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Cape Ann Museum displays historical architectural drawings

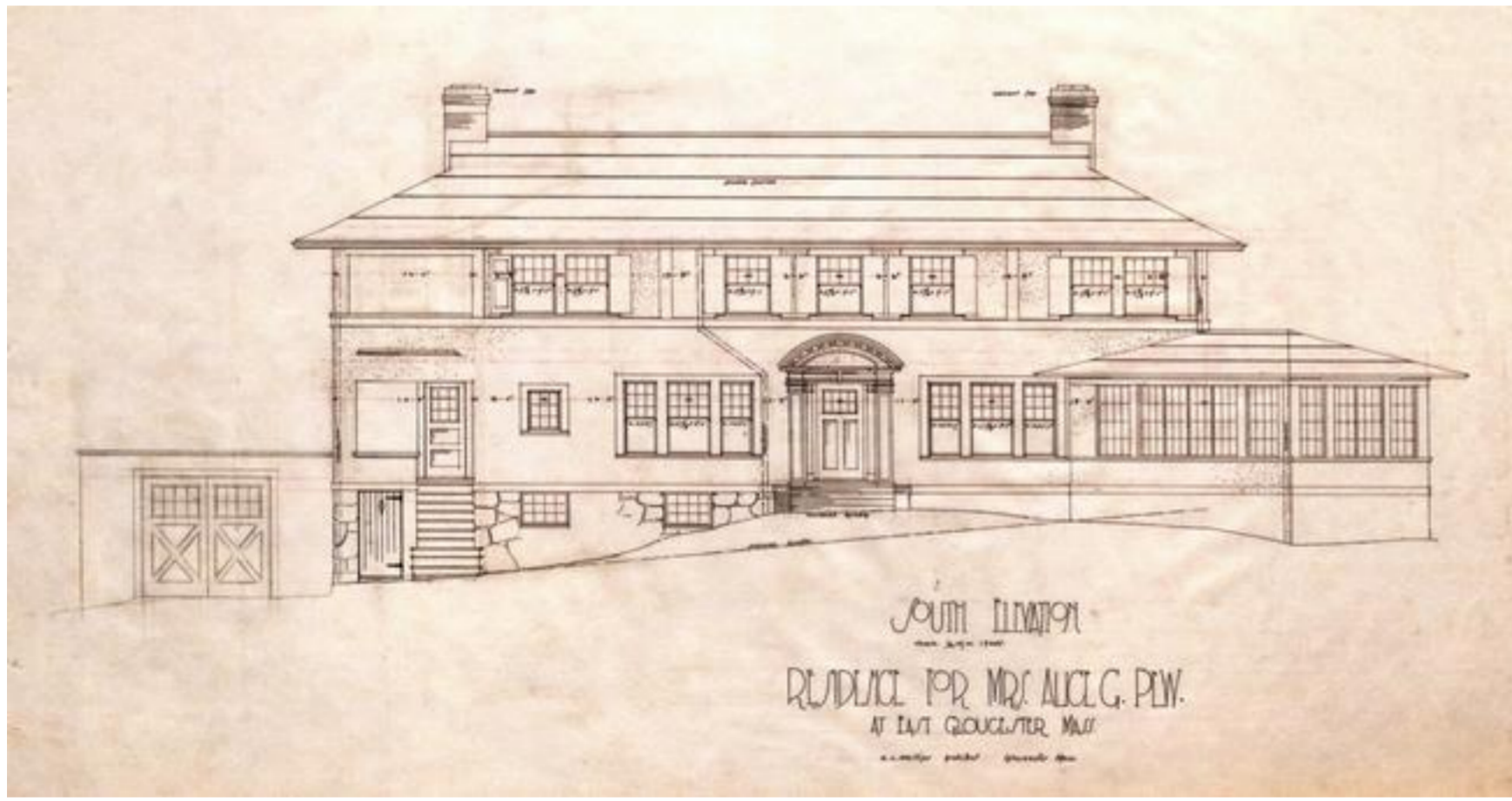
Architectural styles around Cape Ann vary wildly, from Victorian to Greek Revival to Shingle to Queen Anne. Many buildings show a brash mixture of several architectural ideas. And if a major building — residential or public — was designed and built in the first half of the 20th century, it probably was created b...



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Ezra Phillips designed this home for Alice F. and Harry G. Pew. The drawing is ink on linen.

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By Keith Powers / Correspondent

Posted Jul. 13, 2016 at 5:27 PM

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If you go...

WHAT: Design/Build: The Drawings of Phillips & Holloran, Architects

WHERE: Cape Ann Museum, 27 Pleasant St., Gloucester

WHEN: through Oct. 9.

TICKETS: Free with museum admission. Visit www.capeannmuseum.org or call 978-283-0455.

Architectural styles around Cape Ann vary wildly, from Victorian to Greek Revival to Shingle to Queen Anne. Many buildings show a brash mixture of several architectural ideas. And if a major building — residential or public — was designed and built in the first half of the 20th century, it probably was created by Phillips & Holloran, Architects.

The firm folded in the 1960s, and in 2011 more than 300 sets of drawings and plans were donated to the Cape Ann Museum. An exhibition of some of the most notable plans is on view now in "Design/Build," an elegant collection of drawings that show the remarkable professionalism and adaptability of the firm that was founded by Ezra Phillips in 1894.

The Blackburn Building. Spiran Hall. Cape Ann Savings Bank. The T. S. Eliot House. Long-destroyed hotels — grand edifices — in Magnolia and on Bass Rocks. And many stylish residences for fisherman and their families along Stacy Boulevard and Washington Street, evidence of their commercial success.

Phillips & Holloran (Ezra Phillips was joined by Timothy Holloran in the 1920s, and subsequently Timothy's son Robert continued the practice) worked during a time when architecture was developing as a craft, not just as an offshoot of contracting and building.

"This was the beginning of architecture as a profession," says Deborah Epstein, partner in Epstein Joslin Architects, who lectured on her work on Cape Ann on July 7 as part of the extensive programming that accompanies the show.

"There were certainly other people building at the time, but this work is done with a degree of sophistication," she says. "When you look at this show, there isn't what we would call an architectural brand. This is a roomful of different styles. Phillips knew what other people were doing, and he blended styles well."

Plans for a grand hotel in Magnolia — since torn down — serve as an example of what Epstein describes. "It's a classical building, with columns, but shingle style as well, which is kind of crazy,"

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she says. "Then if you look at another hotel, on Bass Rocks, it's also classical, but more vernacular arches, and columns that are more like sticks with a bracket. It's like the same building in two different styles.

"Some of the houses are classical and austere," she says. "Like the owner is saying, 'See how important I am.' Others are much friendlier, almost like they say, 'Look, we have something beautiful.' "

Curator Martha Oaks says "there's about 35 projects shown here, all different. The draftsmanship is lovely, and when you look at them you'll see a lot of things that we still enjoy today."

Epstein points out the quality of the drawings, some done on linen, a part of the architectural craft that has been lost to computer aided design. "Everything in these drawings means something," she says. "In this era, these plans might have been all that the builders worked from. They are incredibly beautiful. These cross-hatches mean something, and this black part means something else. Even the script is part of the language. They clearly took pride in these drawings.

"When architects talk about beautiful plans," she says, looking at the Phillips & Holloran design for the Eastern Avenue School (now the Para Research building), "sometimes it looks obvious. But it takes a long time to simplify it down to something like this. These are particularly beautiful."

Epstein will lecture on her own major Cape Ann project — the prominent Shalin Liu Performance Center. Along with architect Maryann Thompson, who designed Temple Ahavat Achim, they will discuss the thorny issues that accompany the creation of large public spaces in historic districts.

Their lecture is part of an extensive series of talks, walking tours and other presentations that the museum has planned to accompany "Design/Build." For complete information visit www.capeannmuseum.org or call 978-283-0455.

Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR's ARTery. Follow @PowersKeith; email to keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com

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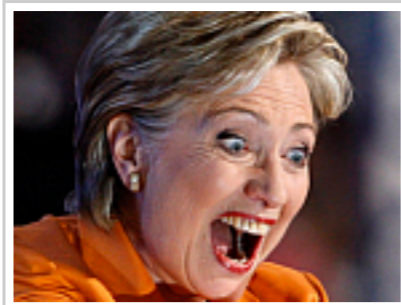
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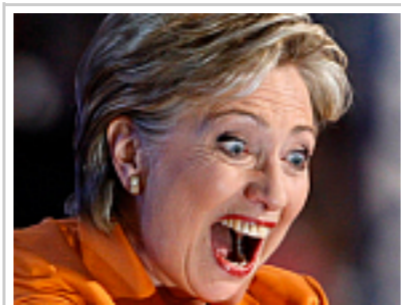
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