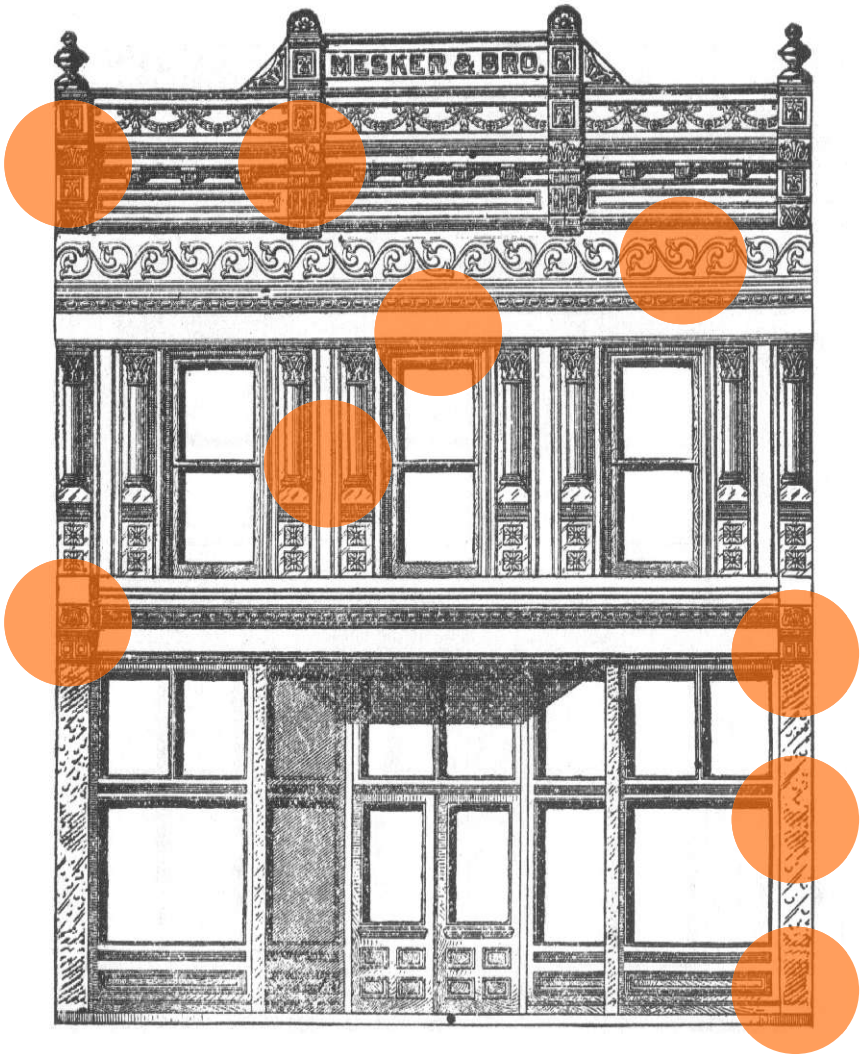
got mesker?

IDENTIFICATION GUIDE TO SHEET-METAL FACADES AND BUILDING COMPONENTS MANUFACTURED BY MESKER BROTHERS IRON WORKS & GEORGE L. MESKER & COMPANY

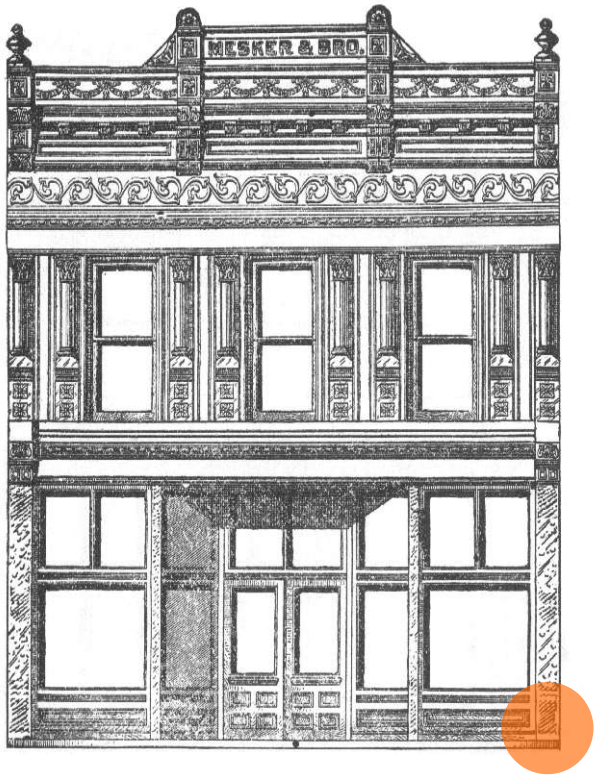


The Mesker companies manufactured building products that ranged from individual components to entire storefront assemblies. Examples in this guide reflect the more commonly found designs employed by the companies. The guide is by no means complete and will be updated as more information becomes available. Please send information about identified facades to "got mesker?," Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, One Old State Capitol Plaza, Springfield, IL 62701, or via e-mail to darius.bryjka@illinois.gov. A current list of identified buildings with Mesker facades and components is available at www.gotmesker.com

CAST-IRON COLUMN NAMEPLATE

Bearing the company name and foundry location, these embossed nameplates are the easiest way to spot a "Mesker." Over the years, the nameplates appeared in several designs which were either molded into the cast iron or bolted on as a plate. Unfortunately, they do not always survive, making the identification more challenging. Even when found, the presence of a company's nameplate does not mean that the entire facade was manufactured by that company. Products from multiple firms are often found on a same facade; therefore, a nameplate should always be corroborated by the rest of the ornamentation.

There are other components of the facade, such as the storefront sill or lintel, that can also bear the manufacturer's name, although that is less common.



MESKER BROTHERS IRON WORKS

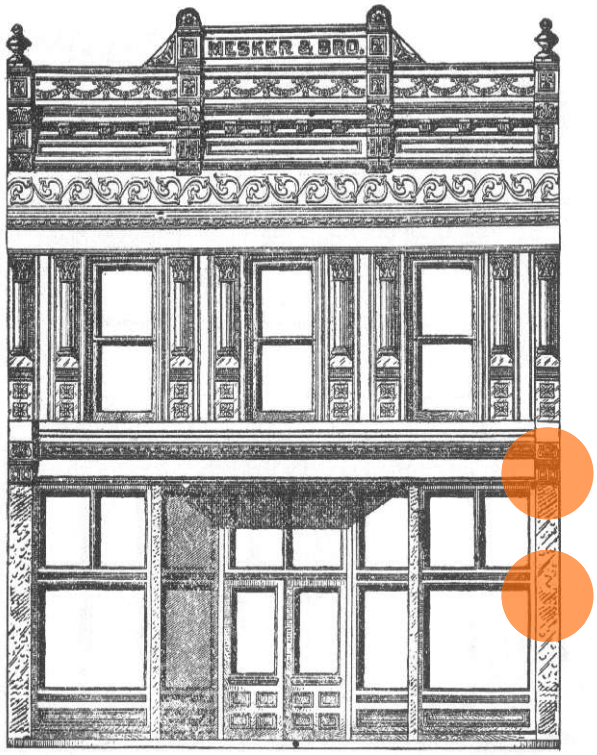
GEORGE L. MESKER & CO.

CAST-IRON COLUMN ORNAMENT

Cast-iron and steel columns offer another opportunity to identify a Mesker facade. While Mesker Brothers utilized only a handful of designs, George L. Mesker & Co. offered a wide array of column capitals. The ornamentation was adapted to varying column widths by altering its proportions or through repetition. Wider columns, of greater carrying capacity, were usually located at either end of the storefront, with more slender columns flanking the entry.

In addition to the designs shown below, both companies employed classically inspired column capitals. Because these designs are similar to those by other companies, they are not ideal for identification purposes and should be verified with illustrations from catalogs. Unadorned columns were also offered.

NOTE: Other foundries produced strikingly similar ornament to that by the Mesker companies. Careful inspection is necessary for proper attribution of the ornament.



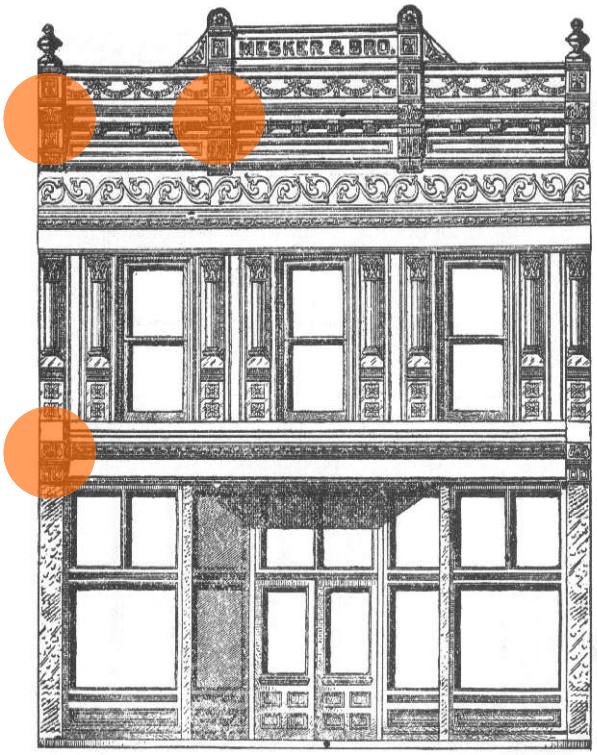
MESKER BROTHERS IRON WORKS

GEORGE L. MESKER & CO.

CORNICE ORNAMENT

The end brackets of the top and lintel cornices often featured dominant design motifs such as the "fleur-de-lis" used by Mesker Brothers and the "morning glory" by George Mesker. Because stylized floral motifs were generally favored not only by the two companies but also by others, careful inspection is necessary in order to properly attribute the facade. Here are some of the more commonly found. As with the other facade components, catalogs are the best way to document the designs.

NOTE: "Fleur-de-lis" is a nod to the French heritage of St. Louis and was used by many foundries from that city. Hence, the presence of this motif does not automatically make the facade a "Mesker."



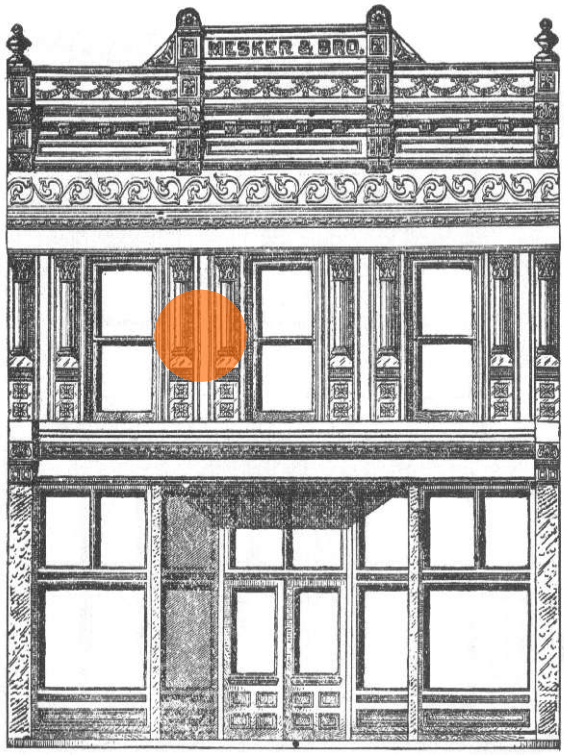
MESKER BROTHERS IRON WORKS

GEORGE L. MESKER & CO.

UPPER STORY COLUMNS

A very distinctive engaged column and base design was used between each of the upper story windows, particularly by the Mesker Brothers. The double-rosette base design (bottom right) is the most common and is a sure sign of a Mesker facade. At the turn of the 20th century, the columns were often used in conjunction with or were entirely replaced by panels depicting a stylized dolphin motif. Although not unique to Mesker Brothers, these upper story columns are very much characteristic of their facades.

Copyright Arthur A. Hart, 2005

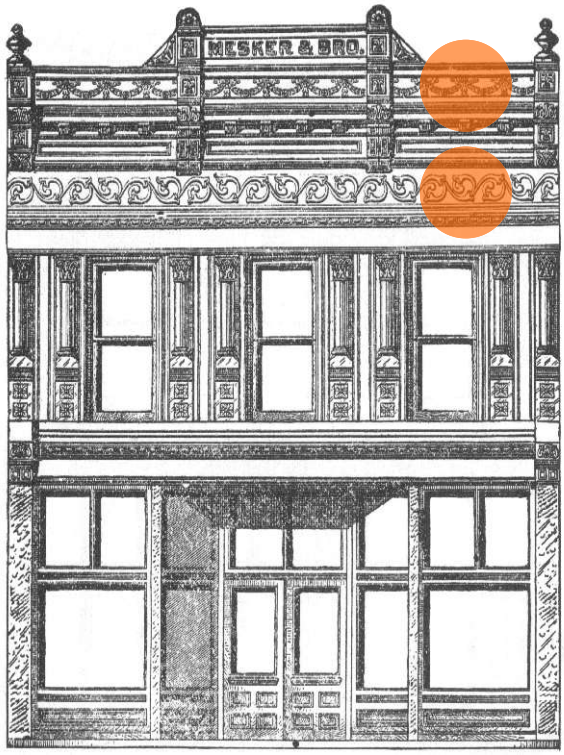


MESKER BROTHERS IRON WORKS

Dolphin panel

ORNAMENTAL SHEET-METAL PANELS

Motifs pictured elsewhere in this identification guide can also appear on the embossed metal panels between the upper story windows and the cornice. However, these areas were usually reserved for less dominant, repetitive designs. Panels depicting the same motif usually spanned the entire width of the facade. In some cases, courses of panels were carried to the top of the parapet, replacing the cornice altogether. Some of the more frequently used are shown below.

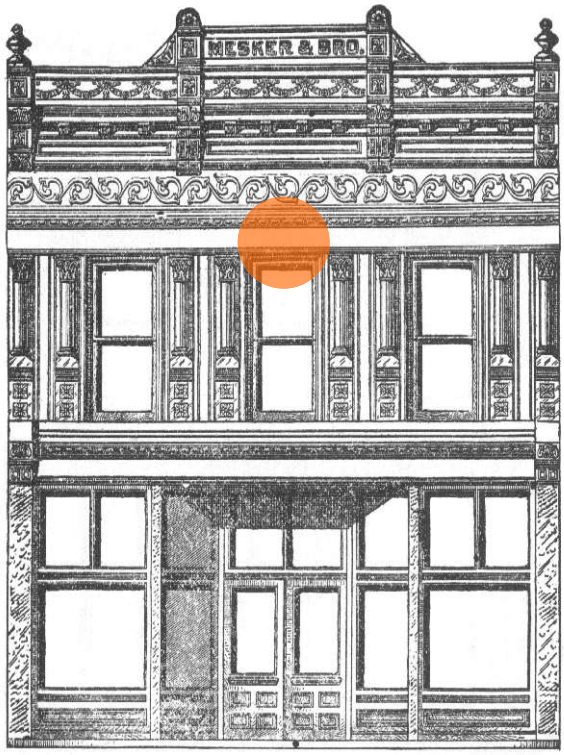


GEORGE L. MESKER & CO.

MESKER BROTHERS IRON WORKS

WINDOW HOODS

Mesker facades were not limited to those clad entirely in sheet metal. In fact, most of the companies' contracts were for "brick fronts," where an upper story of masonry was adorned with a galvanized sheet-metal cornice and structural iron window caps (now known as hoods).



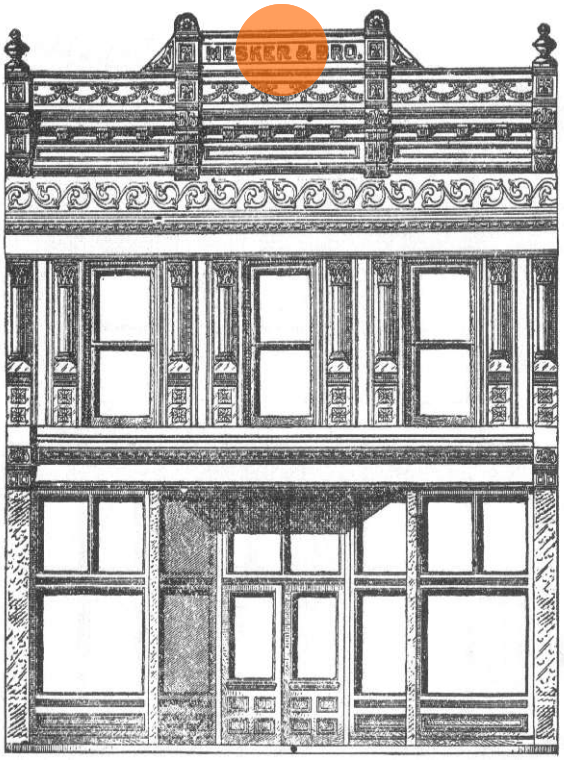
GEORGE L. MESKER & CO.

MESKER BROTHERS IRON WORKS

CORNICE PEDIMENT

The pediment is a crowning element of the cornice, typically centered on the vertical axis of the facade. The pediments were either triangular, rectangular or oval and often contained the original owner's name, date of construction or both. Because of their scale and prominent placement, the pediments often featured ornamentation that was not found elsewhere on the facade. Being prone to damage in strong winds, these do not always survive.

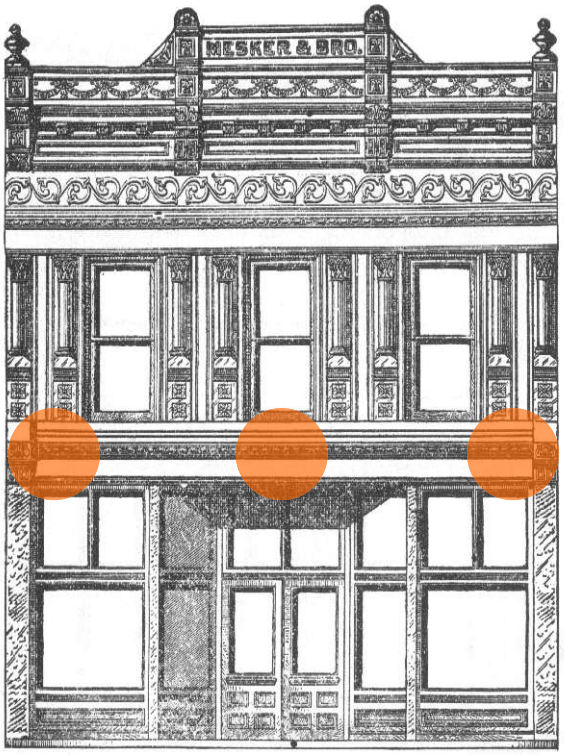
MESKER BROTHERS IRON WORKS



GEORGE L. MESKER & CO.

AWNINGS

The galvanized corrugated iron awnings were either self supporting or mounted with pipe column supports. Only a handful of bracket designs were utilized so when these survive, they are easy to identify.

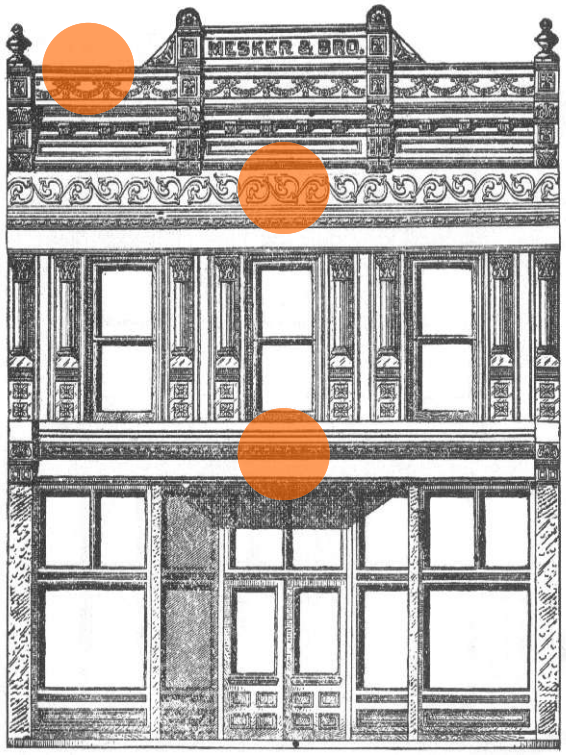


GEORGE L. MESKER & CO.

MESKER BROTHERS IRON WORKS

MISCELLANEOUS

Outside of the complete facades and individual components, both Mesker companies manufactured other building products such as stairs, railings, roof cresting, window guards, ventilator grates, just to name a few. These features are more difficult to recognize and identify, especially in the absence of other more standardized components. Below are just a few examples of these products.



GEORGE L. MESKER & CO.

MESKER BROTHERS IRON WORKS