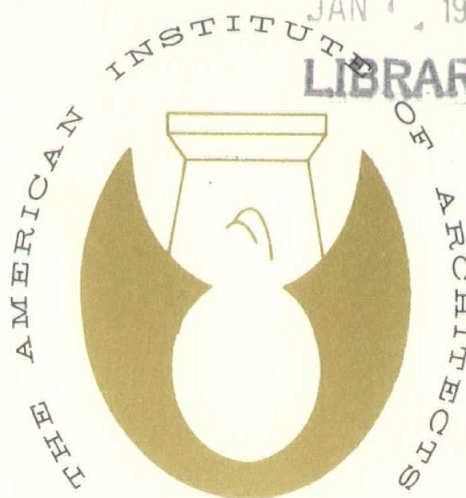


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Sealed bids for building conversion at the G. S. A. Building, 2306 East Bannister Road, Kansas City, Missouri, Project No. 23914, will be received until 2:00 P.M. Central Standard Time, January 7, 1964, at General Services Administration, Public Buildings Service, Region 6, 1500 East Bannister Road, Kansas City, Missouri 64131, and then publicly opened in Regional Administrator's Conference Room.

Project consists of converting approximately 288,000 square feet of existing space into offices, processing areas, and warehouse for Internal Revenue Service, Midwest Service Center. Work includes airconditioning, heating, plumbing, electrical service, lighting, under-floor duct and wiring, new ceiling, flooring, wall covering, partitions, kitchen and cafeteria, computer room, extension to sprinkler system, new loading dock and parking area.

Three complete sets of drawing and specifications will be furnished at no charge to general contractors interested in bidding on the complete project. Not more than three additional sets will be furnished general contractors upon receipt of deposit of \$100.00 per set. Principal subcontractors will be supplied one set of drawings and specifications upon receipt of \$100.00. Make all checks or money orders payable to General Services Administration. All deposits will be returned upon receipt of complete sets of drawings and specifications in good condition within 30 days after bid opening. Upon request, and in the discretion of the issuing office, one set of drawings and specifications will be furnished to builders' exchanges, chamber of commerce, and other similar organizations, with the understanding that the set will be retained on their premises and made available for inspection by any interested contractor or material firm.

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Kansas City, Missouri 64131



SKYLINES

and
MIDWEST ARCHITECT

Vol. 13, No. 11

November 1963

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
John Wellborn Root	3
Honor Awards/63	20
Advertisers In This Issue	31

Cover design by Robert J. Koppes,
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THE BRIEF, BRILLIANT FLAME OF JOHN WELLBORN ROOT,

By Donald L. Hoffmann

Recently, SKYLINEs was fortunate to have access to a very rare book, the biography of John Wellborn Root, great Chicago architect, by Miss Harriet Monroe, his sister-in-law.

Seven Root structures in Kansas City are listed. Six still stand. Most have been unknown to students of Kansas City architecture. Though Root and Louis H. Sullivan ranked as the best American architects of their day, little else has been written about Root's life, his work, or ideas. The following account is based mostly on Miss Monroe's biography, published in 1896.

When John Wellborn Root died in his Chicago home January 15, 1891, he was only 41 years old. Twice he had been secretary of the American Institute of Architects and he was the designing partner of Burnham & Root, the most prominent architectural firm in Chicago.

Two months before his death an appraisal of his work was published in an architectural magazine. Root, said the anonymous review, was a "victim of his own moods—too facile always to carefully reconsider his designs. Much work by Burnham & Root is suggestive and has borne its part in the architectural movement of the day, while much of it reveals crudities begotten of the haste or indifference of the hour."

Root was a man with many friends. They were deeply upset by the review; then they learned that Root had written it. Root's sensibilities were such that, indeed, he often walked blocks out of his way to avoid seeing those of his buildings that he regarded as failures.

His very last sketches were of an office building for a client who had bowed and scraped for some minutes before timidly commenting that he personally did not like Root's

early Montauk block. "My dear Mr. X," said Root, "who in hell does?"

Yet after Root's premature death, Montgomery Schuyler, the leading architectural critic in America at the time, wrote, "I don't know any greater loss that could have happened to the architecture of the future than that man dying before his prime."

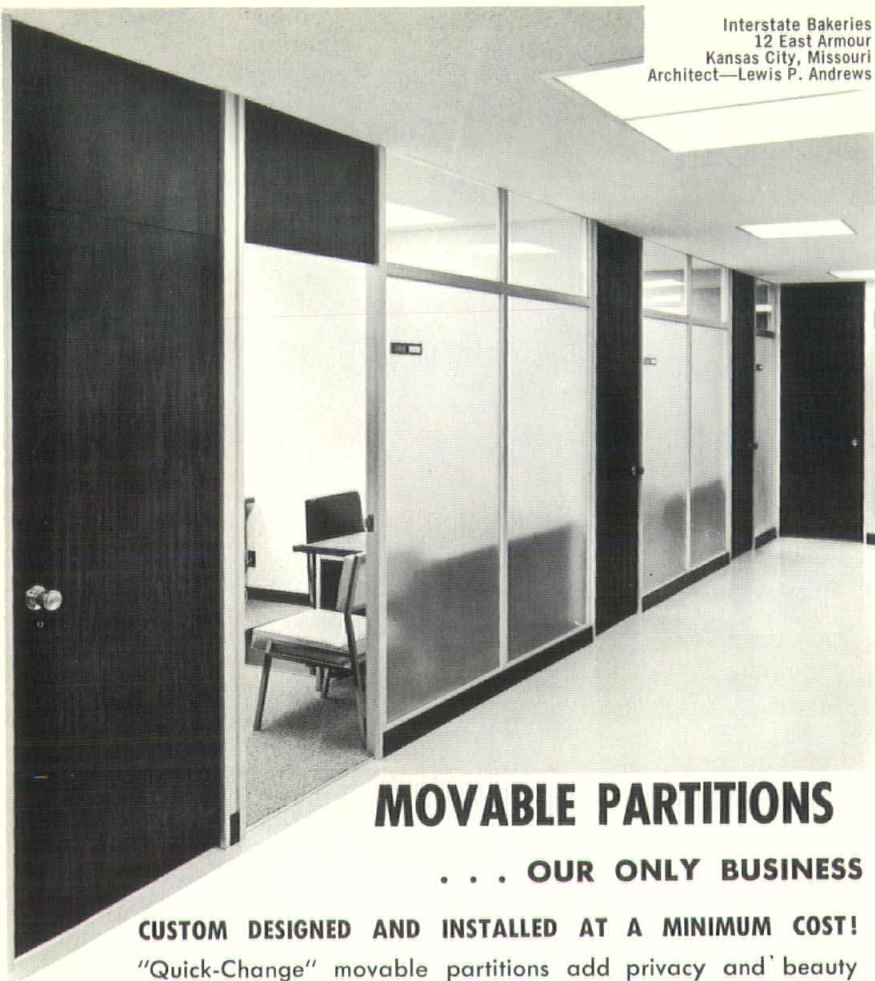
Root had been searching for a living, American architecture. A native of Georgia, he had come to Chicago at the request of P. B. Wight to join the firm of Carter, Drake & Wight. A few days after Root's arrival, Daniel Hudson Burnham joined the same office.

Burnham and Root soon left to form their own partnership, in July, 1873. Their books for their first year showed a net profit of \$364.77. Root, short and heavy-set, in these days fed on oatmeal, which he ate dry, taking a glass of water afterward to make it swell in his stomach.

The partners at first were devoted to the Gothic style. But soon Root's thinking shifted into better focus. "In all the world's history," he wrote, "it has been true and it must always remain true that art produced solely under foreign inspiration has been worthless.

(continued on page 7)

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The sturdy imagination of John Wellborn Root shows through in the tower of the old Kansas City Board of Trade, a building which Miss Harriet Monroe called "a noble monumental structure." The building was executed in 1886-88.



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Despite a few lean years, Burnham & Root quickly grew into a major office on the Chicago scene. The Chicago fire of October 8 and October 9, 1871, had leveled miles of jerry-structures, clearing the way for new commercial buildings.

Major William LeBaron Jenney's first Leiter building had gone up in 1879 and 1880 at 208 West Monroe Street, where it still stands with its castiron pilasters and widely-spaced piers. In the same years, Dankmar Adler & Company had done the 6-story Borden block at Randolph and Dearborn. Burnham & Root's first major office building was the Grannis block at 115 Dearborn Street, built in 1880. Next came the Montauk block, where the partners pioneered the use of isolated pier foundations by imbedding old steel rails in concrete.

A stunning number of important commissions followed. In Chicago alone there were the Insurance Exchange, the Calumet, the Herald Buildings; the Rookery; the Great Northern Hotel; the Masonic Temple; the Woman's Temple; and the great Monadnock Building.

The Monadnock is the best known of Root's designs. Lewis Mumford recently called it "the handsomest office structure of all." Built in 1890, it stands at 53 West Jackson. The story of its design is a curious one, and here is Miss Monroe's account:

"The Monadnock--'Jumbo,' Root used to call it--was the last of the tall buildings to show walls of solid masonry. For this building Mr. Aldis, who controlled the investment, kept urging upon his architects extreme simplicity, rejecting one or two of Root's sketches as too ornate. During Root's absence of a fortnight at the seashore, Mr. Burnham ordered from one of the draughtsmen a design of a straight-up-

and-down, uncompromising, unornamented facade. When Root returned, he was indignant at first over this project of a brick box.

"Gradually, however, he threw himself into the spirit of the thing, and one day he told Mr. Aldis that the heavy sloping lines of an Egyptian pylon had gotten into his mind as the basis of this design, and that he thought he would 'throw the thing up without a single ornament.'

"At last, with a gesture whose pretense of disgust concealed a shy experimental interest, he threw on the drawing-table of Mr. Dutton, then foreman of the office, 'a design,' says this gentleman, 'shaped something like a capital I---a perfectly plain building, curving outward at base and cornice.'

"Many persons remember his desire to grade the color of the building from brown bricks at the bottom to yellow at the top---a project which only lack of time for the manufacture prevented."

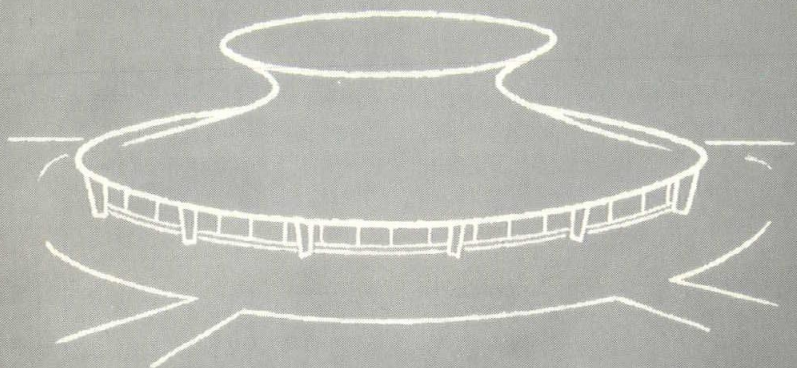
Root's thinking continued to grow with his designing. In 1890 he wrote, "Architecture is, like every other art, born of its age and environment. So the new type will be found by us, if we do find it, through the frankest possible acceptance of every requirement of modern life in all of its conditions, without regret for the past or idle longing for a future and more fortunate day. . .

"If the new art is to come, I believe it will be a rational and steady growth from practical conditions outward and upward toward a more or less spiritual expression, and that no man has the right to borrow from another age an architectural idea evolved from the life of that age, unless it fits our life as normally and fully as it fitted the other."

Root saw the office building as the most expressive of modern life in its complexity, luxury and vitality. He urged architects to consider climate, atmosphere, and the commercial and social conditions of the community in designing office buildings.

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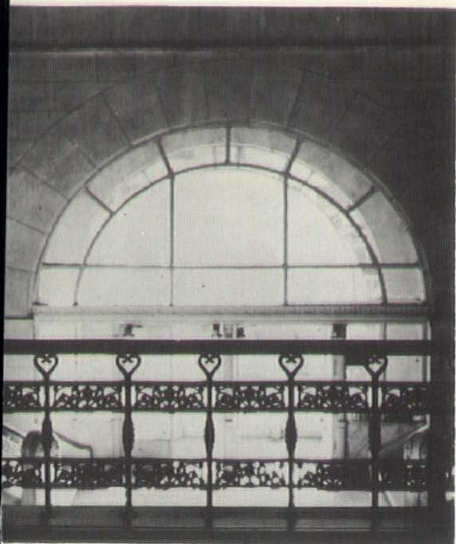
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The entrance court of the old Board of Trade is on a grand, yet simple scale. The ornamented railing is on the mezzanine level. Stairs are at both sides of the commodious arched entrance. Light barely filters through the dusty skylight.

must dictate absolutely the general departure of external forms."

Burnham & Root designed seven buildings in Kansas City, all between 1886 and 1889:

The Board of Trade (now Manufacturer's Exchange), on the northwest corner of Eighth and Wyandotte Streets.

The American Bank (now Park Center) Building, the northwest corner of Eighth and Delaware Streets.

The Midland Hotel (now Railway Exchange Building), the southeast corner of Seventh and Walnut Streets.

The Y.M.C.A. (now Studio Building), the northwest corner of Ninth and Locust Streets.

The Grand Avenue Station, demolished in 1959.

A residence for James L. Lombard, 1805 Jefferson Street, now converted into a hotel with an addition to the south.

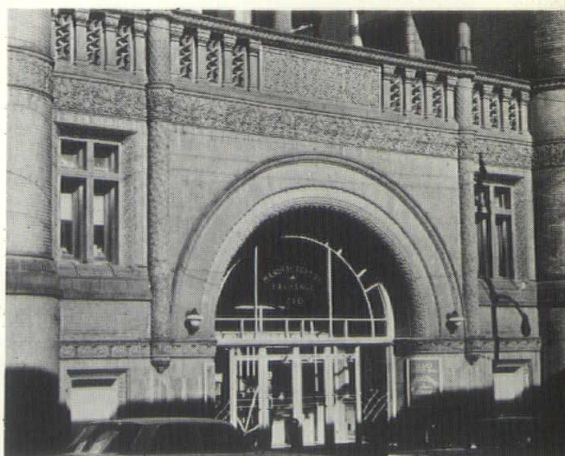
A residence for William Chick Scarritt, 3240 Norledge Avenue, now a nursing home.

The finest of these buildings is the old Board of Trade, for which Burnham & Root won a competition in 1886. It was completed in the summer of 1888.

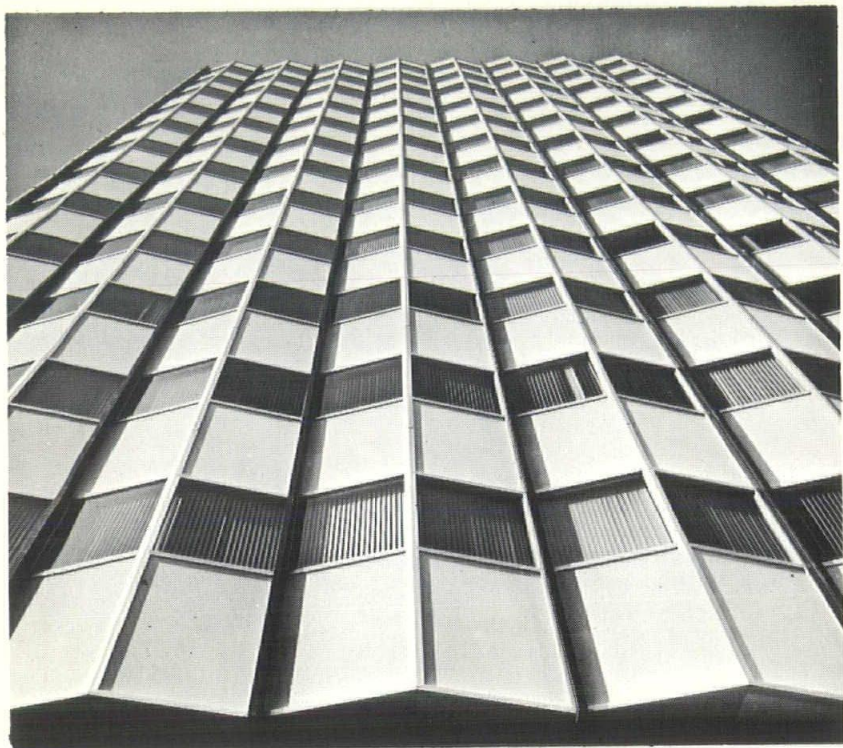
Root had hoped to get the commission for the Chicago Auditorium, but had lost it to the firm of Adler & Sullivan. Sullivan's plan, of course, had the auditorium itself buried inside a huge rectangular block of hotel rooms and public facilities such as bars and a restaurant.

Root's conception was that the structure should be split in two halves, with one containing the hotel and the other the auditorium. These two wings he planned to unite with a central tower, which he envisioned as "a rose."

It is interesting to note that this concept was carried through in the Kansas City Board of Trade. The old building has not been well maintained, but enough of it is left to give a glimpse of its former glory. In its day, the Board of Trade was without doubt the most imposing structure on the Kansas City skyline. Miss Monroe had a deep appreciation of it, and here is what she wrote:



The broad Board of Trade entrance is heavily, yet judiciously, ornamented. The entrance is in the form of a curtain in front of a skylighted court. Note the massive and powerfully moulded masonry piers.



Panels of Carthage Exterior Marble form a striking curtain wall for the 14-story Administration Building at Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company's new Research Center near St. Paul.

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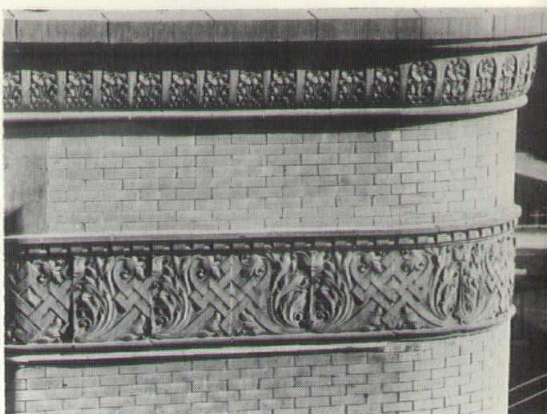
"The Exchange building is a strong, spontaneous essay in civic architecture. The material, above the brown-stone base, is red brick, with terra-cotta ornamentation of the same color.

"The design confesses frankly a Romanesque inspiration---the great tower, which rises abruptly behind the recessed court, from between the mighty wings of the structure, being a triumphant proof of the adaptability of the style to modern meanings. The two large pavilions which it unites differ somewhat in design; the one on the left, which contains the great trading-hall on the fourth story, bearing a low pediment with sculpture in bas-relief, and a narrow balcony at the base of the hall's lofty round-arched windows.

"The pavilions are strongly divided horizontally into three architectural stories, and are united in front by a screen containing the massive gateway---a round arch springing from low massed columns, which leads into a glass-covered court or chamber.

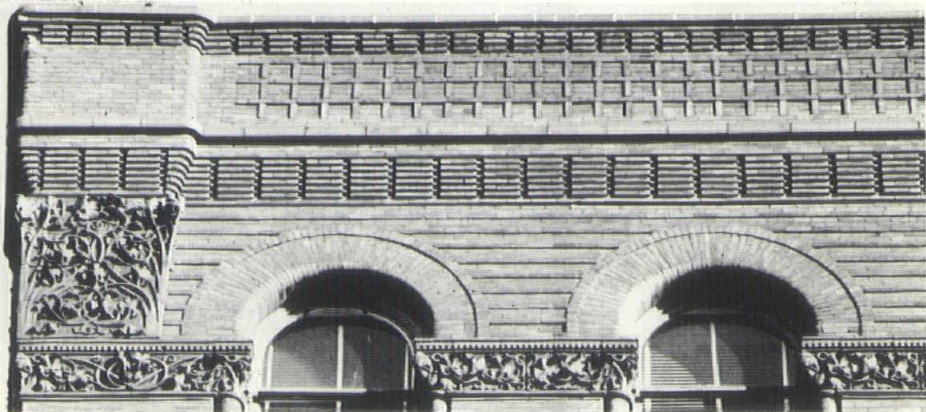
"The tower is broad and low, very beautiful in its grouping of windows and roofs, the semi-circular front, with its roof of steep conical slope, being particularly effective.

"This building is a noble monumental structure, which will speak to the future for this age as eloquently as monuments of the past declare to us the spirit of epochs."



Curved bricks give shape to the piers of the Board of Trade, and ornament composed of floral designs enriches them. This detail is on the fourth floor level, as seen from a window of the huge trading-hall.

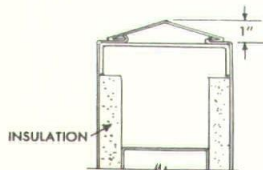
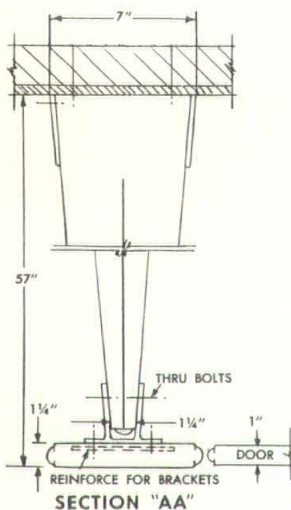
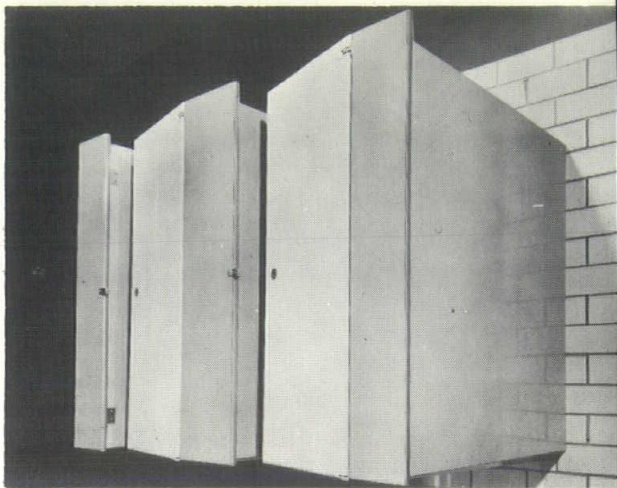
The tower of the Board of Trade functions as housing for the elevators up to a certain point. In its higher reaches, however, it has been left purely ornamental, and the only occupants are pigeons. This is rather disappointing, especially when one considers how Sullivan's tower at the rear of the Auditorium contained offices, with its top story being occupied by Adler & Sullivan. The amount of structural steel bracing inside the Board of Trade tower is surprising. One suspects, however, that it could have been arranged so so as to leave the space usable in some way.



A cornice detail of the old Midland Hotel, now the Railway Exchange Building at Seventh and Walnut Streets, shows the craftsmanship and care in design of a bygone era.

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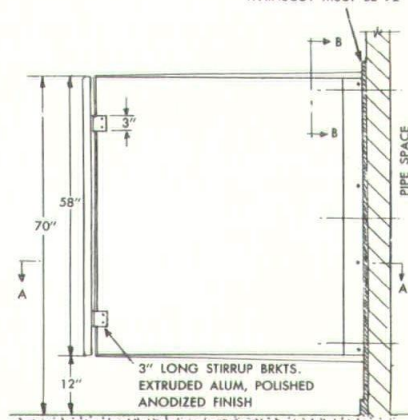
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One of the fine features still intact in the old Midland Hotel is its spiral staircase. It is on the south side of the building, in a bay of windows, and runs from the second to the seventh floors. Some cast-iron ornament in the old Midland is identical to that of the old Board of Trade.

The trading-hall is now unused and in pitifully bad repair. Yet its great space, somewhat on the order of the Union Station lobby, still can be sensed from the proper vantage points.

When urban renewal moves into the area of the old Board of Trade, it must not be demolished. The building is not beyond refurbishing, and if it were demolished, Kansas City would lose one of its greatest architectural landmarks.

The old Midland hotel opened September 6, 1888. It was acknowledged the city's finest hotel until the turn of the century, when such trade moved south to the Baltimore hotel. The Midland was remodeled in 1908 as an office building, so its original appearance is now hard to imagine. It was crudely partitioned over the years and retains interest today only in ornamental details.

Drastic changes have been made to the old American Bank building, another wall-bearing structure originally of red hue. The interior has been remodeled beyond recognition and the exterior has been desecrated with gray paint. The bank first occupied this building in August, 1888.

The Y.M.C.A. building was of less interest from the beginning, probably because of a tight budget. Later called the Pepper building, the west half was badly damaged by fire in 1907. It was rebuilt as the Studio building. Strips of corrugated metal have been added to the facades, making the original appearance of this building unclear.

Both Burnham & Root residences in Kansas City were obviously fine homes in their day. They were built in 1888. The Scarritt home is dominated by a Romanesque turret with a semi-conical roof similar to that on the tower of the Board of Trade. The turret faces south, and gathers in quite a bit of cheerful light for rooms on three stories. A smaller, two-story, turret is at the rear of the house and is nicely planned with a second-floor porch overlooking the northeast bottoms and the bluffs of Clay County.

The Scarritt home, sited directly behind the Kansas City Museum, is in comparatively good repair. There are still stained-glass windows on the first floor, though, as in the other ornament of the house, the designs are rather bland.

William Chick Scarritt was a lawyer, real estate man, and later, the owner of the Scarritt building on the northwest corner of Ninth street and Grand avenue.

The Scarritt building is perhaps the finest work of Root's younger brother, Walter C. Root, who was sent here in 1886 as Burnham & Root's representative during their busy years on construction in Kansas City. The 12-story Scarritt building was erected in 1906, and the four-story Scarritt arcade, around the corner on Walnut street, in 1907. Both are noteworthy in their lavish use of ornament in the manner of Sullivan.

Walter Root, who died in 1925, practiced architecture here, forming a partnership in 1896

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with George M. Siemens. Clearly, he studied the work of the Chicago architects, and especially Sullivan's Schlesinger & Mayer (now Carson, Pirie, Scott) department store.

Burnham & Root's other residence in Kansas City was built for a broker, James L. Lombard. It is on what was once a magnificent site, at 1805 Jefferson street, and is appropriately named "Southview."

The Lombard residence is primarily of tapestry brick, rather than stone. The west facade is most impressive. The design is clean, sharp, and enlivened by a double-arch serving as entrance-way and port-cochere, and by a restrained ornament.

In this residence, Root was not so far from Frank Lloyd Wright's Charnley house of 1891-92, or the Winslow house of 1893; just as in the swelling, curving masses of the Board of Trade he was handling brick with spatial goals pursued by Wright in his administration building for the Johnson Wax company, half a century later. The Lombard house and the Charnley house have the same austere spirit, presaging an abandonment of Victorian architectural excesses.

Unfortunately, a hotel addition was built on the Lombard house in the 1920s, and the house itself has badly deteriorated inside.

Burnham & Root's last building here, the Grand Avenue station, is remembered as a sooty eyesore cramped between the Grand avenue and McGee street viaducts at about Twenty-first street. It was demolished four years ago. The station was erected in 1889 and moved a short distance in 1913 to permit construction of the Grand avenue viaduct. It was a gabled, four-story brick structure, and originally had a cupola.

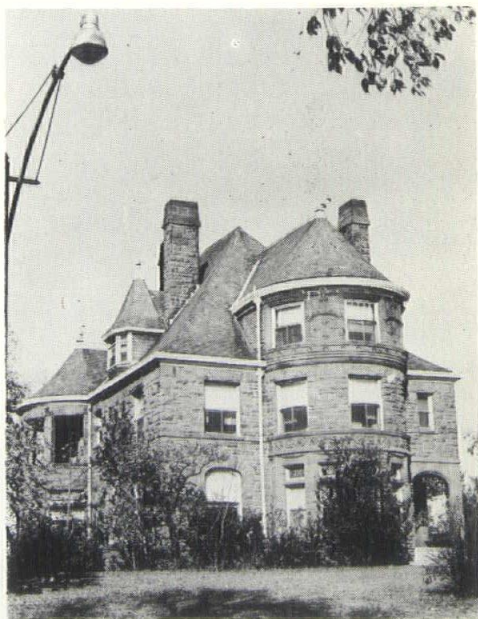
Miss Monroe reports that Burnham always acted as a restraining influence on Root, who was so facile in his designing as to be always on the brink of dilettantism. Burnham, she noted, besides being the front-man of the office and getting the commissions (a job which he performed extraordinarily well, considering the partners designed more than 100 residences in Chicago alone, and office buildings across the

country), generally conceived the plans, leaving the facades and details to Root.

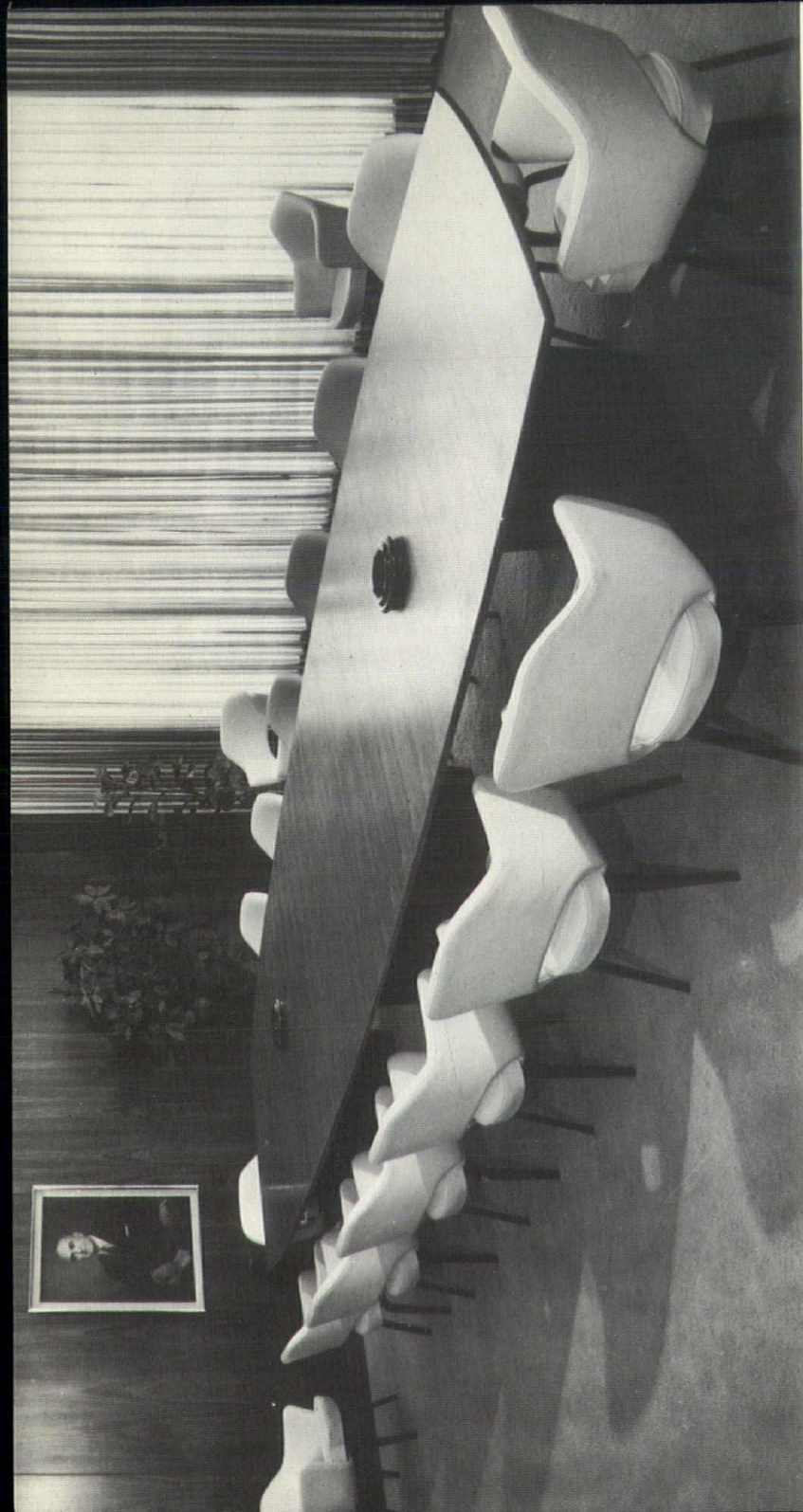
Despite the large office staff, Root was noted for his attention to details, such as ornament. But in the last years, when the partnership was flooded with commissions, it can be questioned whether Root was able to design anywhere near all of these details.

Root burned his light night and day. He moved in a variety of social circles, sharing his wit and skill at improvising on the piano or organ. He was dedicated to the A.I.A. and frequently contributed articles to the leading architectural magazines.

"It is a joy to recall this man's enthusiasm, the activity of his mind, the power of his will," Miss Monroe writes. "These were a force while he lived---a force people were beginning to feel joyously, extravagantly."



The old William Chick Scarritt residence at 3240 Norledge Avenue, behind the Kansas City Museum, is one of John Wellborn Root's designs. The brownstone house is on the bluff above the northeast bottoms, and despite its heavy masonry appearance, has rooms flooded with sunlight.



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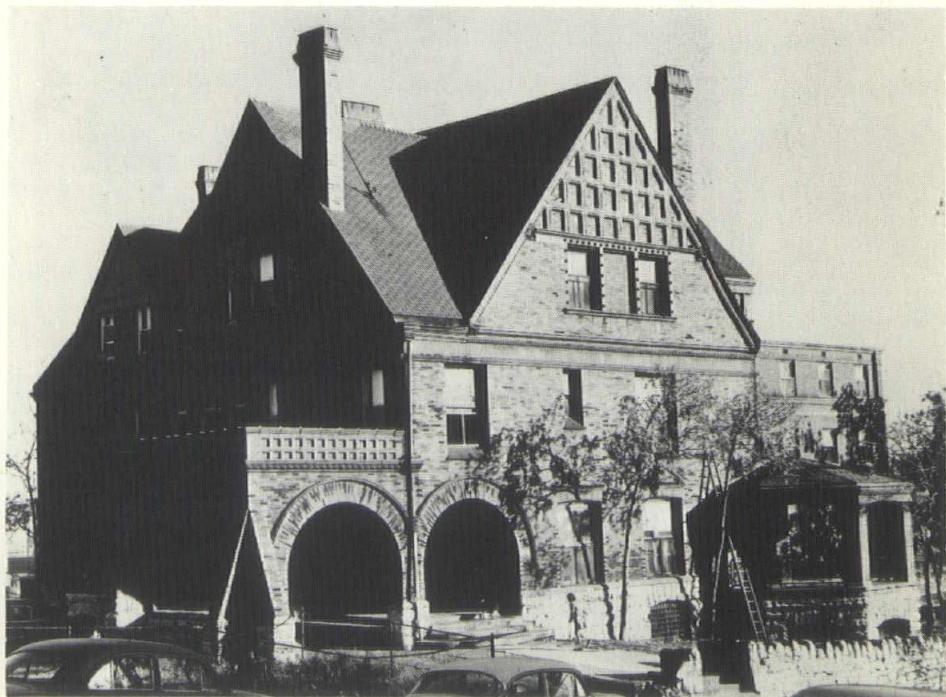
The World's Columbian Exposition was assigned to Chicago by legislation adopted in February, 1890, less than a year before Root's death. Root was chosen consulting architect in August, and in October, Burnham was named chief of construction.

Root first proposed a site on the lake front between Lake and Twelfth streets. He planned to depress and cover the Illinois Central tracks (much as Eero Saarinen handled the tracks on the St. Louis riverfront for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial). The advantage of a downtown site would have been the possibility of retaining the major fair structures as a civic buildings. But after long debate the Jackson Park site, about 6000 south, was chosen, and Root laid out a plan essentially the same as the one finally adopted. Collaborating with Root were Frederick Law Olmsted and his partner, Henry Codman.

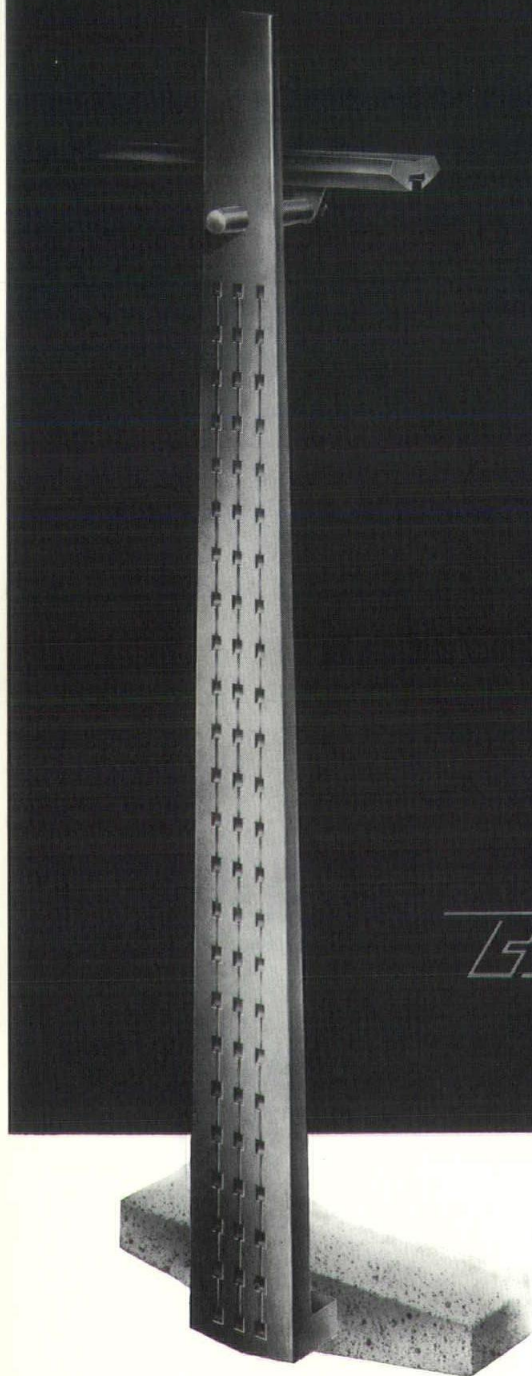
At the last minute, there was a powerful move to locate the fair in Washington Park, inland. Root had the sense to oppose this at all costs, arguing that the great poetic feature of Chicago was its lake. Root's judgment prevailed. His supporters urged him to design the central administration building, but he modestly declined.

Root, however, made some sketches of typical fair buildings. They were characterized by a very light Romanesque motif, or perhaps a kind of oriental classicism; in fact, their appearance is difficult to label with any fairness. What these few sketches showed was liveliness, a fair-like spirit, and a use of color.

"John Root's conception of the Fair differed much from the White City of memory," Miss Monroe writes. "If he had lived and his ideas had prevailed, the Columbian Exposition



A strong and clear facade is presented by the old James L. Lombard residence at 1805 Jefferson Street, called "Southview." Note the fine double-arch in tapestry brick and the coffered ornamentation of the west gable and the cornice of the carriage porch. The Lombard and Scarrit homes are 75 years old.



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would have been a city of color...The fundamental point in Root's creed as an architect was sincerity: a building should frankly express its purpose and its material.

"Thus it would have been impossible for him to design, as the chief buildings of the Fair, imitations in staff of marble palaces: these could not express their material; or to adopt a classic motive: this could not express the purpose of a modern American exposition. He wished to admit frankly in the architectural scheme the temporary character of the Fair.

"...His whole heart was centered upon his hope of an American Fair---an architectural scheme which should express exuberantly our young, crude, buoyant civilization, and strike our note at last in the world's art."

One of Root's last projects was a plan for the Chicago Art Institute. In his final elevations, there is an unmistakable move toward classicism. The two wings had blind arcades more than a little suggestive of McKim, Mead & White's Boston Public library of 1887. The present Art Institute was designed after Root's death by Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge, the successor firm to H. H. Richardson, and it is even closer to McKim's Beaux Arts style.

Whether Root would have been swept up in the classical fervor, had he lived longer, is an open question. He sometimes showed an almost feminine love of beauty in its flimsier forms.

On his deathbed, Root had hallucinations of flying objects of beauty. "Do you see that?" he would ask the others in the room. "Isn't it beautiful...all white and gold!"

In reading musical scores he had the habit of translating the instrumental parts into certain colors: reds and yellows meant the brasses, greens the oboes and bassoons, violet the cellos, and blue the violins.

But as a theorist Root approached American architecture as a giant and prophet.

"Now, in America," he told Miss Monroe in the summer of 1890, "we are free of artistic traditions. Our freedom begets license, it is true. We do shocking things; we produce works of architecture, sculpture and painting which are wholly, irremediably bad; we try crude experiments which result in disaster.

Yet somewhere in this mass of ungoverned energies lies the principle of life. A new spirit of beauty is being developed and perfected...this is not the old thing made over; it is new.

"Compare the best of our recent architecture...some of Richardson's designs, for example...with the most pretentious buildings recently erected in Europe. In the American works we find strength and fitness and a certain spontaneity and freshness, as of stately music or a song in green woods..."



Honor Awards

Kansas City architects were honored with nine awards at the annual chapter awards dinner held November 15 in the Hotel Muehlebach.

It was a year for entries characterized by an intimate and human scale. It was not a year of skyscrapers or vast public monuments. All entries had to have been substantially completed during 1962 or the first eight months of 1963.

Medal awards, signifying overall design excellence, were presented to two entries.

The winners were the Danish Village apartment project on Seventy-ninth street east of Metcalf in Overland Park, Boyle & Wilson, architects; and to the Patrons Mutual Insurance Association building in Olathe, Hollis & Miller architects.

Of Danish Village, the jury commented:

"The jury unanimously agreed that this little group of buildings is entirely remarkable as a 'builder project.' After seeing the photographs, we were delighted and a little surprised to see that the siting of the buildings on the rolling ground is very good indeed.

"The occupants do have a good measure of privacy and the children do have an interesting and varying place to play. We presume to say that the architect did a rather remarkable thing for such a low cost. This project is so simple and generally human that little things show big."

The jury comment on the Patrons Mutual building:

"The jury immediately agreed that among all the entries, this building was less affected, entirely free of clichés and mannerisms and appeared

to be a simple and direct solution to all problems and conditions of plan, place and materials.

"No more than a glance at the plan was required to gain full knowledge of the specific use of the spaces. We felt it is significant that the architects felt no necessity for a sumptuous 'capital E' entrance or a great variety of materials to 'dress it up.'"

Two special awards were presented this year. They went to the residence of Mr. and Mrs. J. K. Higdon at Lake Quivira, Geis-Hunter-Ramos, architects; and to the Sugar Creek police and fire station, Kivett & Myers, architects.

"The jury found this house quite pleasant, an amazing achievement for so little money---and we could not forget that enough money was left to buy a modest sailboat," was the comment. "We congratulate the man who kept to simple materials and did not feel any need for 'gillifrass' such as rock walls, panels of brick veneer, or meaningless sheets of glass."

Comment on the police and fire station:

"As the jury studied this little building from the plans and photographs submitted and later on the site, we became quite aware of its use. We could read back and forth from plan to elevations and find that they were one solid thing in all respects.

"Even the interior spaces, which employ very modest materials and finishes are not only proper and well used, but clearly complement the system of building."

A new category for awards was initiated this year, the art in architecture awards. Two winners were chosen. They were the city park at Twenty-seventh and Madison, Elpidio Rocha,

architect, in collaboration with Dale Eldred, sculptor; and the fireplace mural by Mrs. Gabriella Polony Mountain in the home of Peter Keleti, architect.

The jury praised the park for drawing no boundary between architecture and sculpture and for the emotional impact of its design. The mural was cited for its significance as relief sculpture in a room with a restrained interior.

The final three awards were for craftsmanship.

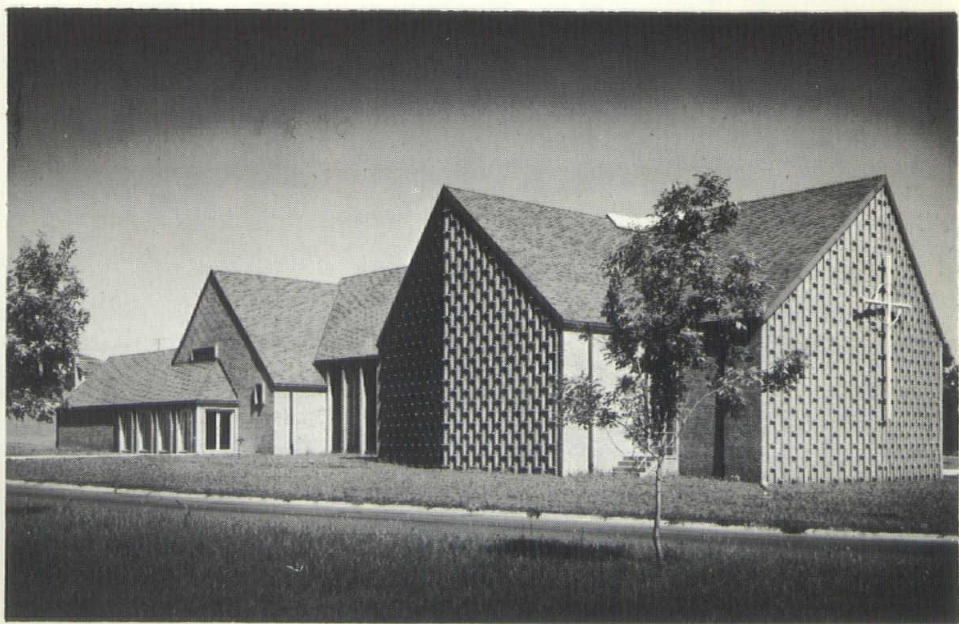
They were the decorative masonry at the Southminster Presbyterian church, 6306 Roe boulevard, Hollis & Miller, architects; the stonework at the Lone Jack museum, Geis-Hunter-Ramos, architects; and the glazed brick sign for the clipper Manufacturing company, Grandview, Neville,

Sharp and Simon, architects.

This year the medal and special awards jury was composed of O'Neil Ford of San Antonio, Tex., John S. Rice of Des Moines, and David G. Murray of Tulsa, all architects.

Jury members for the art in architecture awards were Andrew Morgan, president of, the Kansas City Art Institute and School of Design; Ralph T. Coe, curator of painting and sculpture at the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art; and Eugene George, dean of the architecture school of the University of Kansas.

For the craftsmanship awards, the jury members were Robin Walker, president of the Builders association; S.R. Brunn, president of the Associated General Contractors; and Mark Sharp, Kansas City architect.



Decorative masonry work at the Southminster Presbyterian Church, 6306 Roe Boulevard, also won a craftsmanship award. Hollis & Miller were the architects.



PATRONS MUTUAL INSURANCE ASSOCIATION

A medal award winner was the Patrons Mutual Insurance Association Building in Olathe. The architects were Hollis & Miller.



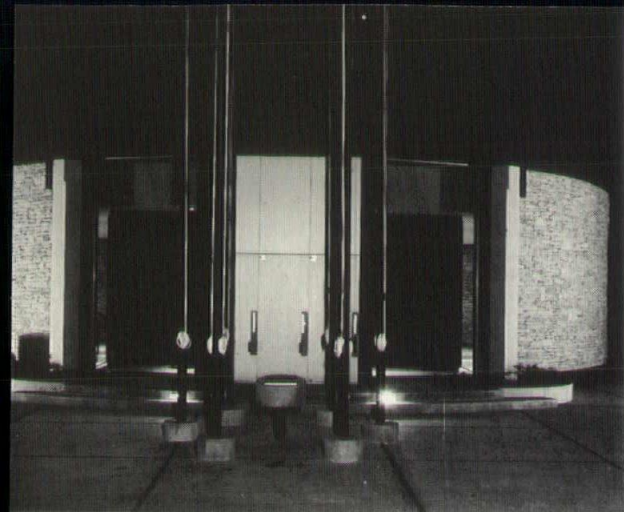
The Danish Village Apartments in Overland Park was a medal award winner. Architects were Boyle & Wilson.



The residence for Mr. and Mrs. J. K. Higdon at Lake Quivira won a special award. Geis-Hunter-Ramos were the architects.



A special award was given to the Sugar Creek police and fire station. It was designed by Kivett & Myers, architects.



Stonework at the Lone Jack Museum won a craftsmanship award. Architects were Geis-Hunter-Ramos.



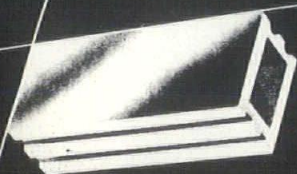
This relief sculpture over the fireplace in the home of Peter Keleti, architect, was executed by Mrs. Gabriella Polony Mountain. It won an art in architecture award.



A decorative sign of glazed brick for the Clipper Manufacturing Company in Grandview won another craftsmanship award. Neville, Sharp & Simon were the architects.

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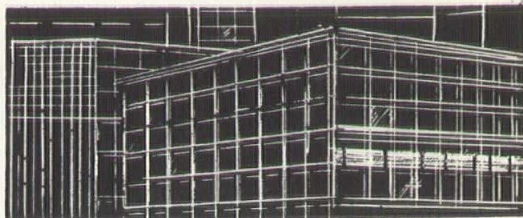
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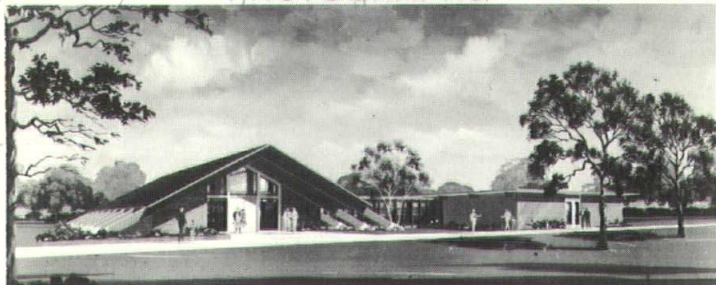
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