

Winter 2010

Review of: Ethan Anthony, The Architecture of Ralph Adams Cram and His Office

Libby MacDonald Bischof

University of Southern Maine, ebischof@usm.maine.eduFollow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/history>Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bischof, Libby. "The Architecture of Ralph Adams Cram and His Office." *Winterthur Portfolio* 44, no. 4 (2010): 395-396.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at USM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in History by an authorized administrator of USM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact jessica.c.hovey@maine.edu.

preference for depicting single, isolated features in a landscape: the embankment running between the train and the viewer seems to suggest that the railway separates people rather than brings [*sic*] them together” (212).

Although Kennedy and Treuherz have collected an impressively broad range of images, their choices often seem arbitrary, dictated by the availability of an object for loan or the limits of their knowledge. They seem most comfortable on British and French materials, but, as an Americanist, I wonder, why Cole and Inness but not Thomas Eakins’s *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* (1871, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) or George Bellows’s *Pennsylvania Station Excavation* (1909, Brooklyn Museum)? The bibliography at the end of the volume suggests one plausible answer: the authors found their way to Leo Marx’s classic, *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), but did not make similar use of any major treatment of late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century American art.¹

Still, the most fundamental weakness of the book is analytical: Kennedy and Treuherz amassed a vast range of materials, but the breadth of materials they found seems to have swamped their ability to interpret them. In their eagerness to show that each object in one of their groupings expresses the often rather baggy theme unifying the grouping, both primary authors essentially ignore ways in which various works express different attitudes toward the railway and the larger industrial and social processes that the railway was used to epitomize. Despite or, perhaps, because of the wide range of materials they consider, the authors consistently conflate differences, making works in different media made in different countries at different times and aimed at different kinds of audiences seem fundamentally alike.

KENNETH JOHN MYERS
Detroit Institute of Arts

Ethan Anthony. *The Architecture of Ralph Adams Cram and His Office*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2007. 200 black-and-white illustrations, project list, bibliography, index. \$60.00.

Ethan Anthony’s *The Architecture of Ralph Adams Cram and His Office* is not a biographical work about the once-prominent late nineteenth- and early

twentieth-century American architect and champion of Gothic revival, Ralph Adams Cram (1863–1942). Rather, it is a visual celebration and overview of the evolution of the key works of Cram and his firm’s diverse architectural portfolio over the course of nearly seven decades. In this volume Anthony, the current president of HDB/Cram and Ferguson, Inc. (the successor to the firm Cram founded in 1889), organizes the work of Cram’s office into three categories: religious architecture, academic architecture, and a “catch-all” grouping of residential, institutional, and commercial architecture. Within these subsections the firm’s work is laid out roughly chronologically, an organizational structure aided greatly by a comprehensive and detailed “Project List” of the firm’s commissions from 1882 to 1943 that appears near the end of the volume (241–48).

Anthony’s work is best described as a catalog. The bulk of the book consists of 200 full- and half-page black-and-white illustrations of plans, artist renderings, and photographs of completed projects, accompanied by the author’s helpful (though overly brief) captions, summaries, and explanations of highlighted projects. As such, he devotes only minimal attention to biographical information about Cram’s interesting and often complex personal and professional life in Boston and beyond. Although Anthony makes clear in his preface that his project is more about the work of Cram’s firm (and less about Cram’s life beyond his architecture), in order to fully contextualize and introduce Cram to readers and admirers of his architectural work, a more detailed biographical section than the one included would have been most welcome. Readers who desire more information on Cram’s life will do well to consult his own informative 1936 autobiography, *My Life in Architecture*, while readers curious about Cram’s more Bohemian past in fin de siècle Boston, as well as his numerous poetic and literary endeavors, will want to peruse Douglass Shand-Tucci’s 1995 *Ralph Adams Cram: Life and Architecture*.¹ What

¹ In his preface, Anthony clearly articulates a significant separation between his own ten years of research for *The Architecture of Ralph Adams Cram and His Office* and Shand-Tucci’s many decades of work on Cram. Anthony notes, “Shand-Tucci advanced the theory that Cram and many of his associates were closeted gays and that much of their artistic endeavor was devoted to covert expression of their sexual preference. I have found no evidence to support his theories” (7). Although I am inclined to agree with Anthony regarding Shand-Tucci’s overemphasis on the homosocial milieu of Cram’s Boston years (see my own “‘Against an Epoch’: Boston Moderns, 1880–1905” [PhD diss., Boston College, 2005]), Shand-Tucci’s research and 1,000+ pages of sometimes overly detailed writing on Cram’s life cannot be so summarily dismissed. Readers interested in more about Cram’s life than what is provided in Anthony’s brief

¹ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

Anthony's work adds to the existing scholarship, however, is a detailed discussion of the evolution of the firm itself, as well as unprecedented access to the firm's own archives. The majority of the plans, photographs, and renderings on display in the book are drawn from these archives and celebrate Cram's place as one of the master practitioners of Gothic revival in the United States. Although the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City is often considered Cram's masterwork, he also effectively advanced his aesthetic, spiritual, and practical preference for the neo-Gothic on college campuses throughout the United States.

Cram's entrée into his later prolific university work came when the young firm won the architectural design competition for the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1902. Cram, Goodhue, and Ferguson's neo-Gothic design trumped others from such well-known firms as McKim, Mead, and White, according to Anthony, because the firm proved to the jury that "old forms could be recombined to suit contemporary purposes." The jury recognized Cram's appropriate material choice of "a local stone that blended with the rugged cliffs over the Hudson River" to create an attractive "Gothic scheme" (24). Throughout his life, Cram fought to resolve the tensions between the medieval and the modern (he wrote increasingly polemic tracts against modern culture as he got on in years). Perhaps his designs were his most effective resolution of that conflict: medieval in design and sensibility but modern in function.² Success at West Point enhanced the firm's reputation and led to increasing academic commissions, including new buildings at Princeton, Rice University, and Sweet Briar College, among others. Despite the increasing number of academic commissions, however, the firm never strayed far from the church building that was such a distinct hallmark of their success.

Readers who enjoy modern American architecture will note after perusing this catalog just how widespread, if under-studied, Cram's influence has

been. Indeed, there has been growing interest in Cram and his firm's work in the last few decades, and such attention on this complex figure and his stunning portfolio is both well deserved and overdue. Anthony, as Cram's successor, has added his straightforward contribution to the considerable recovery work already done on Cram, the firm, and their influence on modern American architecture.

LIBBY MACDONALD BISCHOF
University of Southern Maine

John Bush Jones. *All-Out for Victory! Magazine Advertising and the World War II Home Front.* Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2009. 314 pp.; 60 half-tones and 10 color plates. \$50.00.

This is a lavishly illustrated and superbly produced book on the advertising in ten wide-circulation American magazines during World War II: *Life*, *Look*, *Collier's*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Esquire*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Business Week*, and *Farm Journal and Farmer's Wife*. With sixty black-and-white illustrations and ten color plates, the reader is treated to a large selection of wartime advertising in periodicals that are hard to find, most of them now tucked away in storage as libraries strive to cut down on vandalism and look for shelf space. Magazines once occupied a central place in American popular culture, with circulations in the millions, when people had more time to read and fewer distractions from other media. Advertising fueled this widespread success as it enabled publishers to sell their magazine subscriptions at a low cost and keep newsstand prices low as well. At a time when advertisers feared going out of business as manufacturers shifted from consumer goods to war production, advertising revenue actually increased during the war because the big agencies found a way to sell the war instead of products. Author John Bush Jones meticulously tells this story of advertisers selling ideas instead of consumer goods by focusing on the various campaigns supported by the War Advertising Council, government agencies, and advertising companies themselves. With effective reference to information in *Business Week* and engaging anecdotes about his own memories as a child during the war, Jones paints an absorbing picture of life on the home front as it was depicted in national advertising, when ads were beautifully illustrated with compelling copy designed to motivate civilians to buy war bonds, accept women in blue-collar jobs, resist the black market, donate blood, and do all they were asked to support the troops overseas.

biography should first read Ralph Adams Cram, *My Life in Architecture* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1936), and then consult Douglass Shand-Tucci's two-volume study of Cram, *Ralph Adams Cram: Life and Architecture*, vol. 1, *Boston Bohemia, 1881-1900*, and vol. 2, *An Architect's Four Quests: Medieval, Modernist, American, Ecumenical* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995 [vol. 1], 2005 [vol. 2]), as well as his *Ralph Adams Cram, American Medievalist* (Boston: Boston Public Library, 1975).

² For a detailed discussion of Cram's relationship to the undercurrent of antimodernism in America at the turn of the twentieth century, as well as his Anglo-Catholic sensibilities, see T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 198-215.