BECAUSE OF ITS NAME, MOST ST. LOUISANS associate the land that comprises the Soulard neighborhood primarily, if not exclusively, with Antoine Soulard and his wife Julia (Cerre) Soulard. A good portion of the northern and eastern sides of the neighborhood today was land owned by the Soulards and subdivided by Julia after her husband’s death, including the two city blocks she set aside for the present day Market, and the land upon which St. Vincent de Paul church stands. The latter is located immediately north of where Julia’s home (constructed c. 1837) once stood for over a century before being demolished in 1952 for Interstate 55. But while the Soulards loom large, William Russell and his heirs also played an important role in the development of a core portion of the neighborhood.

Like Soulard who had served as a land surveyor (among other roles) for the Spanish Crown prior to the Louisiana Purchase, Russell had been sent to St. Louis by Thomas Jefferson in 1804 to take over the position of Surveyor in the service of the American government. In this capacity, one of Russell’s chief jobs was to investigate claims for land that had been granted by the Territory’s former Spanish rulers. During his travels, he kept his eyes open for prime land and speculative opportunities for himself and managed to amass an enormous portfolio of property and with it, a fortune.

Russell was a shrewd businessman who knew how to convert land, however remote, into money. Illustrative of this ability was his speculative 1820 plat of a town called Little Rock amidst one of his essentially wilderness land claims in the newly organized Arkansas Territory. He then purportedly sold lots in the town to influential members of the territorial legislature at discounted prices, who then enriched themselves and Russell by voting to establish the capital of the future state at that location.
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CIRCUMSTANCES BEYOND THEIR CONTROL — Bowen & Miller, and the Founding of the St. Louis Architectural Association

by Andrew Weil

JOHN STEVENS BOWEN WAS BORN in Georgia in 1829 and entered the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1848. After graduation he was stationed at the Cavalry School at Carlisle Pennsylvania, and then sent to Jacksonville, Florida, where he met and married Mary Kennerly of Carondelet. He resigned from the military in 1855 and returned to Savannah, Georgia where he briefly practiced architecture before returning to St. Louis in 1857. Back in St. Louis Bowen continued working as an architect with partner Charles Crosby Miller (frequently listed as C.C. Miller). The partnership of Bowen & Miller published an office at 997 Chestnut Street near the waterfront and Bowen lived at a nearby boarding house while he designed and constructed a home for his family on Carondelet’s “Quality Hill” at what is today 927 Michigan Avenue. This home survives, although its 60,000 square feet with 20 rooms has been enlarged with an addition and originally had a flat roof. It’s unclear how Bowen and Miller came to work with each other. Bowen was an accomplished military man, and Miller a civilian from Springfield, Massachusetts. It may be that they teamed up simply because they were both trying to break into professional practice in the city at the same time. Miller came to St. Louis to ply his trade in 1856 and Bowen in 1857; both men were in their mid 20s. While young, they were clearly well respected by their peers and considered worthy of professional esteem. In the spring of 1858, the two were part of a group of the most prominent architects in the city who came together to form what may have been St. Louis’ first architectural trade association.

On St. Patrick’s Day, architects John Johnston, W.B. Olmstead, George I. Barnett, Thomas Walsh, Wm. F. Stacy, George Mitchell, Wm. Rumbier, Patrick Walsh, Thomas Brady, Francis Tunica, J. H. McPike, A.H. Piquenard, Charles H. Peck, Bowen and Miller met to discuss the formation of the St. Louis Architectural Association. The purpose of the Association was to protect and standardize the architectural trade by establishing professional qualifications and minimum prices for different categories of work. The group elected a committee that included Bowen to draft a constitution. By April they had elected officers which included Johnston as President, George I. Barnett and Thomas Walsh as Vice Presidents, C. C. Miller as Recording Secretary and Bowen as Corresponding Secretary among other officers. While the Association had come together cordially, controversy arose in early summer when Vice President Walsh resigned in a huff. The Association had censured him over prices he had charged for the design of the O’Fallon Polytechnic Institute because his cost schedule for the work did not adhere to the Association’s constitution. Despite the fact that Walsh could prove he had bid the project prior to the formation of the group, he was still expected to revise his costs to comply with the new rules, which was not something he was willing to do.

Despite the departure of Walsh, the Association continued to grow with the addition of R. S. Mitchell, and a “Mr. Isaac” (perhaps a young Henry G. Isaac?) as formal members in addition to two honorary members nominated by John Bowen. While the formal end of the apparently short-lived Association remains a mystery, the divergent paths of Bowen’s honorary nominees (and of Bowen himself) give a strong indication that the Civil War caused an irreparable rupture of the organization.

In a meeting of the Association at Bowen & Miller’s office on what was no doubt a stifling July 19h, Bowen nominated, and his colleagues unanimously approved, both Henry Taylor Blow and Meriwether Lewis Clark as honorary members of the group. Politically, these men were at

Dear Friends

EARLIER THIS MONTH, you received a letter highlighting a few of the organization’s accomplishments over the course of 2018 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 too valuable an asset, for us to allow the voice of preservation advocacy to fade.

I ask that you help strengthen that voice for the coming year by making a direct and personal contribution to the St. Louis Landmarks Association. The results of those inspections are too important to the success of the White Tower’s capital. The assessment provided a detailed and prioritized plan for the work that needs to be done to prepare the towers for another 100 years. It also included a rough cost estimate of approximately five million dollars that will be needed to accomplish those goals.

The engineer’s reports have been provided to the owners of the towers (the Water and Parks Departments respectively) along with other City leaders. We will be exploring several intriguing options for raising needed funds, but our first (albeit tiny) effort is already underway.

This fall, the architecture and engineering firm of Wis, Janney, Ellner completed an assessment of St. Louis’ north side water towers commissioned by Landmarks Association. The results of those inspections indicate that both structures are sound, but in need of substantial repairs. Tuck-pointing is a major need with both towers as is work on roofing and the restoration of the White Tower’s capital. The assessment provided a detailed and prioritized plan for the work that needs to be done to prepare the towers for another 100+ years.

Red Water Tower ornaments can be purchased by adding $18.85 (in honor of the year construction started on your annual gift, by calling the office at 314-421-6474, or at www.landmarksll.org.

Sincerely,

Andrew B. Weil
Executive Director

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end of the spectrum, they prepared plans for a five story building near 6727 Michigan Avenue. The other is that of Hubert Primm at 6321 including at least two extant designs in Carondelet. One of these book spanning that time period is in the Bowen Papers at the Missouri Historical Society. We can only wonder what was discussed when Blow entertained Bowen and Miller’s work “superintending” the construction of St. Louis’ Commercial and Residential Buildings.

The Bowen home today, 6727 Michigan Avenue.
Around 1837, Russell purchased a 76-acre tract south of St. Louis. He named the property Crystal Spring Farm and set about organizing it as a county estate. He began planting extensive orchards and a vineyard and recorded his activities in an agriculture diary he called his "orchard book." This document survives and serves as a fascinating record of life on the property and gives insight into the people with whom Russell interacted.

For example, Russell records receiving specimens of various fruit trees from members of the Soulard family, George Sibley, and Mrs. Rufus Easton. He also mentions working alongside his "hands" to plant and fence the property. At least some of these hands were actually slaves. One man named "Washington" who appears in the book in 1838 planting apples with Russell is of particular interest because he appears again years later in a surprising place. While enslaved Africans are unfortunately difficult to see in the historical record because documents like the federal slave schedules simply recorded them as numbers, a picture of Washington and his family has emerged.

Judging by the dates recorded in the Orchard Book, Washington was present on the Crystal Springs property as early as 1838. He started a family with his wife Mary and lived on the farm until the fall of 1847 when, to paraphrase Frederick Douglass, Washington stole himself. Russell published an advertisement seeking the return of one Nicholas Russell (not that one) who left his land with the Allens in 1847. Since that time, Washington had moved to the Missouri / Arkansas border and purchased an additional 30 acres of land from his lands near Helen, Arkansas.

In 1842 Russell built a large Federal style house out of skillfully quarried stone. The house, located near the river, was designed to accommodate the needs of a family with his wife Mary and lived on the farm until the fall of 1847 when, to paraphrase Frederick Douglass, Washington stole himself. Russell published an advertisement seeking the return of one Nicholas Russell (not that one) who left his land with the Allens in 1847. Since that time, Washington had moved to the Missouri / Arkansas border and purchased an additional 30 acres of land from his lands near Helen, Arkansas.

In 1845, Allen had taken the records to the Orchard Book. In the he described the elements of the farm including a spring fed brook, spring house, bee hives, well, poultry yard, stock yard, garden, coal house and carriage house. The land supported extensive plantings of apples, peaches, pears, plums, cherries, and raspberries, and at least twelve varieties of grapes including a wild strain harvested by Russell from his lands near Helen. Allen described the farm in 1847.

The main house faced east and the view looked out over land that sloped down toward the river. Allen purchased an additional 30 acres of property east of the farm from John Cabanne in 1847 with the intention of subdividing the land for sale. In exchange for ceding right-of-ways for the Union Pacific Railroad (Union Pacific Road) the Allen home remained an open tract. Stretching across the long block (south-north) the land had been left undivided in order to provide a buffer zone between farms and the rapidly expanding city.

It’s unclear why Allen didn’t just subdivide that property as well immediately after the family departed, but it may have been because there was actually a financial opportunity in leaving it alone. Many neighborhoods of the era were so crowded that people crowded close, open spaces for recreational purposes. Prior to the creation of the city’s park system, the primary options for outdoor recreation were places like cemeteries, beer gardens, fairgrounds, and privately operated “pleasure resorts.” When not working or in school, children entertained themselves in places like alleys, vacant lots, factory yards, and on the levee. As the newspapers of the day were predictably crowded with stories of children drowning, being crushed by freight cars, falling into open holes, kicked by animals, scalded by steam, and burned by chemicals. The realities of urban life in the mid 19th century were crowded with stories of children drowning, being crushed by freight cars, falling into open holes, kicked by animals, scalded by steam, and burned by chemicals. The realities of urban life in the mid 19th century were.
Special Thanks

THIS PAST OCTOBER, Landmarks Association honored Mary Strauss and the legacy of her husband Leon with the H. Meade Summers Jr. Award for their enormous contributions to historic preservation in St. Louis. We’d like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mary one more time and to thank our wonderful hosts and high level sponsors for their support.

Thanks to Dr. Shahrdad Khodamoradi and Mr. Richard Green for generously hosting us at their lovely home at 3505 Longfellow in Compton Heights.

We would also like to thank the Vino Gallery, Brick River Cider and Urban Eats whose contributions ensured our guests went neither hungry nor thirsty. We would like to acknowledge a major gift given by the H. Meade Summers Jr. Foundation in honor of our award recipients and recognize our Capital, Pillar, and Foundation level sponsors. Thank you to everyone who made this event a wonderful success!

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