

ST. LOUIS' TEMPLES OF THESPIS: AGE OF SPECIALIZATION, PART II

by David J. Simmons

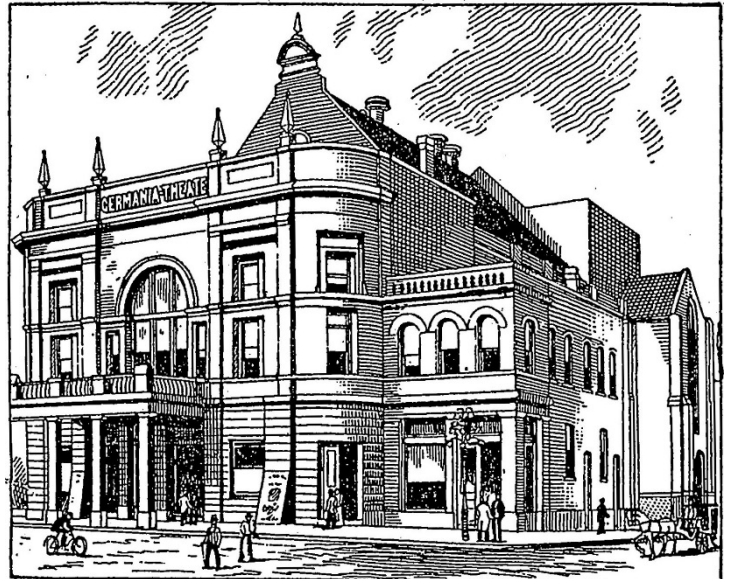
While some of the theaters built in St. Louis during the 1880s and 1890s were lost to remodeling, other theaters were expensively upgraded as theatergoing reached a peak of popularity. The local firms of Isaac Taylor, Otto Wilhelmi, William Swasey, and Kirchner and Kirchner were especially proficient with regard to playhouse conversions. A second generation of summer theaters in St. Louis commenced in the mid-1890's, succeeding the alfresco entertainment at Schnaider's Garden and Uhrig's Cave, continuing until about 1912. The local summer theater movement culminated in the 1919 birth of the St. Louis Municipal Theater's summer season. St. Louis saloon theaters provided a different kind of theatrical experience, one that was distained by polite society.

Casino Theater

George McManus, theater manager (treasurer of the Grand Opera House in 1882) and businessman, asked architect Isaac Taylor in 1884 to convert Gregory's Winter Garden, a high class recreational venue built in 1870 at 24 South Fourth, into a modestly sized theater for high-class vaudeville. Built for \$30,000, the converted theater was called the Casino. Taylor installed in the building an auditorium measuring 40 by 90 feet. It seated 1,013 people divided into three tiers and nine boxes. The ceiling of the audience room rose to a height of 25 feet, while the parquet seating inclined three and a half feet. A small stage was 40 by only 22 feet. Across the front of this four-story brick building Taylor placed a two-story arcade supported by eight Corinthian columns. Opening on August 9, 1884, this vaudeville showcase flourished for four years.

After the ownership and management changed in 1889 the Casino became the London Theater, offering burlesque and risqué vaudeville. During the last four years of its existence the theater became known as the Gayety. Lizzie Esher, owner and operator, scheduled low-class burlesque. Drunkenness, obscenity and criminal activity plagued its existence. Police raided the place on numerous occasions but were not able to close it permanently. Its end came in 1898 when Esher died. Four years later the building was demolished.

Germania Theater



Germania Theater, later 14th Street Theatre, 1403 Locust, 1892, front by Otto Wilhelmi (building originally 1854), from an invoice form dated 1894; thanks to Dennis Northcott, Missouri History Museum

Seeking to have its own theater for the production of German-speaking plays, the German Drama Society acquired the First Presbyterian Church building in 1889 at a cost of \$45,000. Built in 1854 at the entrance to Lucas Place (later 1403 Locust), the church had been designed by Oliver Hart. The congregation moved to Sarah and Washington Avenues in the mid-1880s. Architect Otto Wilhelmi removed the church's front façade and bell tower and replaced them with a modern Renaissance theater front. He transformed the church vestibule into a theater lobby and the sanctuary into a theater auditorium seating 1,000 people on two levels. The auditorium had a small stage fitted up at its north end with dressing rooms off-stage to the left and right and underneath. The ticket office, business room, and restrooms were accessed from the lobby. After spending \$60,000 on the conversion, the Germania Theater opened on September 4, 1892 under the management of Carl Waldeman and F.C. Buechel.

Interest in German language drama declined after a few years. George McManus leased the theater at the close of 1896, changed its name to the Fourteenth Street Theater, and scheduled stock company drama and first class entertainment.

M.L. Crawford purchased the theater in 1900 and changed its name to the New Standard Theater. He promoted a variety of entertainment – stock company drama, vaudeville, and burlesque. He changed the theater’s name twice more: to the Crawford Theater in 1903 and to the Gayety Theater in 1905 when the theater’s format became exclusively comic burlesque.



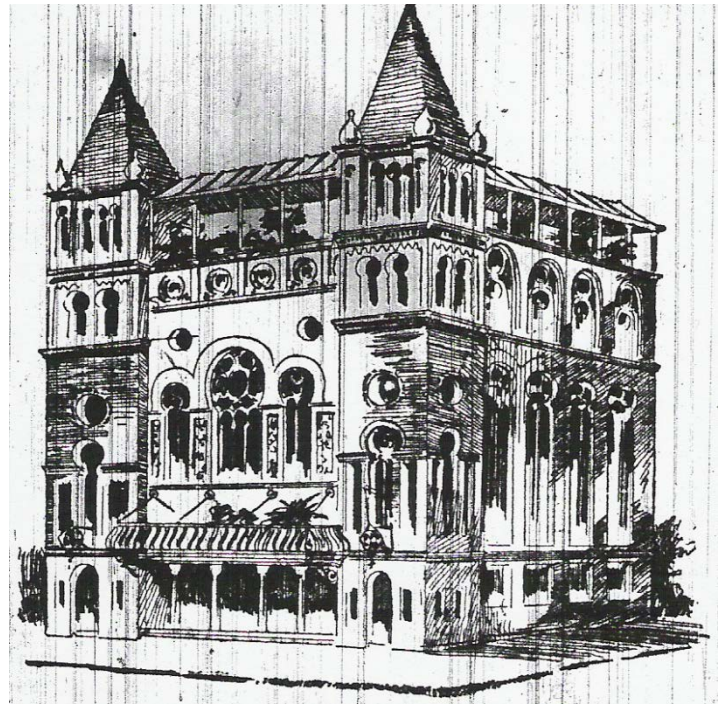
14th Street Theatre (or Theater) after name change, from an 1896 program in the collection of the Missouri History Museum; the 1854 gable and nave of First Presbyterian can be seen behind the 1892 Wilhelmi façade. To the right is the north end of the Exposition Hall.

Several years later it joined the Columbia Burlesque Circuit. During the 1920’s the Gayety had a very successful run. It closed in 1936 and was torn down ten years later.

Oriental Theater

Operational for only three months between September and December 1895, the Oriental Theater at Seventeenth and Pine failed to attract enough people to remain open. In 1867 Shaare Emeth Reformed Jewish Congregation had constructed their new temple at this location from the plans in the Moorish taste by architect Thomas Brady. They vacated the building 27 years later, seeking to move the congregation westward. Eventually they built their new temple at Vandeventer and Lindell.

Banker L. C. Nelson purchased the former temple property in 1894 for \$60,000. Charles Whitney, Jr. and Charles Pope, two theater businessmen, convinced Nelson to allow them to convert the temple into a theater complex. The architectural firm of Kirchner and Kirchner directed the conversion, costing \$65,000. The complex consisted of a rooftop garden restaurant and a theater seating 800 people.



Oriental Theater, 17th at Pine as remodeled by Kirchner & Kirchner in 1895; originally Temple Shaare Emeth, 1867, by Thomas Brady

Charles Pope served as manager for the four productions staged at the theater. After the theater closed, Leo Mosely purchased the property for \$41,000 and cleared the site.

Columbia Theater

Two local businessmen – Charles P. Salisbury and Zachariah W. Tinker believed St. Louis needed a new first-class vaudeville house. To secure a site for this purpose they obtained the four-story Meyer Building at the southwest corner of Sixth and St. Charles. Their idea was to convert the building into a theater. In 1896 the architectural firm of John Bailey McElfrick and Son made preliminary sketches for the project and the Kirchner brothers completed



Columbia Theater, 425 North Sixth at St. Charles, as remodeled in 1908 by Barnett, Haynes & Barnett. Advertised as “America’s Most Beautiful Theatre.”

the plans and supervised the construction of the Meyer Building conversion into a theater at a cost of \$150,000. It was called the Columbia after the Columbia Brewery, which Tinker had helped to organize in 1891. Finished after a year of construction, the Columbia Theater opened on March 28, 1898.

Located at 425 North Sixth Street, the five-story brick Columbia Theater had a frontage of 80 feet to a depth of 125 feet. With rococo decoration both inside and out, the theater seated 2,200 people on three levels with 26 boxes. From the main entrance on Sixth Street people moved into the foyer (25 by 13 feet). A café operated in the basement. Each floor servicing the auditorium had separate lounges for men and women plus a checkroom. The auditorium had a square proscenium, medium size stage, and a central ceiling medallion of 200 lights. The color scheme for the playhouse was gold, pink and blue. Twenty dressing rooms were below the stage.

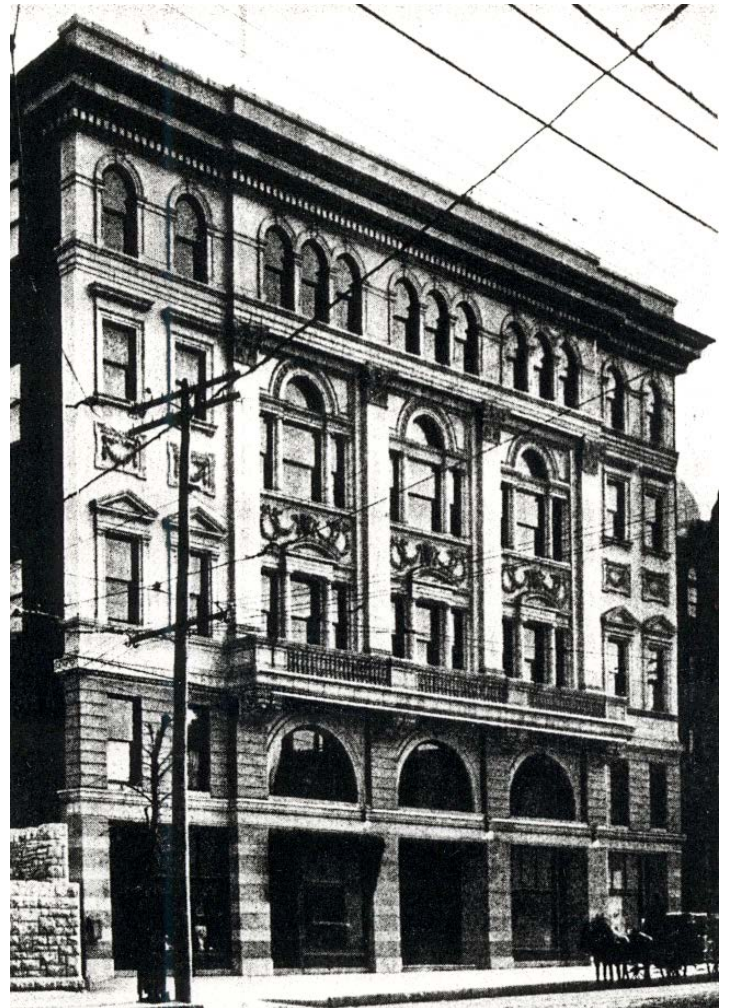


Another view of the Columbia Theater, looking north on Sixth Street, with the Strand on the left, and Stix, Baer & Fuller in the distance

At the turn of the century control of the Columbia passed to the team of Middleton and Tate. Frank Tate in 1906 wanted to erect a new playhouse at Eighth and St. Charles. The architectural firm of Barnett, Haynes, and Barnett made plans for this project. The project was eventually dropped in favor of remodeling the Columbia Theater. The same firm executed the remodeling project in 1908 at a cost of \$125,000. Using French Renaissance ideas, the remodeled theater front had a balcony across the entire façade at the third-floor level, a marquee with multiple rows of lights, and eleven entrances. The number of exits increased to 29 and number of electric lights to 4,000. The street-level lobby contained the ticket office, men's lounge, a frescoed dome, and a painting by Tom Barnett entitled "A Panoramic View of St. Louis." The Columbia operated until 1924.

Odeon Theater

The Masonic Building and Musical Theater Company gave the commission for the Odeon Theater complex at 1038 North Grand Avenue (at Bell) to architect Albert W. Swasey in 1899. After the turn of the century, he would design two other theaters for the St. Louis market. In 1902 he moved to New York where he associated with the Schubert brothers for several years. During that time, Swasey designed more than a dozen theaters in and around New York City. The two-building Odeon complex cost \$400,000. It had a commercial/institutional section (100 by 150 feet) in front and the theater section (118 by 175 feet) attached in the rear. The five-story front structure allowed for Masonic lodge rooms, banquet hall, and a kitchen on the three upper floors, offices on the second floor, and retail space and a central passageway through the building to the theater entrance in the rear at street level. Italian Renaissance design shaped the beige brick with cream colored terra cotta and gray limestone trim.



Odeon Theater, 1038 North Grand, 1899, Albert W. Swasey

As a musical theater, the Odeon focused on its auditorium seating 2,000 people divided into three levels – parquet, mezzanine (with 30 enclosed boxes), and cantilevered balcony. Famed for its outstanding acoustical properties, the

auditorium had a large stage (75 by 50 feet), a 40-foot-high proscenium arch, a rigging area behind the arch 80 feet high, and dressing rooms located in the rear. Stage entrance was on School Street. The lobby accessed a reception room, ticket office, smoking lounge, café, and staircases leading to the upper levels. Other important rooms included a parlor seating 200, rehearsal hall, studio rooms, and a music library. Two through driveways in the basement of the theater building, one north and the other south, allowed passengers to be deposited inside the building. Each drop-off point had a staircase leading to the lobby above.

Following six months of construction, the Odeon staged its first event on November 28, 1899. Less than a year later, the St. Louis Symphony adopted the new theater as its home and remained there until 1934. The greatest stars of American and European classical music and grand opera such as Caruso, McCormick, Melba, Garden, Paderewski, and Kriesler appeared on the Odeon stage. The year after the symphony's departure, the Odeon was destroyed by two fires.

Summer Theater Movement

St. Louis' summer theaters of the late 19th and early 20th centuries created the audience for the city's long-running tradition of summer entertainment at the Municipal Opera. Temporary in concept, these earlier theaters were mostly constructed of wood. Attempts to upgrade these facilities for year-round use often resulted in financial disaster, as a result of the high cost of such transformations. The typical theater had a wooden floor with terraced seating, open sides, a wooden stage with back drop in front and a wood refreshment stand in the rear. The auditorium and stage may or may not have been roofed. Wood out-buildings provided the ticket office and dressing rooms. Some summer theaters functioned as part of an entertainment complex with a public garden, dancing pavilion, mechanical rides, and even an outdoor pool.

Summer theater first appeared in St. Louis as early as 1823 at the Vauxhall Gardens located at Second and Plum. The summer theater tradition emerged in the 1870s, fostered by Schnaider's Garden at Chouteau and Mississippi and Uhrig's Cave at Jefferson and Washington. Between 1895 and 1912 a second generation of summer theaters charmed the public. Of the more than a dozen summer theaters active during this period, the Suburban Garden Theater and the Delmar Garden Theater were the most important. Other summer theaters popular with locals were the West End Heights Theater at Clayton and McCausland, Forest Park Highlands Theater at Berthold and Sublette, Eclipse Park or Oakland Theater at Primm and Virginia, Olympic or Hashagen Park Theater at Grand and Meramec, Bellevue

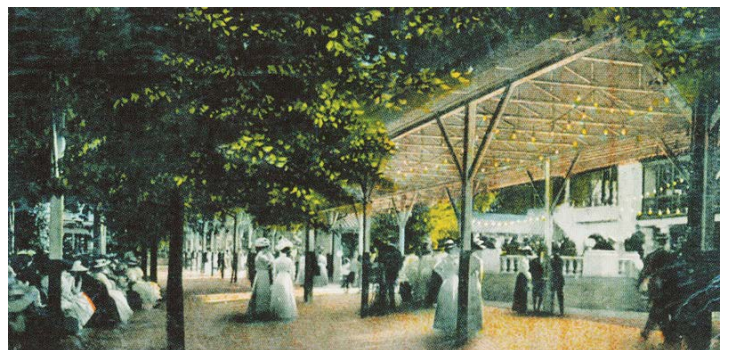
Theater at Easton and Kingshighway, and Koerner Garden Theater at Arsenal and Kingshighway.

Suburban Garden Theater

As the first of a new generation of summer theaters, the Suburban Theater belonged to an entertainment complex next to the Wells Station of the St. Louis and Suburban Car Line. The architectural firm of E. Jungenfeld & Co. (later Widman, Walsh and Bosselier) designed the complex in 1895 for the Jannopoulos brothers. Cost of the complex reached \$100,000. Its enclosed theater seated 2,500 people. Opening in May 1895, it offered a combination of vaudeville and minstrel shows. Five years later it switched to an all vaudeville revue. Using its own stock company with outside star power, drama supplanted vaudeville from 1904 onward.

Architect Frederick Bonsack remodeled the complex in the fall of 1909, spending over \$200,000. Among the improvements was a new open air theater measuring 100 by 152 feet, with a height of 40 feet. It had a concrete floor seating 1,500 people on 32 levels and a concrete roof. The stage (70 by 40 feet) was surrounded by 16 dressing rooms. A lobby at the rear of the theater measured 30 feet deep. Attendance at the new theater and complex failed to meet expectations. The large remodeling debt, rising operational costs, and falling attendance translated into heavy financial losses year after year. After the 1912 season, the theater closed, followed by closure of the complex three years later.

Delmar Garden Theater



Delmar Garden, from a postcard c. 1900

In a number of ways the Delmar Garden Theater's history mirrored the Suburban Theater experience. The Jannopoulos brothers constructed the Delmar Garden Amusement Park at 6701 Delmar (at Kingsland) in the spring of 1900. The Delmar Theater celebrated its opening on May 10, 1900 with a musical show called "Evangeline." Seating 1,600 people, this open-air theater had a refreshment stand at the rear catered by Tony Faust's Restaurant. A twelve-piece orchestra and a thirty-member opera company produced an annual summer season of light opera and musical comedy

through the 1912 season. After the 1908 season, the musical theater was remodeled and a new theater for drama was erected. The Drama playhouse opened on May 23, 1909, and the remodeled musical theater followed on May 30. Operations costs doubled, attendance declined, and the construction debt from the improvements drained away financial resources. Both theaters closed after the 1912 season.

Saloon Theaters

Using a variety show format, this group of theaters achieved notoriety as dens of iniquity where drunkenness, profanity and indecency reigned sprinkled with rowdiness, sexual favors and occasionally murder. Beer and women (“legs and kags”) dictated the existence of these places frequented for the most part by all male audiences of older men and youth as young as twelve years old. Lacking architectural interest, each theater was associated with a saloon either serving as its lobby or attached to the lobby. Overpriced beer was sold and consumed in the auditorium during performances. Most patrons agreed that the more beer you consumed, the better the show became. When the women were not performing on stage, they hustled drinks in the audience for tips. These skills far outdistanced their performing abilities. The Post Dispatch wrote on December 5, 1881 “Their performances exhibited a gross lack of talent. They could neither act, dance or sing.”

One of the most notorious shows in the city was at the Palace Theater. They advertised thirty beautiful women as living statues (the closest thing to nudity allowable by law). Their advertisement claimed “largest and best entertainment for the cheapest price in the city, .10 to .35.” Furthermore, they guaranteed “60 laughs in 60 minutes.”

Admission to these theaters tended to be modest or even free, the profit came from the beer sales. Blatant sexual insinuation and profanity filled every performance. A pall of heavy tobacco smoke hung over the auditorium, making it difficult to breathe. Drunkenness, robbery, and fighting remained commonplace, catching the attention of local police, who frequently raided the theater premises. This situation continued for more than a decade until city government passed the Newberry Law forbidding women from being employed to serve alcoholic beverages. As a result of the new law, all saloon theaters closed. Later several theaters reopened transformed – theater and saloon separated, no drinks in auditorium, and no women serving drinks. Eventually even these theaters disappeared.

The following theaters were classified as saloon theaters or palaces of sin at one time or another:
Bryant’s Theater, 518 Spruce

Esther’s Theater/Alhambra Theater, 712 St. Charles
London Theater, 24 South Fourth
McGonley Theater, 825 North Sixth
Palace Theater/Crystal Palace Theater, 618 Elm
Theatre Comique, 119 South Sixth

At the turn of the twentieth century live theater reached the zenith of its popularity, but soon the winds of change altered its destiny and challenged its existence. What began as a simple novelty evolved into an entertainment phenomenon attracting countless numbers of viewers. Early viewers of the phenomenon called it “motion pictures.”

Sources

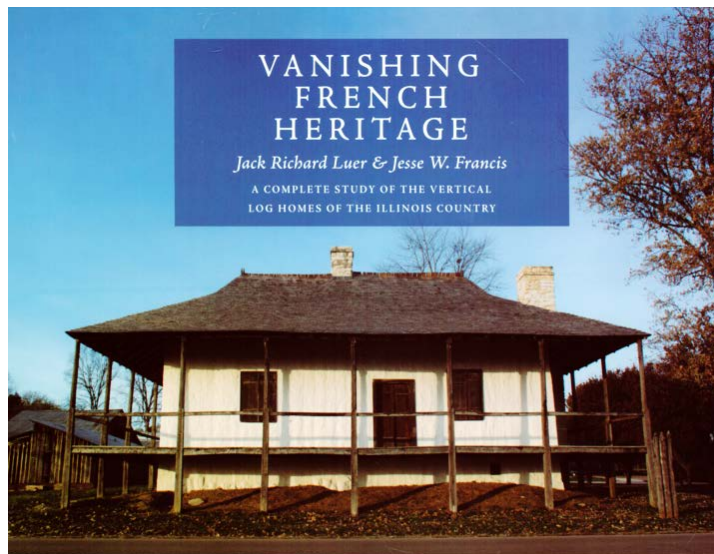
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St. Louis Post-Dispatch, July 4, 1879; Aug. 20, 1879; May 13, 1880; July 12, 1881; Aug. 30, 1881; Sept. 9, 1881; March 29, 1882; Aug. 12, 1882; May 29, 1883; Aug. 31, 1883; Aug. 9, 1884; April 2, 1885; Aug. 9, 1885; Aug. 11, 1889; Feb. 14, 1891; April 12, 1891; July 31, 1891; Oct. 25, 1891; June 26, 1892; Aug. 18, 1892; April 21, 1895; Sept. 16, 1896; Sept. 27, 1896; Nov. 7, 1896; June 13, 1897; March 22, 1898; March 25, 1898; Aug. 15, 1898; July 8, 1899; Nov. 26, 1899; Nov. 29, 1899; April 30, 1916; June 17, 1916; July 1, 1916; Dec. 9, 1928.

Missouri History Museum Archives, Theater Program Collection:
Casino Theater, Box 5
Century Theater, Boxes 5 to 8
Columbia Theater, Boxes 9 to 12
Fourteenth Street Theater, Box 16
Gayety Theater, Box 18
Germania Theater, Box 18
Grand Opera House, Boxes 9 to 22
Hagan Opera House, Box 22
Havilin's Theater, Boxes 22 to 24
Imperial Theater, Boxes 24 to 26
Odeon, Boxes 41 to 44
Olympic Theater, Boxes 44 to 46
Oriental Theater, Box 47
Pickwick Theater, Box 49
Pope's Theater, Boxes 40 to 50
Standard Theater, Boxes 53 to 55
Suburban Theater, Boxes 55 to 56

Missouri History Museum Library, Movies and Theaters
Scrapbook, Volumes One, Two, & Ten.

Vanishing French Heritage: A Complete Study of the Vertical Log Homes of the Illinois Country, draws inspiration from the work of Charles E. Peterson, a pioneer of historic preservation in America, who first brought national recognition to French colonial architecture more than seventy years ago. Over the years, the National Park Service (NPS) followed Peterson's lead and conducted a series of theme studies and surveys (notably in 1960, 1965, and 2001), identifying and documenting French vernacular buildings in America's heartland. This book expands the store of knowledge and adds important details regarding the physical composition, interior and exterior details, and functioning of individual buildings.



The house on the cover is the Jean-Baptiste Bequet House, also known as the Bequet-Ribault House, Ste. Genevieve, one of the last remaining poteau-en-terre houses.

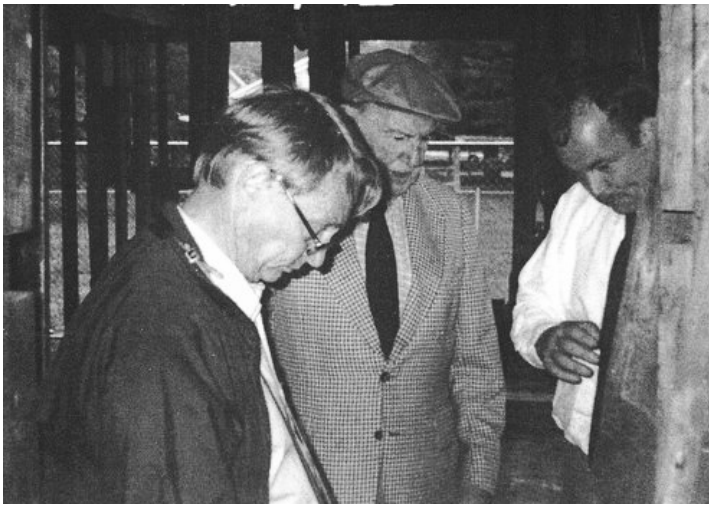
THE NEW BOOK ABOUT FRENCH VERTICAL LOG CONSTRUCTION BY JACK LUER AND JESSE FRANCIS *by Bonnie Stepenoff*

No one has a more intimate knowledge of French colonial vertical log architecture than Jack Luer and Jesse Francis. Over many years of preservation practice, they have explored the garrets, interiors, and underpinnings of rare surviving buildings in the Mississippi River valley. In this long-awaited book, *Vanishing French Heritage*, Luer and Francis share decades of research and hands-on experience documenting and preserving the physical remains of eighteenth-century French settlements in the interior of North America.

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The text has three major sections, plus a glossary and bibliography. Part One provides an overview of French exploration and settlement in the Illinois Country. As the authors conceded, there has never been a very precise definition of "*Le Pays des Illinois*," a phrase that originally denoted the land inhabited by the Illinois people and later signified the French-claimed territory along the Mississippi River north of the Ohio River and south of the Great Lakes. In collecting information for this book, the authors studied French colonial buildings on both the east and west banks of the Mississippi in the present-day states of Missouri, Illinois, and Indiana.

The second section of the book offers brief illustrated discussions of construction methods commonly used in the French settlements of North America. Historians, architectural historians, and preservationists will find much material here that will be useful for identifying, describing, and recording buildings and structures belonging to the French colonial tradition. As the authors point out, it is important to remember that roof profiles, floor plans,



A meeting of the minds: Osmund Overby, left, Charles Peterson, center, and Jesse Francis consider a detail of the Martin House, Dupo, Illinois. Peterson was the original architectural historian at the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, the founder of HABS, and the inspiration and mentor for this book. Photo by Laura Johnson, Vanishing French Heritage, page 182.

materials, and details evolved throughout the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century.

The main body of the text (Part Three) is a catalog of extant vertical log buildings. One masonry building that has been disassembled and placed in storage is also included in the catalog as an example of a French vernacular building with exterior walls made of stone. The remainder of the entries fall into two categories: *poteaux en terre* (post in the ground) buildings with walls constructed of heavy logs set upright in the ground and *poteaux sur solle* (post on a sill) buildings with vertical logs set on a horizontal wooden sill.

Each entry includes information on property history, probable dates of construction, and the physical evolution of the building, although the entries vary greatly in length and thoroughness. Most but not all of the entries provide background on the families who occupied the buildings in the historic period. Some of the entries discuss preservation and restoration efforts. Photographs and drawings greatly enhance the text, but some entries have numerous illustrations, while others have only a few. With each entry, endnotes guide readers to source material.

Of the fifty buildings in the inventory, twenty-nine are located in Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, six in Ste. Genevieve County, six in other Missouri communities, eight in Illinois, and one in Indiana. In the case of White Haven, in St. Louis County, Missouri, only a portion of the house, the West Addition, qualifies as a French colonial vertical log structure. Luer and Francis' research supports the general consensus that Ste. Genevieve possesses by far the largest collection of French colonial vertical log buildings in existence.

At the present time, the NPS is completing a multi-year special resource study of Ste. Genevieve that may ultimately result in greater federal involvement in the preservation of French heritage in that unique community.

Over the years Luer and Francis have played key roles in restoring some of the most important houses in Ste. Genevieve. In the early 1980s, Luer, an architect, directed the restoration of the Bequette-Ribault House (Jean-Baptiste Bequette House), which Peterson described as the archetypical French colonial post-in-the-ground (*poteaux en terre*) dwelling. After the great flood of 1993, Luer conducted an important stabilization project on the Jean-Baptiste Ste. Gemme Beauvais (also known as the Amoureux or Amoureux) House. Francis, a curator and craftsman, worked with Luer on many projects, including the restoration of the Nicolas Janis House (Green Tree Tavern) in 1996.

Vanishing French Heritage pays tribute to a fragile group of architectural resources. The book's detailed information on the physical make-up, as well as the cultural context, of the buildings will be of immense value in on-going efforts to preserve them.

Vanishing French Heritage: A Complete Study of the Vertical Log Homes of the Illinois Country. Cape Girardeau, MO: The Kellerman Foundation for Historic Preservation, 2014

Events Calendar

Society of Architectural Historians to Meet in Saint Paul

The Society of Architectural Historians will host its 71st Annual International Conference in Saint Paul, Minnesota, April 18–22, 2018. Architectural and art historians, architects, museum professionals, and preservationists from around the world will convene at the Saint Paul RiverCentre to present new research on the history of the built environment and explore the architecture of the Twin Cities. Roundtable discussions, workshops, networking receptions, keynote talks, SAH's annual awards ceremony, and public architecture tours will supplement the program. Register at sah.org/2018.



Events Calendar

2018 Society of Architectural Historians St. Louis Chapter St. Louis Public Library – Central Library Lecture Series

St. Louis Public Library – Central Library
1301 Olive St, St. Louis, MO 63103
Carnegie Room (or Training Room)
fourth Tuesday of the month
6:30 pm – 8:00 pm

2018 Spring

Candace O'Connor – The Splendid Architecture of the Central West End
Author, *Renaissance: A History of the Central West End*
February 27, 2018

NiNi Harris – Holly Hills
Author, Historian, recipient of the 2012 Osmund Overby Award from Missouri Preservation
March 27, 2018

Michael Allen – A Few Stones Left Upon One Another: Historic Preservation
Preservation Research Office: Founder, Director, Architectural Historian and Author
April 24, 2018

2018 Fall

John C. Guenther: Hadrian to Hadid – The Architecture of Rome across Time
September 25, 2018
Principal, John C. Guenther Architect LLC
President, Society of Architectural Historians St. Louis Chapter

Peter Wollenberg: Housing the Mentally Ill – A look at the history and architecture of asylums in America
October 23, 2018
architectural conservator
Wollenberg Building Conservation, LLC

Richard Mueller: Contemporary Architecture of Mexico City
November 27, 2018
retired faculty member of St. Louis University High School
adjunct professor at several local colleges
author of the book, *A Century of the Symphony*, a history of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra

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The Society of Architectural Historians
St. Louis and Missouri Valley Chapters

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Spring Issue	15 February
Summer Issue	15 May
Fall Issue	15 August
Winter Issue	15 November

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