

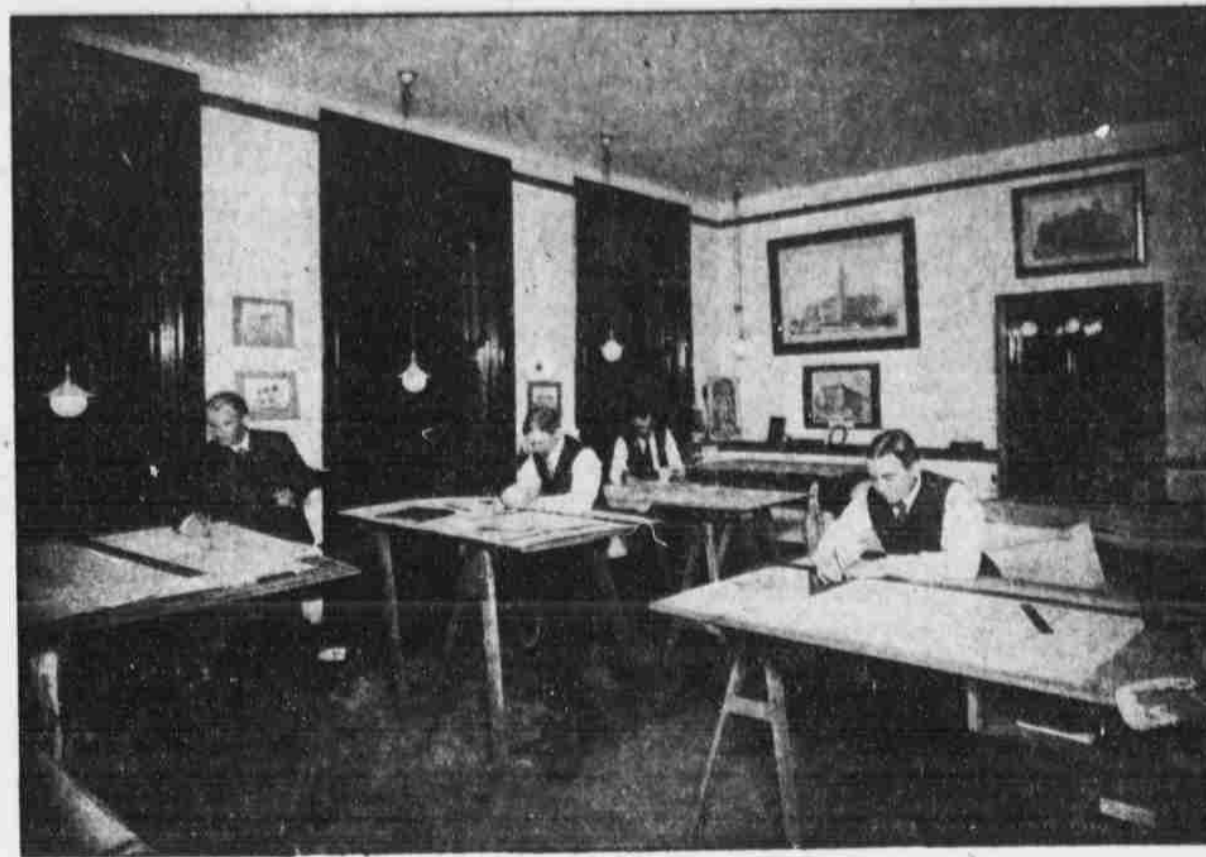
# Omaha's Growth in Recent Years as Represented by the Notable Record of Its Principal Architect's Office



ARCHITECT JOHN LATENSER IN HIS PRIVATE OFFICE.



STRUCTURAL STEEL COMPUTER IN JOHN LATENSER'S OFFICE.



DRAFTING ROOM IN JOHN LATENSER'S OFFICE.

**T**HE wonderful growth and expansion of Omaha in the last few years is the best evidence that the architects and builders have been kept more than busy. This growth is nowhere more strikingly exemplified, than in the wonderful growth and expansion of the business of one Omaha architect, John Latenser. So great have been the increasing demands upon the services of Mr. Latenser and his staff of assistants, that he has been compelled to enlarge his office quarters and has within the past month moved into new office rooms on the sixth floor of The Bee building, that give him facilities for turning out good work, enjoyed by no other architect in this section of the country. In fact, it is said that it is one of the finest architect's offices in the western country.

the filing cases for letters and racks for storage of working plans. Mr. Latenser's private office opening from this waiting room occupies the corner, with window light from both north and east. The fire proof vault safeguards the more important papers and records, and suitable book-shelves house a working reference library. A unique feature of this office consists in the cork lining of the walls almost up to the ceiling, the purpose being to afford purchase for tacking up drawings, photographs and sketches. The room is further decorated by framed pictures of architectural structures and plaster models of ornamental columns and sculpture.

**Fittings for Drafting Room.**  
The drafting room has outlets to the private office and the outside corridor. It is commodious and light with three large north windows, in front of which the tables are arranged. For night drafting, special meridian lamps have been provided for use in the event of rush work. Around the walls at convenient height runs a wall shelf to hold pencils, erasers, rulers and drawing instruments out of the way of the drafting tables. Here, too, the walls are set off with photographs, elevations and models. All the models and drawings represent work that has been or is being executed by this office. The photographs reproduced here

of these different rooms reveal all those various features. While mechanical facilities are, of course, important, the character and quality of an architect's work depend, first, upon the experience and ability of the architect himself and the men he calls to his assistance in various subordinate capacities.

**Mr. Latenser's Work.**  
Mr. Latenser himself has been a resident of Omaha for eighteen years. He got his technical training in the best schools of Germany and has followed it up with long and varied practical experience in design and construction. Without going back many years, Mr. Latenser's skill may be seen in most of the principal building improvements made in this city and vicinity in late years. He was superintendent of construction of the new federal building, which is said to rank above the postoffice of any other city of Omaha's size in the country. He designed and supervised the erection of the new Omaha High school, as well as a large number of other public school buildings, and has more recently built handsome high schools at South Omaha and Hastings. In all he has erected fourteen high school buildings in Nebraska outside of Omaha. On the subject of school architecture, including the intricate problems of heating, lighting and ventilating, Mr. Latenser stands among the highest authorities.

Another example of Mr. Latenser's work is to be found in the new Omaha auditorium, which, even though still incomplete, is most imposing in appearance and will be still more architecturally impressive when the ornamental columns and pediments are all in place. He built the House of the Good Shepherd on South Fortieth street, which is regarded as a model for that class of structure. Just now Mr. Latenser is working on several of the biggest business blocks ever projected for this city. He is building the Hoagland building on Sixteenth and Howard streets, which is to be occupied by the Orchard & Wilhelm furniture establishment and the Thompson & Belden dry goods house, and will give these two concerns the finest quarters yet occupied by any Omaha retail merchants. The palatial department store for J. L. Brandeis & Sons, for which ground has just been broken and which is to cover the entire half block between Sixteenth and Seventeenth streets south of Douglas, and is to be fitted out under his plans with every modern convenience for the conduct of an up-to-date department store.

**Model Business Blocks.**  
Among other things, Mr. Latenser has in hand several large wholesale warehouses, among others, for the Wright & Wilhelmy Hardware company, for the American Radior company and the Millard estate. The growth of business in Mr. Latenser's office has naturally gone along with a corresponding growth in the size of his staff. Besides himself, the work now requires the services of five assistants in the drafting room, with two stenographers, clerks and

inspectors. Each of Mr. Latenser's assistants has been selected because of special fitness for the work assigned to him. W. S. Burrous, the chief draughtsman, is now filling his second year's engagement in the office, having had thirty years' experience in Cincinnati and Chicago. Mr. Burrous is an enthusiastic yachtsman and was former commodore of the Columbia Yacht club of Chicago. A. A. Fuller also holds a license as architect in the state of Illinois and has had twenty-five years' experience in Chicago offices. He has been with Mr. Latenser two years. Mr. Fuller made the drawings showing the architectural orders, which are published yearly in connection with the Chicago Architects' Business association. W. E. Findley, besides filling his position as a draughtsman, assists Mr. Latenser with his work outside of the city. Mr. Findley is well known here and is entering on his fourth year's engagement with Mr. Latenser, which makes his fourteenth year in the business.

**Special Engineer as Computer.**  
A. Gravelle is filling a special engagement in designing structural iron work and foundations for big store buildings, warehouses and offices. He is a member of the American Society of Civil Engineers and is at present designing the steel work, framing, etc., for the J. L. Brandeis & Sons new building, and the steel work for the Temple building for the University of Nebraska. Charles M. O. Krogh holds the position of general draughtsman. Mr. Krogh is an Omaha boy and has had twelve years' experience in the best Omaha offices. When the building season is fully on a special superintendent with practical construction experience is employed to oversee the progress of the work.

**Growing Clientele Also.**  
Assistance in the office is also rendered by Mr. Latenser's two sons, who are shown in the family group. These young men make all the blue prints and help on mathematical computations. The growth of the architectural work developing upon Mr. Latenser's office is specially pleasing to the public, as well as to his friends, because so intimately connected with the building growth of this city and section. To maintain such a center and to carry out the great projects entering in it requires not only energy and ability, but also liberal support from a growing clientele. The capacity of the office is by no means overtaxed and people contemplating building who want first-class service in designing and superintending will find it to their advantage to consult with Mr. Latenser.

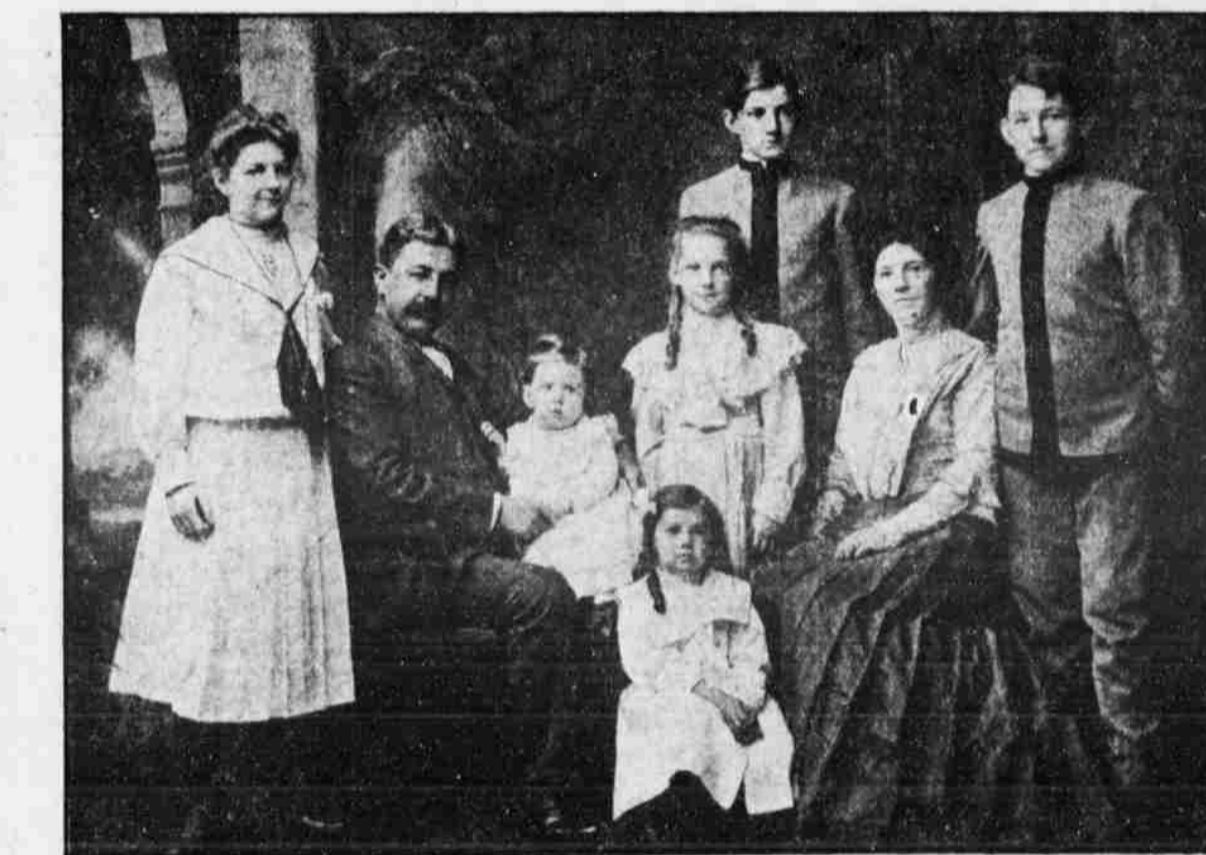
**Unequalled Office Quarters.**  
The location for Mr. Latenser's new offices has been selected in the north corner of the sixth floor, with a view to enjoying the best possible light and air. From the corridor, entrance is effected into a long waiting room for the convenience of patrons, visitors and contractors, and utilized also as a working room for the stenographers, who are constantly busy preparing specifications and correspondence. The main office telephone is here.



JOHN LATENSER'S OFFICE GROUP.—From Left, (Sitting), John Latenser, Alexander A. Fuller, W. S. Burrous (Standing), Charles M. O. Krogh, A. Gravelle, W. E. Findley, Maud Mackenzie, Mary Quigley.



WAITING ROOM TO JOHN LATENSER'S OFFICE.



INTERESTING FAMILY GROUP OF JOHN LATENSER.

## Our Big Panama Shops--Jamaica Negroes Under American Foremen

**B**AS MATACHIN, Panama, April 27.—(Special Correspondence of The Bee).—Take a look at the biggest machine shop on the isthmus of Panama. It is situated half way between the Atlantic and the Pacific, in the mountains, high up from the sea. It covers acres and under its galvanized iron roof a network of wheels is humming away at the rate of a hundred revolutions a minute. The floor is covered with moving machinery and gangs of Americans and natives are at work. Here they are grinding old French locomotive wheels into new ones, there they are drilling holes through iron plates and bars and further on steel pinners are shaving off iron as though it were wood. Traveling cranes moved from the roof, pick up steam engines and other enormous weights and carry them from one part of the shop to the other, while in the foundries, adjoining the boiling metal bubbles and seethes as it is carried by the furnaces by Jamaican and Colombian laborers who are making castings of more than a ton in weight. Outside the shop the ground is covered with acres of car wheels, iron dredge buckets and steel rails. The warehouses nearby contain more than \$1,000,000 worth of pumps, dredges and machine tools and the whole is like one of the great industrial institutions of Pittsburgh or Chicago, rather than a repair shop in the heart of the backwoods of the isthmus of Panama.

**Shops at Empire and Colon.**  
Bas Matachin is the chief shop for the work at Colon. It is where the old French material is being made into new for use on the canal. There are other shops at Empire and there are also shops at Colon. Here, where the actual work of excavation is in progress. At Empire there are fully fifteen acres of buildings and storage tracks, and there we have fifty locomotives, several hundred cranes and a vast number of dump cars. At Colon 100 mechanics are making light repairs on the 1,000 cars, thirty locomotives, seven excavators and the new steam shovels which are working there. We have also big machine shops at Colon on the Atlantic and some

equipment of machine tools for a big repair shop. There was not a thing lacking. All we had to do was to put new foundations under the machines, clean them up and start the stationary engines running. After that we began to clean up about the premises. "We had a gang of machete men cut down the jungle and clear out the vegetation about the buildings. It took us almost three weeks to do this and get the machines in running order. We then began to organize our force, and we now have a repair shop that I would not be ashamed to show to the mechanical engineers of any American railroad."

"What kinds of work are you doing?" I asked. "Almost everything in the line of repairing," was the reply. "We have 100 men at work making general repairs upon locomotives and car equipments and all kinds of other machinery used in the canal work. Our capacity just now is seven locomotives and 115 cars per month. We have already repaired about 1,000 of the old French dump cars, and they are now in service at Colon. Most of them were badly broken and rusted out. We renewed the timbers and replaced the missing parts. We repaired a number of locomotives, and now have between thirty and forty of them in use, and we have also been doing a great deal of fitting up of boilers, engines, concrete mixers and other things for the water works and sewer departments. We

are repairing cranes, excavators, drills, dredges and all sorts of things."

**French Machines vs. American.**  
"What is the character of the French machinery, Mr. Strom?" I asked. "It is excellent of its kind, but much of it is now obsolete, having been supplanted by better inventions and by American improvements. When it was put here twenty years ago it was absolutely modern, and the finest that could be purchased. As it is now, much of it is good, and when it is sprinkled with additional tools from the states we shall have machine shops inferior to none. Take the French locomotives. Those which we are now repairing are of Belgian make. They are well designed and of superior workmanship, but they are complicated and in some ways hard to maintain. We can use them, however, and are repairing them for Colon and other points."

"We are also repairing the old French excavators, which, by an endless chain of buckets, scoop up the earth and load it on the cars. These are now in use, and Chief Engineer Wallace will probably continue to use them until he has enough steam shovels or other superior American machinery to take their places. Just now when our machinery has not come from the states, much of this old French stuff can be used."

"Indeed, it is hard to estimate the value of the material which we got with the canal. The equipment of the shops here is, I judge, worth at least \$250,000."

"How about your labor, Mr. Strom?"

"We have American foremen, with natives under them. We have some Jamaican negroes, who are skilled mechanics, and we have a Spanish locomotive gang. French gang and an American gang. We have one blacksmith whom I will put up against any white blacksmith anywhere. The majority of the Jamaicans, however, are worthless as far as skilled labor is concerned. We can use them for rough work only."

"What other races do you employ?"

"We have a number of Spaniards, some of whom are superior to the mechanics from the states. We have some French,

men and a large number of Colombians. We have a Spanish locomotive gang. We work them side by side, and each tries to see whether it cannot do the most work. So far the French play second fiddle to none."

"Are your men interested in their work?"

"The Spaniards and French are much interested."

"How about the Jamaicans?"

"We have to drive them all the time. They have no energy and no individuality. They drag along, waiting for the whistle to blow."

**Americans in Panama.**  
"What is the character of your American labor?"

"We have about the same class of workmen here that you find in the states, and use them chiefly for foremen. We pay them 45 cents gold an hour, and in addition furnish them free quarters. This is about 25 per cent more than they receive in the states. We pay the common laborer from 15 to 40 cents an hour in silver, which is equal to, from 7 1/2 to 20 cents an hour in gold. The Jamaican mechanics get more."

"Can Americans work here in the tropics?"

"I think so, especially under cover, as in the shops. Bas Matachin is high and healthy. We have but little sickness, and have had almost no malaria since the vegetation was cleared away. We want the very best American mechanics we can get, and I think they will eventually be satisfied with their pay and their accommodations."

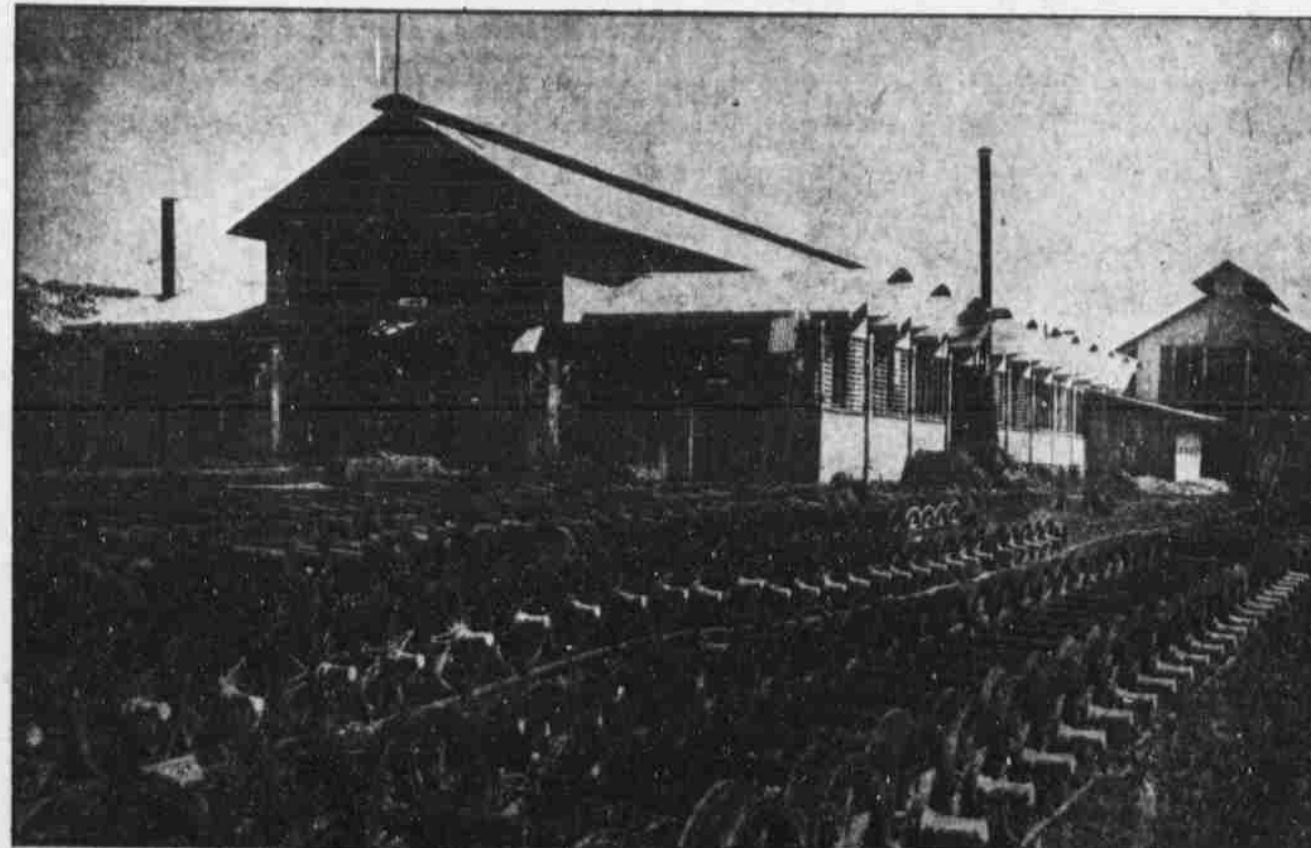
**Young Engineers at Panama.**  
"What kind of men have you in your engineering corps?"

"We have a large number of college graduates who are starting out to make a place for themselves. We have men from Cornell, Purdue, Ann Arbor, the Illinois State university and the Boston School of Technology. They are mechanical engineers getting their first practical experience, and as a rule they are doing well."

"Is this a good place for such men?"

"Yes. The isthmus now offers unlimited

found in the jungles. We did not know they existed when I came here last June, and it was only when Colonel Hooker and I made a trip across the isthmus to look at the French machinery that we discovered them. We had stopped at Georgia, and while moving about there, noticed the corner of this old building peeping out of a dense vegetation. We made our way to it through a mass of car wheels dumping buckets and other machinery, and found a structure about a half dozen acres, containing a complete



UNCLE SAM'S BIG REPAIR SHOPS AT BAS MATACHIN.

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