

describes himself as "first of all a photographer" and modestly states that he still has "no firm idea of what local history ought to be about" (9). Oddly, *Buildings of Iowa* includes no list of photographic credits.

The introduction of the book would appear to bear the imprint of the breadth of Gebhard's understanding of American architecture, as do the comments on many individual buildings. The introduction is noteworthy as one of only a few discussions of the architecture of the whole state that have been written and is probably the most extensive one. In addition, the selection of buildings that the authors have dealt with is characteristic of the architectural heritage of the state, its history, and its people, and is most inclusive. However, the inaccuracies, misspellings, and omissions that I discovered suggest that the authors may not have been familiar enough with the particulars of historic Iowa architecture to give us the quality of record that the editors of the series promise.

Buildings of Iowa does, however, bring to our attention hundreds of buildings in one convenient, well-organized, and easy-to-use volume. Its great value is quantitative—how much architecture it brings to light that otherwise we might never discover. Its greatest shortcoming is qualitative. The authors needed to prepare their record of Iowa architecture more carefully and check their work more thoroughly. Serious readers should consult the sources mentioned in the "Suggested Readings." Guidebook users need patiently to allow for errors in the maps. But the book is the most complete architectural guidebook for the whole state that we have and are likely to get for a long time. Used with caution, *Buildings of Iowa* can contribute a great deal toward our pleasure and instruction.

Homes in the Heartland: Balloon Frame Farmhouses of the Upper Midwest, 1850-1920, by Fred W. Peterson. Rural America Series. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992. xi, 296 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 cloth.

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An estimated 95 percent of all buildings worldwide are not designed by professionals, and thus are termed *vernacular*. Just a decade or so ago it was common for the few scholars writing in the field to issue pleas for others to take up the urgent task of documenting and interpreting America's ordinary architecture within its cultural context, whether by rural community, city, county, state, or region. The call has been heeded in recent years as scores of such

studies have been published. Of these, Fred Peterson's meticulously researched book, which achieves both depth and breadth, will surely be judged an outstanding contribution.

Combining both broad survey techniques and intensive examination of individual dwellings in fifteen years of intensive fieldwork, Peterson documented fifteen hundred frame farmhouses constructed from 1850 to 1920 in five states: Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and North and South Dakota. The dwellings relate not only to differing terrains and types of farming but to several ethnic groups as well, "Yankee," Scandinavian, and German being the most common. Following standard methodology, Peterson groups the houses into ten types based on floor plan, height, and overall massing. Arranged from simple to complex, he identifies them simply as types one through ten. An explication of the typology, a review of settlement patterns, and an authoritative account of the history and technology of balloon-frame construction (which is simply the conventional frame construction using standardized lumber and nails which superseded the old mortise-and-tenon framework) construct a sound foundation for the body of the text.

The subsequent five chapters are organized around the ten types, which are presented in pairs. Each chapter provides extensive discussions of both the types and individual houses. (The chapter concerning type nine, which is the two-story, foursquare farmhouse ubiquitous in the Iowa countryside, will be of special interest to Iowans.) Throughout, a twofold focus unites these chapters. The first is design-related and pertains to all of the possible sources for and influences on the type, ranging from the simple functional houses featured in farm journals to the most elite architectural stylebooks. The second focus, richer and more interdisciplinary, sets the dwelling in the intertwining contexts of agricultural history, technology, settlement patterns, the mores of the midwestern farm community, and above all, the "beliefs, values and behavior patterns" of the inhabitants. The way these houses changed through time in response to growing families and agricultural success is another theme. To these ends, then, Peterson supports and augments his own keen observations with an impressive number of photographs and house plans and an equally impressive variety of printed material, including the standard regional and agricultural histories, farm journal advice, and oral histories, letters, and reminiscences of the inhabitants themselves. In a refreshing departure from common practice, Peterson pays about as much attention to the interiors as to the exteriors. He not only analyzes floor plans and room functions, but inquires into the smallest details of every-

day life, into the shifting and ephemeral arrangements of "women's realm," revolving around the daily chores of cooking, cleaning, laundering, and caring for family members. Through this means, and through the inclusion of diaries and letters of female family members, women are rescued from the oblivion to which so many architectural histories consign them.

As to the book's few limitations, Peterson rightfully anticipates criticism of his typology, a matter on which few scholars ever agree. I found the type-grouping to be overly numerous and arbitrary and of little use outside this study, designated as they are simply by numbers. And the organization of six of the nine chapters around these types, rather than by topics, formed too fragile a framework to provide coherent support for the wealth of valuable information presented. At times, odd choices of architectural terms seemed needlessly confusing. But these are minor quibbles in the face of the solid and lasting contribution this book makes to the nascent field.

I hope the following quotation will further pique interest in this remarkable book, as it illustrates the author's sensitivity, his attractively simple and direct style, and his gift for linking these inert physical structures with people's lives. "Most farmhouses met only basic needs. The shelter served as a station in the lives of members of extended families. Many of them were born there in their mother's beds; they were nursed from injury or through illness in their own chambers; and they died in the fields or in the barn or in the house. The last departure was from the parlor where the survivors staged a wake for the deceased. This tangible experience of life and death within the walls of the house paralleled the cyclic pattern of planting, cultivating, and harvesting. All this while the house was transparently there, always present and functioning but never directly perceived." Only rarely did a house "take on airs" and become "a conscious projection of the individual or the family to the rural community. Otherwise, one 'wore' the house as naturally as the clothes one donned each day to accomplish the work of the farm."

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