A Guide to Florida’s Historic Architecture by the Florida Association of the American Institute of Architects

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the process, be consumed quantities of alcohol, played music, danced and chased a succession of women. Being a playboy helped North to make useful contacts in the upper levels of the entertainment world. How much the circus benefited from these boozy exchanges is a matter of conjecture.

The author commends North for innovations that revived attendance in the wake of the Great Depression, but faults him for gradually losing interest after World War II and turning management of the circus over to subordinates. His withdrawal was partly due to factors beyond his control that undermined the popularity of circuses: competition from television, rising transportation costs, shortages of unskilled labor and prolonged warfare with unions. Albrecht speaks with authority about such matters, and any specialist preparing an institutional history of American circuses will be grateful for his contribution.

George H. Mayer


Creating a good architectural guidebook is a very difficult undertaking. Buildings must be identified, researched and photographed, and the information then packaged in a fashion that addresses the interests of professional architects, history buffs, students, motorists and armchair travelers. When a guide covers an entire state, its publication becomes particularly challenging.

The Florida Association of the American Institute of Architects has undertaken the task of assembling a guide to Florida’s historic architecture with resourcefulness and vigor. The association called upon architects in each of its chapters to document locally significant properties. Beginning with basic information prepared by graduate students in the Department of Architecture at the University of Florida, the chapter architects prepared thumbnail histories of 945 sites, located each on a map and photographed all but four of them. The project coordinators, F. Blair Reeves and Mary N.G. Reeves, dealt with scores of writers from the sixty-seven counties that are included in the guide.

The result is a fascinating chronicle of regional architecture and construction traditions. All types and styles of buildings are included. There are grand mansions like Vizcaya in Miami, millworkers’ cottages and homesteads on the Gulf Coast, Spanish Revival theaters, sturdy lighthouses, Victorian churches, classical courthouses and downtown business blocks. Particularly interesting are the vast resort hotels and industrial structures that served the specialized Florida economy – a citrus packing house in Avon Park, a warehouse at a long-staple cotton processing factory in Madison and an ice plant in Melbourne that supplied households as well as fishermen.

The book focuses on buildings that were erected in Florida before the advent of air conditioning, when builders and architects were forced to accommodate their designs and construction techniques to the demands of the tropical climate. The book’s introductory essay on the state’s architectural history laments how more recent development has created buildings in
which climate and location are often “misunderstood or ignored” and how “large corporations, with heads and hearts elsewhere” have typically commissioned “architecture of national appeal with little Florida accent” (p. 5). The authors optimistically suggest that the closing years of this century “may be remembered as a period of return to a Florida vernacular architecture that takes into account both tradition and innovation” (p. 5). This admirable volume offers a wealth of information that can assist in the process of reinstating a “Florida accent” to the state’s architectural future.

Many readers may wish that the production of the book had been equal to its contents. The postage stamp-size photographs serve mostly to create a desire to see the buildings more clearly. An index would have made the locations of sites and other factual information much more accessible. But these changes can readily be made in future editions, of which there will, hopefully, be many.

Diana S. Waite