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News Letter

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE ST. LOUIS POLYTECHNIC BUILDING

by David J. Simmons

Existing a mere thirty years, the St. Louis Polytechnic Building, located at the southwest corner of Seventh and Chestnut Streets, traveled a road of controversy and financial extravagance. Built between 1858 and 1867 to house the O'Fallon Polytechnic Institute, it accommodated education and business activities under four separate owners, with three transfers and two public sales until the ravages of fire claimed it in 1897. Some of St. Louis' most prominent citizens had a close association with this building, including Mayor John How, Colonel John O'Fallon, William Greenleaf Eliot, and real estate mogul Robert S. Brookings. One of the earliest and best examples of the Second Empire Style built in St. Louis, it displayed a beautiful exterior and a lavish, artistic interior. Architect Thomas Walsh submitted the plans and supervised the building's construction, but he did not actually design it.

In 1855, a group of civic-minded St. Louis businessmen, some associated with the recently founded Washington University, chartered the O'Fallon Polytechnic Institute to educate adult members of the working classes. The Institute honored John O'Fallon (1791-1865), nephew of William Clark and wealthy landowner. The Institute sought to present knowledge as a profitable and pleasing activity through free evening classes, a library with reading room, and an exhibition space. The twenty-man board of directors selected as president John How, who had just completed two years as mayor of St. Louis. To foster their cause, they opened a free night school at the old Benton School on Sixth Street. Anticipating about 150 students, they hired two teachers. To their surprise, six hundred students enrolled, and another six teachers had to be engaged. Over the years the Institute continued to operate night school training at various locations until the St. Louis Public School system assumed control of the program after the Civil War.

Next, the Institute focused on technology training and the practical sciences. To promote interest in this project, the Institute decided to house these activities in a new building. The Institute's board of directors took responsibility

for financing and construction. Once it was completed, the board would transfer ownership of the building to Washington University, which would assume control of the O'Fallon Polytechnic Institute and conduct its daily operations.



Building for the O'Fallon Polytechnic Institute, S.W. Cor. 7th and Chestnut Street, St. Louis. Erected in 1867. Thomas W. Walsh, Architect. Later used by the Public School Library. Still later known as the Wabash Building.

John How personally purchased the Seventh & Locust lot from James H. Lucas at a cost of \$37,500 and leased it free of charge for the new building. The lease agreement ran for 33 years, from the building's completion in 1867 to the end of the century. Colonel O'Fallon contributed \$45,000 in cash toward construction of the new building, plus real estate valued at \$75,000 in the form of two city blocks located in the vicinity of the waterworks. Businessmen associated with the project raised an additional \$125,000 for building and operations. In March of 1858, the Board announced an architectural competition to select a design and an architect for the new building. A plan submitted by the office of Thomas Walsh won the first prize of \$300. Walsh obtained the winning design

from architect Alfred Henry Piquenard, a former employee. Through 1856 and into 1857, Piquenard served as Walsh's office manager and chief designer. During this period, Piquenard's design work, including the legendary Lindell Hotel, made Walsh's firm famous. In the case of the Polytechnic Building, Piquenard's expertise in the French Renaissance and Second Empire styles gave him the edge in the competition.

After selecting Walsh, the board requested extensive changes to his original plan. Walsh hired the architectural firm of Olmstead and Piquenard to execute these revisions. Construction on the building started later the same year. Numerous interruptions caused by the Civil War and inadequate funding plagued the project, and construction extended over nine years. Costs soared above \$430,000, a staggering amount for this period. Spending by the Board and by Walsh ran out of control. When the building's indebtedness reached several hundred thousand dollars, building construction was terminated, even though the third and fourth floors remained unfinished internally.

The dedication of this new temple of learning in June of 1867 saw the gathering of a cross-section of St. Louis: its elite, its educators and its common man. Distinguished speakers lauded the building as a monument to the city's greatness and continuing progress. Praise seemed almost universal except for William Greenleaf Eliot, who remained notably silent. He had a different opinion. His institution would soon possess this temple.

Rising to a height of 122 feet, the five-story building, complete with basement, followed the dictates of the French inspired Second Empire style, resplendent with mansard roof accented with dormers. Its construction depended on a system of cast iron columns and tubular wrought iron beams for support. A veneer of cream-colored magnesian limestone called Nippers stone covered the brick walls of both street fronts. The Chestnut Street façade crossed seven bays for a total of 139 feet. On Seventh Street, six bays stretched across the façade for 109 feet. Each street façade exhibited a carved granite entrance with columns and pediment. Special decorative features included a bracketed cornice, string courses, finished quoins, and magnificent fenestration. Each of the four rows of windows expressed a different design. The striking second floor windows had rounded heads accented with surrounds inspired by 18th-century British architect James Gibbs.

The first floor interior arrangement featured five commercial spaces accessed by individual street entrances, each store measuring 18 feet wide and 52 feet deep. The grand entrance on Chestnut Street opened into a hall 20 feet wide by 66 feet deep. At right angles, a second hall

15 feet wide by 76 feet deep led to the Seventh Street entrance. A grand staircase at the junction of the two halls was constructed of oak and walnut enhanced by a bronze railing. A lecture hall 54 feet wide and 104 feet deep occupied the south end of this floor.

The second floor was divided into three large assembly areas, two small offices, and connecting hall space. Seating 1200 people, Eliot Hall, the largest room in the building, encompassed an area 54 feet wide by 109 feet long and extended upward for 45 feet. Each wall separated into five sections, framed by pairs of Corinthian columns supporting arches. Each arch enclosed a lunette window filled with colorful stained glass. Leon Pomerade frescoed the walls and ceiling with classical figures symbolic of the Arts and Sciences. The ceiling housed fifteen ventilators hidden by rosettes. When the rosettes were lowered, the ventilators circulated air throughout the halls. Gasoliers provided light.

The Ames Library, a second room on this floor, measured 60 feet by 80 feet and accommodated 70,000 volumes. Two-story bookcases were arranged in eight alcoves, each projecting ten feet out into the room and provided with balconies for access to the upper shelves. In the center of the room, the reading area, 40 by 80 feet, contained tables and chairs. Thirty feet above the floor, the groined ceiling displayed a series of portraits depicting famous literary figures frescoed by Thomas Rankin in a brightly colored mosaic style.

The Institute named the library for Edgar Ames, wealthy and civic minded meat-packer. He promised a gift of \$100,000 to stock the library shelves. Before the details of his gift could be arranged, he died, but his will confirmed the legacy. Lucy Virginia Semple Ames, Edgar's wife, objected to the gift and wanted the money to be part of her settlement from her husband's estate. She filed suit to block payment of the legacy. After 19 years of litigation, the courts ruled against Mrs. Ames, and the money passed to the St. Louis School Board, which by that time owned the property. Instead of designating the Ames legacy to buy books for the school library (which would eventually form the nucleus of the St. Louis Public Library system) the Board spent the funds on acquiring real estate and constructing a foundation for a new public high school at Grand and Finney. To honor Ames, they named a new elementary school after him.

Decorated in a similar fashion to other large spaces on the second floor, the third and smallest hall measured 30 feet by 45 feet, with two attached offices. The upper three floors housed seven more halls and several classrooms. The basement provided rooms for the boiler furnace, coal chutes, and storage.

Once the building had been transferred to Washington University, President Eliot moved quickly to eliminate its debt. He sold school-owned lots on Beaumont between Locust and Washington, reducing the building's debt by fifty percent. To cover the remaining indebtedness, he issued bonded debt at eight percent per annum on notes payable in four, five, and six years.

The Institute Board of Directors had failed to consult University officials in selecting the site or planning the building. They had disregarded the university's needs for occupancy. As a result, Eliot judged the building to be an extravagant white elephant, totally unsuited to university use. Its location was more than a mile from the main university campus at 17th and Washington. Plagued by the inefficient use of space, high maintenance costs, and excessive decoration, the building could not be adapted to university use. To recover school losses and to convert a non-productive asset into cash, Eliot chose to sell the property.

Terms of the sale offered the building, the contested Ames legacy, and John O'Fallon's two city blocks for \$280,000. The price represented only two thirds of the building's original cost. In the summer of 1868 Eliot persuaded the St. Louis Board of Education to purchase the building. When the business community heard of Eliot's success, they praised his ability to dump the building on the unsuspecting school board at a price in excess of its value. With the cash from the sale, Eliot paid off the remaining bonds and erected a modest three-story building closer to the main building to house the Polytechnic Department. Frederick Raeder designed the new building, costing \$75,000.

In September 1868, the School Board employed Thomas Walsh to prepare plans for converting the building to Board use. Walsh's plan partitioned the first floor assembly area into three rooms for school administration. In addition, he altered the third floor to accommodate night school classes. Walsh charged the Board \$1,064 for his services, Contractor J. E. W. Dette executed the changes at a cost of \$19,821.

Two and a half years later, the Board contracted further improvements to the building, including steam elevator, new boiler and heating apparatus, and the conversion of Eliot Hall into a library, at a total cost of \$18,545. Thus began the constant litany of repair, alteration, and improvement to the building, draining the Board's financial resources. In time, the Board realized that the Polytechnic Building could not be adapted to meet their needs.

At the Paris Exposition of 1878, Tony Faust, St. Louis restaurateur, saw the new electric arc light demonstrated. This light, precursor of Edison's incandescent lamp, op-

erated on a high voltage charge over a filament, producing a light so intense that it had to be shielded from the human eye. Faust purchased the arc light machinery and brought it to St. Louis. To the delight of his patrons, he demonstrated the light's effectiveness at his restaurant, located on the southeast corner of Broadway and Elm. He talked the School Board into allowing him to install the arc light in the school library reading room. The results proved to be unreliable, and the arc light had to be removed. In 1883, the Board approved the introduction of incandescent lamps into the building, and two years later this more effective lighting system became operational.

By the late 1880s the school board resolved to sell the Polytechnic building and erect a new home for their activities. Local real estate men valued the building at between \$200,000 and \$250,000. During this period the Board rejected several unsolicited offers for it including a bid of \$130,000 from Jay Gould, the notorious railroad financier.

At the same time, one of the leading members of the board rebuffed a more generous building offer. Henry Kirchner, former school board architect, approached a group of local capitalists about purchasing this building. The group decided to offer \$235,000. Mr. Koenig, chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, questioned the offer's legitimacy, refused to consider its details, and failed to notify the board of its existence. He told Kirchner the Board would not accept his proposal without really knowing how the board might react. One year later Koenig voted to sell the building for \$120,000. His arrogant actions had cheated the St. Louis school children out of \$115,000.

Some of its own members saw the Board of Education as a private club, dedicated to the interest of the members rather than the welfare of the children. Two options remained open for the sale of the property. They could sell the building at a well-advertised auction or list it with a local real estate firm, which would receive a one- or two-percent commission.

In 1890 the Board elected Charles Miller as president. Miller knew nothing about real estate or property management. However, he believed the Polytechnic Building to be a fire trap and in imminent danger of collapse. Had he bothered to consult an architect or builder, they would have challenged these assumptions. Miller wanted to sell the building as soon as possible for a cheap price.

Robert S. Brookings, the wizard of St. Louis real estate, who was at this time engaged in creating Cupples Station, the innovative warehouse district, had coveted the Polytechnic Building for a long time. If he could acquire it on

the cheap, under proper management it could become a gold mine. When Miller's opinions reached his ears, Brookings quickly organized a rendezvous with him.

When they met, Miller reiterated his concerns about fire hazard and dilapidation. Brookings knew different. His architect had examined the building and found it solid as a rock. Miller indicated that the Board would be willing to sell at a price below market value. Brookings offered \$105,000 and Miller hesitated. Brookings increased his bid to \$120,000 and Miller jumped at it. To set the deal in motion, Brookings provided Miller with two checks totaling \$20,000 and a note to cover the remainder. He instructed Miller not to disclose his association with the purchase until the Board had approved the deal.

The School Board had never authorized Miller to negotiate the sale of the building. His secret dealings with Brookings violated Board regulations. In addition, his failure to submit the proposed sale to the appropriate Board committee for scrutiny violated another Board requirement.

On the sultry night of August 12, 1890, the Board met for its regular monthly meeting with 16 or its 21 members in attendance. Most of the session revolved around a controversial furnace contract. After a heated debate, eight board members went outside to cool off. Miller selected this moment to introduce an ambiguously worded resolution for the sale. Charles Barstow read it, and without hesitation, explanation, discussion, or debate, the board passed it, eight votes to none. A minority of the board had sold one of their most valuable assets at a throw-away price.

Headlines of the *St. Louis Star* on August 15, told the story:

School fund is robbed outright in the sale of the Polytechnic building. Steal ratified by a *viva voce* vote amid confusion. Blame for one of the most remarkable and brazen swindles ever perpetrated in St. Louis.

A dull-witted school leader, an incompetent school board, and a shrewd real estate manipulator had swindled the school children of St. Louis out of something between \$80,000 and \$115,000, equal to the price tag of two new elementary schools during the same time. Community outrage crossed all class boundaries. People demanded that the school board either change directions or resign. To aggravate the situation, the school board refused to rescind the sale of the property or to investigate the circumstances surrounding it. People believed the board was seeking to cover up its mistakes.

Disgrace greeted those who had participated in this scandal. An exodus of board members commenced. The election of 1891 cleansed the board of its worst elements and permitted something of a fresh start. The new board elected Charles Huttig as its president. Huttig, founder of the Huttig Sash and Door Company, inaugurated the long-awaited investigation of the sale. Centerpiece of this examination turned out to be the testimony of Brookings, who recounted the details of his secret meeting with Miller and the arrangements for the sale. He admitted that he had obtained the building at a bargain price and intended to make a huge profit from it. Since its purchase he had received an offer of \$175,000 for it, which he had rejected. His original plans had included making building improvements, but he had changed his mind. He would let "the magic of his name make the value of it rise."

At the close of 1892, Brookings gained possession of the building. He persuaded the Wabash Railroad to move its offices there. Over the following four years, Brookings raked in more than \$100,000 in profit from building rentals. His management transformed the building into a cash machine. Then in October, 1897, a fire reduced the premises to ashes, and Brookings collected \$125,000 in fire insurance, recouping his original investment. In the interim, he had acquired the freehold of the building site from the O'Fallon estate at a cost of \$225,000. Local businessmen marveled at Brookings' Midas touch.

Reform of the Board of Education in 1897 reduced Board membership to twelve, all elected at large. The new board dedicated itself to the education of the children. Under the capable leadership of Charles Taussig, the new board revolutionized the St. Louis public school system, which became a model for school districts across America. St. Louis education renaissance began with the scandal surrounding the sale of the Polytechnic Building.

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ELMSLIE AND SULLIVAN AT CITY MUSEUM

Bruce Gerrie, curator for the architectural collection at City Museum, and architect Laura Johnson have collected original architectural pieces from buildings designed by Louis Sullivan and George Grant Elmslie for a new exhibition. Elmslie (1869 or 1871 to 1952) was Sullivan's chief draftsman from 1889 to 1909, during Sullivan's most creative period. He worked in partnership with William Gray Purcell from 1910 to 1922, designing several distinguished buildings in the upper Midwest, most notably the 1915-1916 Woodbury County Courthouse in Sioux City, Iowa, designed in conjunction with William L. Steele. Their 1913 house in Minneapolis for Edna Purcell, now known as the Purcell-Cutts House, is owned by the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

Many of the pieces at the City Museum are from three elementary schools in Hammond, Indiana, Elmslie's last great commissions, designed in 1935 and 1936 in association with William S. Hutton: the Edison, Irving, and Oliver Morton schools were demolished in 1991 and later. This terra cotta ornament Elmslie designed for this schools morphs the organic plant forms familiar from Sullivan's greatest triumphs with the stylized geometric patterns of the later Art Deco style. Also featured in this exhibit are selected Sullivan pieces and samples of mass-produced Sullivanesque terra cotta. The exhibit remains on display through December 2008 on the third floor of the City Museum, 701 North 15th Street. Phone 314-231-CITY. General admission to the museum is \$12.



A panel from the facade frieze of the Oliver Morton School, Hammond, Indiana, 1934-36, by George Grant Elmslie. From www.organica.org.

“HATS OFF TO HATTIE” CELEBRATION PLANNED FOR JUNE

Ward Buckner reports that the Lafayette Park Conservancy has initiated a celebration of the life and works of Harriet Hosmer (1830-1908), the sculptor of the monumental statue of Senator Thomas Hart Benton in Lafayette Park. The events will be held on Friday, June 13 and Saturday, June 14, 2008 in observance of the centennial of Hosmer's death:

- A symposium at Washington University's Steinberg Hall, "The Life and Works of Harriet Goodhue Hosmer" will take place on Saturday morning, featuring five speakers on aspects of Hosmer's life and work. She was the first woman allowed to study anatomy at the Missouri Medical College, which later became part of Washington University, and her works were among the first to enter the University's collections. Among the speakers, will be William H. Gerds, probably the foremost authority on 19th-century American art; nationally known art conservator Phoebe Dent Weil; Julia Markus, author of *Across An Untried Sea*, about American artists living in Rome; and art historian Patricia Cronin, a recent fellow of the American Academy in Rome. The fee for the symposium will be \$40, including the opening reception, but members of participating institutions receive a \$10 discount, and the student price is \$15.
- Julia Dunn-Morton, another speaker and the curator of the fine art collection at the Mercantile Library will host an opening reception Friday evening from 6 to 8 at the library, on the campus of UM-St. Louis. The Mercantile owns Hosmer's 1857 marble, *Beatrice Cenci*, one of her most important works.



Beatrice Cenci by Harriet Hosmer, in the collection of the St. Louis Mercantile Library, UM-St. Louis

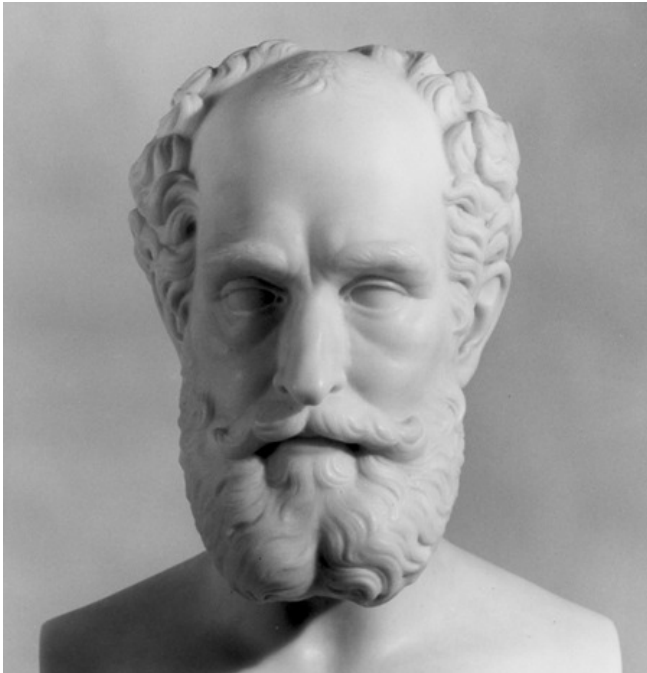
- An exhibition of Hosmer works in the Teaching Gallery of the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum at Washington University. It will open on Friday, May 2 and run through Monday, July 21. The University owns three statues by Hosmer, the portrait of her patron Wayman Crow, Senior, and two mythological figures from the mid-1850s, *Daphne* and *Oenone*.

- A Celebration of the Benton Statue will take place at 5 p.m., Saturday in Lafayette Park. Hosmer modeled the statue of Missouri’s best-known senator and favorite son in 1861 in her studio in Rome. It was cast in bronze in Munich in 1864 and dedicated in Lafayette Park in 1868, attracting a crowd estimated between 20,000 and 40,000. The celebration will feature rousing music of the 1860s, a spirited reveal of the statue, a “plein air” quick paint of the statue, and festivities by a dozen St. Louis area artists. This celebration will be free and open to the public.

- A Gala Celebration in Benton Place opposite the park will commence at 6 Saturday evening. Guests will dine beneath decorated tents and will be invited to tour the homes and gardens of Benton Place, with music and art both outside and inside homes. The paintings completed during the Benton statue celebration will be displayed and offered at auction during the gala. This will be a ticketed event, with proceeds to benefit the restoration of the statue.



Thomas Hart Benton by Harriet Hosmer, dedicated in Lafayette Park in 1868



Harriet Hosmer’s portrait of Wayman Crow, in the Mildred Lane Kemper Museum at Washington University

The Symposium and Gala are the opening events of the campaign to restore the Benton Monument in Lafayette Park. It was commissioned by the Missouri Legislature and was the first public monument in the State of Missouri. The project will involve reconstruction and landscaping the approach to the monument, repair of the limestone block base and the granite pedestal, as well as cleaning and repatinating the statue at a total estimated cost of \$160,000.

Hosmer was born and grew up in Watertown, Massachusetts, near Boston, but she became associated with St. Louis in 1850 when she visited the family of her school friend Cornelia Crow, the daughter of Wayman Crow (1808-1885), a successful dry goods merchant. Crow, a member of the civic-minded congregation of William Greenleaf Eliot’s Church of the Messiah, was one of the founders of Washington University and gave the University the St. Louis School and Museum of Fine Arts, the predecessor of both the St. Louis Art Museum and the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum. Crow arranged Hosmer’s study of anatomy, a highly unorthodox action for its day. He later commissioned the *Oenone* and influenced the commission of *Beatrice Cenci* by the Mercantile. Like other aspiring American artists, Hosmer worked for much of her career in Rome, where she arrived at the end of 1852. She became a familiar figure there, mentioned by Nathaniel Hawthorne in his preface to *The Marble Faun*. She contributed pieces to the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893 and died in 1908 at Watertown.

EVANSVILLE MUSEUM FEATURES MESKER BROTHERS STOREFRONTS

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the name Mesker was synonymous with the production of cast and galvanized metal storefronts that adorned buildings across the United States. The Evansville Museum's new exhibition, "Storefronts of America: The Mesker Story," running through Sunday, May 25, provides an overview of this history. Dutch immigrant John Bernard Mesker sold hardware, stoves and sheet metal and provided repair services to small towns along the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers from a flatboat that he had constructed. After cofounding the Mesker and Busse partnership in Cincinnati in 1847, he moved to Evansville in 1850 where he opened a stove store and eventually began galvanizing ironwork for buildings. Upon John Mesker's retirement in 1876, his oldest son Bernard (1851-1936) took over the management of Mesker and Busse, and John's youngest son Frank (1861-1952) later joined him.

In 1879, George L. Mesker (1857-1936) entered into partnership with his two brothers. Three years later, Bernard and Frank sold their interest in the Company to George and moved to St. Louis, forming a competing firm, Mesker Brothers Iron Works. George remained in Evansville to head Mesker and Busse, which was later renamed George L. Mesker & Company.



During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the two companies set the standard and became the leading producers of cast and galvanized iron storefronts in the United States. Both firms manufactured a prodigious amount of stamped-metal facades and exterior architectural features that graced buildings in Indiana, Illinois, and around the nation. Although prefabricated architectural elements were available from a number of manufacturers, no other companies better exemplified this niche than these two. Their specialized ornamental

sheet metal facades and cast iron storefront components were conveniently ordered through catalogs and easily shipped by rail to customers throughout the country.

George L. Mesker & Company alone sold over 5,000 storefronts through highly successful catalogue marketing. In 1903, the Company advertised that it had furnished storefronts in every state in the United States, "competing successfully with local foundries, cornice shops, and planing mills, by furnishing better designs, better material, and by making lower prices." Often called "Meskers", these facades can still be found on buildings throughout the United States.

In 1916, George Mesker moved from Evansville and resided in New York and Florida until his death in 1936. Although he had not lived in Evansville for 20 years, he generously left a Trust Fund of \$500,000 for the improvement of Mesker Park, 40 acres of wooded land at the top of Summit Drive that he had given the City years earlier. Additional bequests to the City included funds for the Mesker Amphitheatre, Mesker Park Zoo, and the permanent Mesker Music Trust Fund. Over the years, as George L. Mesker & Company diversified, it became George L. Mesker Steel Corporation and, finally, Mesker Steel, Inc. In 1974, Mesker Steel was sold to Fabsteel Company of Texas. Financial setbacks led to the closure of the Company in the 1980s.

Mesker Brothers Iron Works in St. Louis eventually established itself in the steel sash industry. In 1961 Frank Mesker, Jr. sold the St. Louis company to his brother John Mesker. Under John Mesker's ownership, the company was sold to Barry Wehmiller Companies, Inc.

Through physical artifacts—including portions of the Straub Hardware building in the Evansville Museum's collection—and original documents, "Storefronts of America" recalls these highly respected companies and the dramatic impact they exerted on architecture through-



out the United States. Storefronts produced by the firms from the 1880s and beyond can still be found in various parts of the country.

The Evansville Museum is located in downtown Evansville on the banks of the Ohio River at 411 S.E. Riverside Drive. Hours are Tuesday through Saturday 10 to 5 and Sunday noon to 5. Although in Indiana, Evansville is in the same time zone as St. Louis. Phone 812-425-2406 or go to www.emuseum.org. Thanks to Darius Bryjka of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency for alerting us to this exhibit. He suggests dining at the Gerst Haus, a German restaurant located behind a very impressive George L. Mesker façade from 1890.

MISSOURI PRESERVATION CALLS FOR NOMINATIONS FOR 2008 MOST ENDANGERED LIST

Missouri Preservation announces the *Call for Nominations* for its Most Endangered Historic Places List for 2008. The nominations are due on April 1, 2008. The statewide non profit organization will make the announcement of sites chosen for the list during National Preservation Month in May.

Each year Missouri Preservation solicits nominations from around Missouri, evaluates the merits of the submissions, and announces the “Most Endangered.” During the year, Missouri Preservation provides limited technical assistance, advocacy, and planning support for those properties on the Most Endangered List. The Most Endangered Historic Places Program, one of Missouri Preservation’s most visible programs, brings much needed attention to the state’s most threatened historic resources. Modeled after the program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Most Endangered Program annually spotlights historic resources throughout the state that are “at risk.” The threat to the properties may be deterioration, neglect, encroachment, potential demolition or a combination of threats.

Missouri Preservation, known formally as Missouri Alliance for Historic Preservation, is Missouri’s only statewide non-profit organization dedicated to promoting, supporting, and coordinating historic preservation activities throughout Missouri. Nomination forms may be obtained on the Missouri Preservation website at www.preservemo.org. Elizabeth Rosin is serving as Acting Chairperson of the Most Endangered Historic Places Committee and can be reached through the Missouri Preservation office at 573-443-5946.



Wayman Crow, the St. Louis dry goods merchant and patron of Harriet Hosmer, underwrote the cost of St. Louis’s first art museum, designed by Peabody & Stearns of Boston and erected in 1881 on the north side of Lucas Place (Locust Street) near 19th as part of the original campus of Washington University. Mesker Brothers Iron Works supplied the metal work for the building, their first major commission.

HISTORY HIKES, SPRING 2008

The St. Louis Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians sponsors this series of walking tour of historic neighborhoods of St. Louis County. Your guide is Esley Hamilton, preservation historian for the County. \$3 per person. Phone Mr. Hamilton at 314-615-0357 for information. Reservations are essential.

Old Ferguson East

Saturday, April 5, 9 to 11

Meet at New Florissant Road and Church Street, across from the Ferguson fountain. Church is south of Airport Road.

Ferguson is North County's answer to Kirkwood and Webster Grove, a 19th-century commuter suburb (served by the Wabash) with a wealth of Victorian residences and an active preservation ethic.

Old Ferguson West

Saturday, April 19, 9 to 11

Meet at Old Ferguson Station, #1 Carson Road, just west of New Florissant Road

Our tour of 19th-century Ferguson continues with the western neighborhoods and the city's two historic cabooses.

Hi-Pointe and DeMun

Saturday, May 3, 9 to 11

Meet in the small park at DeMun & San Bonita. DeMun Ave. runs north from Clayton Rd.

Hi-Pointe was designed by Henry Wright in 1917 to be a complete community, with retail and a range of housing types. DeMun was added in 1923 with apartments and streetcar retail. Both include portions in Clayton and St. Louis and are now on the National Register.

Continuing Exhibit: "Secrets of Real Estate: John Gossage"

Sheldon Galleries, 3648 Washington Boulevard through May 3

Photographs of the St. Louis area taken by internationally known photographer John Gossage at the invitation of the Sheldon.

Continuing Exhibit: "Storefronts of America: The Mesker Story"

Evansville Museum, Evansville, Indiana through Sunday, May 25

An unusual opportunity to learn about the two Mesker family firms, one based in St. Louis, that shaped the image of small-town America a century ago. See article for more information.

Continuing Exhibit: "Architectural Ornament by Elmslie and Sullivan"

City Museum, 701 North 15th Street through December 2008

City Museum has captured the swansong of the Chicago School of Architecture in its final terra cotta ornament. This permanent exhibit is located on the third floor in Architectural Museum. Admission is free with City Museum admission. See article for more information.

DRINKS AND MORTAR: A MONTHLY GATHERING

January 2008 marked the first anniversary of Drinks and Mortar, the monthly gathering of people who like to talk about architecture, civics, local politics, and city life. Everyone is welcome. The gathering began with a group of people who were discussing simple and sustaining ways of connecting those interested in historic preservation, urbanism and architecture. They decided to do something to get the ball rolling. One year later, there is a name, a Myspace website, a dedicated coordinator – Claire Nowak-Boyd – and a throng of regulars.

The group usually meets on the fourth Thursday of the month at 7pm. The location changes each month in order to explore different corners of the city. Check the website each month for the location: <http://www.myspace.com/drinksandmortar>. Questions, comments, inquiries, & general whatnot should be directed to the queen bee, Claire Nowak-Boyd: clairelovesthecity@gmail.com.



The entrance hall of the St. Louis School and Museum of Fine Art looked like this when it opened in 1881. Harriet Hosmer's statue of Oenone (1854-55) is in the foreground and her bust of Wayman Crow on left. Oenone was the mythical wife of Paris, whom he deserted for Helen. From Washington University's website on women artists.

News Letter

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