

## Henry Hobson Richardson: outline of main ideas

Richardson studied architecture in France. The emphasis of this education consisted of these features:

- the French emphasis on classicism
- a method of design which did not focus on style but focused on spatial organization and planning based on laws of hierarchy and balance
- an understanding of buildings as consisting of two spatial elements: primary spaces and secondary spaces, or as Louis Kahn would later call them, “served spaces” and “servant spaces”
- the primary or served spaces are the spaces which relate to the primary functions and reasons for the building; the secondary spaces are the spaces which allow traffic between primary spaces, which facilitate human existence within the building
- a process of design which begins with a quick sketch or esquisse – a quick, graphic solution to a problem – followed by working out the details but without losing sight of the overall solution which eventually leads to an arrangement of the primary and secondary spaces
- facade and interior details are the last elements and not dealt with until the architect prepares presentation drawings

Richardson’s goal was a union of French methods, European traditions and American sources in order to create an American and personal architectural imagery

The leading European influences in the 1870s were the English Gothic style, the French neoclassical style, and the German *rundbogenstil* (round block style, a German combination of Renaissance and Romanesque styles); many architects combined these styles in a single building (as in Frank Furness’s Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia – see below) with the mansard roof, rounded pointed arches, combination of rusticated stone and red and white brick – a building which seems to make allusions to the French baroque, a quasi-Romanesque style and the Renaissance palazzo.



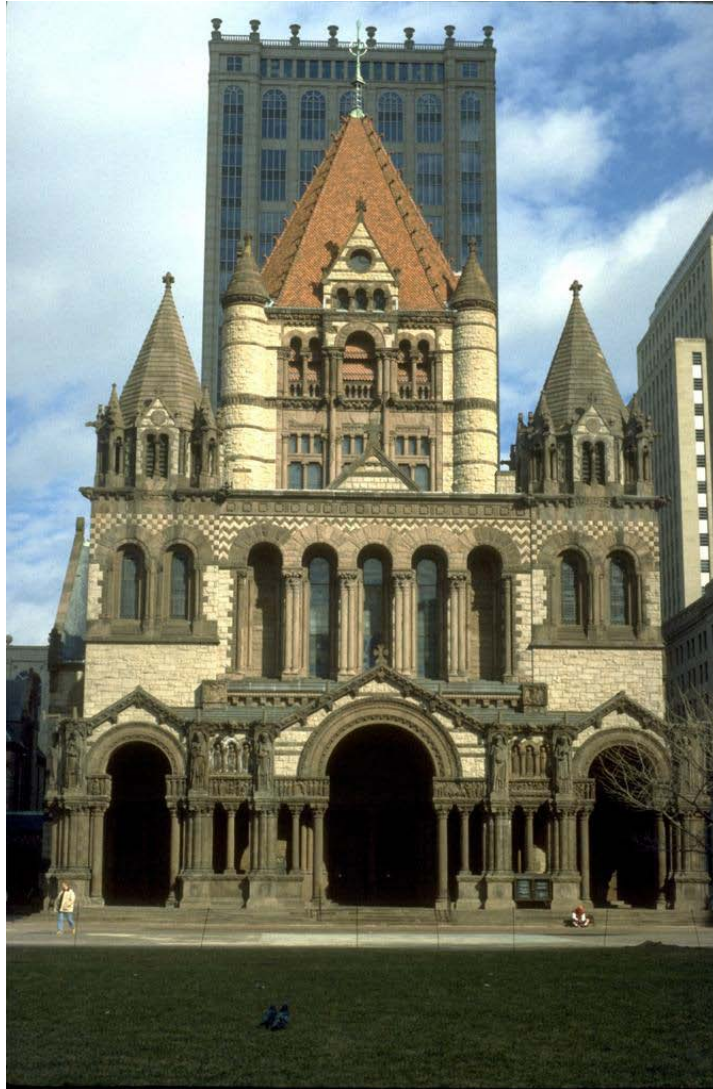
- Richardson's early work was largely executed in an academic manner, staying rather close to French sources
- he soon moves away from this influence, turns to the Rundbogenstil influence which was quite compatible with other buildings in Boston, and begins to develop what will become known as the "Richardsonian Romanesque"

### **Trinity Church, 1872-7, in Boston**

- built on landfill which dictated a centralized plan and a lower tower than he probably wanted
- combined three styles which appealed to him: Syrian Christian, Byzantine, and French and Spanish Romanesque, with traces of the more familiar Gothic although it is largely subordinate to the Romanesque influences
- despite the eclecticism of the sources, the impact is not one of disparate styles or asymmetry, in large part because of his pyramidal massing of the volumes, his interest in the sources as images rather than as historical

sources which should maintain integrity and which would evoke associations to another period or ethic

- polychromatic stone and tile work on exterior



The interior was executed by John La Farge: a heavily gilded, stylized flat style of painting which contrasts with the textural quality of the exterior.

**Ames library in North Easton (and his other libraries):** all are thought out in terms of the interior space:

- barrel-vaulted ceilings, two-story book alcoves
- on the outside, the building is divided into three horizontal zones: a broad

ashlar base resting on the water table; a horizontal strip of identical openings with a continuous sill and lintel; a gabled or hip roof

- Dell Upton, in his book on American architecture, approaches the Ames library as a building which contributes to the “sacralization” of culture and the growth of philanthropy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, he observes that the design of the library interior does not allow the user of the library to obtain books for him or herself; the librarian must fetch the books and deliver them, a ritual which Upton describes as one in which the librarian becomes a surrogate for the donor who gave the money for the library and the patron (in this case referring to the user) becomes a surrogate for the larger community of people who will benefit from the donor’s largesse



The silhouettes of his buildings become tighter and more closely defined as he progresses, while the interior spaces become more harmonious and expressive of “simplicity and quiet” as he put it. This is not to say that he entirely eliminated the introduction of asymmetric elements but that the interplay between asymmetry and symmetry becomes an element of design in itself.

### **Marshall Field department store, Chicago, 1885-7**

- impact of a massive stone block looming up out of the street
- individual stones in the granite base were huge – those in the sills were about 18 feet in length
- horizontal emphasis created by the contrasting belt course at the base of the main story windows, a string course which demarcated the sill of the 7<sup>th</sup> floor, the continuation of horizontal lines through the arched windows, the cornice
- this building was not the shopper's store; it was the store for the salesmen who worked for Marshall Field, a fact which means that the design was not intended to attract shoppers or appeal to a female clientele but to communicate the values of the wholesale company as a company
- despite the obvious influence of Renaissance palazzos on this building, his sources were Boston commercial structures and the factory mills of New England, influences apparent in the exterior facades and in the use of slow-burning wood as structural elements on the upper floors
- it was not a tall building but it did suggest urban scale through both the large blocks on the facade and the treatment of the city block as a single building

### **Glessner House, 1885-7, Chicago**

- L-shaped plan turned away from the intersection of two main streets
- main hall with stair and fireplace tucked into the angle
- library is divided from the parlor by circulatory space which leads to a dining room with a polygonal bay
- exterior: monochromatic granite walls, laid in horizontal ashlar, closely set on the edge of the sidewalks; the angled side which can't be seen from the front shelters a private garden
- inner garden walls are brick with limestone trim, creating two different wall treatments for public and private spaces



### **the Ames Monument (WY) and Ames Gate Lodge (MA)**

a departure from his other work in the use of geological imagery, rather than architectural; but the geological image was seen as a uniquely American source of cultural expression;

appropriately for the Wyoming setting, he based the monument on regional land forms rather than building archetypes

the gate lodge: rusticated base which unexpectedly connects the gate lodge to the monument in Wyoming

Dell Upton suggests that these two works served to “naturalize” the Ames family with imagery that gave them the stature of having been part of the landscape forever rather than the capitalistic industrialists they really were



**Richardson's legacy:**

- 1) the Richardsonian Romanesque (becomes an important part of the "stick style" and "shingle style" forms of domestic architecture, styles seen to be uniquely American)
- 2) a disciplined rational approach which he inherited from the French Beaux-Arts school of architecture, but he applied it to historicist architecture, rather than classical
- 3) an architectural expression of American life which influences both Sullivan and Wright