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 I. Barnett before entering practice on his own c. 1875. In 1881 he married Lucie Tetard of St. Louis. Kirchner served as architect for the St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS) for two, non-consecutive terms from 1880 until 1883 and again from 1885 until 1889. During the time he worked for the SLPS, he designed many schools, although just two, Gratiot and Blair, remain. Both schools were completed in 1882 as was Kirchner’s St. Louis Cotton Exchange Building (shown left) on Walnut (demolished 1940).

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. Interestingly, a dispute with the St. Louis Chapter resulted in Kirchner’s resignation, although he remained a member of the national AIA.

In 1885, H. W. Kirchner designed major additions to Academic Hall at the University of Missouri, Columbia, which would tragically burn just seven years later. In 1889, Kirchner began a partnership with his brother A.H. Kirchner (b. 1858). A. H. Kirchner was a prominent architect in his own right, who also designed many buildings for the SLPS prior to the tenure of William Ittner. Practicing as Kirchner & Kirchner, the firm received many important commissions, primarily for commercial buildings in St. Louis and in western cities such as Denver, Las Vegas (New Mexico) and Santa Fe. In St. Louis, H. W. Kirchner’s only known surviving commercial building is the Balmer & Weber Music House (today known as the Ludwig Lofts) at 1004 Olive.

In 1890 Kirchner moved to Denver, Colorado to oversee the construction of the Colorado Mining Stock Exchange that the firm had designed. Regarded by some as Denver’s finest Richardsonian Romanesque building, the stock exchange was torn down in 1967. Kirchner & Kirchner also designed courthouses for Santa Fe and Mora, New Mexico (demolished), as well as an insane asylum (demolished) and city hall (extant) at Las Vegas, New Mexico. Kirchner traveled extensively in the American West in the late 19th century but moved back to St. Louis in 1894. He continued to be listed in the city directories variably as a civil engineer and architect until late in life when he became president and treasurer of the River and Trail Transportation Company. He died on April 18, 1937 and is buried at Calvary Cemetery. After her husband’s death, Lucie moved near Ironton, Missouri in the Arcadia Valley where she died in 1949.

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Dedicated on September 28, 1907, the Leiderkranz Club at 2700 South Grand (east side of Grand at Magnolia—today a strip mall containing a Dollar General and Ruler Foods) was constructed as the new home for an elite German social club when it moved from its previous location at 116th and Chouteau. Having evolved from a German men’s chorus formed in 1870, musical performance and appreciation was central to Leiderkranz life. As the social geography of German society moved westward in the 19th century St. Louis, privileges of membership at the club were welcome in all of the building’s public rooms. No expense was spared. The new building was equipped with basement bowling alleys, a kitchen that could serve 1,000 guests at a time, and an enormous ballroom. The centerpiece of the theater which boasted the second largest stage in the city and an elaborate lighting system that used mirrors to diffuse illumination. Marble wainscoting, wood paneled walls and rich tapestries adorned billiard rooms, smoking rooms, six practice rooms equipped with grand pianos, and ladies’ lounges. No expense was spared.

Unique among male-dominated clubs in 19th century St. Louis, privileges of membership at the Leiderkranz were extended to both women and men. Known as the Damen Verein, the women of the club were welcome in all of the building’s public spaces and were also accommodated with rooms of their own where they were not allowed. Judging by advertisements and newspaper articles of the era, the Damen Verein played an important role in planning many of the club’s activities and its ladies were held in high esteem for their musical abilities.

While the club was progressive with regard to female membership, it was known for extravagant parties that lasted from dusk until dawn, club leaders adhered to a strict code of behavior which led to some interesting transgressions and controversies. For example, at 4:00 in the morning on New Year’s Day, 1912, Edwin Lemp committed a serious offense which lead to a three month long feud between the club and its members and resulted in his resignation of membership. No matter that Edwin was the Vice President of the powerful Lemp Brewing Company, he was personally thrown off the dance floor by club President Moritz Eyssel for being dressed in a business suit rather than formal evening wear. Lemp later stated that he knew about the rule requiring “full dress” but hadn’t thought it would be in effect at that late (or early) of an hour! A year later the sensibilities of the club were once again offended when a group of young members disgraced the ballroom by dancing both the “Turkey Trot” and the “Tango.” The Post-Dispatch reported that three of the guilty had already been dismissed and that several others “were tried for the offense.” Apparently there was a belief among some of the club’s older members that the Pipe had issued a formal decree against these dances, although the article’s headline indicated that Cardinal John Glennon had been consulted on the matter and that he doubted the existence of a formal papal ruling.

The onset of World War One had somewhat of a chilling effect on the exuberance of German cultural clubs like the Leiderkranz, as did Prohibition. The latter was cited as a reason for the club’s declining membership in a Post-Dispatch article from 1920 reporting on the sale of the building. Apparently, the sale of alcohol had been a critical component of the organization’s revenue stream and its loss had resulted in increased membership fees and reactionary resignations. The new owner of the building was a fraternal organization called the "Mystic Order of Veiled Prophet’s of the Enchanted Realm." The Veiled Prophets renamed the building the “Alhambra Grotto” and began a remodeling effort that included the addition of the grotesque mask to the center of the façade, which is the subject of our “Elements” photo. The building was demolished for the current strip center in 1962.
The Firmin Desloge Hospital by Andrew Weil

The Firmin Desloge Hospital is among the most recognizable buildings in south St. Louis. Its distinctively jagged French Gothic roofline is so iconic that it has become inseparable from the architectural identity of St. Louis University and has been quoted several times in designs for later campus buildings. Sheathed in copper covered lead (a fitting tribute to the source of the Desloge fortune) the roof lends the building a certain Gotham City quality. Lighted at night, it shines like a beacon and can be seen for miles perched mysteriously on the precipice of the Grand Avenue ridge. Desloge Tower (more recently known as St. Louis University Hospital) is the kind of building that makes a city unique. But, how much longer will it be around? A quick overview of the history of the tower and its associated chapel was detailed by Esley Hamilton in the summer, 2008 issue of the Society of Architectural Historians Newsletter. He wrote:

"[F]irmin Vincent Desloge (1843-1929) provided in his will funds for a hospital to serve St. Louis University and its affiliates in this area. A poignant example can be found in the lines of comments made by Alderman Joe Roddy, in whose ward the hospital is located. In September, the Post-Discant reported that Roddy said that he would "obviously prefer the hospital (Desloge Tower) stay," but that he doesn't want to jeopardize the benefit of current and future residents."

Desloge continued…

completed by nationally renowned architect Ralph Adams Cram, including the major sculptural group of the Crucifixion by John Angel for the altar. Archbishop Glennon consecrated the chapel on November 9, 1933."

Fast forward to the fall of 2015. Following the recent sale of St. Louis University Hospital to SSM Health (an organization that traces its roots back to the Sisters of St. Mary, which accepted the donations in whose ward the hospital is located) plans to build a new hospital north of the present site were announced. Despite the fact that the new hospital represents an existing investment of hundreds of millions of dollars, this is St. Louis, so of course the optimism must be tempered by the threat of ominous side effects. In this case the threat is implied by the refusal of SSM representatives to comment on whether the new hospital will make Desloge Tower redundant and therefore a target for expedient demolition.

The threat is magnified when one reads between the lines of comments made by Alderman Joe Roddy, in whose ward the hospital is located. In September, the Post-Discant reported that Roddy said that he would "obviously prefer the hospital (Desloge Tower) stay," but that he doesn’t want to jeopardize the significant investment SSM is making by placing obstacles in the way of construction. Considering that the new hospital is being proposed for a different location, the argument is spurious. That is, until one considers the long history of wanton clearance and land-banking by St. Louis University and its affiliates in this area. A poignant example can be found in the case of the utterly unique armorial of Battery A of the St. Louis Light Artillery which sat on land immediately north of Desloge until it was demolished by SUL for the construction of the Gyo Obata-designed Wohl Institute beginning about 1960. The Wohl Institute stood at the site until 2011 when SUL exchanged it for a vacant lot.

Desloge Tower has been a landmark of south St. Louis and St. Louis University for over eighty years. Truly a building that defines the unique character of our community, the loss of the tower and chapel would be a severe blow to the identity of the city, and to the morale of those of us who desperately want St. Louis to remain a distinctive place. While nobody would lament the removal of the multiple late 20th century additions on the west side of the building (they obscure the original design), the tower and chapel should be preserved at all costs. Great cities, civilized minds, enlightened people do not wantonly destroy the monumental cultural achievements of earlier generations simply because they don’t "fit" into whatever exciting new plan is presently being peddled. If we aspire to be a great city, or even just a community that earns the respect and love of its citizens, we must oppose ideas that present our great cultural achievements and our unique heritage as disposable "obstacles."

Stakeholders to Save the Iconic Desloge Hospital Tower is being formed. We invite all citizens and organizations to come together to foster positive and creative dialogue with SSM Health and St. Louis University to chart a path forward for this iconic building.

Desloge Tower is in excellent condition and capable of serving in its current role or being adapted to new uses and kept in productive service indefinitely. Because the building embodies an astonishing amount of energy and other "sunk" environmental costs that would be utterly squandered by demolition. Because the continued use of the building would be in keeping with the teachings of Pope Francis who has recently chastised the citizens of the world for "the harm we have inflicted on [the earth] by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed us."

Because these reasons, a group known as the Stakeholders to Save the iconic Desloge Hospital Tower is being formed. We invite all citizens and organizations to come together to foster positive and creative dialogue with SSM Health and St. Louis University to chart a path forward for this iconic building.

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Dear friends,

As you know, Landmarks Association relies heavily on the support of our membership to meet our humble financial needs. We would like to thank you for your continuing support, and encourage you to pass this newsletter along to a friend with an invitation to join! Becoming a member is easy. Simply call the office at 314-421-6474 or visit landmarks-stl.org and click on the “join” tab.

Thanks!

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