

# THE STONECUTTERS

John T. Sielaff

COMPLETED IN 1905 after nine years of work, the Minnesota capitol building was by far the largest construction project the state had ever seen. Much has been written about the challenges the project posed to architect Cass Gilbert and the era's politicians. Now, as the building undergoes major restoration, is a good time to recognize the contributions of the building's original contractors and workers. Many tradesmen—including carpenters, bricklayers, plumbers, sheet-metal workers, ironworkers, and hoisting engineers—labored on the job. When one looks at the capitol, however, its most obvious feature is the enormous quantity of precisely cut and carved marble. Ginny Lackovic, an architect who has been involved in the restoration since 2005, reflected: "This building is really a monument made



Carving capitals with pneumatic tools in the stone shed. The carver at left is probably St. Paul native Louis Faulkner.

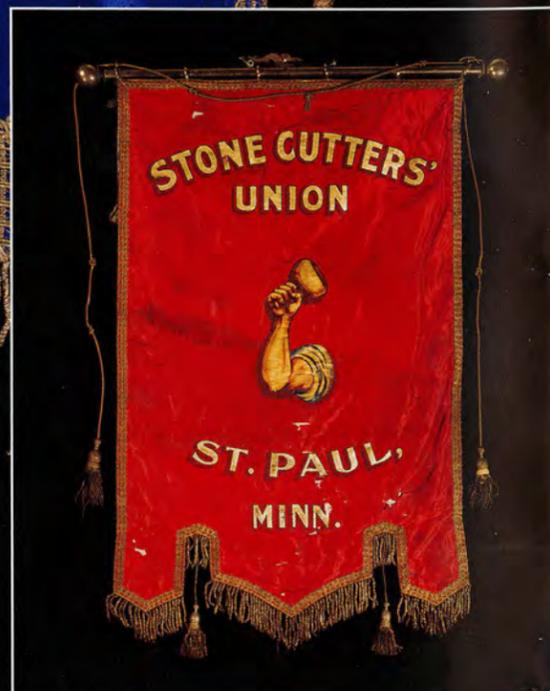
of stone. . . . The exterior is about stone. The interior is also stone. There are 38 different types [of stone], but one type of wood."<sup>1</sup>

One hundred years ago, stonecutters and carvers were respected members of the building trades. Although the evidence of their expertise endures, little has been written about their profession or their lives. Skilled stonecutters, mostly European-trained immigrants, not only shaped and carved the capitol's exterior stone but also its interior staircases, balusters, and handrails.<sup>2</sup> Less-skilled laborers operated stone saws and planers. As it happened,

Minnesota's capitol was built during a time when new technology was drastically changing the centuries-old craft.

IN THE SUMMER OF 1897, Minnesota newspaper commentators were up in arms over the impending decision to use Georgia marble on the new capitol building. Although Cass Gilbert professed to have come to favor marble only after a thorough consideration of the durability, cost, and appearance of various materials, there is evidence that his mind was made up from the beginning. The

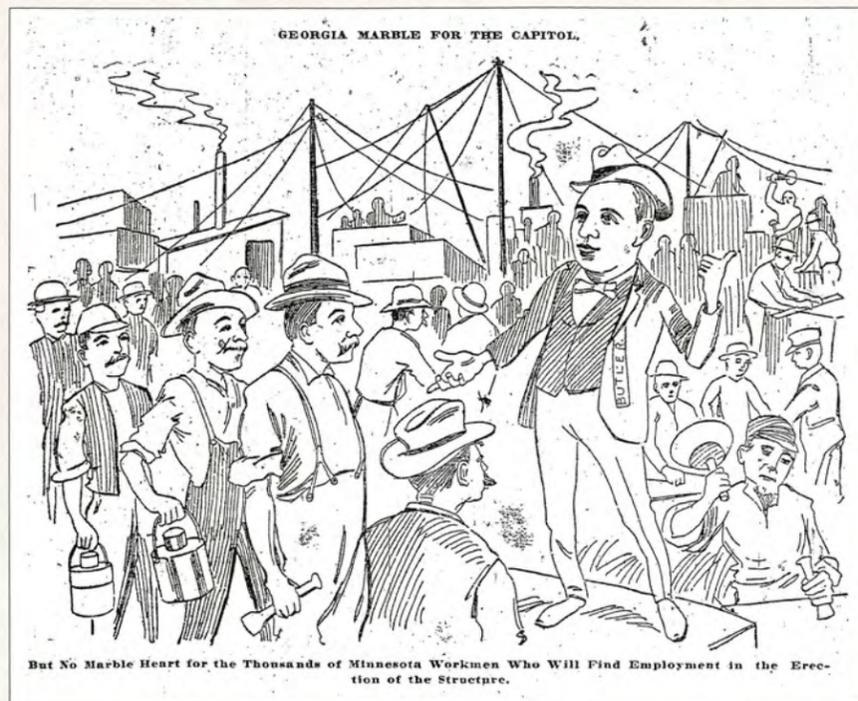
FACING: Silk banner with metallic fringe and tassels, almost four feet long and three feet wide, adorned with a hand-painted image of a working stonecutter (front) and an upraised arm clutching a stonecutter's maul (back). Banners were a source of pride and identification, frequently carried in parades and at conventions.



1893 legislation establishing the Minnesota Board of State Capitol Commissioners to oversee construction stated, "Preference shall in all cases be given to Minnesota materials and labor," and many felt this required contractors to use local stone. Organized labor was said to strongly favor Minnesota stone, and some union organizations passed resolutions to this effect. Actually, labor was divided on the issue. At a "mass meeting" in St. Paul on June 25, 1897, union leaders and local politicians spoke out against the use of Georgia marble, although St. Paul businessmen and union members were notably absent. Maybe it was difficult for St. Paulites to see how the choice of stone would make much difference to them.<sup>3</sup>

The country had been suffering through a prolonged economic depression and, although some people hoped that the large project would boost St. Paul's economy, unemployed stonecutters had not, so far, shared in the benefits. The job was contracted in stages, and when St. Paul builder George Grant constructed the capitol's foundation in 1896, he had used some local material and labor. But his contract required that he build primarily with large blocks of stone from Winona. St. Paul's new Federal Courts building (now Landmark Center), under construction since 1893, was being made of granite quarried and cut in St. Cloud.<sup>4</sup>

Much of the union push for Min-



Front-page cartoon featuring Walter Butler and the marble controversy, published the day after Butler-Ryan was awarded the capitol contract, St. Paul Daily Globe, September 2, 1897

nesota stone appears to have come from the St. Cloud Central Labor Body, which represented that area's Granite Cutters' Union, and from Minneapolis officials, who saw St. Paul as their chief rival. Granite Cutters' Union members worked exclusively with that harder stone and did not even have a branch in the Capital City; St. Paul's stonecutters labored in the local limestone industry, providing blocks for the city's basements, and were members of a different union, the Journeymen Stonecutters' Association of North America. Bucking popular opinion, W. R. Worden, president

of the Minneapolis branch of the Journeymen Stonecutters' Association, submitted a letter to the capitol commissioners arguing that using "soft stone"—marble, limestone, or sandstone—would employ more Minnesotans (namely, his members) than granite, since the size of the job would require importing most of the granite cutters from out of state.<sup>5</sup>

On September 1, 1897, the contract for the superstructure of the capitol was finally awarded to the Butler-Ryan Company of St. Paul. Specifications required that the walls be granite on the basement level and two feet of brick faced with four inches of marble on the upper floors. The choice of a local contractor was celebrated in St. Paul, while the selection of marble was bitterly condemned by the Minneapolis papers. To mollify Minnesota business interests and newspapers, Channing Seabury, vice-president of the Board

*"If the Board does select outside stone for the new building, it will require that it be dressed in St. Paul."*

of State Capitol Commissioners, stressed that the contract included 250,000 cubic feet of Minnesota granite, limestone, and sandstone as opposed to 141,000 feet of marble—and that all stonecutting and finishing would be done in state.<sup>6</sup>

There was not much opposition to the use of marble from St. Paulites. The requirement that labor be performed in state and the fact that the stone was coming from out of state coincided to create a perfect situation for local stonecutters and other workers. As the *St. Paul Globe* had previously pointed out: "If the Board does select outside stone for the new building, it will require that it be dressed in St. Paul," whereas if St. Cloud granite was chosen, "it would practically give no more employment to local cutters than if the stone was dressed at the quarry."<sup>7</sup>

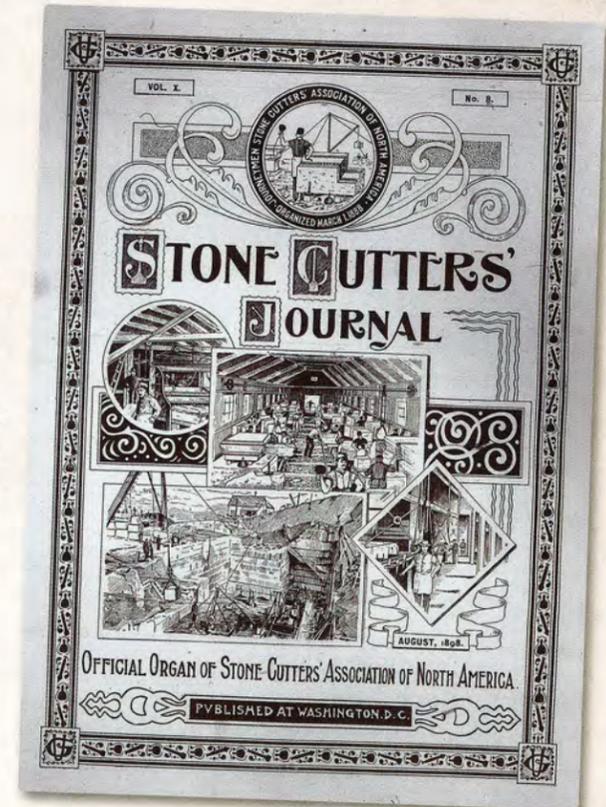
**T**HE JOURNEYMEN Stonecutters' Association of North America, also known to its members as the General Union, or G.U., was founded in 1887, though it had been preceded by several other attempts at national organization going back to the 1850s. St. Paul stonecutters had organized an independent union in 1885; Minneapolis predated them by several years. Although their demand for recognition in the 1880s had first been met with stiff resistance, relations between Twin

Cities stonecutters and their employers were generally harmonious by the time of capitol construction. Stonecutters were among the most highly paid tradesmen in the city at 40 cents per hour and had achieved the eight-hour day by 1897. Many of the bosses had come up through the ranks and were in sympathy with the union's goal of maintaining a high level of craftsmanship, while the workers felt a responsibility to promote the industry.<sup>8</sup>

Whereas many other St. Paul trades employed a full-time organizer or "walking delegate," the stonecutters apparently never felt this need, as all elected officials spent their days working at the trade. High attendance was the norm for meetings, and it was considered both a privilege and a duty to serve the union. During a tough time in 1912, the St. Paul branch reported, "All the officers had volunteered to serve gratis." Members traveled freely between the branches in the U.S. and Canada, and points as far south as Guatemala were considered to be within union jurisdiction. Stonecutters were an independent lot and, since many of the branches had a history much longer than the G.U.'s, it was not unusual for a branch to secede if a disagreement with the international organization could not be resolved.<sup>9</sup>

Members caught violating trade rules were vehemently denounced, and a "scab list" was printed in the *Stonecutters' Journal*, the G.U.'s monthly magazine. If a member wished to make amends, however, he could pay his fine and all would be forgiven. The St. Paul scab list in March 1897 included James Ross, Louis Eschenbacher, and William Hay, all of whom were later readmitted and worked on the capitol. Ross even served as vice-president of the local in 1901, and Hay was its corresponding secretary in 1899. When he died in September of that year, he was eulogized in a letter to the *Journal* and his union brothers served as pallbearers.<sup>10</sup>

**T**HOUGH IT WAS TRUE that building the capitol of granite would have required help from out of state, using marble, a material foreign to most local stonecutters,



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For more information on the work and the workers, including a video documentary, visit [www.whobuiltourcapitol.org/](http://www.whobuiltourcapitol.org/).

also meant importing labor. Gilbert had never before designed a marble building, and the Butlers, bricklayers by trade, had never worked with it.<sup>11</sup> They would need experienced help, and much of it would come from outside Minnesota.

Soon after winning the contract, the Butlers made an unfortunate discovery. They had based their bid on the assurance of a Georgia marble supplier that his price would be 25 cents a cubic foot; they now found that he was incompetent and it would cost them 40 cents. To avert disaster, Walter Butler traveled to Tate, Georgia, and leased a quarry. His brother John lived there and managed the marble extraction. The huge blocks—the largest were 6 feet square, 12 feet long, and weighed more than 36 tons—were shipped on railroad flat cars to St. Paul, then hauled from the depot to the building site on horse-drawn wagons. The youngest of the Butler brothers, Emmett, stated in his memoir that wages in Georgia were 8-to-12 cents

*“Contractor Butler is working the machine saws twenty-four hours a day and the great planers twenty-one hours a day.”*

per hour, about half of what Minnesota laborers got at the time.<sup>12</sup> John Butler probably did not have too much trouble persuading a few of the Southerners to try life in Minnesota. These men were an important part of the work force because they were experienced, both with marble and with running the machines the Butlers purchased to do the initial cutting of the blocks.

In the month after obtaining the contract, the Butlers began building a huge shed at the northwest corner of the capitol site to house stone saws and planers as well as provide a winter shelter for the handworkers. Charles Hubbard, corresponding secretary of the St. Paul branch of the G.U., reported to the *Stonecutters' Journal* in February 1898: “The preparations for the starting

of the capitol are in good progress. The planer shops and saw mills will be built on the most approved principle.” The trade journal *Stone* enthusiastically described the work that later went on in the shed: The sound of the machinery “makes a din at the new capitol, which during the night can be heard for blocks. Contractor Butler is working the machine saws twenty-four hours a day and the great planers twenty-one hours a day.”<sup>13</sup> The “marble saw mill” was quite a novelty, and reporters from the local papers were sent over.

The saws are two long strong steel blades set in a movable rack and drawn to and fro across the blocks. A stream of sand and water is kept pouring over the blocks to feed the saws, so they will not become clogged, but will work through without friction . . . at the rate of four inches an hour. . . . From the saw gang the marble slabs are taken to the planers and polished. The planers look like guillotines [with] knives which are fixed rather than descending blades. Two hours are required for the polishing of a slab six feet long. When the slabs are removed from the planers they are as smooth as glass.<sup>14</sup>

Emmett Butler had this to say about the machine operators: “We

*Hauling marble from St. Paul's railroad depot, down East Fourth Street between Minnesota and Robert streets, to the capitol site*



*Newly built stone shed, April 1898, with piles of uncut marble. A woman posed by the massive blocks provides a sense of scale.*

started out with about one third of the men from Georgia, then we started training local men. . . . The remarkable thing about quarrying marble in Georgia was the type of labor and the very small wages they got and they were very skilled men.” Between 1898 and 1900, 28 men among the hundreds who listed the Butler-Ryan Company as their employer in the *St. Paul City Directory* gave their occupation as planer, sawyer, or polisher. At least 11 of them had lived in Georgia before moving to St. Paul to work on the capitol. Emmett Butler claimed that the company had imported as many as a dozen African American workers from Tate, Georgia, but research to date has identified only five: Coy Johnson, Judge Jarrett, John McMurry, Benjamin Stephens, and Isaac Suddeth.<sup>15</sup>

Several whites also moved to St. Paul to work with the machinery. John Duckett, Phillip Elliott, George

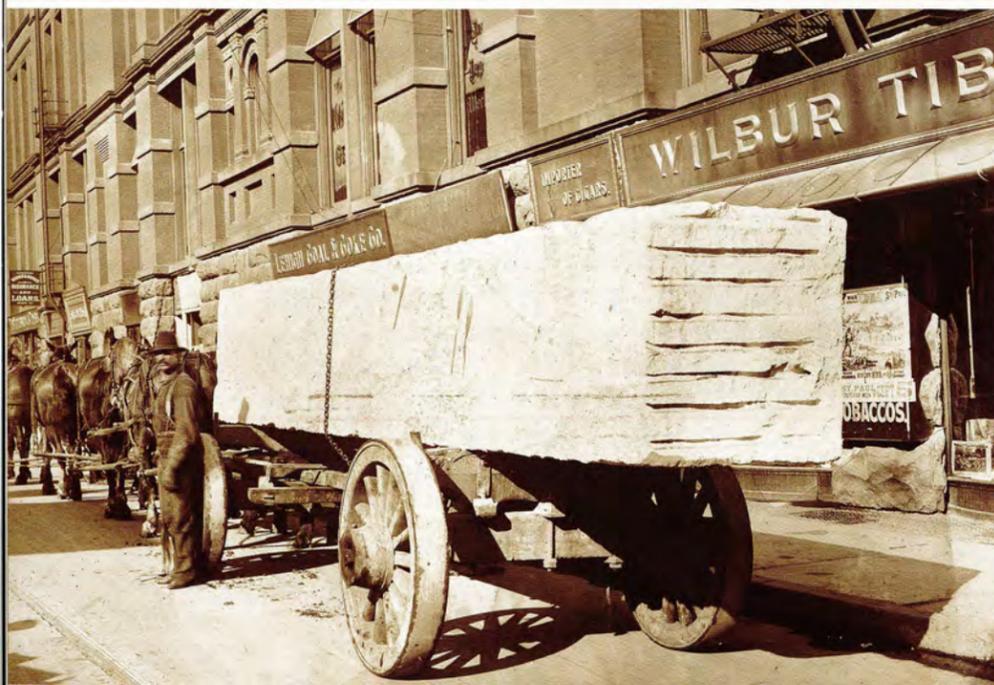
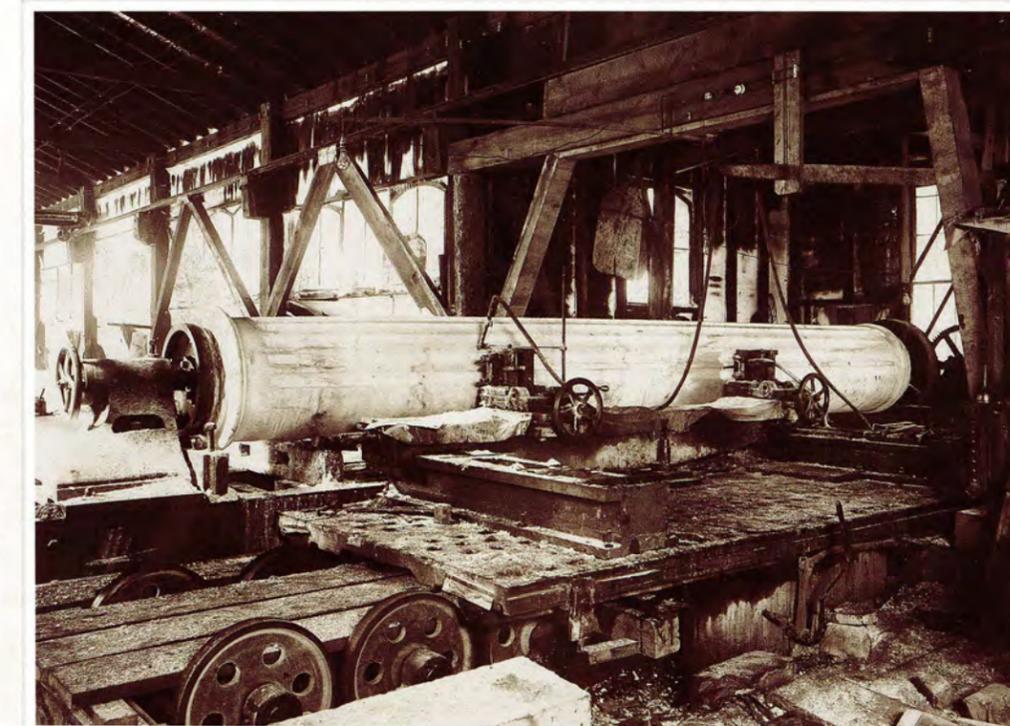
*Butler's invention: a machine for cutting flutes in marble columns, pictured inside the stone shed.*

Wolford, John Humphrey, and Felix Arthur were Georgia natives. Swedish immigrant William Benson also moved from Georgia, where his wife and children had been born.<sup>16</sup> These 11 men were the core of the round-the-clock “sawmill” that produced the marble for the Minnesota capitol.

**S**TONECUTTERS had a love-hate relationship with the mechani-

zation of their industry—but mostly hate. Pneumatic drills used in quarrying and steam-powered stone saws and planers made cut stone more affordable, thus increasing the demand for stonecutters who did the carving and final shaping. As mechanization advanced, however, work customarily done by craftsmen was increasingly accomplished by machine tenders. In St. Paul, as early as 1895, the *Globe* reported that machine planers had reduced the number of skilled stonecutters in the city to 50 from a previous high of 400. The Butlers, for their part, sought to take advantage of the Industrial Revolution's innovations. William Butler even invented a machine for carving flutes in the capitol's marble columns, most likely the one the *Globe* called “the new column machine . . . which does the work in one week that eight men would be obliged to put in six weeks on.”<sup>17</sup>

The stonecutters' experience was not unique. The 1890s saw the building of new and more efficient factories, particularly in the textile and metal industries. The scientific management principles of Frederick Winslow Taylor were in vogue,



and his methods demanded total management control over a highly mechanized workplace, making craft unions with their traditions and work rules irrelevant. In addition, many stone businesses sidestepped city-based unions, locating plants near the quarries and shipping prefinished material to job sites. Machine operators were not eligible for membership in the Stonecutters' Association, which required either demonstrated proficiency as a "practical stonecutter" or the completion of a four-year apprenticeship making the worker skilled in the use of traditional tools.<sup>18</sup>

Stonecutters vigorously debated whether they should admit machine tenders and transform their union from a craft-based one to an industrial model. Some, like Hugh Jennings from Minneapolis, advocated a more radical solution: "The class that makes the machine

must own it if they would escape the chains of industrial slavery." Hugo Reich, who worked on the capitol for several years while also serving on the national executive board of the G.U., summed up his opinion in a 1904 letter to the *Journal*. His vignette could almost be called "A Stonecutter's Day at the Capitol."

Let us imagine this picture: Two stonecutter friends coming home together after quitting time; one works at the banker [workbench], the other at the planer. The first dresses in a neat clean suit of clothes, face and hands clean . . . dressed like a gentleman stonecutter. . . The other brother has blue overalls and jacket, with face and hands all black with grease and dirt; nothing like a stonecutter at all. He might be true at heart and all that, as clothes don't make the man, but it don't fit his craft.<sup>19</sup>



Hugo Reich, 33 years old and "a clever young man," according to Stonecutters' Journal, November 1903

**T**O OVERSEE the stonecutting, the Butlers hired a well-known French Canadian professional. A feature article in the *Stonecutters' Journal* reported: "The preparation of the stone is under the able superintendence of Mr. Joseph Bourgeault, whilst his son, Joseph Bourgeault

*"I made working drawings and lists for stonecutters, a tag for every stone."*

Jr., acts as shop foreman." Born in Quebec, the senior Bourgeault had supervised the stonecutting on a number of downtown St. Paul's commercial structures in the 1880s, including the Germania Bank building, which still stands. During the early 1890s, he was living in Duluth, operating his own cut-stone business. His oldest son, Joseph Jr., played clarinet professionally in a local orchestra; apparently, his day job was foreman in the stone shed. Another son, Albert, worked on the capitol as a stonecutter. Asked for his opinion during the marble controversy, Bourgeault admitted, "Foreign labor will have to be imported at any rate" but a combination of stone would employ the largest number of Minnesotans. "If the building is part granite and part marble all of the stonecutters will have a chance." In a memoir written in 1942, Bourgeault, then 91, remembered the capitol job as "the most complicated and the finest work" of his long career. Initially hired by Butler-Ryan to help with their estimate during the bidding process, he recalled that he spent one hour each day in the stonecutting shed, one on the construction site, and eight in the office, figuring the cutting. "I made working drawings and lists for stonecutters, a tag for every stone."<sup>20</sup>

FACING: Men at work. Stonecutters (left), attired in suits, hats, and vests, working the marble; laborer in overalls (right) watching the crane lift a block, April 1898.



Supervisor Joseph Bourgeault, from the *Canadian Who's Who and Why*, 1914



Thomas Gibney, Stonecutters' Journal, March 1898. Though he came to St. Paul from Georgia, he was born and trained in Ireland.

In addition to Bourgeault, dozens of G.U. members who traveled with their trade converged on the city. It was a time-honored custom that, after completing his apprenticeship, the journeyman stonecutter would spend several years traveling to acquaint himself with local practices and his brothers across the country. The *Stonecutters' Journal*, which regularly reported the movements of members, in June 1898 noted the admission of several men into the St. Paul local by traveling card: Percy Morton, William Ellis, William Harvey, and Thomas Gibney, all from Tate, as well as Xavier Moore from Montreal and Chris Gallagher from Duluth. These stonecutters, like all others in this article, named Butler-Ryan as their employer in the *St. Paul City Directory*. Normally there were 35 men in the St. Paul branch, but in May 1898, when stonecutting at the capitol was at its peak, the *Minnesota Union Advocate* reported 175 members. In March 1907, when the job was over, membership was back at 37.<sup>21</sup>

Emmett Butler remembered one stonecutter in particular, Everett

Shahan, as a key employee. Shahan's father and brother also worked for the Butlers, but Everett was considered the genius of the family. In 1901, at the age of 21, he took on the task of figuring and cutting the hundreds of blocks of marble for the capitol dome. A unique challenge, the dome generated months of discussion between the architect, the engineer, and the contractor. Final drawings, however, do not show detailed instructions for cutting the marble. This task, as was common practice, was left to the skill and ingenuity of tradesmen. According to Emmett's account, Shahan made a model of the dome on the floor of the St. Paul YMCA gymnasium, using it to calculate the dimensions of all the pieces.<sup>22</sup>

The large increase in membership re-energized the Stonecutters' local and helped revive St. Paul's labor movement. Unions had gained a permanent footing with the founding of the St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly in 1882, but membership fell off drastically during the depression of the 1890s. Many locals disbanded or, like the Stonecutters,



barely survived. During the capitol construction years, though, St. Paul labor made decisive gains, both in terms of total members and in forming new unions. The *Minnesota Union Advocate* noted that the Carpenters' contingent of 597 members in 1899's Labor Day parade was a huge increase over the previous year's 37. Thirty-two of St. Paul's 77 locals in 1903 had been founded within the last six years. Laborers and teamsters, who first organized in 1900, did not even have a union when the capitol project began.<sup>23</sup>

In 1897 the Stonecutters, like many smaller St. Paul unions, were not affiliated with the Trades and Labor Assembly. In January 1898 that quickly changed, and Stonecutter delegates became active members of the assembly. They marched en masse in the 1899 St. Paul Labor Day parade, accompany-

ing a float carrying several members carving marble blocks from the capitol. Traveling stonecutter William Hamilton, president of the St. Paul branch in 1899, was also president of the St. Paul Building Trades Council. Michael Giordano, another prominent traveler who served as delegate to the Trades and Labor Assembly, was given a front-page send-off by the *Union Advocate* when he moved to New Jersey in August 1900 after working on the capitol for two years.<sup>24</sup>

The rejuvenated Stonecutters' local was inspired to employ new tactics to expand its share of available work. When the capitol job began, there were no G.U. branches in Kasota, Mankato, or Sandstone. Organizers were sent from St. Paul to remedy the situation. There seems to have been no trouble bringing Kasota and Sandstone into the

fold, and though wages still lagged those in the Twin Cities, it was now possible to apply the union's rules regarding transportation of stone. For example, when the St. Paul branch discovered in 1899 that stone for the city's Luther Seminary was being cut and finished in Sandstone, a committee was dispatched to negotiate with the Minnesota Sandstone Company. They achieved a contract requiring that the stonecutters for that job, though working in Sandstone, would be compensated using St. Paul hours and wages.<sup>25</sup>

**A**S WORK ON THE CAPITOL progressed, stone carving commenced, and this required an additional subcategory of itinerant worker. Butler-Ryan subcontracted the carving to the Chicago firm of Purdy and Hutcheson at the direc-

*"Only the highest class of artistic workmanship will be accepted, and the architect will be the sole judge of this matter."*

tion of Cass Gilbert, who specified that "only the highest class of artistic workmanship will be accepted, and the architect will be the sole judge of this matter." Frederick Purdy and William J. Hutcheson, both carvers themselves, were admitted into the St. Paul G.U. branch in 1899. Carving included the 12 large eagles encircling the capitol dome, the 6 eight-foot figures symbolizing "Virtues" that stand above the main entrance, the capitals of some 50 columns, and a wealth of other decorative details. For the Virtues, the carvers copied smaller models sent by the sculptor, Daniel Chester French; the work was executed with pneumatic and hand tools in the relative comfort of the stonecutters' shed. For much of the other decorative work, carvers made plaster models using the architect's drawings and then commenced carving *in situ* on scaffolding.<sup>26</sup>

On April 28, 1900, Alfred Swanson and Frank Thiery were erecting a scaffold in preparation for the carving when a rope they were using to lift material became entangled in the wheel of a wagon hauling stone. The scaffold was pulled down, and they were thrown 40 feet to the ground. Thiery landed on a pile of

*Scaffold for in situ carving, April 28, 1900. The photo in the Capitol Commissioners' album dates the image May 1, but the back of an identical print in the New-York Historical Society bears Cass Gilbert's note: "2 men fell from scaffold . . . the same afternoon this photo was taken. Swanson was killed."*

sand and broke a leg, but Swanson struck some beams on the way down and was killed. Single and apparently having no relations in the city, he lies in an unmarked grave at Pioneers and Soldiers Cemetery in Minneapolis.<sup>27</sup>

Most of the carvers were temporary residents of St. Paul, although some had previous Minnesota ties and some stayed on. Hutcheson was born in Glasgow, Scotland, and had worked there as well as in Paris before emigrating in 1880. His American career had taken him to numerous cities, including Minneapolis, where he worked on Burton Hall at the University of Minnesota in 1894. He moved to St. Paul with his wife and daughter after the capitol project and died there in 1907.<sup>28</sup>

German emigrant George Schmid first arrived in St. Paul in 1882 and

was a carpenter. He traveled to Munich in 1889 to study carving, and then returned. Minnesota-born Louis Faulkner cleared into the St. Paul branch in July 1899, coming from Albany, New York, though he had joined the St. Paul local at a young age and served as its recording secretary in 1887. Herman Schlink lived in Minneapolis and is credited with much of the stone carving on that city's Turnblad mansion, now the American Swedish Institute. Albert Corwin, though he later settled in St. Paul, had no previous link to Minnesota. He was corresponding secretary of the Tate branch in November 1897 and may have found out about the capitol job at that time. Several architect reports refer to Hutcheson and Corwin working on the Virtues.<sup>29</sup>

**T**HE YEARS OF THE CAPITOL'S construction marked a high point both locally and nationally for the Journeymen Stonecutters' Association. Writing in 1916, George E.

## ORGANIZING RURAL STONECUTTERS

Nationwide, it was becoming common to have stone cut in quarry towns and then shipped to building sites. Precutting reduced the price of shipping, and labor cost much less in the rural quarry areas. If this practice was allowed to continue unchecked, urban stonecutters would find themselves without work. The Journeymen Stonecutters' Association's 1890 *Constitution* (Article 14) attempted to address the problem: "This Association will not countenance the transportation of cut stone from one place to another unless the wages and hours are equal; except in such cases where the interchange of work between two branches is mutually agreeable without regard to wages or hours."

Of course, this rule could only be enforced if all involved were union members, so the G.U. worked to organize men at the quarry towns and raise their wages to a level that would not undercut their urban brothers'. Various branches also tried a combination of additional strategies to discourage shipping pre-cut stone, with mixed success. Some lobbied government bodies to require that stone for civic projects be

cut on site, while others tried to convince business groups that using local labor was in their best interest. In 1901, for example, the Minneapolis local got city aldermen to reject bids from private contractors and have the work for a new water system done by local stonecutters, supervised by the city engineer. But the next year the Pillsbury Library was built using non-union Vermont marble. Ultimately, the union found it awkward to oppose building a library and instead took a "generous view of the situation, placing their interests as citizens above those as artisans."

*Minneapolis Journal, July 24, 1901, 7, July 27, 1901, 7, Aug. 2, 1901, 9, June 20, 1902, 6, July 12, 1902, 7 (quote); Minneapolis Tribune, May 17, 1902, 6; Stonecutters' Journal, July 1902, 7.*



Well-used maul and selection of chisels: points for roughing out stone, toothed for shaping and modeling forms, and flat for finishing surfaces and details.

Barnett of Johns Hopkins University estimated that mechanization had diminished the number of stonecutters in the country from 20,000–25,000 in 1900 to 10,000 at the time of his study.<sup>30</sup> Changing architectural styles also reduced demand for cut stone. Stonecutters used a variety of strategies to deal with the disappearance of their jobs. Carvers were better able than others to cope with mechanization, as they had been using pneumatic tools in addition to traditional ones for years. Although mechanization speeded up the pace of work, their skilled hands were still needed.

Travel was one coping strategy. Albert Corwin had moved his wife and five children to St. Paul while he worked on the capitol. The family settled there permanently, and he was active in the union, serving as president of the local in 1911. Yet his picture appeared in the *Stonecutters' Journal* in May 1918 when he was employed in Winnipeg. George Schmid was working in San Francisco in 1920, though he and his wife raised a large family in St. Paul.<sup>31</sup>

Many G.U. members who had come to St. Paul for the capitol used their union contacts to find jobs elsewhere when that work was done. Thomas Gibney moved to Helena to work on the Montana capitol and then to San Francisco, where he served as president of the local for a number of years. Still in the trade at the age of 61 in 1933, he died in a fall while working on the San Francisco post office.<sup>32</sup> Camille Steffen and his father-in-law Louis Pinsounnault were active in the St. Paul local before moving to Los Angeles in 1904, where they were working as stonecutters in 1910.<sup>33</sup> John Berrisford eventually moved to Bloomington, Indiana, as the Bedford limestone



St. Paul native and traveling carver  
Louis Faulkner, 1893

district continued to need stonecutters for several decades.<sup>34</sup> Hugo Reich, a former president of the St. Paul local, also moved to Indiana to work as a foreman in the limestone industry, eventually settling in Illinois.<sup>35</sup>

Some skilled stoneworkers managed to stay put. Alexander Fraser, who had emigrated from Scotland in 1870, and Michael Strom, originally from Illinois, were two of the earliest activists in the St. Paul union. Both continued in the profession and raised families in the city. Fraser had been a delegate to the St. Paul Trades

and Labor Assembly in 1890 and Strom represented the local at the G.U.'s 1892 convention.<sup>36</sup>

Most stonecutters were familiar with other masonry trades, and some used those skills to stay employed. In 1910 Charles Duchesne was working as a stone mason and John Lundgren as a tile layer.<sup>37</sup> Other capitol stonecutters, as they got older, opted out of the construction industry. Two prominent members of the St. Paul local, Otto Raschick and Arnold Riebstein, had left by 1920 to become a post office clerk and a building inspector, respectively. In a time before pensions and Social Security, they must have considered themselves lucky.<sup>38</sup>

For the machine operators, mechanization was not an issue. Several of the African Americans from Georgia continued to find employment in the Minnesota stone industry, becoming early pioneers in the mass exodus of blacks from the South now known as the Great Migration. Judge Jarrett usually listed his occupation as laborer, but the 1910 U.S. census found him working in Kasota as a stone polisher. He brought his mother and sister with

her family to St. Paul and lived out his life there, eventually working as a dining-car waiter for the Northern Pacific Railroad and retiring in 1954. Benjamin Stephens and Isaac Sudeth also stayed and raised families in St. Paul, working in construction as stone finishers. Isaac's son, Oscar, was hired as a marble polisher at the capitol in 1904 when he was only 17.<sup>39</sup> Coy Johnson and John McMurtry, on the other hand, left Minnesota without a trace soon after their work was done.

Only two of the white Southerners who worked with the stonecutting machinery—William Benson and John Duckett—settled in St. Paul when the capitol was completed. Duckett, single when he came from Georgia, was a stone sawyer in the shed. He and his Minnesota-born wife, Emma, raised a family in St. Paul, where he became a bricklayer.<sup>40</sup> William Benson seemed determined to adapt to the changing stone industry. He got a job with a stone contractor in St. Paul, and his sons Thomas and Walter followed him into the trade. In 1915 Thomas, only 25 years old, died of

so-called tuberculosis. (Silicosis accompanied by tuberculosis was an all-too-common fate for stonecutters in an era free from safety regulations or dust protection.) In the 1920s William and his younger son, Walter, were employed as planers by C. H. Young Co., a large stone contractor. By this time machine workers were union members, and in 1921 William served as president of the Twin Cities local (the two branches merged in 1917). In 1929 Walter moved to Indiana, where he was a planer in the Bedford limestone industry and a union member. Meanwhile, according to the 1930 U.S. census, William, then 63, was a marble worker for a wholesale marble shop in St. Paul. The *Stonecutters' Journal* reported in August 1932 that William Benson had died while visiting his son. Cemetery records list his cause of death as tuberculosis complicated by myocarditis.<sup>41</sup>

Felix Arthur, another of the white workers from Georgia, was the first of six men killed during the capitol's construction. On May 4, 1898, his leg was caught in the drive belt of a marble planer in the stonecutting shed.

His body was sent back to his family for burial.<sup>42</sup> Fellow Georgian Phillip Elliott moved to Sandstone to work in the quarry and died there in 1913 of what his death certificate called "pulmonary tuberculosis stonecutter's phthisis."<sup>43</sup>

**A**NYONE WHOSE JOB has been de-skilled or eliminated by mechanization and management decisions will find the stonecutters' struggle to maintain their dignity and make a living a familiar one. A strong union tradition, although challenged by the transformation of the industry, was instrumental in helping the stonecutters navigate through the changes. It is fortunate—for them and for us—that the Minnesota State Capitol was constructed in an era when new machine technology made stone affordable yet there were still many skilled artisans to execute the required detail. When we look at the capitol, we should recognize that the Journeymen Stonecutters' persistence in maintaining a high level of craftsmanship enables us to enjoy the results of their labor today. ☐



## Notes

The author especially thanks the other members of the *Who Built Our Capitol?* project—Randy Croce, David Riehle, Victoria Woodcock, and Dan Ganley—and historian Peter Rachleff for their suggestions; Woodcock and Riehle also discovered the names of workers killed on the job. Thanks also to architect Ginny Lackovic and to Croce, for interviewing her; the Butler family, for providing Emmett Butler's memoir; Barb Swanson, for providing the memoir of Joseph Bourgeault, her great-grandfather; and architect Tom Blanck, for the use of photos.

1. Ginny Lackovic, interview by Randy Croce, Nov. 2010, transcript, 5, [www.whobuiltourcapitol.org/interview-architect-ginny-lackovic](http://www.whobuiltourcapitol.org/interview-architect-ginny-lackovic). Neil B. Thompson, *Minnesota's State Capitol: The Art and Politics of*

*a Public Building* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005) is the latest and best telling of this story.

2. In 1893, 72 percent of the state's known stonecutters were foreign born; *Biennial Report of the Minnesota Bureau of Labor Statistics* (St. Paul: Pioneer Press Co., 1895), 178.

3. Thompson, *State Capitol*, 24, 32–33; *An Act to Provide for a New Capitol for the State of Minnesota . . . General Laws of 1893* (St. Paul: St. Paul Dispatch, 1894), 11, copy in Minnesota Board of State Capitol Commissioners, Records, State Archives, Minnesota Historical Society (hereinafter Commissioners records and MNHS); *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 24, 1897, 7; *St. Paul Globe*, June 25, 1897, 2. The executive board of the St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly had met with representatives of the St.

Cloud Granite Cutters' Union and, at their urging, passed a resolution favoring Minnesota stone and convened the rally; St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly, Organization Records, Minutes, 2: 215 (Sept. 25, 1898), MNHS.

4. *St. Paul Globe*, May 1, 1896, 8; *Winona Daily Republican*, June 4 and 5, 1896, both 3; Eileen Michels, *A Landmark Reclaimed* (St. Paul: Minnesota Landmarks, 1977), 31.

5. *St. Paul Globe*, Aug. 29 and 31, 1897, both 2. Although Minneapolis had a Granite Cutters' local, the St. Cloud local claimed jurisdiction over St. Paul; St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly, Minutes, 3: 120 (Sept. 23, 1898).

6. *Globe*, Sept. 1, 1897, 1, 8; "Sundry Reports," 65, and "Specifications," 20, in Scrapbook, 1893–1907, Commissioners rec-

ords. Gilbert's specifications seem to present marble as the economical choice: "If Marble is selected for the exterior face work, all ashlar shown as six inches and ten inches thick, may be reduced to four inches thick."

Michael Ryan left the partnership on May 1, 1902; the successor company, Butler Brothers, finished the job. George Carsley, Report, May 1, 1902, Cass Gilbert Collection, Dept. of Prints, Photographs, and Architectural Collections, New-York Historical Society, New York City (N-YHS).

7. *Globe*, Aug. 12, 1897, 2.

8. *Globe*, Apr. 5, 1885, 5, Apr. 11, 1886, 7, Mar. 9 and 30, 1886, both 2, June 5, 1889, 2; *Stonecutters' Journal*, Sept. 1897, 16, Wisconsin Historical Society, Labor Collections, Madison. St. Paul stonecutters had no problem increasing their hourly wage from 40 to 45 cents in 1900 and to 50 in 1902; *Stonecutters' Journal*, June 1900, 5, Mar. 1902, 6.

9. *Stonecutters' Journal*, Feb. 1912, 12; N. R. Whitney, "Jurisdiction in American Building-Trades Unions," *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, 32 (1914): 19; George E. Barnett, "The Stonecutters' Union and the Stone-Planer," *Journal of Political Economy*, 24 (May 1916): 422. For examples of strife, see Whitney, "Jurisdiction," 78, 84; *Minnesota Union Advocate*, July 25, 1902, 3.

10. *Stonecutters' Journal*, Mar. 1897, 5 (scab list), Nov. 1899, 15; *Globe*, Oct. 1, 1899, 12, Dec. 27, 1901, 5; *St. Paul City Directory*, 1898-1900.

11. Walter and William Butler were founding members of the Bricklayers Union in St. Paul, and Walter was president of St. Paul Local #1 in 1884 and 1885; Bricklayers, Masons and Cement Blocklayers Union Local No. 1, Records, 1: 186, 192, MNHS. In 1995 Walter Butler, grandson of the company founder, said, "We were told to vote Democratic, go to mass once in a while, and support Local #1"; interview by Susan Granger, Casiville Bullard file, State Historical Preservation Office, MNHS. Emmett Butler talks about learning to lay brick; Emmett Butler and Larry Fitzsimmons, "The Emmett Butler Memoir," 26, unedited version, ca. 1951-52, [www.whobuiltourcapitol.org](http://www.whobuiltourcapitol.org).

12. *Stone: An Illustrated Magazine*, June 1898, 47; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Feb. 27, 1898, 9; Butler, "Memoir," 79-84.

13. *Stonecutters' Journal*, Mar. 1898, 5; *Stone*, June 1898, 47.

14. *Globe*, Apr. 18, 1898, 2. See also *Pioneer Press*, Feb. 27, 1898, 9.

15. Butler, "Memoir," 80, 95. These men were found in U.S., Census, 1900, Population, St. Paul: Johnson, Ward 4, Precinct 1, enumeration district (e.d.) 83, sheet 11; Stephens (Sephens [sic]), Ward 8, Precinct 11, e.d. 133, sheet 16; Suddeth (Sidell), Ward 4, Precinct 11, e.d. 91, sheet 2; Jarrett (Jarett),

Ward 7, Precinct 8, e.d. 42, sheet 11; McMurtry, Ward 8, Precinct 12, e.d. 38, sheet 31; *St. Paul City Directory*, 1899-1905. All census information, here and below, from *Ancestry.com*.

16. U.S., Census, 1900, Population, St. Paul: Duckett (Duckilt [sic]), Ward 9, Precinct 6, e.d. 144, sheet 11; Elliott, Ward 8, Precinct 6, e.d. 128, sheet 6; Wolford, Ward 9, Precinct 2, e.d. 139, sheet 4; Benson, Ward 9, Precinct 7, e.d. 144, sheet 3. For Humphrey and Arthur: *St. Paul City Directory*, 1899-1905.

17. *Stonecutters' Journal*, July 1902, 17; *Globe*, Apr. 28, 1895, 7, Feb. 5, 1898, 10 (column machine); Martin R. Haley, *Building for the Future: The Story of the Walter Butler Companies* (St. Paul: Lincoln House, 1956), unpaginated; Thompson, *State Capitol*, 52.

18. Daniel Nelson, *Frederick W. Taylor and the Rise of Scientific Management* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), 41-46; David Montgomery, *Workers' Control in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 9-27, 113-38; *Constitution and By-Laws of the Journeymen Stonecutters' Association of North America* (St. Paul: L. M. Fisher, 1890), 11-13. All Stonecutter Association constitutions are in the Wisconsin Historical Society.

19. *Minneapolis Journal*, Dec. 13, 1901, 15 (Jennings); *Stonecutters' Journal*, May 1904, 17 (Reich). James P. McHugh, secretary-treasurer of the G.U., solicited opinions from locals on admitting machine tenders. Letters appearing in the November 1901 *Journal* show that almost all members wanted stone planers to be outlawed, and many imagined this could be accomplished if members refused to work on machine-planed stone. See also, Barnett, "Stonecutters' Union," 421-27.

20. *Stonecutters' Journal*, Jan. 1899, 6; U.S. Census, 1900, Population, St. Paul, Ward 9, Precinct 2, e.d. 139, sheet 7; *St. Paul City Directory*, 1898-1900; *Duluth City Directory*, 1895; *Minneapolis Journal*, Aug. 8, 1901, 7; *Improvement Bulletin*, Minneapolis, Oct. 5, 1901, 18; *Globe*, Aug. 19, 1897, 2; Joseph Bourgeault, "Memoir," 4-5, [www.whobuiltourcapitol.org](http://www.whobuiltourcapitol.org). The former bank is at 6 West Fifth Street.

The *St. Paul Globe*, Feb. 28, 1904, 40, reported that the Butlers had a file of more than 39,000 cards, each corresponding to a stone on the capitol's exterior or dome. "Each stone is not only cut to pattern within one thirty-second of an inch, but it is marked with the figures showing its location . . . we could ascertain who cut it and when he did the work"

21. *Stonecutters' Journal*, June 1898, 6, Mar. 1907, page number missing; *Globe*, Nov. 28, 1897, 18; *Minnesota Union Advocate*, May 6, 1898, 5.

22. Lackovic interview, 5-6; Butler, "Memoir," 85-88. Lending credence to the



Lowering an eagle into place atop one of the columns ringing the capitol dome, 1901

story, the *Globe*, Jan. 17, 1902, 6, identified Everett and his brother Earl as members of the YMCA mandolin orchestra.

23. *Union Advocate*, Sept. 8, 1899, 3; *Ninth Biennial Report of the Minnesota Bureau of Labor Statistics* (St. Paul: Great Western Printing Co., 1904), 296-97; *Seventh Biennial Report . . .* (St. Paul: Pioneer Press Co., 1901), 294-95. For Teamsters, first organized as Team Owners Local 120, see especially *Globe*, Mar. 25, 1900, 3. For Laborers, first organized as Mason Tenders, see *Union Advocate*, July 13, 1900, 3.

24. St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly, Minutes, 3: 15 (Jan. 14, 1898); *Globe*, Sept. 5, 1899, 10, Feb. 2, 1899, 10; *Union Advocate*, Aug. 17, 1900, 1; *St. Paul City Directory*, 1898-1900.

25. *Stonecutters' Journal*, July 1898, 7, Apr. 1899, 4, June 1899, 9, 10. Kasota had a local in 1886, but it lapsed until reorganized in 1898.

Often, cutters had no idea of the destination of their work, making the rule difficult to enforce. In 1900 it was found that a job destined for St. Paul was being cut in Kasota at local wages and conditions (\$3.00 for a 10-hour day). The Kasota men pled ignorance and, apparently, the only recourse was to fine the contractor \$20. This tactic may have borne fruit later that year; when the same contractor got the job for the St. Paul jail, he agreed to have the stone cut in St. Paul. *Stonecutters' Journal*, Aug. 1900, 14, Sept. 1900, 6, Feb. 1901, 10.

26. "Sundry Reports," 65, and "Specifications," 19, Commissioners records (quote); Gilbert, Architect's diary, Gilbert collection, N-YHS; *Globe*, Feb. 9, 1899, 8, May 26, 1899, 8; Carsley, Reports, Nov. 20, 27, 1900, Aug. 24, 26, 31, 1901, Gilbert collection. Gilbert also specified which carvings had to be done *in situ*. His drawings allowed the carvers much room for interpretation. Photographs of plaster models for the column capitals

and other details were sent to him for approval before being executed in stone. Judging from *St. Paul Dispatch*, Sept. 2, 1907, 6, Hutcheson was responsible for the models.

27. Newspapers reported that Swanson was a mold caster, but the architect's accident report called him a carver. *Minneapolis Tribune*, Apr. 28, 1900, 7; Carsley, Report, Apr. 27, 1900, and Gilbert, Report, May 1, 1900, Gilbert collection; Minneapolis Pioneers and Soldiers Cemetery, burial record for Alfred Swanson.

28. Ten stone carvers listed Purdy and Hutcheson as their employer in the 1899 *St. Paul City Directory*. On Hutcheson: *St. Paul Dispatch*, Sept. 2, 1907, 6; *Minneapolis City Directory*, 1894; Minnesota death certificate 1907-57-2083 (cause of death: tuberculosis). Hutcheson's name is carved at the bottom of the bas relief sculpture on the exterior of Burton Hall.

29. Schmid: U.S., Census, 1900, Population, St. Paul, Ward 6, Precinct 13, e.d. 113, sheet 1; U.S. Passport Application, Nov. 6, 1889, U.S. Consulate, Munich, Germany, *Ancestry.com*. Faulkner: *Globe*, Apr. 13, 1887, 2; *Stonecutters' Journal*, July 1899, 14; Minnesota, Census, 1885, St. Paul, Ward 4, Ramsey, 15. I am indebted to Anne Faulkner for some of this information.

The American Swedish Institute has photos of Schlink and Corwin working on the Turnblad mansion as well as some of Schlink's carvings; see <http://reflections.mndigital.org> (search Schlink). Corwin: *Stonecutters' Journal*, Nov. 1897, 5, Mar. 1898, 14, Apr. 1898, 14. Virtues: Carsley, Report, Nov. 20, 27, 1900, Gilbert collection.

30. Barnett, "Stonecutters' Union," 419-20.

31. Corwin: *Stonecutters' Journal*, Feb. 1912, 12, May 1918, 12. The December 1921 issue features photos of panels he carved for Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter. Schmid: U.S., Census, 1910, Population, St. Paul, Ward 5, Precinct 13, e.d. 73, sheet 13; U.S., Census, 1920, Population, [Schmidt], San Francisco, Precinct 16, e.d. 149, sheet 1.

32. U.S., Census, Population, San Francisco: 1910, Ward 1, Precinct 20, e.d. 8, sheet 7; 1930, Block 664, e.d. 68, sheet 10. *Stonecutters' Journal*, May 1933, 16.

33. *Globe*, July 26, 1901, 10, Dec. 13, 1901, 8; *Stonecutters' Journal*, Jan. 1904, 5; U.S., Census, 1910, Population, Los Angeles County, Belvedere Township, Precinct 2, e.d. 10, sheet 19.

34. U.S., Census, 1910, Population, [Barrisford], Minneapolis, Ward 7, e.d. 120, sheet 9; U.S., Census, 1930, Population,

[Berrisford], Bloomington, IN, Ward 4, e.d. 53-8, sheet 3.

35. U.S., Census, 1910, Population, Ellettsville, IN, Ward 1, e.d. 140, sheet 3; U.S., Census, 1930, Population, Riverside Village, IL, Ward 3, Precinct 6, e.d. 16-2174, sheet 14; *Stonecutters' Journal*, July 1905, 5, May 1936, 16.

36. Strom: U.S., Census, 1910, Population, St. Paul, Ward 6, e.d. 86, sheet 22; *Globe*, Mar. 9, 1886, 2; *Stonecutters' Journal*, Jan. 1926, 9; *Pioneer Press*, Feb. 1, 1918, 8. Fraser: U.S., Census, 1900, Population, St. Paul, Ward 1, Precinct 1, e.d. 67, sheet 19; *Globe*, Aug. 24, 1890, 11. I am indebted to Fraser's great-granddaughter, Tammy Tell, for her help.

37. U.S., Census, 1910, Population, St. Paul: Duchesne, Ward 9, e.d. 132, sheet 11; Lundgren, Ward 1, e.d. 31, sheet 1.

38. U.S., Census, 1910, Population, St. Paul: Raschick, Ward 4, Precinct 1, e.d. 37, sheet 1; Riebestein, Ward 8, Precinct 2, e.d. 91, sheet 7.

39. Stephens in U.S., Census, Population, St. Paul, Ward 9: 1910, e.d. 136, sheet 13; 1920, Precinct 5, e.d. 108, sheet 4; *Minneapolis Spokesman*, Apr. 14, 1940, 1. Isaac Suddeth: Minnesota, Census, 1905, Population, St. Paul, Ward 8, Precinct 1, e.d. 42, sheet 34; *The Appeal*, May 29, 1909, 4. Oscar Suddeth: *The Appeal*, Nov. 6, 1915, 4. Jarrett: U.S., Census, 1910, Population, Kasota Township, e.d. 67, sheet 5; Death Certificate 1965-MN-006658, Judge Jarret [sic]; *St. Paul City Directory*, 1899-1905; Northern Pacific Railway Co., Personnel Dept. Records, MNHS. Thanks to David Riehle for finding Jarrett in the NPRR records.

Other African Americans, such as Casiville Bullard and Ernest Jones, left the South to work on the capitol, though not as stonecutters. Both were skilled bricklayers born in Tennessee. On Bullard, see Laura M. Weber, "The House that Bullard Built," *Minnesota History* 59 (Summer 2004): 62-71.

40. Duckett in U.S., Census, Population, St. Paul, Ward 10: 1910, e.d. 139, sheet 5; 1920, Precinct 2, e.d. 115, sheet 14; 1930, e.d. 62-181, sheet 27.

41. Death Certificate 1915-MN-021854, Tom H. Benson. William Benson: *St. Paul City Directory*, 1898-1932; *Stonecutters' Journal*, Oct. 1929, 15, Aug. 1932, 7; U.S., Census, Population, St. Paul, Ward 2: 1910, Precinct 1, e.d. 37, sheet 2; 1920, Precinct 1, e.d. 19, sheet 5; 1930, Precinct 2, e.d. 62-28, sheet 22; Forest Lawn Cemetery records, St. Paul; traveling cards signed by Benson, as president, Wisconsin Journeymen Stone-

cutters' Association Records, Wisconsin Historical Society. The union admitted planer operators in 1906 with a special card allowing them only to run machines; stonecutters could work on machine-cut stone only if the machining was done by G.U. members. *Constitution and By-Laws*, 1906, 5, 7. On the merger: *Stonecutters' Journal*, July 1917, 7.

Although workers and their unions had long realized the injurious effects of exposure to dust, not until the 1930s was there widespread recognition that dusty working environments caused permanent lung damage and other problems that might only appear years later. David Rosner and Gerald Markowitz, *Deadly Dust: Silicosis and the Politics of Occupational Disease in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 2-48.

42. *Globe*, May 5 and 6, 1898, both 2. Minnesota first enacted Workers Compensation Insurance in 1913; Shawn Everett Kantor and Price W. Fishback, "How Minnesota Adopted Workers' Compensation," *The Independent* 2 (Spring 1998). Some employers carried insurance for their employees before 1913. Butler Brothers payroll records in November 1905 include a charge for insurance; Commissioners records. Deaths in the construction industry were not unheard of; *Ninth Biennial Report . . . Minnesota Labor Statistics*, 238, reported nine in 1904.

43. *St. Paul City Directory*, 1899-1901; U.S., Census, 1910, Population, Sandstone Township, e.d. 128, sheet 1; Death Certificate 1913-MN-010217. His widow, Lulu, stayed in Sandstone and raised their children. One son, Edward, nine when his father died, followed in his footsteps, becoming a stone sawyer in the quarry. He died in 1985 at the age of 81; Death Certificate 1985-MN-004770.

*The photo on p. 5 is courtesy the Collection of the New-York Historical Society; p. 7, 10 (top), 11 (right), and 14 (bottom) are courtesy the Wisconsin Historical Society Labor Collection; p. 9, 10 (bottom), and 13 are from the Capitol Commissioners photo album, courtesy architect Tom Blanck. All others are in MNHS collections; banner and tools (belonging to Swan Pearson, a foreman who worked on the James J. Hill house) photographed by Jason Onerheim.*