

---

## Book Reviews

*From Cottage to Bungalow: Houses and the Working Class in Metropolitan Chicago, 1869–1929.* By Joseph C. Bigott. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. Pp. xvi, 261. Illustrations, tables, figures, notes, index. \$40.00.)

Identifying Joseph C. Bigott's central theme is something of a challenge. At one moment the book is about the development of the balloon frame in Chicago-area residential construction; at another, it is a chronicle of the founding and development of Hammond, Indiana, and West Hammond, Illinois; and at yet another, it is a sociological study of Polish settlement in Chicago from the 1890s to the 1920s. The book is more a series of loosely related essays than it is a study with a single theme and a clearly stated thesis. It is as much a sociological study of selected ethnic groups, religions, and political issues as it is a study of cottages and bungalows.

Within the numerous themes Bigott takes up, he poses a number of challenges to traditional ways of understanding urban history. He makes it clear, for instance, that his focus is not on utopian visions of model towns, experimental communities, or high styles of architecture, subjects that typically interest architectural and urban historians. Rather, his emphasis is on common workers' houses built in Chicago and its suburbs during the period of industrial development and the emergence of corporate capitalism. He examines the material evidence of the built environment by analyzing workers' houses themselves and relevant written sources, photographs, maps, and historical drawings. He combines this material evidence with census materials, housing surveys, and fire insurance maps to illustrate issues of housing types, settlement patterns, and the establishment of religious and political institutions.

In a chapter on construction practices, Bigott challenges the idea (again, promoted by architectural historians) that a Chicago carpenter in 1833 invented the balloon frame—a system of light, wood framing that remains standard practice today. He argues instead that the history of home construction must be looked at in a broader perspective, that developments and innovations occurred over a long period of time and were the result of many different people and businesses. Invention took place incrementally as builders met the immediate needs of providing low-cost housing. Construction practices were transformed in the second half of the nineteenth century as factory-made products gradually replaced the handwork of local carpenters.

In a chapter on the settlement of Polish immigrants in Chicago and its suburbs Bigott contradicts most social reformers by emphasizing the danger of studying only the poorest neighborhoods where there was rampant crime, prostitution, and gambling. These neighborhoods surely existed, but the real story to Bigott is found in those

neighborhoods that did not deteriorate. A larger portion of Polish immigrants in fact moved out of older neighborhoods into newer outlying communities and parishes, where they gained access to comfortable accommodations in residential areas that offered a wide range of amenities. They obtained better housing often with multiple occupancy, which provided them with rental income, and they received assistance from the Catholic church, which provided the social and religious institutions that gave structure and optimism to their lives.

Of most interest to Indiana readers will be Bigott's history of the founding and development of Hammond, a city that provides a good study for the social and economic origins of nineteenth-century cottage housing for a working-class population. Bigott is especially interested in the way corporate power transformed home ownership in industrial communities like Hammond at the end of the nineteenth century. His study covers a time when northwest Indiana underwent a significant transformation from prairie and sand dunes to one of the largest industrial districts in the world. The growth of this industrial area within the context of rising corporate capitalism redefined the nature of working-class home ownership and construction practices.

JOHN W. STAMPER is associate professor in the School of Architecture, University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana.

*An Early Encounter with Tomorrow: Europeans, Chicago's Loop, and the World's Columbian Exposition.* By Arnold Lewis. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997. Pp. xv, 353. Illustrations, bibliography, index. Clothbound, \$34.95; paperbound, \$21.95.)

In the generation following the horrific fire of 1871, Chicago thrived as no other American city. The city, and especially its "Loop," became an urban laboratory for architecture, civil engineering, innovative technology, and commercial activity. In 1893, ambitious city leaders hosted the World's Columbian Exposition to commemorate the four hundredth anniversary of Columbus's first voyage to America, an event that really served more to celebrate the progress of the host city during its short sixty-year history.

It is no wonder, then, that Europeans were fascinated by this upstart city in the midwestern United States, and that thousands of them visited Chicago between 1880 and 1900. Many of these visitors were experienced travel writers or architectural critics, and their articles form the basis of this book. Arnold Lewis, professor emeritus of art history at the College of Wooster in Ohio, has utilized literally hundreds of published sources in English, French, and German to present a comprehensive, detailed, and well-written study on what European visitors saw when they came to Chicago and what they thought about the city and its people. It might have been nice to