



Organized to preserve the work of Minnesota's most important architect.

## Dr. Barbara Christen to Speak at February Lecture

**Note the location change for this lecture.**

The lecture will be held at the Commodore Hotel, 79 Western Ave. North, at 7:00 PM, Tuesday, February 5, 2002. (Just north of the University Club on Western Ave.) The Minnesota Humanities Commission sponsors the 2002 Lecture Series. Admission is free to members of the Cass Gilbert Society. There is a nominal charge for nonmembers.


Dr. Barbara Christen, research associate at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts/National Gallery of Art, will speak at the upcoming Cass Gilbert Society lecture. Dr. Christen's talk will address Cass Gilbert's design process for the Minnesota State Capitol approaches and the University of Minnesota campus plan and how they relate to his other comprehensive plans.

The plan for the capitol approaches marked Gilbert's early interest in master plans, later influencing his proposals for master plans for New Haven and Waterbury, Connecticut. The campus plan for the University of Minnesota went through a series of changes, affected in part by university politics. Nonetheless, the Minnesota project had an impact on his later ideas for the University of Texas and Oberlin College.

Dr. Christen is the co-editor with Stephen Flanders of Cass Gilbert, Life and Work: Architect of the Public Domain (W. W. Norton and Co., 2001), a collection of essays based on the symposium "Cass Gilbert, Life and Work: From Regional to National Architect." held in New York City, November, 1998. As the executive director for the Committee on Cass Gilbert projects, she

New  
**Cass Gilbert, Life and Work:  
Architect  
of the  
Public Domain**

*Dr. Barbara Christen and Stephen Flanders*



W. W. Norton and Co., 2001  
(Copies will be available at the February 5th lecture.)

organized the symposium, five exhibitions, a full-day walking tour, and special building tours and lectures.

Her talk for the Cass Gilbert Society is based in part on her contribution to the Norton volume; her dissertation Cass Gilbert and the Ideal of the City Beautiful: City and Campus Plans, 1900-1916, awarded in 1997 by the City University of New York; and her essay "The Architect as Planner: Cass Gilbert's Response to Historic Open Space" in Inventing the Skyline: The Architecture of Cass Gilbert (Columbia University Press, 2000).

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## Message from the President

By Jean Velleu

Those of you who were fortunate to hear Geoffrey Blodgett lecture to us about Cass Gilbert will surely regret, as do I, his untimely death in November, 2001. His lectures were most well received by our audiences. His knowledge was expansive and his informal manner of presentation was most appealing.

Fortunately for all of us he was able to finish his long awaited book before his death. His wife Jane says he was able to "see his book, to look through it and enjoy the pictures and the 'feel' of it."

It is not a large book. It is comfortable to hold and seems appropriate for the many intimate details Geoffrey relates. The Cass Gilbert Society has received a copy from the Minnesota History Center, publisher. It will be placed in our library where it will be available to our members.

I have enjoyed perusing the book and have learned some fascinating things. During the "hard times" Gilbert competed for the design of the New York Life Insurance Company's building in downtown St. Paul. He did not win the competition but was able to convince the winner, Daniel Willard, an architect with a New York firm and old friend from MIT, that Gilbert's firm was the best qualified to oversee the work. Soon after the building was completed in 1889 a large bronze American eagle was installed over the entrance. When the building was demolished 80 years later the eagle by Augustus Saint-Gaudens was moved to a new location in downtown St. Paul. This same eagle will soon be moved to Overlook Park next to the University Club. When you see the eagle there next summer you will know that Cass Gilbert saw it too, and probably had a hand in its placement over 100 years ago.

A sudden influx of capital from eastern investors allowed Cass Gilbert to win the commission for his successful Endicott Building (1888-89). I was interested in these dates because that was the same period he designed and supervised the building of Portland Terrace, where I live. It seems capital appeared and disappeared quickly at that time. A severe depression set in for all of St. Paul. It explains why the owner of Portland Terrace was forced to turn over the building to the bank and perhaps it is the reason Cass and Julia lived at 550 Portland Terrace for a time in 1889. They must have been experiencing hard times like everyone else. Perhaps the low rent or even partial payment of fees allowed them to live here inexpensively.

I hope you will seek out Geoffrey Blodgett's new book and enjoy it. Its focus on Gilbert's earlier work in St. Paul provides fresh insight into developments and struggles for growth in our own community. ■

New

## Cass Gilbert: The Early Years

by

Geoffrey Blodgett



W.W. Norton and Co., 2001

## Geoffrey Blodgett

*(This information was forwarded to the Cass Gilbert Society by Sharon Irish, author of Sources of American Architecture, Cass Gilbert: Architect, Modern Traditionalist, and a CGS lecturer.)*

**NOVEMBER 16, 2001**—Geoffrey Blodgett, Emeritus Robert S. Danforth Professor of History, Oberlin, died Thursday afternoon after a long struggle with cancer.

Professor Blodgett was a distinguished member of the Oberlin faculty from 1960 until his retirement in 2000. He exemplified all three of the qualities which the College most prizes in its faculty: he was a gifted and powerful teacher, a recognized scholar, and a fine citizen of Oberlin College and its surrounding community. He is a legend to generations of Oberlin students.

Geoffrey Blodgett was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Oberlin in the Class of 1953. He served in the U.S. Navy from 1953-55 and then attended Harvard where he received the A.M. in 1956 and the Ph.D. in 1961. His love for Oberlin brought him back here in 1960 as Instructor in History. He was appointed to the Robert S. Danforth Chair in History in 1988.

Blodgett is survived by his wife Jane Taggart Blodgett class of '54 and his three children, Lauren, Barbara and Sally. Funeral arrangements will be private and a memorial service will take place in December at a date to be announced.

The Blodgetts have established an endowed fund at the College, the Geoffrey T. Blodgett Endowed Memorial Scholarship Fund for students concentrating in American history and American architecture. ■

# The Bus Tour to New Richmond: A Review

The bus tour into Wisconsin on October 14, 2001, was a great success according to those aboard. None of us had been to the Hudson Country Club before and it rewarded us with a fine brunch, featuring a delicious variety of food, plus a wonderful view of the fall colors to the west.

As we made our way from Hudson to New Richmond, Tom Blanck favored us with background history of the town and provided us catalogues he and Charles Locks had developed earlier for the New Richmond Preservation Commission: New Richmond Walking Tour. This made our visit there doubly interesting as we were able to walk to many of the homes surrounding the Mosher home, our major destination. One of these homes belonged to Buffington, who designed the Minnesota Capitol that existed just before Cass Gilbert designed the current one. Nancy Peterson, a long time resident of New Richmond, also told us of other dignitaries who had lived in the town. Notably, the McNally family, who contributed so much to making the "city beautiful", (the McNallys were associated with the Minneapolis *Tribune*) and the Knowles brothers. Warren Knowles served as governor and Robert Knowles was in the Wisconsin state Legislature. Nancy pointed out both of their residences. One was impressed upon entering New Richmond that it was a prideful town with well kept homes surrounded by beautiful lawns. Perhaps the fact that a tornado in 1899, which destroyed much of the city and forced the home owners to rebuild, could account somewhat for its prime condition.

We were met at the Mosher home, (1887), by the gracious owners, Heidi Beckstrom and Phillip Connolly. They welcomed all 34 of us into their lovely entry hall and living room. Immediately the charm of the house made you want to move in. They told us how Heidi had long wanted a house of this era and they were happy to find it for sale. Tom Blanck pointed out interesting architectural features such as the triple fire places facing the living room, entry and study. This arrangement, plus the high ceilings, gave a wonderful open feeling to the first floor. The front entry had the special charm of open stairway, window seat and leaded windows for which Cass Gilbert was well known. A curved ceiling over the window seat suggested a Roman influence.

We were invited to explore the whole house, including the attic and basement. We discovered along the way that the Dining Room fireplace had been tastefully paneled over and that the floor was not original. The friendly, old fashioned kitchen had not lost any of its wonderful windows even though some modernization features made it more convenient for today. Each upstairs bedroom was more charming than the last, all with large windows and lots of light which reflected in the golden fall color from outside. The attic was unfinished and one could see the original timbers surrounding a wonderful oval leaded window at the front gable end. The steam producing furnace in the basement was large and appeared serious about keeping the house comfortable on cold winter nights.

(continued)

We must give the owners, Heidi and Phillip, credit for tastefully choosing and arranging the lovely antique furnishings throughout, so appropriate for the house. It was a fine experience to see a house from Cass Gilbert's early career (along with the original blueprints). One could almost see him studying the blueprints as he traveled by train to visit the site. When we exited via the comfortable back porch and glanced back at the house, one felt a warmth about the house. In New Richmond Walking Tour the exterior of the house is described this way: "The Mosher home cost \$10,000 to build. Its crisp, severe design reveals its Shingle-style roots. It also features a three-story Queen Anne bay on the front façade. Originally it had a front porch which projected several feet beyond the face of the building and was supported by Doric columns. This added to the formality of the house."

The last stop on our tour was the Grand Garage Mall in Stillwater where we lingered to view the cast bronze staircase that had been salvaged from the Federal Bank Building in Minneapolis before that part of the building was destroyed. Tom Blanck had images of how the building looked originally and how it appears today. The Society wishes to thank Tom Blanck for sharing with all of us his knowledge of New Richmond and the Mosher House. And, a very special thank you to Heidi and Phillip for sharing their wonderful home with us. ☐

- Jean Velleu

**NEW**

**Cass Gilbert Society  
Web Site**

[www.cassgilbertsociety.org](http://www.cassgilbertsociety.org)

Visit our new website to get information about our upcoming lecture, to view pictures of Cass Gilbert's buildings, and to read a biography of Cass Gilbert.

Let us know if you have suggestions for the Website. We would love to hear from you.

# Of Note

## Appointments to Governor's State Capitol 2005 Commission November 14, 2001

This Commission has been established to develop a comprehensive plan for the 100th Anniversary of the Minnesota State Capitol Building.

The Cass Gilbert Society has a special interest in the 2005 - 100th Anniversary of the Capitol Building, because it is one of Cass Gilbert's primary architectural achievements. We will keep you advised of future developments with this anniversary event.

### *Commission Members:*

Joanne Benson, CEO of Minnesota Business Academy, St. Paul

Diane Berthel, Principal with Berthel Schutter, St. Paul

Cay Shea Hellervik, VP of Personnel Decisions International, Minneapolis

Hubert "Skip" Humphrey III, Senior Vice President, GCI Tunheim, Minneapolis

John Labosky, President, Capital City Partnership, St. Paul

George Latimer, Professor of Urban Studies, Macalester College, St. Paul

Lila Moberg, professional special event planner

Rick Nelson, government affairs consultant & Chair of the MN Film Board, Mpls.

Anita Pampusch, President of the Bush Foundation, St. Paul

Peter Todosovich, Executive Director of the University Branch YMCA, Minneapolis

Bill Sands, President of Western Bank, St. Paul

Sara Barrow, Minnesota State Arts Board, St. Paul

### **New York Trip Update**

Our New York trip planners are at work once again to arrange an excursion to New York to visit the Cass Gilbert buildings. The Cass Gilbert Society Board is hoping to make the trip a reality in September or October, 2002. We will keep you updated as we get information. Thank you to all who have shown interest in the trip. ■

### **Charles Locks to Speak**

Charles Locks will speak at Barnes & Nobel, Calhoun Village, on February 17, 2002 at 2:00 pm about Cass Gilbert. Charles Locks participated in the book: Cass Gilbert, Life and Work: Architect of the Public Domain, edited by Barbara S. Christen and Steven Flanders. Call 651-848-0312 for information about this event. ■

# Cass Gilbert Society

## Membership Renewal Time

### Annual Memberships Expired December 31, 2001

Our annual memberships run from January 1st to December 31st. Please help us to save extra postage and renew now by using the form below.

**Note:** Members attend our lectures for free and receive a copies of our quarterly newsletter.

Thank you to all of you who renewed early. If you have not yet renewed please take a few moments to do so today!

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### 2002 Membership Renewal Form

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I would like to renew my membership\*

\_\_\_\_\_ I would also like to donate this amount to the Cass Gilbert Society\* \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Attached is my check for \_\_\_\_\_ \$25.00/Household, or \_\_\_\_\_ \$50.00/Business

Please make your check payable 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**

**CASS GILBERT SOCIETY, INC.**

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

Place  
Stamp  
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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

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**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 annual membership extends from January through December. The fees are: \$25.00 per year/household, \$50.00 per year/business. If you have membership questions please call Sheila Meyer (651) 222-

**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 / Household or \_\_\_\_\_ \$50.00 / Business made out to Cass Gilbert Society, Inc.

Member's Name \_\_\_\_\_

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City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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