



Winter Lecture 2001: The Seligman House

*Note the location change for this lecture.
Commodore Hotel, 79 Western Ave. North,
February 20th, 7:00 PM. (just north of the
University Club on Western Ave.)*

Cass Gilbert's Seligman residence in Montana is alive and well after 113 years, surviving an earthquake in 1935. The restoration of its 22 rooms is nearly completed under its present owners, Samantha Sanchez and Tim Coulter. The couple, who relocated to Helena, Montana from Washington, D.C. a decade ago, will talk about their residence in the context of Gilbert's Montana work. They will describe their restoration project as well as their success in researching the history of their house. The lecture series, sponsored by the Minnesota Humanities Commission, is open to all; there is a nominal fee for nonmembers of the Cass Gilbert Society.



Interior of the Seligman Residence, Helena, Montana

Helena-St. Paul: An Historical Connection

By Tom Blanck

In 1883, the Northern Pacific Railroad, drove its golden spike at Garrison Montana, near Helena. Headquartered in St. Paul since 1887, the Northern Pacific connected its line from St. Paul to the west coast through Helena. The line started as a hurriedly completed claptrap of temporary bridges and poorly built track which required decades of improvements. A spectacular three-train caravan made its way from St. Paul to the ceremony near Helena with national and international dignitaries, as well as prominent Minnesotans. The most notable historic figure present was former President, U. S. Grant.

The U. S. Government had granted Northern Pacific extensive real estate along its line and the railroad actively worked to develop cities, industries and farming along this route. In 1882 while building lines approaching Helena, the Northern Pacific sold rights it had acquired from the government to the Seligman interests of New York for an already operating gold mine

near Helena. The \$95,000 sale price provided funds that the railroad quickly expended on construction of lines, closing the gap toward its golden spike.

Five years after this sale, Cass Gilbert produced his largest and most remarkable house in the west for A. J. Seligman. Cass Gilbert and his staff spent considerable time in Helena while the house was being built.

Other architects in St. Paul also sought to capitalize on the boom opportunities the new rail line fostered. Probably the most successful in this marketing effort were St. Paul Architects Hodgson and Stem. Stem was a keen competition for Gilbert in St. Paul; each would become national leaders in the design of railroad depots. A number of Stem's designs replaced depots designed by Cass Gilbert. Hodgson and Stem' designs for Helena include a bank, a charming shingle-style house—the Ono Fino Terrace (*see illustration*) named after a Montana gold mine, and the 1887 Lewis and Clark County Courthouse. In 1908 they designed the still extant railroad station in Helena.

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Message from The President

By Jean Velleu

Spending part of December in New York meant that I got to see the Cass Gilbert exhibit: "Inventing the Sky-line" at the New York Historical Society. It was impressive, with many sketches and drawings not shown before. Letters, both personal and business, showed Gilbert's skill with detail. The statement was made that Cass Gilbert saved so many of his papers they would stack higher than the Woolworth Building if piled up. I regret you couldn't all see it. We do have the publication about the show in our Library and it will be available to you soon.

Our membership renewal is continuing at a most positive rate and suggests to us that you are happy with what we have been able to present to you so far in our young organization's life. Our plans for 2001 look even more exciting. If you have not renewed please send along your check or if you know someone who might enjoy being a member encourage them to join us. We would welcome them. More members means more funds to work with and more choices in programming. We want to serve our members well.

Do you notice anything different about this newsletter? We have made changes in the format and will now be presenting camera-ready copy to the printer. This new procedure will save money for the Society. Let us know how you like the results. We are truly grateful for the efforts of everyone who is involved with the newsletter as well as the many other volunteers who help so willingly at our lectures and events.

As we look ahead to this year I urge you to mark your calendars, if only tentatively, with the dates you will see suggested on our calendar of events (see page 5). Our architectural stroll on May 13, we hope will include as many as 4 Gilbert churches in the neighborhood. It should be fun to compare and contrast them. Of course, if enough of you are interested to make a trip to NYC worth planning that will be a major event for those who can go. And for those who can't, we still have a day bus trip planned for October. We will see Gilbert sights in Wisconsin and have lunch. All this plus our scholarly lectures in February, April, September and November. And who knows but what our catalog of research information might be published this year? That will be special whenever it happens.

Hope to see you at the February 20 lecture. (*Please note the location change to the Commodore Hotel.*) Who would have thought that Cass Gilbert traveled as far as Montana with his architectural skills? What got built there? So many segments to fit together. Gilbert was such a prolific designer. Are we anywhere near completing examination of the stack yet? ☒

How About A New York Trip?

Several members have asked us so we are exploring the idea. This is what we know so far. Through our contacts in NY we would see the Woolworth Building, the Customs House on Bowling Green, the New York Life Tower and more. We would stay in a reasonably priced hotel that serves breakfast, travel the most expedient way with our guide, go for a long weekend (perhaps June 7-8-9-10) at a cost of about \$1,000 per person.

We cannot plan further without knowing your interest. Please call Judy Pfankuck (651-227-4509) by March 1st to indicate your interest. ☒

What If?

By Charles Locks

Cass Gilbert's father, Samuel Augustus Gilbert, died in 1868 just two months after relocating his family to St. Paul from Zanesville, Ohio. His death came after a short illness, but years later Cass reported that his father's health had been broken as a result of his military service. At the time of his death, Samuel was forty-two; Cass was eight. The death of his father had a profound effect on Cass and his family, but the death of his grandfather may have ultimately had even a greater consequence for Cass and his family.

Samuel's father, Charles Campion Gilbert—a Yale graduate and the first mayor of Zanesville—died when Samuel was eighteen, a few years after the death of Samuel's mother. Samuel—third of seven children—desired to become a farmer. It was not a lofty goal for a boy with a prominent father and an older brother who was a cadet at West Point. His father, however, acceded to the wish of his son and declared that he intended to purchase a farm. Charles also stated that he planned to give up his house in Zanesville and move to the farm. He expected that he would remain a widower there for several years more until he could get most of his children out of the house and on their own before remarrying.

Charles died before he was able to close the sale on the property he had selected. George Cass (later a director and president of the Northern Pacific Railway) became Samuel's guardian. Samuel had—in his own words, "a good common school education but no profession." He found employment with the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey for fifteen dollars per month. He worked surveying the Gulf of Mexico coast for most of six years, saving his money so he could afford to marry, and in the summer of 1854, he married Elizabeth Fulton Wheeler.

When Cass Gilbert became famous, there was no shortage of historians and genealogists connecting his family

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(What If?, continued)

to all the noted Gilberts from Devonshire, England (Sir Humphrey, Adrian, Francis, Sir John, Sir William, and Alfred). It is ironic that Samuel Gilbert—writing to an uncle in the year of his marriage, an uncle he had never met—was ignorant of his own parents' dates and places of birth. He knew generally that they were born near Hebron, Connecticut, and his grandfather had been a colonel in the Revolutionary War, but he was looking for precise information to include on monuments he was planning for their gravesites.

While working for the Coast Survey, Samuel received a medal from the U.S. Congress for rescuing shipwrecked sailors off the Texas coast. During the Civil War, he was known by his men as "Iron Sam," and he commanded a victorious battle at Lewisburg, Virginia. He was credited with preventing the State of Kentucky from seceding by breaking up a secret meeting of the legislature, threatening to arrest the entire legislature if it did not immediately disband. He was brevetted the rank of Brigadier General and was recommended for promotion to Major General. After the war, he was invited by the Republican State Committee of Ohio to accept the nomination for governor, which he declined because of poor health.

A man who had no greater ambition in life than to become a farmer, Samuel Gilbert rose to a level of prominence because of his military service, a uniquely American tradition as old as the nation. Still, speculative and intriguing questions abound: Would Samuel Gilbert have become a war hero and general if he had moved to a farm near Zanesville? Would Samuel have ever moved his family to St. Paul if he were a farmer and landowner in Ohio? Would Elizabeth Wheeler Gilbert and her four sons have been accepted into St. Paul society if her late husband had not been a military general and war hero? Would Cass Gilbert, growing up on an Ohio farm, have ever become an architect? ☒

Mark Your Calendars

Please put these dates on your calendar so that you will be able to join us. The lectures all begin at 7:00 PM and are held at the University Club of St. Paul, unless otherwise noted.

Tuesday, February 20, 2001 - Lecture, Commodore Hotel, 7:00 PM

Tuesday, April 17, 2001 - Lecture

Sunday, May 13, 2001 - Architectural Stroll

Tuesday, September 18, 2001 - Lecture

October Wisconsin Bus Tour: Details to be Determined

Tuesday, November 13, 2001 - Lecture

(Helena-St. Paul, continued)

In 1985, Cass Gilbert entered and won the competition for the design of the Montana Capitol. As the result of political intrigue his design was never built; after several years he did receive the \$2,5000 award for winning this competition. The Montana Capitol opened in 1902. It was subject to several attempts to rebuild it or expand its wings. Though never successful, Gilbert sought these commissions for decades.

Gilbert's design for the Montana Capitol is shown in the middle illustration of Gilbert capitol designs in this newsletter. So similar was the design to that of the Minnesota State Capitol that this rendering was issued mistakenly as a postcard identifying it as the Minnesota Capitol. Gilbert's design for the Montana State Capitol was similar in massing to the Minnesota Capitol. However, it incorporates two major elements seen in his design for the Arkansas State Capitol, also shown—namely arched windows in the drum below the dome, and a Greek pedimented entry porch popular in European monumental buildings of the day.

James Knox Taylor, Gilbert's early architectural partner also had a major influence on the city of Helena. In 1904, the U.S. Government acting through Taylor as Architect of the Treasury, built its Renaissance Revival Federal building. Today, as the City Hall, it remains a prominent feature in the historic core of Helena.

Two sons of Reverend Edward Neill moved to Montana. Neill was the founder of the Baldwin Academy, the preparatory school in Minneapolis that Cass Gilbert attended as a child. One of Neill's sons died at a young age due to an accident on his ranch in Montana; the other son, J. M. Neill, was a member of the Montana Bar Association, lived in Helena and published a newspaper. J. M. Neill was a life-long friend of Gilbert's and one of his most ardent supporters. Gilbert often visited him at his home in Helena, just opposite the Seligman house.

Other prominent St. Paulites with strong Montana connections were photographers F. Jay Haynes and his son Jack. In 1883, F. Jay Haynes was the official photographer for Chester Arthur's expedition in Yellowstone, as well as the Northern Pacific's golden spike ceremony. After 1895, he was the official photographer at Yellowstone. Haynes maintained his primary studio on the northeast corner of Selby and Virginia Streets in St. Paul until 1921. The studio was later moved to Bozeman. An extensive collection of Haynes' photographs can be seen at the Montana Historical Society in Helena.

Other St. Paulites who capitalized on the Montana boom included Yerza Brothers Grocery Wholesalers, Sanitary Dairy, and Goodkinds Stores. The Boston N. W. Realty Company, with considerable St. Paul holdings, speculated in Montana warehouses and small town hotels, often sending Cass Gilbert to look at their investments. ☒

Illustrations for This Issue



Oro Fiso Terrace, Helena, Montana
Architects: Hodgson & Stem, Competitors of Cass Gilbert

(Illustrations, continued page 4)

(Illustrations, continued)

Minnesota State Capitol, St. Paul, Minn.

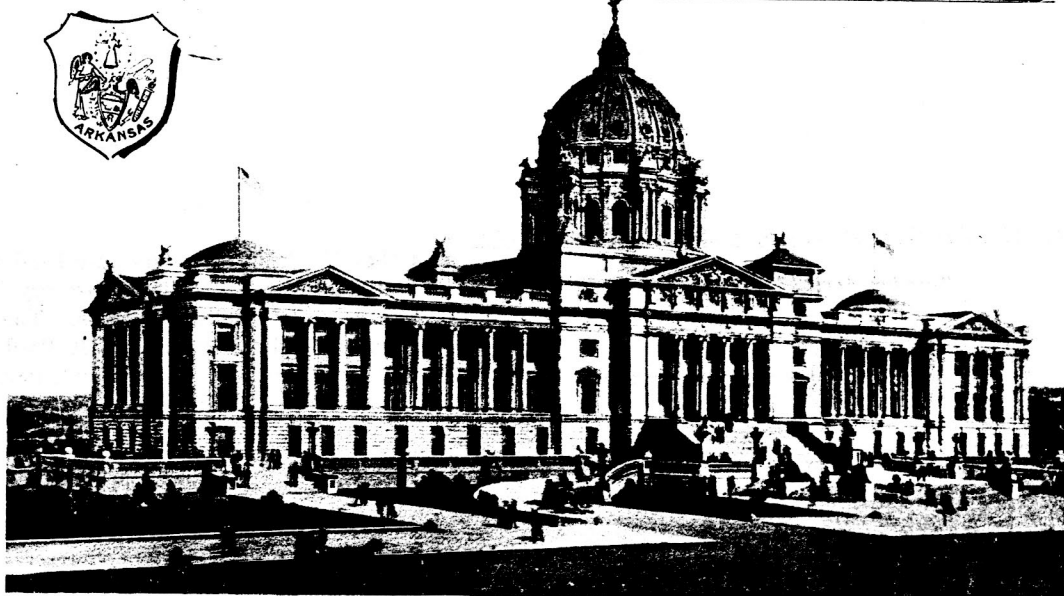


Minnesota State Capitol, St. Paul, Minn.

*State Capitol,
St. Paul, Minnesota*



*Gilbert's Proposed
Design for the Montana
State Capital — Never
Realized.*



State Capitol, Little Rock, Ark.

*Gilbert's design for
the State Capitol,
Little Rock, Arkansas*

