



697

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

1. Name of Property

historic name: Parker, Charles and Grace, House

other name/site number: N/A

2. Location

street & number: 4829 Colfax Avenue South

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Minneapolis

vicinity: N/A

state: MN county: Hennepin code: 053 zip code: 55409

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: private

Category of Property: buildings

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>  1  </u>	<u>  1  </u>	buildings
<u>      </u>	<u>      </u>	sites
<u>      </u>	<u>      </u>	structures
<u>      </u>	<u>      </u>	objects
<u>  1  </u>	<u>  1  </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this   X   nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property   X   meets        does not meet the National Register Criteria.        See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official

Date

Ian R. Stewart, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

5/1/92

State or Federal agency and bureau Minnesota Historical Society

In my opinion, the property        meets        does not meet the National Register criteria.        See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

Entered in the National Register

  ✓   entered in the National Register

       See continuation sheet.

       determined eligible for the

National Register

       See continuation sheet.

       determined not eligible for the

National Register

       removed from the National Register

       other (explain):

*Delores Byers*

6/11/92

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic: DOMESTIC

Sub: single dwelling

Current : DOMESTIC

Sub: single dwelling

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7. Description  
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Architectural Classification:

Prairie School \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Other Description: N/A \_\_\_\_\_

Materials: foundation CONCRETE\_\_ roof ASPHALT\_\_\_\_\_  
          walls      BRICK\_\_\_\_ other      \_\_\_\_\_  
                  STUCCO\_\_\_\_

Describe present and historic physical appearance.   X   See continuation sheet.

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8. Statement of Significance  
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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: statewide \_\_\_\_\_.

Applicable National Register Criteria:   C  

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) :   N/A  

Areas of Significance: ARCHITECTURE \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period(s) of Significance: 1913\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates : \_\_\_\_\_ 1913 \_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person(s):   N/A    
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation:   N/A  

Architect/Builder: Purcell, Feick and Elmslie \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.  
  X   See continuation sheet.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University of Minnesota, Northwest Architectual Archives
- Other -- Specify Repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: less than one acre

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing      Zone Easting Northing

A	15	477040	4973360	B	_____	_____
C	_____	_____	_____	D	_____	_____

\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: \_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Lot 17 and north 31' of west 36' of Lot 6, and west 11' of south 29' of Lot 6, Block 3, Walton's Lyndhurst Addition to Minneapolis (P.I.D. 16-028-24-14-0146)

Boundary Justification: \_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

The boundary includes the entire city lots that have historically been associated with the property.

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11. Form Prepared By

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Name/Title: Charlene K. Roise, Architectural Historian \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: Hess, Roise and Company \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 20 December 1991 \_\_\_\_\_

Street & Number: 710 Grain Exchange Bldg. \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: 612-338-1987 \_\_\_\_\_

City or Town: Minneapolis \_\_\_\_\_ State: MN ZIP: 55415 \_\_\_\_\_

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

Section number   7   Parker, Charles and Grace, House Page 1  
=====

Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Minnesota

Built in 1913, the Charles and Grace Parker House is a two-and-one-half story frame building sheathed with stucco, resting on a high brick basement over a concrete foundation. It was built by the nationally prominent Prairie School architectural firm, Purcell, Feick and Elmslie of Minneapolis. The house is located in a residential neighborhood in south Minneapolis near the southeast corner of Lake Harriet. It is on the east side of Colfax Avenue, a street lined, for the most part, by single-family houses similar in size to the Parker House. A large hill dominates the topography of the area, giving the Parker House an unusual setting: it is situated high above street level and far back on the lot. The elevation and set-back effectively provide seclusion from the street, and the house is further screened by a row of cedar trees along the hill's ridge. Two short flights of steps and a semi-circular walkway lead easterly from the street to the house.

Stairs leading from the entrance walkway to the front of the house are edged by brick, which conceals the stairs from the street. A terrace runs across the front of the house. The building's brick base extends upward from a slightly projecting concrete sill. The brick forms a solid parapet around the terrace. Two large square flower boxes, incorporated into the parapets, anchor the front corners of the terrace. A brick wall carries the horizontal sweep of the foundation beyond the house to the southern property line. The brick is capped by stone throughout.

The roof's gable end faces the street. With an eight-to-twelve pitch, the roof displays a relatively steep slant for the Prairie School style. The gable extends several feet beyond the west elevation, with stucco continuing up from the wall to cover the rafters. The gable is trimmed by a plain cypress barge board. The rafters end several feet beyond the north and south walls, and are likewise encased in stucco and trimmed with cypress. To the south, a smaller gable projects from the facade on the first floor. It shades the sun porch, which protrudes from the front of the house. The sun porch windows wrap around the building's southwest corner.

The sun porch gable visually balances the ornate entrance on the north side of the front elevation. The door is surmounted by a semi-circular sawed-wood screen with an organic, Sullivan-esque design. The arch is framed by a plain wood arch. This, in turn, is bordered by a flat wood arch decorated with a sawed, flower-like pattern. An abstract representation of coiled ivy is sawn in a pair of square ornamental blocks flanking the top of the door, at the arch's impost. A flat horizontal board extends out from the base of the arch and terminates in a square wood block. The wide wood door situated beneath this elaborate crown holds a square, leaded glass window. The window is a linear composition of brown, green, gold and red-brown glass, interrupted on the top and sides by a popular Purcell, Feick and Elmslie motif, a splayed-corner rectangle. The window, and other leaded

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number   7                        Parker, Charles and Grace, House      Page 2  
=====

Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Minnesota

glass in the house, was crafted by the Mosaic Art Shops of Minneapolis.<sup>1</sup> The wall between the door and the porch holds a band of casement windows. Another ribbon of casements light bedrooms on the second floor. Window sills on the first floor are of stone. The remainder of the surround on the first floor windows, and the entire surround on the second floor windows, is flat wood molding. Similar treatment is used on all exterior windows. All wood trim on the house is now stained brown. It appears that some of the wood, particularly that on the door ornamentation and some front porch details, was originally polychromatic. The stucco, now tan, was probably tinted a darker tan or earthy pink tone initially, as was most stucco used by the architects during this period.

On the north elevation, five small, square, individual windows pierce the brick basement. Steps lead down to a central, exterior door providing access to the basement. On the first floor, there is a group of four casement windows. Three casements and six small square windows, all strung together, are tucked beneath the eaves on the second floor. Screens from rear porches on the first and second floors fill the east end of the north elevation and wrap around to the east side of the house. The roof holds two small, gablet dormers with square windows.

The porch wing projects from the north end of the east elevation. The back entry is through the first floor porch, which is approached by several steps. An alcove holding the dining room windows extends from the first floor. Between the alcove and the porch, a glass greenhouse bay has replaced the original pair of one-over-one sash windows in the kitchen. Because this is a rather secluded location on a secondary elevation, and because the simple wood trim surrounding the window opening has been retained, this alteration does not significantly impair the building's architectural integrity. Above the alcove, on the second floor, a ribbon of three casement windows open from the maid's bedroom. To the right of these casements are two sliphead windows for the bathroom. Three small square windows are centered below the gable end at the attic level.

The roof extends down to the first floor on the western half of the southern elevation to cover the sun porch, which projects from the southwest corner of the house. A brick chimney stands near the center of the roof by the ridge. To the east, the eaves match those on the northern elevation, sheltering a band of small square windows on the second floor. Two original gablet dormers project from the roof, one from the second floor and one from the attic. A shed-roofed dormer was added for the attic when that space was finished for habitation. A trio of casement windows offer southern exposure to the first floor dining room.

The interior layout is typical of the open plan often used by Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, with a prominent central fireplace and a relatively unobstructed flow of

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<sup>1</sup>See advertisement for Mosaic Art Shops in The Western Architect, July 1915, p. 19. The firm provided glass for a number of Purcell and Elmslie projects during this period.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number   7   Parker, Charles and Grace, House Page 3  
=====

Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Minnesota

space between living room, sun porch and dining room. The front door leads into an entryway with a low, shallow-arched ceiling. Wood-slat screens at each corner define the central hallway, which leads from the front door to the second-floor stairway, also edged by wood slats, and to the kitchen. The screens also demarcate the hallway from the living room, which extends at a right angle. A massive brick fireplace fills the east wall of the living room. The brick, the same as that used on the exterior, is complemented by thin, deeply incised bands of terra cotta-colored mortar. Two pairs of square, wood pillars support the simple wood mantel. Wood molding outlines plaster panels on the wall above. A set of original metal light fittings flank the panels, and other original fixtures hang from the ceiling in each corner of the room. A bench is built into the northern end of the room's western wall. A band of windows runs south from the bench. Like all of the casements in the house, the main windows swing out, with the screen/storm window hinged inside the house to facilitate cleaning and changing. Radiators below the windows are hidden by a long wood cabinet with wood screen doors. Leaded glass doors in the center of the south wall, repeating the glass design from the front door, lead onto the "living porch," a sun room with windows on three sides. The large window sash are mounted on tracks that lower them into the basement when opened. Cypress board-and-batten siding covers the north wall. East of the door leading to the porch are built-in book cases with leaded glass doors. Two bands of wood ring the living room walls. A strip of wood connects the door- and window-frame lintels and the top of the fireplace panels, broken only at the entryway cove. Two strips of wood at a right angle trace the juncture of wall and ceiling. Wood strips, extending from the floor to the lower wood band, also mark the room's corners. The same detailing is repeated in the dining room, which is entered through a wide opening, cased in wood but without doors, in the southern end of the living room's eastern wall. The dining room's eastern wall holds a high alcove with three small, square windows. The alcove is flanked by a pair of narrow windows, below which are radiator cabinets with wood screen doors. A door in the room's northwest corner leads into the kitchen, which has been extensively remodeled. Although virtually no trace of the original room remains, the new design, particularly the horizontal bands of wood trim, is sympathetic to the house's design.

Doors from the kitchen go to the back hall and basement, and to the front entry hall. A stairway leads from the entry hall to the second floor. Access to the second-floor rear sleeping porch is from the stair landing, as is a door to the attic stairway. On the second floor, rooms radiate from a central hallway. The master bedroom, located in the southwest corner, has a sitting area beneath the southern dormer. Two walk-in closets in the bedroom's southeast corner each have a window and built-in shoe boxes; one also has a built-in wardrobe. A smaller bedroom is in the northwest corner. The maid's room, with its own sink, is in the southeast corner. It is entered through a private hallway and storage area at the south end of the center hallway. The bathroom is next to the maid's room, along the east wall.

Plans for the house show the attic unfinished, with a "future room" sketched in.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number   7   Parker, Charles and Grace, House Page 4  
=====

Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Minnesota

Trim in the rooms suggests, however, that this area was completed during the same era as the rest of the house. The attic is divided into two rooms plus a bathroom.<sup>2</sup>

A detached garage was added to the rear of the property in 1922. Although the designer is unknown, the structure closely follows the lines of the house. Like the house, the gable of the one-and-one-half story garage is oriented east-west. It is covered with stucco, and trimmed with simple wood barge boards and trim.<sup>3</sup> The garage is a non-contributing building.

The current owner, Veloris J. Peterson, has worked to return the house to its original appearance whenever feasible. The building's architectural integrity is very well-preserved.

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<sup>2</sup>Original plans are at the Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota.

<sup>3</sup>Records for 4829 Colfax Avenue South at Minneapolis Building Inspection Department.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number: 8 Parker, Charles and Grace, House Page 1  
=====

Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Minnesota

The Charles and Grace Parker House is eligible for the National Register under Criterion C for clearly illustrating through distinctive design characteristics the Prairie School style of architecture. The building is significant as an important work of Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, one of Minnesota's most prominent architectural offices. It was built during the firm's most active and influential period. In their Guide to the Architecture of Minnesota, David Gebhard and Tom Martinson assert that the years from about 1908 to 1917 produced "the largest single group of buildings of consistently high quality in Minnesota's architectural history." They credit several architects, but "above all the houses, small banks, and other structures designed by Purcell and Elmslie . . . pushed Minnesota once more onto the national architectural scene." The particular distinction of the Parker House is emphasized by the fact that the principals included it in an overview of their work published in The Western Architect in 1915. It has since appeared in a number of important architectural history studies, including H. Allen Brooks' The Prairie School: Frank Lloyd Wright and His Midwest Contemporaries. The design is particularly noteworthy for the unique entryway ornamentation of sawn wood, and for the building's pure, sculptural form.<sup>4</sup>

#### History of the Charles and Grace Parker House

The 1910 Minneapolis city directory lists Charles J. Parker as the secretary of Grinnell, Collins and Company, wholesalers of fruit and produce. Shortly thereafter, however, he became involved in the burgeoning automobile business. According to the 1911 directory, he continued to work for Grinnell, Collins, while also managing Tri-State Rubber Company, distributors of "Swinehart" tires. In March 1912, he and Alex Robertson, presumably a relative by marriage, bought out the Western Motor Supply Company, an automotive supply retailer and wholesaler, located at 1018 Nicollet Avenue in Minneapolis. The city directory in that year shows W. W. Robertson as president of Western, A.D. Robertson as vice president, and Parker as secretary and treasurer. In January 1909, Parker had married William W. Robertson's daughter, Grace.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>The Gebhard/Martinson Guide, published by the University of Minnesota Press in 1977, remains the most comprehensive overview of the state's architecture. In The Western Architect, the house is incorrectly referred to as the "Harry S. Parker" dwelling (July 1915, p. 10). Three issues of The Western Architect dedicated to the work of the firm (January 1913, and January and July 1915) were reissued as The Work of Purcell and Elmslie, Architects (Park Forest, Illinois: Prairie School Press, 1965). The Brooks book was issued by W.W. Norton, New York, in 1972.

<sup>5</sup>Brief history of Grinnell, Collins and Company in Minneapolis Journal, 31 March 1910. Announcement about the purchase of the Western Motor Supply Company in "Supply House is Sold," Minneapolis

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number: 8                                  Parker, Charles and Grace, House          Page 2  
=====

Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Minnesota

The Parkers apparently began discussing construction of a new house with Purcell, Feick and Elmslie in 1912. On January 6, 1913, William Purcell wrote to George Feick Jr.: "Mrs. Parker has looked over the drawings and the plans seem to interest her very much." On June 10 of that year, Mr. Parker applied for a building permit for a two-story, 42'10" by 34'4" "plaster-ven." house on a concrete foundation. Purcell, Feick and Elmslie are listed as the architects, with Henry Ingham as the builder. The house was to be completed by October 10 of the same year, at an estimated cost of \$6,000. Plumbing and electrical permits were applied for in mid-August.<sup>6</sup>

Plans for the house appear to have been altered quite significantly during the design process. In Purcell's January 6 letter, he wrote that there were several items "absolutely fixed in Mrs. Parker's mind, and should not be varied":

The terrace with steps at the right hand end and a curving walk passing between the end two of three cedar trees. . . . The sun room must not project beyond the front line of the house. . . . The wall of the terrace must not exceed one foot in height above the terrace platform, the idea being not to cut off the view of the flower box from the street, in looking up. Ample flower box to extend full length of front windows.<sup>7</sup>

While the curved walk does pass through a row of cedars and lead to a terrace, the steps are on the terrace's left end. Although the sun room does not project as much as similar rooms in most contemporary designs by the firm, it does indeed protrude beyond the front plane of the house. The long window box below the front windows became, instead, two square planters flanking the terrace.

Purcell's comments on the roof line seem even more contradictory. On one hand, he asserts that house will have a "flat hip roof, pitch say 5 to 12, as usual." In the same letter, however, Purcell claims that Mrs. Parker looked at the initial plans and "has apparently had the other system of roofing pretty definitely in her mind and tells me that she has drawn out for herself such an elevation a great many times." Whether the "other system" was a gable or some other roof design is unclear, but Purcell adds that "she asks us . . . if we cannot make for her an elevation with the other system of roofing so that she could more easily decide for

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Journal, 31 March 1912, 8. The wedding of Charles and Grace is described in "Charles J. Parker marries Grace Robertson," Minneapolis Journal, 15 January 1909, 8.

<sup>6</sup>Letter, William Purcell to George Feick Jr., 6 January 1913, in the collection of the Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis; Building Permit B104454 at the Minneapolis Building Inspection Department.

<sup>7</sup>Letter, Purcell to Feick, 6 January 1913.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number: 8 Parker, Charles and Grace, House Page 3  
=====

Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Minnesota

herself what she is going to like."<sup>8</sup>

Among Mrs. Parker's "absolutely fixed" items was a "roof sun parlor like Leuthold's with liberal projections." The Ward Beebe House, also known as the Leuthold House after Beebe's in-laws who financed the construction, was built at 2022 Summit Avenue, St. Paul, in 1912. The house included a petite polygonal sitting room, complete with built-in furniture, on the second floor above a screened porch extending from the eastern wall. Although the Parker House is well equipped with porches -- a "living" porch off the living room on the south side, and two screened porches in the rear -- none resemble the Leuthold's sun parlor.<sup>9</sup>

Plans for the house dated April 28, 1913 are initialed M.A.P. (Marion Alice Parker) and L.A.F. (Lawrence A. Fournier). Both had also apparently worked on the Leuthold residence. The plans were checked by George Feick. They show the building essentially as it now stands, but some details were not completed. The plans call for leaded glass in nearly every window, but this appears only in the front door, the doors to the living porch, and the adjacent bookcase doors. The fireplace was to have had a glass mosaic above, where there are now plain plaster panels. These details were probably cut due to financial constraints, given Parker's contemporaneous investment in Western Motor. Capital limitations may have also eliminated the Leuthold-like roof sun parlor, as well as the garage. The site of a "future garage" is outlined along the house's north wall, but ironically Parker, who made a living in the automotive industry, never had a garage at this house. The detached garage behind the house was erected in 1922 by John Schruth, a general contractor who had acquired the property from the Parkers by 1919. The building permit indicates that the construction was to be done by day labor at an estimated cost at \$300. No architect is given.<sup>10</sup>

The house's attic displays another change. The drawings show it unfinished, with a "future room" sketched in at the top of the stairway along the eastern wall, where a bathroom is now located. The large shed-roof dormer in the south roof,

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>The Beebe/Leuthold residence is listed on the National Register. Its sun parlor is described by Purcell in his "Parabiography, 1912" (typescript, vol. 6, 1951, pp. 31-32, at the Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota).

<sup>10</sup>A set of twelve plans for the house is in the collections of the Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. For information on Schruth, see entries under John Schruth and under Schruth and Jackson in Minneapolis city directories from 1919 to 1932. Details on the garage included in Building Permit B155647, 3 January 1922, at the Minneapolis Building Inspection Department.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number: 8    Parker, Charles and Grace, House                          Page 4  
=====

Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Minnesota  
=====

which provides light for the attic's front room, is certainly not original. The style of the attic woodwork, however, suggests that the attic was finished not too long after the house's construction. It appears that this modification was undertaken during Schruth's ownership. Several permits for plumbing and plastering are recorded for the building in 1921; between 1923 and 1958, no permits were issued for 4829 Colfax. It is possible, but unlikely, that such a large project would have been undertaken without a permit. It thus appears that the attic construction occurred in 1921.<sup>11</sup>

**Purcell, Feick and Elmslie and the Parker House**

The life of the firm of Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, more commonly known as Purcell and Elmslie, was brief, tumultuous, and brilliant. William Gray Purcell came from an affluent Chicago family active in literary and artistic circles. He studied architecture at Cornell University, and had a brief stint working for the prominent Chicago architect, Louis Sullivan. He and a college friend, George Feick Jr., moved to Minneapolis in 1907 and established an architectural practice. In 1909, they were joined by George Grant Elmslie, who Purcell had met in Sullivan's office. Elmslie's family emigrated from Scotland in 1884. He attended public school in Chicago until 1888 when, at age seventeen, he began an apprenticeship with Joseph Lyman Silsbee, a prominent Chicago architect. He was hired by Sullivan a year later, and was appointed the office's chief draftsman in 1893 when Frank Lloyd Wright left that position. Although Purcell had urged Elmslie to come to Minneapolis earlier, he remained in Chicago, producing much of the elegant ornamentation credited to Sullivan, until lack of work forced Sullivan to let him go.<sup>12</sup>

The Parker House was built in 1913, during the most successful period of their practice. Purcell was an energetic promotor, and kept the office busy with a number of commissions, particularly for houses and banks. They had just completed one of their most famous commercial works, the Merchants' National Bank in Winona (1911-12). Houses for John H. Adair (Owatonna, 1913), Ward Beebe/John Leuthold

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<sup>11</sup>Records for 4829 Colfax Avenue South at the Minneapolis Building Inspection Department.

<sup>12</sup>A detailed analysis of the firm is in David Gebhard, "William Gray Purcell and George Grant Elmslie and the Early Progressive Movement in American Architecture from 1900 to 1920" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1957). Other information about the firm and the principals is in William Purcell, "Purcell and Elmslie Biographical Notes" (typescript, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota). See also Larry Millett, The Curve of the Arch (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1985); and Brooks, The Prairie School.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number:   8                        Parker, Charles and Grace, House      Page 5  
=====

Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Minnesota

(St. Paul, 1912), J.W.S. Gallagher (Winona, 1913), Merton S. Goodnow (Hutchinson, 1913), E.S. Hoyt (Red Wing, 1913), Oscar Owre (Minneapolis, 1911-12), and Purcell's own home in Minneapolis (1913), all date from this era and all are listed on the National Register.

But this was also a very unstable time for the firm. George Feick, who was primarily an engineer, left in 1913 to run a family business in Ohio. In August 1912, Elmslie's young wife died suddenly, plunging the architect into a prolonged depression. He returned to Chicago to stay with his sisters, and decided to open a branch of the firm there, leaving Purcell to run the Minneapolis office single-handedly. The long-distance business dealings soon became strained. Although Purcell and Elmslie was not officially disbanded until 1920, and the men continued to have a friendly working relationship for a number of years thereafter, the productive, golden age of the firm had ended by the late 1910s.<sup>13</sup>

The firm's fame was earned by its creative designs in the Prairie School style. This style was partly a reaction against the various period revivals popular across the United States in the late nineteenth century. Promoted as the first truly American style of architecture, the Prairie School was born in Chicago by designers influenced by Louis Sullivan and the concept of "organic" architecture. Led by the motto "form follows function," these architects sought to reflect the nature of a building's structure through its design, rather than hide the structure beneath a facade mimicking a pseudo-historical style. Organic architecture also respected a building's setting and the materials used in its construction. As a result, the Prairie School style, as its name implies, adopted the horizontal lines and earth tones of the Midwestern prairie. Exterior walls were usually tinted stucco and brick, shaded by the roof's broad eaves. Simple wood trim highlighted structural elements. Ribbons of casement windows emphasized the horizontal and also blurred the distinction between interior and exterior space. Houses featured open floor plans revolving around a substantial, central chimney.

The most flamboyant and famous champion of the Prairie School style was Frank Lloyd Wright, an acquaintance of both Purcell and Elmslie in Chicago. Wright's most well-known residential commission in Minnesota, the Little House (Northome, 1913, demolished), was a contemporary of the Parker House. Other Chicago Prairie School architects made a mark in Minnesota as well. The work of George W. Maher in Homer (King Estate, c. 1912), Minneapolis (Winton House, 1910), and Winona (the unusual "Egyptian Prairie" Winona Savings Bank, 1914) is particularly noteworthy. Although other Minnesota architects eclectically adopted the Prairie School as they did Sullivanesque and period revival styles, Purcell and Elmslie was the only firm in the state to consistently use and develop the Prairie School style. Thus, when the Parkers selected them to design a house, there was no question about the type of architecture desired.

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<sup>13</sup>Purcell, "Notes"; Millett, 128-132.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number: 8 Parker, Charles and Grace, House Page 6  
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Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Minnesota

As indicated by the single piece of correspondence available regarding the construction of the Parker House, William Purcell was responsible for working with the Parkers, and his hand is clearly evident in the design. The high gable, brick base, banded casement windows, and glazed sun porch are reminiscent of the Prairie School house that Purcell designed for his parents, in River Forest, Illinois in 1909. In the Purcell House, however, the brick covers the entire first story, instead of serving as a high basement as at the Parker House. Also, the orientation of the Purcell House gable, which parallels the street, gives a very different feel to the design. The use of a relatively high gable stands in contrast to the low, hipped roof more typically advocated by Prairie School architects. The firm designed a number of gabled residences during this period, including the Gallagher House (1912-13), the Leuthold/Beebe House (1912), the P.E. Byrne House (Bismarck, North Dakota, 1909), the E.C. Tillotson House (Minneapolis, 1912), the Margaret Little House (Berkeley, California, 1915), and the Henry Einfeldt House (River Forest, Illinois, 1914-15). In many of these buildings, the structure is articulated by wood strips in an almost Stick-Style manner on the wall plane: horizontal bands delineate floors, lines highlight the juncture of eave and wall, vertical trim marks wall corners. Gable ends are sometimes treated decoratively as well, filled with diamond-shaped or triangular windows. Elevations are often stratified horizontally by the use of different materials. Cross gables interrupt side elevations. The Parker House, however, displays the Prairie School style in a much purer form. It is essentially a straightforward cube tucked beneath the protection of the gable's broad sweep. The roof of the sun porch not only echoes the gable's line, but is incorporated into it as well. The original earth tone of the stucco, making less of a contrast to the wood trim, showed off the building's simple, sculptural form even more prominently. The obligatory screen porches are tucked out of sight on the rear elevation.<sup>14</sup>

The facade's simplicity provides a fitting setting for the building's jewel, the ornate doorway. In his dissertation on Purcell and Elmslie, David Gebhard cites the Parker House door as one of the most important sawn wood designs produced by the firm. The door's arch is reminiscent of the semi-circular window beneath the front gable of the Leuthold House, extended wood blocks and all. As an artistic statement, however, there is no comparison. The sawn wood ornamentation exuberantly proclaims the Parker House's entrance. This is clearly the work of Elmslie, who continued to create eloquent ornamentation despite intense grief over his wife's death. His sketch survives for a square filled with delicately coiled vines, highlighted by a soft blue background. This was used for the impost blocks beneath the arch. The drawing is labeled "Panel 'C' of Sheet 100." Sadly, only one other drawing of any ornament remains. Labeled "Parker" with the notation "this motif," it was apparently a working sketch for a design that, ultimately, was not used. Sawn wood ornamentation was used on other buildings designed by the firm during this period, including the J.W.S. Gallagher House, the Bradley House (Woods

<sup>14</sup>Letter, William Purcell to George Feick, 6 January 1913, at Northwest Architectural Archives.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number: 8 Parker, Charles and Grace, House Page 7  
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Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Minnesota

Hole, Massachusetts, 1910), and the E.L. Powers House (Minneapolis, 1910). In most cases, however, the wood ornamentation played a secondary role in the structure's design, such as serving as infill beneath a gable. The prominence and intricacy of the Parker House door is indeed exceptional. The only disappointment is that the original polychromy is no longer extant.<sup>15</sup>

Another unusual design element of the Parker House is the front terrace. The main doorway in many Purcell and Elmslie houses was often recessed, and covered by a small roof or porch. It is not known if the wish for an ornate entryway brought the Parker's door to the front plane of the house. More likely, it was the desire of Mrs. Parker for her flower boxes that lead to the development of the terrace, thus providing a canvas on which to display an artistic doorway. Mrs. Parker appears to have been the most important voice in the couple's design decisions, and as Purcell later reminisced, building owners "were not just our clients but partners in the enterprise." The high, secluded site was certainly a factor as well. A terrace would not be of much use along side a very public street such as St. Paul's Summit Avenue, but could be a pleasant retreat in a quiet Minneapolis neighborhood, on a site high atop a hill shielded by a row of cedars.<sup>16</sup>

The Charles and Grace Parker House displays the features that brought national prominence and distinction to Purcell, Feick and Elmslie: Prairie School styling, respect for setting, careful selection of materials, open plan interior. The unique doorway shows the genius of one of the most talented and original designers of the early twentieth century, George Grant Elmslie. The building's excellent state of preservation makes the Parker House an important illustration of the Prairie School style and of the work of Purcell, Feick and Elmslie, one of Minnesota's most important architectural firms.

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<sup>15</sup>For Gebhard's reference to the Parker House sawn wood, see p. 267. Elmslie's sketches are at Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota. Elmslie's ornamental design is analyzed in-depth in Paul E. Sprague, "The Architectural Ornamentation of Louis Sullivan and His Chief Draftsmen," vol. 1 (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1968).

<sup>16</sup>Purcell quote in "Purcell and Elmslie Biographical Notes," n.p.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number:   9   Parker, Charles and Grace, House Page 1  
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Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Minnesota

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