

Public Abstract

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ORDINARY SINGLE-FAMILY HOUSES IN THE UNITED STATES:  
THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS AND  
THE ARCHITECTS SMALL HOUSE SERVICE BUREAU

The development of the design process for ordinary single-family houses has followed a uniquely American pattern. As early as the beginning of the eighteenth century, pattern books appeared in the colonies and were used as sources for the latest design ideas. Local builders and carpenters adapted these patterns to new buildings, especially single-family houses. Alongside builders, some gentlemen fashioned themselves into amateur architects from reading the variety of architectural pattern books available in the colonies. Trained architects first entered the picture in the United States with Benjamin Henry Latrobe, a British architect. An emphasis on monumental design, begun by Latrobe, has continued to characterize much of the architecture profession since its inception in the United States.

The purpose of this study is to discover why architects in the United States are not involved in the design of ordinary single-family houses for the majority of people and how it got to be this way. Specifically, primary documents of the American Institute of Architects and the Architects Small House Service Bureau were used to identify the challenges architects faced in the early twentieth century with regard to single-family house design.

Architects are continuously looking for ways to expand their market share for design in the United States—often in competition with related professions. Furthermore, architects are trained to provide beauty, innovation, and function in buildings and people would theoretically benefit from their services. They are also charged with representing the client's concerns in the design and building process.