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# THE EDITOR'S PAGE

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THE PEOPLE of Winona County gave historic preservation in Minnesota a significant boost on December 7 when they approved a \$1,100,000 bond issue to preserve and renovate their eighty-three-year-old courthouse. The vote was 5,523 to 3,587 — a majority of 60.6 per cent. This county-wide referendum ended a thirteen-year siege on the embattled edifice. Arrayed against preservation were the county board of commissioners and strong elements of the Winona business community. Only a few individuals, at least at first, were willing to organize for preservation. As the courthouse survived each successive crisis, however, preservationists multiplied and became increasingly vocal. Gradually, support galvanized under the banner of the Committee for a Sensible Courthouse Plan, now known as the Winona County Progress and Preservation Association. The association's president is Edwin Maus, a thirty-six-year-old piano tuner and farmer from Minnesota City.

When the first proposal to scrap the courthouse surfaced in the late 1950s, a few Winonans and a handful of architects around the state voiced opposition. In spite of this and other resistance, the county board consistently favored demolition of the old structure and its replacement with a new building. Three times in thirteen years, Winona County voters rejected bond issues recommended by the county commissioners who wanted to pay for a new courthouse by increasing the mill-rate levy for the county building fund.

The county board brushed aside proposals by the Committee for a Sensible Courthouse Plan to adapt the interior to current needs. The committee therefore took its case to the people and secured many signatures on a petition. Students from three colleges in the city joined the campaign, and a phonograph record was even issued to help build momentum to save the courthouse. The authority of the commissioners to raze the old building and erect a new one was challenged in

a taxpayers' suit, but it failed. The secretary of the interior added the courthouse to the *National Register of Historic Places*. The Minnesota Historical Society then recommended to the 1971 state legislature that the courthouse be designated a state historic site and placed on the "protected" list. The legislature held a hearing, listened to both sides, and then compromised by giving the Winona landmark state designation without protected status. The decision on the future of the courthouse was left to Winona County.

Eventually, the commissioners agreed to finance a study to determine what would be best for the building. The architects who conducted the study in July, 1971, recommended a \$1,600,000 program for complete renovation, including elevators, air conditioning, sandblasting, and tuck pointing. The county commissioners unanimously agreed to put to a vote of the people the question of complete renovation and its cost. A total of \$1,100,000 would come from a bond issue, the remaining \$500,000 from the county building fund.

What is the significance of the Winona County referendum? It would seem to be considerable, but one would be naive to read in it a total vote for the aesthetic, historical, and architectural significance of a public landmark. A majority of the voters obviously linked history and economy together. The rescue of a sturdy old building of quality simply seemed a far better bargain than putting up a new structure.

At the same time, those interested in salvaging the best of our visual landscape can draw encouragement from the referendum in several ways: (1) it signals a widespread feeling in favor of the foremost public building in Winona County; (2) it vindicates the wisdom of "let the people decide" when citizens and public officials are at odds over a preservation or environmental issue; (3) it dramatizes the fact that young people as well as older citizens relate to significant old buildings; (4) it shows the need to organize and en-

gage in the political process; and (5) it illustrates a reversal of a widespread American tendency to discard its architectural treasures without adequate consideration. Too often the new is appealing just because it is new or the subject of a "main street" promotion. Once the new is built, the exchange for the old often turns out to be a net loss in terms of quality, but by then it is too late.

The Winona County Courthouse drama shows unmistakably that two elements must be brought into play to conserve our finest public buildings: (1) a contemporary, or adaptive, use must be found to justify

the perpetuation of such a building, and (2) the force of government is essential to preserve significant public structures. Making them into museums is not the answer. The best of Minnesota's courthouse architecture, in Winona, Washington, and other counties (the picturesque Dodge County Courthouse in Mantorville, for example), deserves to be preserved. The majority of the people who live in Winona County obviously agree. They are to be congratulated for giving their distinguished courthouse a new lease on life.

RUSSELL W. FRIDLEY, *Director*

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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*The First American: A Story of North American Archaeology.* By C. W. Ceram.

(New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971. xxi, 357 p. Illustrations. \$9.95.)

C. W. CERAM, author of the popular *Gods, Graves, and Scholars*, has turned his pen and literary skills to North America in this new work. Following his established approach, he concentrates on the early years of North American archaeology and on the individuals who figured significantly in its development. The book, therefore, is not a synthesis of American Indian culture history, and readers who want an encyclopedic compilation of North American prehistory will need to turn to Gordon R. Willey's *An Introduction to American Archaeology: North and Middle America* (vol. 1).

Ceram concerns himself with the discoveries of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which laid the groundwork for contemporary archaeological research. The southwestern United States cultures, the burial and temple mounds of the eastern states, and the beginnings of Early Man (or Paleo-Indian finds) form the archaeological backbone of the book. Included are informative descriptions of archaeologists at work: Thomas Jefferson, Adolph Bandler, A. V. Kidder, Ephraim Squier, Earl Morris, and many others. Ceram presents the men and their finds in the context of the intellectual excitement and thrill of discovery which characterize the early days of any discipline.

Interspersed throughout the text are chapters on the origins and development of technical aids to archaeology. Thus there is a section describing the concept of stratigraphy and another on radiocarbon dating and its discoverer, Willard F. Libby. Andrew Douglass and tree-ring dating are also discussed. Equally interesting are short chapters on

theories about such enigmas as Atlantis and Mu, the Cardiff Giant hoax, and the origins of maize. A chapter on archaeology as anthropology—a fundamental characteristic of North American archaeology—is presented to underscore the contrast with the Old World's primarily prehistoric archaeology.

Readers will find the book well written and copiously illustrated. They will note a few errors of fact, too, such as the contradictory dates given for the Hopewell culture in Chapter 16, but such errors are probably inevitable in a work of this sort. Some readers may also be disturbed by the author's frequent use of italic print to emphasize a point that the author finds incredible. Apparently amazed that the Americans Indians were capable of building an earthen pyramid (such as the one at Cahokia, Illinois) which stands larger than an Egyptian pyramid, Ceram italicizes the information because he thinks the reader will not believe it either.

Ceram's account of North American archaeology in its period of infancy is fascinating. I hope that readers will realize that North American archaeology is now entering a state of maturity and that a Ceram-style book written fifty years from now about the present period of archaeological research will show a completely different approach and orientation. The problem-directed research of today, with its concern for the analysis of culture process and anthropological theory, will tell a very different story. The discerning reader will understand, however, that the maturation apparent in archaeology today is present only because the pioneering work described by Ceram laid the necessary foundations.

*Reviewed by* ELDEN JOHNSON, *professor of anthropology at the University of Minnesota and state archaeologist.*



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