

WOMEN AS ARCHITECTS.

BY JOSEPH DANA MILLER.

Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly (1876-1904); Jun 1900; Vol. I., No.2.;

American Periodicals Series Online

pg. 0_010



"BUENAVISTA"—A SPANISH VILLA, NEAR STAMFORD, CONN.

Designed by Mrs. E. E. Holman.

WOMEN AS ARCHITECTS.

BY JOSEPH DANA MILLER.

THE AMERICAN WOMAN IN ACTION.—XIX.

THERE are few practising architects among women in the United States, but these few have accomplished enough to make it profitable to direct our attention to their work. Miss Lois L. Howe, who resides in Boston, and who won second prize for her design for the Woman's Building at the World's Fair, says: "The field of architecture is so little known to women that it is scarcely time to say much about their fitness for it. It seems to me to contain no obstacles which may not be overcome by any woman whose determination and interest in her work are strong enough to face them."

Perhaps the best known woman architect in the country is Mrs. Minerva Parker Nichols, of Brooklyn. Since her marriage a few years ago, she has not practised, but the New Century Club House in Philadelphia, on Twelfth street, near Sansom, stands as strong testimony to the high quality of her art. Its style is Renaissance, and it is built of Pompeian brick and Indiana limestone. Mrs. Nichols came to her line of work by hereditary right, for her grandfather was a well known architect and ship designer. The New Century Club House at Wilmington, Delaware, is also of her designing; and to these should be added a handsome residence at Overbrook, Pennsylvania, and a schoolhouse (old Colonial) at Cambridge, Massachusetts; a fine cottage at Avon-by-the-Sea, and a number of homes of pleasing architectural exterior.

Two houses in Germantown, however, are Mrs. Nichols's especial pride, because in these instances the architectural talent has been reinforced by the maternal instinct. This union has resulted in a dozen dainty devices—clothes, china and laundry closets, dumb elevators everywhere, and, think of it! a bath room for the baby, with every convenience for the infant's and mother's comfort. Mrs. Nichols personally superintended the erection of these buildings, and in the case of the New Century Club House at Wilmington, the

builder declared that he had never worked for an architect who better understood the business.

The Woman's Building at the Atlanta Exposition grounds was the work of Mrs. Wagner, *née* Mercur, of Pittsburgh. She not only prepared the plans, but superintended the construction to the minutest detail. It has been her custom to engage living apartments in the neighborhood where her designs are in process of execution that she may witness the progress of every step from beginning to completion. In addition to the Woman's Building at the Atlanta Exposition, she has prepared plans for and personally superintended the building of the Female Seminary at Washington, Pennsylvania; the Children's Building at Marshalsea, Pennsylvania; St. Martin's Church at Johannesburg, Pennsylvania; St. John's Chapel at Pittsburgh, and the remodeling of the Pittsburgh College for Women, in that city. The central portion of the College received an addition of two stories, and to the left a gymnasium was added. Mrs. Wagner has just completed the Wilson College at Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, and a Seminary building at Washington, Pennsylvania. But as with most of these ladies, it is the home features of the work in which, with true feminine instinct, she takes the greatest pride; and Mrs. Wagner considers that a house at Edgewood, Pennsylvania, has the finest interior of any home she has planned.

Miss Ida Anna Ryan, who is a practising architect at Waltham, Massachusetts, was early attracted during her high-school days to the study of design, and a few years later, at the end of her term at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, her junior design received the first of the first four prizes, and she was then invited to compete with only senior and fifth class men in the Junior Beaux Arts contest, in which she won second prize for a grand plan, elevation and section of a public market. Among her later designs are a sanitarium, to be built at South Farmingham, Massachusetts, containing twenty-one rooms, and a large hall running through the house. The building will be Colonial, but simple in detail; painted white, with dark green blinds, and located upon a twelve-acre lot.

Miss Lois L. Howe, of Boston, is represented in the illustration taken from a photograph of the interior additions to the Lowell house at Cambridge, Mass. Miss Howe is a relative of the Lowell family. She took second prize for a design for the Woman's Building at the World's Fair, as already mentioned, and has followed the profession of architect assiduously ever since. The suburban houses she has planned have been Colonial for the most part, but her most interesting work has been in additions and remodeling.

The Misses Hands and Gannon are two young architects who practise in co-partnership in New York city. There are many cottages along the Jersey coast which owe their designs to the tasteful art of these young women. But their most notable achievement is a plan for model tenements, which has extorted the admiration of such students of the problem of the housing of the poor as E. R. L. Gould and Jacob Riis, author of "How the Other Half Lives." When these plans were laid before Sir Sidney Waterlow, head of the Improved Dwellings Company, in London, he said, with much enthusiasm: "These are the best plans for single tenements I have ever seen, the



MARY N. GANNON. ETHEL FRANCES SARGENT. IDA ANNAH RYAN.

most clever and ingenious;" and Jacob Riis said: "They have, in my judgment, solved the question of building a decent tenement on a twenty-five-foot lot. . . . I am content to know that the question I judged incapable of solution has been solved."

These young architects studied the tenement problem in a very practical way. For years they talked and studied over their plans, and it was long before they were finally matured. Then they went to Forsyth street and lived as factory girls live. All the inconveniences, unhealthy surroundings and bad sanitation they acquainted themselves with by actual experience; and they set to work to devise plans which should abolish the many evils incident to tenement life. It was a problem in morals as well as construction that they had set themselves to study.

These plans for a model tenement provide for a house ninety feet long, with ten feet of space to conform to legal requirements; a court in the centre of the building; tiled entrance and a hallway of porcelain walls. Each apartment



HARRIET FRANCES LOCKE.

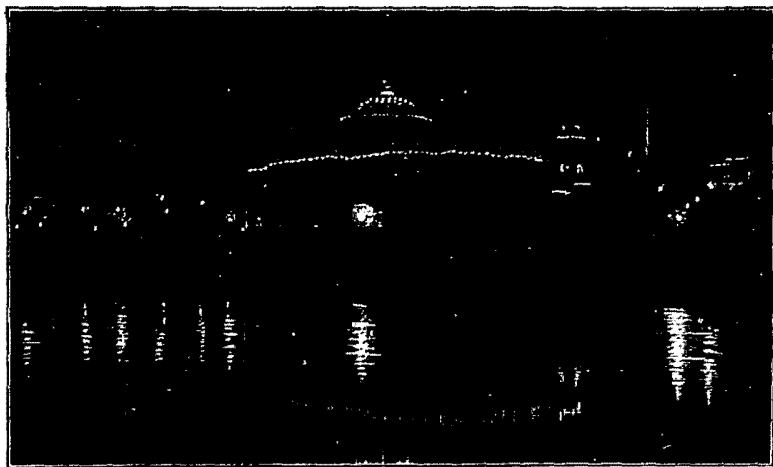
ALICE J. HANDS.

ELISE MERCUR WAGNER.

has its own balcony, and there are fire escapes at both the back and front of the house. An arc light in the court will illuminate every room in the house. The roof, with railings eight feet high, is designed as a breathing spot. There is an ash chute and garbage receptacle which solves the refuse problem. The often perplexing questions of interior conveniences—light, so desirable in tenements of the cheaper class, cleanliness and hygienic conditions—are solved in many ingenious ways; and the entire plan is remarkable for its completeness of detail, its economy of space, and the homeliness and comforts realized at a minimum rental, for an average rent of \$2.50 per week will pay a fair return on the capital required for land and building. A company has been formed and land purchased in West Fifty-seventh street, New York, where the ideals of these earnest and clever young women may be realized. These model tenement plans are not the only achievement of these girls. Together they designed the Florence Hospital, at San Francisco, erected at a cost of \$30,000, and a villa for Mr. C. F. Johnson, of California, modelled after the Czar's palace at Livadia and costing \$50,000.

Mrs. E. Elizabeth Holman, of Chestnut street, Philadelphia, occupies rather a unique position among architects. She has designed pretty nearly everything except office buildings—theatres, hotels, stores, and city and suburban residences. She has won a wide reputation for quaint and unusual Summer cottages, which have the merit of being convenient and comfortable, as well as cheap.

Few of those who do business with "E. E. Holman, Architect," suspect that these initials stand for a woman who has practiced her profession for eight years and whose houses are in every State of the Union, except Mississippi, including, too, Summer houses in Canada and only recently a house



WOMAN'S BUILDING AT THE ATLANTA EXPOSITION—NIGHT VIEW.

Designed by Mrs. Wagner.



INTERIOR ADDITIONS TO THE LOWELL HOUSE AT CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

Designed by Lois L. Howe.

built in Jamaica, British West Indies, the material for which was mill-made in this country and shipped there.

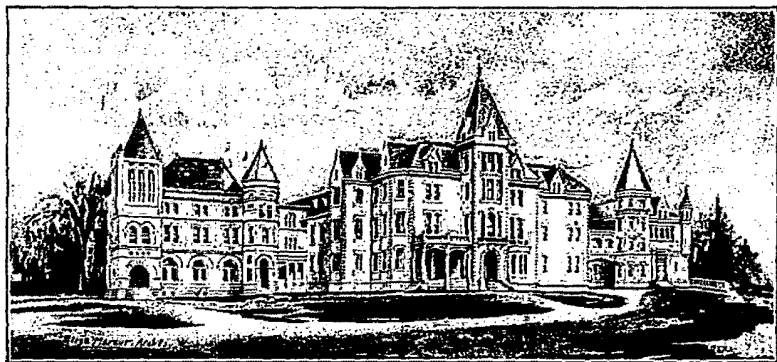
Among Mrs. Holman's more ambitious work is a Summer house in the Dutch Colonial style at Cazenovia, New York, designed to give as nearly as possible the effect of the old family mansion of by-gone days. The house has a central hall fronting on the side which overlooks a lake. The staircase is of old Colonial style, the quaint balustrade having been taken bodily from an old house.

But the work which Mrs. Holman considers her best is Buenavista, a villa in the Spanish style, shown in the cut at the head of this article, built upon a hill near Stamford, Connecticut. It is a striking instance of the possibility of making a house "climb gracefully down-hill." There is a drop of from twenty to fifty feet between its two ends and quite a drop at the *porte cochère*. This is built low, and stairs inside go up between arches filled with glass, which form a palm house. The front and main side entrances have curiously carved doors, modelled somewhat on those of Spanish churches. There is a large entrance hall with a stair tower and a reception room opening from this hall, all of which are Moorish in decoration. The living hall is an immense room panelled in white, to increase its apparent size, and with two large windows filling all of the north end, except that portion occupied by the fire-place, and commanding a most magnificent view. The long corridor, with outside balcony leading to the curved stair, has below it a billiard room

and a smoking "den" back of that. The communication between library and billiard room is made through an artistic lobby with descending steps. From the billiard room, stairs go up to the tower, which like all the others affords a splendid view of the surrounding country. This is a magnificent house, on a commanding site, and Mrs. Holman is prouder of it than of any other of her designs.

To the names of women architects given should be added those of Miss Esther Stone, the first woman to win the Rotch prize at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and now of the firm of Stone, Carpenter & Willson, of Providence, Rhode Island; Miss Esther Sargent, now assistant in the architect's office of the B. M. R. R. in Boston, and designer of a school building at Saco, Maine, and a number of fine residences; Miss Harriet F. Locke, of Nashua, New Hampshire; Miss Laura Hayes Fuller, of Chicago, designer of the Woman's Building at the coming exposition at Springfield and a prize winner in the competition for plans for the Woman's Building at the World's Fair; Miss Sophia G. Hayden, the successful competitor in that contest, and considered the very best draughtswoman ever graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and Miss Annie L. Hawkins, a graduate of the Maryland Institute of Art and Design, who has to her credit a high school building at Havre de Grace, Md. But the pioneer among women architects is Mrs. Bethune, now living, I believe, in Buffalo. Attention was attracted to her a few years ago by reason of her application for membership in the New York Association of Architects, which met with much opposition.

That the number of women who have essayed the profession of architecture is yet so small is due to the fact that few institutions supply the necessary instruction, and to the other fact that established architects are not eager to employ women in the offices where alone the really practical knowledge is to be acquired.



PITTSBURGH COLLEGE FOR WOMEN.

Remodeled by Mrs. Wagner.