

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and
Social Sciences

Great Plains Studies, Center for

Spring 1998

Review of *Buildings of Colorado* by Thomas J. Noel

Ted Ertl

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, tertl2@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Ertl, Ted, "Review of *Buildings of Colorado* by Thomas J. Noel" (1998). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 381.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch/381>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Buildings of Colorado. Thomas J. Noel. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. vii+669 pp. Photos, maps, references, index. \$45.00 cloth (ISBN 0-19-509076-4).

This is the fifth in the ambitious Buildings of the United States series of guides to American architecture taken on by the Society of Architectural Historians and inspired by Nikolas Pevsner's classic series on the Buildings of England published between 1951 and 1974. Thomas Noel's fine if brief introductory overview of Colorado's historical and architectural legacy provides the context for understanding the selected buildings. The book is clearly organized into four sections based on the state's major river regions—South Platte, Arkansas, Rio Grande, and Colorado; each region is introduced with a description of its historical development and a key map. Counties and towns with their own descriptive histories further subdivide

these sections. The catalog of significant buildings contains detailed identifications including current and historical names, dates, architects or builders, and addresses, along with informative and entertaining commentary.

All entries have the authority of sound scholarship and the critical eye of an architectural historian. It is refreshing to see an architectural guide written with a solid understanding of both history and architecture. The broad diversity of its buildings from vernacular to high style, from prehistoric to contemporary, makes this guide better than usual—a truly representative, although certainly not exhaustive, collection of Colorado architecture.

Good maps are essential to any architectural guidebook, and the many outline maps Noel offers here will assist in orienting the traveler, who would nevertheless also be wise to carry a current Colorado highway map to find those prize buildings outside city limits. The author further enhances the volume with an extensive bibliography, as well as a glossary to its architectural terminology. The index gives a useful listing of buildings, architects, places, and historic personalities.

One shortcoming is the paucity of building photographs: just over 400 illustrations for over 1700 entries. After long travel, and lacking any visual image for guidance, a viewer might well be disappointed by the author's selection or, worse still, make no effort to see the building at all. For the more adventurous, however, there is always the prospect of discovering fascinating buildings not included in the guide along the way.

Abundant photographs of derelict buildings reveal a warmth and character in strong contrast to some of the more mundane examples of contemporary architecture, though one fears these decaying structures may be gone by the time the viewer arrives. Included perhaps as the last record of a dying breed, they warn us about how fragile the built environment is when given over to neglect.

Although any published work has flaws, those in *Buildings of Colorado* are minor, such as the unfortunate distorted illustration of Denver South High School. Sometimes only a detail of a building is shown without providing a visual understanding of the structure as a whole. The historic photographs accompanying entries are often of greater interest than the current ones. There is a wide range of photographic quality: many images have a professional appearance, while a few seem to be amateur snapshots.

Architectural historians should find the guide of particular interest. One of the problems of doing Great Plains research is the disappearance of local architects, often during times of economic hardship. In *Buildings of*

Colorado one finds references to Nebraska architects who later did work in Colorado. Isaac Hodgson Jr. earned a living for several years in Minneapolis, Omaha, and Denver, each time producing significant architectural work. After a successful career in Hastings, onetime mayor Charles C. Rittenhouse moved his architectural practice to Cañon City. Frederick C. Eberly worked briefly in Omaha between periods in Missouri and Colorado. Matthew L. McBird, son of M. J. McBird who designed buildings in Lincoln, Council Bluffs, and Denver, worked in Cripple Creek. Guides such as this prove to be extremely useful tools for those who are tracing architectural events across state lines on the Great Plains. **Ted A. Ertl**, *College of Architecture, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*.