the indigestion of a man treated to a banquet. For the feast of new information on and analysis of one of America's defining cities, we are grateful.

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Surveys

Christine Stevenson

Medicine and Magnificence: British Hospital and Asylum Architecture, 1600–1815

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Samuel Johnson observed in 1761 that “...Those antient nations who have given us the wisest models of government, and the brightest examples of patriotism... have yet left behind them no mention of alms-houses or hospitals, of places where age might repose, or sickness be relieved” (89). Pliny the Elder, for example, had urged the curative power of long country walks. The advent of purpose-built charitable hospitals in England in the seventeenth century, emerging from the private houses and monasteries that had long served the sick and needy, confirmed to many of Johnson's contemporaries that the ancients had finally been surpassed and that the modern, Christian era had come of age. For both symbolic and functional reasons, therefore, ancient architectural models were found unsustainable to hospital design. The use of antique columns and pediments gave hospitals a meaningless air of antiquity, and in the case of their use at the notorious Bedlam (St. Mary of Bethlehem), appeared to celebrate civilization's weakness rather than its strength. For functional reasons (the spread of diseases in wards), and no doubt also for practical ones, Thomas Jefferson in 1787 hoped that no hospitals would be built in Virginia, and that paupers would be boarded with charitable farmers and that in sickness they would be cared for by their neighbors. Designers of the first purpose-built hospitals for the state—Bruant in France and Wren, Hooke, and Hawksmoor in England—were therefore faced with the dilemma of expressing charity through an ornamental language whose rhetoric was ill-suited to it. It follows that they emphasized their projects' role in royal magnificence, and chose the palace type as its most natural expression. But almost from its inception, Greenwich hospital was out of step with the new, constitutional mood. Nicholas Hawksmoor observed to Lord Carlisle in 1734 that "I once thought it wou'd have been a publick Building but it will sink into a deformed Barrac[k]," while in 1736, according to James Boswell, Dr. Johnson "remarked that the structure of Greenwich hospital was too magnificent for a place of charity" (84, 253 n. 6).

Christine Stevenson's excellent study of British hospital design charts the questioning by patrons and physicians alike of the appropriateness of decoration and of hints of luxury in charitable works for the poor. Chapter one describes the hospital ideal; chapters two and three deal with Bedlam, Chelsea, and Greenwich; and chapter four with the limits of charitable display. Where Greenwich was decorated with Corinthian pilasters, later hospitals and asylums were ostentatious in their plainness and celebrated their utility through the self-conscious avoidance of the classical orders (such as the royal hospitals at Haslar, built between 1746 and 1762, and Plymouth, between 1757 and 1762). Stevenson presents the hospital as among the most potent building types for the Enlightenment's questioning of the validity of the orders as a necessary part of architecture. In pitching ornament against function, for example, the architect James Bevans had emphasized to a parliamentary committee investigating asylums that the shade of the immense Ionic portico at New Bethlehem in Southwark thrust some rooms into gloom (206).

In chapters five to seven, Stevenson analyzes the rise of other manifestations of ornament, or what might be termed "useful magnificence," in the form of spacious and well-ventilated wards, fireplaces, and good drainage. These innovations were, however, driven not by the architect but by the men and women of science, of whom Florence Nightingale is the most notable. In the eighth volume of the Encyclopédie published in 1765, Denis Diderot wrote that in hospital design the "architect must subordinate his art to the opinions of the physicians" (202). The architect's loss of control over salubrity parallels the impact on Renaissance architectural theory the rise of descriptive geometry, as outlined by Alberto Pérez-Gómez (Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science [Cambridge, Mass., 1983]). Indeed, this parallel is dramatically underlined in the case of the later-eighteenth-century hospitals designed in the form of a panopticon, or centralized wheel, a scheme born from the need for utility and control introduced by the arch-utilitarian Jeremy Bentham. While during the eighteenth century hospital design replaced the country house as the focus of charity and debates concerning its appropriate display, in the nineteenth it came to rival that most functional of buildings, the fort, as the purest expression of geometric regularity.

In the later chapters of Stevenson's book, hospitals emerge as a modern building type par excellence. Where previous historians have emphasized the similarity in appearance of the eighteenth-century hospital to the country house, Stevenson points to its novelty: their requirement of undifferentiated floor levels over that of a piano nobile, for example, and their need for high-ceilinged wards. Her study makes clear the link between medical advances and changes in hospital plan and form, and the growth in the idea that hospital and asylum architecture could itself promote health through internal galleries and external colonnades. Her early account of London's first Bedlam, with its grills for peering at the inmates, sets the scene for outlining these reforms. The conditions
at the Hôtel-Dieu in Paris, said to be the most dangerous place on earth and which Stevenson vividly describes, gave rise to the modern pavilion-ward plan first published in 1788. Michel Foucault identified this event as inaugurating the modern era of hospital design, but Stevenson effectively demonstrates that the seeds were sown much earlier in British hospitals.¹

Stevenson's narrative ends where Jeremy Taylor's study begins, namely with the Derbyshire General Infirmary, completed in Derby in 1810.² In so doing she invites comparisons. Whereas Taylor's book chooses as its organizing principle the developments in hospital types, Stevenson's focuses on the shifting meaning of architectural magnificence through developments in science and attitudes to ornament, the latter of which dominate the closing two chapters. Looking beyond the time frame of her study, she concludes that in the first two decades of the twentieth century, in the sterilized era of operating theaters and tiled walls, an architecture that sought to be quite so "ostentatiously utilitarian was no longer comfortable or natural" (236). She ends by implying that, ironically enough, the wheel had come full circle, and the orders were back in vogue. Yet this revival was destined to be short lived, for the dawning age of state welfare was less concerned with porticoes and pilasters than it was with scale, and consequently the orders finally came to lose their status as the principal emblems of magnificence.

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**Notes**


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**References**

William C. Allen


William C. Dickinson, Dean A. Herrin, and Donald R. Kennon, editors

*Montgomery C. Meigs and the Building of the Nation's Capital*


"[Meigs] has not designed the Capitol extension, nor any other work on which I have been engaged with him;—he is not an Architect,—his calling is that of a Military Engineer."

Thomas U. Walter (Allen, 273)

Thomas U. Walter wrote these words in 1857 about Montgomery C. Meigs, his partner in the construction of the U.S. Capitol dome. Walter and his contemporaries saw Meigs as an army engineer and Quartermaster General of the Union Army, but not as an architect. Later scholars cast Meigs as a meticulously organized bureaucrat and a scientifically minded engineer. But current, revisionist studies have questioned those assumptions. Meigs's work at the Washington Aqueduct, the Capitol Extension, the Pension Office, and the Cabin John Bridge are cited as evidence of his skills as a designer. His art patronage, watercolor paintings, and photographs argue that he was a multi-talented individual who deserves closer attention. Two new publications do just that: Montgomery C. Meigs and the Building of the Nation's Capital and History of the United States Capitol: A Chronicle of Design, Construction, and Politics consider his many contributions to the Capitol and to the country.

Meigs trained as an engineer at West Point and remained in military service to the end of his career. A reputation for scrupulous management and unbending integrity, earned in the building of a series of western military forts, brought him to the attention of Chief Army Engineer General Joseph G. Totten, who in 1852 reassigned Meigs to Washington, D.C. This put the young engineer in the proverbial right place at the right time.

Meigs left a wealth of primary documents. He wrote daily in his journal, read voraciously, kept scrapbooks, took photographs, and made watercolor drawings. Both of the books under review use the material in these archives. They also benefit greatly from the recently completed and long-overdue translation of Meigs's journals from Pitman shorthand.

Contemporaries described Meigs as energetic, proud, cantankerous, complicated, and quick tempered. He had a wide range of interests, great integrity, but little sense of humor. A good friend of both Secretary of War Jefferson Davis and, later, President Abraham Lincoln, Meigs benefited from their political clout in furthering his projects. His ability to maintain his reputation for honesty even within two of the most corrupt administrations in American history, James Buchanan's and Ulysses S. Grant's, demonstrated his strength of character. Meigs not only knew how to get things done, but he did it with admirable efficiency.

Architecture was Meigs's great love. His interests as engineer, military manager, artist, architect, patron, historian, scientist, and photographer were all served by the activity of building. Both of these books clearly demonstrate the manner in which he crossed nascent boundaries between architecture and engineering.

_Montgomery C. Meigs and the Building of the Nation's Capital_ stems from a 1996 National Building Museum symposium on the topic. The resulting anthology of essays is divided into three sections that treat various aspects of Meigs's architectural career. The first, "Meigs the Engineer," includes articles by Dean A. Herrin, Harry C. Ways, and Martin K. Gordon, and presents a bio-