

Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church: Minneapolis, Minnesota Case Study  
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1. Intro

a. Building Typology

Community houses of worship have long played a major, yet quiet, role in the development of the built environment. Traditionally small in size, these houses of worship were built to meet the needs of relatively small, often urban, congregations made up of members from the surrounding community or neighborhood. These buildings were primarily constructed prior to the widespread use of the automobile. Like their larger counterparts, community houses of worship typically were designed with a space for worship services, a gathering or meeting space for congregation members, and perhaps an office and education area. In historic community houses of worship, interior spaces often served multiple uses, rather than having dedicated spaces for every ancillary activity. Houses of worship can be found in nearly every architectural style, though some styles are more or less common than others. One of the least common styles for houses of worship is the Prairie style. The Prairie style is more commonly seen in residential buildings, but was used on a handful of nonresidential structures. Prairie styled houses of worship, like residential Prairie styled buildings, are characterized by long low lines often created by using thin roman bricks, low pitched roofs with eaves that extend beyond the walls, stained or dark wood trim, and patterned leaded glass windows. Though many community houses of worship continue to house small congregations, many others experienced disinvestment due to changes within the local community and beyond. Formerly disinvested properties have begun to find new uses including: the Sacred Heart Music Center in Duluth, the Lakeville Area Arts Center in Lakeville, and the B'nai Abraham Synagogue in Virginia. This case study will focus on the restoration of the Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church in Minneapolis.

b. Specific Building Intro

Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church, located at 116 East 32<sup>nd</sup> Street in Minneapolis, Minnesota is an excellent example of how a religious building can be reused after the original congregation has moved away. The brick Prairie style church, designed by Minneapolis architects, William Gray Purcell and George Feick in 1909, was constructed as a Presbyterian “mission church” to serve the Lyndale neighborhood in Minneapolis and is one of the only remaining Prairie style churches in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Originally known as Stewart Memorial Presbyterian Church, the building was purchased in 1988 from the Presbytery of the Twin Cities by the current owners, the Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church.<sup>2</sup> The church was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978 and was designated as a local landmark by the City of Minneapolis in 1984.



**Figure 1: Prairie Style Details of Redeemer. Photo by Doug Ohman, Pioneer Photography**

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<sup>1</sup> Unknown Author, “NOTES for the Church, 12/8/1997,” Minneapolis – Redeemer Baptist file, Preservation Alliance of Minnesota, St Paul, Minnesota.

<sup>2</sup> Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church, “Church History,” Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church, <http://www.embracingtheword.org/>.

## 2. History/Property Background

Construction of the church began in 1909 when the Presbytery of the Twin Cities hired Minneapolis architects William Gray Purcell and George Feick to design a new “mission church” for the Lyndale neighborhood in Minneapolis. The Prairie style was selected for a number of reasons, including Purcell’s own personal taste. Purcell, who was raised as a Presbyterian in Oak Park, Illinois, designed the church to be “based... on [his] own Presbyterian conscience to crystallize church experience.”<sup>3</sup>

The congregation of Stewart Memorial Presbyterian Church wished for their new building to serve the role of a sacred worship space, while not copying the traditional image of a church. Mark Hammons summarized Purcell’s and Feick’s reasons for eliminating the traditional bell tower in a speech, stating, “When asked to explain why there was no bell tower, for example, Purcell and Feick pointed out that the church simply did not need one – nor the expense of adding it. The church served a local community whose gatherings were known to be held at a set time. The traditional emergency services of a bell to the surrounding area were now also irrelevant; the telephone could be used to relay news more efficiently.”<sup>4</sup> Constructing the church in the Prairie style also meant the congregation did not have to spend additional money on extensive ornamentation for the sanctuary or exterior of the church. These cost saving decisions helped to keep the overall construction costs of the church under \$20,000.<sup>5</sup>

In 1914, the congregation had a pipe organ installed into the nave of the church, altering the choir loft arrangement from the original design.<sup>6</sup> By 1920, the congregation of Stewart Memorial had raised enough money to complete the construction of an education wing to the west of the sanctuary. Plans had been created by Purcell and Feick for an education wing at the time of the initial construction, but the design was never executed due to a lack of funding, though Purcell’s and Feick’s sliding door that now connects the sanctuary and education wing was constructed. The congregation hired the American Building and Realty Company to design the education wing. The wing was designed in a style very similar to the one designed by Purcell and Feick, with some stylistic differences in the details.<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 2: Restored Education Wing and Church. Photo by Emily Thomas**

<sup>3</sup> Alan K Lathrop and Bob Firth, *Churches of Minnesota* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 108.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Hammons, “Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church: An Architectural and Historical Perspective,” Text copy of speech in Minneapolis – Redeemer Baptist file, Preservation Alliance of Minnesota, St Paul, Minnesota.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Mack, interview by author, Minneapolis, MN, July 2, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

### 3. Disinvestment

The congregation of Stewart Memorial was primarily a “walking congregation,” made up of local residents who walked to services at the church.<sup>8</sup> The construction of Interstate 35W through the Lyndale neighborhood of Minneapolis, which began in 1960, created a physical barrier that cut the congregation and surrounding neighborhood in half.<sup>9</sup> During the construction of I-35W, much of the Stewart Memorial congregation was absorbed into the congregations of other neighborhood churches. Though construction of I-35W was completed by 1967, the congregation of Stewart Memorial had diminished to the point that regular services were no longer held at the church. Due to declining numbers at various neighborhood Presbyterian churches, the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area voted to combine the parishes of Stewart Memorial and Bethlehem Presbyterian, creating Bethlehem-Stewart Presbyterian Church.<sup>10</sup> Services for the combined congregation were held at the Purcell and Feick church until the early 1980s.

### 4. Advocacy / Fundraising

In 1980, Bethlehem-Stewart Presbyterian Church was awarded a \$9,300 grant through the Minnesota Historical Society State Grants in Aid program to conduct a conditions evaluation of the Purcell and Feick church.<sup>11</sup> The congregation hired Robert Mack, one of the principle architects of a young firm from Minneapolis, MacDonald and Mack, to conduct the evaluation. Unfortunately, a lack of funding meant little work was completed on the building following the initial conditions evaluation. To offset the costs of owning the church, the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area began leasing out portions of the building to various organizations, including Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church in 1983.<sup>12</sup> In 1988, Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church’s pastor, John A. Rhyne, began searching for a new home for his congregation. In addition to looking at a number of other properties, Pastor Rhyne approached the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area with the hope of purchasing the Purcell and Feick church.<sup>13</sup> The Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area agreed to sell the church on a contract for deed to Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church for \$140,000.<sup>14</sup>

From the beginning, the congregation of Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church knew that a fair amount of work needed to be done to bring the building up to both city code and their worship requirements. Work however, did not begin immediately as the congregation lacked the capital for the project.

Two significant events stand out as integral factors in the eventual restoration of the church. First, in 1989, an article by architectural critic Linda Mack, titled *5 historic churches in area cry out for major renovation*, ran in the Minneapolis Star Tribune. The article served to

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Minnesota Highway Department Project Videos circa 1960, Minnesota Highway Department Archives, State Archives, Minnesota Historical Society Library, Minnesota History Center, St Paul, Minnesota.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Mack.

<sup>11</sup> Mandy Skypala, email message to author, July 16, 2009. In 1980, eligible applicants for Minnesota Historical Society grants were "county, regional, and local historical societies, other nonprofit organizations, and subdivisions of government." Being listed on the National Register was not a requirement for receiving grant money.

<sup>12</sup> Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church, “Church History.” When the congregation began leasing the church from the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area, the congregation was known as the Tabernacle Baptist Church..

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. A contract for deed is a sale contract where the seller provides the financing, and the buyer pays off the loan in installments, typically with a final balloon payment.

raise public awareness of the church and its pressing need for repair. And second, in a seemingly unrelated event, the Redeemer Missionary Baptist congregation, headed by Clifton Johns, offered the church's fellowship hall as meeting space to the newly formed Harriet Tubman Center in the early 1990s. The Tubman Center Board of Directors used the fellowship hall during the construction of the Tubman Center, located next door to the church. In 1994, the Tubman Center Board attempted to repay Redeemer's hospitality by offering to help restore the historic church. Together with the Tubman Center Board of Directors, the congregation of Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church formed a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization known as Redeemer Restoration Project.

The sole purpose of Redeemer Restoration Project was to raise money to fund a full restoration of the church. By creating a separate charity to head the restoration of the property, the congregation was able to cast a wide net for potential donors – including those who would not normally donate to a religious organization. Clifton Johns was quoted in an April 11, 1999 *Star Tribune* article, explaining why people were donating to the cause, saying “some have been interested in the architecture, some in the social programs of the church, some in both.”<sup>15</sup> In 1995, Robert Mack was hired by the Redeemer congregation to update the conditions evaluation he had created in 1980 for the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area.<sup>16</sup> Robert's updated conditions evaluation helped to steer Redeemer Restoration Project members in creating a prioritized plan for the restoration of the church. The conditions evaluation was also used in various promotional efforts of Redeemer Restoration Project organization to bring attention to the conditions, both good and bad, of the property when soliciting for donations.

The main capital campaign organized by Redeemer Restoration Project was known as “Simple Gifts: Restoring a Prairie School Church,” and was launched in 1997. Included in the promotional brochures for the campaign was information about the history of the Church, the history and significance of the architectural style, and a brief background on Purcell and Feick. The promotional brochures helped to generate awareness of the Church as an architectural resource – highlighting that it was one of very few prairie style churches in the country, and was designed by prominent local architects. Over the next two years, the capital campaign was able to collect \$2.3 million, including \$100,000 from the church's own congregation, which at the time was approximately 300 people. Donors for the campaign extended beyond the congregation and surrounding neighborhood, to people from across the city and state who recognized the value of the unique church. In addition to private donations to the campaign, Redeemer Restoration Project was able to attract donations from various foundations and corporations including: The Belford Foundation, The James Ford Bell Foundation, The Chadwick Foundation, General Mills Foundation, Honeywell Foundation, and The Minneapolis Foundation.<sup>17</sup> Most of the money raised through the Simple Gifts campaign was used to restore the Church and education wing, but approximately \$300,000 was set aside to fund the future maintenance of the property.

## 5. Restoration

After wrapping up the capital campaign earlier in the year, the restoration of Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church began in October 1999. Robert Mack returned to the project once

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<sup>15</sup> “A restoration of the Prairie,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, April 11, 1999, Metro/State Section, B1.

<sup>16</sup> “Community-Wide Fundraising Works for Minneapolis Baptist Church,” *Sacred Places* 1, no. 2 (2003): 5-6.

<sup>17</sup> Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church, “Celebrating the Restoration of the Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church” Program, November 8, 2000, in building file at the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota History Center, St Paul, Minnesota.

again, this time as the restoration architect. The Watson-Forsberg Company of Minneapolis served as the general contractor for the project. The selection process to find a general contractor was unique – rather than putting the project out for bids and selecting the lowest priced bid, Robert selected specific contractors with a history of quality work and experience with preservation projects to vie for the job through a series of interviews with Redeemer Restoration Project. This interview process allowed Watson-Forsberg to better understand the client and their values, as well as their goals of the project. As a result, Watson-Forsberg was able to select subcontractors that supported and were reflective of Redeemer Restoration Project’s and the congregation’s values.<sup>18</sup>

Restoration of the church occurred from October 1999 to September 2000. During this time, the congregation held services in a portion of Zion Lutheran Church, located at 128 West 33rd Street in Minneapolis, which they rented for \$850 per month.<sup>19</sup> According to Robert Mack, much of the exterior restoration work focused on maintenance related issues, including the deteriorating trim, an old roof, cracked masonry, and yellowed windows.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, some repairs were needed to remedy vandalism, including broken or damaged windows, and damage to a few doors.<sup>21</sup>

A majority of the interior restoration work addressed prior alterations that were incompatible with the Prairie style of the church, including Gothic style pendant lights in the sanctuary, a dropped acoustic tile ceiling in the atrium of the education wing, and poor handicap accessibility throughout the property. The Gothic style pendant lights were removed and new reproduction fixtures were installed based on historic photos of the sanctuary. The drop ceiling in the atrium was also removed, opening up the atrium of the education wing addition. Accessibility



**Figure 3: New Handicap Accessible Entry. Photo by Emily Thomas**

to the property was improved by constructing a new, historically sympathetic, entryway on the north side of the building, in conjunction with the acquisition of a joint parking lot for the Church and the Tubman Center. One of the historic Sunday school rooms in the education wing was sacrificed in order to construct an elevator shaft within the footprint of the property. The basement level of the education wing was originally constructed with varying floor heights based on intended room use, including a sunken gymnasium. To improve accessibility, as well as to lower the cost of installing additional elevator stops, a new basement floor was poured to create

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<sup>18</sup> Robert Mack.

<sup>19</sup> Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church, “Church History.”

<sup>20</sup> Robert Mack.

<sup>21</sup> Mack.

a uniform floor level. Additional interior restoration included cleaning the interior wood details, improving the atrium balcony's stability, and repainting the entire interior.<sup>22</sup>

Central to the congregation's full use of the church was the creation of a large immersion baptismal font within the sanctuary. As to not take away from the simplistic design of the historic church, Robert Mack designed the immersion baptismal font to be built into the choir loft, hidden behind a series of panels that are easily moved when the font is needed.<sup>23</sup> The panels around the baptismal font were designed to mimic the historic paneling in the sanctuary.

On November 8, 2000, after 11 months of restoration, the church reopened for services with a program titled, "Celebrating the Restoration of the Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church."

## 6. Conclusion

The restoration of the Purcell and Feick designed, Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church at 116 East 32<sup>nd</sup> Street in Minneapolis has helped to give the surrounding neighborhood a sense of stability and life. The congregation continues to use the historic building as a spiritual center and headquarters for their many social outreach programs and partnerships within the Lyndale neighborhood and the city of Minneapolis. For the entire state, the restoration of the church demonstrates that preservation partners can be found in seemingly unrelated offers of hospitality, and that donations can come in all shapes and sizes. Perhaps most importantly, the restoration of Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church serves as a reminder that preservation does not occur overnight sometimes it can take nearly 14 years of dreaming, 6 years of planning, and 11 months of sweating to get the job done.



**Figure 4: Restoring the Prairie Style windows was key for the restoration project. Photo by Emily Thomas**

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. According to Robert Mack, the interior of nave is not the original color, but rather a tint of the original. The congregation felt the original color was too dark, and wished for a lighter color for the sanctuary. The stairwells of the church were repainted with the original color in order to preserve the original color scheme in a portion of the property.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Mack.

Appendix 1: Table of Rehabilitation/Restoration Key Players

Company Name	Contact	Rehabilitation / Restoration Role
MacDonald and Mack Architects, Ltd.	Bob Mack A: 400 South Fourth Street, Suite 712 Minneapolis, MN 55415 <a href="http://www.mmarchltd.com">http://www.mmarchltd.com</a> Ph: 612.341.4051 E: <a href="mailto:BobM@mmarchltd.com">BobM@mmarchltd.com</a>	Project Architect
Watson-Forsberg Company	A: 6465 Wayzata Blvd, Suite 110 Minneapolis, MN 55426 <a href="http://www.watson-forsberg.com">http://www.watson-forsberg.com</a> Ph: 952.544.7761 E: <a href="mailto:info@watson-forsberg.com">info@watson-forsberg.com</a>	General Contractor
Monarch Studios		Lead Glass Restoration

Appendix 2: Table of Funding

Funding Name and Contact	Type of Funding	Funding Amount	Year
Minnesota Historical Society Mandy Skypala 345 W. Kellogg Blvd. St. Paul, MN 55102 Ph: 651-259-3458 E: <a href="mailto:mandy.skypala@mnhs.org">mandy.skypala@mnhs.org</a>	Grant	\$9,300	1980
David Winton Bell Foundation	Grant	\$3,000	1997
National Trust for Historic Preservation	Preservation Services Fund Matching grant	\$2,000	1997
James Ford Bell Foundation	Grant		1998
Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church Congregation	Donations collected through second collections for capital campaign (Simple Gifts)	\$100,000	1997-1999
Simple Gifts	Capital campaign	\$2,200,000	1997-1999

### Appendix 3: Bibliography

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