

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.

Book Reviews

The strength of the book is its serious treatment of a neglected aspect of American architecture and the bringing to light of a great series of buildings. Architects such as J. Riely Gordon in Texas, Proudfoot and Bird in Kansas, S. S. Beman in Chicago, and Long & Kees in Minneapolis were creators of enduring landmarks. The Richardson idiom was adopted in the region because of the booming economy and the generous supply of building stone: Pre-Cambrian granites, Sioux quartzite, Trenton limestone, Cotton Rock, and others.

The problematic areas are several fold. While Richardson's urban palazzos like the Glessner house in Chicago are noted, the other side, Richardson's substantial contribution to wood house design in the area is completely omitted. The quite glorious interior spaces of many of the courthouses and other structures are completely omitted. Other than a plan of the Glessner house, no plans appear. The book concentrates on the exteriors of masonry structures. While the regional focus is to be applauded, there is a tendency to be parochial; the work of many of these architects in other states is ignored. This points up a problem of the geographical focus, which is neither the commonly accepted Midwest, nor the Great Plains, but ten states up the middle. One wants a fuller picture of what exactly the Richardson impact meant. If nearly the same buildings appear in Indiana, Colorado (neither state is included), West Virginia, and New Hampshire, what does that mean? All of the authors claim that Richardson's style meant more to midwesterners than simply copying eastern fashion; it spoke in a special way to the architect and the client. But then why was it so quickly abandoned for classicism around 1900? These issues are not addressed. The book brings together many buildings, but more analysis with reference to other areas is needed. The role of the federal government and the Architect of the Treasury in spreading the Richardson gospel in the 1880s and early 1890s was certainly important, but it is only briefly noted. For Iowans the lack of a chapter or even much material on Iowa—other than noting the courthouse square—is sad. The state has much to contribute to understanding the Richardson legacy. Overall, however, the book has substantial assets in bringing to light neglected material and suggesting areas still to be studied.

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

RICHARD GUY WILSON

Editor's note: The exhibition that accompanies this book opens at the new State Historical Building in Des Moines on September 18, 1988, and runs through November 13, 1988.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.