

DESPERATELY SEEKING SPIERING A Research Memoir

©1999 By Carol S. Porter

Editor's note: Carol S. Porter is working on a book-length biography, *Where the Lights Are Shining: Louis Clemens Spiering, Architecture for the Arts*. With a new exhibition of Spiering's work up at the Sheldon, I asked Carol to share some of her experiences researching this respectful but little known St. Louis Architect.

Biographers ultimately find what they're looking for, or so it's been said. The implication is that what we find, though not necessarily what we expected to find, is what the antennae of our subconscious attract.

My antennae must have been mad for adventure on March 8, 1997. That was the day I set off for the Missouri Historical Society to learn a thing or two about Louis Clemens Spiering, architect of the Sheldon Concert Hall.

At the time I was a member of an a cappella choral ensemble that had presented several programs at the Sheldon Concert Hall. As happens with just about everyone who performs there, we were awed by the hall's acoustics. Soprano Lesley Garrett reportedly has commented, "Singing at The Sheldon is like performing inside a Stradivarius." It's true. Embracing the musician, the extraordinarily warm auditorium seduces, forgives and



Sheldon Concert Hall

inspires. For a listener, its fabled acoustics work another kind of magic. Say you're listening to a choral concert at The Sheldon. First, the unmiked, unaccompanied blended voices become one voice. Then, if you close your eyes, you lose all sense of physical space and distance. Suddenly you and the single blended voice are one. You literally can't tell where tone ends and you begin. The sound penetrates your very bones. It's cosmic.

Because our chorus was planning a spring 1997 program of turn-of-the-century music at the Sheldon, I decided to find out if we might tie in that program with the building itself. I knew that the Sheldon had been dedicated in 1912 as the original home of the Ethical Society of St. Louis, a liberal religious congregation. I had read that it was designed by "noted World's Fair architect Louis Spiering." And I had heard that Spiering had died shortly before the completion and dedication of his masterwork.

FIRST GLIMPSE

So off I went to the MHS library, armed with my two Spiering facts and one preconceived notion; I confess that I expected to encounter a greybeard. Instead, my gaze fell on the photograph that accompanied Louis Spiering's obituary. It's the same image you see on this page: an intense, impossibly young man, dead at 37. Reading the obituary, I was struck by Spiering's impressive family connections (the extended Bernays clan, an intellectual German-American family, was prominent in St. Louis from 1855 to 1920 or so, influential in journalism, literary criticism, music and medicine), Spiering's impeccable education (Berlin and Paris, culminating in the seven-year architectural program at the Ecole des Beaux Arts), and his achievements during his final years in St. Louis (designs for the Souldard Branch of St. Louis Public Library on Lafayette, the original Artists' Guild clubhouse on Union, multiple residences and of course, the Sheldon Memorial.

No wonder Spiering had so adroitly created a temple for the expression of great ideas and the performance of good music. All his life had been lived in preparation.

I read on. The list of Spiering's honorary pallbearers was a who's who of St. Louis architects of the era: Klipstein, Eames, Mauran, Ittner, Link, Robinson,



Louis Clemens Spiering

Brueggemann, LaBeaume. The funeral addresses bespoke a love and universal admiration for the young man that transcended hyperbolic funeral oratory.

By the time I left MHS library that March afternoon, I was reeling. Here was a story that grabbed me on many levels. It combined my affection for music and music performance, involved my love of historical research, played on my long-standing fascination with architecture and historic preservation and took place in one of my favorite eras, the early years of the 20th century. At the center of the drama was a classic tragic hero, apparently minus the hubris — bright, talented, doomed. Absolutely dedicated to his craft, Spiering lived out his final days directing the construction of the Sheldon from his deathbed. (Later I would discover that he had written checks to subcontractors, in a pathetically shaky hand, up until the day before he died of cancer.)

No question that I had the makings of a compelling script. More important, in my estimation, I had a book . . . a riveting St. Louis story at the heart of a larger, inspirational portrayal of human striving and achievement.

And so it began. In the ensuing months, my biographer's antennae have surprised me time and time again. Every surprise has been delicious, though not always easily comprehended, a research side trip unto itself.

WHO WAS SABINE?

Take my first important breakthrough. It introduced me to Wallace Sabine, linked the Sheldon to the acoustically aristocratic Boston Symphony Hall, and ultimately sent me to the nearly indescribable Riverbank Estate in Geneva, Illinois.

Poring over the archives of the Ethical Society of St. Louis, housed in the Western Historical Manuscript Collection at University of Missouri-St. Louis, I had a eureka moment part way through the board of directors' minutes for the year 1910. Shortly after Spiering received the commission to design the Sheldon Memorial, the board approved a \$200 expenditure to "Prof. Sabine" for "acoustics consultation." No elaboration, no supporting correspondence.

So Spiering had help . . . but from whom? Another investigation revealed the identity of "Prof. Sabine." It should come as no surprise that Spiering went to the best. Wallace Clement Sabine (1868 -1919) is known today as the father of modern architectural acoustics. Consultant to some of the most noted architects of his day, he advised McKim, Mead and White in their design of Boston Symphony Hall, dedicated in 1900 and still considered one of the premier acoustic halls in the United States.

Sabine (pronounced SAY-bin), was assistant professor of physics at Harvard University. He first made a name in the infant specialty of acoustics with his correction of a sound problem in Harvard's Fogg Art Museum, completed in 1895. The Fogg lecture hall was barely usable because of excessive reverberation. Sabine, relatively new on faculty, was given the uncoveted assignment of solving the problem.

His methods are now legendary. For a period of several years, working in the wee hours of the morning to avoid interference from outside noise, Sabine performed many series of experiments using a single organ pipe tuned to 512 cycles per second (slightly higher than the standard concert pitch of A440), a stopwatch, and a load of seat cushions from a neighboring building. He thus determined the effect of sound absorbent materials on reverberation, and produced a formula, based on a hyperbola, which would allow him to accurately predict the acoustical properties of a room — even taking into account the many

variables changing with each design (room dimensions, plaster on wood lath vs. plaster on wire, wood paneling, etc.).

It was this ability to predict, even more than the ability to remedy, that made Sabine increasingly sought after as an architectural consultant. Most of his consultations took place by mail. He charged a standard fee of \$200 for a detailed analysis of architectural plans, although he generously gave gratis responses to brief letters of inquiry. (He did so in 1911 for St. Louis Board of Education architect William B. Ittner, who sought his opinion of a fire- and sound-proof curtain in the auditorium of the new high school then being planned.)

FROM ST. LOUIS TO GENEVA, ILLINOIS BY WAY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASS

Needless to say, I was dying to witness an exchange of ideas between the great scientist and the talented young architect. At the very least, I needed substantive proof of the link between Sabine and the Sheldon. Surely I would find it in Sabine's papers at Harvard University. But no. I was referred to Riverbank Acoustical Laboratories in Geneva, Illinois. So I called. Yes, Sabine had been affiliated with Riverbank; in fact, it was he who designed the facility. With encouragement from the personable staff at Riverbank, I planned a visit to their museum and archives to continue my search for the Sabine-Spiering-Sheldon link.

(Next time: Riverbank Revealed.)

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Riverbank Acoustical Laboratories, Geneva, Illinois

NEW MOUNT SINAI CEMETERY

by Ann Morris

New Mount Sinai Cemetery is the apotheosis of all the arts that come together in a cemetery: engineering, landscaping, architecture, sculpture, stained glass, symbolic imagery, and history.

New Mount Sinai Cemetery is the oldest Jewish cemetery in the St. Louis area. It was established by Jewish congregations beginning in 1850, when B'nai Brith Society purchased one acre for a cemetery on Gravois Road. At that time, Jews were being buried in the Camp Spring Cemetery on Pratte Avenue (now Jefferson Avenue) and Cooper Street, established by Emanu El Congregation in 1848, or in the United Hebrew Burial Ground at 23rd and Scott Avenue, established by the United Hebrew Congregation in 1840. Both of those early cemeteries are now part of the railroad yards in Mill Creek Valley. In 1852 the two South St. Louis Jewish congregations, B'nai Brith and Emanu El, merged to form the B'nai El Congregation. Their Camp Spring Cemetery filled up quickly, and in 1859 the first burial took place in the new cemetery on Gravois Road.

Shaare Emeth, a German Reform Jewish congregation, was organized in 1869 and worshipped at 17th and Pine. The new congregation requested permission to bury its dead in the Gravois Road cemetery, and together the Jewish congregations organized the Mount Sinai Cemetery Association. The group purchased five additional acres next to the cemetery on Gravois Road, and they drew up a constitution and bylaws specifying that "only persons who are, at the time of their death, known to be Israelites" can be buried in Mount Sinai Cemetery.

In 1872 the Mount Sinai Cemetery Association reinterred the remains of 43 adults and 53 children from the Camp Spring Cemetery in Mill Creek Valley into part of Block 18, near the entrance to Mount Sinai Cemetery, and the Association erected a marble monument in memory of those remains.

In 1886, Temple Israel was organized, and in 1888 its members were admitted to the Mount Sinai Cemetery Association. That same year, the Cemetery Association reincorporated and received a perpetual charter under the name of the New Mount Sinai Cemetery Association.

A chapel, designed by C. B. Clarke, had been built at Mount Sinai Cemetery in 1873, and the red granite and wrought iron entrance gate was built next to the chapel in

1893. Then, in 1905, the chapel was torn down, and a new chapel, designed by Will Levy, was built on the same site.

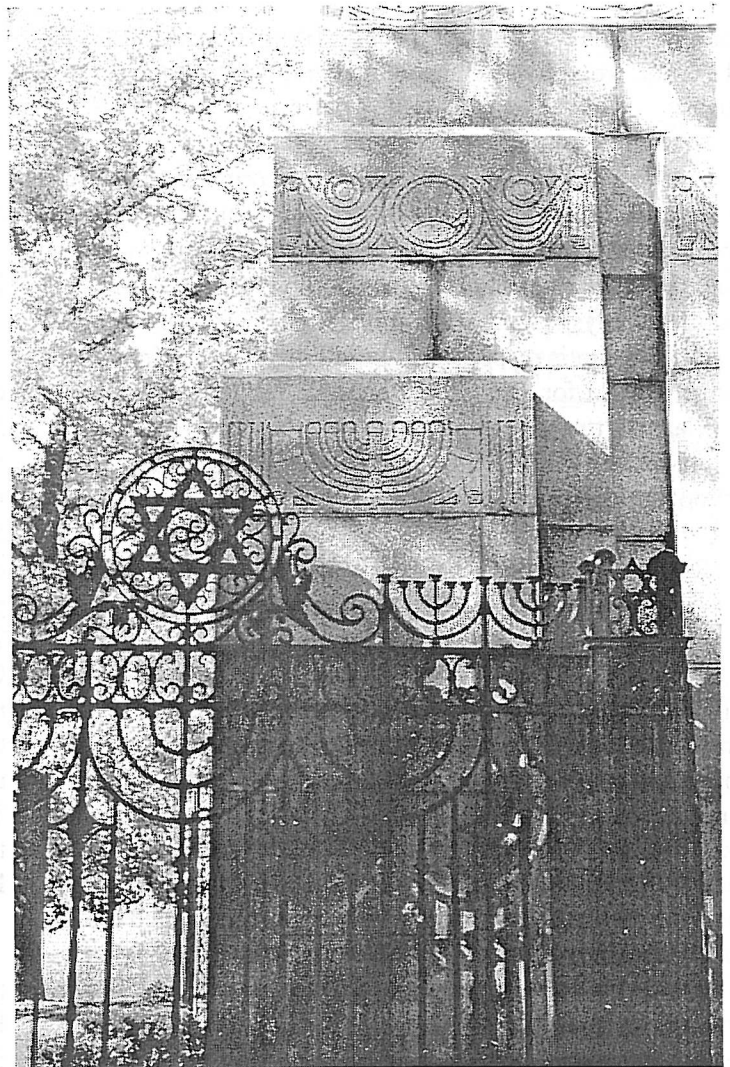
More than thirty acres were added to the cemetery over the years, and in 1907 the Board hired the Pitzman Surveying and Engineering Company to lay out roadways, walkways, and family lots. Julius Pitzman was an excellent choice for designing a picturesque Rural cemetery. He had become a civil engineer while working for his brother-in-law, Charles E. Salomon, the Surveyor of St. Louis County, in the 1850s. During the Civil War Pitzman served as a topographical engineer for the Union Army, mapping the Battle of Shiloh, Sherman's supply base at Memphis, and the Confederate position during the Siege of Vicksburg. After the war, he created the Pitzman Atlas of St. Louis County, showing every road, farm, and property line in the county, which enhanced his reputation with its thoroughness. Pitzman learned landscape engineering and, in 1874 he visited Europe to study the great parks. He advocated the acquisition of a large park for St. Louis, and when a charter was granted for Forest Park, Pitzman became the Chief Engineer. Pitzman also designed St. Peter's Cemetery on Lucas and Hunt Road, the small, charming Odd Fellows Cemetery on South Broadway, and the exclusive private places around Forest Park. Pitzman's design of curving roadways at New Mount Sinai Cemetery complimented the contours of the hills and provided many excellent sites for family mausoleums, reminiscent of the curves and hills and close-together mausoleums of Pere Lachaise Cemetery in Paris.

The limestone House of Comfort in Queen Anne style was built in 1916 as a rest house and luncheon spot, to accommodate the horse drawn funerals from the city which often took all day. It now serves as the cemetery office.

The monumental Art Deco entrance gates on Gravois were designed by Benjamin Shapiro in 1932. Wrought iron gates with stylized menorahs and Stars of David swing



Mount Sinai Cemetery Entrance



Cemetery Gate Detail

open between granite pylons, which are ornamented with carved friezes of stars of David and menorahs. A house for the cemetery caretaker, a garage, and two large greenhouses were built in 1938.

Acme Marble and Granite Company of New Orleans completed the large community mausoleum, just inside the entrance gates, in 1969. The large stained glass window, 17 feet high and 20 feet wide, in the center chapel section of the mausoleum, was designed by Sol Nodel, the brother of Rabbi Julius Nodel of Shaare Emeth Congregation. The hand-blown glass was made by the Rudy Glass Company of York, Pennsylvania. The window contains the Hebrew word *Emeth*, which means "Truth," and is called the Window of Truth. An image of the earth as seen from the moon commemorates the historic walk on the moon by astronauts Armstrong and Aldrin which took place while the window was being built.

Following the service as caretaker of Anton Pohman from 1901 to 1915, the job of caretaker has passed from father to son through three generations: Henry A. Eirich

from 1916 to 1950; Henry C. Eirich from 1950 to 1980; and Scott Eirich, from 1980 to the present. In 1991 the board of directors had the mounds of ivy removed from all the single graves and family lots. Ivy mounds are a distinctive tradition in Jewish cemeteries in this area, but they are time-consuming and expensive to maintain. In 1992 a formal Japanese "Walking Garden" was designed and planted in front of the Mausoleum.

Rabbis buried at New Mount Sinai Cemetery include S. H. Sonneschein, Leon Harrison, and Ferdinand M. Isserman from Temple Israel; Samuel Sale, Julius Gordon, and Julius Nodel from Shaare Emeth; and Moritz Spitz, Julian Miller, and Bertram Klausner from B'nai El.

SOURCES

William Hyde and Howard Conard, *Encyclopedia of the History of St. Louis*. St. Louis: Southern History Company, 1899, Vol. III, pp. 1739-1742.

Julius Pitzman, *Atlas of the City and County of St. Louis, Missouri*. Philadelphia: A. B. Holcombe & Co., 1878, p. 57.

Plat Book of St. Louis County, Missouri. Des Moines, Iowa: Northwest Publishing Co., 1909, pp. 50-51.

Mary Pool, unpublished histories of New Mount Sinai Cemetery, 1996 and 1997.

J. Thomas Scharf, *History of St. Louis City and County*. Philadelphia: Louis Everts & Co., 1883, Vol. II., pp. 1738-1739.

Editor's note: Ann Morris is the director of the Western Historical Manuscript Collection at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Last year, she wrote about the cemetery study she was undertaking for St. Louis County. The foregoing is just one result.

WHAT'S IN A NAME

From James Lees-Milne's diary entry for October 20, 1942, published in *Ancestral Voices*, 1975:

The church is of granite and I pronounce it horrid, until I see on a notice board that Sir Giles Scott is the architect. Whereupon my interest is aroused. I look again, and find some merits in the design.

MAUSOLEUMS AT NEW MOUNT SINAI

New Mount Sinai has preserved the plans for 28 of the 39 mausoleums on its grounds, and as part of her study, Ann Morris has gone through them all and has compiled the following list. It shows that while many mausoleums were provided by monument companies, others were individually designed by local architects, including some of the most respected. No date is given unless it appears on the plan itself, since a mausoleum may be constructed long before or long after its occupant's death.

NAME	DESIGNER, DATE
Adler-Baer-Schram	Benjamin Shapiro
Baer, Sigmund	Charles Blake, Chicago
Butler, Samuel B.	Will Levy, 1939
Desberger, Joseph	Rosenbloom Mon. Co.
Ehrlich, Alice	Chioldi Granite Co., 1932
Fuller, Aaron	Charles Blake, Chicago
Glaser, Julius	Rosenbloom Mon. Co., 1941
Greenfield	J. M. Hirshstein, 1916
Guckenheim, Emil	Rosebrough Mon. Co.
Haas, Samuel	J. M. Hirshstein, 1923
Horwitz, Kalman N.	Rosenbloom Mon. Co., 1933
Koplar	Rosenbloom Mon. Co., 1963
Lesser, Julius	Will Levy, 1904
Levy, Louis	Geo. Dodds Granite Co., 1930
Lewin, T.	Raymond E. Maritz, 1954
Manne, Max	Rosenbloom Mon. Co., 1959
May, Morton J.	Chioldi Granite Co.
Meyers, Emanuel	Will Levy, 1921
Rothschild, Sidney	Chioldi Granite Co., 1933
Samuels, Theodore	Tom P. Barnett, 1919
Sandfelder	Rosebrough Mon. Co.
Sherman-Lux	Rock of Ages, Barre, VT, 1970
Shoenberg, Moses	Chioldi Granite Co., 1924
Wolff, Minnie	Charles Blake, Chicago

ARCH PUBLISHES NEW EERO SAARINEN BOOKLET

The Jefferson National Parks Association has published a new 16-page booklet, *Eero Saarinen: architect, sculptor, visionary*. It retails for just \$1.95. This brief but well-illustrated biography of Saarinen from his birth in Finland in 1910 until his death in August of 1961 covers some of his best-known designs such as the Ingalls Hockey Rink at Yale University, the 38-story CBS Building in New York, and Dulles Airport near Washington, D.C., as well as our own Gateway Arch. The author, Lawrence W. Cheek, studied architectural history at the University of Arizona and architectural criticism at the Harvard Graduate School

of Design. He began writing critically on architecture in 1978 as a staff writer for the *Tucson Citizen* and currently is a contributing editor of *Architecture Magazine*. Under the name Larry Cheek he has written guides to Santa Fe and Arizona for *Compass American Guides*.

Formerly known as the Jefferson National Expansion Historical Association, the Jefferson National Parks Association is the private, non-profit support group for the Arch and the other facilities of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial.

PRESERVEMO GROUP FORMED

The busy Mr. Myers has also created an e-mail discussion group for the Missouri Alliance for Historic Preservation. Myers bills it as "the best source for information on the preservation of Missouri's built environment, organizations, products and services, financial assistance and tax credits, architectural history and research, 'how to,' laws and legislation, and more." You can post messages to preservemo members at: preservemo@egroups.com.

Direct questions or comments to the group moderator at: preservemo-owner@egroups.com

Early discussions have involved the theft of architectural artifacts, which is rampant nationally. The focus here seems to be wrought and cast iron fences and ornaments, which disappears not only from inner-city St. Louis but from cemeteries and churches all over the metropolitan area.

BERNOUDY BOOK SEES THE LIGHT

Osmund Overby's long-awaited book about William Bernoudy will appear in October. Published by the University of Missouri Press, *William Adair Bernoudy, Architect: Bringing the Legacy of Frank Lloyd Wright to St. Louis* will include 280 photographs, including 183 of the dazzling color views by Sam Fentress that SAH members may remember from Professor Overby's talk a few years ago. Gyo Obata has written the foreword.

Bernoudy (1910-1988) studied with Wright for three years beginning in 1932 as one of the first apprentices in the Taliesin Fellowship. Returning to St. Louis he formed a partnership with Edouard Mutrux in 1938. Bernoudy became known for his skill in designing houses that harmonized with the local environment and terrain. Beyond his own work of over a hundred new buildings, he played a wider role in the cultural life of St. Louis with his wife Gertrude, an avid art collector.

Osmund Overby is Professor Emeritus of Art History and Archaeology at the University of Missouri-Columbia and past president of the national Society of Architectural Historians as well as a faithful member of this chapter. *William Adair Bernoudy, Architect* sells for \$49.95. Buy it at Left Bank Books, the only independently owned full-service bookstore in St. Louis.

MISSOURI ALLIANCE SEEKS WRITERS FOR ITS NEW WEBSITE

Robert Myers, a city planner by trade, has created an ambitious new website for The Missouri Alliance for Historic Preservation (MAHP): <http://www.preservemo.org>.

In addition to news about the Alliance and its activities, the site is intended to be a resource for preservationists throughout the state.

Myers is looking for writers to help flesh out some sections. **Architectural Styles** plans to provide a tour of Missouri architecture by style, with photographs. **Cultural Landmarks** would showcase the state's most important properties, again with photographs. Authors will be credited.

Some of the sections are well under way, and the site already includes links to more than 200 other internet sites of interest to Missouri preservationists. Here are some other highlights:

Chronology is a timeline of Missouri preservation, both achievements and setbacks, starting with Matthew Field's 1841 poem, "Touch Not a Stone," which appealed unsuccessfully for the preservation of the 1764 Chouteau Mansion.

Inventory includes inventories and databases of Missouri's historic resources. Greene County, Cape Girardeau, Columbia and Kansas City have their historic properties listed on the web, in addition to St. Louis and St. Louis County.

Real Estate. Historic properties for sale

Research. More than 300 bibliographic citations on Missouri preservation and architecture, plus the state's relevant laws and regulations.

Resources. Financial assistance, technical know-how, and specialized products and services for preservation.

To volunteer your assistance, contact Robert Myers at 2241 Saint Louis Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63106, or e-mail RMyers8113@aol.com

A Tour of New Mount Sinai Cemetery
 Saturday, September 25, 1 to 3 p.m.
 8430 Gravois Road, Affton

See the monuments and mausoleums you've just read about in the region's oldest Jewish cemetery. Led by author Ann Morris, director of the Western Historical Manuscript Collection at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, and Esley Hamilton. Parking in the cemetery, which is on the south side of Gravois between Heege and Weber. Call Esley at 615-0357 after September 10.

Art St. Louis-Artist Studio Tours
 Saturday & Sunday, October 2 & 3, noon to 5
 Washington Avenue Loft District

Art St. Louis, a non-profit visual artists' organization and gallery is sponsoring a FREE opportunity to visit local artists in their studios. It will include an outdoor sculpture garden at the Campbell House Museum and an AIA architects gallery plus juried and curated exhibits in the recently renovated spaces of our emerging Loft District. Call 241-4810.

**"Learning to Look
 at Contemporary St. Louis Architecture"**

Wednesday, October 13, 6:30-8:30
 Phillips Selkirk Auctioneers, 7447 Forsyth, Clayton

Mark Howald, director of Phillips Selkirk, and Esley Hamilton of the County Parks Department, will speak in the fourth of a series of educational seminars at Phillips Selkirk. There is no fee, but reservations are required. Phone 314-726-5515.

"Great Moments in Architecture: Souvenir Buildings from the Ace Architects Collection"

October 15 through December 31
 Wednesday through Sunday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
 McNamee Gallery, Samuel Cupples House
 West Pine Campus, St. Louis University

The more than 260 bronze, glass, stone and wood miniatures in this show are drawn from a total of almost 1,400 in the collection of the Oakland, California-based Ace Architects. Buildings from all times and places are represented, including such St. Louis landmarks as Union Station, the 1904 Festival Hall, and the Arch. Read about the collection in *Souvenir Buildings Miniature Monuments*, published in 1996, and the new 1999 *Monumental Miniatures*.

"Little Buildings and Very Little Buildings"

Saturday, October 16, 2 p.m.
 McNamee Gallery, Samuel Cupples House
 West Pine Campus, St. Louis University

Architect David Weingarten and collector Margaret Majua will give a slide presentation on the history of souvenir buildings in conjunction with their exhibit. Admission is \$5. Call Pamela Ambrose at 977-3022.

"Louis Clemens Spiering: St. Louis Architect"

September 16 to November 15
 talk, noon Tuesday, November 19
 Bernoudy Gallery of Architecture
 The Sheldon Art Galleries, 3648 Washington Blvd.

Curator Suzanne Pace has organized an exhibit on the work of our cover-story architect, who produced many varied works in his short career. Starting this fall, the five Sheldon Art Galleries will be open free to the public every Tuesday and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The galleries also open one hour before scheduled performances and by appointment. Esley Hamilton and Carol Porter will talk about Spiering November 19. For more information, call 533-9900.

"The Taj Mahal: A Building to Die For"

Thursday, October 28, 7:30 p.m.
 Lashly Branch Library, 4537 West Pine

Jeffrey Hughes, Associate Professor of Art and Director of the Graduate Program in Art at Webster University will speak on what is perhaps the world's greatest mausoleum and the most familiar work of Mughal architecture. Dr. Hughes wrote his dissertation on Mughal architecture at the University of Iowa and did post-graduate work in Islamic studies at Harvard. This talk is one of our series on world architecture.

"Meaning and Form in Italian City Squares"

Thursday, November 18, 7:30 p.m.
 Lashly Branch Library 4537 West Pine

Continuing our series on world architecture, Yael Even will share the findings of her study of the traditional piazzas of Italy, which range from the picturesque irregular spaces of the Middle Ages to the monumental symmetrical designs of the Baroque. Dr. Even is Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

REPORT FROM OUR TREASURER

We now have a bank account! This may not seem like a newsworthy achievement; however, it took us six months of talking to various individuals before we were finally able to determine the best paper route to take to achieve this goal. Our bank is Commerce, and our SAH chapter is now registered with both the state of Missouri and the IRS.

Our delay in obtaining a bank account is the reason checks written to us early in the year were not cashed until summer. We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused.

To date, the St. Louis Chapter has 78 paid members.

A full treasurer's report was delivered at the annual meeting in June. For more information, please call me at 849-5170.

Patty Bausch, Treasurer

student \$5	St. Louis & Missouri Valley Chapters,
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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 314-615-0357; Fax 314-615-4696; E-mail Esley_Hamilton@stlouisco.com. Deadlines for submission of material for publication in **NewsLetter** are as follows:

Spring issue	15 February
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Winter issue	15 November

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