



LANDMARKS LETTER



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

The Plouder House and the Evolution of Saw Mill Technology in St. Louis

by Andrew Weil

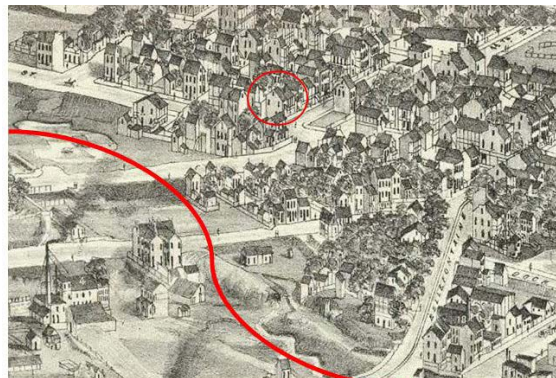


IN LATE OCTOBER OF 2017, I was contacted by a friend who works at Most Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Hyde Park about the home of an elderly parishioner that was going to be coming up for sale. This home had been a question mark in the minds of people who are interested in the oldest surviving houses in St. Louis for decades. Named the "Plouder House" after the family that has owned it for close to a century, the humble building at 3303 Klein Street is referenced in a letter from the 1970s in Landmarks' files. Written by a J. Broderick and Dr. Howard Miller of

the UMSL History Department, the letter explains that the two men had been "surveying the north side for a course Dr. Miller [was] teaching on the earliest buildings in St. Louis" with special emphasis on the area surrounding St. Liborius and Most Holy Trinity Parishes. The Plouder house attracted their attention because of its unusual form. Although they had been enclosed, the home clearly had full-length gallery porches running parallel to its side-gable roof. Combined with a raised basement, these features suggested possible French Colonial influence. In addition, its frame construction and modest size pointed to an early date of construction compared with the surrounding predominantly brick neighborhood.

The men examined the property and interviewed the owner, Mrs. Otilia "Tillie" Plouder who said that she had moved into the home with her husband around 1951, and that it had previously been her father's home. The family story was that the building was a "settler's cabin" which had been built originally because of its proximity to a waterway they referred to as "Goose Creek." Evidence of an early construction date was recorded by the historians in the basement where floor joists of "red cypress" bearing the marks of a "straight saw" were observed.

Prior to visiting the site, I attempted to verify some aspects of the story that had been passed down by the Plouder family. While I was not able to locate a historical reference to "Goose Creek" it appears likely that this moniker may have been a colloquial name for a well documented nearby waterway known officially as "Rocky Branch Creek." An article that appeared in the national publication *Engineering News* in 1914 (vol. 71. No. 16) entitled "The Reconstruction and Relief of the Rocky Branch Sewer, St. Louis MO" confirmed that the natural creek bed was once located just south of the home. It also indicated that Rocky Branch had ceased to be a natural water course around 1860 when the City began to enclose and channelize it as the principal sewer system for this rapidly developing area of north St. Louis. In these early years, the Rocky Branch Sewer was second in size and importance only to the massive Mill Creek trunk sewer which drained downtown and the near south side through the valley of what the French referred to as the "Petite Riviere."



Plouder House and Route of "Rocky Branch Creek" 1875

continued on pgs. 6 & 7 >

IN THIS ISSUE...

- 2 **Elements**
- 2 **A Call for Downtown Walking Tour Volunteers**
- 3 **Notorious St. Louis: Pretty Boy Floyd**
- 4-5 **Architect Spotlight: Rockwell Milligan**
- 6-7 **Plouder House Continued**
- 10 **Annual Appeal Reminder**

INSERT:

- 8 **Landmarks Membership**
- 9 **Thank You**

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Elements

2801 MAGNOLIA

by Katie Graebe and Andrew Weil

THIS DETAIL IS PART OF THE CAST IRON storefront of the building at 2801-03 Magnolia. While the building had been essentially abandoned since the late 1970s, it has now been beautifully rehabilitated by Messiah Lutheran Church in partnership with RISE Community Development and host of community partners. Completed this past fall as a component of a larger, scattered site redevelopment called "East Fox Homes," the rehabilitation was the recipient of Landmarks' first 0% revolving loan! We couldn't be more thrilled to have played a part in putting this important building back into productive use.

Constructed in March of 1890 for \$10,000, the building was unusual for the time because the permit was issued to a woman. Mrs. J. Krechter (nee Thecla Albers) owned the property for several decades before passing it to her daughters Mary and Philomena. It remained in family control through at least the 1950s. During this period, a typical range of neighborhood business tenants occupied the first floor storefronts including grocers, a bakery and confectionary. Today the ground floor commercial space is being used as a common space for the first residents to move back into the building in more than 40 years.

A Call for Downtown St. Louis Walking Tour Volunteers

WE ARE PROUD TO ANNOUNCE that participation in Landmarks' Downtown Architectural Walking Tour programs grew by over 80% this year! Clearly these tours (which run every Saturday from April–October) and the wonderful volunteers who staff them are doing something right. As we all know, there is strong interest in the history and architecture of our community, and we are proud that our walking tours help residents and visitors alike to connect with the heritage of our city. Of course, in order to ensure we don't become victims of our own success, we need to continue to expand the program's volunteer base.

Not only do we need more tour leaders, we would welcome assistance from graphic artists, marketing professional, researchers, writers, and people who can provide technological support. It's certainly an exciting time to join this effort, so don't delay. In order to be ready for the start of tours in the spring, we want to hear from you today. To volunteer, please call our volunteer coordinator Rick Rosen at (314) 421-6474, or email him at: lmvolcoordinator@gmail.com



2801 Magnolia Before and After Rehabilitation.



Most of our wonderful downtown walking tour guides!

Notorious St. Louis: Pretty Boy Floyd

by Andrew Weil



ONE OF THE GREAT THINGS ABOUT living in a city as old and interesting as St. Louis is the incredible capacity of the built environment to reveal layers of remarkable history. Every day we are surrounded by stories. The trick is in coaxing these tales back into the light of the present from their hiding places in the attics and alleys of time.

For the following narrative, I owe a debt of gratitude to Stephen Werner who revealed the core of it to me in a short essay that he sent one afternoon last summer.

Thanks to Stephen, I learned that an unremarkable building at the northwest corner of 39th and Vista has a link to one of history's most notorious criminals. Now occupied by the C. L. Smith Packaging Company, the building is a remnant of the once bustling industrial district that thrived in the 19th and early 20th century in the Botanical Heights neighborhood. Constructed in stages between 1912 and 1932, the complex served as a corporate office, warehouse, distribution, and bakery facility that supported St. Louis' network of Kroger Grocery Stores.

The story begins in the summer of 1925 when Fred Hildebrand and Charles Floyd, two young friends from Sallisaw, Oklahoma, came to St. Louis, ostensibly for a camping trip along the Meramec River. Already known in their home town by the nicknames "The Sheik" and "Pretty Boy," the two were budding criminals who planned to use the overgrown banks of the river as a hideout while preying on the people and businesses of St. Louis.

While camped along the Meramec, the men purchased supplies at the Meramec Highlands General Store, and became friendly with its proprietor Joseph Hlavaty. When they grew tired of roughing it, they rented rooms from Hlavaty above the store (now a home at 1015 Barberry Lane in Kirkwood). The two young men, just 19 and 22 respectively, also befriended Hlavaty's 16 year old brother.

Floyd, Hildebrand, and the younger Hlavaty soon got into trouble. After being accused of a "statutory offense" related to two sisters, the men found themselves needing to pay for a legal defense (the right to a free public defender had yet to be established by the Supreme Court). Desperate to keep his little brother out of prison, Joseph Hlavaty agreed to participate in a scheme proposed by the more experienced young criminals. The men had already enjoyed success that summer preying upon individual Kroger stores, which operated on a cash-only basis; now Hildebrand and Floyd put forward a bolder plan to rob the payroll from the main Kroger office. The Hlavatys would earn their share by acting as lookout and getaway driver respectively.

On the afternoon of September 11, Joseph Hlavaty drove the crew into St. Louis where they stole a Cadillac to be used in the robbery. In this car, they continued to the Kroger complex at 39th and Vista arriving around 1:00 in the afternoon. Floyd and Hildebrand burst into the building and rushed to the second floor office where they secured nearly \$12,000 in cash wrapped in paper bundles bearing the stamp of the Tower Grove Bank (*this building at 3155 S. Grand today is the King and I restaurant). The group then sped back toward the County, with a Kroger delivery driver who had witnessed the robbery in hot pursuit. At some point the Kroger driver picked up a policeman and the two continued to tail the outlaws, who split up near the intersection of Scanlan and Watson Road. There one of the robbers jumped into a parked Ford and took off. The pursuers then changed their focus to that car and lost sight of the stolen Cadillac. At the intersection of Piccadilly and Manhattan, the Cadillac suddenly reappeared and opened fire on Kroger truck, ending the chase.



Former Kroger complex today.



Former Meramec Highlands General Store today.

Back at the Meramec Highlands General Store, the money was divided. At a time when the average industrial worker made less than \$1,500 a year, the robbers had made a huge score. Floyd and Hildebrand headed back to Oklahoma and the Hlavatys stashed their share in a suitcase beneath a rock in some nearby woods.

At this point, Floyd and Hildebrand had far more money than sense. When they had left for St. Louis that summer, they did so by jumping a freight train. People in their rural hometown of Sallisaw had noticed. In 1925, the small community on the border between Arkansas and Oklahoma had less than 2,500 residents. It was the kind of place where both money and secrets were in short supply. When the young men returned weeks later, each behind the wheel of a brand new Studebaker Six, eyebrows raised. Not surprisingly, the sudden improvement in their circumstances aroused the suspicion of the local sheriff who brought them in for questioning. Both were searched and a roll containing \$1,000, still neatly wrapped by the Tower Grove Bank, was found on Hildebrand. The money was traced back to the Kroger robbery at which point Hildebrand, clearly the brains of the outfit, started bragging.

Hildebrand's voluble admissions brought into focus a trip to St. Louis that had involved much more than simply camping on the Meramec. He boasted of responsibility for the robberies of six other Kroger stores in the city in addition to an incident in which he stole the payroll of Killark Electric Company and pistol whipped its president Joseph Desloge. While he claimed that Floyd had been involved in a majority of these crimes, his partner was appropriately circumspect and denied the charges. In the end, Floyd, Hildebrand, and the elder Hlavaty were sentenced to terms in the state penitentiary in Jefferson City.

Charles, "Pretty Boy" Floyd was released in the spring of 1929. If anything, his time in prison cemented his identity as a hardened criminal. Over the course of the next five years, his exploits as a prolific, charismatic, and murderous bank robber made him a household name nationwide. Following the death of John Dillinger, Floyd rose to the rank of "public enemy #1" on the FBI's most wanted list. He was killed in a shootout with law enforcement near East Liverpool Ohio in 1934.

While this sordid story is far from pleasant, it's the accretion of such tales that results in a city's unique identity. Such an identity is a valuable thing. It cannot be bought; it must be earned. It can be squandered. I believe that this narrative is far more interesting because the buildings and places that anchor it still exist. It's an achievement that this story can even be illustrated as so many tales have lost that opportunity forever. Preservation isn't about creating a unique community; it's about retaining the one we've already earned.

Architect Spotlight: Rockwell Milligan

by Andrew Weil

ARCHITECT ROCKWELL MENOTTI

MILLIGAN was born January 10, 1868 in Centreville, Ontario Canada to Henry G. Milligan and Harriet Clancy¹. He started high school in Napanee, Ontario before relocating to Wichita Kansas, where he graduated in 1885. Milligan received his higher education at Lewis Academy and Garfield University in Wichita, which he attended until 1888². He then moved to Denver, Colorado and worked in the office of an unknown architect before relocating to St. Louis in 1890 where he joined the firm of prominent architect Isaac Taylor.³ Milligan's admission to Taylor's firm coincided with that of designer Oscar Enders, which, according to architectural historian David Simmons, inaugurated one of the most important periods of Taylor's career. During the 1890s, Taylor rose to the height of prominence as a designer of office buildings, clubs, hotels, and mercantile buildings around St. Louis. His achievements during this decade laid the ground work that resulted in his appointment as Chairman of the Architectural Commission and Director of Works for the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1901.⁴



Rockwell M. Milligan

After working under Taylor for three years, Milligan joined the firm of George R. Mann, with whom Harvey Ellis was presently employed. At the time, the firm was overseeing the construction of St. Louis' City Hall.⁵ Mann's firm designed at least seventeen buildings currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places primarily in Missouri and Arkansas including the Arkansas State Capitol.⁶ During Milligan's time in Mann's office in St. Louis, it seems that he played a role in the design of the magnificent St. Vincent's Hospital in Normandy. While this design is presently attributed to Mann and Ellis due to the presence of their

names on a published drawing of the building in an unfinished form, Milligan's biography in the 1906 Book of Missourians lists St. Vincent's among his works. It may very well be that Milligan is responsible for the changes to the design that took place between the initial concept and the final product. Whatever the case, this project foreshadowed an important component of Milligan's later career during which he came to be known for prominent hospital commissions.⁷

In 1897, William B. Ittner was hired as Commissioner of the St. Louis Public Schools and Milligan joined Ittner's staff as his staff as Chief Draftsman.⁸ He continued in this position under Ittner for approximately two years before striking out on his own with a practice specializing in hospital and institutional design. He worked independently between 1899 and 1905, when he entered a partnership with fellow architect Charles H. Wray.⁹ Between 1899 and the dissolution of Milligan's partnership with Wray in 1914, he is credited with having designed between 35 and 40 hospitals nationwide including the Frisco Railroad (Bridgeport, CT.) the Hotel Dieu (El Paso, TX), St. Vincent's Infirmary (Sherman, TX) St. Leo's Hospital (Greensboro, NC.) St. Margaret's Hospital (Montgomery, AL.) Providence Sanitarium (Waco TX.) and the Cotton Belt Route Hospital (Texarkana, AR).¹⁰ None of these named buildings survive.

Milligan & Wray enjoyed some prominent, non-hospital local patronage as well including a residential commission at 37 Portland Place for David Coalter Gamble (extant), the "Wall Building" at the northwest corner of Vandeventer and Olive (demolished)¹¹ and a downtown building for the St. Louis Transfer Company (demolished).

Following the departure of William Ittner from the SLPS in 1914, Milligan was elected as his replacement.¹² That same year he married Ms. Maude Marquardt. In taking over for Ittner, Milligan was charged with continuing a seventeen year tradition of exemplary school design, which had garnered a national reputation for St. Louis' prosperous and growing district. For the next fifteen years with the SLPS, Milligan



Cotton Belt RR Hospital, Texarkana, AR: Demolished



Provident Sanitarium, Waco, TX: Demolished.

¹M. L. Van Nada (ed.). Book of Missourians. T. J. Steele & Co. St. Louis, 1906.

²Walter B. Stevens, "Centennial History of Missouri, The Center State 1821-1921." S. J. Clarke & Co. St. Louis. 1921, p. 186.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p.4.

⁵Stevens, 1921, p. 186.

⁶Riddle, Anthony S. NRHP Nomination. Arkansas State Capitol Building. 1974.

⁷Stevens, 1921, p. 186.

⁸Ibid.

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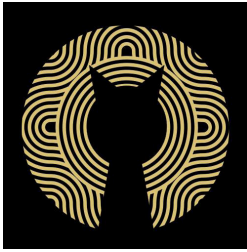
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designed twenty six public schools, twenty four of which survive. These schools perpetuated Ittner's ideas about ideal forms, best practices for health and safety, the need to maximize access to natural light, and the need to design attractive buildings that would inspire students. While Milligan's work continued in the Ittner tradition, like his predecessor he continued to try to refine ideal school design by experimenting with massing, fenestration and the use of new technologies, like telephone systems and ozone air purification, as they became available.

To all but the most practiced eyes, Milligan's work for the SLPS is virtually indistinguishable from that of his esteemed predecessor. Indeed, the combined thirty two years of the Ittner-Milligan dynasty represents a belle époque of St. Louis City school design. During this period the Board of Education generously allowed the architects to design beautiful "palaces of learning" which today represent a majority of the city's characteristic educational architecture.

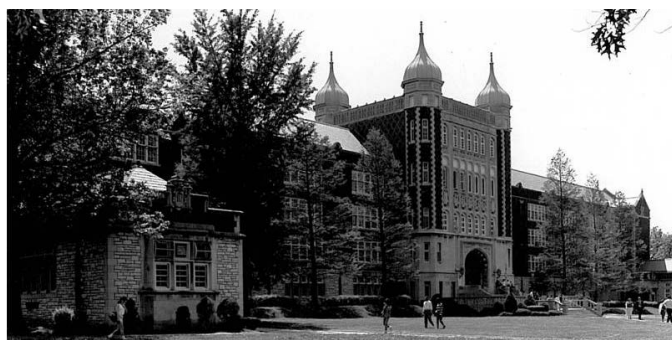
Milligan's career was cut short by a sudden "paralytic stroke" on September 30, 1929. He left behind his second wife Lelah, and children from his previous marriage sons Trevor and Ralford, and daughters Janice and Audrey. He was buried at Bellefontaine Cemetery.

Milligan was stricken at his home at 4156 Flora Boulevard (extant).¹³ While building permits have been lost for this section of Flora, Milligan's home certainly looks like one of the architect's school designs. In fact, it looks like it could have been constructed of leftover materials from school production. Like most of his schools, the home is constructed of red brick laid in garden wall bond with fire-flashed headers. The entry has a surround of smooth, machine dressed limestone above which an oriel window projects from the second floor. A gable centered on the attic level is adorned with half timbering and brick laid in a herringbone pattern and all the windows on the primary façade are costly leaded glass.

While Milligan is not as well known as a school architect as William Ittner, his work represents a significant contribution to the architectural character of St. Louis.



Former St. Vincent's Asylum, Normandy, MO.



Milligan's Roosevelt High School, St. Louis, MO.



St. Vincent's Sanitarium, Sherman, TX: Demolished.



St. Margaret's Hospital, Montgomery, AL: Demolished.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰M.L. Van Nada, 1906.

¹¹Architects Files, Milligan & Wray, On file, Landmarks Association of St. Louis, 911 Washington Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63101

¹²Stevens, 1921 p. 186.

¹³"R.M. Milligan, School Board Architect Dies" *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, October 1, 1929.

Further evidence confirming the proximity of the home to the creek can be found in the Pictorial St. Louis map, which shows the remains of a drainage running on a northwest-southeast orientation to the south of the home. This drainage corresponds to the location and orientation of present day Branch Street, which, according to William and Marcella Magnan's book *The Streets of St. Louis*, was named because its eastern portion had followed the line of Rocky Branch Creek.

In mid October, Landmarks' staff in addition to Al O'Bright (Chief Historic Architect for the National Park Service, Midwest Region), architectural historian MiMi Stirtz, and Danny Gonzales (St. Louis County Parks Historian) were granted access to the home. In visiting, we hoped that further investigation of the manner in which it was constructed would tell us more about its age. In particular we were interested in the reference to the "straight saw" marks that were noticed on the unusual floor joists. Such indications of building technologies are often the key to unlocking the earliest construction dates.

It turned out that the reference to floor joists in the Plouder House bearing the marks of a "straight saw" referred to a straight-bladed mechanical reciprocating saw, rather than a hand-operated "pit saw." Machine made "cut nails" dating to the middle of the 19th century were the only hardware observed and while a historical photograph did confirm the presence of gallery porches, it also showed that the home was originally built at grade, not on a raised basement. It turned out that Klein and Buchanan Streets had been cut down to a level several feet below the original ground surface (a common occurrence in St. Louis) sometime prior to 1875. Oral history revealed that the Plouder family themselves had excavated the earth beneath and around the building in the 1940s before enclosing the newly created basement with a cinderblock wall.

This information combined with measured lumber dimensions led us to conclude that the home was likely built between 1825 and 1850. Not as old as we'd hoped, but interesting nonetheless.

The presence of floor joists bearing what are today fairly rare (in St. Louis) marks from a straight saw provides an opportunity to examine the evolution of lumber milling technologies in the city. In the early days of our community there were two straight-bladed saw technologies that existed basically simultaneously; mechanical reciprocating saws and hand-powered pit saws.

The two technologies can be identified and differentiated by striations known as "kerf marks" that are left on the wood by the blade during the cutting process. Hand operated, two-man pit saws (aka "whip saws") leave a distinctive sweeping "V" shaped kerf caused by the alternate downward cutting stroke and the subsequent upward retraction of the blade. An example of such marks can be found in the U.S. Grant National Historic Site Whitehaven, which was constructed in 1818. Cuts made by such a saw, and the lumber they create, are typically less uniform than their mechanical counterparts due to the human variance in the force and trajectory of each stroke.

In contrast, mechanical reciprocating saws were governed by gears which operated the blade and advanced the log. This mechanical action



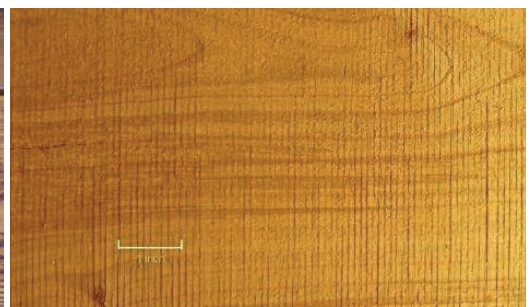
"Pit" saw.

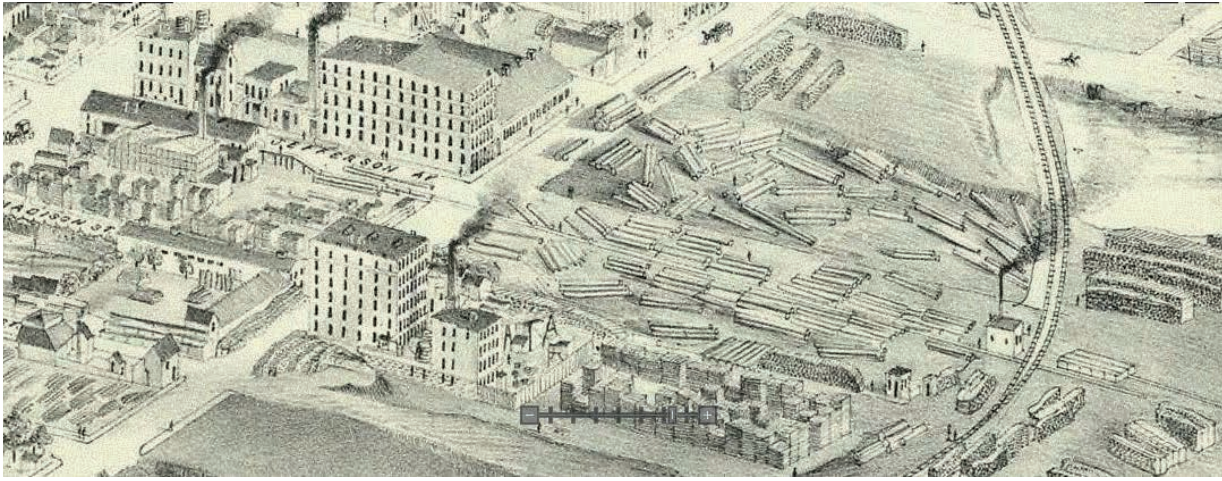
generated very regular rows of evenly spaced kerfs and lumber of more uniform dimensions. While it is convenient to think of the use of these two technologies as a linear progression from older (man-powered) to newer (mechanical power), the truth is somewhat more complicated. Certainly the earliest sawn lumber in St. Louis would have been cut by man-powered saws, and the use of such technology for processing local materials for a home in a rural area would have been a very accessible option, but mechanical saw mill technology was present in the city nearly from the beginning.

A reference provided by Bob Moore, Chief Historian at the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial provides what may be the first reference to a saw mill in St. Louis. The reference is to a "Constable Sale" that took place in 1774, in which one Charles Bizet (aka Biset) purchased the following in exchange for "92 livres in deer or beaver skins...a saw-mill, working two saws...with the utensils therein; a house or frame Cabin in bad order and the ground belonging to the said mill, consisting of four arpents of land in front, by its depth to the shores of the Mississippi; the whole situated on the 'River Maline,' two leagues from this post..." [St. Louis Recorded Archives, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 121-122. No. 148]. The "River Maline" is a reference to Maline Creek, which drains a portion of northeastern St. Louis City and County and empties into the Mississippi near the intersection of Hall Street and Riverview Boulevard. This reference provides evidence that water powered mechanical saws were already in operation less than ten years after the founding of the city.

Another saw milling technology that was important in the early days of St. Louis and that existed simultaneously with hand saws and water powered saws was the animal-powered mill. Like their water-powered counterparts, these also used straight, reciprocating blades. While many were installed in permanent facilities, the machinery was not

Kerf marks from left to right: a pit saw, circular saw, band saw, mechanical reciprocating saw





Boeckler Sawmill and Conrad & Logeman's Furniture Factory, North Riverfront, 1875.

reliant on a water source for power making it possible for a temporary mill to be transported directly to a woodlot or construction site. Such mills were essentially windlasses in which horses or oxen were harnessed to horizontal "horse shafts," which then connected to a central vertical driveshaft. Sylvestre Labbadie is credited by multiple sources as having an early, if not the earliest oxen powered saw mill in St. Louis, which he established on the north riverfront sometime around 1818.

By the late 1830s, steam engine technology had advanced enough that steam powered sawmills rapidly took over the industry and made dimensional lumber much more accessible as a building material. At this time, straight-bladed reciprocating saws would still have been ubiquitous although the circular saw would begin to become the technology of choice in the 1850s.

In comparison with a straight-bladed saw which makes only one cut per stroke, a circular saw cuts continuously allowing for much more efficient production. While reciprocating saw mills remained in production in rural areas into the 20th century, the circular saw's speed ensured that it came to dominate lumber production on an industrial scale in the mid 19th century. Circular blades make a diagnostic curved kerf mark.

Beginning in the 1870s, the band saw became increasingly common for certain aspects of industrial lumber production, but this technology largely supplemented rather than supplanted circular saws. A band saw uses a long, continuous, flexible blade stretched on pulleys. Such saws make a straight kerf mark like a reciprocating saw, but the lines tend to be thinner and more densely packed. They also tend to be slightly less regular because the comparatively thin saw blade flexes as it cuts. The rapid adoption of both the circular saw and then the band saw in the second half of the 19th century means that most of the historic buildings in St. Louis contain dimensional lumber produced by these technologies.

With the rise of the railroad age, the need for every community to produce its own lumber declined as the finished material could easily be shipped from centers of timber production around the country. Still, lumber remained an important part of St. Louis' industrial production. Because of its central location, the city was in an excellent position to receive raw materials from the timber producing regions of the Great Lakes as well as the South.

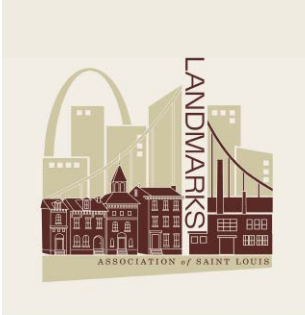
Logs were brought into St. Louis in vast quantities to be broken down at riverfront sawmills, and then distributed for the production of everything from homes and furniture to barrels and wagons. In 1875, the prevalence of saw mills and the industries they supported was depicted by Pictorial St. Louis. Plate 46 for example shows a large supply of raw timber piled up adjacent to A. Boeckler's saw mill and lumber yard, which was conveniently located next door to Conrad & Logeman's furniture factory. By 1902 E.D. Kargau claimed in his book *Mercantile, Industrial and Professional St. Louis* that the city "was the center of the world's lumber trade." While this statement is likely an exaggeration, it was estimated that the sum of local lumber consumption and distribution from the city at the turn of the 20th century was over a billion board feet annually.¹

When school groups come through Landmarks' educational programs, we like to talk to them about how being an architectural historian is sometimes like being a detective. Buildings are much more than a barrier that protects human activity from the elements. They are also dense, detailed records of everything from human ideas, skills and cultures, to trade networks and technological evolution. What can your home teach you? Start by seeing what it's made of.

¹Kargau, 1902. P.232.

Historic photo of the Plouder House.





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2017 Appeal Reminder

Dear friends,

Earlier this month, you received a letter highlighting a few of the organization's accomplishments over the course of 2017 along with a request for an additional contribution as the year draws to a close. I would like to humbly reiterate that appeal, and to remind you how heavily we rely on the financial support of Landmarks' members to maintain operations. St. Louis is too important a city and our architectural heritage is too valuable an asset, for us to allow the voice of preservation advocacy to fade. Instead, I ask that you help strengthen that voice for the coming year by personally taking a moment to consider the things that make you proud to be a St. Louisan, and to contribute to the organizations and institutions that make our community great. With your help, we will all step confidently into 2018 ready to continue the exciting work of building, and restoring a better St. Louis.

P.S. Landmarks can accept your end-of-the-year contribution into January, as long as it is back-dated to 2017.

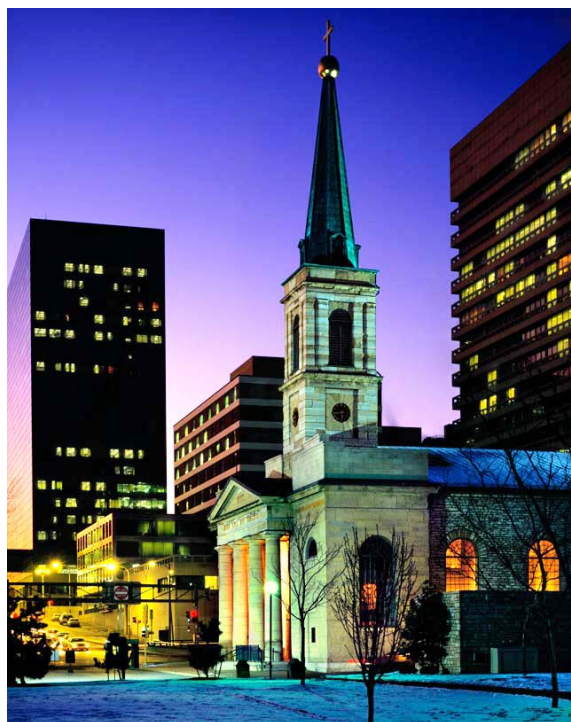


Image Courtesy of Richard Sprengeler.



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