

## Introduction

Architecture is the expression of the mutual action between man and the environment in which he develops his life.

—Ricardo Porro

*The Adirondack Architecture Guide* is the first field guide to the architecture of the Adirondack Park. The Southern-Central Region volume extends from the southern boundary of the Park to the High Peaks and from the western Park boundary to the Northway. It includes fourteen tours with more than 700 buildings or sites, representing a cross-section of Adirondack architecture ranging from National Historic Landmark great camps to humble cabins, schoolhouses, and bridges. The Northern Region and Eastern Region volumes now in production will complete the coverage of the Adirondack Park.

The purpose of *The Adirondack Architecture Guide* is threefold: to allow the user to discover buildings; discern their architectural interest and value; and understand them in the context of Adirondack history and culture.

Created in 1892, the Adirondack Park is a unique combination of public and private lands, natural places and man-made places, inextricably intertwined on six million acres (9,375 square miles, 24,280 square kilometers) of beautiful but challenging terrain. The Park is the largest National Historic Landmark in the contiguous United States, recognized for its outstanding historical significance. It contains 100 towns and villages, but no cities. Different from, say, Beacon Hill, Lower Manhattan, or any urban destination, buildings and sites worth seeing in the Adirondacks are generally not concentrated, but widely dispersed and sometimes well hidden. The *Guide* invites modern-day Adirondack explorers to engage with unexpected architecture and to go to places they might never have visited before.

The Adirondacks possess representative examples of American architecture from every era since the late 1700s. But the region also spawned building types, techniques, and styles that are unique to its own history and geography. The work of prominent architects from outside the region is well represented. At the same time, talented local designers, builders, and craftsmen designed most buildings. They also developed the Adirondack Rustic-style that was subsequently exported to the National Parks and throughout the country.

To capture the rich diversity of the built environment, the *Guide* purposely ranges across geography, socioeconomic strata, building types, and time, from early settlement to the present. The first selection criteria for the *Guide* are that a structure is still standing, possesses architectural interest, and can be viewed by the public. The majority of entries are buildings that are simply well designed, architecturally noteworthy in some regard, or illustrate the threads of community development and architecture particular to the cultural fabric of the Adirondacks. Exemplars of Adirondack architecture such as Great Camps and other rustic structures are included, as are numerous sites and types associated with tourism, such as historic hotels, children's camps, tourist cabins, and amusement parks. Naturally, the architecture of Adirondack communities is the core of the *Guide*, including civic buildings, representative commercial and residential architecture, churches, mills, and factories, and such iconic buildings as one-room schoolhouses. Further selection criteria, such as a building's current architectural integrity, or whether it might contribute to excessive coverage of a particular building type or style, are applied flexibly. For example, a ruined tannery or a compromised historic theater might still have noteworthy value due to its relative rarity or its initial significance. On the other hand, a significantly altered church or house is less interesting when there are better representative examples. At the same time, including repetitive examples might usefully illustrate an architectural ensemble, the evolution and variants of a building type or architectural style, geographic dispersion, or an architect's or designer's cumulative body of work.

In its broadest meaning, "architecture" denotes all types of man-made structures and landscapes. Beyond buildings, the *Guide* also includes designed landscapes, such as cemeteries and parks; engineering structures, such as railroads, bridges, and dams; and public art, from work by nationally recognized artists to local folk art in the public realm.

Field survey has been the primary method of identifying buildings and sites for the *Guide*, in concert with research by the authors, local historians, and property owners. Many thousands of miles on the ground and on the water have been covered to survey the Southern-Central Region alone. An encyclopedic guide, however, would grow impossibly long. The *Guide* is selective yet representative, encompassing both the ordinary everyday architecture of the region as well as structures that are individually extraordinary—in their quality of design, rarity, innovation, or even their “what is that?” curiosity factor. While local historians and other Adirondack residents have suggested properties for the *Guide*, the authors are responsible for the final selection and assessment of sites. Ultimately, that selection is subjective, representing what we would show to visitors if we could guide each one in person.