to support a bull ring in Washington Square, Germans, whose neighborhood came to be known as Little Saxony, and free people of color.[34]

By mid-century ethnic and racial divisions were intercut by economic differences. The adjacent blocks of the Vieux Carré and the American Sector were the wealthiest part of the city, but the Anglophone population was beginning to build suburban villas in the upriver city of Lafayette, now known as the Garden District, which was annexed to New Orleans when the three municipalities were dissolved in 1852. The Francophone elite built large houses along the Esplanade, the street that separated the Faubourg Marigny from the Vieux Carré. Modest householders dominated the "downriver lakeside" quarter of the Vieux Carré and the adjacent faubourgs Tremé and Marigny. A contractor laying a sidewalk along Barracks Street in the lower Vieux Carré stopped work because most of the residents there were too poor to pay their assessments. The city agreed to accept their taxes in installments to avoid forcing them out of their "small properties." A few blocks farther downriver one came to the Faubourg Marigny, dismissed by a French resident as the "faubourg of poverty." Upriver from the Faubourg Sainte-Marie, near where flatboats were broken up at the end of their journey, close to employment on the levee and in slaughterhouses, cotton presses, and ironworks, another faubourg of poverty formed and became known as the Irish Channel.[35]

CHAPTER 2 { THE RELICS OF CIVILIZED LIFE

Early-nineteenth-century New Yorkers called Broad Street, one of the city's principal thoroughfares, Smell Street, while Beaver Street was Slaughterhouse Lane, nicknames that acknowledged the oceans of fetor that flooded antebellum American cities. Tanneries, distilleries, slaughterhouses, fat-rendering plants, and other industrial enterprises belched forth distinctive stenches, to the disgust of their neighbors. The most offensive of these were traditionally exiled to the edges of cities, but not always. A soap house near the waterfront in Philadelphia was a "disagreeable surcumstance" to its neighbors, the wealthy Drinker family. Similar industries operated in the middle of large nineteenth-century cities, where they frequently attracted lawsuits. Even restricting these industries to the edges of cities was not a solution, for then they lay in the path of expanding residential development, as in "Gentilly, Metairie and neighboring places" outside New Orleans, whose residents complained to that city's council about the unlicensed slaughterhouses near their homes.[1]

Although such industrial stenches often drove urban dwellers beyond the limits of tolerance, they were accents in a stew of odors endemic to everyday life. The most pervasive of all urban smells were those that the New Orleans physician Edward H. Barton called "the relics of civilized life": the odors arising from human and animal wastes and refuse. Food spoiled in the markets, particularly in warm weather, perfuming the air for blocks around. Decaying and fermenting grain filled warehouses and ships on the waterfront. Animal odors were everywhere. Cattle, goats, swine, and other live animals lived in town—in addition to the ever-present horses—to supply food and to act as scavengers. Even a city as large as Philadelphia was compelled in 1821 to pass an ordinance barring free-ranging goats from streets, alleys, public squares, and the State-House Yard (the grounds of Independence Hall). Although the city fathers endorsed an act of the state legislature in 1789 to prevent residents from allowing pigs to roam the city, they refused to appropriate funds to enforce it, and nearly forty years later James Ronaldson still found cause to complain about the "increasing practice of feeding swine in the streets." New York's public porkers roamed free until the middle of the nineteenth century.[2]

Nineteenth-century cities had no comprehensive drainage systems. In 1849, Boston was one of the best served, with approximately twenty-five miles of

sewers, while Baltimore had only one mile. In Philadelphia, there were eleven miles of sewers, which were beginning to replace the earlier system of gutters that fed into open sinks, where liquids evaporated or were absorbed into the earth. Other cities, such as Louisville and Cincinnati, followed the example of New Orleans, where ditches so deep and wide that footbridges were required to cross them lined the streets and drained into the Mississippi River. These ditches were minimally cleaned and maintained by chain gangs of slaves taken from the city jail or rented to the city by their masters.[3]

In densely built-up sections of the city, outhouses (usually called privies or necessaries) were shared among several households. Some Philadelphians' privies, particularly in older neighborhoods of the city near the Delaware River, were located in their basements in the manner of medieval urban houses in Europe. Only the best houses and businesses were supplied with individual backyard necessaries, and even these backed so closely onto neighboring properties that they sometimes collapsed during cellar excavations for new buildings.[4]

Unlike rural outhouses, which were small and could be relocated as they filled, urban privies were quite sizable pits. They were periodically dusted with lime to sanitize them and to suppress their foul smells, but they were cleaned out only at ten- or twelve-year intervals. Privy cleaning was a disgusting operation conducted at night and in winter to reduce the pollution of whole neighborhoods: "Tho Necessary, yet very offensive," punned Elizabeth Drinker about a privy cleaning next door to her house. During the removal of forty-four years' waste from her own family's outhouse, the Drinkers burned incense in the kitchen to ward off the stench. For a similar operation in 1831, Stephen Girard hired Stephen Bill to empty a six-foot-diameter privy at one of his rental properties on Spruce Street in Philadelphia, "depth of filth taken out 13 feet."[5]

Many poor people and some who were not so poor had no privies at all. They dumped their excreta directly into the street, where it mingled with the urine of male passersby who customarily relieved themselves there, or they had it removed by nocturnal "tubmen" who often spilled as much in the streets as they succeeded in carrying to the river for disposal. Urbanites also threw their garbage and other domestic and commercial offal into the streets. In New York, this rotting refuse accumulated in the center of the streets and became known as "corporation pie" (fig. 2.1). Cities hired scavengers to cart it away—but not often and not very far. They usually dumped it into a convenient vacant lot or at the edge of the city.[6]

Inevitably, growing populations created more "offal" and "filth" than urban authorities could manage. In most American cities, streets, rivers, creeks, and gutters were informal, illegal, but widely used depositories of convenience for everything from household trash to dead animals. Thomas Condie and Rich-

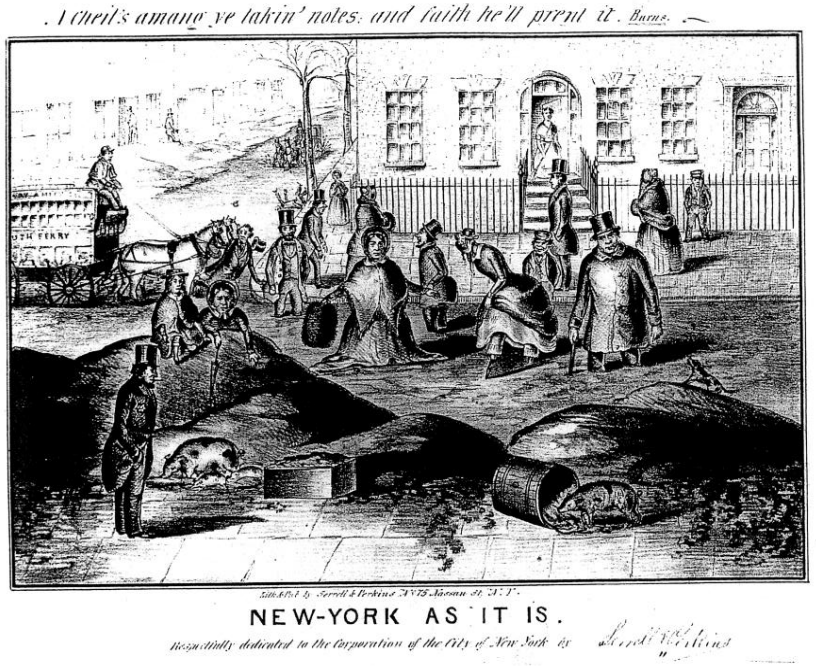


FIGURE 2.1. *New-York as It Is, Respectfully dedicated to the Corporation of the City of New York* by Serrell & Perkins, ca. 1850. (The Library Company of Philadelphia)

ard Folwell reported in 1798 that the open sinks into which Philadelphia's gutters flowed "exhale the most noxious effluvia; for dead animals and every kind of nausea, are thrown into them, and there remain until they become putrified," even as they assured readers that "there are few cities that can vie with Philadelphia in point of elegance or even cleanliness." James Pitot complained of "garbage and dead animals lying all over the streets" of New Orleans in 1802. Possibly as a dramatic letter to the editor, some brazen parties in New Orleans dumped "some dozen or fifteen, or more, cartloads of filth" into the downtown streets near the offices of the *Daily Picayune*, creating "a most abominable stench" in 1854.[7]

Waterfronts were the most popular dumping grounds. Some Philadelphia merchants used the Delaware River near their stores as privies, while the Drinkers disposed of spoiled food there, including two barrels of tainted salt fish, which Elizabeth Drinker assumed would "probably be taken up by some one" and eaten. New Orleans's levee and batture were littered with the "contents of privies, decayed or putrefying fish, flesh and fowl, from the markets; damaged

flour, potatoes and fruit, rotten hides,—to which we may add, as an occasional incident, dead horses, mules, etc." Lighters, barges, and keelboats loaded with horses, cattle, hogs, and victuals "fermented or damaged, . . . emitting inconvenient odors [and] offensive vapors," moored next to steamboats and oceangoing ships. These vessels dumped their garbage and raw sewage into the water at their moorings, where it joined the sewage of upriver settlements, the run-off from the city's drainage-ditch sewers, and the contents of household chamber pots emptied there by passersby. The stench was so powerful that Louisiana's first American governor, William C. C. Claiborne, claimed that it often disturbed him "even when in my chamber."[8]

Early in the American regime the city council proposed to build three floating bridges along the Mississippi "upon which the negroes will be compelled to go in order to throw all cesspool filth and other refuse into the current and not on the banks of the river, as is now practiced . . . to the greatest displeasure of those who frequent the levee." This project failed. A decade later the engineer-architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe specified that the intake pipe for his waterworks would run far out into the river's channel "by which he would escape the vast impurities which were near the shore, where every species of filth was hourly deposited." Nevertheless, as late as 1834 Latrobe's son John observed men along the batture filling hogsheads of drinking water from the river. Dip a glass into the "dirty, gurgling mass" of the river "as it rolls along, and constantly boiling up from the bottom," wrote one disgusted commentator. "Dip a tumbler full, each of which is thick with what you may call '*mud*,' if you please. . . . Yet those who live here, . . . drink it, and say they '*like it.*'"[9]

Climate, poor drainage, unpaved streets, and air pollution rendered the urban environment palpable as well as fragrant. Benjamin Latrobe claimed that in Pittsburgh "the Earth is a rich mould that melts in the Rain, and after a hour's shower is an unfathomable quagmire. The mud is incredible. Besides its depth, i[t] sticks and slips, and has all the possible qualities of well tempered brick earth, to which the muddiest State of the Washington common, is a well carpeted drawing room." Such conditions were common in the badly and incompletely paved streets of even the largest cities.[10]

In some cities heavy industry compounded the problem. Industrial smoke that contributed to stenches also covered cities with soot, which could not be restricted to certain neighborhoods as, to a limited degree, industrial odors could be. The notorious pall that hung over Pittsburgh in the early twentieth century began a century earlier. The city's glass works and ironworks and its steam engines generated a "thick cloud of smoke, impenetrable to the rays of the Sun" in 1813, and dusted the city with a "fat blacking, which lights upon every thing and every body. White clothes are inadmissible[,] white skin not less so. Every body wears a black Mask. You see the most beautiful women walking about in this fashion. So much for the Sky." In New York, according to one journalist, wherever buildings were being constructed, the "air in their neighborhood is so loaded with clouds of lime and dirt, that people of irritable lungs should not attempt it. Macbeth might justly call such passage, 'the way to dusty death.'"[11]

Even without industrial assistance, the intense heat and humidity that afflicted most eastern and Gulf Coast American cities for large parts of the year made the sea of stench palpable.[12] The climate was most oppressive in New Orleans, of course. Diarist Luther F. Tower frequently complained of summer heat that was "intolerable." "The hottest day yet," he wrote in September 1846. "The sun is actually Scorching. People engaged in business on the Levee Complain bitterly. Deaths by Coup du Soleil [sunstroke] are frequent." Yet northern cities could be equally oppressive. In July 1797 Elizabeth Drinker recorded a "very warm yea hot day" in Philadelphia: "I fear we shall hear of many who have suffer'd by the heat, it may be called intense . . . great complaints of the heat." In July 1834 New York City's temperature hovered between 86 and 94 degrees for eleven days running, resulting in the deaths (attributed to "drinking cold water") of twenty-four people on the tenth alone, and the expiration of several horses pulling the Greenwich Street and Broadway stages. Even on ordinary summer days, daily life in a northern city was uncomfortable. Harrison and Holms promoted their New York daguerreotype studio as "the coolest rooms in town to have a Likeness taken." In rivals' shops, they facetiously claimed, "several respectable citizens disappeared lately. . . . They suddenly fell into a melting mood, and nothing had been seen of them but sundry coats, hats, boots, wigs, &c."

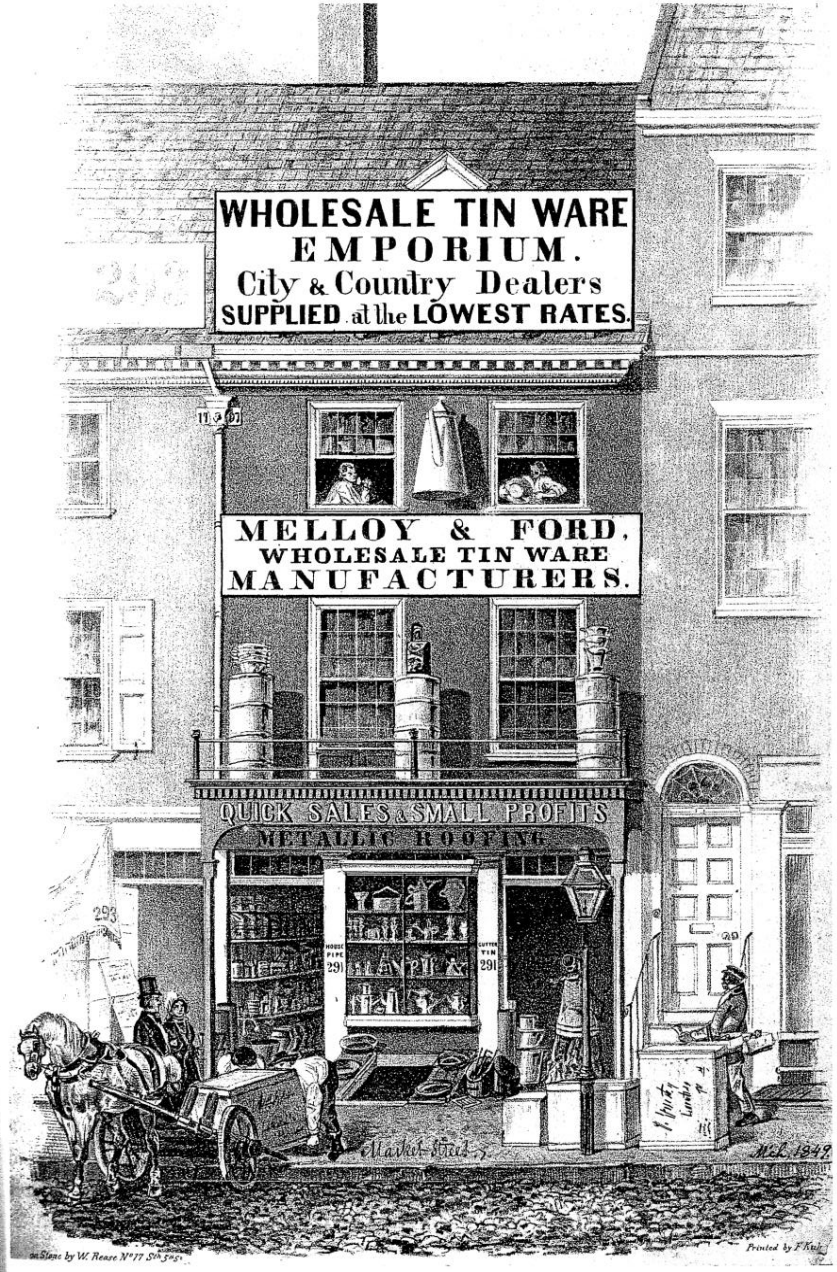
Heat brought other bodily afflictions, including bedbugs, "those filthy insects" who arrived with the spring, and, even worse, the swarms of mosquitoes endemic in cities with open sewers and watercourses of all sorts. For most visitors and residents, as for Harriet Martineau, they were a "great and perpetual plague." While mosquito bars (netting around beds) served well enough during the night, one had to fight the pesky creatures all day and all evening. Women wore gloves, wound loose muslin around their throats and ankles, and draped nets over their heads, while men resorted to loose pantaloons and boots and sometimes draped netting around their work spaces as well (fig. 2.2). One man claimed to have invented a full-body net that hung from his hat brim. But most people grew accustomed to the bites and preferred to put up with them "rather than bear a little additional warmth" from the extra clothing.[13]

Mosquitoes added yet another dimension to urban life: "Splendid Serenades." Their drone was a continuo in a fractured symphony of sounds and noises that

FIGURE 2.2. Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *Colonel Blackburn's Specific against Muskitoe bites in the Month of July, 1796, Rippon Lodge, Virginia.* (The Maryland Historical Society)

filled the city day and night, growing louder as the nineteenth century wore on. American city streets were stone-paved (when they were paved at all) with cobbles or Belgian blocks. Carts, wagons, and omnibuses clattered over them on wooden- and metal-rimmed wheels. "Ungreased and screaming cartwheels," a legacy of Spanish-era attempts to suppress smuggling, grated on sensitive nerves in New Orleans. "The very air [of New Orleans] howls with an eternal din and noise," wrote Alabama visitor Albert J. Pickett. Under such conditions, merchants were forced to relocate their clerical offices to the rear of their buildings to escape the din. Courts found it difficult to conduct business over the clamor of the street, so the first experiments with noise-reducing pavements such as wooden blocks, asphalt, and macadam were conducted around public buildings in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, although many New Orleanians opposed the first proposals to pave Crescent City streets, fearing that it would simply add to the noise.[14]

Small-scale manufacturing in the upper stories, cellars, and back- and side yards of shops and residences in the heart of the city showered noise upon neighbors and passersby (fig. 2.3). This cacophony was intermittently pierced by more distinctive sounds. "Loud and repeated cries of fire" disturbed urban visitors' sleep, but they were so common that residents ignored them. During the day, the "universal clanking" of church bells tolled deaths, holidays, and the arrival of distinguished visitors. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Philadelphia still had a bellman, or town crier, and New Orleans a town drummer. Philadelphia's auctioneers hired bell ringers to announce auctions and to advertise all sorts of other goods (fig. 2.4). The curmudgeonly historian John Fanning Watson complained about the employment of "a bell-man to keep the neighbourhood in irremediable distress, for an half hour together." The bell man's instrument punctuated the distinctive cries of street vendors adver-



opposite
FIGURE 2.3. William H. Rease, *Melloy & Ford Wholesale Tin Ware Emporium*, Philadelphia, 1849. (The Library Company of Philadelphia)

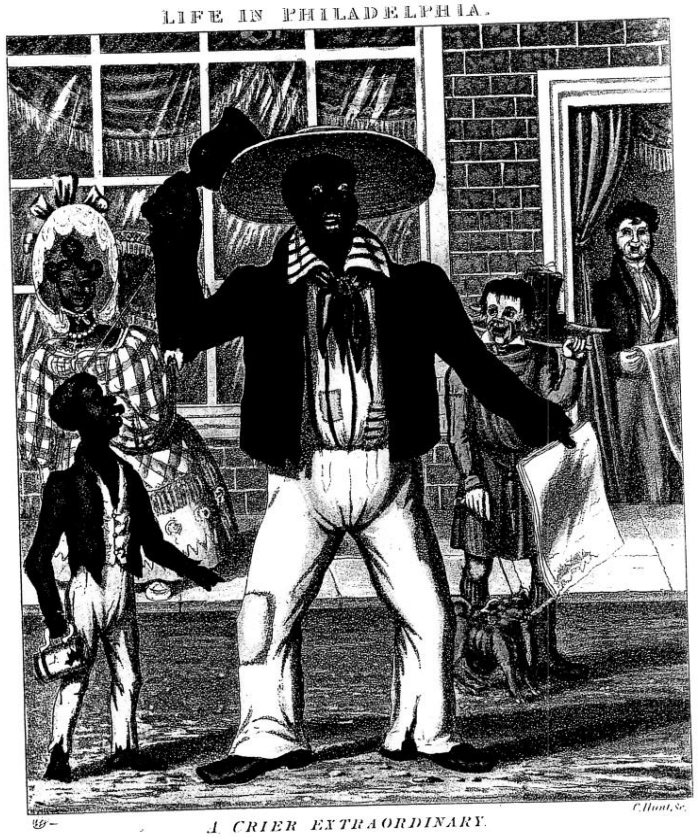


FIGURE 2.4. W. H. Isaacs, *Life in Philadelphia: A Crier Extraordinary*, Philadelphia, ca. 1825. Auctions were traditionally announced by a bellman who cried the items for sale. (The Library Company of Philadelphia)

tising their wares and services: "Hot Muf–fins!" "Sweep, O-O-O-O!" "Messieurs, amateurs, connoisseurs de toutes couleurs, venez, venez, achetez de moi!"[15]

These accounts offer a vivid, if repulsive, image of the dizzying sensory ambience of antebellum American cities. Sensory overload was as old as urban life, but in the decades after the establishment of the nation, inadequate infrastructure and weak governmental regulation in rapidly expanding cities immersed urbanites in an ever-deepening ocean of sights, sounds, smells, and textures that was trying, even overwhelming.

Most present-day Americans would find such environments difficult to tolerate and, more and more often, so did their nineteenth-century ancestors. One warm May day in 1863, General Benjamin Butler, commander of the Union forces occupying New Orleans, set out with his wife to view the city that his troops had captured a few months earlier. A short way into their drive, the couple came to the turning basin of the New Canal, which drained the city and provided access for cargo boats coming from Lake Pontchartrain.

> As we approached the "basin," the air seemed filled with the most noxious and offensive stenches possible,—so noxious as almost to take away the power of breathing. The whole surface of the canal and the pond was covered with a thick growth of green vegetable scum, variegated with dead cats and dogs or the remains of dead mules on the banking. The sun shone excessively hot, and the thermometer might have been 120°. We turned to the right and went down along the canal as far as Lake Pontchartrain, finding it all in the same condition until within a few rods of the lake. We drove back by a very different route.[16]

Returning to his office, Butler summoned the city official who oversaw the canals and streets, and demanded to know what was wrong. The man professed ignorance. "Did you observe anything special" when you last visited the canal, Butler asked.

"No, General."

"Not an enormous stink?"

"No more than usual, General; no more than there always is."[17]

The Butlers' and the commissioner's conflicting reactions to the canals of New Orleans invite us to take a critical look at these accounts, to push past the picturesquely disgusting by asking whether they were more than ever-present annoyances. Faced with early republican cities in all their manifestations, visitors and residents reacted in ways that were neither random nor entirely predictable. They had a history and an anthropology, as well as a psychology and a neurology, that are sometimes evident in the written and visual records left by nineteenth-century urbanites. Consider Alexander Graydon's recollection of his walk to school through the streets and byways of prerevolutionary Philadelphia, then English North America's largest city.

> I had my choice, indeed of different streets, and sometimes varied my course; but it generally led me through what is now called Dock street, then a filthy uncovered sewer, bordered on either side by shabby stables and tan-yards. To these, succeeded the more agreeable object of Israel Pemberton's garden

(now covered in part by the [first] bank of the United States) laid out in the old fashioned style of uniformity, with walks and allies nodding to their brothers, and decorated with a number of evergreens carefully clipped into pyramidal and conical forms. Here the amenity of the view usually detained me for a few minutes: Thence, turning Chesnut street corner to the left, and passing a row of dingy two story houses, I came to the Whale bones, which gave name to the ally, at the corner of which they stood. These never ceased to be occasionally an object of some curiosity, and might be called my second stage, beyond which there was but one more general object of attention, and this was to get a peep at the race horses, which in sporting seasons were kept in the widow Nichols's stables, which from her house (the Indian Queen at the corner of Market street) extended perhaps two thirds or more the way to Chesnut street.[18]

Few of the monuments of Philadelphia's broad main streets celebrated by early-nineteenth-century printmakers, strangers' (travelers') guide authors, and travelers appear in Graydon's anecdote. He zigzagged through side streets, alleys, and back lots, taking note of curious landmarks along the way. At the same time, Graydon's written memories were colored by his persona as an author. He was a former Pennsylvania politician and a prominent but disillusioned revolutionary looking back on the colonial city of his youth. As Graydon told it, the schoolboy and his city were one: the kinds of homely and unsophisticated landmarks that might attract a boy's attention epitomized homely and unsophisticated Philadelphia itself. His own growth was transparently intertwined with the city's. Graydon used a common early-nineteenth-century technique for ordering his childhood recollections: studding his account with literary allusions that help give it shape and significance. The description of Israel Pemberton's garden, for example, paraphrased Alexander Pope's description of seventeenth-century formal gardens—"Grove nods at Grove, each Alley has a brother"—and Joseph Addison's complaint about trees that rose in "Cones, Globes, and Pyramids" as a way emphasize to readers the old-fashioned quality of a city that was rapidly losing the landmarks of its founders. The decline of the unpretentious city paralleled the decline of the new republic, in which upright citizens such as Graydon were pushed aside by pretenders and self-promoters.[19]

At the same time, another kind of progress shaped the tale: from the foul smells of sewage, poorly kept stables, and tanneries in and around Dock Creek—from the relics of civilized life—to the visual pleasures of Pemberton's garden, the whale bones, and the race horses. In his walk to school, Graydon enacted the phylogeny and ontogeny of selfhood. Students of human development and the psychology of perception write of the ways that the human animal has come

to favor the so-called "distance receptors," especially vision and hearing—forms of perception that one can practice at a distance—over the more immediate systems of touch and taste on which other animals rely. Smell lies somewhere between the two—it has lost much of its practical function in humans but remains an important emotional and memory stimulant, as we will see in the next chapter.[20]

The changes that have occurred over the course of human evolution are repeated to some extent in the development of individuals. Infants use taste and touch (direct contact with the environment) as important orientation tools, but early on, visual observation and bodily imitation supersede tactile exploration as key developmental strategies, even in newborns. After infancy, most people rely on the other three senses, particularly hearing and sight, which embody varying degrees of spatial separation between stimulus and receptor.[21]

Reliance on listening and especially seeing allows a person to distinguish a self from its surroundings and to distinguish elements of the surroundings from one another. This ability—"field independence," or the capacity to separate perceived items from their contexts in a "structure of space"—is critically important in shaping the elementary sense of selfhood, as a finite object in a world of objects. At a more advanced level, it permits a person to see him- or herself as an entity apart from the family or other social group, for selfhood is developed in the context of other selves: "To know oneself is to know oneself as a person among others," in the words of psychologist R. Peter Hobson. One learns that one is a being similar to but different from other beings. The achievement of a degree of field independence and "intersubjectivity" is part of the developmental process of infants, but it is also explicitly encouraged by cultural values that modify and reinforce this general human tendency to favor distance receptors.[22]

In other words, while we all share these biases and patterns, as self-conscious beings we are not the prisoners of our physiologies. Neurological and psychological properties shape the human orientation to the world, but to the universal characteristics of all animate beings and to the common developmental trajectory of individual members of our own species humans add a cultural dimension, an element of learned behavior that fine tunes, interprets, and sometimes redirects these instinctual patterns. As a result, the particular mix, or "ratio," of our perceptual faculties varies over time, across cultures, and according to the gender, age, and physiological and psychological constitutions of individual people (as, for example, in the commonplace pattern through which people who have lost the use of one or another sense often develop the others more highly to compensate for the impaired faculty).

Graydon portrayed his boyhood walk as this sort of journey, from the raw

sensory experience of Dock Creek to the absorption of the cultural pleasures of art, science, and sport—the garden, the whale bones, and the race horses—as he moved toward school. So his anecdote points us to the deeper significance of the relics of civilized life. Early republican urbanites were anxious to discover what their near contemporary Immanuel Kant called a "fixed and abiding" self: a personal and social identity that would remain stable in the face of great political and urban changes. Graydon's *Memoirs* painted him as just such a person, holding to principle when others in the new republic abandoned theirs.[23]

The relics of civilized life were troubling because city people understood how much their selves were contingent on their connection to their surroundings: the self was inevitably a self in space. Elizabeth Drinker was reminded of this during a walk with her son through Philadelphia one spring day in 1798. "On our way home, I was quite deranged, or in other words lost myself—leaning on Williams Arm we walked on for a considerable time without speaking, my thoughts were employ'd" in thinking about a legal deposition. "When we had just past the market in second Street, and William spake to me, and interrupted my revery I was fairly lost, knew not where we were, nor could I find it out 'till we came to the Church, nor then could hardly reconcile that we were in second street, we had intended when we sett off to go another way. I believe I am not the first that has for a short space of time forgot themselves, tho' not apt so to do: I never was so before in my life, nor can I account for it altogether[.] I did not fully recollect myself 'till we were near front [street], in Arch street."[24]

Like Graydon and most of her other contemporaries, Drinker assumed that a "single real and authentic essence," a "decision-making agent ultimately responsible for the actions of the whole person" governed each individual. When she lost contact with that pilot Drinker lost her *self*. The incident so troubled her that she wrote about it defensively and at length in her diary, even though she recognized that it was a common type of mental lapse. It unnerved her.[25]

In a society that was growing and fluid, city people in the early republic depended on the evidence of their senses to anchor themselves in the scene. John H. B. Latrobe conveyed this vividly in his account of a visit to New Orleans in 1834 to trace the steps of his father and half-brother, both architects and both victims of yellow fever there two decades earlier. Latrobe's path through New Orleans suggests that he may have been using his father's manuscript journal as a guidebook, but his tourist's itinerary quickly dissolved in the Crescent City's sensory intensity. The ship that brought him had moored near the vegetable market, and Latrobe set off upriver along the levee toward the meat (now French) market, his ears regaled by the cries of vendors, "shouting forth in French English and the negro patois," competing with the seven church bells calling worshippers to prayer. As he crossed the place d'armes heading toward his boarding house on Canal Street, he was struck by the "full and noisy custom" of the cafés and saloons, whose patrons drank "Rum and gin, Monongahela, and Tom and Jerry" prepared from an "army of bottles, with contents of all colors" and served on marble- or mahogany-topped bars fitted with "shining brass works." On the street, soldiers in "gay and tasteful uniform" passed by, as their "sundry thumps upon a bass drum [spoke] martially to the ear." Snatches of inconsequential conversation drifted toward his ears as he passed the shopkeepers lounging in their doorways, men and older mixed-race women sitting on their balconies, smoking cigars, and beautiful young quadroon women pedestrians, admired but then snubbed when their racial identity was revealed ("dont let her hear you").[26]

Latrobe's account was a highly self-conscious effort to record his sensory immersion in the city. As he discovered, his multiple levels of awareness did not always mesh. The path from sensation to enlightenment through perception was not as direct as Graydon's account suggested. In his encounter with the quadroon woman, Latrobe responded positively to the human signs she showed, to signs that we recognize instinctively as human social signals. At the same time, he was also attracted by more limited cues learned from the gender norms of his native culture—"a fine figure, a beautiful foot, an ankle like an angels—an air quite distinqué [*sic*], and then so strange, and characteristic—so Spanish." However, his response was quickly reproved by his unnamed companion, for he had missed even more subtle, more narrowly defined, local racial signs: "A Quadroon! Well, I'll know better next time."[27]

The relics of civilized life appropriately emphasizes the human aspect of the urban sensory world. While the new sensory intensity of visual chaos, cacophony, stench, heat, humidity, and filth created real discomfort and disorientation, it acquired additional alarming connotations in antebellum American cities, where rapid social diversification, economic transformation, and new ideologies of selfhood and personhood prompted anxious scrutiny of one's own and others' place in society. Intrusions on individual comfort were described as intrusions on spatial order, and intrusions on spatial order were in turn interpreted as disruptions of social relations. Of all the sensations that grated on city people's nerves, the ones that other people created were most offensive. Surrounded by industrial noises, animal stench, climatic oppression, and human beings, they allotted most of their energies to scrutinizing their neighbors.