



Master Builder of the Lower Rio Grande: Heinrich Portscheller (Sara and John Lindsey Series in the Arts and Humanities)

W. Eugene George DECEASED

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In 1865, Heinrich Portscheller emigrated to Mexico from his native Germany, perhaps motivated by a desire to avoid compulsory military service in the Austro-Prussian War. The scion of a well-known family of masons and master builders, he had the misfortune to disembark at Veracruz during the Franco-Mexican War. Portscheller and his traveling companion were impressed into the imperialist forces and sent to northern Mexico. Sometime following the Battle of Santa Gertrudis in 1866, Portscheller deserted the army and eventually made a place for himself in Roma, a small town in Starr County, Texas.

Over the next decades, Portscheller acquired a reputation as a master builder and architect. He brought to the Lower Rio Grande Valley his long heritage of Old World building knowledge and skills and integrated them with the practices of local Mexican construction and vernacular architecture. However, despite his many contributions to the distinctive architecture of Roma and surrounding places, by the mid-twentieth century he was largely forgotten.

During nearly fifty years of historical sleuthing in South Texas and Germany, W. Eugene George reconstructed many of the details of the life and career of this important South Texas craftsman. Containing editorial contributions by Mary Carolyn Hollers George and featuring a foreword by Mariá Eugenia Guerra and a concluding assessment by noted architectural historian Stephen Fox, *Master Builder of the Lower Rio Grande: Heinrich Portscheller* at last permits a long-overdue appreciation of the legacy of this influential architect and builder of the Texas-Mexico borderlands.

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