

MINNESOTA CHAPTER
OF THE SOCIETY OF
ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS

105 5TH AVENUE SOUTH
SUITE 485
MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55401

Left: Landscape of the Metcalf Property. Photo: Rolf Anderson.

Right: Floor plan for the main residence. Brooks Cavin Papers,
Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota
Libraries, Minneapolis.

MINNESOTA CHAPTER
OF THE SOCIETY OF
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MNSAH
WITH RESPECT TO ARCHITECTURE | SEPTEMBER 2019



PLEASE JOIN US Sat | 5 October

METCALF RESIDENCE | THE MNSAH

FALL TOUR

FLOOR PLAN
SCALE

Below: Reverend George Metcalf and his dog Lucky, 1960.
Photo: St. Paul Pioneer Press

Right: Brooks Cavin Jr., ca. 1966. Photo: MNHS.

MNSAH 2019 Fall Tour
Metcalf Residence
Saturday, October 5, 2019

The Metcalf Residence



MNSAH's Fall Tour features the Metcalf residence in Afton, located fifteen miles east of downtown St. Paul. The property consists of the main house and two guest houses designed in the International style by architect Brooks Cavin Jr.

The buildings are located on a hillside along the southern perimeter of the property to take advantage of expansive views over a picturesque marsh and woodland. The buildings step down the hillside, integrating them into the site rather than competing with the natural landscape, which encompasses 180 acres.

The main house and one guest house were completed in 1959. The second guest house was built in 1967. The one-story buildings share common design characteristics of the International style including an emphasis on horizontality, flat roofs, unornamented surfaces, and façade composition that includes large window groupings and expanses of windowless masonry wall surfaces.

The interior of the main house includes many distinctive features such as a multi-colored tile floor in a range of geometric shapes, a fireplace with a copper hood and a cantilevered stone

hearth, and numerous built-ins. However, the most notable feature is a rare central atrium.

The kitchen is a remarkably well-designed space with an array of high-end cabinetry, fixtures, and built-in appliances that reflect the rapidly expanding range of consumer products that were introduced in the post-World War II era. The house also contains other innovative products including an intercom system, a fire detection system, central lighting controls, and dimmer lights.

Reverend George and Mary Metcalf | Reverend George Metcalf was an Episcopal priest. During World War II he served as the Assistant Third U. S. Army Chaplain and personal chaplain to General George S. Patton Jr. After the war, Metcalf returned to St. Paul and served at St. Paul's On-the-Hill Episcopal Church. But he and his wife, Mary, focused much attention on the development of their Afton property and its use as a religious retreat center. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that the main house includes a chapel.

MNSAH 2019 fall tour

Below: Metcalf residence (right) and guest house (left).
Photo: Rolf Anderson

MNSAH members Ben and Sally Scott were acquainted with the Metcalfs. During the course of the tour, they will share their personal experiences at the Metcalf property in the 1960s.

Brooks Cavin Jr. | Brooks Cavin Jr. received a Master in Architecture degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Design, studying under Walter Gropius. He later worked for Eero Saarinen. In 1946, Cavin settled permanently in Minnesota and opened a practice in St. Paul after winning an international competition for the design of the Minnesota Veterans Service Building. His design, which was selected from eighty-seven submissions, is considered one of St. Paul's first notable modern buildings.

Cavin designed residences, schools, hospitals, and a number of buildings on the University of Minnesota campus. He also taught in the School of Architecture at the University of Minnesota and served as director of the St. Paul Gallery and School of Art. Cavin was also an early leader in the historic preservation movement in Minnesota and worked on the restoration of Fort Snelling and the Landmark Center. He was part of the first generation of preservation architects in the state.

Belwin Conservancy | The Metcalf property was acquired by the Belwin Conservancy from the Metcalf family in 2010. The Belwin Conservancy works to protect the St. Croix Valley through land conservation, scientifically-based ecological restoration, and by building connections between people and the natural world. A portion of the registration fee for the tour will be donated to the Belwin Conservancy.

Following the tour, you may wish to enjoy a walk on the trails of the picturesque property.

THE DETAILS

DATE AND PLACE

Saturday, October 5, 2019, 9:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

The Metcalf Residence is located at 795 Indian Trail South in Afton, Minnesota. Proceed east from St. Paul on Interstate 94; exit at Manning Avenue/Highway 95; turn right (south) on Manning Avenue/Highway 95 and immediately merge into the left turn lane; turn left (east) on Hudson Road and proceed 1.5 miles; turn right on Indian Trail South; proceed 1.0 mile to the Metcalf Residence, which will be on your left. You will be provided with parking instructions upon arrival.

COST

\$25 for MNSAH members; \$40 for non-members. A portion of the fee will be donated to the Belwin Conservancy.

Join or renew at mnsah.org/join

REGISTRATION

Online at www.mnsah.org/events/fall-tour-2019/ or send check and names of those attending to Lock Bounds, 2072 Iglehart Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55104. All participants will be asked to sign a hold-harmless agreement upon arriving at the Metcalf Residence.

The registration deadline is Tuesday, October 1, 2019.

QUESTIONS

Contact Rolf Anderson at 612-272-3415 or roanders6@aol.com



recognition

Minnesota Modern Masters honored with AIA Minnesota Special Award

The Minnesota Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians (MNSAH) has received a Special Award from AIA Minnesota in recognition of its Minnesota Modern Masters (MMM) Oral History Program. The award will be presented on December 6, 2019 at International Market Square.

The program, which was created and is conducted by MNSAH members, has been described as “one of the most important archival projects ever attempted in the history of Minnesota’s architecture,” by Tom Fisher, Professor and Director of the Minnesota Design Center at the University of Minnesota. Fisher further observed that through its documentation of Minnesota’s leading architects, educators, and journalists, the MMM program underscores the important truth that “buildings are not just created for people; they are also created by people and we can never fully understand the ideas that drive our architecture without also comprehending the ideas of the people who designed or critiqued it.”

In their letter of support for the Special Award nomination, Joan Soranno, FAIA, Vice President/Design Principal at HGA, and John Cook, FAIA, Vice-President and Senior Project Architect at HGA, cited the importance of “the holistic approach of the project, which places significant value on the intersection of history, architecture, community, and our shared sense of place.” In doing so, it “provides a broad unprecedented perspective on architecture in the Midwest and vital cultural context that will benefit future generations as they seek to understand the past.”

To date, the program, which has been funded primarily by three Minnesota Historical and Cultural Heritage “Legacy” grants, has conducted over two dozen interviews with architects and other professionals in the field of architecture. The archived interviews are available to researchers through the MNSAH collection at the Northwest Architectural Archives at the University of Minnesota. In addition, edited versions of the interviews can be viewed on MNSAH’s Vimeo site, vimeo.com/mnsah, or via a link in the “Program” section of MNSAH’s website, mnsah.org.

Jane King Hession

Phelps Mill

All images courtesy of MNSAH.



Left: Picturesque Phelps Mill on the Otter Tail River. The tall white building is the original 1889 mill, with the adjacent 1895 red addition. Hydraulic turbines are installed beneath the two identical white turbine houses, drawing their water from the pool behind the historic stone dam stretching across the river to the right.

Center: Looking out the mill window, over the roof of one of the turbine houses and toward the mill dam and truss bridge.

Right: The water, rushing over the dam and sluiceway, past the mill and turbines, fills the mill and park with sounds and experience of the historic milling operation at Phelps.

MNSAH in June formally requested consulting party status for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) Section 106 review of the proposed Phelps Mill Dam Fish Passage Project. The USFWS is the lead federal agency, working in cooperation with Otter Tail County and the Minnesota DNR. As part of a larger project, the agencies propose altering the historic mill dam to facilitate fish passage on the river. Based on preliminary information, MNSAH believes the action may constitute an adverse effect to the National Register listed mill, dam, and historic district.

Known today as Phelps Mill, the historic flour mill was built in 1889 as the Maine Roller Mills in Maine Township, Otter Tail County. The 1880s saw the introduction and quick adoption everywhere of the new roller process for producing quality flour—thus the name “roller mills”—spelling the end of the traditional millstone. The mill also installed two hydraulic turbines

for waterpower rather than the picturesque, but less efficient, wood water wheel. Because they’re located outside the mill building, they’re visible today. With rollers and turbines, Phelps was up-to-date and modern in 1889. A major 1895 addition to the building enabled Phelps to also grind buckwheat, rye, and feed.

An 1887 wood dam first ponded the Otter Tail River to power the turbines, but it eventually deteriorated. Today’s stone dam, intricately tied to the mill both functionally and aesthetically, replaced the wood dam in 1908. The water rushing over the dam is heard inside the mill and across the complex, being an intrinsic part of the total mill feeling and experience.

A steel pony-truss bridge, itself an individually significant historic property, is adjacent to the dam and has provided a permanent river crossing for the mill since 1907.

The mill closed forever in 1939, a victim of the Depression and the phenomenal growth of major urban mills in Minneapolis and elsewhere in the state. Small rural mills serving local communities vanished everywhere.

The Otter Tail County Board purchased the mill and dam in 1965 to preserve the historic properties as the focal point of a county park. The project was an early historic preservation effort in the state. Listing in the National Register of Historic Places followed in 1975, making Phelps one of the earlier National Register listings in Minnesota. At that time, the listed property included the core milling “complex,” including both the mill and the dam. In 1984, the 9.4-acre Phelps Mill historic district was listed, now including the mill owner’s house, head miller’s house, truss bridge, store, and part of the mill pond and landscape.

With so many interrelated historic components—mill, dam, bridge, store, pond, as well as the houses of the owner and head miller—Phelps

Mill is the most complete and well-preserved historic mill district in Minnesota and uncommon in the five-state area. Significantly, the mill also retains its original machinery. With fire claiming other historic Minnesota mills in recent decades, including those at Freeport, Stockton, and Faith, as well as the Washburn A and Crown Roller mills in Minneapolis, Phelps emerges as a remarkable survivor.

The photogenic site continues to serve as a community park and regional recreational area, supporting the annual Phelps Mill Festival. The mill and dam are administered by the Otter Tail County Historical Society, opening the mill for tours from May through October.

Rolf Anderson, MNSAH chapter president, anticipates the chapter being added to the list of consulting parties, which also includes the Otter Tail County Historical Society.

Bob Frame

THE **st. andrew's** PRESERVATION EFFORT

Over the past year, a number of MNSAH members have been involved in the effort to preserve St. Andrew's Catholic Church, a building located just to the southeast of Lake Como in St. Paul. The former Catholic Church merged with another congregation in 2011, and the church and associated school building were later sold to the Twin Cities German Immersion School. For a number of years, the school used the main level of the church as a gymnasium and the lower level for a cafeteria, but ultimately decided they wished to demolish the church and construct a new gymnasium.

A group of neighbors interested in saving the building formed an organization called Save Historic St. Andrew's. The new organization, and a related neighborhood group, Friends of Warrendale, worked collaboratively in this effort. MNSAH members became involved when the neighborhood groups wished to know if St. Andrew's was eligible for historic designation by the city of St. Paul. Rolf Anderson, Barb Bezat, Marilyn Chiat, Alan Lathrop, and Bob Roscoe formed the team of consultants that studied the building to make this determination. Robert Ferguson also became involved when he studied the historical precedents that informed the building's unique Romanesque Revival style.

New information emerged about the building in the course of the study. Perhaps most interestingly, the name of the architect had to be rediscovered. Architectural historians typically rely on building permits to identify an architect. But through an anomaly in the St. Paul building permit form at the time the church was constructed in 1927, there was no space to record the architect's name. Remarkably, church records revealed that the

architect was Charles Hausler, St. Paul's first city architect. Hausler not only designed many important city-owned buildings, but he also hired C. A. P. Wigington, who is recognized as the nation's first black municipal architect. Hausler also created an important body of work once he returned to private practice.

The neighborhood groups managed to locate Charles Hausler's granddaughter, Jenny, who lives in Florida. She provided historic photographs of Hausler working in his office, and an image of Hausler's original rendering of St. Andrew's. Jenny also became a new MNSAH member.

MNSAH member Tom Fisher, former Dean of the College of Design at the University of Minnesota, and current director of the Minnesota Design Center at the University, offered to assemble a pro bono team of experts to study St. Andrew's. Fisher said the team could study the needs of the Twin Cities German Immersion School, determine if the church building could be effectively reused, and perhaps investigate constructing an addition elsewhere on the site if more space was still needed. The school declined his offer.

The team of consultants ultimately concluded that St. Andrew's was eligible for local designation as an important example of the Romanesque Revival style. Moreover, the design of St. Andrew's is based on a distinctive variation of the style that developed in northern Italy and southern France from the 9th through the 12th centuries. This version of the style features complex, polychromatic compositions. The church was also considered historically significant as an important community landmark that served a working-class neighborhood, which included Hungarian immigrants.

Top: Charles Hausler's original rendering of St. Andrew's. Image: Jenny Hausler.

Center: St. Andrew's Catholic Church. Photo: Rolf Anderson.

Bottom: Detail of complex brickwork and polychromatic design. Photo: Rolf Anderson.

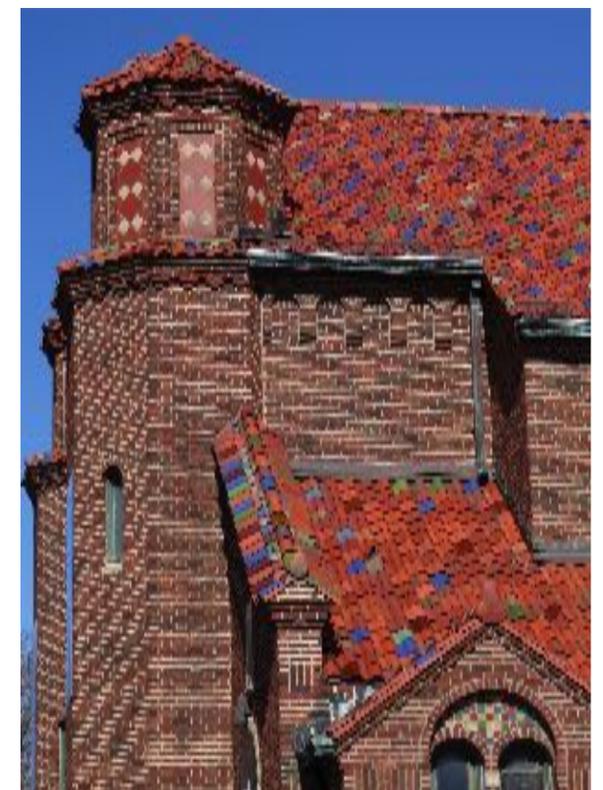
The St. Paul Heritage Preservation Commission concurred, and voted to designate St. Andrew's. (Additionally, the State Historic Preservation Office concluded that St. Andrew's is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, which would qualify the building for grants from the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund.) However, the St. Paul City Council did not approve the designation. A majority on the council appeared unwilling to oppose the wishes of the school. Jane Prince was the only council member who called for additional dialogue with the goal of achieving a win-win solution.

Once the city council failed to approve historic designation, which essentially paved the way for demolition, the neighborhood groups filed a lawsuit against the school under the Minnesota Environmental Rights Act (MERA). Rolf Anderson, Robert Ferguson, and Tom Fisher were among those who testified on behalf of the neighborhood groups.

The judge concluded that St. Andrew's is indeed a historic building and that there are feasible alternatives to demolition, which is the standard that must be met under the law. However, the judge required a \$1.9 million dollar bond for the legal proceedings to continue. Unfortunately, it was not possible to raise such an amount.

As the newsletter goes to press, the demolition of St. Andrew's is underway..

Rolf Anderson



news FROM THE BOARD

Our first event of the year was the annual meeting, which featured architectural historian Jane King Hession, who presented a talk titled, “Frank Lloyd Wright in Japan: Revisited.” Her extensively researched talk discussed Wright’s fascination with Japan and its impact on his life and work. Jane also described his body of work in Japan and its current status. She also talked about Wright’s influence on future generations of architects, who also left their mark on Japan. Jane’s inspiring talk provided strong encouragement to visit this captivating country.

The annual meeting also resulted in some unexpected publicity. Photographer Matt Blewett attended the event and photographed MNSAH members for the Star Tribune’s “Scene & Heard” feature article. We don’t often make it into the press, much less in living color!

Our Spring Event featured a talk by architect Julie Snow that was held in her offices in the Minneapolis Warehouse Historic District. Julie had been interviewed by our Minnesota Modern Masters program, and, similar to our 2018 event with John Cuningham, our intent was to provide an opportunity for MNSAH members to hear directly from architects about their lives and careers. Julie’s description of her design philosophy was of particular interest. She talked about using architecture to create cultural change, and how even in the context of a private project she strives to create public space. Julie noted that when she is designing a second home, she encourages the client to use the opportunity to reimagine one’s life.

In August, we were able to offer an unexpected Pop-up Event. Past-MNSAH president Jennifer Olivarez connected us with Michael Thomson, who is from Australia and a member of the Walter Burley Griffin Society. Michael offered to present a talk titled, “Castlecrag and Usonia,” in which he compares a collection of Wrightian-style homes in Pleasantville, New York, with a model suburb in Sydney, Australia, designed by Griffin and his wife, Marion Mahony. The MNSAH Program Committee quickly moved into action and organized the event.

Not surprisingly, both Castlecrag and Usonia feature highly organic architecture, and MNSAH members saw similarities between the homes at Castlecrag and Griffin’s designs in Mason City, Iowa, which we toured some years ago. While Usonia is set in a heavily-wooded area, the homes at Castlecrag feature stunning views of the Sydney harbor from high above the water on a rugged promontory.

A unique characteristic of both communities is their strong communitarian spirit. Usonia was organized as a cooperative with shared ownership and a focus on community activities, while Castlecrag features shared green space and walking paths, and a number of common buildings used for child care, art classes, and community events.

As described in an article in this issue, we are very excited and appreciative to have been selected for a special award from AIA Minnesota for our Minnesota Modern Masters program. So many MNSAH members have contributed to this program beginning at its inception some years ago. We are grateful for the recognition and pleased we could bring this very worthwhile program to fruition.

We hope to see you at our Fall Tour of the Metcalf Residence!!

Rolf Anderson
President



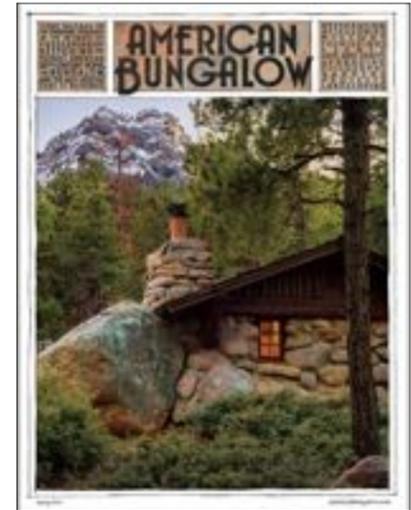
Rolf Anderson, Jennifer Olivarez, and keynote speaker Michael Thomson.

OUR PURPOSE IS TO:

- Promote and advance research of Minnesota’s architectural history
- Broaden awareness of the state’s architectural heritage through meaningful scholarly and public engagement with the history of the built environment
- Offer opportunities to experience significant architectural sites, structures, and landscapes
- Advocate for and promote the documentation, preservation, and conservation of the built environment
- Engage and cooperate with learned and professional societies in the pursuit of common objectives

MNSAH BOARD

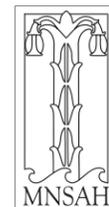
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American Bungalow is the only magazine devoted exclusively to the bungalow and the Arts and Crafts movement. *American Bungalow* is offering MNSAH members a 15% discount on subscriptions, past issues, books, and more. Visit the *American Bungalow* website at shop.ambungalow.com and use code MCSAH in the checkout section to receive your discount!

American Bungalow is also interested in news or events in our area, as well as homes or articles that might be featured in the magazine. The current issue of *American Bungalow* includes an article on a bungalow in Minneapolis!



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