

*Iowa Historic Schools Highlighting Victorian Influence: Photo Study of Architecture*, by Sandra Kessler Host. Council Bluffs: Sandra Kessler Host, 2014. 126 pp. Illustrations, appendixes, bibliography. \$27.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Lucy Townsend is professor emerita at Northern Illinois University, past president of the Country School Association of America, and editor of the *Country School Journal*.

The seeds of Sandra Kessler Host's historical study were sown while she was participating in a community project to restore Willow Tree/Richland #1 School, built in 1883 near Odebolt, Iowa. To ensure the authenticity of the restored rural school, the group consulted a restoration architect who identified Victorian features in the school's original structure. That revelation led Host—curator for the Iowa Rural Schools Museum of Odebolt, descendant of a pioneer family, and an alumna of the school—to embark on a three-year study to uncover an answer to this question: How common were Victorian features in Iowa rural schools built in the Victorian era (1860–1900)? Host set out to find, examine, and photograph all standing historic country schools in Iowa's 99 counties. She photographed ornate features considered to be Victorian and explained why later generations ignored or effaced them. She assigned photos to categories to illustrate different architectural features as the schools evolved. She also included other matter, such as photos of Victorian clothing styles, the Willow Tree restoration process, and maps. In addition, she explored Iowa's history during the late 1800s to place the schools in a broader context.

The result is a coffee-table book divided into an introduction and preface, three chapters, a conclusion, and four appendixes. The first chapter explores Victorian influences on Iowa rural schools built between 1860 and 1900. The second includes current photos of rural schools that have remnants of Victorian features. The third contains current photos of 220 Iowa historic schools placed in six categories: schools built during the settlement years (before 1870); town schools; historic religious/private schools; maintained first-generation rural schools (built before 1910); second-generation rural schools (built after 1910); and consolidated rural township schools built in the early 1900s.

In the conclusion, Host answers her initial research question by asserting that about 3,787 (30 percent) of rural schools built in Iowa during the nineteenth century had Victorian features. She also concludes that the restored Willow Tree/Richland #1 School is an excellent example of country schools having Victorian features. She explains farmers' ability to adorn these schools by asserting that more than a million farm settlers had the skills and financial resources to build schools with Victorian influences.

Over 25 percent of the book is devoted to appendixes. Appendix A identifies Iowa's standing historic schools by county. Appendix B lists Iowa's historic schools on the National Register of Historic Places. Appendix C contains a narrative of Iowa's rural settlement and the role of rural schools in that story. Appendix D includes a bibliography and suggested readings.

Host's book is a treasure trove of more than 400 beautiful photographs and accompanying text. Like most coffee-table books, it is oversized, hard covered, and ideal for display on a table. Unlike most coffee-table books, it includes long prose passages, definitions of terms, and historical analysis based on original research. Thus, it would be a valuable resource for anyone studying or restoring country schools.

The book has two weaknesses, however. First, its organization is sometimes confusing. For example, the research question (repeated often) concerns schools built between 1860 and 1900. Yet later the dates are 1860 to 1910. Host does not clearly explain that difference. A second weakness is the book's sprawling organization. For example, the table of contents lists six categories of current photos of Iowa historic schools, but Host later tacks on two more: unmaintained one-room rural schools and rural schools repurposed for other uses. Despite such weaknesses, Host's book would be a valuable resource for those who attended one-room schools, state and local historical societies, and libraries in Iowa's towns, cities, and universities.

*County Capitols: The Courthouses of South Dakota*, by Arthur L. Rusch, with an introductory essay by Jason Haug. Historical Preservation Series 5. Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2014. vi, 170 pp. Illustrations, map, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 paperback.

Reviewer Wesley I. Shank is professor emeritus of architecture at Iowa State University. He is the author of "The Demise of the County Courthouse Tower in Iowa: A Study of Early 20th-Century Cultural and Architectural Change" (*Annals of Iowa*, 1992).

*County Capitols* is a historical encyclopedia of South Dakota county courthouses. For the building now serving each county, Arthur Rusch provides a concise entry with a photograph and caption listing address, construction dates, architect, contractor, and cost. He includes a historical sketch of the county and of the construction of its previous and present courthouses, a detailed architectural description of the present courthouse, and occasionally photographs of earlier ones. Notes identify sources.