

American Architecture from the MIT Press

Lois Craig and the staff of the Federal Architectural Project, *The Federal Presence: Architecture, Politics and Symbols in United States Government Building*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978. Pp. 580. Plates \$37.50 U.S.

Ochsner, Jeffrey Kark, *H.H. Richardson: Complete Architectural Works*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983. Pp. xiii, 466. Plates, maps. \$50.00 U.S.

Searing, Helen, ed. *In Search of Modern Architecture: A Tribute to Henry-Russell Hitchcock*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Architectural History Foundation of New York and the MIT Press, 1982. Pp. vii, 368. Plates

Volume 12, numéro 2, octobre 1983

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018981ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018981ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

(1983). Compte rendu de [American Architecture from the MIT Press / Lois Craig and the staff of the Federal Architectural Project, *The Federal Presence: Architecture, Politics and Symbols in United States Government Building*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978. Pp. 580. Plates \$37.50 U.S. / Ochsner, Jeffrey Kark, *H.H. Richardson: Complete Architectural Works*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983. Pp. xiii, 466. Plates, maps. \$50.00 U.S. / Searing, Helen, ed. *In Search of Modern Architecture: A Tribute to Henry-Russell Hitchcock*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Architectural History Foundation of New York and the MIT Press, 1982. Pp. vii, 368. Plates]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 12(2), 165–166. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018981ar>

All Rights Reserved © Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine, 1983

Cet document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

Book Notes/Notes bibliographiques

American Architecture from the MIT Press

The MIT Press consistently achieves high standards in its specialized line of architectural studies. Given the quality of paper and abundant plates, the cost of the lengthy and lavish books has been remarkably reasonable. Most titles hold some interest for urbanists, providing at the very least a wealth of illustrations for instructional purposes. The texts are necessarily brief and, on artistic matters, to the point. Social history and architecture have not been mated directly. Recent titles include international studies like Johann Friedrich Geist's encyclopedic work, *Arcades: The History of a Building Type*, and John McAndrew's *Venetian Architecture of the Early Renaissance*. The United States titles should help instil a degree of pride among American readers, perhaps elicit a bit of sorrow about lost buildings, and provoke controversy about the expenditures of the nation's largest builder — the federal government. The history of architectural excellence and folly encompasses metropolitan centres as well as smaller cities where the elites and the government once afforded the finest materials and craftsmanship. The MIT volumes often remind one of how extensive the American architectural tradition has been in styles and in the locales where treasures survive. While architectural volumes for the University of Chicago Press largely have celebrated the genius of one city, those from MIT span the nation.

Lois Craig and the staff of the Federal Architectural Project, *The Federal Presence: Architecture, Politics and Symbols in United States Government Building*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978. Pp. 580. Plates \$37.50 U.S.

Counting among its founders the great architect Thomas Jefferson, the American federal government always has exercised a direct impact through its building programmes: customs houses, courthouses and military facilities. Its indirect influence likewise has been considerable for many cities and especially state capitals have sought to emulate features of the District of Columbia. What began with L'Enfant's plan for Washington has become, according to Craig, "the most gigantic business on earth." That alone makes this an important work. Handsome and comprehensive, the volume concentrates on the superlative structures, but it does portray a few warts. It includes elegant gems that remain in use (the Patent Office, 1836-1840; now the National Portrait Gallery), monumental nationalistic showpieces like the Library of Congress (1886-1897), and the concrete products of an arsenal mentality such as the \$5.6 billion missile tracking station near Grand Forks, North Dakota (now abandoned). *The Federal Presence* assembles a graphic account of the nation's changing visions. "Passion can create drama out of inert stone" (Le Corbusier). Indeed.

Ochsner, Jeffrey Kark, *H.H. Richardson: Complete Architectural Works*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983. Pp. xiii, 466. Plates, maps. \$50.00 U.S.

One of the four giants of American architecture — Richardson, Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright and Lewis Kahn — Henry Hobson Richardson made his name synonymous with a Romanesque revival style in the United States. A graduate of the University of Louisiana and, most important, Harvard College, he enrolled in the Ecole des Beaux-Arts at Paris in 1860. The Civil War cut off the source of support for his studies. He worked with several French architects before returning to America in 1865 where, for awhile, he designed Tiffany lamps. Through a Harvard friend, he entered a charmed circle of wealthy Massachusetts patrons; the Chapin and Ames families were especially instrumental. Another Harvard contact, William Dorsheimer, was a major New York state politician who was instrumental in securing New York State commissions for the architect. During the late 1870s and early 1880s, Richardson's use of rounded broad arches and rusticated stone attracted commissions in the Atlantic states. A rotund figure, who posed for photographers in hooded monk-like robes, Richardson seems to have had a panache for self-advertising that accented the medieval. Appropriately, he designed the Washington home of Henry Adams, (1884-1886) author of *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* (1904). In 1885, the *American Architect and Building News* placed five of his buildings in the top ten of a poll. His tower buildings became popular models for federal architects (see *The Federal Presence*) as well as architects who prepared civic and commercial structures in Canadian cities. The old Toronto City Hall resembled Richardson's Allegheny County Buildings (1883-1888).

Ochsner's all too brief text intimates how architects were drawn by the partners of corporate enterprises from one locale to another where, with their talents on display, they earned yet a further round of commissions. A set of maps illustrates the Boston focus in Richardson's work; the route of the Chapins' Boston and Albany Railroad helps explain one axis in the geographic pattern to his work.

Despite the eastern concentration, Richardson's most famous commission was in Chicago. Perhaps there is some significance in the fact that Marshall Field had been raised in Boston. In any case, the Marshall Field Wholesale Store, can only be appreciated from the photographs that appear in virtually all works on modern American architecture. It was demolished for a parking lot in 1930 when the company moved its wholesale operations into a further classic structure that would be owned by yet another Boston family — the Merchandise Mart held by the Kennedy family. As with

so much of the history of commercial architecture, there is an undercurrent of urban interdependency.

Searing, Helen, ed. *In Search of Modern Architecture: A Tribute to Henry-Russell Hitchcock*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Architectural History Foundation of New York and the MIT Press, 1982. Pp. vii, 368. Plates.

Henry-Russell Hitchcock has been writing on architecture for fifty five years. His contributions extend from monographs on European architecture to a bibliography on architectural books and vernacular pattern books for houses in the United States. One of his early works (1936) was a study of H.H. Richardson. Hitchcock helped promote the International Style and he then assisted practitioners like his student Philip Johnson to “face the end of the International Style with fortitude and delight.” He had the capacity to do his own work and to inspire students. The latter’s *Festschrift* honouring their teacher contains nineteen articles distributed in sections: “The Age of Romanticism-Rationalism, Revivalism, and Eclecticism, 1740-1900;” “American Archi-

itecture to 1900: Romanticism and Reintegration;” and “Twentieth Century Architecture — The New Tradition and the New Pioneers.” Some articles are extremely specific and fail to “reveal a great or original architect.” Sarah Bardford Landau’s article is not one of these. Indeed, her challenge to the conventional wisdom on a mainstream topic in American urban history should become a new orthodoxy. Her ample plates and accompanying text indicate that New York’s commercial style anticipated that of Chicago. “The design essentials associated with some of the best Chicago work — specifically, arcading, verticality, and the tripartite scheme — were practiced much earlier in New York.” The plate illustrating the now demolished New York Produce Exchange (1881-1885) by George B. Post makes a further point. It probably influenced the Marshall Field Store and thereby cautions against attribution of an innovative style to a single artist working out of solitary genius.

John C. Weaver
Department of History
McMaster University