

THE REASON FOR ICONS

Just as artists, sign their paintings and authors use by-lines, construction workers followed a long-standing tradition by placing artistic images as symbols of protection, and reminders of hopes and important values. Milwaukee City Hall, when built, the "tallest inhabited building in the world" for four years (1895-99), deserves that its idealistic origins and its brave workers be given such recognition and respect.



Although the City Hall contains a partial puddled-iron frame within its tower, it is primarily a masonry masterpiece – equivalent to thirty stories, in a five-story world at that time. It is appropriate to select a symbol from the greatest time of masonry glory, when stone-carved guardians watched over important buildings, as a salute to the intrepid workmen, and the goals of democracy and fairness which inspired them. May their ideals be achieved for all people.

To symbolize the tradition, a replica of these carved-masonry watchful guardian-spirit grotesques (sometimes called gargoyles) has been donated to the Milwaukee City Hall

Some of such artwork is a form of signature, and clearly workers on large or difficult projects, naturally are inclined to take pride in their work, and in a job well-done. They also typically wish to express hope and good will for the future of their creation. The tradition is still strong among stone-carvers and steel-workers, where it is possible to exercise discretion, sometimes privately and secretly, despite a modern world of canned cad-cam methods, battalions of inspectors, and no discretion or departure without change-orders, re-costing, multi-level meetings, and endless copious debate. —Charles R. Baumbach

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A SYMBOL TO
HONOR WORKERS
WHO BUILT

MILWAUKEE'S HISTORIC CITY HALL

TRIBUTE TO THE INTREPID WORKERS, THE
LABOR MOVEMENT, AND THE SPIRIT OF JUSTICE
OF THE PEOPLE OF MILWAUKEE, WHOSE
RESPONSE TO THE 1886 BAY VIEW MASSACRE
BUILT THE ICONIC MILWAUKEE CITY HALL
(TALLEST BUILDING IN THE WORLD: 1895-1899)
AND A CENTURY OF BETTER, MORE IDEALISTIC,
BIG-CITY GOVERNMENT

On May 5, 1886, the State Militia fired upon 1500 workers marching in support of the eight-hour day movement, killing at least six in the Bay View Massacre, Milwaukee's most tragic labor event.

In the months following, the shock of the community and the solidarity of the working people of Milwaukee brought about a new dedication and commitment to justice and fairness, resulting in the election of an ad hoc "Peoples Party" which won all offices in the fall elections of 1886, freezing out the Democratic and Republican Parties for several cycles.



Charles J. Baumbach

The idealist local government conceived a bold proud monument to public hopes for good government. It built a new City Hall, making it "the tallest inhabited building in the world," a distinction it held from 1895 to 1899.

The Milwaukee City Hall is a symbol of idealism, invention, hard work, and achievement. Among the workers who scaled the scaffolds to build this historic structure was Charles J. Baumbach, a mason/bricklayer, who arrived as a teenager from Europe in the 1870s, with perhaps several years of Mason's Guild Apprenticeship in Germany.

The 34-inch tall icon (shown on back page) symbolizes how workers left their mark on the construction of important buildings has been donated by his grandson, Charles R. Baumbach, in November, 2009, on behalf of the people of Milwaukee, the labor movement, the ideals involved, and his grandfather.

May Justice and Human Rights triumph!

CITY HALL: A MONUMENT

Milwaukee's choice of a noteworthy building symbolized its hope for good government

In August, 1891, the Common Council, in part with a view to creating a respectable home for city government, voted to have a design contest for a new City Hall to replace the old tiny two-story one. But before plans were complete, the Panic of 1893 began: the worst national economic disaster in U.S. history to that time. It lasted four years and, at times, up to 40 % of the Milwaukee work force was reportedly unemployed. The final City Hall concept certainly turned out to be a mixture of characteristics that various political forces could agree upon.



Previous City Hall

By August, 1893, starving unemployed workers began marching and demanding government relief. Somehow the grand City Hall Project proceeded. Perhaps it was even enlarged and expedited as an anti-depression action. The cornerstone was laid in February, 1894, with completion and occupancy in December, 1895. Some tower details and the final installation of the eleven-ton bell, named Solomon Juneau, took approximately another year.

For many reasons, including the dramatic design, and size of the project, as well as its efficient construction, the whole Milwaukee community, its citizens and all of the workers involved, swelled with undying pride. For a few years, Milwaukee's City Hall was not only the biggest and grandest in the U.S., but the tallest inhabited building in the world. It is intriguing to wonder what forces precisely came together to create this unique monument... and whether there may be further clues hidden within the cornerstone of the building.

By chance, Philadelphia, which started a bigger, grander, and more opulent City Hall in 1871, still hadn't finished theirs until 1901. When completed, it became the tallest building in the world (1901-1908), and had cost about \$34,000,000 compared to Milwaukee's cost of about \$1,000,000 and a construction time of less than two years.

Arguably, today Philadelphia's City hall is the biggest in the U.S., and Milwaukee's may be the second biggest, in one sense or another. But many other facts give Milwaukee additional evidence for its long-held reputation of audacity, practicality, efficiency, resilience, and honesty.

As the four-year "Panic of 1893" wore on, despite terrible statistical drop-offs in production and disastrous unemployment, losses, business failures, and other disasters, after four years, jobs and production recovered and the Mil-



waukee economy boomed again, though other cities did not fare as well or so soon.

*According to Milwaukee historian John Gurda, even though "robber barons and political bosses vied for space on the front page, and venality, not morality, seemed to govern both political and corporate life" for many years, at the worst of times, "a strong countercurrent of reform was never far beneath the surface."



Workers at City Hall

EPILOGUE

The Milwaukee City Hall was born during an unstable period between 1886 and 1910, during which the local Labor Movement took form, and after which a long period of relative local government stability ensued. The City Hall represents the first dramatic expression of the idealism and many good qualities which made Milwaukee famous.

*Again, to quote Historian Gurda, "Local residents [in 1895] realized that the building was more than a seat of government. ...City Hall was first prize in a pitched political battle that virtually defined the period." And by 1910, "Milwaukee became the first large city in America to be governed by Socialists." —Charles R. Baumbach, *San Francisco, California December 2008*

*From "The Making of Milwaukee," John Gurda, *Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1999.*

COMPARING CITY HALL

MCH is the Tallest Inhabited Building in the World (1895-1899): 112m. (353ft) w/o flagpole.

Preceded by: Manhattan Life Ins. Bldg, NYC (1894): 106.1m. (348ft) high.

Followed by: Park Row Bldg, NYC (1899): 119.2m. (391ft) high.

Ignored?: Potala Palace, Tibet, Home and Offices of Dalai Lama et al until 1959, "(Built 1645-1694): 117m. (384ft) high, contains 1,000 rooms, 10,000 shrines, 200,000 statues."

Famous Structures to Compare [Neither approach the height of the Milwaukee City Hall.]

Statue of Liberty (1886): 93m. (305ft) incl. 47m. (154ft) pedestal – MCH 39% higher.

Leaning Tower of Pisa (Built 1173-1372): 56.7m. (186ft) tall – MCH nearly twice as high.