

From the Archives

Decisions! Decisions!

In the late 1920s, First Church faced the realization that relocation was imperative. Under the long pastorate of Washington Gladden, the church witnessed unparalleled growth in both membership and prestige. Gladden's successors the Rev. Dr. Carl Patton, the Rev. Dr. Irving Maurer, and the Rev. Dr. McIlyar Lichliter continued the tradition of impactful preaching and ministerial outreach, fostering steady membership expansion. However, the limitations of the church's location at 74 E. Broad Street—just across the street from the Statehouse— became evident, necessitating a move to fulfill its mission to members and the community.

In late December 1928, the church purchased three parcels of land on E. Broad Street, just west of 9th Street and opposite the future site of the Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts (now the Columbus Museum of Art). With the location decided, the building committee turned its attention to selecting an architect. Renowned architect John Russell Pope of New York City, known for designing iconic structures such as the Jefferson Memorial and The National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, was chosen for the task. (More information about Pope will be shared in a future post.)

The building committee engaged the congregation in numerous discussions about the architectural style for the new church, and the overwhelming preference was for a Gothic-style building. This decision led to a significant architectural contribution to Columbus and the nation. Worshippers in this space today are beneficiaries of that historic decision. However, the process of reaching consensus on the final building design was a masterpiece of negotiation skills. Throughout 1929, hundreds, if not thousands, of architectural sketches shuttled between New York and Columbus. Fortunately, our Archives house a testimony to that process. In today's post, we share one of the earliest renderings from the architect, revealing his vision for the interior of the new Gothic church (see image below). Are there elements suggested in the sketch that you recognize in the "finished product?" Are there elements proposed by Pope that were accepted but modified? Were there suggestions in the sketch that didn't make the final cut?



Source: The Archives of First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, OH.

