

## Building An American Identity: Pattern Book Homes and Communities, 1870-1900

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pattern of the American population. He suggests that these structures undergirded the development of progressivism and formed the structures underlying the geopolitical patterns and dynamics of both federal and state power. Provocatively suggesting how geography does indeed shape social and political reality, Meinig succeeds in offering a compelling new geographic perspective on the economic, social, and political history of the United States through 1915. By doing so, Meinig provides the context in which the United States began to construct itself as a world power. How the United States became integrated into a world system in the twentieth century, and how that integration shaped American geography, will be the subject of the fourth volume of *The Shaping of America*.

Although Iowa is cited only six times in the index, it is central to Meinig's analysis. Indeed, one could argue that by heightening the reader's awareness of how anything occurring in any American system increasingly affected life elsewhere, one could read Meinig's account of different regions as an analysis of the geographic transformation of Iowa. Directly referred to more than 20 times in the text, Iowa, in Meinig's account of the creation of a national system, was successively transformed from a frontier fringe; to a transcontinental corridor, to the heart of the Corn Belt within a natural region called "Prairies," to the outer edge of the manufacturing belt. Iowa was also a place immigrants as well as railroads passed through regularly. Finally, Iowa was a cultural hearth, a place from which people left to go west or east. Iowans affected the society and culture of Oregon as well as the Southwest and southern California—where they joined settlers associations or state societies and gathered at annual "Iowa picnics." By following Meinig's analysis of the emergence of a national system, one can also discern, indirectly, how Iowa's shifting geographic position between an edge or center within the hinterland of the national system continually reshaped Iowans' own sense of place within the larger shaping of America.

*Building an American Identity: Pattern Book Homes and Communities, 1870–1900*, by Linda E. Smeins. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1999. 335 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$52.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY CLIFFORD E. CLARK JR., CARLETON COLLEGE

Much of the story of the expansion of single-family housing in the late nineteenth century that Linda Smeins covers in her new book is already well known: the construction of large numbers of picturesque Victorian houses, the battle between pattern book writers and profes-

sional architects for control of the housing market, and the connection between house design and middle-class ideals. What is original about Smeins's approach is her focus on the connection between home-building and American nationalism. As she states, "the subject of domestic architecture and its location became a site for negotiating traits of national identity. Among the most contested issues in the quest for a national style of building were what American houses would look like and who would determine their appearance" (16).

In order to provide the necessary background for her discussion of architecture and American national identity, Smeins spends the first two-thirds of her book carefully reviewing the context in which the debate took place. She begins by acknowledging that although Americans in the years before the Civil War had followed Greek and Roman classical precedents and later embraced Gothic house styles, tastes in housing at mid-century remained eclectic. Subsequent chapters trace the sustained expansion of the housing market in the late nineteenth century and identify the emergence of an idealized vision of the perfect community, which consisted of single-family houses in suburban or small-town settings. Relying heavily on the pattern books themselves and on the debate within architectural journals, Smeins covers the rise of the pattern book designers who paired house design with national identity in their quest to be recognized as professional architects, the association of social status with pattern book designs, and the role of a new journal called the *American Architect and Building News* in the quest to create professional standards.

The most interesting part of Smeins's argument appears in chapter seven and in the epilogue on the building design standards that emerged and on how they were put into practice in Bellingham, Washington, her one community example. Smeins argues that no single style came to dominate. While A. F. Oakey and other members of the American Institute of Architects despised the pattern book designs, favored colonial and classicist designs, and argued for an "architecture characterized by restraint," local carpenters and the larger public supported eclectic designs, which they labeled "modern." These were often two-story rectangular structures with projections on both levels, often with porches, towers, and chamfered bays, shingle decorations on the upper levels, and scroll-sawn gable decoration. One of the great values of this book, therefore, is to identify clearly the eclecticism of design that has undercut architectural historians' attempts to develop consistent stylistic labels such as "Queen Anne" or "Eastlake" for Victorian houses. Smeins argues convincingly that contemporaries used such terminology in widely divergent and inconsistent ways.

Smeins never systematically addresses the issue suggested in the book's title: the relationship between domestic architecture and American identity. The closest she comes to addressing this question is to quote a contemporary observation of what was called the "anonymous style." The nation's "native work," that observer claimed, was "the natural thing for a people restless, inventive, restrained by no artistic scruples or diffidence, fond of positive and even startling effects and given to display" (262). For those interested in understanding the promoters of Victorian house designs, this is a useful and informative book.

*Building the Invisible Orphanage: A Prehistory of the American Welfare System*, by Matthew A. Crenson. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998. xii, 383 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$45.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY KENNETH CMIEL, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

The past few years have seen the publication of a bevy of books on the history of orphanages in the United States. In general, those books have been more sympathetic to the historic orphanage than its popular stereotype as a heartless place cruel to children. Matthew Crenson's *Building the Invisible Orphanage* adds another brick to the literature. He provides an overview of policy and debate about U.S. orphanages from the middle of the nineteenth century through the 1920s.

Crenson is a little less friendly to the orphanage than some other recent historians (this reviewer included), yet he does not caricature. His book is a finely etched portrait of what the orphanage was and what people thought about it. He tells of the increasing reliance on orphanages as the nineteenth century progressed; how most children in those institutions actually had a parent living; how there never were enough orphanages to house all dependent children. Finally, he recounts how late nineteenth-century progressive reformers became disenchanted with what they called "institutionalism" and devised the modern foster care system and mother's pensions as alternatives. The latter became the basis for the New Deal's Aid to Families with Dependent Children program. In all, *Building the Invisible Orphanage* is a fine overview of the history of the institution and its alternatives.

Many of these themes have been discussed in other recent work on the orphanage. Yet Crenson tells the story well. Moreover, he shrewdly adds to our understanding in a number of places. I have never read as good an account of the politics of "placing out" in the nineteenth and twentieth century. In the 1800s, unattached children in large cities were indentured and sent West to live on farms. The archi-

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