

RAMSEY COUNTY

# History

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Fall 2017

Volume 52, Number 3

*Emma F. Brunson:*

The First Woman Registered  
as an Architect in Minnesota

*Diane Trout-Oertel*

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## Onward Central, Onward Central: The 150-Year Legacy of St. Paul Central High School

*Steven C. Trimble, page 3*



St. Paul's Central High School as it was in the 1920s, left, and as it is today. As part of celebrating the high school's 150th anniversary, students entered the building through an arch of red and black balloons, the school colors. The Central mascot, the Minuteman, is shown in the patch on the right. The photo of the building in 1920 is courtesy of Steven C. Trimble; the photo of the students is courtesy of former Central teacher Jack Schlukebier; the patch is courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society; the other photos courtesy of John M. Lindley.

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 52, Number 3

Fall 2017

THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON JANUARY 25, 2016:

**Preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future**

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### A Message from the Editorial Board

This issue brings us Steve Trimble’s thoughtful history of Central High School, St. Paul’s first and still-operating high school, which recently celebrated its 150th anniversary. He traces the development of the school, which first graduated two students in 1870 with one giving a Latin oration! Over the years, Central has grown to a diverse and vigorous institution. Along the way, he highlights notable alumni such as Max Schulman, writer and creator of TV’s *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*; Jeanne Arth, Wimbledon champion; and Dave Winfield, member of the Baseball Hall of Fame. In Diane Trout-Ortel’s insightful examination of the work and life of Emma Brunson, we are treated to a profile of Minnesota’s first female registered architect. In the 1920s and ’30s, when most women were not employed outside the home and many were busy with domestic duties, Brunson designed and built a number of St. Paul homes. We are lucky that both of these authors have skillfully used primary documents and other records, a great resource for good local history. Trimble includes excerpts from Central’s literary magazine and student newspaper to set the tone and uncover stories of life at the school. And Trout-Ortel has interviewed the current owners of many of the houses that Brunson designed. Their accounts of the details of construction help us to understand what made them fall in love with their homes. Happy reading!

*Anne Cowie*  
Chair, Editorial Board

# Emma F. Brunson: The First Woman Registered as an Architect in Minnesota

Diane Trout-Oertel

By 1899 St. Paul had already been platted north to Larpenteur Avenue, the city's current boundary, but the blocks above Maryland were sparsely settled. That June, a group of schoolgirls were busy at work on one of the vacant lots near the intersection of Greenbriar and Hawthorne. Covering an incident that took place there, a reporter for the *St. Paul Globe* described the scene as follows: "The playmates had divided the sand batch into a park, with paths running in all directions, and had erected a miniature pavilion of branches. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Despite the serious nature of the news article, surprisingly the reporter devoted attention to the environment the girls had created. Noteworthy too is that the oldest of these girls, presumably their leader, would become the first woman to be registered as an architect in the state of Minnesota, a distinction she would hold for more than a decade.<sup>2</sup>

That woman was Emma Frieda Brunson, a little-known pioneer in the field of women in architecture. She was one of two hundred or so women in the United States who were working on design and building projects in the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> Of these, only about a dozen were practicing in the Upper Midwest. In Minnesota, fewer than five women have been identified with architectural projects of any size during this period.<sup>4</sup>

Typical of the times, Emma received no formal training in architecture and acquired her skills by working on projects. From 1905 to 1920, she worked as a draftsman for prominent architect Augustus Gauger.<sup>5</sup> She obviously was given secretarial duties as well. She was described in the 1907 *St. Paul Directory* as "stenogr A. F. Gauger" after attending Lancaster Business College in downtown Saint Paul in 1906. Although she was still listed in the directory as such in 1919, it is certain that her duties were hardly limited to secretarial tasks. During the fifteen years she worked for Gauger, she apparently became proficient at drafting plans and writing specifications. Early

examples of her work housed at the University of Minnesota's Northwest Architectural Archives document her capabilities in both areas.<sup>6</sup>

## A Pivotal Year

In 1921 the State Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers and Land Surveyors was formed and professionals in these disciplines were encouraged to register with the State of Minnesota. Although not required to do so until much later, many responded immediately. Among them was Augustus Gauger, who had been actively engaged in the formation of the Board. As her longtime mentor, Gauger may have encouraged Brunson to register as well, given that she had recently left his employment and started her own firm. Or perhaps she herself perceived that registration would be a useful credential. In any case, Emma Brunson became the first and only woman to register with the newly formed board, and it would be another twelve years before Florence Dorothy Glindmeir became the second woman to register as an architect in Minnesota.<sup>7</sup> That nothing similar occurred in neighboring states until 1942, when architect Lillian Leenhouts registered with the State of Wisconsin, puts Brunson's early certification in perspective.<sup>8</sup>

Although her bold step apparently garnered no attention for Brunson here at home, elsewhere it put her in the spotlight, if only for a brief moment. Her photograph

MINNESOTA BOASTS  
ONE REGISTERED  
WOMAN ARCHITECT



Mrs. Emma F. Brunson.

Mrs. Emma F. Brunson of St. Paul is the only woman architect registered in the state of Minnesota. She wonders why more women do not qualify to be registered, for she believes that men architects could learn a great deal from the woman architect, particularly in the field of home building.

This announcement appeared in the Oshkosh Daily Northwestern on February 1, 1923, two years after Brunson became a registered architect and began to practice on her own. This photograph was featured in several other Midwestern newspapers, along with statements from Brunson that expressed her thoughts on house design. Photo courtesy of www.newspapers.com.

appeared in a newspaper article which was circulated in various forms in several Midwestern newspapers in 1923. The article reported that she was surprised more women didn't register as architects because male architects could learn some things from them, especially when it came to designing houses. In her words:

A man overlooks the little things which a woman needs in her home and they [men]

seem to forget that it is the woman, always the woman who really chooses the home. The man may pay for it and decide whether the price is right, but the woman decides whether the house is right. Closets, windows, kitchen conveniences and labor saving devices all appeal to the woman and a man [male architect] is so apt to forget them although his plans and the artistic appeal of his house may be perfect.<sup>9</sup>

Emma's comments on designing homes may seem a bit biased today, but her words point out that perhaps the then all-male architectural profession was lacking a valuable perspective.

In the decades that followed, she brought that perspective to the many houses she designed for various neighborhoods throughout St. Paul. To date, nearly twenty homes designed by Brunson have been documented. That all but one of them

## *Augustus F. Gauger*

**A**ugustus F. Gauger (1852–1929) is considered one of Minnesota's great architects. He designed a variety of building types, including schools, businesses, churches, courthouses, and homes, not only in Minnesota, but throughout the Midwest and beyond. His buildings were animated by multiple bays, decorative dormers, turrets and towers.

Some of his finest work can be seen in St. Paul. One of Gauger's best commercial structures is the W. F. Stutzman Block at 721–733 East Seventh Street, which was completed in 1889 and is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Also notable are the William Schornstein Saloon and Grocery at 223 Bates Avenue built in 1884; the Schoch Building at 374 Maria built in 1885; and the Zion German Lutheran Church at 780 N. Cortland Place built in 1888.

Although many of the homes he designed for St. Paul no longer exist, such as the extravagant Theodore Hamm house that once dominated the hill overlooking the Hamm Brewery, three of the six houses he designed for Summit Avenue survive. They include the Lindeke house at 295 Summit built in 1885; the Constans mansion at 465 Summit built in 1886; and the house at 107 Farrington, which was built in 1882 and was originally situated at 301 Summit. A group of houses designed by Gauger on Lake Como includes his last home at what is now 1183 West Como Boulevard, where he moved

after his first house at 559 Desota Street was destroyed by fire.

Gauger was born on February 16, 1852, in Germany. His family immigrated to the United States in 1862 and settled on a farm near Oshkosh, Wisconsin. He worked as a carpenter in Oshkosh for several years before moving to Chicago, where he apprenticed as an architectural draftsman. In 1875 Gauger moved to St. Paul, where he lived and worked for the remainder of his life. He was first employed as a draftsman in the office of Edward Bassford, a successful architect whose office was a training ground for many other prominent architects in the late nineteenth century, including Cass Gilbert. In 1878, he married Albertine O. Nitschke, a native of Wisconsin and started his own firm.

His office was on the third floor of the Scandinavian American Bank Building at Sixth and Jackson Streets. In addition to managing his private practice, Gauger held several high-profile positions in St. Paul. He served as the architect for the city's board of education from 1881 to 1887 and designed the Douglas, Franklin, Longfellow, and Rice Schools in St. Paul. He was the city's building inspector from 1894 to 1895. The following year he chaired the committee charged with revising the city's building codes and served on the committee again in 1910–11. From 1905 to 1929 he provided architectural services to the Minnesota Soldiers' Home (now known as the Minnesota Veterans Home) in Minneapolis



*Augustus F. Gauger. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

and designed the impressive Women's Residence (1905) on that campus.

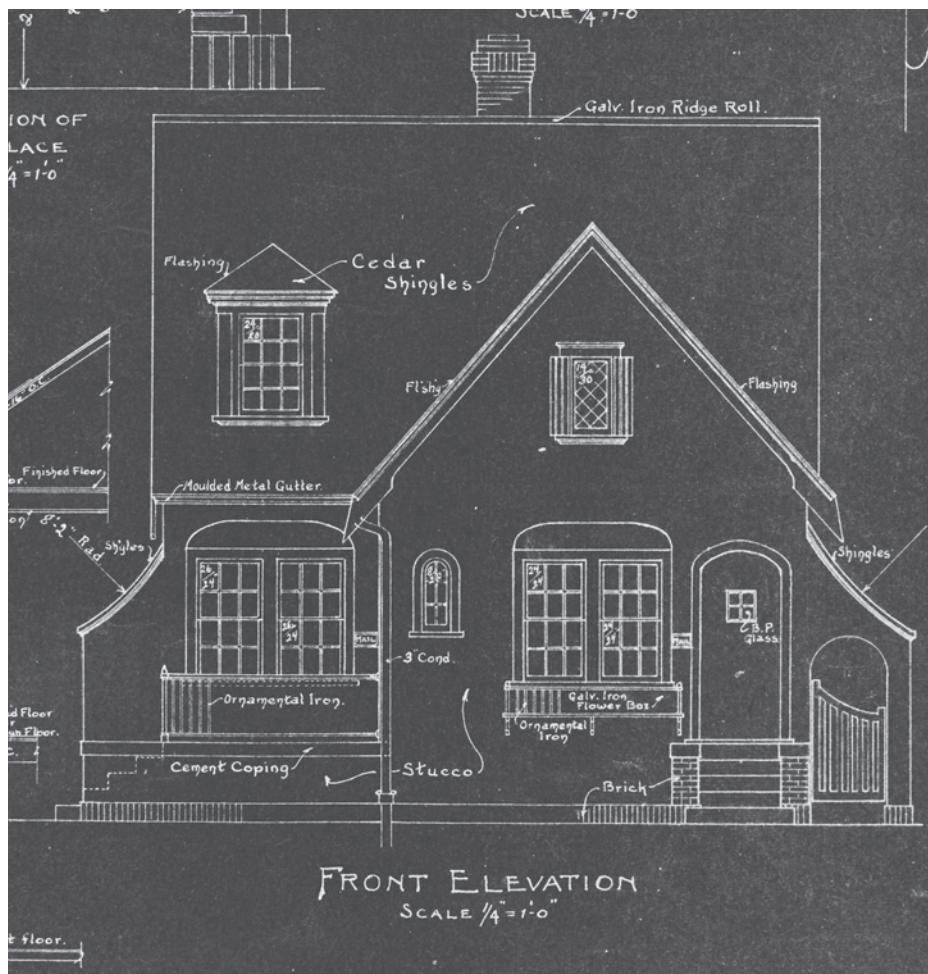
Gauger also played a prominent role in the architectural profession. He helped establish the Minnesota Chapter of the American Institute of Architects and became a fellow of the AIA in 1889. He served on the board that was formed in 1921 to register Minnesota professionals in the engineering and architectural fields and was the second architect to be licensed in the state. When he retired in the late 1920s, his son Raymond Gauger succeeded him in the practice. Augustus Gauger died on February 17, 1929, and is buried in St. Paul's Oakland Cemetery.

are still in service today is a measure of their success. Most of the houses have been altered to some extent but are essentially the same in appearance and function. Although designed for an earlier lifestyle, her houses continue to meet the needs of current owners and are still valued for their warm character and practical floorplans.

## A Period of Professional Development

Emma's self-employment got off to a slow start with a few small projects. Her first jobs included a garage for her brother and a small house at 140 Stevens Street, on St. Paul's West Side. In these early years, she also wrote specifications for other architects whom she likely had met while working for Gauger.<sup>10</sup> Starting a private practice is never easy, and Emma may have been growing impatient by 1925. In any case, she took the proactive step of developing a project on her own, a one-and-a-half-story frame house near the intersection of Payne and Maryland. The building permit for 842 Maryland lists Emma Brunson as the owner as well as the architect, which implies that she purchased the lot and developed it on her own. A year later she would develop an adjacent lot. Although Gus W. Stone was listed as the contractor for the earlier house at 842, the permit for 846 Maryland identified Emma Brunson as the contractor. The latter project may have been the first for which she was the owner, the architect, and the general contractor, but it was by no means the last.<sup>11</sup>

While these two design-build ventures were in progress, Brunson also worked on four projects where she played the traditional role of the architect, designing houses for specific clients and collaborating with contractors to get them built. During this time she prepared the drawings and specifications for 677 Delaware Avenue, near Cherokee Park on St. Paul's West Side; 673 Nebraska Avenue in the neighborhood west of Lake Phalen; and 640 Gotzian Street in Dayton's Bluff. All three houses are examples of the American Foursquare, while her earlier houses can best be described as bungalows. These two housing types were the most popular options for the middle class during the first two decades of the



The Carroll duplex at 1273–75 Van Buren Avenue was Brunson's first experiment with the English Cottage Style that was popular in the 1920s. The front of the house suggests a single-family house rather than a duplex. An entrance to the second unit was concealed behind the sloped extension of the facade shown on the left side of the front elevation above. At a later date, the house was significantly remodeled and is now a single-family home. Blueprint courtesy of the Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries.

1900s. After doing straight-forward examples of each, Brunson turned to the romantic styles that became fashionable in the 1920s. The William E. Carroll duplex at 1273–75 Van Buren Avenue in the Hamline-Midway neighborhood, built in 1926, was her first project to incorporate period details. Stylistically an English Cottage, it was followed up by a Spanish Revival design and a string of English Tudor Cottages.<sup>12</sup>

Independent of their style, the homes Emma Brunson designed in the twenties were influenced by the Arts and Crafts Movement which advocated pleasingly simple, functional forms and natural materials. The widespread application of these ideals in the early 1900s is re-

sponsible for the character of many of St. Paul's older neighborhoods. Typical of the era, Brunson's wood-framed houses were clad in stucco, brick, clapboards, or combinations of these materials and featured pitched roofs, prominent chimneys, and double-hung, multi-light windows grouped in twos and threes.

The interiors of Brunson's houses featured hardwood floors, generous wood-work, and built-in components, which were not limited to kitchen cupboards, linen cabinets and sideboards. Almost every house she designed had a mail slot, a telephone niche, and a laundry chute. Brunson's practicality was also reflected in her floor plans, which made the most of every square inch of a house and virtually

eliminated the need for hallways. These and other features that she incorporated in her homes nearly 100 years ago continue to please their current owners.

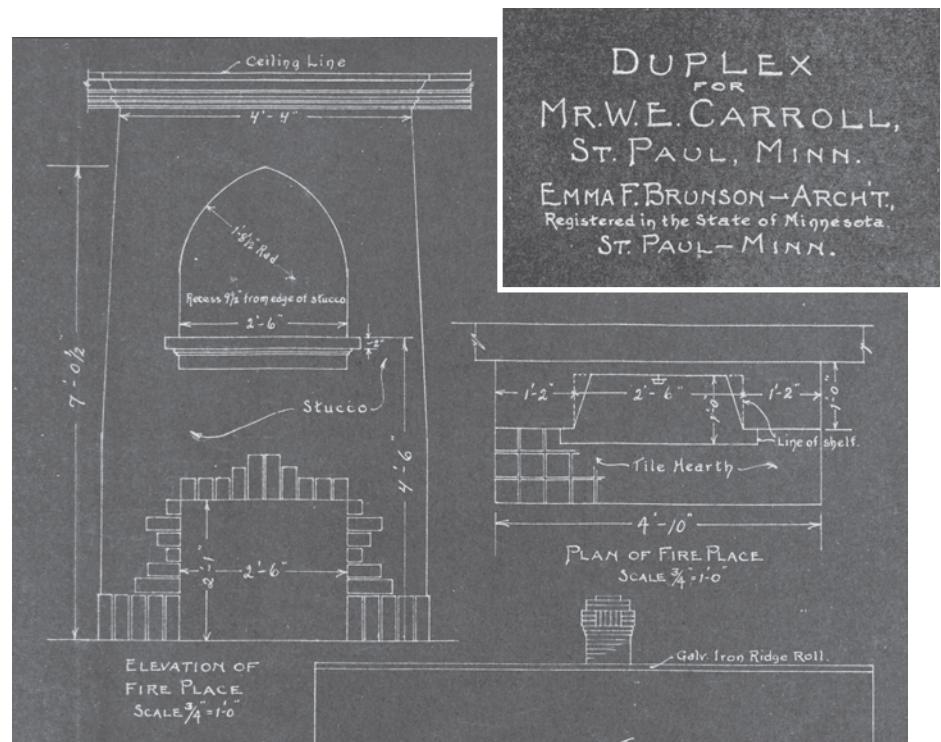
John Politsch, who lives at 677 Delaware Avenue, likes the layout of his house. The rooms on the first story are arranged around a fireplace at the center of the house. The only space devoted solely to circulation is the stair hall between levels. John also appreciates the generous windows on the south side of the house, which flood the rooms with light.<sup>13</sup>

Ann Berg observes that her Brunson home at 1359 Osceola Avenue in the Macalester-Groveland neighborhood feels more spacious than most bungalows. In actuality, her house's footprint is an average size, but wasted space is virtually eliminated, which allows the rooms themselves to be larger. Arranged in a circular pattern, the rooms flow into one another, reducing circulation space to a stairway at the center. Ann also values her home's character. Built in 1927, the house incorporates Spanish Revival details, including round-headed doors and windows. Doorways on the interior are arched as well. The curved walkways and circular planter in the front yard of the house are site details that Brunson would repeat on future projects, including her own home.<sup>14</sup>

The houses Brunson designed during the twenties reflect considerable professional growth and as the decade progressed, her projects became increasingly sophisticated in terms of the details she incorporated as well as the products and finishes she specified. By the late twenties, Brunson had developed skills that would serve her well in the hard times ahead.

### A Resourceful Approach to the Depression

Despite the economic climate, Emma Brunson fared remarkably well during this period by building several spec houses on lots she purchased in various neighborhoods in St. Paul. In 1929 and '30, she developed a pair of houses on Arlington Avenue on the East Side that would not only show how much she had progressed as an architect, but also exemplify how fine a result could be achieved when she had complete control



*These drawings for the fireplace in the Brunson-designed duplex on Van Buren Avenue are representative of the attention to detail that Brunson typically paid to the interiors of her houses. Blueprint courtesy of the Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries.*

of a project. Both houses are picturesque Tudor Cottages with steep gabled roofs which easily accommodate two full stories in a one-and-a-half-story massing.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the features they have in common, the houses are individual designs inside and out. The one at 726 Arlington is the home of Hannah and Jim Holt. It is an excellent example of a Brunson house, especially since it has never been remodeled and retains leaded glass windows, textured plastered walls, coved ceilings, and original light fixtures. Jim says, "It's these amenities that add to the quality of life. When the realtor took us to see the house, I liked it before I even got past the front vestibule." Hannah agrees that it's the house's character and craftsmanship that make it special, but also praises its practical floorplan claiming, "I could tell from the moment I walked in the house that a woman had something to do with its design." She adds, "Of all the houses I have lived in, this is my favorite. I want to grow old in this house."<sup>16</sup>

While 726 and 732 Arlington were under construction, Brunson was working on two other projects, a two-story

house at 732 Montana Avenue in the neighborhood west of Lake Phalen, as well as a cottage at 1212 Hawthorne, just south of Lake Phalen.<sup>17</sup>

Correspondence between Brunson and St. Paul's building inspection department regarding the house on Hawthorne indicates that once again she had purchased a lot, then designed and constructed a house on it for subsequent sale. Her letter to Superintendent of Inspection, Harry S. Bronson dated February 6, 1931, offers us glimpses of a competent, confident business woman defending where she had the foundation of the house located. Reminding the Superintendent that he had previously approved the 30-foot setback of the house's foundation, she wrote:

When the excavation was commenced we discussed the distance, and checking up came to the conclusion it would be the better way to keep the front line with the front line of the other houses, and since there is a hood projecting on the third house west of ours, projecting the vestibule of our house would conform with the projection of the hood. We talked about setting the house back 35 feet but thought the appearance then would be

terrible as our house would set 5 feet back of the rest of the houses.<sup>18</sup>

Subsequent paragraphs of her letter cited the Building Code and further solidified her case, while also addressing the Superintendent's concern about the overall appearance of the block:

Please note that our bungalow is away at the end of the street, there being but one lot east of ours adjoining park property and that has only a frontage of 30 feet with only about 20 feet of front sidewalk. I doubt if this lot will ever be sold for building purposes—if anything the party buying our house may purchase it for lawn or garden use.

She later offered to buy the adjacent lot and concluded the letter with, "Thanking you kindly in anticipation of an early favorable reply, and with best wishes and personal regards. . ."<sup>19</sup> Brunson would continue to develop properties, but this house on Hawthorne was likely the last of its kind. Soon her homes would reflect changes taking place in the housing industry.

### **Experimenting with New Styles and Technologies**

During the 1930s, the returning popularity of the colonial style influenced Brunson's exteriors, Art Deco crept into her interiors, and synthetic materials sometimes surfaced, but although her

houses were influenced by contemporary design trends and modern technology, they retained the warmth and practicality of her earlier homes. She specified predominantly natural materials but juxtaposed them with modern finishes and new products. She continued to incorporate her standard built-in amenities.

In 1936 Brunson was still developing her own projects. She purchased a lot in Highland Park, the popular, new neighborhood that the City of Saint Paul had acquired in 1925, the year that the Ford Motor Company opened an assembly plant there. The house she subsequently designed and built at 1855 Pinehurst Avenue is a two-story, frame colonial. The

## *Emma F. Brunson-Designed Houses in St. Paul\**

Date	Address	Original Owner	General Contractor	Cost	Comments
1924	140 Stevens St. W.	Mary C. Mills	Henry Martin	\$4,200	24 x 32; 1½ stories; clapboard
1925	842 Maryland Ave. E.	Emma F. Brunson Mrs. P. Krogstad	Gus W. Stone	\$4,000	24 x 30; 1½ stories; clapboard;
1925	677 Delaware Ave.	Dr. Wilton B. Stone	Henry Martin	\$6,500	26-4 x 28-4; 2 stories; stucco
1926	673 Nebraska Ave. E.	Charles E. Smith	Gus W. Stone	\$5,000	26 x 28; 2 stories; stucco
1926	640 Gotzian St.	Theodore D. Maier	Benjamin M. Fisk	\$4,000	24 x 26; 2 stories; stucco
1926	1275 Van Buren Ave.	William E. Carroll	Benjamin M. Fisk	\$5,000	24 x 44; 1½ stories; stucco; originally a duplex
1926	846 Maryland Ave. E.	Emma F. Brunson N.P. Nelson	Emma F. Brunson	\$4,000	26 x 34; 1 story; clapboard; later demolished
1927	1359 Osceola Ave.	Hugo V. Koch	George F. Venne	\$4,000	30 x 38; 1½ stories; stucco
1929	726 Arlington Ave. E.	Emma F. Brunson William E. Loberg	Emma F. Brunson	\$4,000	32 x 28; 1½ stories; stucco
1930	732 Arlington Ave. E.	Emma F. Brunson Clancy R. Curtis	Emma F. Brunson	\$4,000	26 x 28; 1½ stories; stucco
1930	732 Montana Ave. E.	Edwin R. Larson	Emma F. Brunson	\$4,500	26 x 28; 2 stories; stucco
1930	1212 Hawthorne Ave. E.	Emma F. Brunson Dr. William Heck	Emma F. Brunson	\$4,000	32 x 40; originally 1½ stories; stucco
1936	1855 Pinehurst Ave.	Emma F. Brunson	Emma F. Brunson	\$7,500	24 x 34; 2 stories; clapboard
1936	203 Montrose Place	George Olson	Emma F. Brunson	\$5,000	28 x 28; 2 stories; stucco
1938	1435 Edgcumbe Rd.	G. A. Hilmer	Oscar Gustafson	\$6,900	56 x 24; 2 stories; clapboard; attached garage
1939	1847 Eleanor Ave.	Walter W. Lang	Minneapolis Firebrick Service Co.	\$4,500	35 x 40; 1½ stories; brick and stucco
1940	1233 Edgcumbe Rd.	Herman C. Hahn Anna M. Clevedge	Gustafson Bros.	\$5,500	26 x 30; 2 stories; clapboard; attached garage

\* Sources: Saint Paul Building Permits (in chronological order) 12175, 14126, 14973, 18785, 22668, 24027, 24295, 25114, 39334, 41818, 43007, 43772, 58977, 60256, 27915, 46970, and 73066. Original dimensions of each house, given in the Comments, are in feet with the width followed by the depth. Where Brunson is listed as the Original Owner, she developed the property and then sold it to the person whose name is immediately below her name. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, \$4,000 in 1924 is equivalent to about \$58,000 today; \$4,000 in 1940 would be about \$71,000 today.

home's current owners, Kevin and Deborah Gephart, like its convenient and flexible layout, which is well-suited for entertaining. The large living room extends the full depth of the house, bringing in light from two directions. Round-headed windows on either side of the fireplace once borrowed light from an adjacent sunporch as well, but these windows were later removed when the porch was remodeled into an office. Brunson put a second fireplace in the basement, providing for a future living room there, a novel concept at the time. This space was separated from the rest of the basement with block partition walls, indicating a fire-safety concern on the part of either Brunson or the code officials. The Gepharts have recently turned this space into a family room. Despite its more modern plan and contemporary touches such as the Art Deco bathroom, the house features the same practical built-ins and amenities seen in her earlier houses. As in some of the other Brunson houses, there is a walk-in closet with a built-in dresser off the master bedroom and a linen cabinet with a pull-out folding shelf in the stair hall.<sup>20</sup>

While she was developing the house at 1855 Pinehurst, Brunson served as contractor as well as architect for a very striking and thoroughly modern house that was equipped with central air conditioning, a fairly unusual amenity in 1936.<sup>21</sup> Located in the neighborhood south of the Town and Country Club, the Moderne Style house at 203 Montrose Lane has a flat roof and cubic massing. The white, untextured stucco walls are punched with multi-light casement windows. The flat plane of the front facade is broken only by a prominent vertical element resembling a pilaster, and ornamentation is limited to a semi-circular canopy and ship's railing over the front door. On the rear of the house, a large semi-circular bay once featured a curved, floor-to-ceiling, glass-block wall that flooded the dining room with soft light. The glass block was replaced at some point with fixed glass by a previous owner.

Today, Edward Piechowski and Sean Ryan are remodeling the house in a more sensitive manner. They are well-aware that they have a Brunson-designed home and have been researching its history.



*This photo of the Brunson-designed home at 203 Montrose Lane appeared in the St. Paul Pioneer Press on December 24, 1945. Wrapped up in a huge ribbon and tied with a bow, the Moderne Style house, with its cubic massing and untextured stucco walls, resembled a giant Christmas package. Lighted candles on the canopy over the front door illuminated a "Merry Christmas" greeting on the facade above. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

After undertaking a sympathetic remodel of the Art Deco kitchen, which preserved period furnishings like the original enameled cabinets, they are now working on the second story. There they have discovered that a bedroom, which once spanned the entire width of the house, originally had wall-to-wall carpeting, uncommon then, in a mauve color that was fashionable in the thirties. Brunson's circular landscape feature, which was buried in the front yard, has been restored, and is now an attractive fountain.<sup>22</sup>

The one-and-a-half-story, brick-veneer and stucco house at 1847 Eleanor Avenue also indicates that Brunson was not afraid to try new things. The home's attached garage was an unusual feature in 1939 and code officials were likely grappling with the fire separation requirements between a garage and adjacent living spaces. A variety of strategies may have been under consideration at the time. In this case, the garage walls and the ceiling were finished with stucco except for one wall which is brick. Here a door

leading to the main portion of the house has steel facing on the garage side and a wire-glass window. Another modern feature of the house is its use of glass block. Current owners, Jerry and Leona Shannon, particularly enjoy the dining room's curved bay window which is built entirely of glass block and has a window seat below that is finished in gum wood. They also appreciate the other gum wood built-ins, which include the fireplace surround and a corner cupboard in the dining room. Other unique details include the unusual laundry chute built into the newel post at the top of the stair to the second story and the telephone niche with a pull-down, gumwood shelf for the telephone book.<sup>23</sup>

By the time Brunson designed the house on Eleanor, Minnesota's economy had begun to recover and she had resumed the traditional role of the architect. Among her other homes constructed in St. Paul during the late thirties and the early forties, are the colonial-style houses at 1233 and 1435 Edgcumbe Road.<sup>24</sup>

## The Later Years

Since Emma Brunson was registered as an architect until 1967, she likely continued to practice during the fifties and sixties, but these projects are undocumented as of yet, except for the house she designed and built for herself at 2350 Edgerton Street in Little Canada.<sup>25</sup> Situated on a diagonal facing the intersection of Edgerton and Evergreen Streets, the brick- and stone-clad house is approached via a circular driveway. The front sidewalk curves around a circular planter before leading to a recessed veranda-like front porch. Originally there were three arched doorways leading from the porch to separate areas of the house. The doors that led to Emma's office and to her bedroom have since been replaced with windows and today only the front door remains.<sup>26</sup>

The house overlooks Lake Gervais and large windows on the rear elevation take advantage of the view. As in earlier houses Emma designed, livable square footage is maximized. The basement, which walks out at grade on the rear, provides additional living space. With a steeper roof pitch than typical of houses being built at the time, the attic was designed to be a future expansion space, and Brunson placed a stairway in the foyer to access it.

The current owners, Christie and Raj Nagalla, who have recently remodeled the interior of the house, verified that Emma equipped the house with her usual built-ins plus additional ones that suited her personally, including wall-to-wall bookcases and a window seat in the room that was her office. Christie, who grew up in the house, which her father bought shortly after Brunson died, appreciates the built-in amenities, which include niches on either side of the front door. She says, "Touches like these arched recesses at the entry give this house a personality that most houses don't have."<sup>27</sup>

Molly Brunson, the granddaughter of Henry Borchert Brunson, Emma's adopted son, relayed her mother's recollections of visiting Emma at this house. Jodell Brunson remembers a "gorgeous [house] on a corner lot with a large garden" and a "garden bench with stained glass insets," the one thing her husband Geoffrey Brunson would have liked to

inherit from Emma.<sup>28</sup> She also recalls a room with 8½ x 11, black and white photos of Brunson's houses, and an enormous and elaborate Christmas village that Emma would assemble for the holiday season. As for Emma herself, Jodell remembers her as a "powerful and tough woman [who] controlled the family with her wealth."<sup>29</sup>

James Eugene Gruetzke, the grandson of Emma's brother Erich Henry Brunson, also remembers visiting Emma at this house. When he was in seventh grade, his father, Harry "Bud" Gruetzke, who had moved from Minneapolis to Portland, Oregon, in 1934, took him on a trip to Minnesota in the late fifties to meet his relatives in the Midwest. James recalls that the trip was "quite an adventure." It was December and he was fascinated with winter Minnesota-style, which was so different from Oregon's. They stayed with his grandparents, who lived in Minneapolis. James remembers driving around and his father showing him the school he had attended as a boy. He remembers the ice rink that had been created by flooding the playground and how he went ice skating for the first time. He had a lot of trouble until his father showed him how to lace up skates properly: "nice and tight." They also drove by the place where his father grew up; the house was gone, replaced with a retirement center. As they drove around, his father pointed out "buildings that Emma designed."<sup>30</sup>

James and his father went to see Emma twice during their stay in the Twin Cities. James recalls that "he had the time of his life" the afternoon he and his father spent with Emma, and he will never forget it. He walked down a steep, icy path to the lake behind Emma's house and went out about fifty feet on the lake when he heard the ice starting to crack beneath him. He was terrified and ran back to the house. When he told Emma and his father what happened, they pointed to the fish houses and vehicles parked on the frozen lake and explained that what he heard was only the surface ice cracking. He went right back out to play, taking Emma's sled with him.<sup>31</sup>

The second visit was in the evening for dinner. He remembers that "there was

this wall that had her stuff on it." He can't remember exactly what he saw there but thought they might have been certificates. He probably also saw the black and white photos that Jodell Brunson noticed. James recalls that Emma was "rather proud of them." Characterizing Emma as "a nice-looking, distinguished elderly lady," he remembers that she wore her dark hair, which was streaked with gray, in a bun.<sup>32</sup>

## Brunson's Personal Life

Not much is known about Emma's personal life. She apparently was a very private person who did not seek the lime-light and her name rarely appeared in newspapers. What we do know about her and her family is mainly gleaned from census and genealogy records.<sup>33</sup>

Emma was the daughter of Frank V. Gruetzke and Emma C. (Ehling) Gruetzke, who immigrated to America from Germany with two children sometime after 1880. In 1885, they were living in Stillwater with three sons—Frank, Erich, and Bernard. Emma was born there on February 17, 1887. Later that year, the family apparently moved to St. Paul where Emma's father, who had taken a job with the Northern Pacific Railway, built the house that she was to live in for the next 70 years. The house, located on the southwest corner of Greenbriar and Hawthorne, still exists today, although numerous changes over the years have altered its original appearance. Another child, Francis "Fannie" Gruetzke, was added to the family in 1889.<sup>34</sup>

Emma and Fannie attended Cleveland School at the northeast corner of Jenks and Walsh Streets, and during this time, Emma occasionally gave piano recitals and literary readings at various women's clubs and churches on the east side.<sup>35</sup> The Gruetzke girls received their entire education at Cleveland School, which accommodated all the grades until the high school program was removed to a separate facility and renamed Johnson High School. Relocated a couple of times, the school is still in operation today as the second oldest high school in St. Paul.<sup>36</sup>

By 1906, Emma was attending Lancaster Business College and working for Augustus F. Gauger, Architect. Her sister

Fannie was a stenographer at Mulrooney, Ryan and Clark Company. Her oldest brother Frank was a U.S. Marine. Her youngest brother, Erich Henry, known as Harry, was a switch-tender for the Great Northern Railway (GNRR). Her brother Benjamin was a boilermaker in the GNRR shops. Her father was now a car repairer for the GNRR. This was the last year the entire family lived together in the large house on Hawthorne. In the next few years, Emma's siblings would leave St. Paul, while she continued to work for Gauger and live at home with her mother and father.<sup>37</sup>

In 1912, she married Harry Stewart Brunson, who grew up in St. Paul and was employed as a salesman for Berger Manufacturing Company at the time. Emma and Harry set up their household in her family's homestead on Hawthorne, where they remained throughout their marriage. Harry eventually became a boiler inspector for the state while Emma opened an architectural office in their home. Over the years, substantial improvements were made to the house at 698 Hawthorne under Emma's direction. The frame structure was faced with brick veneer and a second entrance was created, presumably to provide a separate access for her clients.<sup>38</sup>

Although they had no children of their own, they adopted and raised two children. Henry Borchert Brunson was sent to them by relatives in Germany soon after his birth in 1914. The other child, Dora Brunson, likely came to them under the same circumstances. During and after World War I, German infants and children were sometimes sent to live with relatives in the United States.<sup>39</sup> While Dora returned to Germany at some point, Henry remained in the States and spent most of his life in Minneapolis. He married Ruth (Vladik) Brunson the couple had two children, Geoffrey Frank Brunson and Julianne Lorraine Brunson. Henry fought in World War II, and after the war ended, the Red Cross informed him that his biological mother, Elsa Borchert, had been found in Germany. As her entire family had perished during the war, she was sent to the States to live with Henry and his family.<sup>40</sup>

Emma's husband, Harry, died in 1958.



*The Gruetzke/Brunson residence, 698 Hawthorne in St. Paul, as it appears today. Emma spent her entire childhood and most of her adult life in this house. Built by her father in 1887, the original clapboard structure was expanded and remodeled several times. In 1933, Emma added brick veneer and an entry vestibule with two separate entrances. Most of the divided-light windows have since been replaced. Photo courtesy of Diane Trout-Oertel.*

Her house in Little Canada was now complete, and this is where she spent her last twenty years. Emma retired in 1968. When she died in 1980 at the age of 94, a simple obituary identified her as a Member of Degree of Honor Columbia Lodge No. 14 and Royal Neighbors but made no mention of her career as an architect. The obituary indicated that she was survived by "her daughter Dora in Germany" and "daughter-in-law Ruth Brunson," suggesting that the two children she had adopted continued into adulthood to be considered her family. Other survivors listed were three grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren, and two nieces.<sup>41</sup>

When Gordon Forbes, the attorney who handled her estate, was interviewed in 1987, he indicated that, upon Emma's death, the 8 x 10 photographs of her houses were given to a niece who lived in Decatur, Illinois. The niece, Amelia Mulrooney, may subsequently have passed the photographs on to her children. Both her son and daughter died childless in 2008 and 2004 respectively, and in the absence of heirs to contact, the photographs could not be found. These photographs would have served as an invaluable resource, revealing additional houses designed by Brunson and docu-

menting the original appearance of those that have already been identified.

Emma Brunson's story is incomplete and the full extent of her accomplishments may never be known. How she became the unlikely person to become the first woman registered as an architect in the state of Minnesota may never be fully explained. However, one thing is certain . . . she was a creative and industrious woman who left her mark on many neighborhoods throughout St. Paul.

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## Endnotes

1. *St. Paul Globe*, June 9, 1899, p. 10. The article, “Agnes Gilbert dies as the result of a neighbor boy’s blow,” describes the scene and tells how a boy came from across the street and hit one of the girls in the back with a stone. The funeral was held at St. Patrick’s Church and the eight pallbearers, all schoolmates of the deceased, included Emma Brunson and her sister Fanny. The article mentions that the girls attended Cleveland School, which was located at the corner of Walsh and Jenks.

2. Jeanne M. Zimniewicz, “Early Women Architects in Minnesota,” an Independent Study Project submitted to Alan Lathrop, advisor and evaluator, University of Minnesota, Winter Quarter 1987. Zimniewicz identifies the first woman to register as an architect with the Board of Registration, State of Minnesota, as Emma F. Brunson (223, registration #203, 12/23/1921) and the second as Florence Dorothy Glindmier (1068, registration #722, 7/17/1933). She cites non-registered architects Dorothy Brink Ingemann, Miriam Bend Lein, and Marion Alice Parker and identifies the first woman to register with the Board as a landscape architect as Margherita Tarr (1809, registration #1598, 6/6/1935).

3. Sarah Allaback, *The First American Women Architects* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2008). For an historical perspective of the architectural profession in the United States, especially as it relates to women, see also Ellen Perry Berkeley and Matilda McQuaid, eds., *Architecture: A Place for Women* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989).

4. Zimniewicz. It is difficult to put a number on the women who were involved with designing buildings in the early 1900s since much work is undocumented. More women likely played a role in building projects, especially houses.

5. Alan K. Lathrop, *Minnesota Architects, A Biographical Dictionary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 29.

6. Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Emma Brunson Papers, File number N123. See also the Augustus F. Gauger Papers, File Number N122.

7. Official Records of the Board of Registration, State of Minnesota, now called the Minnesota Board of Architecture, Engineering, Land Surveying, Landscape Architecture, Geoscience and Interior Design. The records confirm that Brunson was the first woman architect to register with the Board and that she was first woman to be registered in any of the professions overseen by the Board. Her mentor, Gauger, was the fourth professional overall to register and the second architect to do so, having been slightly edged out by Harry Taylor Downs.

8. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries, Archives Department, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Records, 1936–1990, Call Number UWM Manuscripts Collection 223.

9. *Reading Eagle*, February 11, 1923, p. 12; Oshkosh

*Daily Northwestern*, February 1, 1923, p. 5; *The News-Herald*, March 19, 1923, p. 13.

10. St. Paul Building Permit 12175, on file in Ramsey County Historical Society (RCHS) Research Center, St. Paul, Minn. (hereinafter RCHS).

11. St. Paul Building Permits 14126 and 24295, RCHS.

12. St. Paul Building Permits 14973, 18785, 22668 and 24027, RCHS. The duplex at 1273–75 Van Buren Avenue was drastically remodeled at some point and is now a single-family house.

13. Author’s site visit and site visit and interview with John Politisch on March 4, 2015.

14. Author’s site visit and interview with Ann Berg on January 4, 2015. 1359 Osceola was built for Hugo Koch and his wife Grace in 1927 per St. Paul building permit 25114. Brunson had designed a residence for Koch in 1923 and drawings and specifications for this earlier house, which was never built, are included in the Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota, Emma Brunson Papers, File number N123.

15. St. Paul Building Permits 39334 and 41818, RCHS.

16. Author’s site visit and interview with Hannah and Jim Holt on February 8, 2016.

17. St. Paul Building Permits 43007 and 43772, RCHS.

18. Letter to Harry S. Bronson, Superintendent of Inspection, Department of Parks, Playgrounds and Public Buildings, Saint Paul, Minnesota, from Emma F. Brunson, Architect, February 6, 1931. This letter is attached to St. Paul Building Permit 43772, RCHS.

19. Ibid.

20. Author’s site visit and interview with Kevin Gepphart on February 19, 2016. St. Paul Building Permit 58977, RCHS.

21. St. Paul Building Permit 60256, RCHS.

22. Author’s site visit and interview with Edward Piechowski and Sean Ryan on August 8, 2016.

23. Author’s site visit and interview with Jerry and Leona Shannon on February 18, 2016. St. Paul Building Permit 46970, RCHS.

24. St. Paul Building Permits 27915 and 73066, RCHS.

25. Zimniewicz, Part Three: The Architects; Village of Little Canada Building Permit 66 on file at City Hall.

26. Author’s site visit and interview with Christie and Raj Nogalla on October 10, 2015.

27. Ibid.

28. According to Jodell Brunson, the family never received anything from Emma’s estate, which was administered by the lawyer next door who allegedly “swindled the family, taking everything for himself.”

29. Email to the author, February 26, 2015, from Molly Brunson, daughter of Jodell (Hornstra)

Brunson and Geoffrey Frank Brunson, the son of Henry Borchert Brunson who was adopted by Emma Brunson and her husband during World War I.

30. Author telephone interview with James Eugene Gruetzke, grandson of Emma Brunson’s brother, Erich Henry (“Harry”) Gruetzke, on March 16, 2015. James does not remember whether the “buildings” his father pointed out were houses or other structures.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. The author is grateful to Ann Berg for her genealogy study, conducted in the winter of 2014. Ms. Berg’s research sources included 1885 and 1905 Census records, miscellaneous newspaper articles and obituaries, the Social Security Death Index, The Register and other genealogy records related to the Gruetzke and Brunson families.

34. 1885 Minnesota State Census; Minnesota Births and Christenings Index, 1840–1980; U.S. Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936–2007; *St. Paul City Directories*, 1886–1956;

35. *St. Paul Globe*, May 14, 1897, pp. 1, 2; October 10, 1897, p. 18; November 3, 1901, p. 9; April 20, 1902, p. 30; October 15, 1902, p. 6; May 29, 1904, p. 18.

36. Author’s site visit to Johnson High School’s library. A collection of historical materials in the school’s library includes “Exams 1902,” a grade book that lists both Emma Brunson and her sister Fanny as students at Cleveland High School. A 1913 Yearbook in the library, *The Maroon*, indicates that in 1911, Cleveland High School students were relocated to a new building named Johnson High School, which was located at the southeast corner of Walsh and York. Later Johnson High School moved to its current location at 1349 Arcade Street.

37. *St. Paul City Directories*, 1905–1920; Ann Berg’s genealogy research. Brother Erich Henry moved to Minneapolis in 1906. In 1907 Bernard (aka Benjamin) moved to Seattle, where he became an important figure in the Boilermakers Union. Fanny married James E. Mulrooney in 1909 and later moved to Decatur, Illinois.

38. *St. Paul City Directories*, 1886–1956; St. Paul building permits for 698 Hawthorne, RCHS. *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for St. Paul, 1903–1951*.

39. Peter T. Lubrecht, *Germans in New Jersey: A History* (Charleston, S.C.: The History Press, 2013), 95. Lubrecht reminds us that German children were sent to the U.S. during this period to protect them from the uncertainties of World War I, or because their parents were casualties of the war or couldn’t afford to raise them.

40. Email to the author, February 26, 2015, from Molly Brunson. Per an obituary in the *Minneapolis Tribune* on January 28, Henry died in 1978. He is buried in Fort Snelling National Cemetery.

41. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, December 8, 1980, Obituary Notices.

# R.C.H.S.

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Emma F. Brunson was the first woman to be registered as an architect in Minnesota. This map shows the location of all the Brunson-designed houses in St. Paul that have been identified to date. Surviving records indicate that there are at least three other houses that she designed, but these records don't state where these houses were. As indicated in the chart on page 19, the house at 846 Maryland Avenue East was later demolished and another structure was built on that site. The photos shown here highlight 10 Brunson-designed houses discussed in Diane Trout-Oertel's article beginning on page 15.