

ERNEST O. BROSTROM, ARCHITECT

Ernest Olaf Brostrom was born in Sweden in 1888, and subsequently emigrated to the United States with his parents. He attended public schools, but had no formal architectural training. By 1907, he was employed as a draftsman with the Eisentraut-Colby-Pottenger Company, Architects, in Sioux City, Iowa. He came to Kansas City in that year with the firm's president, John P. Eisentraut, to set up The Eisentraut Company, Architects, with offices in the Scarritt Building. The Scarritt, with its Sullivanesque ornament, was one of the finest examples of Chicago School architecture to have been erected in Kansas City, and must have exerted a strong attraction on the young would-be architect.

Brostrom became a strong admirer of the work of Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright, and would remain so for the rest of his life. In 1910, he traveled to Chicago in the hope of working for Wright, only to find the Oak Park Studio closed and Wright fled to Europe. Brostrom then returned to Kansas City, where in 1911 he briefly worked as an architect for a local contractor, Harry Bliss.

In 1912, the twenty-three-year-old Brostrom established his own office in the Brent Building at 1113 McGee, and for a while apparently set up residency in his office space. His earliest known independent design was for the Swedish Evangelical Mission Church, built in 1912 at 1501 West 42nd Street. The church was simple and straightforward, a Greek cross in plan with a squat corner tower. Executed in brick and stucco with wood trim, the design utilized Gothic decorative elements but geometricized them in a manner suggesting an Arts and Crafts influence. This style, which Brostrom himself termed "Pseudo Gothic," was subsequently used for the majority of his church designs.

Within a surprisingly short time, Brostrom became an acknowledged specialist in small church design. Just seven years later, in 1919, he published a book entitled Churches, in which he offered advice to those about to undertake the building of a church. The book was illustrated with over 35 of his own designs, including churches in Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, and Kansas. One of these was the First Baptist Church in Rosedale, Kansas, built in 1916 at 901 Southwest Boulevard. It was this design that may have led to the commission for the George Rushton residence of the following year, across the street at 815 Southwest Boulevard.

The Craftsman style Rushton residence was built of fireproof construction, in an apparent response to a fire that had destroyed an earlier building housing the Rushton Bakery. But the house was not yet completed when, for a second time, the George Rushton Baking Co. on the opposite side of Southwest Boulevard burned on September 8, 1917. Brostrom was hired to design a temporary replacement building, and began work on plans for a new fireproof bakery building on the site of the old. Shortly thereafter, Brostrom received the commission for the Jensen-Salsbery Laboratories building at 520 West 21st Street in Kansas City, Missouri, which as chance would have it would be completed before the Rushton construction finally began.

Both the Rushton Bakery and the Jensen-Salsbery Laboratories building were superb examples of what is now called the Prairie Style, but which Brostrom and others of his generation referred to as the Chicago School. It was at about this time that Brostrom actually met Louis Sullivan at an A.I.A. convention in Chicago. "He was then pretty frail," Brostrom recalled later. "At that time a terra cotta company had taken him over and given

him something to do to keep him from starving. He seemed so pleasant to talk to. There was not any feeling of bitterness that I can recall."

It is important to note that the Jensen-Salsbery and Rushton designs were among the very few commercial/industrial buildings in the United States to actually be designed in the Prairie Style. The only other examples that come readily to mind are Wright's E-Z Polish Factory of 1905 (a design probably unknown to Brostrom), Purcell and Elmslie's International Leather and Belting Corporation of 1917-1918, and of course Wright's Larkin Company Administration Building in Buffalo, completed in 1906 and the evident inspiration for both the Jensen-Salsbery and Rushton designs. The laboratory building is a simple three-story brick structure marked by brick piers that terminate with banded brick courses. Two figurative sculptures by the Norwegian-born artist Jorgen C. Dreyer add further emphasis to the central entry. This entry is a flattened version of the end elevation of the Larkin Building, while the flanking portions of the front facade are derived from the Larkin side walls.

The undertaking of larger commissions did not mean an end to Brostrom's church designs. Two particularly fine buildings, both for African-American congregations, were completed in Kansas City, Kansas concurrent with the Jensen-Salsbery Laboratories. The First Baptist Church at 500 Nebraska Avenue and Mason Memorial Methodist Church at 1417 North 9th Street both eschewed Brostrom's earlier use of Gothic detailing in favor of a stronger geometry and a concern for surface texture. In the case of First Baptist, the forms were essentially Classical Revival, including the use of engaged columns on the south and east facades, but in place of the expected Classical detailing Brostrom designed ornament based on a more abstract

geometry. The capitals of the engaged columns and their flanking piers were particularly effective.

Another church design of note was for the First Baptist Church in Caney, Kansas. This was Brostrom's one known church project to be fully in the Prairie Style. While the detailing again recalled the Larkin Building, the massing was similar to that of William Drummond's design for the First Congregational Church of Austin, in Chicago. Unfortunately, the Caney design was to remain unbuilt.

Construction of the Rushton Bakery finally began in 1919, after the end of World War I. While it has many similarities to the Jensen-Salsbery Laboratories, it is arguably a more accomplished design. Where Jensen-Salsbery is blocky and the entry does not appear to be well integrated with the remainder of the front facade, the Rushton Bakery is strongly horizontal with all its parts carefully subordinated to the overall design. The thoughtful proportioning extended to the entry sculptures (now removed) as well, which were again executed by Jorgen C. Dreyer.

In 1920, Brostrom entered into a partnership with Philip T. Drotts, and Drotts was consequently listed as associate architect on the Rushton project. The firm continued to specialize in churches, and designed several in Kansas City, Kansas including the London Heights Methodist Episcopal Church at 1418 Garfield Avenue and the University Methodist Protestant Church at 1937 North 32nd Street. The latter church was of stone, a material that Brostrom used only occasionally but with considerable skill.

The major Brostrom and Drotts commission was for the Newbern Apartments at 525 East Armour Boulevard, probably Brostrom's best known design. The two towers were built in 1921-23, with the connecting entry and lobby added in 1925. Unlike the Rushton and Jensen-Salsbery designs, elaborate

Sullivan-esque ornament was used throughout, at cornice and parapet, on the pier capitals, and in the marvelous surround of the entrance with its highly inventive iron and stained glass light standards. The terra cotta ornament did not consist of "stock" pieces purchased from a catalog, but was all designed by Brostrom and manufactured by the Kansas City Terra Cotta Company, while the light standards were cast by a forerunner of the Benson Manufacturing Company. Kansas City architect D. Kent Frohwerk recalled Brostrom working on the design of the ornament in the summer of 1921, while Frohwerk was employed as a draftsman with the firm during school vacation.

Brostrom and Drotts ended their partnership late in 1921. Brostrom continued in the firm's offices on the sixth floor of the Reliance Building, where he had been since 1918, and also continued to specialize in small church design. In 1926, Brostrom and his wife Esther moved from 4217 Wyoming to a new house which he had designed at 3725 Valentine Road. The house was of stucco, with multiple gables, and like many of his churches combined Gothic elements with a more abstract geometry. His most accomplished residential design, perhaps the closest parallels are to the unpublished, 1920s' quasi-Tudor designs of Prairie School architect William Drummond.

As the Midwest economy declined in the late 1920s, Brostrom's church commissions may have begun to dwindle in number. In 1927, he diversified his practice by organizing and becoming president of the Con Tee Company. The company made products for use in reinforced concrete construction, such as spacer bars and column clamps, an area where Brostrom's experience with structures such as the Rushton Bakery gave him considerable expertise.

Although his Prairie and Sullivan-esque designs were now largely behind him, Brostrom never lost his enthusiasm for what then seemed to be a lost

cause. He owned Sullivan's Autobiography and A System of Ornament, both published by the A.I.A. in 1924 following Sullivan's death, and he was a friend and long-time correspondent of William Gray Purcell. When called upon in 1926 and 1930 to make additions to the Rushton Bakery, Brostrom faithfully continued the Prairie Style idiom of the original design. "Architecture did not start when bricks were piled together," he once asserted, "but when some dreamer layed them in a pattern and design with a motive in his thought."

"Sullivan-esque grew naturally, but few grasped that they were dealing with life and character during those days, even as now. We knew so little of the basic theme, and base from which it sprang."

As with many architects, Brostrom's fortunes declined in the 1930s. He only executed three projects in Kansas City, Kansas during the decade, two of them quite minor, and this seems to reflect his practice in general. By 1935 he had closed his office in the Reliance Building and was working out of his home. His home address also changed in 1939, to 5828 Wyandotte, and during World War II he drops entirely from view, not even being listed in the 1945 city directory.

By 1947, Brostrom and his wife were residing at 4302 Oak, and there they would remain for the next eighteen years. Brostrom still carried on a practice out of his home, but he was at least semi-retired. One of his last projects of note was for the St. Stephen Baptist Church at 1414 Truman Road, built in 1945-47. Like a significant number of his early churches, it was executed for an African-American congregation. It is essentially an Art Moderne design, but certain ornamental touches recall the earlier church and school designs of yet another Prairie School architect, Barry Byrne.

In the mid 1960s, Ernest O. Brostrom retired to Bridgeville, Pennsylvania. He died in Pittsburgh on August 28, 1969. He was 80 years old. "The people," he said in an interview with Donald Hoffmann, "don't appreciate the jewels that are dropped among them."

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PARTIAL LIST OF STRUCTURES DESIGNED BY ERNEST O. BROSTROM, ARCHITECT

1. Swedish Evangelical Mission (First Covenant) Church, 1501 West 42nd Street, Kansas City, Missouri, 1912.
 2. Apartment Building, 912-920 East 41st Street, Kansas City, Missouri, 1912.
 3. Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1200 Grandview Boulevard, 1914.
 4. First Baptist Church, 500 Nebraska Avenue, 1915.
 5. First Baptist Church of Rosedale, 901 Southwest Boulevard, Rosedale, Kansas, 1916.
 6. Bethel Evangelical Mission (Bethel Covenant) Church, 6th and Harrison Streets, Topeka, Kansas, 1916.
 7. Metropolitan Baptist Temple, 9th Street and Washington Boulevard, 1916.
 8. Large Gothic church (project), location unknown, c. 1916.
 9. Chapel (project), location unknown, c. 1916.
 10. Memorial chapel (project), location unknown, c. 1916.
 11. Baptist Church, Oskalossa, Kansas, c. 1916 (not built).
 12. Greystone Heights Baptist Church remodeling, 133 Greystone Avenue, c. 1916 (unfinished; demolished).
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13. Methodist Episcopal Church, Wayne, Kansas, c. 1916 (not built).
 14. First Baptist Church, Loup City, Nebraska, c. 1916.
 15. Gospel Hall Association, 2818 Troost, Kansas City, Missouri, c. 1916.
 16. United Brethren Church, McCracken, Kansas, c. 1916.
 17. Reformed Presbyterian Church, 4400 Wyoming, Kansas City, Missouri, c. 1916.
 18. First Presbyterian Church, Yates Center, Kansas, c. 1916.
 19. First Presbyterian Church, Humboldt, Kansas, c. 1916.
 20. Presbyterian Church, Galena, Kansas, c. 1916 (not built).
 21. First Presbyterian Church (reconstruction following fire), Iola, Kansas, c. 1916.
 22. Lutheran Church, Olsburg, Kansas, c. 1916 (not built).

23. English Lutheran Church, location unknown, c. 1916 (not built). This project may have been for Trinity English Lutheran Church, subsequently designed by Phillip T. Drotts and built at 801 North 17th Street in 1923.
 24. Assaria Evangelical Lutheran Church, Assaria, Kansas, c. 1916.
 25. Trinity Lutheran Church, Lawrence, Kansas, c. 1916 (not built).
 26. St. John's Lutheran Church, Salina, Kansas, c. 1916.
 27. Bethel Neighborhood Center, 12-14 South 7th Street, c. 1916 (demolished).¹
 28. Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church remodeling, Kansas City, Missouri, c. 1916.
 29. Nurses' Home, Swedish (Lutheran) Hospital, 3001 Wyandotte, Kansas City, Missouri, c. 1916 (demolished).
 30. Swedish Free Mission Old People's Home, Boone, Iowa, c. 1916.
 31. Bethel A.M.E. Church, 24th and Flora, Kansas City, Missouri, c. 1916.
 32. Grace Methodist Episcopal Church, Winfield, Kansas, c. 1916.
 33. Temporary basement for Jamieson Temple, C.M.E., Kansas City, Missouri, c. 1916.
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34. First (Woods Memorial) Christian Church, Excelsior Springs, Missouri, c. 1916 (status uncertain).
 35. First Christian Church, Harrisonville, Missouri, c. 1916. Similar to the First Baptist Church, Kansas City, Kansas, except for the use of Classical detailing.
 36. First Christian Church remodeling, Richmond, Missouri, c. 1916 (unfinished).
 37. Methodist Episcopal Church, Longwood, Missouri, c. 1916.
 38. First Methodist Church, Humboldt, Kansas, c. 1916.
 39. Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Clinton, Missouri, c. 1916. Similar to the Metropolitan Baptist Temple, Kansas City, Kansas.
 40. First Baptist Church, Mount Ayr, Iowa, c. 1916.
 41. First Baptist Church, Butler, Missouri, c. 1916.

¹The Bethel Mission, Central Avenue Branch, was located around the corner at 726 Central Avenue.

42. First Baptist Church remodeling, Warrensburg, Missouri, c. 1916 (unfinished).
43. Temporary Basement for Ruby Avenue Baptist Church, 1150 Ruby Avenue, c. 1916.
44. First Baptist Church, Wellington, Kansas, c. 1916.
45. First Baptist Church, Caney, Kansas, c. 1916 (not built). Brostrom's only known Prairie Style church design.
46. First Methodist Episcopal Church, Fremont, Nebraska, c. 1916 (not built).
47. First Methodist Episcopal Church, Sioux City, Iowa, c. 1916 (not built).
48. Guardian Angels Catholic Church and Rectory, 1310 Westport Road, Kansas City, Missouri, c. 1916.
49. Guardian Angels Parochial School, 4232 Mercier, Kansas City, Missouri, c. 1916 (demolished and replaced).
50. Immaculate Conception Parochial School, Montrose, Missouri, c. 1916.
51. St. John's Parochial School, Pilot Grove, Missouri, c. 1916.
52. Catholic Church (project), location unknown, c. 1916.
- ~~53. Episcopal Church (project), location unknown, c. 1916.~~
54. First Church of Christ, Scientist, Creston, Iowa, c. 1916 (not built).
55. George Rushton Residence, 815 Southwest Boulevard (originally 811 Southwest Boulevard), Rosedale, Kansas, 1917.²
56. 8th Street Baptist Tabernacle completion, 1420 North 8th Street, 1917.
57. George Rushton Baking Co. (temporary reconstruction following fire), 814 Southwest Boulevard, Rosedale, Kansas, 1917-18 (demolished).
58. Jensen-Salsbery Laboratories, Inc., 520 West 21st Street, Kansas City, Missouri, 1918; Jorgen C. Dreyer, sculptor. NR 7/16/85
59. Pie Bakery for George Rushton Baking Co., no address given, 1918 (may be same as No. 57 above). \$18,000
60. First Baptist Church completion, 500 Nebraska Avenue, 1918-19.

²Frank Rushton lived at 11 South Cherokee, and George Jr. lived at 809 Southwest Boulevard, both properties adjoining their parents' home, although there is no indication that either house was designed by Brostrom.

61. 9th Street A.M.E. (Mason Memorial Methodist) Church, 1417 North 9th Street, 1918-19.
 62. Far Famed Paking Plant, Railroad and Shawnee Streets, Rosedale, Kansas, 1919 (status uncertain).
 63. George Rushton Baking Co., 814 Southwest Boulevard, Rosedale, Kansas, 1919-20; Phillip T. Drotts, associate architect; Jorgen C. Dreyer, sculptor. SR 7/03/79
 64. London Heights Methodist Episcopal Church, 1418 Garfield Avenue, 1920; Brostrom and Drotts.
 65. 8th Street Christian Church, 1401 North 8th Street, 1920-23; Brostrom and Drotts.
 66. Rosedale City Hall grounds improvements, 1166 Southwest Boulevard, Rosedale, Kansas, 1920; Brostrom and Drotts (demolished).
 67. Building for Jensen Salsbery Laboratories, Inc., southwest corner 11th and Shawnee Road (outside city limits), 1920; Brostrom and Drotts (status uncertain).
 68. J.B. Sleigholm Residence, no address given (outside city limits), 1920; Brostrom and Drotts (status uncertain). \$8,000
 69. Maywood Methodist Episcopal Church, Maywood Station, Kansas, 1921; Brostrom and Drotts (demolished if built).
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70. University Methodist Protestant Church, 1937 North 32nd Street, 1921; Brostrom and Drotts.
 71. Newbern Apartments, 525 East Armour Boulevard, Kansas City, Missouri, 1921-23; Brostrom and Drotts. NR 9/23/80
 72. Grandview Park Presbyterian Church addition, 1613 Wilson Boulevard, 1922.
 73. Guardian Angels Catholic Church completion, Mercier and Westport Road, Kansas City, Missouri, 1922. The upper portion of the bell tower was never built.
 74. Quindaro Christian Church Sunday School addition, 1235 Georgia Avenue, 1924 (altered).
 75. Central Methodist Episcopal Church completion, 931 Argentine Boulevard, 1925 (done instead of new church proposed in 1921 by Rose and Peterson).
 76. Newbern Apartments addition, 525 East Armour Boulevard, Kansas City, Missouri, 1925. NR 9/23/80
 77. George Rushton Baking Co. addition, 814 Southwest Boulevard, 1926. SR 7/03/79

78. Ernest O. Brostrom Residence, 3725 Valentine Road (originally 3721 Valentine Road), Kansas City, Missouri, 1926.
 79. Restaurant and filling station for the Old Dutch Mill Co., Victory Junction on U.S. Highway 40, 1928 (demolished).
 80. Emmanuel Baptist Church, 1335 Quindaro Boulevard, 1929 (demolished).
 81. Richard W. Rushton Residence, 4311 South Pearl Street, 1929.
 82. George Rushton Baking Co. addition to house refrigeration machinery, 814 Southwest Boulevard, 1930. SR 7/03/79
 83. Service Station, Henning and Southwest Boulevard, 1930 (demolished if built).
 84. Welborn Community Church rebuilding, Welborn, Kansas, 1936.
 85. Faculty Quarters (3 duplexes), Central Baptist Theological Seminary, 30th and Armstrong, 1940.
 86. St. Stephen Baptist Church, 1414 Truman Road, Kansas City, Missouri, 1945-47.
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