have been the architect of Farley church than Wren. And he might have been reminded that Wren died in 1723, so that if Robert Carter did receive a design by him he must have kept it stuffed away in a bottom drawer for five years at least—in fact Wren has not been shown to have made any designs during the last twelve years of his life—before he took the first step of which we have any record towards building a new church.

Far from being solid, Dr. Gowans’s attribution of King Carter’s church to Wren is flimsy indeed, though no flimsier than much else in this ill-considered publication. M AR C U S W H I F F E N

Arizona State University


The stated intention of this book is that it shall be “a text on the most important aspects of American colonial architecture” and that it shall “present drawings and verbal descriptions of all the buildings built in the Colonies by people who deserve the title of architect.” The author has organized this undertaking in three “books.” Book I deals with “Architects Who Sent Designs from England.” Book II deals with “Architects of the American Colonies: South.” Book III deals with “Architects of the American Colonies: North.” Each book contains a few biographical notes on the persons the author has chosen, and line drawings of the buildings which he attributes to them. The book is intended to serve the needs of the casual reader, the research-scholar, and the student.

Few readers in any of these categories are likely to be entirely satisfied with the contents of this volume. Apart from the general grouping into “books,” the “architects” are presented with little continuity, and hardly any attempt is made to account for the intricacies of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century American architectural history. The attributions are generally left suspended, without a strong overall analysis to give them meaning.

The illustrations consist of line drawings of exterior elevations, all drawn to the same scale (given at the beginning of the text but not included with the drawings). The presentation of religious, civic, and domestic buildings in this manner gives an indication of the comparative sizes, but the author does not indicate how the dimensions for these drawings were obtained. Plans and sections are not provided. In many of the drawings front and back (or north and south) views are combined, and no consistency is observed as to whether the front view is the left or right half of the drawing. The various textures of wood, brick, and stone are lost, and they are not always mentioned in the text.

The bibliography consists of twenty-six secondary sources, some listed by city and some by publisher. Only one of these published since 1960 is based firmly upon reliable documentary sources. Mr. Millar cites no articles. He includes Christ Church, Boston, Massachusetts (1723), among his attributions to Sir Christopher Wren (three “possible,” two “probable,” and two “certain”) as “certain.” If he had read Suzanne Foley’s account of the building of Christ Church (Old Time New England, 11, Jan.–Mar. 1961, 67–83), he might have come to a more conservative conclusion.

The result of basing speculative attributions on secondhand and out-of-date information is notable in the case of Robert Twelves. Mr. Millar attributes the Foster-Hutchinson House, Boston, Massachusetts (1688), Stoughton College, Cambridge, Massachusetts (1699), the William Clarke House, Boston, Massachusetts (1712), the MacPhaedris-Warner House, Portsmouth, New Hampshire (1716–1723), the Old State House, Boston, Massachusetts (1711–1713), and the Old South Meeting House, Boston, Massachusetts (1729), to Robert Twelves. The last building named is the only one for which Mr. Millar claims definite knowledge, the other attributions being “an educated speculation, based on stylistic similarities.” Mr. Millar says he does not know whether Twelves was young or old in 1730 and that “it is a pity that more is not known about him.”

The Old South Meeting House of 1729 appears to have first been given to Robert Twelves by Hamilton A. Hill in 1890 (History of the Old South Church, 1, 450, fn.1: “Robert Twelves is said to have been the builder”). This was repeated by Charles A. Place in 1923 (Old Time New England, xxiii, Jan. 1923, 114), by Hugh Morrison in 1952 (Early American Architecture, p. 433), and by Harold W. Rose in 1963 (Colonial Houses of Worship in America, p. 213). Mr. Millar’s bibliography includes only Morrison and Rose.

The Braintree, Massachusetts, Town Rec-
ords (Randolph, Mass., 1886), state that “Lieut. Robert Twelves, who erected the South Church at Boston died March 9th, 1696/7, Aged 77 or thereabout.” This refers to the first South Meeting House of 1669. Other records show Robert Twelves to have been active as a builder and military officer in Braintree from 1645 until his death. If there was a second Robert Twelves who built the second South Meeting House, reliable documentation about him has not been brought forward, certainly not by the authors on whom Mr. Millar depends. It appears at the moment that five buildings have been attributed to a man who died before they were built.

The dilemma about Robert Twelves has been given in some detail here in order to indicate the kind of difficulty that readers will encounter in attempting to use this book. A “text” on American colonial architecture needs to be more than a list of “architects” (as defined by the author) to whom buildings have been assigned with widely-varying degrees of plausibility. Some years ago there was perhaps a kind of comfortable assumption that the architecture of the American colonies was familiar and adequately understood. Serious students of the subject today know that this is not true. Increasing numbers of architectural historians are searching the early American records in order to clarify many puzzling problems of attributions and of relationships between the buildings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. We hope that before long a start can be made toward a biographical dictionary of American builders comparable in thoroughness to H. M. Colvin’s Biographical Dictionary of English Architects 1660–1840 (1954). Better information about the early builders should make possible new and more meaningful analyses of the patterns of colonial building along the Atlantic seaboard. Speculations about attributions that are yet to be substantiated are welcome in contexts where the reader feels assured that painstaking and responsible investigations form the basis for the accompanying positive statements. Mr. Millar does not give us that assurance. M A R I A N C. D O N N E L L Y

University of Oregon