

Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture II, edited by Camille Wells. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986. ix, 244 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$35.00 cloth, \$14.00 paper.

Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture, edited by Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986. 560 pp. Illustrations. \$24.95 paper.

The alliance between preservation and vernacular studies would appear to be a likely one considering they are both relatively recent—roughly twenty-five years old—and are two of the many disciplines that are part of the also recent “new” social history. Social history involves the study of the entire population, as opposed to an exclusive focus on the politically powerful. It is unfortunate that preservation is popularly thought of as being concerned with preserving only the large, highly decorated houses of the merchant and professional classes, when in reality preservation and vernacular studies are broader and more diversified than we realize. Vernacular students have found a new way of looking at things made by ordinary people and have uncovered a startling amount of pertinent insights into the lives of rural and working-class families. There is a new kind of historian, one who is still academic, but more like the specialist, presumably at his or her best doing research or field work.

Preservation in Vernacular Architecture II is, as the title suggests, part of a series published by the University of Missouri Press for The Vernacular Architecture Forum, a North American organization established in 1980. Volume two surpasses volume one visually and technically, and the selections are generally of higher quality. Volume two provides twenty essays selected from papers presented at the Vernacular Architecture Forum’s conferences in North Carolina in 1982, Wisconsin in 1983, and Delaware in 1984. In addition, it offers abstracts (often accompanied by drawings and photographs) of thirty other essays presented at the three meetings. In *Preservation in Vernacular Architecture II* there are no holds barred when it comes to dropping the names of authors who pioneered the field. The introduction alone, which is jammed with sources, would satisfy a reference librarian.

Common Places presents twenty-three articles which are representative of the best vernacular studies during the past twenty-five years. The articles are longer and more in depth than those in *Preservation in Vernacular Architecture II*. They represent the avant-garde of the field, and their authors have fortified them with explanations to the point where the essays seem self-conscious.

The editors of both books try to find a common framework to fit together a variety of different disciplines under the heading, “vernacu-

lar studies.⁷ This new field of research has attracted a number of interdisciplinary scholars who believe that the word *vernacular* means a new way of looking at buildings. Besides the scholars one would expect, such as architectural historians, there are cultural geographers, historical archeologists, anthropologists, other social scientists, art historians, architects, and nonprofessionals. Their articles seem technical, yes; but readers who want to describe ordinary buildings or who are curious about the houses in their own neighborhoods will find both volumes fascinating as well as useful.

A brief listing of some of the topics considered will give an idea of the scope of these two anthologies. The majority of the articles are about rural houses in the eastern half of the country. Besides the usual ethnic house forms, there are Quaker meeting houses, one-room houses, central-passage houses, house-barns, shotgun houses, downtown rooming houses, sub-Georgian dwellings, bungalows, early modern houses, and working-class homes. Commercial structures are not left out. There are even some commercial buildings naively decorated with classical ornament that are grouped under vernacular. Planning concepts include traditional farmstead layouts, field patterns, courthouse squares, village plans, and cow towns. Finally, some articles describe approaches to field work, such as how to do diagramming and up-to-date preservation surveys. For each article the hard-working editors have provided well-chosen charts, maps, measured drawings, and photographs, both historical and contemporary. These illustrations align themselves with the text and are aided by lengthy captions.

Many of the articles can be time-saving steps for research in Iowa. For example, similarities can be found between New England house types and houses built in the eastern half of the state. Other articles can also provide models, assuming that there is a uniform system and that migrants have an innate sense of room size and structural methods, as some proponents of vernacular architecture assert. The articles on twentieth-century structures can also be applied to Iowa and other midwestern states. Buildings in Iowa may well have the diversity of type and time-span that typify a universal model. Iowa lies directly in the path of the western migrations, both before and after the arrival of railroads. Its settlements vary in ethnic patterns. Population studies show there were migrants from New England, mid-Atlantic, and southern areas before the waves of European settlers who arrived in the second half of the nineteenth century. Above all, Iowa is basically a rural state, slow to change, which makes it ideal as a subject for a comprehensive study and offers a heyday for the vernacular student. If one merely said that the two books under consideration would be useful to

teachers and students, it would be an understatement. Almost any article in them could be important in laying out the groundwork for an Iowa-based study that would yield a representation of the western movement far more complete than previously realized.

There is no question that these two volumes are needed. In the past, vernacular architecture has been somewhat of a mystery. Many publications simply tag a building as "vernacular" without further explanation. The initial works in the field have been difficult to locate, and the study, as a whole, slow to evolve. This is understandable, considering the complications and disagreements of a diversified discipline; the classification of ordinary buildings, for example, may never be agreed upon. These two volumes complement each other in their efforts to explain what the arguments are and what further work needs to be done.

WEST BRANCH, IOWA

GERALD MANSHEIM

The Spirit of H. H. Richardson on the Midland Prairies: Regional Transformations of an Architectural Style, edited by Paul Clifford Larson with Susan M. Brown. Great Plains Environmental Design Series. Ames: Iowa State University Press and University Art Museum, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1988. 173 pp. Illustrations, notes, list of architects, index. \$24.95 paper.

The premise of this book is that Henry Hobson Richardson (1838–1886), the prominent Boston-based architect, exercised a major impact on the architecture of the midland prairies in the decades of the 1880s and 1890s. The product of an exhibition currently on tour, the book is the first in a series planned by Iowa State University Press that will deal with design on the Great Plains. The book contains a generous 212 illustrations, composed of vintage and recent photographs, drawings, and maps. The reproduction quality is high, and there is some color. The book is handsomely produced, though the layout can be confusing. There are six essays: Paul Clifford Larson, the editor/curator, attempts to survey the region and Richardson's impact on it; Thomas Schlereth, Richard Longstreth, and Kenneth A. Breisch treat Richardson's legacy in Chicago, Kansas, and Texas, respectively; Judith A. Martin looks at city development patterns and the architecture; and John C. Hudson deals with the geology and land development patterns. Overall, the book is a welcome addition to American architectural scholarship and midwestern studies, though there are some problematic areas.

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