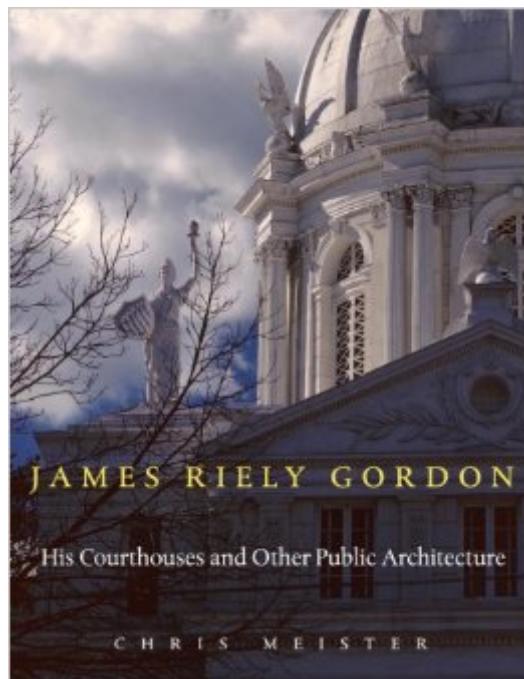


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James Riely Gordon: His Courthouses And Other Public Architecture



Synopsis

One of Texas's most talented architects in the late nineteenth century, James Riely Gordon may have been the nation's most prolific designer of county courthouses. Though Gordon's Texas courthouses made his reputation, they represent only half of a career in which we see reflected many issues and events shaping American architecture. Most notable were the effort among architects to organize their craft as a profession, the controversial Office of the Supervising Architect of the United States Treasury, the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, and the City Beautiful Movement. Situating Gordon's career, Meister focuses on the public architecture, the pursuit of which took Gordon from San Antonio to Dallas and on to Chicago and New York City as he secured commissions in nine states. Competition was fierce, and Gordon often had to defend his reputation against scandalous charges leveled by jealous architects and unscrupulous politicians. In his interdisciplinary approach, Meister examines political, cultural, and economic forces for their impact on the finished buildings as well as on Gordon's career and exposes the political and legal wrangling so often attendant to the construction of buildings that serve as the nexus for their communities.

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Customer Reviews

Any lover of courthouse architecture can gorge on it here, getting to know the remarkable career of James Riely Gordon, the master builder of Texas courthouses. Focusing on public buildings (and leaving houses and commercial structures for another day), the author traces the architect's steps

from grand courthouses in San Antonio, to small cities and town squares across Texas, into Mississippi, and finally to the Northeastern states after Gordon moved to NYC. The acclaimed Texas State Building at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the Arizona Territorial Capitol, and the Vicksburg City Hall are also covered. For armchair historians and academics, you get 20 pages of footnotes and 5 pages of bibliography in this first serious professional biography of one of the greatest architects to come out of Texas. For the casual reader, you can enjoy well over 100 black & white photographs and illustrations, and a special section of almost 50 color pictures that allow this to serve as a suitable-for-gifting, coffee-table book. But start to thumb thru looking at pictures and you'll get hooked! It's very nicely organized, so if you want to read only the chapter that includes your hometown favorite building, you can do that. Each chapter tells a story of its own. More likely you'll be swept along, reading just a little more and more until you know you can't stop. For even serious readers, descriptions like "fictile exterior program ... voissoeurs ... corbelling ... tourelles ... a frieze filling the spandrels" may challenge and expand your vocabulary. But not to worry. Skip any words or phrases you don't quite grasp and the exciting story rushes on without them.

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