Justus Krumbein (1847-1907)

Justus F. Krumbein was a prominent architect in Portland and the Willamette Valley from 1871 until his death in 1907. His work included designs for many significant commercial and residential buildings and the second state capitol in Salem.

Born near Hamburg, Germany, in 1847, Krumbein received formal architectural training at the Polytechnic School of Hanover, graduating in 1867. In 1869, he immigrated to San Francisco, where he remained for two years before relocating to Portland in the fall of 1871. Krumbein joined in partnership with W.G. Gilbert, and one of the firm's first designs was a residence for transportation magnate Jacob Kamm. Built in southwest Portland, the formal Second Empire style of the Kamm House reflected Krumbein's European training. Although moved from its original location, in 1951, the Kamm House remains one of the few early Portland mansions still standing. Located at 1425 SW 20th Ave. in the Goose Hollow neighborhood, it is listed on the National Register of Historic places.

In 1873, Krumbein and Gilbert won a competition to design a new state capitol for Oregon, and Krumbein supervised construction for the project until the building opened in 1876. The plans called for a domed structure, modeled somewhat after the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., but the dome portion of the building was not completed until 1894. The building stood until 1935, when it was destroyed by fire.

Not long after winning the capitol competition, the partnership between Krumbein and Gilbert dissolved, and Krumbein began working with notable Portland architect Warren H. Williams. This partnership lasted only until 1878, but by that time both Krumbein and Williams had become the preeminent designers of Portland's cast-iron-fronted commercial buildings. Krumbein's work during this period included the Bickel Block (1883), which was renovated in 2008 and is now part of the University of Oregon's Portland campus.

In 1878, Krumbein struck out on his own and entered the most extravagant phase of his career. In 1884, he designed his most notable cast-iron building, the Kamm Block. The four-story building was a marvel of architectural ornamentation, with hand-carved wooden detailing complementing cast-iron columns and a blend of Renaissance and Gothic styles. The opulence of the Kamm Block and other buildings like it fell out of favor toward the end of the nineteenth century, and in 1948 it was torn down and replaced by a parking lot.

In about 1890, Portland's cast-iron era ended, and Krumbein's career began to slow. He designed a few more notable buildings, moving away from the Victorian opulence that defined his earlier career. In 1892, he designed one of Portland's early Richardsonian Romanesque-style buildings, the Ancient Order of United Workmen Temple in downtown Portland. Soon after, he won a competition to design the St. Vincent Hospital in northwest Portland. Krumbein reportedly designed one or more buildings for the 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition, the final significant works of his distinguished career.

Only a few of Krumbein's buildings are still standing, but he was one of Portland's most significant architects of the nineteenth century.

Written by Val Ballestrem

Further Reading:

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