

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

*Stanford Newel, Proposal Rock,
and Newell Park Widows*

**Newell Park Celebrates
Its Centennial**

Winter 2009

Volume 43, Number 4

Page 11

Courthouse Sculptor

Lee Lawrie

Paul D. Nelson

—Page 3



*Two of Lee Lawrie's architectural sculptures,
Liberty (top) and The People, on the façade
of the St. Paul City Hall and Ramsey County
Courthouse, Fourth Street entrance.
Photo courtesy of Paul D. Nelson.*

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Executive Director

Priscilla Farnham

Founding Editor (1964–2006)

Virginia Brainard Kunz

Editor

John M. Lindley

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

J. Scott Hutton

Past President

Thomas H. Boyd

President

Paul A. Verret

First Vice President

Joan Higinbotham

Second Vice President

Julie Brady

Secretary

Carolyn J. Brusseau

Treasurer

Norlin Boyum, Anne Cowie, Nancy

Randall Dana, Cheryl Dickson, Charlton

Dietz, Joanne A. Englund, William Frels,

Howard Guthmann, John Holman, Elizabeth

Kiernat, Judith Frost Lewis, Rev. Kevin M.

McDonough, Laurie M. Murphy, Richard H.

Nicholson, Marla Ordway, Marvin J. Pertzik,

Jay Pfaender, Ralph Thrane, Richard Wilhoit.

Directors Emeriti

W. Andrew Boss

George A. Mairs

Richard T. Murphy Sr.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Anne Cowie, *chair*, James B. Bell,

Thomas H. Boyd, John Diers, John Milton,

Debra Mitts-Smith, Laurie M. Murphy,

Paul D. Nelson, Richard H. Nicholson, Jay

Pfaender, David Riehle, G. Richard Slade,

Steve Trimble, Mary Lethert Wingerd.

HONORARY ADVISORY BOARD

William Fallon, William Finney, Robert S.

Hess, George Latimer, Joseph S. Micallef,

Marvin J. Pertzik, James Reagan,

Rosalie E. Wahl.

RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Jan Parker, chair

Commissioner Tony Bennett

Commissioner Toni Carter

Commissioner Jim McDonough

Commissioner Rafael Ortega

Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt

Commissioner Janice Rettman

Julie Kleinschmidt, manager,
Ramsey County

Ramsey County History is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul, MN 55102 (651-222-0701). Printed in U.S.A. Copyright © 2009, Ramsey County Historical Society. ISSN Number 0485-9758. **All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or otherwise reproduced without written permission from the publisher.** The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors.

Fax 651-223-8539; e-mail address: admin@rchs.com; web site address: www.rchs.com

RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 43, Number 4

Winter 2009

THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON DECEMBER 20, 2007:

The Ramsey County Historical Society inspires current and future generations to learn from and value their history by engaging in a diverse program of presenting, publishing and preserving.

CONTENTS

- 3 *Courthouse Sculptor*
Lee Lawrie
Paul D. Nelson
- 11 *Stanford Newel, Proposal Rock, and Newell Park Widows*
Newell Park Celebrates Its Centennial
Krista Finstad Hanson
- 20 *Growing Up in St. Paul*
The Teen Years and OLP
Susanne Sebesta Heimbuch

Publication of Ramsey County History is supported in part by a gift from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie Jr. and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon

A Message from the Editorial Board

How often do we drive past a familiar scene and fail to appreciate the history behind it? In this issue, three writers take us on a tour of places we think we know but whose rich stories are rarely told. Paul Nelson gives an in-depth look at Lee Lawrie's architectural sculptures on the exterior surfaces of the St. Paul City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse. More famous for his artwork at Rockefeller Center in New York City, Lawrie's Courthouse sculptures combine graceful forms with a sense of purpose as they illustrate concepts such as industry, justice, and liberty. Nelson will be giving a talk and guiding a tour of St. Paul architectural sculpture on March 29 at the St. Paul Central Library—join him if you can.

Susanne Sebesta Heimbuch takes us back to the early 1960s with her evocative look at Catholic education at Our Lady of Peace High School, which occupied the current site of William Mitchell College of Law. And Krista Finstad Hanson revisits the story of Newell Park, which for a time in the 1920s and '30s was a neighborhood gathering place buoyed by vigorous community support. Thanks to the efforts of many, today this revitalized park serves as a jewel in the Hamline-Midway neighborhood. Explore your county's roots, and discover new perspectives from your armchair!

Anne Cowie,
Chair, Editorial Board



Courthouse Sculptor Lee Lawrie

Paul D. Nelson

“**V**ision of Peace” is not the only sculpture at the St. Paul City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse in downtown St. Paul. It may seem to be—Carl Milles’s enormous, spectacular, and iconic figure has a way of grabbing just about all the artistic attention the public has to give. In fact, though, there are eleven other major carvings in or on the building on Kellogg Boulevard: the second floor bust of Jose Martí; Albert Stewart’s six wonderful, main-floor bronze elevator doors; and four large exterior relief works—the subject of this article—by the greatest artist to work on the building, Lee Lawrie.

Not many people today know Lee Lawrie’s name, nor was he much known to the public in his lifetime, 1877–1963. But during the first half of the twentieth century, Lawrie was one of the busiest and most successful of American artists, and hundreds of thousands of people still enjoy his work today. His most famous (but not best) piece is the statue of Atlas at Rockefeller Center in New York City.

Atlas is not at all typical of Lee Lawrie works; he did comparatively few free-standing statues. His specialty and passion was architectural sculpture, the fancy term for carving on buildings.

His architectural commissions were many and celebrated: the Los Angeles Public Library, the Louisiana State Capitol,

the Bok Carillon Tower in Florida, Rockefeller Center (where he did much more than Atlas), and his masterpiece, the Nebraska State Capitol in Lincoln.¹

While at the peak of his powers, and just before beginning Rockefeller Center, Lawrie found time in 1931 and 1932 for a minor commission, the Ramsey County Courthouse in St. Paul.²

Lee Oskar Lawrie was born in Prussia in 1877 and came to the United States in 1881. At age fourteen, living with his mother in Chicago, a two-word sign, “Boy Wanted,” introduced him to his fate, his muse, his life. It led him to a job with a local sculptor, and then to the sculpture workshops of the World’s



Top of the page: The People, located above the Fourth Street entrance to the St. Paul City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse. Photo courtesy of the author. Above: Atlas, one of fifteen Lee Lawrie works at Rockefeller Center, New York City. Photo courtesy of Gregory Harm.

Columbian Exposition, otherwise known as the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893.

This was the famous White City, European classical architectural forms recreated (often magnificently) on the reclaimed swampland north of downtown. The sculpture was imitation European too, in the style known as Beaux Arts, based on classical forms but sometimes a little ostentatious. In Minnesota the “Father of Waters” sculpture at the Minneapolis City Hall is an excellent

example. This is the first style that Lawrie learned but not the last.

After Chicago Lawrie, while still a teenager, bounced around the East, working as an assistant and apprentice to several sculptors, Augustus St. Gaudens the most prominent of them. In 1895 he met a rising young architect named Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, whose specialty at the time was churches in the Gothic style. Gothic is what most people see in their minds when they think of the great cathedrals of Europe like Notre Dame—pointed arches, tall, narrow spires, rose windows, and lots of statues. An excellent local example, though unadorned, is Central Lutheran Church in downtown Minneapolis.

With Goodhue Lawrie mastered the Gothic and found his area of genius, architectural sculpture. Gothic churches required endless iterations of the human form—Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and the saints—to fill their countless portals, niches, chapels, and altars. This was adornment with a purpose, beauty designed to instruct the congregants (who in the original Gothic era did not read Scripture) in the ideas and the personalities of the faith. In the Gothic style architecture and sculpture complemented one another in the service of a greater purpose. This conception of sculpture took hold of Lee Lawrie's imagination and never let go. All the rest of his career, including his work in St. Paul, he strove to have his sculptural work announce and enhance the nature of buildings of which they were part.

This goal was straightforward in churches, where their purpose was clear and the forms well known. The task was more difficult with commercial and government buildings, especially when the skyscraper came along. The invention of the skyscraper presented architects and architectural sculptors with unprecedented challenges. For architects, the challenge lay in how to go very tall and incorporate both function and beauty.

For sculptors the challenge was perhaps greater. As buildings rose skyward, the style of design went simple: clean lines, great masses, basic geometric forms. Where did sculpture, so recently rather busy and ornate, fit in? More profoundly, perhaps, the tall building pre-



Lee Lawrie. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

sented a problem of scale. Throughout history sculpture had been placed where the unaided eye could (more or less) comfortably appreciate it. But, what place could outdoor sculpture have on a building three hundred feet tall?

One answer, of course, was to dispense with architectural sculpture altogether. Another was to search for a new approach to fit the new times. Lee Lawrie had the good fortune to possess that artistic temperament that thrives within narrow limits, like Shakespeare's poetry within the confines of the sonnet. He wrote, "I think there is more opportunity for artistic thought in meeting the resistance that a modern building puts up than in purely aesthetic sculpture."³ Companion good fortune lay in his alliance with Goodhue,

an architect who changed masterfully with the times.

In 1919 the Nebraska legislature resolved to build a new state capitol, and opened a design competition. Goodhue won it and insisted that Lawrie be his sculptor. The Nebraskans demanded plenty in the design: magnificence, functionality, modernity, and history. Goodhue provided the first three; for depiction of the history, he relied on Lawrie. For substance, both relied, however, on Professor Hartley B. Alexander of the University of Nebraska, a consultant on the project.

The Nebraska capitol rejects the neo-classical style of almost all U.S. capitols, starting with the national capitol in Washington, D.C.: no dome, no columns, no reference at all to Greek or Roman architectural models. Minnesotans are rightly proud of Cass Gilbert's marvelous elaboration of the familiar capitol design (a Beaux Arts style, commissioned in 1895), but there is nothing original about it. The design's clear Greek and Roman lineage is supposed to remind people of the ancient and European origins of democracy. The Nebraskans, rulers of a young state in a new civilization, insisted on American styles and references in their new capitol.

In Nebraska's capital city of Lincoln, the huge space Goodhue had to work with enabled him to achieve functionality, modernity, and magnificence by a low, massive, blocky, and spacious base with a skyscraper tower in the center. The lines are clean and the forms geometric, like Nebraska itself. The clean lines presented sculptor Lawrie, charged with portraying Nebraska history in stone, with a fundamental challenge: on flat surfaces, where does sculpture go? In



The Last Supper, St. John's Episcopal Church, West Hartford, Conn. Photo reproduced from Lee Lawrie, Joseph F. Morris, ed.



The Nebraska State Capitol, with Lawrie's The Sower atop. Postcard photograph courtesy of Gregory Harm.

one of his answers we see the template for what he did in St. Paul.

Rather than build carvings onto the building, Lawrie cut the carvings into it. The reliefs, never deep, preserve the essential flatness of the exterior. The story of Nebraska history, going back to Magna Carta then through the Founders and on to statehood, is told in a series of horizontal panels—the signing of the Declaration of Independence, President Lincoln issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, and so on, familiar scenes to all. The composition is static, as the Gothic church compositions Lawrie had done so often tended to be. In these panels, however, the figures are blockier, plainer, less realistic than in his Gothic works, easier to see and understand from a distance.

The panels in the Nebraska carvings are static except for one, the centerpiece, the frieze over the main entrance. Here we have motion. Called “The Pioneers,” this one shows a band of Nebraska pioneers striding (or maybe trudging) across the prairie, all but their guide (modeled on Buffalo Bill Cody) looking resolutely forward. Though idealized, these figures are realistically done.

One can see what Goodhue and Lawrie were up to. The historical scenes are relentlessly horizontal and earthbound, like Nebraska. The background events are static, but Nebraska itself, expressed in “The Pioneers,” is in motion, dynamic, alive. Above all, atop the central tower, stands “The Sower,” the symbol of agri-

culture and by extension civilization, his scattered seeds giving rise to life, community, prosperity. This is Goodhue’s and Lawrie’s combined masterpiece, architecture and sculpture united.⁴

Like the Nebraska statehouse, the new St. Paul City Hall/Ramsey County Courthouse pointedly rejected older styles and embraced the new. It is a skyscraper, all flat surfaces and basic shapes, a low base with a central tower.

Unlike Nebraska, sculpture was not inherent in the original plans. Though sculpture may have been contemplated by the commission in charge of the building, and by the architects (Holabird and Root of Chicago and Ellerbe Associates of St. Paul) too, no mention of it appears in the records until 1931, two years into the planning.

Lawrie was chosen, apparently without controversy or debate, on November 25, 1931, on the architects’ recommendation.



Solon, Nebraska State Capitol. Photo courtesy of Gregory Harm.

On that date the building was already partially built. Lawrie’s bid, \$13,750, was accepted a few weeks later. Though one has to assume that Lawrie and the architects consulted from time to time, there is no evidence that Lawrie ever visited St. Paul. He lived and worked in New York.

That architectural sculpture was an afterthought in the design of the City Hall/County Courthouse is suggested by this: When dignitaries and the public came to see the building at its ceremonial opening, December 17, 1932, there was no sculpture to see. Lawrie’s models for the courthouse were not accepted until two days later. Carving began later still.

The Courthouse Commission did not tell the artist what to carve; instead, it adopted “Suggestions for Themes Exterior Stone Sculptoring.” Lawrie followed some of them.

The Suggestions proclaimed the Fourth

Street doorway to be “the main monumental entrance to the building.” They called for a five- by eight-foot inscription panel above the door, flanked by four- by five-foot panels of relief sculpture. Above these, the Suggestions called for “a figure of Liberty conceived as the ‘Rights of the Citizen.’” It was to be 3.5 feet wide and 11 feet tall, holding an open book inscribed on the right with the words “Vox Populi, symbolizing the sources of sovereignty in the civic and community government, and upon the left hand “Jus Civile,” emblematic of the courts and their interpretation of the fundamental law of the community.”

Lawrie carried out these directions to the letter, though “Liberty” was placed not directly above the door, but much higher. Standing outside the Fourth Street entrance, one has to look sharply (and uncomfortably) upward to see it.

For the inscription and lateral panels the Commission offered a choice of three inscriptions, four lines of fourteen to seventeen letters each, and reproduced here as in the original document:

JUSTICE IS A CONSTANT AND PERPETUAL WILL TO RENDER UNTO EACH HIS DUE

LAW IS THE RAMPART OF THE CITY; LAWS ARE THE REGISTERS OF THE PUBLIC WILL

LIBERTY IS THE RIGHT OF INTELLIGENCE TO ASSUME ITS OWN RESPONSIBILITIES.

There were two to be two flanking panels. One was to symbolize WISE COUNSEL, that is, “the administration of public welfare by the City,” in the form of an “Indian-American council;” the other STRAIGHT JUSTICE, symbolized by a frontier justice of the peace. Maybe it was all the hyphens; Lawrie responded to these suggestions by ignoring them.⁵

There would be no inscription. He filled the space above the doors instead with a street scene he called “The People.” The similarities with his Nebraska over-the-entrance frieze, “The Pioneers,” are so



Top of the page: *The Pioneers*, Nebraska State Capitol. Photo courtesy of Gregory Harm. Above: *The People*, St. Paul City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse. Photo courtesy of the author.

numerous that one is tempted to conclude that the artist imitated himself. The two show the same sense of movement, though the urban scene is more crowded and hectic; the figures walk with the same tread, their gazes downcast at the same angle. In Nebraska the idealized pioneers represent the people of that rural state; in St. Paul the idealized street throng represents an urban people. And Lawrie was careful to include a variety of classes, occupations, ages, and, with one African American, even races.

There are important differences between the panels too. The Nebraska frieze is full of local references—plants, animals, tools, and Buffalo Bill. The St. Paul scene has no local anchor; it could be a street anywhere in the United States or Europe. In Nebraska Lawrie worked with the architect from the earliest stages of planning, with careful attention to local detail; in St. Paul Lawrie came in late and never had the same intensity of engagement with the site.

The two buildings do share a similar relationship between major symbols. Visually, the elements form a very tall, narrow triangle. In Lincoln, “The Pioneers” at the base, “The Sower” at

the apex; in St. Paul, “The People” at the base and “Liberty” at the apex. In St. Paul the artist’s message seems clear—from the people, absorbed in their daily tasks, arises their collective practicality and wisdom, “Vox Populi” (voice of the people), which becomes “Jus Civile,” the fundamental law of the community. Together they are embodied in the figure “Liberty,” portrayed in severe classical form, a reference to its Greek and Roman origins. The contrast between the realistic figures of “The People” and the nearly abstract “Liberty,” stands for the transformation of the quotidian to the eternal.

All residents of Ramsey County owe thanks to Mr. Lawrie for preferring his own judgment to that of the Commission. Imagine the embarrassment today of having an Indian-American council—a treaty council?—with its whiff of theft and coercion, adorning the seat of government under the banner, “Wise Counsel.”

That was the north-side entrance. The south, then Third Street, now Kellogg Boulevard, entrance was always conceived as less important, probably because the lively downtown of the early 1930s had most of its bustle to the north.

On the south the Commission suggested two relief panels, one on each side of the doors. On the left, the “County” side, images suggesting the Life of the Fields, “perhaps symbols of the old St. Paul landing with the early flour and lumber mills, with figures symbolizing law as protectress of the life of the community as typified by childhood, youth, maturity.”

On the right, or City side, “a civic goddess with mural crown, and in the background the skyline of the city, with secondary figures representing the early builders of the city, the Woodsman, Furtrader, Pioneer, Soldier.”⁶

Lawrie responded in a general way to these suggestions. If one can say there are city and county sides, he switched them, putting city on the left. There is a goddess with a crown, and a skyline (featuring the new city hall), but no other human figures; instead, early industries are represented by the geared wheels, anvil, and barrel. The goddess bears the symbols of authority and law; an open book symbolizes education. On the right, or county side, another goddess figure stands heroically, bearing symbols of agricultural bounty. In



Liberty, St. Paul City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse. Photo courtesy of Maureen McGinn.



City Side, St. Paul City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse. Photo courtesy of the author.

history of his art. (His lack of schooling did not prevent Yale—where he received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 1908—and Harvard from hiring him as an instructor.) He placed his work in a tradition going back to the great civilizations of Egypt.

These panels have some delightful details. On the City Side, note the match between the hair of the goddess and the profile of the courthouse, and the diagonal line formed by her staff and the spokes of the wheel. On the County Side, Lawrie played with the hair again, this time pairing it with the trail of smoke from the locomotive. And here there are interplays of arcs: the sickle, the cornucopia, the sunrise, and the horn. Both compositions are rhythmic and balanced, with a hint of humor.

It is commonplace today to think of all art as the artist's self-expression, but this is a new idea in human history and one that Lee Lawrie rejected. His goal always was to express not himself but the purpose and function of the building. In 1934 he wrote, "It is the mural sculptor's business to see to it that his expression is consistently in accord with the idea of the building, its time and place, as well as its design." To Lawrie, that was the purpose of his art (which he called "modern mural sculpture"): to announce to the public, and to posterity, the nature of the building of which his works were an integral part.⁷

We do not know exactly when the



County Side, St. Paul City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse. Photo courtesy of the author.

the background, there are tall pines and a hurrying freight train. The skyline and pine forest are the only identifiably local visual references that Lawrie produced.

In style, Lawrie borrowed from the images of the ancient Middle East, which he had learned about from his late mentor Goodhue. The stiff, heavily stylized goddess figures call to mind Egyptian and Assyrian sculpture. Lawrie had very little formal education, but he had studied the

courthouse sculptures were completed, though it was probably in 1933. (The actual carving was done by John Garatti, an Italian-born St. Paulite who also worked on "Vision of Peace.") We do not know how the public reacted to them. We do know how Lawrie wanted people to react: "As we go about and look at the buildings critically we can decide for ourselves whether the mural sculptures are merely works of art in themselves, or whether they

Details

There are four major pieces on the courthouse exterior, but the attentive visitor will notice several smaller pieces too, most prominently on the roofline of the east wing, along Wabasha Street. They look like symbols (they are), but of what?



The Commission suggested calumets. Lawrie instead gave them the hive, symbol of industry.



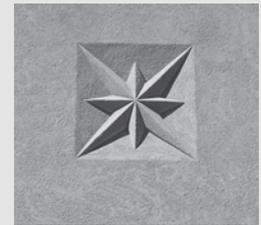
The Commission wanted Scales of Justice, and Lawrie provided them.



The "unpainted washstand upon which Governor Ramsey wrote the territorial proclamation."



The Commission wanted "mural crown, emblematic of civic society, Roman sword, emblem of St. Paul."



Lee Lawrie's interpretation of "The North Star (symbol of the state.)"

All photos in "Details" courtesy of the author.

Lawrie's Works

In his lifetime, Lee Lawrie produced a great variety and great quantity of works; some statuary, much more relief sculpture—Beaux Arts, Gothic, modernistic; some somber, some funny.

A Lee Lawrie tour of the United States would cover a lot of ground: Providence,

designed to give the reader a sense of his productivity and range of styles.

No one has yet compiled a complete list of his creations, and that is beyond the scope of this article. It will suffice here to mention some of his noteworthy commissions.



Top: South Dakota, St. Louis World's Fair of 1903. Photo from Mark Bennitt, *History of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition (St. Louis: Universal Exposition Publishing Co., 1905)*. This is the earliest known image of a Lawrie work. Above: Angel of the Old Dispensation, Church of the Heavenly Rest, New York City. Photo from *Sculpture by Lee Lawrie*.

Rhode Island; West Point, Brooklyn, and Manhattan in New York; Philadelphia; Washington, D.C.; Florida; Louisiana; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; South Bend, Indiana; Chicago; Lincoln, Nebraska; St. Paul, and on to California. We offer here just a sampling of Lawrie's work,

- Post Headquarters and Chapel, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, N.Y. (1905)
- Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York City (1913–1914)
- St. Thomas's Church, New York City (1917–1919)



Top: Cow Jumping Over the Moon, Los Angeles Public Library, Los Angeles, Calif. Photo from *Sculpture by Lee Lawrie*. Above: Screen from the Bok Carillon Tower, Lake Wales, Fla.

- Nebraska State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska (1920–1924)
- National Academy of Sciences, Washington, D.C. (1920–1924)
- Los Angeles Public Library, (1923–1926)
- Fidelity Mutual Life Insurance Building, Philadelphia (1927)
- Episcopal Church of the Heavenly Rest, New York City, (1929)
- Bok Carillon Tower, Lake Wales, Florida (1929)
- St. Paul City Hall/Ramsey County Courthouse (1932)
- Pennsylvania Education Building (1932)

- Louisiana State Capitol, Baton Rouge, Louisiana (1932)
- Rockefeller Center, New York City (1933–1937)
- Wichita Art Institute, Wichita, Kansas (1935)
- Jefferson Annex to the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (1938)
- Corn Products Research Center, Argo, Illinois (1945)



Top: Cane Cutter, Louisiana State Capitol, Baton Rouge, La. Photo from *Sculpture by Lee Lawrie*. Above: Wisdom Planning the Universe, Rockefeller Center, New York City. Photo courtesy of Gregory Harm.

Those looking for photographs of Lawrie's works should consult Christine Roussel's thoroughly beautiful volume, *The Art of Rockefeller Center* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), and Gregory Harm's newly published *Lee Lawrie's Prairie Deco: History in Stone at the Nebraska State Capitol* (available at www.blurb.com). But the world awaits a comprehensive appreciation of Lee Oskar Lawrie.

take their place as complements to their surrounding architecture; whether they represent ideas foreign to the purposes of the building, or whether they make the building's purpose more articulate."

Just so, as much today as in 1933: The visitor to the Ramsey County Courthouse can decide for him or herself whether Lee Lawrie's sculptures are mere decorations, or expressions of the purpose of the building, or something else. Do the four main pieces form, with the design of the building itself, a harmonious and interrelated whole? Whether Lawrie succeeded by his own measures, or not, he created in St. Paul the most thoughtful and subtle architectural sculpture in the Twin Cities. Based in part on the St. Paul pieces, critic Walter Agard wrote in his 1935 book, *The New Architectural Sculpture*, that "we may declare with conviction that Lee Lawrie is the foremost architectural sculptor in America."⁸

Writing in 1934, Lee Lawrie saw a great future for architectural sculpture

in North America. "The promise for the future is bright. It is not improbable that the American mural sculptor will do for his country what the Greek did for his—achieve what is not borrowed, but native." He was wrong. The Depression coincided with the advance of modernism in architecture, a movement that disdained decoration. Henry-Russell Hitchcock Jr. and Philip Johnson's influential 1932 book, *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922*, held as one of its three principles of architecture the elimination of all exterior sculpture. After Lee Lawrie completed Rockefeller Center (1937), his phone stopped ringing. By the end of the decade he so despaired of working again that he had resigned himself to subsistence farming in Maryland.

It never quite came to that; Lawrie worked intermittently as a sculptor and consultant until his death in 1963, but his art form did not survive him. In the United States, architectural sculpture is dead. It is like the silent film; you can find ex-

amples that still bring delight and amazement, but there are no new creations. In his prime—the era of his St. Paul work—Lee Lawrie saw himself as the inheritor and modernizer of an ancient tradition that would continue forever. Instead, it died with him. His works, including the little-noticed St. Paul panels and details, live on; examples, perhaps, of American sculpture, "not borrowed, but native."⁹

Paul D. Nelson acknowledges and thanks Gregory Harm for his encouragement, his photography, and his work in promoting interest and appreciation of Lee Lawrie. Nelson is a member of the RCHS Editorial Board and a frequent contributor to Ramsey County History. His article on the life and death of St. Paul's Central Park won the Society's 2006 Virginia Kunz Award. He and Sr. Joan Kain recently published a second edition of Rocky Roots (2007), a guide to the uses of ornamental and dimension stone on downtown St. Paul buildings.

Architectural Sculpture in the Twin Cities

Architectural sculpture can be found in St. Paul and Minneapolis. There isn't much, but there is perhaps a little more than one might think. You see it without really seeing it.



The most prominent pieces, predictably, adorn the Cathedral in St. Paul. There's a rather florid frieze beneath the point of the arch of the main (east facing) portico, depicting Jesus with his disciples. This is an example of sculpture in the Beaux Arts tradition. So too are the symbolic figures in the

smaller frieze below the great circular window. The figures of St. Peter and St. Paul, flanking the window, complete the composition. These would not have been to Lee Lawrie's taste, but certainly they met his base requirement of architectural sculpture—that it announce the function of the building.

The sculpture on St. Thomas More Church at Summit and Lexington avenues in St. Paul stands squarely in the Gothic revival mode where Lawrie did so much of his own work. The work is beautiful, with rhythmic patterns and here and there a hint of whimsy in the smaller figures.

There is nothing downtown and nothing in the Capitol complex that can be called architectural sculpture, except of course on the Courthouse, and around



the corner from it on the south side of Wabasha Street, high above the sidewalk. There, on the building's façade, the graceful figures of a piping Pan and a dancing nymph signal what took place many years ago in the old Lowry



Lounge. On University Avenue, a little ways west of the Capitol, there is a single delightful panel on the Old Home Dairy Building. The image says it all.

Above the west-facing door of Gethsemane Church (905 Fourth Avenue South) in downtown Minneapolis



there is a delightful tree with the banner, "A Place Which Was Named Gethsemane." The Basilica of St. Mary (1600 Hennepin Avenue) features a single piece, Mary emerging from clouds.

The Rand Tower (527 Marquette Avenue), an Art Deco Holabird and Root creation from 1929, features back to back figures of Mercury, each crouching against a wall and holding, or playing with, a model airplane. The message



has nothing to do with the building; its builder, Rufus Rand, was an amateur aviator. The red sandstone building next door sports Egyptian carvings around the entrance. The Qwest Building at 224 Fifth Street South (425 Second Avenue South) makes the most stylish use of sculpture, with its ornamental pat-

terns and stylish, powerful eagle, all in fabulous Rainbow Stone from Morton, Minnesota.

Two other downtown Minneapolis buildings stand out for their use of carving to announce their purpose. The Armory (500–530 Sixth Street South) uses words and images with appropriate forcefulness.

The masterpiece is the old Farmers and Mechanics Bank (now the Westin Hotel at 520 Marquette Avenue). The heroic figures that flank the main entrance really could not be more perfect: cut in big blocks of Mankato-Kasota stone, they convey strength and reliability, exactly what you want in a bank, especially one built just after the end of the Depression, in



1942. The artist was Warren T. Mosman, head of the sculpture department at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. His touch of genius is tucked away, around the corner (on the Sixth Street South side) and near the roof line. Once again, the image says it all.



All photos in "Architectural Sculpture in the Twin Cities" courtesy of the author.

Endnotes

1. Enumeration of Lawrie's works comes from a variety of sources: Timothy J. Garvey, *Lee O. Lawrie: Classicism and American Culture, 1919–1954* (Minneapolis: Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1980); Lee Lawrie, *Sculpture* (Cleveland: J.H. Jansen, 1936); Joseph F. Morris, ed., *Lee Lawrie* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1955); and three web sites: Smithsonian Institution Art Inventories Catalog, <http://siriris-artinventories.si.edu>, and www.leelwarie.com and www.bisonwerks.com, maintained by the independent scholar Gregory Harm. No comprehensive list has yet been published, though Mr. Harm is working on it.
2. Biographical information is from Garvey, *Lee O. Lawrie*, 9–12. Lawrie's views on sculpture are found

- in Lee O. Lawrie, *Modern Mural Sculpture* (Pasadena, Calif.: Esto Publishing Co., 1934).
3. Eric Scott McCready, "The Nebraska State Capitol: Its Design, Background and Influence," *Nebraska History* 55, no. 3 (Fall 1974): 377.
4. Garvey, *Lee O. Lawrie*, 60–123; Charles H. Whitaker and Hartley B. Alexander, *The Architectural Sculpture of the State Capitol at Lincoln Nebraska* (New York: American Institute of Architects, 1926).
5. Files of the St. Paul City Hall-Ramsey County Courthouse Commission (call no. 113.J.5.6.F), Minnesota Historical Society (MHS); Ellerbe & Co. and Holabird and Root, "Saint Paul City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse," *American Architect* (July 1933); *Pioneer Press*, December 18, 1932, p. 1 (ceremonial opening).

6. "Suggestions for Themes Exterior Stone Sculptoring," in the files of the St. Paul City Hall-Ramsey County Courthouse Commission, MHS.
7. Lawrie, *Modern Mural Sculpture*. Lawrie did not deny the role of individual creativity, but to him it came out in the service of a bigger purpose: "Although no new ways of designing and modeling are available, the personal characteristics that stamp each sculptor's work, when applied to an original theme and an architectural problem make it a creation."
8. Walter Agard, *The New Architectural Sculpture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1935), 45.
9. Lawrie, *Modern Mural Sculpture*; Garvey, *Lee O. Lawrie*, 260–282 (later years.)

Published by the Ramsey County Historical Society
323 Landmark Center
75 West Fifth Street
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

U.S. Postage
PAID
St. Paul, MN
Permit #3989



In 1909 someone named Clara, who lived on Capitol Avenue, sent a postcard (top right) of the Frog Pond that once existed near Hamline University to a friend in North Dakota. That Frog Pond was then located on the site of today's Newell Park in St. Paul's Hamline-Midway neighborhood. The postcard and the adjacent photo of Newell Park on a fall day in 2008 show just how much this park has changed in 100 years. Postcard courtesy of Steve Trimble; photo courtesy of Krista Finstad Hanson. For more on the centennial of Newell Park, see Krista Finstad Hanson's article on page 11.