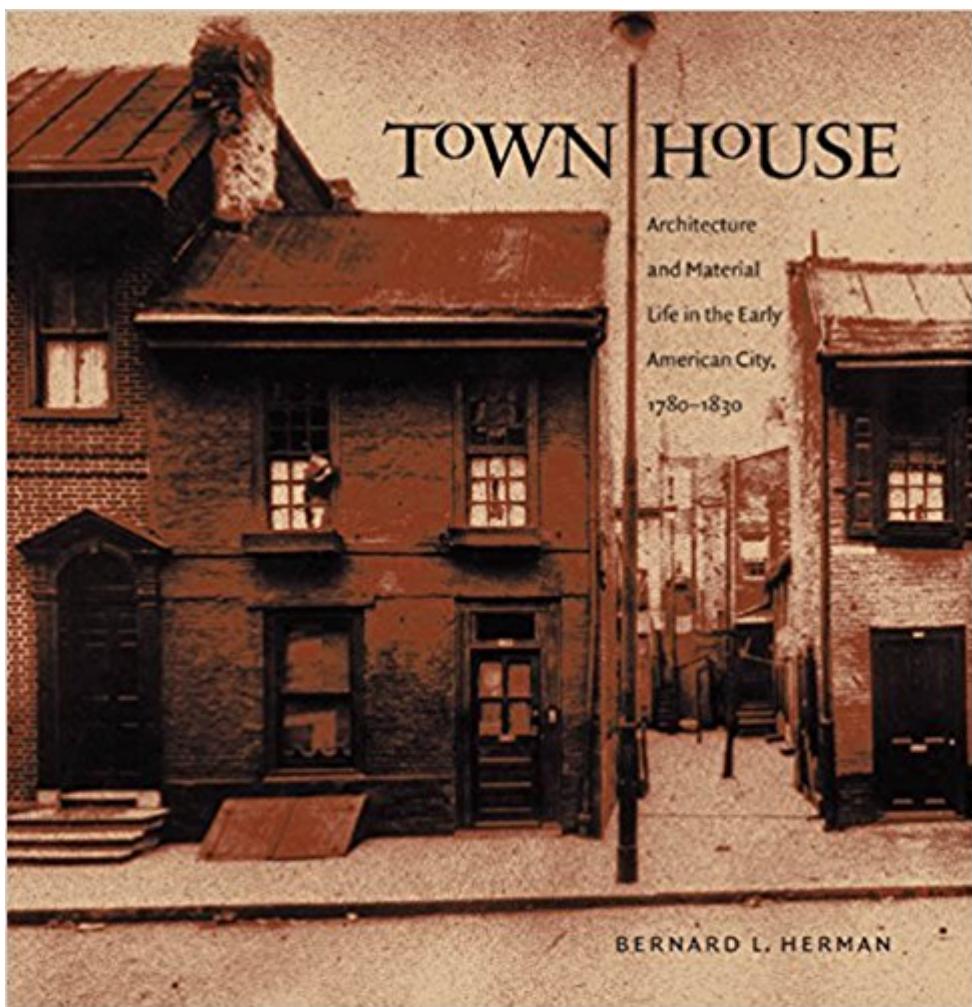


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# **Town House: Architecture And Material Life In The Early American City, 1780-1830 (Published By The Omohundro Institute Of Early American History And Culture And The University Of North Carolina Press)**





## **Synopsis**

In this abundantly illustrated volume, Bernard Herman provides a history of urban dwellings and the people who built and lived in them in early America. In the eighteenth century, cities were constant objects of idealization, often viewed as the outward manifestations of an organized, civil society. As the physical objects that composed the largest portion of urban settings, town houses contained and signified different aspects of city life, argues Herman. Taking a material culture approach, Herman examines urban domestic buildings from Charleston, South Carolina, to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, as well as those in English cities and towns, to better understand why people built the houses they did and how their homes informed everyday city life. Working with buildings and documentary sources as diverse as court cases and recipes, Herman interprets town houses as lived experience. Chapters consider an array of domestic spaces, including the merchant family's house, the servant's quarter, and the widow's dower. Herman demonstrates that city houses served as sites of power as well as complex and often conflicted artifacts mapping the everyday negotiations of social identity and the display of sociability.

## **Book Information**

Series: Published by the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture and the University of North Carolina Press

Hardcover: 320 pages

Publisher: The University of North Carolina Press; First Edition edition (November 30, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0807829919

ISBN-13: 978-0807829912

Product Dimensions: 9.2 x 8.8 x 1.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.6 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,468,258 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #52 in Books > History > Europe > Scandinavia > Denmark #2033 in Books > Arts & Photography > Architecture > Buildings > Residential #3073 in Books > Arts & Photography > Architecture > History

## **Customer Reviews**

""Town House is the first study to bring the methods of the new vernacular architectural history to the American city. Bernard Herman ranges far beyond architecture to people these houses, fill them with goods, set them next to their neighbors on the street, and link them to transatlantic

predecessors and contemporaries. He shows us not only how these buildings were used, but what they meant to their residents. "Town House is a tour de force of architectural and urban history. (Dell Upton, University of Virginia)""Town House" is the first study to bring the methods of the new vernacular architectural history to the American city. Bernard Herman ranges far beyond architecture to people these houses, fill them with goods, set them next to their neighbors on the street, and link them to transatlantic predecessors and contemporaries. He shows us not only how these buildings were used, but what they meant to their residents. "Town House" is a tour de force of architectural and urban history. (Dell Upton, University of Virginia)""[A] wide-ranging and amply illustrated work. . . . The book abounds in insights." -- "American Historical Review""Herman's work, as it captures and restores to modern readers the ambiguity and lyricism of an earlier built environment, continues to show us how valuable such studies are, and makes that scholarship especially accessible, exciting, and inviting." -- "Journal of the Early Republic"

Town House will definitely appeal to connoisseurs of historic architecture, who will find it an arresting, fascinating, and, in some ways, original book. General readers with a passing interest in the subject also will be rewarded. . . . This book effectively delivers the sobering lesson that no matter the era, houses do not lie.--Alabama Mobile Register[A] wide-ranging and amply illustrated work. . . . The book abounds in insights.--American Historical ReviewA thorough, imaginative, and persuasive reconstruction of the lived history of vernacular buildings in the early republic. Bernard Herman leads his readers through town houses of Charleston, Boston, Philadelphia, Norfolk, and Portsmouth, looking into attics and cellars as well as parlors and chambers, to explore who inhabited these buildings and what architecture meant to them. Deploying the evidence of probate, insurance, and tax records alongside building plans, travel narratives, and archeological digs, he situates town houses in their immediate communities and in a transatlantic culture.--Elizabeth Blackmar, Columbia UniversityBeautifully designed and ingeniously illustrated.--North Carolina Historical ReviewHerman's new book, *Town House: Architecture and Material Life in the Early American City, 1780-1830*, is a most remarkable guided tour of the early American city in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. . . . Herman has dramatically extended the boundaries of our knowledge of the early American city, has provided an important model for future studies, and has made a fresh and compelling case for the scholarly significance of material culture.--Winterthur PortfolioHerman's book has been recognized as exemplary in the field of vernacular architecture. . . . Architectural and urban historians should find *Town House* illuminating. . . . He has provided a solid foundation for further investigation of the ties between historical forces and material

life.--Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians

Entwining the histories of dwelling places with those of the humans who dreamed, built, lived, and worked in them, the book offers a fresh perspective on the past lives of port towns stretching from Charleston, South Carolina, to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, with detours to Bristol, Bath, and Baden along the way. Beautifully produced and lavishly illustrated, Herman's study is often captivating and sometimes transporting.--William and Mary Quarterly

Herman's work, as it captures and restores to modern readers the ambiguity and lyricism of an earlier built environment, continues to show us how valuable such studies are, and makes that scholarship especially accessible, exciting, and inviting.--Journal of the Early Republic

Herman has fused the empirical density of wood, brick, and stone to a new kind of cultural history that focuses on how people--farmers, merchants, women, shipwrights, servants, and slaves--experienced urban life and shaped an everyday poetics of streets and back alleyways. Packed with wonderful discoveries from both fieldwork and the archive, Herman's book weaves a web of connections from Charleston to Philadelphia to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and then to Bristol, Frome, Deptford, and Gravesend. It demonstrates, too, the subtlety of his narrative method, drawn from the utter interdependency of material artifacts and written documents. *Town House* will be required reading for a long time to come.--Robert Blair St. George, University of Pennsylvania

*Town House* is the first study to bring the methods of the new vernacular architectural history to the American city. Bernard Herman ranges far beyond architecture to people these houses, fill them with goods, set them next to their neighbors on the street, and link them to transatlantic predecessors and contemporaries. He shows us not only how these buildings were used, but what they meant to their residents. *Town House* is a tour de force of architectural and urban history--a book that we have long needed.--Dell Upton, University of Virginia

Herman's latest book is the product of over a decade of research, spanning the Atlantic to encompass the major cities of the east coast of North America and England. This innovative and engaging assessment of a wide range of sources for the social and architectural history of town houses provides many new insights into material life in the North American and English city of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century.--Roger Leech, University of Southampton

*Town House* presents a rich, detailed picture of the spatial, material, and cultural life of American cities in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.--Technology and Culture

I have mixed emotions about this book. On the one hand, it's clearly been written as a labor of love, thoroughly researched and well illustrated. On the other hand, I personally struggled with the read. As a reference resource, it definitely fills a void since I can't think of another book that so

thoroughly covers this material. I will definitely retain as a reference for homes of this period.

Want to know more about City Living during the 18th and 19th centuries? This book is your go-to resource. Filled with a number of historic images, floor plans and primary resources, this text explores life as it was for some Americans during the transition from British Colony to the rise of the Victorian Era. It paints a different picture than the wealthy grand homes we're all use to seeing as museums. The simple truth is most people didn't live that way and it's reflected in this book. I highly recommend for anyone wants to learn more about this time.

As a reenactor/interpreter of life in America in the late 18th/early 19th Centuries at various historic sights/events, I was very excited by this book. It has provided in depth understandings in ways I had never found before. Definitely one of my new favorite and most valuable resources.

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