



CASS GILBERT SOCIETY

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

CASS GILBERT AND DETROIT

Join the Cass Gilbert Society on **Tuesday, February 28, 2012**, at the University Club, 420 Summit Avenue, Saint Paul, at 7:00 P.M. for a follow-up event from the Society trip to Detroit. **Barbara S. Christen, Ph.D.**, noted Cass Gilbert scholar, will preview the talk, *Envisioning a Grand City: Cass Gilbert's Detroit*, she will be giving at the annual conference of the Society of Architectural Historians to be held this April in Detroit. Cass Gilbert's Detroit Public Library (1913-1921), Scott Memorial Fountain (1921-1922), and the Belle Isle Bridge (1915), offer rich territory, previously unstudied collectively, to explore perspectives of city planning in early twentieth-century Detroit. The library served as one aspect of a civic center plan that was scuttled in the face of a struggling economy, labor concerns, and a world preparing to join a war, but that is only part of the story. Gilbert also envisioned a city center knit together with the outer city by grand boulevards leading to an extensive bridge project that included recreational and park areas. Dr. Christen's talk will examine and contextualize the rhetoric in the popular press about Gilbert's grand schemes in relation to the ideals of the City Beautiful. It will also examine the role of Detroit, Charles Moore, who was secretary to Michigan senator, James McMillan (author of the McMillan Plan in Washington, D.C.), and editor of Burnham and Bennett's *Plan of Chicago* (1909). Her talk will also consider the role of education for an emerging citizenry by examining the spatial, didactic, and programmatic goals of the Children's Room in the library. The decorative treatments and uses of the children's areas in the building have not been studied at length and deserve attention in light of the larger project of reformist ideals.

Dr. Christen's talk will be followed by a question and answer period. Other participants on the Detroit tour will also be present to answer questions and comment on the tour.

Admission is free to Cass Gilbert Society members and students. Non-members are charged \$5.00.



Fireplace surround in the Children's Room of the Detroit Public Library, executed in Pewabic tiles.
Photo: Marjorie Pearson

A HOLIDAY CELEBRATION AT THE FREEMAN HOUSE

The Cass Gilbert Society is hosted a very successful holiday celebration on Sunday, December 4, 2011, at the George Freeman house, 505 Summit Avenue at Mackubin Street, Saint Paul, to raise funds to further the research activities and enhance the website and online database of the Cass Gilbert Society. The Mount Curve String Quartette provided musical accompaniment. The current owners, architect Peter O'Brien and his wife, Helen (Duffy) Pearce, were the hosts. As part of the festivities, Cass Gilbert Society president, Ted Lentz, welcomed the guests, and Herb Grika read a poem that celebrated the opening of the Woolworth Building in 1913 and Cass Gilbert's accomplishments. Marjorie Pearson presented the following remarks on the house and its owner.

When he designed the Freeman House, Cass Gilbert was at the height of his abilities as a designer of residential architecture. The house is adapted to its corner site. The exterior is faced with rusticated Oneata limestone, a very popular local building material of the period. The porch has overscaled Byzantine-style capitals. The roof shingles are ceramic tile, apparently from the Ludovici Company. On the interior the major public rooms are on first floor; this is where the family would have received guests, entertained, and dined. The central stairhall is designed as a living space with an inglenook at one side and the major rooms opening off the hall. This form of free-flowing space Gilbert learned from his mentors McKim, Mead & White. The details of the oak woodwork are notable. Some of the details, like the delicate beading in the moldings and pendant forms in the upstairs mantelpieces, Gilbert used in several of his houses. Other detail reflects English Tudor and Jacobean precedents, a feature that suggests the national background of Freeman, Gilbert's client. The English detail is particularly apparent in the stairhall and in the dining room.

At the time the house was built, Freeman was the president of C. Gotzian and Co., boot and shoe manufacturers. Gilbert's association with the Gotzian family goes back as early as 1883 when he designed a house on Virginia Avenue (now Virginia Street) for Theodore Schurmeier and Caroline Gotzian Schurmeier. Caroline was Conrad's oldest daughter. He was a German immigrant, born in 1835 in Saxony, who came to St. Paul in 1855. He married Caroline Busse in 1859, and they had 9 children, 6 of whom survived to adulthood. He seems to have gone into the shoe business fairly soon after he came to St. Paul; one source says 1857.

George Freeman was born in 1845 in St. Ives, England; his family immigrated to Cleveland, Ohio, in 1853, then moved to St. Paul in 1855. George went to work as a clerk in the shoe business owned by his brother-in-law Louis Semper in 1860, then became a traveling salesman for Gotzian in 1866. He did well enough that he became Gotzian's partner in 1872. Meanwhile, he had married Mary Isabel Deney in about 1869. She was also born in 1845, in Illinois, according to the 1880 census records. They proceeded to have 6 children: Stella, born 1870; George J., born 1872; Olive, born 1875; Maude Gertrude, born 1876; Charles, born 1879; and Clarence, born 1882.

Conrad Gotzian died in February 1887; according to the *Pioneer Press*, at his side were James J. Hill, his friend and partner, George Freeman, and two sons-in-law, Theodore Schurmeier and Arthur Driscoll, as well as other family members. Later that year the company was reorganized with Freeman as president; Gotzian's only son Paul was also in the business as secretary and treasurer.

George and Mary Freeman's last child, Harold, was born in April 1890; Mary died in September, possibly as the result of childbirth complications.

It would seem that George threw himself into his work, for the company prospered. In 1892, Gilbert designed a new warehouse-factory-office building on East Fifth Street and Wacouta. The company had previously been located on East 3rd Street. By 1895, business was so good, the company could barely keep up with demand, 2,100 pairs of shoes a day (*St. Paul Globe*, Aug. 22, 1895). That same year Gilbert designed another warehouse-office building for the company around the corner on Wacouta.

Then, the following year, Gilbert designed this house for Freeman. Why would a widower with 5 children still at home commission such a house? They were living at 354 Bates Avenue off East 5th Street on Dayton's Bluff, a neighborhood that was losing its social cachet. Freeman's peers were relocating to Summit Avenue, following the lead of James J. Hill who had been living on the edge of Lowertown at East 9th Street and Canada. (Conrad Gotzian lived just down the street from Hill.) I also speculate that he needed an appropriate and fashionable setting to marry off his two daughters, Olive and Maude. When they moved into the house, the household consisted of George, his five younger children, and two Swedish immigrant servants, both young women in their 20s.

Among other distinctions, George was said to own the first private automobile in St. Paul, purchased in 1900. Both Freeman and Gotzian were Masons and active in the St. Paul volunteer fire department. When the department was professionalized, Freeman was the first fire commissioner.

Paul Gotzian left the Gotzian company in 1905, to go into the real estate business. He commissioned a house from Gilbert on Summit Court, which is very similar on the exterior to the Freeman house.

George had retired from the company by the time *Men of Minnesota* was published in 1915 (succeeded by William H. Cadwell as president). He died in 1916, and the house was sold in 1917.



George W. Freeman in 1883
Photo: Minnesota Historical Society



George W. Freeman with members of the Washtae Club at the
St. Paul Winter Carnival, 1886
Photo: Minnesota Historical Society

ANNUAL MEETING NEWS, 2011

The Cass Gilbert Society board held its annual meeting on November 20, 2011. According to the Society by-laws, the annual meeting is held on a date as close as possible to Cass Gilbert's birthday, which is November 24. Officers for 2012 are: Ted Lenz, AIA, president; Cindy Stephani, vice president; and Carolyn Nayematsu and Vincent Platt, co-treasurers. Sheila Terryll has resigned as secretary, and the position is currently vacant. Board members are Nicholas Marcucci, Sonja Mason, Marjorie Pearson, Jean Velleu, Art Weeks, and Wendy Weimer. Marjorie, Jean, and Wendy are all *presidents emerita*. Marjorie is also the Newsletter Editor. New board members are Barbara Christen, Ph.D., noted Cass Gilbert scholar and co-editor of *Cass Gilbert: Life and Work*; Helen Post Curry, a great-granddaughter of Cass Gilbert and national advocate for Gilbert's work; and John Yust, architect and architectural metal worker and a former staff member at the Minnesota Historical Society. James G. Hirsh is the general counsel and Nathan Stone Buttleman is associate counsel. Linda Bjorklund remains as fundraising coordinator. This is the first year that the Cass Gilbert Society has had board members who live outside the Twin Cities metropolitan area. We are using teleconferencing to allow them to join our monthly board meetings.

MINNESOTA STATE CAPITOL PRESERVATION COMMISSION

In his role as Cass Gilbert Society president, Ted Lenz is serving as one of four of Governor Mark Dayton's appointees to the Minnesota State Capitol Preservation Commission. The Commission is examining solutions for the preservation, restoration, and future of the Minnesota State Capitol. For more information on the Commission, see: <http://www.admin.state.mn.us/recs/capitol/capbldg.html>. It contains links to various reports and background studies, as well as presentation materials and meeting agendas.

As part of its mission for education and outreach, the Cass Gilbert Society is exploring the idea of a series of talks on various aspects of the Capitol, to be presented this spring.

CASS GILBERT SOCIETY, INC.
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Our Mission

To preserve our cultural heritage through advancing scholarship in 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. All contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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The Minnesota Historical Society reminded us that Saint Paul has had a long tradition of winter fun, focusing on the Winter Carnival, with a group of photos on its visual resources database (www.mnhs.org/visualresources). This photo of a ski slide down Ramsey Hill, taken in 1917, depicts Cass Gilbert's German Bethlehem Presbyterian Church with its pointed steeple in the background.

RENEW YOUR SUPPORT FOR 2012

Please use the enclosed form to renew your Cass Gilbert Society support in 2012. Our records are maintained on a calendar year basis, with the expiration date noted on your address label. We encourage you to provide your email address if you have one. It will only be used to send out announcements between the publication dates of the Newsletters.

You can show your support at various levels and any contributions above the basic level are much appreciated. Your support ensures that you will receive our quarterly Newsletter via U.S. mail, free admission to lectures, reduced fees for local tours, and eligibility to participate in regional tours. Your contributions are the major source of funding for operating expenses for our all-volunteer organization.