



ROCKFORD HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

425 East State Street
Rockford, Illinois 61104

LANDMARK APPLICATION

This form is for use in applying to the City of Rockford for designation of a property as a Rockford landmark. **Please read the instructions on how to complete the form before actually filling it out.** Type all entries or print clearly in black ink.

1. NAME OF THE PROPERTY

Historic name Chancery of the Rockford Diocese

Common name(s) Chancery

2. LOCATION

Street address 1245 North Court St Zip code 61103

General location if no address available Note: WINGIS identifies the address as 1243 N Court St.

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership

- Private
- Public (City of Rockford)
- Public (other than the City)
- Public and private

Type of Property

- Building(s)
- Structure(s)
- Site
- Object(s)

Status

- Occupied
- Vacant
- Vacant & boarded up
- Work in progress

4. PROPERTY OWNER(S)

Name St Peters Cathedral

Address 1243 North Court St, Rockford, IL 61103

(Building actually located North Church St but property tax info shows Court St.)

Application Status [to be completed by Commission staff]

Date received _____ Public hearing date(s) _____

Date of RHPC action _____ RHPC action & vote _____

Date submitted to City Council _____ Date of City Council action _____

City Council action & vote _____

5. LEGAL DESCRIPTION (Attach separately if too long)

11-14-453-001 BLAISDELLS ADDN LOT 001 BLOCK 003

11-14-453-002 BLAISDELLS ADDN W 20 FT LOT 002 BLOCK 003

11-14-453-003 BLAISDELLS ADDN ELY 30 FT LOT 2 + WLY 35.2 FT LOT 003
BLOCK 003

6. INCLUSION IN EXISTING SURVEYS OF HISTORIC RESOURCES

- 1974 State of Illinois Survey (Ranking _____)
- 1979-81 City of Rockford Survey (Ranking _____)
- 1985 City of Rockford Survey (Ranking _____) Roll 84, #29 & 30
- Other City of Rockford Surveys (Year of survey _____; ranking _____)
- Listed on the National Register of Historic Places individually
- Listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing element of a historic district
Name of district _____
- Listed as a contributing property in a local historic district
Name of district _____

7. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic function Church (Diocese) office and Bishop's residence.

Current function Vacant as of 2009

8. DESCRIPTION

Architectural style Beaux Arts/French Renaissance

Materials

Foundation Poured concrete

Roof Multicolored slate

Exterior walls Indiana Limestone, articulated corner quoins and the use of horizontal detailing for the base and body and parapet.

Other Doors: dbl wood w/ fanlight transom. Windows: wood dbl sash 4x4 paired or tripled. Ornament: Quoins, take balustrade, circular dormer. Miscellaneous: Window hoods w/brackets, medallion, columns over entry in renaissance style.

Structures on the property

1. 1260 N Court St (St Peters Catholic Church School)
2. 1229 N Court St (Convent)
3. 1243 N Church St (St Peters Catholic Church and Rectory)

Narrative description - Provide a narrative description of the following on one or more separate pages, numbering them as "Description, page 1" and so on:

- The property as a whole;
- Each building, structure or object both historically and as they are now; and
- Any other important elements on the property.

9. SIGNIFICANCE

Check the criteria which apply in this case:

- A. The building or structure predates 1860.
- B. Exceptional example of a historic or vernacular style, or one of the few remaining in the City of Rockford.
- C. Extraordinary curiosity or picturesque work.
- D. Work of a nationally known architect.
- E. Outstanding or the only known example of work by a locally well-known architect or master builder.
- F. The property most closely associated with the life or activities of a major historic person, organization or group (including ethnic groups).
- G. The property most closely associated with a notable historic event.
- H. Of a type associated with a use once common but now rare.
- I. Site has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.
- J. By virtue of its location or activities held there, is a current or former focal point of life in the City of Rockford.

Date(s) of construction 1929

Other significant dates Chancery office and Bishop's residence from 1929 to 2002

Period of significance 1929-2009

Architect/Builder Wybe J. van der Meer

Narrative statement of significance - Provide a narrative statement of significance on one or more separate pages, being sure to include a statement for each of the criteria checked above. Number the pages "Significance, page 1" and so on. (See Attachment)

10. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

On a separate page, cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this application.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Marge Bevers / Don Bissell, Leadership Circle, Friends of Ziock (FOZ)
Name/Title/Organization

112 N Wyman St Apt 3, Rockford, IL 61101-1145
Address

Bevers: 815-962-2199 beversden@comcast.net Bissell: 815-348-7759 donbissell@usa.net
Daytime telephone number and/or email address

12. OWNER'S CONSENT

The owner(s)'s written consent that the above property be designated a historic landmark by the City of Rockford should be submitted with this application *if possible*.

13. SIGNATURE

I hereby affirm that this application and all information submitted with it are true and correct to the best of my knowledge. I agree that this application and all information submitted with it become the property of the City of Rockford. I understand the Rockford Historic Preservation Commission will record the landmark status of the property in the Office of the Winnebago County Recorder upon approval by Rockford City Council of this application.

12/19/2018

Signature of Applicant

Date

14. FILING FEE

There is a filing fee of \$118 for each proposed landmark. The fee is used to pay for the required legal notice in the newspaper, and for recording landmark status at the County Recorder's Office. Checks should be made out to the City of Rockford.

15. PHOTOGRAPHS

Applications must include photographs of the proposed landmark property. Please refer to the instructions for completing the application form to see what photographs are required and the format to be used.

16. SITE PLAN

Attach a site plan showing the location of all buildings, structures and objects on the site in question. This should be drawn as much to scale as possible.

Significance Page 1

Narrative Statement of Significance

- B. *Exceptional example of a historic or vernacular style or one of the few remaining in the City of Rockford*
This building is one of the few Beaux Arts buildings remaining in the City. The mansard roof is of particular interest.
- C. *Extraordinary curiosity or picturesque work.*
A classic example of the Beaux Arts style, the use of materials in the entry way is worthy of note.
- E. *Outstanding example of work by locally well-known architect.*
Wybe Vander Meer focused much of his architectural career on Roman Catholic Church buildings and schools. In Rockford, these include the Muldoon and St. Thomas High Schools. He also designed the Marmion and Madonna High Schools in St. Charles, St. Vincent's Orphanage in Freeport, St. Joseph's Hospital in Aurora, and Sacred Heart Seminary in Geneva.
- F. *The property most closely associated with the life or activities of a major historic person, organization or group.*
This property with adjacent Roman Catholic Church buildings was the home to the Diocesan Bishop and office. This building was erected during the early years of the depression while the present Cathedral of St. Peter was dedicated in 1960. This property was core to the Diocese from 1929 when construction was completed until 2002 when the office and Bishop's residence moved to the far east side of Rockford.
- H. *Of a type associated with a use once common but now rare.*
There are few remaining Beaux Arts buildings in Rockford, according to historic preservation architect Gary W. Anderson.
- J. *By virtue of its location or activities held there, is a current or former focal point of life in the City of Rockford.*
This building is part of a very large complex which formed the heartbeat of the Roman Catholic Church and Diocese in Rockford. The campus included The Cathedral of St. Peter (1243 N. Church), St. Peter's School (1260 N. Court) with large fenced children's playground, an adjacent Convent (1229 N. Court) and the Chancery (1243 N. Court) which served as Diocesan office and the home of the Bishop.

Description, Page 1

The Chancery is one of a number of buildings on a Rockford Diocesan campus located between N. Main St and N. Court Streets (on the east and west) and Reynolds and Salem Streets (north and south). This complex also includes the Cathedral of St. Peter, St. Peter's School, and adjacent convent. The Chancery itself occupies three lots at the northeast corner of the intersection of Reynolds and North Court Streets.

The neighborhood was reputed to be ("Diocese of Rockford, IL", pg 138-40) "the highest point in the city of Rockford. It was known as Piety Hill, and the Bishop recognized in it a most desirable site for a church... The purchase of property was completed in the fall of 1920 when the Bishop bought the Blaisdell residence and property at 1240 N. Church St. The whole property secured consisted of lots 1-4 on Court and Sumner Streets and lots 15-18 on Church and Sumner with a dwelling at 1229 N. Court Street and another at 1240 N. Church St. The cost was \$36,200."

The first building erected on the campus was dedicated in 1922 as a church, school and hall. It was named in honor of the first Bishop of the Diocese of Rockford, Peter James Muldoon.

One of the early parishioners at St. Peter's was architect Wybe Vander Meer. Born in Woudsend, Friesland (Holland district north of the Zuider Zee), he emigrated to America in 1907, stopping in Grand Rapids, MI and Aurora, IL before settling in Rockford in 1920. He was a musician (composer) and poet as well as an architect. In his later years, he and his family lived at 1704 National Ave, the former home and first Rockford Diocesan office under the leadership of the Right Reverend Edward F. Hoban. Vander Meer died 18 May 2018 in Aurora, IL.

Vander Meer's architectural projects in Illinois were many, including St Mary's Church (Pecatonica); St. Peter's and St. Anthony's Churches as well as Muldoon School and St. Stanislaus (Rockford), St Patrick's (McHenry), St Joseph's (Apple River), and Holy Trinity (Scales Mound).

Between 1928 and 1931, the Roman Catholic Church in Rockford experienced a building boom. Much of this was accomplished following the arrival of the Right Reverend Edward F. Hoban in May 1928. Realizing facilities were inadequate at the first Diocesan office and home at 1704 National Ave, he selected Vander Meer as the architect and authorized construction of the new Chancery office and official residence of the Diocesan Bishop shortly after arriving in town. Construction began immediately and was completed in 1929. There are no other buildings on these three lots. It is the northern-most building of the entire campus.

According to the "Diocese of Rockford" 1908-2008 (pg 30) reports" a "note of interest about this building is that it is actually two buildings joined to each other and then covered by exterior stone, giving the impression of one uniformly constructed building. The north end was newly built and the south end was a large home to which the new part was attached."

It is a two (plus)-story of grey limestone block with a mansard roof in the Beaux Arts (French Renaissance) style. It is one of few excellent examples remaining in the Rockford area. It includes both home and office with ornamentation: quoins, fake balustrade, circular dormers, window hoods with brackets, medallion and columns over the entry in the French Renaissance style.

(continued next page)

Description, Page 2

The owner is the Diocese of Rockford which has recently announced plans to demolish this building as well as the convent south of the school. In preparation for demolition, the Church has begun deconstruction, removing some of the valuable architectural and interior artifacts. While these scars are evident – they can be repaired and some artifacts retrieved. One note of concern: a number of windows have been removed or are open to the elements. While this will take a toll over time, the building remains today in excellent structural condition and a beautiful example of a lost architectural style.

Further, this building represents the heartbeat of the Diocese for most of the 20th Century (1929 and 2002).

The Friends of the Chancery believe this building, based on architecture and history, richly deserves to be saved from demolition and given a new lease on life.

Major Bibliographical References

- WINGIS website
- County Assessor's website
- Catholic Churches & Institutions by Wybe J. vander Meer B.N.A, A.I.A
- 1928 Sandborn map – no church buildings were in the 1200 block of N. Court or N. Church
- 1927 & 1928 City Directories – no church buildings listed for N. Church or N. Court
- Golden Jubilee History of the Diocese of Rockford (1908-1958)
- Diocese of Rockford (1908-2008)
- Newspaper articles
 - Weds, 19 Dec 2018 - " Mayor's past, present fight chancery razing" (page 1), Den DeCoster
 - Weds 19 Dec 2018 – My View "Diocese should halt demolition of historic chancery building", Larry Morrissey

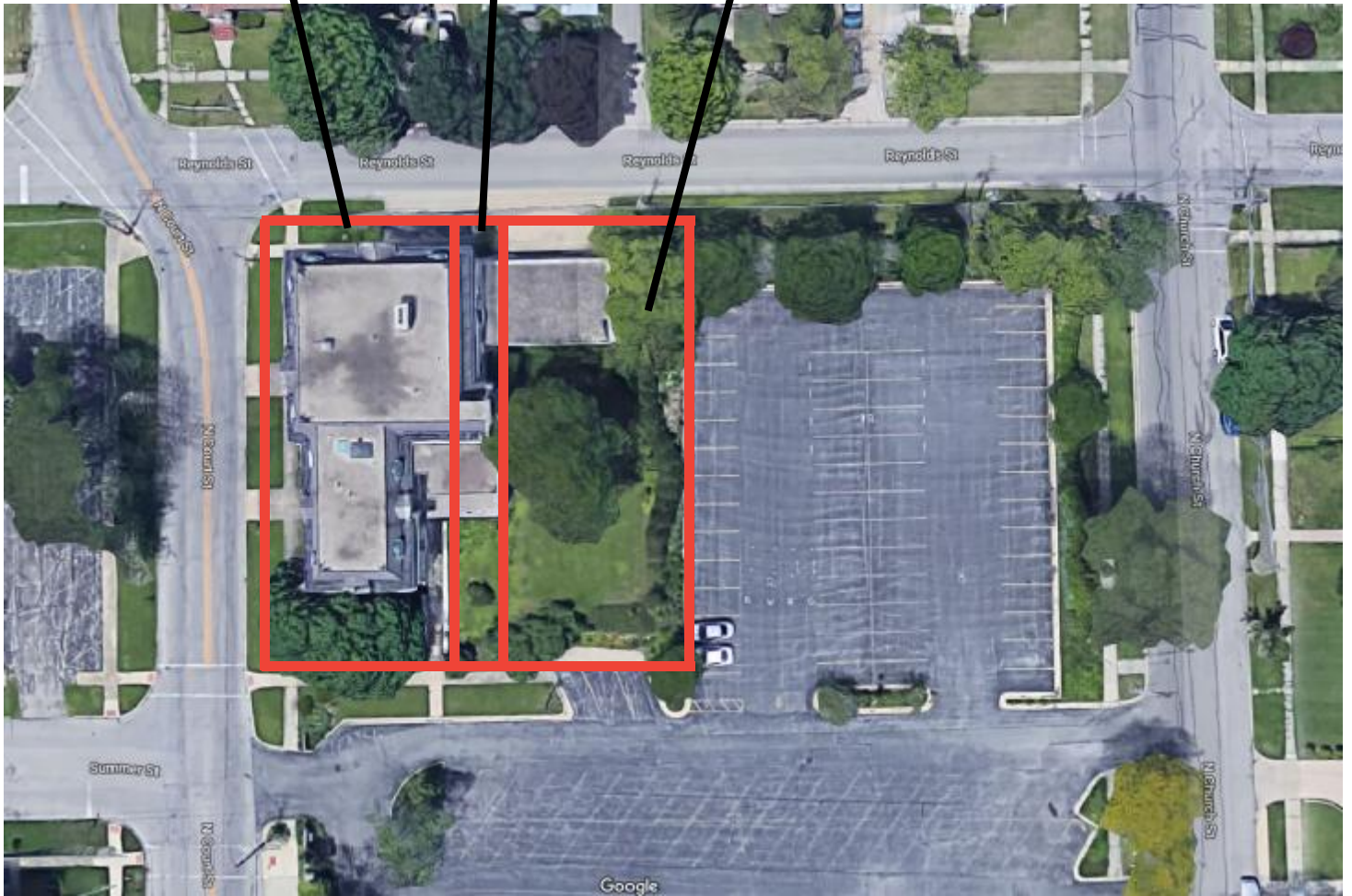
Researchers reviewed a myriad of articles that mentioned vander Meer projects.

Site Plan

11-14-453-001

11-14-453-001

11-14-453-001





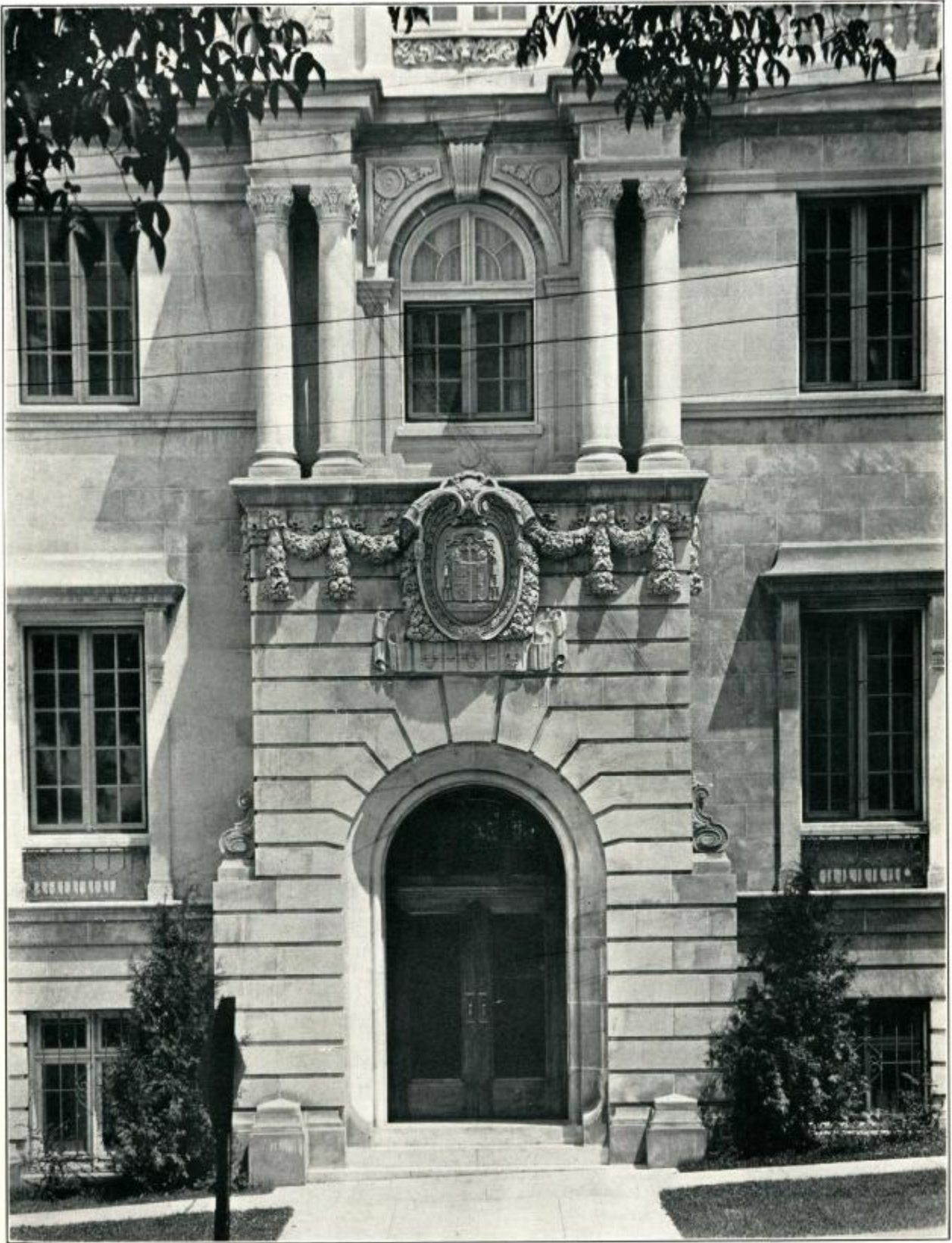
NORTH AND WEST FACADES

Historic Photo, Date Unknown



GENERAL VIEW

Historic Photo, Date Unknown



MAIN ENTRANCE DETAIL

Historic Photo, Date Unknown

Attachment 2, Pg B



Corner of N Court St and Reynolds St, 12/19/2018



Directly south of Chancery Building, 12/19/2018



Reynolds St, directly north of Chancery, 12/19/2018



Directly south of Chancery Building, 12/19/2018



LOOKING EAST FROM PUBLIC SPACE

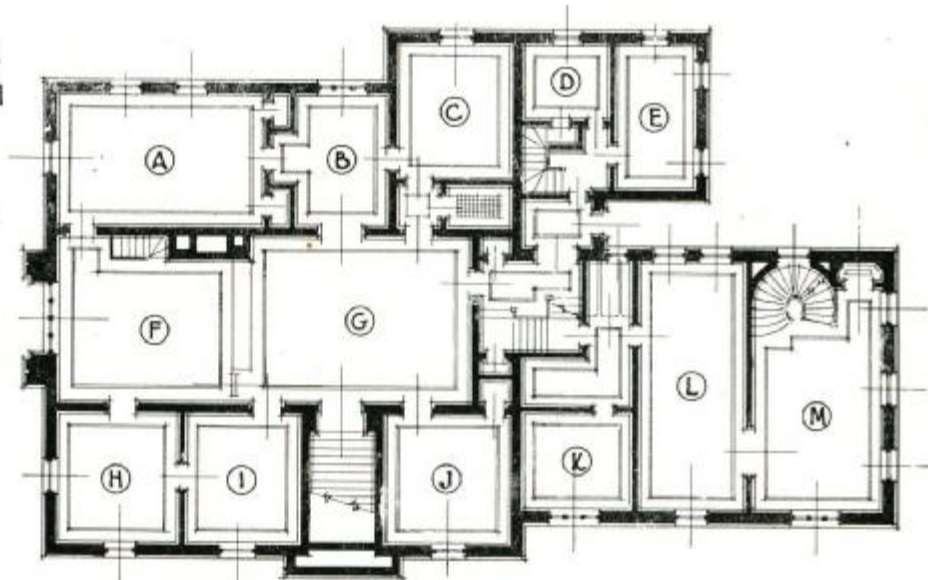
Historic Photo, Date Unknown



BUSINESS OFFICE

Historic Photo, Date Unknown

- Ⓐ BISHOP'S SUITE
- Ⓑ WAITING ROOM
- Ⓒ SECRETARY
- Ⓓ BED ROOM
- Ⓔ SITTING ROOM
- Ⓕ WORK SPACE
- Ⓖ PUBLIC SPACE
- Ⓗ BOOK KEEPER
- Ⓘ CHANCELOR
- Ⓙ OFFICERS
- Ⓚ KITCHEN
- Ⓛ DINING ROOM
- Ⓜ PARLOR



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

Historic Photo, Date Unknown

W. J. VAN DER MEER

OPENS ARCHITECT'S OFFICE, TRUST BLDG.

W. J. Van der Meer, who has been in Rockford for the past two years practicing his profession as an architect has opened offices at 209 Rockford Trust building on his own account. He has been a licensed architect for years and has been connected with very large building enterprises here and in Chicago. He was in the construction department of the army during the war. He was constructing superintendent of the six million dollar powder plant at Richmond, Va. He starts on his own account with a good list of clients.

Sep 18, 1919

VAN DER MEER MOVES

W. J. VanderMeer, architect, Mead building has moved his offices from 214-15 to the corner suite on the same floor where he will have larger and better accommodations. Mr. VanderMeer is taking bids on a school building at Savanna, and is making plans for several buildings in and near Rockford.

Mar 23, 1923

DESIGNS FOR CHICAGO HOUSE DRAWN UP HERE

Plans for an apartment building in Chicago which will house 60 families are being drawn by W. J. VanDerMeer, architect with offices in the Mead building. It was announced yesterday.

Mr. VanDerMeer also is receiving bids for the new Holy Trinity church to be constructed at Scales Mound, Ill. Scales Mound is a few miles west of Freeport. He has completed plans for a \$20,000 residence in Savanna, Ill., and reports that the school building built for the Rev. F. J. Antl at Savanna is progressing rapidly. The school, which will be three stories in height, is to be completed for the fall term in September. It will cost \$65,000, and has an auditorium and gymnasium.

The VanDerMeer firm is drawing plans for a three story addition to a furniture store at Savanna, which will cost \$55,000, and will complete work on the Haskell Park apartment building, North Church street and Park avenue here by Sept. 1.

A new laundry building at Michigan City, Ind., and the St. Stanislaus parochial school here will be built according to designs drawn up by the VanDerMeer architects.

Aug 18, 1923

VANDERMEER TO DESIGN CHURCH

W. J. VanDerMeer, Rockford architect, is at work on plans for a new church building for St. Gall's Catholic parish of Elburn, DeKalb county, which is in Rockford diocese.

The Rev. Fr. Lawrence E. Troy, pastor of St. Gall's has announced the purchase of a building site on the main street of Elburn. The parish has outgrown its present church structure.

Jun 16, 1925

W. J. VANDEMEER COMPOSES SONG

A new song, Joung Sang (Evening Song), composed by **Wybe J. VanderMeer,** architect, has just been issued by his Amsterdam publishers, G. Alsbach & Co. Mr. VanderMeer wrote both the lyrics and the musical score for the song, the lyrics published in Frisian, Dutch, and English. He has also published several other compositions. A collection of verse, De Swalker (The Wanderer) has been published in three languages.

Rockford Register Republic, Oct 30, 1925

ARCHITECT IS VERSE WRITER IN SPARE TIME

WYBE VAN DER MEER HAS
HOBBIES AMONG THE
ARTS

(BY JED)

Architect by profession, musician by nature, booklover by pleasure, and writer by hobby—such, the epitome of Wybe J. van der Meer, 529 Summer street, copies of whose first printed collection of verse will be here soon.

Publishing a volume or two of verse does not necessarily make a man remarkable—as witness the case of Mr. J. U. Nicholson; but when a man publishes such a volume in three languages; plays violin and composes a bit in his spare time; weaves short stories out of experience and writes aphorisms for mental exercise, besides keeping up with his profession and assuming those duties properly falling to the head of a family—then he is entitled to more than passing notice from his community.

Native Of Friesland.

Such a man, again, is Wybe van der Meer. Talking with him for the first time, in his Mead building office, I groped for the proper questions to ask first. But not long. The man's interests are magnetic. He told of his native land—Friesland—and of early life; then books—so many of them he has read, and of such variety; then startings in America, college, work — and the family.

In Woudsend, Friesland, he was born; and there he had his first music lessons from the village priest. Fundamentals learned then have clung and worked through years of violin playing, composing, scoring.

Ear Fails Him

"I was going to be a Kreisler in those younger days," he told me. "But then, 12 years ago, came ear trouble. 'I could hear,' he said, 'but could go no further. That ambition ended in impossibility. I laid the violin aside.'"

Music, though, was not his only interest. Early he gained apt reading knowledge of French, Dutch, German and English and dug into classics in all these languages, besides many in translation. He liked Russian authors—Tolstoy, particularly. He read Thackeray, Rousseau, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Emerson, Jack London, Cooper, Bernard Shaw, John Ruskin (whom he considers "one of

Tennyson, Shelley, Keats, Shakespeare—a perfect heterogeneity of nationalities, men, styles.

Holland Likes Cooper

Cooper, he told me, is very strong in Holland. Mark Twain is widely read and loved there. Hugo is not well liked, for the Dutch, said he, are too phlegmatic and analytical to enjoy his sentimentality, such as it is.

Friesland, though a possession of Holland's north of the Zuider Zee, is peopled by a folk entirely different from the Dutch in temperament. Hence van der Meer valued by the cultures of both. His name is Dutch, though his descent is Friesian.

"Friesians," he told me, "are like the Irish; quick witted, loving argument. 'Wealth is in the hands of a few, but the poorer people are remarkably happy. Their greatest delight is in repartee.'"

After traveling about the continent studying in France, Germany, and Holland, van der Meer set sail for America in 1907. His first stop was in Grand Rapids, Mich. Later, he attended Chicago Technical college where he completed his study in architecture; then taught for two years prior to the war.

Returns After Wife

Coming to Rockford in 1920, van der Meer took up his profession here; but returned soon to Holland to marry and bring back the daughter of an old employer, whom he had known since childhood—Angeline Verhaaf van der Hoeve. Thus a home was made here, and now there are two other: Julia Clementine, aged 3; and Johanna Josephine, just 2 years. Julia Clementine is studying piano, and her father hopes to see her become no inconsiderable musician.

And now comes his book. Wybe van der Meer has written verse ever since childhood. He doesn't take it too seriously. "I should think it almost an insult if anyone were to call me a poet," he said as we talked; "but the things I write are sincere, and I obtain pleasure from them."

Friend Writes Preface.

An old friend on the continent—O. H. Systra—is responsible for the collection. Keeping constant track of van der Meer, he finally asked permission to assemble verse that has been published or accumulated in manuscript form for some 10 years past. He made preparations, and wrote a preface.

"The Wanderer" is the result. In English are

Van der Meer's mind pictures of local scenes—the river, the pines—

and memories from past life and ambitions:

"How faithful you have been
Through later lonesome years,
When youthful rhapsody
Changed to a song of tears."

Thus he sings to his violin, an old companion in days and experiences of many colors.

Wybe van der Meer never re-views. Ideas and tunes flow through his mind and come onto the paper naturally; nothing of his production can ever be forced.

Aug 9, 1925

ARCHITECTS SHOW OPENS MONDAY EVE

Five local architects, Jessie Barloga, Frank A. Carpenter, Arthur Eliel, W. J. VanDerMeer and C. E. Wolfley, will show sketches and photographs of their work at the exhibit which will open in the Rockford Art association's galley Monday and continue for two weeks.

The gallery will be closed Sunday for the hanging of the exhibit. Belle Keith gallery, in the Woman's Club building, will be open, however, from 2 to 5 pm., and the public is invited to see the exhibit of water colors by Thomas Hall.

A meeting of the Art association Monday evening will mark the opening of the architects exhibit. Mr. Carpenter is chairman for the evening. A musical program will be given by Mrs. Oscar Keller, contralto and Miss Beatrice Schabacker, pianist.

Oct 13, 1928

Wybe Jelles van der Meer sr.

Carpenter, architect, musician and poet

Its buildings

music

poems

Catholic buildings

Book

Wybe van der Meer Sr. was a professional architect (BNA and AIA). In the United States, he designed many Catholic buildings that ran from schools to monasteries and churches, as well as residential and retail buildings. You can find them on [the map](#) at the bottom of the page. In addition, he wrote music pieces and poems (Frisian, English and Dutch). As far as I have found, he had two daughters (9/7/1921 / F / VAN DER, MORE JULIA CLEMENTIN / VAN DER, 7/3/1923 / F / VAN DER, MORE JOHANNA) and one son (Wybe Jelles van der Meer). 12 Feb 1928 - 27 Jan 1995 Kerville, Texas).



Wybe, Engelina and the children



Johanna and Wybe jr. Vacation?

He left from Woudsend in 1906 to the United States. In November 1906 he sailed with the Statendam from Rotterdam to New York. According to the passenger list, where he is ranked thirteenth, he was unmarried and professionally employed as a carpenter. In the US he went to a friend, H. Jollema, Grand Avenue 813 Grand Rapids Michigan. He lived in Grand Rapids from 1907.

<https://www.hfjansen.nl/page26.html>