

Richard Karl August Kletting

1858 -- 1943

Most tourists make lists of must-see things at the places they visit. In New York, it would be the Empire State Building and the Statue of Liberty. In Texas, everyone wants to see The Alamo. Today a visitor's list for Utah would include the national parks in southern Utah, perhaps the Winter Olympics venues, and arguably Utah's most famous urban attraction, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Temple Square.

But at the beginning of the 20th century in Utah a must-see list would have been a different one. Certainly Temple Square would still be there. A bit later in the century the huge open-pit copper mine in Bingham Canyon would undoubtedly have made the list. But by 1916, two other buildings on the list drawn by any self-respecting tourist (or for that matter resident) were both designed by the man known as the "Dean of Utah Architects" – Richard Karl August Kletting. The buildings bracket his professional life in Utah.

The first was the original Saltair Resort, located on the southeast shore of the Great Salt Lake. In the early 20th Century it was by far and away the most popular attraction around. And at the height of its relatively short life, more than half a million people came each year to bob about in the lake, ride the giant rollercoaster, attend performances of traveling vaudeville companies, and most important of all, dance on what was advertised as the world's biggest dance floor. Kletting completed the design for the ornate structure within only months of his arrival in Utah in 1892 at age 34. After soaking in the architecture of Paris, the young Kletting had decided to immigrate to America in 1883. He spent the next nine years making his way west. Saltair opened in 1893, the same year the imposing Salt Lake Temple was dedicated by Mormon church president Wilford Woodruff. Saltair burned to the ground in 1925.

The last and crowning achievement of Kletting's distinguished career came at the end. At 64 he was among forty other architects who submitted plans for the new state capitol. Stunning in its scope and proportions, the Beaux Arts classical revival structure draws upon the vocabulary of the United States and the Texas State Capitols so popular in turn-of-the-century America. The construction materials – terra cotta and reinforced concrete – made the building an example of truly modern concepts in architecture.

Kletting's other achievements have become some of Utah's beautiful private mansions and businesses, including the Enos Wall mansion on South Temple Street (formerly the home of LDS Business College), the McIntyre Building on South Main Street and Salt Lake School District's Oquirrh School. After his death in September of 1943, the state legislature named a 12,000-foot peak in Summit County in his honor.



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