



# The American Builder's Companion

*Benjamin Asher*

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## **The American Builder's Companion** Benjamin Asher

There is scarcely a New England town which does not contain houses, church spires, or ornamental interior details derived from the Late Colonial architectural designs of Asher Benjamin (1773–1845). Benjamin disseminated his ideas chiefly through his publications, of which this book is the most important.

Books such as *The American Builder's Companion* were written for local carpenters to be used as manuals and guides. They made it possible for small-town carpenters, who were already skilled in rudimentary carpentry and house construction, to give their buildings sophistication and style. There were instructions for raising and supporting several types of roofs, constructing winding stairs, spacing fluting evenly on columns, modeling and mounting friezes, etc. Carpenters were thus able to plan, build, and decorate complex, ornate structures.

*The American Builder's Companion* includes rules and definitions of practical geometry and discussion of methods for drawing basic shapes and cutting them out of solids. There are designs for interior ornament — patterns for decorative cornices, moldings, banisters, stucco ceiling ornaments, mantels, etc., as well as designs for doorways and windows. Benjamin also deals with problematic structural elements, and finally provides full plans and elevations for private houses, wooden churches, and a court house.

Important as one of the single, major disseminators of a style which became almost ubiquitous in the Northeast, Benjamin's book also contains a rich store of evidence on problems and achievements of early American builders. Direct references to tools, materials, common practices and processes, and unconscious indication of taste and aesthetic values of the time will be invaluable to students of architecture, experts in restoration, and readers interested in American history and culture. New introduction by William Morgan. 70 plates.

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