

Restoration architect works to save part of Texas history

By SONDR A HOSTETLER
Reporter

The historical significance of architecture is too great to allow deterioration of buildings from Texas' past, restoration architect Raiford Stripling says.

Stripling, a 1931 graduate of Texas A&M, is exhibiting his work in the Langford Architecture Center.

The exhibit honors his extensive work in historical preservation and restoration in Texas. The pictorial exhibit will be in the gallery of Langford until the end of February. Gallery hours are 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

As a student of architectural designer Samuel Charles Phelps Vosper, Stripling helped Vosper design six buildings constructed at Texas A&M during the 1930s.

Stripling said Vosper, an avid student of classical architecture, was responsible for the Greek Revival style of the buildings built here during the Depression.

With \$3.5 million allocated for construction, Texas A&M was one of only two campuses in Texas undergoing major construction at that time. The other was the University of Texas, which had a \$5 million budget. Stripling said a contributing

factor to the decorative design of the Depression-era buildings was the vast supply of cheap and skilled labor.

The buildings Stripling helped design at Texas A&M are the System Administration Building, Civil Engineering Building, Halbouty Geosciences Building, Chemistry Building, Scoates Hall and Animal Industries Building.

Cast-stone facades and ornate ironwork were representative of the detail involved in the Depression-era buildings.

The columns on the east entrance to the System Administration Building are an example of the Greek Revival period Vosper liked so well. The face of the daughter of Col. Charles Nelson, Corps commandant from 1927 to 1932, is etched on alternating columns of the building. Other columns are etched with the face of Sarah Orth Aston, daughter of William Orth, superintendent of construction at Texas A&M during the 1930s.

Stripling attributes the use of mosaic tile and the geometric style of the Chemistry Building to Vosper's admiration for the Beaux Arts style. The ornate designs were possible because of the abundant labor force in the 1930s.

Stripling said he believes buildings on campus should have been preserved before they were allowed to decay.

"They should have preserved structures as part of the growth of the school," he said.

Stripling said Vosper's encouragement in classical architecture and Stripling's own interest in Texas history led him to historic restoration.

Stripling has restored numerous homes and historical sites throughout Texas in the past 50 years. He said it is important to preserve the visual aspects of historical sites as well as written records.

Some of the buildings and homes he has restored include Ashton Villa in Galveston and the Greek Revival style homes in his hometown of San Augustine.

Historical monuments Stripling has restored include the French Legation in Austin and Fort Parker near Mexia. He said his favorite is the Fort Parker renovation because it was the only Texan fort built while Texas was a separate nation.



Photo by Dean...

Jere Hilland, third year environmental design student from Houston, examines close up some of the pieces in the Stripling exhibit Tuesday in the Langford Architecture Building Gallery.

Stripling's love of precision is evident in his insistence on detail in his projects.

Before restoration begins on a project, Stripling insists on a thorough study of the project and the land surrounding it.

"In preservation it has to be right or you are telling a lie," he said.

During reconstruction of the La Bahia mission at Goliad, Stripling insisted on an archeological survey bringing the topsoil down back to the 1836 occupational level. The excavation uncovered about 5,000 artifacts

which remain on site at the mission.

Stripling sees a return to classical architecture as a temporary architecture to be used until the classical line of the Greek Revival is restored.

He said the "glass box" style of modern architecture is a result of architects conforming to what the clients could afford.

"We are going back to classical architectural style and the public seems to appreciate what they like," Stripling said. "A person does not have to be an artist or an architect to see something that is pleasing to his eye — to appreciate it. Even is he is not able to tell why."

A Greek Revival style building in San Augustine, built in 1836, is Stripling's home. It is characteristic of the style because of the clean lines and the attention to detail and precision.

At 73 Stripling presented a commission as a consultant for four restoration projects in Texas, two near Austin, one in Houston and a fourth in Antonio.

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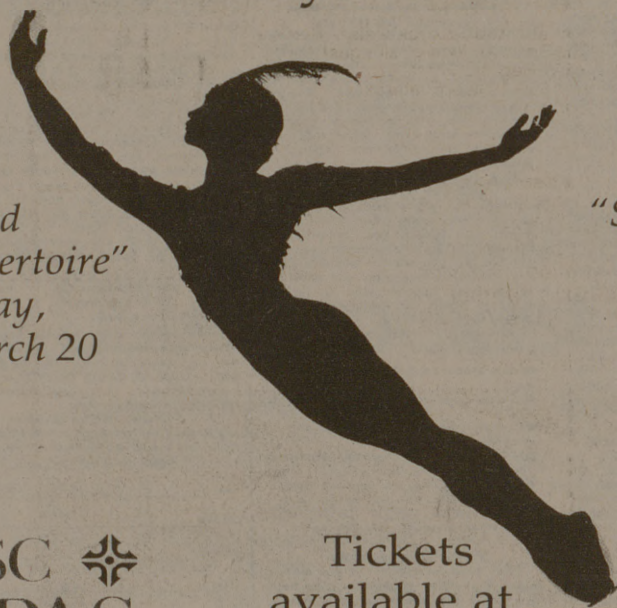
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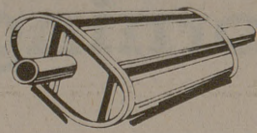
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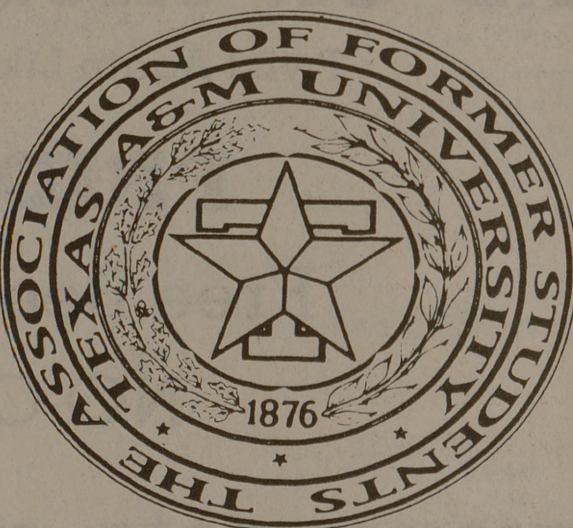
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