



# LANDMARKS LETTER



Can you guess the building this architectural detail is from? See *Elements* on page 2.

## The Tunstall-Douglass House; a Case Study in the Evolution of North St. Louis County

by Andrew Weil



*Tunstall-Douglass House before the Fire*



*Tunstall-Douglass House, 2014*

### EARLY HISTORY

THE HOME COMMONLY KNOWN as the Tunstall-Douglass House (constructed sometime prior to 1858) at 15310 Old Halls Ferry Road was located in the "Old Jamestown" vicinity of north St. Louis County. Unfortunately, the home was demolished in recent years after a catastrophic fire, but its story offers a fascinating glimpse into the early settlement history of St. Louis County in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The story of the land, the land owners, and the building itself provides insight into the way St. Louis County moved from a wilderness into the Colonial Period and gradually became subdivided and developed into the agricultural community that existed until post World War II suburban migrations changed its face once again.

The land on which the home was built was originally a portion of the property conveyed to David Brown (Survey 107) as a grant from the Spanish government in the late 18th century.<sup>1</sup> The grant was surveyed on November 15, 1797, certified on March 3,

1798 and confirmed by Spanish Lt. Governor Zenon Trudeau. The concession was for 400 arpents on "the waters of St. Ferdinand" (today known as Cold Water Creek).<sup>2</sup> In 1819, the heirs of David Brown (Daniel and Mary Brown) sold the property to four of the five sons of John Patterson (1760-1839), a nearby landowner who had also settled in the area on a Spanish land grant in the late 18th century. These families along with many of the other early settlers of St. Louis County of Anglo-American descent are examples of a pattern of migration of families from the states of what is now regarded as the Upper South into the Louisiana Territory at the end of the 18th century.

Beginning in the 1790s, the Spanish Colonial Government actively sought to attract settlers to the Louisiana Territory. The reasoning behind these efforts was that the settlers would band together to defend their communities in the event of an incursion by British interests from the north, even if they weren't particularly loyal to the Spanish Crown. While it was very difficult to attract

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Rosenkotter. *From Westphalia into the World*, (no location: Michael Rosenkotter, 2003), p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> *American State Papers 1809-1815, Public Lands Vol. 2.*, Washington D.C.: Gales & Seaton, 1834), p. 692.

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## Elements

### ARCHITECT H. WILLIAM KIRCHNER'S GRATIOT SCHOOL

THE FOLLOWING  
DETAIL IS of custom  
window reproductions  
based on surviving  
elements from W. H.  
Kirchner's Gratiot School.  
Several examples of  
the specialized sash  
design survived on both  
of Kirchner's surviving  
school buildings  
(Gratiot and Blair) and  
were reproduced as  
a component of the  
rehabilitation of Gratiot  
School by Garcia  
Properties.

For all the details,  
please see the article on  
page 10.



Window detail from  
Gratiot School



Gratiot School, located at  
1615 Hampton Avenue,  
in St. Louis City



Gale Huntington Yerges

## A Tribute to Gale Huntington Yerges

by Carolyn Hewes Toft  
Executive Director, 1976-2008

Gale Huntington Yerges (1928-2019) was the first female President of Landmarks Association; she may also have been the most important leader in the history of the organization. Having previously served as President of the Junior League of St. Louis and the Women's Association of the Missouri Historical Society, Gale brought an unflappable spirit, extensive executive experience and the transformative gift of virtually unlimited volunteer time. At the start of her tenure in the mid 1970s, she precipitated both the move to downtown's Railway Exchange Building and the gradual acquisition of a full-time professional staff. I was the initial member of that staff, but Gale spent at least as much time in her office as I did in mine. She was also a much better typist!

Buttressed by a Board Secretary from one the most prestigious law firms in town, Landmarks embarked on the first architectural survey of downtown, hired a specialist to prove that the Shrine of St. Joseph could be saved, intervened and collaborated with neighborhood groups from Hyde Park to Soulard and finessed a change from total clearance to rehab/reuse in the La Salle Park Urban Renewal project. The latter effort brought us a long-time friendship with Ralston Purina; our work in Laclede's Landing sparked Mesker Park, another corporate partner and, in 1977, the first in a series of publications.

The next publication, The St. Louis Old Post Office, coincided with the keenly awaited announcement of the winner of a national design competition to re-open the National Historic Landmark. Senator Tom Eagleton revealed the winner at a luncheon co-sponsored by Landmarks. If memory serves, he was introduced by President Gale Yerges who had been indispensable in making the august occasion at the Old Post Office appear effortless.

By 1981, when Gale's husband Howard ("Howsie") received notice of his transfer to Maryland, Landmarks was already embroiled in what would be a prolonged, ultimately futile, battle for the Gateway Mall. We will never know if Gale's presence might have made a difference. We do, however, know that she took everything she learned in St. Louis and changed the face of historic preservation in Maryland.



## Letter from the Director

Dear friends,

Is anybody else ready to put 2020 in the rearview mirror?

I hope you are all doing well and can't wait to see you when normal operations resume! I miss my friends!

It's been a tough year for everyone—families, businesses, organizations, and communities. Thankfully, we are St. Louis Strong. What does that mean? To me it means that we support each other in times of need and we never forget what St. Louis was, is, and can be.

Landmarks Association remains strong and fiercely committed to the mission of historic preservation in our community.

I know that you are tired of hearing requests for donations from non-profit organizations such as ours, but I ask you to consider a gift to Landmarks Association as resources allow. The timing doesn't matter; a gift doesn't need to sneak down the chimney at the end of the year. However, we do rely on your financial support and, like you, have been challenged over the course of the previous 10 months.

Please know that the Board of Directors and Staff of Landmarks Association is grateful for donations of any size and that we are committed to making sure that gifts are put to work furthering our mission to preserve, enhance, and promote the architectural heritage of the St. Louis region.

With gratitude and wishes for a happy, healthy, and prosperous new year.

Andrew B. Weil  
Executive Director



Dr. Richard E. Mueller

## My Joining Landmarks Association

by Dr. Richard E. Mueller

Being asked to reflect on my joining Landmarks Association at its beginning, at the age of seventeen, allows me to recall some wonderful memories.

I don't think there was ever a time when I was not interested in old historic buildings and neighborhoods. I grew up in North St. Louis in a middle class home with my parents a few blocks from Fairground Park and O'Fallon Park, and I attended Ashland Elementary School on North Newstead Avenue.

As a student I was aware that my grade school was a special place. I didn't know that it was an Ittner-designed building, but I appreciated characteristics that were typical of an Ittner school environment: the graceful terrace in the front of the building; the pretty tile work in the interior; the abundance of natural light that was allowed to enter the building.

My walks through my neighborhood revealed a wealth of old buildings, which opened me to an appreciation of the richness of my environment. I also loved going to my neighborhood parks and was fascinated to learn of their rich history.

My parents were not particularly interested in historic preservation, but they were more than willing to indulge the interests of their only child. Sometimes I would read in the newspaper about an old building that was about to be demolished, and my parents would take me in the family car to the structure so I could get a good look and take some snapshots with my Kodak. Dr. William Swecosky, a retired dentist, who followed these issues very attentively, regularly alerted the newspaper when he discovered that an important building was about to be demolished.

In 1959 I read in one of our newspapers that an organization devoted to local historic preservation was being formed. I called the phone number they provided and joined the Landmarks Association of St. Louis. I have been a proud and happy member for over sixty years.



colonists from Spain to the wilds of Louisiana, the Americans were easily enticed by promises of land.

As waves of settlers and speculators devoured lands in western areas of Kentucky and Virginia following the end of the American Revolution and subsequent cessation of Indian conflicts in those areas, many early pioneers looked ever westward to new opportunities. The Spanish spread the word that land was available in the Louisiana Territory and promised to relax the religious restrictions that had previously required settlers to profess the Catholic faith. As a result, settlers like the Pattersons and Browns along with more recognized names like the Boones entered the St. Louis region in the 1790s and settled on land provided to them by the Spanish.

After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the American government gained control of the Territory. Not wanting to alienate the residents, the American regime agreed to honor legitimate land claims that were derived from the Spanish and French Governments, but the legitimacy of the claims had to be proven. As such, commissions were created to evaluate and “adjust” land claims and create a legal (American) paper trail for property owners. The records of these commissions were dutifully recorded and can be found in the American State Papers collections, available at the Missouri History Museum Library among other places. This collection represents a fascinating window into life and land use in Territorial St. Louis and includes testimony about clearing land, building homes and fences, planting crops, and sometimes also includes detailed maps. On January 5, 1809, David Brown’s representatives went before such a commission in St. Louis and claimed his 400 arpents on Coldwater Creek, a claim that was confirmed.<sup>3</sup> Some of Brown’s neighbors including John Patterson also had their claims confirmed that day. Apparently encouraged by his experience, Brown returned to the Commission in October of 1811 ambitiously claiming an additional 600 arpents; this claim was rejected.<sup>4</sup>

According to deed research carried out by St. Louis County Parks’ historian Esley Hamilton as a component of an inventory of historic properties in 1988, the land grant where the Tunstall-Douglass House would later be built was sold in 1819 by the heirs of David Brown (Daniel and Mary Brown) to several of John Patterson’s sons.<sup>5</sup> It is unclear if they ever settled on the property. The Patterson brothers subdivided the original survey and a portion of the property (approximately 84 acres) where the house was situated was given to John Patterson III (locally known as John Patterson Jr., but genealogical research has determined that he was at least the third successive John Patterson in the family line).<sup>6</sup> John Patterson III was married to his stepsister Jane Jamison. Among their children was Margaret Rebecca Patterson (1832-1912) who would later reacquire the property with her husband Nicholas Blacklock Douglass.

John Patterson III died in 1833 leaving the property to his wife Jane.<sup>7</sup> He was buried in the Cold Water Cemetery (extant—listed in the National Register 5/19/04), which his father had established on a portion of the property north east of the home site in 1809.<sup>8</sup> Following Jane’s death in 1847, the land was further subdivided and in 1851 it passed to seven Patterson heirs including Joseph Patterson who appears to have separated the Cold Water Cemetery from the rest of the property at that time.<sup>9</sup>

In 1852 the property (minus the cemetery) was purchased by John Northern and Samuel Patterson, who then sold it to Isaac Sturgeon acting as trustee for one Elizabeth B. Tunstall; the sale price was \$5,100.<sup>10</sup>

## THE TUNSTALL PERIOD

The Tunstall family was recorded in Louisville, Kentucky in the 1840 census, but by 1850 they were living in St. Louis County in the vicinity of the farm. It appears that Elizabeth Tunstall and her husband Joseph were living in the household of Joseph’s father Thomas on land owned by Thomas’ nephew Warrick Tunstall. The census indicates that they appear to have arrived in Missouri by about 1843.

The Tunstall family, as recorded by the 1850 census, consisted of Thomas, who owned a steam mill and was originally from Virginia; Mary (38) born in Kentucky; Joseph R. (28) a merchant born in Kentucky; Elizabeth (22) born in Kentucky; Adelaide B. (5) born in Missouri; Ellen (16) born in Kentucky; Robert (15) born in Kentucky; Thomas J. (11) born in Kentucky; Mary L. (7) born in Missouri; and Frances (4) born in Missouri.

The 1850 slave schedule establishes the Tunstalls as owners of enslaved people, but does not record the people by name, as was unfortunately the typical practice. The fact that enslaved people were regarded as property and not human beings, and thus were not afforded the dignity of being recorded as such, remains a persistent, shameful, and frustrating obstacle to African American genealogy to this day.

According to the schedule, in 1850, Joseph and Elizabeth’s branch of the Tunstall family owned eleven enslaved people: eight males ranging from eight to 55, and three females aged 19, 20, and 40 respectively. Given the nature of agriculture in St. Louis County, this was actually a fairly large enslaved population for a farm in the area as cereal farming did not require the same amounts of labor as cash-crops like hemp and tobacco in Missouri’s “Little Dixie” region, or the massive cotton, rice, and sugar operations of the deep south.

Interestingly, Thomas, the head of the household, was not listed as owning any land. It appears that his family was living in a house on land that was still owned by Thomas’ nephew Warrick Tunstall, who was listed as owning \$20,000 worth of real estate.<sup>11</sup> Warrick was listed in the census as a farmer, but was really a lawyer by trade. He was a prominent man who had been among the founding members of the Law Library Association of St. Louis and who was, by the 1840s, moving between Washington D.C. and St. Louis on business matters. Indeed, he was recorded by, at that time, U.S. Congressman Abraham Lincoln as having paid him a visit in 1848.<sup>12</sup>

Warrick’s household consisted of himself (36), his wife Florinda (aka Florida, nee Boswell) (25) both born in Kentucky; Pryor (9) born in Missouri; John T. (7) born in Missouri; Mary J. (5) born in Missouri; Florinda (1) born in Missouri; Lizzie Boswell a relative of Florinda Sr. (4) born in Kentucky, John T. Lattamore (27) born in Virginia and working as an “S.B. Clerk”; Mary Lattamore (19) born in Virginia, Florinda Lattamore (1) born in Missouri; Jane Tunstall (58) born in Kentucky; and Louisa Tunstall (16) born in Kentucky.

Warrick held an additional eleven slaves; eight males between the ages of 55 and eight, and three females between the ages of 16 and 24.

In 1853, Isaac Sturgeon, acting as agent for twenty-five-year-old Elizabeth Tunstall, who had apparently received an inheritance from her father James Burks, purchased the property where the house stood for

<sup>3</sup> bid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 615

<sup>5</sup> Esley Hamilton, *Historic Inventory Form, St. Louis County Parks and Recreation, Tunstall-Douglass House*. Clayton, MO: St. Louis County Parks, 1988), N.P.

<sup>6</sup> O.J., *Patterson The Patterson Family* Unpublished genealogy in the collection of the Old Jamestown Association. 2011

<sup>7</sup> Hamilton, 1988: N.P.

<sup>8</sup> Jeanette Rowland Miller, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form: *Cold Water Cemetery, (Washington, D.C.: US Department of Interior/National Park Service, 2003)*, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Hamilton, 1988: N.P.

<sup>10</sup> US Census, 1850: Browning, Charles Henry, *Americans of Royal Descent* (Baltimore MD: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1969), p. 456-457.

<sup>11</sup> US Census, 1850: Browning, Charles Henry, *Americans of Royal Descent* (Baltimore MD: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1969), p. 456-457.

<sup>12</sup> Roy P Basler, *Collected works of Abraham Lincoln, Vol. 1. 1809-1865* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), p. 466.

\$5,100.<sup>13</sup> It seems that she and her husband Joseph were ready to move out of Thomas' household and strike out on their own.

Because building permits did not exist at the time, usually historians have to rely on circumstantial evidence from land sales to determine the origins of buildings from this time period. The change in acquisition price of land from one sale to the next is important because it can give an indication as to whether substantial improvements were made by a property owner. Frequently a dramatic increase in the sale price of a property over a relatively short period of time indicates a major improvement such as the construction of a house.

In the short five years the Tunstalls owned the property, its value increased by 36%, selling in 1858 for \$8,000.<sup>14</sup> Given the architecture of the building and other evidence, this increase is the reason for the attribution of a construction date range of c. 1855. In addition, Joseph and Elizabeth appear to have had the financial means/support network to construct the home; Elizabeth had her recent inheritance and Joseph's father (who owned a lucrative milling business) and his wealthy lawyer uncle lived nearby. In addition, there were 15 adult enslaved men recorded as belonging to the family who could have assisted with (free) construction labor. Finally, Joseph and Elizabeth had the motive to construct a house; they were a young married couple moving from a parent's household to their own land for the first time with one child (Adelaide) and more progeny on the way.

Despite the auspicious start, it seems that life for Joseph and Elizabeth Tunstall in Saint Louis County did not work out and in 1858 they sold their property to Nicholas Blacklock Douglass and his Wife Margaret Rebecca (Patterson) Douglass. Margaret was a daughter of John Patterson III who had owned the land previously. The Tunstalls moved back to Lexington, Kentucky where they were recorded by the census in 1860. Thomas M. Tunstall, Joseph's father remained in north St. Louis County at least through 1860. Warrick Tunstall moved to Texas with his family in 1854 where they remained for the rest of their lives.<sup>15</sup>

## THE DOUGLASS PERIOD

Nicholas Blacklock Douglass was born in Maryland around 1821 to Richard Land Douglass and Maria Blacklock. The family migrated to St. Louis County between 1821 and 1838. Nicholas served in the Army during the Mexican War and by 1850 had returned to Missouri where he married Margaret Rebecca Patterson.<sup>16</sup> The 1860 census recorded the family on the property consisting of Nicholas (39), Margaret (29), Richard (9), and twins Edwin and Mary (7). Interestingly, a brick molder from New York identified only as "Holmes" was also listed as living in the household. It is reasonable to assume that Holmes was working for the Douglass family; perhaps he was employed to finish the house started by the Tunstalls? Perhaps he was constructing outbuildings? Perhaps he was simply boarding with the family and working in the area? It would be convenient if there was some indication that the house underwent a major building episode during the Douglass occupation, but the value of the property actually fell substantially during their time on the land.

Nicholas was recorded as owning six enslaved people in 1860; the composition of the slave population suggests that the enslaved people were a family. The Douglass' slaves were a 30-year-old man, a 30-year-old woman, an eight-year-old girl and three boys aged two, four, and ten. It also recorded a "slave house" on the property indicating that some or all of the enslaved people lived outside of the primary residence.

Nicholas Douglass made his living as a farmer and the family was fairly prosperous. The 1860 census showed the value of Nicholas' real estate holdings at \$8,000 and his personal estate at \$600; by 1870, his holdings were valued at \$13,000 and his personal estate at \$1,800.



Figure 1: Joseph Brown Survey 1829

The 1870 census noted the presence of daughters Virena and Mary Douglass in the household. Both girls would grow up to become teachers at the old "Brown School" (extant) which was established c. 1859 nearby at 19710 Old Jamestown Road.<sup>17</sup> By 1880, the family employed three farm hands; Phillip Schulky (19) from Massachusetts, William Nidey (28) from Ohio and Coran Sales (35) from Virginia. They had also adopted an eight-year-old girl who was listed as E. Cunningham. Ms. Cunningham was born in Missouri to parents from Ireland.

## THE POST-CIVIL WAR SHIFT—GERMAN MIGRATION

Throughout the second half of the 19th century, the available censuses and atlases of the area demonstrate a shift in the ethnic composition of landowners as well as a trend toward smaller and smaller farms. As time moved on, large tracts of land with roots in Spanish land grants, were further subdivided and the population became increasingly composed of German immigrants who had been flooding into the St. Louis area since the 1830s.

Early atlases like those of Joseph Brown (1829) and Julius Hutawa (1847) show large tracts of land whose boundaries mostly date to the Colonial period (Figures 1 and 2). Even Hutawa's later atlas of 1862 is dominated by Colonial surveys and the land is usually owned by the families of the original Anglo-American and French claimants (Figure 3). But the census of 1860 begins to tell a different story as the names of German landowners like Henry Garten and John Hoffmeyer appear on farms surrounding the Douglass property. Many of the "old guard" slaveholding landowners in the area sided with the

<sup>13</sup> Hamilton, 1988: N.P.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Census 1860-1880.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Swanson, *Missouri Historical Research Record*, (Hazelwood, MO: Heritage Research Service, March 1968), p. 30.

<sup>17</sup> Gregory M. Franzwa, *History of Hazelwood School District*, (Hazelwood, MO: Board of Education Hazelwood School District, 1977), p. 9-10,



HISTORICAL ATLASES SHOWING THE PROPERTY THROUGH TIME



Figure 2: Hutawa Atlas 1847



Figure 4: Pitzman Atlas 1870



Figure 3: Hutawa Atlas 1862



Figure 5: Pitzman Atlas 1878



Herman Rosenkoetter



Marie Elise (Eliza) Clara Rosenkoetter

Confederacy during the Civil War, and left the area during or within a few decades after the conflict. By the 1870s the Germans were a dominant presence in "Old Jamestown" and in 1885, Nicholas Douglass sold the land that he and Margaret had owned for 27 years to Herman and Eliza (nee Schnittker) Rosenkoetter.

Rosenkoetter's parents immigrated to America from Germany as children in the 1840s. His father Henry and mother Philippine (nee Koch) were married in 1850 and by 1861 they had eleven children, which they raised on a 53 acre farm on New Jamestown Road.<sup>18</sup> In 1861, Henry joined the 4th Missouri Cavalry and fought for the Union for nearly three years before being discharged.<sup>19</sup> He apparently returned home to St. Louis County for a brief visit and then rejoined his former unit and was killed at Union City Tennessee in July of 1863. Philippine remarried, but died in childbirth in 1869 when her son oldest son Herman was eleven.<sup>20</sup> After the death of his father and mother, young Herman was handed responsibility for taking care of his ten siblings. He worked the family farm and attended school only sporadically.<sup>21</sup> In 1882 he married Eliza Schnittker and the couple purchased the former Tunstall-Douglass farm.

Rosenkoetter became a very prosperous farmer who specialized in fruit trees and by 1920 he owned three hundred acres of land. In addition to farming, he was also active in community service serving for fifteen years as the township road supervisor and for thirteen years on the local school board.<sup>22</sup> After raising nine children in the Tunstall-Douglass home, Herman died in 1933 and Eliza died in 1943. They are buried in Salem Evangelical Lutheran Cemetery.

After World War II, north St. Louis County began to transform from an agrarian landscape into vast tracts of single-family houses as social and economic conditions changed. This transformation was fueled by many factors including desegregation of city neighborhoods, aging urban housing stock, the rise of the automobile, federal housing policies, and the baby boom. Neighborhoods from the mid 20th century remain a defining feature of the landscape today.

The Tunstall-Douglass property serves as a case study that helps to understand the evolution of much of the metropolitan area. In the 18th century, the landscape was one of semi-wilderness interspersed with large land grants owned by elites of French and Spanish extraction (who mostly held the lands as investments) as well as American migrants who largely lived on their claims, making improvements with the aid of enslaved labor. After the Civil War, lands were further subdivided into smaller and more efficient farms dominated by a strong German immigrant presence. After World War II, the national housing shortage coupled with housing policy decisions, the rise of the automobile and the suburban ideal, and the proximity of the area to the employment center of St. Louis resulted in an almost wholesale conversion of north St. Louis County to the suburban environment we know today. Still some remnants of the 19th and even 18th century history remain in the form of remnant houses, street names, and places like Coldwater Cemetery at the edge of the old Tunstall-Douglass property remind us of the deep history of St. Louis.

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<sup>18</sup> Rosenkotter, 2003: 59

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Clayton Watchman Advocate, History of St. Louis County, Missouri. (Clayton, Missouri: Clayton Watchman Advocate, 1920), p. 101

<sup>22</sup> Rosenkotter, 2003: 59.





Image 1: 1908 postcard with H. F. Roach design, Emily Hood collection



Image 2: c1930 photograph of the LaSalle Building, SHSMO collection



Image 3: c1949 photograph of the LaSalle Building, Missouri Historical Society collection

## The LaSalle Building

by Katie Graebe

SITUATED AT THE NORTHWEST CORNER of N. Broadway and Olive (501 Olive), the LaSalle Building had a difficult path to development. In 1906, the LaSalle Investment Co. and promoter W. H. Miltenberger negotiated a 99-year lease on the ground where the building was to be built with property owner (and former Mayor) Rolla Wells. At the time, the five-story Wells Building occupied the site. The LaSalle was planned to be erected at the same time as the Third National Bank Building across the street (1906). Rental listings projected that the LaSalle would be complete and ready for occupancy by August 1, 1908.<sup>1</sup> Originally designed to be a 19-story office building by architect H. F. Roach at a cost of \$685,009, the LaSalle Investment Company secured a building permit on July 26, 1907. The *Post-Dispatch* noted that the building would be Gothic in design with "... a body color of chocolate brick trimmed with ivory white terra cotta." It would be served by three high speed elevators and boast an interior finished with Honduran mahogany and Italian marble wainscoting, etc.<sup>2</sup> Promoters of the building stated that the LaSalle would be "unique among St. Louis buildings. . ." and that because of its height and narrow profile, it would "... rise like a giant divested of his flesh, a head taller than all other downtown skyscrapers."<sup>3</sup>

Reality soon set in. There were issues with promoters, fundraising, and disagreements between the City Building Department, contractors and architects. Excavation for the deep foundations needed to support such a tall and narrow building started but the substrate was found to be quicksand. Eleven unanticipated piers needed to be sunk through the quicksand and clay upon which the foundation would eventually

rest.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the project shrunk to 16 stories to reduce costs and delays resulted in the site becoming derisively referred to as the "Hole in the Ground."<sup>5</sup> The project was abandoned until late 1908 after several disagreements, replacement of contractors Caldwell & Drake, and a lawsuit from Mayor Wells who went after the development company for owed rent. New plans were prepared by architect Isaac S. Taylor who reduced the scale of the building from 16 to 13 stories and removed Roach's planned Gothic ornamentation (Image 2). When work finally started again the City Building Commissioner stopped it because the Oakes building, on Broadway north of the LaSalle, had become unstable and required demolition.<sup>6</sup>

Despite all the setbacks, the building was completed and open for lease in 1909, but the trouble was not over. Mayor Wells sued the LaSalle Investment Company because it had defaulted on three lease payments. The company unsuccessfully fought the suit for years (unsuccessfully) and Wells, his son, and the family's Realty and Investment Company took over the building in 1916.<sup>7</sup>

In 1939 the building underwent an extensive remodeling that stripped it even further of any ornamental elements in an effort to create a more "streamlined look".

The image from 1907 (see page 9) shows the anticipated construction boom in downtown St. Louis, of which the LaSalle was a part. Many newspaper articles noted the prime location of buildings on Olive Street which became known as the "Olive Street Canyon" due to the tall buildings contiguously lining the street. By the first decade of the

<sup>1</sup> "Dwelling to Let: Stores for Retail Purposes and Offices", *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, Sun., Sept. 29, 1907, Newspapers.com

<sup>2</sup> "19 Stories for Broadway Corner" *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, Sun, Jun16, 1907, Newspapers.com

<sup>3</sup> "All the St. Louis Sky-scrappers & Big Buildings," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Sun, 13 Oct 1907, p60, Newspapers.com

<sup>4</sup> "Quicksand Row Ties up Work on Skyscraper", *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Sat, Oct 26, 1907, p2, Newspapers.com

<sup>5</sup> "La Salle 'Hole' Will No Longer Be An Eyesore", *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Sun, Apr 26, 1908, p30, Newspapers.com

<sup>6</sup> "Wreckers to Begin on Oakes Structure To-day", *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, Mon, Dec 28, 1908, p14, Newspapers.com

<sup>7</sup> "Sues to Keep Skyscraper", *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, Thu., Feb. 17, 1910, p7, Newspapers.com



20th century, Olive Street between 4th and 12th Streets was firmly established as the primary retail and office center in downtown St. Louis.<sup>8</sup> As modern buildings went up, the smaller two to four-story buildings went down, and empty lots were filled by at least 1910.

In 1908 the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* predicted that the intersection of Olive and Broadway would become the financial axis of the city with the largest banking establishments occupying the four corners.<sup>9</sup> The Bank of Commerce (replaced by the 19-story Boatman's Bank in 1914)<sup>10</sup>

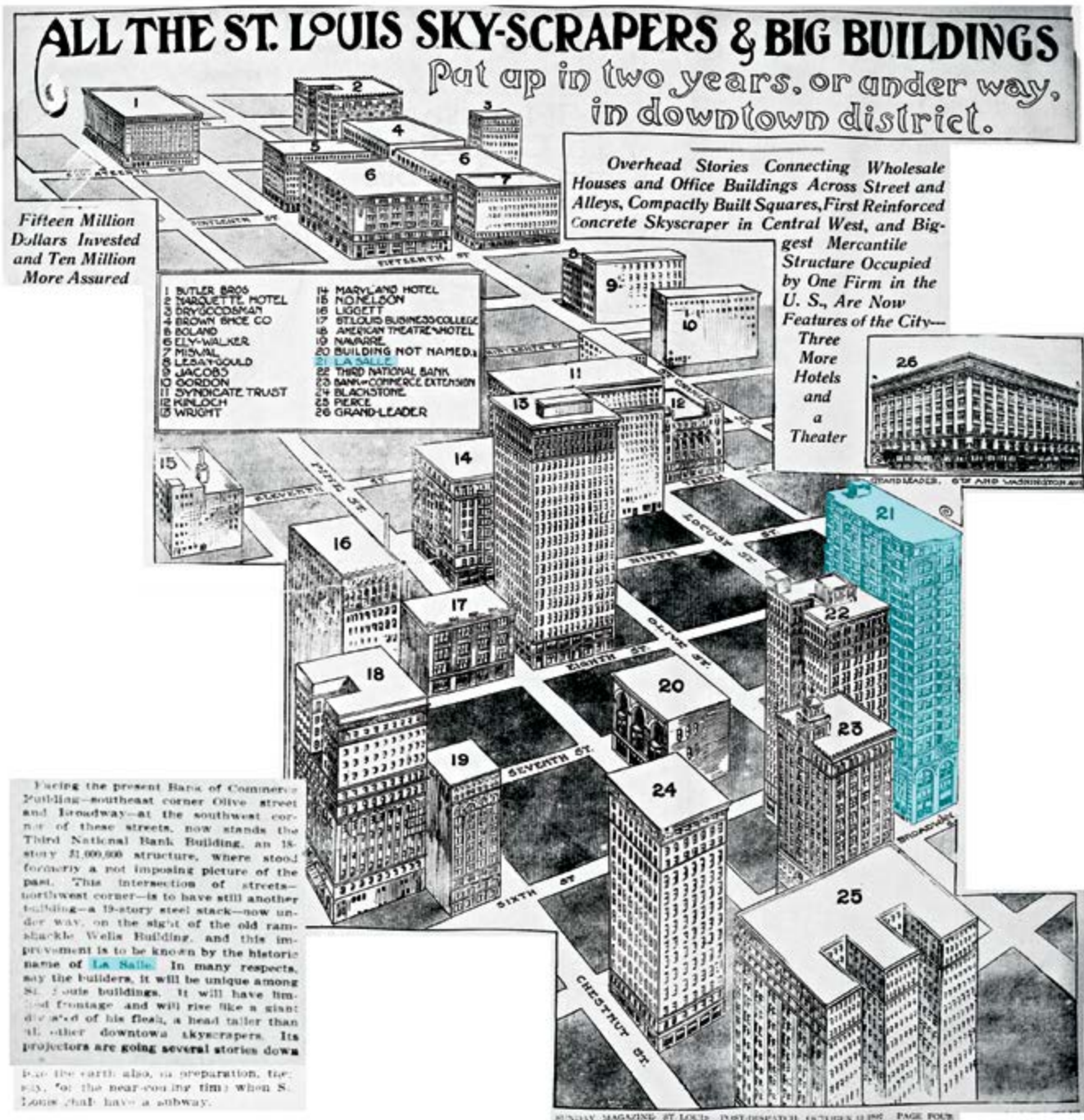
<sup>8</sup> Landmarks Association [Mary Stritz], "Olive Street Terra Cotta District", 1985, <https://www.mostateparks.com/sites/mostateparks/files/Olive%20St%20Terra%20Cotta%20Dist.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> "Realty Market Shows Decided Upward Trend", *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Sun, Apr 12, 1908, Page 34, Newspapers.com

<sup>10</sup> Now known as the Marquette Building

sat on the northeast corner; the 11-story National Bank of Commerce (1902) was on the southeast corner; and the 18-story+, Third National Bank building was at the southwest corner of Broadway and Olive, but the LaSalle spoiled the party. The building never got the anticipated "important banking concern," instead remaining primarily an office building with some floors and spaces that were persistently vacant. Through the years, the building housed several law firms such as that Hart & Hart as well as the Ranken School of Mechanical Trades (today's Ranken Technical College) and the LaSalle Candy Shop on the first floor.

After becoming vacant in the early 21st century, the LaSalle has recently undergone a 20 million dollar renovation by Vianova Development and is now open as a boutique hotel under the Hotel Indigo brand.



Article: "All the St. Louis Sky-scrappers & Big Buildings," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Sun, 13 Oct 1907, p 60, Newspapers.com



# A Country School in the City: Gratiot School and Architect H. William Kirchner

by Andrew Weil



Gratiot School, located at 1615 Hampton Avenue, in St. Louis City was constructed in 1882 to replace the older Cheltenham School.

GRATIOT SCHOOL, located at 1615 Hampton Avenue, in St. Louis City (photo above) was constructed in 1882 to replace the older Cheltenham School (photo on page 11), which was originally located approximately ¼ mile to the northwest on what is today the 1300 block of Graham Street.<sup>1</sup> In 2016, Landmarks Association successfully nominated the building to the National Register of Historic places in advance of redevelopment by Garcia Properties for apartments (which have been complete and fully leased for several years). The building was identified as architecturally significant because it is a rare example of early school house design in St. Louis and illustrates the manner in which the St. Louis Public School Board constructed small, but easily expandable schools in areas of the city that were still developing and poised for growth. The building is rare because the smaller schools that were constructed in what were then rural contexts were usually replaced, or in some cases completely absorbed into larger buildings as surrounding neighborhoods developed and population grew. As such, the early schools that remain and predate the building boom of architect William Ittner's tenure with the St. Louis Public Schools at the turn of the 20th century are interesting survivals.

Present research indicates that Gratiot is one of only two surviving schools (out of sixty that once existed) designed by master architect H. William Kirchner. While the school was expanded with wings designed

by Ittner and (presumably) Rockwell Milligan in 1899 and 1919 respectively, Kirchner's original school house forms the central block of the building and his design still defines the character of the composition. While Kirchner designed prominent buildings in St. Louis, Columbia, Missouri, Denver and New Mexico only four of his works (including Gratiot) are known to survive nationally.<sup>2</sup>

## CHARLES GRATIOT

The school is named for Charles Gratiot, the owner of the original land grant that encompassed the present school location. Born in Switzerland to parents of French extraction, Gratiot served in the Continental Army in the early years of the American Revolution and came to St. Louis in 1780.<sup>3</sup> Through his marriage to Victoria Chouteau, he secured a relationship with one of St. Louis' founding families whose influence in the politics and economy of the settlement cannot be overstated. It is therefore not surprising that Gratiot's 1785 petition for a large tract of land outside the town limits was granted and later confirmed by both the Spanish and later American authorities.<sup>4</sup> Gratiot's grant, known as the "Gratiot League Square" in the syntax of the time, encompassed an area three miles by three miles in size (otherwise known as a

<sup>1</sup> Julius Pitzman, *Pitzman's New Atlas of the City and County of St. Louis, Missouri*. (Philadelphia, PA.: A.B. Holcombe & Co., 1878), np.

<sup>2</sup> Literature search conducted by Andrew Weil, Landmarks Association.

<sup>3</sup> McCune Gill, *The St. Louis Story, Library of American Lives*. (St. Louis: Historical Record Publishers, 1952), p.266.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.



Gratiot School c. 1890, Prior to Expansion



Gratiot League Borders

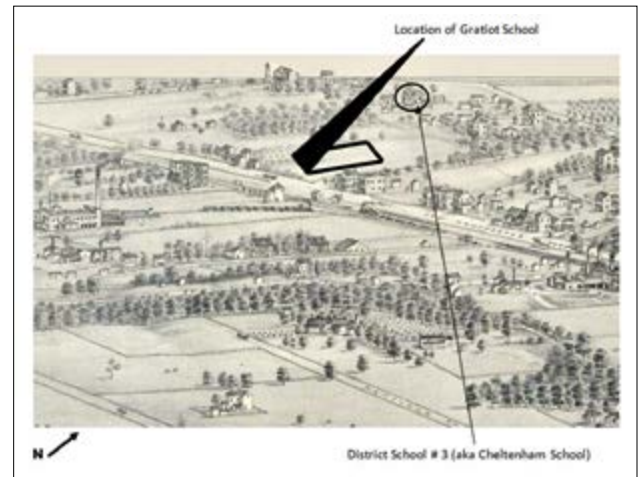
“square league”) (See map upper right). The modern boundaries of the grant, as defined by historian Bob Corbett based on translations of the original land grant documents from Spanish by McCune Gill (Vol. 1, 268-270) are:

- North line—approximately the center line of Forest Park on an east-west axis
- South Line—Pernod Avenue
- East Line—Kingshighway Boulevard
- West Line—McCausland Avenue<sup>5</sup>

### WILLIAM SUBLETTE AND CHELTENHAM

Another early landowner in the area was William Sublette who envisioned a spa retreat centered around the springs of sulphur-laden water that surfaced on the wooded hillsides along the River des Peres. The river, long ago contained by engineers for flood control purposes, once flowed through the valley to the south of the present school where industry and railroad tracks define the landscape of today. As early as the 1830s, Sublette constructed a home and guest cottages on his property in the vicinity of his springs. Around 1850, the resort was leased to William Wible, who renamed it “Cheltenham” after the famous spa by that name in Gloucestershire, England.<sup>6</sup> While the spa was only operated under the name Cheltenham briefly, the name became permanently associated with the area.

The Cheltenham area remained largely rural in character well into the latter third of the 19th century, although the arrival of the Pacific Rail Road (later the MO Pacific) in 1852 and the discovery nearby of commodities such as coal and high grade clays suitable for a wide range of brick and terra cotta products spurred industrial development (and the end of the spa). The arrival of the railroad initiated the first significant round of land subdivision in the area and greatly facilitated the establishment of industry. In 1853, subdivisions known as “Cheltenham” and “Cheltenham Place” were created, which further associated the vicinity with the name (though significant settlement remained decades away).



1875 Pictorial Map of St. Louis City

By 1855 two brick factories had opened in the area.<sup>7</sup>

The 1875 Pictorial St. Louis map provides a glimpse into the appearance of Cheltenham less than a decade before Gratiot School was built and at the time when the City was poised to annex the land. The map shows the school site as a vacant tract. Diagonally across Manchester Road and the Pacific Rail Road tracks to the southeast from the future school site was the Cheltenham Railway Station. Across Billon Avenue to the east, which today is the ramp leading from the Hampton viaduct to Manchester Avenue were the Gittens and Cheltenham hotels. Today these buildings appear to have been located essentially under the Hampton viaduct.

<sup>5</sup> Bob Corbett, *The Gratiot League Square*. Dogtown—(Webster University, n.d. Web. 06 Nov. 2015), <http://faculty.webster.edu/corbette/dogtown/history/gratiot.html>

<sup>6</sup> Gary Ross Mormino, *Immigrants on the Hill: Italian Americans in St. Louis, 1882-1982*. (Columbia, MO.: University of Missouri Press. 2002), p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> Norbury Wayman, *History St. Louis neighborhoods, Oakland*. (St. Louis, MO: St. Louis Community Development Agency, 1978), np.



To the southeast and southwest of the school site along the valley there were already major industrial operations including Cheltenham Fire Brick, St. Louis Smelting and Refining, Laclede Fire Brick, Pacific Fire Clay, and Mitchells Fire Brick. With industry expanding rapidly in the area, the residential population was primed for growth, yet residences remained few and far between. There was however a small rural school in operation. The map notes the presence of a two-room building to the northwest of the present school site identified simply as "District School Number 3."<sup>8</sup> The annexation of the Cheltenham area by St. Louis City in 1876 meant that as the population grew, the small rural school would be replaced with one designed according to standardized district specifications by a professional architect.

## ST. LOUIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Founded in the 1830s, the SLPS system grew rapidly throughout the mid 19th century, though its most dramatic expansion occurred as the century began to draw to a close. The 1870s were a particularly challenging decade as the School Board had to contend with mass immigration to the City and the effects of a large expansion of the geographical City limits. Between 1870 and 1879, the student population of the District doubled and the decade ended with 104 school houses (either purpose-built, or rooms leased as classrooms) with a capacity of 47,270 seats.<sup>9</sup>

Since 1870 (the earliest records identified) the SLPS had contracted with four different architects who each essentially remained on retainer for terms of between two and three years although they were allowed to take on work from outside clients. The year 1879 marked the third year of architect Thomas J. Furlong's association with the schools and in 1880, twenty seven year old H. W. Kirchner took over.<sup>10</sup> Among the pressing tasks assigned to Kirchner were a series of expansions of existing schools and the construction of new schools in areas of the City that had been annexed four years earlier; among them was Cheltenham/Gratiot.

In the Report of the Board of Public Schools for the period 1880-1881, President Frederick Newton Judson addressed the need for schools in areas such as Cheltenham, writing: "[T]he City has a widely-extended area, some portions thinly settled, and school facilities of rural or suburban character are required in a large section." He continued by noting that a site for a new school had recently been purchased in Cheltenham.<sup>11</sup> Bids for work on the new school at Cheltenham, which would be renamed Gratiot just prior to opening, were let on March 10, 1882.<sup>12</sup>

## EARLY SCHOOL DESIGN

Kirchner's design for Gratiot adhered to the School Board's requirement for an easily expanded, standardized floor plan. Faced with a situation in which schools were becoming overcrowded within a very few years of their construction, President Judson wrote that he was "in favor of erecting our school buildings so that additions can be made to them from time to time, as occasion might require."<sup>13</sup> Buildings were to have four rooms per floor connected by a central hall and would ideally be three stories tall although presumably due to low population density, a two story plan was approved for Gratiot.<sup>14</sup> The school also complied

with an earlier design mandate that called for separate interior stairways for boys and girls leading to separate playgrounds. This segregation of the sexes had been implemented years earlier because, per SLPS minutes, the Board had learned that such a policy reduced the need for corporal punishment.<sup>15</sup>

A historic image of Gratiot taken shortly after it was completed illustrates the two original entries, which were converted into window bays when the subsequent additions were built. It also shows the fence that divided the school yard into girls' and boys' play grounds. The playgrounds were situated on the south, east, and north sides of the school. Detached privies were located on the west side of the property, although they were filled and replaced with more modern indoor facilities by William Ittner during his 1899 renovation and expansion.<sup>16</sup>

Kirchner designed a handsome school house with a raised limestone basement, red brick walls, unusual windows with lights of various sizes arranged in a geometric pattern, and a façade that stepped back twice before arriving at a pair of stair halls with recessed entries on both the north and south ends of the eastern facade. The cornice line was ornamented with brick corbelling and the façade featured sill courses of smooth faced limestone and variably recessed brick.

Centered at the roofline were a terra cotta pediment and a terra cotta sign reading "Gratiot"; the false pyramidal roof itself was capped with a cupola that supported both a school bell and weather vane (plans show these were removed by Ittner in 1899). The aforementioned historic image shows a large agricultural field to the west of the building as well as a handful of frame farmhouses and the modest spire of St. James the Greater Catholic Church in the distance. At the time, the school would have been one of the largest and most formal institutional buildings in the Cheltenham area and provided a clear indication that the small settlement was now becoming part of the City of St. Louis.

While St. Louis has a wealth of beautiful school buildings, mostly designed by the world-renowned architect William B. Ittner, who served as the architect for the SLPS between 1897 and 1914, very few buildings that predate his tenure survive. The oldest of the "pre-Ittner" school houses is the original Lyon School, which dates to 1868 and is a contributing component of the National Historic Landmark campus of the Anheuser-Busch Brewery (NR and NHL 11/13/66). To date, the architect of this building remains unknown. The only other SLPS buildings that are older than Gratiot are three designed by architect Frederick Raeder: Des Peres School (NR 9/2/82, 1873), Carondelet School (NR 3/21/07, 1871), Irving School (a contributing resource in the Hyde Park Certified Local Historic District, 1871) and the Adams School which was presumably designed by Edmund Jungenfeld or Thomas Furlong in 1878. H.W. Kirchner's other extant school, Blair, was also constructed in 1882, the same year as Gratiot. As historian Ni Ni Harris notes, the early schools, or "school houses" of St. Louis were fairly utilitarian, but they were also dignified and intended to be monuments to learning.<sup>17</sup>

## H.W. KIRCHNER

Henry William Kirchner was born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1853 and came to St. Louis as a boy. He studied architecture in the office of George Ingram Barnett before entering practice on his own c. 1877. Kirchner served as architect for the St. Louis Public Schools for two, non-consecutive terms from 1880 until 1883 and again from 1885 until 1889.<sup>18</sup> Unlike in later years when SLPS architect or Superintendent of School Buildings was a full time position, Kirchner was free to accept

<sup>8</sup> Richard J. Compton and Camille N. Dry, *Pictorial St. Louis, the Great Metropolis of the Mississippi Valley*. (St. Louis: Compton & Company, 1876), plate 97.

<sup>9</sup> St. Louis Board of Public Schools, *Report of the Board of Public Schools, 1878-79*. (St. Louis, MO.: np., 1879), p.29.

<sup>10</sup> Sharon Dolan, *Historical Listing of SLPS Architects/Building Commissioners*. St. Louis Public Schools Records Center/Archives. ND, NP.

<sup>11</sup> St. Louis Board of Public Schools, *Report of the Board of Public Schools, 1880-81*. (St. Louis, MO.: np., 1881), p.20-21.

<sup>12</sup> "About Town," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*. 10 March 1882.

<sup>13</sup> Report of the Board of Public Schools, 1881: 22.

<sup>14</sup> Report of the Board of Public Schools, 1879: 259-26.0

<sup>15</sup> Carolyn Hewes Toft, "Education and Design: The St. Louis Public School Buildings." *Landmarks Letter*, March/April 1987, p.2.

<sup>16</sup> Gratiot School blueprints, on file SLPS Facilities Office.

<sup>17</sup> Ni Ni Harris, "Rare School Houses." *Carondelet Historical Society Newsletter*, Summer, 2014, p.1.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



Blair School, Landmarks Assoc. School Survey

outside work while working for the City.

The same year he designed Gratiot (1882), he designed a prominent building for the St. Louis Cotton Exchange (demolished 1940). In 1885, also while working for the SLPS, he designed major additions to Academic Hall at the University of Missouri, Columbia (along with Morris Frederick Bell), which would tragically burn just seven years later. Despite the loss of the building in 1892, the building's six Ionic Columns survive as a symbol of the University to this day.

In 1884, Kirchner was one of the six organizers of the St. Louis Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and served as its first secretary.<sup>19</sup> In 1889, Kirchner began a partnership with his brother A.H. Kirchner. Known as Kirchner & Kirchner, the firm was the recipient of many prominent commissions, primarily for commercial buildings in St. Louis and in western cities such as Denver, Las Vegas and Santa Fe. In St. Louis, their only known surviving commercial building is the Balmer & Weber Music House at 1004 Olive Street downtown. In Denver, Kirchner & Kirchner designed the Colorado Mining Stock Exchange Building.<sup>20</sup> Regarded by some as Denver's finest Richardsonian Romanesque building, the stock exchange was torn down in 1967.<sup>21</sup> The firm also designed courthouses for Santa Fe and Mora, New Mexico (demolished), as well as an insane asylum (demolished) and City Hall (extant) in Las Vegas, New Mexico (\*that's not a typo, there is a Las Vegas, NM!).<sup>22</sup>

While Kirchner has been credited with designing sixty schools in St. Louis during his career, it appears that with just one exception they have all been either demolished or so thoroughly incorporated into later expanded school designs as to no longer be recognizable as distinct Kirchner buildings today.<sup>23</sup> Aside from Gratiot, the former Blair School at 2707 Rauschenbach Avenue is the only remaining example of an H.W. Kirchner school.<sup>24</sup>

In contrast with Gratiot, which was originally constructed in a rapidly industrializing, but still largely rural area, Blair School was built in a prominent neighborhood adjacent to St. Louis Place Park. The higher population density and a much more urban context of Blair dictated a substantially larger building. The central block of Blair reflects Kirchner's interpretation of SLPS instructions that called for "twelve room

buildings, three stories in height, having four rooms to the floor, and each one placed in a corner so as to get light from four large windows."<sup>25</sup> This basic plan was intended to be easily expanded through the use of flanking wings, features that were eventually added to both Blair and Gratiot as the student population grew.

Despite the presence of flanking wings on Gratiot, the form, scale, and design of Kirchner's original school still remains the focus of the composition. The school is interesting because, while it was expanded, it wasn't expanded so drastically as to completely alter its character, as happened with many other schools.

It is interesting to note that William Ittner actually submitted two options for expanding Gratiot in 1899. The one that was accepted and implemented in two building episodes (1899 and 1919) involved the addition of wings that matched the original building in scale, materials, and the use of modest ornamentation. In contrast, his alternate proposal would have completely subsumed the original school by essentially constructing a larger building around the existing building.<sup>26</sup>

A good example of an early rural school that was utterly absorbed by an Ittner expansion in the late 1890s can be found in Arlington at 1617 Burd Avenue on the city's north west side. Originally constructed by architect Thomas Furlong in 1880 as a four-room, two-story building much like Gratiot, the original school is no longer visible at all and it is only thanks to detailed historical research that we have any knowledge of the building's evolution.

The fact that Gratiot never underwent such a drastic enlargement is probably due to the fact that the population grew so rapidly in the surrounding area in the early 20th century that the SLPS opted to construct entirely new schools to accommodate the student population rather than completely reorganize the existing facility. In 1917, Rockwell Milligan designed Dewey Elementary School at 6747 Clayton Road (eight tenths of a mile northwest of Gratiot) and in 1919 he designed Roe Elementary School at 1921 Prather Avenue (eight tenths of a mile west). That same year, Gratiot's south wing was added, but never again was the school building significantly changed although WPA workers were responsible for school yard improvements. These included the concrete retaining walls and probably the limestone slab paving on the sloped ground that surrounds the east and south portions of the school yard.<sup>27</sup> There is some question about the WPA attribution for the latter as they are not present in a 1930's era photograph.

Gratiot operated as an elementary school until 1976. From 1976-1993 it served as a high school for students with special needs, and then as the school archives before closure.<sup>28</sup>



Gratiot c. 1935

continued on pg. 16 >

<sup>19</sup> Carolyn Hewes Toft, Esley Hamilton, Mary Henderson Gass, *The Way We Came: A Century of the AIA in St. Louis*. (St. Louis, MO.: The Patrice Press, 1991), p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> Stevens, Walter Barlow, *St. Louis, the Fourth City, 1764-1909*. (St. Louis, MO.: S.J. Clarke & Co., 1911) Vol. 3, p. 966.

<sup>21</sup> Francis J. Pierson, *Getting to Know Denver, Five Fabulous Walking Tours*. (Denver, CO.: Charlotte Square Press. 2006), p. 73.

<sup>22</sup> Stevens, 1911: 966; Otero, Miguel Antonio, *Report of the Governor of New Mexico to the Secretary of Interior, 1887-1898*.

<sup>23</sup> Carolyn Hewes Toft, Esley Hamilton, Mary Henderson Gass, 1991: 9.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Board of Public Schools 1879: 259-260.

<sup>26</sup> SLPS Facilities Department Archives.

<sup>27</sup> Gratiot School Blueprints, on file SLPS Facilities Office.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with former SLPS archivist Sharon Dolan, St. Louis, Missouri, September 2015.

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*A Country School in the City: Gratiot School continued from page 13*



Gratiot Rehabbed

A winner of Landmarks’ Most Enhanced Award in 2018, Gratiot was carefully restored and converted for residential use by Garcia Properties (Gratiot rehabbed figure). Today the lights are on and the building is once again filled with people. This success story should serve as an important lesson for the St. Louis Public School system, which is currently pursuing yet another consolidation plan that will result in the closure and “moth-balling” of eleven school buildings. While the demographic realities facing the SLPS are undeniable, history has unfortunately shown us that mothballed schools quickly become vandalized and lose both historic/ architectural integrity, but also lose resale value (aka, public dollars that could be put back to use within the school system). A concerted effort should be made by the SLPS to match potential developers with any planned school closures so that this unfortunate cycle isn’t repeated. The architectural heritage of the SLPS is too important and too adaptable for new uses to allow it to languish for years before putting it on the market.