

# What are the facts about Albuquerque's Venetian Palace? (and what is the truth about its designers?)

an update by Edna Heatherington Bergman

The autumn of 1977 in Albuquerque was enlivened for those who are interested in local architecture and its history by the publication of a number of articles about local buildings and about architecture in general. *The New Mexico Independent* ran an entire issue in October and several followup pieces and letters in honor of Architecture Week. *Albuquerque* magazine, besides starting off a regular series on local buildings with one on the Simms Building (footnote: 1954, Flatow, Moore: the remarkable heating and cooling system, designed by Bridgers and Paxton, is of as much importance as the building itself, which was the city's first "high-rise."), included in its October issue an article by Bainbridge Bunting on Albuquerque's best and worst buildings. Continuing into the new year, the *Independent* has recently devoted front-page space to the Old and the New Occidental Buildings, two of the city's most interesting remnants.

However, persistent errors flaw the accounts of the New Occidental Building, the white terra-cotta palace at Third and Gold Streets, and some were even incorporated into the caption of the photo on page 13 of the November-December *New Mexico Architecture*. I do not know what is the source of the date 1924 for the construction of this building. There is, in the back room of the Building and Inspection Department, a simple log of building permits from 1913 until the advent in the forties of the present file-drawer record system. Bainbridge Bunting also possesses a transcription from this log of all jobs listed over a minimum cost—I think \$2500—from 1913 through 1930. Permit 1162, late in 1916, is for the corner of Third and Gold, block 17, lots 13-16, Occidental Life Insurance Co., \$35,000 for a one-story building. No permit appears for the address in 1923 or 24.

Perry Wilkes, from his research in the city directories, gives a history of the address changes of the Occidental company: From the Old Occidental Building of 1905, on the southwest corner of Central and Broadway, "they moved into the Korber Building (now demolished) at 200 N 2nd about 1914. They moved to the corner of Third and Gold about 1917 . . ." (footnote: *New Mexico Independent*, vol. 82, no. 12, Jan. 6, 1978, p. 1) I think this evidence supports that of the building permit log, that the building was designed and built 1916-17.

Local Architect Louis Hesselden, who was 21 at the time it was built, confirmed Trost and Trost as the architects. The best information on Henry Trost and his firm is a paper by Lloyd Engelbrecht in the *Prairie School Review*, vol. VI no. 4, Fourth Quarter 1969. (Footnote: Dr. Engelbrecht, now at Wichita

State University, has continued his research on Trost and has found new information since 1969. He is to present a paper on the Franciscan Hotel at the meeting of the Society of Architectural Historians in San Antonio, Texas, in April, 1978). Henry Trost was born in Toledo, Ohio, in 1860, and after working as a draftsman in Toledo architects' offices can be found practicing architecture in the Southwest in the early 1880's. By 1888 he was in Chicago, where he was active in the Chicago Architectural Sketch Club and was designing ornamental iron work. Although he is not known to have worked in the Sullivan office, he certainly learned to design Sullivanesque ornament, and some of his drawings in this style are in the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin. Trost moved to Tucson in 1898 and to El Paso in 1904. Some fine evidence of his own hand in the New Occidental's design is the ornament in the spandrels between the arches. The Doges' Palace itself has blank spandrels.

My own history of Albuquerque architectural firms, derived from city directories, does not start till 1920, in which year Trost and Trost are listed. In 1921 and 22 the listing reads "George P. Hill, Associate." (From his own history in architectural directories, we know that A. W. Boehning, Sr., was a draftsman for Trost and Trost 1921-24). In 1923 George M. Williamson is listed as associate, but in 1924 (Williamson having set up his own firm) the listing is again simply Trost and Trost. The firm is not listed from 1925 until in 1931 they reappear as Trost and Trost and W. M. Brittelle.

William Miles Brittelle, Sr., was born in Imperial, Nebraska, in 1894. After serving in the army in World War I, he began his architectural career working in the office of H. J. Manning in Denver, in 1920, studying at the Denver extension of the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design. He was working in Pueblo, Colorado, in 1926, evidently still with the Manning firm, when according to John Ginner, Williamson recruited him specifically to be a designer; he remained as chief draftsman and designer until 1931. He described his position with Trost and Trost in 1931-32 as architect and designer. In 1932 he set up his own office in partnership with Ginner.

John Ginner told me in an interview a little more than a year ago of the jubilation in the office in 1934 when Brittelle got the remodelling job by promising to bring it in at a cost no higher than the insurance payment. The existing crenellated and crocketed cornice replaces Trost's original deep overhang. Brittelle also enclosed what had been an open arcade, considerably increasing the building's floor area. Brittelle was the designer of the old St. Joseph's Hos-



*The new Occidental Building at Third and Gold, Albuquerque*

pital, the President's Residence at the University of New Mexico, the Strong-Thorne Mortuary, and the First United Presbyterian Church.

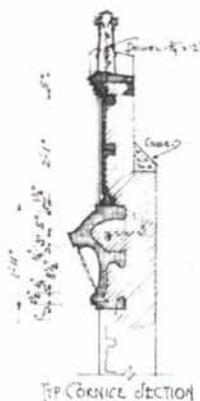
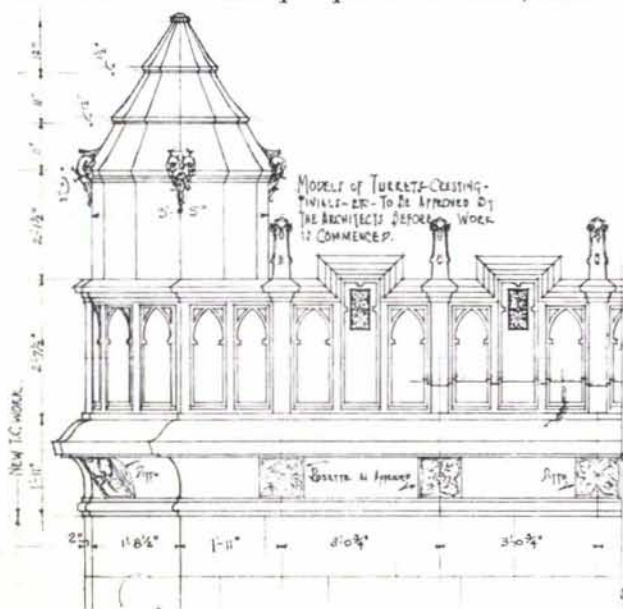
It is commonly supposed that the reason for the New Occidental's quotation of the first story of the Doges' Palace was that the client (and whether this would have been Raynolds or McMillen is not clear to me) had travelled to Europe, seen and admired the original. But Louis Hesselden told me that what the client had actually seen was in Oklahoma, another building quoting the Palace. This is one of my favorite stories about Albuquerque architecture, and

I hope it is true. Further research suggests itself: had Trost himself quoted the Palace in an Oklahoma building?

Postscript, February 22: I have just learned from Dr. Engelbrecht that original plans of the New Occidental still exist in a private collection in El Paso, and are dated July 19, 1916.

Dr. Engelbrecht is continuing his research on Henry Trost, and expects eventually to publish a long article or a book on Trost and his work. This will be a most valuable reference for New Mexico historians, as many important New Mexico buildings were designed by Trost. In Albuquerque, the firm was responsible for the Berthold Spitz House (Chaparral Home), the original building of Albuquerque High School, the New Occidental, the First National Bank, and the Sunshine, among others.

*EHB*



*A detail from 1934  
working drawings  
by W. Miles Brittelle, Sr.,  
A.I.A.*