

*The Last Great Necessity: Cemeteries in American History*, by David Charles Sloane. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991. xxiii, 294 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$35.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY LOREN N. HORTON, STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

Attitudes toward cemeteries have gone through as many changes as the names given to places where dead bodies are buried. For instance, early in U.S. history such places were called *burying grounds*. The semantics emphasize the difference. The finality, the gloom, the simple disposal of unwanted remains is the lesson to the living that the evil ways of life lead to the grave. The softening of the words to *grave yards* led to the increasing beautification of the grounds, a changing of the marker symbols from the skull and crossbones or skeletons and scythes to the winged cherubs and weeping willows. Not until the nineteenth century was the word *cemetery* used commonly. With the new term came the attitude that deceased people were only asleep or at rest. Marker symbols of an optimistic and comforting nature were used.

Community involvement characterized early burials. Everyone involved had a prescribed part in these community-centered rituals, and the burying grounds were often centrally located. The movement of cemeteries out of town, partly for sanitation reasons, removed burials from general public experience and restricted involvement to the family and friends of the deceased. "Rural cemeteries" gradually evolved into "landscape-lawn cemeteries" and finally to "memorial parks." Attitudes about both death and the bodies of the dead changed to accommodate changes in burial procedures.

Another way of describing this process of change in burial places is through a simple formula. Burial places moved from sacred public space to social public space to commercial public space to expendable public space. All of these stages or trends occurred within the United States. Iowa was settled during the beginning of the "rural cemetery" movement. Of course, settlers from Europe or the eastern United States brought with them the burial customs from their places of origin, so facets of the earlier phase, and complete case studies of the "rural cemetery" and the later stages can be found in all midwestern states.

A study of the significance of cemeteries in American history has been long overdue. Methods of and places for disposal of dead bodies must surely be one of the most necessary of functions for groups of people. Even though it seems like such a simple need to predict, most towns did not make provisions for it in original plats or plans. Perhaps

it seemed like a turn-off to prospective lot buyers to see burial lots on a map next to residential and commercial lots. But once the concentration of population reached a certain level, burials within the community itself became a problem. In *The Last Great Necessity*, David Charles Sloane explains very clearly the arguments raised for removal of burial places on grounds of health, sanitation, and hygiene. He also emphasizes the major role of the "rural cemetery" movement in promoting changes in attitudes towards burials and memorializing the dead.

This is the sort of book that people interested in the subject matter might wish they had written themselves. Its strengths of content, organization, and documentation are superb. The only real weaknesses are in the overuse of upstate New York examples and the redundancy, the restating of the same evidence and the same conclusions over and over again. This is particularly true of the sections on the commercialization of cemeteries and the sections explaining the development of the memorial park concept. There is also some confusion about the economic prominence of early cemetery promoters and boards of directors of cemeteries under corporate control. In contrast to these slight imperfections are such strengths as the explanation of obscure facets such as the marketing of white bronze markers and the regulations relating to government-issued markers for military veterans.

*The Last Great Necessity* effectively treats cemeteries as important factors in American social history. An astonishing amount of research has resulted in a very readable book. While the subject matter might not be instantly appealing, everyone will recognize the importance and necessity of cemeteries. It is a fine reference book, both in its totality and in its component parts.

*The Midwest in American Architecture*, edited by John S. Garner. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991. xv, 259 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$37.50 cloth.

REVIEWED BY RICHARD GUY WILSON, UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

*The Midwest in American Architecture* is a festschrift, a collection of ten articles, written in honor of Walter L. Creese, a major architectural historian who taught many years at the University of Illinois and retired in 1987. The articles are written by former students and colleagues, all of whom either teach or are involved in the practice of historic preservation. As a collection of articles, the book has the virtue of many voices, and the vice—at times—of brevity and unevenness.

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