

cleavages in the 1920s. I hope it will inspire others to aim their research towards expanding our understanding of generally valid theories rather than the entrepreneurial search for "new" interpretations.

America's Favorite Homes: Mail Order Catalogues as a Guide to Popular Early Twentieth-Century Culture, by Robert Schweitzer and Michael W. R. Davis. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990. 363 pp. Illustrations, charts, notes, glossary, bibliography, index. \$49.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY FRED W. PETERSON, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, MORRIS

America's Favorite Homes introduces readers to a history of mail-order catalogue houses from about 1895 to 1941 sold by Sears, Roebuck, and Company; Montgomery, Ward & Co.; the Aladdin Company of Michigan; the Gordon Van Tine Company of Iowa; and others. In the first of the three major sections of the study, the authors discuss architectural styles, house construction materials and methods, the development of a market for mail-order catalogue houses, and the growth of the companies that designed them, advertised them, and specified ways to efficiently build a house in a balloon frame or platform frame construction by using the companies' processes of assembling the precut pieces of the structure.

The second and third sections of the study contain surveys of the architectural styles of mail-order catalogue houses as divided into two historic periods. The National period from 1900 to 1920 is characterized in part as a transitory stage from older nineteenth-century styles to new American designs and the emergence of those new designs in Prairie, Craftsman, Bungalow, and Foursquare houses. The third section presents houses from what the authors call the Academic period from 1920 to 1941. Designs in this period are carefully rendered reproductions of Tudor and Colonial originals adapted to new requirements and amenities of twentieth-century life styles.

America's Favorite Homes provides coverage of a broad, complex development in American building technology. There is a distinct advantage of being able to perceive the mail-order catalogue house phenomenon as a pervasive, major force in creating a popular esthetic in domestic architecture design from the 1890s to 1940. Anyone surveying the built environment of the Midwest and Iowa is certain to discover examples of house designs illustrated in *America's Favorite Homes*. Foursquare, Bungalow, or Colonial Revival houses can be identified in city neighborhoods, on shaded avenues of towns, and on farmsites. The floorplans for these familiar houses as illustrated in the

book enable one to understand how these structures functioned as homes for the thousands of American families that found them so efficient, economical, and modern.

Unfortunately, the illustrations in the text are reduced from their original scale and printed in a half-tone so that they lack clarity. One must use a magnifying glass to discern details of floorplans and read the text on the catalogue's page on which the plan appears. Some plans are so faint that finer focus does not yield important information.

Frustration with the visual material of the illustrations is compounded with some of the contents of the text. The discussion of the balloon frame method of construction is oversimplified and too brief to provide an adequate basis for understanding the application of this construction method to precut house manufacturing. In retrospect the development from balloon frame to precut platform frame building seems an inevitable result of the emerging industrial, commercial, and technological growth of the nation in the second half of the nineteenth century. The gradual acceptance and eventual popularity of balloon frame construction created the basis for the popularity of mail-order catalogue houses by the end of the century. The way in which these developments affected our values and ways of doing things is not adequately discussed.

Although the title of the book is *America's Favorite Homes*, it is essentially *houses* that are documented and analyzed. There is very little interpretation of these structures as homes of families of different socioeconomic classes, esthetic tastes, and practical and ethical ideals for home life. The authors might have built the house from the inside out by describing the beliefs and values about domestic life styles that American families desired to realize in the home. Were household efficiencies and modern amenities valued more highly than personal growth of individuals within the home? Was scale and size of the house as much an indication of substance and success as it was in American homes of the 1880s? Did the Victorian belief that moral and spiritual values are learned and maintained in the home still influence the design of a house?

The volume is intended to appeal to "home lovers," to students of architectural history, and to professionals such as local officials, preservationists, and realtors. *America's Favorite Homes* does perform well as a guide for these groups to recognize and appreciate a significant segment of our architectural heritage. The subject of the study is, however, so rich in meaning for the interpretation of American culture that one wants to comprehend more clearly how these favorite homes embody and communicate an American way of life that devel-

oped from the nineteenth century and contributed to our electronically computed popularities of the 1990s.

Journey to Autonomy: A Memoir, by Louise Rosenfield Noun. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990. 143 pp. Illustrations, index. \$19.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY KATHERINE JELLISON, MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY

Louise Noun's memoir begins with her birth to a wealthy Des Moines family in 1908 and ends with her emergence as one of the nation's foremost collectors of works by women artists. Between these two events, Noun's life was marked largely by frustration with the roles assigned to her: dutiful daughter, self-sacrificing wife and mother, unsalaried volunteer. Only in her later years was Noun able to create a satisfying identity for herself. Noun's chronicle of her "journey to autonomy" serves not only as the story of one woman's experience but as an insightful discussion of the times in which she lived.

Noun's account of her early life focuses largely on her relationship with her mother, a woman who was "strong but unloving" (3). The daughter of German Jews who settled in Oskaloosa, Iowa, Rose Frankel Rosenfield viewed her marriage to Des Moines department store owner Meyer Rosenfield as the end of her chances for a life of travel and adventure. As a result, she imposed her own unrealized dreams on her two daughters, sending younger daughter Louise to study art history at Radcliffe/Harvard, even though the young woman "showed no abilities or natural interest in this direction" (17). Until her death in 1960, Rose Rosenfield remained a controlling presence in her daughter's life, contributing to Noun's negative self-image.

Following marriage to Des Moines dermatologist Maurie Noun in 1936, the author devoted herself to the care of her husband and daughter and participated in community activities considered appropriate for a well-to-do matron. Noun became involved in the League of Women Voters and later the Iowa Civil Liberties Union (ICLU), but these activities did not offer relief from her insecurities.

The turning point came when Noun underwent psychiatric treatment and began to forge an identity that was not defined by her relationship to her mother, husband, or daughter. Her involvement in the feminist movement of the 1960s strengthened her personal identity and brought a new sense of purpose to her work in state and local politics. Taking greater control over her life, Noun left her unsatisfactory

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