

Midwestern Landscape Architecture, edited by William H. Tishler; Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000; 258 pages, \$37.50.

REVIEWED BY BOB SCARFO

After twenty-five years of teaching, I find that my students still seem to draw their ideas out of thin air. I believe in the value of intuition. I also believe in the need to substantiate and legitimize intuitively derived design ideas with artistic principles, social facts, and the recorded longevity of historical practices and products. The latter is what *Midwestern Landscape Architecture* provides as its greatest value. Bill Tishler and the other twelve authors are to be commended on their research and down-to-earth writing styles. This first compendium of midwestern landscape architectural history is an important resource. The articles and their notes are equally informative, discussing the practices of eleven men and two women designers that span nearly a century of dynamic regional growth.

In roughly chronological order, we are introduced to design principles and practices that shaped the heartland and beyond. From Noel Dorsey Vernon's accounts of Adolph Strauch to Miriam Rutz's sensitive summary of Genevieve Gillette, we are treated to the well known and not so well known. Articles about better-known designers include the Olmsteds—Frederick Law Olmsted (by Victoria Post Ranney) and Frederick Jr. and John Charles Olmsted (by William Tippens); Ossian Cole Simonds (by Julia Sniderman Bachrach); and Warren Manning (by Lance Neckar). Among the lesser known are Elbert Peets (by Arnold Alanen) and Wilhelm Miller (by Christopher Vernon).

In seeing *Midwestern Landscape Architecture* as a history text, many educators and young designers will miss its contribution as a design resource. The personal stories carry us beyond surface fame (and what most would assume to be almost magical design talent) to the long hours at kitchen tables (Jens Jensen), days of train travel overseeing geographically dispersed projects (Olmsteds, Manning, Kessler), failing health, failed projects, and death in obscurity. We are also treated to unique friendships and chance happenings. Strauch's missed train and chance finding of a local businessman's card resulted in his remaining in Cincinnati as a landscape gardener. The result was Spring Grove Cemetery.

As a design resource, *Midwestern Landscape Architecture* provides enduring examples of design decision making. We get the reasons sites were selected and how the potentials were identified and handled. Miller employed indigenous plants and landscape features to enhance the Midwest's horizontal character, while Gillette's story illuminates the need for design and planning processes applied to the political arena. She saved Tawas Point State Park, on Lake Huron, as a bird flyway by inviting the state representative and his son (an avid bird-watcher) to visit the site.

The authors of *Midwestern Landscape Architecture* have brought history to life.

Bob Scarfo has a Ph.D. in social geography, and a BLA and MLA in landscape architecture. He is an associate professor at Washington State University's Design Institute in Spokane.

