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Jane Wilson McWilliams, “Annapolis, A City on the Severn: A History” in *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 107, no. 2 (Summer 2012), 234-35.

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Jane Wilson McWilliams, *Annapolis, A City on the Severn: A History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011), ISBN 9780801896590. Cloth \$44.95, 512 pp, 164 halftones, 5 line drawings.

At the tip of a narrow peninsula on Chesapeake Bay's western shore sits the port of Annapolis, Maryland. Today the city is typically associated with the numerous sail boats in its harbor and the historic buildings that line its streets. Often overlooked is the important place in Maryland's history this small city has had. Despite calls by local historians for a comprehensive history of the state capital, until the recent publication of Jane Wilson McWilliams' *Annapolis, A City on the Severn* there has not been since the 1880s a monograph on the city that attempted to fully capture the port's history. Jane Wilson McWilliams admirably fills this gap with a book that provides nicely captures the dense richness of Annapolis' history.

McWilliams frames Annapolis' history as one in which disparate newcomers, including white retirees and striving Hispanic immigrants, have been drawn to the port by its "location, its culture, or its economic possibilities." (373) Although the book discusses the city's politics and economy in detail, it is the town's land use and development that the author makes her primary focus. Decade by decade the author in great detail precisely maps the growth of the port on the Severn from a small English outpost settled in the mid-seventeenth century to the bustling state capital it is today. Began from a Calvert desire to have commerce at designated seaports rather than at individual plantations, Annapolis's growth resulted from various political and economic rivalries. Competition between political factions, and between Annapolis, its neighbors and state and federal governments are vividly described by McWilliams. Eighteenth century battles over the Governor's mansion, the establishment and expansion of the US Naval Academy and the 20th century expansion of Annapolis by annexation of near-by suburbs are used to illustrate how the city grew. As McWilliams aptly describes, the establishment of the United States Naval Academy led Annapolis to becoming a "Military Town" in which the Academy's operations shaped the lives of many of the town's residents. Changes in land use policies, such as the increasing importance of zoning and historic preservation regulation, play an important part in McWilliams' book. The author persuasively argues that without strong land use regulation and the vigorous advocacy of local preservationists such as Anne St. Clair Wright, the present positive state of Annapolis might have been a very different story. In her telling of the city's development, McWilliams effectively employs voluminous illustrations, maps and census tables to give readers a strong visual sense of the port's growth from a "finished" city fully contained within a mile square to its more sprawling character today.

A strength of the book is its inclusion of short essays by other historians. These sidebars, on such topics as eighteenth century working women, the *Maryland Gazette*, the African American alderman William H. Butler and the Annapolis Convention of 1786, offer interesting insights into issues not explored in depth in the main body of the book.

Annapolis, A City on the Severn is also characterized by McWilliams' in-depth research. Throughout this chronologically organized nine-chapter volume McWilliams provides deeply into the institutional and political life of Annapolis with its roles as a port, capital and educational center each given full consideration. For anyone interested in understanding the development of the Terrapin State's capital, *Annapolis, A City on the Severn* now serves as the starting point for all researchers.

Where the book is lacking is in not connecting Annapolis' history to larger national and global issues. This is most noticeable is in the book's discussion of race. While the author tells us that Annapolis switched from being a city that in 1860 had only one voter support Abraham Lincoln to almost half of its voters casting ballots for the tall mid-westerter in 1864, she does not describe why this change occurred or how it might have been part of a larger national change. Similarly, while McWilliams describes the Democrats regaining control of Annapolis local government in 1875 this significant political realignment is not situated within the larger movement by Southern whites to reclaim political power at the expense of blacks. When blacks were largely disenfranchised during the Jim Crow era did Annapolis black women, like those in Wilmington, North Carolina, create new methods of political activism? Consideration of such larger national questions would have made for a more compelling narrative.

Notwithstanding its local focus, the book is a useful addition to the Maryland historiography and a welcome addition to the histories of port cities.

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