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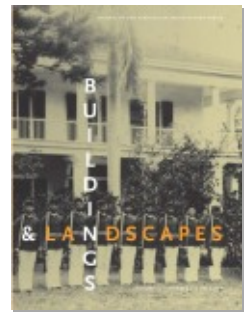
E 40°: An Interpretive Atlas (review)

Paul Kelsch

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“auto house.” Though function is inevitably the primary focus of the book, distinctive form is also noted, as when the different shapes of parapets are analyzed and illustrated for the subtype known as the “auto shed with parapet” (with examples mostly from the 1920s). Besides helping to organize this material, this analysis demonstrates the pride taken in these newfangled structures by their owners. Anyone interested in the history of the garage or any community interested in preserving what is left of their own garage structures would be advised to consult this book.

Guides, guidebooks, and surveys declare what we think is architecturally significant. A book on garages would have been unthinkable fifty years ago; as Pevsner himself said, “A bicycle shed is merely a building, Lincoln Cathedral is architecture.” The field is much more broad-minded and egalitarian than it used to be about what is considered worthy of attention (and preservation). At the same time, this very shift means we sometimes swim in data and are swamped with examples, an acute exasperation when producing a guidebook. Fortunately, as these books demonstrate, the answer to this dilemma does not have to be “either/or”; it can be “both/and.” No guidebook or survey will ever be complete and none will be definitive. Each generation must produce its own, reflecting the evolving concerns of the time and the ongoing state of research.

NOTES

1. Alan Day and Vaughan Hart, “The Architectural Guidebook: From Palladio to Pod,” *Architectural Research Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (2007): 151–58. Vaughan Hart and Peter Hicks, *Palladio's Rome* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press 2006).

2. Bridget Cherry, “Fifty Years of the Buildings of England,” *Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain Newsletter*, no. 73 (Summer 2001): 1–3. Bob Harbison, “Guiding Lights,” *Building Design* (July 29, 1988): 18–19. Alex Clifton-Taylor, “Architectural Touring with the Little Guides,” in *Concerning Architecture*, ed. John Summerson, 238–51 (London: Allen Lane, 1968).

3. These goals are presented in the Forewords to the volumes in the series. They were also announced in several SAH publications: Osmund Overby, “A Monumental Series,” *Society of Architectural Historians Newsletter* no. 4 (1994): 34–35; Nicholas Adams, “Architectural Touring American Style,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 52, no. 3 (September 1993): 265–66.

4. Reviews of various volumes in the BUS series, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 54, no. 4 (December 1995): 489–95.

5. Data on number of buildings in other jurisdictions was unavailable. Manhattan has a low number of buildings per unit of population because of the prevalence of apartment buildings. There is approximately one building for every twenty-eight people in Manhattan.

6. Mary Corbin Sies, Review of BUS volume on *Buildings of the District of Columbia*, in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 54, no. 4 (December 1995): 493.

Jack Williams

E 40°: An Interpretive Atlas

Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006.
248 pages, photographs, maps, plans, diagrams.
ISBN 978-0-8139-2524-0, \$30.00 PB

Review by Paul Kelsch

The enigmatic title of *E 40°* is a geographic reference: E 40° is the angle from true north of the Appalachian Mountains as they run from Alabama to Maine. Jack Williams uses the line of the mountains as a spatial and geographic armature to link studies of five sets of towns: courthouse towns of Alabama; river, wagon, and railroad towns of Alabama; soft-coal towns of West Virginia and Kentucky; hard-coal towns of Pennsylvania; and fishing and boat-building towns of Maine. Each set of towns is tied in its own way to the mountains and to the resources that each exploited

in its development and heyday. Each also has a distinct and concise plan, usually gridded, that results from the specific circumstances of geography, transportation, and resource extraction. It is this relationship between town plan and geographic and cultural circumstances that is the focus of the book.

The subtitle of the book, *An Interpretive Atlas*, while more mundane, is more informative of its actual content. Simply defined, an atlas is a bound volume of maps and diagrams, and *E 40°* is a map-based interpretation and analysis of the various sets of towns. Some of the maps are historical, including maps of early transportation routes, bird's-eye views of the towns, and Sanborn maps of streets and their surrounding buildings. Others were made for the purposes of this investigation, including figure-ground drawings, street plan diagrams, and composite maps of buildings, street grids, railroads, waterways, and topography. Though relatively conventional types of maps, they are beautiful and clear representations of the towns' structure, and they make Williams's assessment of the relationships between the geography of the Appalachians and the urban structure of the towns very believable. Indeed, the book is so graphically engaging that it is hard not to just flip through it, looking at the pictures, before reading the text. In doing so, many of the relationships between topography, resources, and transportation are evident from a preliminary visual survey.

The graphic interpretation is accompanied by well-written narrative accounts of the historical and geographic circumstances that led to the towns' settlement and prosperity. The narratives are further illustrated with historical photographs, showing the towns as places of social engagement and thriving commerce. Though it would be easy to romanticize life in them, the text and photographs acknowledge the hardships of life there: the oppressive racial segregation in Alabama, the drudgery of work in the mines, and the potential perils of working on the sea.

Though each town has its own history and

geography, commonalities between them led to distinct patterns of settlement within each geographic region. At the southern end of the Appalachians, the courthouse towns of Alabama were the social and cultural centers of each county. They were geographically centered in their respective counties and were equally spaced within a day's carriage ride, so that judges could easily negotiate the circuit of courts within their jurisdiction. The river, wagon, and railroad towns in Alabama were the urban centers in an agrarian landscape and were sited where topography allowed a meeting of farm products and transportation networks. In West Virginia and Kentucky, where the land is deeply dissected by rivers, the steep, narrow valleys constricted development of both railroads and towns in remote locations adjacent to bituminous coal seams. The figure-ground drawings of these towns appear as constellations spreading in seemingly random directions as they follow stream courses and small valleys. By contrast, the anthracite coal towns of central Pennsylvania formed with long, tight, rectangular grids, sandwiched between parallel ridges of the Appalachians and constrained on their ends by the adjacent coal mines, located within walking distance of the miners' homes. The coastal towns of Maine formed in response to the conditions of their harbors with streets radiating from the center or running perpendicular to the shoreline. They are the only townships in this study that formed without conspicuous grids of streets.

Understanding this relationship between geography, culture, and town form is at the center of Williams's argument that concise urban form is a fundamentally more sustainable means of settlement than today's sprawling suburban development. By this he means both ecological sustainability and cultural sustainability in reference to the towns' role as repositories of social interaction and cultural memory. As appealing as this argument is to one who also has a fondness for the Appalachian region and to small towns in general, it is problematic in ways that Williams

himself acknowledges. Most of these towns prospered in their day due to very exploitative relationships with the land that were fundamentally unsustainable. Consequently many of them no longer have viable economies and are dying, unless like the towns in Maine, they have managed to draw upon their physical charms to become tourist destinations. For all their visual appeal and concise urban form, they seem to be the antithesis of ecological sustainability. Without an economic base, they also seem to be culturally unsustainable, although as "cisterns of culture" (219) they do indeed carry a legacy of the lives of those who toiled in the mines, on the sea, and in the fields of the Appalachian region.

At various points in the text, Williams references the Civil War and especially the battle at Gettysburg where soldiers from Camden, Alabama and Camden, Maine fought each other at Little Round Top. This historical coincidence gives Williams a nice narrative thread, but it also points to another potential level of interpretation that lies unmined beneath the surface of his analysis. Williams notes that many of these towns commemorated their Civil War dead with a statue of a soldier with downturned eyes, often in a park or at a critical junction in the town's plan. In a figure-ground drawing, elements like Civil War statues often are rendered invisible, relegated to the "ground," which is depicted merely as blank paper. One wonders what other representations of cultural memory, what other social and cultural stories are told in these towns' urban form but are also muted by the particular maps collected and made for this atlas. Williams' histories of these towns and the historical images he includes tantalize with their narrative content, yet little of that is actually readable in the maps. For all of their clarity, the maps seem to silence much of the civic detail of these towns, detail that perhaps is as much a cistern of culture as are the town plans themselves. How these towns represent their particular history and geography within their civic structure might prove to be more informative, more translatable to other settle-

ments, and more culturally sustainable than their street plans. It makes one yearn for more information and more thorough interpretation of their form.

But that of course would mean a different book. Atlases usually cast their nets wide rather than deep, and *E 40°* follows in that tradition. By including as many examples as he does, Williams establishes a framework for comparison within each region and all along the Appalachian Mountains. In doing so, he brings little-known towns out of the shadows of the mountains and into the light of wider geographic and cultural discourse. Hopefully others will follow in his footsteps and pursue in more depth the issues that he introduces in this broad, interpretive atlas.

Anthony C. Wood

Preserving New York: Winning the Right to Protect a City's Landmarks

New York: Routledge, 2008.

394 pages, black and white illustrations, photos.

ISBN 0-415-95284-0, \$40.00 HB

Review by Jennifer Baughn

Let's face it: legal history is not exactly an action genre. So it was with some trepidation that I approached *Preserving New York: Winning the Right to Protect a City's Landmarks*. I was pleasantly surprised on all counts, however. First, unlike any legal history I've ever seen, it is a beautiful book: peppered with archival photos on hefty paper stock and with a layout and font meant to please the reader's eye. Second, it comes alive with the stories of hardy individuals and organizations who struggled to save the neighborhoods and buildings they loved, leading up to the 1965 passage of the New York Landmarks Law.

Over the course of twelve chapters and an epilogue, Anthony Wood debunks the popular myth that New Yorkers discovered