

Charles E. Fox

The Other Half of Marshall & Fox

by Linda Freeman Neff, Mayslake Research Volunteer

Most of what is written about the firm of Marshall & Fox concerns the flamboyant Benjamin H. Marshall. Much less has been written about his more sedate partner, Charles Eli Fox.

Born in 1870 in Reading, Pennsylvania, Fox was the oldest of the four children of William Milton Fox and Martha Ellen McCauley. He spent his youth in Reading, where his father was the superintendent of the E.S. Fox & Co. Terra Cotta Works.

After studying architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and receiving his degree in 1891, Fox moved to Chicago to work on the World's Columbian Exposition. As a member of the prominent firm of Holabird & Roche, Fox specialized in the new steel frame construction that was emerging in Chicago. During his association with Holabird & Roche, he worked on some of the firm's most notable buildings including the Old Colony, Marquette, Monadnock and Republic.

Beginning in 1905, many of the remaining years of Fox's career were spent in partnership with Benjamin H. Marshall, in which Fox continued his role as construction specialist as well as project manager. Practicing together for almost two decades, Marshall & Fox catered primarily to Chicago's wealthy elite, specializing in luxury apartment buildings, hotels, theaters and clubs.



Fox's role as a founding member in the newly formed South Shore Country Club led to the firm's 1906 commission for the original clubhouse building. Completed in 1910, the 19-story Steger Building was Marshall & Fox's first Chicago high-rise office building and set the standard for many of the firm's subsequent commercial designs. The partners also designed such classic structures as the Blackstone Hotel and Theater, Lake Shore National Bank, the Edgewater Beach Hotel and the Drake Hotel. Many of their elegant apartment buildings can still be found along the Gold Coast. Marshall & Fox were particularly adept at creating designs reflecting historic revival styles, such as Francis Peabody's Tudor revival-style Mayslake Hall and Samuel Insull's Italianate-style home, known today as the Cuneo Mansion and Gardens in Vernon Hills.

Similar to Marshall, Fox, too, enjoyed a leisurely life. His travels for pleasure and business included trips to countries in the Caribbean and Europe on luxury liners such as the Lusitania and Olympic. (Incidentally, based on the descriptions he provided on his passport applications, he was 5 feet 8 inches tall with dark brown hair and brown eyes.)

Fox never married. He lived in Hyde Park and later along the Gold Coast and was a member of the Chicago Club, the Mid-Day Club, Union League, Exmoor Country Club, Olympia Fields Country Club and the Chicago Athletic Association. A renowned yachtsman and a veteran of many Chicago-to-Mackinac Island races, Fox was also a member of the Chicago Yacht Club. He joined in 1898, served for several years as secretary and was elected the club's commodore in 1924.

More professionally and civically oriented than Marshall, Fox twice served as president of the Illinois Society of Architects and was an organizer and first president of the Architects Club of Chicago. During World War I, he devoted his practice to designing hospitals for the Red Cross. In 1915 he was accepted as a member of the American Institute of Architects; he later received the institute's chapter prize for his work on the Blackstone Hotel. In 1922 he was elected the first vice-president of the Illinois Association of Architects.

A Nov. 25, 1923, Chicago Tribune article reported that Benjamin Marshall filed suit for dissolution of their firm the previous day. Marshall charged that Fox executed contracts on his own behalf and then appropriated the proceeds without depositing them in the co-partnership as specified in their original agreement. Marshall also charged that Fox on occasion assumed exclusive control of the firm, causing numerous disagreements, and that his manner insulted and antagonized potential clients, resulting in lost business. Beyond dissolution of the partnership in 1924, the ultimate resolution to this suit is unknown. Interestingly, this legal action took place at the same time that Marshall was constructing his famed studio and home in Wilmette.

In June of 1925 while on a train returning to Chicago from Rochester, New York, Charles Fox suffered a stroke. His condition was further complicated by bronchitis and nephritis. He died of a cerebral hemorrhage in his Ritchie Court apartment in Chicago on Oct. 31, 1926, at the age of 56. The funeral took place at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago, and he was buried in his home town of Reading, Pennsylvania, in Charles Evans Cemetery.