

takes a major step in rectifying the situation. The contents provide not only a detailed account of the building's design and construction, they consider its evolving functions over time. Not long after its completion, the building began to seem dated, and the vision of the 1901-02 McMillan Plan rendered it an esthetic albatross. Proposals to recast it in the academic classicism of the early 20th century went nowhere, and expanding White House functions took over the quarters once the original departments vacated during the late 1940s. Ever-increasing demands for space in the executive branch kept the building in use, and eventually its grandiose design became appreciated again.

The book fittingly concludes by chronicling the extensive restoration work that has occurred inside and out in recent years. All along the way, the authors have tied their story to Washington—its planning, growth, architects, and politicians.

*Palace of State* is as sumptuous a production as it is an informative one. Filled with beautifully reproduced illustrations, many of them seldom or never before published, the visual matter matches the illuminating text. Scholars and everyone else interested in the physical character of Washington will find this book richly rewarding.

### *Carving Out the Commons: Tenant Organizing and Housing Cooperatives in Washington, D.C.*

By Amanda Huron (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 224 pp., index, paper, \$25

REVIEWED BY JOHANNA BOCKMAN

Today Washington, D.C., seems like a terrain of hyper-gentrification and widespread displacement. Yet D.C. has also been and continues to be at the forefront of grassroots experiments combating these destructive trends and creating new, democratic worlds. Amanda Huron, an assistant professor of interdisciplinary social sciences at the University of the District of Columbia, brings us into this on-going history in her new book, *Carving out the Commons*.

In 1975 what did D.C.'s first elected city council members in the 20th century do? Huron writes that they "immediately turned [their] attention to one of the most pressing issues of the day: gentrification and displacement of low- and moderate-income residents." They passed a rent control pro-

gram, temporary moratoria on the conversions of rentals into condominiums, a tax on flipped residential properties, and a law giving tenants the right to purchase their homes. This last law allowed for thousands of renters to stop their own displacement by creating a special kind of housing cooperative: limited-equity cooperatives. These limited-equity cooperatives are the focus of Huron's book.

In limited-equity cooperatives (LECs), residents collectively own their apartment building by buying shares in it. They collectively and democratically manage it, and, if they move out, do not sell their shares at market price but at a small, fixed percentage above their original contributions. Thus, and this is important, they limit the resale value, which keeps this housing permanently affordable to incoming members with low and moderate incomes. Furthermore, Huron argues that LECs remove these buildings from the capitalist housing market and create another kind of world within the city.

Huron studies ten limited-equity cooperatives in D.C., seven that still exist and three that no longer do. These cooperatives were founded between 1979 and 2004. Her sources primarily are fascinating interviews with the co-op residents and observation of their living arrangements. She also used the Washington Innercity Self Help (W.I.S.H.) archives held in the Washingtoniana Collection of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library. W.I.S.H. helped D.C. residents organize LECs in the 1980s and 1990s.

Since Huron explores the experiences of these D.C. residents as a way to understand the "urban commons," this book will interest both those studying Washington history and those seeking to create LECs and other commons. The first two chapters build a theory of the urban commons, which is important and original, but may be challenging for non-academic readers. As Huron argues, cities are filled with housing, businesses, and other resources that are privately owned and run for private profit. However, cities are, in

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fact, the product of all of us—as can be seen in the city’s block parties, social street life, and democratic community-building in LECs—and should benefit all of us. Huron argues that we can take back the “urban commons” that we have created by expanding on what the resident-organizers of LECs have already built. She writes: “Studying how commons have arisen—or been created, or been seized—in the past, can help us learn how we can continue to seize, or create, and expand commons today.”

The following three chapters describe life in the ten cooperatives Huron studies. They are clearly written and a pleasure to read. Privileging the words of the residents, Huron takes us through the initial formation of these cooperatives (chapter 3), the benefits they have provided residents (chapter 4), and the challenges to, and continued commitments of, the residents (chapter 5). Huron discovers that these cooperatives create a kind of oasis for low-income people. As one cooperative resident, Sheila (Huron does not use real names of her informants), put it, “So you’ve got a nice decent place and you don’t have to worry about your housing. So now, you can do other things, education, whatever you need for a job, you can—that’s the opportunity! And that’s how I see limited-equity cooperatives, as creating that opportunity.”

Huron’s masterful use of such quotations provides deep insight into the grassroots experiments that are a central part of Washington’s history.

Huron concludes with a call to expand the urban commons, “so that people can begin to resist or even partially escape capitalism, gain some control over their collective lives, and forge relatively stable ground from which to work to further dismantle capitalist structures of life.” She reminds us of the anti-capitalist worlds within historic Washington and within Washington today.

### *Creating Capitol Hill: Place, Proprietors, and People*

By Charles Carroll Carter, William C. diGiacomantonio, and Pamela Scott; maps by Don Alexander Hawkins (Washington: U.S. Capitol Historical Society, 2018), 304 pp., illus., paper, \$29.95

REVIEWED BY FERGUS M. BORDEWICH

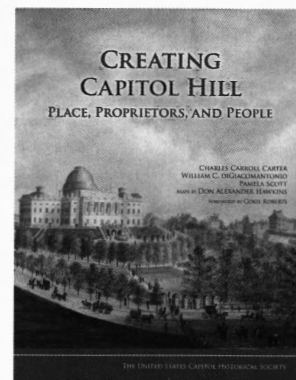
This beautifully designed, erudite, and highly readable book will delight scholars and general readers alike. Its four concise and enlightening essays comprehensively recount the early development of Capitol Hill within the larger Federal City. The

essays are accompanied by a profusion of superb illustrations, many rarely seen, portraying the city’s physical and demographic landscape both before and after its selection as the setting for the nation’s capital.

Washington was, as everyone knows, one of the first planned cities of modern times, a fact that is vividly manifest here. As numerous eye-grabbing prints, watercolors, engravings, portraits, sketches, and plans make clear, before Congress decided to place the capital on the Potomac there was, so to speak, “no there there.” Apart from the small commercial towns of Alexandria and Georgetown, the site of the future city was an expanse of gently rolling hills, woods, and meadows bisected by Goose Creek. The modest waterway was sometimes pretentiously called the Tiber, after the great river of ancient Rome, whose banks “were shaded with tall umbrageous forest trees of every variety,” as Margaret Bayard Smith, the wife of a Delaware senator, wrote in 1800.

Crisp essays by historians William C. diGiacomantonio and Pamela Scott summarize the complex political maneuvering in the First Congress that determined the site of the capital, and the hapless attempts to finance the city’s early development by means of lotteries and shady real estate manipulations. Both George Washington and the penurious Congress had allowed themselves to be persuaded that private enterprise could do the job more cheaply and efficiently than public funding. It couldn’t: the entire project almost collapsed beneath a tumble of bad loans and broken contracts before Congress eventually, grudgingly stepped in.

To these essays, historical cartographer Don Alexander Hawkins has added an engrossing chapter on the mapping of early Washington. Some examples, such as Andrew Ellicott’s topographical engraving, are well known. Less familiar are Hawkins’s own maps showing the jigsaw patterns of land ownership before the city’s development, the location of such colorfully named properties as Flint’s Discovery, the Widow’s Mite, Cerne Abbey Manor, and the Houpyards—sites of now long-gone manor houses, watercourses, meandering




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*Fergus M. Bordewich's most recent book is The First Congress: How a Group of Extraordinary Men Invented the Government.*