DURING HOLY WEEK of the year 1904 Minnesota’s Archbishop John Ireland concluded that the vigorous and growing archdiocese of St. Paul needed a new mother church. He reached this decision while alone in his office on Thursday evening, reflecting, he said, upon “the deep devotion of the people” and “the large attendance at the morning service.” Never one to do things in a small way, Ireland envisioned the new mother church as a “great cathedral” which would symbolize the strength and solidity of Catholicism in the Upper Midwest.¹

The forerunner of the archbishop’s proposed cathedral had been the Chapel of St. Paul, built in 1841 by Father Lucien Galtier and thirteen Catholic parish families. It was a simple log structure, measuring about eighteen by twenty feet, erected on the site now bounded by Kellogg Boulevard, Minnesota, and Cedar streets. In 1847, Father Augustin Ravoux, who had succeeded Galtier three years earlier, added an eighteen-foot extension. The chapel was

¹This and much other material in the present article is based upon a “Historical Sketch” written by Msgr. Lawrence F. Ryan, who was intimately associated with the planning and building of the cathedral. The “Sketch,” the architects’ working drawings, and all other manuscripts cited are in the temporary historical museum in the crypt of the cathedral. The author also interviewed Father Ryan on November 19, 1963. A tape record of this interview is on file in the library of the school of architecture at the University of Minnesota. Father Ryan’s unstinting assistance and co-operation have contributed greatly to the preparation of this article.
abandoned in 1851 when Bishop Joseph Cretin assumed his duties. The first Cathedral of St. Paul, a stone building located at Sixth and Wabasha streets, was used until 1858 when it became inadequate for the needs of the rapidly growing Catholic population. A second cathedral was then built at Sixth and St. Peter streets. This structure became the mother church of the Archdiocese of St. Paul when Ireland was named archbishop in 1888.

The continuing development of a clerical hierarchy and the constant growth of membership, which resulted in overflow crowds in the St. Peter Street church by 1904, culminated in the decision to build the present Cathedral of St. Paul. Another prompting circumstance may have been the fact that the city of St. Paul was improving its municipal facilities on a broad basis; city park acreage, for example, had quadrupled between 1890 and 1900; a new Capitol was being erected; and there was talk of developing parkway approaches to the new statehouse similar to the boulevards of Paris and the Mall of Washington.

Less than a fortnight after his initial decision had been made, Ireland appointed an executive committee for the building of the new cathedral and, through that committee, purchased the property of Norman W. Kittson. This site on St. Anthony hill would allow the new edifice to dominate the city visually and to be seen for miles around. The land was also well situated in relation to the parish boundaries and was free of the growing traffic congestion in the downtown area of the city.

The Kittson mansion, built in 1875 on a site formerly owned by Stella Selby, was a Victorian residence with a mansard roof and elaborate scroll-saw trim. The property was bounded on the north by Dayton Avenue, on the south by Selby Avenue, and on the east and west by residential plots. In order to prepare the ground for the new cathedral, the house was to be razed and the course of Summit Avenue was to be changed. The avenue would follow a gentle arc, curving across the east boundary of the church property and thereby eliminating the residences at that point. Henceforth, the cathedral land would be bounded on three sides by streets.

THE SELECTION of an architect was of paramount importance. In December, 1904, the executive committee organized an architectural competition for the design of the...
cathedral. Considered as candidates were Ralph Adams Cram; Cass Gilbert; MacKim, Mead, and White; Maginnis and Walsh; Thomas Fitzpatrick (a local architect); and Emmanuel L. Masqueray. For reasons still obscure, the competition was never held. Instead, on March 17, 1905, ten days after he was first interviewed by the committee, Masqueray was formally appointed to design the new building.

Educated in his native France, the architect reached St. Paul well recommended. He had received the Ecole Deschaumes prize of the Institute of France in 1879, the Chandesacques prize in 1880, the gold medal of the Paris Salon in 1883, and in 1903 a commission to be the chief designer and consultant for the St. Louis Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904.

It was at the exposition that Masqueray and Ireland first met. The two men had common bonds. Each had been educated in Paris, and each was a pioneer and a powerful dreamer. Masqueray had left his homeland to establish a practice and an atelier in America. He approached architecture as an artist whose function was to conceive vast and majestic edifices. Ireland's vision extended far beyond the borders of his diocese and encompassed the building of a truly American Catholic church—strong and unified—from a chaotic welter of immigrant groups, old-country antagonisms, and language barriers. It is not surprising that they came away from their meeting with positive appraisals of one another, and that subsequently the prelate advised the architect to visit St. Paul.

The shared vision of the new cathedral drew them even more closely together. Father Lawrence F. Ryan, rector of the cathedral from 1916 to 1940, recalls “How many hours the two dreamed and planned. Now they talked calmly. Now they soared on the wings of enthusiasm and Masqueray throwing aside his halting English broke into French until he had the Archbishop equally fluent and eloquent... Hands were going like a Dutch windmill.”

By June, 1905, Masqueray had prepared tentative sketches which were approved by the executive committee in November, and he was then authorized to proceed with the construction drawings. Further approval was granted in January, 1906, for the preparation of specifications and working plans for the crypt up to the water table. In September of that year this work was sufficiently advanced so that the contract for grading and excavating the site and for constructing the crypt was let to Lauer Brothers.

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*Pioneer Press, December 29, 1904; January 29, 1905. Evidence that the competition was never held, while not conclusive, is certainly strong. No mention of it was ever made in the minutes, nor did the committee record paying any architect for entering. Masqueray never claimed to have won it, and none of the others ever admitted having lost. Masqueray is the only architect on record as having been interviewed by the committee.


*Ryan, “Historical Sketch.”
Construction Company of St. Paul. Curiously, after this was done, preparation of the working drawings for the crypt continued. Some of these, which show the interior finish of the crypt, were done as late as September, 1907. This suggests that the construction company was responsible only for building the structural masses—the concrete footings, stone foundation, walls and piers—and that the work of applying the interior finish was left to another contract.\(^1\)

Prior to the letting of the contract for the crypt, the Twin City Rapid Transit Company was consulted as to whether the cathedral foundations would in any way be affected by that company's tunnel which ran under Selby Avenue. Spokesmen for the transit line gave reassurances and suggested the placing of an ornamental iron station—to be known as the cathedral station—close to the rear of the church with a connecting stairway to the tunnel below.\(^12\)

Masqueray's cost estimate was also made before the crypt contract was let. Describing his figures as "liberal," he arrived at a cost of $1,000,000 for the main structure without the dome, and with the dome in place, $1,200,000. Upon receiving Masqueray's estimate, the Executive Committee decided to pursue the project, and on November 15, 1905, and January 18, 1906, the Working Drawings, sheets 105, 201, were completed.

\(^{11}\) Minutes of the Executive Committee, November 15, 1905; January 18, 1906; Working Drawings, sheets 105, 201.

\(^{12}\) Minutes of the Executive Committee, July 5, 1906.
Ray's estimate, Archbishop Ireland decided that "certain parts of the structure could be well left to the future for completion, such as the chapels, ornamentation, etc.,” saying, in effect, that the cathedral would be built — and paid for — in stages.\(^\text{13}\)

ON SUNDAY, June 2, 1907, the cornerstone of the cathedral was laid by Archbishop Ireland. The St. Paul Pioneer Press described it as the “greatest church event in the history of the Northwest.” Messages from notables such as Pope Pius X and President Theodore Roosevelt were received, a grand parade of thirty thousand marchers was held, and some sixty thousand visitors were drawn to St. Paul.\(^\text{14}\)

The crypt was completed while Masqueray finished the working drawings for the superstructure. The exterior elevation drawings were not done until 1908 and the main floor plan and the granite details until 1909. In August of the latter year the P. M. Hennessey Construction Company was signed as the contractor for the masonry and granite bearing walls up to the cornice line which, at the dome, marks the spring line and, at the roof, the intersection of the vertical wall surface with the roof. The structure above the cornice line was to be a steel frame, and in September, 1912, the W. J. Hoy Company was awarded the contract for the steel erection. This work was completed in 1914, and work on the ceiling of the dome and roof was begun in April by the firm of Beil & Herment of Chicago and New York.\(^\text{15}\)

On Palm Sunday, March 28, 1915, the first mass in the Cathedral of St. Paul was celebrated by Archbishop Ireland. At this time the wall surfaces were still exposed whitewashed brick. The main altar and baldachin were neither designed nor in place. The chapels of St. Peter, St. Joseph, the Blessed Virgin, and the Sacred Heart

\(^\text{13}\) Minutes of the Executive Committee, July 5, 1906.
\(^\text{14}\) Pioneer Press, June 12, 1907.
\(^\text{15}\) Facts and Figures in the History of the Cathedral, an undated brochure, a copy of which is in the cathedral's temporary historical museum.
were bare; the apse chapels and the statues of the four evangelists had not yet been designed. For the first services the bell from the old mother church was installed in the tower of the new one. A huge throng crowded the building. This no doubt encouraged Ireland, since not everyone in the diocese shared his enthusiasm for a "great cathedral," and some had predicted that he would never see the structure full.¹⁰

The coming of World War I slowed down the progress of the building. Although work on the main cathedral chapels was commenced, labor and materials were in short supply. The chapel of St. Peter was finished in May, 1917, but that of St. Joseph, scheduled for completion in December, was not done until the following May because of "the growing uncertainty" resulting from the conflict. The chapel of the Blessed Virgin, begun in 1917, remained incomplete until April, 1919, awaiting shipments of Italian marble from Europe.¹⁷

These three were designed in detail by Masqueray himself, but he lived to see only the first completed. On May 26, 1917, just a few steps from the cathedral, the architect suffered a fatal heart attack. Ireland did not long survive him. The archbishop fell ill the following summer and by early winter was so weak he could not visit the cathedral. He then took up residence in the Wilder house across Summit Avenue and on fine days had himself moved out to the north porch, from which he could view the edifice. He died on September 25, 1918, less than a year and a half after Masqueray. These two men had brought the building to a point at which its basic form and essential character could be seen and enjoyed. They left to their successors a grand outline which needed only to be filled in and elaborated.¹⁸

AUSTIN DOWLING inherited the mantle of Archbishop Ireland, and Whitney Warren of New York, later joined by Charles Maginnis and Timothy F. Walsh of Boston, carried on the work of Masqueray. Warren's reputation matched that of his friend and predecessor. Like Masqueray he was a

¹⁰ Pioneer Press, March 29, 1915, p. 8; interview with Father Ryan.
¹⁷ Ryan, "Historical Sketch."
¹⁸ St. Paul Dispatch, May 26, 1917; September 25, 1918; Ryan, "Historical Sketch."
graduate of the Ecole des beaux arts; he had designed Grand Central Station in New York City and also the Ambassador and Biltmore hotels there. His main contribution to the cathedral was the high altar and baldachin, finished in 1924. Warren's design—the simplest among three or four which he submitted to Ireland a month before the archbishop's death—included a six-column colonnade to support the bronze baldachin crown. The curving marble steps which form the base of the high altar are not Warren's design, but that of Maginnis and Walsh.19

In the spring of 1923 the two Boston architects were commissioned to design the rectory and the sacristy. By adding the octagonal sacristy they altered and softened Masqueray's original concept, which had terminated the cathedral too abruptly with the apsidal chapels. When they went on to execute plans for the interior finish of the sanctuary, however, they sensitively followed the guidelines indicated by Masqueray in his early interior elevations. Their designs, completed on paper by March, 1931, included all of the interior detail except the three chapels finished by Masqueray himself, Warren's altar baldachin, and the dome and roof ceilings.20

Meanwhile, Archbishop Dowling pushed the actual construction steadily ahead throughout the decade of the 1920s. The rectory was in use by January, 1925, and after many delays the sacristy was completed in the following June. By the next summer the marble and stone veneer in the sanctuary had been placed; the Mankato stone veneer on the piers and the marble veneer in the apsidal chapels was completed by May, 1927. Thus the interior of the structure was no longer bare brick, and a start could be made on the sculptural pieces and the remaining chapels.21

The Great Depression and the death of the archbishop brought another pause in the work. Archbishop John Murray, Dowling's successor, never instituted a general building program but proceeded toward the completion of the structure a piece at a time. In 1932 the east rose window was set in place; all the sculptural pieces were installed in the cathedral interior by March, 1933; and finally in 1941, thirty-five years from the date of placing the first concrete footings, the building was essentially finished with the setting of the rose windows in the north and south transepts.22

Of the sculptors who produced works for the cathedral, four are noteworthy. Leon Hermant of New York created the ceiling figures and the exterior sculpture of the east tympanum and cartouches, as well as the statues of St. Peter, St. Joseph, and the Blessed Virgin; Albert H. Atkins of Boston was responsible for the bronze grille at the rear of the sanctuary, and the figures of St. Anthony, St. John the Baptist, St. Boniface, and St. Therese; John Angel of New York

19 Withey, Biographical Dictionary, 629, 636; Ryan, "Historical Sketch"; interview.
20 Ryan, "Historical Sketch"; interview.
21 Ryan, "Historical Sketch"; interview.
22 Ryan, "Historical Sketch."
did the statues of the four evangelists which stand at the four main piers of the edifice; and the Italian artist Ernest Pellegrini shaped the bronze angel atop the sacristy dome. Charles J. Connick of Boston, who designed the rose windows as well as other smaller windows within the cathedral, was known particularly for his ability to combine intense blues and reds into luminous compositions. In his own words, he strove, not for “a picture made transparent,” but for “a window made rarely beautiful.”

The Plan of the mother church, which follows the main lines of Michaelangelo’s design for St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome, combines several architectural styles. The dome over the intersection of the nave and the transept is a traditional Catholic cathedral form, perhaps more Byzantine than Roman in origin; the pediment sculptures derive from a Greek temple, the rose windows are quotations from a Gothic cathedral, and the cartouches stem from a baroque church.

Such academic eclecticism put Masqueray in good standing with the public and with the architectural profession of his generation. In the early years of the Twentieth Century, Americans were still entranced by
the colossal re-creation of the past seen at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. Thus Masqueray saw no irony whatever in describing the cathedral as "entirely of the Twentieth Century," and "a modern structure" in which "the principal object was that the congregation could see and hear." As he viewed it, his eclecticism was modern functional architecture.

Essentially, the Cathedral of St. Paul is a bearing wall structure. The massive stone foundation walls rest on reinforced concrete footings. The footings under the four main piers which support the dome measure fifty feet square by nine feet deep. The composite granite-brick-masonry walls, covered on the interior by marble veneer, begin at the level of the sanctuary floor, extend to the top of the roof parapet, and reach to the top of the drum on which the dome rests. These bearing walls are solid masonry with no steel reinforcing except for a log chain under each rose window, placed to resist the thrust generated by the circular opening in the masonry. The thrust of the dome is resisted by flying buttresses concealed within the drum. The dome itself, like the peaked roofs, is formed by a series of bolted steel trusses covered on the outside by a copper skin and on the inside by ornamental plaster work. The floor of the sanctuary over the crypt rooms is a reinforced concrete slab supported on brick arches which, in turn, are supported by plate girders and beams; the floor above unexcavated areas is simply a reinforced concrete slab on grade.

The exterior and the basic form of the structure as it exists today are true to Masqueray's concept. The copper dome with its intense turquoise patina, the gray and weather-streaked granite walls, the interior space, vast and convex—all are part of the architect's vision. There are, however, departures from Masqueray's original ideas. He had imagined the cathedral as being full of light. The rose windows were to have admitted much of the illumination, creating across the nave deep, slanting shadows and great shafts of light. As executed, these windows are exciting and beautiful in themselves, but they deny Masqueray's concept, as do the lighting fixtures of the building's interior. Here he had envisioned indirect cove lighting—an advanced idea for the time—behind cornices high on the nave walls and within each chapel. The spotlights in the dome and in the chapels which glare back at the beholder contradict this concept. Warren's altar baldachin also differs markedly from what Masqueray had in mind. The latter envisioned a four-posted one similar to the giant baldachin in St. Peter's at Rome.

Finally, the finish work in the crypt area is most certainly not one of the Frenchman's creations. If any part of the cathedral is aesthetically wrong, it is this. The plaster walls, the woodwork, and the composition tile floors in the crypt rooms are violently out of character with the rest of the building. Masqueray had conceived of the crypt as having the same finish materials as the cathedral nave.

Although little remains to be done, the Cathedral of St. Paul is not entirely finished. Outside the east entrance, two balustrades await the placing of heroic-sized bronze figures—one of Archbishop Ireland and the other of Father Galtier. And inside, a pair of panels, high on the east walls of the north and south transepts, are prepared for two giant murals. One will depict the dedication procession of the present cathedral with Ireland and his associates among a vast throng of nuns, priests, seminarians, and laymen. Its counterpart, portraying the arrival of the first bishop to the parish, will show a small group of settlers and Indians with a single priest waiting on the shore to welcome a steamboat. On the bluff behind them will stand the log chapel of St. Paul.

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26 Interview with Father Ryan.