



ACSP Distinguished Educator, 1993: Ann L. Strong

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This essay is the ninth in a series on the recipients of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning Distinguished Educator Award, ACSP's highest honor. The essays appear in the order the honorees received the award.

Where would environmental planning be today without Ann Strong, the first woman to receive the ACSP's Distinguished Educator Award? She was a champion for using the law to advance decision making about environmental quality who devoted her career to teaching generations of planning students at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Fine Arts (now the School of Design). She was an inspiring and rigorous teacher who employed the Socratic Method with the skill and wisdom of a conductor for a symphony orchestra. Professor Strong published influential books and



articles. She collaborated with colleagues from diverse academic backgrounds, was engaged in a variety of significant organizations and projects, and was a savvy administrator and inspirational leader. Through her life's work, it is no overstatement to say she helped create the fields of environmental law and environmental planning.

Professor Strong taught at Penn for more than three decades—from 1959 to 1993—where she left an enduring mark on the School's culture of excellence. For much of that time, she offered her flagship course, Environmental Law, to students in Penn's departments of city planning and landscape architecture as well as Penn Law. Ian McHarg's Master of Regional Planning (really ecological planning) curriculum required this course and I was one of her students. A stern taskmaster (with a dry wit), she assigned several judicial decisions for each class, and expected each student to be prepared to discuss each one in detail. Early in the semester, after calling on a series of unprepared students, she dismissed the class. This happened once a year. Every student came thoroughly prepared the rest of the semester. Not only were her standards high for in-class performance but also for writing assignments. Term papers were reviewed with surgical precision. I remember her detailed comments, thoughtful

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suggestions, and helpful corrections. In many ways, Ann Strong helped me hone my writing skills.

In addition, she taught the required introductory planning studio, *Cities as Physical Systems* (a core Master of City Planning course), and *Development Controls in Europe*. Professor Strong was an adept thesis advisor. I know because she was my dissertation committee chair and guided and challenged me to make an original contribution—all of which paid off when the Johns Hopkins University Press (her frequent publisher) published my *Soil Conservation Policy in the United States* (Steiner 1990), which was based on my dissertation. Similarly, Elisabeth Hamin's wonderful *Mojave Lands* (Hamin 2003), also published by Hopkins, about the planning of a large, public landscape began as an Ann Strong–mentored dissertation.

The author of six books and editor of another, Professor Strong wrote clearly with insight on topics that remain relevant. In fact, she pioneered several important planning areas. Her *Planned Urban Environments: Sweden, Finland, Israel, The Netherlands, France* (Strong 1971) explored the successes and shortcomings of the new town/community experience in five countries. Strong sought to inspire American planning implementation through examples of European and Israeli accomplishments. *Planned Urban Environments* influenced the new community movement then popular in the United States, including *The Woodlands in Texas* (planned by the Philadelphia firm Wallace, McHarg, Roberts, and Todd, which was founded by her Penn colleagues).

Ann Strong was a principal member of a team of planners, attorneys, and scientists for an innovative plan for the Brandywine Valley, west of Philadelphia and north of Wilmington, Delaware, centered in Chester County. As a result of the experience, she and John Keene (another member of the planning team and the Penn faculty), published “The Brandywine Plan” in the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* (Keene and Strong 1970). This article remains one of the most insightful reflective first-hand accounts of a planning experience from the planners themselves. Strong and Keene explained that the plan attempted to accommodate the area's projected growth while protecting its water and forest resources and natural beauty.

In *Private Property and the Public Interest, The Brandywine Experience* (Strong 1975), Ann Strong reflected more deeply about the plan and analyzed the difficulties of gaining political acceptance of an inventive set of ecologically based land development regulations in a community that placed a high value on private property rights. It is a gripping story of an ambitious and visionary plan, which was endorsed by the community in principle but rejected in practice. Throughout the United States, planners work with similar communities that appreciate environmental quality but worship private property even more so.

Her scope expanded far beyond eastern Pennsylvania. Through *Land Banking: European Reality, American Prospect* (Strong 1979), Professor Strong illustrates how

land banking, the public purchase of land held in reserve, had become common practice in several Western European nations. Through this book and other works, Professor Strong became an early pioneer of the purchase and transfer of development rights concepts.

Her love for PennDesign resulted in *The Book of the School: 100 Years*, coedited with George E. Thomas (Strong and Thomas 1990), which traced the history of Penn's programs in architecture, city planning, fine arts, and landscape architecture. It is a sourcebook on powerful personalities and influential lives associated with the school, such as Louis Kahn, Denise Scott Brown, Paul Davidoff, Anne Whiston Spirn, and Ed Bacon. *The Book of the School* helps to illustrate the intersection between city and regional planning with allied disciplines.

Her broad interests in the intersections that planning experiences with other fields is reflected in the numerous articles Professor Strong published in planning journals and law reviews on topics such as open space preservation, growth management, eminent domain, national parks, conservation easements, wetlands conservation, and agricultural lands protection. She was active in both Europe and Asia and maintained strong relationships with planners internationally.

Professor Strong was especially fond of the Public Trust Doctrine, which, with its origins in English common law, is deeply rooted in our legal system. The Public Trust Doctrine holds states responsible for navigable waterways and the preservation of certain natural and cultural resources for the public use. Furthermore, according to the doctrine, the government owns and must protect these resources for the public good. She perceived great potential in the doctrine to advance environmental quality and as a tool for planners.

Ann Strong was born in 1930 and graduated from Vassar College and the Yale Law School (the latter a rare accomplishment for a woman of her generation). She served on the editorial board of the *Journal of Planning Literature* and as a reporter for *Land Use Law and Zoning* digest. She was active in numerous civic and professional organizations and a member of the boards of the Environmental Law Institute and the Environmental Defense Fund. She served on the Pennsylvania State Planning Commission and the Chester County Housing Authority (which she founded and chaired) in addition to other local and national boards.

At Penn, she held several administrative positions, chairing the planning department and serving as associate dean. Professor Strong played these roles during periods of academic change and challenge and provided a calming, steady influence. She consistently offered wise counsel informed with intellectual acuity.

Professor Strong met her husband Michael at Yale: she from Auburn, New York, a small city in the Finger Lakes; he from London. They were lured to Philadelphia by its dynamic mayor, Richardson Dilworth, also a graduate of the Yale Law School. Before joining the Penn faculty, she worked with Dorothy Montgomery and the Philadelphia Housing

Association. Meanwhile, Michael Strong joined a substantial law firm. Professor Strong reports that she was “supported in all respects by Michael.”

Since her retirement from Penn in 1993, Ann Strong continued to live in Devon in Chester County—where she and her husband raised their two sons and which was a focus of much of her attention as a planner — and later in adjacent Montgomery County, in the Philadelphia suburbs. She was elected chair of the Green Committee at the Beaumont Retirement Community. In that capacity, Professor Strong continues to advocate a green, sustainable vision for her community.

“The School is as great as the sum of its parts,” she and George Thomas wrote of PennDesign in their introduction to *The Book of the School: 100 Years*. Her part was indeed great.

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Author Biography

Frederick Steiner is the Dean and Paley Professor at the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Design. He previously served for fifteen years as Dean of the School of Architecture at the University of Texas at Austin, and taught at the University of Pennsylvania, Arizona State University, Washington State University, and the University of Colorado at Denver. He received a PhD in City and Regional Planning from the University of Pennsylvania and is a Fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects and the American Academy in Rome.