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ARCHIBALD G. RIGG TELLS SPOKANE, WASH., ARCHITECTURAL CLUB THAT THE NAME IS A MISNOMER

Declaring that America has a little of everything architecturally—some good, some indifferent and mostly bad; that the modern sky-scraper is an architectural monstrosity, and that fashions necessarily must perish while styles endure. Archibald G. Rigg discussed the "American Style of Architecture" at a meeting of the Spokane Architectural Club in the Hutton building, Spokane, Wash., the evening of June 5th. He said in part:

"The term 'American style' is in itself a misnomer. The word 'American,' as applied to a distinctive style of a distinctive people, cannot be used. The American nation as a composite and amalgamated whole as yet is not a reality. It is true that we have developed some characteristics which might be termed national, but until there is a more complete fusion of the diverse traits which characterize us we cannot use the word 'American' in an absolute sense.

"England has an architecture—the historic growth of an established nation.

So it may be said of France, Italy and other countries. It is true that America, though infantile in history, has a little of everything architecturally—some good, some indifferent and mostly bad.

"Among the first examples of architecture in America are specimens of French architecture found in Louisiana and Florida. In Florida we find examples of Spanish architecture. But so characteristic are these styles of the people who planned them that they can hardly be defined as American architecture.

"Further north in New York, Maryland and the Carolinas, the Dutch and the Swedes built replicas of their national architecture, modified somewhat by the exigencies of climate and life in this country. Accordingly these specimens took on the aspect of a new country.

"Aside from these few examples of architecture in the colonial period, the main development has been along English lines, particularly up to the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

"This English Georgian which had its beginning in the Renaissance brought our architects in touch with the classical principles and style which they developed into the colonial, or American Renaissance. The world at large was looking to America for an original and unique development in architecture, forgetting that the Americans did not comprise a separate and distinct nation, but rather a collection of Europeans with European traits.

"Taking the fundamental features of the Renaissance, coming as they did to us through the clearing house of English Georgian, we so infested them with a local feeling through modifying them to the needs of the time, place and materials that they became essentially American and the probabilities are that if we had followed up this type instead of rambling into other architectural styles we would today have had a typical American style. In fact, our domestic colonial stands unique in its adaptation of Renaissance motive to the medium of wood which proved itself suitable to the development of the classical details, gaining thereby a universal warmth and personality.

"The best examples of colonial houses are found today in Annapolis, while the city hall of New York and Independence hall in Philadelphia, in more durable material, remain to us as monuments of that period. While we were still working in colonial the discoveries of Stuart and Renett among the architectural remains of Athens had a very great influence in changing the types of building in this as well as in other countries from the Renaissance to its real prototype, the Greek. Toward the end of the 18th century the country became dotted with Greek adaptations which became

the official style at least and remained so until about 1860.

"The treasury, patent office and other public buildings were built in one or the other of its orders. A notable example of this style is seen in the University of Virginia. For that kind of building the Greek orders lent themselves admirably, but when our designers tried to apply these motives to domestic architecture they were found unsuitable, causing the style to perish, except where used for public buildings, which helped familiarize the public with a harmonious assemblage of architectural forms.

"The latest and most impressive work of the Greek revival was the addition of the wings to the capitol at Washington, without dispute the most impressive building in this country. In trying to imitate these monuments in the smaller towns with cheaper materials all refinement and significance were lost. It was on these conditions the gothic revival depended.

"This period commenced with the erection of Trinity church in New York, completed in 1846. This edifice probably was the first church of any size built in this country by a schooled architect. Following the completion of Trinity there was created an immediate demand for this style of work for churches.

"At about this time the discoveries by Ruskin of examples of medieval building in the north of Italy awakened interest among the younger architects of England. About 1860 the Victorian Gothic made its appearance in this country. When properly and conservatively handled by the trained architect the results were excellent, but novices dabbling with the intricacies of this style soon discouraged builders and architects

returned to the dignified and simple colonial building.

"The time was now ripe for the importation of the next British fad, Queen Anne, including the Jacoban and Georgian styles. In Queen Anne architecture was suggested historic home atmosphere, though it was much disguised with American nonsense. Still it appealed to the better educated people without their knowing of the infractions. They thought Queen architecture merely another clever fashion. But as practiced now this style is used by the speculative builder only, the better classes knowing that the secret of successful architecture does not lie in inventions. This bizarre jumble led to a reaction toward the colonial, which, however, was interrupted by H. H. Richardson with his original adaptations of Romanesque. His first success was Trinity church, Boston, completed in 1877.

"This style commended itself to the younger architects through the lack of elaboration. On the other hand the drawback of this style for modern purposes was its vagueness. Richardson made no effort to correct this, exaggerating it beyond reason. However, those who did not copy his extravagance, but sought the sources of his designs, produced some very creditable work. This style promised to become a real living style, but this promise was shattered.

The Romanesque revival did not long survive the revivalist.

"From what we have noted of the different styles in America from the earliest times, it is plain they have been adaptations of foreign styles. Into what chaos in America have they led us? The result of the best adaptation is the gradual formation of a national style of architecture. Style is never evolved by architectural invention, for invention belongs to science.

"Of the many things entering into the different architectural styles, the influence of individuals has counted least. One generation of builders has taken up the work where its predecessor stopped. The fashions of architecture perish; style endures.

"Of course, we have today one development in building absolutely peculiar to America, but whether it can be called real architecture or whether we wish it labeled 'The American Style,' is open to argument. I refer to the commercial buildings best exemplified in the sky-scrapers. Are they a necessity? Can buildings of 20 or more stories be legitimately placed on a street laid out for three or four story blocks? Is there no limit but that of self-interest to which we may look?

"To the European cities that years ago limited the height of secular structures our sky-scrapers are architectural monstrosities."