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GRAND AVENUE'S FLYING SAUCER AND ITS ARCHITECT

by Esley Hamilton

The furor that erupted in late June over the proposed demolition of the small building at 212 South Grand was unprecedented in that the enormous opposition to the plan was generated by the internet, and particularly by a Facebook page. Much has been written about the resulting controversy and the light it shed on how decisions about redevelopment and preservation are made in St. Louis. Less has been said about the history of the building and how the building became an eye-catcher known to virtually everybody in St. Louis.

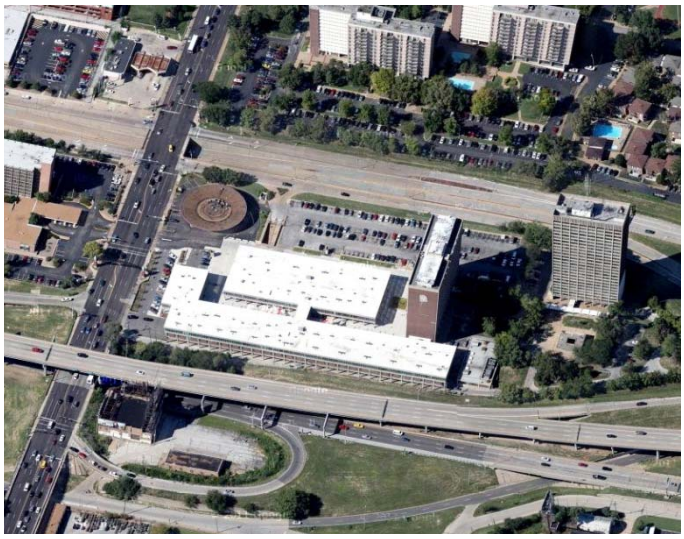
The Del Taco at 212 South Grand, June 22, 2011, photo by Christian Gooden, St. Louis Post-Dispatch

The building was originally erected as part of the five-building Council Plaza project, sited on nine acres that had been cleared as part of the massive Mill Creek Valley urban renewal project. It was intended to serve as a gas station for the the residents in the two residential high-rises and the workers in the two-story building that occupied the bulk of the site. Council Plaza was a project of Local 688 of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, headed by Harold Gibbons. Gibbons was a nationally known figure in the labor movement and a dedicated community activist. He was able to use federal housing legislation here to create privately owned but publicly subsidized housing that coincidentally created a prestigious home for the Union. When completed, Council Plaza was considered a model for the nation.

Richard Henmi was the Associate and Chief Designer of the architectural firm of Schwarz and Van Hoefen when the project started, but by the time it ended he was a partner. The firm did some of the best work in St. Louis during the 1950s and 1960s and was unusual in maintaining its design flare while working on large commercial projects. The firm could trace its origins the whole way back to the late 19th century and the St. Louis office of the Boston firm Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge. John Lawrence Mauran and Ernest Russell left Shepley in 1900 to form Mauran, Russell & Garden, later Mauran, Russell & Crowell, which for decades was the largest architectural practice in St. Louis. After Mauran died in 1933, the firm became Russell, Crowell, Mullgardt & Schwarz. The name became Russell, Mullgardt, Schwarz & Van Hoefen in 1952 when Hari Van Hoefen became a partner. The Engineers Club on Lindell and the Wohl Recreation Center in Sherman Park on North Kingshighway were highlights of that decade. W. Oscar Mullgardt lived until 1962 and Ernest Russell until 1969, but beginning in 1960, the firm's name was shortened to Schwarz & Van Hoefen. Arthur Schwarz's plan that year for downtown St. Louis was the major catalyst for the Gateway Mall, and the Mansion House complex followed in 1967. Schwarz succumbed in 1971, but the firm continued under Henmi until 1989.

Arthur Klein served as development consultant for the Teamsters and became in effect the client for architectural matters. Because of the complexity of the project the distinguished structural engineer Bernard Schwartz (1923 -1998) was called in from Philadelphia. Schwartz was a graduate of Drexel and worked on high-rise projects throughout the country. His international work included the Bangladesh government complex in Dacca, one of the masterworks of fellow Philadelphian Louis Kahn.

The gas station, although the smallest building in the Council Plaza group, was conceived by Henmi as the focal point, both visually for those driving past and functionally for those driving onto the site. The structure of the flying saucer is a hyperbolic paraboloid (see the Winter 2010 Newsletter for other examples) constructed of thin-shell concrete. This puts it in the distinguished company of the McDonnell Planetarium and the Priory Chapel as a cutting-edge work of the era. The long, seemingly unsupported overhang is cantilevered out from the angled piers at the center of the building.



Council Plaza seen from the south, with 40/64 cutting across the bottom, Grand Boulevard on the left, and Forest Park Parkway above. The low-rise office is much bigger than it appears from the street.

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In 1964, after two years of planning, the first part of Council Plaza was constructed, the 16-story Council Tower West. The long two-story Union Plaza building followed in 1966; it accommodated offices for the union, the Labor Health Institute (a clinic for union workers), and retail and support facilities for the residents. With it was a parking structure for 480 cars (recently demolished). The gas station was built in 1967 as one such convenience. Leased to Phillips 66, it also served the wider public. Council House East (also called Number Two), the 26-story tower residence for the elderly, was completed in 1968.

Over the years maintenance of this complex fell farther and farther behind until the future of the whole complex seemed at risk. The 250-foot sculptural bas relief worked into the brick east wall of the taller tower by sculptors Saunders Schultz and William Severson began to fall, leaving a pile of bricks at the foot of the wall. The present redevelopment was made possible in part by the state and federal tax credits for rehabilitation of historic buildings. Melinda Winchester wrote the nomination to list the whole complex in the National Register in 2007. (Online at http://www.dnr.mo.gov/shpo/nps-nr/06000217.pdf.) She sees the significance of Council Plaza as having to do with social history and community planning & development rather than architecture.

The Del Taco, showing the relationship to the three other buildings of the Council Plaza complex, photo by Brent Jones, St. Louis Beacon

Mr. Henmi's personal story is inspiring. He was one of several young Japanese Americans brought to Washington University under the auspices of the campus YMCA during World War II to escape internment. Gyo Obata was another. (See *The Way We Came: A Century of the AIA*, page 68, for more on this story.) Henmi is a modest man but has taken great pleasure in the unexpected acclaim his gas station has received so many years after he designed it.

Photo by Laura Miller, Riverfront Times

POSTAL SERVICE HONORS INDUSTRIAL DESIGNERS

The *Pioneers of American Industrial Design* stamp pane coming out this July honors 12 of the nation's most influential industrial designers. Encompassing everything from furniture and electric kitchen appliances to corporate office buildings and passenger trains, the work of these designers helped shape the look of everyday life in the 20th century.

Industrial design emerged as a profession in the U.S. in the 1920s but really took hold during the Depression, when manufacturers turned to industrial designers to give

their products an appealing modern look. The new, streamlined looks evoked a sense of speed and efficiency and projected the image of progress and affluence. Even as streamlining gave way to new looks in the 1960s, the groundbreaking work of industrial designers continued to transform the look of homes and offices across the country.

The Architect's Newspaper (AN, www.archpaper.com) reported that the selection was made by USPS art director Derry Noyes (daughter of Eliot Noyes) and stamp designer Margaret Bauer, advised by designer Niels Diffrient, who worked in the office of Henry Dreyfuss. Some respected designers had to be eliminated because they're still living and hence not eligible. Here they are, in order of birth:

Frederick Hurten Rhead, 1880-1942
A ceramicist, Rhead taught for a time at the People's University in University City. He is best remembered for the sleek Fiesta® line introduced by The Homer Laughlin China Company in 1936.

Walter Dorwin Teague, 1883-1960
Known as the "dean of industrial design," Teague designed several popular cameras, including the 1934 "Baby Brownie," during his career-long collaboration with Eastman Kodak Company.

Norman Bel Geddes, 1893-1958
A founding member of the American Society of Industrial Designers, Bel Geddes championed streamlining. The author of highly influential books on design and urban planning, he created visionary new looks for cars, trains, planes, buildings, even entire cities.

Raymond Loewy, 1893-1986
Loewy arguably did more to define the look of modern America than any other industrial designer. He created the distinctive look of Air Force One and worked with NASA on the interiors of America's first space station, Skylab. In 1971, he created the logo for the newly formed U.S. Postal Service.

Donald Deskey, 1894-1989
Deskey is best known for the Art Deco interiors he designed in 1932 for Radio City Music Hall. He was also one of America's most innovative industrial designers.

Gilbert Rohde, 1894-1944
Rohde was one of the most influential and innovative furniture designers in the U.S. His designs for Herman Miller in the 1930s and 1940s were based on simplicity and practicality.

Greta von Nessen, 1900-1978
Von Nessen specialized solely in lighting. Her "Anywhere" lamp, introduced in 1951, featured a tubular aluminum base and an adjustable shade of enameled metal. Several of von Nessen's lamps have been featured at the Museum of Modern Art.

Russel Wright, 1904-1976
Wright's affordable modern furniture and tableware, characterized by minimal but elegant forms, revolutionized the way many Americans live at home.

Henry Dreyfuss, 1904-1972
Considered by many to be the first designer to apply ergonomics systematically to product design, Dreyfuss designed products that touched all corners of American life, from household appliances like clocks, sewing machines, and vacuum cleaners to tractors and even the comfortable interiors of trains and planes.

Peter Müller-Munk, 1904-1967
Peter Müller-Munk is best remembered for the chromium-plated brass "Normandie" pitcher, introduced by the Revere Copper and Brass Company in 1935. It was affordable and easier to care for than traditional silver.

Dave Chapman, 1909-1978
Chapman is probably most known for his classroom furniture, but he also designed household appliances like refrigerators, hairdryers, radios, and electric heaters. His streamlined sewing machines, introduced in 1947, featured a chrome grille that evoked the sleek look of contemporary automobiles.

Eliot Noyes, 1910-1977
Noyes bridged the gap between business and art, transforming the industrial design profession into more than just a commercial venture. He persuaded his corporate clients to adopt long-lasting design principles instead of changing each year. For IBM he designed buildings, interiors, and a range of office equipment, including the iconic 1961 "Selectric" typewriter. He also helped IBM and other companies develop a distinct and consistent visual identity.

ARCHITECTURE BOOKS FROM JEFFERSON'S LIBRARY FOUND AT WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Washington University announced on Presidents Day, February 21,the discovery that several books (28 titles in 74 volumes) given to their library back in 1880 were part of Thomas Jefferson's personal library. Included among them are six important works on architecture. The discovery was made by Ann Lucas Birle and Endrina Tay, scholars at the Robert H. Smith International Center for Jefferson Studies at Charlottesville. This makes Washington University the third largest holder of Jefferson's books after the Library of Congress and the University of Virginia.

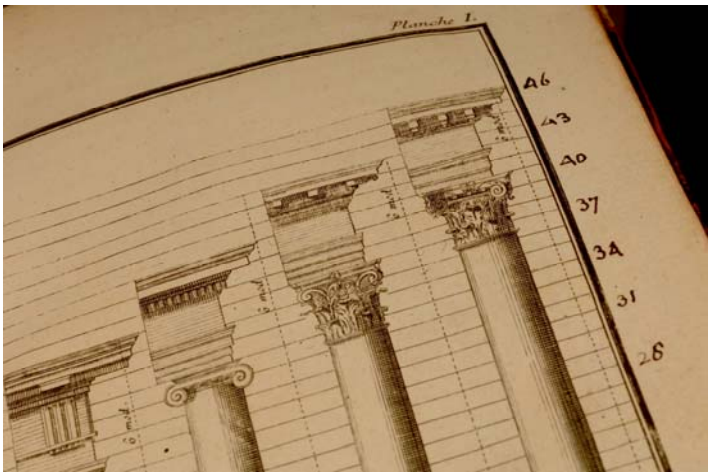
Jefferson famously sold most of his library to the Library of Congress to replace their original collection burned by the British in 1814. Almost as soon as the books left Monticello, however, he started to purchase replacements and other new works, usually working through a book dealer in Philadelphia. The books from this second collection are known to scholars as the Retirement Library. These books had to be sold after his death because of his many debts.

Nobody kept a list of the purchasers at that 1829 sale, but one of them kept a list of his own. Joseph Coolidge, Junior, the husband of Jefferson's granddaughter Ellen Wayles Randolph, sent a letter to an agent requesting that he bid on certain titles that he and Ellen wanted, and he appears to have been successful in acquiring all of them. Ellen lived until 1876 and Joseph until 1879. Their library of 3,000 books was then inherited by their daughter Ellen and her husband Edmund Dwight. They donated it the next year, 1880, to Washington University, doubling the size of the school's library. The university designated this the Coolidge Library and inserted bookplates indicating the volumes were the gift of the family of Joseph Coolidge. Over the years, nearly all of the books have found their way from the circulating shelves into the university's rare book collections.

The books in the Coolidge collection that originally belonged to Jefferson were identified in part from Coolidge's letter and also from Jefferson's distinctive ownership marks, which Endrina Tay recognized.

Ann Lucas Birle noted that one set of three volumes, *Principles of Civil Architecture* by Francesco Milizia, had particular meaning to Joseph Coolidge because he himself had presented them to Jefferson on a visit to Monticello in May of 1824, before he had met his future wife. Jefferson's surviving thank-you note mentions that he planned to use the books as part of a lecture on architecture at his new University of Virginia.

Most of the architecture titles here were intended to be practical aids to construction; half of them deal with the rules for the five classical orders. Scholars have long been aware that Jefferson's designs for his campus were inspired by certain ancient and modern buildings known to him through books of the time. His correspondence during design and construction references such books, including some that have been found here.



A page from Thomas Jefferson's copy of Freart de Chambray's Parallele de l'architecture antique avec la moderne, containing notes in Jefferson's hand.

Except for the Milizia, all the architecture books are in French, even though three of the five had originally been written in Italian and one in Latin. The Vignola, Palladio, and Scamozzi appear to have been a uniform set. They are octavos rather than the more familiar larger format for architecture books and were all published in 1764 by the same Parisian publisher. Jefferson was fluent in French from his years as ambassador in Paris. Here is the complete list:

Andrea Palladio, *Architecture de Palladio: contenant les cinq ordres d'architecture*, Paris: Jombert, 1764.

Vincenzo Scamozzi, *Oeuvres d'architecture de Vincent Scamozzi*, Paris: Jombert, 1764.

Vignola (Jacomo Barozzi da Vignola), *Regles des cinq ordres d'architecture par Jacques Barrozzio de Vignole*, Paris: Jombert, 1764.

Vitruvius, *Abregé des dix livres d'architecture de Vitruve*, Paris: Chez Jean Baptiste Coignard, 1674, an abridgment made by Claude Perrault of the only extant Roman treatise on architecture.

Roland Fréart, sieur de Chambray, *Parallele de l'architecture antique avec la moderne: suivant les dix principaux auteurs qui ont écret des cinq ordres*, Paris: Errard & de Chambray, 1766.

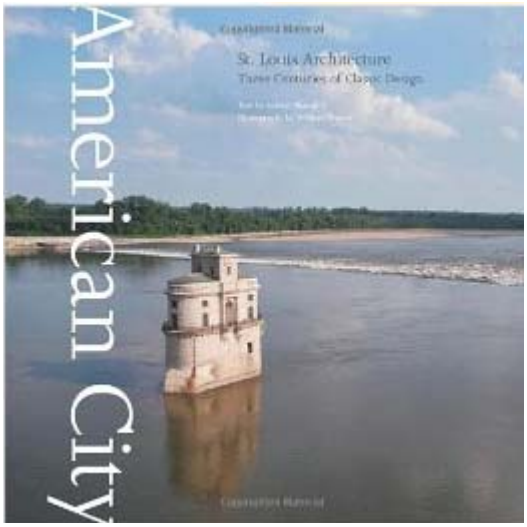
Francesco Milizia, *Principj di architettura civila*. Bassano: Remondini, 1813.

In addition to the architectural interest of these particular volumes, the whole collection has a broader value, as the Washington University historian David Konig explained: "Jefferson's mind had a seamless, all-encompassing quality, making the kind of connections typical of an Enlightenment thinker. What he read in one field he would apply to his thinking in another. Each of these volumes will be of interest to at least five different scholars in at least five different fields."

NEW BOOK ATTRACTS ATTENTION

by Esley Hamilton

A new book about St. Louis architecture is a rare event, and even rarer is a book about St. Louis architecture that is promoted by big institutions such as the Missouri Botanical Garden and draws widespread public interest. *American City: St. Louis Architecture: Three Centuries of Classic Design* has done that. Published in 2010 by an Australian company, The Images Publishing Group Pty Ltd, the book was released here this spring in a series of well-publicized events. Over 322,000 people said that they liked the seven striking photographs by William Zbaren what were posted with the review of the book by www.ArchDaily.com.



Robert Sharoff, the author, claims that the book is the first of its kind since John Albury Bryan's *Missouri's Contribution to American Architecture*, published in 1928. In some ways this is true. While the 1989 AIA book, *A Guide to the Architecture of St. Louis*, has good pictures of many more buildings, they are miniscule by comparison. The quality and size Zbaren's photos have to impress.

The subtitle of the new book obviously pays homage to George McCue's book, *The Building Art in St. Louis: Two Centuries*, published in three editions in 1964, 1967, and 1981. This book could not cover 300 years, since the 250th anniversary of the city's founding is still three years away. The subtitle instead refers to buildings put up in three centuries, the 19th, 20th and 21st, beginning with the Old Courthouse started in 1839 and ending with the Maya Lin's Ellen S. Clark Hope Plaza at BJC Hospital, dedicated last year.

For an enthusiast of local architecture, part of the interest of this book is seeing which fifty buildings Sharoff and Zbaren chose to include. Actually several choices might not count as buildings, including two of our three water towers, the Eads Bridge, the Milles Fountain, the Arch, and the aforementioned plaza. Within those parameters, many choices are familiar landmarks. Some seem to have made the list because they are by famous architects, and that generally means architects from out of town, including H. H. Richardson (the recently restored Isaac Lionberger House), Henry Ives Cobb (the Chemical Building), Philip Johnson (the old General American Life on Market), Edward Larabee Barnes (1010 Market, a building underappreciated by most St. Louisans), and Fumihiko Maki (both Steinberg and Kemper at Washington University). Others, however, are buildings a discerning tourist might admire without being prompted by a big name or even a guidebook. Certainly neither the Bee Hat, Tums, or 1891 Bell Telephone buildings, nor the Grant Clinic made it into the AIA Guide.

Local architects get more of their due in Sharoff's introduction, which gives attention to George I. Barnett, Link, Taylor, Ittner, Bradshaw, Study, Armstrong, and Obata in particular. Sharoff's text sometimes reflects dated sources, as for example in his mention of the delivery room at the Public Library, now known as the Great Hall. Other errors, however, are ones that most natives would have made, too, notably that the "renovation" of the Climatron in the 1980s "involved replacing the original Plexiglas panels with heat-tempered glass" instead of creating an entirely new dome inside but structurally unrelated to the old framework.

The book's reasonable price – $40 in contrast to $60 for the Detroit volume in this series – reflects the support of the three underwriters credited in the acknowledgements: Robert A. Wislow of U. S. Equities Realty, Robert G. Clark of Clayco, Inc., and Michael Neidorff of Centene. This probably explains the inclusion of the new Centene Plaza building, one of only three selections outside the St. Louis city limits, along with Lambert Terminal and the second intake tower at Chain of Rocks (why not also the first?).

The definitive book on St. Louis architecture remains to be written, but this book may inspire more people to look around St. Louis and appreciate what they see.

"MATERIAL LANDSCAPES" ON DISPLAY AT THE SHELDON

The new exhibit in the Bernoudy Gallery at the Sheldon is intended to encourage the interest in landscape architecture raised by recent initiatives in the St. Louis area, including the international design competition to reshape the area surrounding the Gateway Arch, and the creation of Citygarden and Old Post Office Plaza. The curator, Liane Hancock was until this summer at Washington University but has just become an assistant professor of architecture at Louisiana Tech in Ruston, Louisiana. She has selected eight projects that focus on the use of modern materials in landscape.

The Pentagon Memorial; photo by Melissa Kaseman

The design firms are all young but already recognized internationally. Along with their creativity, most share unconventional names akin to rock bands and rap performers: D.I.R.T. studio; dlandstudio; ESKYIU; KBAS; Legge Lewis Legge; PEG Office of Landscape + Architecture; Stoss Landscape Urbanism; and W-A-N-T-E-D. Although their designs may focus on the nature of materials, their photographs turn them into abstract patterns divorced from their materiality.

The most monumental of the projects on display is the Pentagon Memorial in Arlington, Virginia, designed by KBAS (Kaseman, Beckman Advanced Strategies) to commemorate the 184 lives lost on American Airlines Flight 77 on 9/11. The site is a field set back from the building on the trajectory of the flight, with 184 cantilevered seats arching above and revealing lighted pools of water.

W-A-N-T-E-D Landscape LLC was founded by Paula Maijerink, a native of the Netherlands who is now on the faculty of Harvard. She has used a dragon design donated by a tattoo artist to create a large image in asphalt and crushed glass in Brooklyn, New York.

Asphalt Tattoo in Brooklyn; photo by Paula Meijerink

Like Meijerink, Legge Lewis Legge has created a temporary landscape for the Jardins de Métis, located 220 miles northeast of Quebec City on the Métis River. The original 1926 garden there is now complemented by cutting-edge annual projects. Andrea Legge, Deborah Lewis, and Murray Legge, based in New York, created "Round UP (After Monet)." They raised mounds of dirt to an unnaturally steep slope through the use of modern strapping and packaging materials, then planted them with grasses that gradually grew to resemble Claude Monet's haystack paintings.

Round UP (After Monet); photo by Legge Lewis Legge

Stoss Landscape Urbanism, based in Boston, has been working on the extensive Fox River Redevelopment project in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Chris Reed, the founding principal of the firm, has planted ground cover in random patterns but adhering to an imaginary grid.

Fox River Redevelopment, Green Bay; photo by Chris Reed

Karen C'Closkey's firm PEG created a modern variation on the traditional Renaissance geometrical knot garden, called "Not Garden/Not Again." They used digital technologies to create a complex pattern and to cut into a fabric engineered to block weeds. The plants grow only in the open areas so don't need to be trimmed and shaped.

Not Garden/Not Again: PEG, office of landscape + architecture

You can enjoy a great collection of photos from the exhibition at Arch Daily, "the world's largest architecture website": http://www.archdaily.com/156389/material-landscapes-liane-hancock-2/

Events Calendar

Exhibit: Material Landscapes

June 17, 2011 to January 21, 2012
Sheldon Galleries, 3648 Washington Avenue

This exhibit showcases a selection of contemporary landscape architecture projects around the world by eight outstanding young landscape design firms. It was commissioned by the Sheldon and curated by Liane Hancock. *See the article in this newsletter*. The Sheldon Galleries are open free to the public Tuesdays noon to 8; Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays noon to 5, Saturdays 10 to 2, and an hour before Sheldon performances.

"An Afternoon at Greystone"

Greystone, near Pevely, Jefferson County
Sunday, September 18, 1 to 5 p.m.

This 75th Anniversary event for the Eugene Field House St. Louis Toy Museum presents a rare opportunity to visit the Gothic Revival house "Greystone," built in 1867. It has long been recognized as the finest residential example of the style in Missouri but is rarely accessible. The house stands on a bluff directly above the Mississippi River and is furnished with antiques appropriate to the house. This benefit event will include a picnic lunch catered by Something Elegant. Please call the museum at 314-421-4689 for details and tickets.

Greystone in 1940, a view from the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), photo by Lester Jones. The trim is now white.

2011 Missouri Preservation Conference

Friday, November 2 to Sunday, November 4
Joplin, Missouri

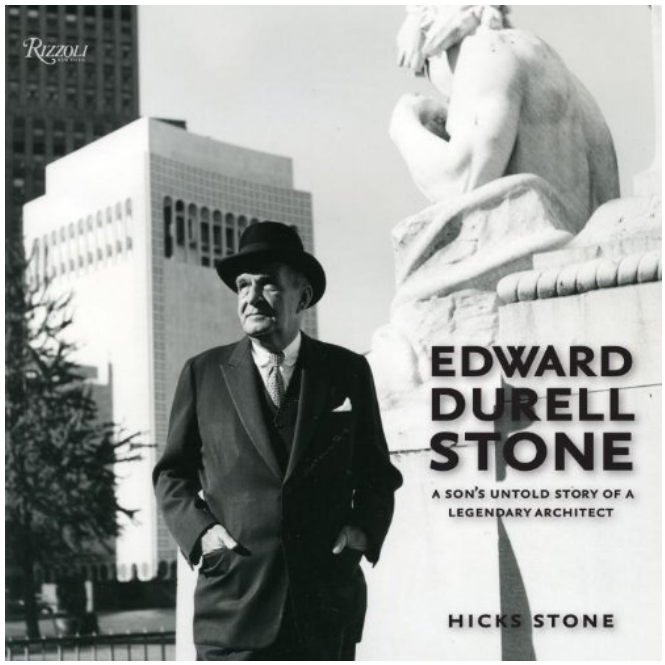
Contrary to popular belief, there is still a Joplin. The downtown and historic districts all survived the massive tornado that struck the city on May 22, and preservationists there are looking forward to presenting their treasures to the rest of the state.

DURELL

You may have noticed that both the SAH and Landmarks Association announcements of the talk on January 26 by Hicks Stone, the son of architect Edward Durell Stone, spelled his father's middle name two different ways. The correct spelling is "Durell."

Hicks explained that the name "Durell," spelled with a single "r", arose originally from a corruption of the surname, variously cited as Dural or Doral, of his great-great-great-great grandmother. "There is virtually no information about her," he wrote, "including what her first name was, except that she married Dr. Laughlin McLean, who was born in Scotland in 1740 and died in Nashville in 1805. The name did not reappear in her immediate descendants until father. Under the circumstances, the misspelling probably is understandable."

Hicks Stone's new book, *Edward Durell Stone: A Son's Untold Story of America's Legendary Architect*, will be released by Rizzoli International Publications in October. If you would like to receive an announcement, you can join the mailing list at



www.edwarddurellstone.com

Like his father, Hicks Stone is an architect, and you can see his firm's web site at www.stone-architecture.com.

News Letter

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