

## *“Unique and Handsome”: Cass Gilbert’s Designs for the Montana Club*

Patty Dean

On a snowy Monday evening in late April 1903, a fierce fire raced through all six floors of the Montana Club in downtown Helena, Montana. Within three hours, the stone and brick structure, considered by a local newspaper to be the “most magnificent building this side of Chicago devoted to club purposes,” was a total ruin with losses of \$150,000.



Twelve years earlier, in 1891, the members of the fledgling Montana Club—after meeting in members’ offices and business blocks for six years—had launched a subscription drive to raise \$75,000 to build a permanent clubhouse.

In 1891 the Club purchased a triangular lot for \$45,000 in downtown Helena from Samuel T. Hauser and hired German-trained architect John C. Paulsen and his business partner John LaValle to design its first permanent quarters.

As distant in time and space as the new Montana Club building might have seemed to be from early eighteenth-century London, it nonetheless shared a common male “domesticity” in form and function with Boodles’, Brooks’, White’s, and other “gentlemen’s clubs” clustered around that city’s St. James Street. London’s first gentlemen’s clubs had grown from informal coffeehouse gatherings of men assembled for leisurely conversation, gambling, and dining in the late seventeenth century. The first



*Paulsen and LaValle’s original Montana Club ablaze, April 27, 1903. Photograph by L. H. Jorud, Helena, Montana. Courtesy Montana Historical Society, Helena (Pac 80-27F21).*

buildings constructed expressly as clubs resembled the townhouses they had originally been housed in. The interior plan of the men’s club manifested strict physical, hierarchical, and social separations between men and women, “stranger” and member, and staff and member. The club represented, in the words of one historian: “a domestic side to public patriarchy. By offering a private environment without the stresses of family life and a public realm without its political responsibilities, occupying a clubhouse suggests both the comfort and the freedom of being ‘at home’ but in the public spaces of the city.”

Like that of the late eighteenth-century Brooks’ club in



*Paulsen and LaValle's original Montana Club, northwest corner of Sixth and Fuller Avenues, Helena, Montana, 1893–1903. Photographer unidentified. Courtesy Montana Historical Society, Helena (Pac 953-326).*

London, the Montana Club's Main Hall was also two floors high with an adjacent staircase and a symmetrical arrangement of rooms off to both sides granting them an equal status. Other rooms in the building's upper four stories included card rooms, reception rooms, library, and "bachelor" apartments for non-resident members or Helena members who preferred to live at the club. The Mutual Life Insurance Company and Helena Water Works Company occupied the first floor offices. Women could only enter the Club proper, however, with a club member and then only at specific times: "When ladies are present on reception nights, no drinks except lemonade or claret punch of any kind shall be mixed or served under any circumstances upon the second and the third floors of the club and the bar shall always be closed during the hours of the reception. Drinks may be served on the fourth and fifth floors during reception nights. . . . Ladies can use bowling alley when with members on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m."



The conflagration of 1903 began on the building's top floor, and efforts to battle it were unsuccessful due to the fire's extreme heat and speed. Happily, the few club members in the building and Toy, the Chinese cook who discovered the fire, were able to escape, with some carrying the Club's early member and guest registers. The building was a total loss.

Reaction to the Club's misfortune was swift with its Wall Street lien holder immediately telegraphing: "Very sorry. May Club rose [sic] phoenix like what is insurance." The secretary for the Silver Bow Club, seventy miles away in Butte, consoled: "Words



*Ruins of Paulsen and LaValle's Montana Club, April 28, 1903. Photographer unidentified. Courtesy Montana Historical Society, Helena (PAC 88-39 F1).*

cannot express our sorrow for the loss of your beautiful club home.”

While an investigation was being made, member Charles M. Webster at the Office of the Collector of Customs in Great Falls hypothesized as to the fire's origin: “[Perhaps] the seed sown by our friend Bovard [the minister at St. Paul's Methodist Church] found root in the shallow pate of some fanatic who thought he was especially called to rid the community of that ‘hell-hole of vice’ so feelingly referred to by the Rev B—.”

The morning after the fire, the Club's president, E. C. Day (whose “bachelor” apartment at the clubhouse was a total loss), met with several other members at a nearby office block and decided to lease a vacant mansion owned by the widow of a former member. The minutes of the meeting also recorded that the fire had begun in the northwest corner of the club building's top floor at 10:35 p.m. and concluded with a note on the formation of a committee to raise funds for its rebuilding.

Clark, Dodge and Co., the Wall Street lien holder, once again telegraphed the Club on May 2, asking what the building's insurance coverage was and if it would cover the cost of a new building. Unfortunately insurance covered approximately \$62,000—not even half of the \$150,000 loss. Nonetheless, the Club had already raised \$32,000 in subscriptions and announced that another \$19,000 would be secured. A subsequent meeting noted that the “sentiment was to retain good features [of the] old Club, especially general features of main floor and half floors and putting bar in basement.”

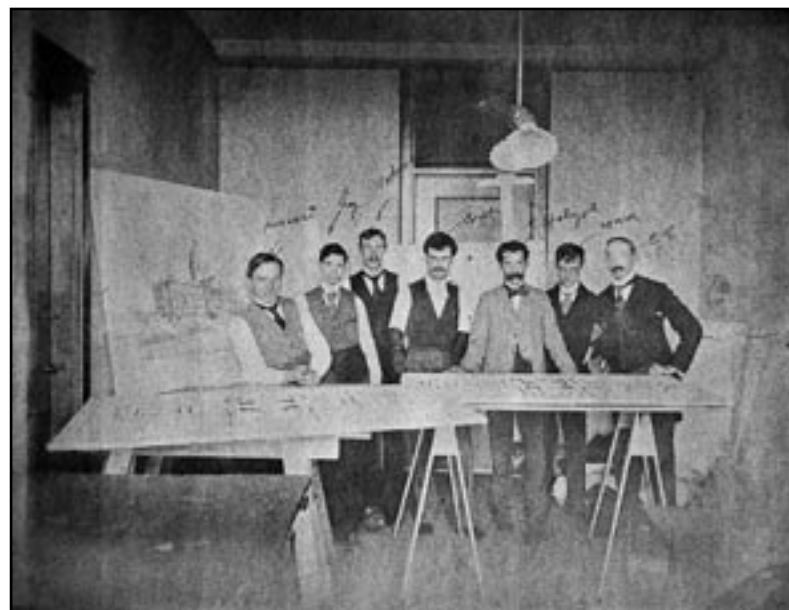
In the meantime, an investigation into the conflagration revealed that Harry Anderson, the fourteen-year-old son of the club's black bartender Julian Anderson, had set not only the fire

that destroyed the clubhouse but also an earlier one that had been discovered in its basement and quickly extinguished. Harry admitted to setting a third blaze that engulfed a private stable and that he had actually ridden to the site with the firefighters.

Under the chief of police's questioning, the teenager confessed, "all that I intended to do was to have the horses run. I thought that they [the firemen] would be at the place before any damage was done." Anderson was sentenced to the state reform school until he reached adulthood. While it's not clear what happened to Harry following his term, the elder Anderson continued to work at the Montana Club for another fifty years.

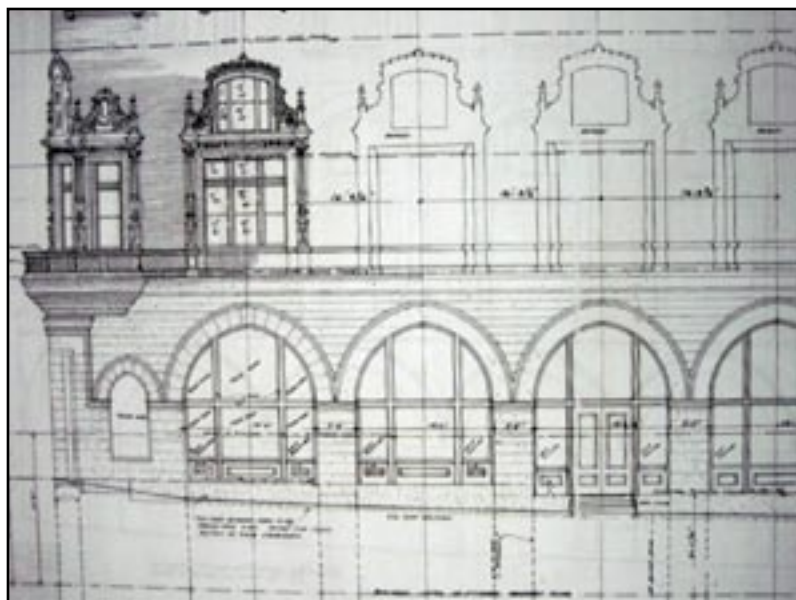
One week after the calamity, the Club's Board of Governors assembled a five-man Building Committee to "negotiate with architects and secure preliminary sketches for [the] new club." The committee approved a motion that the new building's cost be limited to \$80,000 and recommended renowned St. Paul and New York City architect Cass Gilbert as their choice. The committee's head, E. C. Day, an attorney, might have been familiar with Gilbert's work from his late 1880s tenure in St. Paul working as an editor for West Publishing. But another committee member, John Neill, had a long-standing friendship with Gilbert that dated from their adolescence at a St. Paul prep school (later Macalester College). After graduating from Delaware College and studying law at Columbian University in Washington, D.C., Neill was appointed Surveyor General of Montana by the newly elected President Grover Cleveland in late 1883. He eventually purchased the *Helena Daily Independent* newspaper and became deeply involved in community affairs.

Although Cass Gilbert had recently established an office in



*Cass Gilbert and his St. Paul office employees with drawings of his Minnesota State Capitol, probably 1900–1905; Gilbert is at right, George Carsley is at center wearing sleeve protectors. Photographer unidentified. Courtesy Montana Historical Society, Helena (PAC 76-11-1).*

New York City, hoping to augment his dwindling St. Paul practice and garner more East Coast commissions, he was no stranger to Montana. Born in Ohio in 1859, Gilbert had grown up in St. Paul and studied at Massachusetts Institute of Technology for a year before traveling to Europe in 1880. Upon his return, in 1883, McKim, Mead and White of New York had hired him to execute their Minnesota, Dakota, and Montana Northern Pacific Railroad projects. Eager to begin his own practice, Gilbert left New York City and started his own firm in St. Paul. By the summer of 1883,



*Cass Gilbert, Montana Club Fuller Avenue elevation, August 24, 1903. Montana Club Blueprints and Drawings, 1903–1950, Small Collection 1998, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena. Photograph by Patty Dean.*

McKim, Mead and White began directing their Northern Pacific Railroad work between St. Paul and Helena to his fledgling office. Among the designs Gilbert executed was the railroad's depot in Helena and a railroad hospital in Missoula. Eventually becoming one of the nation's most famous and prolific architects, Gilbert is frequently credited as the "Father of the Skyscraper" for his design of the fifty-five-story Gothic Woolworth Building in lower Manhattan, the world's tallest building until eclipsed by the Chrysler Building in 1929.

He also designed a shingled Queen Anne house in Helena

for international banker A. J. Seligman in 1887, submitted entries in competitions for the Montana State Capitol in 1894 and 1897, and drew up plans for a warehouse in Great Falls in 1901. Gilbert was familiar with the Montana Club, recalling in a letter, "I remember with much pleasure having enjoyed the hospitality of the Montana Club in years past."

Gilbert was interested in the commission and, in a letter written one week after the fire, proposed that one or two committee members "visit St. Paul and go East with me to inspect clubs in Chicago and New York preliminary to beginning your own work. I am sure it would be advantageous [sic] to it." One of the clubs he no doubt wished the Montanans to scrutinize would be his newly completed Union Club on Fifth and Fifty-First in Manhattan.

The committee was evidently in greater haste. They urged Gilbert to travel to Helena right away, but, as he telegraphed John Neill, it was inconvenient for him to visit at that point and that he would be glad to send an "experienced competent representative . . . [to] obtain [the] requirements." Gilbert would visit later.

Neill immediately telegraphed his friend back, saying: "Think it essential that you should come personally and at once. You are first choice of committee if terms within our reach. Wire probable terms and if you will come."

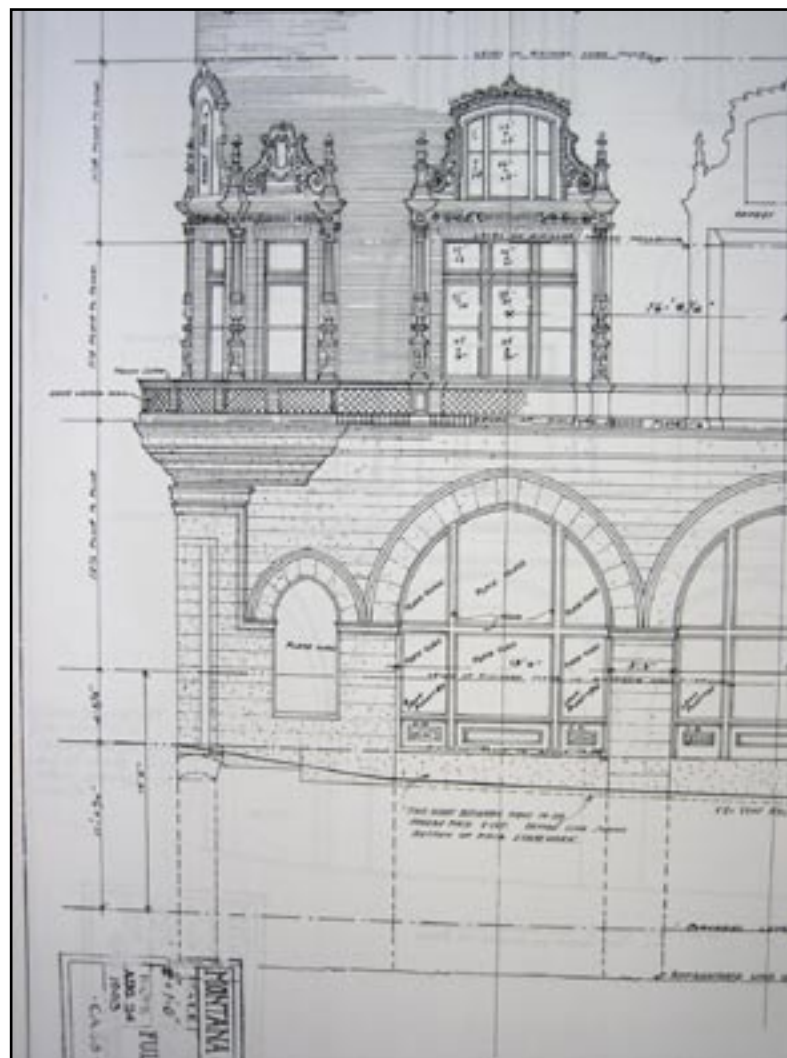
Gilbert capitulated to his friend's entreaty, noting he would "come to Helena at once on the understanding that the club engages my services as architect at usual schedule," charging the Montana Club the same rate he had charged for the recently completed Union Club. The Montana Club's representatives met with Gilbert on May 11, 1903—only two weeks after the fire—and

discussed the new building and its furnishings.

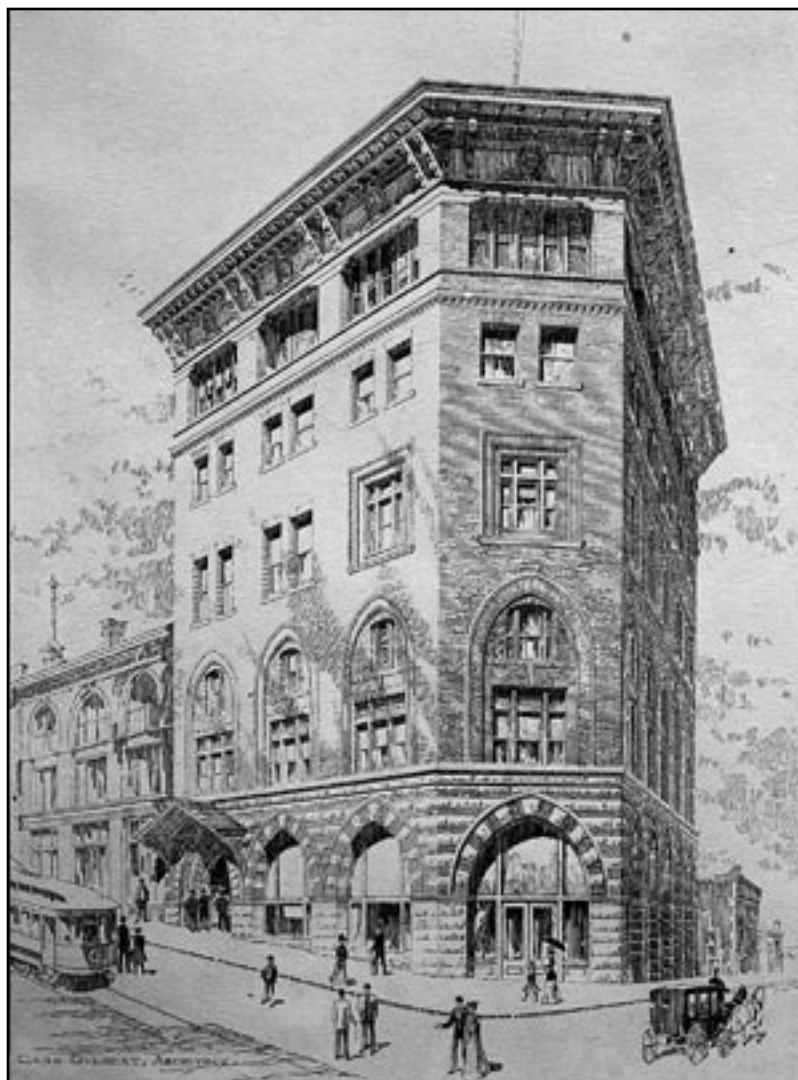
Approximately six weeks later, Gilbert sent copies of his preliminary drawings to Club members, noting that a lack of information on the foundation's depths had delayed their preparation. His floor-by-floor description retained aspects of the old building while incorporating improvements the club members desired, such as a vestibule door to keep out the winter chill and street noise and a basement bar, a "Rathskellar," a feature he had also included in his designs for the Minnesota State Capitol. The second floor remained the Club's main floor and housed the Reception Room, Main Hall, Billiard Room, all with soaring twenty-foot-high ceilings as well as the Drinking Room, Guest's or Stranger's Room, and Office.

A mezzanine floor contiguous with the high-ceilinged rooms provided two "conversation rooms" and a loggia from which club members could overlook the Reception Room, Billiard Room, and Main Hall—"in this respect similar to the old Club House," Gilbert wrote. Such an arrangement again echoed the private/public spheres found in the earlier London clubs as club members' comings and goings could be easily seen on "public" stairways. Those wishing to engage in private social, business, or political discussions could easily step into alcove-like "conversation rooms" just off the more public areas. The loggia, lit by an open light shaft extending up to the roof, four stories above, opened into the Governor's Room where the club's officiating members were to meet.

The third floor included a Card Room (although he suggested it be switched with the second floor's Billiard Room to gain the latter additional space) and six bedrooms for resident or non-resident members. The third floor mezzanine was all



*Details of rounded corner of Montana Club, September 1903. Montana Club Blueprints and Drawings, 1903–1950, Small Collection 1998, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena. Photograph by Patty Dean.*



*Montana Club presentation drawing, Cass Gilbert, Architect, April 1904.  
Courtesy Montana Historical Society, Helena (PAC 88-39 F1).*

bedrooms and also contained the upper portion of the Card Room's seventeen-and-a-half-foot ceiling. The fourth floor was designated entirely for bedrooms and bathrooms with either light from the light court or the exterior. Gilbert took extra care to explain that the thirty bedrooms, for the most part, were accessed from private corridors, "so that the noise and usage of [the] Club will disturb the occupants as little possible." Due to the bedrooms' small size, he deemed them more suitable for transient use rather than permanent residency. The entire fifth story was designated for the dining room with seating for as many as seventy-five people at separate tables, as well as a kitchen and commodious serving room "important in the case of banquets, which I understand [are] occasionally given at the Club." He also included two servants' rooms in the attic space per the Building Committee's requirements.

Gilbert proposed to use "the old stone work of the first story as far as practicable—above this to use brick and terra cotta. The style of the building will be in the Spanish Renaissance with a wide, over-hanging cornice. It will make an ornate building, and one I think that will be satisfactory to the club." He admitted the possibility that some of the ornamentation might be reduced due to cost but nonetheless believed that if the design were executed as stipulated that "it will present an appearance that is essentially that of a club building, and one that will be unique and handsome." He closed his seven-page letter, "I have [found] the subject one of great interest, and while the form of the lot makes it a difficult problem to design, nevertheless, I believe the result will meet your own expectations and desire."

The Building Committee telegraphed their general

acceptance of Gilbert's proposal on the fourth of July 1903, followed with a letter from President E. C. Day: "The drawings have been exhibited in the club rooms for the last four days and have been examined in detail by almost every resident member of the club, and we have yet to hear any adverse criticism upon them. The Board of Governors at its meeting last night unanimously approved the plans." The Rathskellar had "met with very favorable comment, except that all are afraid of the ventilation," suggesting that a fireplace from the main, i.e. second floor, be included and "a large open fireplace be arranged for this room." In addition, the Board determined to leave the Billiard Room on the second floor, but use only two tables, and decided to eliminate and/or expand some of the bedrooms. Gilbert replied that he believed their alterations could be accommodated in the working plans.

On July 17, the Club contracted with E. W. Fiske (who was superintending the construction of the Reed and Stem-designed United States Public Building up the street) to remove the rubble and, for \$460, to dismantle all the remaining cut stone, number the pieces, and pile them on the vacant lot west of the building to await reconstruction.

In an early September letter accompanying the drawings, Gilbert revealed his anxiety at staying within the \$70,000 appropriated for the building's reconstruction and "have therefore modified the design where it seemed practicable, to reduce the expense without impairing the effectiveness of the building." Moreover, Gilbert's examination of the old, "badly done" masonry in the debris had caused him to advocate for a complete new foundation. The original above grade stonework that was salvageable was to be augmented with new stone. Another cost-

saving measure was to use the local Kessler brick and "only such terra cotta ornamental outside trim as necessary to give a suitable appearance to the building." Gilbert reiterated his concern at the building's cost and formulated alternative schemes based upon specific omissions. Nonetheless, he remained committed to providing the Montana Club membership with a quality building as he suggested that the "best general contractors in Helena and several from St. Paul or Minneapolis should be invited to bid upon the work. Several Chicago contractors have also asked an opportunity to bid upon the work and we might find it desirable to deal with them."

Gilbert's original design specified ornate terra cotta ornamentation for the windows on the Sixth Avenue side, perhaps as much Flemish/Lowlands as Spanish in inspiration. It also included the recreation of the original all-granite first story, the Club entrance under an angled hood, and a curved corner entrance to the offices for lease at the intersection of Sixth and Fuller Avenues. A brickwork lattice rail was to run the length of the second story. The fenestration of the Sixth Avenue elevation's upper stories was varied but no less dramatic. The Fuller Avenue elevation retained the same motifs as the Sixth Avenue one in its first- and second-story details and materials.

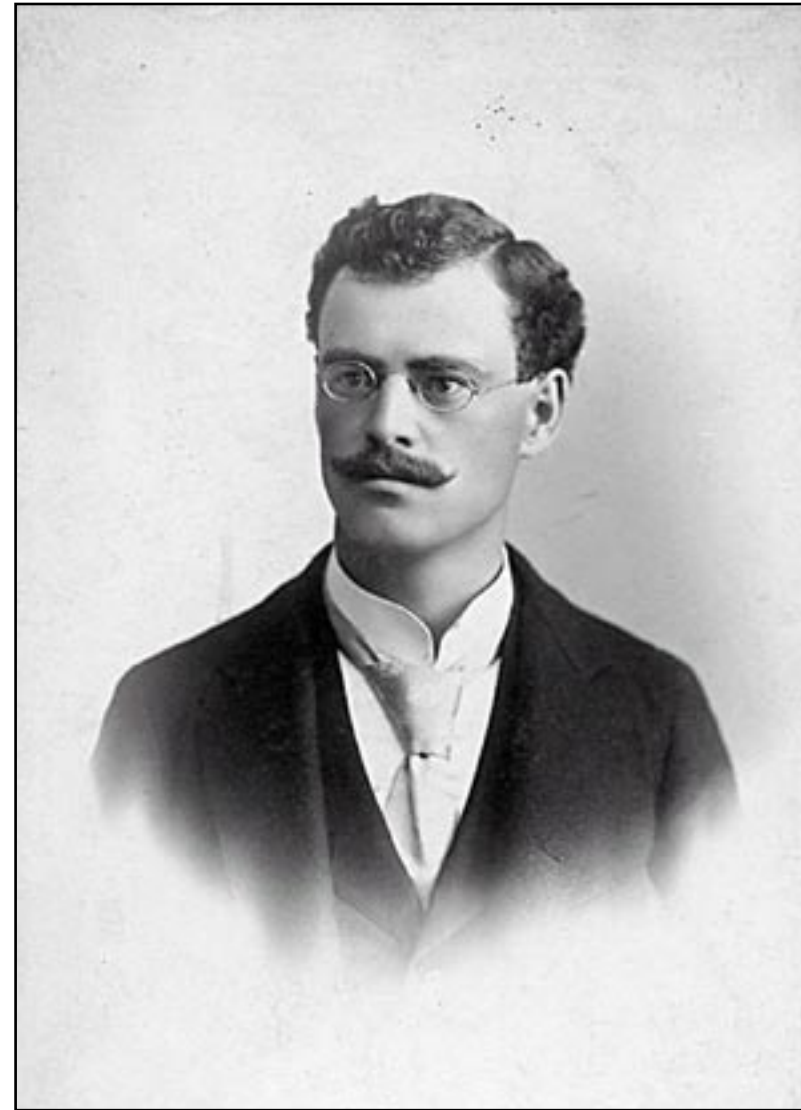
Still apprehensive about the "disturbed condition of the building market at the present time" and the building's cost, Gilbert decided to offer two alternatives to his original design. Alternative "B" retained the original proposal's ornamentation and materials but omitted the entire fourth floor, greatly reducing the number of bedrooms. The architect gamely observed that such an elimination would not "impair the appearance of the building, in fact it might



even look better from the exterior without the fourth story.” The very flamboyant terra cotta ornamentation incorporated the club’s initials into a terra cotta cartouche.

Alternative “C” retained the omission of the fourth story and also flattened the building’s curved corner into a chamfered one, and omitted the second-story balcony and nearly all of the terra cotta ornamentation. In addition Gilbert simplified the original specifications for the Library but “leaving it a very effective and picturesque room.” Such revisions must have been a concession for Gilbert, however, given the club members’ wish that the new interior’s configuration be the same as the old building’s. His creativity and vision were therefore confined to exterior and interior materials and detailing.

The Montana Club Building Committee agreed with Gilbert’s suggestion to proceed with an advertisement for general construction bids on September 30, 1903, in John Neill’s *Helena Daily Independent* newspaper and the *Pioneer Press* in St. Paul. At the same time, the Committee advised him, “The sentiment of the committee is adverse [sic] to accepting the changes or alternatives, designated by you as ‘B’ and ‘C’ and the committee is inclined to indulge in the hope that bids may be received at such figures as to permit the carrying out of the original design.” The Club was too reliant on the twenty-six bedrooms’ rental income for its future economic viability. In the end, bids from the Congress Construction Co. headquartered in Chicago with branches in Seattle, New Orleans, and Norfolk, Nebraska, the Butler Brothers of St. Paul, and Lease and Richards of Great Falls and Helena were opened and revealed to be nearly double the \$80,000 budget. With these discouraging results, the Club invited the architect to return



*George Carsley, circa 1895. Photograph by Taylor, Helena, Montana. Courtesy Montana Historical Society, Helena (Pac 87.11.2).*

to Helena so they might modify the plans together.

Gilbert, however, was still learning how to coordinate the work at his original office in St. Paul and his new one in New York City. His expanded firm also had a number of ongoing major projects—not the least their continuing work on the Minnesota State Capitol—and suggested that George Carsley of his St. Paul office make the trip in his stead. A Trempeleau County, Wisconsin, native, the thirty-three-year-old Carsley had lived in St. Paul as a boy but lived in Helena for a few years in the early 1890s when his carpenter/draftsman father had relocated there. The younger Carsley eventually returned to Minnesota to attend the university, obtained an architecture degree, and went to work for Gilbert. Their professional association would continue off and on throughout their lives. (In fact, Cass Gilbert was an honorary pallbearer at Carsley's Helena funeral in 1933, one year before his own death.)

The Building Committee telegraphed Gilbert in early November: "Have your Mr. Carsley come at once consult about reduction in cost of building." Working together on November 10, the committee and Carsley identified nineteen cost-saving items that included using native stock in place of Washington fir, using native-stock millwork, and omitting some vaults, the terra cotta ornamentation, and marble in the toilet rooms. The two lowest bidders received these revised plans and resubmitted their bids, but the lowest of these was \$100,000 for the building's construction alone. In early January 1904, the Board authorized building costs not exceed more than \$105,000, as the "building [embodied the wishes] of members." No provision was made for furniture in the budget, and the Board felt it was "not advisable to try to raise more

by subscription but [agreed] construction should be started."

Nearly a year after the fire, on March 17, 1904, the Board reviewed bids from general contractors in Butte and Spokane and from Congress Construction in Chicago and awarded the contract to the Chicago firm, the only bidder from the first round. Subcontractor bids for wiring, plumbing and heating, and the elevators were quickly advertised, received, and awarded with Butte Electric for the wiring, John Sturrock of Helena for plumbing and heating, and Otis Company for the elevator.

In the meantime, Gilbert had contacted T. Kain and Sons who operated a granite quarry west of Helena near Ten Mile Creek. The company promised, "we will furnish new cut granite for the first story of the new club building . . . and the privilege [sic] of using all old cut stone now on site, according to plans." But the revised plans required "considerable less granite," and the architect advised: "The old granite work may be used as far as possible: where one-half of the arch stones for the main entrance is in good condition they may be jointed and [a] new piece used to take the place of the broken part."

Carsley described the design and materials for the building as finally approved:

The building will have an exterior appearance something of the north Italian or Sieneese style of architecture, the broad projecting cornice supported on timber brackets, together with [a] plaster frieze, loggia, and the pointed arches, being characteristic of the architecture of that country. . . . brick courses will alternate with granite above

[the] impost line in [the] first story to the window sills of [the] second story. This brick work, together with the brick of the main body of [the] building, will be of local paving brick, with thick mortar joints. The ornamental brick around window openings will be somewhat lighter in color, in moulded forms, giving interest to the otherwise simple character of the work.

As he had done with the Minnesota State Capitol, Gilbert intended for the Montana Club's exterior to change as the weather and light changed:

The color appearance of the building has been given quite serious study by the Architect, and the combination of different materials has been made with that object in view. It is expected that in the clear bright sunny atmosphere of Montana there will be a continued varying effect of color and a pleasing display of light and shade, the cool, deep shadows being lit up and warmed by reflected light. This will be particularly noticeable in the stained effect of the timber cornice, on [the] plaster frieze and under the hood over the main entrance.

As the architects developed this option, the building's revised design recalled two of Gilbert's Twin Cities projects. His design for the 1892 Conrad Gotzian Shoe Co. building in St. Paul's

Lowertown incorporated a similar chamfered corner and entrance. Horizontal stone bands segment both buildings' vertical mass into thirds, a favorite Gilbert device.

The recessed Gothic arches and fenestration of the Minneapolis Realty Company Warehouse Gilbert remodeled in 1902–1906 are very similar to the multi-story, slightly pointed arches on the Montana Club's second story. (Gilbert also designed a warehouse for this same company in Great Falls, Montana, in 1901–1905.)

The location and configuration of the clubhouse entrance remained essentially the same as before, just uphill from the leased offices' entrance. A note on the drawing specified: "Old stone work of entrance to be used again, damaged pieces to be replaced[,] carved stone to be same as before." Unlike the original club, which had an all-granite foundation and first story, the new clubhouse alternated the stone courses with local Kessler brick to reduce cost. The peaked hood above the entrance was supported by carved wood brackets and roofed with pinkish-grey Ludovici "tiles with the underside to show."

In the clubhouse's entry, the carved oak wainscoting with plaster wall and encaustic tile floor previewed the mixture of materials and motifs that awaited inside. Initially, for the entry floor, the architects specified vitrified four-inch red tiles with a single white-dot one-inch tile and meandering Greek key border for the main entrance and vestibule. At some point, however, the specification must have been changed to a new design incorporating a left-facing swastika, a Sanskrit device meaning, "It is well."

With construction finally underway, Gilbert's office advertised for bids for the Club's decoration in September 1904.



*Montana Club Main Hall (first floor), probably June 1905. Photographer unidentified. Courtesy Montana Historical Society, Helena (PAC 88-39 Fr).*

Some of America's most renowned decorators had anticipated this announcement. These included Herter Brothers of New York City, who had gained national fame twenty years previous with their published designs and furniture for W. H. Vanderbilt's Fifth Avenue house as well as their recent work for the Minnesota State Capitol; Chicago's Tobey Furniture Co. (who had furnished the dining room of a Helena house that became the Governor's residence in 1913); the newly established Gustave A. Brand Co., also of Chicago (whose principal had worked with Gilbert on the decoration and furnishing of a Summit Avenue residence in St. Paul when Brand was the head designer of Marshall Field and Co.'s decorating department), and the L. P. Larson Decorating

Company of Minneapolis.

But, in the end, Gilbert awarded the contract to Mitchel and Halbach, another Chicago firm. Otto Mitchel and Frederick Halbach had started as decorative painters in the early 1880s, but by the time they decorated City Hall in 1885, their business had expanded to include art glass, woodwork, wallpapers and textiles, and the design and manufacture of furniture. Their work on Marshall Field, Jr.'s, Prairie Avenue mansion in 1891 had garnered them additional acclaim. In the case of the Montana Club's furnishings, however, they subcontracted the manufacture of the furniture, writing Gilbert, "we wish to state that the people we intend placing this order with have executed some of the finest furniture in the hallways of the Imperial Hotel in the City of New York, and these people are Messrs. Karpen Bros. of this City. We have their guarantee that all work to be made for the Montana Club will be of the highest order, both as to quality of wood selected, workmanship and all materials to be employed necessary for same."

The decoration and furnishing of the first story's main hall presented a rather masculine appearance with its paneled wainscoting and balustrade, substantial beams, molding and doorframe, and wrought iron lighting fixtures. The Karpen Brothers' early-twentieth-century furniture line included a wide range of styles and forms: upholstered Art Nouveau settees, lodge furniture, Morris Chairs, and quarter-sawn oak settees such as the Mission-style ones specified for the Club's Entrance Hall and Billiard Room.

As noted previously, club members wished to retain the configuration of the original building's major spaces. However,



*Montana Club Rathskellar, probably June 1905. Photographer unidentified. Courtesy Montana Historical Society, Helena (PAC 88-39 Fr).*

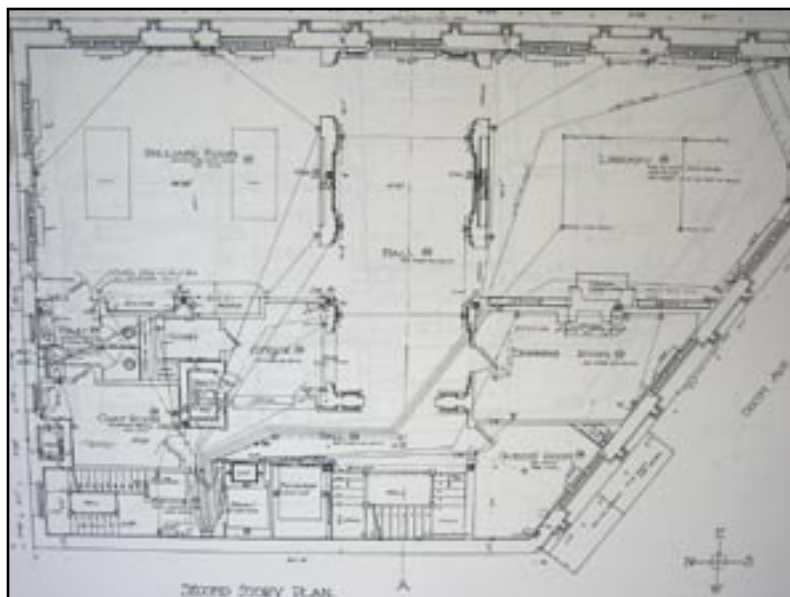
one addition they made was a bar in the clubhouse's basement, the "Rathskellar." Gilbert had just designed a Rathskellar for the Minnesota State Capitol with a vaulted ceiling, tiled floor, and frescoes with German drinking mottoes.

But because the Montana Club's cellar in this portion of the building had low ceilings, a more cozy, even mysterious, ambiance was the result. Stained Washington fir boards boxed in the room's cast iron columns and structural steel beams. Most of these pillars featured decorative polychrome heraldic shields above shelves to hold members' beer steins. A fireplace of red and black brick (probably the local Kessler brick) anchored the corner of the room formed by the building's chamfered corner. E. C. Day

asked Mitchel and Halbach to have the finish on the Rathskellar furniture "harmonize" with the embossed leather panels from the Leatherole Co. that lined the room's walls and sent them a sample. A newspaper description of the room attributed the millwork to the Capital Lumber Co. of Helena "finished in the Dutch style of architecture." The bentwood chairs were manufactured by Heywood Bros. and Wakefield Co. of Chicago. The Rathskellar's below-grade faux diamond-paned windows were passively illuminated by seven-inch-square sidewalk lights embedded in the sidewalks along Fuller and Sixth Avenues.

Morreau Gas Fixture Mfg. Co. of Cleveland, who supplied the light fixtures for the Minnesota State Capitol, also provided those for the Montana Club. Wrought iron and art glass fixtures were specified for the first floor main hall, Rathskellar, Drinking Room, Billiard Room, and Dining Room. The company was dedicated to producing a high-quality fixture, as they wrote Gilbert shortly before the Club's June 1905 re-opening: "There only remains one shipment yet which consists of the Wrought Iron goods, which we are hurrying through the factory as fast as we possibly can. . . . it takes longer to finish up Wrought Iron goods as the process of the blackening, etc., is very tedious and we have to take all the necessary time in order to do the work well."

The social hierarchy of this private club is evident in the plans for its main floor, the second story. Public and "service" staircases continue from the first floor. When a non-service male (since women's access to the club was restricted to specific times and conditions) reached the top of the public staircase, he was able to proceed in to the clubhouse's *sanctum sanctorum* only if he were a member. The "Guest's Room," also referred to as the "Stranger's"



*Montana Club second floor plan, Cass Gilbert, August 19, 1903. Montana Club Blueprints and Drawings, 1903–1950, Small Collection 1998, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena. Photograph by Patty Dean.*

Room, was placed outside the members' sphere. If a non-member somehow arrived in the members-only sphere, staff in the office just to the left inside the hall could intercept and direct him accordingly.

One of the new club's grandest spaces was the hall identical in scale (one-and-a-half stories), placement, and function to that in the old clubhouse. The most evident difference between the versions was that the new decoration abandoned the somewhat exotic nature of the old loggia and lunette transoms with curvilinear ornamentation. Gilbert's design retained the hall's seating and assembly function and rendered the hardwood and



*Montana Club Hall (second floor), probably June 1905. Photographer unidentified. Courtesy Montana Historical Society, Helena (PAC 88-39 Fr).*



*Main Hall in Paulsen and LaVallé's Montana Club, December 1900. From the Anaconda (Montana) Standard, December 16, 1900.*

moldings in a more spare, almost classical style.

Gilbert's original design called for a sawed-out balustrade, but the budget constraints on the overall decorative scheme led to its final, paneled appearance. In the hall itself, the spaces between the heavy beams were to be painted an "old blue color" "to give a rich effect as seen in some of the halls of France, Italy and Belgium" with walls of "old red." The tallcase clock in the hall's corner is now on the landing between the first and second floor stairway.

At a May 1904 meeting of the club's board, building committee member and hardware supplier/retailer Anton M.

Holter presented a letter from the Union Stock Yards of Chicago offering to furnish a room in the new building. A number of the Stock Yards' board of directors knew "what the hospitality of the Montana Club means" [and commissioned furniture from Duryea and Potter, a Chicago company, for the Drinking Room just inside the second floor Main Hall].

The English hunt scene wallpaper frieze, faux timbered dado, tiled fireplace, wrought-iron art glass wall lanterns, and sturdy Mission furniture lent the Drinking Room the "dainty and handsome" ambiance the stockyard directors had promised.

The one-and-a-half-story Billiard Room, easily viewed from one of the conversation rooms on the mezzanine above, housed two Newport pool tables and one Saratoga billiard table from the Brunswick-Balke-Collender Company of Chicago. The heavy velvet portieres ordered from Schuneman and Evans in St. Paul were secured with twisted gold cords. The multi-story skylight with a six-pointed-star leaded-glass design illuminated one of the conversation rooms and the interior rooms above this level.

The wall treatment in the Billiard Room consisted of burlap panels framed by lengths of Washington fir stained to resemble oak. On the east wall, leaded-glass transoms above the sash windows and below the clerestory windows provided visual interest. The ceiling and frieze above the wainscoting was covered with Japanese gold paper with a brownish tinge.

The Library, also one-and-a-half stories high, served as a reception room and completed the functions of the main second floor: drinking, playing pool, and reading. Even with the simpler ornamentation and elimination of the curved corner, it retained an expansiveness and elegance. The Library's south orientation



*Montana Club Drinking Room, probably June 1905. Photographer unidentified. Courtesy Montana Historical Society, Helena (Pac 88-39 Fr)*

and large one-and-a-half-story windows provided copious light, anticipating Gilbert's later designs for Detroit's public library (1913-1921) and St. Louis' Central Library (1907-1912). The room measured approximately thirty by forty feet with an arched ceiling, tinted in canary yellow. Its walls were covered in a brocade-pattern wallpaper, possibly of a grey color. The built-in bookcases, "Canyon Green" marble fireplace, and classical ornamentation were enameled in white.

As previously noted, there are specific similarities between the Minnesota State Capitol, completed in St. Paul in 1905, and Gilbert's designs for the Montana Club completed in the same year. In comparing drawings for the furniture of both projects,



*Montana Club Billiard Room, probably June 1905. Photographer unidentified. Courtesy Montana Historical Society, Helena (Pac 88-39 Fr).*

some identical seating furniture and tables were specified, although not always executed, for both buildings. The Gilbert office used two letter codes for furniture they designed and sent out to potential bidders. The quarter-sawn oak library table identified as "AG" in the Montana Club plans and presumably manufactured by Karpen Brothers was also designated as table "GG" in Gilbert's designs for the Minnesota State Capitol's Senate Retiring Room. The Minnesota table, however, was of mahogany and manufactured by Herter Brothers.

The Montana Club's shorter version of this table, an extant example of which can now be found in the club manager's office, omitted the center pedestal of the Minnesota version. The "AL"





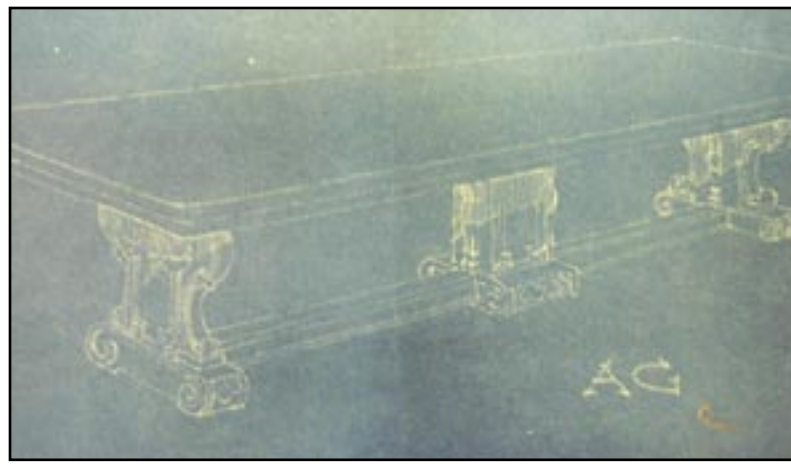
*Montana Club Library, probably June 1905. Photographer unidentified. Courtesy Montana Historical Society, Helena (PAC 88-39 Fr).*



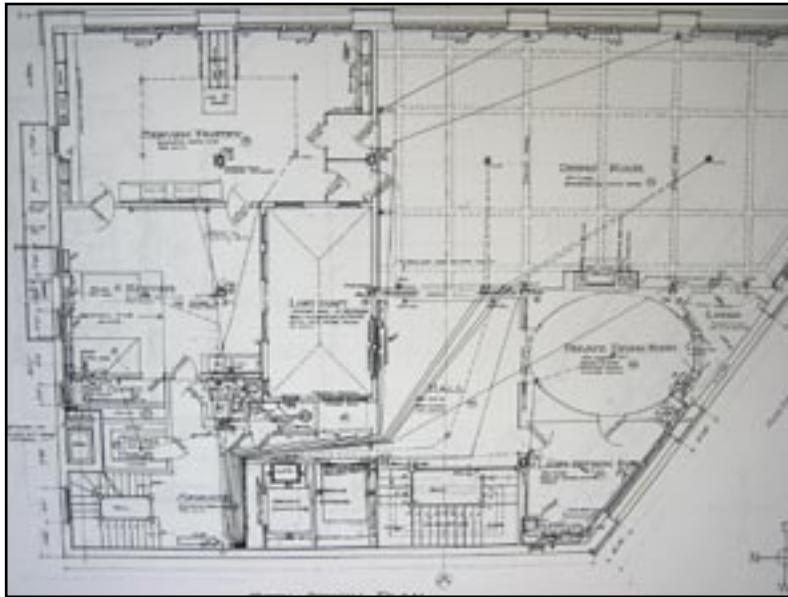
*Extant example of Montana Club library table style "AG" in club manager's office. Photograph by Patty Dean.*



*Minnesota State Capitol Senate Retiring Room with table style "GG" nearly identical to Montana Club library table style "AG"; both designs by Cass Gilbert, 1905. Sweet, Minnesota Historical Society (Loc# FM6.15S r1 Neg# 13234).*



*Drawing of Montana Club library table style "AG," Cass Gilbert. Montana Club Blueprints and Drawings, 1903-1950, Small Collection 1998, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena. Photograph by Patty Dean.*



*Montana Club fifth-floor plan, Cass Gilbert, August 24, 1903. Montana Club Blueprints and Drawings, 1903–1950, Small Collection 1998, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena. Photograph by Patty Dean.*

armchairs used in the Conversation Room overlooking the Billiard Room are the same as the four “AN” mahogany armchairs by Marble and Shattuck of Cleveland, used in the Minnesota State Capitol’s Governor’s Reception Room.

Other major rooms at the Club included the Card Room on the third floor with burlap wainscoting and striped green wallpaper. The room’s mantel and hearth was specified to be a “Vermont White” marble strongly veined in black.

The fifth floor, like the others, had member, non-member, and service areas. A serving pantry, kitchen, and smaller service



*Montana Club Ladies' Retiring Room, probably June 1905. Photographer unidentified. Courtesy Montana Historical Society, Helena (Pac 88-39 F1).*

areas were located at the rear or north of the building while a Ladies' Retiring Room and two dining rooms quite different in their scale and decoration inspiration were located at the front.

The ivory ceiling, enameled woodwork, “old rose” painted walls, and birdseye maple tables, chairs, rockers, and cheval mirror in the Ladies Retiring Room imparted a femininity alien to the remainder of the clubhouse.

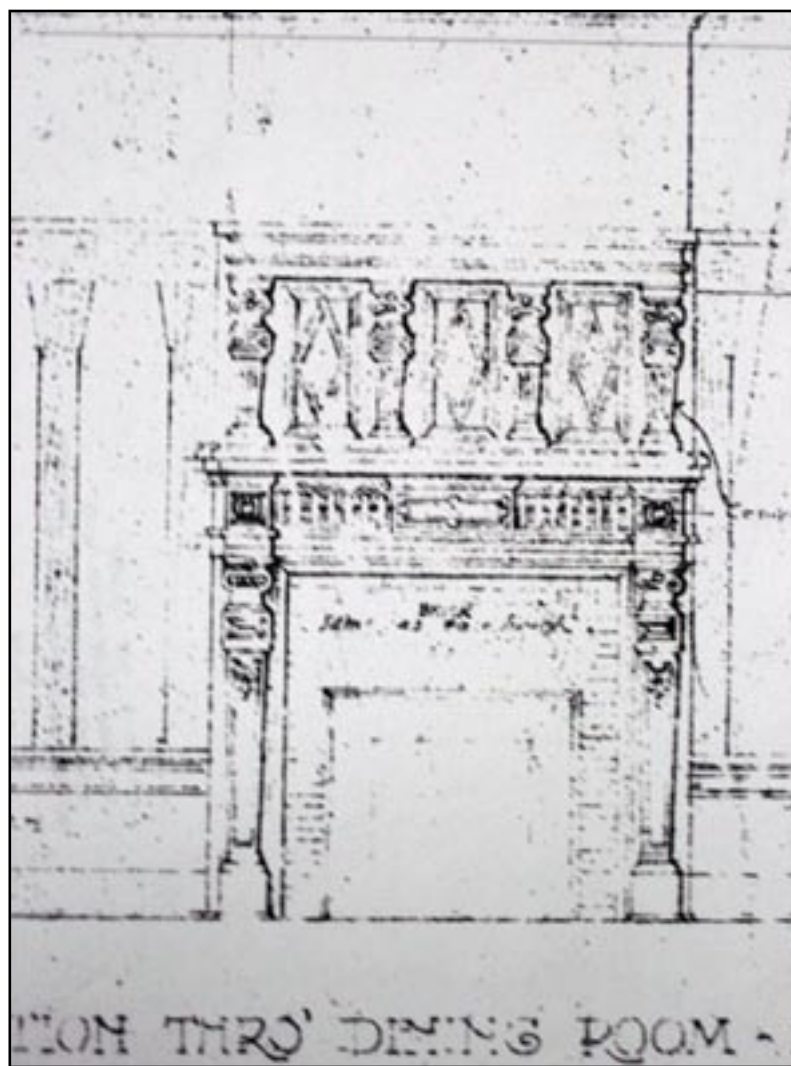
The private oval dining room’s proximity to the Ladies' Retiring Room likely provided an intimate venue for engagement parties or other gatherings where women were to be present. The

six-foot dining table could be expanded to fourteen feet with the insertion of fourteen leaves; the chairs were of a mahogany finish with Spanish leather seats. This private dining room also offered Gilbert a forum to demonstrate his mastery of decorative schemes. Subdued Colonial Revival molding and details painted white enamel and the pale lemon ceiling, a shade lighter than the walls, contrasted with the more virile details and palette of the Club's other rooms.

At some point, possibly around 1915 or so, a hunt-scene wallpaper was added and it is likely the more appropriate silver chandelier replaced the wrought iron one originally specified. A recessed loggia accessible from the dining room's double doors was described in a 1905 newspaper article, "and here, perched high above the noise and bustle of the city the visitor may look out and drink in the beauties of the mountains and the city round about."

A second door exiting from the loggia opened into the Main Dining Room, which measures thirty by sixty feet. Like the Billiard Room, this dining room incorporated Washington fir with an oak stain, burlap on the walls, and a Japanese gold paper on the ceiling and cove. The centerpiece of this room was the Jacobean-Tudor fireplace, " [which added] to the homelikeness of the place," just as the fireplaces in the original clubhouse had.

The twenty-five art glass windows in the Main Dining Room were designed to represent "the progress of civilization in Montana. . . . Every stage of the march of civilization is pictured here, from the time when the red man was monarch of all he surveyed down to the present day when Montana stands proudly up in the great sisterhood of states." The windows depicted miners, sheep ranchers, farmers, timbermen, railroad expansion, and the



*Montana Club Dining Room fireplace, August 1903. Montana Club Blueprints and Drawings, 1903–1950, Small Collection 1998, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena. Photograph by Patty Dean.*



*Montana Club Dining Room stained glass railroad cartoon and window. Cartoon courtesy Montana Historical Society, Helena. Photographs by Patty Dean.*

homes of Indians and settlers, but curiously they included no representation of cattlemen. (It's possible these were in an adjacent room and replaced with clear glass windows at some point.)



Mitchel and Halbach presumably made these windows as art glass was one of their specialties.

Although the Montana Club re-opened in late June 1905—with its total cost amounting to \$125,000—its appearance continued to evolve as needs dictated. Two major projects were undertaken by George Carsley, who had relocated to Helena permanently as of 1911. In about 1914, the Banking Corporation



*Montana Club Dining Room stained glass mining cartoon and window. Cartoon courtesy Montana Historical Society, Helena. Photographs by Patty Dean.*

of Montana leased the front office on the Club's first floor and Carsley furnished drawings of a grillwork entrance and balcony as well as interior fittings.



Carsley's second alteration was to the Guest's or Stranger's Room adjacent to the Main Hall on the second floor, adding an ornate molding to the ceiling and paneling the walls.

Today, Gilbert's "unique and handsome" Montana Club building is 101 years old. The Club's fortunes have ebbed and flowed as Prohibition and illegal gambling came and went, the membership rose and fell (in accordance with the state's boom-and-bust



*Montana Club Annual Dinner in Dining Room, December 30, 1911.  
Photograph by Culbertson. Courtesy Montana Historical Society, Helena  
(953-299).*

economy), lifestyles and leisure activities changed, and convenience and safety features were mandated. Its membership now includes women, and the first female president of the Board of Governors was elected in the mid 1970s.

When the Montana Club opened to its membership in the early summer of 1905, the *Helena Daily Record*, the newspaper owned by Cass Gilbert's boyhood friend, John Neill, headlined it as "[a] Dream in Architecture . . . [the] handsomest building in

Montana . . . [a] magnificent structure complete in every detail of furnishing and equipment from Rathskellar to 'sky floor.'"

At the Club's first smoker in their new building on New Year's Eve 1905, Major Martin Maginnis, its resident poet, commemorated the event:

So now tonight we dedicate our new palatial home.  
And hope that, blessed by happy fate, we nevermore  
    need roam  
Daddy Day will make some speeches, the Major  
    make some rhymes;  
And Cory make some sketches lest we forget old  
    times;  
And we'll sing farewell to the old year and hail his  
    lusty cub.  
May this be done for a thousand year in The Old  
    Montana Club. . . .

Maginnis' cozy sentiments aside, the opening of the new Montana Club, with its design by one of the nation's most famed architects and construction and furnishing executed by Chicago and Twin Cities firms, reconfirmed Helena's stature at the dawn of a new century as a cosmopolitan center and the state's political and economic hub. The Montana Club had indeed proved to be a phoenix.



*Invitation to Montana Club Tenth Annual Smoker, December 31, 1906. Drawn by Robert C. Reamer & A. C. Raleigh. Courtesy Montana Club, Helena.*

## Works Cited

- Philip Richmond Barbour Papers, MC 95, Montana Historical Society, Helena.
- Blodgett, Geoffrey. *Cass Gilbert: The Early Years*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001.
- Christen, Barbara S., and Steven Flanders. *Cass Gilbert, Life and Work: Architect of the Public Domain*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2001.
- A. B. Cook Papers, MC 280, Montana Historical Society, Helena.
- Cass Gilbert Papers, MC 16, Montana Historical Society, Helena.
- Samuel Thomas Hauser Papers, MC 37, Montana Historical Society, Helena.
- Anton M. Holter Papers, MC 80, Montana Historical Society, Helena.
- Irish, Sharon. *Cass Gilbert, Architect: Modern Traditionalist*. New York: Monacelli Press, 1999.
- Kompelien, Carolyn. *Attention to Detail: 1905 Furniture of the Minnesota State Capitol*. St. Paul: Capitol Historic Site Program, Minnesota Historical Society, 1989.
- Montana Club Blueprints and Drawings, SC 1998, Montana Historical Society, Helena.
- "Montana Club" vertical files, Montana Historical Society, Helena.
- Neill Family Papers, MC 248, Montana Historical Society, Helena.
- Paladin, Vivian, and Jean Baucus. *Helena: An Illustrated History*. Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1996.
- Charles Benton Power Papers, MC 55A, Montana Historical Society, Helena.
- Thomas Charles Power Papers, MC 55, Montana Historical Society, Helena.
- Rendell, Jane. *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space and Architecture in Regency London*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002.