

PITTSBURGH ACCORDING TO SHIEBLER

by Lauren Uhl

The Progressive Architecture of Frederick G. Schiebler, Jr.
Martin Aurand

Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994. Notes, appendices, bibliography, illustrations. 184 pp. \$49.95.

WHEN I MOVED to Pittsburgh nearly a decade ago, I tried to hasten my acquaintance with the city by taking weekend walks through different neighborhoods. It was always an interesting journey because

Pittsburgh has a lot to offer architecturally — narrow 19th century rowhouses, an impressive Civic Center in Oakland, marvelous stretches of Colonial Revival homes. But the one thing that literally stopped me in my tracks was the Highland Towers apartments.

A friend and I were walking down Highland Avenue and happened to stop and look up as we passed the apartment building. “Look at those tiles! Look at those doors!” We had a delightful time pouring over the building, discovering all its architectural details, and only left after deciding that trying to see the interior by ringing doorbells at random probably was not a good idea. A plaque on the building informed us that the architect was Frederick Schiebler. We’d never heard of him but were interested in finding more of his designs.

For fellow fans who have discovered Schiebler’s better-known works, such as the Highland Park Towers and Old Heidelberg apartments, Martin Aurand’s book will come as a welcome guide to the architect’s other commissions. For those not acquainted with the architect, this is a delightful introduction.

Schiebler designed some of the city’s most visually interesting buildings during a career that spanned 50 years. He apprenticed for nearly a decade with local architect Henry Moser, as well as the prestigious firm of Longfellow, Alden, and Harlow. After striking out on his own, Schiebler obtained a handful of commissions for which he produced traditional and classical designs. Although he learned the basic architectural principles from his mentors, he didn’t follow long in their footsteps. Soon he began to look to Europe for inspiration — to the English Arts and Crafts Movement and the Viennese Secession. Drawing on these and other influences, Schiebler created a body of work that is strikingly different from most Pittsburgh buildings of the 1910s and 1920s. His designs continue to delight home owners and fans of architecture with picturesque exteriors, warm interiors, livable floor plans, and beautiful details.

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Born in 1872 on Bouquet Street in Pittsburgh’s South Oakland neighborhood, Schiebler left Central High School at 16 to apprentice with a series of architectural firms. By 26, he was ready to strike out on his own. Schiebler married Antonia Oehmler, entered private practice and became his own first client, designing a honeymoon cottage in Swissvale. Setting up shop in nearby Wilkesburg, Schiebler began to build a clientele in and around Pittsburgh’s East End. His marriage to Antonia ended about 1912, when she took the children and moved to California. Schiebler moved his office to East Liberty. He apparently lived with a variety of friends and clients during the 1910s, then in 1923 married Blanch Clawson of Indiana, Pa. Although his practice dwindled after its heyday in the 1910s and 1920s, Schiebler continued to work on projects until the late 1940s. At that time, he received a measure of notoriety when he was interviewed for articles in *Charette* and *Architectural Record*. Suffering from progressive blindness, Schiebler died in 1958 at 86.

Aurand’s work is an important contribution to the under-explored field of Pittsburgh architects. Only a handful of books delve into the work of a single local architect or firm, including *Organic Vision* on Peter Berndtson, and *Architecture After Richardson* on Longfellow, Alden, and Harlow. A few others — Franklin Toker’s *Pittsburgh: An Urban Portrait* and Walter Kidney’s *Landmark Architecture: Pittsburgh and Allegheny County* — serve as general introductory guides to architecture in the region. And, of course, there are the eclectic writings of Jamie Van Trump. Yet many individuals and firms who left their mark of the city — Charles Bickel, McClure and Spahr, Frederick Osterling, James T. Steen, to name a few — have not their stories fully told.

Schiebler’s practice was centered in Pittsburgh’s East End, so a good portion of his work can be viewed in a day’s tour. This slim and easy-to-read volume is much more than a mere descriptive catalog, however. It carefully traces Schiebler’s architectural development from early work using traditional revival styles, through his peak of creativity drawing heavily from the Progressive movement, to the final commissions when he returned to a more familiar approach to design. Aurand is careful to detail Schiebler’s influences along the way with words and pictures. Paired photos and drawings give a fascinating glimpse into some of Schiebler’s adaptations of form and design. The beautiful tile spandrels in Highland Towers, for instance, are taken from fabric designed by German architect Peter Behrens. Appendices include an annotated catalog of Schiebler’s commissions, including works mis-attributed to him, and a partial list of books in his architectural library.

Aurand has done an admirable job of bringing to light the work of one of Pittsburgh’s most interesting yet little known

architects. The book is notable not only for its important content, but its handsome production. The crisp text, the wealth of historic and contemporary photographs, and its attractive layout make it an informative and enjoyable piece of scholarship. ❁

Bookcase

Historic Contact: Indian People and Colonists in Today's Northeastern United States in the Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries

by Robert S. Grumet

Norman, Ok: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995. Pp. 514. Foreword, preface, introduction, bibliography, index, illustrations, figures, maps. \$47.50 hardcover.

Using a diverse array of archeological, ethnographic, and historical sources, anthropologist Robert S. Grumet offers an insightful and thorough analysis of contact between Native Americans and Europeans along the colonial frontier. The book examines contact from Maine to Virginia, and from the Atlantic Ocean to the Upper Ohio River Valley.

Grumet divides *Historic Contact* into three sections, by region: the North Atlantic, the Middle Atlantic, and the Trans-Appalachian. Each section opens with a lengthy overview, and then delves into specific chapters: for example, the Niagara-Erie Frontier or the Powhatan Country. These chapters closely examine intercultural contact and its ramifications among the Native Americans and European participants. The Upper Ohio Country chapter covers Western Pennsylvania's archeological finds, though earlier sites like the Meadowcroft Rockshelter are absent due to their age. Otherwise, this comprehensive guide to the many diverse cultures is an invaluable resource for those researching Native Americans or colonial history. — Gary Pollock, *Museum Division* ❁

1676: The End of American Independence

by Stephen Saunders Webb

Reprint: Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1996. Pp. 440. New preface, preface, introduction, index, maps, illustrations. \$17.95 paperback.

The American colonies first asserted their political independence in the 1630s, and were mostly governing themselves for the quarter century before 1676. But plagues, Indian insurrection, and civil war that year found the oppressive colonial oligarchies too unresponsive to overcome the disease, natives, social immaturity, and rival empires. Wars alone wiped out an entire generation of settlement and decimated capital investments — some suggest that average levels of welfare did not recover until 1815! Many colonists, tired of the ruling elites, either chose the English empire or had it forced on them.

This work concentrates on two of 1676's most tragic episodes: Bacon's Rebellion (or Revolution, as author Webb calls it) centered in the Chesapeake area of Virginia, and King Philip's War in New England. Virginia's troubles developed when the western Iroquois

nations pushed the Susquehanna Indians south to the Potomac. When the colony was slow to respond, a local militia was raised. The combat turned into a fight against the colonial government and grew to include every class and race. King Philip's War was really a widespread resistance movement by the Algonquin Indians. King Philip, an Indian so-named for his adoption of English customs, equipped his men with guns and armor, but the colonists overwhelmed him with superior numbers and the massacre of non-warriors. It became the most destructive war in American history, at least in proportion to population.

Both events left the structures of American autonomy fractured, with the colonists wanting for physical protection and civil and economic order. The English crown stepped in and employed the same forceful measures it had just used to take control of the three British kingdoms.

In his new preface, Webb states, "In 1676, as contrasted to 1776, the royal response to an assertion of American independence was swift, overwhelming, and constructive.... [resulting in] a hundred years of royal rule and Anglicization, the imperial period of American history." However, these events also sowed the ideological seeds and imperial hatreds that would culminate in the revolution of 1776. — Brian Butko ❁

Our Priceless Heritage: Pennsylvania State Parks, 1893-1993.

by Dan Cupper

Harrisburg: PHMC, 1993. Pp. 70. Foreword, introduction, index. \$12.95 paperback.

The Legacy of Penn's Woods: A History of the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry, 1895-1995

by Lester A. DeCoster

Harrisburg: PHMC, 1995. Pp. 96. Foreword, introduction, tables, appendix. \$12.95 paperback.

These companion volumes offer concise histories of two often overlooked subjects: state parks and state forests. Issued for their respective centennials, the books follow the stories chronologically, mixing in numerous historic photos. The books look similar, their brown and green duotone/accent colors being one of the main distinctions.

Cupper traces the parks from their forestry roots to the first park at Valley Forge, the CCC camps, and environmental action programs. Sidebars introduce some very interesting park rangers and campers. DeCoster follows the winding story of forests from virgin timber to extensive logging to more recent conservation efforts. He also profiles many of the men and women who contributed to the legacy of the state forests.

Both fields trace their early efforts to the protection of resources from the onslaught of 18th century industrialization. It was part of a wider awareness, but one that took root slowly. Pennsylvania's greatest era of state park expansion came in the 1950s and '60s. Today, there are 114 parks hosting 37 million visitors each year, while state forests encompass 2.1 million acres.