

differences we discover in such comparisons and we can celebrate the similarities we share with others in the nation and in the world as we understand the ways we live and work and play in the ordinary circumstances of the homes, businesses, shops, schools, and other structures we have built for our use and for our sense of private and public identity.

*Testaments in Wood: Finnish Log Structures at Embarrass, Minnesota*, photographs by Wayne Gudmundson, text by Suzanne Winckler. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, in cooperation with Sisu Heritage, Inc., 1991. xi, 83 pp. Notes, bibliography. \$16.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY MATTI E. KAUPS, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, DULUTH

This slim volume contains forty-eight photographs and a preface by Wayne Gudmundson, introduction by Eric Paddock, text by Suzanne Winckler, a cartogram by an anonymous contributor, and comments on photographs by Michael H. Koop. It is a miscellany of photographs and observations about buildings, people, events, and institutions set mostly within the confines of an administrative unit, the township of Embarrass in northeastern Minnesota. The aim is to convey photographically the landscape legacy of a Finnish rural enclave, a segment of a larger ethnic island, where over twenty log buildings are on the National Register of Historic Places, and where the past is promoted, commercialized, and sold to tourists. The volume is devoid of theoretical discussion, though the reader is reminded about the significance of Embarrass being a historic site, how photographs aspire to comprehend the interaction between people and the environment, and how alleged "architectural landmarks" supposedly act as "reminders of our cultural identity" (8). What constitutes Finnish identity and "Finnish architectural style" is left to the discretion of the reader.

The essay by Winckler ranges from Finland to Minnesota and covers a myriad of topics, including social, economic, and religious institutions in an attempt to provide a historical background to the settlement. Excepting the discussion on saunas, hay barns, and the use of the *vara* or scribe, it provides but minimal information in an integrative sense about the buildings, especially regarding the process of change in time. One wonders, for example, what was the impact, if any, of the cooperative movement on log buildings the Finns raised on land?

Koop's comments on the photographs, much as Winckler's essay, are marred in places by singular interpretations, factual errors, and inferential leaps of substantial magnitude. Unheard of is the sup-

posed "smoke method" used in saunas (16); hewn timber walls and "double corner notches" have nothing to do with north European log construction technique (77); "full dovetail corner notches" do not convey "traditional Finnish fashion" (78), and so forth.

Methodologically speaking, Gudmundson's photographs dating from the 1980s were intended to form the focus of the volume. They are said to communicate the aesthetic and functional dimensions of the landscape and "speak forcefully for themselves" (6) about the buildings and the place. Yet the photographs capture only the external, visual landscape; the volume contains not a single print of interior space—of the inside of a house, a barn, or a sauna—which presumably was important to the inhabitants as well. The photographic method as applied to the contemporary Embarrass scene has a serious limitation in that while it documents architectural survivals, modifications, and more recent additions, it cannot record vanished buildings and their functions, forms that were components of the landscape in the past, and that are not even alluded to in the volume.

The volume is composed by individuals who possess a certain degree of familiarity with the Finnish immigrant experience. Some of the ideas and concepts presented have appeared in print previously, but are not acknowledged in notes. Perhaps the greatest value of the work, neither history nor ethnology, lies in its being a handmaid to the ongoing commercialization of the log buildings the immigrant Finns erected, not as symbols, but as buildings used in everyday lives. Ethnicity is being invented, because the log buildings of Embarrass from the beginning included and exhibited architectural characteristics practiced throughout forested northern Europe, and cannot therefore be claimed as "Finnish traits" or as Finnish "testaments in wood," either in biblical, legalistic, or cultural terms.

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.