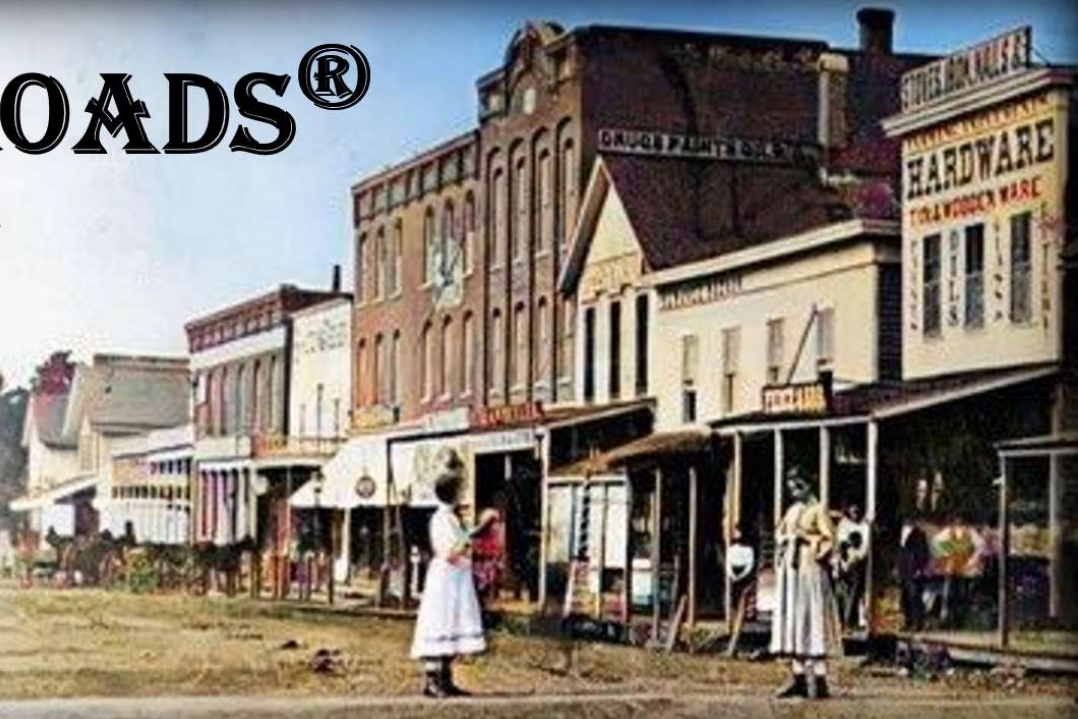


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Dean R. Karau

April 2026

Reprint of a book review appearing in the March-April 2026 ILLINOIS HERITAGE:

A Book Review:

WALTER THOMAS BAILEY:

STARING INTO THE YAWNING GULF OF ETERNITY.

By Dean R. Karau

Reviewed by Kathryn H. Anthony, Ph.D.

*Professor Emerita, ACSA Distinguished Professor AIA/ACSA Topaz Laureate
School of Architecture, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.*

An excerpt of Dr. Anthony's review:

"I was aware of Bailey's ground-breaking role as our first Black architecture graduate from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where, decades later, I served on the faculty for 40 years. . . . Yet it was only after reading Dean Karau's WALTER THOMAS BAILEY: STARING INTO THE YAWNING GULF OF ETERNITY, that I realized my prior knowledge was just the tip of the iceberg.

"Karau's masterful book chronicles Bailey's lifelong career in a way that no other publication has accomplished to date. It reflects an incredible amount of work to illuminate and document the entirety of Bailey's work over his lifetime, thus preserving his legacy for future generations."



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BOOK REVIEW

Walter Thomas Bailey: *Staring Into the Yawning Gulf of Eternity*

By Dean R. Karau
Kewanee History: Dusty Roads

Review by Kathryn H. Anthony

In 1904, well over a century ago, Walter Thomas Bailey (1881-1941) made history as the first Black architecture student to graduate with a bachelor's degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and in 1910 as the first to receive a master's degree in architecture from the same school.

Yet as one of only about ten Black students enrolled at Illinois, he was not permitted to live or eat on campus. On the other side of the country, Paul Revere Williams (1894-1980), a successful Black architect in Los Angeles who designed more than 3,000 buildings, was not permitted to eat by the pool or stay as a guest at the Beverly Hills Hotel, which he had redesigned. Williams designed scores of homes in neighborhoods with legal agreements that prevented Blacks from living there. Hattie McDaniel (1893 or 1895-1952), played Mammy in the blockbuster 1939 film, "Gone with the Wind," the first Black actor to receive an Academy Award. Yet she was not permitted to attend the world premiere, held at Atlanta's Loews Grand Theater, a whites-only venue.

In this respect, trailblazers Bailey, Williams, and McDaniel showed a remarkable ability to overcome adversity in the face of rampant racial discrimination that was all too common in their day.

Not long after he graduated with his bachelor's degree, in 1905 Bailey became the first Black architect licensed in the state of Illinois.

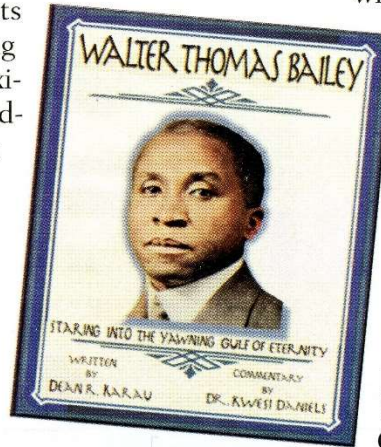
By the time he passed away at age 60, Bailey had become one of the most

prolific architects of his era, having designed approximately 100 buildings throughout Chicago, Memphis, and the South.

Yet until only recently his legacy largely remained in the shadows.

The creation of a new mural in 2018 celebrating Walter T. Bailey, located on the side of the B&B Printing Company building in Kewanee, Illinois sparked the curiosity of author Dean Karau, who shares the same hometown. Karau, a retired Minneapolis attorney, took it upon himself to find out more.

His search for information about Bailey revealed relatively little short of a 1998 article by Lee Bey in *Chicago Sun-times*, "Black Designer All But Forgotten," a 2002 master's thesis at the University of Illinois by Mikael



David Kriz, "Walter T. Bailey and the African-American Patron," and an all-too-brief Wikipedia entry. Karau then took on the role of detective, conducting meticulous historical research. Worth mentioning is that he did so over the course of a year or more without the aid of a research assistant,

research grant, or an academic or commercial publisher. For Karau, his mission to shine a light on Bailey became a labor of love, culminating in his recent book *Walter Thomas Bailey: Staring into the Yawning Gulf of Eternity*.

He also created some corresponding videos, including a fascinating 2025 lunch and learn presentation to the DuSable Black History Museum and Education Center, available at: <https://youtu.be/4vQ5omuPS0o?si=qP6ro-7L6xtkdsed>

Karau's comprehensive, well-written text, along with hundreds of illustrations, detailed maps identifying precise locations of Bailey's designs, a plethora of first-hand correspondence, historic announcements and press coverage of Bailey's buildings, all make for a fascinating read. In addition, commentary by Kwesi Daniels, Ph.D., Department Head of Architecture at Tuskegee University, is interspersed throughout the book, lending yet another valuable perspective.

1. WTB home, 4322 S. Prairie
2. WTB office in Overton Hygienic Bldg., 3619-3627 S. State
3. National Pythian Temple & WTB office, 3735-3745 S. State
4. First Church of Deliverance, 4315 S. Wabash
5. South Park Gardens / Ida B. Wells Project, bounded by South Parkway, 39th, Cottage Grove & 37th
6. Olivet Baptist Church, 31st & South Parkway
7. The Sunset Hills Country Club Clubhouse - Momence, IL (off map to south)
8. African & American Exhibit at the Century of Progress World's Fair (at Nat'l Pythian Temple - No. 3)
9. Rosenwald Community Bldg., 4632 S. Wabash
10. Morning Star Baptist Church, 3993 South Parkway (2-story brk. church)
11. Pilgrim Baptist Church, 3301 S. Indiana (renovation)
12. Harvest Baptist Church, 4546 S. Dearborn
13. Progressive Baptist Church, 3701 S. La Salle (2-story brk. church)
14. Crook Funeral Home, 4638 S. Indiana (2-story funeral home)



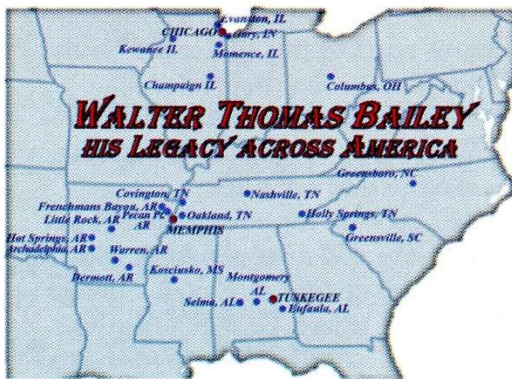
15. 4833 S. State (2-story add. brk. res.)
16. 11326 S. Ashland (2-story brk. res.)
17. 9951 Racine (remodel 1-story brk. add.)
18. 5436-38 S. State (remodel 1-story brk. add.)
19. 1414 W. 117th (1-story brk. service station)
20. 3921-23 Indiana (remodel res.)
21. 132 E. Garfield (1-story brk. store add.)
22. 2906 S. La Salle (1-story brk. store)
23. 11336 S. May (res.)
24. 4545 S. Vincennes (alterations)
25. 8229 S. Loomis (remodel res.)
26. 7715 S. Marshfield (1-story brk. res.)
27. 6132 S. Loomis (1½-story brk. res.)
28. 1407 W. 61st (1-story brk. res.)
29. 6144 S. Loomis (1½-story brk. res.)
30. 9246 S. Michigan (2-story brk. res.)
31. 6120 S. Loomis (1½-story brk. res.)
32. 11200 S. Trumbull (1-story brk. res.)
33. 6138 S. Loomis (1½-story brk. res.)
34. 4719-21 S. Drexel (3-story brk. apt. bldg. - altering 8 apts. into 9)
35. 9359 S. Wabash (1-story brk. res.)
36. 9204 S. Perry (1½-story brk. res.)



National Knights of Pythias Temple postcard.

business and apartment buildings and individual residences. His buildings while based in Memphis were mainly in Tennessee, Arkansas, and Mississippi, but also in Illinois, Indiana and Ohio.

Bailey moved to Chicago in the 1920's to design and build the Knights of Pytheus National Temple, in the center of the Bronzeville neighborhood. At that time it was the largest building in the world designed, built and financed by Black entrepreneurs. It was known as "the skyscraper of Bronzeville," and contained a 1500-seat theater, a seventh floor ballroom, a roof garden, stores and offices. The project was featured in Howard University's Exhibition of the work of Negro-Architects in 1931, in the school's Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. This project led to scores of other commissions throughout the Chicago region.



Notably, many public buildings that Bailey designed became the centerpiece of Black culture and community during the tumultuous Civil Rights era of the 1960's. In 1961, the First Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama served as a refuge and fortress for the Freedom Riders,

attacked by angry mobs as they integrated interstate travel on Greyhound buses.

I was aware of Bailey's groundbreaking role as our first Black architecture graduate from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where, decades later, I served on the faculty for 40 years. My familiarity with his work included a visit to the First Church of Deliverance on a National Organization of Minority Architects' conference tour in Chicago, serving as an invited symposium participant at Tuskegee University, and co-authoring a book chapter on the history of African American architecture alumni at the University of Illinois. I developed a new seminar on gender and race in contemporary architecture which I taught for over three decades. Yet it was only after reading *Dean Karau's Walter Thomas Bailey: Staring into the Yawning Gulf of Eternity*, that I realized my prior knowledge was just the tip of the iceberg.

Karau's masterful book chronicles Bailey's lifelong career in a way that no other publication has accomplished to date. It reflects an incredible amount of work to illuminate and document the entirety of Bailey's work over his lifetime, thus preserving his legacy for future generations.

The book is available at Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/WALTER-THOMAS-BAILEY-STARING-ETERNITY/dp/B0DHH1JSDP>

Kathryn H. Anthony, Ph.D., is Professor Emerita, ACSA Distinguished Professor AIA/ACSA Topaz Laureate School of Architecture, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

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