Donahue-Wallace’s chapters on colonial urbanism, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century religious architecture, and neoclassicism are of particular interest. Chapters on colonial painting are interspersed with those on architecture. As she acknowledges, the separation of media is problematic in discussions of sixteenth-century works in which painting, sculpture, and architecture were interdependent. She resolves the problem in later chapters, treating churches and altar screens together, and discussing their roles in the evolution of the Churrigueresque style in Mexico, and their functions in mediating devotion and defining interior space. The author gives additional attention to architectural sculpture in her discussion of the sixteenth-century Andean planiform style (also known as mestizo baroque), which she suggests may have been “an entirely new [style] created according to the tastes of the living indigenous population” (122). She notes that the planiform style was found on European and criollo facades, but does not delve much deeper into the far-ranging questions about cultural exchange and the synthesis of sculptural vocabularies in the style.

Donahue-Wallace claims that the art and architecture of the Spanish colonies “participated in a constant and diverse cultural negotiation” (xxiii). While it is clear that the unique social and cultural conditions of the Spanish conquest and its aftermath gave rise to forms distinguished by their links to at least two different cultural traditions, and that entirely new spatial arrangements (e.g., the atrio and posa chapels) evolved to accommodate the requirements of religious conversion, the term negotiation raises problems. Throughout the text Donahue-Wallace admirably places building and paintings in the social and class networks of colonial New Spain and Peru, demonstrating the ways that colonial labor systems brought Europeans and Amerindians together in the formation of a mestizo culture. However, although the art, techniques, and building traditions of indigenous cultures clearly shaped Spanish Colonial architecture, it is doubtful that native artisans had much agency to negotiate.

At points one wishes for greater comparison of colonial art and its European models. A stronger discussion of precedents and more comparative plans and elevations would help readers understand Latin America’s colonial buildings in the context of Western architectural history, where they belong. Illustrations are abundant, yet the beautiful color plates featured at the center of the book are almost all of paintings, while buildings, and even paintings depicting cities, are shown in lesser-quality black-and-white photographs within the text. Translated excerpts from primary sources on architecture, urban planning, and colonial society from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries augment Donahue-Wallace’s narrative and are welcome in a field which urgently needs more high-quality English translations of original documents.

Donahue-Wallace’s book integrates recent research, much of it in Spanish, and draws on a number of classics, notably Harold E. Wethey’s Colonial Architecture and Sculpture in Peru (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), John McAndrew’s incomparable Open-Air Churches of Sixteenth-Century Mexico, and work by George Kubler and Martin Soria.1 Her work complements more recent treatments of architecture in Mexico and Peru by James Early and Valerie Fraser. Donahue-Wallace’s book is most closely comparable to Gauvin Alexander Bailey’s Art of Colonial Latin America, with which it might be paired productively on a syllabus.2 Each has its strengths. Bailey’s book includes Brazil, greater discussion of European precedents, and touches on the art of Iberian colonies outside of the Americas. Donahue-Wallace’s tighter focus and in-depth discussion of buildings in their social contexts make her book more immediately useful in the classroom in some respects. In its cogent explanation of the diverse influences and distinctive conditions that shaped colonial Spanish architecture, Art and Architecture of Viceregal Latin America, 1521–1821 joins a body of architectural historical scholarship that aims to tell the story of buildings outside of Europe, and reveals some of the disciplinary challenges and the opportunities in the endeavor.

Gail Fenske

The Skyscraper and the City: The Woolworth Building and the Making of Modern New York

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008, 400 pp., 12 color and 200 b&w illus. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 9780226241418

Only now has one of New York’s most famous skyscrapers received the book it deserves. The world’s tallest building when it opened in 1913, Cass Gilbert’s Woolworth Building instantly became a popular tourist sight and was nicknamed the Cathedral of Commerce. Gail Fenske rightly treats the building as more than an isolated structure, locating it in the history of architecture, and the social and cultural history of New York. She gives equal attention to the building as commercial venture, as architectural form, as engineering feat, and as social construction. She makes clear from the outset that there was a tension between the Gothic exterior of the building and the modern engineering required to build it. She further emphasizes “the vibrant urban culture of mass entertainment, mass spectatorship, and technological theatrics in which Woolworth and his skyscraper both competed and triumphed” (5). Commerce was literally inscribed in the structure, with its shops, arcade, and spectacular lighting. The building was also intended as a projection of Frank Woolworth’s ego and as a giant billboard for his corporate brand.

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Notes


Fenske divides her book into three parts. The first comprises a chapter on Woolworth's choice of the site on Broadway at City Hall Park and one on the competitive intentions for the building that led him to Cass Gilbert as its architect. Much of Woolworth's success emerged from his careful study of urban crowds, and he located his "five-and-ten-cent stores" only after observing a town's pedestrians for days. Like the stores, his skyscraper headquarters would be a highly visible site on the most heavily traveled street of New York, on what was then called the Ladies' Mile of Broadway. He exercised detailed aesthetic control over his spreading empire of stores, issuing precise specifications for the length of counters, the height and fonts for lettering, and the exact placement of signs. All ceilings had to be white, all awnings gold, and every visual enticement was based on what trial and error had proven most effective. If at first he rented commercial space, with success he built imposing Woolworth Buildings, notably the one at the center of Lancaster, Pennsylvania (1900), whose gold domed cupolas were lighted at night and visible for miles. On buying trips to Europe Woolworth also studied architecture, noting especially the great Parisian department stores and enthusing over the Eiffel Tower. He also studied the Beaux-Arts architecture of the expositions in Chicago (1893) and Buffalo (1901). Back in New York, he built a Renaissance chateau on Fifth Avenue (1901) and was inspired by the visual prominence that the Singer Sewing Corporation achieved with its Singer Tower (1908). Briefly the tallest building in New York, spectacular lighting made the Singer's shining tower float above a much darker Manhattan. Woolworth wanted an even grander billboard that would dazzle the nation, and chose for its location City Hall Park, ensuring an open space from which to view it. Not only was this site at the city's heart, it was also near the end of the Brooklyn Bridge and would become a stop on two different subway lines (238).

For financing, Woolworth partnered with the Irving Exchange National Bank, which not only invested in and managed the building, but became an anchor tenant as well. In engineering terms, 1910 was a good moment to build tall, because by then steel-beam construction and wind-bracing and fire-protection systems were all well understood. High-speed electric elevators that moved 600 feet or more per minute made upper floors more accessible than in many earlier skyscrapers. Woolworth admired Cass Gilbert's West Street Building (1905–7) and his New York Custom House (1899–1907), and he also had seen his Festival Hall at the St. Louis Louisiana Purchase Exposition (1904). But the two men moved in different circles, and Gilbert had the better social connections.

Chapters three through five trace Gilbert's architectural development before the Woolworth Building, explain his Beaux-Arts approach to the skyscraper as a form, and describe the actual construction. Many photographs and drawings illuminate how during 1910 and 1911 Woolworth's building grew in conception from a twenty-story project to "a low blocky building joined with a tower" (129) that ranged in height between 420 and 550 feet, and then doubled in size to become the world's tallest building. Because the greater height demanded more expensive foundations and stronger wind bracing, while adding many additional offices to be rented out, it increased the economic risk. Woolworth continued to acquire adjacent property in January 1911, even after foundation work began, making possible a final height of 792 feet, and requiring modification of the foundation work that had already begun. Fenske reproduces drawings that show the melding of sacred and secular elements into "a complex but fluid synthesis" (138) of late Gothic style. The building's ornamental flamboyance expressed Woolworth's commercial ambitions. During construction, Louis Horowitz, the builder, found that Woolworth wanted to micromanage details, requiring weekly reports on labor costs and even the price of second-hand rope, while Gilbert also constantly looked over his shoulder. Yet despite many disagreements, construction brought the three men closer together. The steel frame shot up in just nine months and then was covered with 7,500 tons of hand-made terracotta that gave it "a human scale, delicacy, and soaring, aerial lightness" (201). Gilbert had abandoned the dark medieval palette and viewed "terra cotta through a nineteenth-century Ruskinian Gothic lens," using lighter colors to strengthen the tower's vividness (209).

Chapters six and seven focus on the completed building, from the moment President Woodrow Wilson pushed a button in 1913 that turned on a spectacular lighting display and sparked a wireless telegraphic signal to the Eiffel Tower. Next came a banquet for 800 people, many of them transported to the event on special trains. The speakers extolled Woolworth as a rags-to-riches exemplar of capitalism and the building as an apt visualization of his rise. The structure was promoted as a "city within a city," with its own fire-fighting apparatus, electrical generating system, and heating and ventilation throughout. The public entered a cruciform-plan lobby-arcade (based on the Mausoleum of Galla Placida in Ravenna) whose mosaics suggested cosmopolitan opulence. Any visitor could visit the German Rathskeller restaurant, basement swimming pool, health club, and barbershop, or stroll through the eighteen ground-floor shops and the Irving National Bank. A select few could enjoy the downtown club in the upper stories, the gymnasium, the running track on the roof, and the observatory and palm garden at the top. Woolworth's Empire-style offices on the twenty-fourth floor included Bonaparte memorabilia, consciously used to promote a Napoleonic corporate culture. Woolworth also had a lavishly decorated personal apartment. The structure as a whole became not only a workplace but "a fantasy setting for a European-inspired, cosmopolitan and high-style form of consumption" (9). On every floor, Gilbert fashioned elegant halls, portals, and interiors that made its luxury so desirable that, despite a glut of office space in New York, within two years the building was turning a profit and soon after was fully occupied. As the Woolworth became world famous, many adopted its advertising slogan, the Cathedral of Commerce. Although Gilbert repeatedly emphasized that the building
was secular in inspiration, he also intended it to be inspirational (269). The Gothic style and Christian imagery "cast the F. W. Woolworth Company as an ethical and benign capitalist enterprise," one that seemed to concentrate "the best of Western civilization" in one space (270).

Once completed, different publics invested the Woolworth Building with meanings. Frank Woolworth trademarked Gilbert's design, but as a symbol it ultimately escaped his control. Some applauded the building as public architecture appropriate to the City Hall location. Others employed the rhetoric of the technological sublime and offered it as proof of America’s emergence as a world power. The public could see its floodlit tower from fifty miles away, and in 1916 alone 100,000 people paid fifty cents each to visit its fifty-fourth floor observation deck. John Marin painted the building, Alfred Stieglitz photographed it, and it became identified with modernity and "American-ism" (290).

Fenske concludes with a discussion of the Woolworth as a signature building on the New York skyline, before it was eclipsed in height and before champions of the International Style attacked the Gothic skyscraper as a contradiction in terms. The building’s public image since about 1925 thereby remains a topic for future research. But otherwise this beautifully illustrated volume, the result of decades of research, is definitive. All the relevant archives and collections have been consulted and digested into readable prose, framed by a broad understanding of the secondary literature. Fenske has created a highly satisfying fusion of architecture and cultural history that deserves the widest readership.

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Anthony Geraghty
The Architectural Drawings of Sir Christopher Wren at All Souls College, Oxford: A Complete Catalogue
Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2007, 296 pages, 487 color illus. $150.00 (cloth), ISBN 9780754640714

Over the last ten years, books on Sir Christopher Wren, both scholarly and popular in nature, have appeared on a regular basis. Engaging his architecture to varying degrees, they come at the end of a long line of publications that began in 1823. ¹ The 1998 works by James Chambers (a "pocket biography" for the general audience) and by Margaret Whinney (her 1971 book reissued as part of a World of Art series)² were followed in quick succession by the lengthy "life" treatments of Adrian Tinniswood, His Invention So Fertile: A Life of Christopher Wren (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001), and Lisa Jardine, On a Grander Scale: The Outstanding Life of Sir Christopher Wren (New York: Harper Collins, 2002). These two authors depend heavily on specialized scholarly studies on Wren’s architecture and science, but also reexamine primary source documents and drawings. Also worth noting is the short 2007 publication of Kerry Downes, written originally for the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, part of the Very Interesting People series of Oxford University Press.³ Downes’s contribution is the latest testament to the existence of a large non-specialist audience fascinated with Wren. It reminds us that important architectural historians can and should have a critical role in engaging the popular audience directly, and not just conducting the foundational scholarship incorporated into biographical syntheses by non-specialists.

In contrast to this series of biographies stands this tightly focused study of the drawings produced by Wren and his office, a collection that has been critical to all research into the architect’s work. The Architectural Drawings of Sir Christopher Wren at All Souls College, Oxford: A Complete Catalogue is a welcome and long-needed addition to the Wren literature, directly engaging us with almost 500 drawings, mostly orthogonal in nature, produced by Wren and his draftsmen at the King’s Works from the early 1660s to 1722. They depict the royal buildings commissioned from Wren as Surveyor General, as well as the public and private commissions he received while employed in other capacities. The drawings have always been available for direct study, thanks to the Codrington Library at All Souls College and its excellent staff. In addition, almost all were reproduced as high quality black-and-white plates in the twenty volumes of The Wren Society that appeared from 1924 to 1943. In neither case, however, has it been possible to easily browse the entire All Souls collection.

Thanks to Anthony Geraghty’s handsome volume it is now possible to do so. Reproduced in color and in a range of sizes, all of the drawings are quite readable. Many readers will be delighted to see familiar images awash in gray, red, blue, and yellow. But in addition to the high-quality reproductions, of equal if not greater importance for our understanding is the clear and logical arrangement of the drawings and the informative text that accompanies them.

The book is divided into seven sections according to building type (the universities, St. Paul’s Cathedral, parish churches, royal palaces, town and country houses, designs in Westminster, and miscellany). Within each section the projects are arranged chronologically, as are the drawings associated with each one. Wren's major works, or those represented by a large number of drawings, are provided with introductory texts discussing the chronology of the drawings, the changes in the design over time, and new conclusions based on the evidence of the drawn lines themselves. For example, a drawing of base moldings in Wren's hand (no. 6) is correlated for the first time to a wooden model of Pembroke College Chapel, Cambridge, thus firmly documenting his authorship of that design. Among the over seventy drawings of Wren’s City churches, only two (St. Benet, Thames Street, nos. 136–37) can be firmly attributed to Robert Hooke, thus challenging the recent assertion that he had a significant design role in many of those projects. About forty sheets in the hands of Wren and his