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Preserving the recent past

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Preservation is full of acronyms: SHPO (State Historic Preservation Office), EAW (Environmental Assessment Worksheet), NRHP (National Register of Historic Places), PAM (Preservation Alliance of Minnesota), but here's one that might be less familiar: DOCOMOMO. Yeah, it's a funny one! It's actually short (believe it or not) for an even longer proper name: DOcumentation and COnservation of buildings, sites and neighborhoods of the MODern MOvement. DOCOMOMO is an international organization "dedicated to the study, interpretation and protection of the architecture, landscape and urban design of the Modern Movement."

The Modern Movement, or mid-century modernism as we typically refer to architecture from this period, is characterized by simplicity of style and form. Modernism adopted the principle that form follows function, meaning that the use of the building would determine the shape and architecture. As such, buildings from this era emphasize horizontal and vertical lines, and were purposefully lacking ornamentation. Though modernism's beginnings are rooted at the turn of the twentieth-century, modernism grew in popularity and became a dominant building style after the Second World War. Architects such as Le Corbusier in France, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius in Germany are well recognized champions of the style. Closer to home, architect Ralph Rapson stands out as Minnesota's modern master.

In recent years mid-century modernism has been getting increasing attention as these buildings are reaching or have surpassed the 50-year mark required for listing on the National Register. The work of DOCOMOMO and similar organizations, like the Recent Past Preservation Network, has been integral in ensuring that modern masterpieces are getting the recognition and preservation that they deserve. The National Trust for Historic Preservation has launched a new center for Modernism and the Recent Past and, in this issue of *The Minnesota Preservationist*, its director

Editor's Notes

By Kelli Andre

Christine Madrid French has contributed an overview discussion of modernism and the National Trust's role in preserving it.

In Minnesota, we have a fair share of modern marvels and we are featuring two icons that have been getting considerable attention lately: Christ Church Lutheran in Minneapolis and Marcel Breuer's Abbey and campus plan for St. John's University in Collegeville. Additionally, Close Associates, Inc. Architects, a well-known Minneapolis based firm recognized for its contributions to residential modernism, is profiled by President Gar Hargens. Hargens discusses notable Close designed homes in the Twin Cities and their specific features that make them distinctly "modern."

Have an interest in the preservation of mid-century modernism and want to get involved? DOCOMOMO is currently in the process of forming a Minnesota Chapter. You can find them on Facebook under DOCOMOMO MN. And while you're there, make sure to friend the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota as well! Speaking of the Alliance, we are bringing back our PAM-o-rama tours this year and they are focusing on—you guessed it—the recent past. Watch for more information about our tours in the pages of this and upcoming issues of *The Minnesota Preservationist*, as well as on our website: www.mnpreservation.org

TTFN!



Kelli Andre
Editor

Saving America's Modern & Recent Past Architectural History

By Christine Madrid French, *Modernism & Recent Past*
Program Director, National Trust for Historic Preservation
and JulieAnn Murphy, Research Assistant

A first-time visitor to Minnesota may be surprised at the variety of modern architecture, from rectangular glass houses to curvy concrete campuses, in this northern state. Indeed, a quick survey of built resources from the mid-twentieth century to today, often referred to as the "recent past", reveals a productive and creative infatuation between modern architects and the Land of 10,000 Lakes. Equally notable is the presence of a strong local contingent working to ensure that these buildings are not only remembered, but celebrated.

Minnesotans make strong claims to their modernist heritage—whether it be architect Marcel Breuer's work at St. John's University in Collegeville or Ralph Rapson's designs for suburban houses—and their passion is growing. A newly minted chapter of DOCOMOMO, an international organization dedicated to the documentation and conservation of the modern movement, recently hosted

a bang-up party at the Uptown studio of furniture purveyor Design Within Reach that attracted a range of modern enthusiasts. Last October, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, with the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota and the Minnesota Historical Society, organized a two-day

"Modern Module" (funded by the National Endowment for the Arts) that was intended to bring people together for conversation and analysis in a program tailored to the local community's preservation concerns and addressed within the context of the region's own historic modern resources. More than

Johnie's Broiler in Downey, California. Nearly demolished, the building was rebuilt by Bob's Big Boy and is now re-opened.



On the Cover

Built in 1963 by Minoru Yamsaki, the building with its 85-foot high portico that recalls classic architecture, has a commanding presence at the northern end of Nicollet Mall in downtown Minneapolis. The Northwestern National Life Insurance Company Building (now ING) is considered a highlight of 1960s modernism in Minneapolis.

Photo by Katherine Scott, Black Box Images.

Photo courtesy of Christine Madrid French.

150 people attended the Minneapolis panel discussion at the 1949/1962 Eliel and Eero Saarinen-designed Christ Church Lutheran, designated as a National Historic Landmark last year, while more than twenty local leaders, historians, planners, and architects joined us for an invitational roundtable the following day in St. Paul.

These recent events built upon nearly two decades of persistent effort by preservationists in Minnesota and across the country. In 1995, the first conference dedicated to this topic—Preserving the Recent Past—took place in Chicago, followed quickly by part two in Philadelphia a few years later. The timing seemed perfect for this discussion. All across the country, significant modern buildings and landscapes of the recent past

were disappearing before our eyes while plans for the demolition of others continued to come in. The momentum of the conferences was followed by a series of similar events, new public education strategies, and the founding of a number of grass-roots organizations, including the Recent Past Preservation Network. A few major victories were scored, with notable building “saves,” yet there were also casualties within the field, marked by contentious battles and sad losses over the last decade, including Minneapolis’ original Guthrie Theater designed by Ralph Rapson.

Advocates for modern and recent past issues have sparred with critics of preservation over a few basic ideas: When does a building become “historic”? How do we single out significant structures from the proliferation

of buildings constructed after World War II? What are the methods for analyzing character defining features for a structure that is only forty years old, and delineating standards for preservation and reuse? Are existing guidelines adequate to address these issues, or are widespread changes required? At the 1995 conference, H. Ward Jandl, a noted preservationist, predicted that we would be “grappling” with these key issues “for the remainder of this century and well into the next millennia.” Well, here we are, still sorting through what makes a building or landscape worth saving. In the meantime, the buildings continue to age and a new set of concerns—Brutalism, Post-Modern, Urban Renewal, Sustainability—rise up as pertinent issues in preservation. Perhaps it is in our collective best interest to accept this “new” idea of preserving our recent history and work together to embrace our past, however problematic.

Kays Kitchen in Minnesota, a prime example of roadside architecture.



Photo courtesy of Christine Madrid French.

There are notable challenges in this pursuit. Federal policies for listing resources on the National Register of Historic Places are restrictive to the point that designation of buildings from the mid-twentieth century is rare. The “Fifty-Year Rule,” or criteria for consideration of listing, states that properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years shall not be considered eligible for the National Register unless they are proven to have “exceptional importance.” Application of this guideline over the last half century has skewed the reliability of the National Register, which at this point does not accurately reflect the range of architectural expression in our country. Communities will seek out local designation, which typically lends the most oversight and protection for a structure, rather than entangle themselves within the complexities of these national criteria. Palm Springs, California, a mecca for modernists, counts more than sixty buildings as Class 1 Historic Structures, for example, yet has no structures listed on the National Register. Indeed, the entire state of Minnesota has fewer than a dozen post-World-War-II buildings recognized on the national level. Yet a map of “Minnesota Modernism”

produced by the Preservation Alliance, the American Institute of Architects and the University of Minnesota's College of Design, lists more than 90 notable buildings and landscapes throughout the Twin Cities and Greater Minnesota.

As advocates, we need to present these structures as an integral part of our nation's own architectural lineage and expand our definition of significance to include cultural contexts that matter the most to local and regional constituencies. A troubled modern building—abandoned or in disrepair—is easily portrayed as a misfit that must be removed to restore community integrity. The structure is deemed worthy not of praise but of demolition. Forced to choose sides in this debate, the public often relies on subjective aesthetic analysis and unfavorable generalizations.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation's Modernism + Recent Past Program, also known as TrustModern, is actively working to change how communities view, steward, and preserve the architectural and cultural heritage of the recent past before more landmarks are lost. Funded in large part by a generous grant from the Henry Luce Foundation, TrustModern is supporting efforts to save treasures of modernism and the recent past along America's roadsides, in its metropolitan centers, and on Main Street. With the valuable help of our local, state, and national partners, we are promoting preservation of modern-era resources through advocacy and improved public awareness, while assisting in efforts to identify, document, and list important architecture of the twentieth century. Social media sites are proving to

Photo courtesy of National Trust for Historic Preservation.



Richard & Dion Neutra VDL House & Studio in Silver Lake, California. TrustModern is working with the Neutra family and Cal Poly Pomona to secure the structure and remedy material issues at this landmark modernist building.

be a valuable new resource as we nurture this nationwide network, with a large part of our communications occurring through Twitter (with almost 600 followers of our TrustModern feed), Facebook, and PreservationNation.org, the website of the National Trust.

A perusal of the feedback on our websites reveals that we are not alone in this effort. The preservation of modern buildings and structures of the recent past is an international movement. Organizations such as International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) have dedicated resources and established specific committees in this area. I currently serve on the 20th Century Heritage Committee for ICOMOS, and we regularly communicate with people struggling with the same issues in Germany, Australia, and Britain, just as we do in Portland, Salt Lake City, and Cleveland. At a time when development pressures, the vagaries of the economy, and aging

infrastructure put more modern and recent past resources at risk, the National Trust is recommitting itself to create a strategic agenda and network that enables citizens and organizations to successfully advocate for these buildings and landscapes.

During a recent dinner discussion, my young sons calculated what year it would be when they reached my age. The answer was 2045. We as a profession are duly inspired by the belief that we are saving buildings "for the next generation," but have we really considered what that means? In practice, that 1950s main street bank or 1960s library at the center of our current debate will be nearly a century old by the time my children near middle age and have their own families. The drive-in, roadside diner, or bowling alley will be relics from another era, if any survive at that point. Are we prepared to tell people that these resources were not worthy of recognition or deserving of our full efforts when we had a chance to make a difference?



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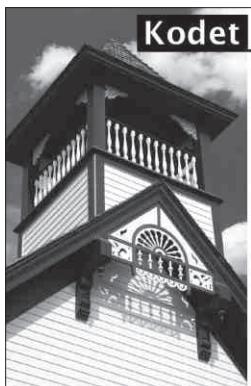
The work of my preservation predecessors is visible in the restored Victorian mansions of San Francisco, the church spires of St. Paul, and the Art Deco Motels of Miami. In the future, I hope that the "next generation" will be able to see that we tried—and succeeded—in saving our own architectural heritage.

About Chris Madrid French:

Christine Madrid French co-founded the Recent Past Preservation Network and served as the president for nine years. She is currently the Director of the Modernism + Recent Past Initiative with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, a new program launched in March 2009, and also serves on the 20th-Century Heritage Committee for the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS).

Welcome New Members

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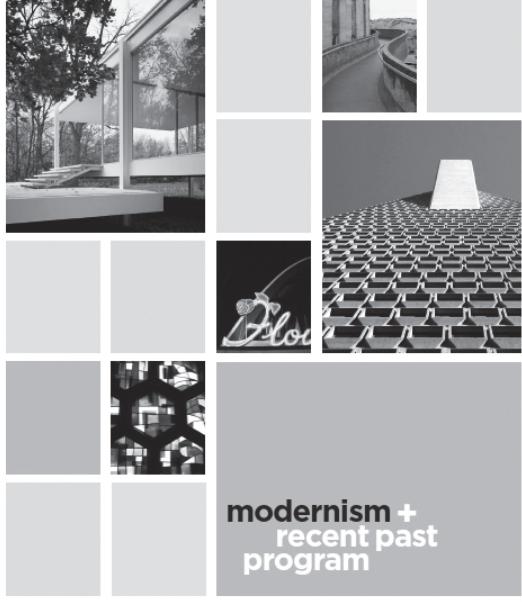
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Top photo: John Hejduk, Architects, Inc.; Middle left photo: William C. French; Middle right photo: John Hejduk, Architects, Inc.; Bottom photo: John Hejduk, Architects, Inc.

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Historic Preservation / Community Planning

The Breuer Zone:

By Nancy A. Miller

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At St. John's University in Collegeville, campus planners refer to the clusters of buildings designed by modern master Marcel Breuer as "Breuer zones." Architects, critics, and scholars around the world call them hallowed architectural ground.

An article published in *Architectural Forum* in 1968 lavished the following praise on Marcel Breuer's abbey church at St. John's in Collegeville: "It is one of Breuer's most famous buildings, and one of the finest religious structures of modern times." Other contemporary architecture journals—and the international architecture community—were equally complimentary. Today, the reputation of the abbey church remains undiminished, 40-plus years after its completion. So how did "one of [the] most famous buildings" designed by a founding member of the Bauhaus, and "one of the finest religious structures of modern times," end up in the middle of Minnesota? The answer to that question is a good story.

It started in 1951, when Abbot Baldwin W. Dworschak and a few of his Benedictine colleagues met to discuss their concerns that

they were not sufficiently caring for their aged and retired brethren—an obligation clearly laid out in the sixth-century Rule of Benedict that guides the monastic community. Consequently, a building committee was formed to study the construction of a wing onto the existing monastery, which was part of a quadrangle of brick buildings built between the mid-1860s and 1880s.

By the time the building committee made its full report, in 1953, the scope of the building project envisioned had expanded to encompass the needs of both the Abbey and University of St. John's. The report included many recommendations and five priorities: a monastery wing for the aged; a new library; a new church; new offices and classrooms; and facilities for guests. Owing to the variety, scale, and significance of the building endeavor, the committee wisely

elected to engage an architect to develop a comprehensive plan for the campus.

Abbot Dworschak sent a letter to a list of 12 selected architects to inquire about their interest in the project. On this list were some of the most renowned modern architects of the time, including Walter Gropius, Pietro Belluschi, Eero Saarinen, Richard Neutra, and, of course, Marcel Breuer. The letter indicated the monastery's decided interest in developing a progressive course of architecture, which the monks felt was well suited to their communal disposition. "The Benedictine tradition at its best," wrote Abbot Dworschak, "challenges us to think boldly and to cast our own ideals in forms which will be valid for centuries to come, shaping them with all the genius of present day materials and techniques. We feel that the modern architect, with his orientation toward functionalism and honest use of materials, is uniquely qualified to produce a Catholic work." For the new church in particular, the monks were interested in reflecting in architectural form the updated liturgical practices that had been in place since the 1920s—a goal that included engaging the congregation in a more direct manner.

Five of the architects who responded to Abbot Dworschak's letter were brought to campus and interviewed in a process that concluded with the selection of Marcel Breuer. By January 1954, Breuer had prepared a plan for the abbey and college showing a rectilinear layout of buildings that translated the forms of the traditional monastery into a modern idiom. He

Bell banner and church at St. John's Abbey.



Photo courtesy of Stephanie Hartje

reoriented the campus in anticipation of the coming interstate (I-94), which was to be built to the east of the campus and would provide access from the north. The plan was divided roughly diagonally, into zones for the monastic and scholastic functions, which would meet at the new abbey church. Breuer proposed his scheme as a 100-year plan for the campus, in which 19 new buildings would be added through a process of what he called "shadow building": New buildings would be completed and occupied before the buildings they were replacing would be torn down, to achieve the institutional goals with minimum disruption.

The first of the Breuer-designed buildings was the one that had spurred the formation of the building committee: a monastery wing. The four-story structure, built to the south of the quadrangle, toward Lake Sagatagan, was constructed of "enduring, non-pretentious materials," as described in an article appearing in *Architectural Record* in 1961. Breuer felt that the materials—untreated concrete, brick, and granite—appropriately reflected both the character of the monastery and the tenets of modern architecture. He used similar materials throughout his 20-year association with St. John's, during which time he constructed 10 buildings.

St. Thomas Hall, a dormitory completed in 1959, has a structure and aesthetic most similar to the monastery wing. In both buildings a concrete frame creates a grid of brises soleils, or window shades, that extend out from the exterior walls. Dark-gray granite, quarried locally at Cold Spring, faces the buildings. For his Bernard, Boniface, and Patrick Halls, a series of dormitories completed in 1967, Breuer moved away from the strict rectilinearity of the earlier structures and adapted the brises soleils into dynamic, faceted concrete forms. Breuer's motif of creating textured and layered façades was achieved in the Alcuin Library and Peter Engel Science Center—completed in 1964 and 1965, respectively—through the application of hollow-tile chimney flues over the windows of the buildings.

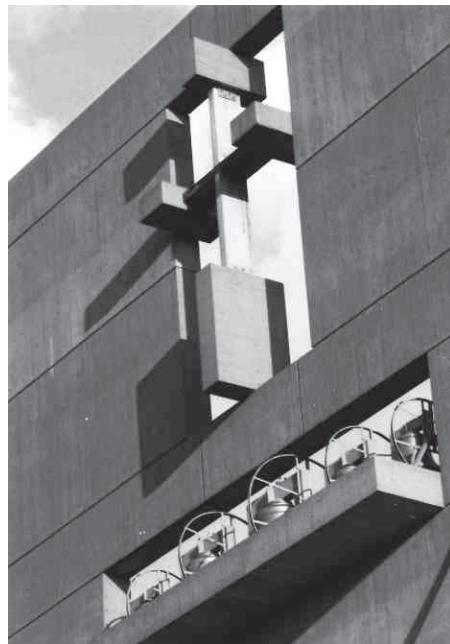
Of course, Marcel Breuer's architectural expression was not limited to the façades of his buildings. Inside the Alcuin Library, for example, two concrete "trees" support the structure and organize the internal layout of the building. Breuer's genius, captured in these buildings at St. John's Abbey and University, lay in fusing structure, material, and form as interdependent elements. Nowhere is that more evident than in the abbey church and bell tower, which stand at

that is not to say that the project rallied everyone from the start.

Breuer's office produced an early, longitudinal scheme for the church and sent it to the architect in Paris, where he was overseeing the construction of the UNESCO headquarters; Breuer returned the plans with notes, questioning the logic of the longitudinal plan, especially in light of the goal of creating a space that would more fully engage the congregation in the liturgy. Soon after he developed a new, radically different proposal: a trapezoidal plan that was wider at the entrance and narrowed at the altar. Thimmesh recalls that in those early plans Breuer "showed a thing standing in front of this trapezoidal structure that he called a banner." That thing, of course, evolved into the iconic bell tower that stands in front of the church and announces its presence in the landscape for miles around. As the scheme developed, Breuer revealed his plan to employ concrete folded plates in the construction and formal expression of the church—a structural system he had developed in consultation with the respected Italian engineer Pier Luigi Nervi.

How did the monastic community react upon seeing Breuer's proposal for the church? "Roughly, our first reaction was shock," says Thimmesh, with an undercurrent of dry humor. Although Abbot Dworschak's letter of inquiry had explicitly requested a modern response to St. John's proposed projects, the monks clearly were not prepared for Breuer's bold, structural reinterpretation of the traditional church. "Quite simply, the shapes of things weren't church-like," says Thimmesh. "We all wanted a campanile, or something. The notion of the raw concrete seemed very strange to us." Clearly apparent in Father Thimmesh's lighthearted recollections is his knowledge of the ultimate success of the design, as well as some affection for the designer.

In response to this shock, Thimmesh remembers, "Breuer very quietly, very gravely—as he always did—made us see the beauty of plain, unornamented forms." Not



Close up view of the bell banner at St. John's Abbey.

Photo courtesy of Stephanie Hartje.

the formal and ideological center of Breuer's plan for St. John's.

Father Hilary Thimmesh, who served as secretary of the planning committee for the church and later as university president (1982–1991), notes that Hamilton Smith—Breuer's design partner during the years he worked with St. John's—recently called the abbey church "a building fully realized." In those few words Smith suggests high praise for the process of taking the church from concept to building—a process often compromised by budget, construction, and competing interests. Father Thimmesh recalls "exceptional harmony between contractor, architect, and workers" during the construction of the abbey church. But

surprisingly, the Collegeville and St. Cloud communities grew increasingly enthusiastic about the design as they watched it being built. Thimmesh recalls how the beauty and drama of the wood formwork (for the poured-in-place concrete) erected during construction stirred intense interest: "People appreciated the skill that went into the thing and the complexity."

And the result, for most who see it, is nothing short of inspirational. The banner, a 126-foot-high vertically cantilevered concrete slab, is the church's modern bell tower. Behind it is a wall of stained glass layered with a honeycomb-patterned concrete screen. Inside, beyond the baptistery, is the church hall, a wide, open space with a balcony raised on four concrete piers, providing a two-story accommodation for a congregation of nearly 1,600—and achieving the goal of bringing congregants physically closer to the liturgy. The central altar is surrounded on its sides and behind with the choirs. Overhead, a perforated canopy suspended by thin rods and wires, in combination with the colored light filtering through the north-facing stained-glass wall, creates ambient lighting effects rivaling those of the most admired historical churches and cathedrals. "By the time the church was actually built," says Thimmesh, "the design had grown on us and we were quite enthusiastic about it."

In the years since Marcel Breuer developed his comprehensive plan and buildings for St. John's, a number of architects have contributed to the plan's realization and expansion, including Hugh Newell Jacobsen; Rafferty Rafferty Tollefson Lindeke Architects; Hammel, Green and Abrahamson; Ellerbe Becket; Bentz/Thompson/Rietow; Traynor, Hermanson & Hahn; and, most recently, VJAA, with its designs for the guesthouse and the chapter house renovation and addition. "Things have been built, more or less, where Breuer plotted them," says Father Thimmesh of these campus additions. "In a much larger sense Breuer's plan was followed. He really met our future needs in a way that has been extraordinarily satisfactory."

Modern Landscapes at St. John's

By Frank Edgerton Martin

"For those who think of the cloistered life as a dark anachronism from the Middle Ages," wrote *TIME* magazine in April 1954, "the new St. John's Abbey and University will be a vivid testimony to the way the life of the spirit leaps from century to century and is contemporary in each." St. John's was national news because Marcel Breuer's master plan for 19 new buildings marked a revolutionary approach to integrating architecture and landscape by redefining the idea of the cloister itself. "Instead of running along the side of a building, as cloisters have done since St. Benedict," *TIME* reported, "they will be independent covered walks, mostly of local fieldstone on the outer side, roofed with reinforced concrete and glass-walled or open on the inner side to provide views of the gardens and landscaping." In other words, the formal structure of courtyards would remain, yet walkways would be freed from buildings to move through outdoor space. What could be more modern?

Such a free-flowing system of connections set the framework for later campus planning at St. John's by Vermont-based landscape architect Daniel Kiley. Today, visitors to the school find a rare fabric of 19th-century masonry buildings, stone walls, northern forest, and lakes. In dramatic contrast to this traditional monastic landscape, Breuer's iconic church and library stand out. Less appreciated are the spatial connections and new courtyards created by the modern-era dormitories and academic buildings shaped by Breuer and later enriched by Kiley's dense plantings and site circulation.

Writing on the Cultural Landscape Foundation website to honor Kiley after his passing in 2005, landscape architect Gregg Bleam recalled riding in the backseat of a car with Kiley on the way to a meeting at St. John's. Kiley saw him flipping through his sketchbook, presumably filled with

site-specific vignettes. "He pulled the book away from me, scanned his eyes over my primitive drawings, closed the book, and said, 'Get the diagram right first,' a phrase that I have never forgotten." Chicago landscape architect Peter Lindsay Schaudt, who also worked with Kiley in the early to mid-1980s, confirms the Kiley lesson: "Dan never rushed into any project. He liked to spend a lot of time absorbing the site before he even drew a diagram."

Indeed, before sketching details or even thinking about materials, Kiley looked to the spatial and topographic character of each location. He studied long outward views and the outdoor rooms created by buildings and existing trees. With his Harvard classmates James Rose and Garrett Eckbo, Kiley rebelled against the Beaux Arts tradition in design still fashionable in late 1930s landscape architectural training. They cared little about creating a beautiful presentation drawing that looked "historic." Rather, following the modern movement in architecture, they sought to shape space before ornamenting it. They tried to adapt landscape architecture to contemporary technologies, modern activities, and new ways of socializing.

Yet the precedents in design history of spatial balance and proportional harmony influenced Kiley, as they did Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer. Kiley, for example, is known for "bosques" of trees planted in a tight grid and linear tree arcades that line paths. In nature, trees don't grow this way, but they do grow more densely than most of us realize. In the pinewoods and trails on the outskirts of St. John's, one discovers a series of interwoven outdoor rooms beneath the canopy. At the core of campus, Kiley helps us to appreciate this nearby beauty through the urbane lens of conscious symmetry, asymmetry, and spatial repetition.



Exterior view of Rood House in Lowry Hill, Minneapolis. The house was designed by Winston and Elizabeth Close in 1947.

A look at mid-century modernist homes through the work of Close Associates

By Gar Hargens, AIA, President,
Close Associates Inc., Architects

For over twenty years, I worked for and with two pioneering practitioners of mid-century modern architecture in Minnesota—Winston and Elizabeth Close, FAIA. Founded in 1938, Close Associates designed many types of buildings but specialized in houses. I was their student intern in 1968 at the start of my architectural schooling at the University of Minnesota. By the time I was their partner and they retired, I understood and appreciated the tenets that Win and Lisl held dear: compact efficient designs, a strong connection to the site, sustainable practices, and a maximizing use of materials. It is interesting how large and elaborate homes became in the 1980s and

1990s, and how today most clients who call our office want the simple, affordable, energy efficient, innovative houses that the Closes and their colleagues championed for many years.

I own *The 1940 Book of Small Houses* edited by *Architectural Record*. Its contributors include such diverse and famous talents as Prairie architect Frank Lloyd Wright, traditionalist Royal Barry Wills, and a young Ralph Rapson. What is strikingly similar about their designs is how deliberate and compact they are, reflecting perhaps the economic sacrifices of World War II and a lingering sense of frugality. The designs are spare and maximize space in ingenious ways. I remember watching the Closes turn a design over and over to cut a few more square feet from the scheme. They favored built-ins because they saved space and the expense of buying furniture.

Like the architects in the book, the Closes also carried the goal of economy into structural design. A favorite Close solution was chassis framing, where an abutting 2x8 and 2x4 become a four-foot-on-center structural column and also the frame for a fixed window, with only the addition of an outer wood stop. It was simple, clean design with minimum materials. No wonder that one of the Closes' favorite books was *The Elements of Style*, by William Strunk and E.B. White, which preached tight, precise prose.

Builders of the mid-century modern era did not have the power tools the trades work with today, and ripping a plywood sheet, for example, was done by hand with a rip saw. Architects therefore used dimensioned lumber and full-uncut sheets to save on labor. The grid was an essential planning tool. Its use contributed to the modular, boxy look of many mid-century modern homes. The credo was economy and affordability, and there was little waste. That still sounds like a good approach.

Another elegant solution involved the use of concrete plank, concrete slabs with large voids along their centers to lessen their

Photo courtesy of Northwest Architectural Archives.



Living room with floor of structural clay tile in King House.

weight. Early on, the Closes realized that if holes were added to the plank's downward face, the main furnace duct could be placed right below so that the planks could duct tempered air. Holes at the other end or top of the plank let air flow into the space or evenly up to windows. Our office also has this system. In slippers or stocking feet, having a naturally warm floor is a special treat this time of year. And the concrete floor makes up/down acoustics great too. The Closes used this system even if there was no basement with concrete plank above. The one story, slab on grade King House built in 1950 in the Kenwood Neighborhood in Minneapolis appears to have a floor of large tiles. However, they are not a standard tile dimension. Looking further reveals that the tiles are the outer faces of 4-inch structural clay tile, masonry units that for years were used for walls in commercial and manufacturing buildings. With the house drawings is a diagram showing how these hollow units were to be placed on the floor with their openings aligned to form duct runs.

Another characteristic of the times and one still popular in modern designs today is the use of new and in some cases unlikely materials. Plywood, developed during World

War II, was of particular interest to the Closes and like-minded architects. The Closes used plywood as the exterior finish siding/facing material on the 1947 Rood House, a large home for a sculptor and his wife on Mount Curve Parkway in Lowry Hill. Plywood was also used inside many Close homes. It was rotary cut (to show maximum pattern) and dressed up with only a light white stain. Concrete block, cement asbestos board, Masonite, Homasote (pressed cardboard sheets), and vinyl asbestos floor tile were some of the other new, fairly inexpensive, low-maintenance materials mid-century modernists liked to use and that could often be left in their natural state. Redwood was also available and became a popular wall choice inside and out. The Closes trumpeted redwood's natural tendency to weather to a silver tone, so that it didn't have to be finished and required no maintenance. Not all clients agreed with this aesthetic but it was clearly part of the architects' vision.

Honest expression of materials was in fact very important to the mid-century modernists. Concrete block was left exposed, Masonite and Homasote were unpainted and wood was left unfinished whenever possible. The Closes scorned the idea of hiding materials and disliked decoration in

general. Serendipity could also play a role in their designs. One day Lisl noticed that the backside of a 1x4 had been grooved during the milling process. She liked the way it looked and told the carpenters to install it wrong side up. The resulting attractive pattern became standard for Close ceilings. In Close homes I visit, many of these ceilings (all redwood and unfortunately, no longer available) have now been painted. The owners may have been trying to cover up condensation stains, since mid-century homes usually had little insulation and sketchy vapor barriers.

The Closes and other mid-century modernists liked flat roofs, partly for reasons of economy and partly for their appearance. Flat roofs offered several advantages: good rainwater management (especially with interior drains), no danger of ice dams, and potential use as decks. Unfortunately, spotty insulation and vapor barriers sometimes caused condensation problems, as mentioned above. Skylights, too, were popular, but early deficiencies in their design and installation gave them an unreliable reputation. Today's skylights are much better.

Mid-century modernists also strove to relate houses to their sites in creative ways. New technologies of the era allowed large glazed openings that made smaller spaces seem larger by leading the eye to the outdoors. Flat roofs were often extended over window walls to protect openings and provide sun shading. Siting was very important, both for passive solar gain and establishing a comfortable relationship to the ground. To limit digging no deeper than the required footing depth, designs were often split leveled with entry at grade; the lower level half in the ground, the upper half out of the ground. This allowed the lower level slab to be right above the footing and provided that level with better light and easier access.

In a time of lingering recession and worry over climate change, the work of the mid-century modernists remains instructive. Today's architects are trying to simplify, reuse, recycle, and incorporate the latest technologies – all practices that the Closes and architects like them first embraced more than half a century ago. Sometimes recent history can suggest smart solutions for today's problems.



Photo courtesy of Northwest Architectural Archives.

Interior hallway in the Rood House. If one looks carefully, you can notice that the shelves/cabinets in the hallway are made of plywood.

Gar Hargens, AIA, is President and Owner of Close Associates Inc., Architects in Minneapolis. Gar is known for designing affordable, contemporary homes, a natural progression from the firm's Mid Century Modernist beginnings. He has also pursued the preservation side of sustainability through renovation of historic properties. Two well known award winners are Pratt School in Minneapolis and 260 Summit Avenue in Saint Paul, the Louis and Maud Hill House. Gar served nine years on the Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission, three as its Chair. He is currently on the Board of the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota.

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Making it Work: Preserving a Saarinen Landmark

By Will Stark, Chair,
Friends of Christ
Church Lutheran

“Modern” means *belonging to the present period in history*, according to my dictionary. Not so in architecture, where “modern” is a style from two generations ago, not the present. The finest examples of Modern architecture are experiencing a revival of interest, swept up in a fascination with sleek, mid-century style. This is true for Christ Church Lutheran, a south Minneapolis church designed by Eliel Saarinen, one of the twentieth century’s most influential architects. Largely free of ornamentation and using basic geometric forms, this 1949 building helped to usher in the Modernist era, creating a new paradigm for spiritual spaces. Featured in *Life* magazine upon its completion, it has attracted design students and enthusiasts from around the world since the day it was built. Closer to home, it has slipped into quiet obscurity, with even its closest neighbors unaware of the treasure in their midst. A rejuvenated congregation and a newly formed group dedicated to preserving the landmark building are turning things around, giving more people access to the sublime space, while protecting the masterpiece for future generations.

The Christ Church Lutheran Story

At the close of the Second World War, a modest congregation of Lutherans in a Minneapolis’ Longfellow neighborhood

Photo courtesy of Pete Sieger and Tom Dolan.



Exterior view of Christ Church Lutheran, Minneapolis.

made a momentous decision that would have far-reaching effects on the way Americans appreciate ecclesiastical architecture in the modern era. Faced with steeply escalating building costs, the congregation found that the traditional Gothic Revival edifice they had planned to build had grown financially out of reach. A new plan was necessary not only to reign in expenses, but to address the sobering influences that the devastating war had on American culture and spirituality. Under the leadership of Pastor William Buege, the congregation issued an invitation to one of the nation’s preeminent architects and design educators, Eliel Saarinen, whose design work and leadership at the Cranbrook Academy of Art were shaping a

new generation of Modernist architects and designers. Buege later recalled, “I asked him [Saarinen] if it were possible in a materialistic age like ours to do something truly spiritual. He soon showed me.” To the congregation’s joy, the famed architect accepted the challenge.

Modernist religious buildings had been slow to gain acceptance, perhaps because no other building type was so rooted in traditional architectural styles. Until Christ Church Lutheran, only a handful of modern churches had been constructed in the United States. Through his unique style, Saarinen facilitated the emergence of Modernist religious architecture by demonstrating that



The main sanctuary of Christ Church Lutheran, with its slanted ceiling and slightly wavy walls that lend to outstanding acoustics.

it can be both spiritually moving and cost-effective. The refined, sophisticated use of materials, form, proportion, scale, color, pattern, and light resulted in a building with great dramatic effect, architectural impact and impeccable acoustics, yet one that retains a very human scale with a feeling of profound serenity and repose—qualities that distinguish Saarinen's work from that of his fellow Modernists. The building also served as an affordable Modernist prototype that

was emulated by congregations throughout the United States.

Considered by many to be Eliel Saarinen's masterwork, the Christ Church Lutheran's influence was confirmed in 1977 when it received the prestigious Twenty-Five Year Award from the American Institute of Architects, an honor recognizing buildings of enduring significance and broad influence. The award noted that "art, science, and faith achieve a serene harmony in this church... a living symbol of architectural integrity, it has provided inspiration and guidance to countless architects." According to historian Albert Christ-Janer, the church is without precedent in ecclesiastical architecture because of its focused design, lighting, and acoustics. He wrote, "this church is proof of one of the more telling arguments for Modern architecture: that only new forms can take full advantage of recent developments in acoustics, lighting, and other basic building sciences—and that these new forms can be just as compelling as the old forms that they supersede."

Christ Church would be the last of Eliel Saarinen's built works. He was present at the dedication ceremonies in November 1949, but died suddenly the following year. When the congregation sought to expand the facility with an education wing, they looked to Eliel's famous architect son, Eero. Though Eero is known for his exuberantly futuristic buildings, the education wing is a subdued, and intentionally subordinate design, in homage to his father's masterpiece. Eero died in 1961 at age 51, and would not see the education wing completed the following year. The joined pair of buildings stands

Photo courtesy of Pete Sieger and Tom Dolan.

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Come and see Christ Church Lutheran for yourself!

Worship services are held on Sundays at 9:30 a.m. www.ChristChurchLuth.org

The Friends of Christ Church Lutheran conduct free tours on the first Sunday of each month at 11:00 a.m. Special tours can be arranged for groups: www.FriendsofCCL.org

*3244 34th Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55406
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today as a rare example of the father and son's individual works combined.

Preserving a Modernist Masterpiece

The building that was so revolutionary for its time—while under construction, the neighbors were concerned that a factory was being built—has entered a state of dignified respect. Through the years, the congregation remained fully aware of the significant building with which they had been entrusted. Virtually no changes were made that would compromise the design integrity of the architectural gem. Fortunately, the use of simple materials and sturdy construction techniques has made care for the structure relatively easy. Still, the congregation found it challenging to keep up with maintenance and major repairs, such as a roof replacement, while continuing its mission.

The congregation took the bold move to embrace the building's historic distinction.

Exterior view of the addition Eero Saarinen designed as sympathetic to his father's original design.

To document and commemorate the historic significance, they asked Rolf Anderson to prepare a nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. It was listed in 2001, just two years after its 50th anniversary. After attending a training program by the Philadelphia-based Partners for Sacred Places, church leaders took an assets based approach to rejuvenating the congregation and preserving its building. Recognizing that many architects and admirers of Modern design have long studied, known, and respected the building, the congregation believed it could be successful in reaching beyond its congregation to those who are committed to the preservation of architecturally distinguished buildings. Through the work of the church's preservation committee, a new group was formed—Friends of Christ Church Lutheran. The Friends are a non-sectarian, non-profit organization committed

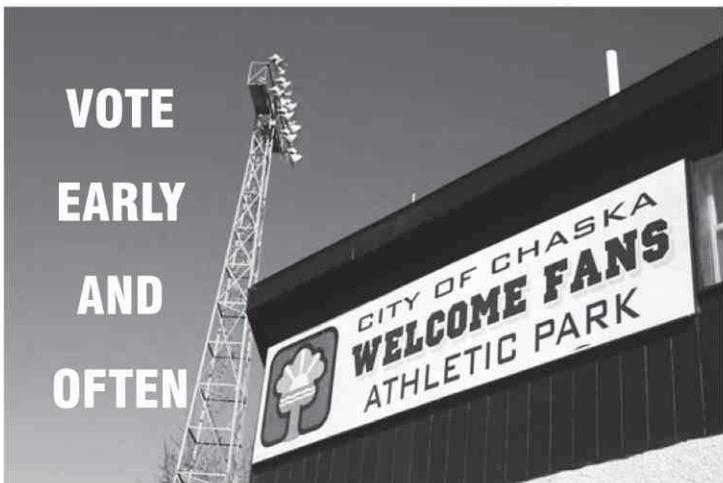
to preserving the Saarinen landmark through public awareness, education and fundraising.

Several fortunate circumstances aided the Friends in making its first two years a success. First, a joint exhibition by the Walker Art Center and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts on the work of Eero Saarinen brought increased awareness of Christ Church and hundreds of people to a standing-room only symposium in one of only two Eero Saarinen designed buildings in the state (the other being the IBM facility in Rochester). A series of concerts and a silent auction were held to raise new funds to support the preservation efforts. Finally, through a National Park Service initiative, the building was listed as a National Historic Landmark—Minnesota's 23rd. In a celebration attended by such dignitaries as Senator Amy Klobuchar, the designation brought greater awareness of this unique and important part of Minnesota's and the nation's architectural legacy.

The Friends and the congregation are beginning to reap the rewards of their strategic collaboration. With over 400 "friends" on its mailing list, supporters now have a vehicle to contribute directly to the building's preservation fund. The congregation was recently awarded a \$160,000 Save America's Treasures grant from the National Park Service to help repoint and repair its iconic bell tower. The Friends and congregation are partnering to raise the matching funds.

With support from a broad community, and the leadership of the congregation and the Friends, Christ Church Lutheran will continue to inspire, and offer peace and serenity with its fresh and optimistic version of Modernism for many years into the future.





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Click on “Preserve to the Power of 10” in the Neighborhoods tab.

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What is it with windows?

Some preservationists liken windows to a person's eyes—the part of the building that allows one to see into its soul and character. Judging from the recent attention that has been paid to historic windows, this is an apt comparison indeed.

About this time last year, the Preservation Alliance's volunteer Advocacy Committee was preparing to include "Historic Wood Windows" on our annual list of the 10 Most Endangered Historic Places. The primary reason for this unusual, statewide, categorical listing was the news that federal economic stimulus measures would allow a \$1,500 tax credit for people who installed energy-efficient, replacement windows in their residences. We feared that many people would leap at this so-called opportunity, without doing their due diligence and research, and install new, manufactured windows in place of historic windows that could be successfully refurbished or retrofitted. Preserving existing historic windows not only maintains a building's historic character, but can be successfully repaired and upgraded for a fraction of the cost of replacement.

When we announced that Historic Wood Windows were on the endangered list, we actually thought we might be behind the curve. Other statewide organizations had already identified wood windows as historic resources in peril. The Preservation League of New York State included Historic Wood Windows on its "Seven to Save" list back in 2006. In Michigan, the State Historic Preservation Office and the statewide non-profit, Michigan Historic Preservation Network, had partnered with the City of Kalamazoo and were preparing to offer an intensive, two-week workshop on window repair to unemployed contractors. Information was already circulating that historic windows could be successfully rehabilitated and made to be more energy efficient.

It turns out that we, like many others, underestimated the level of interest in this subject. Windows were a featured topic at the Minnesota Preservation Conference last September, where window restoration contractor Paul Schmidt demonstrated his techniques and a mock heritage preservation commission faced a proposal for window replacement head-on. The Alliance's "Old is the New Green" symposium, held in conjunction with the state American Institute of Architects convention, included a display booth with informational panels on historic windows and discussions with renovation contractors and architects.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has been particularly responsive on the topic of window preservation, providing a number of tips and tools on its website, www.PreservationNation.org. These

Out Standing In the Field

By Erin Hanafin Berg

resources have been compiled in part through the efforts of statewide and local preservation organizations like the Alliance, which have alerted the National Trust to the windows-related concerns of their membership. A new feature on PreservationNation is a searchable calendar to find where window restoration workshops are being held across the country.

Although the Alliance has no definite plans for a workshop of our own in the immediate future, it is clear that the care, maintenance, and preservation of historic windows is an issue that is not going away and that it is of continuing interest to the owners of historic buildings. Historic Wood Windows will continue to be a priority issue for the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota, and we invite you to work with us to increase recognition of their importance and potential for preservation.



Erin Hanafin Berg
Field Representative

The Dr. George R. Christie House in Long Prairie.



Photo courtesy of Erin Hanafin Berg.

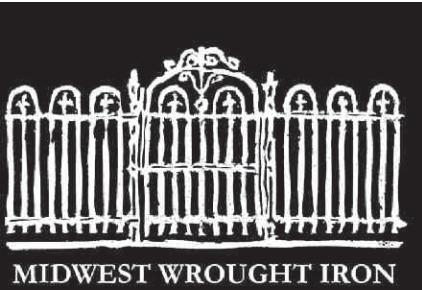
Voices from the past

Quotations on preservation

“Less is more.”

—Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969) was a leading German modernist architect. He taught at the Bauhaus in Germany and emmigrated to the United States, becoming a leading authority in modernist theory and greatly influenced the profession.



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The Last Word

By Bonnie McDonald

When our Communications Committee approved featuring the recent past as this issue's topic, I was thrilled. Focusing on the recent past, and our field's ongoing dialogue about its preservation, is really a discussion about the future of our movement itself. As time progresses and our built environment ages, our "to do" list of historic places to recognize and protect only grows. Post-war designs are the new Victorians for the next generation of preservationist.

The Millennials, as our generation is often called, is ready to hoist the banner for the now unpopular remnants of Urban Renewal and suburban expansion. We want to be on the cutting edge of preservation to steward designs now maligned by the public (think New Brutalism) long enough for them to resurge as trendy. Our philosophy holds true to 1960s activism focused on the preservation of history while integrating the cultural shift toward prizes sustainability, social justice, sense of place, and economic opportunity. In this new environment stewarding post-war "architecture for the masses," a populist approach to our work only makes sense.

As a recent past devotee, my own scholarly research revolved around this topic. My master's thesis focused on the preservation of mid-century world's fair sites in the United States—certainly not a study destined for the best-seller list. What I did discover was that the public's sense of ownership for *their* fairgrounds, largely borne out of public financing and significant boosterism, resulted in the long-term preservation of the site. Case in point, the Space Needle has become a popular icon for the city of Seattle. Completed in 1962 for the Century 21 Exposition (Seattle World's Fair), it was designated as a local historic landmark in 1999 well before it hit the National Register 50-year benchmark. As Seattle's populist

symbol, designating the Space Needle paved the way for other mid-century sites' consideration for landmark status.

Here in Minnesota, there are few mid-century properties designated as historic, but that trend is certainly shifting. Frank Lloyd Wright's Lindholm Service Station in Cloquet was an early leader having been listed in 1985 at just 27 years old. Recent listings include Minneapolis' Farmers & Mechanics Bank and Christ Church Lutheran, both featuring 1960s-era additions that have yet to reach the 50-year mark. The Heritage Preservation Commissions in both St. Paul and Minneapolis have considered Urban Renewal area historic districts, one of the first such designations in the nation. Minnesota has the rough beginnings of a recent past windshield survey with the *Minnesota Modernism Map* produced by DOCOMOMO MN board member Nancy Miller for the Alliance's 2006 "Future of the Modern Past" symposium. (Copies are available by contacting the Alliance office.) Addressing the recent past is not optional, it's our future.

I recognize that the state tax credit is a perennial feature in my column. This legislative session has provided cautious optimism that this may be our year to celebrate success. We were strong out of the gate on the first day of the Session being included in key leadership bills. You can help make 2010 the year of the state rehab tax credit—follow its progress, get involved, and make your voice heard by visiting the Alliance's website at www.mnpreservation.org.

The Alliance has made significant advances in recent years through the leadership of our incredible Board of Directors. We convey our gratitude and give a fond farewell to indefatigable board members Laura Faucher, Mike Logan, and Mary Wingerd as their



Photo courtesy of Bonnie McDonald

Seattle's Space Needle a popular icon of the recent past designated a local historic landmark at 37.

terms conclude. Thank you for six years of your invaluable contributions. Welcome to new board members Ellen Herman, an appraiser and owner of E.B. Herman Companies, and Gar Hargens, architect and principal of Close Associates, Inc. Architects. A special thank you to outgoing Chair Claire Stokes who has continued our expansion, including implementing our significant goal to re-launch the Minnesota Main Street Program. As Claire steps into the role of Vice Chair, we welcome incoming Chair Renay Leone and her expertise as a real estate attorney and former executive director of the Minnesota Land Trust. The staff and I look forward to working with Renay to continue the implementation of our 2009-2011 Strategic Plan.

Bonnie McDonald

Bonnie McDonald
Executive Director

Where Is It?

By Bill Morgan

Stephanie Howe, Brenda Graves, David Linner, and Floreen Meyer recognized the former Minnewaska Hospital building in Starbuck, Minnesota. Stephanie, who runs her own architectural firm in Alexandria, and I were members of a reuse



Photos by Bill Morgan.

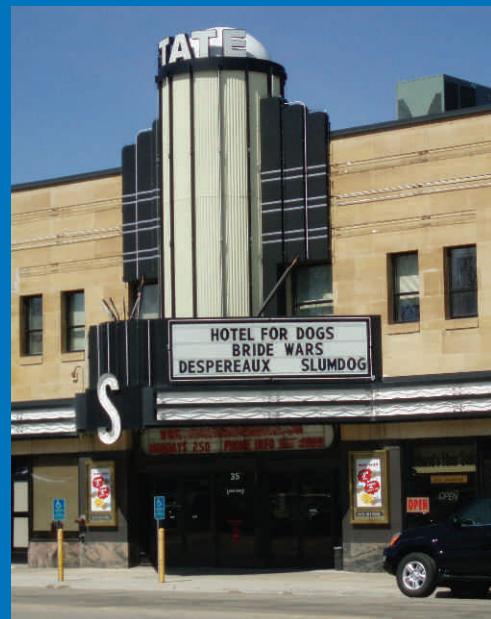


Where was it last time? Starbuck.

team that documented the hospital several years ago. The Dutch Colonial building is an anomaly on the Minnesota prairie; a structure more than likely to have found a home on the East Coast. Standing in downtown Starbuck, population 1240, the hospital has had a rollercoaster career; including having once served as a Halloween haunted house. Today, the building houses the Glacial Hills Elementary School.

Let's go to the movies for this issue's "Where Is It?" Photograph by Erin Hanafin Berg.

My e-mail address is: wtmorgan@stcloudstate.edu. Home: 834 Village Avenue, Sartell, MN, 56377.

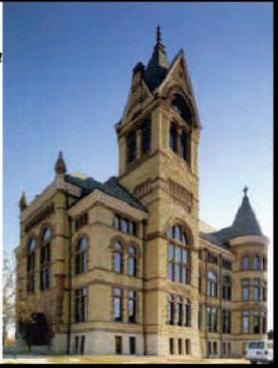


Where is it this time?

Photos by Erin Hanafin Berg.

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