

7-1-2014

Book Review - The Oglethorpe Plan: Enlightenment Design in Savannah and Beyond

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Recommended Citation

Arnold, Eli (2014) "Book Review - The Oglethorpe Plan: Enlightenment Design in Savannah and Beyond," *Georgia Library Quarterly*: Vol. 51: Iss. 3, Article 22.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/glq/vol51/iss3/22>

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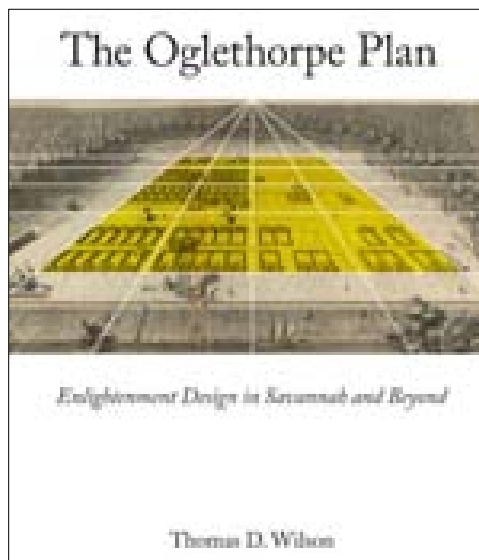
The Oglethorpe Plan: Enlightenment Design in Savannah and Beyond by Thomas D. Wilson
(University of Virginia Press, 2012:
9780813932903, \$35.00)

In *The Oglethorpe Plan: Enlightenment Design in Savannah and Beyond*, town planner and independent researcher Thomas D. Wilson offers readers an approachable and well-researched history of the Colony of Georgia, the City of Savannah, General James Edward Oglethorpe, the English Enlightenment, and urban planning theory. Through extensive use of contextual history, Wilson provides not just facts and dates but gives the audience a complete picture of the influences upon characters and events and the impact affected by those figures and occurrences.

Beginning with a detailed genealogy and history of Oglethorpe's family in the context of the political, social, economic, and scientific/technological revolutions occurring throughout Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Wilson supplies the familial foundation on which Oglethorpe developed his progressive ideals and goals. The author goes into great detail on the overarching plan, vision, and execution of Oglethorpe's plan for Georgia, applying the modern construct of the strategic plan to his idea. By offering a background into Oglethorpe's circle of influence (in regards to both people and events), the author allows us to understand the motives of and setbacks faced by the founders. Further, Wilson provides a window into the general designing of a

colony—a process of which many casual readers of history may lack understanding.

Describing the detailed process of creating the architectural plan for the City of Savannah and surrounding areas, Wilson offers a glimpse into the mind of Oglethorpe and his attempt to create a physical space based on the theoretical underpinnings of the Enlightenment. Further, Wilson provides a more detailed account of the eventual downfall of Oglethorpe's vision for the



prohibitionist and abolitionist Georgia experiment than offered by previous colonial historians. The author concludes not only with the lasting influence of Georgia and Oglethorpe's vision today but also of the Savannah plan on modern municipal planning—an influence lacking mainstream understanding.

Wilson purports the idea that urban planning can embody—and further—social change. Although

Oglethorpe's American experiment is often described as a failure, Wilson believes that he was the first true American abolitionist and laid the foundations of that movement before independence was even established. Far from being a failure, the Georgia colonial experiment was a required precursor on the path to eventual universal liberty.

Culled from primary documents including the official Georgia colonial records, diaries of participants, and municipal records and maps, Wilson successfully creates a detailed case study that lacks academic jargon, making it very readable for an audience ranging from high

school history students to academics. Copiously illustrated with images and charts—many created by the author himself—this book belongs in the circulating collection of any library in Georgia. *The Oglethorpe Plan: Enlightenment Design in Savannah and Beyond* fills a gap in Georgia colonial history, carving out

a place for a contextual history that brings the influence of Oglethorpe, Georgia, and Savannah to the present day through the premise that social change can be rooted in urban design.

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