

The Midwest in American Architecture

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 1992 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

Recommended Citation

"The Midwest in American Architecture." *The Annals of Iowa* 51 (1992), 424-426.

Available at: <http://ir.uiowa.edu/annals-of-iowa/vol51/iss4/19>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

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.

The book is not a comprehensive history of midwestern architecture, but rather focuses on the period, 1880–1920, and for the most part—seven of the chapters—on Chicago and the two major traditions that developed there, the Chicago School of urban commercialism, and the Prairie School of residential and small-town buildings. The major figures of these two traditions—Sullivan, Wright, Elmslie, Griffin, Root, and Burnham—appear many times in the book. Chapters are devoted to their major buildings and activities: Sullivan and Adler's Auditorium, Burnham and Root's Rookery, and Griffin's landscape designs. A few of the secondary and more shadowy figures appear, such as Solon Spencer Beman, a major designer of Chicago commercial structures and of the failed worker's utopia, Pullman, Illinois. John Garner provides a tantalizing glimpse of that model town. Dankmar Adler and the importance of German design also appear in an essay by Roula Geraniotus. Louis Sullivan's ornamental system receives two studies: Narciso Menocal shows the philosophical, spiritual, and complicated underpinnings of the lush foliage on the later banks such as in Grinnell; and Ronald Schmitt demonstrates how the ornament became commercialized by terra cotta manufactures and appeared on main streets such as in Sioux City. The most challenging essay comes from Craig Zabel; he examines Sullivan's disciple (and factorium, right hand man, and protector), George Grant Elmslie, who found the burden of Sullivan's mantel a trying and even depressing experience.

Beyond the Chicago focus, there is a secondary theme of subjects out in the hinterland. Susan Appel covers the development of brewery architecture in Cincinnati, St. Louis, Dubuque, and elsewhere. Ellen Weiss treats a Methodist campground or "little Chautauqua"—Bay View, Michigan—which was laid out and built in the 1870s and 1880s. Both breweries and campgrounds used to dot the American landscape. Finally, John Garner in the preface and afterword provides an important synopsis of the teaching of architectural history at the University of Illinois from its first professor, Nathan Clifford Ricker in the 1870s. Since Illinois was the second American university (MIT was the first) to offer a program in architecture and has been for years the locus of midwestern architectural education, this is a very important perspective, for it is historians who define what gets studied, and the University of Illinois has been of central importance in creating our view(s) of midwestern architecture.

This book could be easily criticized for what it does not contain; the list is infinite. Iowa and its buildings play only a small, walk-on part. But alternatively the book indicates not only the central focus of most midwestern architectural studies—Chicago, its heroes, and the

turn-of-the-century period—but new perspectives that are coming into play. Social and personal history plays much more of a role, and both the context of the time and place and the individual biography, warts and all, appear. There is life beyond Chicago, and there are many subjects worthy of study. Finally, the recording, interpreting, writing, and teaching of the history of architecture must be considered in any perspective.

Snowbelt Cities: Metropolitan Politics in the Northeast and Midwest since World War II, edited by Richard M. Bernard. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990. ix, 352 pp. Maps, tables, appendixes, notes. \$35.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY GERALD D. NASH, UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

During the past two decades urban historians have viewed the development of American civilization from a variety of new perspectives. Some, such as Carl Abbott and Richard Bernard, developed the concept of the Sunbelt to analyze new communities in the South and West. Such an interpretation invariably invited a contrast. In the 1980s, thus, Bernard postulated the theory of a Snowbelt, a land encompassing the Northeast and the Middle West. If the precise boundaries of these regions were difficult to locate—and were challenged by some critics—these theoretical formulations nonetheless contributed to a deeper understanding of American urban growth in the second half of the twentieth century.

In order to develop the concept of Snowbelt cities more fully, Bernard invited a group of historians and urbanologists to dwell on the issue. Each contributed an essay on a city on which he or she was an expert. The communities included Boston, New York City, Baltimore, Washington, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Chicago, Cleveland, and Kansas City. As Bernard notes, "if the 1970s were the decade in which Americans discovered the Sunbelt, the 1980s mark the era of rediscovery for the urbanized regions of the Northeast and Midwest. Once the focus of media attention, the Sunbelt and its youthful glow began to fade just as northern lights brightened, recharged by promises of high-tech prosperity. Where once the press hailed the sunny climes below the 37th parallel, it now deplors that region's trouble spots, folded away where the sunlight of economic development never shines. By contrast . . . the mature and settled cities of the Snowbelt appear ready to light the nation's way to economic modernization for the twenty-first century" (1). But Bernard warns that the processes of change are enormously

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.