BRENTMOOR PARK & DELMAR GARDEN: HENRY WRIGHT IN ST. LOUIS

by Eileen Ostermeier

Henry Wright (1878-1936) was one of the most important and influential landscape architects working in St. Louis in the beginning of the twentieth century. He designed a number of projects here that informed his later, more famous work at Sunnyside and Radburn. During his early professional years in St. Louis, Wright developed an approach to design that permeated all of his projects. Two of his most important projects in St. Louis, Brentmoor Park and Delmar Garden, convey similar ideas about planning. Despite very different economic conditions, site contexts, and the years in which they were built, both projects reveal Henry Wright’s humanistic, integrated, and progressive approach.

The two projects were built early in Wright’s career. Brentmoor Park was built much earlier in 1910 and contained “one-to-two acre lots, curving interior drives and large, period homes” (Ann Brennan, “The Wright Stuff,” Clayton Word, Fall 1992 “Private Places” edition). Conversely, the Delmar Garden subdivision was built in 1920 for middle class apartment dwellers. Both projects, however, display similar design ideas.

In both Brentmoor Park and Delmar Garden, Henry Wright possessed a keen eye for existing site conditions. At Brentmoor Park, the organization of streets and the orientation of the houses were based on the existing contours. Wright chose to capitalize on an existing ravine in the site, designing curvilinear roads that follow the geography and facing the houses inward towards the ravine. The irregular topography of the site became a focus of the design rather than a problem to be solved. At Delmar Garden, Wright laid out his plan based on the existing urban context. Here, the flat site allowed for more formal organization of streets. Commercial buildings either fronted Delmar or surrounded the streetcar tracks, and residential areas were set back in the more private northern section.

This organization of streets was a major element of the design of the two projects. In both projects, Henry Wright limited through traffic in an effort to alleviate increasing congestion. At Delmar Garden, Wright oriented many of the roads north-south to cut off traffic from the prevailing east-west corridors of the city. In one case, access to and from a major street north of the site was cut off by a cul-de-sac. Likewise, at Brentmoor Park, the facing of the homes away from the major roads “provided a haven from the hustle and bustle of passing trolley cars on Wydown Boulevard” (Brennan). Henry Wright also set up a hierarchy in the system of streets. At Brentmoor Park, major roads encircle the ravine in the center, and service roads are pushed to the outer edge. Similarly, at Delmar Garden, the structure of commercial roads, residential streets, and alleys sets up a clear distinction between the different uses. Here, as in Brentmoor Park, the service areas are cleverly hidden. Wright designed H-shaped and T-shaped alley systems to hide the long, ugly vistas usually encountered in typical city blocks. Long alleys in the center of the block were cut off near the ends by shorter, transverse alleys.

The orientation of the buildings along the streets also became very important to Wright. At Brentmoor Park, Wright faced the houses away from the major avenues.
The houses are focused inward towards their own green lawns and the shared green space of the ravine. Wright describes an early inspiration for this idea during a trip abroad to Ireland:

I passed through an archway in a blank house wall on the street to a beautiful villa fronting upon spacious interior gardens... I learned then that the comforts and privacy of family life are not to be found in the detached dwelling, but rather in a house that judiciously relates living space to open space, the open space in turn being capable of enjoyment by many as well as by few. (Wright, “The Autobiography of Another Idea,” Western Architect, 1930, p. 139).

Spatial organization of the buildings themselves was also key in Wright’s designs. At Brentmoor Park, he faced the living rooms to the garden spaces and the service areas towards the street. Delmar Garden posed its own set of challenges with the arrangement of apartment buildings. Bemoaning the row house, or rather, the “narrow lot” of the row house in “The Sad Story of American Housing” (Architecture, Volume LXVII, 1933), Wright argued for more humane proportions in multi-unit housing. The lots at Delmar Garden are 55 by 95 feet, instead of the neighboring 40 by 150 feet. This allows for shorter but wider buildings, which face the street (instead of a dark, narrow side yard) and let in more light than the typical “shotgun” plan. While the apartments at Delmar Garden lack the spacious green lawns of Brentmoor Park, the importance of facing the buildings towards green space was not forgotten by Wright.

It is this very humanism that sets Wright apart as a designer. He designed places for people to live in, not for contractors to sell. Wright improved the living experience in his works by increasing light and air in the buildings, by focusing views on shared green space, and by organizing a system of circulation with the people in mind. Ideas that he worked out in these early projects would later inform his important work elsewhere and set a standard for planning in St. Louis.

GEORGE F. TOWER JUNIOR
AND HIS GRAND AVENUE HOUSE
by David J. Simmons

Located at 1520 South Grand Avenue, the Queen Anne or Shingle Style home of George F. Tower Junior received its finishing touches in 1889. E. A. P. Newcomb, a Boston architect, provided the plans. Newcomb had previously designed two Queen Anne Style residences in St. Louis: the George O. Carpenter house on the southwest corner of Compton and Russell in 1883; and the Carlos Greeley house on the northwest corner of West Pine and Spring in 1884 (both demolished). Newcomb enjoyed patronage in several American cities, including Brookline, Buffalo, and even Honolulu.

The house’s cost of $18,000 was advanced to his son by George F. Tower Senior, whose own Second Empire mansion, erected in 1867, was immediately to the south at 1540 South Grand. In the vicinity of the two Tower residences several other elegant houses were designed by St. Louis architects:

All these have been destroyed. The nearest house on Grand remaining from this era is the 1888 Warner House at 1905 South Grand, by Theodore C. Link.

The use of Boston architects by transplanted New Englanders was often seen in St. Louis at this time. Peabody & Stearns, for instance, designed Eliot’s Church of the Messiah, and Hurd & Rice designed the First Congregational Church (now Grandel Square Theater), the church the Towers attended. George Franklin Tower Senior, born in 1825, had arrived here from Boston in 1849. He established himself in the wholesale grocery and liquor trade, becoming a partner in several firms – Livermore & Co; Cooley, Tower & Co.; and eventually the George F. Tower Company. In 1879, he bought the Goodwin Manufacturing Company, makers of candles and soap and eventually moved it to 3332 Chouteau, in walking distance of the Grand Avenue houses. George Junior entered the new company as a clerk in 1880 and eventually became plant manager, vice president, and, after his father’s death, president.

In 1886, George Junior married Carrie Kehlor, whose family was perhaps more prominent than his own. She was eldest daughter of James B. M. Kehlor, a Scot who had arrived in St. Louis in 1864. James and his brother Duncan Kehlor purchased the Laclede and Pacific Flour Mills, and by the end of the century the Kehlor Milling Company were producing more flour than any other mill in this city. The Kehlors lived at 6 Vandeventer Place, which they purchased in 1875 from Napoleon Mullikin, a steamboat owner and captain. Mullikin, one of the three founders of Vandeventer Place, had built this Second Empire mansion in 1872 on speculation. George I. Barnett designed the thirty-two room house costing $40,000.

In 1896, after the death of George Tower Senior in 1893, George Junior moved his family into his father’s house next door and sold his own house to John D. Manly, partner in the firm of Manly & Thompson, farm implements. George shared his father’s estate of $600,000 with his stepmother and three sisters. Carrie’s father died in 1903, leaving an estate worth $4,340,000 to his wife Lamira.

With their increasing prosperity, the Tower family participated in the downtown real estate market, erecting several imposing mercantile buildings. The three most important were 615-625 Olive (5 floors, 1902, Eames & Young, $150,000); 610 Olive (4 floors, 1915, Albert B. Groves, $50,000); and 600-604 Olive (6 floors, T. P. Barnett, 1920, $280,000). The latter two were part of the Terra Cotta District, demolished in 1988.

The Tower family joined the migration to the “West End” in 1906, relocating to 4969 Berlin (now Pershing Place). George sold 1540 South Grand to the St. Louis Public School Board. Later that year, His Mysterious Majesty the Veiled Prophet of Khorassan summoned to his Court of Love and Beauty as Queen Miss Marguerite Kehler Tower, George’s daughter.

The Towers moved in 1908 to 5151 Washington Avenue and again in 1910 to 27 Vandeventer Place, the twelve-room Romanesque mansion that had been designed in 1885 by H. H. Richardson for John R. Lionberger. Mary Lionberger, John’s daughter, sold it for $125,000, a high price considering the decline of the value of Vandeventer Place property during this period. Newspapers reported the original cost of the building to be more than $100,000. Acquisition of the Lionberger mansion allowed Carrie Tower to be close to her ailing mother at Number 6.

In 1917, Marguerite Tower married Eugene Pettus, a grandson of Missouri’s first Secretary of State and founder of Blackwell-Wielandy, the printing company. Eugene and Marguerite lived at 4949 Pershing Place and at Overlook Farm near Clarksville, which her father had purchased in 1902. George F. Tower Junior died in 1924 and Carrie in 1936. Their daughter survived until 1972.
The area immediately west of Grand between Park and Lafayette originally seemed destined to become a middle class enclave as far west as Tower Grove Avenue. The decline of this district resulted for the most part from three changes. In 1895 Liggett & Meyers Tobacco Company announced it would erect the world’s largest tobacco plant at the west end of this neighborhood. Designed by Isaac Taylor, the complex covered eight city blocks, cost several million dollars, and employed more than four thousand workers. Its presence transformed its surroundings into a working-class neighborhood filled with tenements.

Commercial invasion of this part of Grand Avenue commenced in 1912 with the construction of the five-story Nicholas Building at the southeast corner of Grand and Park. Albert Groves furnished the plans for the new $60,000 building for Nicholas Pelligreen. Several two-story mercantile buildings followed from the offices of Preston J. Bradshaw, Thomas Sheehan, and the firm of Klingensmith, Rice & Wilkins. In 1926, Saum Brothers created the Shaw State Bank Building at the southwest corner of Grand and Park.

This stretch of Grand Avenue has had an institutional presence since 1874, when the Episcopal Orphanage was built at Grand and Lafayette on land given by Henry Shaw. The Rebekah Hospital opened in 1893 at Grand and Caroline, and it became the nucleus of the Saint Louis University School of Medicine in 1903.

The St. Louis School Board initiated a wave of expansion in 1901 when William B. Ittner designed the Wyman School at 1547 South Theresa, on the east side of the same block as the Tower house. He followed in 1905 with the Normal School at 1517 South Theresa. It became Harris Teachers College and is now the embattled Theresa School. In 1914, Ittner’s Taussig Open Air School at 1532 South Grand replaced the home of George Tower Senior. (That building has been replaced.) Eleven years later, the Board built the Gallaudet School at 1600 South Grand to serve deaf students. School Board architect Rockwell Milligan provided the design for this $245,000 project.

Neighborhood metamorphosis continued throughout the twentieth century. In spite of these changes, the house built for George Tower Junior survived under the ownership of the School Board. Now the Board is seeking to sell this property, and George’s love nest has an uncertain future. As the last vestige of an elegant bygone era in this neighborhood, it should be preserved.

THE 1895 INTER CLUB EXHIBITION
by Esley Hamilton

Chicago architect Ben Weese recently found (in the used book section of the Prairie Avenue Book Shop in Chicago) a reprint of the catalogue of the 1895 exhibition held by the St. Louis Architectural Club and the St. Louis Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. The booklet is small, measuring only 4 ½ by 5 1/8 inches with 24 pages, but even without illustrations it provides a remarkable insight into the interests and achievements of young architects in St. Louis at that time. We thank Ben for his alertness.

The St. Louis Architectural Club goes back to 1891, the same year that the St. Louis Chapter of the AIA was rechartered. Earlier efforts had failed, Inland Architect reported (as quoted by Carolyn Toft in The Way We Came, 1991, p. 23), “on account of unsociability of the members.” The Architectural Club reorganized in 1896 along lines that went far beyond a social club, offering classes in architectural design, construction and allied arts. Even after Washington University started its architecture program in 1901, the Club continued to provide training to many more young men at a much lower cost until it finally sputtered to a halt in 1938.

Isaac S. Taylor's perspective drawing of the Planters Hotel, Fourth Street elevation, between Chestnut and Pine. Published in the Souvenir of the 29th Convention of the AIA, 1895

The 1895 exhibition was held at the Museum of Fine Arts at 19th & Locust, the building given by Wayman Crow and designed in 1881 by Peabody & Stearns. The show was divided into several groups, including submissions from similar clubs in Chicago, Philadelphia, and Cleveland. In the Chicago group was Hugh Garden, whose brother Edward G. Garden was serving as president of the St. Louis club that year. The executive committee, like the membership (totaling 81) lists many names that a century
later are unknown, but some still resonate. Second vice-

president was Oscar Enders, and the secretary was Rockwell Milligan. Other familiar names include Annan, Barnett, Clymer, Groves, Helfenstein, Hellmuth, Ittner, Klutho, Knell, Levy, Link, Nolte, Sanger (Milligan’s successor at the School Board), Swasey, Taylor, Trueblood, Weber, and Wuest, along with the sculptor Robert Brighurst.

The national competition organized by The Brickbuilder, for the design of a city house attracted 25 entries extending from Boston to Cedar Rapids. Sixteen Club members showed student and imaginary works, including Albert Guissart, who showed seven drawings from his study at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. Ernst Klipstein (spelled Klippstein in the catalogue) showed three drawings from Europe, although he was not listed as an active member. Eight individuals and firms showed actual commissions, buildings either projected or already standing, and among the latter were photographs of Swasey’s chateau on Portland Place for William Bixby and the Roman arch entrance to Lewis Place, submitted by Tom Barnett, here called Thos. P. Barnett. Both John Laurence Mauran (“representative of Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge”) and the firm of Grable, Weber & Groves showed designs for Second Presbyterian Church; in the real world, Shepley did the chapel wing, but the main church went to Link.

The catalogue concludes with a section called “The Allied Arts.” Here William T. Bailey and Frank A. Seifert, both “modelers” or architectural sculptors, showed capitals, panels, and Moorish and Renaissance ceiling reliefs, along with Rococo and Empire friezes. Two firms of interior decorators, F. Cecil Dwyer and Read, Annan, showed sketches of their work.

What did all this work look like and what became of it? A brief search has turned Taylor’s perspective for the Planters Hotel, first published in the souvenir of the 1895 convention of the AIA and reprinted in The Way We Came, p. 24. For most of the designs, however, and for that matter most of the designers, this little catalogue is their only toehold on immortality.

Edward Wilhelms, AIA, of the Farnsworth Group, the firm that merged with the Wschmeyer Group, facilitated the donation. As Fine Arts Librarian at SLPL and Steedman Librarian, I sorted, boxed, transported, unboxed, and resorted 21 boxes of materials, with the help of a summer intern.

The gift came with no strings attached, so SLPL had a free hand in the disposition of the materials. Many of the books were those that every library and every architect who studied and practiced in the mid-to late twentieth century owned; most of these have not been retained, or have been added to the library’s general collection. But there were a few gems that have been added to the Steedman Library.

Of local interest are volume one of A Monograph of the work of Maritz & Young (St. Louis, 1929), Examples of Architectural Work by Wm. Albert Swasey (St. Louis, 1900), and Examples of Recent Work from the Practice of Trueblood & Graf Architects (St. Louis, 1930) autographed by Messrs. Trueblood and Graf. Also included are materials from the legendary Harland Bartholomew and Associates, including a circa 1950 promotional booklet for the firm and reports on various projects that Mr. Wschmeyer helped to develop. Several local planning boards and commissions are represented by plans and reports dealing with urban planning of St. Louis in the 1950s and 1960s.

Last but not least are several thick “scrapbooks” of clippings, postcards, drawings and other materials that Mr. Wschmeyer must have used for reference and inspiration.

Further afield, we have a lovely first edition copy of Eliel Saarinen’s The City: Its Growth, Its Decay, Its Future (New York, 1943), a pristine copy of Sketches and Designs by Stanford White... by his son Lawrence Grant White (New York, 1920), a nice copy of the somewhat scarce The Octagon; An Historic Residence of the Year 1800; Belonging to the American Institute of Architects… (Washington, 1927), and fine copies of Henry Russell Hitchcock’s In the Nature of Materials; 1887-1941; the Buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright (New York, 1942), and Sigfried Giedion’s A Decade of New Architecture (Zurich, 1951). Most of these books are signed and dated by Mr. Wschmeyer.

If you would like to make arrangements to see these materials, or to visit the Steedman Library, I will welcome your call at 314-539-0383.
Exhibit: “The Ravenna Mosaic Company: A Retrospective”
McNamee Gallery of Samuel Cupples House
St. Louis University, West Pine Campus
Through December 31, 2003
Tues-Sat, 11 to 4

The exhibition presents a visual history of the Ravenna Mosaic Company, which was internationally known for the design and execution of mosaics. Original drawings, cartoons, and actual mosaics will be on view. The Emil Frei Glass Co., a noted glass studio in St. Louis, started Ravenna in the mid 1920s, when Frei was commissioned to execute the St. Louis Cathedral mosaics. The Ravenna Company became a leading presence in this field, with commissions in New York, Berlin, and Chicago. Hildreth Meiere, head designer for Ravenna, was known for her work at the Cathedral and at Rockefeller Center in New York. The exhibition is curated by Robert Blaskevicz in conjunction with Saint Louis University’s Pius XII Memorial Library, which holds the Ravenna archives.

Exhibit: “Vertical City: The Life and Design of Pruitt-Igoe”
Sheldon Art Galleries, 3648 Washington Ave.
Through Saturday, January 17, 2004

This exhibit examines the origins design, habitation, and decline of the massive public housing complex of 33 11-story buildings erected in 1954 and demolished in 1976. The name Pruitt-Igoe recalls not only the controversial design but also the lives of the people whose paths crossed there. Gallery Hours: Tuesday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Wednesday, 9 to 5; Saturday, 10 to 2, and one hour before concerts and during intermissions.

Gallery Talk: Joseph Heathcott on Pruitt Igoe
Sheldon Art Galleries, 3648 Washington Ave.
Saturday, January 17, 11 a.m.

The last day to see this impressive exhibit will also be your opportunity to hear the curator, Dr. Joseph Heathcott of St. Louis University, discuss his insights into Pruitt-Igoe, certainly a major episode in the history of St. Louis at the intersection of architecture and sociology.

Missouri History Museum, Lee Auditorium
Tuesday, January 27, 7 p.m.

Robert Weyeneth, professor of history at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, speaks in the Discover Series (formerly the Urban Forum). With a background in historic preservation and special interests in historical memory and popular cultural, Dr. Weyeneth will explore why historic preservation shapes popular understanding of history and how it often seems to avoid the controversial and painful episodes of the local and national story. He offers suggestions on how historic sites and museums can be more inclusive, by engaging the problematical past in constructive ways.

Talk: “The Archives of Tower Grove Park: A Window on History”
Stupp Center, Tower Grove Park
Sunday, February 1, 2 p.m.

Andrew Cooperman, former park archivist, will review the contents of the Tower Grove Park Archives and discuss what these tell us about the history of the park and its place in St. Louis. Much of this history is contained in the board minutes, reports, correspondence, photographs, blueprints and other sundry documents and media.

Annual Gathering
Jefferson Barracks Visitors Center
South end of Broadway, Lemay
Sunday, February 8, 6 to 9:30 p.m.

This year’s annual gathering will take use the newly reconstructed barn at Jefferson Barracks Park. Originally built in 1878 and demolished about 1950, it has been rebuilt as a center for education and events. Hal Olsen, architect for project and Chapter member, will be on hand. Supper will be followed by our traditional slide show; bring slides of one building. Phone Esley Hamilton 314-615-0357 to reserve @ $15.
Events Calendar

Exhibit: “Still/Current”
Xen Gallery, 401 North Euclid
Opening Friday, February 13, 5:30 to 8:30
Tues.-Sat. 10 to 6 and Sun. 11-4, through March 26

Architectural photographer Ken Konchel explores the dramatic interiors of the abandoned Laclede Powerhouse in large-format photos up to 20 x 24 inches. Completed in 1902 to designs of Mauran, Russell & Garden, the Powerhouse will soon be substantially renovated to be the home of Trailnet and Confluence Greenway Project and a trailhead on the Riverfront Trail. Phone 314-454-9561.

Talk: “A Sense of an Entrance:
The Gates at Tower Grove Park”
Stupp Center, Tower Grove Park
Sunday, March 7, 2 p.m.

Marilyn Heldman, adjunct professor of art history at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, will explore some of the visual traditions that impart a “sense of an entrance,” and how they relate to the gates of Tower Grove Park, reflecting a continuity of design traditions stretching back over three millennia.

Talk: “Beyond the ‘Big Muddy’:
Promoting the West in American Art 1840-1904”
Stupp Center, Tower Grove Park
Sunday, April 4, 2 p.m.

Andrew Walker, director of museum collections at the Missouri Historical Society, will examine artists who used St. Louis as a starting point to venture into the dramatic landscapes of America’s developing West. The Mississippi River was a great natural wonder that opened the heartland to the world and shaped our nation’s history and culture.

History Hike: New Mount Sinai Cemetery
Saturday, March 20, 9 to 11 a.m.

One of the most historic places in the region, New Mount Sinai Cemetery is relatively little known. Founded in 1850, it was designed to emphasize the natural beauty of the site, and it has a concentration of impressive monuments and mausolea, commemorating some of the most familiar names in St. Louis history. Meet at large mausoleum near entrance, 8430 Gravois Road between Hege and Weber.

History Hike: Tuxedo Park, Webster Groves
Saturday, March 27, 9 to 11 a.m.

We preview the last in the series of tours being developed by Ann Morris for the Webster Groves Historical Society. Tuxedo Park was laid out in 1890 as a commuter suburb with its own train station. It grew further when the streetcar came down Summit Avenue. In spite of its high-society name became a haven for middle-class families, and most of the neighborhood’s features are still in place. Meet at First United Methodist Church, 600 Bompart at Fairview.

History Hike: Maplewood
Saturday, April 10, 9 to 11 a.m.

The Maplewood Subdivision was laid out in 1890 and includes some of the largest and best preserved houses in the larger City of Maplewood, along with interesting businesses and churches. Members of the active new Maplewood Historical Society will meet the group. Meet at Scheidt Hardware, 7320 Manchester Road.

FUTURE EVENTS
Annual Meeting and Garden Party
Saturday, June 5, 10 to 12
Melanie & Tony Fathman Garden

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE FALL NEWSLETTER?

Your patience is appreciated as the Fall 2003 Newsletter slowly makes its way to you. It will be a special issue devoted to buildings erected in Missouri by life insurance companies. A second special issue should arrive in April, that one devoted to landscape architects in St. Louis.
A LUSTRON UPDATE

Since our article about Lustron houses in the Summer 2003 Newsletter, they have been in the news. The movie, “Lustron: The House America’s Been Waiting For,” appeared at the St. Louis Film Festival, and Marianna Riley had an article about the film and the house in the November 18 St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Readers have phoned in to update our list of Lustrons. The house at 1108 Bopp Road, #37 on the list, has been demolished. The house at 1166 Pembroke that we illustrated has been covered with siding. On the other hand, another Lustron has been located at 930 Lindsay Lane in Florissant, still occupied by its original owners. Tom Bakersmith reports, “It is a model 02, yellow in color. A room added on the back, but otherwise an original – no faux stone foundation or redwood siding – just a prime example.”

Please contact us if you have any other corrections or updates to our Lustron list.

SAH TOUR: LA FRONTERA CHICA

The Society of Architectural Historians has announced a study tour of the Texas/Mexico border area called “La Frontera Chica.” The tour will be offered February 12 - 15, 2004, and will be led by Mexican preservation architect Carlos Rugiero Cázares, and architectural historian Stephen Fox. For a look at the detailed study tour description and itinerary, go to this website: http://www.sah.org/SAHborderMailrFinalFinal.pdf.

Architects are eligible to earn up to 26 AIA/CES credits for participating in this tour. If you have inquiries about the tour, please direct them to Gail Ettinger, SAH Manager of Meetings and Tours, gettinger@sah.org.