

Henry Van Brunt

Architect

1836-1903

by Susan Jezak Ford

Henry Van Brunt was a Harvard-educated architect with a national reputation. In 1887, at the age of 50, he left the cultural attractions of his home town of Boston, Massachusetts, and moved his family and company to the frontier town of Kansas City. At that time he was one of the few professionally trained and one of the best-known architects west of the Mississippi.

Henry Van Brunt was born in Boston and practiced architecture there for 20 years after he finished school. He sent his partner, Frank M. Howe, here in 1885 to open a branch office of Van Brunt and Howe in order to oversee the firm's many commissions from the Union Pacific Railroad. Kansas City was experiencing a population and building boom during this time, so Van Brunt joined Howe here two years later. National architectural firms set up temporary offices during this decade and began constructing new buildings in Kansas City. The now local firm of Van Brunt and Howe designed many important buildings and remained a permanent fixture in the city.

Bringing progressive ideas from the east coast, the firm built some of the Kansas City's most prominent buildings. Although many have been demolished, including the Emery, Bird, Thayer Department Store, several works of the firm still stand. The eclectic style of Van Brunt and Howe can be seen in the George Blossom residence at 1032 Pennsylvania, the Coates House Hotel at 1005 Broadway and the August Meyer residence, now located on the campus of the Kansas City Art Institute as Vanderslice Hall. The firm did not use one style of architecture, but combined details from several different historical styles.

After moving to Kansas City, Van Brunt continued to receive commissions from across the country, often for railroad stations. The firm was chosen to design the Electricity Building for the Chicago World's Columbia Exposition of 1893. Van Brunt frequently wrote for professional journals, was well-known as an architectural critic, and became president of the American Institute



of Architects in 1898. Van Brunt retired to Massachusetts in 1899 and died in 1903.

Sources

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