

## Arthur C. Runzler, Milwaukee Architect

Arthur Runzler was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, July 31, 1890, the third child of Herman Runzler (b.1867 d.11-30-1949) and Wilhimena (Minnie) Budig Runzler (b, 1866 d. 4-2-1947 ). Herman was born in the United States of German descent and, Minnie came from Germany at age one. In Milwaukee they lived at 1234 N. 24th Place in a small one family house. Arthur's older brother (William T. Runzler) (b.1881 died c.1967 ) was educated at the University of Wisconsin majoring in History, got his Master's Degree at Harvard, and his Ph.D. in Munich Germany. He became a professor of German at the University of Utah, arried Julia Hallen and they had one child, Wiliam H. Runzler who never married. Arthur's sister, Rosalia (Rose), (b. 1883 died c. 1966) was a high school graduate. When young she had scarlet fever which left her somewhat hearing imparied ( probably moderate), and apart from a period of working in a hat factory in Kingman, AZ, lived in Milwaukee with her parents whom she cared for in their later years. It had been thought that her hearing problem was significant enough to prevent her from finding a suitable husband. After her parents deaths, she moved to Glendale California at about age 69 and at her death, established a small scholarship for visually impaired students which continues to this day.

Arthur attended public schools in Milwaukee, followed his brother to the University of Wisconsin, Madison. There he worked on the Wisconsin Badger as an artist, was in the International Club and I believe a coxswain on the rowing team. While there he wrote a song which won second place in a contest. ("On Wisconsin" was first). He graduated in 1913. He majored in History also. Because of a "heart murmer" he did not serve in World War 1. After Wisconsin, he went to the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, School of Architecture. He worked his way through school, working nights in a funeral parlor, chipping out some sort of carbon from some engine boilers (???), and possibly had other jobs. He graduated Summa Cum Laude in c. 1916 and returned to Milwaukee where he bagan an architectural practice..

At age 35, January 15, 1925 Arthur married Helen Olivia Gilman, 33 daughter of Charles H. Gilman, a real estate manager and Maud Gilman, housewife. Helen's parents were second cousins, Helen was the middle child of three, with Carolyn older and Charles Jr. younger. Helen was a high school graduate, The Gilmans were descended from old New England Puritan stock, including some Massachusetts governors, people like George F. Gilman, founder of the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company (A&P) and the family had a heritage of having servants. Arthur believed he had "married up" and was somewhat embarassed about his German heritage.. He spoke excellent German which was sometimes

used at home, but did not regard this as an asset. In all actuality, and in my (Arlen Runzler Westbrook's) opinion, the Runzlers were much more accomplished than the Gilmans at that time in achieving higher education and status, however, this apparently did not affect his feelings! The Gilman's emphasis for hundreds of years in the United States was on business and money; the Runzler's values were on education and culture.

Their only child, Arlen, was born November 17, 1928 (and is the author of this small biography). At that time, the family was living in an English style house Arthur designed at 4901 N. Lake Drive, Milwaukee. However, the Depression arrived and they were unable to afford this rather large house. They moved to the two family house Helen owned on 922 N. Farwell Ave until a medium sized 6 room house could be built in 1932 on Lower Ridgeway in Elm Grove, a Milwaukee suburb. Helen died in 1934 as a result of a medical overdose of a barbituate administered by a friend's doctor to relieve the pain of menstrual cramps when Arlen was 6. Arthur said, "I could have sued him but it would not have brought her back." He had a short 6 week marriage when I was 12 to an old divorced friend, Betty Morgan Pink, who for some reason, left him and returned to her former husband. He raised me with the help of 2 housekeepers until I went away to the University of Wisconsin, Madison, at age 17. Sometimes, as a child, I went with him to inspect houses under construction and somehow absorbed the terminology of "studs, stringers, millwork, footings" etc.

He had an office at 728 N. Jefferson St., Milwaukee in a building that was Gilman family owned, a 3 room office on the 4th floor. I suspect that he might have received a reduced rent, but can't verify that. That building has been torn down since. Charles Gilman had a real estate office on the same floor and from there managed a series of apartment houses the family owned in, I believe, Milwaukee's Third Ward, family property in Sullivan County, NY at a 19th century family lumber and leather site known as Gilman Station, and property in Sheboygan. The apartments in the third ward were later demolished.

For a short period, Arthur had a draftsman working for him, but mostly he worked alone. I have no record of his work after his graduation, during the late teens and early 1920s. Once he told me the least he ever earned was \$500 in one year, I think the most was \$10,000 which was a good sum for the 1930's and 40s, his main period of professional work in Wisconsin. He retired in 1951 at age 61 and moved to Los Gatos, California. However, finding himself still in need of income, he built 4 houses there and sold them. There he met Pauline Kirn, a widow about 15 years younger and married for the third time. They built and lived in a more modern house on Blossom Hill Road until his death January 1962, at age 71 of colon cancer which had metastasized.

He kept no records of his projects, and no blueprints. Apparently everything was discarded when he moved to California and he did not consult me about this--I was 22 at the time, newly married and apparently not wise enough to ask him about his records or work. I have kept a few blueprints which I acquired from his later house projects.

His work included a large Catholic Church in Milwaukee, a Distillery in Crandon, Wis, addition to a school in Brown Deer and other large buildings of which I have no documentation. But his real expertise was in single family houses. During the 1920s he followed the popular styles of Spanish and English houses, some quite large, especially in Milwaukee and Wauwatosa. He won national recognition in the American Architect journal in the July 5, 1928 journal for his house design at 6316 W. Washington Blvd, Wauwatosa. He did say that that house was built in a number of places in the United States (but did not specify where to me.) During the 30s, he specialized in Colonial/Cape Cod styles, sometimes using the local limestone "Lannon Stone" particularly, and some brick. His clientele ranged between Fox Point, Brookfield, West Bend and places between and I think got commissions by referrals from satisfied home owners. During his last several years before he moved, he built several houses for speculation, particularly in Wauwatosa and Elm Grove because, as he said, it was easier than working with clients! He sold them easily. In the late 1940s and in houses he designed in the 1950s he designed primarily one story houses, some in a "ranch" style. He also designed a small 5 room house for me at 24 Herrick Ave, Delmar, NY where I lived with my first husband, Kendall Birr.

Once he said to me that he felt he could have done more work if it were not for the Depression in the 30s during which time building slowed, and also during the war with limitations on building materials, gas rationing etc. I think he did well when he was just getting started during the 1920s, when the economy was booming and apparently he has some sizeable and significant jobs.

I feel I should say something about my father as a person. He was a somewhat quiet, gentle man, modest by nature. In some ways he could be described as a Renaissance Man because of his varied interests and talents. Gardening, especially flowers was a big hobby, even after he retired to California. Travel was a passion. He, his third wife, me and first husband Kendall Birr did the "grand tour" of Europe in the summer of 1955. He traveled extensively in Europe beginning as an assistant tour guide to his brother, Will when still in college. In Europe he preferred Italy, France, Germany, Switzerland, where he hiked all the passes one summer. With Pauline (Polly) he wintered one year in Bourne, France, another on Tenerife, Canary Islands. He made many trips to Mexico and

was very fond of that country, he made a trip to Cuba. When business was slow, sometimes, no matter whether I was on school vacation, we would get in the car and take a trip (me doing homework in the car as we went), to places like Los Angeles, northern Mexico, Charleston, SC, for example. He began a book on southwestern Wisconsin architecture, focusing on Georgian/Colonial/Greek revival architecture such as is found in Mineral Point, Galena, Ill. etc. He took photographs to be included but never completed this project --gas rationing during the war was his stated reason. He continued interest in his college major, history, and was interested in archaeology as well, delighting when he found 2 arrowheads in his flower garden at his home in Elm Grove! In addition to being an architect, he was an artist and did professional quality work in oils, pencil sketches of buildings and water colors, a hobby which he continued until his death. (He did not sell his art work, which he probably could have). He also was an excellent photographer, working mostly with slides. Neither my father or mother had any religious affiliation and we never attended religious services. (His background was Lutheran, hers Presbyterian). He said he was a member of the Masons, but I do not recall him ever going to a meeting. He had a number of close friends, a group of professional men he lunched with weekly at the Pfister Hotel across from his office. Other friends came through his business, real estate and building trade materials especially. He stayed close to his parents, sister, his in laws family, all of whom lived in the Milwaukee area. As he said once to me, it wasn't always easy being both mother and father to me after my mother died, but I feel he did a fine job. He liked to do modest hiking and walking and kept trim. His indulgence was a Steinway grand piano and his favorite music was Chopin which he played almost daily. He was tuned to nature, I remember watching a spider make a web on our screened porch, and bringing into the porch a cocoon and watching the butterfly come out; every August we watched for "falling stars".

I have documented to the best of my memory, with his letters to me at college, and recollections of a family friend, Errol Wordell, who worked for Modern Millwork Company which supplied the custom millwork for his houses, a list and some photographs of his which I am sending to the Wisconsin Architectural Historical Society. In case of missing house numbers, or to double check them, a photo of them is included; I believe most are still standing. In addition, in 2001 we rephotographed a few of his houses in color prints, these are also included, mostly duplicates of the black and whites. This document/list and exhibits are in a separate group from this small biography and enclosed with it. In the event, I discover some other buildings of his, or published articles, I will send them at a later time for the record. (I believe an article was published on one of his houses in the Milwaukee/Journal Sentinel, within the past decade, but do not have that information available at this time.)

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