

David E. Postle, Architect

David Elmer Postle (1863-1939) was an Elgin architect from 1892-1921. He left his mark on Elgin with many impressive buildings, such as the Lords Park Pavilion, the Elgin Public Museum, the old Elgin High School, the David C. Cook Publishing Co., three churches, as well as many high-end residences.

David was born February 18, 1863 on a farm near Columbus, Ohio, to Franklin and Catherine Postle. His ancestors, who came to America about the time of the American Revolution, were of Welsh and English stock. He was one of 11 children, two dying very young. He was trained as a teacher and taught school for two years before moving to Chicago in 1884, where he took a position in an architect's office in order to learn the business.

David worked with several architectural partners in his career. In 1892 he entered into a partnership with Elgin architect Gilbert Turnbull and during their two years together they designed many fine Elgin buildings and homes. Also about 1892 he partnered with Chicago architect John B. Fischer, a partnership that lasted 29 years. From about 1905-10 David partnered with a young Chicago architect named Harry H. Mahler (1876-1975) and together they designed an Elgin church, a museum and several residences, mostly on upper Douglas Ave. Later in his career, after he moved to California, his partners were his two sons, George and David, Jr.

Oliver Postle, David's older brother, was also a Chicago architect and the brothers often worked together until the late 1890s, when Oliver read about the fortunes being made in the lead and zinc mines of Missouri. Unable to persuade David to come along, Oliver moved his family to Missouri and quickly fell into financial difficulties. A business partner skipped town and Oliver, broken in spirit, financially-depleted and worn out physically, became ill with typhoid and died in November 1899. Oliver's daughter (David's niece), Katherine Joy Postle Blackstone, grew up to become a well-known artist.

One of David's first Elgin designs, in 1892 (along with partner Gilbert Turnbull), was the George Richardson home at 600 E. Chicago St. Richardson had come to Elgin in 1889 to become superintendent of the David C. Cook Publishing Co., one of Elgin's biggest industries. While designing the home he met the Richardsons' only child, 23-year-old Georgia (1868-1957). He and Georgia were married Oct. 24, 1893 in the home of her parents, a home the newlyweds would continue to occupy until 1903 when they built their own home, a Prairie-style double residence at 50-54 N. Liberty St., at the north end of the same block.

In 1892, David designed, with Gilbert Turnbull, the German Evangelical Church at 19 Center St. (Iglesia Carismatica Puerta De Sion since 1999). In 1910 he designed, with Harry Mahler, the St. John's Lutheran Church at 115 N. Spring St. In 1912 he designed the Epworth Methodist Church at 551 Arlington Ave. (Calvary Baptist Church since 1980).

In 1897 David and his brother Oliver were commissioned to design a pavilion in Lords Park to replace one that had just burned down. This new pavilion opened in 1898 in a picturesque setting overlooking the lagoon. In 1990 its use was suspended when structural cracks were discovered. Because it had become a community landmark, the City Council decided upon a complete restoration. By 1993, when it was re-dedicated, over \$1 million had been put into the building – considerably more than the original cost of \$5,000. In 1991 the pavilion was honored as Elgin's first officially-designated "Local Historic Landmark."

In 1905 David also designed, with Harry Mahler, the other landmark building in Lords Park – the Elgin Public Museum. Originally called the Lord Memorial Museum, this Neoclassical style building was largely funded by George P. and Mary Lord, and was built to house the extensive natural history collection of George Lord. The original design was to have north, east and west wings meet in a central hall. George died in 1906, soon after construction began, and by 1907 only the central hall and west wing were completed. Interest in the project declined after George's death and the building remained in an asymmetrical state of construction until 2000, when the east wing was finished to complete its symmetry. The Elgin Public Museum is the oldest building in Illinois built expressly as a museum that is still serving that purpose.

The Everett Apartments at the southeast corner of DuPage St. and Park Row were designed in 1899 by David for his father-in-law George Richardson. This 2-story brick Neocolonial style building originally held eight units, four-to-six rooms each. It was one of the first Elgin multi-family residences to be called an apartment building rather than a flat. Designing "The Everett" may have been a good preliminary exercise for David's next big apartment complex in 1902 – "The Pattington" in Chicago.

The Neoclassical style Pattington Apartments in the Uptown neighborhood of Chicago consists of two 4-story stone-and-brick U-shaped structures built around courtyards. It has 72 luxury units, each containing six-to-nine rooms, and is Chicago's largest apartment complex built before the 1920s. Considered Chicago's best vintage courtyard building, the Pattington was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 and won the 1995 Dreihaus Preservation Award. The complex has been a condominium since 1977.

In 1901 David again collaborated with his father-in-law, this time in George Richardson's capacity as superintendent of the David C. Cook Publishing Co., the giant publisher of Sunday School literature. D.C. Cook was operating out of a congested conglomeration of buildings at the northeast corner of Chicago St. and the Fox River, a site ill-equipped for the needs of an expanding, high-volume, progressive-minded firm. A spacious new site was chosen at 850 N. Grove Ave. and here a thoughtfully-designed factory complex was built. The frontage building consists of a stately 2-story Greek Revival administration building, flanked by two single-story wings that, after the 1910 addition, extended nearly 400 feet along N. Grove Ave. The main factory buildings are in the rear of the frontage building. Innovative, state-of-the-art features designed to increase the efficiency, productivity and comfort of the employees included skylights, a fresh air ventilation system, adaptable 1-story construction, a lunchroom and a recreation hall. David also designed the 1910 addition to the factory, along with partner Harry Mahler.

The old Elgin High School at 360 DuPage St. was designed by David in 1904 and built in two stages, in 1905-06 and 1910-11 (in 1938 there were two additions). This was Elgin's only public high school until 1962 when Larkin High School opened. A new Elgin High School was opened in 1972 on the eastern edge of town and since then the old Elgin High has housed administrative offices for the school district.

The last Elgin construction designed by David (along with his Chicago partner John Fischer) was a \$500,000 4- and 5-story addition to the Elgin National Watch Co. in 1921. In May 1921 David moved his family to Los Angeles, California and continued his successful career there, joined by his two sons, George Richardson Postle (1896-1984) and David Elmer Postle, Jr. (1901-?). The two boys, the Postles' only children, both graduated from Elgin High School and the University of Illinois school of architecture.

In a 1923 interview David had only good things to say about Elgin, the city in which he established his career, met and courted his wife and raised his two boys. His move to California was "just responding to the call of the West, and anxious to give my sons touch with its advantages." While in Elgin David was very active in the First Methodist Church, where he was superintendent of its Sunday School and a member of the Church board. He also served as a member of the Board of Education (1916-19) and was a member of the Monitor Masonic lodge. His wife Georgia was very active in the local prohibition movement. In 1914 she was the leader of the "drys," when they successfully voted to outlaw saloons in Elgin Township.

David Postle passed away in Pasadena, California at age 76 on March 12, 1939 and was buried there. He will be remembered not only in Elgin, but also in Chicago and the Los Angeles area, for the many landmark buildings he and his partners designed.

Acknowledgements: Mike Alft's books and newspaper articles; various newspaper sources, including obituaries and building reports; federal censuses; Internet sources; photos by Judy Van Dusen and others.