



# NEWSLETTER

Preparations are now complete for our next Biennial meeting in Minneapolis, which will be at the convention center over November 12 -14 with accommodations arranged at the Hilton Hotel accessible by those nice warm bridges that the city is famous for! More information is inside on registration, which is now open, the program and tours.

At the same time the program is shaping up for the 5th International Congress in Chicago next year. The scientific committee has accepted over 250 papers from the 485 abstracts which were submitted. Committee members were impressed with the quality, range and scope of the topics making the selection a difficult undertaking. For those of you fortunate to be on the list, author's guidelines have been posted.

As the Chicago meeting is being held at the Palmer House Hotel, our costs are going to be higher than the usual previous venues at University facilities. This means we need to raise sponsorship money to close the gap and ensure that we can put on a good show. That campaign is underway and it would be a big help if all members can direct potential sponsors to the website [www.5icch.org](http://www.5icch.org) or pass on their names to Melanie at [melaniefeerst@gmail.com](mailto:melaniefeerst@gmail.com)

Finally the usual plea for short articles for this newsletter and any news you would like to pass along.

Brian Bowen  
Chair, Management Committee

Don Friedman  
Newsletter Editor

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*Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest*

## THANKS TO OUR INSTITUTIONAL AND CORPORATE MEMBERS

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- \* Associated General Contractors of America
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## THOMAS JEFFERSON BUILDS HIS RETREAT

In the summer of 1806 President Thomas Jefferson put aside his duties in Washington, D.C. and traveled to remote Bedford County, Virginia to help lay the brick foundations of a house. This foundation, which the bricklayer “was not equal to himself,” was for no ordinary building. Jefferson’s necessary skill probably had to do with the geometry of laying out the unusual shape of the house, one that was his lifelong favorite: an octagon. The construction of Jefferson’s private retirement retreat was off the public radar and for the fourteen years he lived there, he kept it that way. Poplar Forest was many things. It was Jefferson’s most perfect architectural work meant to be his inspiration. It was his dream house where he could indulge “his fancy.” It was a radically modern American work. It was one of the best definitions of the centuries-old Roman villa. It was the most Palladian American work in the real essence of what that meant. And it was a psychological necessity for a man who coveted peace and quiet for his intellectual pursuits. After retiring in 1809 from forty years in public life, and returning to

his beloved Monticello that was just being completed after forty years, Jefferson began what we can consider the lost missing link of his architectural works.

The same bricklayer and carpenter who had previously worked at Monticello, and who would later work at the University of Virginia, constructed Poplar Forest while corresponding almost weekly with President Jefferson. This correspondence is one of the rarest documentations of an early American building. Not only were Jefferson’s detailed instructions very explicit, he frequently educated the workers through his letters about his rationale for using certain forms or materials. Rarer were the workers’ letters to the President’s House. And rarer still were the letters between enslaved craftsman John Hemings, who executed the finished trim at Poplar Forest, and Jefferson, who might be a three-day journey back at Monticello. Hemings, who had trained under two Irish carpenter/joiners at Monticello, was not only literate, he was literate in the language of classical architecture.



*Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest*

Poplar Forest was privately lived in until 1979 and rescued as a museum property in 1983. Since 1990 it has undergone an extraordinary restoration not only using Jefferson era materials and techniques but following the historical sequence of how Jefferson completed the house from 1809 to 1823. Interior trim is currently being made from antique poplar wood from the property by two craftsmen using antique planes for the neo-classical moldings. One of the most Jeffersonian features of the house was a 100-foot service wing after those Palladian style wings used at Monticello. Just prior to the Poplar Forest wing, which never got its symmetrical wing, Jefferson had added two such wings to the President's House. The significance of these wings was the flat deck over a hidden roof system, Jefferson's only architectural invention that he improved upon for almost twenty years of use at several projects.

Thomas Jefferson was one of the most experienced builders in America, having spent his lifetime studying the processes and technologies of materials and construction. He took to heart the first century Roman Vitruvius's advice that an architect had to know the practical art of building in addition to the theoretical traditions of design. His education of, and relationship with, his builders was unprecedented. Jefferson's role as a designer and builder had begun with Monticello when he was 26. By the time he built Poplar Forest, he had absorbed five years of observation of European practices, he had rebuilt Monticello in a sophisticated design and construction manner, and he had intimately directing the construction of public buildings in Washington, D.C. In the peace, quiet and inspiration of Poplar Forest, Jefferson conceived and planned what he called "the hobby of my old age," the University of Virginia. This was to be his apogee of building construction where he had not only conceived a new type of university, formulated its curriculum, selected its professors, chosen books for the library, ordered scientific instruments for its laboratories, and fought for the public funds to construct it, Jefferson had also de-

signed the buildings, written detailed technical specifications, reviewed builder's contracts, recruited workers from afar, insisted on quality materials and workmanship, and supervised what was the largest construction project in the country. To the many other titles he has acquired, we can honor Thomas Jefferson the Builder.

Travis C. McDonald

Director of Architectural Restoration

Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest

#### GENERAL ENQUIRY

This email received recently. If anyone can help please contact Ms. Brees directly.

"I was wondering if you know of any articles about old construction methods that have to do with penny set windows and dime set doors?

We are fixing up our house and when we removed a picture window we found wheat back pennies spaced on the sill. My husband said they used to use pennies to set in windows and dimes to set in doors. I've been looking for articles about this method of construction, but have had no luck.

Our house was built in 1906, its a 2 story house with a barn style roof.

Thank you. It was very interesting finding these pennies. The earliest one was from 1907. They are all wheat back pennies.

Sincerely,  
Brenda S. Brees"  
bbrees@gmail.com

## CHSA 2014 BIENNIAL MEETING, MINNEAPOLIS, MN

The Construction History Society of America (CHSA) is joining the AIA Minnesota Convention for CHSA's 4th Biennial Meeting, from November 12-14, 2014 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. National and international CHSA members will attend and join a community of AIA practitioners passionate about regional architectural, preservation, and construction history.

We are pleased to offer a wide variety of short presentations on construction history topics, panels, tours, and networking opportunities, hoping to shed light on our collective past as it informs the present and the future of our built environment, culminating in a rich discussion and tour of the Minnesota State Capitol restoration. All are welcome to register and attend the thematic presentations.

The Minnesota AIA Convention begins on Tuesday, November 11th, with CHSA events beginning Wednesday, November 12th. Registration includes access to all AIA Minnesota Convention events and the Exhibit Hall. Continuing Education credits are available at many sessions. [Click here to download the Convention program](#), or click on the links below for more information about each session and event.



*Minnesota State Capitol*

### CHSA Sessions and Events

#### Wednesday, November 12:

- 9:30am – 11:00am: Event 19 – Legacy Design and Detail
- 11:00am – 1:00pm: CHSA-Member Bus Tour: Seventh Street Helicoidal Bridge
- 1:00pm – 2:30pm: Event 25 – Leadership & Remembrance
- 2:45pm – 4:00pm: Event 30 – Engineering and Design Legacy

#### Thursday, November 13:

- 9:30am – 10:45am: Event 42 – Historic Materials
- 11:00am – 12:15pm: Event 47 – Landmark Preservation: Basilicas
- 12:00pm – 2:30pm: CHSA-Member Walking Tour: *An Architect's Stories from the Mill City Museum Construction*
- 2:30pm – 4:00pm: Event 50 – Engineering History
- 4:15pm – 5:30pm: Event 54 – Legacy Organizations
- 5:30pm – 7:30pm: CHSA Member Reception – Movie Night with Mortenson Construction: *The Making of the Union Depot*

#### Friday, November 14:

- 7:30am – 9:00am: CHSA Board Meeting
- 8:30am – 10:00am: Event 60 – Mid-Century Modern
- 10:15am – 11:45am: Event 64 – Landmark Preservation – Minnesota State Capitol Restoration
- 12:00pm – 2:00pm: AIA Minnesota Keynote and Lunch: "The Loyalty Switch" by James Kane
- 2:30pm – 5:00pm: Event 66 – Minnesota State Capitol Tour
- 5:30pm – 7:30pm: CHSA Reception at the Minneapolis Club
- 6:00pm – 11:00pm: AIA Awards Celebration recognizing Julie Snow, FAIA; CHSA Informal Gathering

## CHSA 2014 BIENNIAL MEETING, MINNEAPOLIS, MN

## Tours for CHSA Members

**Wednesday, November 12, 11:00 am – 1:00 pm**

**Tour the Seventh Street Helicoidal Bridge**

A walking tour guided by Benjamin Ibarra-Sevilla, Assistant Professor of Architecture at the University of Texas at Austin Designed by William A. Truesdal, and constructed in 1883-1884 by Michael O'Brien and McArthur Brothers of Chicago, this double-arched, masonry highway bridge that spanned the St. Paul and Duluth Railroad tracks in St. Paul is historically significant for its rarity and the technically demanding nature of its skewed, helicoidal spiral, stone-arch design. The bridge is one of the few of its type in the United States, and is the only known bridge of its type in Minnesota. The bridge was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1989 and on the American Society of Civil Engineers Historic Civil Engineering Landmarks in 2000.

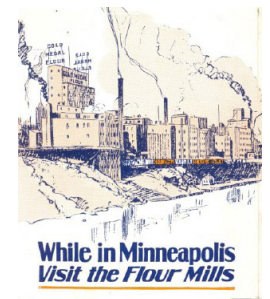


**Thursday, November 13, 12:00 pm – 2:30 pm**

**An Architect's Stories from the Mill City Museum Construction**

A walking tour guided by John Stark, AIA, Project Architect, BKV Group

The Washburn Crosby Mill was the largest flour mill in the world when it was built. Shut down in 1964, it was ravaged by a fire in 1989 and left in ruins. The Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) was able to stop the fire fighters from using their hose to knock down the remainder of the building walls. The City of Minneapolis stabilized the building, and for almost 10 years it sat empty waiting redevelopment. In 1997 a visionary developer teamed up with MHS and began architectural designs. Numerous discoveries and stories took place as history was uncovered, and the museum and tenant spaces above took shape. Stories of these discoveries and how the building affected the design will be told as you walk the public space in what is now Mill City Museum.



## CHSA Member Receptions

**Thursday, November 13, 5:30 pm – 7:30 pm**

Movie Night with Mortenson Construction: The Making of the Union Depot

Popcorn: Buttered or Plain? You decide when you join us Thursday November 13th for a happy few hours of networking and movie magic, sponsored by Mortenson Construction. Sit back and relax after a day of learning with the recently released film Back on Track: The Rebirth of St. Paul's Union Depot, a documentary by Greg Ellis about the renovation of this historic structure in St. Paul. Ellis' film, a detailed chronicle of the dramatic renovation of the historic depot and the meticulous work by dedicated teams of architects, engineers, construction workers, historians and preservationists culminated in the transformation of the building from an empty, decaying state back to its magnificent original glory complete with modern amenities. Appropriate refreshments will be provided. 3-D glasses not required.

**Friday, November 14, 5:30 pm – 7:30 pm**

Reception at the Minneapolis Club – 729 2nd Ave South, Minneapolis, MN 55402

Please join us for the concluding event of the 2014 Biennial Meeting of the Construction History Society of America. Solidify your new relationships, say goodbye to old friends, and enjoy a drink before dinner out on the town. Cash bar and light appetizers provided. Business casual attire. Parking provided in the Minneapolis Club Parking Ramp on 8th St. South.

## Registration

Registration for the AIA Minnesota Convention includes registration for the CHSA Biennial Meeting. CHSA members receive the regular AIA Minnesota member discount, as well as a \$20 credit toward CHSA membership in 2015. There is also a discount for online registrations.

Registration for the Convention and Tours can be found at the AIA Minnesota Convention website.

## Hotel accommodations

The Hilton Minneapolis

1001 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55403

\$129 single/double through October 12

For reservations, call 1-888-933-5363 or 612-376-1000 (use code AMC for reserving your room). Or for online hotel reservations, visit [www.aia-mn.org/convention](http://www.aia-mn.org/convention).

## 5TH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

JUNE 3-7, 2015, PALMER HOUSE HOTEL, CHICAGO, IL

Progress with our preparations continues apace. Major activity since the last newsletter in July has included:

- The Scientific Committee has reviewed the 485 papers received (three reviews minimum per paper) and accepted approximately 280 for delivery at the Congress. These are now being sorted out into sessions.
- Author Guidelines have been devised and posted at the website ([www.5icch.org](http://www.5icch.org)) which includes a template.
- Selection of local tours is underway. These should be posted at the website shortly.



*Jack Knife Bridge over Chicago River*

- We are close to finalizing the registration arrangements and amounts. Current thinking is to open registration in January.
- Fund-raising to close the gap between registration fees and outlays is well underway with Marvin Levine taking the lead. Response has been generally encouraging but it is hard work and any leads from you our members will be appreciated.

**WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS**

Marcio Oliveira, Brasilia, Brazil  
John Lambert, Abstract Masonry Restoration Inc., Erda, UT  
Julia Manglitz, Treanor Architects, Lawrence, KS  
Robert M. Frame, Mead & Hunt, Minneapolis, MN  
Casey Cline, Boise State University, Boise, ID  
Travis McDonald, Poplar Forest, Lynchburg, VA  
Stanley Sklar, Dispute Resolution Services, Northbrook, IL

## WHO WE ARE

The Society is dedicated to the study of the history and evolution of all aspects of the built environment—its creation, maintenance and management. It is a forum for scholars and professionals in the field to share, meet and exchange ideas and research.

Membership is open to a wide range of construction related disciplines involved in the planning, development, design and construction of buildings and engineering infrastructure, in addition to those concerned with their operation and preservation.

Members share a passion for examining how our existing structures were planned, designed and built, with the purpose of using this knowledge to better preserve what we have and to guide us in determining future directions.

The US branch of the Construction History Society is a distinct entity catering to the historical studies and interests of its members here in America. Membership in the US branch includes full benefits in CHS at large, including receipt of the Society's Journal and newsletter and links to scholars in the field worldwide.

## CORRESPONDING SOCIETIES

Public Works Historical Society, [www.pwhs.net](http://www.pwhs.net)

Historical Construction Equipment Association, [www.hcea.net](http://www.hcea.net)

Society of Architectural Historians, [www.sah.org](http://www.sah.org)

## MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Brian Bowen (Chairman), GA Tech, Atlanta, GA

Tom Leslie (Secretary), Iowa State University, Ames, IA

Jeff Beard, Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA

Jenn Cappeto, Cappeto Conservation LLC, Denver, CO

Benjamin Ibarra-Sevilla, University of Texas, Austin, TX

Lee Gray, University of North Carolina, Charlotte, NC

Peter Hilger, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN

Donald Friedman, Old Structures Engineering, New York, NY

Stephen Buonopane, Bucknell University, PA

Rachel Will, Wiss Janney Elstner, Chicago, IL

Construction History Society Representative  
James Campbell, Cambridge, UK

## COMMITTEE ADVISORS

Frank Matero, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA

John Ochsendorf, MIT, Cambridge, MA

THIS IS YOUR NEWSLETTER AND THE ONLY VEHICLE WE HAVE TO KEEP IN TOUCH WITH ONE ANOTHER.  
SO PLEASE USE THIS TO LET US KNOW:

- \* your interests in construction history, your current research, précis of recent lectures, etc.
- \* books, texts & articles that your fellow readers should know about
- \* names and e-addresses of colleagues and friends that we can include on our mailing list
- \* if you are willing to write a brief article for us.

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