

LANDMARKS LETTER



Can you guess which building this architectural detail is from? Test your knowledge with our column, *Elements* on page 2.

Architects Known & Unknown: H. W. Kirchner

by Andrew Weil



HENRY WILLIAM KIRCHNER was born in Baltimore Maryland in 1853 and came to St. Louis as a boy. He studied architecture in the office of George I. Barnett before entering practice on his own c. 1875. In 1881 he married Lucie Tetard of St. Louis. Kirchner served as architect for the St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS) for two, non-consecutive terms from 1880 until 1883 and again from 1885 until 1889. During the time he worked for the SLPS, he designed many schools, although just two, Gratiot and Blair, remain. Both schools were completed in 1882 as was Kirchner's St. Louis Cotton Exchange Building (shown left) on Walnut (demolished 1940).

In 1884 Kirchner was one of the six organizers of the St. Louis Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and served as its first secretary. Interestingly, a dispute with the St. Louis Chapter resulted in Kirchner's resignation, although he remained a member of the national AIA.

In 1885, H. W. Kirchner designed major additions to Academic Hall at the University of Missouri, Columbia, which would tragically burn just seven years later. In 1889, Kirchner began a partnership with his brother A.H. Kirchner (b. 1858). A. H. Kirchner was a prominent architect in his own right, who also designed many buildings for the SLPS prior to the tenure of William Ittner. Practicing as Kirchner & Kirchner, the firm received many important commissions, primarily for commercial buildings in St. Louis and in western cities such as Denver, Las Vegas (New Mexico) and Santa Fe. In St. Louis, H. W. Kirchner's only known surviving commercial building is the Balmer & Weber Music House (today known as the Ludwig Lofts) at 1004 Olive.

In 1890 Kirchner moved to Denver, Colorado to oversee the construction of the Colorado Mining Stock Exchange that the firm had designed.

Regarded by some as Denver's finest Richardsonian Romanesque building, the stock exchange was torn down in 1967. Kirchner & Kirchner also designed courthouses for Santa Fe and Mora, New Mexico (demolished), as well as an insane asylum (demolished) and city hall (extant) at Las Vegas, New Mexico. Kirchner traveled extensively in the American West in the late 19th century but moved back to St. Louis in 1894. He continued to be listed in the city directories variably as a civil engineer and architect until late in life when he became president and treasurer of the River and Trail Transportation Company. He died on April 18, 1937 and is buried at Calvary Cemetery. After her husband's death, Lucie moved near Ironton, Missouri in the Arcadia Valley where she died in 1949.



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911 Washington Avenue, Suite 170
St. Louis, Missouri 63101
Ph: 314-421-6474
www.landmarks-stl.org

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Elements



Leiderkranz/Alhambra Grotto Building, c. 1920s. Image courtesy of the Missouri History Museum.



2700 South Grand today.

THE LEIDERKRANZ CLUB: 2700 South Grand

DEDICATED ON SEPTEMBER 28, 1907, THE LEIDERKRANZ CLUB at 2700 South Grand (east side of Grand at Magnolia—today a strip mall containing a Dollar General and Ruler Foods) was constructed as the new home for an elite German social club when it moved from its previous location at 13th and Chouteau. Having evolved from a German men’s chorus formed in 1870, musical performance and appreciation was central to Leiderkranz life. As the social geography of German society moved westward into the Compton Heights and South Grand areas, the club followed suit hiring the prominent architectural firm of Helffensteller, Hirsch & Watson to design a new facility within walking distance of the Strassberger Music Conservatory and Tower Grove Park.

The new building was equipped with basement bowling alleys, a kitchen that could serve 1,000 guests at a time, and an enormous ballroom. The centerpiece of the club was the theater which boasted the second largest stage in the city and an elaborate lighting system that used mirrors to diffuse illumination. Marble wainscoting, wood paneled walls and rich tapestries adorned billiard rooms, smoking rooms, six practice rooms equipped with grand pianos, and ladies’ lounges. No expense was spared.

Unique among male dominated clubs in 19th century St. Louis, privileges of membership at the Leiderkranz were extended to both women and men. Known as the Damen Verein, the women of the club were welcome in all of the building’s public spaces and were also accommodated with rooms of their own where men were not allowed. Judging by advertisements and newspaper articles of the era, the Damen Verein played an important role in planning many of the club’s activities and its ladies were held in high esteem for their musical abilities.

While the club was progressive with regard to female members, and was known for extravagant parties that lasted from dusk until dawn, club leaders adhered to a strict code of behavior which led to some interesting transgressions and controversies. For

example, at 4:00 in the morning on New Year’s Day, 1912, Edwin Lemp committed a serious offense which lead to a three month long fight between him and the club and resulted in his resignation of membership. No matter that Edwin was the Vice President of the powerful Lemp Brewing Company, he was personally thrown off the dance floor by club President Moritz Eyssel for being dressed in a business suit rather than formal evening wear. Lemp later stated that he knew about the rule requiring “full dress” but hadn’t thought it would be in effect at that late (or early) of an hour!

A year later the sensibilities of the club were once again offended when a group of young members disgraced the ballroom by dancing both the “Turkey Trot” and the “Tango.” The *Post-Dispatch* reported that three of the guilty had already been dismissed and that several others “were to be tried for the offense.” Apparently there was a belief among some of the club’s older members that the Pope had issued a formal decree against these dances, although the article’s headline indicated that Cardinal John Glennon had been consulted on the matter and that he doubted the existence of a formal papal ruling.

The onset of World War One had somewhat of a chilling effect on the exuberance of German cultural clubs like the Leiderkranz, as did Prohibition. The latter was cited as a reason for the club’s declining membership in a *Post-Dispatch* article from 1920 reporting on the sale of the building. Apparently, the sale of alcohol had been a critical component of the organization’s revenue stream and its loss had resulted in increased membership fees and reactionary resignations. The new owner of the building was a fraternal organization called the “Mystic Order of Veiled Prophet’s of the Enchanted Realm.” The Veiled Prophets renamed the building the “Alhambra Grotto” and began a remodeling effort that included the addition of the grotesque mask to the center of the façade, which is the subject of our “Elements” photo. The building was demolished for the current strip center in 1962.

Preservation of America’s Iconic Route 66

by Ruth Keenoy

DID YOU KNOW THAT YOUR SUPPORT of Landmarks helps to fund the preservation of Route 66 in Missouri and Illinois? Over the past five years, Landmarks has worked with the Route 66 Association of Missouri and Missouri Preservation to assist property owners along Route 66 with historic preservation issues. For example, in 2012, Landmarks nominated the Route 66 Steak ‘n Shake in Springfield, Missouri, to the National Register of Historic Places. More recently, Landmarks has been working on National Register nominations for properties in Devil’s Elbow (Pulaski County) and completed an eligibility assessment for The Diamonds near Villa Ridge (Franklin County). Far too often, property owners and communities along Route 66 find themselves without funding or technical support for rehabilitating properties that our present day highways and interstates have long abandoned. While most of Route 66 is outside of our primary mission area in St. Louis, we still feel it is important to provide assistance, when possible, for significant sites in rural areas.

For more than a decade, Route 66 related preservation efforts in Missouri have received limited funding through the National Park Service’s Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program. Like most historic preservation programs however, the corridor initiative was never fully funded when created in 1999. The support that is provided is distributed among the eight states through which Route 66 runs, including Missouri and Illinois. Most projects are funded through the park service’s cost-share grants, which have supported a wide range of efforts in Missouri,

including repairs and installation of an HVAC system at Cuba’s Wagon Wheel Motel in 2010 and neon sign restoration at St. Clair’s Skylark Motel in 2014.

The Route 66 Corridor program will expire in 2019. In an effort to find a source of permanent assistance for preserving Route 66, the National Park Service is conducting a feasibility study to determine whether the highway would be better served by the National Historic Trails program. If such a plan goes forward, Route 66 will be the nation’s first automobile route to be honored as a National Historic Trail. Currently there are 19 National Historic Trails in the United States, including the Lewis and Clark which passes through Missouri. Although most parties involved in the feasibility study believe that the trails program would be a good fit for Route 66, we are concerned about losing funds currently provided through the Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program. Currently there is no parallel to this type of support under the National Trails system.

We do not know what the future holds for Route 66 but we will continue to support the preservation of resources along the Mother Road here in Missouri and Illinois regardless of the outcome. This year, we hope you will continue your support of Landmarks and other associations such as Missouri Preservation and The Route 66 Association of Missouri. We appreciate the support of our members and hope to provide some good news for Route 66 in and around St. Louis in 2016, particularly in relation to Devil’s Elbow and The Diamonds.

BELOW: The Diamonds, circa 1949. RIGHT: What remains of The Diamonds present day.



Courtesy of Joe Sonderman

The Firmin Desloge Hospital by Andrew Weil



Image courtesy of the Missouri History Museum. Contemporary image from Landmarks' collection.

THE FIRMIN DESLOGE HOSPITAL is among the most recognizable buildings in south St. Louis. Its distinctively jagged French Gothic roofline is so iconic that it has become inseparable from the architectural identity of St. Louis University and has been quoted several times in designs for later campus buildings. Sheathed in copper covered lead (a fitting tribute to the source of the Desloge fortune) the roof lends the building a certain Gotham City quality. Lighted at night, it shines like a beacon and can be seen for miles perched mysteriously on the precipice of the Grand Avenue ridge. Desloge Tower (more recently known as St. Louis University Hospital) is the kind of building that makes a city unique. But, how much longer will it be around? A quick overview of the history of the tower and its associated chapel was detailed by Esley Hamilton in the summer, 2008 issue of the *Society of Architectural Historians Newsletter*. He wrote:

"[F]irmin Vincent Desloge (1843-1929) provided in his will funds for a hospital to serve St. Louis University and to replace the old St. Mary's Hospital. His widow Lydia Davis Desloge (1855-1932) and two sons, Firmin Vincent II and Joseph presented one million dollars jointly to the Sisters of St. Mary and St. Louis University in 1930. Work started on the 13 story building in November of that year, to designs of Study & Farrar with Arthur Widmer. Archbishop John Glennon formally laid the cornerstone on June 2, 1931.

*Mrs. Desloge gave another \$100,000 to be used for a chapel to be built adjacent to the hospital. By the time this second gift was reported by the *Globe-Democrat* on February 15, 1931, the design had been*

completed by nationally renowned architect Ralph Adams Cram, including the major sculptural group of the Crucifixion by John Angel for the altar. Archbishop Glennon consecrated the chapel on November 9, 1933."

Fast forward to the fall of 2015. Following the recent sale of St. Louis University Hospital to SSM Health (an organization that traces its roots back to the Sisters of St. Mary, which accepted the donations from the Desloge family to build the hospital and chapel in the first place) plans to build a new hospital north of the present site were announced. Despite the fact that the new hospital represents an exciting investment of hundreds of millions of dollars, this is St. Louis, so of course the optimism must be tempered by the threat of ominous side effects. In this case the threat is implied by the refusal of SSM representatives to comment on whether the new hospital will make Desloge Tower redundant and therefore a target for expedient demolition. The threat is magnified when one reads between the lines of comments made by Alderman Joe Roddy, in whose ward the hospital is located. In September, the *Post-Dispatch* reported that Roddy said that he would "obviously prefer the hospital (Desloge Tower) stay," but that he doesn't want to jeopardize the significant investment SSM is making by placing obstacles in the way of construction.

Considering that the new hospital is being proposed for a different location, the argument that Desloge Tower is an "obstacle" appears to be spurious. That is, until one considers the long history of wanton clearance and land-banking by St. Louis University and its affiliates in this area. A poignant example can be found in the

Desloge continued...

case of the utterly unique armory of Battery A of the St. Louis Light Artillery which sat on land immediately north of Desloge until it was demolished by SLU for the construction of the Gyo Obata-designed Wohl Institute beginning about 1960. The Wohl Institute stood at the site until 2011 when SLU exchanged it for a vacant lot.

Desloge Tower has been a landmark of south St. Louis and St. Louis University for over eighty years. Truly a building that defines the unique character of our community, the loss of the tower and chapel would be a severe blow to the identity of the city, and to the morale of those of us who desperately want St. Louis to remain a distinctive place. While nobody would lament the removal of the multiple late 20th century additions on the west side of the building (they obscure the original design), the tower and chapel should be preserved at all costs. Great cities, civilized minds, enlightened people do not wantonly destroy the monumental cultural achievements of earlier generations simply because they don't "fit" into whatever exciting new plan is presently being peddled. If we aspire to be a great city, or even just a community that earns the respect and love of its citizens, we must oppose ideas that present our great cultural achievements and our unique heritage as disposable "obstacles."

Landmarks Association is currently working with descendents of the Desloge Family and other stakeholders to advocate on behalf of the building. While we recognize that the needs of modern medicine may render the tower inappropriate for some hospital activities, we are confident that the building can be adapted to serve a useful purpose. In an effort to articulate our position, the following statement regarding the Desloge Tower has been prepared and promulgated by Landmarks in cooperation with Christopher D. Desloge.



September 23, 2015

Because the Desloge Hospital Tower is a landmark component of the St. Louis City skyline and an architectural masterwork from which surrounding neighborhoods, St. Louis University, and the city at large derive identity and sense of place.

Because the building and its associated chapel represent the work of master architects Study, Farrar & Majors, Arthur Widmer, and Ralph Adams Cram respectively, and also embody significant patterns of social history, the building would be considered eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and classified as "High Merit" under the terms of the St. Louis City Preservation Ordinance (64689).

Because the residents of the City of St. Louis through their elected officials have identified and codified the preservation of the City's architectural and cultural heritage as a common good to be protected, enhanced, and perpetuated for the benefit of current and future residents.

Because Desloge Tower is in excellent condition and capable of serving in its current role or being adapted to new uses and kept in productive service indefinitely.

Because the building embodies an astounding amount of energy and other "sunk" environmental costs that would be utterly squandered by demolition.

Because the continued use of the building would be in keeping with the teachings of Pope Francis who has recently chastised the citizens of the world for "the harm we have inflicted on [the earth] by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her."

Because of these reasons, a group known as the Stakeholders to Save the Iconic Desloge Hospital Tower is being formed. We invite all citizens and organizations to come together to foster positive and creative dialogue with SSM Health and St. Louis University to chart a path forward for this iconic building.

Andrew B. Weil
Executive Director
Landmarks Association

Christopher D. Desloge

Energizing Communities Through Preservation, Planning & Education
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ABOVE LEFT: Armory image courtesy of Missouri History Museum. CENTER: Courtesy of Paul Hohmann. ABOVE RIGHT: Vacant lot photo by Landmarks.



Kirchner continued...

While not a well-known architect, Kirchner once had a vision for a building in St. Louis that, had it been constructed, would have made his name as synonymous with the city's architecture as the name Saarinen is today. In 1901 as the city was planning the World's Fair, Kirchner published a bold proposal in the *Post Dispatch*. Though not accepted, the proposal would be echoed forty six years later when the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial Association announced a design competition for a monument to be built on the St. Louis riverfront. Kirchner's idea? St. Louis could derive a new sense of identity by constructing a monumental triumphant arch containing a museum of American history. Designed on a scale previously unimagined, the arch structure was to have a width of 420 feet at its base and soar to a height of 275 feet (45 feet taller than the spire of Union Station, the tallest building in the city at the time). Such a building, according to Kirchner, would cement St. Louis' place on the map! "This Arch" he reasoned "many times larger than any in existence and designed on new lines of thought, would make the city

even better known than the Eads Bridge has. Located as St. Louis is, in the Louisiana Purchase territory, the largest city nearest the Mason and Dixon Line, in the center of population of the country, is particularly well fitted for a monument, gathering within records of all historic transactions between Spain and America, the North and South and other history of the country."

Unlike most other buildings to be constructed for the Fair, Kirchner's arch was to be permanent. Constructed of steel, granite, brick and terra cotta, its fabric would reflect the products of St. Louis's industry.

"When the exposition has become a thing of the past" he wrote "this structure will remain a monument of its purpose, the greatness of the territory it commands, the enterprise of the citizens of St. Louis and the gratitude the country owes those who have gone before and left the memory of their greatness to us."

As the maxim goes, "history does not repeat itself, but it rhymes." This year as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the completion of the Arch that was built, we can reflect on the fact that, if the winds of history had blown in another direction, we could be celebrating a 111th anniversary!

ABOVE: The Colorado Mining Stock Exchange Building. RIGHT: Kirchner's proposed triumphal arch



COMING SOON: Spring 2016 New Washington Avenue Tours

ON SATURDAY, APRIL 2, 2016, Landmarks Association and ReVitalize St. Louis will be rolling out a new architectural walking tour of Downtown's Washington Avenue. Like the two existing Downtown walking tours, this tour will operate every Saturday from April through October and will be conducted by trained docents. The Washington Avenue Tour will showcase the historic street's rise to prominence among the country's most important garment and shoe districts in the early 20th century, and examine its outstanding collection of commercial architecture.

Though the importance of Washington Avenue as a garment district eventually declined, the quality of its buildings (and the fact that they weren't arbitrarily demolished) has resulted in a dramatic revitalization of the neighborhood over the past two decades. Indeed, it was the redevelopment of Washington Avenue that catalyzed the new era of downtown living in St. Louis. The tour aims to celebrate the history and architecture of downtown's most intact streetscape, while promoting the centerpiece of the central business district's residential resurgence. This new tour represents a significant



The view from Washington Avenue at Tucker Avenue facing east, c. 1920 Landmarks' collection.

expansion of the existing Downtown Walking Tour program, which was first organized in 2000 by the group "Metropolis St. Louis." Following the 2014 merger of "Metropolis" and an organization known as "ReVitalize St. Louis," Landmarks Association stepped up to help operate the tours and ensure continuity. Now, the tour program is once again on a solid foundation and ready to grow.

The focus has already attracted a wonderful group of volunteer researchers

who have been working to craft the tour itself, as well as people who are interested in training to serve as tour guides. If you would like to support the effort to celebrate and promote Washington Avenue by becoming a tour guide, please contact Landmarks' Volunteer Coordinator, Rick Rosen, Monday through Thursday from 12pm to 5 pm, at (314) 421-6474, or email at: LMVOLCOORDINATOR@GMAIL.COM

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