

'Where the biggies leave off...'

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A missing time capsule, the 'lost' E.C. Warner mansion, Leonard's Flowers: please help us out!

By Michael Wilson

Time capsules are intriguing. They're compelling. They represent real, flesh-and-blood people, now long dead, talking and deciding what objects they want future generations -- us -- to remember them by. But what do we make of a time capsule that's disappeared?

It's been a long wait -- 65 years -- to find out what Ministers Life and Casualty Union officials placed in the time capsule inside the cornerstone of their new, modern headquarters building at 3100 West Lake Street on November 22, 1953.

The weather was unseasonably warm, 80 degrees by noon, when 87-year-old Willis G. Calderwood, for decades a widely known speaker and writer on temperance, "placed the box of historical articles into the cornerstone of the new building," as the Minneapolis Star put it.

Mell W. Hobart, MLCU president since 1920, looked on. In his remarks he traced the organization's half-century of progress since its founding in 1900 by his father, Walter P. Hobart. By 1953 MLCU had more than 30,000 ministers in its membership, making it the largest organization of clergymen in the world, the Star reported.

Also participating was the esteemed Dr. Howard Conn, senior minister at Plymouth Congregational Church since 1944, who would continue his ministry well past his retirement in 1976, up until his death in 2000 when he was living at The Kenwood in Lowry Hill.

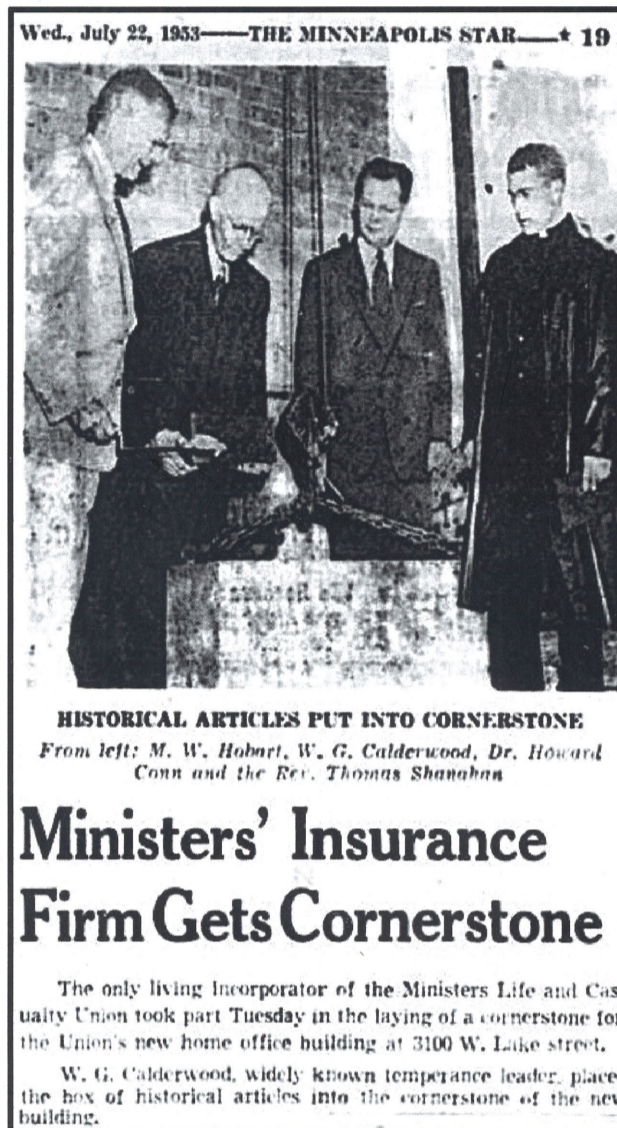
Restrictive covenant signed in 1994.

The cornerstone-laying foursome included the Rev. (later Msgr.) Thomas Shanahan, a relatively youthful 49-year-old Minneapolis native who was librarian at St. Paul Seminary from 1931 until his death in 1968 during a skiing trip in Aspen.

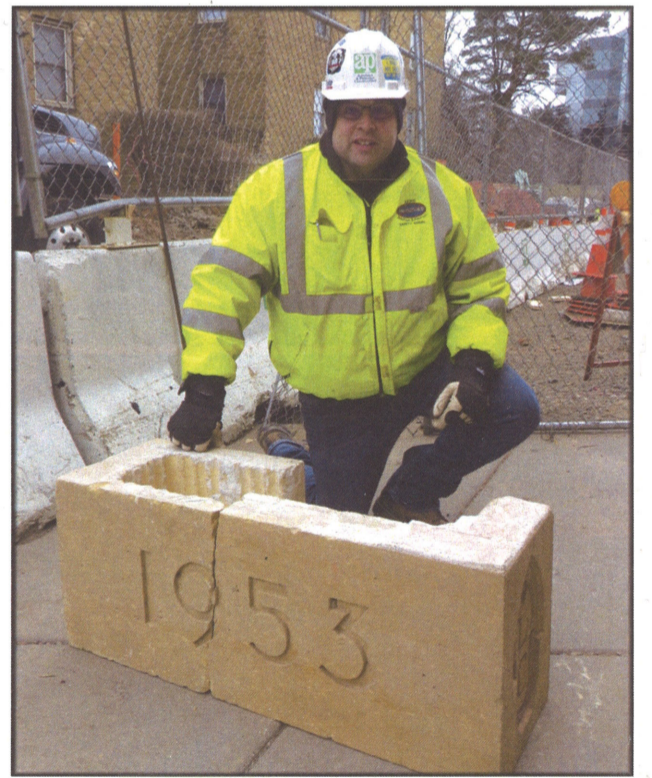
MLCU employees, clergy members, and agents from its 110 affiliated agencies walked past the handsome 1953 cornerstone for years until the company, by then called Ministers Life, merged with Minnesota Mutual Life in mid-1993. Ministers, with 75 employees and \$250 million in assets, was dwarfed by Minnesota Mutual, and all operations were soon moved to the latter's headquarters in downtown St. Paul.

The Ministers Life building stood empty until Stuart Ackerberg bought the 50,000-square-foot, four-acre property in November 1994. Minnesota Mutual insisted on a Restrictive Covenant "in connection with the existence of a time capsule contained within the presently existing building." The document stated that "in the event the presently existing building ... is ever demolished, the person(s) who then holds title to the Property will use its best efforts to ensure that the time capsule is not damaged and shall promptly return it" to Minnesota Mutual.

Ackerberg put money into updating and improving the 1953 building, renaming it Lake Pointe Corporate Center, and, as is his practice, took good care of his



Above: Dave Hobart, great-grandson of Ministers Life and Casualty Union founder Walter P. Hobart, in June 2018. His grandfather Mell W. Hobart, MLCU president, helped lay the cornerstone and time capsule in 1953. Below, Dale Schafer, Adolfson & Peterson's senior superintendent, was perplexed to see the empty space (below, left) where the time capsule should have been resting. (Photos: Michael Wilson.)



tenants and the grounds. Cedar-Isles-Dean residents and the tens of thousands of people who drove past 3100 West Lake Street every day came to love the whimsical mobile sculpture Hanging Fish and the giant green Adirondack chairs, which now sit across the street next to Ackerberg's Lake Calhoun Center.

Cornerstone removed - no time capsule!

In August 2015 Brickstone Partners, based in Denver, bought the 3100 West Lake property, intending to replace the 1953 building with a mid-rise luxury apartment building. Following a sometimes contentious review process with the CIDNA Land Use & Development Committee, Brickstone received city approval for its Lakehaus Apartments, secured financing, and fenced off the site last November.

Meanwhile, discussions ensued between represen-

tatives from Brickstone and Securian (formerly Minnesota Mutual) and an interested Cedar-Isles-Dean party over the disposition of the time capsule. Ted Hathaway, senior librarian at Hennepin County Library's Special Collections department, offered to archive the contents but cautioned not to expect the Rosetta Stone or the Hobart family jewels. Newspaper clippings, items about MLCU, and a few photos were more likely.

In late December workers removed the cornerstone and sent word to Dale Schafer, senior superintendent for general contractor Adolfson & Peterson: the cornerstone was empty. There was no time capsule.

Schafer was stunned. "I remember thinking, darn!" Schafer says. "I was really counting on seeing what was inside." The cornerstone split down the middle

during removal, but the rectangular niche carved into the block to hold the "box of historical articles" faintly visible in Calderwood's hands in the 1953 Minneapolis Star photo was intact. No time capsule.

The wall into which the cornerstone was set is thick concrete. Drilling through the wall from inside to purloin the time capsule? Stealthily removing the cornerstone in the dead of night, then reinserting it after making off with the box? Not too likely.

"It's odd. It's really a shame," says Ackerberg. "Even if there's nothing of intrinsic monetary value inside, time capsules are a big deal," he says. "They let us see what was important enough to people from a different era that they wanted us to be able to see it today."

Further questions could, and probably should, be asked. Meanwhile, do you have any clues, any suggestions, any words of advice? Email us at <hillandlakepress@gmail.com>.

The truly "lost" E.C. Warner mansion.

And while you're at it, please help us uncover more information about two buildings that once graced the southwest and northwest corners of the Lake Street, Dean Parkway, and West Calhoun Blvd. intersection: the Ellsworth C. Warner mansion, which became the Vince Day Center; and Leonard's Flowers.

The Warner mansion is one of the most "lost" of the Twin Cities' "lost mansions." Even "Lost Twin Cities" author and historian Larry Millet has no information.

As I wrote in the March 2017 Hill & Lake Press, linseed-oil baron Ellsworth C. Warner built his mansion in 1912 at 3030 West Calhoun Blvd. for the then-staggering sum of \$175,000 -- \$4.5 million in 2019 dollars.

Warner's Midland Linseed Products Company would merge in 1923 with George Archer's and John Daniel's linseed company to form today's ADM, number 48 on the 2018 Fortune 500 list. We're talking serious money here.

Warner started wintering in Palm Beach and in 1939 built a permanent home, Windsong, which still stands, one mile from Mar-a-Lago, much lovelier and more graceful than his castle-like mansion on West Calhoun Blvd.

Warner died in January 1942. His home was purchased by Hennepin County in 1945 for \$50,000 and converted into a children's home for "dependent or neglected children" (some accounts say "emotionally disturbed"). Named for a recently deceased district judge, the Vince A. Day Center opened in July 1945 with 40 children.

The high costs of maintaining a half-century-old mansion for 22 youngsters led the County Board to close it on September 1, 1953. After a stormy public debate over what to do with the property, the board voted in favor of demolition, which took place in November 1953, three months after Norton and Peel photographed the West Lake/Dean/West Calhoun intersection.

Also demolished was the Charles Purdy house, built in 1907 at 3100 West Lake Street. In 1952 the Purdy house had been moved across Lake Street to the Warner/Vince Day site to make room for the Ministers Life building -- but that's another story.



Motorists and walkers in this 1953 photo (facing west at the Lake Street-Dean Parkway intersection) could see the palatial Warner mansion (hidden amongst the trees), by then the Vince Day Center for emotionally disturbed children, and buy a dozen roses at Leonard's Flowers, both now long-forgotten. Please help! Send your recollections to <hillandlakepress@gmail.com>. (Photo: MN Historical Society, Norton & Peel Collection.)



This is apparently, and astoundingly, the only photo in existence of one of Minneapolis' grandest mansions -- the Ellsworth C. Warner mansion built in 1912 at 3030 West Calhoun Blvd. The Star and Morning Tribune never carried a photo of the house, but the enterprising and short-lived Minneapolis Daily Times did, on July 7, 1945, as Mr. Warner's mansion reopened as the county-owned Vince Day Center for abandoned and neglected children. The mansion was razed in November, 1953. Do you have recollections of the building -- or better yet, a photo? Contact us at <hillandlakepress@gmail.com>.

Astoundingly, only one photo of the Warner mansion is known to exist, in the July 7, 1945, issue of the short-lived Minneapolis Daily Times.

Some folks remember the imposing structure. Harriet Harriet Horwitz recalls driving past it in her parents' car. Do you have any recollections? Please let us know.

Leonard's Flowers - roses a buck a dozen.

Recollections about Leonard's Flowers should be an easier ask. A Minneapolis Morning Tribune reporter described it thus in July 1961:

"You cruise along Dean Blvd. past giant trees shading the street, past magnificent apartment buildings and lush landscaped lawns. As you approach Lake St., Lake Calhoun glistens dead

ahead, the Calhoun Beach Club is at your left, across the street is a glistening insurance building [on the Warner/Vince Day site], and to your right is a flower shop made out of old storm windows and lumber covered with peeling paint.

"Inside sits Leonard Bouchard, 47, bushy-browed and alert to serve anyone who wants to buy a dozen roses for a buck."

What a character! What a quirky, eccentric, lovely addition to the Cedar-Isles-Dean retail scene! Please send your stories about Leonard Bouchard and his offbeat flower shop to hillandlakepress@gmail.com.

And keep your eye out for that missing time capsule!