BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

OF THE

LEADING MEN OF CHICAGO,

WRITTEN BY THE BEST TALENT OF THE NORTHWEST.

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WILLIAM W. BOYINGTON.

The architect is one of the most influential men in the community, and is largely instrumental in determining the general appearance of a city, giving outside character to the people. The outworkings of his brain are the shapes and moulds which strike the eye of the traveler with pleasure or distaste, and make the location attractive or otherwise to him and to those who, through him, obtain an idea of its claims to their patronage, or desirability as a residence.

The industries of the people make a city, bringing into subjection the forces of nature, and changing her common treasures into stores of individual wealth; but it is the architect who shapes and directs their labors, and arranges for their most convenient performance. It is his province to take the situation as he finds it, to study its peculiarities of climate, soil, position and material, to group with these the industrial activities and social habits of the people, giving to each and all their due importance in the discussion of the question, how best to plan the structures in which the people live, do business, worship, are educated, or merely amused, so as to develop the greatest amount of architectural beauty conjoined with absolute fitness to the position and to the end sought in the building. The best architect is the one who most thoroughly effects this combination of idea and aim, and the degree of perfection exhibited in this respect determines the relative desirability of a structure or city.

Chicago has reason to be proud of her architects. They are a superior class of men, having grappled successfully with difficulties of no ordinary magnitude. Our lack of natural drainage, the inequalities of our streets, and the early dearness of durable building material, all presented great obstacles, while the treacherous character of the soil in the most

aristocratic portions of the city seemed for a time to lay an embargo on the erection of massive buildings. In spite of all this, we have now a city which will compare favorably in point of architectural fitness with any on the continent. We may not have progressed so far yet into the realms of gorgeous adornment as some others, because with us the genuine utilitarian principle is prevalent. But for solidity and adaptability to the end sought, we need yield to none, and though the useful takes precedence of the merely beautiful, we have scarcely an unsymmetrical building, or one whose proportions and details are not in accordance with good taste, out of the thousands of structures which have been designed by our city architects, while there are very many in which it would be difficult to suggest an improvement, either in external appearance or internal arrangement.

Prominent among the architects of the city of Chicago, stands the subject of this sketch—William W. Boyington—a true representative man of his class, and an acknowledged leader in that great architectural reform which, during the fourteen years of his residence here, has been in progress in Chicago, appropriating her waste places to occupancy by the busy multitude, and changing her shanty dwellings to palaces wherein operate and dwell the real kings of the great West—her business men. He has been a power in shaping the destiny of Chicago in its external aspect. From him has gone forth the fiat which has set at work and kept busy thousands of intelligent workmen, whose every movement was in harmony with the one great idea of the author, and ever tending to its completion. Dozens of draughtsmen and clerks have detailed his conceptions on paper, and thousands have given them more enduring form in wood, brick, cement, or marble. A vast number of our largest, most stately, and most useful edifices are the realizations of his "thoughts on architecture." Nearly as many marble fronts have been erected from his designs as from those of all the other architects combined.

Mr. Boyington's professional greatness is of the genuine stamp—the result of study, hard work, a constant attention to the requirements of the occasion. His was no royal road to eminence. He commenced life with but the ordinary advantages of education, neither birth nor fortune aiding with their seven-league boots in the race to the temple of fame; and if he outstripped the great crowd in the universal "onward press," it was simply that his steps were judiciously taken, that the path was carefully scanned as he moved along, and the most direct route chosen toward the desired goal. He is one of nature's noblemen, claiming only that patent,

the seal of which is borne by so many of our Western men, and has become the imprint of Western institutions—the sign of Western progress.

W. W. Boyington was born July 22, 1818, in the town of Southwick, County of Hampden, State of Massachusetts. His father, Juba, and his mother, Aurelia, daughter of Captain Thomas Campbell, were both children of the earliest settlers in Southwick. The family lived there until the subject of this sketch was about sixteen years old, where he enjoyed the advantages of the common and academic schools. In 1834, the whole family removed to Springfield, in the same county. About this time he joined the Baptist Church, and commenced to learn the trade of a carpenter and joiner, under his father. He made such good progress that at the age of eighteen he was able to do a journeyman's work and command full wages. This was the result of intense application. His evenings were devoted to the study of architectural science, while his working hours were occupied in mastering the details of his trade. His ambition was to become thoroughly competent, as he had no sympathy with that too numerous class of workmen who are always in trouble through ignorance of their business. His efforts were crowned with such success that at the early age of twenty he was employed as foreman by Charles Stearns, Esq., who was heavily engaged in building, and carried on a lumber yard, both of which branches of business were intrusted to the supervision of Mr. Boyington. He here had an excellent opportunity of exercising his architectural skill, and becoming acquainted with the different kinds and gradations of the various materials used in building.

At the age of twenty-three, he commenced business for himself, as a builder, executing several heavy contracts, and, being known as a reliable architect, he was not unfrequently called upon to furnish designs for buildings to be executed by others. He continued in business very successfully for about three years, at the end of which time his shop was burned to the ground, his tools and materials being entirely consumed. This was a terrible blow, but the case was not desperate. A new shop was quickly in running order, in a new locality, and within another year his business had so much increased that he removed to another location, where a steam-engine, planing mill, and door and sash-making machines were added to his previous force of hand-workers.

This establishment was placed on a more solid pecuniary basis by a partnership arrangement, and under the firm name of Decreete, Boyington & Co., business rapidly increased to a very large extent,

Mr. Boyington attending to the architectural department. For five years the company was highly prosperous, at the end of which time it was nearly ruined by a fire that entirely destroyed their buildings and machinery, and swept out of existence one of the largest lumber stocks in that section. The shops were, however, rebuilt, but Mr. Boyington soon thereafter sold out his interest, and thenceforward devoted himself exclusively to architectural labors. During the next two years many extensive buildings were erected from his designs, and many important contracts made and executed. About this time he was elected a member of the State Legislature, and assigned the position of Chairman of the Committee on Public Buildings.

In the spring of 1853, Mr. Boyington came out to Chicago, to see the chances offered in this city, which was then just beginning to be talked about in the East. He returned home, and after some month's delay wound up his business in Massachusetts, and in November removed hither. His first work here was to make out a plan for Charles Walker, Esq., of the ground on which the great Central Union Depot now stands, showing the character of the buildings which could be placed upon it, the railroad company being then about negotiating for the site for the depot grounds. He has been ever since that period most prominently identified with the history of our civic growth, as the city was just ready for architectural style, and finding ample scope for the exercise of his talents, and generally meeting with the recognition which his ability deserved, especially after the first few months, by which time he was generally conceded to be a man of extraordinary talent in his profession. His success during the subsequent thirteen years is scarcely equaled in the history of any architect in the whole of the United States.

Up to the year 1853, when Mr. Boyington came to Chicago, the city could boast but very few buildings worthy of note in an architectural point of view. Here and there a structure was visible possessing some claims to notice, but, with a limited range of exceptions, the buildings in the city were little better in appearance or comfort than the old log house, and not one-half so substantial. How wonderfully the scene has changed! The revulsions of commercial panics, the universal suspension of banks, the almost entire stagnations of trade, the terrible excitements of war; none of these have stayed the successive piling of bricks, the aggregation of slabs of marble, and the rearing of the massive timbers, to form our city into one great system of architectural beauty.

A glance at some of the more important structures erected under the supervision of Mr. Boyington will show, to some extent, how large a share of credit is due to him as a contributor to this grand result. The following, erected from his designs, and under his immediate oversight, embrace a majority of our most prominent buildings, though in this list we omit all mention of many hundreds of buildings of various kinds, the construction of which he has superintended, and which alone would, in the career of most architects, make a very creditable display, both in number and individual importance.

He has been the architect of the following churches: St. Paul's, Universalist, corner of Van Buren street and Wabash avenue; First Presbyterian Church, on Wabash avenue, near Congress street; Wabash Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church, on the corner of Harrison street; First Baptist Church, on Wabash avenue, near Hubbard Court; North Presbyterian Church, corner of Cass and Illinois streets; Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church, on West Monroe street, near Morgan.

The above named six church societies are the most prominent and influential, in their various denominations, in the Northwest, and the buildings will compare favorably with the same number of churches in any of the Eastern cities, if, indeed, they may not take rank as superior in architectural perfection and internal arrangement to any in the East. Church edifices, but little inferior to those above mentioned, have been erected from the designs of Mr. Boyington in the States of Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Iowa, and in various cities in this State, outside of Chicago, for several different denominations.

Among the hotels planned and erected by Mr. Boyington, are the magnificent Sherman House, standing on the corner of Clark and Randolph streets, the Massasoit House, on the corner of Lake street and Central avenue, in this city; the Newhall House, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and the Brewster House, at Freeport, Illinois.

Among the public buildings for educational, railroad, reformatory and other purposes, we note the University of Chicago, at Cottage Grove, together with the Observatory building, which now contains the largest telescope in the world; Female Seminary at Hyde Park; Female Seminary and Convent of the Sisters of Mercy, on Wabash avenue, near Madison street; an extensive High School at Des Moines, Iowa; the Illinois State Penitentiary, at Joliet, a fire-proof building throughout, was constructed principally under his charge; the buildings and tower of the

Chicago Water Works; Insane Asylum and County House, at Knoxville, Illinois; State Arsenal at Des Moines, Iowa; fire-proof County Jail in Pike County, Illinois; fire-proof building occupied by the Land Department of the Illinois Central Railroad, located on Michigan avenue; the union depot and office building of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific, and Michigan Southern and Northern Indiana Railroad Companies, fronting on Van Buren, Sherman, Harrison and Griswold streets—unequaled in regard to extent and architectural effectiveness by any railroad building yet erected in the United States; Crosby's Opera House and Art Building, fronting on Washington and State streets. It is the finest structure of the kind in the country, and is superior, in several respects, to any structure now existing as an opera house or theatre, in any of the countries of Europe; Young Men's Christian Association building and public hall, on Madison street and Broadway place—finished in 1867. The hall is the largest in the West, and capable of seating three thousand persons; Masonic Hall and Oriental building, on La Salle street, between Washington and Madison.

Of extensive business blocks, we may mention the following: Bowen Brothers' and McKay Brothers' marble front block, fronting on Wabash avenue and Randolph street; McCormick and Farwell's marble block, on Lake street, near Wabash avenue; McCormick and Powell's marble block, on the corner of Michigan avenue and Lake street; Wadsworth and Keep's marble block, on the corner of Wabash avenue and Lake street; Mills, Follansbee & Co.'s marble block, on the corner of Lake street and Wabash avenue.

The above named comprise a street frontage of over twelve hundred lineal feet, or very nearly a quarter of a mile, and embrace a large majority of all the wholesale marble-fronted stores in the city.

About the same number of equally extensive wholesale stores have been erected in the same neighborhood, and on South Water and River streets, from the designs of Mr. Boyington, all of which are the heaviest class stores, with brick fronts. Mr. Boyington has also designed and superintended the erection of smaller blocks, both marble and brick, for retail stores and offices, on the various streets in the city, too numerous to recapitulate, but can be enumerated by the mile. He has been equally sought for as the architect for private dwellings. Some idea of his popularity in this particular may be gathered from a statement of the fact that the three-quarters of a mile next north of Twelfth street, on Michigan

avenue, contains thirty of the very best dwellings in the city, nearly all marble fronts, including the magnificent marble-fronted terrace on Van Buren street; all of which have been designed and superintended by Mr. Boyington. Of these buildings we might enumerate many which are of the most expensive order, and not inferior to anything to be found on Fifth avenue, in New York. He has been the architect, also, of buildings in nearly the same numerical proportion to the whole, on the other avenues of the South Division, and in the North and West Divisions.

He has been engaged in preparing designs and plans for a palatial residence, the most extensive of anything west of the Hudson River, which is being erected for B. F. Allen, Esq., Des Moines, Iowa.

In this age of practicality, when everything is measured, at least in theory, by dollars and cents, there are doubtless many who, on reading the above, will feel inclined to ask, "What does it all amount to?" We will answer the question in advance. "Nearly twenty millions of dollars." This is a round statement of the amount which has been intrusted to Mr. Boyington's hands for building purposes in this city and the Northwest during the past thirteen years. In order to a full appreciation of the value to society of the conversion of this vast amount of money, it must be remembered that the results are permanent, ministering daily to our social wants or business necessities, paying good interest, and not suffering material deterioration in the using. It must be remembered, also, that nearly the whole of this money has been expended as wages, paying workmen in our own section. The clay in the bank, the stone in the quarry, and the tree in the forest, are of very little value. It is when labor has been expended in cutting, shaping, carrying and piling, that they become valuable, and in exact proportion to the amount of useful labor expended upon them. The competent architect who wields these forces, sets in motion and directs these energies, is a real benefactor to his race, not only to the pecuniary extent of so many dollars, but morally and socially.

Mr. Boyington married, at the age of twenty-one, while foreman for Mr. Stearns, Eunice B., daughter of Jacob Miller, of Springfield, Massachusetts, on the 20th of December, 1839. On that day in 1864, the pair celebrated their silver wedding in Chicago, in company with their nine children—five sons and four daughters. He has lost but one child—his first-born son—who died at an early age.

Personally, Mr. Boyington is a man in whom one will naturally feel interested on a casual acquaintance. In the office he is the soul of method, having a time and a place for everything. He is at home to everybody at proper hours, and from the dictate of the millionaire to the complaint of the humblest worker, he listens to all with a respectful civility and answers with a frankness which in its turn commands respect and frankness from all. He is a model in the despatch of business, seldom needing to make a reference, or, if needing it, knowing exactly where to lay his hands on it. He is at home on every subject and detail connected with his business, bears in mind the progress of every piece of work which he may have in hand, and directs now here, now there, without hesitation, confusion or danger of mistake. His success lies not so much in depth of acquirement as in eminent practicality, and this latter trait is noticeable at a glance. Outside, his eye is of the eagle sort. He takes in at one sweep a view of the situation, and an error or omission must be well covered up if it escape him. He is well known, too, as thoroughly conscientious, never seeking to take undue advantage, but insisting on a faithful fulfillment of the terms of a contract by both parties thereto.