

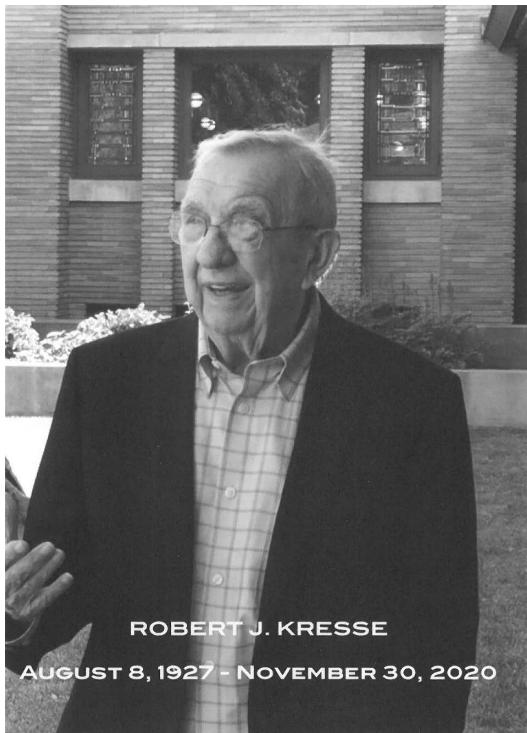
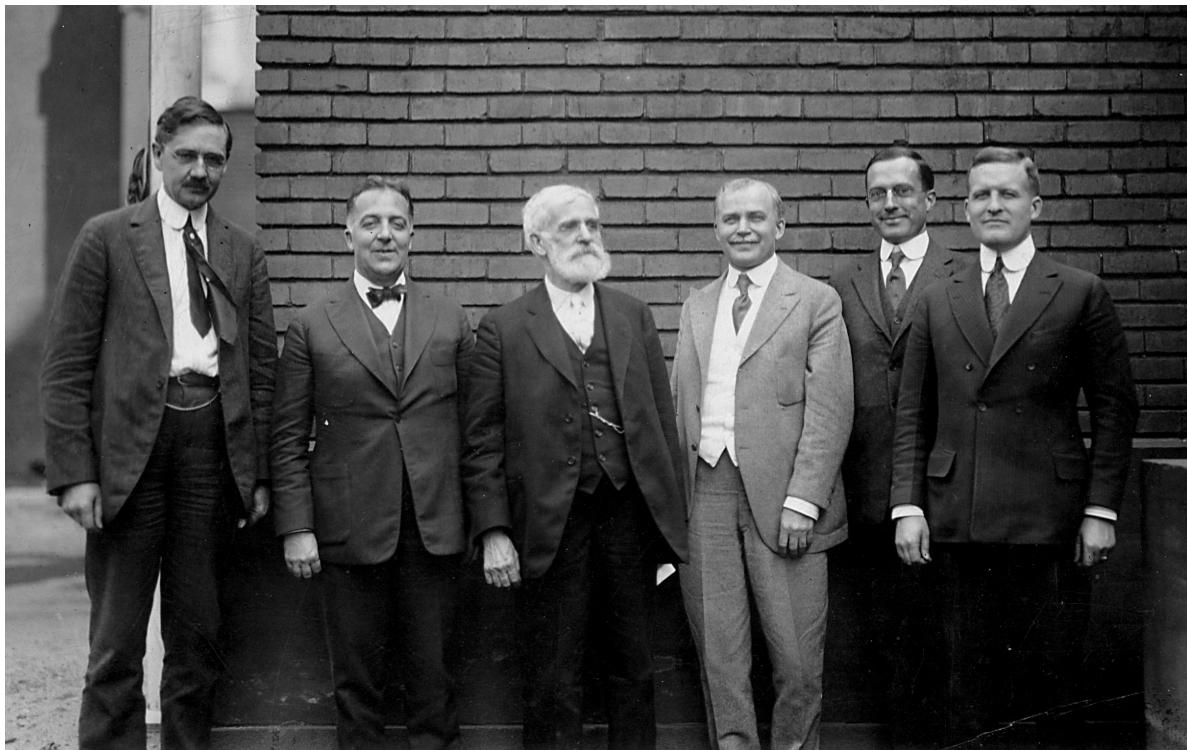
LARKIN CENTER OF COMMERCE RECOGNIZES THE CONTRIBUTIONS MADE BY ROBERT KRESSE RELATED TO JOHN LARKIN AND THE LARKIN SOAP CO. AND THEIR INFLUENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY

A few years ago the Univ. of Buffalo's graduate Art Department paid homage to John D. Larkin, Sr. and his company, the Larkin Soap Co. by hosting a major national conference in Buffalo featuring the Larkin Co. as the genesis of the arts and crafts movement in the U.S.. Its program of numerous activities, lectures and exhibits spread out over a four month period of time, and included visits to many sites in Western New York. The Larkin Center of Commerce and its museum were not only one of the sites toured by conference attendees, but also was a major sponsor of the conference.



Just about every site visited exists today because of the efforts of Robert (Bob, as he liked to be called) Kresse. Bob so loved Buffalo that he made saving and restoring, objects and programs a part of his life's work. A number of those sites and programs were the [product of the quiet charisma of John Larkin, Sr. and his employees such as Elbert Hubbard (Roycroft campus), and Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture in Buffalo (Larkin Administration Building, Darwin Martin House, William Heath House and Walter Davison House). JDL collaborated

with the Olmsteads in planning the parks and had even begun planning a community which would have adjoined Olmstead's Delaware Park, but the land got bought up by another developer before JDL and the Olmsteads had completed their ideas and were ready to make an offer.



By way of background, Bob was 93 years of age when he died at home in November, 2020, having been cared for by his adoring – and adored – wife, Mary Ann. Till the last few weeks of his life, he still went out – maybe a little wobbly, but he was loath to be slowed down. He and Mary Ann joined me and our friend, Diane Chrisman, for what had become an annual holiday celebration, this time at the Roycroft Inn. (My first ever meal with the Kresse's had also been at the Roycroft Inn, at the reception following the famed Roycrofter, Kitty Turgeon's funeral, in Nov. 2014. (More about this later.)

At the time of Bob's death he was still a licensed and practicing attorney at the firm, Barclay and Damon. In fact, years before, he had been my uncle's commercial and real estate attorney. In more recent years, his long time secretary often brought work to Bob at his home. Bob's career spanned 70 years!

As a trustee for the Wendt Foundation since 1984, Bob was not only able, along with his fellow Trustees, to provide funding for restoration of the Roycroft Inn as well as for other projects, but also assisted with organizing and motivating other individuals, organizations and political powers involved with education, industry, the arts, culture and ecology. His influence surpassed the reach of the Wendt Foundation. He, along with his wife, Mary Ann, have been moving forces in restoring, preserving and improving many aspects of our community, empowered by their affection for it.

How fortunate for Western New York that one of Bob's interests and subject of his affection was the Arts and Crafts movement that evolved here going back to the late 1800's. The very subject of that aforementioned conference was the role of John Larkin and his company in planting the seeds of that movement that is now such a defining part of the culture of Buffalo and Western New York. The Larkin Center of Commerce was a major supporter of that conference, recognizing its role in the Arts and Crafts movement.

It was JDL who brought, in 1875, his then 19 year old brother in law, Elbert Hubbard, to work in the soap company founded by JDL. It was JDL who nurtured Elbert and gave him the opportunity to learn about business, merchandising, employee relations and the like. Elbert became fertile ground for the creativity that drove him to leave, in 1893. Unsure how to proceed with achieving his yearning for a new way of life, he went to England to meet William Morris, a famed originator of the Arts and Crafts movement in that country.

Inspired by what he observed there, Elbert returned to the U.S. to create a new venture in East Aurora, i.e. the Roycroft campus. Driven by his creativity, Elbert attracted artists and craft people. Roycroft became a model for the Arts and Crafts movement throughout the United States, renowned for its work in leather, copper, ceramic and other craft items. Over the years the campus grew both physically and in reputation, attracting not only artisans who desired to live in East Aurora and market their goods there, but also tourists and serious buyers who wanted to visit this interesting community and savor its products. The outcome, of course, was the building, in an Arts and Crafts style, of the Roycroft Inn in 1905.

Interestingly, it was built at the same time as the Larkin Co.'s Administration Building. (LAB) Kitty Turgeon and Robert Rust, in their book, "Images of America: The Roycroft Campus," (1999) comment that while there is no question about Frank Lloyd Wright being the architect for the LAB, there is no architect of record for the Roycroft Inn and FLW never made a claim to it. But Turgeon and Rust, noting the close friendship that had existed between Elbert and Larkin Co. V.P., Darwin Martin for many years, opine that there is unlikely any way that Elbert was not aware of the FLW design for the LAB. and was likely influenced by it.

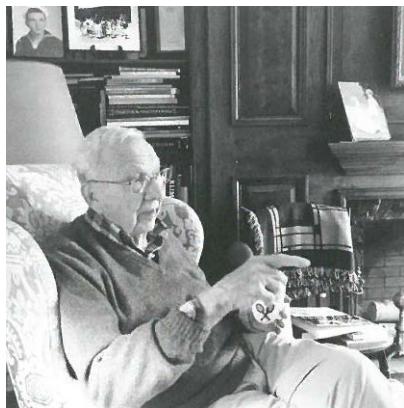




*Spook-Eats*

While the Inn was initially successful, by 1971, according to Turgeon and Rust, the Inn had been closed and neglected for many years. It had declared bankruptcy as early as 1938 and twice more after that under different ownership. Shockingly, in the 1940's and again in the 1960's, the Buffalo Bills football team, had used the Inn during summer training camp. ("The Roycroft Inn: History and Celebration," by the Roycroft Revitalization Corp.

Turgeon and Rust's book informs us that that, largely through Turgeon's historical research and drafting of the application for federal Landmark Status, such status was achieved in 1986. But they quickly remind us that "without the huge investment in 1987 by the Wendt Foundation, in joint effort with the Village of East Aurora and the Landmark Society of W.N.Y, it would not have survived." In 1994 the Wendt Foundation became the owner and entered into an arrangement with Someplace Different to manage the Inn. :The Roycroft Inn: History and Celebration," Jennifer J. Lewis, Ed.. And who was the lead man from the Wendt Foundation through all of this? Bob Kresse. And for years after, and as recently as in November, 2020, Bob was always received as a "Star" any time he entered the Inn.



It may be that the Roycroft Inn was the project, among culturals, for which Bob is best known, but there are other historic Larkin projects for which Bob also bestowed his advocacy, either through the Wendt Fdtn. or on his own. Those related to Larkin about which I am aware include"

Larkin Administration Building (informal collaboration with Darwin Martin) Darwin Martin House (its first Board Chairman and many years on the

Board, including throughout its restoration, Wendt funds Gardner's Cottage – adjunct to the Martin House Barton House – adjunct to the Martin House Graycliff – funding WNY Heritage Magazine

I finish with a quote by Douglas DeCroix' "Endnotes" re: Bob published in the Winter, 2021 issue of "Buffalo Heritage:"

"Western New York has lost a true pillar of the community... Bob was a tireless advocate for the region and its cultural treasures.. Take a look around Buffalo and the Greater Western New York region. If you find a successful restoration, preservation or reimaging effort, then there is a good chance he was somehow involved."

Bob was a treasure and though he has not been gone long, it seems like forever, but for his footprints left all over our community