

2003 Cass Gilbert Society Walking Tour

Cass Gilbert in Lowertown, St. Paul



**Northern Pacific Railway Building
Cass Gilbert, 1896 (left)
Bradford L. Gilbert, 1878 (right)**

Lowertown grew up at the “Lower Landing” on the Mississippi River, beginning in the 1840s. As Saint Paul grew, Lowertown evolved into a major warehouse and distribution center serving the entire Upper Midwest. Lowertown’s railroad, manufacturing, and wholesaling companies expressed their pride and permanence in the structures they erected, beginning in the 1880s. A significant concentration of these buildings survive, unified by similar architectural styles and construction materials. Many were designed by the city’s most prestigious architects, including Cass Gilbert and Clarence Johnston. Gilbert and Johnston had worked together in the offices of A. M. Radcliffe between 1876 and 1878 and then had gone on to study architecture at M. I. T.

The Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation was established in the late 1970s to encourage adaptive use and compatible new development in the area. The Lowertown Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983 and designated as a Saint Paul Heritage Preservation District in 1984. Through a combination of restoration and adaptive use, Lowertown enjoys an exciting mix of residential and commercial activities in one of the city’s most historic areas.

Gilbert Building, 413 Wacouta Street between East 6th and East 7th Streets
Built in 1893-94 as the Boston Northwest Realty Company Wacouta Street Warehouse; Cass Gilbert, architect

This five-story brick warehouse is a straightforward design with a corbelled brick cornice, round arches defined by molded brickwork, terra-cotta roundels, and segmental-arched windows. The building utilizes “slow-burning” construction with the exterior brick walls supporting massive fire-resistant timbers. Cast-iron columns provide interior support.

The client was a Boston-based realty and investment firm that later commissioned other buildings from Gilbert. An early tenant was T.L. Blood’s Northwestern Paint Works. During the 1930s and 1940s the building was owned by the Cardozo Furniture Company. The building has been meticulously renovated for office use.



Mears Park, bounded by Sibley, Wacouta, East 5th and East 6th Streets. Landscaped in 1888 as Smith Park; renamed Mears Park in 1974 and redesigned in 1975.

This section of Saint Paul was originally platted in 1849 with this block designated as a “public square.” It named Smith Park and graded and landscaped in 1888. The park was renamed in honor of Norman Mears, a Saint Paul businessman who was instrumental in initiating the revitalization of the Lowertown area, and redesigned in 1975.



Finch, Van Slyck, and McConville Dry Goods Company Building, 366 Wacouta Street between East 5th and East 6th Street
Built in 1911; James E. Denison, architect; C.A.P. Turner, engineer; 1923 addition, Clarence Johnston, architect

This large eight-story building, faced with cream-colored brick and adorned with neo-classical detail, employs the innovative reinforced-concrete construction system, pioneered by Minneapolis engineer C. A. P. Turner. Flat slab floors are carried on mushroom columns. This system supports heavy loads across broad spans. The two bays at the north were added in 1923.

Finch, Van Slyck, and McConville was established in 1856 as a dry goods company. By the end of the nineteenth century, it had become the largest dry goods wholesaler in St. Paul. The new building reflected the expanding scope of the company’s operations. It was converted for condominium use in the 1980s.



Gotzian Shoe Company Building (Parkside), 242-280 East 5th Street at Wacouta
 Built in 1892; Cass Gilbert, architect

This five-story Romanesque Revival style building is of red brick with large arched window openings and a canted corner entrance facing Mears Park. It was designed by Cass Gilbert to house the factory and warehouse of the Conrad Gotzian Shoe Company. Conrad Gotzian, a German immigrant, had settled in St. Paul in the 1850s. Following the Second World War, the building was occupied by the Milton Clothing Company, among other tenants. It was converted for residential use in the 1980s.

Gotzian Shoe Company Building, 352 Wacouta Street between 4th and 5th Streets
 Built in 1895; Cass Gilbert, architect.

This five-story commercial building is faced with red pressed brick with contrasting polychromatic brick and terra-cotta detail. A corbeled brick cornice, round-arched windows, and a cast-iron storefront are other distinctive features that recall the design of the Wacouta Street Warehouse. Paul Gotzian, the head of Gotzian Shoe Company, hired Gilbert to design this building as a factory and sales outlet. However, soon after construction, it was converted to a rental property. For many years, it housed the factory and warehouse of the American Beauty Macaroni Company. It was converted into residential space with a commercial first floor in the 1980s.

Market House, 289 East 5th Street between Wall and Broadway
Built in 1902 as the Tighe Building; J. Walter Stevens, architect

This six-story red brick warehouse building is quite plain except for its dentilled classical cornice. Commissioned by Ambrose Tighe, a son-in-law of Conrad Gotzian of the shoe company, it was constructed as a rental property with considerable unheated space for storage. After housing a variety of commercial tenants including the Cardozo Furniture Company, it was converted for mixed commercial and residential use in the 1980s.

Gordon and Ferguson Building, 331-341 Sibley Street between East 4th and East 5th Streets
Built in 1911-13; Clarence H. Johnston, Sr., architect

This eight- and nine-story building is faced with cream-colored brick over a structural-steel frame. The straightforward articulation of the walls and windows rise to a classically inspired cornice. This was the largest manufacturing plan commission of Johnston's career. The Gordon and Ferguson firm was established in 1879 and specialized in leather goods and furs, manufacturing hats and caps. The building has been converted for office use. The Army Corps of Engineers, St. Paul District, is a major tenant.



Hackett Block, 262-270 East 4th Street between Wacouta and Wall
Built in 1890; Clarence H. Johnston, Sr., architect; addition ca. 1906.

This five-story Romanesque Revival building is faced in red brick above first floor storefronts, divided by cut stone piers. Round-arched windows provided a large amount of light to the interior. A corbelled cornice surmounts the facades. An incised stone sign panel, reading “Hackett Block” is placed above the fourth-story windows. Four bays were added to the west side of the building in about 1906. The interior employs slow-burning mill construction, capable

of carrying very heavy floor loads, similar to that used by Gilbert three years later in the Wacouta Warehouse.

The building was commissioned by Charles W. Hackett who established a hardware business in St. Paul in 1872. Hackett, Walther, and Gates Hardware Company was the largest wholesale hardware firm in the city, when the building was expanded in 1906. Hackett was also the vice president of the First National Bank and president of the Chamber of Commerce and the Young Men's Christian Association.

Allen Building, 287 East 6th Street between Sibley and Broadway
Built in 1906-07, 1910, for J. H. Allen; attributed to Office of Cass Gilbert, architect

This large six-story brick-faced building was constructed in two phases, employing flat-slab concrete floor construction in the first section and mushroom column concrete construction in the addition. George H. Carley, Cass Gilbert's St. Paul office manager, signed the building permit, but he probably did not design it. The unpretentious facades, crowned by a modest corbelled brick cornice, belie the interior structural innovations.

The client, John H. Allen, came to St. Paul in 1864 to join his brother's wholesale grocery business. He was also a director of the National German American Bank. The Allen Company occupied this warehouse building for many years.

Site of the Northern Pacific Railway Building, Broadway between Prince and East 5th Street
Built in 1878, Bradford L. Gilbert, architect; 1896, Cass Gilbert, architect

The first section of the building, located at the corner of Prince and Broadway, was designed by New York architect Bradford L. Gilbert who worked on a number of buildings for the railroad. The young Cass Gilbert worked as a draftsman on office layouts for this building. In 1896, Cass Gilbert was given a commission to expand the building north to East 5th Street. The five-story brick-faced structure had a rusticated stone base, segmental-arched window openings, round-arched doorways, and projecting oriels.