A New Architecture

A remarkable event took place at the Smithsonian July 23. Under the joint sponsorship of the Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation and the National Museum of the American Indian, architectural historian Dr. Carol Krinsky of New York University and Rick West, Director of the NMAI, conducted a lively and learned dialogue on the subject of contemporary Native American Buildings.

Dr. Krinsky spoke of contemporary Native American buildings in two organizing categories: the literal symbol, which because of its specific reference tends to be tribal, and the symbolic abstraction, a formal structure which is based on an idea representing the thinking of the Indian community. In the first category she identified 4 sub-groups: forms identified very closely with individual tribal tradition such as hogans; modifications to traditional forms such as a round house built with a steel rather than a wooden frame; traditional plans realized in non-traditional elevations such as a plan of an otherwise ordinary school based on an ancient maze pattern; and cosmetic modifications such as mural paintings or sculptural ornament.

In the second category, Dr. Krinsky illustrated 5 sub-groups: plans based on traditional objects but not on traditional buildings such as the well known turtle building for the multi-cultural center at Niagara Falls; structures which suggest traditional building forms such as Oglala Lakota College with its subtle suggestion of the tipi* form broadly interpreted; solutions of Native American architects using a personal vocabulary to interpret traditional values such as the Pyramid Lake Cultural Center by Dennis Numkena; solutions evolved by a consultative process which characterizes the Indian culture even if the resultant form does not have an obvious formal expression which is Indian, as exemplified by the Ramah Navajo School by Sanford Hirshen; and buildings such as the Cherokee Museum at Cherokee, North Carolina, which express Indian values by their integration into the natural environment.

In this presentation, a picture of what is happening in Native American architecture today began to emerge, revealing a visible and strong contemporary movement. The contribution of architectural history to the Museum of the American Indian is in creating a structure for the classification and analysis in formal and cultural terms of the broad range of contemporary Native American buildings. With the understanding gained, Krinsky and West emphasized, the aesthetic principles of indigenous American architecture can be incorporated into the new buildings for NMAI.

* The spelling as used by Peter Nabokov in *Native American Architecture*
AN INTERN’S SUMMER RESEARCH PROJECT

Since its formation in 1986, OAHP has been a summer home to undergraduate and graduate student interns. This summer, OAHP was delighted to offer Barre Klapper a six-week internship.

Barre attended Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts, where she majored in art and architectural history. Prior to receiving her Bachelors degree in 1989, Barre presented a paper on her senior honors thesis, Defining Science Museum Architecture: The 1904 at the University of Texas in Austin. Because of her increasing knowledge of historic preservation architecture, OAHP was pleased to present Barre with the opportunity of working on a specific project geared towards her newly-acquired skills. Her goal was to document the changes to the interior of the National Museum of Natural History since the official completion of the building in 1911. The focus of the study was to devise a format combining visual and historical information.

Barre’s research included the examination of documents from the Natural History Drawings and Papers Microfilm Collection in the Office of Design and Construction, the Natural History Drawings ink-on-paper drawings for each decade showing through the use of color the demolition and construction undertaken.

Barre’s summer project will provide a greater understanding to the Institution of the building’s evolution and therefore aid in future planning with regard to historic preservation efforts. Barre’s study will be available in OAHP for all who are interested in the evolution of National Museum of Natural History.

IVY ON THE CASTLE

ANOTHER OF SMITHSONIAN’S PERSONAL EFFECTS?

Some readers may remember the Smithsonian building in its ivy-covered days. The architectural detail of the red sandstone building was picturesquely obscured under a thick screen of green foliage. While the growth of ivy creates a Romantic atmosphere appropriate to the mid-nineteenth century Gothic Revival building, the pernicious roots of the plant are extremely damaging to the masonry. The roots enter the walls through the mortar joints and establish complex root systems which erode the stone. The corrosion of the mortar allows the entry of water, which freezes and expands in the winter time, causing still more damage.

It was because of such damage that the Smithsonian removed all of the ivy (seven truckloads full) covering the facades of the building in the fall of 1982. Several

Holmes Report to the Smithsonian, at the Boston Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians’ Graduate Conference.

In 1990 Barre was accepted in the Master of Architecture and Architectural Preservation program Collection at the Smithsonian Archives, the Annual Reports of the Smithsonian and the U.S. National Museum, and oral history interviews. Her final project illustrates certain aspects of the building’s development and cites the sources of her research. It consists of four

NHB floor plan from National Museum Report, 1913.
different strains of ivy were found growing up the walls of the building, the most common being Boston Ivy (Parthenocissus tricuspidata) and English Ivy (Hedera helix). Some of the roots measured several inches across. The Department of Botany dated most of these roots as being about twenty years old. However, OAHP recently chanced upon an interesting letter in the Smithsonian Archives. Written on May 31, 1900, by the third Secretary of the Smithsonian, Samuel P. Langley, the letter thanks Mrs. Harriet E. Wells for her gracious gift of "a slip of ivy from the tomb of James Smithson at Genoa." Langley writes that he "shall have it carefully nursed for a time and planted about the Smithsonian building." Photographs dating back to the 1870s show ivy growing on the building; clearly, a precedent existed for Langley's proposal to plant Smithson's ivy in 1900. Though we can't ever know for sure, the possibility that the ivy that covered the Smithsonian could have been another legacy of our benefactor James Smithson is probably just a Romantic notion of our own.

PHOTO-OP

» **WHO:** George Washington

» **WHAT:** This monumental neoclassical sculpture of the first U.S. President was executed by Horatio Greenough in 1841. Upon completion, it was placed in the rotunda of the Capitol Building but moved to the east lawn of the Capitol in 1843.

» **WHERE:** The West Wing of the Smithsonian Building, today referred to as the Commons, when it housed the Division of Graphic Arts.

» **WHEN:** ca. 1958-1959 with newly completed Graphic Arts exhibits and division curator, Jacob Kainen, in foreground. The statue remained in the west wing until 1962, when it was installed in the Museum of History & Technology (now NMAH) which was then still under construction.

» **WHY:** The statue came to the Smithsonian in 1908 from the Capitol because Congress was concerned over the deterioration of the work of art due to exposure. In 1907-8 the Smithsonian was planning to establish the National Gallery of Art on the second floor of the building. The west wing seemed an excellent place for a sculpture gallery; Greenough's sculpture was placed in the apse in anticipation of the passage of legislation for the National Gallery of Art. Although the bill failed to pass, the statue of Washington remained in the west wing, presiding over the changing exhibits of Graphic Arts for more than half a century.
MOVING TOWARDS AN AESTHETIC ROTUNDA

The third-floor Rotunda of the Smithsonian Building today serves as both the Wilson Center's reception area and as an exhibit of furniture and decorative arts objects representing the Aesthetic Movement in America. These pieces form one of several groupings intended by OAHP to display particular styles of 19th-century design. It is appropriate to dedicate an exhibit to the Aesthetic Movement since this style's popularity in the United States began with the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. OAHP created an Aesthetic backdrop in the Rotunda (a space which is not original to the building) by hanging draperies of floral tapestry and velvet and bringing together objects chosen from the "Castle" Collection.

The Aesthetic Movement attempted to introduce artistic principles to the production, display, and use of all manner of household goods. In England, such artists-craftsmen as William Morris and D. G. Rosetti had eschewed industrialization by combining honest craftsmanship with naturalistic decoration. The idea of bringing art into everyday life led to profuse surface decoration, and the display of art on these surfaces created what was considered a pleasing juxtaposition of many images and designs. In 1876, Americans were exposed to the arts of many "exotic," Eastern cultures. Thus, Japanese fans and other Oriental motifs pervade Aesthetic design, as seen on our vases. Similarly, the frieze in the Rotunda is part of an "Anglo-Japanese" set of wallpapers, reproduced from the Cooper/Hewitt Museum collection.

The ideals of the Movement were routed when manufacturers reworked Aesthetic designs to allow mass production. Charles Eastlake, author of the 1868 book, *Hints on Household Taste*, found his name linked to such furniture: "I find American tradesmen continually advertising what they are pleased to call 'Eastlake' furniture, with the production of which I have had nothing whatever to do, and for the taste of which I should be very sorry to be considered responsible." However, good Aesthetic, Eastlake design is represented in the Rotunda by the étagère and center table. The relatively simple lines and stylized ornament of the Aesthetic Movement evolved not only into the Eastlake style, but also gave inspiration to the sturdy Arts and Crafts style, and the flowing designs of Art Nouveau.

[Image: From "The House Beautiful" by Clarence Cook, 1881.]
ETYMOLOGICAL MORSEL

A late classical sarcophagus (pictured here in an 1867 photograph) came to the Smithsonian in 1858 when it was transferred along with the entire collection of the defunct National Institute. Erroneously identified as the tomb of a Roman emperor, it was brought to this country from Syria in 1839 by Commodore Jesse Duncan Elliott and presented to the National Institute as a possible final resting place for Andrew Jackson. Jackson declined the offer shortly before he died in 1845 stating: "I cannot permit my remains to be the first in these United States to be deposited in a sarcophagus made for an emperor or a king."

The word "sarcophagus" comes from the Greek "sarkophagos" which literally translated means "flesh-eating stone." The archaic definition of the word was "a type of limestone used among the Greeks for coffins [which] disintegrated the flesh of bodies deposited within." Today, the word can refer either to a stone coffin or a monument resembling an ancient stone tomb.

In 1904, the Syrian sarcophagus was again considered as a possible tomb, this time for the remains of James Smithson. Smithson's remains had been brought to this country from Italy by Smithsonian Regent Alexander Graham Bell; the English cemetery in which he was buried was slated for demolition by the city of Genoa. Smithson's remains were buried in a wooden coffin beneath a monument resembling a sarcophagus in form but not in function. This decorative monument remained behind in Italy while Smithsonian officials considered plans for a monumental "Smithson Memorial." Economic realities, however, precluded the building of an elaborate memorial; the marble marker was then recovered and incorporated into a modest crypt. Intended only as a temporary crypt, this simple, sparsely decorated room in the Smithsonian's first building may in fact be a most fitting memorial because in essence the Institution itself is Smithson's monument.

BELL
MULTI-CULTURAL
HIGH SCHOOL
SEMINAR

This summer, OAHP and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Education and Public Service co-sponsored a seminar and field-trip for students of the Bell Multi-Cultural High School of the District of Columbia. The Bell School, a public high school with a culturally-diverse student population in the Adams-Morgan neighborhood, operates a craft and vocational curriculum, with sections in woodworking, upholstery and furniture repair. The administration of the Bell School and the Assistant Secretary approached the OAHP "Castle" Collection staff, with the idea that the students of the Bell school could benefit from seeing a different context for the application of their developing skills. They believed that students can gain not only a broader appreciation of these skills, but a deeper understanding and connection to the world at large. They also believed that the vocational curriculum of a public high school should place the skills of the budding craftsperson into a comprehensive intellectual framework, within the context of an historical collection, such as the "Castle" Collection.
The seminar was held at Hodge’s Design, in Fort Washington, Maryland. Hodge’s is a small, successful, minority owned upholstery and drapery shop specializing in upholstery of antique furniture. Inez Hodge and her staff demonstrated essential restoration techniques, including laying out and executing diamond patterned tufting, in the upholstery of an antique armchair from the OAHP "Castle" Collection. Smithsonian staff members discussed the selection of historically correct fabrics for our furniture from commercially available fabric samples. Mrs. Hodge discussed traditional materials, such as horse hair, cotton batting and Spanish moss.

The seminar at Hodge’s Design was an inspiration as well as a learning experience for the Bell School students and OAHP. Mrs. Hodge stressed the practical value of learning traditional techniques required in the upholstery of antique furniture to supplement modern techniques. Antique furniture is far more likely to be cherished, saved and upholstered again than modern furniture. The seminar allowed the students to relate their training to a real business and presented an often neglected, but vital aspect of the upholstery business.

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