



Ramsey County Historical Society
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Landmark Center, 75 W. 5th St.
St. Paul, MN 55102

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

City Hall-
County
Courthouse
50th Anniversary
Issue

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CORRECTION George Mitsch, Sr., mentioned in the story on St. Paul's early breweries in Volume 16, Number 2, of *Ramsey County History* was born in 1825. His son, George Mitsch, Jr., was born in 1854. Also, it was John Seegar who was president of Bonn Refrigeration.

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ON THE COVER: The St. Paul City Hall-Ramsey County Courthouse is a new addition to the city's skyline in this photograph taken during the middle 1930s. Kellogg Boulevard has obliterated the buildings that once lined the river side of old Third Street, but along the boulevard on the right can still be seen the remnants of 19th century St. Paul.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Photographs on the cover and on page 15 are from the Ramsey County Historical Society's collection. Photographs on pages 4, 6, 9, 10, and 21, are from the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society. Photographs on pages 3, 12, 13, 17, and 18 are from Ellerbe Associates, Inc.

God of Peace: Milles' 'Finest Creation in Stone'

BY DANE SMITH

From the beginning, something seemed to be missing in the plans for the main floor concourse of the St. Paul City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse. The long, narrow, high-ceilinged hall itself was splendid. Although it was a concession to "public-building grandeur," it served a legitimate function of accommodating spaciously the flow of pedestrian traffic from the main entrance on Fourth Street to the office space on both sides of the ground floor, to the six tower elevators near the exit to Kellogg Boulevard.

The concourse was impressive, even on the blueprints. As the local architect commissioned to work with designers Holabird and Root of Chicago, Thomas Ellerbe could see that here was a dramatically different interior space, accented by black marble columns rising three stories, to a gold ceiling. The floor of light-colored Travertine, an open-veined Italian marble, would contrast with the vertical darkness. The plan for the end of the hall, opposite the Fourth Street doors eighty-five feet away, called for more black marble, fashioned to resemble a ship's prow soaring from floor to ceiling. It would be lighted by more vertical amber fixtures. The prow was to be the focal point of the hall. This, Ellerbe realized, was a wonderful frame into which someone had neglected to place a picture. Today, at 88, he recalls thinking that a "marble prow was a poor excuse for a work of art.

"Since the original concept of the courthouse, I had a persistent feeling that we architects had not taken advantage of what could be one of the most unusual and outstanding focal points in the structure, the place most visitors would have to pass" Ellerbe remembers. "I didn't have the slightest idea what might be substituted for those forty-foot golden light fixtures but the more I dreamed about it, the more important that particular location seemed to be. It appeared to cry out for an unusual imaginative treatment.



The God of Peace

"Having studied sculpting and having an interest in it, the only solution in my mind was a piece of colossal art in the form of a sculptured object, a human figure, elongated to fit the space, or an abstract creation with a significant meaning."

Ellerbe first broached this idea to Ray Corwin, his chief designer, and to his design staff. As might be expected, they liked the idea. The test would be whether John Holabird and John Root would accept a suggestion from their associate architect. At about the same time, the most influential member of the courthouse commission, William Oppenheimer, was told of Ellerbe's idea.

Holabird and Root immediately agreed, Ellerbe said. But it was Oppenheimer, civic leader and St. Paul attorney, who would eventually suggest that the sculpture be designated a war memorial as a means of placating a group of veterans who wanted two floors of the courthouse for meeting rooms.

"WE AGREED to fix rooms in the civic auditorium for the veterans and offered to make a war memorial of the hall," Ellerbe said. As it turned out, the agreement made the sculpture possible, but it would return to plague the planners.

The next task was to find a sculptor. The



The scorned and rejected model of a soldier, symbolizing return from war.

search began with a visit to Paul Manship, a St. Paul native who was winning national recognition. Manship's name was familiar to Ellerbe, because his mother, as a girl, had been a neighbor of the Manship family and she had watched the sculptor's progress. Ellerbe was disappointed to discover that Manship was preoccupied with other commissions, including a massive sculpture he was completing for the new Rockefeller Center in New York City. He was so involved, in fact, with the Rockefeller Center project that he displayed little interest in the courthouse.

On Ellerbe's next trip to Chicago, he lunched with associate John Root, who had just returned from Sweden. Root recommended Carl Milles, a Swedish artist whose work Root had liked. Root urged Ellerbe to study photographs of Milles' work and suggested that Ellerbe meet Milles, who had just

been appointed "sculptor-in-residence" at Cranbrook Academy in Bloomfield Hills, a suburb of Detroit. The academy had recently been established as a graduate school of the arts and had made news for its support of the still-unfamiliar modern style of art.

Ellerbe was excited by the photographs. Plans were made immediately for a trip to Cranbrook, and Carl Herbert, secretary of the courthouse commission, was invited to go along. Ellerbe and Herbert were won over, both by the artist's personal philosophy and by his professional attitude. There was one small problem. Milles was a confirmed pacifist and he at first flatly refused to be associated with a war memorial. Ellerbe and Herbert managed to convince Milles that they would be happy with a design celebrating peace, but a fine line would have to be trod. The commission was sensitive to growing public criticism of the \$100,000 that had been budgeted for the project. This was the Depression, many people in St. Paul were standing in bread lines, and the commission decided no formal contract with Milles would be drawn until he presented an idea that would be acceptable to the public.

Milles was born June 23, 1875, in Lagga, Sweden, a tiny village near Upsala. His father, Emil Anderson, had been an officer in the Franco-Prussian war, and he had adopted the surname Milles during his military service.

Young Milles was apprenticed to a Stockholm cabinetmaker. It was the first step in the direction of fame as sculptor. He supplemented carving lessons in the cabinetmakers' shop by night courses in drawing, modeling, and design in the Technical School in Stockholm. When he was 17, his father permitted him to study art. Five years later, Milles won his first prize as a sculptor. He submitted some of his work in a minor exhibition and won about \$50. He spent the next twelve years in Paris where he studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, and supported himself by selling figurines carved from wood taken from the floors of the house in which he lived.

Milles haunted the museums of Paris when he was not attending classes, and Auguste Rodin, the sculptor, became his god. In 1900, Milles entered his first exhibition in the Salon des Artistes Francaise and received an honorable mention. In 1901 he participated in a competition which was to focus considerable attention on him. Sweden proposed to erect a statue commemorating Sten Sture, the

Swedish national hero of the fifteenth century. Milles was awarded fourth prize, but the students at the University of Upsala, where the memorial was to be erected, attacked the jury's award with such vigor that Milles was asked to submit a second model. He did so in 1903. The commission was granted in 1912, and thirteen years later the Sture memorial was erected. It stands today as one of Sweden's most notable objects of art.

Milles received many profitable commissions in Sweden. These enabled him to travel extensively in Italy and Germany. In 1909 he designed a fountain as a monument to Swedish industry, and this marked the beginning of his fame as a designer of monuments. Milles was internationally famous long before representatives of St. Paul approached him with the suggestion of a war memorial.

AT THE TIME of the first talks about the memorial hall statue, Milles was approaching 60 years old, and his personal appearance must have attracted attention on St. Paul's streets. He was described in most accounts at the time as "graying, sturdy and broad-shouldered," but Ellerbe and Herbert remembered that Milles was a "caricature" of the offbeat artist. "He was a very heavy man and always wore black clothes and a pie-shaped hat," Ellerbe said. "He wore a loose coat and would always button only the top button, so the coat would splay out around him." Both Herbert and Ellerbe agreed, however, that the aging master had an "absolutely delightful" personality and cheerful demeanor. He was gracious, possessed a wry humor, and was fond of children.

Clever as he was, Milles' first three concepts were turned down, for reasons ranging from the political to the technical. His first idea was a representation of the apostle Paul, for whom St. Paul was named. "It was beautifully done, as far as a technical work of art was concerned," Ellerbe said, "but Milles' humor got the better of him. The statue looked more like a Don Quixote, but worse than that, the halo was cocked at an angle, giving the saint the appearance of being slightly inebriated, which would never pass in a religious community such as St. Paul. Nor was the commission enthralled with a clearly clerical theme for a secular building. The issue of separation of church and state, as much as anything, doomed the first Milles idea.

"THE NEXT SUBMISSION was a figure, Mississippi the Father of Waters, which was appropriate because St. Paul is at the head of navigation on the Mississippi," Ellerbe remem-

bered. "This was to be a rugged male figure holding a fish on his left breast, with water surging from the fish over the statue and into a pond at the bottom. The figure would be illuminated to give life and sparkle to the huge statue. But again there was doubt about selling it to the public. Then someone suggested that the statue be made of cast glass. In addition to having the same sparkle as water, it would be dramatically lighted. However, no one could imagine a thirty-foot glass statue. The problem was submitted to Owens-Corning Glass of New York, who spent nearly a year and thousands of dollars experimenting with large glass blocks, which would have to be ground to precise shapes. Finally the project was abandoned. There didn't seem to be a way to cool huge blocks of glass without warping and excessive grinding, which made the undertaking prohibitive in cost.

"It was at this point that the negotiations with the veterans groups became more serious. Thus, the third idea was to design a statue with a war theme, although everybody who knew Milles knew he would find a peaceful theme."

Sure enough, Milles' next suggestion was distinctly non-military. He produced a three-foot-high plaster cast of a soldier, a stark nude figure, symbolizing return from war. The young man's head was crowned by a laurel wreath. He held a sheath of wheat in one hand and a sickle, symbolizing swords beaten into plowshares, in the other. The courthouse commission arranged to present the model to a group of mothers of veterans at the St. Paul Athletic Club, where Milles would also speak. About 100 women gathered for the event. Milles uncovered the statue and began an impassioned explanation of its symbolism.

"THE MOTHERS listened to this beautiful, almost heart-rending speech, with ill-concealed disdain," Ellerbe said, "but Milles was so wrapped up in his subject he didn't notice. Finally, one woman announced that the statue was a disgrace, that it was downgrading their sons. They wanted a real fighting man returning from the trenches with mud and blood, guns and bayonets, strong war heroes.

"Milles listened in consternation, then said in a quiet but agitated voice that he would not create any such thing. He thought we should honor peace rather than war. A violent discussion followed. Milles left the room. Outside, he said, 'Tom, I am going back to Sweden where people understand me. These Americans are terrible . . . They are

warlike and I will have nothing to do with them.' He left St. Paul and we did not hear from him for months." When he finally returned to St. Paul, he had with him the design of the God of Peace. When the statue was unveiled, Milles wrote an article for the St. Paul newspapers explaining that the idea was based on his recollection of a scene in Oklahoma two years before the commission had contacted him.

"I well remember New Year's Eve, 1929, when visiting some friends in Ponca City," he wrote. "I was invited with them to witness an Indian ceremony in celebration of the advent of the New Year. It was very inspiring to me. Before 3,000 Indians and we three whites, the oldest Indian spoke of peace in the world, a talk that I never will forget. So beautiful with such a deep, masculine feeling of brotherhood and understanding between the different people and races.

"In the monument there is nothing of realism, the base being ornamental, with five Indians sitting around a fire smoking their pipes of peace. Out of that smoke of tobacco and fire arises in their imaginations their god of peace, talking to them and to all the world. I sincerely hope that the symbolism will be understood and the monument appreciated."

GRACIOUSLY GLOSSING over the earlier difficulties, Milles concluded: "I wish to thank those men who have been courageous in accepting this monument for erection in your city and hope that the future will be grateful to them for their deed. It is not always that an artist meets such understanding as I have met in St. Paul."

The commission wholeheartedly approved of the God of Peace and the model was approved by city and county officials on June 23, 1933, Milles' birthday.

The only remaining obstacle before construction could begin was a decision on what material to use for the statue. The consensus was that the statue should be light in color, to contrast with the darkness of the hall. Milles would not make the decision alone. The *Pioneer Press* reported that, "Various experts had been considering the kind of material to be used." There is some dispute about how Mexican onyx was chosen. Ellerbe said he remembers that during a meeting with Milles someone picked up an ashtray of Mexican onyx and suggested its use. The *Pioneer Press*, however, reported that "samples from the quarries of the world were submitted to the architects, the sculptors and members of

the commission." Finally a piece of onyx was sent from a quarry in Central Lower California (the new Pedrara quarries on the Baja peninsula in Mexico), 300 miles south of the international border.

The sample seemed perfect but there was little hope that enough could be furnished for a statue thirty-eight feet high and needing more than seventy-five tons of material. "But it was learned that the owner of the quarry had been preserving intact for years a thick ledge of this creamy onyx. He had been saving it for something, he did not know what," the newspaper account continued.

The mineral shelf was perfect for Milles' purposes. Onyx frequently is striated by veins of brilliant color, but Milles wanted as uniform a tint as possible because he thought that highly contrasting veins would create a bewildering and distracting pattern in a piece of sculpture as large as the God of Peace. More than 100 five-ton blocks were cut from the site and hauled over an improvised road more than fifty miles to a beach where, when weather and tide permitted, the blocks were loaded into thirty-foot boats, transferred to a sea-going vessel farther offshore, and were shipped to San Diego. There, St. Paul stone carver Giovanni Baptiste Garatti, one of the country's most skilled craftsmen, sorted out the best for shipment to St. Paul.

Meanwhile, Milles and a crew of assistants in Cranbrook worked on a full-scale model of the Indian. "In the initial stage," reported the *Pioneer Press*, "it had to be made of clay and the clay had to be kept damp until work was finished, so several helpers were assigned to spraying water on the huge mass. The next step was to cast a plaster shell around the clay, then remove the shell and use it as a mold for the plaster model from which the actual statue was to be copied."

At the same time the courthouse was being readied. Because the statue would weigh sixty tons, the floor at the end of the hall was reinforced by a three-foot-thick concrete slab which was supported in turn by columns that descended to bedrock.

THE PLASTER MODELS were sawed into sections and shipped from Detroit to St. Paul as the onyx blocks were arriving. The contract for fabrication of the statue was let in September, 1934, to Osborne-Peterson, Inc., Brioschi Studios, and Garatti, all of St. Paul. It was Garatti and a crew of nineteen expert stonecarvers, and not Milles, who actually fashioned the statue. They began carving and assembling on May 1, 1935.

"Art experts expressed the view that much of the detail of the statue would be lost if it were set in the niche, as first contemplated," said the *Pioneer Press*. "The idea of setting it on a revolving base was suggested, investigated and found to be practical, although it never had been done with a statue of this size." The contract for this revolving base, which can be turned forty-five degrees each way from the center, was let to the St. Paul Structural Steel Co., on October 2, 1935.

The model was reproduced in onyx by means of a pointing machine, which gave the stone workers precise measurements of every line and curve. The ninety-eight onyx sections were fasted to a steel I-beam, the Indian's spine, and were further supported by three-quarter-inch bronze "ribs." Joseph E. Osborne, secretary of the Osborne-Peterson firm, said at the time that twenty-five men worked on the statue in St. Paul, and they put in 12,800 hours of labor. Wages ranged from \$2 an hour for skilled carvers to 55 cents an hour for laborers. The cost of the statue was approximately \$65,000--\$39,500 for the fabrication, \$4,190 for the turntable and \$600 for lighting. Milles was paid a fee of about \$20,000, out of which he had to pay the salaries of eight assistants, buy materials for the plaster model, and cover incidental expenses.

Garatti was interviewed by the *Pioneer Press* after the statue was completed. The writer noted that the 54-year old craftsman was a native of Italy who had come to St. Paul in 1919. He had worked on the carving for St. Paul's Cathedral in New York City, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington, Virginia, the Manitoba Parliament building in Winnipeg, and the post office in Denver.

"I put in considerable time studying Mr. Milles' plaster model of the statue before I undertook the copying of it," Garatti said. "When I had the idea pretty well fixed in my mind, we started in by smoothing down the onyx blocks, and selecting them for various parts of the statue. After this we went to work with the pointing machines--the tools with which the features of the model were transferred to the onyx. This was difficult, exacting work. It had to be done right, for I wanted to please Mr. Milles and avoid spoilage of the material."

THE ACTUAL CARVING was done with pneumatic tools and the pieces were later ground and polished. Most of the carving was done in a large building near the state capitol.



Carl Milles

"When we erected the statue," Garatti said, "it fit almost perfectly." Garatti offered this critique of the piece on its completion: "I think Mr. Milles is the greatest living sculptor, although I do not understand all of his work. He is a modernist and I was raised in the classic school." That understated ambivalence would manifest itself in more outspoken forms after the statue was unveiled on May 28, 1936.

The two-day ceremony was a more elaborate occasion than the dedication of the courthouse itself a few years earlier. There were band concerts, luncheons, speeches, and tributes paid to the statue by several veterans groups and by an Ojibway Indian chief, Edward L. Rogers. Thirteen-year-old Elizabeth Herbert, Carl Herbert's daughter, dressed in a nautical-looking pinafore dress, pulled the cord that unveiled the Indian. President Franklin D. Roosevelt had been invited to attend, but he declined, citing the "press of public business." He said in his letter to Oppenheimer that it was "fitting that this memorial be dedicated to peace . . . The highest tribute we can pay to the courage and sacrifice of those in whose honor you have reared this War Memorial is to continue to maintain a just and lasting peace."

Milles was unable to attend the unveiling, because of illness, but he sent a letter in which he called the monument his "finest creation in stone." Local reviews, however, were harsh. A

long account written for the *Pioneer Press* by reporter A. J. Crocker contained brief opinions of the statue gleaned from visitors to the hall. The most vitriolic denunciations came from St. Paul.

"Former resident of London, England: 'None of the museums in London had anything approaching this example of modern art.'"

"St. Paul man: 'I get so damn mad every time I see the thing I can hardly talk.'"

"Group of six from Bloomington, Ill.: 'A marvelous work of art and deserving of unbounded civic pride.'"

"St. Paul resident: 'Monstrosity, a huge joke.'"

"Tourist from Copenhagen: 'Beautiful, colossal. The setting is most impressive.'"

"St. Paul woman--too angry for satisfactory interview: 'Who ever heard of a white Indian with two right hands?'"

"Bemidji woman: 'I just returned from Radio City but even there they have no hall which can compare with this one.'"

"St. Paul woman: 'Hideous in appearance. I'm surprised that a group of intelligent men would erect such an unfitting tribute to our soldiers'."

"Detroit party: 'This hall should be a gathering place for America's sightseers and art students'."

BUT IF SOME of St. Paul's citizens were unimpressed, the reaction from art critics nationally and around the world was uniformly congratulatory. *Time Magazine's* art critic wrote: "Ubiquitous in U.S. parks and public buildings is the conventional war memorial doughboy with trench helmet and bayonet charging eternally in bronze or marble. Last week an arrestingly different conception for a U.S. war memorial was unveiled at St. Paul, Minn. Startled citizens and American Legionnaires got their first look at a huge brooding Indian, towering in 55 tons of cream-white onyx 36 feet above a slowly rotating pedestal in the black marble concourse of St. Paul's new City Hall . . . This boldly romantic Indian God of Peace had been made for St. Paul by Sweden's great, famed sculptor Carl Emil Anderson Milles, whose international reputation overawed literal minded objectors to his scheme."

The *Illustrated London News* carried a full-page picture of the statue, and called it "Carl Milles' great work." The *Architectural Forum* also ran pictures, with the comment that "it is a superb composition, carved with a master's feeling for material, greatest of a long series of

great works." The *New York Times*, *Popular Mechanics*, and the *American Swedish Monthly* also covered the unveiling with unqualified praise.

A professor of architecture at the University of Minnesota, S. Chatwood Burton, wrote perhaps the most eloquent tribute to the statue: "Time marches on and makes obsolete the dear old monuments of the Civil War; it will continue to march on, when most of the monuments hastily made to commemorate 'The Great World War' will be forgotten; the eager doughboys with bayonets fixed ready to go over the top, and kill or be killed, will continue to hold the same pose through the cold winter evenings; oh, how we wish that they would either go after their enemies or stop posing--throw away their bayonets and go home to a good supper and a well-earned rest. Soon their clothes and steel helmets will be out of style and be dated like the statues of gentlemen we see in our parks wearing long swallow-tail coats of bronze. But the God of Peace, a great work of art, cannot go out of fashion."

The criticisms had quieted down by April, 1938, when the *Minneapolis Tribune* reported the following:

"The peace memorial in the new Ramsey County Courthouse . . . may rest in peace itself from now on. While it was being constructed by Carl Emil Milles, renowned Swedish sculptor, the 55-ton symbol of peace succeeded only in stirring up civic controversy in St. Paul--controversy that rang through luncheon clubs and council chambers--controversy that praised it to the skies as one of the best pieces of contemporary sculpture, and shouted it down as 'absurd,' 'out of character,' and 'too expensive.'"

"But Mr. Milles and his peace-pipe smoking Indians (who both kept their own counsels and their tempers during the controversy) had the last laugh and the last word Wednesday. For, Associated Press dispatches reported, Mr. Milles was awarded the gold medal given annually by the Architectural League of New York for his 'great contribution to sculpture.' His entry was the Ramsey County peace memorial."



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THE GIBBS HOUSE

at 2097 West Larpenteur Avenue, Falcon Heights, is owned and maintained by the Ramsey County Historical Society as a restored farm house of the mid-nineteenth century period.

The Ramsey County Historical Society was founded in 1949. Its chief function is to collect and preserve the history of the city and the county and share that history with the people who live here. The Society is the county's historian. It preserves those things from the past that are the community's treasures — its written records through the Society's library; its historic sites through establishment of the Irvine Park Historic District and its successful efforts to help prevent destruction of the Old Federal Courts Building, now Landmark Center. It shares these records through the publishing of its magazine, brochures, pamphlets, and prints; through conducting historic sites tours of the city, teaching classes, producing exhibits on the history of the city, and maintaining its museum on rural county history. The Gibbs Farm Museum, the oldest remaining farm home in Ramsey County, was acquired by the Society in 1949 and opened to the public in 1954 as a museum which would depict the way of life of an early Minnesota settler. In 1966 the Society moved onto the property a one-room rural country schoolhouse dating from the 1870s. Now restored to the period of the late 1890s, the school is used for classes, meetings, and as the center for a summer schoolhouse program for children.

Society headquarters are located in Landmark Center, an historic Richardsonian Romanesque structure in downtown St. Paul, where it maintains the center's only permanent exhibit, a history of the building during the seventy-five years it was the federal government's headquarters in St. Paul.

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