

**STYLE AND MEANING: THE SPANISH
REVIVAL
IN CAPE GIRARDEAU 1924-1937**
BY JANE STEPHENS AND BONNIE
STEPENOFF

A city dresses itself in buildings, choosing architectural styles from a changing catalog of fads and fashions. But some styles "fit" better than others, and choices are far from random. Urban streetscapes record not only the passage of time, but also the solidity of place, not only general trends, but also unique qualities, not only characteristics, but also character.

This article is a case study in the dissemination of twentieth-century Spanish revival styles from the southwestern United States to a small Midwestern city on the western bank of the Mississippi River. The article traces the origins of this colorful and romantic building style, its early appearance in the state of Missouri, and its flowering in the Missouri town of Cape Girardeau. Builders there chose the style, not randomly or whimsically, but because of its resonance with the city's Spanish heritage. Examples of the style reflect and enhance Cape Girardeau's unique identity.

Twentieth-century Spanish styles proliferated in Florida and the Southwest, which were once Spanish territories. These styles evolved from the colonial and mission styles into the more elaborate Spanish eclectic style. This type of architecture became popular with the celebration of the opening of the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego in 1915 and peaked during the 1920s and 1930s. Characteristics of Spanish style buildings were long, low rectangular shapes and low pitched roofs of "S"-shaped tiles having little or no eave overhang. Wall surfaces were often adobe, modern stucco, or beige brick that resembled adobe. In many buildings, the most prominent feature was the use of arches in door or window openings. Walls often rose above the roofline in shaped parapets. Decorative details were rich and plentiful, frequently borrowed from Moorish, Byzantine, Gothic, or Renaissance architecture.¹

Colorful and exuberant, Spanish eclectic buildings boldly expressed the expansionism and optimism that characterized American cities and towns in the early twentieth century, especially the 1920s. The Santa Fe and other railroads adopted the style for grand terminals in the South and Southwest.² Spanish-style buildings, with their festive exteriors, sprang up at fairs and expositions throughout the country. Architects and builders freely borrowed Spanish motifs for office buildings, hotels, and commercial buildings in cities and suburbs. In the 1920s, when Americans fell in love with the automobile, white stucco service stations with red tile roofs popped up along newly-constructed highways and at bustling intersections in growing cities and towns.



Commercial Building, Missouri State Fairgrounds, 1901-1906, Thomas W. Bast. Photo Courtesy of Doris Danna

The Missouri state fairgrounds in Sedalia featured some prominent early examples of the Spanish style in Missouri. Architect Thomas W. Bast designed several cattle barns and administration buildings with shaped parapets and arched window and door openings between 1901 and 1906. Bast drew inspiration from the joyously eclectic architecture of the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893 as well as buildings he had seen at other state fairs. While not purely Spanish in style, Bast's fairgrounds structures incorporated textured brick wall surfaces, missionsque arches, and other Spanish elements. Not typically Midwestern, this style appropriately expressed the pride, optimism, and exuberance that characterized the state fair idea.³

In 1915, architect Preston J. Bradshaw broke with St. Louis tradition and designed the large midtown Plaza Hotel complex in Spanish Colonial Revival and Italian Renais-

Between 1912 and 1930, new homes in Spanish eclectic styles appeared frequently in growing suburban communities near St. Louis and Kansas City. Substantial homes with stucco exteriors, arched entrances, and tile roofs graced streetscapes in fashionable new communities such as Clayton and University City. Apartment buildings featuring Spanish-style ornamentation popped up in Kansas City and St. Joseph.⁶

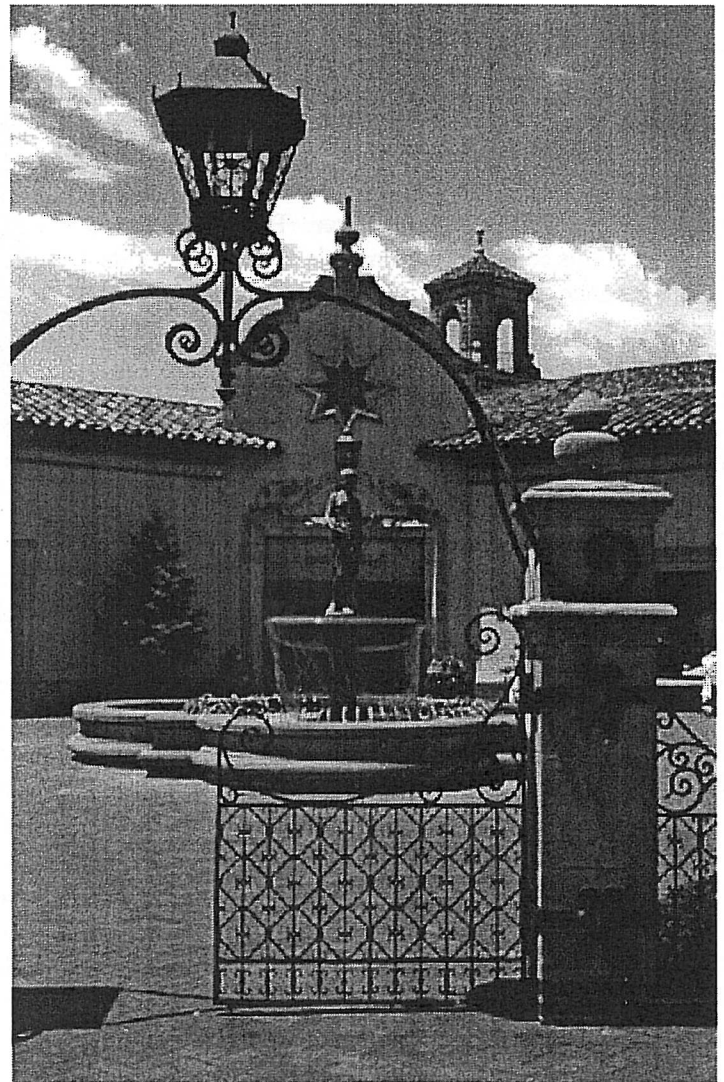
Spanish-style commercial buildings occurred less frequently. Builders of service stations and motor courts occasionally borrowed the low profile, flat wall surfaces, and tile roofs of adobe dwellings characteristic of the American Southwest. Hotels and stores in the Spanish style remained more rare. But one of Missouri's most notable collections of commercial buildings in the Spanish style developed in downtown Cape Girardeau, a small commercial center, halfway between St. Louis and Memphis.



"Pink Building," Plaza Hotel Complex, Locust at Lindell, St. Louis, 1915, Preston Bradshaw. Period Photo, courtesy of Debbie Wafer

sance styles. The complex was the first major commercial development in St. Louis to employ all-stucco exteriors rather than the standard brick and terra cotta. The complex included a six-story concrete frame U-shaped hotel with a nearly flat hipped roof, bracketed at the eaves. Exterior ornamentation included decorative brick embedded in stucco.⁴

Perhaps the most visible and ambitious example of this style in Missouri was in J. C. Nichols' Country Club Plaza shopping center and business district in Kansas City. Beginning in 1912, architects Edward Buehler Delk and George Kessler prepared plans for the complex, with the assistance of the local firm of Hare and Hare as landscape consultants. Developer J. C. Nichols encouraged his designers to employ a modified Spanish style for most of the buildings. Nichols, who had traveled extensively in Europe, had admired colorful Spanish market places with their elaborate towers, courtyards, and fountains. The name 'Country Club Plaza,' employing the Spanish word 'plaza' for an open area within a city, reflected these Spanish inspirations.⁵



Country Club Plaza, Kansas City, 1912 and later, Edward Buehler Delk

In Cape Girardeau, this style had a special appeal because of the city's Spanish heritage. Located on the western bank of the Mississippi River, the area known as Louisiana became part of the Spanish Empire in 1763 when the French ceded all claims west of the Mississippi River to Spain. The Spanish retained control until 1803 when President Thomas Jefferson, learning that the area was being handed back to France, decided to purchase Louisiana and rid the flourishing new American republic of its fickle European neighbors to the west. During the four decades of Spanish reign, Louis Lorimier, a French-Canadian who befriended both the Spanish and the Indians of the area, received a Spanish land grant and settled in an area along the Mississippi known as "Cape Girardot." Lorimier chose to become a Spanish citizen.

Louis Houck, Missouri historian, railroad builder, and Cape Girardeau booster, drew attention to this heritage with the publication of his book, *The Spanish Regime in Missouri* in 1909. Although Houck made a reputation as a Missouri historian late in his life, he spent most of his adult years struggling to build railroads linking Cape Girardeau and the Missouri Bootheel with industrial centers to the north and east.⁷ Houck's influence as a railroad tycoon, a tireless promoter of southeastern Missouri, and an admirer of the state's Spanish colonial heritage certainly influenced the flowering of Spanish architecture in his adopted hometown.

Between 1900 and the 1920s, partly due to Houck's tireless boosterism, Cape Girardeau emerged as a hub of commerce. Houck's shortline railroads opened the southeastern Missouri lowlands to development. Lumbermen rushed to the area to cut timber from the Bootheel, shipping the harvest by rail through Cape Girardeau. A monumental drainage project turned swampland into prosperous farms. The region's population soared, and Cape Girardeau



Southeast Missouriian building, Cape Girardeau, 1925, Tom P. Barnett. Photo by Bonnie Stepenoff

became a center for services and shopping. Between 1900 and 1920, the population of Cape Girardeau more than doubled.⁸

With its new status, Cape Girardeau searched for an identity. Houck, who has often been called the "Father of Southeast Missouri," led the quest for the city's past. He spent years collecting documents relating to Southeast Missouri and published a long account of the city's Spanish period.⁹ In his interest in the colonial past, he resembled another American businessman, John D. Rockefeller, who in 1926 decided to restore the colonial village of Williamsburg, Virginia.¹⁰



Southeast Missouriian building, Cape Girardeau, Detail Front Door

Not surprisingly, there may have been a strong link between Houck and the *Southeast Missouriian* building, the most significant Spanish-style building in Cape Girardeau. Houck was a longtime friend and supporter of the newspaper's owners, brothers Fred W. Naeter and George Naeter. It was likely that the Naeters' selection of Spanish architecture reflected their friend's passion for Missouri history. Certainly the Naeters took pride in claiming that the building was erected on the site of the original seat of the Spanish government in Missouri.

In July 1924, the *Southeast Missouriian* proudly announced the beginning of work on its new building, which would cover more ground than any other commercial building in Cape Girardeau. The building measured 125.6 feet by 175.6 feet and occupied the "fanciest" piece of real estate in town. The owners of the newspaper purchased the lot at the corner of Broadway and Lorimier Street, not only because of its prime business location but because of its historical associations. Local tradition held that Louis Lorimier established his trading post under the Spanish flag in 1793 on this tract of land. Today a bronze tablet states: "The Spanish established the first government west of the Mississippi River on this site in 1793."

The Naeter brothers chose the Spanish type of architecture for their new building because of its historical associations as well as its aesthetic qualities. The Naeters' scrapbook contains a clipping from *The Publishers' Auxiliary*, April 11, 1925, announcing the building's construction:

This building is of the Spanish type of architecture, mainly because it is believed that on this spot the first government west of the Mississippi River was established by the Spanish and from this site radiated the civilization of the Louisiana Purchase.¹¹

Whether or not the building actually stands on the precise spot on which the early Spanish government conducted its business, the Naeters' certainly had history in mind when they selected a site and a style for their building.

Architect Tom P. Barnett designed the building in a Spanish eclectic style, with a long, low profile, a low-pitched tile roof, a soaring tower (now gone), arched door and window openings, and colorful decorative flourishes. Walls were of stucco painted a gleaming white. Perhaps the most distinctive detail was the application of deep blue tiles to the exterior walls. The imposing facade featured front doors framed in decorative oak. Three balconies projected from the second story. Other details included terra cotta and brick articulation of the prominent door and window arches.

While the building was under construction, the Naeter brothers received word of their friend Houck's death. Reflecting on this sad news, the Naeters wrote in an editorial on February 18, 1925:

We have lost the best friend we have had in Cape Girardeau. We have lost a friend who came and offered to help us at a time when he really didn't know us. We have lost a friend who came to us frequently and asked if there was anything he could do to aid us in our work.¹²

Seven months later, the Naeters dedicated their new building, which they later described as "a monumental structure with beauty superseding utilitarian principles."¹³

Before completion of the newspaper building, another Spanish style structure arose, just across the street, at 318-320 Broadway. The Cherry Florist, which later became the Surety Insurance Building, has a broad storefront ornamented with terra cotta medallions. Other typically Spanish features include a rectangular tower bearing large tile



Surety Insurance Building, Cape Girardeau, 1925. Photo by Bonnie Stepenoff

letters spelling out the word "Surety." Its facade is constructed of patterned brick in shades of brown, beige, and orange.

In 1927 Barnett, influenced by shops he had seen in Paris, designed another commercial building in Cape Girardeau.¹⁴ Hecht's department store building on Main Street added visual excitement to the commercial streetscape with its tall facade, steep hip roof and an eclectic collection of architectural details including Spanish S-shaped tiles and terra cotta medallions. Stucco and patterned red brick add color and texture to the wall surfaces.

During that same year, a group of local investors specifically chose the Spanish style for a grand new hotel in the city. Although most of the money was raised locally, advertising for the bonds was statewide and included the following "Description for Security":¹⁵

...82 guest rooms, 66 with private baths, steel, concrete and brick construction -- fireproof. Architectural design -- mission type with matt brick exterior. Two high speed elevators, a modern fireproof garage of brick and concrete designed for 40 cars maximum. 90 feet on Broadway by 226 feet deep.

Value =	Land	\$ 40,000
	Buildings	232,000
	Furnishings	50,000
	TOTAL	322,000

The newspaper reported that the new building would be "of the Spanish type of architecture, in keeping with the history of this locality."¹⁶

Walter P. Manske and George Bartling of the architectural firm Manske & Bartling, Inc., of St. Louis, submitted the final design of the Marquette Hotel, a six-story building with two square towers. A Cape Girardeau contractor, A. H. Gerhardt, constructed the building. Despite its Spanish design, the hotel was named after the famous French explorer Father Jacques Marquette, and a replica of the Marquette family crest was designed by the architect and installed over the main doorway.¹⁷ The original exterior appearance remains unchanged, except for a 1936 addition.¹⁸

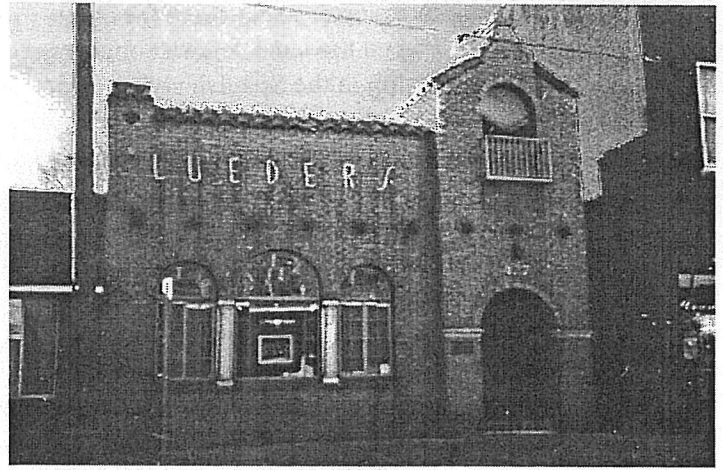


Marquette Hotel, Cape Girardeau, 1927, Manske & Bartling. Photo by Brian Smith

The hotel's Broadway and Fountain Street facades are enhanced by two Spanish towers, 16'7" square, which rise a full story from the roofline on the southeast and southwest dormers of the building. Exterior walls facing these two busy streets are clad with buff colored, wire-cut brick laid in stretcher bond. Rear walls are of red brick laid in Flemish bond. Decorative brickwork, in which the brick is slightly outset in relief to form a diamond pattern, occurs on the towers, the frieze, and above the main doors facing Broadway.

First-story windows and doors are contained within large semi-elliptical arches with ornate glazed terra cotta surrounds. Decorative panels, three feet tall of glazed terra cotta stippled to look like pink granite, occur between the arches at street level. Panels of verde antique smooth polished marble occur under windows within the arched surrounds. The roof trim consists of a frieze of decorative brickwork with an architrave and cornice of ornate, glazed terra cotta.

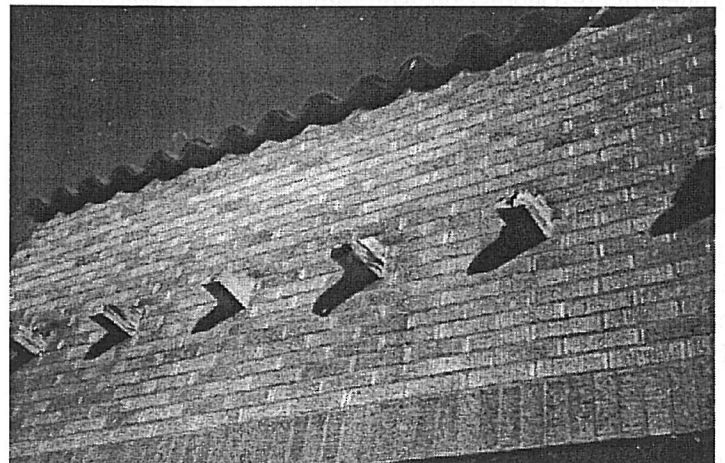
Much smaller than the Marquette, but perhaps purer in style, was Lueders' Studio, which opened its doors in 1925. Architect A. F. Lindsay designed this missionesque building with a charming bell tower, tile roof, and classic



Lueders' Studio, Cape Girardeau

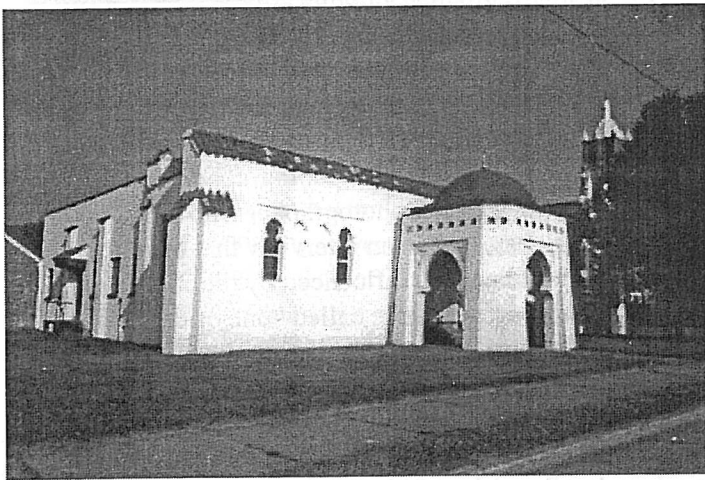
arched window and door openings. Contractor Fred Kurre constructed the building of clay tile and brown brick for Herbert L. Lueders, a prominent photographer. Paul Lueders, an award-winning photographer who continued in his father's business, said in an interview that the choice of styles for this building was influenced by the *Southeast Missourian* building, which he called "one of the best buildings in Missouri," and also by the Hecht's building.¹⁹

Two other small buildings on Broadway exemplify the Spanish style. The doctor's office at 714 Broadway is a typical modest Spanish-style building with a patterned brown brick facade, three small rectangular towers, red S-shaped tile accents on the parapet, a recessed entranceway, and exposed rafter ends. The Playdium Building, an old drugstore converted to a tavern, also features an S-shaped tile roof, brown brick facade, terra cotta ornamentation, a recessed entranceway, and an arched door opening. Green tile adds color and texture to the facade. Wrought iron ornamentation accents the entranceway.



714 Broadway, Cape Girardeau, Detail of Parapet

Perhaps the most interesting application of the Spanish style occurred in 1937 when the local Jewish congregation erected a house of worship in the Spanish style. Prior to 1937, the congregation held services in the Community Clubhouse in Capaha Park. When the clubhouse burned down, the group constructed a building on Main Street. This new B'nai Israel Synagogue opened its doors in September 1937, with a formal dedication on March 20, 1938.²⁰ Significant architectural features of this interesting building include white stucco walls, an S-shaped tile roof, and tile accents around the portico and the entrance way. Window openings and the arch of the portico are horseshoe shaped in the Moorish style.



B'nai Israel Synagogue, Cape Girardeau, 1927. Photo by Bonnie Stepenoff

By 1937, the Great Depression had dampened the booster spirit of the 1920s, ending the brief flowering of Spanish architecture in Cape Girardeau. With their bright colors, lavish decorations, and whimsical use of brick, terra cotta, and tile, the Spanish-style buildings seemed to belong to a lost-more optimistic age. Commercial buildings of the 1940s and 1950s would be more restrained and utilitarian in nature. But the Spanish-style buildings remained as reminders of pre-Depression aspirations.

One could visit Cape Girardeau today and easily overlook its Spanish heritage, perhaps expecting to find, based on its name, stronger traces of a French heritage. The only real historical evidence of Spain's having been there at all consists of a large stone marker at the corner of Spanish and William Streets which identifies El Camino Real, the King's highway, which was laid out in 1789 so that Coaches could travel more easily from New Madrid, about fifty miles south of Cape Girardeau, to St. Louis.

Like its founder, Don Luis Lorimier, who became Spanish by choice, Cape Girardeau dresses itself today in a fashion uniquely appropriate to serve as a reminder of a

rich past. Some styles "fit" better than others, and the Spanish eclectic styles of architecture are "tailor made" for Cape Girardeau, because of their visual associations with the city's Spanish colonial heritage.

NOTES

1. Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide To American Houses* (New York, 1984), 417.
2. Jeffrey Richards and John M. MacKenzie, *The Railway Station: A Social History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 47-48.
3. "Missouri State Fairgrounds Historic District," National Register Nomination, 1991, prepared by Roger Maserang and Steve Mitchell.
4. "Plaza Hotel Complex," National Register Nomination, 1985, prepared by Deborah B. Wafer.
5. Saj Jivanjee, "J. C. Nichols and the Development of the Country Club District," on file in Missouri Cultural Resources Inventory.
6. Missouri Cultural Resources Inventory, Historic Preservation Program, Department of Natural Resources, Jefferson City, Missouri.
7. See William T. Doherty, *Louis Houck: Missouri Historian and Entrepreneur* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1960).
8. *Images of the Past in the City of Roses* (Southeast Missourian, 1993), 10.
9. "Louis Houck, the Father of Southeast Missouri," *Sikeston Standard*, March 6, 1936.
10. Norman Williams, Jr. and Edmund H. Kellogg, eds., *Readings in Historic Preservation Why? What? How?* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 39.
11. Naeter Brothers Scrapbook on file at the office of the *Southeast Missourian*, Cape Girardeau.
12. *Southeast Missourian*, February 18, 1925.
13. *Missourian's hobby Illustrated* (Cape Girardeau, 1948), 4.
14. "Hecht's" file, *Southeast Missourian* archives.
15. Advertisement on file, *Southeast Missourian* archives.
16. Undated clipping from the *Southeast Missourian*, on file in the Regional History Collection, Kent Library, Southeast Missouri State University.
17. In fact, the building was named for the Marquette Cement Manufacturing Company of Cape Girardeau, according to an undated clipping in the Regional History Collection.
18. Blueprints, Manske and Bartling, Inc., Architects.
19. Paul Lueders, Interview with authors, January 27, 1994.
20. "B'nai Israel" file, *Southeast Missourian* archives.

Events Calendar

Cemeteries of University City

Sunday, September 27, 1998, 2 to 4 p.m.
 Shaare Zedek Synagogue,
 829 North Hanley Road

The Historical Society of University City sponsors a talk, tour, and publication focusing on the city's five Jewish cemeteries, with a backward nod to the Methodist cemetery that used to be there. Esley Hamilton will give a brief slide introduction to the subject at Shaare Zedek Synagogue, 829 North Hanley Road (at Amherst). A look at the 1950 International Style building, with windows by Rodney Winfield, will be followed by a walk to nearby B'nai Amoona Cemetery, with its varied 19th-century monuments. Hamilton's booklet on the cemeteries, illustrated by Pat Hays Baer, will be released at the same time.

A Frederick Dunn Celebration

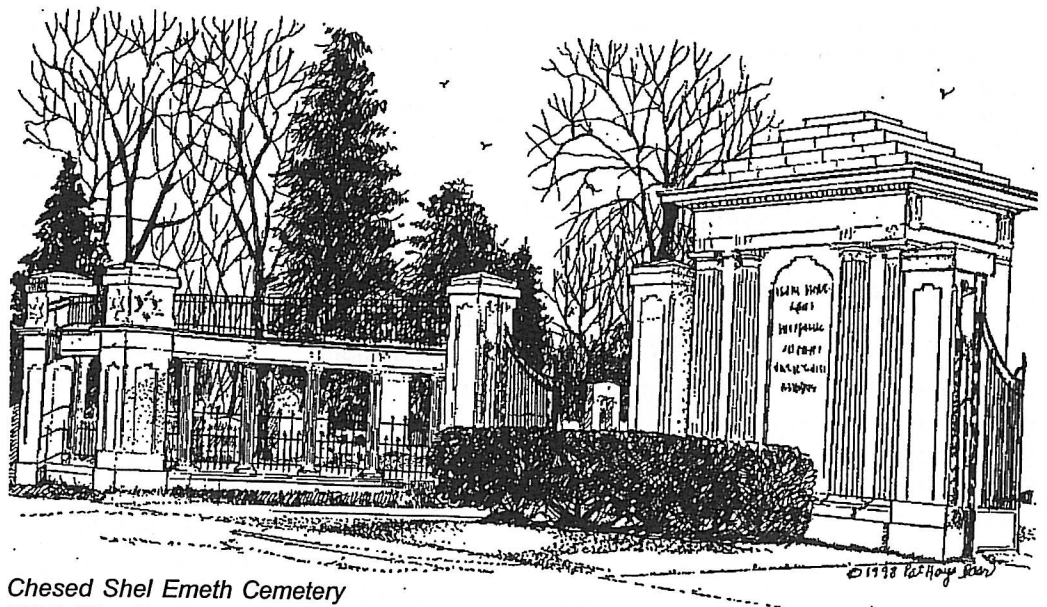
Sunday, October 18, 1998, 2 to 5 p.m.
 St. Mark's Episcopal Church,
 4712 Clifton Avenue

This event includes a talk and self-guided tour of buildings by St. Louis architect Frederick Dunn (1905-1984) whose work has long been admired by those who know it for its unique blend of tradition and modernism. A large collection of photos has recently come to light documenting this work, and Esley Hamilton will show examples and talk about Dunn's significance in one of his early masterpieces, St. Mark's Episcopal Church, located on Clifton Avenue just north of Nottingham and west of Hampton in St. Louis Hills. Following the talk, participants will be given directions to other buildings by Dunn, some of which will be open especially for this celebration.

Brooks Stevens, Industrial Designer

Monday, November 9, 1998, 7:30 p.m.
 Room 116 Givens Hall, Washington University

Anne Woodhouse, Shoenberg Senior Curator at the Missouri Historical Society, will speak about Brooks Stevens, the Milwaukee-based industrial designer. It has been said that Brooks Stevens was to design what Frank Lloyd Wright was to architecture. Beginning in 1934 with the Evinrude motor, Stevens created design innovations for almost every type of industrial product, from the Miller beer bottle to the Excalibur automobile, and including the rotary lawnmower and the first nonwhite kitchen appliances. In his day, Stevens rivaled such celebrity designers as Raymond Loewy, Henry Dreyfuss and Walter Dorwin Teague, but today his name is less familiar than theirs. Anne Woodhouse has long had a special interest in Stevens, and her talk will give his work its proper due.



*Chesed Shel Emeth Cemetery
 7570 Olive Boulevard, University City
 Founded 1893, gate 1929*



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institution, affiliation, or special interest

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