

The Latrobe Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians
proudly presents:

French Roof Mania ***The Rise and Fall of the Second Empire Style in America***



A Lecture by Roger G. Reed
Wednesday, September 30, 2015
The First Congregational United
Church of Christ
945 G Street, NW, Washington, DC
6:30pm – reception
7:00pm – lecture

The Second Empire style has come to epitomize Victorian architecture, and often in a negative setting. Everyone from Charles Addams to Alfred Hitchcock has worked to cement the image of a house with a mansard roof

representing age, decay, and obsolescence, if not murder and mayhem. Yet this style (as historians have defined it) was extraordinarily popular in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Architects and taste-makers generally despaired at its universal popularity for all classes of society and all types of buildings (except churches). Yet the public was infatuated.

Why was this style so popular and why did it lose popularity? A common assumption that it found favor is that there was a widespread infatuation with France during the Second Empire. While there is truth in that, especially for the grand public buildings, it does not fully explain the popularity of the “French roof” from Maine to California. Its popularity grew during and shortly after the Civil War, well before many of the iconic buildings such as the State, War, and Navy Building in Washington and the Philadelphia City Hall were under construction.

This lecture is national in scope and based upon an investigation of the extensive listings in the National Register of Historic Places. It will look at the origins of the style in America and explore the spread of its popularity across the country. Many sources for the spread of its popularity are investigated, including literary journals, early architectural journals, style books, agricultural journals, and pattern books. By 1870, and during the decade that followed, the Second Empire style was arguably the most popular architectural style in America. It demise, unlamented by most architects, rapidly followed despite the continued use of the “French roof” is ways no longer recognizable to the country of its origin.

Roger G. Reed is an historian for the National Register and National Historic Landmark Programs. He is the author of *Building Victorian Boston*, *The Architecture of Gridley J. F. Bryant*.

The lecture takes place at **The First Congregational United Church of Christ, Second Floor, 945 G Street NW, Washington, DC**. Reservations are not required. \$10.00 for Latrobe Chapter members, student members (full time) free with ID, \$18.00 for non-members. For general information, please see the Latrobe Chapter website at www.latrobechaptersah.org.