As we all know, some streets downtown are more intact than others. As the fortunes of the central business district declined in the second half of the 20th century and downtown workers came to rely heavily on personal automobiles for transportation, many buildings in the central business district were converted into parking lots and garages. This trend was particularly destructive to the older, smaller-scale buildings which were easier to demolish and whose relatively small numbers of tenants could more easily relocate. With the exception of Washington Avenue, where a more varied mix of building sizes and forms remains, downtown’s historic building stock tends to be over-represented by enormous office buildings, former department stores, hotels, warehouses, and buildings constructed for civic, legal, and banking purposes. The smaller, more “human scaled” commercial and mixed use buildings are few and far between.

Today, it is difficult to imagine (or remember) how the parking lots and garages of downtown were in many cases once land that was tightly packed with “main street” scale architecture. Such three, four, five story buildings supported a dizzying array of businesses and facilitated a teeming pedestrian environment. Sadly, even where examples of this type of building still remain in the central business district, they very rarely retain much semblance of their original context and are thus read as isolated monoliths rather than components of what was once a rich architectural tapestry. Because these buildings are usually survivors of unfortunate development patterns, they have a tendency to exist in fairly dismal environments. In such places, pedestrian traffic is predictably light, passersby tend not to linger, and interesting little buildings sometimes fly below the radar. The 1100 block of Pine Street is one such environment where a fragment of a once beautiful, functional and humane scale of urban architecture still exists in the form of the Publicity Building.

If you have never noticed the now ironically named “Publicity Building,” you are in good company. Its surroundings are far from beguiling. Its neighbor to the east is a surface parking lot, to the south is a block long parking garage, to the north an alley, and to the west the unwinviting (at least to the pedestrian) blank walls of two 1960s era office buildings. Of course it wasn’t always this way. A heart wrenching photo from the Post Dispatch Sunday Pictures Magazine of December 1965 provides a glimpse of the building’s former context on the south side of Pine Street where the parking garage is today. The last home of the Westliche Post can be seen at the western (shown, right) end of the row against the backdrop of the former Southwestern Bell office building.

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Elements

LIBERTY BELL OIL COMPANY, 1430 S. VANDEVENTER

This terra cotta installation is situated above the entrance to the former Liberty Bell Oil Company office at 1430 South Vandeventer. Constructed in phases between 1910 and the 1940s, Liberty Bell was a distributor of a wide range of petroleum products including fuel oils, industrial lubricants, kerosene and gasoline, which it received on a dedicated rail spur from the nearby Missouri Pacific tracks. Liberty Bell’s main office building, constructed in 1930, faces Vandeventer and features variegated brick contrasting with the extensive use of cream colored terra cotta. On the first floor, brick pilasters are connected by round arches of terra cotta tiles forming a blind arcade that spans the width of the building. The name of the company is written in terra cotta lettering on the raised parapet and the main entrance features an elaborate terra cotta surround with a custom made Liberty Bell logo in relief. Today the building is vacant, but its new owners have big plans and a strong track record of successful rehabilitations, so hopefully life will be returning soon. The Liberty Bell Building is a potent reminder of a day when the architecture of even something as mundane as an oil distribution facility was designed not just to serve a purpose, but to delight.

Cherokee Hopping: A Brewery Renewed

by Katie Graeber

While St. Louis’ microbreweries have been doing great work adapting and rehabilitating historic buildings around the city for many years, until now, no new brewing operations have utilized any of the city’s surviving brewery buildings. This is now changing as Earthbound Brewery is expanding and hopping from its current location at 2710 Cherokee a few doors west to 2724 where the co-owners of the company have been working tirelessly to renovate the last surviving building of the Cherokee Brewery Company.

The Cherokee Brewery descended from an earlier brewery founded by the Meier brothers in 1866. Bought out by Ferdinand Harold and George Looze in 1867, the brewery was situated on the southwest corner of Cherokee and Ohio Avenue. Under Harold and Looze, the complex expanded to encompass the entire block between Ohio and Iowa Avenues and was officially incorporated as the Cherokee Brewery Company in 1877.

The Whipple and Company’s c.1872–c.1878 insurance map illustrates an early version of the complex which contained four main buildings and a rear beer garden. By 1909 the majority of the complex was demolished save for the two buildings on the corner of Iowa and Cherokee. Whipple’s “building B” (2724 Cherokee, see rendering below) is all that survives today. Originally constructed as a two-story brick ice-warehouse, by 1895 two additional stories had been added and the building converted to a stockhouse. This building will soon be Earthbound Brewery’s new indoor/outdoor taproom and production complex.

As they did with their earlier location, Earthbound Brewery is personally doing the teardown and build-out for their new venue. Co-owners Stuart Keating, Rebecca Schranz, and Jeff Siddon have been working with Will Lieberman, the property owner, and architect Nathan Dimirge to restore the original look, feel, and purpose of the building with the support of both Federal and State Historic Rehabilitation Tax credits.

Since the start of the work in 2015, they have removed a prior tenants’ non-original exterior cladding, interior structures including a catwalk and a 30 ton plaster and lath drop ceiling, and have added bathrooms and a commercial kitchen. This work uncovered original interior openings which they have highlighted in the build-out. Exterior restoration has been aided by the existence of 1870s period photographs. The warehouse was built on top of a pit or quarry and it eventually contained two large ice machines that cooled the building’s three expansive cellars 45 feet underground. When the neighboring building was demolished, the debris was deposited in the vaulted brick basement and adjacent cellars with stone groin vault ceilings. Much of this subterranean space was recently excavated by hand with the help of wheel barrows and a belt conveyor. In all, over 15,000 cubic feet of soil, clay, rock, and bricks have been removed from the basement and cellar and sump pumps are draining the flooded subbasement.

Work is steadily progressing, with a focus on improving access to the lower levels, finishing interior spaces, completing exterior restoration and adding the most important element… the brewing equipment! Rebecca Schranz emphasized that they are also excited about getting the biergarten, to be situated on the now empty lot on the corner of Cherokee and Iowa Avenue, completed soon. We look forward to seeing the finished product next year.

Special thanks to Ryan Reed, Rebecca Schranz, and Stuart Keating.

Corporate letterhead, featuring the building, 1949.


Cherokee Brewery Postcard, c.1895.

Brewery letterhead c. 1880. By Wittenberg Sorber, StL.
The Publicity Building was constructed by the Nelson Chesman Advertising Agency in 1903. At the time, Nelson Chesman & Co. was among St. Louis’ oldest advertising concerns and the building was erected in anticipation of a boom in the need for advertising as the 1904 World’s Fair approached. Nelson Chesman & Company grew out of an earlier advertising agency called Rowell & Chesman, which was founded in St. Louis in 1847. A partnership of George P. Rowell and Nelson Chesman, the company began advertising its services in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch in 1873. At that time, the company was one of only three advertising agencies that were listed in the city directory. Because professional advertising agents were something of a novelty in the city, Rowell & Chesman, appropriately, took out a detailed ad to explain exactly what it was that they did. In it they wrote: “We undertake the management of the advertising business for reputable and responsible advertisers...we undertake to secure for every advertiser the lowest rates...and to contribute our services in obtaining attractive display, good position, and in keeping the expense of any proposed advertisement within prudent limits...All the leading papers of the entire country may be found on file at our office. We specially solicit business for Texas, Arkansas, the Territories, and all sections of the country which are tributary to St. Louis.”

As children, Rowell and Chesman had been schoolmates and friends at Lancaster Academy in Lancaster, New Hampshire. When Rowell founded the American Newspaper Directory in New York in 1849, Chesman may have been his first editor and was certainly serving in that capacity by at least 1871. With this publication, George Rowell set out to standardize what had previously been a chaotic and ambiguously defined system for pricing advertising space. As he described in his autobiography, in the middle of the 19th century, publishers set their own rates for advertising based on what Rowell considered secretive and arbitrary criteria. Rowell was aggrieved by this system because it relegated advertising agents like him to the status of intermediaries who were stymied trying to buy and sell a product (ad space) whose value had no metric. As he put it, “I believe, it is not the space he occupies that an advertiser pays for, but an indefinite something the exact value of which neither the man who buys, nor the man who sells quite understands.”

In order to try to create a context for evaluating the fair price of space in a given publication, Rowell set out to systematically document every known American paper that regularly sold advertising. According to historian Jackson Lears, Rowell and his agents traveled the country collecting data on circulation, sales, paper quality, and whatever other statistics they thought the political and business editors of American newspapers, advertising policies, and useful details about the readership of thousands of papers. He and his editor Nelson Chesman then packaged the data into a multi-volume reference work so that they could use it to inform their clients as well as other advertisers about how and where to spend their advertising budgets. Rowell’s innovation has been called the birth of modern consulting because he moved beyond brokering the purchasing advertising space and instead became a purveyor of the information that advertisers and advertising agents needed to craft and place their campaigns.

The Directory that Rowell compiled and Chesman edited was the first essentially complete list of American publications that sold advertising space (nearly 6,000 initially) and is considered an important step toward modern advertising practices and the standardization of the value of advertising space. In his seminal work The History and Development of Advertising Frank Pesbrey wrote that “George P. Rowell did perhaps more than any other man to develop advertising in the 19th century...” As editor of the Directory, Chesman clearly played an important role as well.

In 1874, Chesman decided to seek his fortune out west in the burgeoning metropolis of St. Louis and his friend George Rowell agreed to support the endeavor. Rowell and Chesman became partners in a new agency, which brought the concept of the American Newspaper Directory to St. Louis. The ad men quickly found a ready audience in the growing city, which, as city directories indicate, was awash in print media, but virtually devoid of professional ad agents.

It seems that Rowell was essentially just helping to set his friend up in business as he never actually moved to St. Louis as Chesman did; he retired his name from the company after just four years. After Rowell’s departure, Nelson Chesman continued doing business in St. Louis under the name “Nelson Chesman & Co.” although he didn’t formally incorporate the company until 1888. That same year the company expanded its office space in New York City and in 1891 an office in Chicago was added.

Originally constructed as a building (demolished) at 312-314 Chestnut Street, the growth of the company in the last two decades of the 19th century led Chesman to begin to explore the construction of a headquarters building for the company. Where the firm had begun with fewer than five employees, by 1900 it had grown to more than sixty workers. Chesman’s success, like that of his former partner Rowell, stemmed from the systematic approach he took to his trade. For his book, he invested enormous resources in researching all the major publications across the country, the characteristics of their readership and, their current advertising rates. He also worked to educate businessmen about the benefits of advertising and how best to target a particular audience through a campaign.

In 1903, the company moved forward with the construction of its national headquarters in St. Louis. The city was selected over the other branches because of its central location and because of the enormous business opportunities that were expected to be created by the upcoming St. Louis World’s Fair. Newspapers praised the company as being among the “longest established” advertising firms in St. Louis and stated that it stood “…in the vanguard with the biggest advertising agencies in the country.”

The new building was to be designed by the (presently obscure) local architectural firm of Kennedy & Matthews and rise to a height of 12 stories. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch called the announcement one “[o]f the numerous important realty transactions consummated during the past year...”, but buried within the article was the admission that “Owing to the inability to secure structural steel, the owners will take possession of their new home upon the completion of the first five stories of the building, which will be carried to 12 stories as the steel may arrive.” It is unclear whether Nelson Chesman ever intended to construct such a large building, or if the company made the announcement about construction of a larger building as what amounted to a publicity stunt. If it was for the latter reason, it was a successful gambit as publications from the Post Dispatch and Globe Democrat to the American Architect and Building News covered the story.

Circumstantial evidence that the twelve story building announcement may indeed have been a publicity stunt can be found in the fact that the company never occupied more than half of the building at any one time. While the St. Louis office coordinated the efforts of other branches of the company which, by 1912 included offices in New York, Chicago and Chattanooga, Nelson Chesman was usually listed as occupying only the second and third floors on Pine Street. Other floors were generally rented by trades such as lithographers and type setters who would have worked hand in hand with the advertising agents.

Another possible explanation for why the company never realized its vision of a twelve story building could be that just three years after the building permit was issued, Nelson Chesman died. At that point, vice president and treasurer Conrad Bulke took over and the company continued to move forward with the Publicity Building until 1936 when it disappeared from the St. Louis City Directories.

Today the Publicity Building represents a direct link back to pioneers of the advertising industry in St. Louis and the United States at large. Would this connection ever have been discovered without the building itself requiring an explanation? Historic architecture serves so easily as a point of departure for exploring the stories of the people and industries that shaped our community. This fact reminds us that the landscape is not static and that buildings may be organic physical objects, but the destruction of what may be the only trail marker that still points the way down a long forgotten path.
He hired on to a telegraph crew as a water boy. The crew was tasked with building overhead lines, a job that demanded a high level of professionalism. However, the standards of professionalism were allowing unskilled workers to join the union because the work was poorly paid, dangerous, and inadequate for the effort required.

By 1883, Miller had migrated to St. Louis where he found work as a journeyman electrician. He began to learn to be a lineman as a young teenager when the electrical workers union in the country was founded. He was part of the Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (now the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, or IBEW), which was formed in 1891 to improve standards of safety and training for electrical work as the industry grew.

Miller had grander ambitions. He realized that the growth of the industry required high standards of professionalism required organization. He participated in the first meeting of the American Electrical Workers Union and its annual conference in St. Louis this past summer. The building of the early electrical trades from across the country, and the history of the union, are well documented.

IF ANYONE HAS DRIVEN DOWN South Grand Avenue to discuss the creation of a national union; the National of deterioration, Union members were highly motivated to rehab some truly fascinating surviving buildings. Because of the work of IBEW Preserves its History and Saves the former Miller Museum prior to rehabilitation. Miller Museum prior to rehabilitation. Miller Museum prior to rehabilitation. Miller Museum prior to rehabilitation. Founding members of the IBEW. Henry Miller is second from left, middle row.

Within a few years, the man had organized a local AFL union, but Miller had grander ambitions. He realized that the growth of the industry and its need for high standards of professionalism required organization. By 1891, while serving as the President of the local union, Miller brought tenth other Midwestern union representatives to a St. Louis board house on what was then Franklin Avenue to discuss the creation of a national union, the National Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (now the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers) or the IBEW was the result.

For over 125 years, the Union has protected both the rights of its members and the safety of the general public because it did much to improve standards of safety and training for electrical work as the country universally adopted electrical power in the early 20th century. Unfortunately, the dangers of the trade that drove the formation of the Union in the first place claimed the life of the illustrious Henry Miller just five years after it was founded. Having worked for Washington D.C., Miller fell from a ladder trying to restore power after a storm and later died of his injuries.

Through the rehabilitation of Miller's boarding house at 2726 Martin Luther King, the members of the IBEW were paying a fitting tribute to Henry Miller and the history of their union. They have also done a great thing for St. Louis by preserving this piece of our city's history and interpreting it with a beautifully restored historic building. The museum can be toured by appointment and arrangements can be made by calling the IBEW union office at 314-647-5900.

New members are always welcome! Contact the IBEW at 314-647-5900 or 314-647-5888.

Founding members of the IBEW. Henry Miller is second from left, middle row.

New Members

Patricia & Andrew Murphy
David Miller
Tom Jones & M. Brady O’Toole
Mary Ann & Keith Palk
William & Nancy Miller
R. G. Ross Construction Company, Inc.
James B. Stetler
Jeff & Ann Smith
S. Louis Electrical Contractors, Inc.
Maximus Construction
Caterpillar
Julie & Ryan Holtz
Ruth & Michael Kraus
Alan & Charlotte Hamilton
Robert Hamilton, Jr.
David A. Wheeler
Barnes & Thornburg
James Bickford
E. Terrence Jones
John Kane
Art & Barbara Knauss
Ruth & Thomas Conklin
St. Louis Electrical Contractors, Inc.
Glenn C. Kiesel
Wayne D. Kram
George M. Kliney
Lynn & Jon Ulstrom
Domingo P. Mejia
David & Susan Delano
Laura & Michael Sturtz
Suzanne M. Murphy
Cheryl & Robert Gildersleeve
Jackie Greenlaw & Steven Truchel
Mike & Helen Klayton
John & Beth Falk
Betty Roberts
Michael P. McNulty
MBA Club of Missouri
J. Michael Hoffman
Sara & Jon Guglielmo
Linda & John Flory
Laura & Jeff Brumberg
George & Lisa Spath
Karen & Ed Frey
Lawrence & Susan Wyman

Miller Museum prior to rehabilitation.
Welcome Katie!

I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS opportunity to introduce our newest staff member Katie Graebe. Some of you may know her from previous work she has done for our organization as an intern and a subcontractor, as a past volunteer with the Chatillon-DeMenil Foundation, or as the administrator for the Missouri Alliance for Historic Preservation. Katie was born in Belleville, Illinois and has always been fascinated with the architecture of her community and the St. Louis Region at large. She graduated from Miami University, in Oxford, Ohio, with a dual major in History of Art and Architecture and Classical Humanities, complimented by a minor in Eastern Religions. She then pursued graduate coursework at the Savannah College of Art and Design in the Historic Preservation program. During that time she interned with Landmarks Association, volunteered for DOCOMOMO (an organization dedicated to the documentation and conservation of Modern Movement resources) volunteered with the Historic Savannah Foundation, and traveled to southern France where she gained hands-on, technical preservation experience. We are excited to welcome Katie to the staff and are very confident that her skills, experience, passion, and work ethic will serve Landmarks Association and its mission well in the future.

Dear Friends,

Earlier this month, you received a letter highlighting a few of the organization’s accomplishments over the course of 2016 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 2017 ready to continue the exciting work of building, and restoring (!), a better St. Louis.

Thank you,
Andrew B. Weil,
Landmarks Association Executive Director