

THE ARCHITECTURE OF JOSEPH LYMAN SILSBEE
Transitional Years, Syracuse to Chicago

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本論はPersonal Background and Historical Context (昭和56年度日本建築学会近畿支部研究報告集) そして Early Work in Syracuse, New York (昭和56年度日本建築学会大会学術講演梗概集) に続くシルスピー研究の第三報で、1880年前後のアメリカ東部における建築意匠についての一般的考察をまじえて、シカゴにおけるシルスピーの比較的に初期の作である二つの教会と、それらに相前後してニューヨーク州Buffalo に建てられた二つの住宅の建築的な特性を、それぞれの意匠的側面を中心として対照しつつ、論述するものである。

FROM SYRACUSE TO CHICAGO

Silsbee's work during his years in Chicago was catalogued and published with an article on the architect by S. K. Sorell in 1970, although the article would be better if Sorell had been more discreet in the designation of architectural styles.¹ The date of Silsbee's departure from Syracuse and arrival in Chicago, which was argued by Sorell in a footnote of the article, should be reexamined at the beginning. Sorell's belief is that Silsbee established his practice in Chicago prior to May-June of 1882, since he is first listed in the *Lakeside Directory* of that year. There is no reason to be doubtful of the city directory, but on the other hand, the other conceivable dates of his move, especially those of his departure from Syracuse, are all after 1882. Although the discussion of an exact date of an architect's move is not necessarily significant in the history of architecture, it may have partly misled Sorell's study. Concerning a residence in Buffalo, New York, which was illustrated in the *American Architect and Building News* in 1884 (Fig. 1), Sorell writes that it was designed after Silsbee settled in Chicago?² However, we can find a short description of "RESIDENCE..BUFFALO N.Y. J.L.SILSBEE. ARCHT. SYRACUSE. N.Y." and small letters of "FRED R. HIRCH DEL. 83."³ Therefore, we should be more tolerant about the date of Silsbee's move until more definite records on his life and work are found. It is generally difficult for an architect to establish his practice in a new place without a certain period of preparation.

A RESIDENCE IN BUFFALO, NEW YORK

Beginning with an analysis of the residence in Buffalo which may belong to his Syracuse work, Sorell suggests that Silsbee's work in Chicago seems to have lagged several years behind stylistic currents in the East and concludes that his production from 1884 to 1886 was generally "Queen Anne".⁴ Sorell's understanding of the "Queen Anne" is, however, misleading. It would be helpful to our understanding of Silsbee's work in the early 1880's and of the "Queen Anne" in the United States to compare the residence with a house illustrated in the *Buffalo Business Directory* of 1884 (Fig. 3). The illustration was taken from W. T. Comstock's *Modern Architectural Designs and Details* of 1881. The house itself was designed by Lamb and Wheeler, and inappropriately labeled as a "Queen Anne Cottage" by Comstock.⁵ It has many similar features to such English country-house-type structures as R. N. Shaw's Grims Dyke (1870-1872) or T. Harris's British Executive Commissioner and Delegates Residence of the 1876 Philadelphia Exhibition, and should be called American vernacular "Old English" rather than "Queen Anne".

1. S. K. Sorell, "Silsbee: The Evolution of a Personal Architectural Style," *The Prairie School Review*, VII, No. 4, 1970.

2. Sorell, "Silsbee", 7.

3. *American Architect and Building News*, No. 433, APR. 12, 1884.

4. Sorell, "Silsbee", 6.

5. W. T. Comstock, *Modern Architectural Designs and*

Details..., New York, 1881, plate 1.

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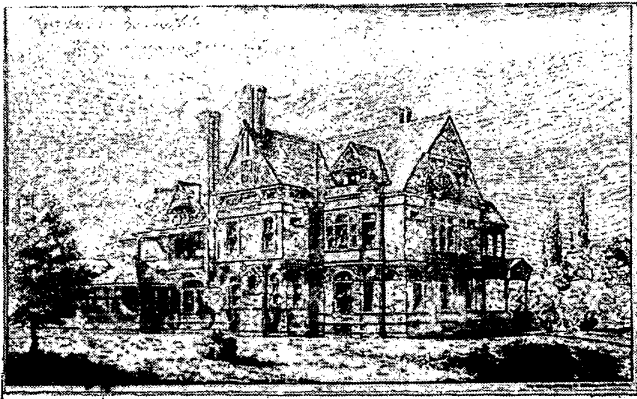


Fig. 1
A Residence in Buffalo, c. 1883.
From *American Architect and Building News*, 1884.

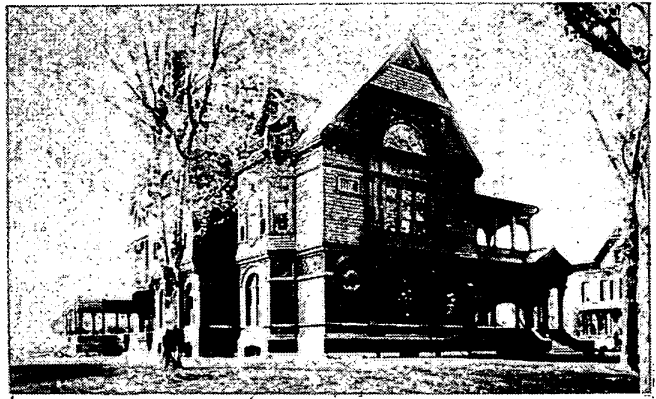


Fig. 2
A Residence in Buffalo, c. 1883.
From *L'Architecture Américaine*, 1886.

A residence in Buffalo is identified as one that appeared in *L'Architecture Américaine*, a French photographic anthology of recent buildings in the United States, published in 1886.⁶ This publication gives us more information about the residence (Fig. 2). The surfaces were covered with brick on the ground story with the plastic ornamentation in the frieze and spandrels, and with shingles on the upper stories. The big arched light beneath a projecting attic gable was leaded. This was probably derived from oriel windows with arched central lights of so-called "Queen Anne" urban buildings of contemporary England, judging from another similar motif on a bay window of the second story. At the same time, this kind of detail might have been suggested by some American buildings of what is called "Federal" period or of the preceding academic period in 18th-century colonial architecture. These buildings with various kinds of Palladian details must have been familiar to Silsbee, who had lived in such old cities of New England as Boston or Salem, Massachusetts. The French book also shows that the two-tiered porch was much more extensive than supposed from the illustration of 1884, and with latticework screens which were sometimes used in "Shingle Style" structures. This porch, which could be called veranda or piazza if it was very extensive, together with another on the opposite side of the residence which was basically octagonal and could be called pavilion, made this structure "American" rather than "Old English". In addition, the shingle skin was not combined with half-timbered gables, but there were small carved panels instead. The residence was an American "Shingle" version of "Old English" with touches of "Queen Anne".

CHURCH FOR ALL SOULS' SOCIETY, CHICAGO

Although G. C. Manson noted, after H.-R. Hitchcock's suggestion,⁷ that the pastor of All Souls' Church was instrumental in bringing Silsbee to Chicago,⁸ the architect had already built more than twenty houses in Chicago area before the church of 1885. It must have been Chicago's rapid growth of building construction and housing development which brought him to Chicago, rather than the commission to build the small church. Silsbee built, for example, at least five houses in 1883 and 1884 for Potter Palmer, a successful real estate developer and one of the major figures in the reconstruction of Chicago after

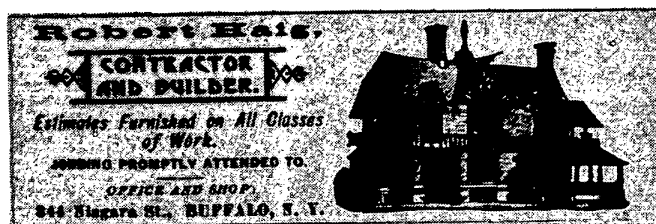


Fig. 3 A Builder's Advertisement

From the *Buffalo Business Directory*, 1884.

6. *L'Architecture Américaine* is republished as *American Victorian Architecture* (New York, 1975).
7. H.-R. Hitchcock, *In the Nature of Materials*, New York, 1942, 4.
8. G. C. Manson, *Frank Lloyd Wright to 1910*, New York, 1958, 15.

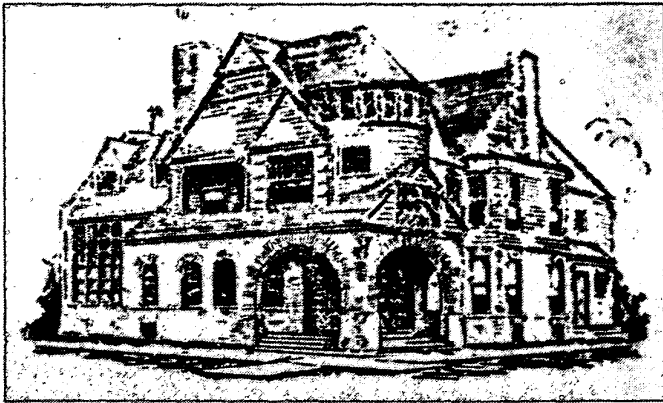


Fig. 4
Church for All Souls' Society, Chicago, 1885.
J. L. Silsbee's Drawing.

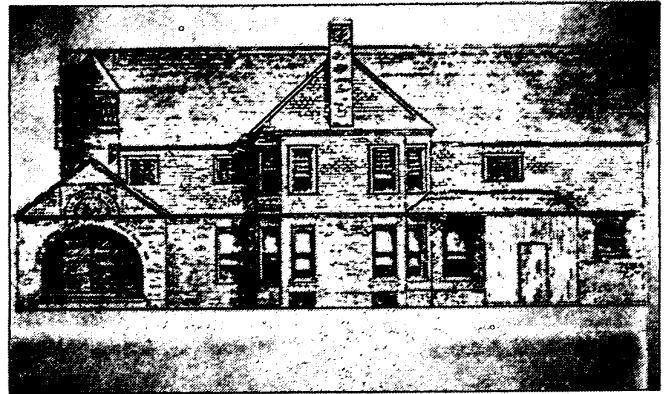


Fig. 5
Church for All Souls' Society, Chicago, 1885.
Elevation of the west front.

the Great Fire of 1871.⁹

Built on the South Side of Chicago, All Souls' Church was a type of dwelling house in its design, and not greatly different from the residence in Buffalo. Frank Lloyd Wright, the pastor's nephew, noted in his *Autobiography* that there was the parsonage above where he usually went to dinner on Sundays.¹⁰ Another small structure was proposed on the south as a parsonage annexed to the church, but no record of its construction can be found. The surfaces of the second story and roofs were covered with shingles, but the first story was of brick (Figs. 4 and 5). While All Souls' Church has long since been demolished, Wright's description of this structure as a church looking like a "Queen Anne" dwelling is, however, misleading.¹¹ Although the plan of the church cannot be found, it may not have been very different from that of Unity Chapel of Spring Green, Wisconsin, of the same year. Not only the chapel but also All Souls' Church must have affected Wright's design of Unitarian Chapel for [sic] Sioux City, Iowa, which appeared in the *Inland Architect and News Record* in 1887, and was supposedly his first independent design.

The congregation of All Souls' outgrew the church-home at the south-east corner of Oakwood Boulevard and Langley Avenue in fifteen years. The Abraham Lincoln Center, the new building for the congregation, was constructed between 1903 and 1905 on a site diagonally opposite All Souls' Church with a south frontage on Oakwood Boulevard. Although the new edifice was initially designed by Wright, the executed building of six floors may be mostly attributed to Dwight Heald Perkins as well as to the pastor of All Souls', Jenkin Lloyd-Jones.

ANOTHER RESIDENCE IN BUFFALO, NEW YORK

There also appeared two photographs of another residence in Buffalo by Silsbee in the French publication of 1886 (Figs. 6 and 7). They may possibly be the Francis House of 1885, since this is the only recorded recent house designed by Silsbee and built in Buffalo before 1886 except the residence already mentioned. This residence was relatively small, and its plan must have been compact. Although these two residences in Buffalo were built within a few years, the more recent one clearly showed its new

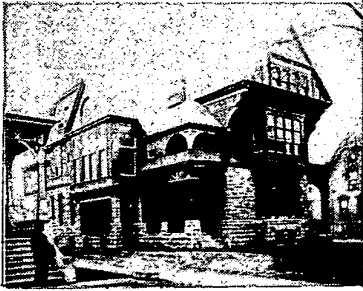
9. The interior of the Potter Palmer residence or "castle" on Lake Shore Drive (designed by Cobb and Frost, and built in 1882) was partly remodelled by the firm of Silsbee and Kent, not later than 1883, with furnishings of Herter Brothers of New York.

Edward A. Kent (1853-1912), who had studied architecture supposedly in Paris, began his work in Syracuse as draftsman for Silsbee. Around the time of

their move to Chicago, Kent was probably taken into partnership by Silsbee, although Kent left to Buffalo around 1884 to maintain an independent office.

10. F. L. Wright, *An Autobiography*, New York, 1932, 97 (1977 edition).

11. Wright, *Autobiography*, 91 (1977 edition).



Figs. 6 and 7

Another Residence in Buffalo, c. 1885.
From *L'Architecture Américaine*, 1886.



Fig. 8

Unity Chapel at Helena, near Spring Green,
Wisconsin, c. 1885. Drawing by F. L. Wright.

features; the surface of lower level was of rock-faced coursed ashlar, shingles of upper stories were more natural and more dominant all over the structure, chimneys were more simply designed, and the sweep of the roof was more continuous than that of the older one. The quality of the continuity of surfaces in this residence, including its fairly strong horizontality, was to be developed in more mature ways in the late 1880s. Silsbee shifted from the so-called High Victorian mode of the 1870s to the Shingle Style of the late 1880s by way of this stage, keeping the sense of natural expression of the horizontality in stones, bricks, and shingles. There was an identity of manner behind the nominal architectural modes. He retained his High-Victorian interest in the inherent qualities of the materials, and seems to have turned his attention more to their textures in the 1880s. In case of this residence, however, the great varieties of surface treatment was slightly superficial. The various forms of elaborate ornamentation had already become feasible by such technological innovations as the steam-powered scroll saw. It was a task assigned to late-19th-century designers to make the most of them, at the same time, not to make an improper use of them. There were two more peculiarities in the design of this residence. One was a kind of dormer which connected one of the roof slopes to another (Fig. 7). The other was a pair of huge elaborately curved brackets which supported a projecting gable. Silsbee continued to employ the former in some varieties, but not the latter.

UNITY CHAPEL OF HELENA VALLEY, SPRING GREEN, WISCONSIN

Though it was as late as 1889 that Silsbee eliminated unnecessarily intricate details from the surfaces of houses and produced a few almost plain shingled houses, he had made a quite simple shingle-surfaced chapel, also for Jenkin Lloyd-Jones, not later than 1886. It is Unity Chapel in the Helena Valley near Spring Green, Wisconsin. F. L. Wright's drawing of this chapel shows its softly shingled roofs, walls, a porch post, and horizontally coursed rock-faced ashlar base, as well as small-paned double-hung windows (Fig. 8). Almost all of these features permit it to be called a "shingle style" chapel, and its reserved character makes it look like a "vernacular" by a local builder. However, it is likely that we can detect the shadow of H. H. Richardson on the design of this chapel. It might well have been the ecclesiastical image of one of Richardson's local or academic community libraries reflected on the surface of shingles which was also Richardsonian material.¹² At the same time, we may be able to see traces of Unity Chapel not only in Wright's Unitarian Chapel project but also in the single story shingled cottages and stables of "T" or "L"-shaped plans for L. Sullivan and J. Charnley built in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, in 1890, though many of them have been considerably altered or even demolished and none of them can show the definite authorship of either Sullivan or Wright. Thus, this little chapel stands rather anonymously in between Richardson and Wright, as Silsbee's houses of the mid-1880s anticipated his small and less ostentatious work of the late 1880s and early 1890s.

12. Among several libraries designed by Richardson, the Converse Memorial Library of Malden, Massachusetts (1883-5), might well have served as a model of Unity Chapel. See the perspective illustration in Van Rensselaer, 1888, 1969, 83.