

Book Reviews

Hubka admires the energy and ingenuity of his subjects in achieving respectability within the limitations of their resources. His book is the best kind of tribute to nineteenth-century rural life. It deserved the Abbott Lowell Cummings Award from the Vernacular Architecture Forum, and was the appropriate focus of a traveling exhibit, "A Good Stand of Buildings." His words, the photographs he reproduced, and the diagrams and renderings of farmsteads and buildings done by himself, enable us as well to understand and to honor these resolute and ambitious people.

UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

RICHARD L. BUSHMAN

American Log Buildings: An Old World Heritage, by Terry G. Jordan. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985. 193 pp. Notes, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$28.00 cloth.

Students of American cultural history have long been intrigued by the causes and consequences of the transit of civilization from the Old World to the New. Log construction and its associated architecture has been one type of material culture to which cultural geographers, folklorists, and other students of traditional life have frequently turned in order to delineate the specific contours of cultural transmission. In a masterful synthesis based on a decade and a half of fieldwork in this country and in Europe, Terry Jordan, Walter Prescott Webb Professor in the Department of Geography at the University of Texas, examined both these issues. He systematically traced the European roots of American log buildings and their role in the formation and development of colonial American culture.

In monitoring the origins of American log construction and its diffusion in the colonial era, Jordan tested four explanatory concepts previously used by scholars investigating the transmittal of European culture to North America between 1600 and 1775. These four models are first effective settlement, colonial cultural simplification, syncretism, and cultural preadaptation. Jordan's data lend credence to the validity of each of these concepts, but they most strongly support the idea of first effective settlement, argued in different ways by Wilbur Zelinsky and Fred Kniffen. Central to Jordan's evaluation of these four theories is his concern to settle a long-standing controversy over the precise European cultural hearth for American log building. Several theses of European origin have been proposed—Finno-Scandian, Alpine-Alemannic, German-Slavic, British—but the debate has centered between proponents of Scandinavian origin and those who insist on German antecedence.

Jordan sides with those who see the Finno-Scandian settlers as exerting the largest degree of influence in America. He finds that numerous architectural features and techniques linked to what he calls the "American midland culture" (an area which is mapped as extending from a Delaware Valley core southward across the middle of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and on into eastern Texas) find their closest European equivalents in the Baltic lands and should, therefore, be considered probable introductions from Sweden and Finland. These features and techniques include diamond, "V," square, half, and saddle-notching; chink construction; the corncrib and single-crib barn; the use of round logs and two-sided ax- and adze-hewing; the ridgepole and purlin roof with board covering; and the dogtrot and gable-entrance single-pen dwelling plans.

In order to substantiate his argument and to counter the claims of Henry Glassie that the Germans deserve the credit for log construction, Jordan marshalls an impressive arsenal of documentary photography, measured drawings, diffusion maps, and floor plans. Two types of data are particularly convincing. One is a series of maps drawn to depict various material culture characteristics such as log shaping, chinking techniques, corner notching typology, house floor plans, and barn forms found in northern Europe, southern Central Europe, and the Bohemia-Moravia-Silesia-Saxony borderland. Two tables found in Jordan's concluding chapter graphically demonstrate his claim for the predominant influence of the Finno-Scandian source region, first in the origins of numerous midland American carpentry features and, second, in the origins of midland American dwellings, barns, fences, and bridges.

American Log Buildings will be of interest to every student of the traditional built environment. It provides not only a cogent descriptive analysis of midland American log architecture but also an overall perspective on New World building style and technique. Anyone who studies American log construction in the future will have to take into account Jordan's argument and the impressive empirical base on which it rests.

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

THOMAS J. SCHLERETH

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