



GILBERT'S RESIDENTIAL WORK VARIED IN DESIGN ELEMENTS

My house is to me as my castle. – Sir William Staunford (1567)

St. Paul architect Tom Blanck, currently involved in a project to identify and catalog the work of Cass Gilbert, has found that during the twenty-seven years of its existence, Cass Gilbert's St. Paul office produced more than 160 designs that took three-dimensional form in stone, brick and wood. About half of them were residences.

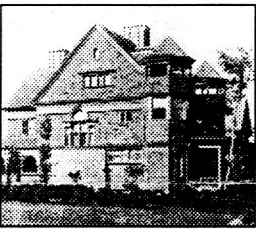
These homes range from rather simple cottages to large multi-storied structures with special attention to intricate detail. They came in a variety of architectural styles. As Blanck notes in a treatise on Gilbert's work, "He took design to mean the creation of original patterns, and he thus avoided frequent repetition of design idiom and detail."



471 Ashland

sky-blue glass set in white plaster of paris surround the opening in the front entry fireplace to stunning effect, and is evidence of Gilbert's sense of whimsy.

In 1884, Gilbert designed a house at 3 Crocus Hill for J.Q. Adams of the Boston Realty Company. A brilliant, eclectic design, the house was published in Picturesque St. Paul in 1888 and in architectural journals of the era. It featured Queen Anne massing with Richardsonian Romanesque detailing in the stone and arches at grade level. Windows and window trim were Colonial Revival. The shingled second story was intended to be set off by stucco in the third-story gables, but in its construction, shingles replaced the stucco.



3 Crocus Hill

Blanck's treatise provides the following brief descriptions of architectural styles and interesting details found in some of the "Castles" designed by Gilbert for his clients.

The Elizabeth Gilbert (1882-84) house at 471 Ashland Avenue was Gilbert's first independent work, and many features of the Shingle-style design are original, especially the detailing of the large east and west gables and front dormers. The porch details derive from Richardsonian Romanesque, and Queen Anne windows in the attic provide important geometric accent to the shingle surfaces. Squares of

Gilbert's most exquisite urban Shingle-style design is the D.W. McCourt residence (1887) at 161 Cambridge Avenue. Although modest in size, it is a well-integrated design that successfully occupies a site where all the building's facades are highly visible. The exterior displays a skillful juxtaposition of volumes and voids. Portions of the first floor are stucco, and the fireplace is exposed on the exterior for volumetric effect. Porch posts are round and shingled in a rather personal adaptation of the Shingle style.

Window design provides one of the most individual stylistic themes in Gilbert's residential architecture. Each building he designed has one or more unique windows, generally crafted in clear leaded-glass. The field of these windows is sometimes regular, sometimes irregular, and sometimes abstract. In the McCourt house, the device is an interlocking pattern of ovals that could be mistaken for modern. The stairway window is influenced by Queen Anne, and the wood muntins divide a double border of small rectangular panes on the perimeter, while the center is filled with a radial pattern of curving muntins.

Nearly all Gilbert's early residential work was in the Shingle style. Although he never abandoned the style, Gilbert began to add to his repertoire. His first departure was the A.J. Seligman house (1887) in Helena, Montana.



161 Cambridge

In the Seligman house, Gilbert employs a clearly stated American colonial element. The colonial wing combines the medieval overhang and diamond-shaped, leaded-glass windows of the seventeenth-century with the gable, bay, and siding of the eighteenth-century. The balance of the house is a mixture of American colonial and Queen Anne. By 1887, Colonial Revival was well established on the east coast, but it had not reached Helena, a city built largely in the Queen Anne vernacular. By designing one-half of the house in the accepted Queen Anne, Gilbert could experiment with the other half.

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RESTORED RATHSKELLER IS SETTING FOR SPECIAL SOCIETY EVENT



Dan Tarnoveanu, an artist and historic conservator, supervised the restoration of the Capitol rathskeller

Nearly a century after the grand opening of the Capitol eatery, diners are once again able to enjoy their meals as intended by Cass Gilbert, the building's celebrated architect.

Gilbert traveled extensively in Europe before he designed the Capitol, and it apparently was while on those jaunts that he picked up ideas for one of the features he would incorporate into his most famous Minnesota project (and several later designs).

The Minnesota Capitol cafeteria—first created as a full-service restaurant—was completed along with the rest of the building in 1905. The

design style replicated a German rathskeller (or beer hall), featuring freehand paintings of squirrels, eagles, grape leaves, and slogans in German along the room's arched ceilings.

But by the 1990s, a series of remodeling and repainting projects had erased the beer hall theme and left the cafeteria with as many as seven layers of paint covering the original artwork. Anti-German sentiment resulting from World War I led Gov. J.A.A. Burnquist to order in 1917 that all decorative design and German mottoes be painted over. The sentiments eroded over time, and in 1930, Gov. Theodore Christianson called for restoration of the German mottoes. However, soon after the work was started, the Women's Christian Temperance Union objected to the drinking mottoes, and several were altered. For example, one German motto, translated here into English, says, "After hearty eating you can do some hearty drinking." But there also is the warning, "More people get drowned in the cup than in the creek."

Once again, in 1937, the slogans were painted over during the first of many redecorating efforts. It wasn't until the late 1980s that restoration was back on the drawing board. Historical preservation artists began chipping away at the paint and plaster, but funding ran out and restorative efforts withered.

The cafeteria's luck changed about three years ago with a \$1.2 million legislative appropriation, and the German rathskeller was back on its way into the Capitol basement. An additional \$1.04 million was made available in 1997.

The second phase of renovation began in May 1998 and is now completed.

Dan Tarnoveanu was the conservator in charge of the renovation, spending hundreds of days on a 20-foot scaffold as he worked to make the arched ceilings resemble their German-influenced beginnings.

It took Tarnoveanu and his co-workers nearly six months to uncover the original designs and draw their replications. Paint samples were sent to Boston to be matched while artists constructed full-sized samples of the designs they would be replicating.

The work, Tarnoveanu says, is unique among projects in the United States, but the techniques are common in Europe, including those used in restoring artwork in the Cistine Chapel.

The Cass Gilbert Society has arranged a special evening in the rathskeller on Tuesday, January 25. The event, for members and non-members, will offer a close-up view of the rathskeller restoration work, as well as tours of other architectural features in the Capitol. The guided tours will begin at 5:30 p.m. and at 6:30 p.m. Refreshments will be served in the rathskeller. There will be a modest charge for the event, \$12 per person for members, \$16 per person for non-members. Reservations must be made in advance. Additional information and a reservation form, with a deadline date, are provided on an insert mailed with this newsletter.

(Information and photo for this article provided in part and with permission by *Session Weekly*, a publication of the Minnesota House of Representatives.)

AT THE END OF THE YEAR PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By Jean Velleu

Our first "official" year as the Cass Gilbert Society, Inc. has come to an end and I cannot help but marvel at two things:

- 1) the incredibly talented volunteers who came forward to make up our Board and help in other ways.
- 2) how their talents meshed together as they gave of themselves in this new community effort.

The credit for our accomplishments this year goes to these dedicated professional people who made things happen. At our first meeting we had architect Tom Blanck and scholar and writer, Paul Larson, encouraging us to help the community learn about and appreciate Cass Gilbert. There was some kind of special energy that surrounded us. But when we held our first meeting with ambitious ideas of what we might do, I remember being very concerned about how we would get funding. Who would write the proposals? I did not know that Linda Bjorklund had that as her expertise and offered it freely at the first meeting. Her successful approach to the Minnesota Humanities Commission soon allowed us to begin the Lecture Series.

I had little hope that Membership Chair, Eva Schnasse's visit with a member of the Butler family at a reception would invite a proposal that allowed us start-up money and an even greater amount to go toward research on Gilbert residences. Of course we could not access this money until we could assure these Foundations we had our 501(c)3 in place. Along came attorney Jim Noonan, who prepared for us an outstanding presentation that made it possible to have it in hand in July of '99. Don Woods seemed to know just how to approach the appropriate sources for a number of these written about Gilbert's work. So we began a scholarly library that could be accessed for research. Don's expertise helped in many other ways as he suggested "how best to do things." Nancy Peterson started clipping and pasting to record our history and there was lots of it, considering how generous our press coverage was from the Star Tribune and the Pioneer Press.

Dewey Berscheid did the newsletter with the ease of the seasoned journalist that he is. All four issues were highly readable and well done.

John Lyndon still asks, "How did you find me?" John took over with his computer expertise when Ellen Fridinger resigned as Treasurer and has made our financial lives much easier.

Sharon Schwarz paid attention to a lot of detail to organize the Lecture Series locations and then to introduce each lecturer with a smile and winning words. Sharon and Ardis Noonan, with the help of Linda and Tom Blanck, masterminded a five year plan for Programming that we will be able to draw on for years to come.

At the early stages we did not know how the community would receive us. We soon welcomed as many as 200 at one of our lectures. We are most appreciative to Thomas O'Sullivan and Carolyn Kompelien for freely giving their expertise about Cass Gilbert and the Capitol for our first lecture and Tom Blanck for our fourth lecture about the German Presbyterian Church. The lectures by biographer Geoffrey Blodgett and Gail Fenske were funded by the Minnesota Humanities Commission. We appreciate Geoffrey and Gail's willingness to travel here to share their knowledge of Cass Gilbert, the person, and

his most famous building, the Woolworth Building in New York. All of the lectures were held at the University Club with a generous space donated by John Rupp. Each session was videotaped by Dick Velleu. We all enjoyed Herb Grika's wonderful photographic book presentation about the Capitol held at Tom Blanck's residence. Many others have contributed generous time, especially Marilyn Vogel. Thank you to each one I have failed to mention.

The first of our Cass Gilbert architectural tours was a well-received fundraiser. Each tour was led by an architect and ten Gilbert houses were featured along with historical notes of the times. We thank Linda Bjorklund for organizing this event.

As we enter the millennium year we look forward to sharing with the community more and more information about this most famous Minnesotan who left us a broad range of buildings demonstrating his superb skill in bringing together architectural elements in a most beautiful way. His sense of scale and proportion in presenting these designs was and is an outstanding feature. Cass Gilbert was a unique talent who largely went unsung in his own time. It is appropriate that we honor him now, that we look back and document all he has given us in Minnesota and also look beyond our own state to appreciate his magnificent contribution to the nation.

— Gilbert's Residential Work continued from front —



Helena, Montana

Gilbert designed two houses for W.H. Lightner. The first, 322-24 Summit Avenue (1886), is a double house designed for Lightner and his law partner, G.B. Young. While decidedly Richardsonian in style, Gilbert introduces several eclectic details to the brownstone building, including: a heavily carved gable, diamond-patterned carvings on stone railings, and a massive shingled dormer that carries two of his favorite details—a sawtooth edge on the lowest row of shingles and a raised, curvilinear design that is a very large version of an eyebrow window. The interior is less eclectic; although, on different facades and different floors the windows vary in style and design. Some have decorative wood muntins; others are leaded-glass. This window variation is a feature of both houses.

The house next door at 318 Summit Avenue (1893) is the most Richardsonian of all Gilbert's efforts and one of the most poetic. Its great success is the integration of every element of the facade into the whole. The purple Sioux quartzite is banded with Kettle River sandstone. The detailing—including the brick pattern work under the eaves, layered masonry and moldings, and bands of windows between columns—is exquisite.

The J. Dittenhofer residence (1898-99) at 705 Summit Avenue is Gilbert's first residential work in the Beaux-Arts style. The exterior is yellow limestone in a random ashlar pattern, capped with a green tile roof. Following no particular European or American prototype, this building displays a great amount of imported detail. The lavish interior is Renaissance, a version of the Villard townhouses done in wood.

The entire front facade of the Livingstone house (1898) at 339 Summit Avenue is derived from a Venetian Renaissance residence transported to an American setting. In Venice, the vaporetto would have pulled up to steps coming out of the canal to the loggia. Here the loggia is a porch that overlooks Summit Avenue—in a sense, the Grand Canal of St. Paul.

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