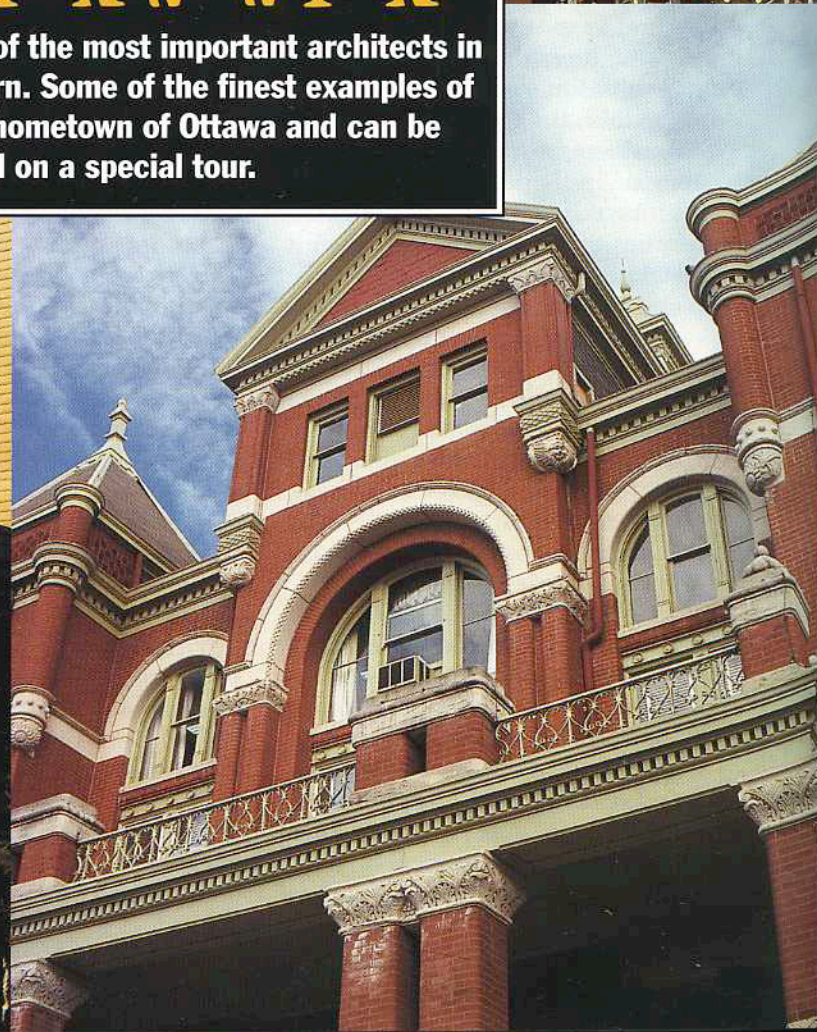
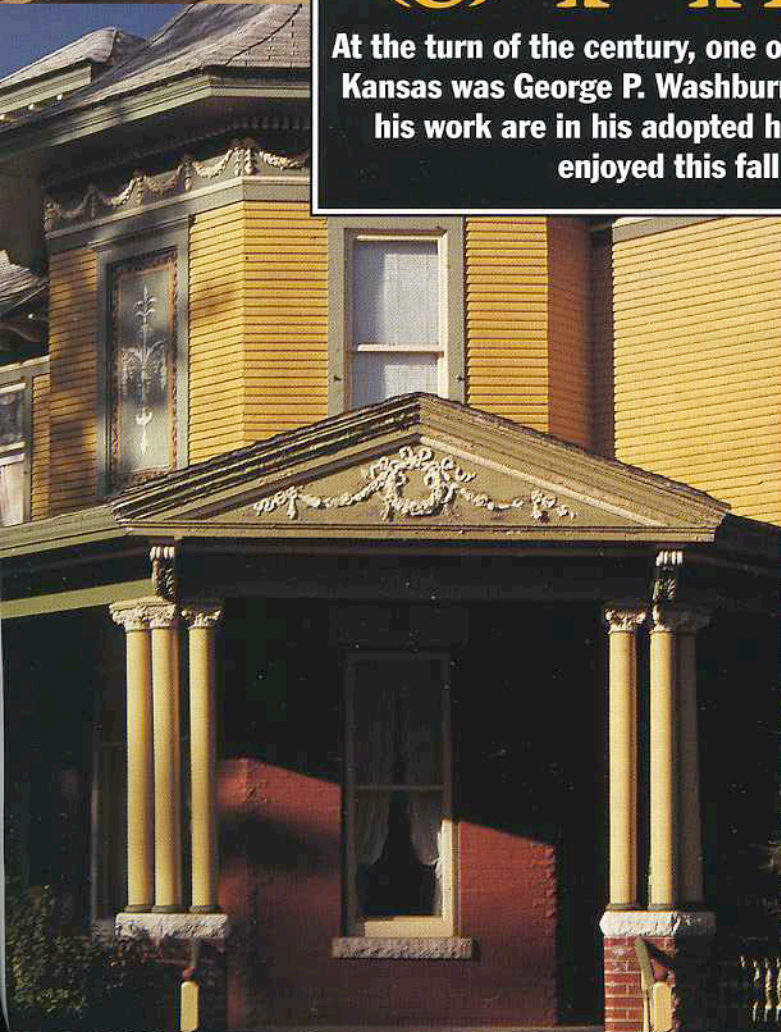


GEORGE WASHBURN'S OTTAWA

At the turn of the century, one of the most important architects in Kansas was George P. Washburn. Some of the finest examples of his work are in his adopted hometown of Ottawa and can be enjoyed this fall on a special tour.



Photography by Neal Allen

Few cities in the state rival the city of Ottawa's legacy in numbers of residential, commercial and public buildings that are the work of one architect — George P. Washburn (1847-1922). Most of Washburn's working life was spent in Ottawa, but a number of towns and cities in Kansas and neighboring states also claim one or more of his architectural structures. Washburn designed 13 county courthouses in Kansas as well as one in Oklahoma and one in Illinois.

Following service in the Civil War and a brief stay on the family farm in Missouri, Washburn began the study of mathematics and architecture at Bryant & Stratton's Commercial College in Quincy, Illinois. In 1878, Washburn was listed as a carpenter in the city directory for Kansas City, Missouri.

Washburn moved his family to Ottawa in 1879 and began work in his profession. According to his daybook, he contracted to make doors, designed the A.M.E. Church and erected a metal storefront for a friend's commercial building.

In 1880, he began employment with Kansas City's pioneer architectural firm, Cross and Taylor. He logged over 13,000 miles supervising the construction of Union depots in Atchison, Denver and Peoria, Illinois, for the firm.

During his early years in Ottawa, Washburn also served as architect

Though local research indicates there were over 60 Washburn residential, commercial and public buildings in Ottawa, only half are identified. Examples of his surviving work include: top left, this unusual corner building on the Hamblin block; top right, the Ransom house built in 1892; bottom left, the Kiler house built in 1898 and, bottom right, the Franklin County Courthouse which was completed in 1893.

"Ottawa may feel proud of her architect, Mr. George P. Washburn. His ability is recognized far and near and he has done as much to advertise Ottawa as any one man. The many substantial buildings erected under his supervision will stand as monuments to his memory."

— the Ottawa Herald 1904

for the Kansas State Board of Charities. Among his projects were designs for the main building of the School for the Deaf in Olathe, the north wing of the School for the Blind in Wyandotte (now Kansas City, Kansas,) and the Girls Industrial School in Beloit. He also worked with John G. Haskell on buildings at the Osawatomie State Hospital.

Washburn built his Ottawa office building at 314 S. Main in 1887 where he practiced until around 1910. His son Clarence began working with him after 1900 and a son-in-law, Roy W. Stookey, later joined the firm. A segmented arch and stone trimmed window still marks Washburn's second-floor office. The Washburn names are painted on a frosted glass panel flanked by beautiful stained glass spandrels. After Washburn's death in 1922, Clarence and Stookey continued the practice into the early 1940's.

Washburn reached a peak in his career in the 1890's that some, including contemporary architects, believe stands out as one of the most important in turn-of-the-century Kansas architecture. Washburn's work is often monumental, not only in scale but often in presentation. His Ottawa architecture documents the passage of architectural styles from Victorian

Gothic through Shingle Style, Queen Anne, Romanesque Revival, Colonial Revival to "free classical" after 1900.

Local research indicates over 60 Washburn residential, commercial and public buildings, though only half are identified. His surviving Ottawa work dates to 1886 with the United Presbyterian Church at 3rd and Walnut and the Becker-Dietz cottage at 410 S. Elm. Both structures are frame and small in comparison to his later work. The cottage has been beautifully restored as a family home. The church, now a homeless shelter and community food pantry, hasn't received such care.

Washburn's prominent buildings in Ottawa include the Franklin County Courthouse, City Hall, Ottawa's Carnegie Library, Ottawa University's Administration Building, the First Baptist Church, the County Infirmary and a dozen or more magnificent houses. Five of these structures, including a complete block of downtown stores, are on the National Register of Historic Places.

Washburn collected newspaper clippings about his work which he preserved in scrapbooks. These have been saved and provide many interesting facts about the man and his work.

"Architect Washburn says that should all the buildings be erected in the coming summer which are now contemplated, Ottawa will enjoy a decided boom. A number of cottages and several finer residences are being figured on and Mr. Washburn is having quite a rush of work," is an example of a statement from a newspaper clipping in Washburn's scrapbook.

Among his crowning achieve-

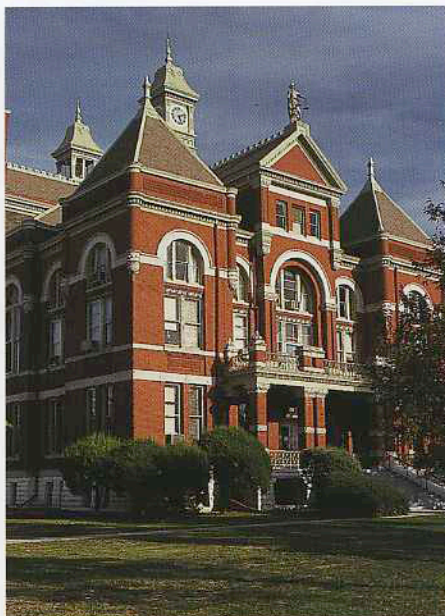
ments is the Franklin County Courthouse that serves as a centerpiece of his Ottawa work. The magnificent three-story limestone and brick structure remains very much as it was in 1893 when it was built.

Preservation of the exterior and interior spaces and design through the years is a tribute to the succeeding county commissions. The oak trim, oak staircases, major courtroom furniture and encaustic tile in the main floor hallway are still in beautiful condition. The courtroom on the second floor is unchanged with the exception of a rear balcony added in the 1980's to provide fire escape access for the third floor. As evidence of its authenticity, the courtroom as well as the exterior of the building was used in the NBC television movie "Cross of Fire" filmed in the summer of 1988.

Architectural terms describe the courthouse as rectangular Romanesque Revival with Colonial Revival detailing. Semicircular stone arches above the second story windows interconnect to provide a continuous stone band around the building. The stone-linked lintels of the first floor windows also form a continuous stringcourse.

"Work on the new courthouse is progressing as rapidly as the gloomy weather of the past two weeks will permit. The slaters and tanners are here ready to complete the roof as soon as the stonemasons finish the walls and gables," reads another clipping in Washburn's scrapbook.

Washburn used Ottawa as his portfolio, hosting endless contingents of county commissioners, school boards and church building committees to examine his work on site.



The Franklin County Courthouse, considered one of Washburn's crowning achievements, serves as a centerpiece of his Ottawa work.

Washburn designed and built a family home in Ottawa for his wife, Alice, and four children in 1897. The large, comfortable home at 507 S. Cherry has had only one other family owner and remains much as it was when it was built. The first floor and porte-cochere are brick veneer and the upper floors are sided with shingle accents at the gables. An amusing story is told about son-in-law Roy Stookey's arrival in splendor at the house with a new automobile. The grand entrance was spoiled by his inability to remember how to shut the car off, however. Stookey was forced to drive around and around the porte-cochere until the car ran out of gas.

Following the sudden death of Alice in 1909, Washburn designed a family mausoleum in Highland Cemetery at 1909 E. 15th. Washburn died at his home in 1922 after a short illness.

In 1983, a granddaughter, Mary Alice Washburn Herbert, wrote, "I grew up knowing my grandfather intimately, but I was 17 when he died. I know, of course, that he was a prominent architect, but my awareness of him was of a more personal nature. I knew what a good family man he was and that he loved Kansas in general and Ottawa in particular."

On Sunday, October 8, 1995, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Ottawa will host its biennial tour and celebration, called "George Washburn's Architecture." The tour provides a view of selected residential, commercial and public buildings. Open this year will be the Franklin County Courthouse, the Sheldon-Wadkins home, now the Turret Inn Bed and Breakfast, and others. A driving tour with a map guide will provide a more complete view of Washburn's Ottawa "portfolio."

The Old Depot Museum, just west of Main St. [US 59] on Tecumseh Street, is the starting point for the tour. A 20-minute slide/tape presentation highlights Washburn's courthouses in other locations and his Civil War experience.

In conjunction with the Ottawa tour, a special tour will be offered this year of Washburn work in Garnett, 25 miles south on US 59, where the grand Kirk House (featured in this issue) will be open for tours and refreshments. The Anderson County Courthouse, a Washburn design built in 1901, also will be open. ■



For further information about George P. Washburn and the October tour of Washburn architecture in Ottawa and Garnett, jointly sponsored by the Franklin County Historical Society and the Ottawa Community Arts Council, contact the Franklin County Historical Society, P.O. Box 145, Ottawa, KS, 66067, (913) 242-1232. Ottawa is in Franklin County on Highways 68, 59 and off Interstate 35.