

Architects of Allerton – History Happy Hour

There is a special group of people that, besides Robert Allerton himself, have contributed the most to the property and that is the group of architects who are credited with the design work for Allerton. Over Robert's ownership of the property, he had 4 architects who designed buildings and gardens here. They are John Joseph Borie, III, James Gamble Rogers, Joseph Corson Llewellyn, and John Gregg Allerton. A 5th architect that deserves an honorable mention is David Adler, as it was in his firm that John Gregg initially worked when he was doing design work for Robert. I realize those names might not jump out at you unless you're an architecture enthusiast or student, but they all played a vital role in shaping what Allerton looks like.

In 1898, when it was decided that Robert should move down to Piatt County to manage *The Farms*, it was necessary for him to build a permanent residence for himself that was befitting of his style and means. His father, Samuel, agreed so Robert asked his architect friend, John Borie from Pennsylvania, to help him with the design work. John Joseph "Dickey" Borie, III had studied architecture as a special student at the University of Pennsylvania, but left before obtaining his degree to study at Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. This is likely where Borie and Robert were introduced as they were both there in 1896. Or it is possible that the marriage of Dickey's older sister, Emily Borie to Arthur Lanard Ryerson of Chicago in 1889 had been their introduction as Ryerson and Allerton moved in the same elite circles. Either way, the two gentlemen had struck up a friendship, and it was John Borie that Robert asked to sail with him to Europe to seek inspiration for what his home should look like. Robert and Dickey settled on modeling the home after Ham House in Richmond, Surrey, England. Modifying the traditional H-pattern of Ham House, Borie drew up plans for Robert's home and they came home to get started. Since Borie was not a licensed architect in the state of Illinois, Robert hired the firm of James Gamble Rogers to be the architect of note on the plans. Borie and James Gamble Rogers were acquainted as they had both worked at the architecture firm of Cope and Stewardson in Philadelphia. Rogers had since set up shop in Chicago and was able to be the licensed architect for the plans for The Farms.

Borie continued to do all architectural design work for Robert after work on the mansion was complete enough for it to be livable in 1900. His work continued with the construction of the Carriage House next to the mansion. The Carriage House is of special note as it features two bas relief designs of Pan on the southeast side facing the Sangamon River. This type of design work was something Borie was very familiar with as he helped design over two dozen bosses installed in the buildings on the University of Pennsylvania campus Quadrangle while he worked for Cope and Stewardson back in Philadelphia. Another example of his sculpture work at Allerton are the sphinx's that live on the terrace in front of the Solarium.

With the house and Carriage House design work completed, work began on the gardens. Borie designed the Brick Wall Garden, originally Robert's vegetable garden, including a pair of wrought iron gates that were later moved to the Chinese Maze Garden. We know this because we have copies of the blueprints for the brickwork, concrete fruit basket sculptures, and wrought

iron gates. Then in 1906, he designed the Gatehouse for the head gardener, James Shields. His attention was then turned back to the mansion, as after only a few years, it had become apparent that the parapet Borie designed, which created the illusion of impressive size for the mansion, was functionally a disaster. Snow and ice got lodged behind it and once melted, water ran inside the attic and caused damage. Borie redesigned the roofline to remove the parapet and put in a traditional roofline. The Solarium also needed an update. Instead of being a place of respite to sit and enjoy the outdoors, the glass roof allowed the sun to beat down on the inhabitants in the summer and in the winter, the open air porch was freezing. Borie designed a roof to cover over the glass ceiling and enclosed the space to make it the lovely room it is today.

He continued to do design work for Robert up until about 1912. Robert had asked for an addition to the Mansion that would connect the Carriage House and the Mansion proper, moving the front door away from being a direct entrance to the Gallery. Borie had long since gone back to the east coast, moving to New York in 1902, and then onto England in 1907 and his side of the line of communication wasn't as swift as it had been previously. While he had begun the plans for the Marble Hallway, ultimately, Robert decided to hire another architect to finish the plans and broadened the scope of the renovation.

Thus, the third architect of Allerton Park came into the picture, Joseph Corson Llewellyn. Llewellyn, like Borie, was from Philadelphia, but had moved to Illinois to attend Illinois Industrial University, as the University of Illinois was called in those days. He graduated in 1877 and held a couple of jobs in the St. Louis, MO area until he established his own architecture firm in Chicago in 1893. You might be thinking that Chicago or the University of Illinois are the connection between Robert Allerton and Joseph Llewellyn, but you'd be wrong. The connection was much closer to home. In 1883, Llewellyn married Emma Clarinda Piatt. As part of the social elite of Piatt County, it is likely that Robert and J.C. Llewellyn became acquainted that way. Like John Borie before him, Joseph became the architect that Robert leaned on for all design work at The Farms. It started with finishing the design of the Marble Hallway and a large-scale renovation to the Mansion. The renovation included the addition of the Marble Hallway and a transformation of the greenhouse house in the Carriage House into a costume wardrobe and changing room, both conceived by Borie. Plus, the merging of two rooms on the 2nd floor of the Mansion into a long room with multiple beds for when families came to stay with Robert and a whole-house heating system renovation. The re-design also had some changes to the first-floor servants' area, which were functional or practical in nature. The other major Llewellyn addition to Allerton Park is the House in the Woods. Robert needed a new house on that spot for one of his gardeners and he needed to prove to his friend William F. Lodge that a house could be made relatively inexpensively, but without using wood, a very flammable building material. Llewellyn designed the tile and stucco building you see today, using the original door frame surround from the Mansion to use on the front of the new House in the Woods.

The Mansion renovations and House in the Woods were completed between 1912 and 1917, but Llewellyn likely designed another project for Robert Allerton in 1915: the Sunken Garden.

The original design of the garden had a teahouse on each end, different staircases, and no upper walls. The Sunken Garden was the cap on the long row of garden rooms that extended out from the Avenue of the Formal Gardens. We don't have blueprints for all of the gardens but it seems likely that Llewellyn was Robert's go-to architect from about 1912 until 1927. During that time the other garden that took shape was the Fu Dog Garden. The concrete House of the Golden Buddhas was poured and the fu dogs were placed in their rows. However, both the Sunken Garden and Fu Dog Garden would again be changed by a new architect.

As I said earlier, there is an honorable mention architect, David Adler. David and Robert knew each other through the Art Institute of Chicago, where both served as trustees at one point. David worked in other architecture firms in Chicago because he had failed his boards in 1917, but in 1928, he received an honorary license after his extensive work was recognized. This was timely, as Robert's familial relationship with John Gregg had solidified. John had graduated with his degree in architecture from U of I in 1926, earned his license in 1927, and after a jaunt around the world to take in global architecture for a year, courtesy of Robert, he went to work with David Adler.

John Wyatt Gregg was not from the Chicago elite, but rather the second son and middle child of a working class family from Milwaukee. Both his parents passed away by 1921 and after transferring from the University of Wisconsin to the University of Illinois in 1922, it would not be long until he met Robert. The two were paired up at a Dad's Day fraternity lunch in the fall of 1922 by William F. Lodge, Robert's friend, and William C. Lodge, John's fraternity brother. Eventually, the relationship became familial, but more importantly for our discussion today, it was also a working relationship. Once John Gregg began work at David Adler's architectural firm in Chicago, he was given work to do for The Farms and he lived in an apartment owned by Robert in Chicago. In 1930 when David Adler's wife died in a car crash and his firm was shuttered, John Gregg moved from Chicago to live permanently at The Farms and began working in earnest as the architect for the property and "farm manager". While on a trip to Europe together in 1929, Robert acquired *Death of the Last Centaur* and John was tasked with creating the garden location for it. Evoking an almost cathedral-like feel with the mortally wounded Chiron raised on a circular altar, he placed 4 columns on each side, and a grand staircase down to the floodplain side. Just a year or so later, the same task was required for the Sun Singer, John creating a space at once sparse and still captivating with the sculpture raised up to accentuate his relationship to the Sun. In the early 1930's Robert revamped the Sunken Garden and the Fu Dog Garden with John at the design helm, making them look as we see them today.

John Gregg's final large-scale garden project was the Lost Garden on the opposite side of the Sangamon in the mid 1930's. Made up of two large intersecting lines, with statuary placed at each end and along the allee of both lines, and featuring a long one-story summer house, the Lost Garden was supposed to be a surprise amid a wooded walk. John kept the same ogee teahouse architecture featured in the formal gardens for the summer house. Often the pair would entertain for picnics in the shade of the summer house. As Robert was wont to do, the garden experienced some changes over the final decade that the pair lived permanently in

Illinois, and ultimately, after falling into disrepair in the 1970's the University took down the Lost Garden and brought all remaining statuary back to this side of the property. As far as Allerton gardens go, you could say that John's garden work was bigger and bolder than those before, putting three exclamation points on the property.

John Gregg also did architecture work inside the Mansion as well. Robert, never happy to leave things the way they were for fear of no longer appreciating them, asked John to redesign the music room into the Library we know today. The work, completed in 1940, created the upper floor with a door cut into the wall near the staircase landing for access. Upper and lower walls received built-in bookshelves to house Robert's 10,000 books. John also renovated the Pine Room, which was the original library, into an office for himself. For the Pine Room, he took the window seating out and moved it to the Butternut Room, which Robert had always used as his main living room. Like with the gardens, John's design work was an exclamation point on the already gorgeous Mansion.