

# Louis Curtiss

Architect

1865-1924

By Susan Jezak Ford

The architectural genius of Louis Curtiss might easily have been overshadowed by his personal flamboyance. He only wore white. He continually smoked monogrammed Turkish cigarettes. He was a reckless driver. Yet his legacy of buildings remains truly recognizable by their style and innovative designs.

Curtiss, a Canadian, studied architecture at the University of Toronto and in Paris before coming to Kansas City in 1887. He worked for a short time as a draftsman for Adriance Van Brunt and joined in a partnership with Frederick C. Gunn in 1889. During his 10 years with Gunn, the two produced more than a dozen buildings, including the Virginia Hotel and the Progress Club. Curtiss visited Europe often, returning in 1898 to draw up plans for the Hotel Baltimore before striking out on his own.

Curtiss was a prolific and diverse designer, experimenting with classical and modern styles alike. His 1900 design for the Folly Theater clearly has a Palladian flavor, yet Mineral Hall, built between 1903 and 1905, has an eclectic, Art Nouveau look. He broke new ground with the Boley Building at 12<sup>th</sup> and Walnut streets. Built from 1908 to 1909, the Boley Building is one of the first structures in the country to utilize curtain-wall construction. The innovative engineering features cantilevered floor slabs that extend past supporting columns to provide an exterior wall of nearly all glass.

Houses of all sizes became fanciful creations in the hands of Curtiss, often including elements from the Prairie, Art Deco, and Craftsman styles. His most recognizable residential design is the Bernard Corrigan residence at 55<sup>th</sup> and Ward Parkway, built in 1912. He designed several houses for Westheight Manor in Kansas City, Kansas, between 1915 and 1921. For himself, Curtiss chose to live in a lavish apartment above his studio in downtown Kansas City.

Louis Curtiss, perhaps Kansas City's most creative architect, died at his drafting table in 1924. He lies today in an unmarked grave in Mount Washington Cemetery.



## Sources

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