

APPLICATION FOR NOMINATION HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

The undersigned hereby applies for Nomination of the following property to be considered for designation as a landmark or historic district, as authorized in section 599.220 of the Minneapolis Code of Ordinances.

1. Street Address of Affected Property:

2200 Park Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55407

Legal Description:

PID: 35-029-24-22-0014

Municipality: MINNEAPOLIS

Addition Name: G N MERRIAMS ADDN TO MPLS

Lot:

Block: 002

LOTS 1 2 AND 22 AND THE N 25 FT OF LOT 3 AND THE N 25 FT LYING E OF
THE W 62 FT OF LOT 20 AND THE S 14 FT LYING E OF THE W 62 FT OF
LOT 21 AND THE N 36 FT OF LOT 21

2. Name of Applicant and Relationship to Property:

Applicant: Commissioner Sue Hunter Weir, Mpls Heritage Preservation Commission

Researcher: Ryan Knoke

Architectural Analysis (Criteria #4): Richard L. Kronick

Address:

Daytime Telephone:

3. Name of Property Owner (if different than applicant):

Address:

Daytime Telephone:

Does the property owner support this nomination? ___ Yes ___ No

(If "Yes", attach a statement signed by the property owner that he/she is aware of and supports the nomination.)

4. Describe the historical, cultural, architectural, archaeological or engineering significance of the property. Include copies of any original building permits. Describe the physical condition of the property and whether the property retains sufficient integrity to convey its significance. State how the property meets at least one of the criteria for designation as a landmark or historic district contained in Section 599.210 of the Heritage Preservation Regulations. Attach additional documentation as needed:

SIGNIFICANCE: The subject property may be eligible for local designation as an individual landmark under criteria 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6.

Criteria #2: The property is associated with the lives of significant persons or groups.

Sumner T. McKnight Family

Sumner T. McKnight Sr.

Sumner T. McKnight Sr., born on April 2, 1836, in Truxton, NY, is a significant figure in the history of Minneapolis and the State of MN. McKnight was a highly successful lumberman, Minneapolis real estate pioneer, and well-known philanthropist and supporter of the arts, and he played a key role in the City's early growth and expansion. He was President of the S. T. McKnight Company, which built the McKnight building, one of Minneapolis's first modern skyscrapers. He married Eugenie M. Manville (b. April 1848; d. August 30, 1903) on September 30, 1868. Sumner Sr. and Eugenie's home at 2200 Park Avenue was well known for hosting many lavish parties, and important social and charity events. Often these events were written up in the local papers and touted as "the most important social event of the [week/month/year]." The McKnight's Park Avenue home was also well-known for its extensive art and antique collection. By the late 1890s, Mr. McKnight., having reached the pinnacle of his success, had begun taking more time for traveling the world, especially throughout Europe, collecting highly valuable antiques and art works. Soon 2200 Park Avenue became known for its seventeenth century furniture and paintings—particularly those of the French painters of the Barbizon school. Sumner McKnight Sr's antique and art collections were written up in feature articles in the *Minneapolis Journal* (*Minneapolis Journal*, April 25, 1903, page 11: "Some Fine Painting Owned in Minneapolis: The S.T. McKnight and J. S. Bell Collections").

In July, 1908, Sumner McKnight Sr. suffered a heart attack, and after a three-week illness, complicated by pneumonia, he died on August 3, 1908, in his Park Avenue home. Funeral services were held at the home at 3 p.m. on August 7, 1908. It is said that his death caused great sorrow not just in Minnesota, but throughout the country. In keeping with a lifetime of philanthropy, Mr. McKnight willed a good deal of money to various charitable causes, including the Home for Children and Aged Women in Minneapolis, Westminster Presbyterian Church, and the YMCA.

After Sumner McKnight Sr's death, his son, Senator Sumner T. McKnight Jr., continue to live with his family at 2200 Park Avenue until 1935, marking 43 years that the mansion was in the McKnight family (see "Senator Sumner T. McKnight Jr" below).

After Sumner Jr. moved out, the McKnight family home sat vacant for some months. By April, 1935, the City of Minneapolis had slated the mansion for dismantling and demolition. On April 9, 1935, it was announced in the *Minneapolis Journal* that the Northwestern College of Speech Arts had received approval from the City Planning Commission to purchase the mansion in response to a petition of Elmer Keefe of the D. C. Bell Investment company on behalf of the college who had been trying to rescue the landmark property for use as their school. The mansion remained in the hands of the Northwestern College of Speech Arts until 1963 when it became a nursing home. ("Old Residence Will Be School: Approval is Given for Use of Old Landmark in City," *Minneapolis Journal*, 1935).

Much is written—and readily available—about Sumner T. McKnight Sr. and his significant influence on Minneapolis and the region. Below is just one example:

Bio of McKNIGHT, Sumner T. (b.1836), Hennepin Co., MN
EXTRACTED FROM: History of Minneapolis, Gateway to the Northwest;
Chicago-Minneapolis, The S J Clarke Publishing Co, 1923; Edited by: Rev.
Marion Daniel Shutter, D.D., LL.D.; Volume I - Shutter (Historical);
volume II - Biographical; volume III - Biographical
=====

Vol III, pg 569-570

Vol I, pg 333 photo

SUMNER T. McKNIGHT

No man had a more just claim upon the esteem, respect and honor of fellow townsmen than did S. T. McKnight of Minneapolis, for many years most actively and extensively engaged in the lumber business, while later he devoted his attention to real estate activity in Minneapolis and was the builder of the first modern office building of the city. While a man of broad vision, his plans were at all times practical and met every demand of present-day conditions. So largely did Mr. McKnight contribute to the substantial development and upbuilding of this section of the country that his death was most deeply deplored by hundreds who had been his associates in commercial enterprises, or had watched with keen interest the part which he played in promoting the real upbuilding of this section of the country.

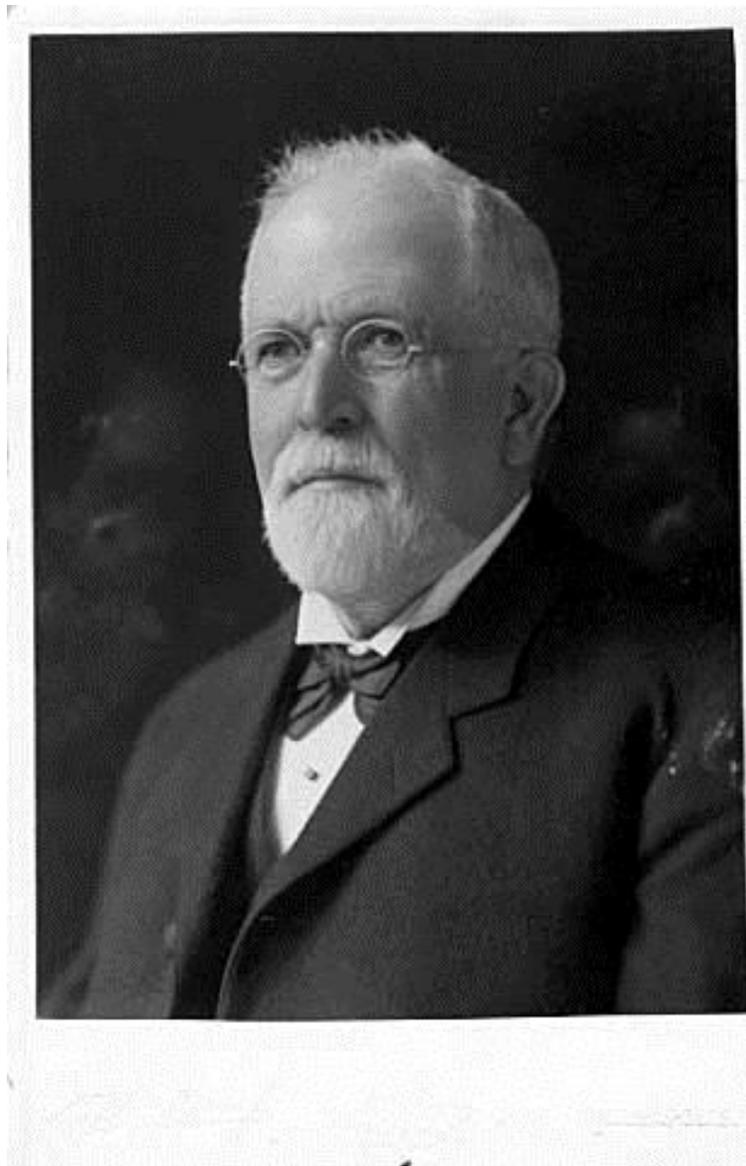
Sumner T. McKnight was born April 2, 1836, at Truxton, New York, and his early years were passed in that city and in Homer, New York, where he attended the public schools. No higher educational opportunities were accorded him but in the school of experience he became a most apt and thorough pupil, constantly broadening his knowledge and promoting his efficiency as he learned the lessons of life. He was twenty years of age when he became identified with the lumber business in Wausau, Wisconsin, and eagerly availing himself of every opportunity for advancement, he eventually established the firm of S. T. McKnight & Company at Hannibal, Missouri. He was always watchful for further chances for the expansion and growth of his business interests and in 1871 he was one of the organizers of the

Northwestern Lumber Company, which was incorporated at Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and of which he became treasurer, continuing in that position from the inception of the company until 1898, when he was elected to the presidency and so served until 1902. In the meantime the extent and importance of his operations had drawn him into prominence in the lumber trade circles of the country and in 1901 he was elected president of the Mississippi Valley Lumbermen's Association, serving as its chief executive officer for two years.

In other fields, too, his labors were wisely and profitably directed. He had been a leading factor in the development of the white pine lumber industry, saw it rise to its highest point and then enter upon its inevitable decline because of the exhaustion of the supply. When one avenue of opportunity seemed closed, however, Mr. McKnight sought out other fields of labor and therein successfully directed his efforts. Long before he had withdrawn from active connection with the lumber industry he had become a prominent figure in financial circles and from 1895 until 1901 was vice president of the Flour City National Bank. In the latter year he became a director of the Security Bank and at the time of his death he was president of the S. T. McKnight Company, which built the McKnight building, one of the lasting monuments of concrete and steel that stand in recognition of his activities. When this skyscraper was completed it marked a new era in construction work. It was paid for in cash the day it was turned over to the owner by the contractor and it has been a center of Minneapolis business activities since its doors were first opened, various leading business firms of the city being here located. Comparatively few men have had such broad practical inclusive and extensive experience in the business world as Mr. McKnight, who during the later years of his life made large investments in Minneapolis real estate and was regarded as one of the most sagacious and conservative men in the city.

On the 30th of September, 1868, Mr. McKnight was married to Miss Eugenie M. Manville of Ripon, Wisconsin, and they became the parents of three children: Mrs. Harriett Crosby, Mrs. Carolyn Christian and a son, Sumner T. McKnight, who continues the business of his father and also is the vice president of the First National Bank of this city and president of the S. T. McKnight Building Company.

He was born in 1885 and is a graduate of Yale University. He served as a captain in the World war and was mentioned as a possible candidate for the appointment to the position of assistant secretary of the treasury. He is a member of state legislature (1923). He belongs to the various prominent clubs of the city, is married and makes his home at No. 2200 Park avenue. He is thus sustaining the enviable reputation associated with the name of McKnight in Minneapolis, where for many years his honored father directed operations that constituted most forceful elements in the city's material growth and expansion. His life history indicates that the sources of our power lie within ourselves and looking at him through the perspective of the years, one notes how he stands out as a man among men in his day and generation, occupying a central place on the stage of action almost from the time that his initial effort was made in the field of business.



Sumner T. McKnight Sr., 1895. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Sumner and Eugenie McKnight Children

Each of the three McKnight children, who at varying times lived at 2200 Park Avenue, are, in their own rights, significant figures in the history of Minneapolis and the State of MN.

Harriett E. McKnight Crosby *(b. Nov 1873 in Mpls, d. August 1, 1949 in Mpls)*

Harriett McKnight married Franklin Muzzy Crosby (1875-1947), on April 10, 1901. A reception for 300 guests was held at Harriett's parents' home at 2200 Park Avenue and the April 10, 1901, *Minneapolis Journal* called it "the most beautiful wedding of the year." Franklin Crosby was the son of John Crosby, Founder of the Washburn Crosby Milling Company, which later became General Mills. Franklin joined the Washburn

Crosby Company in 1898. In 1928, he became a vice president and director of General Mills. Franklin was also active in the community, serving as a director on several corporate boards and as a trustee for a variety of nonprofit organizations, including Abbott Hospital. While living with the Sumner Sr. and Eugenie McKnight at 2200 Park Avenue, Harriett and Franklin made plans for a home of their own, located across the street. Franklin and Harriett commissioned the Spanish Mission Revival-style mansion at 2120 Park Avenue (extant), and in 1903 moved in following the 1902 birth of their first child, Franklin Muzzy Jr. Four of Harriett and Franklin's children were born at 2120 Park Avenue (Eugenie in 1903; Olive in 1906; George Christian in 1911; and Thomas Manville in 1914). The family lived at 2120 Park Avenue until 1941.



Franklin Muzzy and Harriett McKnight Crosby with their family at their 2120 Park Avenue home in Minneapolis, 1920. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.



Harriett, in her wedding dress, with her mother, Eugenie Manville McKnight (center) and sister, Carolyn McKnight Christian. The picture was taken at the McKnight home, 2200 Park Avenue, Minneapolis.

Courtesy of "Franklin and Harriett the Crosby Family Story" by Virginia Huck, Hardcover Publisher: Crosby Co; First Edition, 1980.

Carolyn McKnight Christian (b. September 9, 1875 in Mpls, d. December 13, 1964 in Mpls)

Carolyn McKnight Christian married George Chase Christian on April 27, 1897. George Chase was the son of George H. Christian who was the manager for the Washburn-Crosby Company, which later became General Mills. George H. coordinated the perfection of a "New Process" of milling spring wheat—a new technology that revolutionized the industry and made Minneapolis the flour milling capital of the world from 1880 to 1930. Christian made so much money from the "New Process" that he retired in 1875 to pursue his interest in art, music, philosophy, and philanthropy. The Christian name continued to be associated with flour milling through his two brothers and son, George Chase, who remained active in the business. Carolyn McKnight Christian lived for 36 years at the George Christian Mansion at 2303 Third Avenue S., built in 1919 and designed by the firm Hewitt and Brown (a contributing structure in the historically designated Washburn-Fair Oaks Mansion District). Like her father, Carolyn Christian was no stranger to philanthropy and throughout her life made many charitable contributions to the State of MN, including the endowment of a professorship in cancer research at the University of Minnesota in her late husband's name, and the donation of her house and art objects to the Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts in 1957. The Hennepin County Historical Society purchased the Christian Mansion in 1957.



Carolyn McKnight Christian Mansion / Hennepin History Museum. Courtesy of the Hennepin History Museum.

Senator Sumner T. McKnight Jr. (b. April 6, 1884 in Mpls, d. June 1, 1959 in Mpls)

After his father's death in 1908, Sumner Sr. and Eugenie's youngest child, Sumner T. Jr., continued to live at 2200 Park Avenue until 1935 when he moved his family to Lake Minnetonka, marking 43 years that the Park Avenue mansion was in the McKnight family. Like his father, Sumner Jr was a highly successful businessman, philanthropist, and MN politician. He graduated from Yale University in 1907, and after his father's death became President of his father's S.T. McKnight Company. Sumner also served as Vice President of the First National Bank in Minneapolis, and in 1923 was elected to the MN State Legislature where he served on the House of Representatives until 1928 before being elected MN State Senator for the 1929-1930 Legislative Session. During all of his legislative sessions, Senator McKnight lived at 2200 Park Avenue. Along with his wife, Henriette, Senator McKnight had six children, including Henry Turney McKnight, who also went on to become a MN State Senator during the 1962-1970 Legislative Sessions. Sumner McKnight died on June 1, 1959, just one year after his and his father's namesake foundation, the Sumner T. McKnight Foundation, a well-known supporter of the arts, was established. Today, the Sumner T. McKnight Foundation is presided over by Senator Sumner T. McKnight Jr's grandson, Sumner Thomas McKnight II. Much has been written and is readily available about Senator Sumner T. McKnight Jr. Here is a link to one excerpt: <http://www.leg.state.mn.us/legdb/fulldetail.aspx?ID=13815>



Sumner T. McKnight Jr., courtesy of the 1923-1924 Minnesota Legislative Manual.

Criteria #4: The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of an architectural or engineering type or style, or method of construction.

The Sumner T. McKnight Mansion was built in 1892 for a total construction cost of \$35,950 (\$32,500 construction, plus \$3,450 plumbing and electrical). At the time of construction, the mansion was 50 feet wide and 80 feet deep. The original carriage house was demolished in 1963 and a permit filed for a basement foundation to build a brick addition to the rear of the structure for conversion to a nursing home. This rear addition appears to be the only major exterior alteration to the mansion and does not impair the overall building integrity. The structure still conveys the original design intent of its architects, Bertrand & Keith.

The mansion's exterior is Lake Superior sandstone in the Richardsonian Romanesque Style. This style was created by the Boston architect Henry Hobson Richardson, who, while attending the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris in the 1860s, became enchanted by the 11th- and 12th-century Romanesque buildings of southern France. Richardson's first Romanesque design was Trinity Church (1872-77) on Boston's Copley Square. This and other Romanesque buildings made Richardson famous and prompted architects across the U.S. to adopt his style for large homes, churches, and public buildings. The defining characteristics of the Richardsonian Romanesque style are:

- Exterior walls composed of large rough-hewn stone blocks.
- Naturalistic stone carving of plant forms—usually tightly intertwined vines.
- Prominent use of Roman barrel arches.
- A studied asymmetry.

The bulky stones give Romanesque buildings a feeling of great strength and solidity. The naturalistic carvings suggest that the plant forms and the stone itself might have grown right out of the ground. The asymmetry announces a disregard for classical convention. It has often been suggested that the Romanesque style was popular because these characteristics symbolized the heroic image of 20th century America as the home of strong, self-sufficient men who harnessed nature for the good of humanity. The Sumner T. McKnight Mansion is an excellent example of this—and Mr. McKnight was indeed one of those men.

Interestingly, however, the mansion also has features that work in counterpoint to its predominant Richardsonian Romanesque style. One of these is a hint of classicism in the stone carving above the front door.



Figure 1A: Stone carving over front door (March 2013).



Figure 1B: Close-up of stone carving over front door (March 2013).

An approximately 15-inch-high frieze does represent plant forms as is typical of the Romanesque style. However, uncharacteristically, the plant forms are not naturalistic. Instead, the frieze is made up of a highly stylized repeating pattern of flowers, stems, and leaves presented in two dimensions with so little detail that no specific species can be identified. Running above the frieze is a string course of egg-and-dart, a design element taken directly from the Ionic order of ancient Greek architecture (Figures 1A and 1B).

There is also a hint of Art Nouveau in the iron grates over two basement windows on the mansion's north side (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Iron grate in basement window (March 2013)

The central element of these grates can be interpreted as a sun image with sensuously curving rays, a design that would have been identified in its day as “feminine.” This plays in opposition to the overall “masculine” imagery of the stone house.

In addition, though the front façade is asymmetrical, the towers with conical roofs that form termini at either end of the front façade do lend a hint of classical symmetry to the design.



Figure 3: Front of Sumner T. McKnight Mansion today (March 2013).



Figure 4: Front northeast corner of Sumner T. McKnight Mansion today (March 2013).



Figure 5: Lion carving detail, 3rd floor front dormer of Sumner T. McKnight Mansion today (March 2013)



Figure 6: Northeast tower with 2nd floor open porch, Sumner T. McKnight Mansion today (March 2013).



Figure 7: Northeast tower's 2nd floor open porch ceiling, window, and column detail, Sumner T. McKnight Mansion today (March 2013).



Figure 8: Northeast tower's 2nd floor column and capital detail, Sumner T. McKnight Mansion today (March 2013).



Figure 9: Northeast tower's 1st floor open porch column and ceiling detail, Sumner T. McKnight Mansion today (March 2013).



Figure 10: Original iron work on front door of Sumner T. McKnight Mansion today (March 2013).



Figure 11: Original iron work on north-side porte cochere door of Sumner T. McKnight Mansion today (March 2013).



Figure 12: House numbers in original metal work above north-side porte cochere door of Sumner T. McKnight Mansion today (March 2013).



Figure 13: North side of Sumner T. McKnight Mansion today (March 2013).



Figure 14: South side/southeast corner of Sumner T. McKnight Mansion today (March 2013).



Figure 15: South side/southwest corner showing 1963 rear addition, Sumner T. McKnight Mansion today (March 2013).



Figure 16: Close-up of 1963 rear addition, Sumner T. McKnight Mansion today (March 2013).



Figure 17: Sumner T. McKnight Mansion, approximately 1890s. Courtesy of "Franklin and Harriett the Crosby Family Story" by Virginia Huck, Hardcover Publisher: Crosby Co; First Edition, 1980.

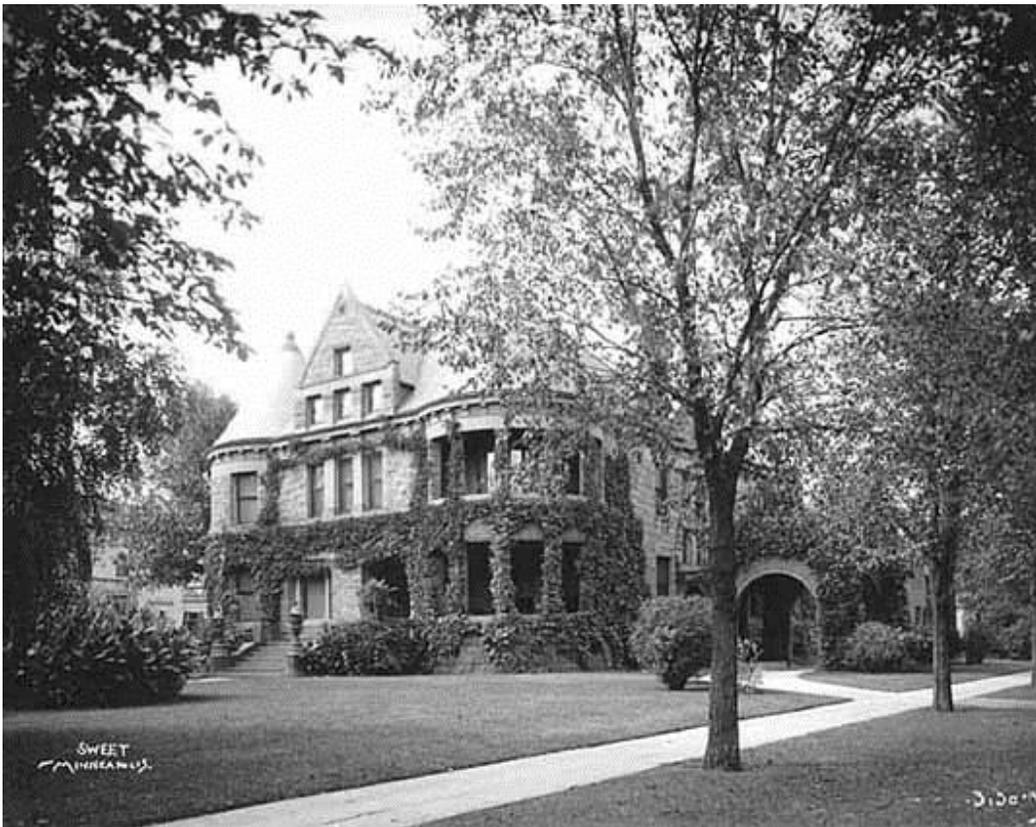


Figure 18: Sumner T. McKnight Mansion, 1900. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society



Figure 19: Sumner T. McKnight Mansion, 1962, as viewed from E. 22nd Street showing the original carriage house, Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Criteria #6: The property exemplifies works of master builders, engineers, designers, artists, craftsmen or architects.

Architects: Bertrand & Keith

George E. Bertrand

George Emile Bertrand was born in 1859 in Superior, WI, was educated in Boston and Minneapolis and began practicing architecture professionally in 1881. He established an architectural firm in Minneapolis in 1886 and formed a partnership with Walter J. Keith from 1890 until 1894. From 1897 until his death in 1931 he partnered with Arthur B. Chamberlin. George Emile Bertrand also wrote various articles on classical architecture which were published in *The Western Architect*. Bertrand tended to design classically-inspired residential and commercial buildings.

Bertrand's work is associated with two locally and nationally designated properties:

1. Northwestern Knitting Company/Munsingwear Building (International Market Square), 718 Glenwood Avenue/275 Market Street, Bertrand & Chamberlin, 1910-1915 (Local and National Historic Landmark)
2. Minneapolis Grain Exchange (north building), 301 4th Ave S., Bertrand & Chamberlin, 1928 (Local and National Historic Landmark)

Other notable commercial buildings associated with Bertrand & Chamberlin, as highlighted in the *AIA Guide to the Twin Cities* by Larry Millett (2007, Minnesota Historical Society Press) include, but are not limited to:

1. Grand Hotel Minneapolis (Minneapolis Athletic Club), 615 2nd Ave South, 1915
2. Major remodel of the Scottish Rite Temple, 2011 Dupont Ave. S., 1916
3. Many buildings in the Minneapolis Warehouse District:
 - a. Dean & Company warehouse, 410 Washington Avenue North, 1902
 - b. Northwestern Glass Company buildings, 215/219 Second Street North 1912/1918
 - c. Parlin & Orendorff Plow Company, 607 Washington Avenue North, 1910

In addition to their commercial work, the firm also designed many fine private residences throughout the Lowry Hill and Kenwood neighborhoods and along Mount Curve Avenue.

Walter J. Keith

Architect Walter Jewett Keith was born in Minneapolis on August 17, 1866, son of George H. and Henrietta (Jewett) Keith. He was educated in the Minneapolis public schools and entered architecture in 1889. In 1890 he formed a partnership with George Emile Bertrand which lasted until 1894. In 1903, Keith established and became President of The Keith Co., architects. He was also president of The Plaza Co., owners of the Plaza, Minneapolis, and founder of *Keith's Magazine on Home Building*, which was very popular during the American Craftsman design era, and was published from the turn of the century through the 1930's. *Keith's Magazine on*

Home Building was an authority on architecture, interior design, and building techniques, and helped popularize the bungalow style. Walter Keith's architectural firm sold home plans, and provided blueprint drawings and detailed materials lists to facilitate building. Keith's plans were marketed across the country through catalogs and books advertised in popular magazines such as *Ladies' Home Journal*. The "Model 1070" appeared in many of these ads. Walter Keith also authored several books on architecture, including: *Historic Architecture for the Home Builder* and *Keith's Architectural Studios*. He was married in Minneapolis in 1889 to Miss Nella Yerxa. The Keith Co. office was at 917 Hennepin Ave and his residence at Hotel Plaza in Minneapolis.

While not an exhaustive list, some particularly notable Bertrand & Keith collaborations, as highlighted in the *AIA Guide to the Twin Cities* by Larry Millett (2007, Minnesota Historical Society Press), include:

1. Scandinavian Bank Building, 517 Marquette Ave, 1895. Style: Exotic / Egyptian Revival
2. 1912 Girard Ave. S., 1894. Style: Richardsonian Romanesque (featuring oversized brownstone arched front entry) with Queen Anne influences

Some notable structures designed exclusively by Walter Keith, as highlighted in the *AIA Guide to the Twin Cities* by Larry Millett (2007, Minnesota Historical Society Press), include:

1. 1908 Kenwood Parkway (1900). Style: Tudor Revival / Arts & Crafts with a French Gothic tower
2. George H. Cook House, 2400 Bryant Avenue South (1902). Style: Large Colonial Revival with outsized pediment above the front porch door

George Bertrand and Walter Keith's catalog of commissions—both during their partnership and individually—represent a variety of architectural and building types. Based on previous locally and nationally designated works, George Bertrand was recognized as a prominent architect and could be considered a master architect. The McKnight Mansion conveys the original design intent of Bertrand & Keith. Any exterior alterations that modified the building's design have been relegated only to the rear of the property and do not impair the building integrity



Walter Jewett Keith, 1917. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Criteria #1: The property is associated with significant events or with periods that exemplify broad patterns of cultural, political, economic or social history,

and/or

Criteria #3: The property contains or is associated with distinctive elements of city identity.

McKnight Mansion's Context Within Park Avenue's "Golden Mile"

Overview

Sumner Sr. and Eugenie McKnight moved from Milwaukee, WI, to Minneapolis in 1887. 2200 Park Avenue was not the family's first Minneapolis mansion. 1818 LaSalle (then Vine Place)—across 19th Street to the north of the Historic Van Dusen Mansion—was the first mansion Sumner Sr. built for his family. The locally and nationally designated 1818 LaSalle (AKA: George R. Newell House) was built in 1888 and designed in the Romanesque Revival style by architect Charles Sedgwick. By 1892, commercial development had begun swallowing up the early downtown mansion districts and 18th Street and LaSalle (Vine Place) was not immune. As a result, many of the early residents of these first mansion districts began a several-decade-long migration away from the downtown core. While it is documented that the McKnight family was quite fond of their LaSalle (Vine Place) home, only four years after construction Mr. McKnight, being the savvy real-estate mogul he was, sold it to George R. Newell, citing that he “wanted to move to an area that [he] considered the coming residential district of Minneapolis.”* This area was Park Avenue.

The Park Avenue context of the Sumner T. McKnight Mansion at 2200 Park Ave represents a distinct and important cultural, political, economic, and social shift and/or movement in Minneapolis City history and among Minneapolis's early founders and business leaders; and its setting within the broader Park Avenue Mansion District associates the McKnight Mansion with a very distinct element of Minneapolis's architectural and landscape identity. Beginning in the late 1800s, as aggressive commercial development was swallowing up the original mansion districts in downtown Minneapolis (namely around 5th Ave south and 7th St. and in and around the Loring Park neighborhood), the city's earliest, most influential, and wealthiest founding residents and business elite (magnates in the then booming lumber, grain, real estate, and newspaper industries) sought refuge in outer-lying areas where they could build more tranquil “urban estates”—far enough outside of the commercial core to offer desired peace and quiet and a “guarantee” against further commercial encroachment, yet close enough to downtown for an easy commute to and from their businesses, shopping, and entertainment. Park Avenue quickly became the migration destination of choice, and the city's most fashionable street for building large, opulent, architect-designed estates.

Desirable By Unique Design and Unusual Efforts

By sheer design, the stretch of Park Avenue from Franklin Avenue south to 28th Street was, from the beginning, platted and planned in an entirely unique way so as to attract the most prominent of Minneapolitans (see excerpt below from *Saturday Evening Spectator*, Minneapolis, Minn. January 15, 1887). As a result of its careful planning, it was destined to become the most sought after and prestigious residential street in the city; in short, it was Minneapolis's answer to St. Paul's Summit Avenue. Its original design included:

- A impressive, wide expanse quite unlike any other in the City, bisected by a narrow, 36 foot-wide, 2-way roadway flanked by 10 extra feet of boulevard on each side [20 feet more than what is seen today]
- 100 foot building set backs
- 230+ feet deep lots that take up the entire east-west length of the Mansion District's 8-block stretch

Rise in Status: The "Golden Mile"

Park Avenue's rise in status happened very quickly, and by 1887 the Minneapolis *Saturday Evening Spectator* boasted that Park Avenue was "the leading residence street in the city." Park Avenue quickly became known as Minneapolis's "Golden Mile."

By the early part of the 1900s, the City's business elite had built 35 of Minneapolis's largest and most opulent mansions along the "Golden Mile" north of 28th Street to Franklin Avenue. Among these early residents were prominent grain men Frank Peavey, James Bell, Franklin Crosby, Edmund Phelps, Frank Heffelfinger, and Charles Harrington; lumber barons Sumner McKnight and Anson Brooks; and Swedish newspaper mogul Swan Turnblad. By contrast, upper-middle-class professionals settled into elegant, architect-designed wood-frame residences along the 10 blocks south between 28th Street and what was then the city limit at 38th Street.

Maintaining the Status: Park Avenue Improvement Association

To ensure the Park Avenue's first-class status, in 1890 these early homeowners formed the Park Avenue Improvement Association to protect the interests of Park Avenue home owners and therefore to "perpetuate the fame of Park Avenue as a fine residence district." The association levied taxes of 10 cents per lineal foot upon themselves for the purpose of managing plantings and boulevard maintenance, tree trimming and insect spraying, street sweeping, traffic regulation, and the strict enforcement of the 100-foot building setback rules. In 1889, the enterprising group even went so far as to privately finance a two-mile project that made their street the first in Minneapolis to be paved with asphalt.

From "Horseless Carriages"to Decline

Because of their wealth, Park Avenue homeowners were among the very first Minneapolis residents to own automobiles, or "horseless carriages" as they were known. In fact, Sumner T. McKnight Sr. owned a "horseless carriage" as early as 1903 (*Minneapolis Journal*, July 30, 1903, page 14). Automobile ownership quickly became a great source of pride and symbol of prestige for Park Avenue's early residents, and every year on June 21—the longest day of the

year—they hosted a “Parade of Autos” where they drove their “horseless carriages” up and down the avenue all day.

Ironically, these very symbols of wealth and pride would eventually become a source of great stress and anxiety for these early Park Avenue homeowners, and a key factor in yet another mass migration: *away* from Park Avenue.

By the 1920s, wide-spread automobile ownership had increased the conveniently paved avenue’s traffic, dust, and noise levels considerably. Aside from its smooth paved surface, Park Avenue’s close proximity to downtown, and straight north-south route, also made it an ideal choice for downtown commuters from the ever-expanding city limits to the south. And so as early as 1920, the next phase of migration for the City’s wealthiest founding residents began. Just as commercial encroachment 20-30 years earlier drove them from the early downtown mansion districts, so, too, had the automobile sent Park Avenue residents clamoring for new, increasingly fashionable, more tranquil, and less traveled residential areas such as Lake of the Isles and Lake Minnetonka.

Despite strong, decades-long advocacy efforts from Park Avenue’s hold-out residents to try and curb the traffic, in 1946 the City of Minneapolis converted Park Avenue’s original 36-foot wide, two-way roadway into a one-way, northbound artery. In 1955, the City widened the roadway to 56 feet, and added a third lane, thus eliminating a full 20 feet of boulevard green space in order to further accommodate the then growing suburban commuters into downtown. In 1967, Interstate 35W opened just a few blocks west of Park Avenue, but Park’s three-lane, one-way configuration remained the same. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, “urban renewal” took the form of demolition and left only eight Park Avenue mansions between Franklin Avenue and 28th Street in its wake (by contrast, the far more modest—albeit architect-designed—wood-frame residences south of 28th Street remained largely intact.).

As such, it is hard to think of a better case for protected the remaining few mansions of the “Golden Mile” against similar fates. To date, only the Swan Turnblad Mansion (American Swedish Institute) at 2600 Park Avenue (Local and National Designation), and the Charles M. Harrington Mansion at 2540 Park Avenue (Local Designation) have received historic designations, leaving those that have not, including the Sumner T. McKnight Mansion at 2200 Park Avenue—which has once already been threatened with demolition (see “McKnight Mansion Threatened With Demolition in 1935” below)—vulnerable.

Architectural Cohesion

Architecturally speaking, Park Avenue (the “Golden Mile” and, even more broadly, the more modest 10 blocks south) exhibits an overall cohesion in its impressive array of popular 19th and early-20th century architectural styles, all rendered by Minneapolis’s most prolific architects, including but not limited to: William Channing Whitney, Harry Wild Jones, Boehme & Cordella, Kees & Colburn, Franklin Long, Lowell Lamoreaux, Orff & Joralemon, LeRoy Buffington, Charles Sedgwick, Bertrand & Chamberlin, Septimus J. Bowler, Theron Potter Healy, Bertrand & Keith, and others of great distinction.

**“Franklin and Harriett the Crosby Family Story” by Virginia Huck, Hardcover Publisher: Crosby Co; First Edition, 1980*

McKnight Mansion Threatened with Demolition in 1935

After Sumner T. McKnight Jr. moved his family from 2200 Park Avenue to Lake Minnetonka, the McKnight family home sat vacant for some months. By April, 1935, the City of Minneapolis had slated the mansion for dismantling and demolition. On April 9, 1935, it was announced in the *Minneapolis Journal* that the Northwestern College of Speech Arts had received approval from the City Planning Commission to purchase the mansion in response to a petition of Elmer Keefe of the D. C. Bell Investment company on behalf of the college who had been trying to rescue the landmark property for use as their school. (“Old Residence Will Be School: Approval is Given for Use of Old Landmark in City,” *Minneapolis Journal*, 1935). The mansion remained in the hands of the Northwestern College of Speech Arts until 1963 when it became a nursing home. **Today, the Sumner T. McKnight Mansion at 2200 Park Avenue is once again vacant and for sale, rendering it vulnerable to any number of potential tragedies.**

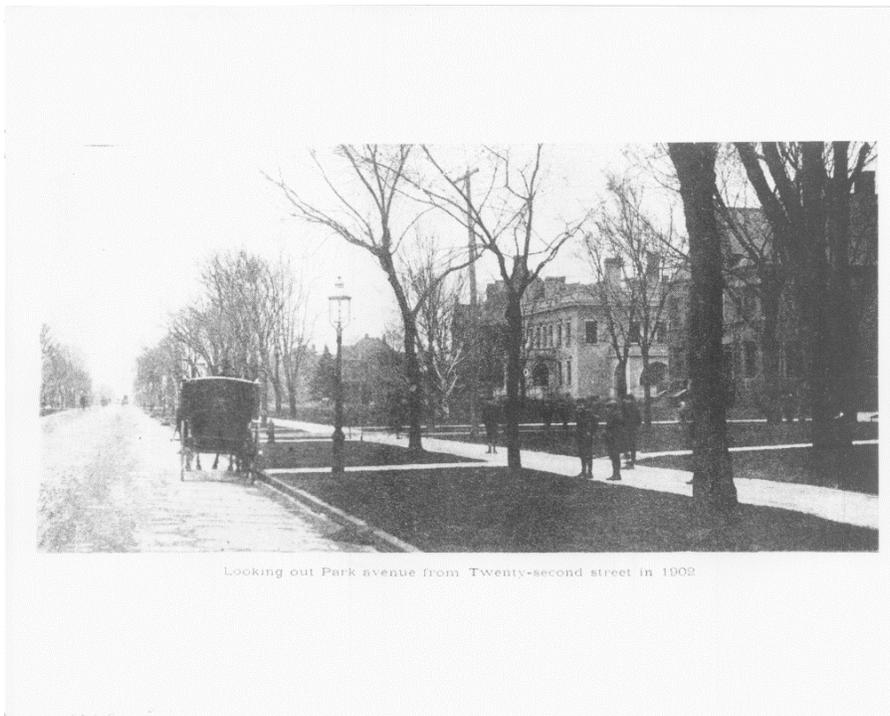
Excerpt from the Saturday Evening Spectator , Minneapolis, Minn. January 15, 1887

Park Avenue. The Leading Residence Street in the City.

Park Avenue has become noted for the large number of beautiful homes which adorn it, and easily ranks as the finest residence section of Minneapolis. Its present desirable condition is partially the result of natural advantages, it being one of the broadest thoroughfares in the city, but is largely due to the intelligent cooperation of an unusually enterprising class of citizens.

The Park Avenue Improvement Association, formed several years since, has accomplished much for the general benefit of the avenue, causing the planting of about 300 trees, the laying of good stone walks, and a uniformity and harmony of improvements in other respects. The curbing of the avenue is an improvement in prospect of next season, with street paving to shortly follow. Water and sewer pipes have already been laid. In the winter season a portion of the avenue forms a race course for the fast "flyers" of the city, and in the summer it is a favorite drive for elegant equipages. Of the Improvement Association, Judge M. B. Koon is president, and L. J. C. Drennen is secretary.

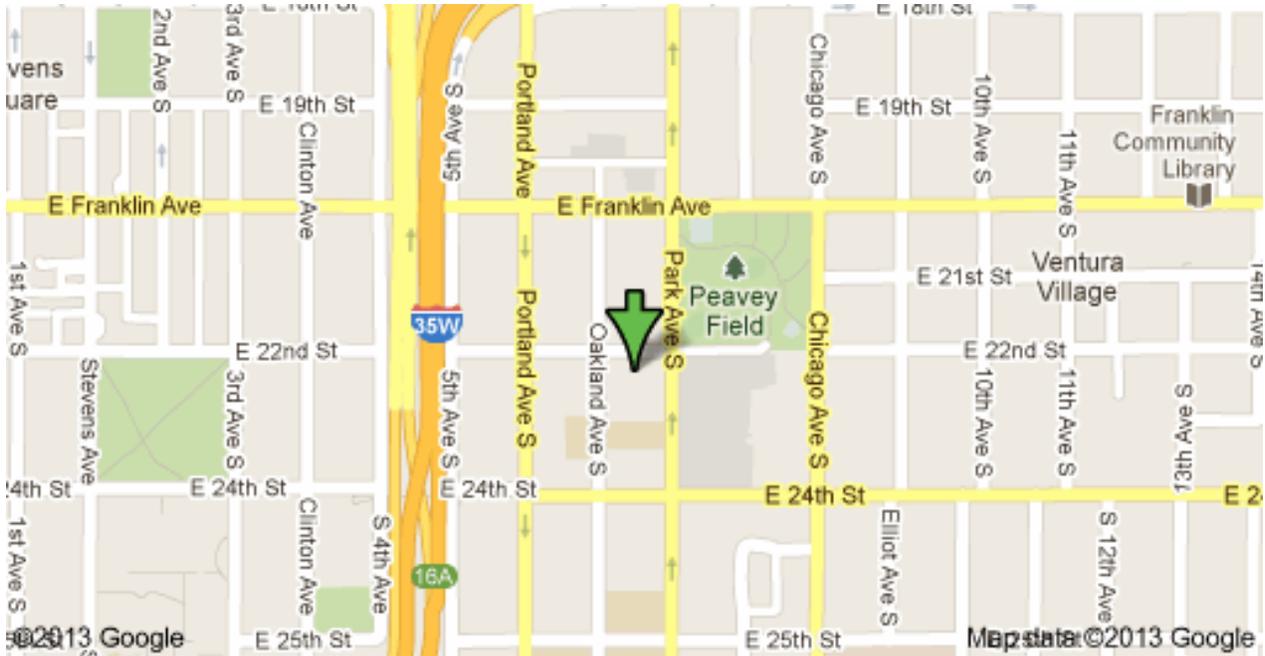
It is a notable fact that many of the finest residences have been built by preference on the east side of the avenue giving a west front. From Twentieth street, or Franklin avenue to Twenty eight street, all of the houses set back not less than 100 feet from the street and all have very large lots, being usually about 230 feet in depth. The property owners are so thoroughly earnest in this idea of symmetrical improvement that one house, which formerly stood too near to the street, has been purchased for the purpose of moving it back in line with the others.



Looking out Park avenue from Twenty-second street in 1902

Park Avenue Mansion District street scene at 22nd Street, showing the Sumner T. McKnight Mansion to the right in the foreground, 1902. Courtesy of Hennepin County Library Special Collections.

5. Attach a map showing the location of the property and photographs of the property including significant structures and significant building interiors (no Polaroid pictures).



Signature of Applicant: _____

Date: _____

Submit completed application to:
Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development Department
Planning Division
Room 300, Public Service Center
250 South 4th Street
Minneapolis, MN 55415-1385
Telephone: 612-673-2597

For Planning Department use only:

Date received: _____
Received by: _____
Date application complete: _____
Date HPC Approved: _____
Date HPC Denied: _____

MINNEAPOLIS CODE OF ORDINANCES CHAPTER 599, HERITAGE PRESERVATION REGULATIONS ARTICLE V. DESIGNATION

599.200. Purpose. This article is established to promote the preservation of historic resources by providing the commission with authority to recommend the designation of landmarks and historic districts and to adopt design guidelines for designated properties. (2001-Or-029, § 1, 3-2-01)

599.210. Designation criteria. The following criteria shall be considered in determining whether a property is worthy of designation as a landmark or historic district because of its historical, cultural, architectural, archaeological or engineering significance:

- (1) The property is associated with significant events or with periods that exemplify broad patterns of cultural, political, economic or social history.
- (2) The property is associated with the lives of significant persons or groups.
- (3) The property contains or is associated with distinctive elements of city identity.
- (4) The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of an architectural or engineering type or style, or method of construction.
- (5) The property exemplifies a landscape design or development pattern distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness or quality of design or detail.
- (6) The property exemplifies works of master builders, engineers, designers, artists, craftsmen or architects.
- (7) The property has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history. (2001-Or-029, § 1, 3-2-01)

599.220. Nomination of property. Nomination of a property to be considered for designation as a landmark or historic district shall be submitted to the planning director on a nomination application form approved by the planning director and shall be accompanied by all required supporting information. A nomination may be made by any of the following:

- (1) A member of the heritage preservation commission.
- (2) A member of the city council.
- (3) The mayor.
- (4) The planning director.
- (5) Any person with a legal or equitable interest in the subject property. (2001-Or-029, § 1, 3-2-01)

599.230. Commission decision on nomination. The commission shall review all complete nomination applications. If the commission determines that a nominated property appears to meet at least one of the criteria for designation contained in section 599.210, the commission may direct the planning director to commence a designation study of the property. (2001-Or-029, § 1, 3-2-01)