

November Lecture Topic: The D. H. Watson House

In 1993, when John Neess and Mark Thomas first inspected property at Hall Avenue and Delos Street, on Saint Paul's West Side, it was the pair of roosting screech owls in the red oak tree that first caught their attention. The house itself, a boxy affair covered by asbestos shingles, did not strike them as distinctive. It was the kitchen, complete with chimney and attached scullery, that convinced them that the home suited their domestic tastes. A contractor's comment that the house design suggested to him the influence of New York architects McKim, Mead and White, provided the first inkling of a house "authorship."

Thomas' extensive research into public and private records of the Watson family, who built the house, revealed nothing about authorship of the house design. Indeed, at times he thought that the house had been designed by the building contractor, Hans Milstedt, as he went along. It was only in the summer of 2000, when Thomas Blanck appeared at the back door, that the owners seriously considered the possibility that



Watson House, circa 1910



Watson House, current

their house and barn had been built in 1886 according to a plan, one coming out of the office of Saint Paul's most illustrious architect, Cass Gilbert.

Thomas' collaboration with Blanck quickly produced copies of a complete set of plans. Rehabilitation of the house now proceeds according to the original design. The history of the Watson family shed light upon a possible early connection between Cass Gilbert and Dwight Watson, whose family was deeply involved in the drafting of the Minnesota State Constitution and its early legislative history as a state.

Thomas and Neess will present the story of their relationship to the house at 402 Hall Avenue, the latest discovery of a Gilbert (and Taylor) design, possibly the first to come out of the partnership of Gilbert and Taylor. The complete set of plans will be available for inspection after the presentation. (Thank you to John Neess and Mark Thomas for contributing information for this article.) ■

Please note change of lecture location:

The lecture will be held at the Commodore Hotel, 75 Western Ave. North (just north of the University Club on Western Ave.) at 7:00 PM, Tuesday, November 13, 2001. The Minnesota Humanities Commission sponsors the 2001 Lecture Series. Admission is free to members of the Cass Gilbert Society. There is a nominal fee for nonmembers.

Message from the President

By Jean Velleu

What can be said about the horrific events of September 11, 2001, staged against the civilized world. We all feel the terrible pain of it. We need to listen to the stories of the survivors to help them overcome their unbelievable trauma. We need to grieve with the families of those who lost their loved ones. We and they will never be the same. But how else can we help besides give blood and reflect on our own lives and actions so that suffering around the world can be lessened somehow? There is much to be done.

At our September 25th lecture we put a basket on the table for anyone who wanted to donate funds through the Cass Gilbert Society for the American Red Cross. Many of you were generous givers and the Board will consider adding to this amount of \$165,100 at our next Board Meeting and send the total amount to the Red Cross. Thank you all for your sensitivity in uplifting the spirits of those who are suffering the most. Every bit will help.

Of course, we are thankful that the Cass Gilbert buildings in New York City were not irretrievably damaged. The West Street building, directly across the street from the WTC was most damaged. It was going through renovation at the time. It is not known if it will be restored. The New York Lawyers Association Building also suffered some damage and the Woolworth Building had some broken windows. These are small things compared to the devastating loss of lives and destruction of the WTC. This information about the Cass Gilbert buildings came to us from Steven Flanders, one of our recent lecturers.

We are asked to return to our normal lives. What we now consider normal will be a consideration for each of us to make. What kind of a world can we determine to work toward that will be safe for our children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews and all others? And for *all* children of the world. Wouldn't it be appropriate for each of them to know of the Custom House and the Woolworth Building and other great buildings of the world with no worry about starvation or security? What is it that really needs to happen in our lives and the nation's policy to move toward a peaceful world? I find myself thinking about this more and more. It's a big order but each small step is important. Decide for yourself, take action. Cass Gilbert, who created beautiful things for the world, by his nature, would have wanted no less.

The Cass Gilbert Society will go on with its activities. Dr. Barbara Christen will be rescheduled in 2002. **It is important that you renew your membership now so you can join us to hear her and be a part of our activities next year. Your renewal now will carry you through 2002. Thank you for your support.** ■

Cass Gilbert's Six (or less) Degrees of Separation

Because of the tragic events in New York and Washington, D. C., on September 11, 2001, Dr. Barbara Christen postponed her visit to Saint Paul and her lecture to the Cass Gilbert Society. Charles Locks, former Newsletter editor and co-author of an essay in the forthcoming volume, *Cass Gilbert, Life and Work: Architect of the Public Domain*, edited by Dr. Christen, spoke instead.

Mr. Locks presented an intriguing account of Cass Gilbert's architectural education, work experience, and early career. He explored the friendships and connections among Gilbert, Clarence H. Johnston, and James Knox Taylor, all fellow Saint Paulites at M.I.T., detailing how the future careers of all three were affected. Gilbert's early work experience with the firm of McKim, Mead, and White in New York gave him important client contacts that he was able to put to use when he returned to Saint Paul in 1882 to set up his own firm.

The financier and railway promoter Henry Villard was a client of particular importance. Villard had commissioned a group of town houses in New York City from McKim, Mead, and White while Gilbert was working there. Gilbert was able to capitalize on that connection to obtain a commission to design a series of railroad depots and other facilities for Northern Pacific railroad in 1882-1884. McKim, Mead, and White discussed the creation of a western office, with Gilbert in charge, to undertake further railroad projects. When Villard's empire collapsed into bankruptcy, that idea was abandoned. Instead Gilbert joined forces with James Knox Taylor in 1885. The two designed about seventy buildings together, before separating.

In 1897, Taylor was appointed head of the Office of the Supervising Architect of the United States Treasury, a position that gave him the responsibility for the design of hundreds of federal buildings throughout the United States, including courthouses and post offices. As Supervising Architect, he was on the jury that chose the architect to design the United States Custom House in New York and was influential in awarding the commission to Gilbert. The design of the Custom House enabled Gilbert to establish a New York office and begin to develop a national reputation. That, in turn, resulted in Gilbert's commissions for what were then the world's tallest building, the Woolworth Building completed in 1913, and the world's largest building, the Brooklyn Army Terminal completed in 1918.

Taylor, by contrast, remained in the Supervising Architect's post until 1912, a position which made him "the country's most important, least known architect." Unlike the other two, Johnston did not have national ambitions. Instead he established a long-lived practice based in Saint Paul that was active throughout Minnesota and included many projects for the state government and the state education institutions. ■

— Marjorie Pearson

Cass Gilbert Society
Nominating Committee

The Mission of the Cass Gilbert Society, Inc. is to preserve and enhance the nation's cultural heritage through advancing scholarship and appreciation of Cass Gilbert's contribution to American Architecture.

October 15, 2001

To: Members of the Cass Gilbert Society
 From: Jean Velleu, President
 Re: Your recommendations for Officers and Committee Chairs for year 2002.

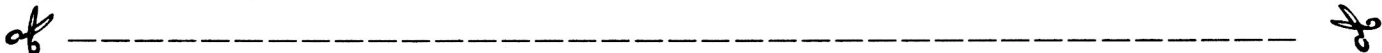
Our Society is now in its third year and, in keeping with our bylaws, it is soon time for election of officers. I have again asked Jim Noonan to chair the Nominating Committee.

We wish to broaden the participation of the entire membership, so the Nominating Committee is requesting your recommendations for members to be considered for leadership positions. If you know of a member who has an interest in or talent for leadership in the Cass Gilbert Society, please provide the name and indicate the office or committee for which you are recommending him/her. Please feel free to nominate yourself. A few words, about qualifications, on the back of this form will be helpful. Thank you for your part in building a strong Cass Gilbert Society. Mail information to Jim Noonan, 339 Summit Ave. St Paul, 55102.

Here is information which may help you make recommendations to the Nominating Committee:

- A. List of current officers and committee chairs.
- B. List of offices to be filled. Please add your recommendations for additional offices and/or committees.
- C. List of current members available to you on request. Call 651 298-1127.

Return the form below to: Jim Noonan, 339 Summit Ave. St Paul 55102 by November 1, 2001.



The Nominating Committee welcomes your suggestions.
Please mail by Oct 31, 2001 to Jim Noonan, 339 Summit Ave, St Paul 55102

A. Current Officers of the Board

President Jean Velleu
 Vice President Marjorie Pearson
 Secretary Mary Michael Connolly
 Treasurer John Lynden
 Member At Large Eva Schnasse

B. Recommendations for 2002

President _____
 Vice Pres _____
 Secretary _____
 Treasurer _____
 Mem at Lg _____

Current Committee Chairs (apptd by the President)

Chair, Fund Raiser Linda Bjorklund
 Editor, Newsletter Sheila Meyer
 Chair, Lecture Series Lana Mahoney
 Chair, Special Events vacant position

Chairs Recommended for 2002

Fund Rsing _____
 Editor, NL _____
 Lecture Series _____
 Special Events _____

This past year the officers of the Board & committee chairs have met at 5:30 PM on the second Thursday of each month. Meeting time will be determined by the new Board depending on the most convenient time for the majority.

Cass Gilbert Society
550 Portland Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55102

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**To: Jim Noonan
339 Summit Avenue
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102**

A Special Poem

Mrs. Stephen W. Shea (Gail), a CGS member who lives in Philadelphia (she is the daughter of member Alice Freeman) sent us this interesting poem that she saw on display when visiting the Cass Gilbert exhibit at the New York Historical Society. Gail found the poem to be so interesting she copied it down on a piece of paper right then and there. She sent it to us because Gilbert kept it in his office and she thought we might all enjoy a little piece of Gilbert lore.

We share it here with all of you. It's not difficult to believe that this particular poem about work was one of Gilbert's favorites. He was a hard worker himself.

"Work"

*Work for pleasure
Paint or sing or carve
The thing thou lovest, tho the body starves
Who works for glory misses oft the goal
Who works for money, coins his very soul
Work for the works sake, then, and it may be
That these things shall be added unto thee.*

— Kenyon Cox

Special Events Volunteer Needed

We need someone who likes to work in big bursts of energy for a short time and then rest for a while. If you would like to be a part of our energetic Board and/or **only** be in charge of special events as they come along, we want to hear from you.

We want you to take charge of our Bus Tours, for example, or our walking tours of Cass Gilbert sites in the historic neighborhood that we have held each spring. All you need to qualify is an ability to organize details and follow through. You will have fun and learn some history besides?

Call Jean Velleu (651-298-1127) and volunteer.

Thank You to Newsletter Contributors

Each issue of this newsletter is a group effort. Without the help of volunteers, the project would be much more difficult to accomplish on schedule.

For this issue, thank you to:

Elayne Donahue, Marjorie Pearson, Gail Shay, and Jean Velleu.

New Richmond Bus Tour

The tour was a huge success, 33 members of the Society spent a lovely Fall day touring the beautiful Cass Gilbert House in New Richmond and the historically significant staircase in The Grand Garage in Stillwater. Watch for a complete review and pictures in our next newsletter. ☐

Membership Renewal Time

Please use the form on page 5 of this newsletter to renew your membership for the year 2002.

Do it now so you won't forget. And there is a gift for early renewal. See the form for all the details.

Thank you!

Mark Your Calendars

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

*Tuesday, November 13, 2001 - Lecture:
Owners of the D. H. Watson house located in West
St. Paul, MN*

*2002 Lecture dates to be announced in the
next newsletter*

Cass Gilbert Society

Membership Renewal Time

Free Gift Offer for Early Renewal!

The end of December is our annual membership renewal time – but we'd like you to renew *now*. That way you can avoid the Holiday rush and eliminate one thing from your "to do" list. And we can avoid sending you a renewal notice. We all win!!

For all renewals received by December 31, 2001 (for the year 2002) we will send you a *gift packet of Cass Gilbert note cards*. These cards will come in handy for your holiday messages.

Note: members attend our lectures for free and receive a copy of our quarterly newsletter.

Thanks for making this process easier for everyone.

Please use the form below to renew your membership.



Membership Renewal Form for 2002

_____ Yes, I would like to renew my membership *

_____ I would like to gift the CHS this amount \$_____

Enclosed is my check for _____ \$25.00 / Household or _____ \$50.00 / Business

Please make your check out to the Cass Gilbert Society, Inc.

Member's Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone (_____) _____

* CGS is a non-profit tax exempt organization under section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

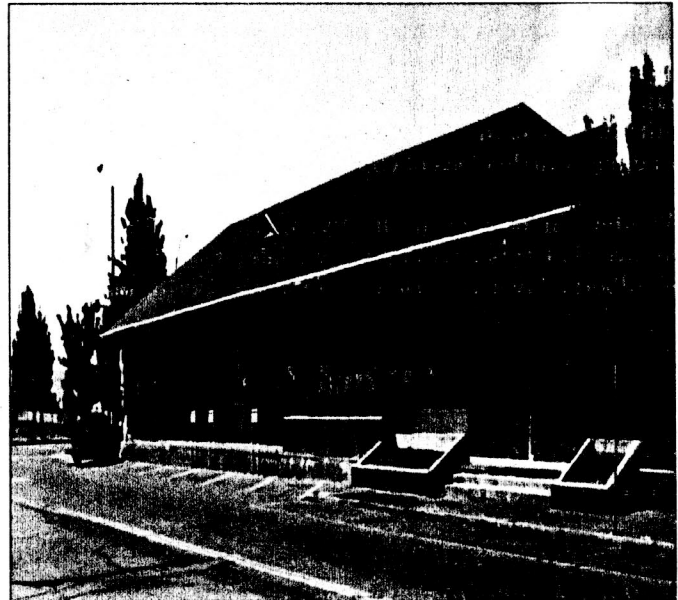
Send Check and form to: Cass Gilbert Society, Inc., 550 Portland Ave., St. Paul, MN 55102

Searching for Cass Gilbert in Yakima, Washington

When CGS member Paul Larson heard that business was taking me to Yakima, Washington, in July, he told me that Cass Gilbert had designed a railroad depot there, but he had no idea if it was still standing.

Yakima, situated about 140 miles southeast of Seattle on the eastern side of the Cascade Mountains, was largely a greating of the Northern Pacific railroad in 1885. Gilbert designed Yakima's third railroad depot, completed in 1898. It was a low rectangular brick structure dominated by hipped roof with broad overhanging eaves and a tall peaked-roof tower. The town and the needs of the railroad expanded so rapidly during the next ten years that Gilbert's depot was superceded in 1909 by another, grander depot, designed by the firm of Reed and Stem. Gilbert's depot became a railway express office. Both buildings still survive and have been converted to use as office, shops, and a restaurant.

The tall tower has been removed from Gilbert's depot, and changes have been made to the windows and doors, but the overall form of the building is still evident,. The railroad tracts still run along



Cass Gilbert Depot, Yakima, WA

side the two former depot buildings, but today the trains haul freight rather than pick up and discharge passengers. (My thanks to Charles Locks and Tom Blanck for further information on the Yakima depots.)

Of Note

Minnesota State Capitol Self-guided Tour

Interested in knowing more about the beautiful Minnesota State Capitol Building? Well, here is an easy way to learn.

The Minnesota Historical Society has published a self-guided tour brochure that contains information about the exterior and interior of the building. So with this brochure you can learn as you wander around the Capitol. The brochure includes floor maps to make it easier to find your way around. For more information call 651-296-2881. ■

NEW !!

**Cass Gilbert Society
Web Site**

www.cassgilbertsociety.org

Try it and let us know what you think.

CASS GILBERT SOCIETY, INC.

550 Portland Avenue
St. Paul, Minnesota 55102
651-298-1127

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Our Mission

To preserve and enhance the nation's cultural heritage through advancing scholarship and appreciation of Cass Gilbert's influence on American architecture.

The Cass Gilbert Society, Inc. is a non-profit tax exempt organization under Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Board Members

Jean Velleu, *President*

Marjorie Pearson, *Vice President*

Mary Michael Connolly, *Secretary*

John Lynden, *Treasurer*

Eva Schnasse, *Member at Large*

Dewey Berscheid Perrin Lilly

Linda Bjorklund Donald Woods

Membership News

- By becoming a Cass Gilbert Society member you will receive our quarterly newsletter as well as any special mailings, and you will also enjoy free admission to our lecture series. Please use the form below and mail your check today.
- CGS membership extends from January—December annually. The fees are: \$25.00 per year/household, \$50.00 per year/business. If you have membership questions please call Sheila Meyer (651) 222-4364.

Membership Form

_____ Yes , I would like to become a member of the Cass Gilbert Society *

_____ I would like to renew my membership; _____ I would like to gift the CHS this amount \$_____

_____ I am a member but would like a gift membership for a friend, listed below

Enclosed is my check for _____ \$25.00/ Household or _____ \$50.00 / Business made out to Cass Gilbert Society, Inc.

Member's Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone (_____) _____

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