



Can you guess which building this architectural detail is from? Test your knowledge with our column, **Elements Page 2 >>**



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LANDMARKS LETTER

Harvey Ellis and His St. Louis Legacy

By Robert J. Byrne >>

In the three or so years that Rochester, NY-born Harvey Ellis lived and worked in St. Louis, he didn't produce many dramatic buildings for our cityscape. Most were commercial structures that lived, died and were buried. But several works which serve an institutional or community purpose have survived splendidly. One of them, St. Louis' City Hall, is going on 110 years as the seat of City government. And there are others.

The Compton Hill Water Tower is one of Ellis' most notable surviving works in St. Louis, but was actually a minor commission when considered in the context of his lifetime output. This 179-ft. masonry "coverup" of an iron standpipe has been characterized by an Ellis scholar as "a perfect design from every angle. An elegant interplay of materials and a clever example of what Ellis often said was his guiding design principle: 'not symmetry, but balance.'"



Compton Hill Water Tower

Born in 1852, Ellis loved drawing and sketching even as a child. His parents, hoping for a military career, got him admitted to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, but the sketchpad was more alluring than the battlefield. He lasted just one semester.

Back home in Rochester, the self-taught designer created buildings for local customers, often emulating the work of H. H. Richardson.

When Ellis traveled to Europe in 1885, the 33-year-old had his eyes opened. The influence of Late Medieval masterpieces—especially the 500-year-old Chateau de Chenonceau on the River Cher in central France—would show up later throughout his career.

Upon returning to the United States, Ellis found work in Minnesota where he completed



Former Saint Vincent's Hospital, Normandy

designs for the Univ. of Minnesota and the Hennepin County Court House/Minneapolis City Hall. Four years later, in 1889, he was lured to St. Joseph, MO, by the architectural firm of Eckles & Mann, becoming their chief designer on mid-sized commercial structures and a number of private residences.

Eckles & Mann brought Ellis to St. Louis in 1891, submitting his design for a consolidated railroad facility. The builders chose another architect—Theodore Link—for what became Union Station, but there are those who see Ellis' thinking in the final, Richardsonian result. Later that year Ellis designed St. Vincent's Hospital for the Insane (later renamed Sanitarium).

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Organized in 1901, the Empire Brewery has largely been forgotten by all but the most avid students of St. Louis brewing history, but it still has a prominent physical presence in the city in the form of its former office building at 311 South Sarah Street. Embedded in the area that was blighted for the rapidly developing Cortex Life Sciences District in the City's central corridor, this stately building is currently the office of U.S. Metals and Supply. Designed by prominent St. Louis Architect Ernst C. Janssen (1855-1946), the building permit for the facility was issued in late January, 1904. Originally constructed as the brewery's office and bottling plant, it was richly adorned with terra cotta busts of the company's symbol—a lioness.

The brewery operated on its own for just six years before becoming part of the Independent Breweries Company (IBC) in 1907 along with eight other local brewers. According to "St. Louis Brews; 200 Years of Brewing in St. Louis" the company brewed Empire lager, Alpen Brau, and American Bohemian brands before closing in the spring of 1918 in anticipation of Prohibition. After an unsuccessful attempt to reopen the facility in the 1930s and a fire that damaged several of the brewery's buildings, IBC tore down most of the complex and walked away. The office building is all that remains.



Empire Brewery

A recent presentation prepared by the St. Louis Development Corporation illustrating the overarching Cortex plan, published by Alex Ihnen at nextstl.com, shows the building slated for demolition and with a new retail building (with a very similar footprint) built in its place. Despite this plan, it seems feasible that the Empire Brewery office could be rehabilitated and adapted for a new use. Wexford Science and Technology, who owns the brewery building, has actually incorporated other historic rehabilitations into the Cortex

Campus including the former Western Electric- Southwestern Bell Distribution Center (4240 Duncan), the Crescent Building (4230 Duncan), and the Brauer Supply Building (4260 Forest Park). Certainly adding the handsome Empire Brewery office to this list would further enhance the visual and architectural appeal of the cortex neighborhood. Unfortunately, the blighting and redevelopment plan approved for Cortex removes the normal protections from arbitrary demolition provided by

the city's preservation ordinance.

Following several conversations between Landmarks and senior Cortex staff regarding the significance of the Empire Brewery and the opportunity that its renovation would present to furthering the sustainability and architectural interest of the campus, we are now confident that both Wexford and Cortex are aware that the building may be an asset rather than a liability. The lines of communication are now open and we'll keep you updated. ●

HARVEY ELLIS and His St. Louis Legacy from cover >>

Secluded off St. Charles Rock Road in Normandy, the immense four story red brick structure stretches for hundreds of yards north and south of a central administrative core. Clearly influenced by Norman French designs, the dormitory-like building is conventional from its rusticated limestone foundation to the gutter line, but above this point becomes a spectacular festival of shapes—steeply gabled dormers, cone-topped turrets with ball-topped spires, square towers with pyramidal peaks, tall, slender chimneys and, curiously, a set of four heavy-lidded "eyes" peering from a fifth-floor attic. Operated by the Sisters of Mercy of St. Vincent de Paul well into the 1970s, today it has been repurposed and operates as the 209 unit Castle Park Apartments.

Although denied the Union Station contract, Eckles & Mann stayed focused on St. Louis and landed an equally prestigious job when the City solicited designs for a new City Hall. Clearly breaking with the Richardsonian and Norman French styles, Ellis closely imitated Paris's own "Hotel du Ville" (City Hall) for St. Louis where to this day very few residents know that the ornamental gables above the building's windows are borrowed directly from the Medieval Chateau du Chenonceau of 1515.

A small gem in Ellis' portfolio, and still wonderfully preserved, is the Union Ave. entryway for Washington Terrace in the Central West End. For the gate, architect George R. Mann and Ellis designed a French Norman clock tower. Easily accessible to visitors, the intricate details of the work—the ornately woven steel archways over the two vehicle portals, the ground-level waterspout and the flanking walls topped by fierce bronze jungle cats—are best seen in person.

In the midst of the "Panic of '93" Ellis accepted a commission from the City to design an attractive covering for a 130-ft tall, 6-ft. diameter iron standpipe on the grounds of the municipal reservoir, at South Grand and Shaw Blvds.

The Compton Hill Water Tower is considered by Ellis expert John Guenther to be one of his most interesting works. Mr. Guenther, FAIA, is a practicing local architect, a lecturer at Washington University, an architectural historian and a long-time admirer of Ellis' output. Last fall he offered a detailed presentation on Harvey Ellis at the Dau Home Furnishings store on Manchester Rd. The Dau firm deals in the Stickley brand of furniture, which originated in the Arts & Crafts era and was influenced by Ellis at the end of his career.

In this presentation, Guenther stated that Ellis' design for the Compton Hill Water Tower was "a significant break from what he'd been doing." He also said that Ellis was often quoted as striving for "not symmetry but balance" in his designs. Meaning? "Meaning that the Water Tower could easily have had four three-quarter-round cylinders attached to each corner of the square shaft, but Ellis truncated and capped three of them at about the

40-ft. level, and then sent the fourth one soaring up 180-feet. Not symmetrical at all."

Guenther also stated that the shaft's buff-colored brick deserved notice, too... "Throughout most of his career, when he used brick it was almost always red brick. Here it's buff colored, but if you look closely, you'll see that he intersperses a single red brick every fourth course, just for variety."

Guenther pointed out that the Richardsonian style rough cut blocks that form the tower's base were modified for the tall attached spire. The blocks become thinner and less massive on their way to the top.

One curious feature, he said, is the Tower's round cap. "It has a bell-like flare that wasn't on the blueprints. He must have changed it during the final stage of construction."

Overall, while the Compton Hill Water Tower was among the smallest of Ellis' jobs, it ranks among his best work, Guenther said. "It's a culmination of decades of ideas and inspirations, and is blended with style and even a bit of playfulness."

Interestingly, Ellis was not around for the Tower's 1898 completion. Lacking further work in St. Louis, the architect departed for Syracuse, New York in mid-1893, ending his three-year stay in the city.

Back East, he did a few building designs, but became more interested in painting—watercolors mostly—of various nautical scenes, such as seashores, sailing ships and seagulls.



Washington Terrace Entrance

In June, 1903, he joined the Stickley Brothers furniture design firm in Rochester, where he displayed a solid feel for the "new Arts & Crafts look" of tables, chairs, cabinets., etc. Unfortunately, in January, 1904, only seven months after joining Stickley, he died of heart and liver disease. He was 52.

"Overall, Ellis was unique in his adaptations of other trends in design of that era," Guenther summed up. "He moved the country's architecture out of the Richardsonian era and into the future. I think we in St. Louis are very fortunate to have the Compton Hill Water Tower. It was the embodiment of many elements he'd used over the years. And, I happen to think it's one of the nicest designs he ever did." ●

For more information on the Water Tower and Park Preservation Society and how to tour the tower, visit <http://www.watertowerfoundation.org>.

2014 Annual Membership Meeting! >>

Join us for the 2014 annual membership meeting Sunday, September 14, 3:00-5:30. Come catch up on the past year's activities and enjoy refreshments in the beautiful surroundings of the former Central States Life Insurance Building at 3207 Washington Avenue in Midtown. Designed by Tom P. Barnett in 1921 (with later additions by Frederick Dunn) this ornate Mission Revival building is frequently mistaken for a church and is a very unusual, grandiose



Central States Life Insurance Building Lobby

example of Spanish Colonial Revival architecture in St. Louis. Recently rehabilitated as the home of information technology firm Chameleon Integrated Services, the lobby of the stunning building is one of St. Louis' newest event venues (Barnett on Washington).

The building will be open for exploration and a reception from 3:00 until 4:00, followed by the report of the Executive Director and a brief business meeting. This event is FREE. RSVP's appreciated. Abundant free street parking on Washington Avenue. ●



Central States Life Insurance Building

Architects Known and Unknown: Robert Kirsch and the Collinsville Miner's Institute >>

Constructed by the United Mine Workers of America and the Collinsville miner's local chapters as a theater and union hall, the Miner's Theater (aka, Miner's Institute) has played an important role

in professional and social life in Collinsville, IL, since 1918. Containing a magnificent theater space, union offices, and a third floor dance hall, the building reflects the prominence

and generosity of the city's miners in the early 20th century at a time when the coal industry employed approximately a third of Collinsville's population.

With the decline of the importance of the coal industry in the area in the middle of the 20th century, restless miners switched allegiance from the United Mine Workers Union to the Progressive Mine Workers (PWA) and ownership of the building went with them. But the importance of mining in Collinsville continued to fade. No longer needed for its original purpose, the Miner's Institute was sold to the Bloomer Amusement Company in 1969, which used it as a movie house until closing in 1984.

At that time, dedicated local citizens formed the Miner's Institute Foundation, took ownership, and operated the Institute as a theatre and community center until 2008 when the Collinsville Area Recreation District (CARD) acquired the building and began restoration. After the first phase of renovation was completed in 2011 (costing just over a million dollars), a newly elected CARD Board voted to cease the project and return the building to the Miner's Institute Foundation which continues the work of raising the estimated \$500,000 additional dollars needed to reopen the building today.

Architect Robert G. Kirsch

The architect of the Miner's Theater was Robert G. Kirsch. Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1860 to German immigrant parents, Kirsch practiced independently in that city from 1887 until 1891. He then teamed up with an architect named Charles Rau to form Rau & Kirsch, a partnership which lasted until 1896. During this time, the firm worked extensively and received both institutional and residential commissions including the prestigious opportunity to design the Oconto County, Wisconsin Courthouse (1891—

extant). This was followed in 1893 by a commission to design the Waukesha County Courthouse along with other institutional buildings in Milwaukee including schools, a jail, and at least one turner hall/theater.

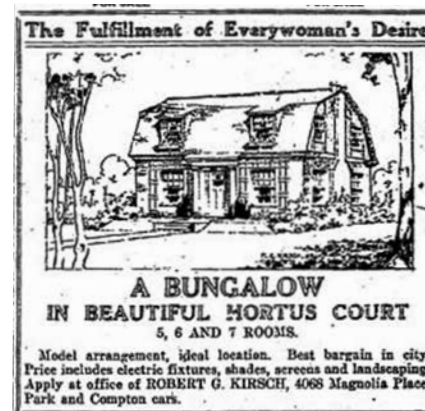
Following the dissolution of the firm, Robert Kirsch received a commission to design the Adair County, Missouri courthouse in 1897. The 1900 census found him living with his family in Macon, Missouri. The three-story Romanesque style building he composed for Adair County was such a success that three other Missouri Counties (Carroll, 1901, Polk, 1906, and Vernon, 1906) commissioned Kirsch to design modest variations on the design for their use. All of these buildings survive today and remain in use.

In 1909 Kirsch received commissions to design the Randall County, Texas courthouse as well as a building for the First National Bank of Canyon City across the street (both extant).

By 1910 Kirsch had moved to St. Louis and was living at 4621 Morgan (now Delmar). In 1912, he was awarded the contract to design the Cooper County, Missouri courthouse for which he departed from the Romanesque idiom in favor of a solid, imposing Beaux Arts block.

Also in that year, Kirsch embarked upon a new stage in his career as an architect/developer. Having purchased land on the north side of Tower Grove Park between Lawrence and Thurman avenues, Kirsch platted Magnolia Place, which was billed as "the only exclusive bungalow subdivision" in St. Louis. Deed restrictions placed on the street by Kirsch required that all houses were to be "bungalow style." Quoted in the Shaw Certified Local Historic District Nomination, the restrictions defined this style as "a building that is wide in proportion to its height and has wide spreading eaves with tile or slate roof and wide porches or verandas." Kirsch reviewed all the plans submitted for homes in the subdivision in order to ensure compliance. According to the same document, 49 homes were built on Magnolia Place between 1913 and 1925.

In 1918, Kirsch returned to his institutional roots designing the Miner's Institute in Collinsville while continuing to reside in St. Louis.



Kirsch Bungalow Ad



Miner's Theater

Robert Kirsch continued >>



Architect Robert G. Kirsch, Courtesy, The Strong, Rochester, NY

By 1921 Kirsch was living near his growing residential development at 4122 Botanical and maintaining an office in what was probably the model home for the subdivision at 4068 Magnolia Place. That year, he doubled down on his bungalow subdivision concept by opening Hortus Court on nearby land on the north side of Magnolia Avenue between Thurman and Klemm. This time, the subdivision diverged from standard development practices in the area by situating building lots along a cul de sac, which ran perpendicular to the thoroughfare of Magnolia Avenue. Automobiles could only access the rear of the homes leaving the primary facades to face out upon an exclusively pedestrian environment.

The choice of a cul de sac layout for Hortus Court indicates that Kirsch was interested in contemporary "Garden City" ideas. Indeed, the choice of the name "Hortus" (Latin for "garden") and the manner in which the homes were oriented to enclose a central walkway amidst manicured lawns and trees suggests that with this development Kirsch

was deliberately attempting to create a "Hortus Conclusus" ("Enclosed

Garden") a concept that had figured prominently in formal landscape design and ecclesiastical art for centuries. Again, plans had to be approved by the architect and deed restrictions required residents to maintain the "landscaped effect" that he had cultivated through design. With room for just ten houses, this little Craftsman enclave featuring tidy gambrel roofed homes maintains the feel of a modest private street to this day.

Kirsch appeared in the St. Louis City Directories for the last time in 1924. He died in 1925 and is buried in Union Cemetery in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. ●



Adair County, MO, Courthouse

Tours >>

Saturday, October 4, 2:00-5:00-- Miner's Theater and Historic Building's of Collinsville, Illinois.



Detail of Miner's Theater

Located just 13 miles from the Arch, Collinsville has a charming downtown full of interesting buildings that are waiting to be explored. Join us for a behind the scenes tour of the Miner's Theater, the 102-year-old Masonic lodge, the 1845 home of Daniel Dove Collins, and the old State Bank. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to the Historic Miner's Theater Foundation to support their efforts to renovate this local landmark! ●

Cost is \$30 for Landmarks' members, \$45 for non-members. Tour begins at Miner's Theater, 204 West Main Street, Collinsville, 62234.

Reservations required: call 314-421-6474 or email Susan Tschetter at tschetter@landmarks-stl.org to make a reservation.

Organizational Updates >>

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These days, historic preservation is not just about singling out and recognizing landmark buildings of exceptional significance. In a city like St. Louis, historic preservation is more effectively defined as a broader philosophy that is built upon the premise that unique historic buildings and neighborhoods are valuable assets that play a critical role in urban revitalization, economic development and environmental sustainability. Couple this position with the idea that excellent contemporary design, where and when appropriate, can further enhance the character of our community and you have the gospel that Landmarks Association has been preaching for more than half a century.

Thank you for your continued support, and if you have friends or family with whom you think our message would resonate, please introduce them to Landmarks Association by passing along this newsletter or contacting our office for additional copies (314-421-6474 or email Susan Tschetter at stschetter@landmarks-stl.org). Another easy way to spread the word is by "liking" Landmarks on Facebook and sharing the interesting stories and opportunities we present on a daily basis. Our members enjoy:

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