

But, at the solicitation of Mr. Guthrie and with the approval of Mr. MacLeod, Mr. Fink's working powers were diverted to the completion of the Jefferson County courthouse in Louisville. The proper way to treat this subject is for some one to write a special paper, and to introduce incidentally, but in proper proportion, Mr. Fink's connection with it. I shall present to you only an abridgment of what I might say, and at the same time offer to give to any member of the club--a lawyer for instance--who will take up the subject, all the data I have from memory, conversation and investigation of records.

In 1858 the Courthouse was spoken of derisively as 'Guthrie's folly.' It was an unfinished, shabby structure which had been planned to become some day the State Capitol. Mr. John H. Harney, in writing of it when it had almost assumed its present form, said that for years it had had no more resemblance to a real courthouse than a rag baby has to a meat baby. The charter of 1851 placed an obligation upon the city of Louisville to finish the courthouse, but the matter was put off from year to year until patience on the part of the county authorities was exhausted. Mr. Guthrie, then the most wealthy and prominent of our citizens, had been associated as a director of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad with Mr. Fink long enough to perceive his abilities in architecture. For reasons which I do not fully understand, the original architect, Mr. Gideon Shryock, was displaced, and Mr. Guthrie engaged Mr. Fink to make a design for the completion of the building. Two ordinances were passed by the General Council of the city of Louisville, one June 5th, 1858, and the other approved November 1st, 1858, in both of which it is stated that "the plan, with the interior dome and without the wings, submitted by Albert Fink be, and the same is hereby adopted." Mr. C. L. Stancliff was chosen by the Council to superintend the erection. I imagine Mr. Fink came on the courthouse premises only when Mr. Stancliff requested his presence there; he had many duties elsewhere. Certain imperfections in material and workmanship which are now to be seen must therefore not be charged to Mr. Fink's negligence.

The portico of the courthouse, which has elicited admiration from visitors to our city, especially while the freshly cut surface of the Bedford stone gave a pleasing color, was designed by Mr. Fink so as to be in keeping with the Grecian Doric style indicated in the old building. The only adverse criticism which I have ever heard against this portico was in relation to the sloping ramps on the right and left of the steps. The top of them formed such a temptation to venturesome children that many undertook to slide down, but fell off, and, in some cases, were seriously injured. This finally led to the insertion of the iron projecting points which you can now see on the ramps.

I will pass from the practice to another part of the courthouse, more hidden, where Mr. Fink's ability was equally displayed, but with which the public in general do not seem to be fully conversant. I refer to the peculiar support in the basement given to the Henry Clay statue and to the iron floor of the rotunda. Nine men out of ten, coming into the courthouse on its main floor for the first time, would assume that the statue is supported by masonry under it. Such, however, is not the case. The middle passway in the basement is open from east to west, and all the load in the rotunda is held up primarily by eight cantilever beams of cast iron, as represented in the diagram.

(Here explain the diagram orally.)

There is uniqueness about the floor of the rotunda in our courthouse which I have never seen duplicated in any city. But rather than have you take only my word as to the exceptional nature of it, let me digress a little. Many of you remember that on the 26th of December, 1905 a fire occurred in the courthouse as the result of faulty insulation of electric wires. Naturally there were very few persons actively engaged in the building at that date, and the fire gained great headway before it was discovered. In order to repair the damage, and also to provide against a repetition of the loss, Mr. Brinton H. Davis, an architect of high standing, was engaged to examine the entire building, and the outcome of it all was a very extensive interior change for the better. In a conversation which I had with Mr. Davis about six months ago, he voluntarily paid tribute to Mr. Fink in speaking of these cantilever beams as evidence that a superior mind had been behind the design of them. Who was there in Louisville at that time that could say with no misgivings just what amount of iron was sufficient in all parts of these peculiar beams, that three eighths of an inch in thickness was enough in one place, or four inches in width was proper at another place, etc? I am aware that at the present day wrought iron or structural bars of steel would be used, but in 1858 those purer forms of iron were not available as building material. The cast iron beams in the rotunda have stood some very severe tests, and they are likely to remain in place for many years to come. There is no more reason to suppose that the floor of the rotunda will become obsolete than that Henry Clay's statue will be discarded, or that the portico on the exterior will give way to a substitute. Thus we may say that the courthouse is a monument of Mr. Fink's presence among us.

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*See also article by
 Seymour in our file*

AUG 13 1947

August 12, 1947

Mr. Richard H. Hill, Secretary,
 Filson Club,
 Louisville, Ky.

Dear Harry:

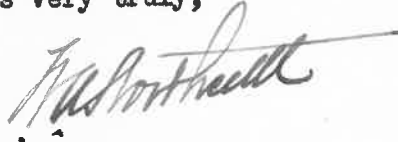
You, of course, know the great interest that everyone is taking these days in the Jefferson County Courthouse. Some want to tear it down; many could not withstand that misfortune. There have been a number of write-ups in the Pointof View Column, pro and con, on that proposition. There was an article in the Courier this past Sunday by Mr. Joe Reister, of the Courier-Journal Lexington Bureau, in the course of which he quotes from Mrs. Elizabeth Shryock Field, a niece of Gideon Shryock, the famous architect. She deals with the Shryock plans for a courthouse building to be placed in the center of Prather Square, fronting on Walnut, Green, Third and Fourth Avenues. The Shryock plans for a courthouse at that location, which was later on to become our State Capitol, were made in 1835, but, as stated by Mrs. Field, nothing was done thereafter for something like a quarter of a century. I enclose clipping from the Courier-Journal of August 9th.

Some days ago, in looking for something else, I came across a copy of an address by Mr. C. K. Needham before the Filson Club at Louisville on October 4, 1920, on the life and achievement of Mr. Albert Fink. That address consists of 39 pages and is extremely interesting. In the course of that address will be found a statement of what occurred near the end of that quarter century to which Mrs. Field referred, when the same James Guthrie, at whose instance Mr. Shryock undertook the task of planning and building our courthouse in 1835, engaged Mr. Albert Fink to make a design for the completion of the building, as fully explained in the attached statement as quoted from Mr. Needham's address.

I thought this might be of interest to you, particularly so as it indicates the wide range of value of addresses before the Filson Club, some of which at least are reported in the Filson Club Quarterly.

I don't think I was a member of the Filson Club at the time, and don't know whether the Quarterly was being published at that time. If it was, I would hate to undertake the task of trying to locate it; but if this address was published in the Quarterly, you, of course, can easily locate it from records of the Filson Club.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "J. M. Posthumus". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name "J. M. Posthumus".

Encl

WAN