

*America's Castle: The Evolution of the Smithsonian Building and Its Institution, 1840-1878.* By Kenneth Hafertepe. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1984. Pp. xxiii, 180. Illustrations, notes, notes on sources, index. \$19.95.)

In this surprisingly engaging book architectural historian Kenneth Hafertepe sets out to explain how the early intellectual and organizational development of the Smithsonian Institution came to be embodied in its first home, the Smithsonian Building. Rather than the boring mixture of institutional and architectural history that readers might expect, the work is an absorbing tale, vividly told by its author.

As Hafertepe relates, the founding of the Smithsonian (1846) occurred amid heated debates over what exactly the institution should be and what sort of architecture would best suit its purposes. Motivated by a Byzantine blend of lofty ideals, political factionalism, blatant nepotism, and petty personal animosities, the disputes resolved themselves into a contest of wills between two men: Robert Dale Owen, Democratic congressman from New Harmony, Indiana, and Joseph Henry, the first secretary of the Smithsonian.

Owen saw the Smithsonian as a multifaceted institution combining a museum, an art gallery, a library, and research facilities; he believed that this manifold mission would be best expressed and served by a monumental, eight-towered building designed by James Renwick, Jr., in the Norman (Romanesque) style. Henry wanted only the research center, and he wanted it housed in very simple quarters. In his opinion Owen's and Renwick's "castle" was a scandalous waste of money. Henry did succeed in forcing Owen off the Smithsonian's Board of Regents in 1848 and Renwick off the construction project in 1852. However, by that time Owen had codified his views in the Smithsonian's enabling legislation, and he had mustered enough support for Renwick's design to insure its completion. In essence, Owen stuck Henry with a charter and a building, and the latter spent his thirty-two years as secretary (1846-1878) in a futile attempt to get rid of them both. The Smithsonian Institution as it is known today reflects Robert Dale Owen's vision, not Joseph Henry's.

On the whole, Hafertepe does an admirable job of elucidating the complexities of the Smithsonian's formative decades. Granted, the subject matter of his book seems highly esoteric at first glance. Nonetheless, *America's Castle* is heartily recommended to anyone with a specialized interest in museums or nineteenth century architecture or with a broader concern for the ways in which politics and personalities have helped to shape America's cultural institutions.

William Hammond Mathers Museum,  
Indiana University, Bloomington

Geoffrey W. Conrad