

## Victorian Architecture of Iowa

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*The Routledge Historical Atlas of the American Railroads*, by John F. Stover. Routledge Atlases of American History Series. New York: Routledge, 1999. 144 pp. Maps, illustrations, graphs, tables, chronology, bibliography, index. \$17.95 paper.

Reviewer Kevin B. Byrne is professor of history at Gustavus Adolphus College. His research and writing have focused on military history and the history of technology and railroads.

This brief atlas by John Stover, dean of American railroad historians, brings together text, maps, and other illustrations exploring the field Stover knows so well. Its 54 entries fall into either of two categories: two- to four-page treatments of issues related to railroad history, or two-page snapshot histories of 26 major lines. The former cover a plethora of engaging topics—a comparison of Lincoln's itineraries while traveling between Illinois and Washington, D.C., in 1849 and 1861, for example, and standard subjects such as land grants and the creation of national time zones. A final chapter on "Railroads in the 1990s" plus a chronology and bibliography complete the book.

Stover's thumbnail sketches employ important and occasionally colorful detail, and his judgments demonstrate a sympathetic but not uncritical understanding of his subject. What distinguish this volume, of course, are the full-color maps that accompany each entry, along with related charts, photos, posters, advertisements, and such. They provide a highly useful visual dimension that enhances the accounts and allows readers to peruse the evidence.

Midwestern readers will find much to interest them here. They may appreciate, for instance, Stover's pithy description of how railroads forged ties between the midsection and the Northeast, cementing that alliance for the Civil War. And they can learn why nineteenth-century Grangers agitated for rate regulation. Concise histories of James J. Hill's Great Northern and of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy, among others, will be welcome, too. In short, author Stover, series editor Mark Carnes, and the publisher have done a favor for anyone interested in exploring briefly this essential facet of the nation's past.

*Victorian Architecture of Iowa*, by William Plymat Jr. Des Moines: Palladian Publishing Co., 1997. 144 pp. Illustrations, maps, bibliography, index. \$45.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.

Reviewer Jan Olive Nash is co-principal of Tallgrass Historians L.C. In that capacity, she has visited and studied the history of Iowa communities for ten years. She is also working on a Ph.D. dissertation at Loyola University Chicago on the survival patterns of small midwestern communities.

The crux of *Victorian Architecture of Iowa* is obvious from its front cover, a surreal but exquisite photograph of a gingerbread Queen Anne house planted, with the help of a telephoto lens, at the feet of a row of giant concrete grain elevators. Angled light from a setting sun washes the same blue-gray palette over both to paint a picture of a sort of enchanted constructed forest on the Iowa prairie. Inside the book, nearly 250 vibrant color photographs treat the reader to a visual feast of ornately decorated and brightly painted residential and commercial buildings, constructed mostly in county seats and small market towns of Iowa between 1840 and 1912. Informative captions locate and date each structure, and note details of construction materials, style, and building history. A town index keyed to a state map makes it easy to locate all the photographs of any particular town.

Wrapped around these photographs are historical stories that pair moments of national (or international) import—the last Civil War battle or the ascent of Queen Victoria—with tales of midwestern history, such as the sinking of the steamboat *Bertrand* on its way to the Montana gold fields in 1865, or the plague of grasshoppers that slowed settlement in northwestern Iowa in the 1870s. More relevantly, and in language intended for general readers, the author also discusses the progression of architectural styles reflected in his photographs, placing the developments within a national aesthetic and highlighting the major architects who drove stylistic changes in the nineteenth century. Most of this information is not new but comes from well-worn secondary sources. Although Plymat frequently quotes both historical and contemporary authorities, he uses no footnotes, relying instead on a short bibliography.

Beyond the author's color photographs—and the book is worth it without more—perhaps Plymat's main contribution is his inclusion of Main Street commercial architecture. Publications abound on "painted lady" residences; far fewer address the shops, double storefronts, opera houses, and other commercial buildings of the midwestern community. Perhaps this is because few old stores have escaped severe alterations at the street level. Upper floors, on the other hand, still reflect a body of intact historic architecture ripe for study. Plymat offers novel information on the materials of Main Street—cast iron or steel window hoods, pressed metal cornices, concrete slurry moldings, wooden millwork—and the common origins of many storefronts throughout Iowa and the Midwest. Complete storefronts, selected from manufacturers' catalogs, were shipped from distant cities to local merchants as separate components with assembly instructions. Thus,

identical storefronts might be found in towns separated by hundreds of rail miles and numerous state borders.

*Victorian Architecture* is the second collection of architectural gems published by Plymat, an accomplished photographer with clear technical skill. Plymat argues that since the mid-1970s, when he offered his first volume of 136 black-and-white images, interest in renovating Victorian architecture has greatly increased. Finding examples of such architecture is easier, too, because of a growing body of literature such as the National Register of Historic Places.

Just as modern elevators loom over Plymat's gingerbread house, so does the bustle of modern life sometimes overshadow our historic streets and neighborhoods. Plymat's beautiful photography celebrates the vintage architecture worth preserving in these often quieter and slower places.

*America's First Black Town: Brooklyn, Illinois, 1830-1915*, by Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000. xiv, 276 pp. Tables, notes, index. \$37.50 cloth.

Reviewer Darrel E. Bigham is professor of history and director of Historic Southern Indiana at the University of Southern Indiana. He is the author of *We Ask Only a Fair Trial: A History of the Black Community of Evansville, Indiana* (1987).

In *America's First Black Town*, Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua explores a small settlement in the American Bottoms that was absorbed into metropolitan St. Louis. Founded in 1830 by black families fleeing slavery, Brooklyn was platted and named by white settlers in 1837. It was chartered as a village in 1873 and renamed Lovejoy in 1891 after the martyred abolitionist. Thereafter the settlement experienced decline. A very small village during most of its history, not really a town, its population apparently peaked in 1910. The end apparently occurred when the St. Clair County sheriff declared martial law there in 1915. It is now at best an obscure place on the map.

Cha-Jua asserts that Brooklyn was distinctive because it began as an antebellum settlement and survived into the early twentieth century. By contrast, most black towns were organized in the West between 1890 and 1910. Given that significant portions of the populace were mulattoes and whites (one in eight were white and an unidentified number were mulatto in 1910), calling this a black town is misleading. Even the author acknowledges that, using such qualifiers as "predominantly" (182).

Cha-Jua, a self-described "Marxist-influenced revolutionary [black] nationalist," claims that Brooklyn's heyday was 1886 to 1894, when

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