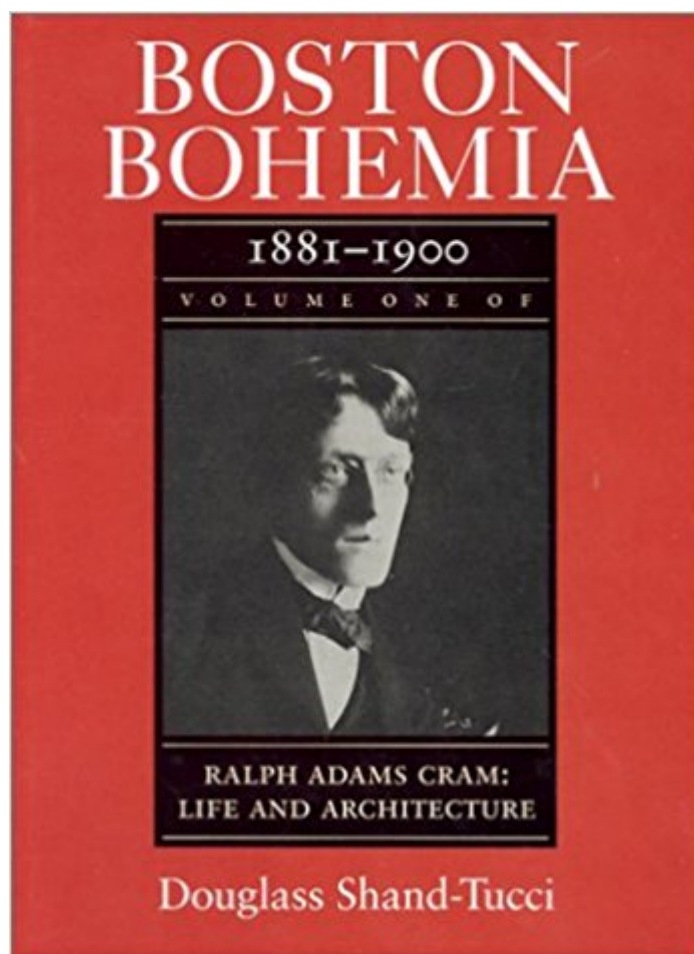


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Boston Bohemia, 1881-1900: Ralph Adams Cram--Life And Architecture



Synopsis

The first major biography of Ralph Adams Cram (1863-1942), America's greatest church architect, this book offers a portrait of America's earliest avant garde, Boston's little known fin-de-siecle bohemia, in which Cram figured as leader, editor, art critic, poet, and designer. Disclosing for the first time the pivotal contribution of Boston's emerging gay subculture to New England's intellectual and cultural history, Douglass Shand-Tucci explores the relationship between artistic creativity and sexual orientation and between homosexuality and High Church Anglicanism. The first of two volumes, this study focuses on Cram's early architectural and literary work.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In the early 20th century, the firm of Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson established themselves as the leading church architects in the United States and as the foremost proponents of the Eclectic Gothic style. Ralph Adams Cram (1863-1942), a prolific writer and speaker-as well as an arch medievalist-wrote 24 books. He was also an architect for New York's Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine from 1911 to 1942. The first volume of this monumental biography (the second volume, American Gothic, is in progress) focuses on Cram's early architectural and literary efforts. Historian Shand-Tucci's (Built in Boston, 1978) broad cultural analysis delves extensively into Beacon Hill's fin-de-siecle bohemian gay subculture. Engagingly written and brimming with research, facts, anecdotes, and minutiae, this work is most at home in American architecture or East Coast cultural life and history collections. Russell T. Clement, Brigham Young Univ. Lib., Provo, Ut. Copyright 1995

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Thank you!

I am very impressed with this book. It is long and detailed but it is chock full of incredibly interesting facts and details of the intertwinings of the gay community, the Anglo-Catholic movement in Boston, architecture and Boston history. I believe this book should be a "cannon" of gay literature and history but it seems to be overlooked. The author's research is incredibly detailed and and exhaustive.

The irony of this camp biography of a turn of the century American gentleman prig is a feather boa and pancake makeup at a Church of the Advent, Beacon Hill, Solemn High Mass. Gossipy "he-IS-gay-storian" Shand-Tucci is at it again. This drag queen drags on about what Cram crammed. Interesting, but so much more could have been said with so much less excess. Shand-Tucci's thesis is that Ralph Adams Cram and Cram's firm was a giant closet of prissy ninny Victorian girls. When I look at Cram's splendid architecture, exemplary life, fervent Anglo-Catholicism, prolific writings, marriage to Elizabeth Carrington Read (clearly a beard), children, and think of this odd biography, it reminds me of the closing scenes of Mel Brook's "Blazing Saddles." "Throw out your hands!! Stick out your tush!! Hands on your hips, Give 'em a bush!! You'll be surprised you're doing the French Mistake!! VOILA!" And then a brawl from a Western bursts in. The contrast between what Cram really was and what this book's thesis puts forward is that stark and ridiculously absurd. Shand-Tucci is better when he sticks to descriptions of Cram's projects and architecture and artistic styles and Cram's appreciations, adaptations, and genius for understatement and synthesis than his idle speculations about bedrooms and boys making moony eyed love letters in stone to each other. And in that respect this is an acceptable history of this important American architectural firm. Still, the glaring parts are so bad a better biography of Cram and his firm are needed. Shand-Tucci also isn't bad when he gathers from Cram's own writings some sense of the man's faith and beliefs and their inspiration and foundation. He also does a credible job on Cram's reasoning for embracing the Gothic both as an architectural expression and philosophical weltanschauung. But then the "bohemian" gay gossip churns up again, and it is all so much innuendo and sneaking behind thick curtains on Beacon Hill frolics that bespeaks more of Shand-Tucci's interests than Cram's predilections. This is two books stuffed into one like D.A.P. (dual author purpose...naughty you! Whatever did you think I mean?). One book is a credible examination of Cram's work and thinking,

and another book is an examination of gay subculture and its intersection with artistic and creative professionals in Boston at the turn of the century. Shand-Tucci's unproven thesis is that despite a busy schedule, a thriving firm, a prolific written output, and a wife and children, Cram cruised half of Boston while keeping his lover/partner Bertram Goodhue amused, satisfied, enamored, and submissive. Looks to me like Shand-Tucci's bottom line is psychological projection and wishful thinking is his top idea. Still, given Ralph Adams Cram's importance in American architecture, this flawed biography is a necessary voice, in addition to the much more focused and more firmly documented "Architecture of Ralph Adams Cram and His Office" by Ethan Anthony.

This sprawling study, which combines elements of cultural history, architecture criticism, gay gossip, and religious iconography, explores a wide range of the poets, art lovers, and fashionable people living in Boston at the end of the 19th century. The central figure, church architect Ralph Adams Cram, a devout Anglo-Catholic and apostle of Gothic Revivalism, launched an assault on Massachusetts Puritanism that resonates in our own times. Shand-Tucci provides an interesting backdrop for Adams--the rarefied atmosphere of Harvard-dominated Boston and the entrenched gay subculture of Boston's North End. Forgotten artists such as poet Louise Imogen Guiney and better-known figures such as George Santayana make important appearances here. Cram's romance/partnership with architect Bertram Goodhue is explored (albeit rather obliquely). Shand-Tucci is at his best when exploring the roots of Cram's religious fervor and when profiling eccentric art patrons such as Isabella Stewart Gardner. I do wish Shand-Tucci's prose were less effusive. The rib-nudging, campy asides to the reader are wearying, and the profusion of exclamation points must break all records. I finally got through it all, however, and I look forward to Volume Two.

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