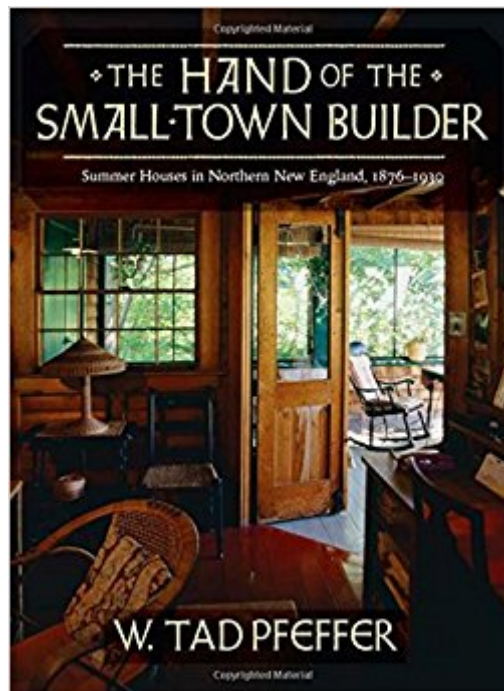




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# The Hand Of The Small-Town Builder: Vernacular Summer Architecture In New England, 1870-1935



## Synopsis

Northern New England in the late nineteenth century saw an explosion of what we now call "new home construction." The railroads had opened up the mountains to tourists while steamers regularly plied the coast. The concept of a paid summer vacation was gaining traction, and families, both rich and poor, were eager to rusticate in small villages where, close to nature, they would enjoy the blessings of a salubrious climate. Middle-class families could afford to build homes, and since their budgets precluded "name" architects, the need was answered by native builders, talented craftsmen familiar with the local resources who could draw the basic lines, muster and supervise a building crew, and meet the needs of clients. These weren't the fancy summer "cottages" of Newport or Bar Harbor, but simple structures erected on modest budgets for comfortable summer living. Many were, and still appear, very beautiful, and the best examples are shown in this striking survey of houses built by self-taught architects whose work survives as testaments to their skill. The men behind the developments were far more than builders; they acted as land speculators, developers, and architects. They ran the typical three-man crews, house-sat over the winter, and were the liaisons with the "summer people" who would arrive in June and leave in early September. The houses they built were sensitive to the local topography and connected to the landscape as masterpieces of vernacular design. From the seacoast and islands of Maine to the hill towns, lakes, and rivers of Vermont and New Hampshire, Pfeffer has thoroughly researched and thoughtfully photographed the best examples. His text is rich with history and commentary. Far more than a pretty picture book, this is a scholarly and richly documented survey of master craftsmen whose subtle but powerful influence on the northern New England landscape is poignantly recorded in these pages.

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## Customer Reviews

'Pfeffer writes about a less explored side of architecture: intimate oceanfront houses and lakeside camps and, most interestingly, their builders, many of them obscure...His photographs are hauntingly lovely.' --Maine Boats, Homes & Harbors

Northern New England in the late nineteenth century saw an explosion of what we now call "new home construction." The railroads had opened up the mountains to tourists while steamers regularly plied the coast. The concept of a paid summer vacation was gaining traction, and families, both rich and poor, were eager to rusticate in small villages where, close to nature, they would enjoy the blessings of a salubrious climate. Middle-class families could afford to build homes, and since their budgets precluded "name" architects, the need was answered by native builders, talented craftsmen familiar with the local resources who could draw the basic lines, muster and supervise a building crew, and meet the needs of clients. These weren't the fancy summer "cottages" of Newport or Bar Harbor, but simple structures erected on modest budgets for comfortable summer living. Many were, and still appear, very beautiful, and the best examples are shown in this striking survey of houses built by self-taught architects whose work survives as testaments to their skill. The men behind the developments were far more than builders; they acted as land speculators, developers, and architects. They ran the typical three-man crews, house-sat over the winter, and were the liaisons with the "summer people" who would arrive in June and leave in early September. The houses they built were sensitive to the local topography and connected to the landscape as masterpieces of vernacular design. From the seacoast and islands of Maine to the hill towns, lakes, and rivers of Vermont and New Hampshire, Pfeffer has thoroughly researched and thoughtfully photographed the best examples. His text is rich with history and commentary. Far more than a pretty picture book, this is a scholarly and richly documented survey of master craftsmen whose subtle but powerful influence on the northern New England landscape is poignantly recorded in these pages.

Dr. Pfeffer's book, *The Hand of the Small Town Builder*, is a shibboleth, some 20 years in the making, of photography, research, travel, writing and persistence in the realization of publishing. The book, as well, illustrates New

England Yankee taste, resourcefulness, frugality, values and initiative. The catalyst was Dr. P. Dr. P's youth spent in summers in Randolph, NH, and association with the Boothman family, the work of whose patriarch John H., was evident in the many Randolph cottages which Dr. P visited. The scope of the book sweeps across New England citing examples of cottage and local architecture/building from the Maine coast to the Belgrade and Rangely lakes, thence to the White Mountain towns of Randolph and Bethlehem, finally coming to rest in Greensboro, Vermont at Caspian Lake. Along this path, Dr. P provides text which illuminates the areas' social and economic history in an interesting, informative fashion, the goal of which is to put the local builders' work in context. The photographs more than compliment the text; they are a tour de force of skill and sensitivity. Complimenting Dr. P's career as a distinguished glaciologist has been a keen, active 40 year interest in photography. The illustrating pictures span the range from straight-forward documentation, to geography and landscape, to creative studies in chiaroscuro. They present with a sensitivity to the nuances of architectural detail. The book could stand on its own as a collection of pictures. "The Hand of the Small Town Builder" will interest the individuals whose lives have been touched by New England summers, particularly those old enough to have visited and tenanted those in several of the communities referenced. Of more poignancy, it will speak to those who have had the good fortune not only to enjoy ownership of one of the book's examples, but to support the local community through hiring contractors, and paying taxes and insurance. As the well known Greensboro, Vermont gardening author, Lewis Hill, stated, "a thing of beauty is a job forever."

This is such a great book. It's full of photos of simple but beautiful hand-made houses with quirky little details and charming touches that aren't found in modern structures. Gives you insights into how to build a modest home that will give maximum comfort and pleasure to anyone who spends time in it. It also contains quite a bit of historical information that provides context and a depth of understanding that makes the read all the more satisfying.

Just what I expected

WONDERFUL - photographs, history & the background stories!

This is a beautiful book, with easy to read text supporting the amazing photographs. Our goal was to

collect ideas for building a summer residence high in the Colorado mountains. The book delivered those ideas, and it confirmed what we have long believed: beauty is created by the mind/hands/heart of the builder. The examples of specific craftsmen in the book are inspiring; these builders cared deeply about the places they built, many times outside and beyond the owner's view or values. One family had never seen the home before they walked in the door.

I love this book, it is so interesting. Just came back from the Randolph town meeting where Dr. Pfeffer was speaking about the book and so I bought a copy and read it. Now Dr. Pfeffer's house is right down the street from mine and I've known him for a while and I'm sick that this book is finally out. I live for the summer in the Will H. Bradley house pictured in the book on pages 108, 139, 140, 141, and the top half of 142. If you want any more info on the Will H. Bradley house, feel free to email me at alexdoyle8@att.net.

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