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We've all seen them but might have been too scared to enter: the house on the hill with its boarded-up windows; the darkened factory on the outskirts of town; the old amusement park with its rickety skeleton of a rollercoaster. These are the ruins of America, filled with the echoes of the voices and footfalls of our grandparents, or their parents, or our own youth. Where once these structures were teeming with lifecommuters, workers, vacationers now they are disused and dilapidated. *Ghostly Ruins* shows the life and death of thirty such structures, from transportation depots, factories, and jails to amusement parks, mansions, hotels, and entire towns. Author Harry Skrdla gives a guided tour of these marvelous structures at their peak of popularity juxtaposed with their current state of haunted decrepitude. Like a seasoned teller of ghost stories, Skrdla's words and images reveal what lies beyond the gates and beneath the floorboards. There are the infamous Eastern State Penitentiary and Bethlehem Steel factory in Pennsylvania, the Packard Motors Plant and Book-Cadillac Hotel in Detroit, and Philip Johnson's New York State Pavilion from the 1964/65 World's Fair. There is the entire town of Centralia, Pennsylvania, where a trash fire set inside an old mine in 1962 morphed into an underground inferno that incinerated the town from underneath; more than forty years later, the subterranean fire still rages. The town is empty now, just as the many other abandoned places in this chronicle. *Ghostly Ruins* is a record of the souls of yesteryear and a chronicle of America's haunted past.

Ghostly Ruins: America's Forgotten Architecture Details

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Mara says

I loved this book by Harry Skrdla!

I happened to love the written words with the pictures.

Very intriguing.

I love old abandoned architecture.

Buildings with character! When creating things meant putting thought and detailed plans into it.

Not just cookie cutter carbon copies and the lowest bid.

Although there wasn't a ton of facts there was more than enough
to give a great peek into what he was showing us.

The pictures were great.

The book was easy and interesting to read and I will definitely share this with friends.

Elaine Meszaros says

Harry Skrdla is a prat. His writing is pompous, overblown and redundant. I can almost guarantee he has a closet full of notebooks where he wrote wretched Goth poetry in while in high school.

The pictures, on the other hand, are beautiful. Encompassing a wide array of ruins - homes, factories, amusement parks - Skrdla shows the beauty and sadness of wonderful unique buildings left to rot. Many of the locations were built during the Victorian era and are massive and solid edifices. These hospitals, jails and mansions are often stone and brick with slate roofs. While their decay may have been going on for a hundred years, the buildings still persevere. Pictures taken of the buildings in their heyday make the crumbling halls and gaping windows all the more poignant and grimly appealing.

Joe Oliveri says

There aren't as many photographs in this book as I would have liked; but the photos it does contain are beautiful and legitimately haunting. Some of the photos are modern, while others are contemporaneous with the buildings' heyday. The past & present contrasts are often disquieting and kept bringing me back to thoughts on the transitory nature of all things.

Thirty abandoned buildings are profiled here, divided into eight chapters: Transportation, Industry, Commerce, Public Works, Home, Amusement, Reincarnation and Epitaphs. Each receives an historical synopsis of when & how it became a ruin; and generally three or four photographs give you a sense of the place.

My biggest complaint with this book is the acid content of the paper. Between the acid, on one hand, and the white-text-on-black-background found throughout the book on the other, many fingerprints will be left behind. I would have rated this book four stars were the paper of a better quality. Then again, perhaps the publisher had gone with this paper so the photographs would be rendered better. It might have been a judgment call in that regard.

Miriam says

I knew that the author was not using "ghostly" in a literal (i.e. actually or possibly haunted) sense, but seriously? These were the most "ghostly" abandoned buildings he could find? Most of them are not even ominous, much less scary. Heck, most of them weren't even atmospheric! Some of them are hardly ruined at all. And the photography is nothing special. I've stumbled across more intriguing abandoned sites by accident.

JoAnn Arnold says

It's sad to see so many buildings falling to ruin. We are a young country but we have very few old buildings. Countries that have existed far longer have many really old buildings. This may be because they don't have the resources to waste what they have. It is easier for us to tear down or build elsewhere than to maintain or refurbish what we have. Also many of the truly old buildings of Europe were built to last and much of what we build today is not.

Alvin says

This is a nice group of photos and text exploring abandoned industrial-mansions-amusement parks and other ruins. As a child I would visit my grandparents near Buffalo, NY, and marvel at the massive factories, steel mills, and onion domed mansions, all left to rust or turned into apartments. I felt like I was walking with the shades and they talked to me. Usually they were much too busy. Weird kid. These photos create a little frisson. Nice design and paper.

Wes Young says

I found Harry Skrdla's book very intriguing. It introduced me to a lot of buildings and places I had never heard of, and of course there is something strangely appealing about abandoned and dilapidated buildings. My gripe however isn't necessarily with the stinginess with which the author has introduced his subjects through photos (yes, I too wish there was much much more), but rather the curious text accompaniment that goes along with each photo set, and introduces each chapter for that matter. It comes off a little too quirky for my taste.

H. Anne Stoj says

I recently picked this up again for the reason I bought it for--inspiration to write. In that, I'm not at all disappointed. I find it a very beautiful book with arresting images that truly capture things lost. I think it's an interesting selection of places from theatres to industrial sites to Danvers (which is always interesting) to the remains of Chicago's Columbian Expo, which I admit having a soft spot for.

I actually liked the introduction. I didn't find it "too spooky" or "too wordy" or "too much". For me, it lines up with how I think about abandoned places. They were, once, places that meant something to someone. They were built for a reason. Often they used to be beautiful. Look at the buildings we have now. So many cookie cutter neighborhood. I was in one the other day, trying to figure out what was odd about the house I was going to and the house next door. It happens that they're the same save one has everything on the right and the other has everything on the left. Sure a few different details, but over all, the same. Unique buildings are constantly torn down to make way for another big box brand that will look exactly like the one ten miles down the road. I can only wonder what that says about us as a society.

Anyhow, I find this a rather beautiful find. It suits my purposes. It causes me to think and create stories and wonder about the past and what things once meant and what they mean now. And for that, I couldn't ask for much more.

Danna says

During a Marfa Lights / McDonald Observatory vacation, I picked up this book on impulse at The Marfa Book Company; if you're ever in the area, I highly recommend a visit. (http://www.marfabookco.com/marfabk_st...) It's interesting to consider how many abandoned structures there are in America, and how much forgotten beauty and history reside within. The author treats his subject with respect and the photography is lovely.

He includes a disclaimer on page 25 to explain that this is not a how-to book for exploring abandoned buildings. Understanding that some folks will go exploring anyway, he offers 5 bits of cautionary advice; this is my favorite:

"4. Vandalism is for adolescents. If the only way you can feel important is by spray painting "Vinnie" on a limestone ashlar wall laid by men with ten times your value to society, then wait until you grow up to visit."

Sarah Sammis says

For as long as I can remember I've been fascinated by old buildings (abandoned or not). Now growing up in California there's not as much in the way of extremely old architecture like there is in other parts of the world, but a building that's even a few decades old can tell an interesting story.

Part of that fascination probably stems from my father's interest in antiques. When he opened his first store it was in a building called The Cracker Factory. As it was an old three story brick warehouse the building had warped stairs and an open cage-style elevator with a bare bulb hanging down where the ceiling of a typical elevator compartment would be. Painted on the ceiling of the elevator shaft was a blue sky with white fluffy clouds. The elevator both fascinated and terrified me.

While The Cracker Factory isn't in Harry Skrdla's Ghostly Ruins: America's Forgotten Architecture, another favorite place of mine is, Bodie, the silver mine ghost town near Mammoth Lakes in California. While Bodie was abandoned in waves over the first few decades of the Twentieth Century, it isn't forgotten. Now a days it has its own Facebook page and makes daily posts about moments in Bodie history.

Skrdla's book covers a few famous buildings, train stations and ghost towns from around the country. The photographs included in the book are for the most part historical, taken when the buildings were in use. The

book is more a history on what was than on what has become of the sites.

I know that safety is an issue when going into abandoned structures but a better mix of old and new, before and after would have been fascinating. Also for each location I wanted more. More text, more photographs, more information. That said, I did enjoy the book but it wasn't as satisfying a read as it could have been.

Stacy says

The oddity of this book is its name - the theme of hauntings wasn't strong. This would have been more aptly named "Abandonment" than anything supernatural.

However, naming quirk aside, I enjoyed the book. It has the photography of abandoned locations but is focused more on the history. There is a feeling of wonder and curiosity in me when I see once-used but now empty places. A sense of all the life that occurred there but now under nature's pull.

The photos could have been larger. More haunting, perhaps? More overgrown? More numerous? More overwhelming? Not sure...but it's the pictures that needed to be 'more' to make this a 5 star book.

Mary Bird says

This book was interesting enough, I suppose. However, I didn't find it overly enlightening, and often the language took on a too-dramatic tone that made me less interested in what I was seeing or reading. I could have done with more context and history - a lot of discussion was vague. Other points were so generic that I could have found them in Wikipedia. Also, I'll be that person - this book needed to be proofread one more time, too.

It wasn't a terrible book. It had its interesting points, and I liked the author's perspective on the importance of decaying buildings overall. It just felt a bit thin.

Carissa says

I enjoyed the photographs in the book. The places were mostly in New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio. I had heard about some of the places and some I had more in-depth information than was written. Of course, Danvers was there. You can't really escape abandoned adventures without hearing about Danvers, Kirkbride and overcrowding. I enjoyed reading about the Niagara Falls power house that used to be the largest then was crushed by a giant slab of the cliff it was built into. I was disappointed with the section on "Homes". Wyndcliffe was interesting, but the end of the chapter has a mansion from the 1800s that burned down at the beginning of the century. It didn't say who owned it, why the columns are still there and, probably the worst part, it was missing captions for the photos. The other photographs all had dates and who was in the photo and so forth. This one had nothing. If I were to read it again, I would skip the all-to-long forward and the introduction to each section. Still, this would be a good introductory piece to someone who had never heard about exploring abandoned places, but would be interested in the subject matter. If you are one of those people, I recommend the website Lost Destinations. Fabulous photography.

Loren says

I bought this book for its photographs, specifically for the exquisite photos of Bannerman's Island. Unfortunately, the photos are not the focus of the book. The over-written text struggles to personify the ruins featured within, but since the author didn't take the photos -- and the photographers are barely named, let alone given a chance to speak -- the personifications are cold and distant.

In fact, I wish I'd stopped reading the text early on. I kept at it, waiting for an insight or interesting fact, but it pretty thoroughly frustrated me.

I wish the photos had been labeled by photographer before I reached the teeny type on the last page. I wish the photos had been dated, so I could have a sense of whether the ruins are still in similar condition or if they've deteriorated since the photos were taken (some of them seem to date to the 1970s or earlier).

I could have done without the photos of the bridges or Centralia, Pennsylvania (which didn't include any buildings).

What I should do is sell this book and look for books that feature the ruins of Detroit, Bannerman's Castle, and the Danvers State Mental Hospital. I want to see for myself, not read someone else's thoughts, especially the thoughts of someone who apparently hasn't even visited the ruins he's discussing. What a frustrating book this is.

David says

A collection of essays - in words and photographs - on some of America's fascinating ruined and extinct places. The subjects include power stations, mental asylums and even a town that fell prey to subterranean fire. A wonderful book for lovers of the poetry of decay, connoisseurs of human impermanence and anyone interested in the socio-economic story of the USA. The fifth star has only been withheld because the author's prose style suffers from the occasional rush of blood to the head. The photographs, as well as providing visual documentation, convey - in many cases - a powerful plangency.
