

farmers of modest means actually adopted or adapted progressive domestic solutions. Furthermore, she only rarely is able to reveal what was really "going on behind these farmhouse facades" (7). As McMurry realizes, plans can be deceiving. People may live quite differently in their houses than a study of plans would suggest. Perhaps McMurry did not have the kinds of sources that would allow her to explore the relationship between designated room use and actual use. Her inability or failure to discuss use, however, makes her book less different from those analyzing "how a pattern-book author thought families would use his designs" (vii) than she would wish. Despite these problems, McMurry's work is provocative and should interest those who study rural life and culture in Iowa and other northern states.

*Common Houses in America's Small Towns: The Atlantic Seaboard to the Mississippi Valley*, by John A. Jakle, Robert W. Bastian, and Douglas K. Meyer. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989. x, 238 pp. Illustrations, glossary, bibliography, index, tables, graphs. \$50.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.

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*Common Houses in America's Small Towns* is likely to make a contribution to material culture studies, but not probably in the way the authors intended. The most useful feature of the book is the large number of maps, which provide opportunities for a very generalized analysis of the distribution of certain types of houses across the eastern United States. On the other hand, the book desperately needed a critical editor to force the authors to examine more rigorously their basic theses, to question their choices of examples, to review their often unfortunate choice of terminology and nomenclature, and to restrict their tendency to offer unsubstantiated rationale as fact. To illustrate the latter point, the authors indicate (p. 80) the occurrence of the shed roof to be an English colonial adaptation to subtropical climate, but offer no evidence. Also, the idea that the frequent occurrence in the North of "tall roomy houses reflects an earlier era of affluence and social pretentiousness" is offered (p. 78) with no supporting evidence. These two examples illustrate the intuitive writing style that characterizes much of the book.

Nowhere are the defects of imprecise writing more evident than in the second chapter, which is devoted to the towns (including Grundy Center, Iowa) whose housing is chosen for analysis. The

chapter is largely superfluous to the development of the book's thesis. The town vignettes often demonstrate bias ("thrift and orderliness mark Hermann's newer neighborhoods as well as its old" [41]) or simply nostalgic nonsense (see the captions for figs. 3-28 and 3-68). More serious are the failure to interpret conditions correctly (see the graph and discussion on pp. 32-33), misstatements of fact (on p. 89 yellow is associated with the Midwest, while the map on the same page reveals otherwise), and the uncritical treatment of statements of fact. To illustrate the latter, one reads that "the association of slate roofing with towns having ties to the Pennsylvania culture area may reflect a German preference" (92). No mention is made of the fact that slate roofs do not appear in large numbers in Hermann, Missouri, the survey town with the strongest German ethnic associations.

Finally, one must lament that the scientific survey in choosing towns, to which the authors refer several times, simply does not exist. Choosing sample locations on the basis of a grid with random selection would have been preferable to the subjective choices used by the authors. Furthermore, the authors have not done what they say they have done. For example, they claim centralized locations for their survey towns, but a glance at the maps shows that many are peripherally located. They admit that "town aesthetics played a minor role in town selection" and that although other studies had characterized certain towns as atypical they chose to ignore that fact (18).

The use of widely accepted terminology and nomenclature would have been preferable to the coining of such innovative and ephemeral terms as "single-pile cottages," "I cottages," "double pile cottages with front extensions," "square cottages," and "minimal ranches." Scholars conversant with material culture studies will be surprised to learn that shotgun houses are classified with double-pile dwellings (145), that double-pile houses are a subtype of double-pile dwellings (133), and that while double-pile dwellings are two rooms deep (13), double-pile houses may be more than two rooms deep (143).

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of *Common Houses in America's Small Towns* is that the patterns identified in the twenty survey towns are assumed to be typical of the entire eastern United States. In several instances, the towns are not even typical of their own local areas and hence housing cannot be representative.

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