

Reviews

BOOKS

A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-First Century

Edited by Robert E. Stipe. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003; 592 pp., illustrations, tables, notes, index; cloth \$49.95; paper \$24.95.

A Richer Heritage aims to document the achievements following the enactment of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) in 1966, a watershed year in the history of historic preservation. This collection of essays succeeds as a survey of the preservation field's ever-broadening fronts of concern even though the quality of the essays is somewhat uneven: Some are excellent; others are pedestrian. As a work of critical scholarship, the volume falls short. But this was not really its purpose. Conceived as a sequel to *With Heritage So Rich*, *A Richer Heritage* succeeds amply.¹

A Richer Heritage is a valuable state-of-the-field book, whether one is a preservation advocate, professional, scholar, or some combination thereof. The well-written chapters convey much useful information. But the volume also mirrors the flaws of the whole preservation field; it is weakly theorized, celebratory rather than reflective, and defensive rather than truly curious about why preservation does not get more public support.

Such criticism, though, is turned on its head by editor Robert Stipe's analysis and meditation titled, "Where Do We Go from Here?" All that is missing from the first 14 chapters are in these final 50 or so pages of Stipe's. He probes and cajoles the field

with constructive criticism that is earnest and well informed. His challenging set of questions about how preservation relates to the rest of the society it serves (not as well as we think), and how this situation might be improved, should inspire debate among preservationists. This chapter distinguishes the book from many other standard, merely celebratory preservation collections.

The first section of the book—five chapters culminating in Thompson Mayes's superb essay on law and public policy—frame the institutional politics and policy-making of contemporary preservation efficiently and effectively. Other chapters are devoted to the most emergent issues in preservation including landscape preservation and social/ethnic issues. Both of these topics highlight the limits of preservation's traditional, artifact-centered thinking, and challenge those of us in the preservation field to deal with change (landscape change, social change, changing cultural politics) in ways that our materialist roots have not prepared us.

Genevieve P. Keller and J. Timothy Keller document the growth of "landscape preservation" by observing how landscapes have been treated like large-scale artifacts. But landscapes are not just a different set of objects to preserve; the real promise of landscape preservation is that it presents a different way of looking at places. The chapters by Antoinette J. Lee, Alan Downer, and Alan Jabbour speak to the changed and sometimes charged debates within preservation. Issues of ethnic representation and social equity are fully on the table, though not fully dealt with by any means. Predicting that "race and ethnicity will shape the cultural heritage programs of the United States in

the next century," Lee hopefully projects that the preservation establishment, which certainly has become more diverse in the last generation, will actually be diverse when those of us early in our careers are looking back in retirement.

The volume's absences are as much blind spots in the preservation field's vision of itself as elisions of this particular book. Generally absent is critical reflection on what preservation finds most difficult or has failed to do, the limits of the field, in general how it connects to bigger issues in American urbanism and society, and how it measures success (again, Stipe's final chapter is a notable exception). Like much that is published regarding preservation in the United States, the collection is unabashedly partial, celebratory, and uncritical ("America's Preservation Ethos: A Tribute to Enduring Ideals" is the title of the introduction). While useful for congratulation (of which much is due), the collection needs bolstering for teaching purposes. Specifically, where are the critical voices that believe in the power of the material past and ask insightful questions about what the field is not doing well, what the challenges are, and where the field should go next?

Indeed, the premise of the book, and many of the chapters, is troublingly anti-historical in that it presumes the existence of a set of timeless preservation ethics and principles, and it touts the ways in which the practice of preservation has become progressively "more mature." History with this frame of mind becomes a simple chronicle of preservation success stories (viz. Charles Hosmer), and obscures as much as it reveals about the field.

Described as "a textbook for historic preservation," *A Richer Heritage* can be useful for teaching at the university level but should not be employed without a critical eye. It is not so much a contribution of new scholarship as an appraisal of the state of affairs in the American preservation field. This volume will take its rightful place on the preservation bookshelf as a marker of its time—along with *With*

Heritage So Rich and *Past Meets Future: Saving America's Historic Environments* and Charles Hosmer's multiple volumes of preservation history.² Editor Robert Stipe deserves praise for bringing out such a wide-ranging and timely volume of work in book form, and we in the preservation field must face up to the volume's implicit challenge to grow the capacity of our field to do critical research and create knowledge for evaluating—not just mapping—the preservation field's course.

In the end, Stipe's book will be most remembered, one hopes, for his own words in the last chapter—

A major step toward fulfilling the goals of the 1966 legislation is to recognize that times have changed and to accept that the preservation movement must change with them. It is perhaps time to question what we are doing, why we are doing it, and whether our current approach is the most effective use of limited resources.

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1. *With Heritage So Rich* (U.S. Conference of Mayors. New York, NY: Random House, 1966).

2. Antoinette J. Lee, ed., *Past Meets Future: Saving America's Historic Environments* (Washington, DC: Preservation Press, 1992). See also Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., *Presence of the Past: A History of the Preservation Movement in the United States Before Williamsburg* (New York, NY: Putnam, 1965); and idem, *Preservation Comes of Age: From Williamsburg to the National Trust, 1926-1949*, 2 vols. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981).

Anthropology Explored: The Best of Smithsonian AnthroNotes

Second Edition. Edited by Ruth Osterweis Selig, Marilyn R. London, and P. Ann Kaupp. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2004; 458 pp., illustrations, bibliographies, index; cloth \$40.00; paper \$17.95.

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