

Researching an Architect or Building

Contributed by AIA Knowledge Resources Staff

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SUMMARY

Information about American architects, both historical and current, is available from many sources. Unfortunately, no single, comprehensive repository of biographical information exists. Nonetheless, a great deal of information about architects can be readily obtained from the following published sources, which are commonly found in architecture libraries.

BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN ARCHITECTS (DECEASED)

Henry F. and Elise Rathburn Withey; New Age Publishing Company, Detroit, 1956; Hennessey and Ingalls, 1970 (reprint of 1956 edition).

This standard work contains brief biographies of nearly 2,000 American architects from 1740 to 1952. Entries include the birth and death dates of the architect and a summary of his or her work.

THE MACMILLAN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ARCHITECTS

Adolf K. Placzek, editor in chief; The Free Press, London, 1982.

This four-volume set presents extensive biographical information on more than 2,400 prominent architects from ancient times to the 20th century. Living architects born after 1930 are not included. A list of works is given for each architect, and Volume 4 provides an index by building name.

CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTS

Ann Lee Morgan and Colin Naylor, editors (2nd ed.); Muriel Emanuel (3rd ed.); St. James Press, Chicago and London, 1981, 1987, and 1994.

This one-volume directory is an excellent survey of prominent architects throughout the world, with biographies and lists of works for more than 550 architects. The 1994 edition added many new entries but deleted entries for architects who died before 1960.

AVERY INDEX TO ARCHITECTURAL PERIODICALS/AVERY OBITUARY INDEX OF ARCHITECTS

The online version of the Avery Index offers citations (not full text) to journal articles published worldwide on architecture and design. Comprehensive coverage is from the 1930s, and coverage of selected journals dates back to the 1860s. Online access is by subscription only; most architecture and art history libraries subscribe. The print version of the *Avery Obituary Index* (Avery Library; G. K. Hall, 1980, 2nd ed.) contains more than 17,000 citations for obituaries of architects from U.S. periodicals since 1876 and from British periodicals since 1843, along with some Western European periodicals.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES OF AMERICAN ARCHITECTS WHO DIED BETWEEN 1897 AND 1947

The Society of Architectural Historians maintains an online database at www.sah.org/aame/bioint.html of obituaries for more than 1,200 American architects who died between 1897 and 1947. The obituaries originally appeared in the *American Art Annual* and its successor, *Who's Who in American Art*.

AMERICAN ARCHITECTS DIRECTORY

Published under the sponsorship of the American Institute of Architects by the R. R. Bowker Co., New York, 1956 (1st ed.), 1962 (2nd ed.), 1970 (3rd ed.).

These directories of AIA members are an excellent resource for these decades. The entries, submitted by the members themselves, include substantial biographical information, principal works, and awards and activities. Entries under firm names list the firm's principals.

REGIONAL DIRECTORIES

The regional directories listed below attempt to provide comprehensive listings of architects in particular areas and time periods. They include information on both obscure and famous architects, but the amount of information varies widely.

Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects, 1700–1930. Sandra L. Tatman and Roger W. Moss; G. K. Hall, 1985.

This work contains biographical information on architects who have ties to the Philadelphia area. An expanded biographical database is available online at <http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/>.

Architects in Practice, New York City, 1840–1900. Dennis Steadman Francis; Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, New York.

Architects in Practice, New York City, 1900–1940. James Ward; Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, New York.

Each entry in the two volumes of *Architects in Practice, New York City* contains the name and work addresses of an architect, as listed in sources such as telephone directories and city directories. Biographies are not included.

The Virginia Architects, 1835-1955: A Biographical Dictionary. John E. Wells, Robert E. Dalton; New South Architectural Press, 1997.

The South Carolina Architects, 1885-1935: A Biographical Dictionary. John E. Wells, Robert E. Dalton; New South Architectural Press, 1992.

Entries might include firm addresses, biographical data, or partial lists of works, depending on what is known about the architect.

Boston Architects and Builders: Compiled from the Boston Directory, 1789-1846. Christopher Hail; Massachusetts Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1989

An alphabetical list of more than 11,000 architects, builders, and craftsmen in the building trades in early Boston includes names, addresses, occupations, and partnerships.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Additional information on American architects and their works is often found in local sources such as public libraries, historical societies, and state archives. If you know where the architect went to school, many university archives keep files on their alumni. Museums and libraries with architectural drawing collections also gather information about architects in their regions.

The American Institute of Architects Library and Archives contains information on more than 100,000 architects who have practiced in the United States. Membership records make up the majority of the data. These records often contain information on an

architect's education, training, and work history up to the time he or she joined the AIA, but not lists of works. The nomination forms for architects who have become Fellows since World War II provide additional information on these architects' achievements. For more information about holdings in the AIA Archives and fees for document delivery of archival information, call the AIA Archivist at 202-626-7496 or send e-mail to archives@aia.org.

Feedback

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