

Arthur L. Pillsbury (1869-1925)

Arthur L. Pillsbury was born in Bloomington, Illinois, on November 29, 1869. He grew up in Bloomington and went to school in Normal. His father, William L. Pillsbury, was the principal of the Model School (teacher training school) at Illinois State Normal University (I.S.N.U). In 1880, his father became the principal of Springfield High School, so the family moved to Springfield. Arthur graduated from Springfield High School in 1888.

After high school, he went to Harvard University and graduated in 1892 with a degree in Engineering. He then returned to Illinois to study at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. His father worked at the university as a registrar, and Arthur played on the university's baseball and football teams. In 1895, Arthur graduated with a degree in architecture. He stayed loyal to the university and continued to support it throughout his life.

After graduation, Arthur traveled to several cities, including Chicago and New York, to learn more about architecture. In 1897, Illinois became the first state to require architects to be licensed. Arthur became one of the first architects in Illinois to be licensed. The next year, 1898, he settled back in Bloomington and partnered with local architect Herman Evans. Arthur also married Daisy Deane Hill on November 9, 1898. They had one daughter, Frances.

Arthur's career grew after the Downtown Fire of 1900 in Bloomington. The fire destroyed 45 buildings in just eight hours, and Arthur was chosen to help rebuild the downtown area. He worked with two other architects, George Miller and Paul Moratz, to design new buildings. They chose a classical style, which was popular after the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago. The rebuilding took only 18 months, and Arthur's designs helped establish his reputation as a talented architect.

In the years after the fire, Arthur designed many buildings in Bloomington, including the Griesheim Building, the McGregor Building, and the Braley-Field Building. He also designed schools, churches, businesses, and homes. Throughout his career, he designed around 435 homes and many other types of buildings. As of 2013, more than 100 of the homes he designed in Bloomington-Normal were still standing.

Arthur was known for designing schools. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, education in America was changing. More people believed that everyone should have access to a high school education, not just those from wealthy families. This led to the need for bigger, more modern schools. Arthur designed many new schools in Illinois, making them larger and more open, with spaces for classrooms, gyms, and other activities. Some of the schools he designed include Bloomington High School, Irving Elementary, and the Horatio G. Bent School (which is still in use today).

One of his most famous projects was the old Bloomington High School, which opened in 1915. It was built in the style of a 17th-century English manor house and included areas for vocational training like woodworking and sewing. The building still stands and was converted into fixed income housing for older adults in 2022.

In 1926, Arthur designed the Ensenberger Building, a large and expensive project that was completed after his death. He died in a car accident on October 24, 1925, while returning from a football game. He was thrown from the car, and the car landed on top of him, causing fatal injuries. He was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington.

Arthur Pillsbury is remembered as one of the most important architects in Illinois. His designs continue to be admired today, and he is known for his hard work, dedication, and generosity to the community.