



RIPS NEWS

Advocates for Historic Architecture

Membership Meetings

Our normal meeting schedule has been disrupted by the Stay at Home if You Can status of our nation, state, and city. Uncertainty of when public gatherings will be safe to attend means we will be addressing meetings on a month to month basis. Watch for email updates and keep abreast of the latest happenings on our Facebook page.

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| August 2020 | A virtual meeting on Zoom is planned. You will receive login information the day before the meeting. |
| September 2020 | Meeting details are not available at this time.
Watch for email updates. |
| October 2020 | Meeting details are not available at this time.
Watch for email updates. |

Remember to keep the third Tuesday of each month marked on your calendar for monthly RIPS meetings and activities

NEW HISTORIC DISTRICT

Rock Island's downtown has been officially added to the National Register of Historic Places as a Downtown Historic District, announced on July 5, 2020. "Rock Island is a historically significant community. Establishing this designation offers many benefits to property owners and the community," Mayor Mike Thoms said. "Projects will be easier to fund with access to tax credits and provides an opportunity for Rock Island to showcase heritage tourism, as a means to advance and encourage historically appropriate development."

The Historic District includes properties located between 1st and 6th Avenues, 14th and 21st Streets. It includes both the Rock Island County Courthouse and Centennial Bridge. We look forward to sharing the stories of the historic buildings and structures in our downtown.

**Congratulations,
Rock Island!**

COURTHOUSE UPDATE

On July 16, in a 46-page decision, the Appellate Court overruled lower courts and rejected the County's claim that the Illinois Preservation Act did not apply to them as they wish to demolish the historic Courthouse. Rather, the Court agreed with the several plaintiffs - national, statewide, and local, including RIPS, Moline Preservation Society, and Broadway Historic District Association- that indeed, the County must adhere to the law; the injunction against demolition was reinstated until the County adheres to the legal requirements. Effectively, this means that the alternatives to Courthouse demolition must be explored and mitigated if at all possible.

Citing the \$114,000 that the County has already spent on legal fees, Landmarks Illinois has proposed that RFPs (Request for Proposals) for reuse of the courthouse be issued and explored. The process would comply with the Preservation Act and allow the County to lawfully proceed with demolition if no viable reuse alternatives are found. A nearly identical solution was proposed last year jointly by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Illinois EPA, with essentially no response from the County.

It should be noted that the Appellate Court did not overturn previous rulings on the powers of the Public Building Commission allowing them to choose a site and fund the construction of a new Courthouse building. Local news editorials have supported the recent Landmarks proposal, but, so far as we know, there has been no response from the County.

HIDDEN TREASURE

We were saddened as we watched the long demolition process on the historic International Style First National Bank in downtown Rock Island. But there was a long-hidden treasure in that building, which had been built in 1962-63. Along the east wall of the basement level was a beautiful mural, painted directly on the wall. (*Below, detail panoramic of mural*)



It was huge, measuring 40-50 feet long, and was uncovered by excavator operator, Cassie Steffen, who called it to our attention. She found that it was signed "Arn Marolf 1963." (*Right, Detail of artist signature*)

We posted one of her photos on the RIPS Facebook page and were happy to find several Marolf relatives responding to us. One, Jessica Marolf, even arranged for two professional photographers, while Cassie uncovered it completely for the photographs. We are grateful to everyone who enabled the documentation of this scene.



Arnold "Arn" W. Marolf (1928-2015) was part of a family of artists. He was born in Minnesota but came to Davenport as a young teen. After graduation from the American Academy of Art in Chicago, he worked as a commercial artist in both Chicago and Davenport. And he was only 22 when he was in the Korean War where he was wounded. Although he clearly maintained his interest in art, by 1956, he joined his father's business W.J. Marolf & Sons Ltd. Masonry Contractors along with his older brother, Waldo "Wally." He retired from there in 1993. Another brother, Leo Marolf, was an architect, who became a partner in the same firm that designed First National Bank. When the bank was built, the firm was known as Stuhr, Parkhurst & Appier. That same architectural firm remains today as Studio 483. Leo may have been Arn's connection to the bank. (*Left, QCTimes obituary photo*)



The mural shows the downtown Rock Island skyline as seen from Davenport circa 1963. Arn Marolf's signature is on the Davenport stone wall at the lower right. Many of the buildings are gone including the Armory and railroad sheds along the waterfront. Of course, the First National is also missing.

It has also been pointed out that the unnamed riverboat at the left, with the tip of Arsenal Island in the background may be artistic license, as there were no ferry boats remaining in that era. Enjoy these photos which we are very proud to share with you.

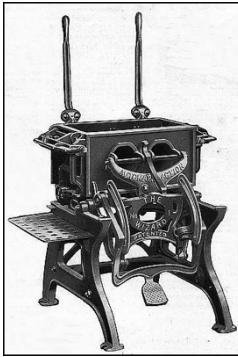
(*Left, Exposed basement level mural during demolition. Water on the basement floor reflects the mural. Rebar and 1st floor structure is just above the mural. The windows seen at the top are from The Best Building, across 17th St. The full panoramic view of the downtown panorama was photographed by Klynn Photography, and shows the demolition debris surrounding the mural. Close-up views we show are thanks to Liz Lauren Photo + Boudoir.*)

ORNAMENTAL CONCRETE BLOCK HOUSES

During the first three decades of the 20th century, concrete block buildings were springing up everywhere: in small towns, on the farm, in suburbs, and in urban neighborhoods. Concrete blocks molded in the appearance of cut stone were less expensive and brought the masonry house within reach of the average family.

Early concrete blocks were not the plain mass-produced concrete blocks which are readily available today. They had character. Hand produced on a metal machine, they could be made at the job site or purchased from a lumberyard. Harmon S. Palmer created the first cast iron molding machine and founded the Hollow Building Block Company. By 1904 he was producing around 400 machines a year.

The molding machine had six sides and a patented way to open the mold so the block could be removed. Workers filled the mold by hand, tamping down the material around the hollow openings in the middle. Using a series of levers, the operator closed the mold, changed the position of the mold, opened the end doors, and the block was released. The block was then carefully moved to a drying rack where it would cure with a daily sprinkling of water for two to four weeks – the longer the stronger. Washing a little concrete off the decorative face of the block produced a more stone-like effect.



Once the popularity of the concrete block was established, competing companies entered the marketplace. Sears, Roebuck & Co. promoted their machine, *The Wizard*, in their 1908 catalog. A standard manual machine, with its eight interchangeable face plate molds, attachments, plus accessories sold for \$63.75. It was marketed to do-it-yourselfers, farmers, small scale contractors, lumberyards, and concrete companies. (*Left, Sears, Roebuck, & Co., "The Wizard."* Right, page from the Sears catalog.)

The addition of interchangeable face plates allowed the production of blocks that looked like different types of cut stonework. Even egg-and-dart, rope or scroll carvings could be cast into blocks making them ideal for friezes or belt courses. Bevel edged panel designs worked well for corners. Lattice pieces could be used for fences or concrete skirts under porches. There were kits for triangular blocks, trapezoid blocks, porch balusters, rails, and columns. There were even molds for sills, lintels, arches and Corinthian or Ionic capitals. In some instances, other interesting materials were added to the mixture. Examples included crushed coquina shells in Florida and bits of colored glass in Wisconsin. Dyes could also be added to make the blocks grey or brown.

The designs for homes built of decorative concrete block most often came from builders or pattern books and were in all shapes and sizes. The most popular style was the American Foursquare. But there were also Colonial Revivals, Bungalows, and cottages. Not as frequently seen and harder to build were Queen Anne, Dutch Colonial, or Mansard-style homes. There were even homes built in the Spanish style or as Japanese pagodas. And the structures were not limited to homes. Garages, churches, schools, hotels, railroad stations, and even ice houses were creatively built out of decorative concrete blocks.



Taking the design to a higher level, Frank Lloyd Wright experimented with concrete blocks. He built four what he called textile block houses in the 1920's in California. The blocks were hand-cast on the premises using the site's own sand. A unique block with a more modern three-dimensional pattern pressed into the surface was designed for each home. Check out www.franklloydwright.org to see pictures of the textile blocks and the homes. (*Left, Entry detail of Freeman House, Los Angeles, CA. Right, Block detail of Millard House, Los Angeles, CA. Photos from FranklloydWright.com*)

*"This is the concrete age.....
The forests are going. Indeed,
they have almost disappeared. What
shall take the place of wood?
The answer is concrete!"*
*From 1910 Helm
Machine Co.*



SEARS, ROEBUCK AND CO., CHICAGO, ILLINOIS.



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ORNAMENTAL CONCRETE BLOCK HOUSES – ROCK ISLAND

we have a variety of decorative concrete block structures in Rock Island. Here are a few pictures with addresses.



Top, left to right, 1629 21st St.,
3901 11th St.,
Garage at 2300 10th Ave.

Bottom, 1630 29-1/2th St., with
detail of the three faces of decorative
concrete used on porch.

Photos by Linda Anderson

But we know there are many more and we would like to compile a list.
If you live in one or know of one, please send a picture and the address
to www.rockislandpreservation.org or post it to our [Facebook](#) page.



Rock Island Preservation Society
P.O. Box 3261
Rock Island, Illinois 61204-3261

