

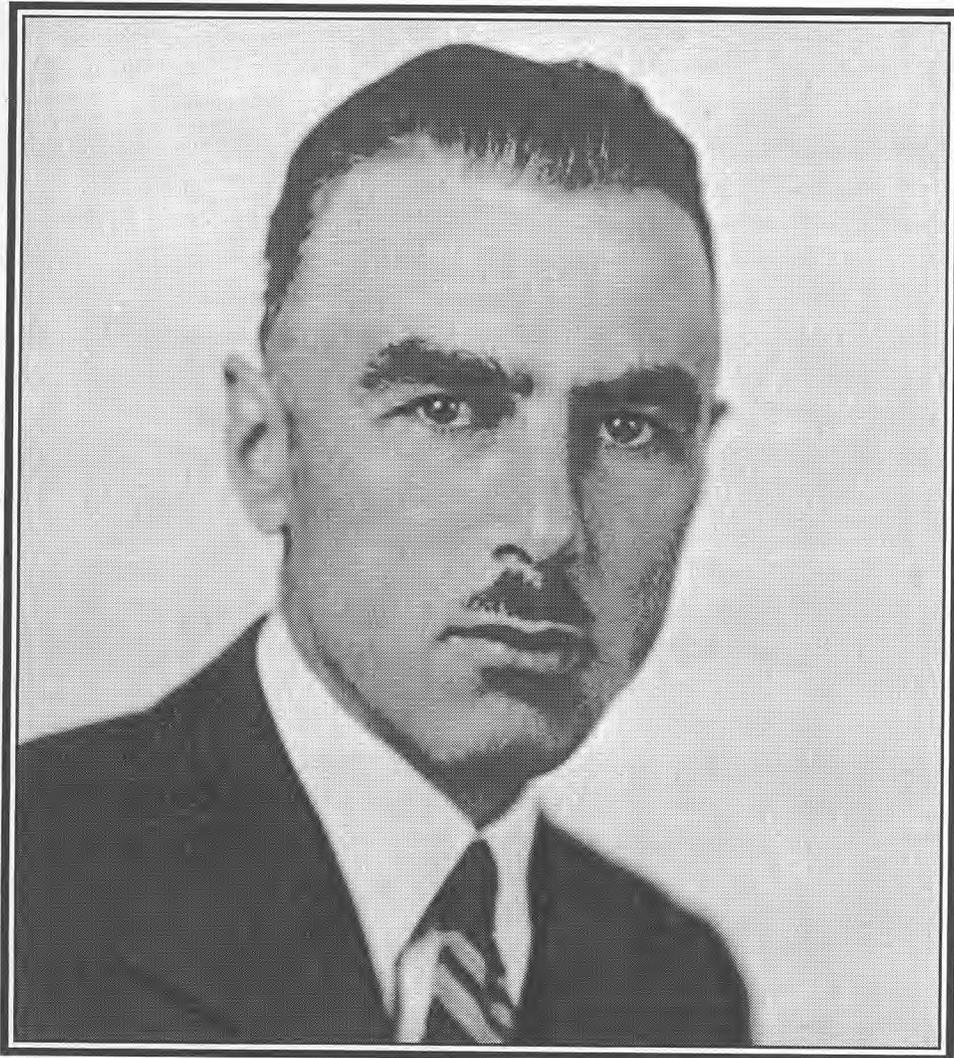
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# NUGGETS OF HISTORY

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## THE HOUSES BARLOGA BUILT

By Peggy Dahlberg Jensen



JESSE A. BARLOGA

From: *Jesse A. Barloga (1888-1947) Architectural Styles*  
Published by the Rockford Art Museum, Rockford, Ill. 1988

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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Jesse Barloga was one of the premier architects in Rockford in the first half of the twentieth century. He designed dozens of beautiful homes in Rockford as well as several commercial buildings, most notably the Rockford News Tower and the façade of West High School. Today many of the homeowners in Brown's Hills, Churchill Grove, Edgewater and Edgebrook as well as other neighborhoods are proud owners of Barloga designed homes.

During the recent cemetery walk held in Greenwood Cemetery, we became aware that Jesse and his wife Viola lie in unmarked graves. The Barlogas were originally interred in the Forest View Abbey Mausoleum at Greenwood. When the mausoleum became too dilapidated and was torn down in 1986, they were reburied in an unmarked grave. Dick Marsh, who along with Marty Mangas has spent much time researching Barloga, decided to lead a campaign to raise money for a marker. The Rockford Historical Society made a donation. Dick approached Tyson & Billy (Jesse's old firm) and Bradley and Bradley Architects. Both firms enthusiastically supported the project. Letters were sent to Barloga homeowners and realtors asking if they wished to donate. A proposed monument has been designed (see page 9). The design has a half-spider web window across the top. The inscription is taken from Jesse's own handwriting.

The article was written by Peggy Jensen and originally appeared in Rockford Magazine in September 1988. It is reprinted by permission. Copyright 1988 by Marguerite D. Jensen. Peggy is a freelance writer and the former Editor of the Nuggets of History. She was also a Contributing Editor to Rockford Magazine.

Thanks are also due to Marty Mangas who provided the photographs used in this issue as well as other materials. Marty has done a great deal of research on Jesse Barloga and lives in a Barloga home herself.

## WE NEED YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS!

If you have a subject that you have researched, or an idea for an article that you would like to pursue, give me a call. I would like to encourage original research into some aspects of local history that have not been adequately pursued. I can be reached at 968-5055.

Thomas Powers, Editor

## THE HOUSES BARLOGA BUILT

By Peggy Dahlberg Jensen

If Jesse Barloga, a turn-of-the-century Pecatonica farm boy, were alive today he would find a kindred spirit in a certain Northern Illinois University (NIU) coed. Seen driving at 65 mph between Rockford and Dekalb, she divided her attention between traffic flow and a book propped on the steering wheel.

Jesse (pronounced "Jess") commuted to school by horse and buggy. Trusting the horse, he would wrap the reins around the buggy whip and bury his head in a book. His mother scolded, "You'll be thrown someday. That horse gallops faster and faster when she sees the barn." Jesse paid no attention.

Is it any wonder, then, that years later Barloga the architect would include a quiet "book room" in each house he designed? His Rockford career, which spanned four decades (1913-1947), left such landmarks as the *Rockford Register Star* News Tower, the Children's Home (now the Pioneer Building) on Longwood and Rural and the Wilson Hall Company on Jefferson and Church streets. But he's remembered for homes that dot the cityscape. "Barloga's shining glory," says Norman Magden, professor of Intermedia Art at NIU, "is his residential statement."

Barloga brought variety to Rockford. In an era when "period" homes were in vogue, his styles ranged from Georgian to Dutch Colonial, English Tudor to French Provincial, Mediterranean Renaissance to Norman, with a smattering of Art Deco. But whatever the style or size, Barloga introduced spaciousness-an intimate relationship with the landscape enhanced by terraces,

porches and patios - and stylistic accuracy.

"Barloga created some of the most beautiful architect-designed homes in Rockford," Magden says. During this, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary month and year of his birth, [This article was originally published in 1988.] Barloga fever has hit Rockford. Five area organizations have had or are planning Barloga exhibits, tours and publications.

Designing homes to meet individual needs and dreams characterized Barloga. Fit the shelter to the needs, working *with* people, not *for* them. With one family, Barloga included a three-room wing for the family's mother-in-law. Another admired roof tiles they saw in Denver, so Barloga ordered not only the required tiles but also extras for replacement.

"Jesse Barloga was a master of details," says retired architect Raymond Knowland, who worked with Barloga for eight years. Dora Bartelt and her late husband, Harold, planned to add a den to the Brown's Hills Renaissance home they purchased in 1945. They hired Barloga, who had designed the home 20 years earlier. During a conference, Harold questioned the choice of expensive moldings, to which Barloga replied, "This room *must* match the rest of the house."

On another occasion, armed with a drawing of a corner cupboard for a house he was building, Barloga drove his green Packard to the office of a do-it-now executive. Confronting the busy man, Barloga characteristically slipped pince-nez (eyeglasses) on his nose, peered through them, removed them and then handed over the drawing. The client approved the design, saying, "Go

with it." But back at his own office and not quite satisfied, Barloga made a second drawing. Several days later he phoned and said, "I have another idea. May I show it to you?" Impatient, the client snapped, "What's the matter? I approved your first idea." Barloga said, "We'll put in the cupboard as soon as I approve it."

The draftsmen who worked for Barloga in his smoke-filled Rockford Trust Building office-Barloga was a heavy cigarette smoker-also knew what Barloga's approval meant. Morgan Hamaker, who worked for Barloga from 1926 to 1928, remembers him as having difficulty conveying his ideas to others. "I'd work all day on a sheet of drawings," says Hamaker, now in his 80's. "He'd look over my shoulder several times. But I'd come back the next morning and the sheets were gone. He'd taken them home, made marks all over them, and I'd have to redo them."

But re-doing drawings before construction paled in comparison with the News Tower Fiasco. The late Upton Bartlett, son of the newspaper's then-General Manager Elliott Bartlett, told Marty Mangas the following story: During construction in the early 1930s, several floors of concrete and steel framework had been erected before on-site supervisors realized that the design designated first floor ceilings one foot lower than the other floors. Consequently, stairways and elevators did not fit. Barloga had to redesign the entire first floor to accommodate the taller ceiling. After completion, Barloga moved his offices into the tower.

Today's Barloga fever began at an informal gathering seven years ago. [Originally published in 1988] Mangas and Jane Borden, residents of Brown's Hills and Knightsville respectively,

encouraged older neighbors to reminisce. Brown's Hills, a 44-acre wooded tract (bounded by Brownwood Drive, North Second, Greenmount and Prospect streets) that originally belonged to farmer Horace Brown, opened for development in 1922. Knightsville, to the north, includes homes dating from 1867. Intending to write a few paragraphs for the neighborhood newsletter, the two women taped conversations.

"At the time," says Mangas, her voice lilting, "we had no idea that we would write a 35-page booklet, develop an historic district...or delve into Barloga history. It's all happenstance."

Mangas and Borden checked the library for Barloga stories. They found only an obituary. Undaunted, they interviewed more residents and learned that Barloga had designed 11 Brown's Hills homes (including his own house at 1324 Brown Hills Road and the Mangas' Dutch Colonial), remodeled three and reworked the exterior of the Cospers Place home that once belonged to newspaper publisher Barney Thompson.

Mangas, a former teacher, expanded her research when restoration architect Gary Anderson showed her Barloga's "job book." Thinking it might be a complete listing of projects, she was disappointed. Entries consisted of assigned numbers and names without addresses. Occasionally one name represented an entire subdivision. Some entries listed designs prepared for, but not accepted by, clients. Other projects were omitted.

For four years, Mangas studied old city directories for addresses, tracked leads and started a comprehensive list of Barloga's works. Why such feverish devotion? "It's fun," says the mother of six grown children, her eyes sparkling.

“It’s my hobby. I like digging for facts and talking with people.

Richard Marsh, who with Mangas is a member of Restoration Education, a local group dedicated to historic

preservation, joined her in 1984. They have confirmed almost 150 Barloga structures. But they believe that his works number more than 400.



Barloga’s dream house – 1364 Brown Hills Rd. Built in 1927. Barloga had to sell this home less than a year after it was built.

Photo courtesy of Marty Mangas

“We assume nothing,” says Marsh, a retired Rockford Products data processing manager/office manager, whose family history in Rockford reaches back five generations. “To establish positive identity, we rely on the

job book, signed blueprints, city directories and building permits. I trust Morgan [Hamaker] for other identifications.” Mistakes published in a 1980 survey of outstanding historic structures created confusion. An outside

expert attributed the Jackson Piano Store and the J.L. Clark Tower to Barloga. But local people telephoned Mangas and Marsh to dispute those claims. The callers offered convincing evidence that two Chicago architects designed the buildings.

"We're delighted to hear from people," Mangas says. "Each tidbit helps to complete the picture." She'd like to locate a man who boasted at the 1987 Overlook house tour, "I used to work for Barloga as a plumber. I can tell his homes by the newel posts." Perhaps he could verify stories that Barloga put blueprints in newel posts.

During the first Brown's Hills Heritage House tour in 1985 featuring Barloga's dream home, Mangas discovered Myrtle. A younger sister of Jesse, Myrtle Larson, now 94, lives in Pecatonica. She provided anecdotes and insights. Larson told the researchers, "I thought everyone had forgotten Jesse."

Perhaps for a time that was true. Early on, Mangas asked the president of the area chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), "What do you know about Barloga?" He countered with, "Who?" Certainly, Barloga was not the only prominent Rockford architect of the era. Among his contemporaries were the Bradleys, A. Reyner Eastman and Willis Hubbard. But Mangas' and Marsh's research has piqued Barloga interest.

Jesse Barloga was born February 15, 1888, in Pecatonica, the second of six children of Henry and Otilla Hedke Barloga. His father not only farmed 300 acres northwest of Pecatonica but also founded Pecatonica's bank and telephone and fire insurance companies.

After earning an architectural degree at the University of Illinois in 1911, Barloga worked in Chicago. Then Rockford architect Frank A. Carpenter hired him as a draftsman. He married Viola Hodgson of Camden, NJ, in 1915; their only child, a son, died at birth. After a stint in construction at Camp Grant during World War I, Barloga opened his own office in 1919 on his 31<sup>st</sup> birthday.

The slender mustachioed man, who dressed impeccably in fashionable suits, was developing a distinctive style. Polly Kostantacos, who has lived in two Barloga homes, says, "His window treatment [large windows with small panes, sometimes arched and reaching from floor to ceiling] adds charm and spaciousness that's missing [from new homes] today."

Also famous for garden rooms, Barloga made provisions even in smaller homes such as his award-winning Clinton Street "honeymoon cottage," a home he and Viola shared between 1922 and 1927. In lieu of a garden room, he framed the arched front door (another trademark) with a walk-through trellis.

To create a focal point upon entry, Barloga specialized in eye-catching staircases flowing from spacious entry halls. A stunning staircase with a huge window at the landing in a Modern French Provincial home in Edgebrook reflects his artistry. Tour guides in the Overlook home pointed out another feature: closet sinks in individual bedrooms. Other characteristics include half or full "spider web windows" over exterior doors and garages hidden from streetside view.



Barloga designed houses in many different styles. The top photo shows a Mediterranean Renaissance design at 1922 Clinton St. Below is a Dutch Colonial located at 1837 Harlem Blvd. Photos courtesy of Marty Mangas.



This home at 222 N London shows one of Jesse Barloga's trademarks. The spiderweb window design (upper right). This design has been stylistically reproduced on the grave marker. (See page 9)

Viola, a talented artist, pianist and interior decorator, worked with her husband. She designed interiors for the Gordon Chapel of Second Congregational Church (where they were members) and the Beloit College Sigma Chi and University of Iowa Sigma Nu fraternity houses. Jesse and Viola designed the Brown's Hills Pennsylvania Country home, completed in 1927, for their personal use. To eliminate budget frustration, they built

their house without asking prices. Scouring the Pennsylvania countryside for materials, they purchased antique hardware and a 150-year old barn. Wood from the barn paneled the book room. A large wrought iron window came from England. Colonial plastering techniques seen in Pennsylvania intrigued them, but Rockford plasterers have never learned that art. Barloga took instruction in Pennsylvania and then taught local men. A Chicago firm

supplied unique pine paneling for the living room.

Among Barloga's friends who knew of the quality and uniqueness of his house, Rockford newspaperman Elliott Bartlett made a standing offer to buy it at cost plus 10 percent. Eventually, Barloga accepted his offer. Bartlett and Barloga shook hands to close the deal. The Bartletts moved in, but they waited five months for Barloga to tally the costs.

Meanwhile, Jesse and Viola purchased the H. W. Williams home, built in 1900, at 1220 National Avenue. In a manner characteristic of architects and interior designs (Frank Lloyd Wright is said to have redecorated a house in which he was a guest-without the absent owner's knowledge), the Barlogas completely changed the sizes and shapes of rooms in the two-story red brick and frame house.

Moving to National Avenue brought Barloga into the area where he had designed his earliest homes. Marsh notes a geographic progression from Franklin and Lawn Places, Harlem Boulevard and National Avenue to streets north of Auburn, then to Brown's Hills, out Spring Creek, into Edgebrook and beyond.

Late in the 1920s, six investors, Barloga included, formed the Edgebrook Syndicate. They purchased 250 acres of farm property south of Spring Creek and west of Alpine Road. Plans called for two divisions: a 71-lot unit, Alpine Crest; and 200 Edgebrook "country estates." Years ahead of other developers, the men envisioned neighborhood shopping centers: a Swiss-style village for Alpine Crest and an English village for Edgebrook. They hired a noted golf architect to design a nine-hole course. (Unexpected financial

commitments with that project probably forced him to sell his Brown's Hills dream home.)

Disaster struck during the stock market crash of 1929. Construction halted, including Edgebrook. Requests for Barloga's architectural services dwindled. Between 1930 and 1937, his job book lists a high of 16 jobs in 1930 and a low of zero in 1933. In 1934 he built two new homes-the Clark "Cotswold Cottage" on North Second Street and a Brookview Road Art Deco-perhaps the only new homes built in the city that year.

As architect for the exterior façade of West High School, Barloga assigned the drawings to his young associate, Raymond Knowland. In 1939, after studying in Canada and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Knowland went to Chicago looking for work. Hearing that an architect from Rockford had come to interview, Knowland applied. Barloga offered him a three-week's assignment. But Knowland worked for Barloga until he died.

The office closed during World War II. Barloga went to work at Detroit's Hudson Motor Company, where he spent 14 to 16 hours a day kneeling on the floor preparing full-size drawings of B-29 bombers. In pain, he blamed it on the long hours of awkward posture. His doctor agreed.

Back in Rockford after the war, he reopened his office. By then he knew he had bone cancer. Courageously, he worked half-days for the next 18 months, relying more and more upon Knowland. On May 27, 1947, Barloga asked Knowland to sign partnership papers at the lawyer's office the next morning. But Barloga died that evening and the document remained unsigned.

Later, Knowland purchased the firm from Viola. (The successor firm today is Smith Tyson Associates, Inc.)

Forty years later, Barloga fever struck the Women's Art Board (WAB). "We were casting about for a creative project to benefit the art museum," says WAB member Patricia Atwood. But after deciding on a Barloga presentation, the WAB discovered that Restoration Education had already accumulated information. A plan evolved: The WAB would have sole responsibility for the exhibit, which will run from April 2 through May 15 at the Rockford Art Museum. Restoration Education would provide expertise and research data-lists of verified homes, construction dates, a chronology, pictures and drawings-for the catalog.

For Mangas, the project is a dream come true. "I thought our research might end up in cardboard boxes." Marsh adds, "On our own we could never have published a catalog. And people have been expecting us to do so."

In fact, some realtors have been hounding Mangas and Marsh for lists. But does a Barloga home demand a more handsome price than other homes? John Whitehead of Whitehead Inc. Realtors doesn't think so, at least not yet. "The neighborhoods in which he built are still in vogue," Whitehead says. "Homes of Barloga caliber are going now [December 1987] for about \$150,000 to \$200,000. The current market reflects inflation, plus people with newfound money and out-of-towners who are willing to pay more. And they [out-of-towners] don't know Barloga from a hole-in-the-wall."

But Barloga fever is spreading among current Rockford residents. The WAB expects record-breaking crowds, encouraged by 1,100 student registrations made before December 1, 1987. "By May," Atwood prophesies, "there will be very few people in Rockford who would not have heard about Jesse Barloga."

The man who read books in a buggy would be surprised.



This is the design for the proposed grave marker for Jesse Barloga.

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