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ROBERT BRUEGMANN, *Holabird and Roche, Holabird and Root: An Illustrated Catalog of Works*, New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991, 3 vols., xx + 1,262 pp., 1,564 illus., 9 maps. \$750.00.

With all that has been written about architects, we know precious little about architectural firms, especially large firms. Historiographical biases have long favored the individual, and even when that person has headed a big, complex office, the focus tends to remain more singular than plural. When there is no one whom we consider an artistic virtuoso, interest in the firm is meager at best. The omission becomes particularly conspicuous for the twentieth century when large architectural and engineering firms have proliferated. Dismissing most of them, we remain quite ignorant of a phenomenon that has been a major force in shaping the urban environment as it exists today.

One may argue that since the products of large firms tend to be idiomatic in nature—to represent broad patterns in building more than unusual ones—concentrating on the output of a single office is not the best approach. Do we really need to know all the things done by a Shreve, Lamb and Harmon, an Abbott, Merkt and Company, or a Morgan, Walls and Clements? Discussing the output of a firm with hundreds, perhaps thousands, of designs to its credit may foster exploration of new realms, but none of them in adequate detail. Might not we learn more by addressing topical matters such as building type, technics, urban growth, or even architectural practice, in which the contribution of these firms is part of a bigger subject? However persuasive such assertions may sound, the fact remains that each sphere of inquiry, including the large firm itself, is important to pursue, for each yields insights not adequately gained by exploration of the others.

The large firm often is not the anonymous organization noted just for efficient business practices and quantity of output that characterize the stereotype. Many such offices have assumed significant roles in advancing both new forms and strategies for their execution. These practitioners have defined and redefined the very nature of numerous building types in which we spend much of our time—facilities for commerce, industry, health care, transportation, amusement, and learning, among others. D. H. Burnham and Company's contribution to the fast-changing requirements of the tall office building at the turn of the twentieth century is well known if not adequately studied. George Post and Sons assumed a similar prominence in the design of large, business-oriented hotels at about the same time. Likewise during the 1910s, Thomas Lamb's office was primarily responsible for creating the movie theater tailored to mass audiences. The architect's function in such cases entails more than the direct translation of client demands into three-dimensional form. Frequently the need is to develop solutions that depart from existing models, sometimes in small, albeit cumulatively consequential, ways, sometimes in dramatically different ones. The extent to which firms can recast the mold is well illustrated by

the efforts of Ketchum, Gina and Sharp and Gruen and Krumeck during the post-World War II era: the two firms were instrumental in convincing skeptical retailers that regional shopping complexes were most efficiently organized around a pedestrian mall. Such innovations have affected the expressive qualities of work no less than its utilitarian attributes. Gruen had as decisive an impact on delineating the character of the regional mall as Burnham had had on that of the grand urban department store half a century earlier.

Beyond innovation, the significance of large firms includes the capacity to reiterate paradigms on so large a scale that they become the general pattern. The size of the office is a crucial factor at both stages. A diversified staff of specialists can be essential to resolving complex problems, especially under pressing time and budgetary constraints. Size is no less important to the capacity of the firm to work on a number of projects concurrently. Without this infrastructure, the very evolution of numerous types as they have emerged during the twentieth century is barely conceivable. The cumulative impact of the design process on this scale is far greater than the sum of its individual parts; it has become a major component of urban form. For all these reasons, focusing on the process by which buildings are created in a large office—on the nature of the participants and the interaction between them—is vital to understanding the product. The purpose of such inquiry transcends specific building typologies to encompass the methods by which an array of different types, each with its own assortment of problems, can be successfully addressed by a single organization at any given time.

Undertaking research on a large firm presents its own formidable challenges, not the least of which is the general paucity of archival records. Even when drawings survive, they alone are not enough to decipher the workings of the office, client relationships, and other factors that make the project worthwhile. In those cases when the record is extensive, the sheer volume of material can be inhibiting. The documentary research required to gain a solid grasp of the material when many hundreds of commissions are involved can consume years of focused effort. Then there is the matter of an appropriate format for publication. The standard monograph, with its emphasis on individual works, is not particularly well suited to the task; and, irrespective of structure, much of the material culled in the course of research will have to be omitted due to the demands of both cost and readability.

Robert Bruegmann's three-volume opus on the Chicago firm known as Holabird and Roche and later as Holabird and Root—or H&R as he abbreviates it—breaks new ground in demonstrating the merits of undertaking detailed research on a large office and in offering a very useful way in which the subject can be presented. To complement his forthcoming monograph, Bruegmann has devised a reference work that is quite unlike anything else we have in print on an architectural practice—large or small. This is not a compendium of reproduced drawings, correspondence, or other archival matter, but a catalogue that is somewhat akin to the copious surveys published by the Historic Monuments Record in the United Kingdom. The books cover all of H&R's known work over a period of six decades, from its founding in 1880 to the eve of World War II—a whopping 1,530 entries. Chronologically arranged, each entry cites basic data (including original and subsequent building names,

address, dates, status, associated architects, client, and cost), a brief physical description, notes on the kinds and whereabouts of surviving drawings, and the project's "history." This latter component, an outline of contemporary sources published about the scheme, often includes lengthy excerpts from the sources themselves. For major works, the account can run several pages. Nearly seven hundred entries are illustrated, over fifty of them with six or more images that include presentation and working drawings as well as photographs of the buildings themselves. Construction shots, details, interior views, sections, and floor plans are abundant. All this material is meticulously indexed: entries can be located by state or country, city, street (for work in Chicago only), and building type as well as through a twenty-three-page general index. Bruegmann has succeeded in serving up a far greater piece of the record than would be possible through conventional means. Furthermore, with so much material presented here, the forthcoming monograph can be fully analytical in its focus, unencumbered by the need for the author to marshal large amounts of documentary evidence.

The question remains whether the effort and expense involved in producing such a tome is justified, particularly when what promises to be the definitive study of the firm is soon to follow. How many people will consult these volumes and how important will that probing be to their respective needs? The answers are not hard to find.

The contents of these volumes tell us much about H&R and aspects of architectural practice more generally than can be analyzed in a text, but not presented in so intricate or precise a way. Here one can get a very detailed profile of commissions—the many small ones that can help build a reputation and later sustain a business, the timing of the first major projects that transform a firm's prestige and position, the emergence of specialized areas of work, and the ebb and flow of business that reflects external, as well, perhaps, as internal conditions. Having a large percentage of unexecuted work is often associated with much smaller offices headed by someone of great artistic ability who is misunderstood, uninterested in business, or otherwise unable to resolve practical matters—a Bernard Maybeck or Louis Kahn, for example. What Bruegmann's study makes clear is that large, well-connected, and thoroughly businesslike firms such as H&R also can face problems in this realm. Between one-third and one-half of their commissions went unrealized, a percentage not far removed from that of Maybeck's practice. It might come as no surprise that slightly under half the projects undertaken during the 1930s were so fated; the percentage was markedly *higher*, however, during the previous decade, which in most other respects was the highpoint of the firm's long career.

Beginning in its initial decade, H&R received major commissions, many of which remain venerated works. A number of its office buildings, from the Tacoma (1886–1889) to the Palmolive (1927–1929), stand as key examples of their respective eras. Hotels such as the Stevens (1922–1927) comprise a scarcely less important aspect of the firm's contribution. Many other schemes can be added to this list, including the extensive campus of Fort Sheridan, Illinois (1890–1893), Soldier Field (1919–1926), the Century of Progress Exposition (1929–1933), and the capitol at Bismarck, North Dakota (1931–1934). The extent of such work and of information provided on it alone will make these books frequently consulted by scholars, prac-

tioners, preservationists, and others interested in the buildings. Furthermore, there is enough material on building types, well beyond just those with which the firm is commonly identified, that these books afford a significant reference for research in the commercial, institutional, and residential spheres. Likewise one can learn much about design in a given period, especially the 1920s when H&R did roughly a third of the work it was to produce during the timespan covered by the three volumes. Finally, students of urbanism and of the distinct forms that are endemic to cities in the United States can extract information from these pages to a degree seldom possible with retrospective publications on architecture. The content is really a catalogue of city parts, many of which are vital to comprehending the aggregate.

Holabird and Roche, *Holabird and Root* should stand as a model, for it provides one of the most useful and appealing formats yet created to present large amounts of source material. The merits of this approach are evident enough for similarly vast archival collections, but this also would be a very instructive means to document large firms for which the archival record is slim or nonexistent. Much benefit could be gained from having numerous volumes of this kind. Bruegmann deserves our thanks for showing the way as well for his dedication to what must often have seemed a thankless task. Garland, too, should be applauded for its commitment to the project and to producing it in such an elegant manner. The cost may preclude many individual purchases, but these books are essential for any library counting architecture among its important subject areas.

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