

FINAL HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

MILWAUKEE AUDITORIUM

I. NAME

Historic: Milwaukee Auditorium

Common Name: Same

II. LOCATION

Address: 500 block of West Kilbourn Avenue
(518 West Kilbourn Avenue)

Legal description - Tax Key No.: 392-2471-000-7

Certified Survey Map No. 6245 in NE & NW 1/4 Sec 29-7-22
Parcel 1 (that portion which is occupied by the Milwaukee Auditorium)

4th Aldermanic District Paul A. Henningsen

III. CLASSIFICATION

Building

IV. OWNER

Wisconsin Center District
500 W. Kilbourn Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53203

V. YEAR BUILT:

1907-9

ARCHITECT: Ferry & Clas, Milwaukee

VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Milwaukee Auditorium covers the block bounded by 5th Street, 6th Street, Kilbourn Avenue (formerly Cedar Street), and State Street. It is located in the Central Business District in an area characterized by civic and institutional buildings. The main auditorium (now named Bruce Hall after one of the first managers, historian William George Bruce) occupies the larger, western half of the building; the smaller eastern portion is now referred to as the Auditorium Annex, and it contains smaller theaters, meeting rooms, and the original front entrance. In the 1940's, when the Arena was built to the east, the front entrance to the Auditorium was enclosed to connect it to the newer building. The main access of the Milwaukee Auditorium was moved to the south side on Kilbourn Avenue. The Auditorium/Arena complex now interrupts 5th street.

According to the building permit issued on October 3, 1907, the structure is 312 feet across the front, 316 feet across the rear, and 300 feet 5 inches deep. The main auditorium is three stories tall while the annex is two stories tall. Bruce Hall encompasses the full height of the western half of the building, while the Annex contains two floors of rooms with a central rotunda. The main auditorium is 65 feet high and covers 330 by 180 feet. The hall's floor itself is 225 feet long and 100 feet wide. The north end houses the stage, while the other three sides contain the seating. This seating area is divided on two levels, the upper row is backed by an arcade that runs completely around the three sides of the room and rounds out the south end. These arches once housed windows. A skylight highlighted the vaulted ceiling but now contains mechanical equipment. Sometime since construction, decorative ribs have been added to the vault in Bruce Hall. The lobby areas included tasteful classical details, such as paneling, ionic pilasters, and sculptural plaques. The structure is built of reinforced concrete and steel and has a red brick exterior.

The style of the Auditorium is generally called "Classical Revival," or "Neo-Classical." It is a two-story red brick building with ionic details. A wide entablature and a belt course of beige stone emphasize the horizontal character of the building and tie the two-part structure together. These horizontals divide the raised basement, the main floors, and the tall parapet that goes around the roofline of the whole building. This lighter stone is also used for the columns originally on the front and the bases and capitals of the piers around the building. All of the windows of the building have been replaced, but their size and shape have not changed. The original tripartite window arrangement featured French detail, which lent the structure something of a Beaux Arts character.

The Auditorium Annex housed the original front façade along Fifth Street. This wing is rectangular in shape and feature projecting end pavilions and a projecting center entrance. The entrance featured a series of two-story fluted ionic columns, the middle ones grouped in twos; they have been replaced with flat brick piers similar to others on the building. At the north and south projecting end pavilions are two story engaged columns on either side of centered windows. Five windows flank either side of the original front entrance, and five windows span both the south side and north side of the Annex. The windows are separated into bays by ionic pilasters of brick. The three middle windows on the north side have been bricked shut, as have the squat rectangular windows at the basement level. The roof appears to be flat; it cannot be seen from the ground due to the brick parapet wall.

The south facade of the main auditorium, Bruce Hall, has now become the primary front of the building. The roof of Bruce Hall is hipped, but a parapet wall of beige metal that extends the original brick parapet wall now obscures the lowest part of the roof. Nine entry doors are centered along this façade in a projecting one story pavilion that is fronted by a grand stair. To either side is a two-story pavilion with pairs of exit doors on the ground level and windows on the second story. Tripartite windows are located on the upper story across the façade.

The west elevation is utilitarian in character and consists of a series of large and small tripartite windows. It appears to have been little altered.

The north elevation was originally set back from State Street due to the early deed restrictions about the property's public use. With the widening of State Street this buffer zone has been reduced. This elevation, like the west front, is utilitarian in character and

features a gabled center pavilion that extends above the parapet wall. Its height was made necessary by housing the mechanicals for the stage area within. Symmetrical groupings of windows are found to either side of the center pavilion. An addition has been constructed on this elevation in recent decades. This is the primary loading area for the complex and now features truck bays as well.

The Auditorium Annex houses rooms named after prominent Milwaukee figures. For instance, the Peter Engelmann and John Plankinton theaters are on the second floor. Plankinton Hall holds an E.M. Skinner pipe organ, the second oldest surviving example of his master craftsmanship. □ On the first floor are three meeting rooms: Juneau, Walker, and Kilbourn. City founders Solomon Juneau, Byron Kilbourn, and George Walker formed separate settlements that eventually combined to create Milwaukee. Thorsten Lindbergh, an artist who, during World War II, painted under the Works Project Administration, depicts many of these men in large murals that adorn various walls on the interior.

The Milwaukee Auditorium is part of western downtown's civic center. The official Civic Center includes the Court House, the Safety Building, the State Office Building, the Arena, the Midwest Express Center, the Public Museum and Discovery World and the nearby Bradley Center, the Reuss Federal Building, the Public Library and numerous hotels.

Alterations to the exterior basically consist of modifications to the original doors and window areas as mentioned above. The original main entry on Fifth Street has been modified with the construction of an addition that links the Auditorium to the Arena. The parapet wall has been extended above the original but the original is still intact. Tinted plate glass windows replaced the original multi-paned sash and French style windows in the 1970's and the decorative cornice appears to have been wrapped in sheet metal at the same time. Many of these alterations are reversible and do not impact negatively on the building's significance to the community. Windows can be restored to their original appearance and the connector wing to the Arena could be removed with the entrance returned to its former condition.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE

Aside from Milwaukee City Hall, there is probably no more significant civic structure in the city than the Milwaukee Auditorium. It is important to the community's sense of history on many levels. First of all, it is a wonderful surviving example of turn of the century urban design and civic pride. It was an important example of Milwaukee's participation in turn of the century architectural trends such as the City Beautiful movement and Civic Center development. An exemplar for communities around the country, it was practical yet elegant. It was the first building to have been completed in Milwaukee's proposed Civic Center and a key factor in convincing city and county officials to go ahead and begin plans to locate the County Courthouse at its present location on 9th Street. It included "all the requirements for a large and commodious convention hall, namely: ample seating capacity and perfect appointments, accessibility and adaptability, absolute safety, requisite stage and stage facilities, complete accessories in the shape of wardrobes, toilets, telegraph and telephone, storage accommodations with ample provision for exhibition space, banquet and assembly halls, a market hall, committee and retiring rooms." For over 90 years the Auditorium has been the location of major political, social and entertainment events for the city. The Auditorium will always be featured in American History texts for its association with the assassination attempt on President Theodore Roosevelt. While in Milwaukee to speak, the then ex-President Roosevelt was shot by John Flammang Schrank at 8:10 PM

on October 4, 1912 while standing in an automobile outside the Gilpatrick Hotel. Although bleeding from his wound, Roosevelt insisted that the car continue on to the Auditorium where he proceeded to speak to an audience of 9,000 people for 80 minutes stating "I have just been shot, but it takes more than that to kill a bull moose".

The Auditorium is important for its use of new technologies. It was built with sturdy foundations, reinforced concrete, and a steel supportive structure. In addition, it is a unique building in that the Classical Revival/Beaux Arts details echo the civic architecture of the time, but the restraint of these details and the use of a red brick facade show a practical and working-class attitude epitomizing the Milwaukee ideal. □

Furthermore, the Milwaukee Auditorium is a monumental example of the Milwaukee architectural firm of Ferry & Clas and one of two structures that set the tone for civic buildings in Milwaukee. Ferry and Clas are known for the numerous posh residences and elegant public buildings they designed for clientele throughout the midwest. The State Historical Society Building in Madison and the Milwaukee Central Library are two examples that were designed primarily to house collections. The Auditorium, designed to accommodate large civic events and popular entertainment venues, is unique in their work and was hailed in its day as a model for other communities. The variety of spaces on the interior made the building multi-functional unlike most of the mono-function arenas and stadiums of today. Throughout its history the Auditorium has made money because of its versatility. With the wave of new convention centers across the country in the 1960's and again in the 1990's, the Auditorium may well be the oldest civic auditorium in a major urban area still used for its original purpose. The alterations that have occurred to portions of the building's exterior are not irreversible and do not diminish the historic significance of the structure.

In conclusion, the Auditorium has served as a place that has witnessed events unequalled in the history of Milwaukee, the United States, and the world. It is a place where Milwaukee residents have gained meaningful experiences and where they have created personal memories. Unlike written texts that can lose meaning over time, the Auditorium stands as the physical embodiment of some of the most important events in Milwaukee history.

VIII. HISTORY

In 1835, Byron Kilbourn, one of the "founding fathers" of the city of Milwaukee, gave to the city as a bequest most of the land between 5th Street, 6th Street, Cedar Street (now Kilbourn Avenue), and State Street. His only stipulations were that it be used as public grounds, house a public marketplace and a specific part would never be built upon. The area was used for various purposes, and in 1867 a permanent structure, called "Market Hall," was erected on the southern portion. This building was first used as a skating rink but was later changed into a public market and meeting hall and it was used for bicycle races and as a gathering spot for shows like traveling minstrels. "Market Hall" was torn down in 1880, and the land, along with another parcel bought by the city, was given in a 50-year lease to the Milwaukee Industrial Exposition Association in order to build an exposition hall for the city. Consequently, the Kilbourn family brought an injunction against the city for using the land for non-public use, but the city obtained their permission for the structure.

This renewed interest in utilizing the land to house a public structure stems from the Centennial Exposition of 1876 in Philadelphia. After seeing the buildings and hospitality displayed by the most American of cities, urban areas around the United States were inspired to build exposition halls. These buildings were meant to attract conventions to the city as well as to supply a community gathering place. Milwaukee, a growing industrial city, was not to be left out of the movement and, in 1881, supported the building of the Exposition Hall with their lease of Byron Kilbourn's land.

Designed by E.T. Mix, a Milwaukee based architect, Exposition Hall was a dramatic Queen Anne structure with a tremendous dome and both an indoor fountain and a basement aquarium. For decades it housed the annual industrial exposition during which the businesses of Milwaukee touted their work. It also included an art gallery and rooms for concerts and meetings, and it displayed the beginning of the city's public museum collection. Exposition Hall was also one of the first buildings in Milwaukee to use electric light. One of the most interesting conventions to take place in Exposition Hall was the Grand Union Dairy Fair of 1882; log cabins, cottages, obelisks, and pyramids built out of cheese decorated the structure.

After the turn of the century, Exposition Hall was growing older and was beginning to become dated; the start of a century-long discussion about convention spaces began in 1903 when the Merchants and Manufacturers Association created a committee to consider replacing the 1880's structure. Then, on Sunday, June 4, 1905 the Victorian Exposition Hall burned to the ground during a "skat" tournament.□ This, of course, created a pressing need for a new building. Accordingly, the state legislature passed a law, with the permission of most of Kilbourn's heirs and adjoining property owners, which called for the building of a new Auditorium. Some of Kilbourn's heirs, however, continued to protest that the uses for the property would not be purely public despite the plan to have a "market space" in the basement of the annex. Eventually the Supreme Court ruled that the Auditorium fulfilled the stipulations of Byron Kilbourn's donation, and since then, his heirs have not disputed the use of the land.

Free to continue the mission for a new community building, the Auditorium committee sent out the call for money. The legislature had passed a measure to supply \$250,000 in funds to be matched by private subscriptions of \$250,000, allowing for a total cost of \$500,000 for the structure.□ Volunteers through intensive campaigning raised the money; both companies and private individuals gave generously to the cause. The city raised its portion with a bond issue.

The building was to be governed by the Board of Directors. This was comprised of leading members of the community. Those voted into the positions in 1906 were Alvin P. Ketch, William George Bruce, Oliver C. Fuller, and Charles E. Sammond. In contrast, the Auditorium Governing Board was a combination of citizens representing those who invested in the building (Milwaukee Auditorium Company) and city officials such as the Mayor, City Attorney, and Treasurer.

Despite the obvious availability of the site of the old hall, there was some disagreement over the location of the new structure. Some felt that a more visible location on Grand Avenue (now Wisconsin Avenue) would have been better. Several factors, however, made using the site of the Exposition Hall more suitable. The primary consideration was that it was already owned by the city so there would not be any additional outlay of money in order to buy land. Also, its location on the west side of downtown was readily accessible

by streetcar so everyone could reach it with ease. In addition, some funding subscriptions stipulated that the building be placed on the site of the old Exposition Hall. Moreover, some downtown businesses were worried that such a structure would cause devaluation of their commercial district although it was generally hoped that the Auditorium would improve the character of the western neighborhood.

Once the placement of the building was decided upon, a nation-wide competition was announced which drew responses from architects all over the country. The price limit was set at \$450,000, allowing for unforeseen costs and the cost of furnishings. Four cash prizes were arranged for the top entries. Out of twelve plans anonymously reviewed, the first prize was given to the firm of Ferry & Clas of Milwaukee.□ Their drawings won because the interior arrangement was deemed the most functional for the purpose of the building. The exterior of the building, however, was modified after the competition to "one which is more classic in design and at the same time more graceful and dignified in outline." The runners up included second-prize winner Robertson & Potter of New York City, third place Mills & Pruitt of Columbus, Ohio and fourth place Van Ryn & DeGelleke of Milwaukee.

Auditorium President Ketch laid the cornerstone on August 1, 1908 among much fanfare. The festivities included a immense parade in which an estimated ten thousand people from local clubs, organizations, and bands took part. Leaders integral to erecting the building made speeches, and at the lowering of the cornerstone, all of the fireboats on the Milwaukee River blew their whistles. Similar festivities were planned for the dedication of the Milwaukee Auditorium, which occurred on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, September 21, 23, and 25, 1909. Boxes for opening night sold for \$100. After a concert that included a performance by the great contralto Madame Schumann-Heink, those in the audience made a tour of the facilities. Then, long into the night, they danced on the floor of the new Auditorium.

The Milwaukee Auditorium was the prototype for such buildings in similar cities throughout the country. The mayor of Detroit and a committee of citizens visited the opening celebration because his city was looking to build an auditorium. The Mayor of Milwaukee at the time, David S. Rose, called the Auditorium "a monument to the triumph of optimism. In it is manifest the spirit of progress, for it incomparably excels all that have preceded it."

The Milwaukee Auditorium shows this "spirit of progress" in its interpretation of two current American architecture movements; both its style and its placement reflect popular trends at the time. The first, its Classical Revival style, was stoked by the 1893 Colombian Exposition in Chicago, also known as the World's Fair. The classically designed buildings displayed at this fair became the style of choice for buildings of public and business use. In Milwaukee, the Central Public Library, Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company's central office, and the County Courthouse all use this style's classical details such as columns, a monumental appearance, and ordered, symmetrical facades.

The second trend, displayed by placement of the Milwaukee Auditorium, is the development of a "Civic Center." This is an area where all public buildings are grouped around park-like malls meant to impress visitors with its beauty and to instill pride in the residents of the city. Collectively called the "City Beautiful" movement, this interest in improving the urban landscape through classically inspired buildings and rational landscaping was presented at the Colombian Exposition and used in the plan of the Mall in Washington D.C. Milwaukee city leaders first contemplated the idea for a "civic center" in

1905, and the construction of the Milwaukee Auditorium was an integral part in developing the concept. In fact, in 1909, the year the Auditorium was completed, Milwaukee's definitive civic center plan was brought forward.□ It included the Auditorium in its span from Wells Street to State Street and from 4th Street to 9th Street. A 1920 referendum officially designated this area for major civic buildings. The present County Courthouse was integral to this program as the focal point at the western end of the Kilbourn Avenue boulevard; the courthouse was completed in 1932 in Classical Revival style.

The Milwaukee Auditorium, therefore, was one of the first buildings erected in order to make Milwaukee an invitingly beautiful and nationally recognized city. Other buildings incorporated into the civic center plan were the Public Library, the State Office Building, the Milwaukee Public Museum, the Arena, the Performing Arts Center (now Marcus Center of the Performing Arts), MECCA (now replaced by the Midwest Express Center), and the Bradley Center. Given the time span over which these buildings were constructed, however, not all of them conform to the monumental, Classical form envisioned by the city planners and the casual observer would not necessarily recognize this collection of buildings as part of an identifiable Civic Center.

The Auditorium has been a well-used facility from its opening day. Statistics in the 1920's show that it was common for 800 to 1,000 events (concerts, lectures, sports, expositions, etc.) to take place there annually. Unfortunately, for as much pride and publicity that was attached to the Auditorium in the first decades of its existence, it eventually became dated. As early as the 1930's Milwaukee's Auditorium ranked smaller than many public halls in other communities. By the Second World War, it was evident that there were problems in using the Auditorium as a sports arena. Consequently, in 1945 the city began to raise money to build a new structure devoted to sports, the Arena. After buying property adjacent to the Milwaukee Auditorium, the building was constructed on the block bounded by 4th Street, 5th Street, Kilbourn Avenue, and State Street. Building commenced in 1949, and the new structure opened on April 9, 1950. The Arena, designed by the Milwaukee firm of Eschweiler & Eschweiler, is distinguishable by its curved roof. It is now connected to the Auditorium Annex's original front entrance.

Throughout the late 50's and 60's, therefore, the Arena hosted the popular sports events such as basketball and hockey, while the question of what to do with the Auditorium remained. In 1966, the Milwaukee firm of Daverman Associations, Inc. was hired to develop another plan for the civic center, particularly the Auditorium and the Arena. In order to make it competitive with other convention centers around the country, the plan called for such things as air conditioning. The cost for this was so prohibitive, however, that the installation of air conditioning was delayed for decades. Daverman also offered a streamlined, cohesive exterior to the Auditorium/Arena complex and further developed the plan for Kilbourn Avenue Boulevard, but these ideas were also dropped because of lack of funds. Essentially, even when including the space of the Arena, the Auditorium was significantly smaller than other cities' facilities. In addition, the acoustics of Bruce Hall were often criticized although in its early years the hall had been praised for its acoustics.□ The problem was further confounded by the fact that the Auditorium had been consistently operating at a profit, so it seemed senseless to destroy it.

By the early 1970's, the question about the functionality of the old Auditorium was put forward once again: was it worth keeping or should it be torn down to give space for another building? The city opted for renovating the structure. The work was completed in 1978 and included new sound systems, lighting systems, and air conditioning as well as

exterior renovations. Meanwhile, a new building was constructed in 1974 on the two city blocks south of the Auditorium between 4th Street, 6th Street, Kilbourn Avenue and Wells Street. It was hoped that this convention hall would lure more national conventions to the city. The new hall together with the existing Auditorium and Arena would be known as MECCA, the Milwaukee Exposition & Convention Center & Arena. Mayor Norquist has referred to this building, rather drab in appearance, as the "big VCR". The Los Angeles firm Welton Becket Associates designed it. It was larger than the Auditorium/Arena, and it was joined by skywalk to the older complex.

At the time, the use of the Milwaukee Auditorium for cultural events such as concerts, operas, and ballets was dwindling with the influx of new buildings for these happenings. The Performing Arts Center, now the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, was built in 1969 to house the permanent music and theater companies of Milwaukee as well as offer a place to stage touring musicians, musicals, and ballets. The Arena was used to show rock concerts, the newest rage in entertainment, and ice shows, an amusement growing in popularity. The Bradley Center, built in 1985, also sapped the function of the Auditorium and Arena with its newer, bigger facilities for sports, concerts and shows. Meanwhile, Milwaukee was losing ground in the convention market because other cities were building bigger accommodations. Finally, in 1995, a state law created the Wisconsin Center District, which, through funding by sales and room taxes, maintains the Auditorium/Arena. It has completed the construction of phase one and two of the new Midwest Express Center. This three building complex is meant to offer variety and flexibility for conventions, concerts, and speakers visiting Milwaukee. It replaced the 1970's convention hall, which was razed in 1999. Furthermore, this new organization completed a refurbishment of the Milwaukee Auditorium during 1998 and 1999. Bruce Hall boasts new colors, and a temporary stage has been designed for smaller gatherings.

Although the functionality of the Milwaukee Auditorium has been questioned frequently, it has survived because of its exceptionally adaptable floor plan. Because of its flexibility, it has survived to become a monument to Milwaukee's rise as a prosperous industrial city with a unique blend of cultures, and it is a reminder of the political, cultural, and economic history of the city and the nation. In addition, as the center of the community, it has been host to a wide variety of activities both in its main auditorium and in its five subsidiary theaters and meeting rooms. A glance at the reservation schedules manifests its centrality in lives of many Milwaukee residents. Furthermore, at the time of the Milwaukee Auditorium's anniversaries in 1922, 1934, and 1962, newspaper articles relate the celebrations and memories of the building. These tales are just the beginning; piles and pages of clippings at the Central Library are evidence of the Auditorium as a long cherished home for cultural and community events.

One of the most famous incidents occurred in 1912 when President Theodore Roosevelt was slated to speak as Progressive Party candidate. Half an hour before his appearance in Bruce Hall, he was shot. The bullet, hampered by his eyeglass case and speech notes, did only minimal harm although the bullet was lodged in his ribcage. He refused medical attention and spoke to the crowds in the auditorium for three hours. A commemorative book was written up on the event and even had photographs of the damaged speech notes and the x-ray of the bullet as it was lodged in Roosevelt's chest. Other presidents are remembered by "celebrity chairs" kept in the attic, among them Woodrow Wilson and William Howard Taft. When Woodrow Wilson spoke at the Auditorium on January 31, 1916, he included in his address the line "when all the world is a fire, the sparks fly everywhere."

Not only presidents used the Milwaukee Auditorium; political organizations often used it for meetings and rallies. In fact, during tense times in United States history, the public nature of the building made for controversy. In the 20's, the Ku Klux Klan wanted to have a rally in the building "to teach [Milwaukee] law and order." Then Mayor Daniel W. Hoan wrote back, "you come here and touch a hair on the head of one Catholic, one Jew, one chiropractor, or one anything else, and I'll make this the hottest place this side of hell for the Ku Klux Klan." □ Later in the century, the proposed renting of the facility to communist groups also stirred controversy. In 1935, many protested the communist utilization of the facility, but others championed free speech to all. It took a plea from local church leaders, citing the Milwaukee Auditorium's availability for orderly meetings, to authorize the communist rental. Then, in 1938, a German group was not allowed to meet in the structure because of tension caused by World War II; this troubling time was particularly evident in Milwaukee, a city with a large German immigrant population.

During World War I, the Auditorium also was the center of attention. At the beginning of the Great War, the boys who enlisted in the first unit from Milwaukee to be sent overseas were barracked in the building. The night before their departure, civic leaders organized a dinner for the soldiers and their families. When they returned, the celebration was held in the Auditorium as well. Also, during the influenza epidemic that swept the country in 1917 and 1918, the Auditorium instigated "influenza seating;" rows were spaced widely, and monitors sat at the ends to catch signs of sickness. When the sickness was at its height, the building became a hospital to care for the afflicted. The Auditorium also played a role during World War II, when bond concerts were performed to raise funds for the American effort in the war.

When not reflecting world history, however, the Milwaukee Auditorium contributed to the lives of those who came to see its cultural events. Music was an essential part of the Auditorium's role. Opera stars Geraldine Farrar and Olga Samaroff kicked off the Auditorium's list of legendary headliners in 1909. The Metropolitan Opera Company with singers such as Enrico Caruso included the Auditorium on its tour. The main stage was host to Yascha Heifetz, John Philip Sousa, and Louis Armstrong. In its early years, Oscar Wilde and Richard Strauss' opera Salome played in Bruce Hall after being banned in major cities across Europe and in the United States. The sensuous "Dance of the Seven Veils" and its violent content did little to perturb Milwaukee viewers. In 1948, the Polka King contest crowned legendary Frankie Yankovic and Four Cleveland Kids as the best polka band. In the 1960's, Herman's Hermit's entertained a crowd of screaming girls, while the television show Shindig taped an episode of its show at the Auditorium.

Besides cultural events, community shows and fund-raisers regularly utilized the many rooms of the Auditorium. Exhibitions such as the Milwaukee Auto Show, the Milwaukee Sentinel Sports Show, the annual Home Show and the Folk Fair were booked at the Auditorium for decades. Numerous organizations and clubs planned fairs, dinners, and dances in the building. The Shriners' circus regularly thrilled visitors. The Masonic organization called Job's Daughters entertained with their Carnival, and Marquette University performed commencement services in Bruce Hall.

Today the Auditorium still hosts concerts, community events, and meetings of local organizations. Most who live in Milwaukee have a story to tell about the building, and more people create memories within its walls every year. In fact, in 1999, the Milwaukee

Auditorium celebrated its 90th anniversary by hosting a Riverdance show, one of the most popular tours of the decade.

ARCHITECTS

The architectural firm of Ferry & Clas was formed in 1890 and consisted of George Bowman Ferry and Alfred Charles Clas. Until their separation in 1912, they worked from their downtown offices located on Broadway between Wisconsin Avenue and Mason Street. Together the men designed high-profile buildings such as the Central Public Library and Museum (Beaux Arts, 1893-97), the Northwestern National Life Company's central office (Beaux Arts, 1906), Buena Vista Flats (Beaux Arts Apartment Building, 908-09), and the Lake Park Pavilion (1903). They caught the national spotlight when they designed the Wisconsin State Building at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo and the Wisconsin State Building for the St. Louis Exposition. Their range of talent spanned all types and styles. Among their Milwaukee designs were office buildings such as Matthews Building (Romanesque Revival, 1892), warehouses and storefronts such as the Steinmeyer Building (Romanesque Revival, 1893), private homes such as the Gustav G. Pabst Mansion (Classical Revival, 1906) and Fred T. Goll Residence (English Tudor, 1898), and churches such as the First Unitarian Church on Ogden Avenue (Gothic Revival, 1891-92). These two architects reflected not only the flexibility and eclecticism of American Architecture, but also the blossoming identity of Milwaukee's civilization.

George Bowman Ferry was born on February 7, 1851 in Springfield, Massachusetts. In 1871-2 he studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and then he returned to his hometown to practice. He moved to Milwaukee in 1881. As an independent architect he designed the Woman's Club of Wisconsin on Kilbourn Avenue (Victorian Gothic 1887) and the Frederick Pabst Mansion on Wisconsin Avenue (Flemish Renaissance, 1890). In addition, he was honored for his contribution to the International Architecture Exhibit at the Paris World's Fair. After he and Alfred Clas dissolved their partnership, Ferry kept the offices on Broadway until 1916. On January 29, 1918, he died at the home of his son, Robert, on Royall Place. He was praised highly as a nationally known architect with a great sense of design. In addition to his work as an architect, Ferry helped organize the first architectural association in Wisconsin, assisted in writing the constitution of the American Institute of Architects, chaired Milwaukee's building code commission, was president of the Milwaukee Art Commission, and was a member of the National Academy of Sciences.

Alfred Charles Clas, the son of German immigrants, was born December 26, 1859 in Sauk City, Wisconsin. There he worked as an apprentice to an unnamed architect for two years, and from 1879-1881 he was employed in an architect's office in Stockton, California. By 1884, he returned to Wisconsin and settled in Milwaukee. Here he worked in the office of James Douglas, where he was promoted from draftsman to architect, and in 1885 he and Douglas formed the firm of Jas. Douglas & Co. He left this partnership in 1887 in order to work on his own from offices on Milwaukee Street. During this time he designed the E.D. Adler Residence (Queen Anne/Romanesque, 1888) and the Bernard Eiring Residence (1888) as well as the William H. Osborne House (1888). He then formed the partnership with George Ferry in the firm of Ferry & Clas from 1890 until 1912. After leaving Ferry, Clas joined his son to form Alfred C. Clas & Angelo Clas until 1921, when he joined his other son, Rubens Frederick Clas, and another architect, John S. Shepherd, in the firm Clas, Shepherd, & Clas until 1931. Clas, Shepherd & Clas designed the Tripoli Temple Shrine Mosque (Islamic Indian, 1926-28). When Shepherd left in 1931, Alfred and his son

continued as Clas & Clas until 1936 when Alfred retired. The Clas & Clas firm continued until 1940 with his son Rubens. Alfred Clas died on July 8, 1942 at the Masonic Home in Dousman, near Milwaukee, of complications from a fall on ice the previous year. Besides designing Milwaukee structures, Clas was an active proponent of the City Beautiful movement in Milwaukee. Not only did he help plan the Civic Center and Lincoln Memorial Drive and Parkway, he also mapped out many of the city's boulevards and parks. Accordingly, he was on the County Parks Commission and served as president of the Metropolitan Park Commission.

Ferry and Clas' work on the Milwaukee Auditorium fits into the Classical Revival/Beaux Arts style for which the firm is most remembered. It is a fine example of their ability to lend monumentality and grace to a building that was not budgeted for the rich marble and bronze and costly embellishments that can be found on some of their other commissions as the State Historical Society' Building in Madison. It is unique in their body of work, however, as the only known civic auditorium building that they designed. It is important for the fact that Clas was a local leader in bringing the ideals of the City Beautiful movement to Milwaukee, ideals he and his partner were attempting to embody in the Auditorium

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- Filardo, p. 84.
- Bruce, The Auditorium, p. 8.
- Milwaukee Auditorium & Milwaukee Arena, Wisconsin Center District, p. 1.
- Skat is a type of card game.
- The building permit originally lists the cost of the building as \$450,000. At some point this was crossed out and replaced with 473,239, then \$471,500.

- The other winners included: 2nd prize: Roberston & Potter, New York City; 3rd prize: Mills & Pruitt, Columbus, Ohio; 4th prize: Van Ryn & De Gelleke, Milwaukee.
- Bruce, The Auditorium, p. 32.
- The Milwaukee Journal, 4/13/50, Milwaukee Public Library Clipping File.
- Usually considered Ferry & Clas' masterpiece, the Central Library is an example of Beaux Arts classicism used in the buildings of the Colombian Exposition.
- Alfred Clas was instrumental in designing the first civic center plan in 1909; a revised plan was developed in 1910 by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and John Nolen. See Built in Milwaukee, Chapter 5 for a complete discussion of the City Beautiful movement in Milwaukee.
- The quality of the acoustics in Bruce Hall seems to be debatable. For instance, after her performance on opening night, opera singer Schumann-Heink praised the auditorium's sound (Levy, p. 6). It is only later that it becomes a problem, and it seems to stem from the introduction of electronic amplification. Perhaps this new technology actually interfered with the natural acoustics of the room.
- "Milwaukee Auditorium" The Milwaukee Journal, Sept 10, 1922, Milwaukee Public Library Clipping File.
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