

## THREE VICTORIAN ARCHITECTURAL ABERRATIONS

by David J. Simmons

The exuberance of Victorian architecture embraced the exotic, relished the asymmetrical, cherished excessive detail, and welcomed the mixture of styles within the framework of the Victorian Ideal. Occasionally the architect and client, endeavoring to push the limits of the Victorian architectural experience, gave birth to something of an aberration. These aberrations remind us that architecture without restraint fathers the grotesque.

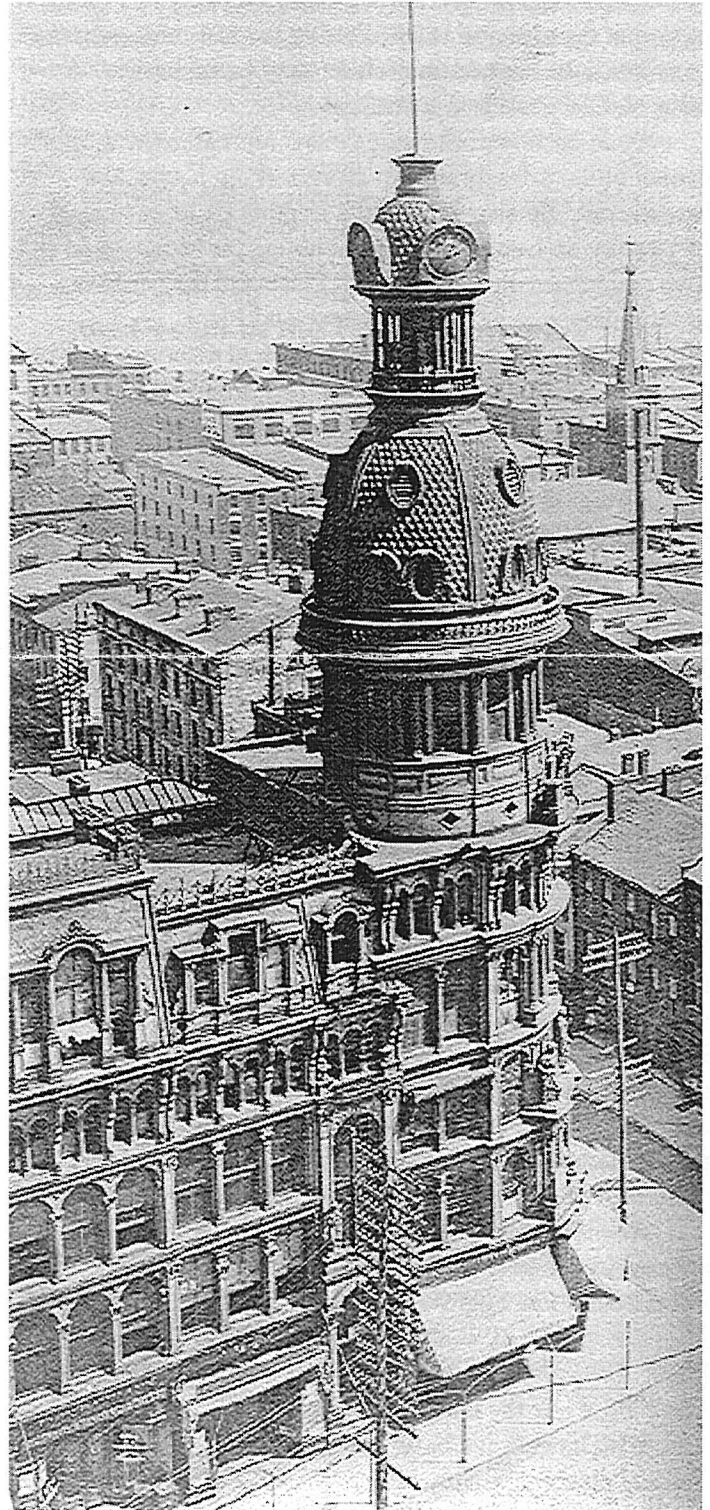
In seeking the most hideous Victorian structures built in St. Louis during the nineteenth century, I have chosen to review the McLean's Grand Tower Block, the improvements to the First Methodist Episcopal Church South, and the Aaron Fagin Building.

### PART ONE: GRAND TOWER BLOCK

In 1874 Dr. James H. McLean erected his Grand Tower Block to celebrate his success as a businessman. After arriving in St. Louis in 1848, he initiated his patent medicine empire in 1852 with McLean's Volcanic Oil Linament. Other patent medicines followed. By 1870, his medicines were being sold at thirty-five thousand retail outlets. His empire was financed with a floating capital of one and a half million dollars.

Several sources attribute the design of McLean's Grand Tower Block to an architectural partnership between Edmund Jungenfeld and James Stewart. No historical source has been found to verify this ascription, and recent research points to Stewart as the sole designer. Both the St. Louis Globe-Democrat and the St. Louis Republican list him as the architect. The Compton and Dry Pictorial Atlas of 1875 does not mention the McLean Block in its listing of Jungenfeld's architectural achievements.

James Stewart (1821-1902) came from a distinguished family of Scottish builders. Alexander Stewart, his brother, was an architect and a builder, counting among his clients Lord Aberdeen, British prime minister, and the Duke of Sutherland. After the death of his father, James Stewart



James H. McLean's Grand Tower Block, Fourth at Market, St. Louis. Note the old Cathedral at upper right.

traveled to Canada in 1843 to establish himself as an architect and builder. He supervised the erection of the parliament buildings in Kingston and erected many other important structures, including the Bank of Montreal, Queens College, and the Ottawa Episcopal Cathedral.

Following his St. Louis arrival in 1865, he embarked on a successful career as a builder and carpenter. Seven years later, the city directory first lists him as an architect. He practiced this profession for twenty-three years before retiring at the close of 1894. During the last three years of his practice, he formed an architectural partnership with Craig McClure and Louis Mullgardt.

As an architect, Stewart is best remembered as a planner of factories, grain elevators, milling plants, and warehouses. He also designed a number of large houses for wealthy St. Louis families, including the McKeighan and Love residences on Vandeventer Place and the surviving Cochran house at Seven Westmoreland Place.

Stewart's architectural style reflects a certain lack of cohesiveness, in which the parts appear more important than the whole. Most of his buildings exhibit an uneasy rambling which frequently slides into awkwardness. Another surviving example of his work is the C. F. Blanke Building, formerly the Haydock Carriage Company factory, located on Fourteenth Street north of Chouteau Avenue.

In 1873, Dr. McLean chose James Stewart as his architect, instructing him to create a landmark. McLean's Grand Tower Block was to be erected at the northwest corner of Fourth and Market streets across from the Courthouse with its beautiful dome designed by William Rumbold. This dome influenced Stewart's design for the new building.

He chose to erect for the McLean Block an L-shaped building consisting of three structures joined together — a four-story Market Street wing, a five-story wing on Fourth Street, and a center structure of five floors crowned with a dome of four levels. After remodeling the Market Street wing into five retail spaces, he reconstructed the Fourth Street wing with its three stores, entrance hall, and rear transverse five story gallery complete with elevator and staircase. Office space occupied the area above the ground floor throughout the complex. Both wings were completed and ready for tenants by the summer of 1874.

Then Stewart built the center structure with its seventy-foot dome. Stewart's dome, shaped like the pointed end of an egg, was supported by a colonnaded drum and topped by a tall colonnaded lantern with its own dome. The lantern dome featured an illuminated clock with four dials, while the lantern itself had a revolving light.

With its massive base, excessive height, and asymmetrical placement, Stewart's domed tower unfortunately appears out of proportion with the rest of the building. Lacking balance and symmetry, the structure supporting the

tower accommodates a catalog of classical devices taken from a mixture of styles: Roman, French Empire, modern Italian, and Venetian. To make matters worse, Stewart fails in his attempt to unify the building through the use of similar arrangement and decoration. Under his guidance, the McLean Block emerges as nine separate entities jammed together into a monolithic leviathan.

The faults of the McLean Block seem to have eluded both client and architect. When the building was completed in 1875, Dr. McLean purchased a half-page advertisement in the St. Louis Globe-Democrat to announce that his masterpiece had been finished. He ranked it as one of the seven wonders of the world. St. Louis had its new landmark. People bought the sham. Jubilant over the success of his new concoction, Stewart adopted the McLean Block design as his new business logo.

The McLean Block enjoyed a fairly long and happy life, adding to the fame and fortune of both Dr. McLean and Mr. Stewart. But all good things come to an end, and so the McLean Block bit the dust in 1901, making way for a multistory office building designed by Eames and Young. The new building housed the Merrill Drug Company. Today the space occupied by McLean's Grant Tower Block is part of Luther Ely Smith Park immediately east of the courthouse.

## **PART TWO: IMPROVEMENTS AT FIRST METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, SOUTH**

After purchasing a lot at the northwest corner of Eighth Street and Washington Avenue, the First Methodist congregation (founded in 1821) erected in 1854 a new church building designed by George I. Barnett. The Romanesque structure cost fifty-five thousand dollars. Following the Civil War some members of the congregation left the church to form a new congregation called St. John's Methodist. Faced with a declining membership, falling revenues, and increasing maintenance costs, the trustees of the First Methodist Church decided to erect commercial structures along the outside perimeter of the church property.

James Stewart received the commission to design the project. He chose to hide the church building behind the new commercial ventures. The church entrance was modified and certain other changes made to maximize space for the new stores and offices. When the improvements were completed in 1875 at a cost of twenty-six thousand dollars, the church property contained eight commercial buildings, each with a basement and two stories. Four structures were in front of the church, with

the church entrance in the center. The other four commercial buildings were along one side of the church.

Drowning in a sea of Tudor or “Anglo-Saxon” detail, these commercial rentals abound with parapets and towers, mixed with Italianate architectural devices. A strange medieval castle set upon an Italianate base. Some people found humor in these buildings. Others considered them a blasphemy against God and severely ridiculed the congregation that built them.

Church trustees soon discovered that nobody wanted to rent this commercial space. The stores were very small, with a depth of thirty feet, at a time when most retail stores had an average depth of fifty to one hundred feet. Secondly, the shops were some distance west of the city’s retail trade district. Finally, the architecture, with its mixture of styles and garish detail, drove potential renters elsewhere.

After seven years of commercial failure, the congregation sold the property for one hundred thousand dollars, helping to pay off their forty-thousand-dollar indebtedness. With the remainder of these funds, they purchased a lot at the southwest corner of Glasgow Avenue and Dayton Street and built a modest Gothic church designed by August Beinke. They remained at their new location until 1909, when the congregation dissolved.

Once the First Methodist congregation departed its downtown location, William H. Thompson, the banker, cleared the site and constructed a six-story office building planned by Henry Isaacs, a well known St. Louis architect of the period. Today the site serves as a part of the southern entrance to the convention center.

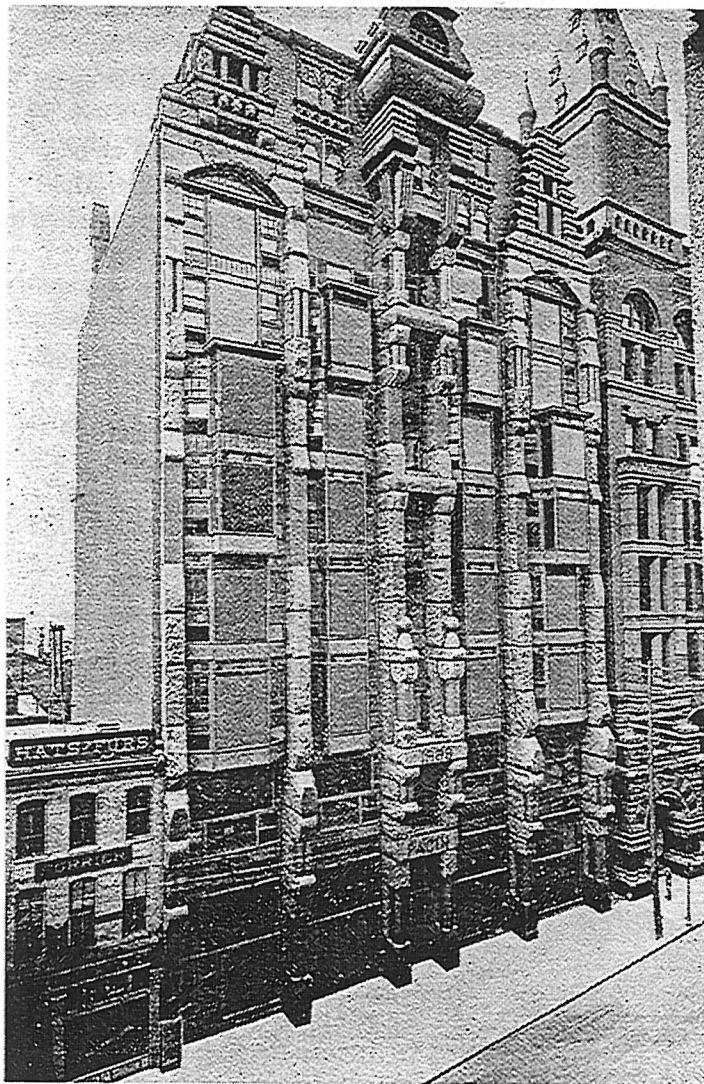
### PART THREE: THE AARON FAGIN BUILDING

In 1892 the *Architectural Record* declared the Aaron Fagin Building to be “the most discreditable piece of architecture in the United States.” Erected in 1888 at a cost of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, the ten-story Fagin Building occupied a lot on the south side of Olive between Eighth and Ninth Streets. Mr. Fagin (1812-1896) entrusted the commission for his new building to his son-in-law, Charles B. Clarke (1836-1899), a well-known St. Louis architect.

Although Clarke’s office was located in St. Louis, most of his commissions were in out-state Missouri, where he had gained a reputation of creating exotic Victorian structures. Prior to the Fagin Building, Clarke’s most famous St. Louis commission was the John Pierce mansion on Chouteau Avenue. This Victorian pile cost in excess of one hundred thousand dollars. Mr. Pierce chose not to live in it. He preferred to rent it to others.

Missouri red granite and glass dominated the facade of the Fagin Building. Decoration on the new structure was confined to shape rather than detail. These strange and unattractive shapes employed as decoration by Clarke appear to originate from no particular style. Rather they seem to arise from Clarke’s own vivid imagination — maybe a childhood nightmare.

The chief fault of Clarke’s design, however, concerned an optical illusion. When people would walk in front of this building and look up at it, the structure would appear to be in imminent danger of collapsing on top of them. Clarke’s design fostered this illusion in several ways. The two floors at the bottom of the structure appeared recessed. The six vertical piers of the facade were irregular in shape and projected outward away from the building. A heavy cornice on the top floor, a projecting observation deck, and a lack of visible horizontal supports bonding the structure together contributed to this illusion. Hence, people would not walk past the building and businesses



The Aaron Fagin Building, Olive between 8th & 9th, site of the present Arcade Building, St. Louis.

would not rent its offices and stores. Architects were hired to examine the structure for safety. They pronounced the building to be safe and sound. No one believed their testimony.

After seven years of financial disaster, the real estate firm handling this building hired the St. Louis architectural firm of Kirchner and Kirchner to remodel the Fagin Building. At a cost of fifty thousand dollars, they removed Clarke's facade and installed a new front of brick with terra cotta trim, using the classical style. The real estate company renamed the structure the Burlington Building and rented all its space in a short time.

Through the years the Fagin Building has had its supporters. They direct our attention to its modern architectural approach of vertical emphasis, absence of decoration, extensive use of glass, and iconoclastic primitivism. They mourned its loss.

Had Clarke continued his architectural experimentation, what would have been the outcome? Could he have become the father of a new American architectural style? We shall never know. Although Clarke lived another ten years following the building's completion, he never again designed another structure.

After twenty-nine years of existence, the Fagin/Burlington building received its demolition orders. The Arcade Building, a Gothic Revival masterpiece designed by Tom Barnett, replaced it in 1918.

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## THE FIRST McLEAN BUILDING AND TAX STAMPS AS SOURCES FOR ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

BY WILTON E. MASON

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[Editor's note: Tax stamps offer a source of images for 19<sup>th</sup>-century commercial buildings that is nearly unknown to architectural historians. Tony Mason, a stamp collector from Madison, Wisconsin, has located a stamp showing Dr. McLean's *other* downtown building and here explains its significance.]

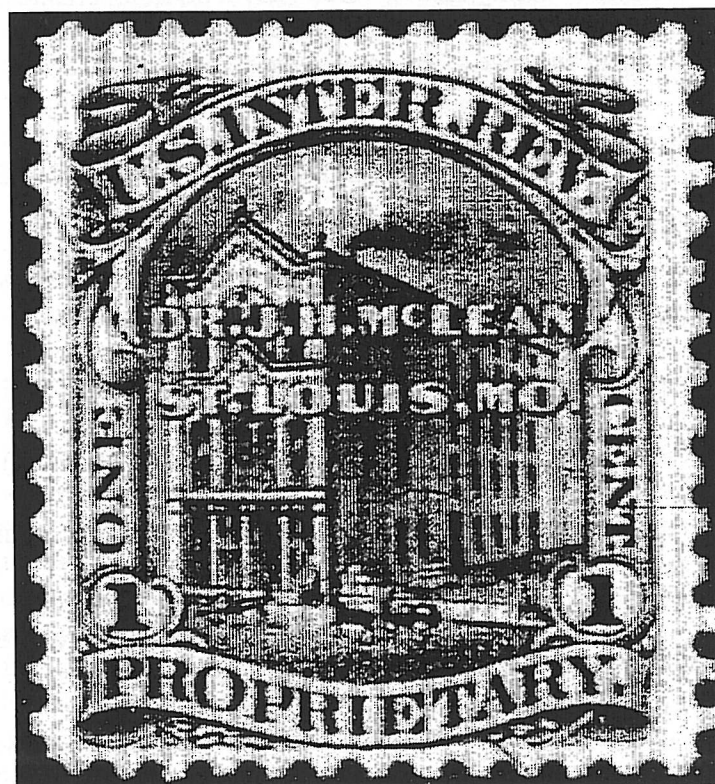
Here are some details about these stamps generally and the McLean stamp in particular. Generally, these stamps are known as private die proprietary stamps. These stamps were authorized by Act of Congress in the fall of 1862 and lasted until the summer of 1883, when the tax was repealed. The initial reason for the tax was to help finance the Union cause in the Civil War. The tax applied to five classes of products: matches, patent medicines,

canned foods, perfumes, and playing cards. Many thousands of firms were subject to the taxes and most paid them by using regularly issued proprietary tax stamps in use at the time.

The federal act also gave companies the right to contract with the government's private printer (Butler & Carpenter in Philadelphia) to design (with government approval) their own "private die" to use on their merchandise. B&C charged \$350 per private die designed. Many firms found these stamps to be excellent forms of advertising, and many were quite showy and attractive. Many manufacturers (incorrectly but shrewdly) let it be known that the imprinting of "U.S. Internal Revenue" on the stamps implied government approval of their products. Interestingly, these stamps raised about 36% of the funds used in the war effort.

I will not trouble you with the intricacies of the taxes, except for the medicine stamps, of which the McLean stamp is one. The tax was based on the retail price of the product. If the retail price was less than 25¢, the tax was 1¢ between 25¢ and 50, the tax was 2¢; between 50¢ and 75¢, the tax was 3¢; between 75¢ and \$1, the tax was 4¢, and for each 50¢ or fraction thereof after \$1, the tax was an additional 2¢.

These stamps were printed on as many as four different types of paper. There was what is called "old paper," which was first used. It is a woven paper of



The first McLean Building, 314 Chestnut Street, St. Louis shown on a proprietary stamp.

varying thicknesses. After about 1871, "silk paper" came into use. It is like the old paper, but has strands of blue silk threads in it. (The stamp illustrated here is a silk paper variety.) In late 1877, watermarked paper ("U.S.I.R.") was put into use. Concurrently with the use of watermarked paper, unwatermarked pink paper was used. There's also a subvariety that may be a fifth type: it is old paper with flecks of silk in it. It's called "experimental silk paper" and is very rare. Not all stamps were issued on all types of paper. Some paper varieties of some stamps are quite plentiful, while other paper varieties of the same stamp may be quite rare. The McLean stamp was issued on all four paper varieties (five, if you count the "experimental silk" variety on which it also appeared). The McLean stamp is a fairly common stamp among these proprieties — called in philatelic circles "match and medicine" stamps. The pink variety is the least common of the McLeans (other than the experimental silk, which is quite uncommon).

As for the McLean stamps, they were first issued April 12, 1867, and last issued February 20, 1883. The design is of their earlier principal office: it was located at 314 Chestnut Street. There was never a stamp issued showing McLean's Grand Tower Block.

Among the remedies that used the tax stamps were the following: Dr. J.H. McLean's Strengthening Cordial and Blood Purifier; Dr... 's Volcanic Oil Liniment; Dr... 's Universal Pills; Dr... 's Candy Vermifuge and Dr... 's Chinoidine Sugar Pills. Claims of their efficacy were, of course, extravagant. They would cure dropsy, diabetes, biliousness, Bright's disease, "female weakness," pains in the back, torpidity of the livers, and congestion of the kidneys.

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## THE LAMELLA BARN AT FAUST PARK CHESTERFIELD, MISSOURI

by Esley Hamilton

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The Arena is the biggest and best known example of a lamella truss roof in St. Louis, but its future is dim. Restoration is currently underway, however, on the earliest example of this structural system in the St. Louis area, the barn that was recently bequeathed by Mary Faust to the St. Louis County Department of Parks and Recreation.

The lamella structural system was introduced to St. Louis in one of the city's most elegant settings, Number One Portland Place, the Italian Renaissance palazzo that was said to have been built by beer baron Adolphus Busch for his daughter Anna "Tolie" Faust. Her husband Edward

Faust, a vice president of Anheuser-Busch and prominent St. Louis businessman, invited architects and engineers in the spring of 1925 to their home for a lecture with movies.

That summer, he erected what he claimed was the first example of this new construction technique in America, a barn at his son's farm on Olive Street Road in Chesterfield. The building measures 50 by 100 feet and rises 36 feet to the apex of its Gothic-arched roof. Faust wrote that fall to the Lamella Roof Syndicate in New York, saying that already there had been "any number of architects, engineers and contractors at the farm to inspect same. All were loud in their praises at the simplicity of the construction and were amazed to learn that actual erection and bolting of the lamellas required less than five days."

The term "lamella" is Latin for platelet. *Greater St. Louis*, reporting on the Faust barn, noted that lamellas were essentially wooden ribs, "curved on one edge, beveled at both ends, and connected into a continuous network, having the appearance of a fish net and the effect of an arch. They are short, easily handled, and when set into a curved roof have great strength, due to their mutual bracing."

Sources differ as to the origin of the design concept, but it was probably invented in 1908 by a housing official in Dessau, Germany. The Lamella Roof Syndicate licensed the system to companies in 20 other cities, one being St. Louis.

The designer of the Faust barn was Gustel R. Kiewitt, then age 23, who had just come from Germany. Kiewitt subsequently built dozens of lamella roofs in St. Louis and around the Midwest, often inserting them into buildings designed by other architects. The largest and most familiar to St. Louisans was the Arena, built in 1929 as a venue for dairy shows and long the home of the St. Louis Blues hockey team. The technique continued in popularity after the war, and one good indication of its acceptance was its use in the Ladue Junior High School, a building designed by



*The Lamella Barn at Faust Park, Chesterfield, built 1925*

the same architectural firm, Murphy & Mackey, that built the Climatron at the Missouri Botanical Garden, one of the first Geodesic domes based on the principles of Buckminster Fuller.

The lamella roof was economical and easy to erect but not structurally foolproof, and it fell out of favor in the 1960s after an incident of structural failure. Gustel Kiewitt was able to see lamella concepts adapted to steel construction in the Houston Astrodome before his death in 1964.

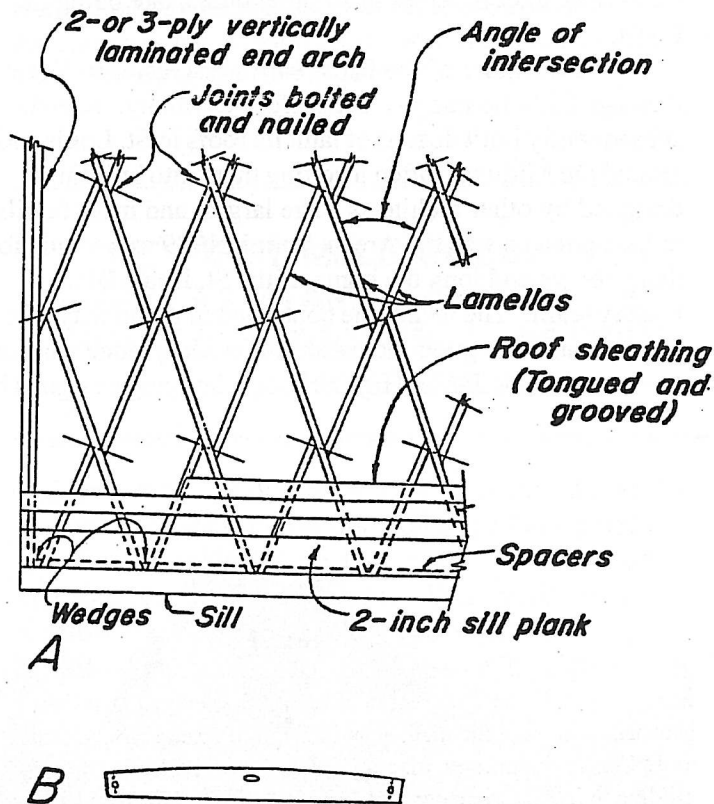
The lamella barn at Chesterfield became a celebrated feature of the unusual estate of Leicester Busch Faust, the son of Edward Faust. The other buildings, including the house, were in the style of New Mexico, sometimes called the "Pueblo Revival," and Faust furnished them with the Navajo carpets, Taos School paintings, and native pottery appropriate to the style. He and his wife Mary gave 98 acres to St. Louis County in 1968 to form Faust Park. Leicester Faust died in 1979, and after Mary Faust's death in 1996, the central 100 acres of the estate came to the County, too. By that time, time had taken a toll on the lamella barn, but it is being renewed structurally and a new roof is on the way. The house is being adapted by architect Jeff Brambilla to be the West County home of the St. Louis Symphony Music School.



*Amoureux House  
Ste. Genevieve, MO*

## NEW PROJECTS AT AMOUREUX HOUSE

A new exhibit on French Colonial architecture in Missouri is one of three new initiatives announced recently by Les Amis, the group organized after the Great Flood of 1993 to assist in the preservation of Ste. Genevieve's French colonial heritage. All three are designed to enhance our understanding and appreciation of the Amoureux House, which Les Amis rescued and presented to the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. The architecture exhibit will show the techniques used in building French houses of the period. Models will illustrate various ground plans, and roof trusses, hinge types, and window framing will be compared. Visitors will be able to handle examples of carpentry and joinery as part of the exhibit. In a second venture, a \$10,000 gift from the Margery Bussen Trust will help to underwrite a \$25,000 scale model of Ste. Genevieve as it looked in 1825. Ste. Genevieve artist-craftsman Lewis Pruneau will create the model for Les Amis to represent the point at which the town's French colonial architecture and early American buildings had reached their peak of interest. When complete, the model will be displayed in the Amoureux House. The third project includes a history of the Amoureux family and an exhibit depicting Amoureux heritage and genealogy to be completed by Anton Pregaldin. A Clayton attorney, Pregaldin is an authority on French family lines in Missouri, Illinois and Indiana and plans eventually to publish a genealogical dictionary of these pioneers. His research on the Amoureux family has taken him back to their home regions of Lorient and Bourgneuf in France. The architecture and family exhibits are scheduled to open on Sunday, May 30, 1999 as part of the third annual Fête Française sponsored by Les Amis. SAH-St. Louis members Dorothy Brockhoff and Anne Woodhouse (our November speaker) have been active in these projects. Tax-deductible donations in support of Les Amis may be sent to Jim Ritts, c/o Deloitte & Touche, One City Center, St. Louis, MO 63101.



A: Lamella roof plan  
B: side view of lamella

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**“Holiday Gathering”**

Sunday, January 17, 1999, 6 p.m.

Mimi Stirtz will again host our annual gathering where we share our architectural experiences at home and abroad. Last year’s participants introduced us to buildings ranging from a cave village in Spain to a house made of aluminum cans in Taos, and including George I. Barnett’s unsuccessful competition design for the Mercantile Library. Bring slides of one building (or place) or just come to enjoy the show. Phone 889-3357 for reservations for the buffet dinner and directions.

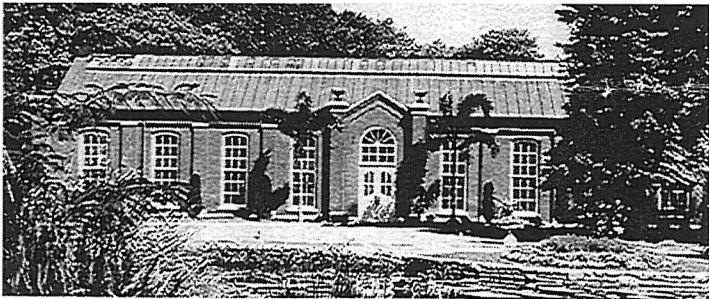
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**“Palms, Paradise and Tropical Climes”**

Sunday, February 7, 1999, 2 p.m.

Stupp Center, Tower Grove Park

Marilyn E. Heldman, adjunct associate professor in the Department of Art and Art History, University of Missouri, St. Louis, discusses the symbolism of palms in art. This is the first lecture in the 10th anniversary Tower Grove Park Lecture Series, which celebrates the renovation of the Piper Palm House in the park. The Stupp Center is located in the park near the corner of Grand and Arsenal.



*The Piper Palm House, Tower Grove Park, St. Louis*

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**BUCKMINSTER FULLER EXHIBIT  
at University of Missouri-Columbia**

Through April 4, 1999, the Museum of Art and Archeology at the University of Missouri-Columbia features the work of Buckminster Fuller, best known for his invention of the Geodesic Dome. On display are copies of Fuller’s patent drawings on mylar along with screen prints showing the constructions to which the patents applied. A 90-minute video on Fuller plays continuously in the museum theater.

These images come a portfolio that has been purchased by the museum to honor Professor Osmund Overby on the occasion of his recent retirement. Known to almost everyone in Missouri with an interest in architecture or historic preservation, Overby is a past president of the Society of Architectural Historians and served as editor of its Buildings of the United States series.

The Museum of Art and Archaeology is located in Pickard Hall on the Francis Quadrangle at the University. Hours are Tuesday-Friday 9 to 5 and Saturday-Sunday noon to 5, with evening hours from 6 to 9 on Thursdays.

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**“Walter Burley Griffin & Marion Mahoney Griffin”**

Sunday, February 14, 1999, 3:45 p.m.

Steinberg Hall, Washington University

Paul Kruty, University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, will speak two of the leading architects of the Prairie School. Walter Burley Griffin is best known as the designer of Canberra, the Australian capital, but he also designed a house in Edwardsville, Illinois, near St. Louis.. His wife Marion began Frank Lloyd Wright’s most talented assistant, producing some of the most admired perspective drawings of his houses.

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**“Some 19th-Century European Models for  
the Design of the Tower Grove Park Palm  
House”**

Sunday, March 7, 1999, 2 p.m.

Stupp Center, Tower Grove Park

John Karel, the director of Tower Grove Park and former director of the Missouri park system, shares the insights he has gained on trips with the Friends of Tower Grove Park to parks and gardens in England, France and Italy that were visited by Henry Shaw, the founder of Tower Grove Park. The talk will be in the Stupp Center at Tower Grove Park, Grand and Arsenal.

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**An Introduction to Scottish Architecture**

Thursday March 25th, 1999, 7:30 p.m.

Lashly Branch Library, 4537 West Pine Blvd.

Esley Hamilton, preservation historian for St. Louis County Parks, will survey the architectural riches of Scotland, from St. Margaret to Basil Spence, using slides from his four visits. With its tower houses, doocots, and crofters’ cottages, Scotland has produced an architecture that is distinct from that of the country to the south.

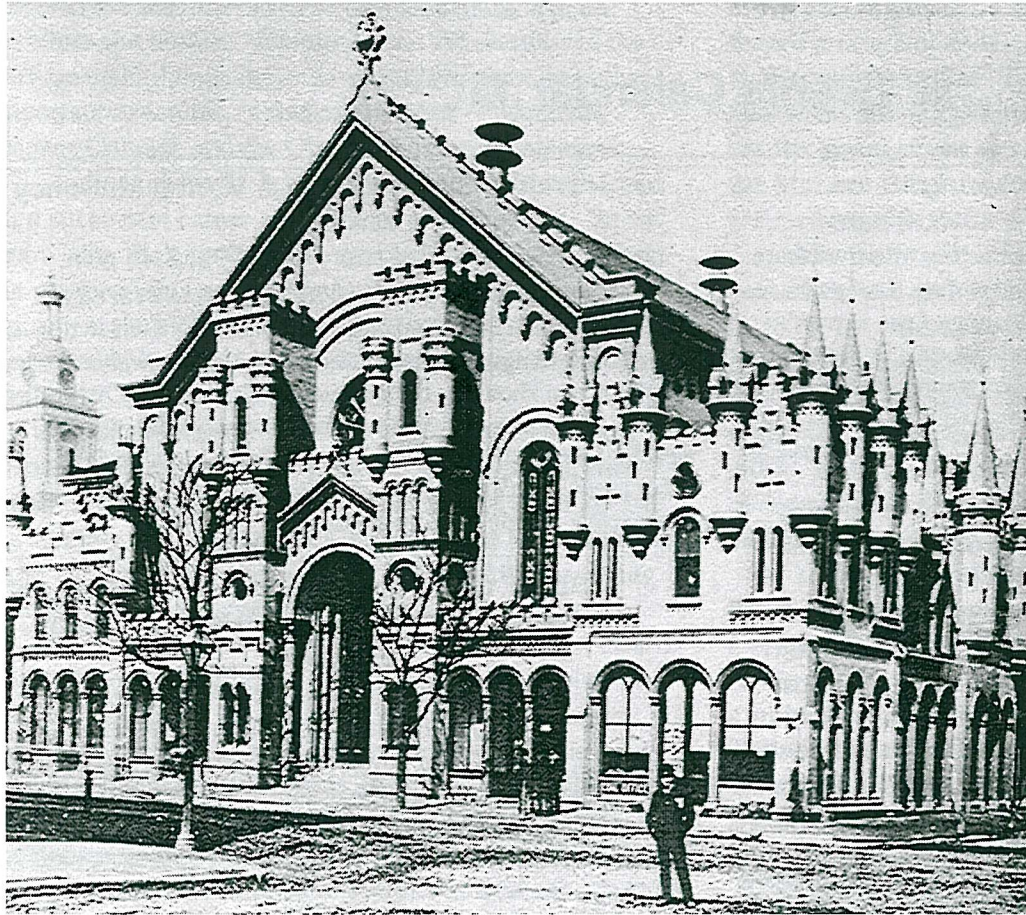
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**Coming in from the Cold: the Evolution  
of the Orangery, Prototype of the Palm  
House**

Sunday, April 11, 5 p.m.

Piper Palm House, Tower Grove Park

Billie S. Britz, lecturer, author and consultant architectural historian, will trace the history and design of orangeries, green houses, and palm houses, placing Tower Grove Park’s landmark building in its historical context. The Piper Palm House is located near the center of the park just east of Tower Grove Avenue. Please note the special time.



*The First Methodist Church, Washington & Eighth Street, St. Louis, showing the surrounding stores. At left is the tower of the old College Church, St. Francis Xavier, on Ninth Street. First methodist was built in 1854 to a design by George I. Barnett, but it is shown here with the row of shops built around 1875 by architect-builder James Stewart. For more information on this curiosity see page two.*

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# News Letter

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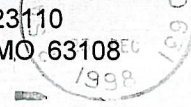
Please mail editorial correspondence and submissions for publication to Esley Hamilton, Editor, 7346 Balson Ave. University City, MO 63130 or contact him at 314-889-3357; Fax 314-889-3696; E-mail pk0f29@co.st-louis.mo.us. Deadlines for submission of material for publication in **NewsLetter** are as follows:

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Winter issue	15 November

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