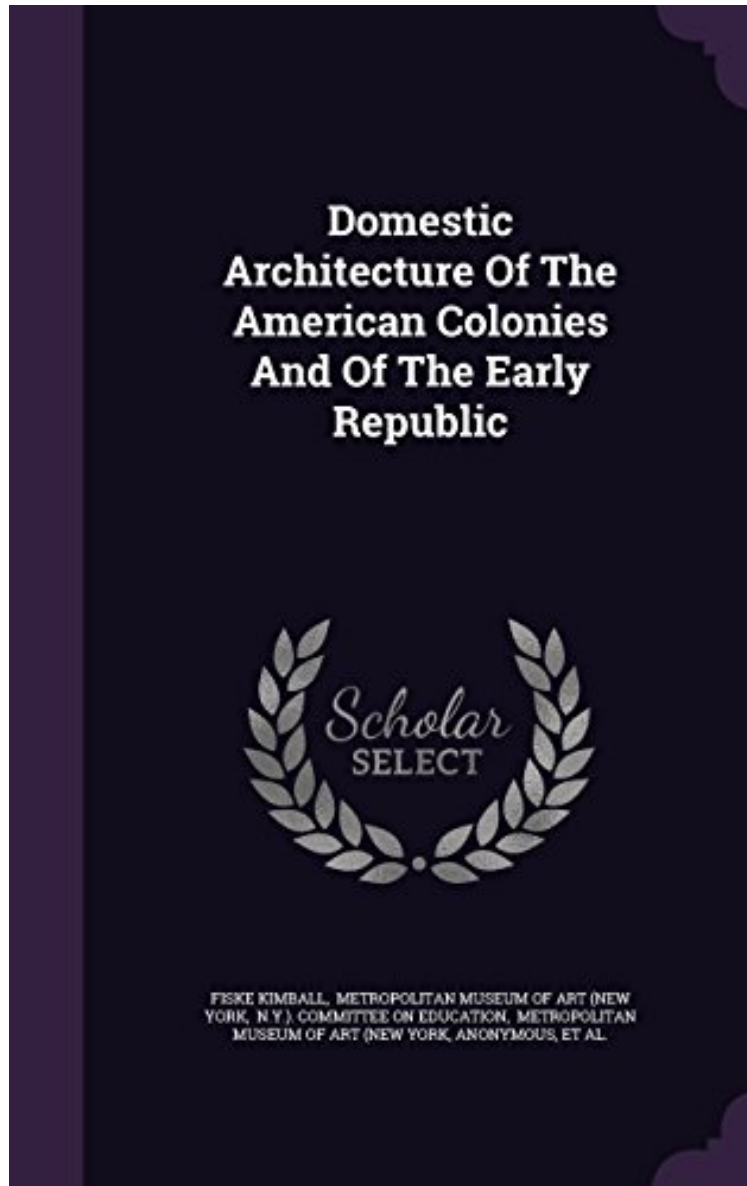


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Domestic Architecture Of The American Colonies And Of The Early Republic

Fiske Kimball

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It did a very good job of setting the stage for frontier development and de-constructed many pre-conception that I had about early housing. Like most Americans when I envision our forefathers pushing inward from the coast and out past the Appalachian Mountains I pictured hardy settlers building log cabins. It seems given archeological, textual, and building evidence that this was not the case. Structures did tend to be single room houses but they tended to take advantage of hill sides, and brush structures not to dissimilar from the primitive shelters called wig-wams used by soldiers in the field during the American Revolution. This makes sense when you remember that all of those settlers came from somewhere and brought hose memories, familiarities, and norms with them.The rest of the book does a nice job of discussing domestic architecture all along the coast and to a degree into the old Northwest. The text focuses though on those structures which are still available to see and because of this much of the common housing is lost. The focus of 70% of the text is on exceptional buildings, trend setters, and up-scale examples of design art. There are reasons for this and the author alludes to this occasionally in the text.Each section is broken down into elements dealing with walls, floor plans, roofs and ceilings, stairs, windows, chimneys etc. The focal point is more on the history of the design from an academic point of view than on a user's point of view. This tends to give us a very top down view and disassociates use and living from design and art.This approach is great if you want to study say ceiling ornamentation and be able to walk into a building or a room and guess its era and influence, but it does little to decipher the transition from generic rooms/parlors to purpose built and adorned rooms. The era in question, particularly 1750-1830 represented a significant change in how people organized their lives and how they viewed things. In America this corresponded to Revolutionary underpinnings in Ancient Rome, the spirit of a Republic and the establishment of an upper class based on wealth rather than nobility. The later part of this era is of course the very end of the true Enlightenment Era of man and nature before the Industrial Revolution changes not just how we work but how and what we buy. Soon enough all Americans will be able to have dining rooms, and than we see dining rooms that look very similar due to mass production of style books, and the very furnishings, and decorations such as curtains, windows, wall paper, and etc. The great homogenization occurs.In final reflection this book is a good attempt to relate the transitions and influences which occurred in domestic houses though mostly in the houses of the well to do. I felt that it bogged down in the details. I am not sure if it is possible to write otherwise but I suspect that it is. There are several other books of a similar aspect that I am reading which do a better job of presenting the facts, the trends, and even the details without bogging me down. Given that this book is a compilation of lectures it perhaps suffers as a book. Much of the material is well illustrated in black and white plans and photos.5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. A well-focused bookBy D. E. ThomasBooks on historic architecture tend to devote too little space to the homes of ordinary people. This book covers dwellings from the huts of the first colonists to governors' mansions, from rural plantation houses to Colonnade Row in Boston.The profusion of illustrations include early and modern drawings, photographs, engravings, and lithographs. They depict floor plans, elevations, interiors, exteriors, and details.What I found particularly useful is the way the author develops the historical changes in materials, style, and philosophy. His research is thorough but not at all dry. For example, he quotes William Hubbard who, before 1682, wrote of the New Haven Colony: "They laid out too much...in building fine and stately houses, wherein they at first outdid the rest of the country."This book will correct misunderstandings and oversimplifications about Colonial domestic architecture.

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About the AuthorThe Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City needs no introduction. It is the preeminent art

museum in the Americas and rivaled by few European museums. In fact, for sheer quality and breadth of collection, it has no equal.