CHAPTER 7

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Architecture for the Future at the Charleston Exposition, 1901–1902

In August of 1885, a hurricane damaged nearly every home in Charleston. One year later, an earthquake laid waste to over one hundred additional buildings. Such widespread physical destruction matched the city's spiritual decline in this age of profound social and economic change. Charleston, once an aristocrat among southern cities, showed little energy in trying to keep pace with these changes; many of the city's youths lost hope and departed, while many of the city's elders lost hope and remained. Economic survival in nineteenth-century America, though, depended on energy and on hopes for the future. While Charleston's traditional elite enjoyed a strong commercial legacy from the city's earliest years, they continued to cherish the traditional business patterns of the antebellum era, when the cotton trade came to Charleston without extra effort on the part of merchants, and when middlemen casually arranged for its shipment.

After the Civil War, however, commercial men and farmers in the South's new upcountry towns and cities began sending more of their produce directly to the North. Charleston was left behind in this new era, as much by its laconic business spirit as by the new railroads which bypassed its port. By the 1890s, however, a group of "young men" appeared in Charleston who knew that they would have to accommodate themselves to these new conditions in order to revive the city and make it a part of the nation's commercial mainstream. Charleston's corps of progressive business leaders adopted an exposition in 1901 in the hope that it would rebuild their city, both physically and spiritually. Business leaders in other southern cities, notably Atlanta, Nashville, and New Orleans, had hosted World's Fairs with similar goals.

These new, relatively aggressive commercial leaders in Charleston also had more specific plans. In particular, they saw their exposition in

1901 as a way to stimulate activity at the city's harbor. If they could get the nation (or at least the Southeast) to come back to the port, which had been improved with federally constructed jetties in 1897, then Charleston might once again enjoy prosperity, and return to its glory days of the late eighteenth century. As the twentieth century dawned and as foreign trade became a bigger part of the nation's commerce, the Spanish West Indies represented a tremendous hope for the South's economic development. The architecture of Charleston's exposition was a crucial part of its leaders' attempt to place Charleston at the vanguard of this trade. This specific plan had only marginal success, but the imagery created by the architecture at the exposition had other, unintended meanings for the future of Charleston as it entered the twentieth century. Charleston's future, so assiduously pursued by young and progressive businessmen, would be aptly represented by these sentimental and historical buildings. The buildings, as much as the drive for modern commercial success, symbolized Charleston's future.

London had held the first international exposition, the Exhibition of the Arts and Industries of All Nations, in 1851. Expositions quickly became institutionalized as signature pieces of western Victorian culture. Fairgoers throughout Europe and America expected to see new technologies, modern innovations, and signs of the future at these expositions. At Philadelphia's Centennial Exposition in 1876, for example, the world first saw telephones; more than half a century later, at New York's 1939 World's Fair, the world began to watch television. An exposition that did not present something new was somehow suspect, only tentatively given status in the pantheon of great World's Fairs.

These fairs occasionally presented architectural innovations as well. Gustave Eiffel's Tower at the 1889 Paris Exposition comes quickly to mind, for example, along with Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace in London in 1851, and the Trylon and Perisphere at New York's World's Fair in 1939. Public expectations for originality in the nineteenth century, however, at least in America, did not always include buildings. Instead, leading architects continued to cloak even structurally innovative buildings in traditional garb. Style was the operative concept for architecture throughout the nineteenth century, as architects chose visual details from historic buildings to bring to the viewer's imagination certain values and assumptions associated with the era in which that style originated. This type of "communication," which relied on conventional images, initially had moral overtones. Innumerable household and architectural theorists, for example, wrote books and articles proclaiming the effect of living amid beauty or ugliness, or appropriate or inappropriate styles. Many of these moral implications began to fade as the nineteenth century wore on, though, while the desire for visual associations remained. Historical styles became like a menu for architects, who in consultation with patrons chose or tailored a "look" that suited the particular purposes of the building.

This was especially the case with World's Fair buildings. Exposition planners needed temporary structures that could be erected quickly and inexpensively and that could provide large sheds with undifferentiated, open floor plans to house exhibits. While fairgoers marveled at the structural innovations of Eiffel's Tower and a greenhouse on the scale of Paxton's Crystal Palace, most expositions presented more familiar or conventional sights. The buildings provided the physical setting and context for the exhibits. The style of the buildings, however, provided the intellectual context for the exhibits and the keys to understanding them.

At the same time as London's and Paris's innovative structures come to mind, for example, the image of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, the "White City," arises in opposition. Chicago's Fair introduced the concept of

an overall stylistic motif for expositions, which became a way of associating the fair with a particular theme. The architects for the White City, while employing modern structural techniques, cloaked the buildings in a Neoclassical skin that projected an image of a refined urbanity and of national power and cultural authority.[1] It influenced American urban planning and architecture for a generation and more and left a powerful legacy for American exposition promoters. The southern expositions, following quickly on Chicago's heels, continued the legacy.

World's Fairs existed not only to make a profit, but also to express some message, be it about patriotism, imperial endeavors, international cooperation, or local pride. Exposition officials had various ways of spreading these messages, including widespread advertising posters and bills, promotional booklets, and access to the national press. However, they all recognized the special importance of buildings. These structures had to convey just the right message and create just the right image in order to bolster the purpose of the fairs.

Southern leaders adopted large-scale expositions during the 1890s. The previous decade had seen small yet pioneering examples, including ones in Atlanta in 1881 and 1887, in Louisville in 1886, and a larger one in New Orleans, the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition of 1885. Atlanta kicked off a second wave with its Cotton States and International Exposition in 1895. Nashville followed suit in 1897 with the Tennessee Centennial and International Exposition. These two formed the immediate context for the South Carolina Interstate and West Indian Exposition, held in Charleston in 1901. Norfolk, Virginia, ended this string in 1907 with the Jamestown Tercentenary Exposition. Taken together, this regional burst of expositions was singular in the history of the institution and invites questions from scholars. In this poverty-stricken rural section, which only recently had endured a devastating military defeat at the hands of its own countrymen, such a burst of this new, expensive, and complex institution seems odd and unlikely.

Urban leaders in the late-nineteenth-century South used expositions to advertise their region as worthy of participating in American commercial life. Businessmen and political leaders of both parties had sought to help the South recover economically from the Civil War. An emergent southern urban business class spearheaded the campaigns to exploit the region's natural resources, develop new markets for its agricultural produce, and promote its manufacturing enterprises.[2] While they did not forsake local support, they encouraged northern investment in southern manufacturing and "respectable" immigration to the South. These leaders also adopted World's Fairs in the hopes of both celebrating and creating the kinds of development and business culture that would give the South a secure place in modern commercial America.

At one level, the South's urban leaders argued that expositions were the most efficient ways for southerners to learn about new products and techniques. While the various conventions and state and local fairs could do this, World's Fairs were something different. Expositions, which were by definition vehicles for industrial modernization and international cooperation, were their tools to alter both the reality and the image of the South. Simply hosting an exposition indicated to the outside world a trustworthy base of organizational and financial resources. This, the southern leaders hoped, would be the initial push toward a modern, stable economy in the South; once outsiders began investing in and moving to the South, southerners would be able to use these additional resources to develop attitudes and institutions that could support and maintain social and economic progress.

They also hoped that expositions would help them to overcome disagreeable regional legacies,

particularly from the South's rural inheritance and from its racial problems, which hindered the region's economic development. These complex legacies help to explain the significance and function of the architecture at the expositions.

The South had long had commercial connections throughout the nation, but its manufacturing legacy was limited. Clearly, the region faced serious obstacles to industrialization, particularly in the early years after the Civil War. The war devastated the region's infrastructure, as farm animals, machinery, and buildings, along with the region's networks of roads, canals, and railroads, suffered. This physical destruction accompanied the immense loss of life, including over one-fifth of the South's adult white male population. Many of those who survived lost their life savings when the Confederate bonds and currency collapsed after the war. Agricultural production dropped precipitously, providing little income for investment.[3] Declining morale accompanied all of these losses, allowing for little of the ebullient confidence that powered northern industrialization and commercial strength.

Other internal factors came into play as Reconstruction moved toward a close. Southern health, education, and infrastructure were plagued by problems, while a lack of factory experience among the people did little to demonstrate industrial competence to potential outside investors.[4] While these internal conditions improved during the 1880s and 1890s, the South's image presented another, perhaps deeper, problem. Northern businessmen had reservations about many aspects of the South, from the region's lack of manufacturing experience to its violence and apparent lack of stability. Southern leaders also had to outrun the legacy of treason, that theirs was a disloyal section, filled with citizens devoted more to their own states than to the Union. At a less virulent level, the South had the reputation as a land of carefree, colorful individuals. Southerners were rural people who lacked the necessary discipline to run a tight industrial ship. The South was pleasing enough to contemplate as a vacation spot, but southern enterprises were a different matter. Expositions, many southern leaders came to believe, were the only institutions powerful enough to overcome such obstacles.

Charleston illustrated all of these problems. The city's history from the Civil War to the early twentieth century was indeed a sad one. Beset by natural destruction, the city's business leaders lacked the tradition of commercial vitality and aggressiveness that characterized such cities as Nashville and Atlanta. Charleston's elite did little to inculcate such a "greedy" spirit. The city's traditional commercial leaders had relied for generations on the drawing power of the city's excellent harbor, and showed little inclination to change. The city had long served as a commercial and social entrepôt, acting as the conduit for the rice plantations of lowland Carolina and the cotton plantations of the midlands and upcountry. The city had also been a center of social life, serving as the seasonal residence for plantation owners and rice and cotton brokers, who built the magnificent single houses in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These plantation owners and their business middlemen had generated a leisurely way of life known as the Charleston Style.

This was a commercial and social heritage which did little to foster an aggressive attitude among its leading residents, who maintained an aristocratic distrust of trade. The Civil War resulted not only in physical destruction and loss of life, but also helped to usher in a new way of doing business throughout the South. Merchants backed by northern credit set up shop in the new towns and cities of the upcountry South, and provided funding for poverty-stricken farmers. These merchants then saw to the marketing of the cotton, which they increasingly sent north along the railroads which extended into the South.[5] The ports of Baltimore and New York at the ends of these trunk lines

flourished, while Charleston, unwilling to accommodate itself to the new conditions, withered. Before the Civil War, for example, the city's merchants had managed to stop the new railroads from reaching the wharves. The lines instead stopped several blocks away, forcing the goods to be transported to the wharves by drays for an extra charge. This situation continued into the late nineteenth century, and, as the end of the century approached, Charleston's port attracted decreasing portions of the nation's trade in imports and exports. It grabbed only 0.37 percent of American foreign commerce in 1900, behind such cities as Norfolk, Savannah, Wilmington, and Newport News.[6]

Manufacturing enterprises fared little better than the city's commerce after the war. The little investment capital that Charleston's leaders possessed often went to upstate textile mills and to the rising southern cities. Some Charleston investors had attempted to form a textile mill in the city in the 1880s, but it quickly collapsed as the result of difficulty in finding both money and workers. The discovery of phosphate deposits along the Ashley River in the 1870s and 1880s promised great returns for fertilizer manufacturing, but when miners found richer deposits in Florida and Tennessee in the 1890s, Charleston's business and reputation again declined.[7] The city reported 566 manufacturing establishments in 1890, with a total capital investment of over $7 million; Atlanta's 410 manufacturers, by comparison, had been able to attract nearly $10 million.[8] Francis Carey, a prominent Baltimore industrialist who had investments in Charleston, spoke bluntly of the city's business image in the 1890s. In a letter to a Charleston businessman, he claimed that "many difficulties exist in Charleston which exist in no other town of its size in the matter of any business enterprise of any kind."[9]

Not all of Charleston's businessmen were content to witness the city's decline. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, the city's rising leaders sought to bring Charleston into line with the nation's burgeoning economy. They often had backgrounds outside the city, and came to success in less traditional lines of trade such as groceries, lumber, and other supplies, as well as in the railroads. Some, including Frederick Wagener, the president of the Exposition Company in Charleston, were foreign by birth, while many others were from the North. They generally focused on two aspects in their attempts to strengthen the city: the need for a new and aggressive business spirit, and the revival of the city's excellent harbor. As early as the 1880s, a Chamber of Commerce committee blended these themes by calling for a more active trade with the West Indies. The city, the authors argued, should act as the port of import and export between the West Indies and the vast productive capacity of the American West. Other cities had been more "vigorous" in seeking this foreign trade, the committee reported, but all was not lost: it would merely "be a work of time and labor" to persuade western merchants to ship their goods through Charleston. They used the pamphlet to sound a call to arms, as they noted that "it will take some time also to secure that co-operation within the State which is indispensable to our success."[10] But few of the city's established leaders, who still controlled much of the city's capital, responded to their call.

Nevertheless, many of Charleston's younger leaders continued to push the city forward into national and international markets. They attempted several times to form commercial organizations, in the hope of taking leadership from the moribund, century-old Chamber of Commerce. Most of these attempts soon lapsed into genteel social gatherings.[11] They finally succeeded in 1894 with the Young Men's Business League (YMBL), which quickly set up a Charleston Freight Bureau and served as a gadfly to the city's more entrenched leadership. Fundamentally, they claimed, the city needed new men and more

money, but its leaders would also have to prove Charleston worthy. "Now is the accepted time," claimed the *Evening Post* in early 1900, "to demonstrate the fact that the commercial enterprise of the city is not all stored away in the different cemeteries."[12]

The YMBL also provided the leadership for the new Exposition. John Averill, a northern-born Confederate veteran and agent for a number of southern railroads, first suggested that the city host an industrial exposition in October 1899.[13] Charleston's "Young Men," having seen the success of expositions in Atlanta and Nashville, quickly took up the call. They found the lures of increased population, greater investments, and a reinvigorated community spirit enticing. As W. H. Welch, president of the YMBL, observed: "The projectors of this Exposition appreciating of the immediate need of some movement which would infuse new life and activity into our city, conceived the idea that an Exposition would produce better results at less cost than anything which we could do."[14]

The expositions in Atlanta, Nashville, and Charleston clearly arose from different local traditions and purposes. As with leaders in the other two cities, Charlestonians had to find a niche for themselves, a way for their city efficiently to fit into the nation's commercial currents. These promoters saw architecture as a key factor that would both draw people to the fair and, more subtly, project its underlying message. The architecture at the different southern expositions indicated a range of options in the southern attempts to fit into the American commercial mainstream.

Atlanta's 1895 exposition presented a vaguely Romanesque style (fig. 7.1). Bradford Gilbert, a New York architect whose works included railroad stations, office blocks, and a skyscraper, designed most of the buildings.[15] His use of the Romanesque came in part from his recommendation that these buildings, with their relatively simple plans and outlines, would be a cost-effective solution to the problem of large, temporary exhibit buildings. However, it also suggested the desire by Atlanta's businessmen to be seen as *au courant* with America's commercial trends. As reflected in its promotional literature and in its various buildings, Atlanta was not just a southern city trying to make its mark. Instead, its leaders argued re-

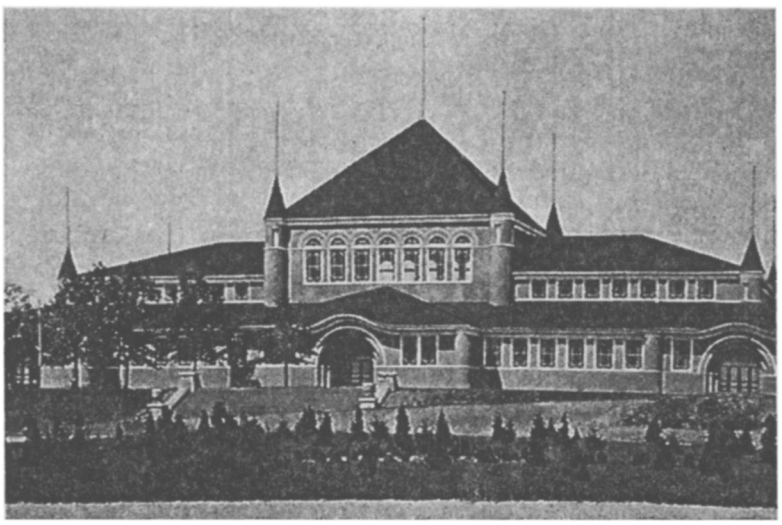

Fig. 7.1. Agricultural Building, Cotton States and International Exposition, Atlanta, 1895. From Walter G. Cooper, *The Cotton States and International Exposition and South Illustrated* (Atlanta, 1896).

peatedly that the city was already a full-fledged partner, capable of leading the rest of the South into the nation's commercial and industrial life. The ethereal classicism of the antebellum South thus gave way in Atlanta to the modern, commercial, vigorous, Richardsonian Romanesque.

Nashville's promoters in 1897 returned to the classical and commissioned several local architects to carry out the work of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition.[16] The administration's decision to create a full-scale replica of the Parthenon was only the most ambitious example of the fair's motif, as the classical heritage spread to nearly every building on the grounds (fig. 7.2). This return to classicism stemmed in part from the exposition's origins as a patriotic celebration of the state's centennial anniversary. Businessmen soon picked up on the idea, and promoted it both as a patriotic exercise and as a modern industrial exposition. In their promotional literature, the Centennial's officials emphasized the city's long-standing motto as "The Athens of the South," which helped explain the classical style of architecture. The motivation for this style was not just local pride, though, as they appealed to a more broadly American past. Through repeated calls to patriotism and virtue, they sought to recall the early years of the American Republic. "Colonial" to the leaders of the Tennessee Centennial meant something other than a specific time. Instead, in their eyes, colonial meant the last era when all sections of the country worked together for a common purpose.[17] Colonial also referred to the era when classically derived architecture provided unifying symbols for the new nation. In the face of pervasive sectional tension and distrust lingering from the Civil War, they claimed that it was now time to reassert such a unity. They appealed to what they saw as a past of national harmony, symbolized by an architectural heritage that all sections could claim.

The South Carolina Interstate and West Indian Exposition, held from December 1901 through June 1902, presented another option for fitting into the national mainstream. Patriotism was not at issue here, as in Nashville, nor was a booming intrastate commerce, as in Atlanta. Instead, Charleston's officials looked almost exclusively to an increase in the nation's foreign trade, which they hoped would pass through Charleston. In

Fig. 7.2. Minerals and Forestry Building, Tennessee Centennial and International Exposition, Nashville, 1897. W. G. and A. J. Thuss, *Art Album of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition* (Nashville, 1898).

one sense, this was a reactionary goal; Charleston had gained prominence in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a port for the surrounding region. The exposition's leaders sought to restore this status to Charleston. At the same time, though, they risked the enmity of a well-entrenched old-guard which disdained such modern methods of urban boosterism, even if the goal was the restoration of Charleston to its Augustan age. This tension continued throughout the exposition and affected its financing in the early months of preparation and in its aftermath. Charleston's traditional commercial elite, however, had little to do with the exposition's architecture.

The exposition's officials, after very little public discussion, hired Bradford Gilbert as the supervising architect. His role here was much larger than it had been at Atlanta, as he designed the grounds and almost all of the buildings, and supervised all other aspects of the infrastructure, including the water, sewage, and road systems. The grounds were north of the city, on the east bank of the Ashley River that forms Charleston's western boundary. His ground plan clearly showed that he looked to Chicago's 1893 World's Columbian Exposition as a guide. Daniel Burnham, Frederick Law Olmsted, and Henry Codman had created a mix of high classical formality in Chicago's Court of Honor and a pastoral setting close to it. Gilbert adopted that division in his ground plan, and a clear spatial division to go along with it. His ground plan featured two principal sections, joined at a narrow neck. The direct opposition of these two, the natural and the artificial, he hoped, would help each show its individuality.

The "Nature" section was on old farmland along the Ashley River, and featured winding lanes and diverse buildings amid a picturesque layout with live oaks and magnolias. Gilbert's reliance on Olmsted's ideas of setting buildings into a naturalistic landscape and making use of the extant natural features was clear. The Natural section, he claimed, "will form a natural park of endless beauty of vista and landscape effect naturalistic [*sic.*] . . . a winding path of 100 feet in width will be carried underneath the overspreading live oaks along the edge of the embankment." He designed this section to contain the Art Building, the Negro Building, the Woman's Building, the various State buildings, along with less naturalistic buildings such as Transportation and Machinery.[18]

The "Art" section lay just to the southeast, on the grounds of the old Washington Race Course. In contrast to the Natural section, the Art section featured a complex geometrical design and more formal and architecturally unified buildings. Gilbert proposed to treat this level stretch of land, from which the trees had already been shorn, "artificially in such a manner as to produce the highest type of art."[19] The main buildings of the Art section most clearly reflected the exposition's dominant motif, and provided the focus of attention for the exposition. In another obvious reference to the Chicago World's Fair with its Court of Honor, Charleston's Palaces of Agriculture, Commerce, and Cotton surrounded a sunken garden and were connected by a colonnade to form a "Court of Palaces" (fig. 7.3).

Here, and in the Administration Building that connected the Art and Natural sections of the grounds, Gilbert let his imagination loose. The most striking aspect of Gilbert's role at Charleston was the wilder and more romantic style of the buildings compared to what he created in Atlanta. Gilbert's mandate was to emphasize a "southern" motif. One is hard-pressed, however, to discern anything distinctively southern in the pictures of the buildings. While the exposition promoters in both Atlanta and Nashville used the labels "southern" and "colonial" interchangeably in describing all classically inspired buildings, Gilbert's approach was markedly different and referred to the particular purposes of the fair.

Fig. 7.3. Sunken Gardens and Auditorium, South Carolina, Inter-State and West Indian Exposition, Charleston, 1901. From *Charleston and the South Carolina Inter-State and West Indian Exposition* (Boston, 1902).

While a number of the exposition's buildings showed different designs and indicated different intents and purposes, the buildings in the Court of Palaces were the most important for creating the exposition's image.

The most obvious contrast to Atlanta was that Gilbert's buildings in Charleston were so richly decorated. Domes, arcades, finials, brackets, and more dazzle and often confuse the eye. Gilbert clearly drew on a wide variety of precedents for these details. Except for vaguely Byzantine touches in the small central domes raised on polygonal, open drums, however, the precedents for these main buildings were primarily found in the Mediterranean world of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Despite Gilbert's vaguely Romanesque buildings at the 1895 Atlanta exposition, one searches in vain for Romanesque or Gothic references at Charleston. Instead, Spanish and Italian styles dominated.

In plan, the three main "Palaces" were simple and nearly identical: rectangular exhibit halls, with rows of arcaded windows across the fronts on either side of grand, projecting central entrances, surmounted by central domes. The differences were primarily in the details, especially at the ends of the buildings. The South Carolina building, or the Palace of Agriculture, featured the square corner turrets which Gilbert used at Atlanta (fig. 7.4). The scalloped gable above the central entrance referred to the fashionable Mission style, which drew inspiration from Spanish colonial missions in California and Mexico. The tracery around the doors in the corner turrets showed Spanish Medieval precedents, while the more recent Italianate comes through in the brackets underneath the eaves.

The Palace of Agriculture, with its shallow domes atop the square corner turrets, pierced cupolas above the projecting central portico, and finials between the arcaded windows, was much more elaborate than its partner across the sunken gardens, the Palace of Commerce (fig. 7.5). While lacking some of the florid Italianate decorations of the Agriculture building, the Palace of Commerce showed clearer references to the Spanish Baroque, with the scalloped gables in the central portico and in the corner features and the tiled hip roofs atop the square turrets surrounding the central entrance. Many features were the same, however, including

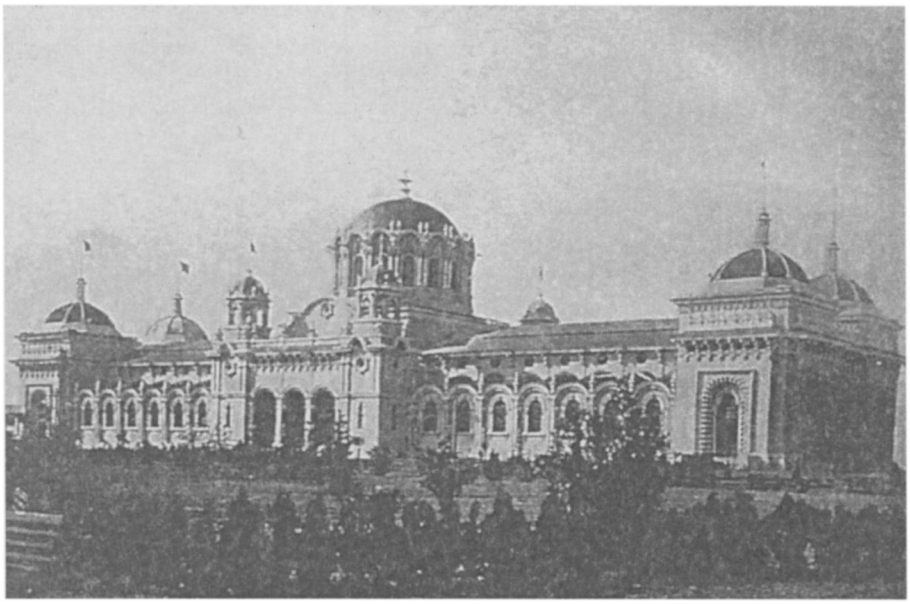

Fig. 7.4. South Carolina Building, South Carolina, Inter-State and West Indian Exposition, Charleston, 1901. From *Charleston and the South Carolina Inter-State and West Indian Exposition* (Boston, 1902).

Fig. 7.5. Palace of Commerce, South Carolina, Inter-State and West Indian Exposition, Charleston, 1901. From *Charleston and the South Carolina Inter-State and West Indian Exposition* (Boston, 1902).

the row of projecting and sloping arcaded windows across the front, the central entrance recessed behind a screen of three arches, and the central dome on a polygonal drum.

The Cotton Palace, which had the place of honor at the head of the Court, was clearly different in elevation and detail from the two Palaces which flanked it (fig. 7.6). The entrance was much more prominent, and featured a five-bay screen with Corinthian columns rather than the three-bay arcaded entrance and a taller dome surmounted by a cupola. It also featured a simple hipped roof without separate corner treatments. This lack of corner treatments focused attention on the entranceway, which featured a scalloped gable similar to the Palace of Commerce and, flanking the portico, rounded turrets each surmounted by a shallow dome with a small cupola. The central dome, dominant horizontality, and Mediterranean-influenced row of arcaded windows across the front provided connections to the other buildings on the Court of Palaces. The more elaborate entrance, however, together with the taller dome and the building's placement at the head of the Court of Palaces, indicated the importance of the building and the centrality of cotton for the exposition, for Charleston, and for the South.

The range of European—particularly Spanish and generically Mediterranean—stylistic references worked against the notion that these buildings could be considered "southern" in any technical sense. These styles had become increasingly fashionable for residential and commercial architecture by the 1890s and early 1900s, particularly in the Southwest and in Florida. These Mediterranean-influenced styles can no more be called southern than can Greek or Roman Revival styles. The connection between the look of Charleston's principal exposition buildings and modern American commerce appears even more strained. The connections, however, worked in two important ways.

The title of the fair itself suggests one way: the South Carolina Interstate and West Indian Exposition. South Carolina's upstate textile mills provided a strong manufacturing base for the state, and Charleston's exposition leaders recognized that they would need extensive support from the mill owners. The exposition was, in large part, an attempt to encourage these upcountry manufacturers to patronize Charleston's port, and

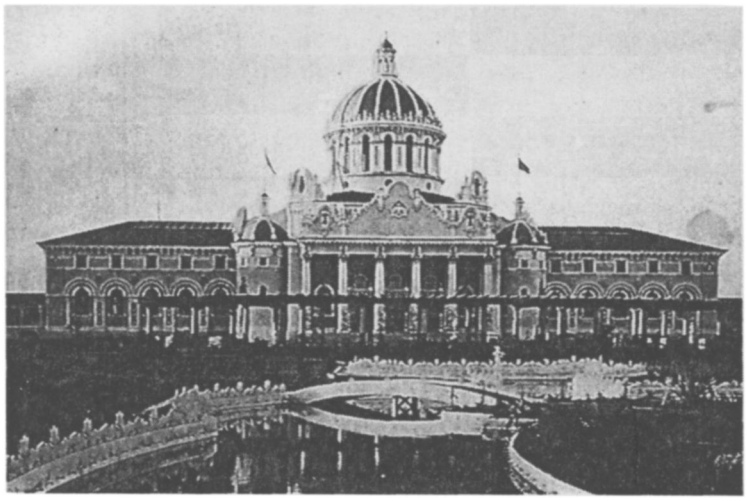

Fig. 7.6. Cotton Palace, South Carolina, Inter-State and West Indian Exposition, Charleston, 1901. From *Charleston and the South Carolina Inter-State and West Indian Exposition* (Boston, 1902).

their lure was the West Indian trade. The Caribbean islands, Charleston's promoters argued, would be a lucrative market for the abundant produce of textile mills in South Carolina and the surrounding states.

As early as February 1900, the officials proposed a central cotton palace "in which will be shown as it were, a cotton seed and what comes from it." Already their plan was to "make the cotton exhibit a practical exposition of the cotton and cotton seed industries in order that substantial and profitable results may follow."[20] Daniel Tompkins, a prominent industrialist in Charlotte, North Carolina, who had long called for increased foreign trade for southern textile mills, coordinated the cotton exhibit.[21] The exhibits in the Cotton Palace came largely from these southern, mostly South Carolina, companies. The plan was to show the manufacturing potential for cotton and to emphasize what the southern mills were producing. Tompkins also helped to articulate the opportunities that the West Indies offered to the South's textile manufacturers. He wrote a letter to the Charleston *News and Courier* in favor of the exposition, which prompted an editorial response. "There is a wide market awaiting the Southern manufacturers in the West Indian countries and in South America," the editors proclaimed, "and the Exposition to be held here next year will enable the manufacturers of this and other Southern States to capture the rich trade of these countries."[22] The chief purpose of the fair, echoed the author of an exposition pamphlet, was "the promotion of more intimate commercial relations with the 70 principle West Indian Islands."[23]

The Spanish–American War in 1899 provided the immediate political context for the fair. American trade with the West Indies, particularly with Spanish-owned Cuba and Puerto Rico, had grown through the 1880s and 1890s. Total American imports and exports with Cuba, for example, reached a prewar high of $102,900,000 in 1893, before dropping to only $24,800,000 in 1898. The war drew the public's attention to these islands, though, and after their "liberation" in 1899, trade resumed quickly; by 1905, total American imports and exports to Cuba reached $124,700,000.[24] Southern business leaders were quick to note the potential profits from a renewed West Indian trade. The *Manufacturer's Record,* which catered largely to southern businesses, noted in 1899 that the results of the war with Spain would be a big stimulant to business. "Our new possessions," the writer concluded, "give us an immense area for industrial development. They give to the daring and enterprising spirits that have made America what it is a new outlet, a new and wonderful field."[25] *The Exposition,* a monthly magazine published by Charleston's exposition company, echoed this confidence. After quoting government statistics showing America's growing West Indian trade, the writer concluded by noting that "[h]ere, then, is a commerce of $100,000,000 lying at our very doors, which the friends of the West Indian Exposition have a right to say is an important item in even so great a commerce as that of the United States."[26] In this hopeful vision, Charleston's niche in America's commercial life was to handle the South's trade, particularly the products of the region's burgeoning textile mills, with the West Indies.

The architecture at Charleston's exposition both reflected and promoted this conscious hope for the future. The stylistic references formed a direct appeal to the Spanish heritage of the West Indies. It was also a way to emphasize Charleston's own legacy of West Indian ties. Indeed, the fair's officials promoted the Spanish influence on Charleston and the exposition regularly. An article in the *News and Courier,* for example, noted that Gilbert "has harmonized with our own beautiful Colonial the most effective characteristics of the old Spanish."[27] In Gilbert's own description, the Cotton Palace was "broken by various pediments, projections,

domes, red-tiled roofs and turrets, in the typical Southern type of architecture in a strong Spanish-American motif of huge masses, simple and strong contour and outlines, with enrichments of terraces and sculpture at the various entrances and initial points."[28] The architectural critic Montgomery Schuyler sought to be more specific in defining the style: "At Chicago they called the style Columbian; at Buffalo they called it Pan-American. It is in fact what they call it in Charleston—the Spanish Renaissance of the Sixteenth Century."[29]

The exposition's planners backed up their buildings with attempts to stimulate local interest in and knowledge of the West Indies. Articles on different aspects of life and business in Cuba and Puerto Rico, for example, appeared regularly in the local newspapers and in the promotional literature. They celebrated Cuban independence day with a well-attended affair, and planned for a West Indian Congress as one of the very few special meetings that accompanied the exposition. This Congress was a sad failure, though, with few representatives in attendance.

The attempts by Charleston's leaders to boost foreign trade at the city's port also faltered. In 1902 the Fruit Dispatch Company of New York announced plans to set up a steamship line between Charleston and Central America, but this was a rare advance.[30] By 1905, Charleston had slipped further in its percentage of America's import trade, falling behind most of the other southern ports. While the city's economy did begin to expand during World War I, this was more a result of government activity at the Naval Base and dry dock than the West Indian trade.

This conscious effort to solicit more active foreign commerce at the port, though, was not the only way to explain the Spanish Renaissance style of architecture. The very romanticism and sentimentalism of the buildings paid tribute to, even glorified, Charleston's commercial backwardness and cultural recalcitrance. At times, comments on the exposition's romantic aspects got out of hand. In describing the administration building, for example, one writer sought to articulate what gave it a Spanish Renaissance feeling: "It is not so much the domes and facades, nor the deep tiled roof, though all these have much meaning, no doubt, but it is the doors and windows which at a glance takes us deep into the pages of some old Spanish romance. These only lack the damsel within and the cavalier without to complete the ideal."[31]

The city's noncommercial, sentimental image was at odds with the message of progress, but still found considerable sympathies in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century America. By the 1890s, anticapitalist and antimodern critics had begun pointing to the perils of improvement while praising the old-fashioned. The early Colonial Revival movement of the 1880s, which focused on the rugged early settlement era, and the fascination with the American frontier provided some outlets for such feelings, while a renewed martial spirit and the increasing popularity of medieval-style romance literature provided others.[32] Charleston's traditional elite, who failed to support the Exposition even if they had offered little outright opposition, gave a local example of another type of antimodernism. As the writer of a 1905 magazine article noted, modern businessmen will never "persuade the Charlestonian to welcome with delight a horde of unidentified tourists. . . . Charleston shakes her head when approached on the subject of huge hotels which will accommodate the man with millions from the swarming centers of America."[33]

Owen Wister catered to this sentiment in his 1906 novel, *Lady Baltimore,* set in a fictionalized Charleston. He claimed an important role in the nation's moral life for this backward city. His friend Theodore Roosevelt chided Wister on this point, noting that "[y]our particular heroes, the Charleston aristocrats, offer as melancholy an example as I know of people whose whole life for generations

has been warped by their own wilful [*sic.*] perversity."[34] Nonetheless, Wister made a strong emotional and moral appeal for the kind of backwardness that he found in Charleston. His protagonist comes to Charleston for genealogical research, and submits to the city's old-fashioned ways. The young man observes to a southern companion that "[s]uch quiet faces are gone now into that breathless, competing North; ground into oblivion between the clashing trades of the competing men and the clashing jewels and chandeliers of their competing wives—while yours have lingered on, spared by your very adversity."[35]

Charleston was indeed spared by its problems. As countless observers have discovered, here was something to treasure in a fast-paced, modern world. The city's architectural as well as commercial development continued slowly in Charleston, as it had since the Civil War. The city's most recent "building boom" before the exposition had been in the 1880s, but it left the distinctive parts of the city unchanged. The exposition itself had no discernible architectural influence on the city, nor did the gradual improvement of the city's fortunes in the early twentieth century permit massive downtown development. Indeed, little of the city's growth in the twentieth century can be attributed to the exposition itself. As a result of this relative failure, though, Charleston's future was in a way secured. The irony, therefore, is strong. While seeking acceptance according to the terms of modern, industrial America, the failure of Charleston's new leaders to overcome the city's traditional leadership allowed for other values to arise later. In 1931, for example, the city council pioneered the concept of historic district zoning as a way to protect its remarkable stock of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century buildings and their iron decorations. Tourists, many of them drawn by nostalgic and romantic wishes for a simpler and slower time, flocked to this living remnant of an earlier age, and gave the city an enduring economic base. Despite the heroic efforts of Charleston's businessmen with their Exposition, their city's salvation came in precisely the quality that they had sought to eliminate.

Notes

1. William H. Jordy, *American Buildings and their Architects: Progressive and Academic Ideals at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 79; R. Reid Badger, *The Great American Fair: The World's Columbian Exposition & American Culture* (Chicago, Ill.: Nelson Hall, 1979), 63–72.
2. See Vicki Vaughn Johnson, *The Men and the Vision of the Southern Commercial Conventions, 1845–1871* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1992), 193–220; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).
3. Foner, *Reconstruction,* 124–25.
4. For varying insights on these and other problems, see Blaine A. Brownell and David R. Goldfield, eds., *The City in Southern History: The Growth of Urban Civilization in the South* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1977); James Cobb, *Industrialization and Southern Society, 1877–1984* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1984; Chicago, Ill.: The Dorsey Press, 1989); Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).
5. For insights on this process, see, among others, Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992), 214–309; Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850–1890* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983), 170–203; and C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1951).

6. *The Foreign Commerce and Navigation of the United States,* House of Representatives, 56th Congress, 2d session, document 13, 50; Walter J. Fraser Jr., *Charleston! Charleston!: The History of a Southern City* (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1989), 208.
7. David L. Carlton, *Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880–1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1982), 72–76; Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860–1910* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1990), 79–80.
8. *Report on Manufacturing Industries in the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890,* Department of the Interior, Bureau of the Census, 1895, Table 3.
9. Francis K. Carey to P. H. Gadsden, Nov. 2, 1899, Hemphill Family Papers, Manuscript Department, Duke Univ. Library, Durham, North Carolina. For further information on Charleston at the turn of the century, see Carlton, *Mill and Town,* Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South,* and Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!* cited above; see also John Joseph Duffy, "Charleston Politics in the Progressive Era," (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of South Carolina, 1963).
10. "Charleston, South Carolina. The Advantages of the City of Charleston as a Port of Import and Export for the Trade and Commerce of the Northwestern States of the United States, and of Central and South America, The West Indies, and Europe," pamphlet, The News and Courier Book Press, 1880 (Charleston, S.C.), p. 20.
11. see Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South,* 159–72.
12. (Charleston, S.C.) *Evening Post,* Mar. 26, 1900.
13. (Charleston, S.C.) *News and Courier,* Oct. 3, 1899; for biographical information on Averill, see *The Exposition* 2 (Dec. 1901): 501.
14. Quoted in *News and Courier,* Dec. 2, 1899.
15. Information on Gilbert is widely scattered. His main pamphlets, *Architectural Sketches. With Sketches Applicable to Modern Structures* (by the author, 1881, 1889), and *Sketches of Public Buildings* (by the author, 1881), can be found in Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Historical Architecture Books, nos. 37 and 38. See also Gilbert, *Sketch Portfolio of Railroad Stations. From Original Designs by Bradford L. Gilbert* (by the author, 1881; 5th ed., 1895). For more general background information, see "Gilbert, Bradford L.," in vol. 2 of Adolf Placzek, ed., *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects* (New York: Free Press, 1982), 201; "Gilbert, Bradford," in Henry F. Withey and Elsie Rathburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)* (by the authors, 1956; facsimile ed., Los Angeles, Calif.: Hennessy and Ingalls, 1970), 233; "Gilbert, Bradford Lee," *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (1910; reprint, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1967); obituary in *American Architect* 100 (Sept. 20, 1911): 3; F. Boyd Coons, "The Cotton State and International Exposition in the New South: Architecture and Implications," (M.A. thesis, Univ. of Virginia, 1988). Additional, scattered material may be found in *A History of Real Estate, Building and Architecture in New York City* (New York: 1898; reprint, Arno Press, 1967), 466–71; "Architectural Ethics: The Case of the Ottawa Terminal Station and Hotel," *Architectural Record* 24 (July–Dec. 1908): 293–99.
16. Nine architects or firms participated in the Centennial: Christian A. Asmus designed seven; Sara Ward Conley designed one; the firm of Gibel and Gabler designed one; Baxter J. Hodge designed one; Frank W. Kreider designed one; William C. Smith designed five, including the Parthenon; Frederick W. Thompson designed one; George W. Thompson designed one on his own and one in conjunction with Julius G. Zwicker; Zwicker alone designed two. All of these individuals can be located in the Nashville City Directories. See Herman Justi, ed., *Official History of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition* (Nashville: 1898).
17. See Drew Gilpin Faust, *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840–1860* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press,

1977), 75; the men who comprised the "Sacred Circle" also looked to the Revolutionary era as the epitome of public virtues.

18. Bradford Gilbert, "The Architect's Story of the Exposition," *News and Courier,* Oct. 23, 1900.
19. Ibid.
20. *News and Courier,* Feb. 13, 1900.
21. See Patrick J. Hearden, *Independence and Empire: The New South's Cotton Mill Campaign, 1865–1901* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Univ. Press, 1982), 26–28, for information on Tompkins.
22. *News and Courier,* June 2, 1900.
23. Alexander D. Anderson, *Charleston and its Exposition: Its Advantageous Position, and Industrial and Commercial Future,* pamphlet, Charleston, 1901, 3.
24. *Annual Review of Foreign Commerce of the United States,* House of Representatives, 60th Congress, 2d session, document no. 13, 33.
25. *Manufacturer's Record* 36 (Dec. 14, 1899): 17.
26. *The Exposition* 1 (Apr. 1901): 159.
27. *News and Courier,* Oct. 23, 1900.
28. Gilbert, "The Architect's Story."
29. Quoted in *News and Courier,* May 14, 1902.
30. Ibid., May 27, 1902; ibid., July 3, 1902.
31. *The Exposition* 1 (May 1901): 211.
32. See T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), for an examination of this complex issue.
33. Anne Rittenhouse, "The Most Exclusive City in America," *Ainslee's Magazine* (Sept. 1905): 129.
34. Quoted in Owen Wister, *Roosevelt: The Story of a Friendship, 1880–1919* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 251.
35. Owen Wister, *Lady Baltimore* (New York: Macmillan, 1906), 60; see William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (New York: George Braziller, 1961), for a thorough discussion of these themes in an earlier era.