

EAMES ECCLESIASTICAL PILGRIM CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, 1932–1937

by Andrew Raimist

Introduction

Charles Eames was a member of Pilgrim Congregational Church at 826 North Union Boulevard in St. Louis from 1929 through 1938. On Friday, June 7, 1929, he married fellow architecture student Catherine Woermann, thereby joining the Woermann family church. Her parents, Frederick and Lucia Woermann, had long been prominent congregation members, and Charles was warmly welcomed.



Pilgrim Congregational Church, St. Louis, Mo.

Pilgrim Congregational Church was designed by Mauran, Russell & Garden Architects in 1906 at Union and Kensington. Image from colorized postcard from eBay.

Catherine Woermann Marries C. O. Eames

THE marriage of Miss Catherine Woermann, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. F. C. Woermann, 7 Arundel place, to Charles Ormand Eames, son of Mrs. Charles O. Eames of Berryville, Va., took place Friday evening at the Pilgrim Congregational Church, the Rev. Vincent Franks of Berryville, brother-in-law of the bridegroom, officiating, assisted by the Rev. Dr. Jay T. Stocking. The chancel was banked in palms and pale pink and blue hydrangeas and was lighted by cathedral tapers in branched candelabra. The alternate pews were marked by tapers, forming an illuminated aisle for the bridal party.

The bride, who was given in marriage by her father, wore her mother's gown of ivory satin, en princesse, adorned with lace worn by four generations in her family. There were long satin sleeves and a deep berth of

Continued on Page Two, Column Two.

The marriage of Catherine Woermann and Charles Ormand Eames, Jr., was reported in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch on Sunday, June 9, 1929. Clipping from Historical St. Louis Post-Dispatch online archive.

Between 1932 and 1937, the church commissioned Eames to create four additions and alterations. It turned to him regularly when addressing critical problems that combined practical and aesthetic concerns. In addressing these issues, he beautified the structure, providing thoughtfully composed, and meaningfully detailed, elements.

Eames respected the existing structure, considering it to be beautiful and well-built. Throughout his lifetime, he never felt modernism antithetical to historical approaches to design. He drew upon the best elements of each method to achieve a synthesis, respectfully contributing to the existing architectural context while using his creative skills to enhance the church. His additions were modern and functional while drawing on Christian forms and symbols. In some cases, those historical references are explicit and, in other instances, somewhat nuanced. Each intervention

materially improved the church, despite its physical size, to the mass and volume of the structure. He carefully considered geometry, proportion, and symbolism using the best quality materials and fabrication methods. Successive congregations have preserved and celebrated these contributions, ensuring they are appropriately maintained for the present and future.



View from the central narthex doors into the main sanctuary down the aisle toward the altar. Eames designed the narthex doors as well as the chancel chandelier above the altar a few years after their wedding. Photograph © Andrew Raimist.

Each addition to the church created a poignant moment, enriching your experience religiously and architecturally. His four contributions, in chronological order, were Narthex Doors and Transoms (1932–1933), a Chancel Chandelier (1932), a redesign of the Tower Roof with a new cross (1935), and a Lighted Sign (1937). We will take up these projects in the order the commissions were initiated. The first two projects were completed before his eight-month sojourn to Mexico, between August 1933 and March 1934, in the context of his partnership, Gray & Eames Architects. The latter two projects were developed after his return to St. Louis in the office of Eames & Walsh Architects.

Pilgrim Church served the well-to-do living in recently constructed neighborhoods around Forest Park in the years following the 1904 World's Fair Louisiana Purchase Exposition. Developing the park for the fair and the university for the 1904 Summer Olympics shifted the city's center of gravity westward toward the city limits, located just west of Skinker Boulevard.

These developments opened up land that had previously been wooded and rural. The newly formed communities gradually became centers for educational, medical, social, religious, and residential life for those able to afford well-appointed homes in the exclusive districts. Several of these neighborhoods were private, gated streets following development patterns established in the prior century.

Two important causes of the migration of citizens and institutions were the creation of a new campus for the Washington University Medical School, designed by Theodore Link, the celebrated architect of Union Station, at the east end of the park. At its west end, Jamieson and Spearl designed Brookings Hall for Washington University's undergraduate campus, originally built as the World Fair's Administration Building. The undergraduate campus employed the Collegiate Gothic style found in East Coast Ivy League schools. It used Missouri red granite and limestone as its primary building materials.

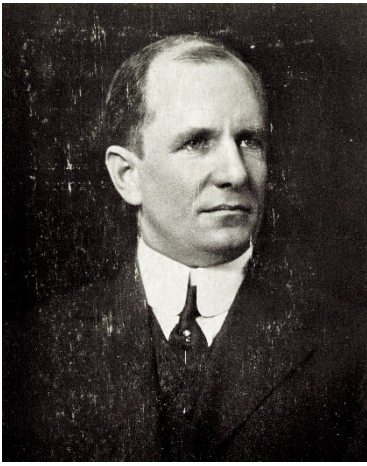


Charles Eames, Christmas Card, lithograph, c. 1930, depicting the Woermann House at 7 Arundel Place built by Woermann Construction Company in 1919. Image © Eames Office, LLC.

Charles Eames attended the School of Architecture under the direction of Professor Gabriel Ferrand, a graduate of the Ecole d'Beaux-Arts in Paris. In the Fall of 1925, he was promptly elected Freshman class president. In the 1920s, there were only a handful of female architectural students. Catherine Woermann, a recent graduate of Vassar College, enrolled in the program in the fall of 1927. She was intelligent, creative, and attractive.

Charles and Catherine left the school in 1928 before earning degrees. By Christmas, they were engaged. Catherine's parents celebrated the announcement with a large dinner party at the Woermann family home at 7 Arundel Place, south of the university, close to Forest Park. The Woermann family were important members of Pilgrim's congregation. Her father headed the building committee for many years.

Pilgrim Congregational Church was built in 1906 to designs of the successful, respected firm Mauran, Russell & Garden Architects. Their celebrated designer, John Mauran, had studied at MIT in its Beaux-Arts program. The church's modified Romanesque style was rendered in Missouri red granite and limestone in keeping with the materials key to the university's nearby undergraduate campus.



Portrait of Frederick Christian Woermann.
Image courtesy of St. Louis Public Library's Collection, Portraits of prominent citizens of St. Louis, Missouri.

Catherine's father, Frederick C. Woermann, had trained as a civil engineer at Washington University in the 1890s. After serving as an Army engineer during World War I, he helped build several university buildings, including Barnes Hospital (1922), Rebstock Hall (1927), McMillan Hospital (1929), Women's Dormitory (1962), Compton Physics Laboratory (1965), and Monsanto Life Sciences Building (1965). He also erected five Jamieson & Spearl-designed fraternity houses in the 1920s. Eames later joined the Sigma Chi fraternity, which Woermann had recently completed. Woermann Construction Company became a respected, prosperous general contractor in St. Louis between the 1920s and 1970s. Woermann was an active alumnus, contributing generously to its annual fundraising efforts.

Following Charles and Catherine's June wedding, they undertook a grand tour of Europe for their honeymoon, funded by her father. By then, his mother, Marie Celine Pauline Lambert Eames, and his older sister, Adele Eames Franks, had moved to Berryville, Virginia. Adele had married Reverend Vincent Chesley Franks, DD, who had taken a position as Episcopal priest. Charles's mother continued living with the Franks for the remainder of her life.

Shortly after they returned from their European honeymoon, October's Stock Market Crash initiated the financial collapse, which began in limited sectors but eventually created challenges endemic to business and labor during the years of the Great Depression. Eames practiced as an architect in St. Louis during these difficult years in a series of partnerships with former associates from his time as an apprentice for Trueblood and Graf Architects between 1925 and 1930. After their honeymoon, Charles and Catherine stayed with the Woermanns until their daughter Lucia was born in 1930 when they moved to a nearby apartment on Pershing Avenue (see figures of Charles, Catherine, and Lucia in his 1931 Christmas lithograph).



Charles and Catherine Woermann Eames admire their daughter Lucia born in 1930. Film still from the Charles and Ray Eames documentary *Eames: The Architect and the Painter*, 2011.

Charles and Catherine were active members of Pilgrim's congregation. She taught in the Sunday School on the building's lower level. Charles gave talks on art, architecture, and symbolism to the Fellowship. He also decorated the children's classrooms by painting murals with scenes from the Bible, including a depiction of the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, the Tree of Knowledge, and the serpent. This portion of his composition centered on a drain stack around which the snake coiled. These murals were eliminated in the course of subsequent remodeling of those spaces.

Eames first partnered with Charles M. Gray to form Gray & Eames Architects in 1931. Their studio was on the second floor of Woermann Construction Company's office in Midtown at 3800 West Pine Boulevard, just west of St. Louis University, the city's premiere Jesuit institution.

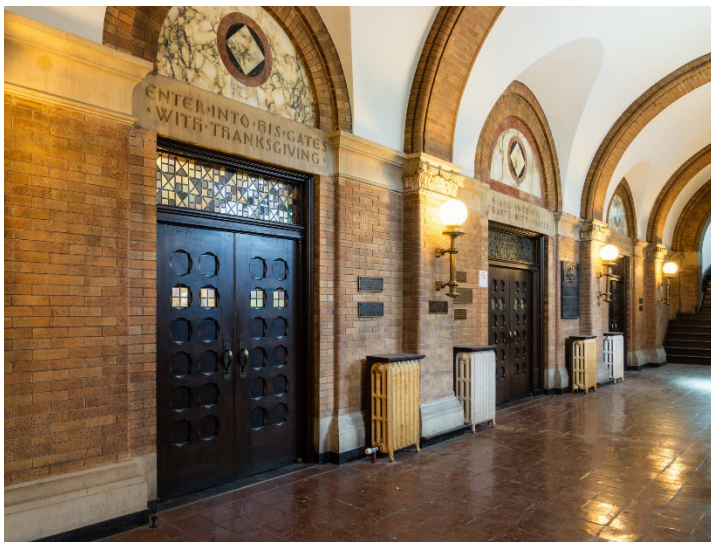
For Christmas 1931, Eames created a detailed lithograph describing the locus of their lives. Charles, Catherine, and their daughter Lucia are depicted at the lower left (A), standing in front of their apartment on Pershing Avenue near its intersection with Rosedale. Behind them, at the far left, Pilgrim church and the Artists' Guild are depicted side-by-side (B). In the center of the image, east of the Park, is the office of Gray, Eames & Pauley Architects (C), close to the New Cathedral on Lindell. The Continental Building rises as a singular skyscraper close to Grand Avenue in Midtown. At the east end of Forest Park, he draws the Washington University School of Medicine by Eames, where he'd worked on two buildings with Trueblood and Graf Architects (D). His rendering of Forest Park includes the MUNY Opera, Zoo, Art Hill, Jefferson Memorial, Lover's Lane, golfers, and more. Toward the bottom right is 7 Arundel Place, Woermann's home (E), indicated by the text "To Grandfather's House," and a playful figure riding a rocking horse along Skinker Boulevard. The main undergraduate campus of Washington University (F) is depicted by Eames. The Mississippi River curves near the horizon, embracing the city from north to south.

Water towers, bridges, skyscrapers, and other civic monuments are depicted, distinguishing north St. Louis (on the left) and south St. Louis (on the right).



Charles Eames lithograph, “Merry Christmas, Catherine, Lucia and Charlie Eames, MCMXXXI.” Key: **A**—Eames family; **B**—Pilgrim Congregational Church and Artist’s Guild on North Union Boulevard; **C**—Gray, Eames and Pauley Office on West Pine Boulevard; **D**—Washington University School of Medicine on South Kingshighway Boulevard; **E**—Woermann family house at 7 Arundel Place; **F**—Washington University in St. Louis undergraduate campus at Lindell and Skinker Boulevards. Image © Eames Office LLC. Annotations in red by author.

The first two projects were completed before his eight-month sojourn to Mexico, between August 1933 and March 1934, in the context of his partnership, Gray & Eames Architects. The latter two projects were developed after his return to St. Louis in the office of Eames & Walsh Architects.

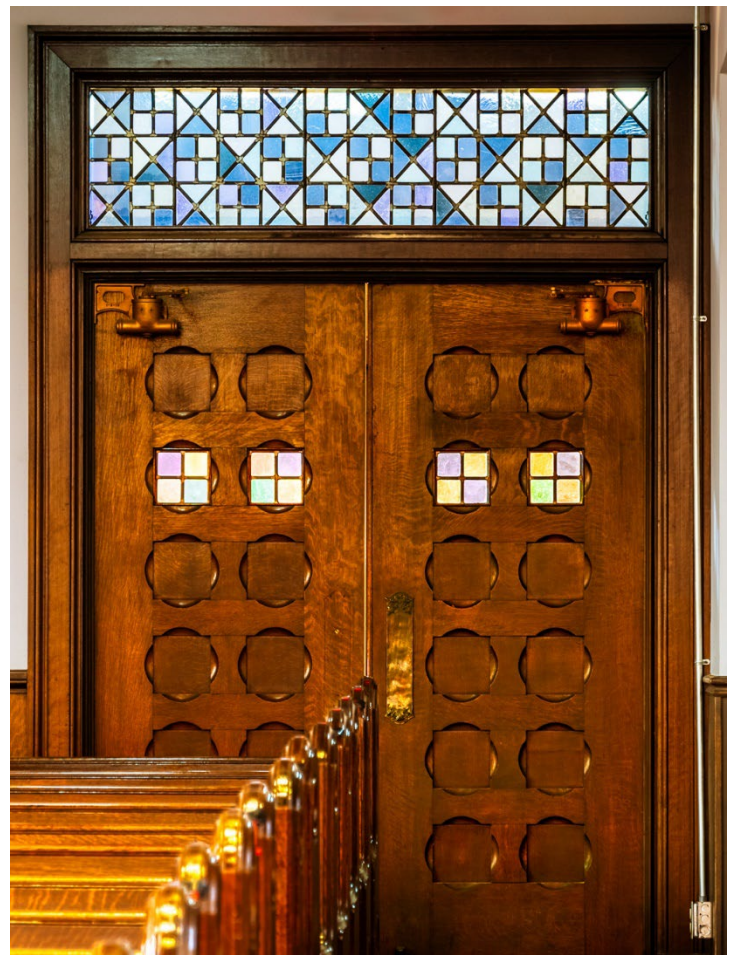


Narthex of Pilgrim Church. The three pairs of doors with overhead transoms located beneath lunettes were designed by Eames. Photograph by Andrew Raimist for Eames Institute.

New Narthex Doors and Transoms, 1932–1933

The existing doors between the narthex and sanctuary were considered inadequate functionally and aesthetically.

The church commissioned Eames to design four new pairs of doors, each with two stained glass lites and a transom above. Three pairs of doors open to the sanctuary. The fourth set opens to the vestibule in the tower’s base at the church’s northwest corner. These doors provide the narthex ease of access, beauty, and unity.



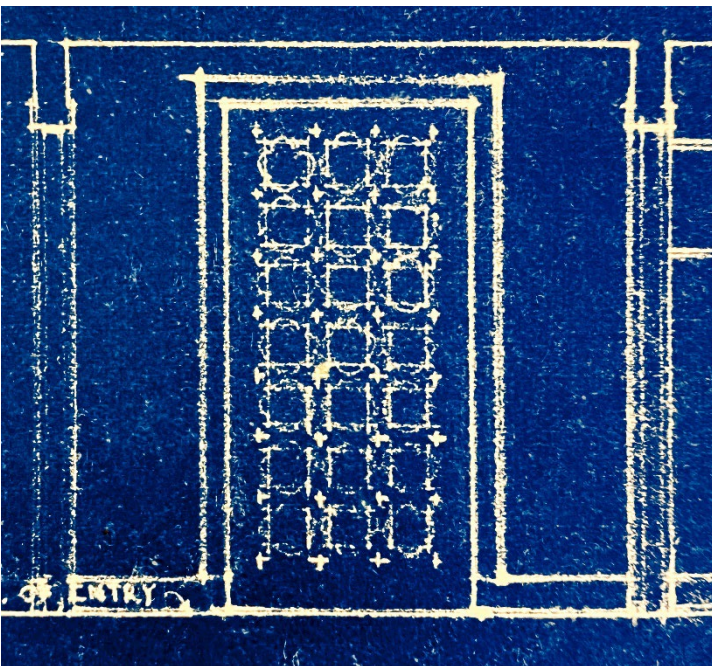
View of Narthex doors from looking from the sanctuary toward the narthex. The colors vary dramatically depending on the lighting conditions. Stained glass, Emil Frei, Jr. Photograph by Andrew Raimist for Eames Institute.

The concept for the narthex doors is derived from a previous Eames design for the main entry door for the Alfred A. Meyer House of 1930–1931, 39 Ridgetop Road, St. Louis County. He worked on this project as an apprentice architect for the established firm Trueblood & Graf Architects. He prepared the perspective rendering of the house for the son of a prominent banker, Alfred C.F. Meyer, who handled the accounts of Adolphus Busch. (John Philip Meyer was another son from the same family of bankers.) This perspective is the only project represented by a line drawing in the publication of *The Recent Work of Trueblood & Graf Architects*, 1930. It includes the interlocking initials “C.O.E.” hidden in the landscaping at the far left beneath the tree, referencing his full name, “Charles Ormand Eames.” Typically, renderings produced by the firm went out with the signature of their lead designer, Hugo K. Graf.



Charles Eames's perspective sketch of Alfred A. Meyer House (1930–1931) executed while an apprentice architect. Image from *The Recent Work of Trueblood & Graf Architects*, 1930.

Eames's initial sketch proposes a series of diamond shapes on the entry door. That door design was abandoned and replaced with a more elegant design with a pattern of squares with circular depressions surrounding them. This formulation was likely intended to reference the Ancient Greek mathematical challenge to construct a square with an area equal to that of a given circle using only a straight edge and compass in a finite number of steps. Without algebra, those were the limitations of mathematics at the time. This puzzle has been the subject of much study and dispute over the millennia.



Detail of Alfred A. Meyer House's entry door with square panels set within circular depressions routed into the oak doors. Excerpt from *Trueblood & Graf construction documents*, 1930. Image courtesy of the State Historical Society of Missouri (SHSMO).



Three pairs of narthex doors with transoms at Pilgrim Church. Eames designed four new sets of doors with overhead transoms. The central set of doors are placed within a wider opening. Eames kept the doors the same size and inserted solid side panels. The fourth pair of narthex doors open onto the vestibule at the base of the tower to the north. Photograph by Andrew Raimist for Eames Institute.

In the Nineteenth Century, several mathematicians claimed it was impossible, while others claimed to have solved it. Leopold Bloom, the main character of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (first published in the U.S. in 1920), dreamed of solving this problem to win a fictional government award of £1 million. "Squaring the circle" has come to mean attempting to do the impossible.

As a student in a Beaux-Arts School of Architecture, Eames would have learned of the perfection symbolized by Platonic shapes. Many important Roman buildings, like the Pantheon of the 1st Century, emphasize the use of spheres, cubes, circles, and squares. These forms were believed to reflect the idealized geometry of Platonic forms relating to the cosmos and heavenly spheres.

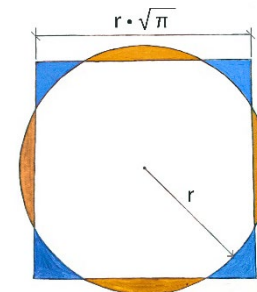
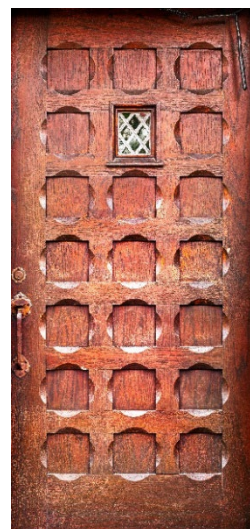


Diagram of "squaring the circle." Illustration by Andrew Raimist.

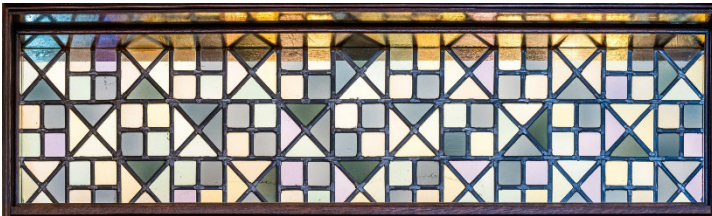
Trueblood & Graf Architects, Alfred A. Meyer House, 1930–1931. Main entry door presumably designed by Charles Eames who would have been disappointed to see a rectangular leaded glass lite inserted into his geometrically harmonious design. Photograph © Andrew Raimist.

Eames explained in a 1977 interview with St. Louis historian Virginia Stith in Venice, California:

“ . . . there was a very small lively guy called Paul Valenti . . . He could draw beautifully, and he really made—he was Italian, and he made the Italian Renaissance really come to life. He was the kind of professor who kind of enters into a plot with the students, and in that way gets them to work and do interesting things.”

Quote from St. Louis Oral History Project interview with Charles Eames, October 13, 1977, Venice, California, as published in *An Eames Anthology*, Daniel Ostroff, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

As delineated, Alfred A. Meyer’s front door was intended to feature 21 recessed square panels with curved routing, suggesting a spherical form has been superimposed over each square. Unfortunately, the door’s geometrical simplicity was marred by someone inserting a rectangular leaded glass lite with diamond-shaped panes, disrupting its composition. Eames must have been disappointed seeing his design spoiled. In devising Pilgrim’s narthex doors, he aimed to correct this error. Interestingly, the Alfred A. Meyer House was the first project by Trueblood & Graf to be constructed by Woermann Construction Company. Woermann oversaw the installation of Pilgrim’s narthex doors.



Detail of transom over narthex door. Looking from the narthex toward the sanctuary offers warmer colors of yellow, orange, and green, and magenta. Alternate squares are divided into four equal smaller squares or diagonally into triangles. Photograph © Andrew Raimist.

Detail of narthex doors with two stained glass square lites by Emil Frei Studio set within a circular depression routed into the oak doors. Photograph © Andrew Raimist.

Eames laid out the doors and their transoms, relying on a similar pattern of recessed panels in two columns of six rows, twelve panels per door leaf. The visual harmony and numerological reference to the twelve apostles made this configuration a desired, inspired solution.

Eames sought to simultaneously fulfill the religious desire for symbolism with a secular derivation of idealized geometries drawn from the Greeks and Romans and interpreted through the eyes of the Renaissance. A geometrical problem passed down from Ancient Greek mathematicians, this puzzle was passed down through Vitruvius and celebrated during the Renaissance various attempts to “square the circle” as an analogy of the perfection God employed in creating the world.



Pilgrim Congregational Church, clock face on tower is arranged as a circle over a recessed square. The design may have been referencing overlaid squares and circles as a symbol of harmony. Photograph © Andrew Raimist.

Eames’s solution for elegantly inserting leaded glass into the narthex doors relied on two square lites, each divided into four squares. He balanced and extended the geometrical harmony of these leaded glass lites with the larger transoms above, subdivided into identically sized squares.

Each of the four corners of the transom contains an ‘X’. The geometry of the leading could be interpreted as Greek crosses and the diagonals of the Chi Rho alternately subdividing the squares in four. The diagonal lines extend beyond to encompass the entire field so it can be viewed alternately as a grid or interlocking diamonds. The stained glass transoms are arranged symmetrically, left to right and top to bottom, with three rows and thirteen columns.

Using contrasting darks and lights from within a palette of colors provides a range of muted colors depending on lighting conditions, including greens, browns, yellows,

purples, and blues. Reflected and transmitted light change throughout the day while remaining insistently abstract in composition.

Eames's harmonious design for the Meyer House's entry door was disfigured by someone inserting a rectangular, diamond-shaped leaded glass. With the narthex doors, he demonstrated he could resolve these geometries in a tight, beautiful composition.

The doors were finally installed sometime after May 1933, when final prices for the door hardware were provided to Woermann, who acted as the general contractor. The church decided to continue using the existing double-acting hinges, which allow the doors to swing both ways. In addition, they re-used the current door checks, closers, and push plates.



View of sanctuary taken from the balcony revealing the focal point over the altar: the Eames-designed chancel chandelier. Photograph by Andrew Raimist for Eames Institute.

Modernizing the Medieval, Chancel Chandelier, 1932

In 1932, a memorial for Mary Maycroft was funded by her daughter, Luella Sayman, to create a chancel chandelier to light the main altar with concealed electrical lighting from above. When Mrs. Maycroft visited St. Mark's Basilica in Venice, she was spiritually and emotionally overwhelmed by the suspended three-dimensional intersection of duplicated crosses overhead upon entering. Its sculptural presence, beauty, and significance deeply impressed her.

Eames's new chandelier was based on the prominent Romanesque-era chandelier in Venice, lit by small oil lamps. In plan, doubled arms create a Greek cross intersecting its the center. When viewed in elevation, it appears close to being a Greek cross, but the vertical dimension is slightly elongated, suggesting a Latin cross.

The challenge Eames faced dealt with replicating the historic fixture where the complex, intricate parts and pieces

of its brass elements were visible yet provided concealed modern lighting within it. He appropriately reduced the size of the medieval chandelier to fit the scale of the sanctuary.



Chancel Chandelier hanging over the altar with electrical lighting hidden within the wider cylindrical element Eames inserted into the medieval Catholic original to accommodate this functional necessity. The position of this cylinder rests on the lower arms of the cross members and are thereby visible from the sanctuary. Photograph by Andrew Raimist for Eames Institute.



Basilica San Marco, Venice. Bronze crucifix with attached glass cups for oil or tapers. The bronze body has been allowed to oxidize to a dark brown. Photograph © Benjamin Parker from 500px.com.

From his experiences designing sets for the Municipal Opera in Forest Park, he understood concealing lighting sources was essential for their proper function as a hidden source of almost magical illumination.

He chose to insert two cylinders into the intersection, doubly crossed members. The upper cylinder has a larger diameter



Three-quarter view of the Chancel Chandelier from below revealing the recessed downlight located away from the congregation. Photograph © Andrew Raimist.

and a lower profile. It rests upon the lower arms of the crossed members. These members remain visible from beneath the upper cylinder, clarifying the structural and symbolic geometry of the fixture. The upper arm of the cross members penetrates the cylinder and appears to disappear into it.



Chancel Chandelier internally lit. Note the glowing light emitted from the sides of the larger, flat cylinder as well as its bottom surface. Photograph from MapQuest.com.



View of the Chancel Chandelier from below showing two recessed downlights at left surrounded by solid metal. The remainder of the donut-shape relies on glass with a metallic coating which offers diffused lighting. Photograph © Andrew Raimist.

This upper cylinder contains several bulbs that provide diffused light, downward, and outward. In addition, he placed two spotlights aimed down toward the altar on the rear of the fixture where the light sources are blocked from view by the cross arms and by recessing them up into the cylinder, thus providing light from above, which doesn't appear to have a source but highlights the altar below.

Before enrolling as an architecture student, Eames spent a summer working for the Edwin F. Guth Lighting Company. Logically, he would have referenced their catalog for the layout of similar fixtures. Eames would have drafted the chandelier to scale for the fabricators depicting its various components. He understood he had to know how it would be fabricated and assembled. Otherwise, it would not turn out as he intended. To ensure accuracy, the sheet metal's decorative scoring, embossing, and punching were likely drawn at full scale. The fabricator was Butler-Kohaus of St. Louis, who produced the custom fixture with its lights and wiring.

The band at the lower portion of the broader cylinder features four rondels. These circular elements, within squares, repeat within each quarter with hand-embossed "dots," defining these circles like a seal. There are twenty such elements, five in each quarter section. The four exposed and visible rondels between the primary cross arms are symmetrical both vertically and horizontally.

Each arm ends with a trefoil cut out within and three-pointed shapes extending outward from the center. This creates a repeated fractal geometry where the Trinity becomes the guiding principle for determining its structure.



Details of the four rondels set within squares encircling the larger cylinder. Fashioned from hand cut and embossed sheet brass. Photograph and silhouettes © Andrew Raimist.

The four decorative rondels in each quadrant between the arms suggest four tulips around a circular disc, diagonally crossed leaf shapes, a Greek cross with divided ends, and an ancient solar symbol in the form of a six-petaled rosette possibly meant to resemble poinsettias. The fifth rondel appears between the doubled arms of the major structural elements. The image is flipped and mirrored. It presents grapes and leaves in a shape suggesting perpetual community despite the delicacy and fragility of life.

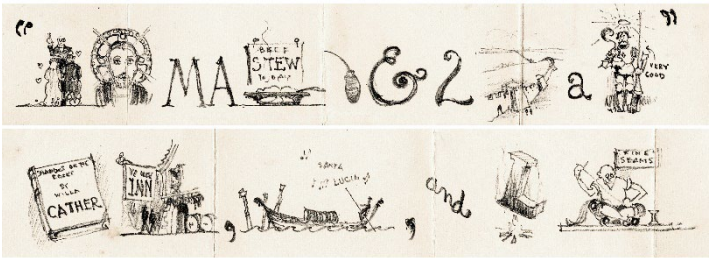
The glittering, refracted light evokes Christ's presence in a world of darkness.



Detail of rondel located at the cardinal points between the paired cross arms representing grapes and grape leaves. Photograph © Andrew Raimist



Eames's sketch of Christ from a Christmas Rebus sent to his niece Adele Eleanor Franks. His image of Christ features the enclosing circle with pattern of dots and a Greek cross as well as diagonal lines of the Chi Rho shape. Image courtesy of Eames Institute.



Eames sent his five-year-old niece, Eleanor Adele Franks, a handmade Christmas card in the form of a rebus, a puzzle of pictures and letters intended to transmit a hidden message. It was postmarked December 20, 1932. The literal transliteration: “Marry Christ MA stew awl and two wall a very good knight” Catherine, Lucia, and char L seams. Image courtesy of Eames Institute.

For Christmas 1932, Eames created a handmade, folded, self-contained Christmas card for his five-year-old niece, Adele Eleanor Franks. Its message included a clever, beautifully rendered rebus visually spelling out, “Merry Christmas to All and to All a Very Good Night. Catherine, Lucia, and Charles Eames.” His sketch of Christ depicts the traditional face of the Savior with a circular halo around his head, a dominant Greek cross, and a lightly sketched set of diagonals extending beyond the circular halo embellished with a series of small circles. This imagery corresponds to his detailing of the chancel chandelier and its decorative rondels.

Rebuilding the Tower Roof, 1935

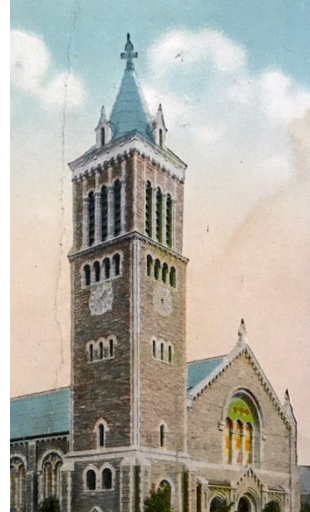
On Friday, July 12, 1935, a series of heavy thunderstorms with ongoing lightning strikes rolled through the St. Louis region throughout the day. An Illinois farmer died in his field, five houses across the area were struck, along with Pilgrim Church’s tower, and a 10,000-barrel gasoline tank exploded in Monsanto, Illinois.

The damage to the tower was described as an 8’ x 10’ opening in the roof, which scattered bricks, stones, slate, and other materials onto the pavement below. Fortunately, no fire ignited the heavy timber structure of its octagonal roof with four dormers. Insurance agreed to pay for the rebuilding, estimated at \$1,000, as long as the church provided sufficient lightning protection.

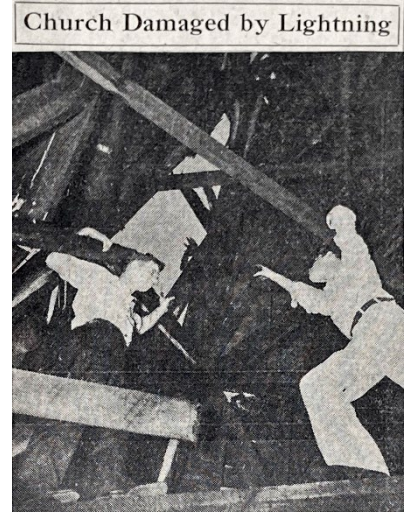
There was a justified fear of another lightning strike, so a comprehensive cathodic protection program was undertaken. Woermann set to work on this project immediately and climbed the tower to examine the damage that day. He noted the cost of the slate alone would be about half the budget.

According to Woermann’s notes and measurements recorded on a legal pad, there were two lightning strikes that day. All the heavy timber at the church’s highest point of the

church posed a fire danger if struck in a future storm. Woermann immediately prepared alternatives for repairing the roof. Eames appears to have developed preliminary sketches by July 18. Ultimately, he proposed eliminating the existing tower roof entirely and replacing it with a low-profile pyramid of standing seam copper. By lowering the height of the roof, it was then possible to emphasize the presence of the new cross raised high above the peak.



Colorized postcard view of Pilgrim Congregational Church prior to lightning strike of 1935. Image from eBay.



Church Damaged by Lightning

Illustration for article on lightning damage due to heavy thunderstorms. View from the interior of the tower’s roof. The photograph depicts two young men examining the damage. From *The St. Louis Star-Times*, Friday, July 12, 1935. Image courtesy of the State Historical Society of Missouri (SHSMO).



Charles Eames’s sketch for proposed new tower roof as a low pyramidal shape. Image from the State Historical Society of Missouri (SHSMO).

The ornament at the top of the historic tower was damaged, so Eames specified a ten-inch ball of spun copper to surmount the remaining base. He created a light-weight, three-dimensional cross combining cast bronze with wrought copper elements that were, at once, decorative flourishes and structural supports. He combined the tall,



Charles Eames. New bronze and copper cross atop the tower. Note the flared ends of each member as indicated in the sketch as well as the thin diagonal members supported with scrollwork. Photograph © Andrew Raimist.



Detail of Eames's sketch for the cross superimposed over the diagonals of Chi Rho. The sketch suggests these forms would occupy one plane. As executed, two intersecting planes repeat the pattern without the circle indicated. Image courtesy the State Historical Society of Missouri (SHSMO).



New pyramidal, low-slope standing seam copper roof minimizes the visibility of the roof, allowing for more emphasis on the cross raised high above. This roof also fits the Italianate style of the tower more than the original Victorian design. Photograph © Andrew Raimist.

extended Latin Cross with diagonally oriented members of the Chi Rho in two perpendicular planes. These geometries reflect his interest in repeated and reflected symmetrical forms combined with Christian symbolism to create a resonant visual element floating above.

In April–May 1936, an exhibition of Catholic art was held, which featured works by Eames and Emil Frei, who had just collaborated on two Catholic churches in Arkansas that were receiving attention for their innovative artistry. Eames &

Walsh were undoubtedly hoping to continue their series of liturgical projects with new commissions.

FREE ART EXHIBITION By the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae Assembly Hall—Ninth Floor

Catholic colleges, high schools, and academies are represented in the fine exhibition of oils, water colors, costume and interior designs, soap sculpture, batik crafts, hand painted china, clay modeling and wood paint. There is also a display of ecclesiastical and lay art by well-known professionals including paintings by Gottfried Schiller and Charles Guest, vestments and altar pieces by Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, O'Fallon, Mo. Stained glass by Emil Frei and church art by Charles Eames. The exhibition closes Thursday, May 7.

Advertisement for exhibit of Catholic Art by Frei, Eames, Quest, and others through Thursday, May 7. Notice from Friday, May 1, 1936 edition of St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Courtesy of Historical St. Louis Post-Dispatch online archive.

Fashioning a Lighted Sign, 1937

In 1937, Pilgrim Church commissioned Eames to design an internally lit sign for its main facade. The sign would be mounted on the solid red granite wall opposite the tower at the facade's north end. The splendid result fully matched their confidence in his judgment and creativity.

The sign was intended to catch passers-by's attention and identify the edifice. The lettering was carefully chosen concerning its size and legibility while remaining true to the character of the church. The sign has recently been expertly refurbished. This was to be his last project for Pilgrim, although no one could have known that at the time.

The forms and symbols displayed in the sign reflect the experience of designing and building two Catholic Churches in Arkansas. Emil Frei was integral to their unusual form-making for those two free-standing masonry churches. The church in Helena, in particular, features an entire ensemble of Eames-designed details, including light fixtures, stained glass, altar, pews, heavy timber framing with inscribed lettering, Stations of the Cross, and the clergy's vestments. These experiences contributed to the richness of form and symbol used in designing Pilgrim's sign. By this time, Eames was fully conversant in the language of liturgical art. He was able to address solving complex problems with consideration for recognizing the client's needs, the concerns of society at large, and the genuine interests of the designer. He ultimately encapsulated these ideas in a dynamic diagram presented at the Louvre in their exhibition "What is Design?" In answering questions posed by the curator, he made it clear that intentionally attempting to be "original" was a fool's errand.



Charles Eames designed this internally lit sign for Pilgrim Church in 1937. It features Greek crosses alternating with stars at the top. In the second and fourth rows water, fish, loaves, crowns, and stars appear. The five horizontal bands almost appear like metal type set to be printed. Eames had a great deal of interest in typography since his days working in a printshop. He was focused on creating the proper image and message while creatively tackling the problem with an unusual approach to signage. The section at the center of the fifth row was set aside for a piece of transparent glass with the pastor's name. Photograph © Andrew Raimist.

Eames was always committed to respecting historical precedent as part of the evolution of design ideas and forms. He saw no contradiction between modern, classic, and indigenous approaches to design. Each was acceptable on its terms and worthy of respect if they “solved the problem” creatively, beautifully, and meaningfully. Concerning the notion of intentionally trying to be original, Eames said, “. . . to be realistic, one must always recognize the influence of those that have gone before.” (Design Q & A, Louvre, Paris, 1972).

St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat, Saturday Morning, December 4, 1937.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

“Decorative Art in the Church” will be discussed by two artists, Emil Frei and Charles O. Eames, tomorrow night before the young people of the Pilgrim Fellowship, at Pilgrim Congregational Church, Union boulevard and Kensington avenue, at 6:15 o'clock.

Announcement of Sunday school talk “Decorative Art in the Church” by Emil Frei and Charles O. Eames, *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, Saturday, December 4, 1937. *Newspapers.com*.

St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat, Saturday Morning, January 22, 1938.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

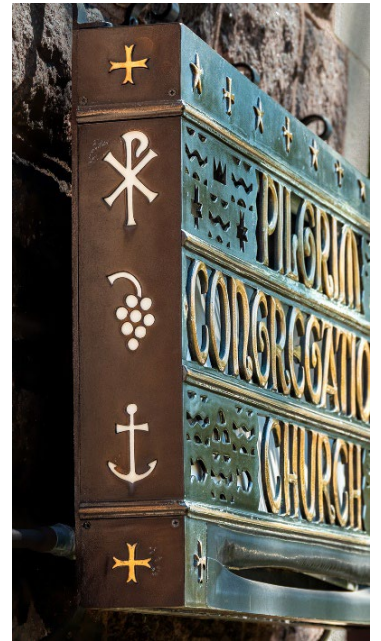
Pilgrim, Union boulevard and Kensington avenue, Dr. Truman B. Douglass: 9:40 a. m., church school, class for young men and women, address by Edward M. Snider, “The Books of History;” adult class, Charles O. Eames, “Religious Symbolism;” 11 a. m., sermon by Rev. Virgil E. Foster, “The Undiscovered Gift;” 11:20 a. m., second session church school; 6:15 p. m., Mayflower Club at church, discussion of “Smoking and Drinking,” led by Dr. Park J. White; Pilgrim Fellowship at church, G. Donald Gibbins, “West of the Aleutians.”

Announcement of Sunday school talk “Religious Symbolism,” by Charles O. Eames, *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, Saturday, January 22, 1938. *Newspapers.com*.

On December 4, 1937, Charles Eames and Emil Frei gave a Sunday school talk on “Decorative Art in the Church.” They had previously spoken together on the meaning and uses of Christian symbols and forms in various contexts. This Sunday School talk for Pilgrim church became their final joint statement on the potential development of liturgical design in the coming years. Charles gave another talk on “Religious Symbolism” about a month later. At the time, it may have looked like ecclesiastical design would play a significant role in his career.



Detail view of sign with crown, cross, fishes, and loaves punched through the bronze face. Photograph © Andrew Raimist.



Side view with Chi Rho, grapes, and anchor punched through the bronze side walls. These symbols correspond to the three lines of type on its front face. Photograph © Andrew Raimist.

Eames left St. Louis in the summer of 1938 to attend Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. They moved from their home in St. Louis County to Cranbrook Academy. Charles, Catherine, and Lucia lived in Building 78 on Academy Road. His Cranbrook experience was transformative personally, intellectually, and creatively. The later efflorescence of excellent design would not have occurred without his Cranbrook experiences. In 1941, he divorced Catherine in Michigan and married Ray Kaiser in Chicago. These events led to them moving to California and pursuing their life-long, fruitful design partnership.

COMPTON HILL WATER TOWER

The Compton Hill Water Tower and the need for stabilization and preservation efforts was featured in a segment on Living St. Louis, NINE PBS, on Monday, November 13, 2023. You may view the segment on YouTube with the link below.

Compton Hill Water Tower Closed to the Public | Living St. Louis - YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZOW-mzfkD0>

Society of Architectural Historians St. Louis Chapter/ St. Louis Public Library – Steedman Architectural Library 2023 Lecture Series

St. Louis Public Library – Central Library
1301 Olive St, St. Louis, MO 63103
Zoom webinar, with Fall Lectures also in-person in the Auditorium of the Central Library.
fourth Tuesday of the month
(except for Thanksgiving week)
6:30 pm – 8:00 pm

to view past talks, see the Library's YouTube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/@STLPublicLibrary/search?query=stedman>

2023 Spring

John C. Guenther, FAIA, LEED AP
Architect
“Gyo Obata – Architect”
February 28, 2023

Esley Hamilton,
Past Preservation Historian, St. Louis County Parks
“The Architecture of Dublin, Ireland”
March 28, 2023

© 2023 **News Letter**

The Society of Architectural Historians
St. Louis and Missouri Valley Chapters

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- Spring Issue 15 February
- Summer Issue 15 May
- Fall Issue 15 August
- Winter Issue 15 November

St. Louis and Missouri Valley Chapters, SAH 2023 – 2024 Board of Directors

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Andrew W. Hahn
Executive Director, Campbell House Museum
The Photos of Dr. Wm. Swecosky — The Dentist who became the “Pallbearer of Old St. Louis”
April 25, 2023

2023 Fall

Robert McCarter
Ruth and Norman Moore Professor of Architecture,
Washington University in St. Louis
“Louis I. Kahn: The Eternal and the Circumstantial”
September 26, 2023:

Meg Lousteau
Director, Cultural Resources Office, City of St. Louis
“When Bad Things Happen to Good Buildings”
October 24, 2023

Andrew Raimist
Architect, Historian, Educator
“Charles Eames’s Ecclesiastical Work: 1932 to 1936”
November 28, 2023:
<https://slpl.bibliocommons.com/events/63d7f3c29e00b42800d27a29>

Andrew Raimist’s talk will be in-person and via Zoom. Register with the link listed below to receive a link to join via Zoom.
<https://slpl.bibliocommons.com/events/63d7f3c29e00b42800d27a29>
It will also be livestreamed on YouTube@STLPublicLibrary.

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