

Exploding Growth in the Young Capital City of Columbus Lead 17 Men to Launch Builders' and Traders' Exchange

Columbus in the Late 1800's

Columbus, Ohio in 1892 was the ideal place to be a builder. With a population of 88,150, the capital had grown 71% from a decade earlier. Originally designed with the Statehouse as its center, the city had stretched 6.6 miles north to south on High Street, and 6.7 miles east to west on Broad Street, and its annual report said nearly 1,000 building permits had been issued that year, totaling \$1 million.

Improvements were non-stop and proudly reported by the city civil engineer. More brick or asphalt roads (13 miles of paving had been added in 1892), new gas-fueled street lights and most significantly, the 1891 arrival of the electric streetcar, meant central Ohio residents could move out to modern subdivisions like Livingston Park, Dennison Park and Indianola Heights.

Along with expanding neighborhoods of \$3,000 frame houses came new schools, churches, office buildings, factories, restaurants and hotels. Ohio industry tradesmen were earning top dollar in Columbus, with the highest daily pay of \$4.69 going to bricklayers, according to the state Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1892. Because construction tradesmen worked nine hour days, six days a week, experienced local masons were bringing home \$28.14 a week.



The first electric streetcar in Columbus began a regular route in 1891, causing local residents to stop and watch as it passed them.



Among the 17 men who founded the Builders' and Traders' Exchange in 1892 was William H. Fish, of Fish Stone Company.

The Builders' and Traders' Exchange is Formed

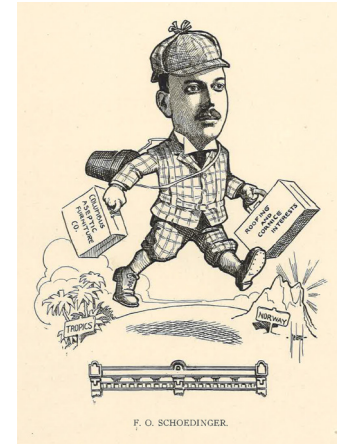
Construction employers found it hard to stay aware of potential projects or to secure the people and products needed to complete them. The need for communication and information among construction specialties motivated 17 men in the industry to form The Builders' and Traders' Exchange, following the lead of similar organizations in Cincinnati and Cleveland. Looking back at the individuals who filed the articles of incorporation on Oct. 13, 1892, it's striking how much they reflect the members and the purpose of the BX in 2017.

Some BX founders were leaders of large, well-known establishments – such as William H. Fish of the venerable Fish Stone Co. and its sister firm, the Fish Press Brick Co. Contributing to dozens of palatial homes and commercial structures at the turn of the 19th century, one of the company's earliest projects was Trinity Episcopal Church, built in 1869 at 125 E. Broad St.

Other founders were young, ambitious entrepreneurs, like 20-year-old Franklin Oscar “F.O.” Schoedinger. Schoedinger started his stove and house furnishings company just two years before signing the articles of incorporation for the Builders’ and Traders’ Exchange. Over the next 60 years, his firm added many lines of business, eventually manufacturing sheet metal building material, metal window frames and sash, steel ceilings, roofing and more.

Schoedinger became a leading citizen of his era, serving as president of the Columbus Board of Trade (the early name of the Chamber of Commerce) and the board of Children’s Hospital. A member of the Columbus Club, the Athletic Club, Columbus Country Club and Scioto Country Club, he was a charter member of the downtown Rotary Club in 1912.

Perhaps some of his leadership skills were honed as the third president of the Builders’ and Traders’ Exchange in 1896, when he was just 24.



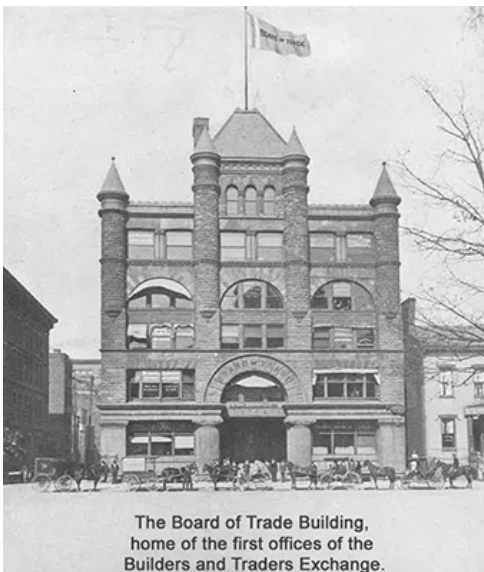
BX founder F.O. Schoedinger, pictured here in a book of caricatures by Billy Ireland called, “Columbus Men Worth While: Presented in Cartoon.”

Along with Fish and Schoedinger, the other BX founders were:

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| Five GCs/carpenters: | Seth W. Nichol; John B. Coulter; Michael Fahey; Robert S. Moling and Henry R. Young |
| Two roofers: | William R. Kinnear , president of The Kinnear-Gager Co.; and George W. Ochs , partner of Ochs & King |
| Two brick masons: | I.A. Geren ; and Joseph F. Blair |
| Three plumbers/gas fitters: | Dennis N. Kelley ; Edward J. McNamara , Westwater & McNamara; and Edward A. Futerer , The Sanitary Plumbing Co. |
| One Plasterer: | John Carlile |
| Two Painters: | William Bebb and John M. Rittel |

Growth and Expansion

With their organization growing quickly, they leased rooms in the prestigious, just-completed Board of Trade building on Capitol Square at 30 E. Broad St., the site of today’s Rhodes State Tower. Along



with two evening meetings a month, members were expected to attend the daily ‘Change Hour, held from 11 a.m. to noon, Monday through Saturday, for the purpose of transacting business with one another. After the ‘Change Hour, lunch was served for a nickel. Long after the ‘Change Hour was discontinued, lunch service continued well into the 1950s when the BX had its own building on Dublin Road.

Immediately, the construction industry transformed its communication and information flow. The ‘Change Hour, the meetings, an updated bulletin board of pending projects and an exhibition room for members to display their products and services were early BX benefits. The Builders’ and Traders’ Exchange was the hub of the industry, becoming the site of regular meetings of the Master Carpenters’ Association, the Master Stonemasons’ Association, the Brick Contractor

Association, the Cut Stone Contractors’ Association, the Plasterer Contractors’ Association and others.

General contractor Seth Nichol was the first president of the Builders' and Traders' Exchange, which set admission fee at \$15 and annual dues at \$12. In its inaugural year, the association had 27 firms on its roster – jumping to 76 members the following year. Although 1893 was a year in which much of the country was suffering its worst depression to date, Columbus weathered the tough economy better than most. As it approached the turn of the century, possibilities for the construction industry seemed as bright as the gas-lit arches spanning North High Street.

If there was one word to describe the world of Builders' and Traders' Exchange members, it was "new." Columbus was brimming with new organizations, new businesses, new neighborhoods, new buildings – it was an exciting time to be at the center of so many dynamic changes. In the late 1890s, the city skyline began to reflect the modern materials and methods used by BX members.

Renowned Chicago architect Daniel H. Burnham designed the first "skyscraper" in Columbus: the Wyandotte Building at 21 W. Broad St., completed in 1897 by BX member Daniel W. McGrath. The 11-story landmark consisted of a steel skeleton covered with masonry, a cutting-edge style that ensured more high rise buildings would spring up in the capital.

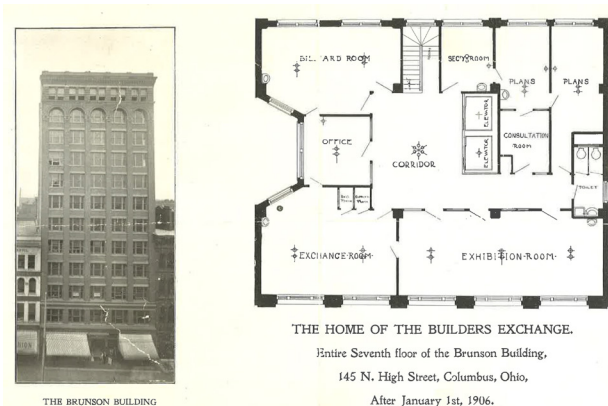
Another remarkable structure finished that year was the Great Southern Hotel at 296 S. High St., billed as the first completely fireproof hotel in Columbus. Using materials that reduced the chance of a catastrophic fire was incredibly important to every citizen and business, because far too many buildings were still burning to the ground in the late 1800s.



The Wyandotte Building was the first "skyscraper" in Columbus in 1897, designed by renowned Chicago architect Daniel H. Burnham.

Builders' and Traders' Keeps Growing and Moving

The Great Southern may have marketed itself as the first fireproof hotel in the city, but the year it opened, the Builders' and Traders' Exchange moved across Capitol Square to the "Fireproof Building" at 71½ E. State St. (the site of today's Sheraton Columbus Capitol Square). An expanding organization meant more space was needed – the 1902 roster listed 190 members. They were as diverse as Professor (and first OSU president) Edward Orton, the architectural firm of Richards, McCarty & Bulford and two companies that are still members 115 years later: The Columbus Coal & Lime Co. and Lang Stone Co.



The announcement of the Builders' and Traders' Exchange that it was moving into the brand-new Brunson Building in 1906.

'Change Hour – featured a large billiard room.

In 1906, the Builders' and Traders' Exchange moved again, renting the entire seventh floor of the brand-new Brunson Building, 145 N. High St., for \$1,800 a year. An announcement of the address change featured the floor plan of the new headquarters, which – in addition to rooms for plan review, member exhibits and the

Apparently, BX members were ahead of their time when it came to business networking. A 1909 audit of Exchange inventory included one desk, one typewriter with stand, one safe, one file cabinet – but also two cue racks, one set of pool balls, 23 bottles of beer and, the most expensive item, the pool table worth \$50.

When the opportunity arose in 1913 to again move to a new hot property, the Builders' and Traders' Exchange members grabbed it, resettling at the modern, steam-heated Arcade Building, 240 N. High St. (at the corner of Chestnut and High streets). An article in a 1914 issue of *The Ohio Architect, Engineer and Builder* magazine described the new BX headquarters in glowing terms.

"In no place in the whole country can be found more commodious or better equipped rooms for the transaction of the business of the Exchange" the article read, adding, "With a membership of 250, embracing the leaders in the building and contracting business, the home of the Exchange is always a busy place. In the private plan room are to be found at all times, scores of plans of jobs of all kinds and sizes, many of the leading architects realizing that this is the very best means of reaching the real live wires of the building business."

Featured in the story was the 1914 BX president, Byron M. Freeman of the Vitrolite Construction Co. And among those listed on the board of directors was a young general contractor, E. Elford.

As the Builders' and Traders' Exchange approached its 25th anniversary, construction continued to boom with downtown landmarks like the Atlas Building, the Seneca Hotel and the Athletic Club of Columbus. And the streetcar suburbs kept development expanding to neighborhoods like Oakland Park to the north, the Hilltop to the west and Eastgate to the east.

Despite the healthy pace of construction, Exchange membership dropped in 1917, to 215. One likely reason was the country's entry into the World War that year, impacting many small and sole-proprietor construction companies. To help affected members, the BX board voted in 1918 to suspend the dues of "any member in the services of the government during the war."

It was a small gesture, but one that showed the sense of community that had developed within the construction industry during the first 25 years of the Exchange. Members probably couldn't imagine that their organization would continue to build that community for another 100 years – weathering storms and celebrating successes as each left their mark on the Central Ohio skyline.

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| <p>OFFICERS</p> <p>E. K. HIBBS, President J. E. RUSSELL, 1st Vice-President A. L. BOWERS, 2nd Vice-President JOHN A. KELLEY, Secretary E. L. HARRIS, Treasurer</p> <hr/> <p>DIRECTORS</p> <table border="0"><tr><td>J. T. Daymude</td><td>A. P. Lamneck</td></tr><tr><td>O. L. Bowers</td><td>J. J. Knox</td></tr><tr><td>R. L. Watson</td><td>Frank J. Busch</td></tr><tr><td>L. R. Moor</td><td>James A. Gaston</td></tr><tr><td>L. I. Tarbert</td><td>D. W. Evans</td></tr></table> | J. T. Daymude | A. P. Lamneck | O. L. Bowers | J. J. Knox | R. L. Watson | Frank J. Busch | L. R. Moor | James A. Gaston | L. I. Tarbert | D. W. Evans |  | <p>EXCHANGE HOUR, 11:30 TO 12:30 DAILY NOON LUNCH SERVICE</p> <p>Daily Bulletins of Building News</p> <p>CITIZENS PHONE 3217 BELL PHONE M. 6038</p> |
| J. T. Daymude | A. P. Lamneck | | | | | | | | | | | |
| O. L. Bowers | J. J. Knox | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| L. I. Tarbert | D. W. Evans | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>OFFICE AND EXHIBIT ROOMS SEVENTH FLOOR BRUNSON BLDG.</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Letterhead from the turn of the last century included the first logo of the Builders' and Traders' Exchange and reminder of the daily 'Change Hour.