



Sheetlines

The journal of
THE CHARLES CLOSE SOCIETY
for the Study of Ordnance Survey Maps

“Book review – Measure of Manhattan”

John Davies

Sheetlines, 97 (August 2013), pp.56

Stable URL:

<http://www.charlesclosesociety.org/files/Issue97page56.pdf>

*This article is provided for personal, non-commercial use only.
Please contact the Society regarding any other use of this work.*

Published by
THE CHARLES CLOSE SOCIETY
for the Study of Ordnance Survey Maps
www.CharlesCloseSociety.org

The Charles Close Society was founded in 1980 to bring together all those with an interest in the maps and history of the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain and its counterparts in the island of Ireland. The Society takes its name from Colonel Sir Charles Arden-Close, OS Director General from 1911 to 1922, and initiator of many of the maps now sought after by collectors.

The Society publishes a wide range of books and booklets on historic OS map series and its journal, *Sheetlines*, is recognised internationally for its specialist articles on Ordnance Survey-related topics.

Marguerite Holloway, *The measure of Manhattan*, WW Norton, 2013, £20.00, ISBN 978 0 393 07125 2

Subtitled *the tumultuous career and surprising legacy of John Randel Jr, cartographer, surveyor, inventor* this book is the story of a flamboyant and eccentric genius (1787-1865) whose work established the grid pattern of modern American cities and facilitated the development of canals and railways in USA. A vivid sense of his character and achievements may be gleaned from some of the entries in the index under his name: Albany lawsuit of, canal projects of, Chesapeake & Delaware lawsuits of, eccentricity of, financial problems of, mechanical ingenuity of, as meticulous record keeper, New York City elevated railway designs, New York City sewer system, obsessiveness of, as perfectionist, surveying instruments designed by, topographical sensitivity of, as urban planner as visionary, Wright's enmity toward, Wright sued by.

Randel was tasked with setting out the proposed street plan of the then undeveloped island of Manhattan. A stickler for accuracy, he designed his own surveying equipment, based, at least partly, on William Roy's account of his famous 1784 measurement of the Hounslow Heath base line. Holloway says '..this was the kind of document that would have consumed and delighted Randel. One hundred and thirty pages of particulars about chains, metals, woods, glass rods, repeated experiments and measurements down to 498 one-thousandths of an inch. Music to the ears of a similarly exacting, similarly obsessive mind.'

This book is a thoroughly enjoyable read, a story well-researched and well told. It will appeal to anyone interested in surveying, cartography, the history of USA or the psychology of the driven personality. The only disappointment is that the copious illustrations of map extracts and surveying instruments are in hard-to-decipher shades of grey rather than the full colour they deserve.

John Davies

CCS members are entitled to 30% discount on this book by logging on to www.wwnorton.co.uk/book.html?id=3323 and entering the promotion code WN238.



Were there undocumented Struve arcs (see page 23) intersecting in North Devon?

This signpost encountered on the South West coast path pointing to Russia, Iceland, America and New Zealand seems to suggest so. Or maybe not.

[photo John Davies]