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## BOOK REVIEWS

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*Landmark Architecture. Pittsburgh and Allegheny County.* By Walter C. Kidney.

(Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation, 1985. Pp. 354; 195 illustrations. \$34.95.)

*Landmark Architecture* is a publication generated by the nationwide concern for local preservation that has spawned a series of urban inventories of lost buildings (*Lost America, Lost New York, Lost Boston*). Here the formula is varied to combine a history of architecture and planning from Fort Pitt to PPG Place based largely upon demolished works (the repetition of "Gone" in the photo captions reiterates the dull thuds of a wrecker's ball) with a section-by-section catalogue of extant monuments presumably worth preserving.

Walter Kidney has emerged as worthy successor to "Mr. Pittsburgh," James Van Trump, as chronicler and defender of the steel city's architectural heritage. He writes gracefully and vividly, occasionally turning a memorable phrase (the Cathedral of Learning is, for example, "absurd but beautiful"), and occasionally rising to lyrical heights. His text is aimed at the laity, those who will influence the preservation program of the Landmarks Foundation. They will find much here to enrich their historical understanding and their architectural perception. For them, the essay is a good read; the catalogue, a wise (if hefty) cicerone. For them, this is a generous book only somewhat marred by the lack of a bibliography.

For the professional historian, the same text will at times seem slightly out of focus, as in the fuzziness which blurs Kidney's handling of Georgian and Federal styles, as well as his cavalier concern for labeling in general. My own particular problem centers upon Kidney's misuse of the term "eclecticism," a misuse which carries over from his earlier and otherwise useful *Architecture of Choice* (1974). "Eclecticism," according to *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, is "the selection of . . . elements from . . . various . . . sources . . . for the purpose of combining them into a satisfying . . . style." The eclectic building is, like one of McGuffey's eclectic readers, an anthology, the result of assembling disparate bits and pieces out of a usable past. Yet Kidney seems to think that any building designed with reference to the past is eclectic, even one based largely upon one past

style. Surely there is a difference between a work designed by compiling sources from various unrelated picturesque and/or classical modes, and a work echoing one historical monument or style. The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts building on North Broad Street in Philadelphia by Frank Furness is a perfect example of design by accumulation; Thomas Jefferson's Virginia State House at Richmond is a good example of a building modeled upon or adapted from a previous monument. We need labels that clearly distinguish the two. The former is "eclectic"; I propose to give the latter the admittedly ugly title of "historistic" until a more sonorous term is proposed. Such labels are important because they clearly suggest that the intentions of the architects, and the resulting buildings, were different. Since what style(s) they used and how they used it/them meant much to the architects "of choice," Kidney's lack of precision fails to do justice to the variety of past design experience. I should also point out, however, that he is not alone in this. He writes about an era until recently little appreciated in the historiography of the twentieth century.

Kidney says, more than once in this work, that H. H. Richardson's Allegheny County Courthouse and Jail is the only internationally significant architectural monument in the area he surveys. Looking at page after page of small grey photographs of the buildings flagged by his sectional guide, I find it hard to dispute his assessment. Still, the ensemble has that special flavor that is Pittsburgh's past and present. Its maintenance is essential—especially in this era of "parachute architecture"; when jet-setting designers drop into your cities buildings of enervating, reiterative banality which threaten to annihilate our regional diversity—and the promotion of that maintenance is well-served by this handsome publication. ■

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*Johnstown: The Story of a Unique Valley.*

Edited by Karl Berger, M.D.

(Johnstown: Johnstown Flood Commission with the assistance of William L. Glosser, 1985. Pp. 743. Preface, index, illustrations.)

Although *Johnstown: The Story of a Unique Valley* does not unfold the entire story of that particular community, the volume does provide