

Unbuilt America: Forgotten Architecture in the United States from Thomas Jefferson to the Space Age. ALISON SKY and MICHELLE STONE. Introd. by George R. Collins. New York, Toronto: McGraw-Hill Book Co., c1976. ix, 308 p. illus. ISBN 0 07 057760 9 \$16.50.

“Unbuiltism.” Authors Alison Sky and Michelle Stone of SITE, Inc., a New York environmental arts group, have coined this apt term to describe the novel subject matter of their fine new book. Handsome, serious, significant, well-researched, interesting, and often humorous, the book is, in their words, “a collection of unusual architectural proposals which . . . for a variety of reasons remained unbuilt.”

More than three hundred projects for buildings, town planning, earthworks, and other kinds of environmental schemes placed in the United States during its two-century history are shown by drawings and models. Each design receives a catalogue-type entry illustrated with one or more of 472 black-and-white figures and described either in the architect’s own words or by a leading expert in his or her own work. The entries are arranged alphabetically by architect, except where a number of designs for a single project are shown, in which case they are alphabetized by project. Thus Christo’s controversial proposal to wrap a building in Times Square follows a selection of unsuccessful entries for the famous Chicago Tribune Tower Competition. This arrangement eliminates historical continuity and frees the reader to enjoy each project solely on its own merits.

The inspired selection includes both old friends and newcomers. Many projects are intensely earnest proposals intended for specific sites (such as Robert Owen’s plan for New Harmony, ca. 1825, or Bruce Goff’s design for an Oklahoma motel, 1964), some are non-specific but serious prototypes (as a house by Benjamin Latrobe, ca. 1795), and others are pure fantasy (Siah Armajani’s 48,000-mile-high tower, 1969). Projects include historically important but little-known designs, such as Edgar Chambless’s scheme for a linear city that he called Roadtown (1910), which in many ways foreshadows Michael Graves and Peter Eisenman’s well-publicized Jersey Corridor Project (1964-66). Some were taken very seriously by their designers but look ridiculous today (W. A. Delano’s government office building in the form of a flag, ca. 1932). All have one feature in common—they remained unbuilt.

The projects exist only in the form of drawings (and, to a small extent, in fragile models), so if they are to survive for posterity the drawings must be preserved. But, as authors Sky and Stone discovered, this part of the architectural legacy “has all but been demolished.” In particular, many architects “could not be bothered with preservation of the unrealized.”

The Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records (established in 1973) is trying to solve this problem in the United States. The Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada (founded in 1974) has organized an archives committee for the same purpose; chairman James Knight recently used these pages to explain the value of drawings and other architectural records and to urge archivists to preserve them.¹

Archivists may grant the importance of collecting records of executed buildings, but what about unbuilt architecture? Architectural historian George R. Collins discusses the importance of unexecuted designs in his articulate introduction to *Unbuilt America*. “The complete history of architecture,” he rightly declares, is “the history of both built and unbuilt.” Unbuilt architecture is just “as valid a history of the art of building,” and, through publication, “can be as influential in history as that which has been built.”

1 James Knight, “Architectural Records and Archives in Canada: Toward a National Programme,” *Archivaria* 3 (Winter 1976-77): 62-72.

Collins recognized that architectural drawings have a dual existence as *records* and as *art*. Drawings "have usually been studied for what they evidence about the built structures which they represent or which they, as studies, lead to"; on the other hand, there is "the intrinsic value of drawings and renderings themselves as works of art." Unbuilt projects are records too, but records of intentions rather than accomplishments. Beleaguered archivists may therefore plead that drawings of unbuilt schemes be deposited in art galleries rather than in archives. While this may be justifiable in theory, a division between built and unbuilt would disrupt the integrity of any group of drawings. So, unless we develop collections devoted exclusively to architectural records (such as the superb Drawings Collection of the Royal Institute of British Architects in London), archivists must begin to collect drawings of both kinds of projects in earnest.

Unbuilt America is so stimulating, innovative, and attractive that it may seem petty to point out a few flaws. Nevertheless, the authors should be chastized for having failed to identify the collections in which they found the drawings. (They give only the sources of illustrations, which are not always the same.) A few text sources are carelessly cited. And too much space has been given to less significant new schemes by young non-architects that were in no way intended to be realized, and would better be considered as conceptual art. But then *Unbuilt America* is itself a landmark in conceptual art: it is the catalogue of a non-existent exhibition of non-existent buildings. Delightful and instructive, *Unbuilt America* will stand as a testament to the inventiveness of architects and as a prod at the consciences of archivists.

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Without Our Past? A Handbook for the Preservation of Canada's Architectural Heritage. ANN FALKNER. Toronto: University of Toronto Press in Association with the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs and Publishing Centre, Supply and Services, 1977. x, 242 p. illus. ISBN 0 8020 2239 1 bd. \$15.00, ISBN 0 8020 6298 9 pa. \$5.00. Govt. cat. no. SU31-29/1976.

Without Our Past? is a practical handbook for concerned citizens, community groups, and historical and heritage societies wishing to preserve Canada's architectural heritage. The book includes chapters on government preservation policy, the role of Heritage Canada, the survey, evaluation and selection of buildings, property acquisition and use, amenities, publicity and finance, as well as an eight-page bibliography, an appendix listing government departments, agencies and programmes, information regarding historical societies and foundations which might be of assistance.

It is distressing to those active in saving Canada's architectural treasures when the Chairman of the Board of Governors of Heritage Canada states that "we have possibly the weakest heritage legislation in the western world." More buildings have been destroyed in the past twenty years than in any other time in our history. Pressures for improved legislation must, therefore, continue at all levels.

Without Our Past? frequently refers readers to historical societies, museums, libraries, and archives for assistance. "An archives' staff can be of tremendous help if the requests for information are specific enough." In fact, Ms. Falkner reinforces many points mentioned by James Knight in his article on architectural records and archives in the last issues of this journal.¹ Both Falkner and Knight emphasize that on the whole archives have a surprising range of "secondary" sources to help in research about buildings: assessment

¹ James Knight, "Architectural Records and Archives in Canada: Toward a National Programme," *Archivaria* 3 (Winter 1976/77): 67-72.