

Unlocking City Hall: Exploring the History of Local Government and Politics, by Michael W. Homel. Exploring Community History Series. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 2001. xiii, 182 pp. Illustrations, notes, suggested reading lists, index. \$18.50 paper.

Reviewer Dennis N. Mihelich is associate professor of history at Creighton University. He has published numerous articles about the history of Omaha.

Michael W. Homel, professor of history at Eastern Michigan University and former councilman and mayor of Ypsilanti, Michigan, has crafted the third book in a series devoted to teaching any literate person motivated to explore some question regarding the past of his or her immediate surroundings how to research local history. It is well written with an excellent argument for the significance of local history. It also includes a discussion of the nature of history as a discipline, an analysis of the methods of historical research, and a description of the various sources available to explore the city hall's past.

The book is divided into four parts. Part 1, "Opening the Door," provides a brief overview of why and how one would investigate local government and politics. Part 2, "Examining Local Government," contains a detailed examination of various offices and institutions of local government in the United States and Canada by their structure and function. Part 3, "Exploring Local Politics," repeats the process in terms of political power, issues, campaigns, and elections. Part 4, "Displaying Results," is a brief but detailed segment on how to prepare a historical product illuminating city hall. It takes the fledgling researcher through the procedures of taking notes, constructing outlines, and writing narratives or scripts. It also suggests forums for the product, such as magazines, newspapers, public addresses, and museum exhibits, as well as a concluding admonition to extend the life of the project by arranging for the preservation of materials collected.

Particularly valuable is the way Homel, in parts 2 and 3, elucidates specific topics, links each with numerous research questions pertaining to that subject, and briefly reviews a relevant work by a professional historian. For example, one way local governments define themselves and their communities is through monuments. The researcher needs to ask: What events and people do they honor? What episodes and people are omitted? What designs did public officials adopt? What are their messages? The topic and the questions are then illuminated by drawing on Paul S. Delaney's discussion, in *The Architecture of Historic Richmond* (2d ed., [1976], 33-34), of the controversy in Richmond, Virginia, over putting a statue of Richmond-born African American tennis player Arthur Ashe near those of Old South heroes. As a further aid, a lengthy list of suggested readings follows each chapter.

Iowans who are interested in nearby history and who want to enhance their ability to research local government and politics will find this book rewarding.

The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture, by Richard Longstreth. Updated edition. American Association for State and Local History Book Series. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2000. 155 pp. 220 photographs, notes, glossary, bibliography, information sources, index. \$22.95 paper.

Reviewer Molly Myers Naumann is an architectural history consultant in private practice. In addition to working with property owners and local governments, she participates in the Artists in the Schools program.

First published in 1987, *The Buildings of Main Street* provided what had not existed before: a concise, coherent typology for identifying commercial buildings. Richard Longstreth developed a set of eleven compositional types to physically describe and understand the individual buildings along America's main streets. Each type is based on a simple design, or pattern, that describes the façade. His typology works equally well with high-style or vernacular buildings, as the basic form stays the same regardless of size, material, or decorative elements. More than 200 photographs from across the country illustrate the various types, ranging from big city skyscrapers to banks in small county seat towns. Longstreth's typology was quickly adopted by many preservation professionals as the standard for identifying and classifying commercial buildings.

The 2000 edition contains the original text and photographs with a new preface and bibliography. Longstreth's preface provides an update on what has been happening in downtown preservation during the past decade, citing the National Trust's Main Street Program and developers' use of investment tax credits for commercial rehabilitation as examples of success stories. He stresses that education and knowledge are the greatest tools preservationists have for preserving their heritage. "The introductory view afforded by this book to a vast, complicated, and engaging subject is a modest step in that direction" (5). The updated bibliography illustrates the increased interest in America's main streets. Of the 149 entries in the general bibliography, only 34 are carryovers from the 1987 edition.

Longstreth's commercial typology works equally well to identify buildings in Chicago or Ottumwa, Iowa, and is as significant today as it was when introduced in 1987.

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