March 10, 2014

Countdown to Riverside City College's 100th Anniversary

The year 2014 will mark the 90th anniversary of the opening of the north and east wings of the Riverside City College Quadrangle. On May 10, 1922 a half million dollar bond issue was passed by the voters of Riverside for the construction of school buildings. Out of this amount, $100,000 would be earmarked for the construction of the first two wings of the Quad. The Riverside City School Board had specified that they would be built on lots which faced Terracina Drive and Riverside Avenue (today known as Miné Okubo Drive). These lots had been acquired in 1921. By 1923 the Board had purchased additional lots south of Terracina Drive fronting Riverside and Fairfax Avenues. Below is a 1919 photo showing the area where the Quad was to be built.

At that same time, the Board also accepted the plans of Riverside architect G. Stanley Wilson for the construction of the new college buildings. Below is a photo of Wilson's plans for the Quadrangle and a photo of Wilson himself.

The next two photos are ground level renditions of the first two Quad buildings. The top photo is an easterly view and the bottom photo is looking south. As you can see, a clock tower was a part of the original plans. However it
was not built until the 2005-7 Quad renovation. It’s difficult to read but above the Library Building windows is the phrase, “EDUCATION SHOULD BE AS BROAD AS MAN.” Like the clock tower, this text did not make it to the final constructed version of the Quad.

On June 14, 1923, a groundbreaking ceremony (in conjunction with the Riverside Junior College Commencement Ceremony) was held. During this ceremony, members of the Board, Superintendent Arthur Wheelock and the 33 members of the 1923 RJC graduating class broke ground. By September 21st, construction bids had been submitted to the Board of Education and the proposals of Cresmer Manufacturing Company of Riverside (general contractor) and Hill & Sons Company of Santa Ana (plumbing and heating) were accepted. Work began on the morning of September 26, 1923. Below are Quad construction photos. The top photo is the Library Building (looking east) before the roof was completed. Today this room is known as Singletary Hall (Quad 144). The photo below that shows five structural elements that were eventually installed above the windows of the Library’s north exterior wall.
Construction of the new buildings occurred faster than had been anticipated. An April 2, 1924 story in the local newspaper reported that the two buildings were at least 80% completed. The photo below was taken from the roof of one of the nearby Riverside Polytechnic High School buildings.

Architect G. Stanley Wilson was rushing construction to have the buildings ready for use by the fall of 1924. His push was successful because the minutes of the July 17, 1924 Riverside Board of Education meeting reported that the junior college buildings were officially accepted. The new structures were indeed occupied during the 1924 fall semester.

In a 2010 interview Dr. H. Vincent Moses (former Director of the Riverside Metropolitan Museum) had this to say about the architecture of the Riverside City College Quadrangle.

“Riverside Junior College was created really within a perfect environment. The City of Riverside was founded by Judge (John) North. It was a kind of reformed colony that brought New England Evangelical values to bear on the city from the very beginning. And then the second wave of immigrants who came here, were well-heeled businessmen who came for the climate and also to take advantage of the Washington Navel Orange and to be part of this new kind of agrarian colony in the desert. But it was an agrarian colony with a twist, well capitalized, that took advantage of the latest science, the latest business methodology, and made Riverside in turn the wealthiest city per capita in the entire United States for the early part of the 20th century. Most of the founding leading lights in the city of Riverside were well-educated, well-heeled individuals. And they reflected the desire to have an educated electorate and their sons and daughters to be educated too. So it was automatic for them to believe that they needed to pass the bond funding to build Riverside Junior College. G. Stanley Wilson is really one of Riverside’s most prominent architects of the early 20th century. His production in the city and this entire region was quite prolific and respected as sound architecture. Not just beautiful but sound architecture. The engineering was right. As a result of that he not only designed the RCC Quad up to the 1950s completion, in the Spanish Renaissance and Italian Renaissance styles that he employed, he also designed the International Rotunda of the Mission Inn for Frank Miller, employing the latest construction technology of the day which was steel reinforced poured slip form concrete. And a lot of that is visible in the RCC Quad especially in the later additions to the Quad in the late ‘30s and ‘40s right up to the 1950s additions to the Quad. And that made him really cutting edge for his day. You see he really billed himself as an architect/engineer and it showed in his buildings. Wilson also employed Peter Webber as one of his designers. Webber’s primary responsibility was to put the finishing flourishes on the Renaissance styles that Wilson liked to use. Webber went off to Europe at Wilson’s behest and studied the classical forms. He was able to bring back the finish detail to apply on architecture like the Quad and the International wing of the Mission Inn in the Moorish Mission style. So that combination of cutting edge engineering and construction technology with the design flourishes and details that Peter Webber could bring to G. Stanley’s work made him really preeminent in the region. And it gives the RCC Quad that special feel that G. Stanley’s work could bring to a finished product. He made a big reputation for himself not only here at Riverside Community College and the International Rotunda of the Mission Inn but in designing most of the public schools in the Riverside Area pre-World War II in those romanticized Arts and Crafts style. Wilson believed, as most other architects, that the pre-eminent public art is in fact
architecture. And it has a civilizing influence to bring to society. Arthur Paul reflected that point of view because he was trained in the classics. He was trained at Occidental College, and believed as Wilson did, that architecture would also have that civilizing influence on students as well as society, and the public could see it. Unlike say fine art which sequestered in a museum or in a private collection, architecture was right out there in the public eye all the time and to bring to it those finished details, not just well done design but the finished details was important too. When Wilson was employed by Arthur G. Paul and the Board of Riverside Junior College, he was employed with a mission. And that was to bring the classical model for higher education to bear on the Riverside campus, in a way that it would instill a kind of venerable status to the new buildings of Riverside Junior College and give it a sense of the ancient and the classical, the sense that Riverside Junior College was a high scholarly place with academic bearing from the very beginning. It was in the intent; the board, the president and the architect working together to do that. And it’s why I think G. Stanley Wilson brought the Italian Renaissance, the Spanish Renaissance directly to Riverside with that design. And finally when the Auditorium and the Outdoor Stage were brought together with this, you had, in essence that self-contained classical, scholarly experience right here on the RCC campus. “

Below are photos of the Auditorium and Outdoor Stage that Dr. Moses referenced. These two structures (completed in 1928 and 1932 respectively) are no longer a part of the RCC Quadrangle. They were removed during the late 1960s Quad renovation.

Below are two photos of the newly completed east and north wings of the RCC Quadrangle. The second photo shows how it looked after landscaping had been added.
March 13, 2014 is Riverside City College’s 98th Anniversary. On that day it will be exactly 2 years until RCC’s 100th Anniversary on March 13, 2016.

The Riverside City College Instructional Media Center is bringing you this five year countdown to RCC’s 100th Anniversary. Our intention is to give everyone a weekly glance at the many people and events that have been a part of the college.

Our thanks go to the RCC Digital Library Archives and the District’s Office of Strategic Communications and Relations for allowing us to use their photo and newspaper collections. Thanks as well to all of the RCC students and Faculty Advisors that were a part of the yearbook and newspaper staffs. Thanks also to Tom Johnson and Gilbert Jimenez who wrote “the book” about RCC’s history. “Riverside City College 1916-1981- A 65 Year History” is available in the RCC Digital Library.

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