

AFTER THE FIRE

The Influence of H. H. Richardson on the Rebuilding of Seattle, 1889-1894

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On October 19, 1889, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reported an interview with an unidentified Seattle architect who presented a general description of the designs for the city's new buildings under construction following the Great Fire of June 6, 1889. Although Seattle papers regularly discussed the new structures, their descriptions were usually limited to building name, architect, size, height, materials, and construction progress. The October 19 report was a marked departure; titled "Beauty in Bricks," it offered rare insight into the thinking of Seattle's post-fire designers because it featured longer discussion by one of them of the genesis of Seattle's new business blocks:

Seattle's new buildings are rising on every hand, and the public is for the first time getting an idea of the appearance of the exteriors.... It is a fact, however, that in rebuilding, Seattle businessmen have looked more toward making strong buildings than fancy, and have preferred to put their money into extra stories rather than into a profusion of ornament.... Almost all of the buildings are of the Romanesque style of architecture, while the heavy, ponderous, unsightly, and inflammable cornice has disappeared entirely.... Seattle's architects have followed the example of Mr. Richardson, the great architect of America, in his modifications of the Romanesque style and have applied it faithfully to the requirements of the present time.

The speaker was probably Elmer Fisher, the most prolific of Seattle's post-fire architects. At that time, few of the new buildings had been completed; indeed, most would reach only to the second floor before inclement weather beginning the following month halted construction until the following spring. Many of the larger blocks—the Pioneer Building, the Burke Building, and the New York Building, for example—had not even progressed beyond their foundations and would not see substantial construction until 1890. Still, the *Post-Intelligencer* was preparing readers for what they would see as the new buildings reached completion. The new city would not look like the one that had been destroyed.

As Fisher suggested, in place of the ornamented High Victorian buildings that had burned, Seattle architects were designing brick and stone structures in the Romanesque Revival style, a mode of design that had emerged following the death of leading American architect Henry Hobson Richardson in April 1886. But the buildings constructed in Seattle should not be understood simply as copies of Richardson's work. The influence of Richardson was critical, but other factors, particularly the city's post-fire building ordinance and the individual backgrounds of Seattle architects, were key issues to the form they gave Seattle's post-fire buildings—many of which can still be seen today in the Pioneer Square Historic District.

When Seattle citizens met on the morning of June 7, 1889, the focus of their discussion was on rebuilding the destroyed downtown district and preventing another catastrophe like the devastating fire of the previous day. On June 8 the *Post-Intelligencer* reported on page one, "The people of Seattle have decided to rebuild the city in brick and stone. The decision was reached quickly and almost unanimously...." The citizens also endorsed widening and straightening selected streets, raising the grades and creating a permanent, paid fire department. Although this meeting was "unofficial," over the following weeks and months Seattle's city government approved ordinances needed to make the citizens' recommendations have the force of law. Most importantly for the future form of the city, a building ordinance said to be based on those of Kansas City and San Francisco was approved by the city council on July 1, 1889.

The full text of the 70 sections of the new building code appeared in the *Post-Intelligencer* four days later. Within the city's commercial district (identified as the "fire zone") the city now required that walls be constructed of masonry and were to be a minimum of 12 inches thick, but the lower walls of tall buildings increased in thickness depending on height. Interior framing was required to be heavy timbers, not the light wood framing of earlier construction that had burned so easily in the fire. Larger buildings were required to have internal masonry "division walls" so fires could not spread. Other sections of the ordinance prohibited wood cornices, limited the size of bay windows, specified that party walls (walls shared by adjacent buildings) must extend above roofs, and required fireproof roofing materials.

The architectural significance of the ordinance cannot be overestimated. Seattle's post-fire buildings were required to take on a very different character from those that the fire had destroyed. In place of the elaborate ornamentation of the High Victorian buildings of the years before the fire, Seattle architects would need to find a new approach to design—one that could create architectural character without high cornices, projecting bay windows, and the like.

Of course, not all architects were quick to change. Bucheler and Hummel designed their new Matilda Winehill Block (1889-90) at Commercial and Main with a prominent corner bay window. By April 1890 this was the target of a lawsuit for violation of the new building code. Although it survived this attack, it was the only bay of this size constructed on any downtown building after the fire, and it quickly made the building appear out-of-date; the designers did not receive other significant commissions.

No doubt Seattle's architects would have responded to the influence of H. H. Richardson had the fire not occurred, but the destruction from the fire and the impact of the new building ordinance provided both the opportunity and the impetus for rapid architectural change.

When Seattle architects turned to Richardson's example in 1889, they joined with their contemporaries across the continent in attempting to continue the architectural movement they understood Richardson to have initiated. Richardson's architectural achievement was the work of just two decades, but he was seen as personally having redirected the course of American architecture. Born and raised in Louisiana, Henry Hobson Richardson (1838-1886) graduated from Harvard College in 1859. The next year he began studies at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, but his attendance was intermittent after his family's support was cut off by the American Civil War. In 1865 he returned to the United States and the following year opened his own office in New York, where his practice was based until 1878.

The buildings of Richardson's early career reflect the influence of the contemporary English Gothic Revival and French Second Empire styles. By 1870, however, Richardson began to explore his own design approach, drawing on the precedent of the Medieval round-arched architecture known as the Romanesque. His experiments in this mode—including the Brattle Square Church, Boston (1869-73), New York State Hospital, Buffalo (1869-80), and Hampden County Courthouse, Springfield, Massachusetts (1871-74)—prepared him to win the competition for Trinity Church, Boston (1872-77), with a Romanesque Revival design. This granite and brownstone structure brought Richardson national recognition upon its completion in 1877 and shaped his ensuing career.

In 1874 Richardson moved to Brookline, Massachusetts, to maintain direct involvement in Trinity Church during construction; four years later he brought his office to Brookline as well. In the eight years left to him before his death, Richardson's career blossomed. The works of Richardson's mature career show that he continued to explore a variety of directions. Some works moved away from specific historic precedents and used historical references and details. His designs came to depend on the simplification of form and the qualities of their materials to create a strong sense of gravity and repose. Some reflect the continuing influence of picturesque tendencies.

During this period Richardson's practice expanded in scope and extent. Although the majority of his projects were in New England, as his fame grew he was called on to design buildings in Washington, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago, St. Louis, and Wyoming. At the same time, Richardson was creating designs for newly emerging building types such as small public libraries and railroad passenger stations.

By 1882 Richardson was widely acknowledged as one of the leading architects in America. Contemporary recognition of Richardson's achievement became particularly evident when five of Richardson's buildings were included on a list of the "ten best buildings in the United States," published by *American Architect and Building News* in June 1885, based on a survey of their readers: Trinity Church, Boston, topped the list. Also included were Sever Hall, Harvard, (1878-80); Oakes Ames Hall, North Easton (1879-81); City Hall, Albany (1880-83); and New York State Capitol, Albany (1867-1899). This list predated the masterpieces of Richardson's late career: the Allegheny County Courthouse and Jail, Pittsburgh (1883-88); the Chamber of Commerce, Cincinnati (1885-88); and the Marshall Field Store, Chicago (1885-87)—works that particularly inspired American architects over the next few years.

Richardson's health deteriorated markedly in the later years of his life. Although warned to slow down, Richardson continued his practice at a hectic pace and died April 27, 1886, at the age of 47. Upon his death, the control of his office passed into the hands of his chief assistants, who carried on the firm under the name Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge. Nearly all of the projects that were unfinished when Richardson died were completed under their supervision.

Richardson rose to the peak of his influence at the time of his death. Perhaps, as architectural critic Montgomery Schuyler later suggested, Richardson's death had "extinguished envy." Or it may have been an overwhelming sense of loss that created an urgency to carry on and complete the architectural movement Richardson had begun. Whatever the cause, the Romanesque Revival soon became a dominant tendency in design across the United States.

Although few Seattle architects were likely to have seen more than a handful of Richardson's buildings, they were aware of his work because it was so widely published. Richardson's later career coincided with the rise of the professional architectural press. The first regularly published architectural journal to achieve national circulation was the Boston-based *American Architect and Building News*, which began publication in 1876. Architectural journals in other cities, including Chicago, Minneapolis, and San Francisco soon followed. Because it was based in Boston, *American Architect* proved particularly important in disseminating Richardson's work. The journal regularly published images of his buildings in the early 1880s, and included them even more frequently in the first years after his death. The journal published illustrations of Richardson's buildings as late as 1895. *American Architect* even commented on its role in expanding Richardson's influence on American architecture: "Every issue of ours with one of his designs was studied in a thousand offices and imitated in hundreds...." *Inland Architect*, based in Chicago and widely distributed in the Midwest and Far West, also carried images of Richardson's buildings in the mid to late 1880s.

The impetus to follow Richardson's example was also given theoretical justification. American architect and writer Henry Van Brunt expressed his admiration for Richardson early and often, and after the mid 1880s was a consistent advocate of Richardson's style as the basis for a national architecture. In March 1886 he praised Richardson's "revival" of the Romanesque in an essay in *Atlantic Monthly* and cited the style's advantages as "an early and uncorrupted type" with "apparently unexhausted capabilities." In his November 1886 tribute to Richardson in *Atlantic Monthly*, Van Brunt reiterated the promise of Richardsonian architecture and continued to emphasize its potential in subsequent articles. Van Brunt's 1889 *Atlantic Monthly* article on western architecture ended with a brief discussion of Richardson and cited his influence as the most positive for architecture in the American West. Van Brunt interpreted the historical Romanesque as a transitional style and presented Richardson's architecture as a new beginning, not simply a revival. The Richardsonian mode was thereby opened to experimentation and innovation, an attitude that was a source for the varied character of the Richardsonian designs produced thereafter.

The rapidity with which American architects turned to the Romanesque cannot simply be traced to Richardson's influence. A key aspect of Richardson's work that made it such a good source for architects of the period was the variety of building types it appeared to encompass. The 1880s and 1890s encompassed a time of rapid city building in the West and urban expansion in the East. The growth of cities during that period was accompanied by an increasing variety of building types requiring architectural designs. Richardson was one of the earliest architects to respond to the new building types—e.g., the small town library or the large urban business block. To architects of his generation, faced with a bewildering array of new building types, Richardson's architecture seemed to offer a clear design system that could be applied to most of the tasks they faced. And, the variety of Richardson's buildings offered a range of solutions to the building tasks faced by architects in an urbanizing America.

For business blocks in the burgeoning cities, Richardson offered examples such as the Marshall Field Store in Chicago. Many cities at the time, including Seattle, were adopting new fire ordinances requiring masonry construction in their urban cores. Architects in these cities turned to the Richardsonian Romanesque to solve the problem of the architectural character of the new fire-resistive business buildings as well as to create an image of metropolitan achievement. After the highly ornamented surface treatments that had been typical in the United States in the

1870s and 1880s, Richardson's approach demonstrated how to achieve a powerful architectural image of strength and stability without an elaborate decorative treatment.

For large public buildings, the preferred example was the widely published Allegheny County Courthouse and occasionally the Albany City Hall or Oakes Ames Hall. The 1880s and 1890s were a time of significant investment in new public buildings across the United States—particularly county courthouses. Fireproof construction for storage of permanent public records was often the major issue, and masonry buildings were the answer. Richardson's work frequently provided the model for new masonry construction.

Urban and suburban growth in the East and Midwest also required new public buildings on a smaller scale—new libraries, schools, train stations, and similar structures. Here Richardson's smaller public buildings provided good examples.

As the American public library movement continued to develop, many architects designed small masonry libraries with simplified Romanesque details. Other public buildings received similar treatments, and Richardson's Harvard buildings proved suitable models for schools at all levels. Similarly, Richardson's churches, primarily Trinity Church, but occasionally his other church buildings, offered precedents for new religious construction.

It is only for residential architecture that Richardson's example was less influential. His masonry residence offered useful models for houses for the wealthy only in the very largest metropolitan centers such as Boston, New York, Washington, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Chicago, Minneapolis, and St. Louis. Almost everywhere else, including Seattle, residential construction remained wood frame, and the Queen Anne and "modern colonial" (now shingle style) modes were common, but neither was considered "Richardsonian" in the same way as the masonry Romanesque Revival.

By the mid to late 1880s and early 1890s, the published Richardson designs were supplemented by many more office blocks and public and institutional structures by other architects working in the Richardsonian mode. As American architects began to draw upon the precedents Richardson had established and submitted their own work for publication, the pages of the professional journals were filled with "Richardsonian" examples. In 1891 the critic Montgomery Schuyler summarized the effect of the Romanesque:

Such an array of buildings in so many different kinds—some admirable, many suggestive, and nearly all in some degree interesting—constitutes at once an impressive demonstration of the extent to which the Romanesque revival has already gone and a promise that in the future it may go further and fare better.

When Seattle architects looked for examples of the "modern Romanesque," they particularly looked to new buildings in Chicago. In contrast to Boston, Chicago was seen as a western city; its extraordinarily rapid growth as a commercial center in the 19th century provided a model that cities like Seattle sought to emulate. And, the successful reconstruction after the 1870 Chicago Fire was especially meaningful in Seattle after its own 1889 calamity.

Of Seattle's leading architects in the late 1880s, only Charles Saunders, and later Warren Skillings, had come from the Boston area and were likely to have visited a large number of

Richardson's works. But several Seattle architects made visits to Chicago, as did some of their clients, so they would have seen the many new commercial blocks by Chicago architects as well as Richardson's Marshall Field Store. By 1889 the fame of Chicago architects was sufficient that Elmer Fisher's client, Judge Burke, pointed to the example of the Rookery office building by Chicago architects Burnham and Root, and the following year Seattle's business leaders turned to Chicago's Adler and Sullivan for the design of the new Seattle Opera House.

Today design that is characterized as Romanesque Revival is often thought to derive entirely from the example of Richardson; however, the emergence of similar work in Chicago cannot be traced entirely to Richardson's influence alone but reflects the contribution of Chicago architects as well. Because Richardson was responsible for comparatively few commercial commissions, the development of commercial architecture in Chicago that freely interpreted the Romanesque style led many contemporaries to see Chicago architects as key contributors to the development of the "modern Romanesque." After Richardson's death the growth of Chicago and the development of its commercial architecture appeared to carry on the design explorations Richardson had begun. Indeed, Chicago architecture of the late 1880s reflects a convergence that proved particularly significant for the spread of the Romanesque mode in the American West.

Thus by 1889, when Seattle architects turned to the reconstruction of Seattle after the June fire, the Romanesque Revival had become the leading national architectural style. But the idea that architectural development in the period was merely the replacement of the earlier Victorian modes by the newer Romanesque Revival is much too simplistic. Rather, architectural history might better be understood as a "palimpsest"—that is, as a surface written on more than once, the previous inscriptions imperfectly erased and therefore visible to influence later inscriptions. Seattle architects may have turned to the new Romanesque mode after the fire, but they could hardly have erased their earlier architectural experience.

The Romanesque Revival mode itself was never a unified or singular tendency but always encompassed a variety of directions. Even Richardson's own work was seen by contemporaries as offering multiple points of departure, partly because a single evolutionary direction in Richardson's own work was never evident from illustrations in the architectural journals. After Richardson's premature death the contributions of others, particularly those in Chicago, were seen from Seattle as extending the range of the design approach Richardson was thought to have begun, the "modern Romanesque." As a result, for architects in Seattle—distant from Richardson's office and from the bulk of his work—the Romanesque Revival was open to a variety of responses. In fact, how Seattle architects used the Romanesque mode often depended on the background each brought from early experience in building and design.

When Seattle architects adopted elements of Romanesque Revival design for their new commercial and institutional buildings, they did so in the context of the changes and challenges they faced. In particular, in the aftermath of the June 1889 fire, they faced the demand for an up-to-date architecture that could prevent another such tragedy. The city's new building ordinance mandated masonry construction in the commercial core. Many of the decorative elements of the older Victorian modes (such as elaborate cornices) were declared illegal while other features, although not prohibited, were considered fire hazards. In contrast, the Romanesque style provided a system for organizing a solid and impressive modern architecture of fire-resistive masonry construction. It was to this mode that Seattle architects turned.

Nonetheless, the post-fire buildings of Seattle frequently confound our expectations. The Richardsonian or Romanesque system is sometimes applied inconsistently, and works that are pure examples of the mode are actually few in number. Romanesque elements were sometimes applied with a very non-Richardsonian capriciousness or even arbitrariness. Further, clear and direct relationships between building plans and elevations often are not evident. Commercial buildings often display apparently regular bay systems on their façades (and may even show a knowledgeable response to the commercial architecture of Chicago or Boston), but internally the structure may not be aligned with these bays and the interior organization may appear unrelated to the exterior. Given these inconsistencies yet recognizing that the architects claimed to be following Richardson's example, how is their work to be understood?

Seattle designers in the pre-fire period freely engaged in the inventive eclecticism of Victorian design and drew on a wide variety of historical sources and styles to create their buildings. By the late 1880s these Seattle practitioners were following the national professional architectural journals, which were filled with new Romanesque revival designs. But none of the Seattle architects who were reading these journals in the 1880s had received an academic education in architecture. Nor did any Seattle architects bring experience from leading architectural offices where practice was governed by principles derived from academic training. Thus, although Richardson had had the advantage of an architectural education that involved learning abstract compositional methods and generalized principles for design, this understanding was not available to Seattle architects who only knew his work from the array of interpretations of Romanesque Revival that filled the pages of the professional journals. These images provided a wide range of source material on which Seattle architects were able to draw after the Great Fire.

Victorian design has sometimes been characterized as the "art of assemblage." This approach can be found in the works of virtually every architect in Seattle in the post-fire period but is easily exemplified in the buildings by that most prolific of Seattle's post-fire designers, Elmer Fisher, who claimed to be faithfully following Richardson's example. Fisher's early commercial works reflected his learning of a fairly typical mid-19th-century "Victorian" compositional approach, which included banded façades divided by flat pilasters and belt courses accented by a variety of ornament. Fisher's post-fire Seattle business blocks reflect his solutions to the requirements of fire-resistive construction and the needs of his commercial clients as well as his response to the Romanesque mode. His most famous post-fire work, the Pioneer Building (1889-91), clearly shows Fisher's integration of Romanesque elements, but his overall compositional approach did not emulate Richardson's. Whereas a Richardson building such as the Marshall Field Wholesale Store read as a single unified block, Fisher's Pioneer Building demonstrated his traditional "Victorian" strategy of dividing building façades with vertical and horizontal elements, creating a gridded effect. The Pioneer Building does feature arched windows, half-round entry arches, small grouped columns, and other conspicuously Romanesque Revival elements, but these are subsumed in a composition that reflects Fisher's previous architectural experience.

Fisher himself indicated the inventiveness and freedom he felt in developing his designs. The hybrid nature of his approach was particularly evident in the Sullivan Building (1889-90, destroyed), a mid-block four-story structure. Its mix of vocabularies—Romanesque round arches and the distorted classical ornament—may seem strange, but this was a deliberate design decision, as Fisher explained in his *Post-Intelligencer* interview in October 1889: "There is the

Sullivan Building. It is of the Romanesque order of architecture with ornaments in the Renaissance style."

One of the more eccentric of Fisher's post-fire buildings was the Starr-Boyd Building (1889-90, destroyed), commissioned by the adjacent owners of two small lots who decided to combine their properties to make a roughly trapezoidal site. The asymmetrically composed façade facing the new Public Square (later renamed Pioneer Place) across from the Pioneer Building was executed in brick trimmed with stone and terra-cotta and was described by the *Seattle Times* in August 1889 as "after the beautiful Moorish style." The juxtapositions of classical, Romanesque, and other ornament made this the most agitated building of Fisher's post-fire career.

In contrast, Fisher's Burke Building (1889-91, destroyed) possessed a much more coherent design, but this may have been due to the direct involvement of the client, Seattle business leader "Judge" Thomas Burke. Surviving correspondence indicates Burke's involvement in details such as the color and quality of terra-cotta and the choice of appropriate roofing materials. In addition, there are references in Burke's letters to the quality of terra-cotta used in Chicago, suggesting that he was aware in more than a general way of the new commercial architecture of that city. Indeed, even in the first announcement of the Burke Building in March 1889 it was compared to the Rookery in Chicago. Thus it seems clear that Burke pushed Fisher in regard to specific aspects of the design. Surviving color images of the building indicate that the color of the terra-cotta and brick were closely matched, allowing the building to read more clearly as a unified composition. While the main entry arch suggested the influence of Richardson, some of the terra-cotta details were more closely modeled after similar features at the Rookery.

Other post-fire Seattle architects also showed Richardson's influence in their work. For example, John Parkinson's Seattle National Bank Building (1890-92, also known as the Interurban Building) offers one of the more sophisticated interpretations of the Romanesque mode in post-fire Seattle. An April 30, 1890, article in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* described the project: "The exterior of the building will be Romanesque in style and nothing but pressed brick, stone, and terra-cotta will be used. The corner will be rounded and the whole building will present as fine an appearance as any other building in the Northwest." Parkinson was more than 25 years younger than Fisher, and although he, like Fisher, had come to architecture from the construction trades, he was much less wedded to Victorian convention. The Seattle National Bank Building's Romanesque treatment, particularly the continuous arcade at the first two floors, indicates that Parkinson was closely following the architectural journals. The decision to use Colorado red sandstone at the base rather than locally available stone, which was generally light gray, added to the coherence of this design.

William Boone had been responsible for designing over half of the prominent buildings destroyed by the fire, but by 1889 his position as the city's leading architect had been usurped by Elmer Fisher. Boone's work after the fire was mixed; most of it continued to display his earlier Victorian tendencies with an occasional few Romanesque features, but once in a while Boone showed unexpected brilliance as an architect. His most remarkable post-fire project was initially called the "Seattle Block," but by 1892 it had been renamed the "New York Building" (1889-92, destroyed), the name by which it was known throughout its history. The New York Building was one of the most powerful expressions of the new architecture in post-fire Seattle. Minor changes might have resulted from Boone's visit to Chicago in January and February 1890, but an

October 1889 newspaper report included a relatively clear description of the project, indicating that the primary features had been developed prior to this trip.

The building was characterized from the first as “massive,” and this evident solidity set it off from virtually all of its Seattle contemporaries. The design appears to have been conceived as a coherent block. Extraneous detail was reduced to a minimum. Above the two-and-a-half-story rusticated stone base rose five floors of brick, with limited stone trim at the cornice. The most remarkable feature of the design was the continuous arcade from the third to the sixth floors on the two street elevations. The continuous vertical piers and recessed spandrels gave a strong vertical expression that clearly recalled works by Richardson and contemporary work in Chicago, but the building appears to have been an original reinterpretation of tendencies evident in those designs. Unlike Fisher, who seems never to have freed himself fully from Victorian conventions, Boone here appears to have transcended the limitations of his background to create a building that incorporated and extended the best design tendencies of the time. In its simplicity, stateliness and repose, the New York Building ranked with the best of Seattle architecture until its demolition in 1922.

The influence of Richardson and the Romanesque was evident not just in the commercial work by Fisher, Parkinson, Boone, and other post-fire Seattle architects, it also affected institutional work as well. The architect whose institutional designs most strongly demonstrate Richardson's influence was Willis A. Ritchie, but his Romanesque revival designs were not to be found in Seattle. Ritchie arrived in Seattle in July 1889 without local connections, but he brought knowledge of the most advanced fireproofing technology of the day from his work as the local superintendent of construction for the federal courthouse and post office built in Wichita, Kansas, between 1886 and 1889. Although he was only in his mid-twenties, this knowledge gave Ritchie a competitive advantage in seeking public building commissions in Washington. Between 1889 and 1893 he won the commissions to design six county courthouses across the state. Although his first, the King County Courthouse, Seattle (1889-91, destroyed), was a classical building, his next three courthouses—in Bellingham, Port Townsend, and Olympia—were all Romanesque designs.

Ritchie won the competition for the Whatcom County Courthouse (1889-91, destroyed) in what is now Bellingham with a two-story stone structure that featured an offset tower. The asymmetrical design reflects the continuing influence of "picturesque" composition, common in the Victorian period, that continued to influence many of the Romanesque revival designs published in the architectural journals.

Ritchie's next courthouse—the Jefferson County Courthouse, Port Townsend (1890-92)—was a massive building praised by the Port Townsend *Morning Leader* in May 1890: "Taken as the drawing of the building shows, it will certainly be one of the handsomest buildings in this country, and as the architect, Mr. Ritchie, says, it is the very finest piece of architectural work he has ever designed or planned, which speaks volumes for our new Courthouse in style and beauty." A large brick building with a raised stone basement and details of stone and terra-cotta, the Jefferson County Courthouse was Ritchie's finest in the Romanesque mode, although his tendency to compose picturesquely is still evident. Its dramatic scale demonstrates the confidence late-19th-century Port Townsend civic leaders had in the future of their community.

The last of Ritchie's Romanesque designs was the Thurston County Courthouse (1890-91; altered), a symmetrical building constructed of Chuckanut stone barged to Olympia from the quarries in Whatcom County. On May 15, 1891, the *Morning Olympian* carried a lengthy description of the building, praising it as "beyond question the handsomest in the State" and describing it as "after the Romanesque in architecture, the style prevailing so extensively in new public buildings in recent years." The design treatment was particularly disciplined, both in its symmetry and in the relative lack of ornament, allowing the rock-faced stone to read more strongly. After preferring picturesque asymmetry for so long, why Ritchie turned to a symmetrical composition for Thurston County is unknown. In 1901 the State of Washington purchased the building to use as its capitol. It currently houses the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the state's board of education.

In 1892 Ritchie moved to Spokane. The following year he won the commission for the largest building of his career, the Spokane County Courthouse (1893-96). The overall form of this structure, with its tall central tower, was clearly derived from Richardson's Allegheny County Courthouse, Pittsburgh, but Ritchie chose not to use Romanesque motifs and details. His building, executed in light buff brick, features French Renaissance terra-cotta detail and is easily described as "chateausque."

Willis Ritchie's turn away from the Romanesque was not unusual. After 1891 the popularity of the style rapidly declined. Architectural critic Montgomery Schuyler had published essays in *Architectural Record* and *Harper's Magazine* celebrating the Romanesque Revival and speaking of its further development. Yet by 1891 the influence of Richardson's Romanesque revival had already passed its apogee, although its downward trajectory was not then widely perceived. Within a few years, however, its decline became apparent to all.

Romanesque Revival can be characterized as a relatively successful national mode of design. Although its period of ascendancy was brief—in Seattle it was the dominant mode of design for just five years, 1889 to 1893—and even during that period it was strongest only from 1889 to 1891. As the buildings in Seattle demonstrate, the Romanesque Revival mode has often appeared to later observers much more coherent than it actually was in its time. Richardson's example served as the broad inspiration for America architects, but his work, as understood through publications, never appeared to offer a single direction for development.

As understood by Seattle architects, Richardson's example presented a new architectural vocabulary that could be absorbed within the framework of the freely inventive design approach that had coalesced in America after the Civil War. How Seattle's architects used the Richardsonian Romanesque vocabulary varied depending on their backgrounds and their abilities to intuit at least some of the lessons of Richardson's example, either from Richardson's own work in publications or from the many published examples of works that applied the Romanesque mode.

After June 1889 Seattle architects faced a situation of rapid change that required new building types and new fire-resistive technologies. Richardson's Romanesque offered a language of design that allowed them to meet these challenges. Their work often still betrays a preference for the ornamented rather than the unadorned surface, for the emphatically vertical rather than the quietly horizontal, and for agitation rather than repose. Yet in these works there is a sense

that the architects were always striving, and at least sometimes succeeding, in making an architecture appropriate to an emerging metropolitan community.

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