

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
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Ramsey County
and Its Early
Courthouses

Page 19

Fall, 1993

Volume 28, Number 3

**Newly Restored, Newly Renovated—
The City Hall and County Courthouse**

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Memorial Hall and the God of Peace, restored so that they shine once again in all their glory in the St. Paul City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse. See articles beginning on page 4. Photo by George Heinrich.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

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An Award-winning Team



Ramsey County History has been awarded a Certificate of Commendation by the American Association for State and Local History. Above (from left) are some of the Editorial Board members who guide the publication process: Priscilla Farnham, executive director, Ramsey County Historical Society; Thomas C. Buckley; Virginia B. Kunz, the magazine's editor; John M. Lindley, Editorial Board chairman; Thomas H. Boyd; Arthur Mc Watt; and Thomas J. Kelley. Not pictured: Charlton Dietz, Laurie Murphy, and Dr. Thomas B. Mega. Photo by Richard Strom.

A Case History of Government in Action

The Newly Restored, Newly Renovated City Hall-C

Thomas J. Kelley

The newly renovated and restored St. Paul City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse will be rededicated with public tours December 4 and 5, 1993. The story of events leading to the first dedication of the building in 1932, as well as its current renovation, is an extraordinary case history of how decisions are made and things get done—or do not get done—in local government. Sometimes the story is dramatic; just as often it is not, but it is examined here in detail because it contains all of the elements that together define the democratic process as it operates in a community.

This unique building, conceived when our country was at the peak of the prosperous 1920s and built during the depth of the world-wide depression of the 1930s, was born out of dissatisfaction with its predecessor. Although the old St. Paul City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse, opened in 1889, had only been occupied for thirty-six years, by 1925 it was apparent to the Ramsey County Grand Jury that the building was seriously inadequate. A year earlier the Grand Jury had conducted a thorough inspection of the building. Its report issued in January, 1925, labeled the massive castle-like structure, "antiquated, inconvenient and an architectural mistake."

Stating that any private enterprise carried on under conditions that exist in the building would be subject to prosecution by the fire and health departments and the labor commission, the jury recommended that a new municipal building be designed to adequately house the activities of the city and county. It also recommended the abandonment for all time of the old type of courthouse and city hall and the construction instead of a modern office building to accommodate all the city and county functions that could be put into one building.

Typically, however, no action followed the report. It wasn't until January, 1927, that the St. Paul City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse Commission, a group of city and county officials charged with overseeing the operations and upkeep of the building, finally raised the question of

what could be done to relieve the pressure for space in the old building, a question which set off months of backing and filling before it was answered.

It was the city government, expanding rapidly to keep pace with the increasing needs of its growing population, that was most pressed for space, while the county, except for the municipalities of New Brighton, North St. Paul and White Bear Lake, remained rural with much of the land occupied by truck farms growing produce for the city markets. This created an interesting mindset among St. Paul residents who were inclined to refer to everything north of Larpenteur Avenue as *the county*. With its separate jail, the county was chiefly concerned with land-related activities and the county court system. City and county governments, however, maintained a good working relationship, due in part to a special state law that made the mayor of St. Paul the chairman of the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners and in part to the fact that the majority of the county commissioners were elected from districts within the city of St. Paul.

At the April, 1927, meeting of the City Hall and Courthouse Commission, County Commissioner Herbert P. Keller proposed that to relieve the courthouse congestion a four-story office building be erected at Fifth and Cedar Streets, a corner of the block occupied by the old courthouse between Fourth, Fifth, Cedar and Wabasha Streets. However, his proposal anticipated the possibility of an entirely new court-

house by suggesting that, "The addition to the building under consideration would be a skeleton type of steel and concrete If a new courthouse is erected eventually on the present courthouse grounds the skeleton of such a building could form a part of it. . . ."

An editorial in the *Pioneer Press* on April 4, 1927, discounted the idea of an addition to the old city hall. It pointed out that the same site had once been considered for a wing to house the county jail but the jail was located instead at Fourth and St. Peter Streets and "The wing idea was never pushed seriously because the architecture of the main structure was archaic when it was constructed and not suitable of perpetuation. The office building is more generally favored for public buildings. It was estimated that such a building housing the police department and all the other 'orphan' departments of the city and county would not cost more than \$200,000. The royal palace or baronial castle style is out of date. If an annex is constructed as proposed it would commit the city and county to the plan of a new municipal building on the site of the old courthouse. That may or may not be advisable."

A few days later a minor event foreshadowed the course the city and county would follow. City and county officers officially called for plans to be drawn for an entirely new city hall and courthouse, even before construction of the first unit of the proposed four-story building. On April 16, 1927, a *Pioneer Press* editorial again hinted at the possibility of a new courthouse by calling for a quick decision on the general plan for a courthouse and suggesting what kind of building it should be.

"The newer idea is to have a public building like other office buildings. If it occupies no more space than necessary it need not ruin the value of a great deal of surrounding property for business pur-

County Courthouse

poses as often results when a large tract is devoted to public use.”

The City Hall and Courthouse Commission continued to struggle throughout the summer of 1927 with the problem of congestion and the need to consolidate the various city offices housed in scattered rental quarters. On September 8, 1927, Commissioner Keller told a joint meeting of the City Council and County Board that relief of the congestion and the centralization of orphan departments could be accomplished by renting quarters in one building. He apparently was referring to the Foot Shultze Building at Robert and Tenth Streets and he asked the City Council to increase the City Hall and Courthouse Commission budget so the additional space could be rented. The council turned him down. They said no funds were available.

The explanation for the lack of funds can be found in the St. Paul city charter then in effect and the law governing the City Hall and Courthouse Commission. Under the law, the city and the county each supplied half of the appropriation for the city hall and courthouse. Neither could supply more than the other. Under the city's charter, the comptroller submitted a budget to the mayor and City Council annually. The City Council could amend the budget by not more than 10 percent for any item and not more than 5 percent for the total budget. The comptroller did not include enough in the city budget so the city could not come up with enough to cover its share and the county could not appropriate more than the city so the proposal to rent a building died.

In 1927, while the City Hall and Courthouse Commission was struggling to find funds for building or renting space to house the overflow from the burgeoning city and county governments, the voters of



The city hall and county courthouse soon after its completion in the early 1930s. Unless otherwise noted, this and other Hedrich Blessing photographs of the building's interior have been reprinted from an article published in American Architect in the mid-1930s.

St. Paul were turning down several bond issues for streets, schools, and other capital improvements. Among the St. Paul business groups opposing the bond issues was the St. Paul Bureau of Municipal Research, an independent organization backed by key businesses. It was one of many chapters organized by reformers in cities throughout the United States to combat corruption and waste in city governments. Carl Herbert, director of the St. Paul bureau, was part of the group of business people who opposed the bond issues because they felt the issues did not clearly reflect the needs of the city and they promised that following the defeat of the bond issues they would study the city's needs and prepare a report of their findings. The United Improvement Council was formed to carry out the promised study. It came up with a list of desirable

projects, the total of which exceeded \$44 million. Recognizing the impossibility of ever getting support for that sum, priorities were assigned to the items on the list, reducing the total to a \$15 million program to be carried out over a five-year period. Carl Herbert once confided that although the list had to be trimmed it still had to contain something for everyone so it would win enough votes for approval. This may explain why the proposal included \$4 million for a new city hall instead of any of the earlier compromises for meeting the space needs. The program also included a new airport, widened streets, new schools, and the initial investment in a sewage treatment facility that was to become the Metropolitan Area Sanitary District. The wide appeal of the projects coupled with the support of all the community's business groups resulted in the passage of the im-

provement program in 1928 by a 2 to 1 majority.

Despite the overwhelming voter support, the project was almost cut short by the Minnesota legislature. The referendum covered only the city's obligation for the building. Before bonds could be issued and the project launched, it remained for the legislature to pass a law enabling the county to issue bonds for its \$2 million share of the construction costs. No problems were expected in passing what was assumed to be a routine bill validating the decision of the voters to build a new city hall and courthouse. This optimistic assumption did not take into account the controversy developing over the selection of a site for the new building. One group proposed razing the existing courthouse and building the new city hall and courthouse on the same site. Another group argued that it should be built on a new site because it would cost \$500,000 to move the offices into temporary quarters, pay rent for two years while a new building was being erected, then move the offices into the new building. The preferred alternative site was the block where the city hall and courthouse now sits, between what was then Third Street (now Kellogg Boulevard) and Fourth Street, Wabasha and St. Peter Streets. In a speech to the Pythian Luncheon Club, Commissioner Keller suggested that the site would make an ideal setting for a building which will loom probably twenty or thirty stories high in the tower. He pointed out that it could be seen from every highway leading into the city and that the cost of the block would be less than the old city hall and courthouse would bring if sold.

The block was occupied by old run-down buildings and their removal, it was felt, would not create a serious impact on the center of the city. In an interview with writer Dane Smith many years after the event and published in 1981 in *Ramsey County History*, Herbert said the block was selected by William Hamm, who owned much downtown property, and other real estate interests because they did not want the center of town disturbed and this block with its older buildings was on the edge of downtown. Others argued that since the city was turning Third Street into Kellogg Boulevard, a wide thoroughfare

with a promenade overlooking the river and the West Side, the improved street would provide a fine location for the new building.

Larry Hodgson, St. Paul's popular mayor who wrote a newspaper column for many years under the name of Larry Ho, had a joint legislative committee draft the necessary bills for submitting St. Paul and Ramsey County's \$15,577,000 bond program to the Ramsey County legislative delegation in January, 1929. One of the bills would create a City Hall and Courthouse Advisory Committee with full power to pick a site, select a plan and construct the building. The bill as originally drafted called for the committee to be made up of four members appointed by the City Council, four by the Board of Ramsey County Commissioners and one by a joint meeting of the two bodies. It also provided that not more than four members of the committee should be city or county officials. The Ramsey County delegation amended the bill to provide that the committee be appointed by the district court judges. This version of the bill was repudiated by New York bond attorneys who said that this provision was illegal. They approved an amended bill that gave the committee advisory powers only.

With legal doubts eliminated and the role of the Advisory Committee much diluted, the enabling legislation was expected to face clear sailing in the Ramsey County legislative delegation. But with the question of where the new building should be located no longer to be resolved by the Advisory Committee, delegation members took it upon themselves to settle the issue. That decision almost scuttled the whole project.

On February 18, 1929, the *St. Paul Dispatch* reported that, "Four of the six members of the Ramsey County Senate delegation decided today that the new courthouse, to be built under the United Improvement Council's program, must be erected in the immediate vicinity of the present courthouse." The House delegation had been split over the same issue for two weeks and fears were expressed that the bond issue of \$2 million to provide the county's share of this project would be blocked by the controversy.

For two months the legislators battled over the location of the courthouse. Several times the project appeared to be dead, as bills were introduced, amended, and then rejected. A young East St. Paul legislator, Beldon H. Loftsgaarden, steered a compromise bill through the House of Representatives which stipulated that the city and county officials locate the building on the present site or within 300 feet of it. The House bill passed in a night session while the speaker ignored motions to adjourn from the bill's opponents. The Senate then passed a bill calling for the old building to be razed and a new building built on the same site. Proponents of the old site found fuel for their arguments when rumors circulated that options were being obtained on various pieces of downtown property with a view of selling them later to the city as the site for the proposed new city hall.

In mid-April, with the end of session looming, the three senators and three representatives serving on the legislative Conference Committee appointed to reach a compromise conceded that they were unable to agree and asked to be relieved. A new Conference Committee was appointed immediately, and its compromise bill was sent to the Senate where it was defeated by a vote of 34 to 32. After a short recess, the bill was reconsidered and again went down to defeat by a vote of 34 to 32. A third Conference Committee made up of legislators from outside Ramsey County was appointed and it convened the same day it was appointed. The members heard from William H. Oppenheimer, St. Paul attorney and chairman of the United Improvement Council which conducted the campaign to get voter approval for the courthouse, and Harry Hageman, who represented the faction holding tight for building on the site of the existing courthouse. Oppenheimer's arguments prevailed. The committee recommended that the courthouse site be chosen by a nine-member commission appointed by the district court judges. The bill passed the Senate in the final hours of the session with one dissenting vote. On April 25, 1929, Governor Theodore Christianson signed the legislation, one of 400 laws which passed in a session where more than 2,000 bills had been introduced. Among the



A new home for the Ramsey County manager. This space on the second floor was once the lobby for the city's real estate and treasury office. Now it includes a large reception lobby, conference rooms, and a library. Photo by George Heinrich.

defeated bills was a proposal for a constitutional amendment to authorize the legislature to levy a state income tax.

Less than two weeks later, the Ramsey County district court judges appointed the nine-member commission that would select the site and oversee the building's construction. "It is an extraordinarily able body," the newspaper said. It included, as freeholders from the city, Ralph Budd, president of the Great Northern Railroad; C. W. Bunn, general counsel and vice president of the Northern Pacific Railway; Homer Clark, president of West Publishing; and William H. Oppenheimer who had been closely identified with the project from the start. Mayor Larry Hodgson and Commissioner J. M. Clancy represented the city government. The county government was represented by Commissioners Arthur A. Stewart and Frank H. Gibbs. Fred H. Murray of White Bear Lake was appointed as a county resident and freeholder. Carl Herbert was secretary of the commission.

As the press explained it, "The commission members will serve without compensation and all their acts will be subject to approval of the City Council and County

Board." In time to come, although the commission was legally only an advisory body, its recommendations were rarely challenged.

The commission held its first meeting on May 15, 1929. Mayor Hodgson was elected its first chairman, and the group immediately asked city and county officials to prepare estimates of the space they would need to meet their present and future needs. During the summer and fall of 1929, the commission deliberated over the site options and by December the County Board and the City Council had adopted resolutions approving the block bounded by Wabasha, St. Peter, Third and Fourth Streets. Confident that their choice of site would be accepted, the commission had already arranged for the sale of the old city hall and courthouse block to the Morris T. Baker Co. of Minneapolis for \$700,000. Included in the deal were

**The Baker Co. sold the northwest quarter of the block to Northern States Power Company for \$100,000. The money was turned over to the city and county as part payment on the purchase price. Unfortunately the Great Depression, world-wide in scope, frustrated the company's*

guarantees that the buyer would put up at least \$2 million worth of new buildings, pay for tearing down the old courthouse, and give the city a twenty-foot strip along Cedar Street.*

Once the site was chosen and the land acquisition underway, the commission turned its attention to the type of building it wanted to create. The commission had already shown a disposition toward a functional approach to design when, at one of its earliest meetings, it asked officials what activities would be carried out in the building and how much space would be required by the various offices now and in the future.

In December, 1929, while most St. Paulites were preparing for the Christmas holidays, commission members divided into teams and toured the United States to inspect other public buildings. The first team made up of Ralph Budd, Homer P. Clark, Frank Gibbs and E. M. O'Neill visited Los Angeles, St. Louis, Denver and Salt Lake City. Following their tour the team concluded that the principal task confronting the commission was that of hiring an architect.

Mayor Larry Hodgson was scheduled to tour the East with Commissioner Arthur A. Stewart but his name did not appear in the following newspaper report of Stewart's trip.

"Mr. Stewart's recent trip was to the New England states. He was accompanied by Carl Herbert, secretary of the commission, and on part of the journey by James M. Clancey, another member of the commission. Mr. Stewart and Mr. Herbert proceeded from Chicago to Buffalo, where they inspected a new \$6,500,000 city hall, then with Clancy, they interviewed two prominent architects and met with the dean of architecture at Harvard University.

"Later they inspected a new courthouse in Providence and Mr. Herbert went to Detroit while Mr. Stewart and Mr. Clancy proceeded to Milwaukee to look over two elaborate court and municipal buildings."

plans and after some lawsuits the remaining three-fourths of the land reverted to the city. World War II followed the depression and it was not until 1951 that the remaining land, which had become known as Victory Square in 1945, was sold for a parking ramp.

Following the trip Stewart said, "In the East the public buildings run largely to the monumental type. It is my opinion, however, that an office type would be more satisfactory for St. Paul."

The commissioners promptly turned the lessons learned on these trips into policies. Oppenheimer, who was now commission chairman, reported that its members were unanimous on two points, "Namely; that the building to be constructed should be of a dignified office type, and second, should be planned from the inside out; that as a tailor makes a suit to fit the individual man, so the building should merely be the garment, as it were, covering and fitting the framework and needs of the governmental functions to be housed therein; that buildings not so planned, while beautiful to look upon, were all too frequently impractical, unsuited to carrying on of Governmental functions efficiently and did not take proper cognizance of the future."

As the commission approached the job of selecting architects for the building, a resolution by the Italian-American Legion of St. Paul advised commission members that the legion, "voicing the sentiment of the Italian people of this city, request that your honorable commission select the major architect for this commission from those now practicing in St. Paul." Support for hiring local architects also came from Professor Frederick E. Mann, head of the University of Minnesota School of Architecture, at a special meeting in Mayor Hodgson's office. He suggested that St. Paul architects should compete for the job by submitting plans for a municipal building to a committee from the American Institute of Architects who would check the qualifications of local architects and choose one or two best qualified to plan the building.

Despite these recommendations, the commission stuck to its decision that it would select the architects, but it agreed to select two architects, one with a national reputation and the other a local firm. It already had set some goals for itself that were to influence its selection of architects. It wanted a skyscraper that would utilize its space efficiently but still have a monumental and impressive bearing. These goals were consistent with the con-

temporary trend in modern design later known as Art Deco, a movement that was to have a major influence on the design of American buildings during the 1930s. Carl Herbert had been introduced to Art Deco by the dean of the Yale School of Architecture and was credited by Oppenheimer with influencing the commission's choice of architects.

The commission moved swiftly in making its selections. In late January, 1930, it interviewed six nationally recognized architects, including Cass Gilbert of New York, who designed the Minnesota State Capitol and many homes and churches in St. Paul; Eliel Saarinen, who was credited with leading the movement away from Neo-Classical, Neo-Gothic skyscraper design to the modern Spartan style known then as Moderne or Modernist style and now as Art Deco;* and John Root of Holabird and Root, designers of the Cook County Courthouse, Chicago City Hall, the *Chicago Daily News* and the Board of Trade buildings, and the Rand Tower in Minneapolis.

Two weeks after it held its last interview, the commission announced that it had selected Holabird and Root of Chicago. The evening after appearing before the commission, Root and John A. Holabird were awarded a medal of honor by the Minneapolis chapter of the American Institute of Architects for their work on the Rand Tower. How much this influenced the commission is not known, but in his 1981 *Ramsey County History* article Dane Smith wrote that "Holabird and Root was already [Carl] Herbert's favorite. He had heard good things about the firm from the dean of Yale's architecture school. In keeping with the commission's criteria, many of the company's designs of this period were contemporary, which at that time meant Art Deco. Herbert's preference apparently influenced Oppenheimer and the rest of the commission. Thomas Ellerbe & Company was selected to be the local firm but securing the contract for designing the city hall and courthouse did not come easily for Ellerbe. He had to resort to some

*The term *Art Deco*, which is used today to describe this school of design and architecture, was not in use until 1966.

**A group of descendants of early settlers who were influential for many years in civic affairs.

maneuvering to land his own commission."

Thomas Ellerbe had inherited a small architectural and engineering firm from his father and was just beginning to make a name for himself in Rochester, where he was designing buildings for the Mayo Clinic. "We were up and coming and I felt we were strong enough to do it," Ellerbe remembered years later. "The rivalry locally was intense. The depression was on its way and practically everybody needed the contract."

Ellerbe recalled that he sealed the contract when he staged a lavish exhibition of his firm's work billed as a "one-firm art-and-architecture show," a dramatic means of demonstrating the firm's ability. He selected stone carvings, bronze castings, stained glass, and textile samples to add color and interest to the prints, drawings, charts and photographs of his work that made up the show. Newspaper reporters wrote glowing stories for their papers on "Ellerbe Architects at Work." Less than a month after the exhibition Ellerbe was awarded the commission.

As the commission's choice was announced, it was challenged by a delegation from the Junior Pioneers,** and by County Commissioner-elect Louis Peter, who charged that 15 percent was too much for architectural fees in designing and supervising the furnishing of the new courthouse and asked that the decision be delayed. Chairman Oppenheimer put down the opposition by explaining that the commission had been reviewing the matter for six months, and the contract with Holabird and Root and the Ellerbe Company moved ahead without delay.

The two architectural firms began work on the design of the new building in February, 1930. By July they had produced a general concept plan which was approved in August, and the completed plans were approved on October 3, 1930, almost exactly nine months after the two architectural firms began the planning process. In an extensive article written for the Sunday, October 5, 1930, edition of the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Oppenheimer described the thorough research conducted by the architects and the commission before plans for the new courthouse would be

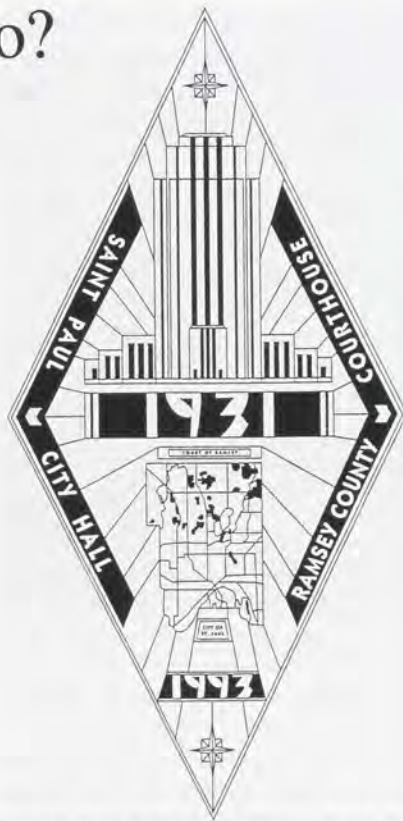
What IS Art Deco?

In 1977 the St. Paul City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse was designated a St. Paul Heritage Preservation Commission site, deemed worthy of preservation as an outstanding example of Art Deco design in architecture. Although Art Deco influenced the design of America's urban buildings for only about a decade, today those buildings are called treasures to be preserved.

The answer to what is Art Deco and where it came from is contained in the following adaptation of a brief history of the Art Deco movement by the design firm of Wold Architects and Engineers.

Art Deco traces its unique style back to Art Nouveau and the Wiener Werkstatte founded in Vienna in 1903 by Joseph Hoffman. In 1919 the Wiener Werkstatte opened a branch in New York City. In 1923 the work of another German designer, Hans Poelzig, was reported at length in *The American Architect*. His innovations and his refinement of indirect lighting and its theatrical applications became a signature of the Art Deco skyscraper style. The emphasis on dramatic lighting as an important element of design is nowhere more apparent than in the city hall and county courthouse in St. Paul.

According to the Wold report, the American version of Art Deco grew from two basic influences: the works of Louis Sullivan and of Frank Lloyd Wright. Along with Sullivan, it is important to mention Holabird and Rouche (the earlier name of Holabird and Root) and Burnham and Root. Both firms were included in the "Chicago



Bronze bas relief designed by Wold Architects and Engineers and embedded in the sidewalk at the Fourth Street entrance to the city hall and county courthouse.

School," which was principally responsible for the evolution of the American skyscraper.

Sullivan developed the use of classical overall massing with detailed and highly organized ornamental surfaces. He also developed the strong vertical piers with recessed windows and spandrels which would be characteristic of Art Deco. Holabird and Rouche were instrumental in developing and refining the steel skeletal frame and its technical integration into the skyscraper concept. Frank Lloyd Wright developed the strong abstract and geometric ornament that was an integral part of architecture.

The 1925 Exposition des Arts Decoratif in Paris became the catalyst that, in sending the message that Modernism was in, energized American architecture and design. American envoys from industry, architecture, design, and crafts came in large numbers and the effect upon their return to America was pervasive.

The high point of American Art Deco is thought to have been the exhibition, "The Architect and the Industrial Arts," which opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City just months before the 1929 stock market crash. The exhibition is recognized as the finest American example of Art Deco. Eight American architects participated. Each created a complete room setting and designed the furniture, furnishings, artwork, and accessories which then were produced by leading manufacturers. Two of these architects, Saarinen of Detroit and John W. Root of Chicago, were interviewed by the St. Paul City Hall and Courthouse Commission during or immediately following the exhibition.

Several Twin Cities buildings erected during the 1930s were influenced by the Art Deco style. In addition to the city hall and courthouse, the former Women's City Club building (now the Jemme building) at St. Peter Street and Kellogg Boulevard and the Rand Tower in Minneapolis are extraordinary examples of the style. The First National Bank of St. Paul and the Lowry Annex, now the City Hall Annex, also reflect the Art Deco influence.

—Thomas J. Kelley

drawn.

"... It was found that there was not even a blueprint of the old building, so blueprints were prepared ... showing the amount of space occupied by each department, its growth and various functions performed by each employee, and the

relation of those functions to other employees. On the blueprints every desk and even every hat rack was located.

"Vault space was studied in such offices as the Register of Deeds, Clerk of the Probate Court and Clerk of the District Court and the number of records that existed 50

years ago was ascertained and the increase in those records over a period of years and up to the present time was likewise charted. From the experience of the past the vault requirements of the future were projected on charts so that we could ascertain what would probably be needed twenty

and fifty years from now.*

"The present plans contemplate one large courtroom which will be used for criminal trials and will be available for cases where there might be a large attendance by the public. The rest of the district and municipal courtrooms are relatively small . . . Today, with the automobile, the movies and the like, there is no longer the large court attendance of former times at ordinary trials. Cutting down the size of the courtrooms enabled the architects to reduce the size of the tower shaft of the building and thereby reduce the cost by \$600,000.

"A courtroom floor will consist of four courtrooms, four judge's chambers with a judge's ante room and an office for the judge's reporter or secretary in each suite, and two jury rooms. There will also be provided in the building two suites of rooms to take care of juries that are out overnight.

"We broke down our city and county governments and realigned them by functions of government irrespective of the form under which they are administered . . . There are certain departments that must be on the first floor because of constant contact with the public. There are certain departments that must be relatively near each other because of the demands of the public or the demands of the departments."

This exhaustive attention to detail paid off in the final plan, as Oppenheimer proudly reported:

"The new building will contain a gross area of 333,320 square feet, developing 264,340 square feet of usable area, or in other words, substantially 79.2 percent of the floor space will be available for office and courtroom use." Oppenheimer contrasted that ratio with the 67 percent of usa-

ble space in the new First National Bank building then under construction, the Minnesota building with its approximately 67 percent of usable space, and the old courthouse with less than 60 per cent of usable space.

"In arranging the various finance offices," he continued, "it is planned that the public will enter from the main corridor into a joint public space with something of the appearance of the lobby of a bank. Around this space will be grouped the activities of the Water Department with its cashier, the Comptroller, the Finance Department and the City Bank, all related one to the other in their dealings with the public. Likewise there will be an entrance from the hall into a common public space dividing the Assessor and the County Auditor, with the Assessor's counters on one side and the Auditor's on the other, again giving the appearance of a modern banking or business institution to these offices and avoiding the duplication of public space. The third floor will contain the council chamber fronting on Third Street, and adjoining it the Mayor's offices . . . the Grand Jury room and County Attorneys' offices."

Although Oppenheimer mentioned a city bank, and the newspaper stories about the building refer to a city bank, little information is available about this unique organization. A retired employee of the comptroller's office recalls hearing old timers in the city government talking about the time during the depression when the city was forced to pay its employees in scrip and later redeeming it at the City Bank. Another retiree said he had heard that the bank was created by an early mayor with socialist leanings. These interesting bits of oral history so far remain undocumented. But the 1930 City and County Employees Year Book, in a description of the Department of Finance, provides evidence that the City Bank can be traced back to the 1914 city charter which was still in effect and in which the following was written:

"The charter provided that bonds of the city may be sold in fractional parts in multiples of \$10.00. Who could have foreseen in that simple sentence which permitted the formation of the Bureau of Participating Certificates, commonly known as the

City Bank . . . [the] nine thousand active accounts [of today] with \$11,500,000.00 on deposit." Interest payments of 3 percent were made twice a year by the commissioner of finance.

"The fourth floor," Oppenheimer explained, "will be devoted to the Department of Education; the fifth floor to part of the Department of Education, the County Superintendent of Schools, City Purchasing Department and the County Coroner. The sixth, seventh and seventeenth floors will be left unfinished to provide for further general expansion and the fifteenth floor that was dedicated to use by the district court will be left for expansion of the court when it becomes needed." Oppenheimer added that the commission was determined to turn over to the city and county a building complete in every way including furnishings.

The commission agreed to the general design for a nineteen-story steel-framed structure with self-supporting exterior walls so that interior walls could be moved or removed without jeopardizing the structural integrity of the building. The first three floors of the building were to cover most of the site, and a tower on the Third Street side of the building would add sixteen more floors to the building.

With the function of the building clearly defined, it now was up to the architects to determine its form and character through the use of materials, texture, color, and artistic embellishment. Holabird and Root was given the responsibility for the basic planning of the general exterior design, and the fundamental concepts of the interior. As planning and construction progressed, however, Ellerbe's people became more involved, mainly because they were on the site and Holabird and Root remained headquartered in Chicago. The City Council and County Board approved the final plan for the building in mid-April, 1931.

Tom Ellerbe's strengths were in the area of detail design and engineering, and his influence could be seen in the state-of-the-art mechanical features such as the elevators, which were considered the fastest and most modern available; the concealed radiation; and a thermostatic control system, which resulted in lower heating bills

**There was no way the architects and the commission could anticipate the increase in records caused by the expanded activity in the courts or the increase in land records resulting from the post-World War II building boom. Although the number of records grew far beyond the earlier estimate, the pressure for space was eased by using computers to store land and tax records and microfilm to reduce the space required for court records. However, computers notwithstanding, the Department of Taxation eventually had to find more space.*



Third floor elevator lobby, showing bronze elevator doors and imported marble used for the walls.

than those incurred in the old courthouse, despite the fact that the new building was three times larger. Other innovations included the control of all clocks from a master board in the top-floor penthouse, which also controlled a sixty-gallon soap dispenser that automatically filled all the dispensers in the restrooms. Ellerbe's insistence on using the most up-to-date mechanical systems available explain in part why the building has served so well for so long. Of equal importance has been the way the Art Deco theme has been used throughout the building, even in such details as door handles, electrical receptacles, light fixtures, mailboxes, stair railings, washrooms, even departmental signs.

On the strength of Ellerbe's statement that, "Holabird and Root were the outside people and we were the inside people," it could be assumed that Ellerbe's was the mind behind the aesthetic consistency exhibited in the building until one crosses the river to Minneapolis and tours the Rand Tower. This exquisite Art Deco building exhibits the same consistent and creative attention to detail and artistic consistency found in the city hall and courthouse. John Root of Holabird and Root was the designer of that building. We may never know whether Ellerbe or Root or the two of them working together in an exceptional col-

laboration were responsible for the Art Deco features of the building; we can only rejoice in the results.

The plan called for jury rooms equipped with sleeping quarters for the jurors. The *Pioneer Press* responded that, "Now that architects have solved the problem of putting jurors to sleep at night, lawyers should do something about keeping them awake in the day time. Dry debate and droning counsel, coupled with summer sunshine and summer heat combine to form a sleep potion which even the resolutely dutiful juror finds it difficult to conquer."

The plan also included a municipal reference library that would be operated under the supervision of the St. Paul Public Library and include law books and reports from other cities and periodicals and journals related to city and county government. The library would be on the eighteenth floor, the uppermost public floor in the building far removed from the intensive activity of the lower floors.

The occupants of the Lowry Medical Arts Building across Fourth Street from the new courthouse filed a last-minute request that the steel framework be welded instead of riveted to eliminate disruptive noise. The request was turned down because welding the joints of steel building frameworks was a new process which the

architects felt had not yet stood the test of time.

For the exterior of the building, the elected members of the commission had voted in favor of Mankato stone, but the citizen members, who were in the majority, favored Indiana limestone. On the eve of the vote by the City Council and County Board to formally ratify the building contracts, the elected officials threatened to block the passage of the contracts over the choice of stone.

They succeeded in delaying the vote for three days but the contracts for construction of the new city hall and county courthouse were awarded on June 6, 1931. Foley Brothers Construction Company was given the general construction contract for \$2,221,490. The plumbing, heating, and electrical contracts brought the total up to \$2,527,212. As the result of the depression, the bids were several hundred thousand dollars lower than expected. However, the bids were no sooner opened than a St. Paul contractor sought a restraining order to block construction of the courthouse by Foley Brothers. He charged that the Foley bid was illegal because it did not include an adequate bond. The legal action was soon dropped and construction began on schedule.

Workers and suppliers of materials in St. Paul saw the new city hall and courthouse and the other city-wide improvement projects as opportunities to improve St. Paul's economy which was feeling the effects of the depression. Four hundred builders and members of the United Building Trades voted unanimously for a resolution asking that the new courthouse be built by St. Paul talent.

Other groups passed petitions calling for the builders to use materials supplied in St. Paul. Milton Rosen, St. Paul's commissioner of public works, estimated that the construction of the St. Paul Auditorium and the city hall and courthouse, which were authorized by the voters at the same time, would provide more than 500 jobs. Tom Ellerbe remembered that the general contractor was authorized to pay 12½ percent over the prevailing pay scale to insure that the best workmen would be hired for the courthouse construction. This increase raised the pay for the workers from 40 to 45 cents an hour. The contract also extend-

ed the 45-cents-an-hour rate to unskilled workers and required that all materials be purchased in Ramsey County and subcontracts awarded to Ramsey County concerns wherever possible. In an address before the St. Paul Builder's Exchange, its president Fred J. Morse warned that this could backfire on St. Paul businesses that supply materials and services to customers outside the city and county.

Just as the political, financial and aesthetic debates leading to the design decisions for the new building were reported in great depth in the St. Paul newspapers, so too was every detail of every event relating to its construction. The first report appeared under the headline, "Work Begins On City Hall:"

"Another skyscraper started reaching for the blue in St. Paul today when work began on the new City Hall and Courthouse. One steam shovel and a fleet of trucks began operations on the northwest corner of Third and Wabasha streets where the new \$4,000,000 structure will tower 265 feet."

The arrival of a shipment of steel for the building was also duly reported:

"More than a third of the 2,500 tons of steel for the City Hall and Courthouse has arrived in St. Paul for fabrication and steel work will be under way on the structure by Saturday, Fred S. Power, president of the St. Paul Foundry Co., which is furnishing the metal announced today. The steel arrived in four barges which was the equivalent of 20 rail cars of steel. The steel was delayed between Winona and Lake Pepin by low water."

All the news wasn't good. On April 15, 1931 the *St. Paul Dispatch* reported:

"A workman in the excavation for the new City Hall and Courthouse was injured seriously today when he was struck on the head by a rock which had been dislodged from the excavation wall. The victim of the accident, Anthony Campbell, 34 years old, was taken to Ancker Hospital where he was reported suffering concussion of the brain and a possible fractured skull. He was in critical condition."

A few months later some concrete forms filled with freshly poured concrete collapsed. There were no serious injuries.

Although the commission had settled



The Probate Court's room on the tenth floor, the only original courtroom remaining on that floor. Restored to its original condition, it has walnut paneling and bronze linear light fixtures. The Honorable Gordon T. Shumaker, Second Judicial District judge, is on the bench. Photo by George Heinrich.

on Indiana limestone for the building before the contracts were let, the decision was not unanimous and the controversy over stone plagued the commission throughout the first six months of construction and eventually delayed the completion of the building. In August, 1931, the press reported that more than 500 tons of stone shipped to St. Paul from Evansville, Indiana, had been rejected by the architects. Although Holabird and Root was in charge of overseeing the stone work on the exterior of the building, the city officials insinuated themselves into the process. The *Pioneer Press* reported that, "Representatives of the City Council, Ramsey County Board, City Hall and Courthouse Advisory Commission and architects and contractors for the new City Hall and Courthouse left Tuesday night for Detroit and Battle Creek, Mich., to determine the question of stone for the building. After visiting buildings in those cities made with the same kind of stone being shipped to St. Paul and visiting quarries in Indiana, which were the source of the stone, the delegation announced they were satisfied with the stone and agreed to keep

the slabs which had already been shipped."

As a result of the controversy, each piece of stone was being inspected before it was put into the building. In January, 1932, the December payment to the contractor for \$152,000 was delayed because some stone had been installed while it was wet and could not be inspected for color. County Commissioner Clyde R. May, who was a vigorous participant in the stone fight, told the council that the Swanson Stone Co., subcontractors for the stone work on the building, was using out-of-town labor, despite the fact that ten St. Paul stonemasons were out of work.

The controversy finally was brought to an end when it was agreed that the contract would be modified and the stone would be given a carborundum dressing to insure a uniform color and texture over the entire exterior. By this time the stone work had fallen several months behind schedule and delayed work on other parts of the building that could not be completed until the stone was installed.

On October 29, 1931, the stone controversy was set aside for the laying of the cornerstone. Mayor Gerhardt Bundlie

placed a copper box containing accounts of recent St. Paul developments under the stone and said, "Each generation seeks to transmit to the next a city greater, better and more beautiful than the last." After the stone was placed, Justice Royal A. Stone, of the state Supreme Court gave the principal address in which he described the history and growth of the city. Julius H. Barnes, chairman of the United States Chamber of Commerce, spoke at a luncheon at the St. Paul Hotel following the ceremony and in an interview for the press he discussed the state of the economy.

"Lack of confidence is at the bottom of the present economic depression," he said. "As soon as people realize that they have been hoarding money beneath their mattresses instead of taking advantage of investments in stocks which can now be purchased at ridiculously low figures; as soon as they realize they have been unduly excited and overly cautious, conditions will return to normal." He added that in his opinion, "this will dawn on them more or less all at once. There will be a veritable landslide toward the return of business confidence."

Despite Barnes's rosy outlook the depression persisted although, ironically, it did result in lower costs for labor and materials than had originally been budgeted for the building. That enabled Ellerbe and the commission to make extensive although unplanned use of exotic marbles and imported woods and to commission four renowned artists to create art works for the building.

The building commission decided that the interior walls should be more than just plaster and paint. Marble was considered for use throughout the building, but because of its cost the commission limited it to the public spaces on the first three floors. The members concluded that wood paneling used elsewhere in the building would create a beautiful and practical interior at a reasonable cost. A. J. Crocker described the results in the *St. Paul Dispatch* :

"The largest collection of rare woods in the world has been used in finishing the interior of St. Paul's new City Hall and Courthouse . . . Europe, Africa and the orient, India, Mexico and the South Sea Islands as well as the forests of

America all have contributed some logs to the making of the veneer used generally in finishing many of the rooms and corridors . . . For some of the rooms in the building, it was necessary to cut seven or eight logs before one could be found to furnish the properly matched veneer for the entire room. The veneer is made in St. Paul [by the Villaume Box & Lumber Company] . . . For more than six months between 150 and 175 highly skilled wood workers and cabinet makers have been busy fabricating and installing some 200,000 square feet of this type of finish and decoration. The total cost of the work is estimated at \$237,000.

"More than half of the wood used in the building is American black walnut. Sawed in different ways are found white oak, butt walnut, birds eye maple, red birch, butternut and California walnut, all from the United States. Primo vero, Mexican and Honduras mahogany came from Mexico, South and Central America and equatorial islands; English oak, French walnut and Austrian oak were brought from Europe; avodire, framire and African mahogany from Africa; teak, rosewood and laurel from India, Burma and Siam; blackwood, Tasmanian oak and oriental wood from Australia, and koa from the Hawaiian islands."*

To make sure the furnishings would be consistent with the building's design, a contract was signed with Ellerbe and Holabird and Root to design the furniture, but only after a bitter fight. Commission Chairman Oppenheimer said that he believed it would save money and time to have the same people who designed the building design and oversee the purchase of its furniture. County Commissioner Louis H. Peter and the Junior Pioneers, who had objected to the 15 percent fee for the architects when they were hired to design the building, now renewed their objections to the fee. Peter also charged that the commission was relying too much on the recommendations of its secretary, Carl Herbert. Whereupon Oppenheimer

**No attempt has been made to use these exotic woods in the new parts of the building. Cherry wood paneling with metal divider strips retain the Art Deco theme of the building and form an easy transition from the old to the new areas.*

charged that Peter had insulted the members of the commission. Following an acrimonious exchange, the matter was laid over and the contract was approved in a later session.

As a result of the decision the furnishings were carefully coordinated with the building details. In many of the offices the benches, chairs, desks, and cabinets were made of woods that matched or complemented the walls and woodwork of the room. Moreover, in many cases the actual design and use of inlays were coordinated with the Art Deco theme of the building.

Marble imported from Belgium, France, Greece and Italy was cut and polished in St. Paul by the Drake Marble Company and used in the public areas on the first three floors where it would have the greatest visual impact. But the element which separated this modern building from others in the area was the way art was made an integral part of it.

Confined by a modest budget, the commission chose to use its limited resources for a few outstanding murals and pieces of sculpture by renowned artists. This decision, like so many of the commission's earlier decisions, did not go unchallenged. When the proposal for art came before the County Board, Commissioner Peter called it "an extravagance." He also took issue with the commissioning of out-of-town artists to do the work. The City Council approved the art proposal, and an editorial in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* supported the commission's position on art but proposed that the artists be selected through a competition. The County Board eventually agreed to the commission's art proposal by a 4 to 3 vote. Later, when the contracts for two of the artists came before the County Board they were first rejected because they were not accompanied by a bond. F. R. Bigelow, a commission member and president of the St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company, told the board members that he did not know of any company that would supply a bond for an artist, and an assistant county attorney added that the county did not require that architects and artists be bonded. The board then insisted that the artists be paid in installments.

Lee Lawrie of New York, who was also designing sculpture for another Art Deco building, the RCA building in New

York City, was chosen to do decorative stone designs for the building's exterior. The largest of his carved stone reliefs is of a busy St. Paul street scene which appears directly above the Fourth Street entrance to the building. Above that is a carved symbol of liberty.

Above the windows on that same side of the building are three of Lawrie's carved symbols: an eight-pointed star for the state of Minnesota; a washstand with a scroll symbolizing the signing of the territorial declaration for Ramsey County; and a castle supported on the hilt of an upraised Roman sword for the City of St. Paul. Lawrie's stone reliefs also appear on both sides of the Kellogg Boulevard entrance. The panel on the left symbolizes the City of St. Paul with a female figure in the foreground holding the scales of justice. Below are the words Law and Order. Foreground elements represent Education, Commerce and Industry.

The female figure on the right holds a scythe and an overflowing cornucopia inscribed with the word Abundance. At her feet is a sheaf of wheat inscribed Agriculture and a butter churn. Off in the distance are a forest and sunset as well as a train and bridge, the link between city and county. Two additional symbols appear on the Kellogg Street side. One is a beehive, the symbol of harmony and order; the other, a set of balance scales, the symbol of justice.

Two other artists, E. R. Stewart of New York and John Norton of Chicago, were commissioned to create works representing periods in St. Paul's history. Stewart designed the six sculpted ground floor elevator doors. Norton painted four large murals for the City Council chamber. The four paintings were described in the *Pioneer Press* by Frances Boardman, who wrote that St. Paul's evolution as a center of transportation was the theme of the murals, with a huge single figure dominating each painting: ". . . the pioneer, the voyageur with his canoe paddle; the steamship captain; the railroad surveyor of yesterday, and next to him the skilled controller of rail transportation today . . ." The color scheme was repeated, she continued, in all the canvasses, integrating them with the architecture of the room.

Memorial Hall, the three-story concourse with its black marble walls and

columns of light extending from floor to ceiling, provided a dramatic setting for Carl Milles's three-story statue, God of Peace, described on page 22 in this issue. But before the statue was put in place the building was completed and occupied.

The city hall and county courthouse was scheduled to be completed October 1, 1932, but as the day grew near the contractor requested a ninety-day extension. Although the contract specified that the builder would have to pay \$600 a day for each day he ran beyond the scheduled completion date, the contractor was granted a grace period because, "The architects failed to have plans for the stone ready on time and delayed in approving the stone after its selection."

Finally, on December 19, 1932, the building was dedicated and opened to the public for inspection. United States Attorney General William Mitchell of St. Paul made the dedicatory address in the St. Paul Auditorium. He paid tribute to the traditions of the city and county and the officials who sponsored such a building.

"This building which we are dedicating here tonight," he said, "marks an epoch in our civic development. It represents the culmination of a wisely conceived and splendidly executed plan of public improvements aimed at the beautification of our city . . ."

Although the City Hall and Courthouse Commission members and the architects at that ceremony had invested great efforts to make sure that their new building would be prepared to meet the future needs of the city and county, it was impossible, even with painstaking research and planning, to anticipate the dramatic changes that would occur in our local governments in the decades following its completion. They also could not foresee the changes in technology which would make their state-of-the-art equipment obsolete. The elevators, the fastest and most modern available in 1932 (when installed they could travel 900 feet per minute and required human operators), would become out-of-date and be replaced a half century later.

One of the features which suffered the most over the years was lighting, an important aspect of Art Deco design. It was used on the outside of the building to em-

phasize its dramatic vertical lines. In the interior light and lighting fixtures also were a key part of the design. In the entry light columns enclosed in custom-built fixtures created a dramatic contrast to the luxurious imported marbles of the floors and walls. In the offices special light fixtures, designed exclusively to complement the overall design and furnishings, provided indirect illumination for people at their desks. As lighting technology improved, the old lights were replaced with fluorescent and direct incandescent fixtures that had greater utility than the former fixtures, but none of their beauty. In some offices attempts were made to retain the lines of the original fixtures but in other offices the changes were paid for from a departmental or agency budget and were carried out without the sanction of the City Hall and Courthouse Commission. In one court office the clerk installed fluorescent lights in diagonal strips across the large ceiling, "to prevent shadows on the workers' desks."

Changing technology soon made other parts of the original mechanical system that seemed so advanced for its time obsolete. The washed air system using well water to cool the building was not adequate and individual departments installed various kinds of cooling systems including residential air conditioners designed to fit in small windows. To make them work in the building the large windows were removed and replaced by unsightly sheets of plywood. The City Hall and Courthouse Commission members blinked at these changes because there was not enough money in their budget to install central air conditioning. One retired department head explained that this lack of money made it necessary for department heads to go it alone on improvements on a hit-and-miss basis.

As Michael Cox of Wold Architects and Engineers, the firm that is overseeing the restoration of the building, observed recently, "The lack of funds over the years prevented officials from making significant changes in the city hall and courthouse. It may have been a blessing because it kept many of the building's important features intact."

At the time the building was dedicated, St. Paul was governed by a commission

form of government, which meant that each of the six City Council members served as the head of a department and the mayor was chairman of the council. Each council member had an office in the department he headed. In 1972, when a charter change brought about a different form of government and council members' duties became purely legislative, it was necessary to turn the entire seventh floor over to offices for the council. Years earlier when the Independent School District (it was the Department of Education when the building opened) outgrew its quarters and moved to a separate building it freed up more than an entire floor of the building which was promptly filled with city offices.

One of the most striking changes brought about by the current renovation of the courthouse has been in the offices of the County Board. When the building opened in 1932, six County Board members shared a single small office next to the Council Chambers and the County Board's meeting room in the southwest corner on the third floor. This is now the media room. The room was so small that six special half-size desks were made for the county commissioners. The seventh member of the board was the mayor of St. Paul, who was automatically the chairman of the board and worked from his commodious quarters on the same floor. There was no county manager at the time. The board's secretary was located in the county auditor's office. Today the county auditor's position has disappeared, along with the elected offices of register of deeds, corner, abstract clerk, clerk of court, and county treasurer.

At the same time these changes were occurring in county government the voters of the city were adopting and implementing a new city charter which wiped out the elected position of comptroller, increased the powers and duties of the mayor and dissolved the commission form of government. These major changes in government organization resulted in significant changes in the use of the city hall and courthouse and the space needs.

In the intervening years, the county government has come to play a larger role in providing health and welfare ser-



City Council chamber, showing two of the four murals by John W. Norton. The County Board also meets here.

vices, libraries, parks and public works. It is also the administrator of many human service programs mandated by the state and federal governments. As a consequence of its increasing duties, its space needs grew rapidly. The commissioners moved from their tiny office to a suite of offices on the third floor once occupied by the city utilities department.

The newly completed changes in the city and county building have provided each county commissioner with a separate paneled office in a suite with meeting rooms that also includes an office for each commissioner's aide. The County Board meeting room is now located adjacent to their offices. The entrance to the board area features a cherry-paneled reception area which replicates a historic lobby space. This space is illuminated by bronze and white ceiling light fixtures. A framed opening was fashioned to recall the detailed scalloped trim found in the nine-bay area (now the county manager's office area). The new County Board meeting room has an octagonal shape which has been used as a design element throughout the building. The walls have a cherry wood

wainscot with acoustic fabric panels divided horizontally with bronze inlay strips. Six different woods were used to make the County Board table. These woods are inlaid in patterns that symbolize the state and county, and are the same symbols used on the exterior by artist Lee Lawrie. The wall, fabric, furniture, and carpet are all period designs.

As functions changed and offices were vacated and reoccupied, expanded and divided over the years, the original materials either could not be matched or economics dictated that new and often incompatible or inappropriate materials had to be used. Furniture which had been so carefully selected to follow the Art Deco motif of the offices was most difficult to control. Pieces which had been custom-made to match the wood in the paneling and trim of a particular room were moved around as functions were reassigned or occupants moved out. Special efforts have been made to recover or restore the lost pieces of furniture. One successful search involved a twelve-foot conference table, its top made from four pieces of wood cut from a single log and booked and matched in a butterfly

pattern. The table was found in a city department outside of the building where it was being used as a work table by a group of designers. The table was retrieved, refinished and became the conference table for labor negotiations in the city personnel department.

Little work has been done on the exterior of the building beyond simple upkeep. The joints in the masonry have been caulked periodically and the roof membrane has been replaced, but these are normal maintenance measures for any building.

Despite the changes to the building and its contents over the last sixty years, the courthouse has remained an outstanding example of Art Deco architecture and design. No amount of indifference or neglect could subdue the message of clean lines and simple dedication to utility which is evident throughout the building. The only major change made in the exterior since the building was opened was the replacement of windows in 1977. The original windows on the lower level were cast and polished metal casements that appeared to be bronze or stainless steel. In the upper floors the windows were stainless steel or metal alloy casements. They matched the color of the cast aluminum panels that together with the windows created the recessed vertical lines which are an outstanding feature of the exterior design. Although these custom windows were attractive, the large single glazed units on the first floor frosted and dripped throughout the winter.

The replacement windows were double-paned sliding aluminum units that were dark enough in color to maintain the dark vertical line. But they do not match the original windows in color and design.

History repeats itself, but never exactly. The events leading to the decision to renovate the city hall and courthouse were free of the controversy and acrimony that marked the deliberations leading to and during the construction of the building a half century earlier.

For several decades recommendations that the building be fitted with central air conditioning were regularly considered by the City Hall and Courthouse Commission and were just as regularly deferred because of the cost. Finally, in the early



The Concourse Level on the lower level near the elevator lobby. The bronze light cove in the ceiling is shaped to represent the Star of the North. Against the wall is a back-lighted panorama with a cut-glass mural created by New York artists Christopher Cosma and Denise Amses. Photo by George Heinrich.

1980s the Commission ordered a serious study of the building. The changes in governance of the city and county probably contributed to the decision to renovate the city hall and courthouse but most observers say the project was triggered both by the desire for air conditioning and the need to improve the mechanical systems.

The report did not generate any action until December 16, 1985, when officials of the city, county and municipal and district courts, calling themselves the Ad Hoc Restoration and Completion Task Force, met to affirm the concept of restoration and

completion of the historic city hall and courthouse. Judge Joseph Summers was named chairman of the group, which included Vic Tedesco, City Council president; Warren Schaber, County Board chairman; Mayor George Latimer, and Chief Judge David Marsden.

The Ad Hoc Committee made completion of the city hall and courthouse part of its mission. When the building was erected it was decided in the interest of economy to leave the old jail building standing on the site of what otherwise would have been the northwest quadrant of the city hall and

courthouse. In 1979 a new jail was built across Kellogg Boulevard from the city hall and courthouse and the old jail was torn down the following year. This move created an opportunity to complete the building as it was originally planned. The Ad Hoc Committee decided to include a five-story addition to be built on the jail site in its proposed restoration and retrofitting package. The City Council and County Board, acting on the recommendation of the committee, decided to move ahead with the restoration, including the new addition on the old jail site.

Tolz, King, Duvall and Anderson and Associates had been commissioned earlier to prepare a preliminary report on the scope and costs of the renovation, historic preservation and addition to the building. In December, 1987, the TKDA report was reviewed and ratified by the Ellerbe Company, the same architectural firm that was codesigner of the city hall and courthouse fifty-five years earlier.

The acceptance of the TKDA report cleared the way to make 1988 a year of decision. It started on a positive note on January 12, when the County Board passed a resolution presented by Commissioner John Finley that called for ". . . the building to be brought into conformance with modern building and safety codes, remedial and maintenance and repairs." The resolution provided for a complete office renovation, including the floors not mentioned in the Ad Hoc Committee report, and a three-floor addition to the building on the vacant spot where the old jail had stood. Two weeks later the City Council passed a similar resolution accepting the scope of the project. On February 16, 1988, both the city and county passed resolutions adopting the renovation plan.

However, officials remained concerned that the project might be delayed by differences over the distribution of ownership, financing and management of the project. Much discussion between the county and the city centered around the financing and how much each unit of government should pay toward the renovation. Warren Schaber, County Board chairman at that time, suggested that the county could issue the bonds to cover the restoration, and he put the details together. County Commissioner Diane Ahrens then introduced

Schaber's proposal, which provided that Ramsey County would pay all of the \$48.5 million debt financing for the city hall and courthouse project and assume the city's part of the outstanding debt for the St. Paul-Ramsey County Medical Center. The city would transfer its ownership interests in the medical center, Boys Totem Town, the Workhouse, Woodview Detention Home and the Lake Owasso residence to the county. Under the agreement, the county would take over management of the city hall and courthouse. The proposal was passed by the County Board on February 16.

Legislative authority was required to issue the bonds. However, in 1988 the Minnesota legislature passed a general law giving all counties the authority to issue capital improvement bonds. The limits under this law were too low to cover the cost of the city hall and courthouse project, but the late Tom Ryan, lobbyist for Ramsey County, convinced the state legislature that the limit should be raised for Ramsey County to enable it to go ahead with the renovation. With the passage of this legislation, the way was clear to launch the project.

A City Hall/Courthouse Renovation Committee of elected officials was established by a joint powers agreement between the city and county. Members of the committee included Ramsey County Commissioners Warren Schaber, Ruby Hunt, and Hal Norgard; the Honorable Lawrence Cohen, judge of the Second Judicial District; Mayors James Scheibel and George Latimer and their representatives Ed Starr, Ed Warn, and Rich Gehrman; Councilmembers Bill Wilson, David Thune, and Roger Goswitz. They met continually throughout the project and received reports from the Project Management Team of staff members who were chosen to represent the courts, the county and the city, as well as the overall project. This team consisted of William J. Bartolic, III, Pat O'Malley, Dave Nelson, Jan Gasterland, Jim Van Houdt, Marion Holly, Karen Kushner, Ed Starr, Jim Hart, Bob Isakson, and Jolly Mangine. The building manager, Dennis Gaiovnik, and county risk manager, Georgiann Schulte, served as consultants to the committee.

The Project Management Team inter-

viewed architects and recommended Wold Architects of St. Paul to the committee. They were chosen to design the changes and oversee the project because of their ability to put together a team that best reflected the needs of the renovation/restoration. Wold also had a history of expertise in working with public agencies. They were joined by an associate architectural firm, the Alliance, and mechanical and electrical engineers Michaud Cooley, Ericson and Associates. A historical architect, the Croxton Collaborative, was hired to develop a historical analysis of the building.

In December of 1988 the architects and engineers launched a predesign study that was as extensive and as intensive as the process used by Holabird and Root and Ellerbe when they started work on the original design for the building. As a first step in the predesign study, the design team measured the building throughout; original shop drawings were analyzed; officials and workers were interviewed; and the features of the building were cataloged to determine areas for historic preservation and areas that would be changed or added.

The team developed a strategy which held the key elements of the renovation/restoration plan, starting with the addition built on the site of the old jail at the northwest corner of the building. With this plan in mind, there was no attempt to artificially age the surface of new materials, such as the exterior limestone of the building addition to make it conform to existing stone. The addition was faithful to the original architect's plan. It extended the lines of the first three floors, joined the original building, and added 32,000 square feet. Outside details, like Lee Lawrie's stone reliefs, are carried through to the addition, but to differentiate the new building, they are cast in bronze. Likewise, on the interior there was no attempt to match the many exotic woods used throughout the building.

The design team also established different categories for handling the historic and new areas. These included the restoration or preservation areas, which are preserved in their original form or restored to their original state; historic transition areas, which serve as bridges between old and

new; new lobbies or reception areas, which are designed in an interpretive manner to reflect the historic order; and historic/interpretive areas which are new but through the use of materials, art, and design are consistent with or contribute to the historic understanding of the building.

Probably the most stunning example of a new historic/interpretive area is the Concourse Level or basement of the building. At first glance, the area looks like an integral part of the restoration, down to the new terrazzo floor, patterned ceiling, and Botticino marble walls and pillars. But in reality, the area once housed the building's air exchangers, which now have been distributed on a lower level and on the sixth and twentieth floors, as well as a seldom used area for election judges. This lower floor had very little traffic, but is now a public lobby and exhibit area, and a highlight of the building.

The Concourse Level was gutted to open the space as a reflection of Memorial Hall in reverse. What is dark and stately in Memorial Hall becomes light and airy one floor below. The three-story pillars of blue Belgian marble in Memorial Hall now reach through the floor to continue on in light Italian Botticino marble, with replicated bronze and white glass light fixtures. This space serves several functions. It ties together four major circulation wings which adjoin the concourse. Included in this area are jury operations, many other office areas, a major conference center which can accommodate up to 300 people, and a vending and commons area.

The commons or seating area, as well as the entire concourse level, was designed to carry out the artist-architectural collaboration which was so important in the Art Deco period. Some of the most significant statements about history were preserved in this building through art and craftsmanship. To carry on this historic tradition, fourteen display cases were built into the colonnade, and are finished with glass etchings depicting the Lee Lawrie symbols found on the building's exterior. The display cases feature an exhibit about the history of the building. The Star-of-the-North theme is predominant in the new floor, ceiling, and glass fixtures. Free-standing display cases and public seating allow visitors the chance to view ongoing

historic displays.

New York artists Chris Cosma and Denise Amses were commissioned to produce a work of art for the commons area of the Concourse Level. A glass mural was chosen as the medium to tie this area to the God of Peace in Memorial Hall. The God of Peace was originally designed to be cast in glass, but because technology did not allow this at the time, it was made of onyx instead. This glass mural, titled "Weather Wall: History of Ramsey County and Saint Paul," is the centerpiece of this floor. It is the largest glass mural of its kind in the country and is six feet high, spanning 100 feet. This etched and cast glass art makes up three sides of the commons or seating area and is back-lit to create an illusion of windows and sunlight in a below-ground space. The artists' attempt in this work of art was to use weather as a metaphor to remind one of the historical place in which one lives amid constant changes. Two years in the making, the mural depicts various periods of history—industrialization, science, architecture, lifestyles, and imagery—which make up St. Paul's and Ramsey County's rich history.

Also on the Concourse Level are storage vaults located under the sidewalks surrounding the building. Over the years, the sidewalks have been replaced in an unsuccessful attempt to prevent water from leaking into the vaults. The sidewalks have again been removed and this time a membrane plus a layer of bentonite, which forms a seal when wet, was laid down before the walks were replaced.

The replacement sidewalks have picked up some of the Art Deco look, with patterns and brass inlaid street markers. An outside concrete park area has been built on the corner of Kellogg and Wabasha street for public use, and trees have been added around the boulevard perimeter of the building.

"The desire for historic preservation and the need for changes had to be dovetailed," said Michael Cox of the Wold firm. "Because of the variety of finishes present in the original design, after much study we chose to recommend a palette of materials which is relatively consistent from one new space to the next. In this way we can effect a calming and ordered influence on the building and set off the new

spaces as a clear counterpoint to the existing without detracting from the exuberance of the historic palette." An example is the County Board reception area, which is new, but has materials and designs that reflect the historic areas. Historic furniture includes two original bronze floor lamps. Only a few of these lamps have been found and preserved. Approximately \$280,000 was used to refurbish and restore historic chairs, desks, tables, book cases, lamps, clocks, and coat trees. "Critical to understanding our approach at Wold for both the new addition and the interior remodeling was the sense that our work as a whole should complement a historic landmark that is a complete statement in itself," said Michael Cox.

It was decided that the addition to the northwest corner of the building where the old jail stood would be faithful to the original concept of the building. It would extend the existing lines of the first floor but it clearly would be new.

At Ramsey County Commissioner Schaber's urging, the City Hall/Court House Renovation Committee asked Wold to perform a functional analysis of city and county departments. This analysis found that although the city and county are equal partners in the ownership of the building, the traditional distribution of space was changed to 62.4 percent for the county and 37.6 percent for the city the day the municipal court became part of the District Court. The courts and court related activities account for most of the county space so that only the offices for the County Board and the county manager and the operations related to that office, such as the budget and policy analysis offices, are located in the city hall and courthouse. These county offices were assigned to the second floor, the City Council offices to the third floor near the mayor and council chambers. At first City Council members wanted individual suites for each council person but later, at the suggestion of Council President Bill Wilson, this idea was modified so the offices would be grouped in a way that would create a more collegial atmosphere.

The complete inventory of the city hall and courthouse was completed in November, 1989. By July, 1990, the design team

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had completed a functional space program for all the departments and divisions to be housed in the renovated building together with schematic drawings of the space they would occupy. The team then turned immediately to the practical design development leading to working drawings and specifications which would be used for bidding and construction.

The drawings were completed on December 19, 1990, and approved by the City Hall and Courthouse Renovation Committee on January 22, 1991. Contracts for the addition were awarded on March 26, 1991. The plans for the renovation were approved on July 23, 1991.

James Steele Construction Company of St. Paul received the contract to build the exterior shell of the addition to the building and PCL Company of Denver with offices in Bloomington received the contract on October 15, 1991, for all of the renovation, restoration and interior work. The bids for construction costs totaled \$34.5 million with just slightly less than half of that total going for heating, ventilation and air conditioning and about 5 percent going for the new addition. Additional items such as elevator improvements brought the final total of the project to \$48 million. The construction was divided into four phases: the building addition, the mechanical and electrical systems, the lower three floors and the basement and the court floors.

Michael Cox pointed out that not only were the mechanical and electrical systems 48 percent of the renewal project but they also presented significant challenges to the architects and builders. The piping and wiring were replaced, communication cables including fiber optics were added throughout the building. District heating and cooling with new heat exchangers and single-tube radiators were also installed. With 10½ foot ceilings and only 12 feet from floor to floor, fitting in the tons of wires, cables, pipes and ducts behind the walls and under the ceilings was a serious challenge to the architects' pledge to retain historic locations in their original design, but with careful threading and intertwining all these items were installed without changing the design or shape of the rooms and spaces they serve.

William J. Bartolic, III, project director for the renovation, said that making the mechanical improvements invisible to the public eye was an extraordinary task. The walls behind the elevators on all floors, where the "chase" or space where the ductwork was to be housed, were filled with electrical and telecommunications equipment and wires. The walls, some of which were made of exotic wood paneling, were removed and then reinstalled so carefully that there is no evidence they were ever disturbed.

"We continued to find ways to balance the budget and preserve the historic value of these spaces, especially in the courtroom areas where major changes were made," said Bartolic. These changes were drastic in cases where historic courtrooms were disassembled and reassembled on other floors, but they were accomplished while preserving history and precious materials and still improving the functions of the space. At first it seemed that costs would prohibit refurbishing the exotic wood paneling, since replacement with new material was less costly. But as the job progressed, the architects and contractors devised new techniques and the workers became more skilled at handling the old paneling, thus saving it for reuse.

Waiting rooms and conference space were missing from the court floors at the time they were built, and letters from judges of the past documented their displeasure at the lack of space for private conferences. To add these functions, the order of the courtroom floors on the eleventh, fourteenth, and fifteenth floors had to be changed. On each of these floors, one of the four courtrooms had to be removed to allow space for a conference room, waiting area, and jury deliberation room. Also added were two small conference rooms for clients and lawyers and a secure holding room. The elevators have been modified on these floors to allow the moving of detainees directly to holding areas without going through public spaces.

Removing these historic courtrooms created some controversy, and the design was changed so they could be reassembled on different floors and still preserve the historic spaces. In reality, the renovation added two new courtrooms on the first floor, adjacent to the Violations Bureau.

Now there is a total of twenty-five courtrooms, rather than the original twenty-one. The two new high-volume courtrooms are located in the building addition and are designed to capture the sense of reverence found in the historic courtrooms. A diagonally-oriented wood grain at the head of the rooms recalls the chevron pattern found above the witness stands in the tower courtrooms. Other features which add a historical feeling are the bronze audience gates, bronze grille, stepped soffited ceiling and replicated cherrywood judges' bench.

The original jury assembly room on the eighth floor has been restored and modified to function as a new courtroom with audience seating. The jury and judges' bench have been relocated from a fourteenth floor courtroom. Two additional courtrooms have been added on the tenth floor. The Grand Jury room has been moved from the third floor to the seventeenth floor to put it near the courts and court-related offices. The vacated space on the third floor was designed as the mayor's conference room.

The Law Library on the eighteenth floor has only two elevators reaching its refurbished walnut-paneled lobby. The original cork floor in the elevator lobby was replaced with patterned linoleum. The lobby opens to the north and south onto two high-ceilinged library spaces, with bronze and opal pendant-mounted light fixtures and judges' paintings. These rooms have been fully restored.

Life safety standards have become more stringent since the building was erected. To conform to the code it was necessary to install a smoke purging system and sprinklers throughout the building. New concealed fire doors are activated by the fire alarm or heat or smoke detectors. All of the asbestos tile and insulation was removed. The building was brought into conformance with access codes. To accomplish this many of the restrooms were completely replaced or added. A new generator capable of supplying enough power to meet all the building's needs in an emergency has been installed. It has sufficient generating capacity to supply power to Northern States Power Company in non-peak hours.

Lighting and light fixtures are key elements in the Art Deco design. The treatment of these elements in the restoration is typical of the attention to detail apparent throughout the renovation project. All of the original fixtures in the building were custom designed to complement the overall Art Deco design. They were carefully removed, polished and lacquered and where necessary new fixtures were installed. All new lights were custom designed in the simple geometric shapes which characterize the existing lights. Each light is shaped and positioned so it will cast a light in the shape of the area it serves. To increase the efficiency of the fixtures in Memorial Hall, high pressure sodium vapor lamps were installed in all fixtures. These lamps give a brighter, warmer light than other light sources and set off the bronze fixtures, grills, and railings, all of which have been cleaned, polished, and lacquered.

Nowhere in the original design was more emphasis given to light than in Memorial Hall and nowhere in the renovation of the building has greater care gone into the restoration of lighting than in Memorial Hall. When you enter the hall from the Fourth Street entrance today you see it as it has not been seen since it was built. Milles's statue, the God of Peace, is brilliantly lighted. The light towers which flank the three-story atrium cast a warm light on the gold mirrored ceiling, creating an illusion of great height. Michael Cox explained that to achieve this result the original gold mirrors had to be replaced.

"They were covered with a varnish-like coating that dulled the finish. When we removed it we found that the original mirror panels were not uniform and they distorted the finish. We surmise that the coating was put on the mirrors to even up the reflection." Because of all this and to accomplish a full restoration, the entire gold mirrored ceiling was replaced.

Although the light towers were an important design element in Memorial Hall, the pulley device to facilitate changing the bulbs was never satisfactory so the architects had to invent a solution that would simplify the replacement of bulbs. This was accomplished by mounting the fixtures like drawers so they could be pulled out from the wall to change the

lamps. Milles' statue, the God of Peace, is now brightly illuminated by new lights.

Just off Memorial Hall are four major public lobby areas. In the new wing of the building is the Court Service Center, which contains the Violations Bureau and two high volume full-size courtrooms which were discussed earlier. Also in this area are additional conferencing, waiting and secure holding spaces. This wing carries out the original architects' intention by providing the fourth public wing located off Memorial Hall. This new area has an octagonal lobby, reflecting the elevator lobby in design. Its new linoleum floor recalls the pattern of the original assessor's office, now remodeled as the City Service Center and also on first floor. There are four marble columns, which divide the space; light fixtures on the columns recall the light forms originally used throughout the building. The verde issori marble and cherry wood walls in this new lobby are typical of the finishes used in the original lobbies.

Although a suggestion that a one-stop governmental office be established on the first floor could not be implemented, when the renovation is complete it will be possible to secure licenses, permits, drivers licenses and birth and death certificates, pay or challenge a traffic violations fine, pay taxes, obtain land records or pay a water bill without ever leaving the first floor of the building. The counter space on the first floor that once served the Department of Finance and for a time the City Bank now is a place where the public can handle transactions with several departments.

Missing in this historic building renovation, however, are two time honored fixtures of past public buildings throughout America during much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—the cigar shop and shoeshine stand. Old timers recall these as the best places to locate a government official. The original cigar shop, located near the God of Peace statue in Memorial Hall, is now a period office, and is furnished with office equipment and artifacts from the past.

This city hall and courthouse has served the community through peace and war, good times and bad, and notwithstanding many years of benign neglect remains a hard working and handsome building. It is

a testimonial to the people whose foresight and energy created this building that has served well as a symbol of government for the citizens of St. Paul and Ramsey county for sixty-one years and now has been beautifully preserved to serve another century.

Much of the information for this article is drawn from files of the St. Paul Dispatch and Pioneer Press newspapers now maintained in the Social Science and Literature Reference Room of the St. Paul Central Library.

Thomas J. Kelley worked in the city hall-county courthouse for twenty-two years as deputy commissioner of finance for the city of St. Paul, Ramsey County auditor, county administrator, city administrator, and director of St. Paul's Department of Community Services. He is now retired and a freelance writer. This is his third article for Ramsey County History. Carol Mladec, public information associate for Ramsey County, also contributed to this article.

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veiling because of illness, but he sent a letter in which he called the monument his "finest creation in stone."

Local reviews, however, were harsh, but if some of St. Paul's citizens were unimpressed, the reaction from art critics nationally and around the world was uniformly congratulatory. The *Illustrated London News* carried a full-page picture of the statue, and called it "Carl Milles's great work." The *Architectural Forum* also ran pictures and commented that "it is a superb composition, carved with a master's feeling for material, greatest of a long series of great works."

The criticisms had quieted down by April, 1938, when the *Minneapolis Tribune* reported that ". . . Mr. Milles and his peace-pipe smoking Indians (who 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."

—Dane Smith



One of the six sculpted ground floor elevator doors, created by E. R. Stewart for the St. Paul City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse. See articles beginning on page 4. Photo by George Heinrich.

R.C.H.S.
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