

Sabbatical Report

**Scott Myers
June 2015**

Original statement of purpose:

The purpose of my sabbatical is to study the history and architecture of significant buildings in Michigan and to use the information and other resources I accumulate for future classes at Kalamazoo Valley Community College. I have always had a desire to delve further into this subject but have never had the time. A sabbatical would give me that opportunity.

I have been a faculty member in the Humanities Department at Kalamazoo Valley Community College since August of 2002. This is my first request for a sabbatical leave.

I have taught the following classes at KVCC:

- HUM 101 - Modern Culture and the Arts
- HUM 203 - A Study of Love
- PHI 209 - Comparative Religion
- HUM 120 - Honors Seminar - Writing about Cities
- ART 221 - Art History II

Architectural history has been a subject of fascination for me since I was an undergraduate (really since I was a child). I have pursued that interest during travels in France, Italy, Greece, and Turkey, as well as locations all over the U.S. Between trips, I have accumulated a personal library of books on architecture of all styles and eras.

At every opportunity, I have toured Michigan's architectural treasures, and now I would like to expand my knowledge of them by traveling the state, taking pictures, and doing research.

Activities performed:

My sabbatical work involved research into architecture and architects who have worked in Michigan. The research was conducted online, in libraries, and in archives. It also involved speaking with people who work at the buildings I visited, or otherwise have knowledge of them. I am indebted to the professionals and enthusiasts who helped me gather information for this project.

In addition, I traveled to various places in Michigan to look at buildings and photograph them.

Objectives accomplished:

My objective for this sabbatical was to spend time delving more deeply into the work of architects I have studied previously and use what I found for units on American architecture in my classes. My research has yielded material I will mine for classes for years to come, so in my judgment, this rather broad objective was accomplished.

Units on American architecture in my HUM 101 class begin with American classicism and the rebellion against it by progressive architects - especially Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright. From there, I introduce the students to Sullivan's ideas about the skyscraper and how they influenced buildings throughout the United States, including Detroit. We go on to study how Sullivan's and Wright's ideas influenced later architects, but not before we examine Wright's career in some detail, concluding with his home designs executed in Kalamazoo and Galesburg.

Michigan has numerous examples of architecture designed in the prevailing styles against which Sullivan and

Wright rebelled. Architects like Elijah E. Myers and Gordon W. Lloyd were successful in Michigan (and elsewhere) because they followed convention. To Sullivan and Wright, Myers and Lloyd were among the mass of second-handers to be left behind by a new, original American style.

Myers (1832-1909) was primarily a classicist, as his Michigan State Capitol design of 1872 will attest. However, he could work in other styles if the commission required it. His Central United Methodist Church of 1889 is next door to the capitol, but is in the popular style of that time, Richardsonian Romanesque. Other works in Michigan by Myers include the picturesque Victorian-style Lansing High School (1875, demolished 2006), and the turreted Norman-Victorian-style Stockbridge Town Hall (1892). His success with the classical style of the Michigan State Capitol led to commissions for similar designs in Texas (1881) and Colorado (1885).



Central United Methodist Church, Lansing
Elijah E. Myers, 1889

Photo: SM

Similarly, Lloyd (1832-1905) was what Professor Michael Farrell of the University of Windsor has called an architectural "chameleon"¹: matching the style of the building to the needs or interests of the client. Born in England, Lloyd established his reputation in Michigan as a designer of churches, especially Episcopal, but also Methodist, Congregational and other denominations. Among his church designs in Detroit are Christ Episcopal and Central United Methodist (1863 and 1866 respectively). Other church designs in Michigan include St. Paul's Episcopal in Flint (1882), St. John's Episcopal (1883) and First Congregational (1868) in Saginaw, and St. Luke's Episcopal in Kalamazoo (1885).



St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Kalamazoo
Gordon W. Lloyd, 1885

Photo: SM

Perhaps Lloyd's most recognized buildings in Michigan are not churches: The David Whitney House in Detroit (1894) is in the Romanesque Revival style (similar to Richardsonian Romanesque), and is now a popular restaurant; and the Northern Michigan Asylum in Traverse City (1885) is Italianate-Victorian and is now part of a multi-use development known as The Village at Grand Traverse Commons.

As I was studying the Michigan works of Myers and Lloyd, I was also keeping in mind those of Sullivan and Wright. Sullivan's only work in Michigan was



The Village at Grand Traverse Commons
Gordon W. Lloyd, 1885

Photo: Daniel Myers

¹ From Farrell's lectures in the class, "Detroit Architecture and the Arts," Central Michigan University, spring semester 1999.

remodeling a bank in Manistique in 1920, but Wright built more than 30 residences in the state between 1897 and 1957.

And it was a former apprentice of Wright's - Alden B. Dow - who brought my research full circle.

Alden B. Dow (1904-1983) was a visionary architect who designed buildings all over the country, including dozens in his hometown of Midland. Known primarily for his residential architecture, Dow also designed churches, schools, and civic buildings. Alden B. Dow was the son of Herbert H. Dow, founder of Dow Chemical Company, who wanted Alden to become a chemical engineer. However, a post-high-school trip to Japan with his family may have been the deciding factor that led the creative young man into architecture.

During that 1923 trip, the Dow family stayed in Frank Lloyd Wright's Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, which had just been completed. The early 1920s was a busy time in Wright's career, and his most celebrated works from that period are the Imperial Hotel and four houses in California that used sculptural concrete blocks as their basic construction material.² Dow was impressed with Japan generally and with Wright in particular. After the trip to Japan, he informed his father he planned to become an architect, eventually studying with Wright at Taliesin in Spring Green, Wisconsin.

Among Dow's earliest architectural commissions were houses designed for friends and relatives in Midland that used concrete blocks as their basic construction material,³ as had Wright's California houses. Dow called these Unit Block houses, and he used the same system of blocks on his own home and studio, preliminary designs for which were completed in 1933, soon after Dow returned to Midland from Taliesin.



Textile Blocks at La Miniatura
Frank Lloyd Wright, 1923

Photo: Jodi Summers

As Dow matured in his chosen profession, he formulated theories about architecture that were based firmly on those espoused by Sullivan and Wright. Like his predecessors, he believed strongly that architects should strive for originality and individualism, avoiding slavish imitation of historical styles. He agreed with Sullivan's most famous aphorism, "form follows function,"⁴ and made a point of customizing his plans to suit the use for which the client intended the building. He also accepted Sullivan's and Wright's ideas about what Wright called "organic architecture"⁵: that a



Unit Blocks at Alden B. Dow Home and Studio, Midland
Alden B. Dow, 1933-1942

Photo: SM

² The so-called Textile Block houses, all completed in 1923, are known by the names of the clients who commissioned them: Millard (also called "La Miniatura"), Storer, Freeman, and Ennis.

³ The houses were all completed in 1933 and 1934 for clients Heatley, Heath, Hanson, and Whitman.

⁴ Sullivan wrote "...form ever follows function, this is the law" in his article, "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered" in Lippincott's Magazine (March, 1896).

⁵ Wright may have used the term earlier, but he first published it in a 1914 article in Architectural Record entitled "In the Cause of Architecture."

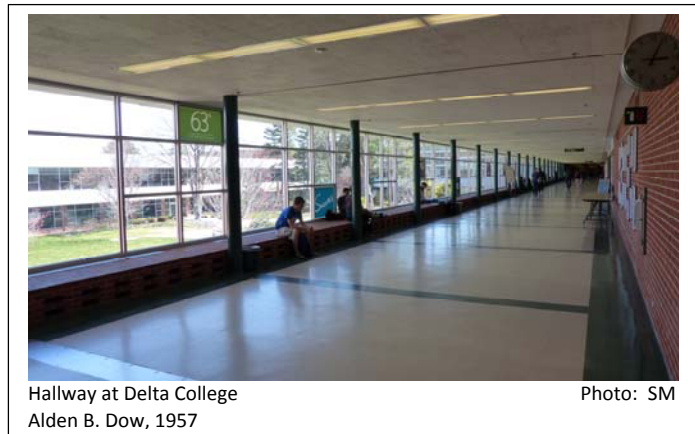
building should have a connection to nature generally and its specific natural surroundings. What Dow added to these three derivations is a fourth principle which I will call "human balance," based on Diane Maddex's use of the phrase in her book *Alden B. Dow: Midwestern Modern*. Dow, like Sullivan and Wright, believed architecture could improve the lives of the people who lived and worked within the walls he designed. However, judging by their written statements, Dow was more concerned with psychological well-being than either of his predecessors.⁶ His designs used texture and color to stimulate the senses, and he accommodated his clients' interest in collecting and displaying objects that mattered to them.⁷

At the height of his career, Dow was chosen to design the Texas Township Campus of Kalamazoo Valley Community College. Like many of his earlier designs - for college campuses and other structures - the KVCC campus is in Dow's unique modern style; is functional and adaptable for the needs of the client; integrates with its location and maintains a strong connection to its natural surroundings; and strives to encourage personal development with features intended to soothe the senses and stimulate reflection and inner growth.

Three aspects of the KVCC design illustrate Dow's architectural principles well:

- Landscaped courtyards: Dow said "Gardens never end and buildings never begin."⁸ In planning KVCC and other buildings, he was as concerned about the landscape design as he was about the structural and design elements.
- Glass-lined hallways: Dow's desire to connect the user of the building with nature is most evident here, in KVCC's long hallways looking out on the courtyards. He also uses the same red-brown brick for the inside and outside of the building as a way of strengthening the connection between the two.
- The Tower of Light: Although it is not currently functioning as a light, the tower was an essential design element for Dow, meant to be a bold central statement about human striving and achievement.⁹

During my sabbatical, I visited Dow's earlier college design, Delta College outside Bay City, designed in 1957. The overall plan is very similar to that of KVCC, though with a much smaller footprint. Dow's design for the primary structure of Delta College has the same glass-lined hallways around a central landscaped courtyard as his design for KVCC. It also has an atrium-like library, reminiscent of, but much less grand than, KVCC's. The primary reason for the differences in the designs is the location of each campus. Delta College is built on flat land. The main library windows look out on a lawn, beyond which is a parking lot. KVCC is built on what Dow called "the brow of the hill"¹⁰ overlooking the woods and lake. Dow appreciated the opportunity for linking the inside and outside in his plan for KVCC, and oriented the two-story library atrium, classrooms, and offices with views toward the wooded valley. KVCC's cafeteria, hallways, and



Hallway at Delta College
Alden B. Dow, 1957

Photo: SM

⁶ See, for example, Sullivan's *Autobiography of an Idea* (1924), Wright's *An Autobiography* (1943), and Dow's *Reflections* (1970).

⁷ This analysis is based in part on passages in Diane Maddex's *Alden B. Dow: Midwestern Modern*, Midland, MI: Alden B. Dow Home and Studio, 2007.

⁸ Quoted in Maddex, p. 68.

⁹ Alden B. Dow to Dale B. Lake, November 2, 1970; Monthly Bulletin, Michigan Society of Architects, June, 1974.

¹⁰ Kalamazoo Valley Community College Long Range Development Plan, January, 1969.

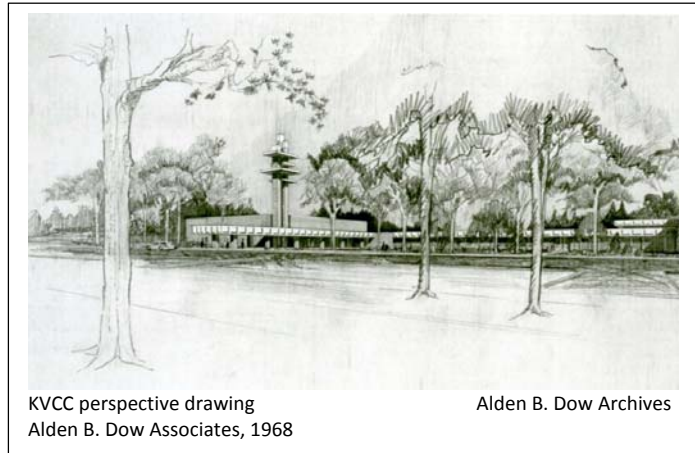
other classrooms and offices were connected to the outside by large windows looking into the central courtyard. Delta College's plan is similar, but it lacked the picturesque wooded area, so there is much more emphasis on the central courtyard, the landscape design for which is Dow's own. It includes a trio of Dow's signature "petal lanterns" (which he used at his home and studio and other commissions), a modern-style concrete block bridge over a pond, and a fountain of 30 arcing water jets, seven of which are reproduced on the college's logo.^{11 12}



Delta College courtyard
Alden B. Dow, 1957 (restored 2011)

Photo: SM

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Dow's design for KVCC is the tower. Originally, the tower stood at the entrance to the main campus building and was meant to be "...a vertical line contrasting with the horizontals of the building, thus drawing attention to that spot which is the main entrance to the college."¹³ Dow called it the "Tower of Light," and the globes that originally lit up at night to designate the entrance to the college and symbolize a lantern showing the way to future success are still visible between the four horizontal slabs, although they do not illuminate at this time.

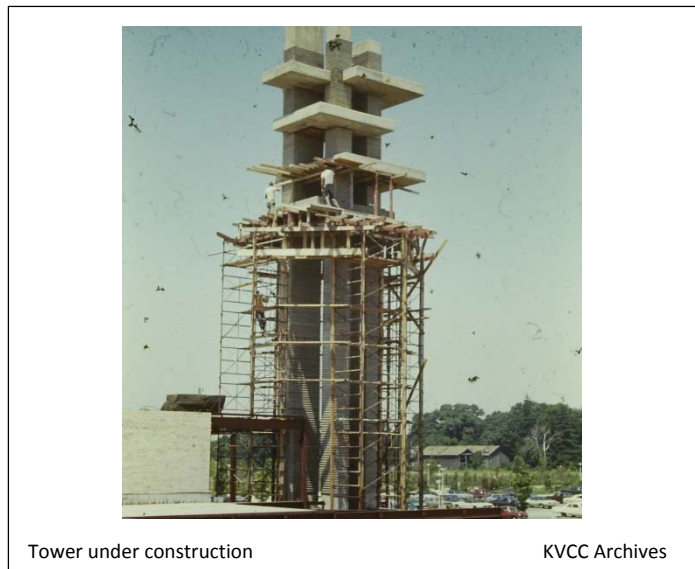


KVCC perspective drawing
Alden B. Dow Associates, 1968

Alden B. Dow Archives

The tower is made of reinforced concrete, formed in a saw tooth pattern that adds visual and textural interest, both from a distance and up close.

The design of the tower is reminiscent of towers Dow designed for other buildings, especially church steeples. A thematic link can be made between Dow's church steeples and the Tower of Light, but KVCC's tower is the architect's boldest sculptural statement in any building of his ideas about human beings "growing"¹⁴ toward personal perfection.¹⁵



Tower under construction

KVCC Archives

¹¹ Jon Becker, Delta College plans to restore Alden B. Dow-designed courtyard, (January 14, 2011), Midland Daily News, http://www.ourmidland.com/news/delta-college-plans-to-restore-alden-b-dow-designed-courtyard/article_7a219de6-200b-11e0-9285-001cc4c03286.html

¹² Zachary Reichard, Delta College dedicates courtyard during 50th anniversary celebration (October 9, 2011), http://www.mlive.com/news/bay-city/index.ssf/2011/10/delta_college_dedicates_courty.html

¹³ Alden B. Dow to Dale B. Lake, November 2, 1970.

¹⁴ Alden B. Dow, *Reflections*, Midland, MI: Northwood Institute, 1970; et. al.

¹⁵ For a detailed discussion of Dow's ideas and the Tower of Light, see Appendix.

Conclusions drawn:

Toward the end of my sabbatical leave, I visited Saginaw to look at buildings by Lloyd and Dow. The divide between these two Michigan architects is clearly evident when one examines their works. They were born in different countries in different centuries, and one was a guardian of tradition while the other followed the avant-garde.

In Saginaw, Lloyd designed St. John's Episcopal Church (1883) and First Congregational Church (1868). St. John's is in the style that brought Lloyd the most renown - Gothic Revival - featuring details he used in many churches, including a light tan brick façade and exposed, decorated wooden beams and trusses supporting the ceiling of the pointed nave. Lloyd's First Congregational is a departure for him: It was designed in the Romanesque Revival style using light red brick, and its interior is less grand - though larger - than the one at St. John's Episcopal or other Lloyd churches I visited.

Another aspect of First Congregational brings a serendipitous conclusion to my sabbatical report: The church's parsonage is a house designed by Alden B. Dow.

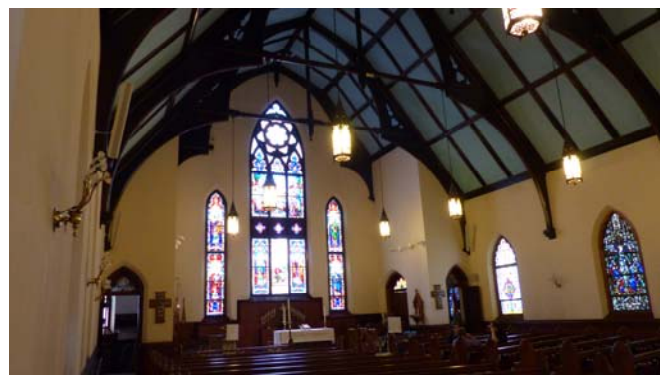
The Mary E. Dow house was built next door to First Congregational in 1936. Mary Dow (1869-1953)¹⁶ was Alden Dow's aunt, a sister of Herbert Dow, and a librarian and school board member in Saginaw.^{17 18} After her death, the church bought the building to use as their parsonage. In 1957, a connecting wing was added between the church narthex and the front entrance of the house.¹⁹

My visit to First Congregational was like walking through the history of Michigan architecture I had been studying. I entered through Lloyd's parish house, which now serves as the church offices. From there, I proceeded to the sanctuary, a wider space than I was used to in Lloyd's Gothic Revival buildings. The sanctuary's most striking features are the stained-glass windows donated by parishioners over the years, including one by Louis Comfort Tiffany ("The River Jordan," c. 1913-14). I happened to arrive when Dr. Quincy O. Dobbs, a keyboard instructor from the Flint Institute of Music, was practicing on the church's recently-restored 1929 Ernest M. Skinner organ²⁰ in preparation for the upcoming Sunday service at which he would be performing. Dr. Dobbs turned on the lights and showed me around the nave and transepts, pointed out the



St. John's Episcopal Church, Saginaw
Gordon W. Lloyd, 1883

Photo: SM



St. John's Episcopal Church, Saginaw
Gordon W. Lloyd, 1883

Photo: SM

¹⁶ <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=pv&GRid=44731609&Pipi=23736722>

¹⁷ Public Libraries, Volume 26 (Google eBook), Library Bureau, 1921, <https://goo.gl/LO2Ytb>

¹⁸ Polk Saginaw, Michigan city directory, 1915, <https://goo.gl/1dB7eA>

¹⁹ The Historic First Congregational Church, http://www.fccsaginaw.org/?page_id=13

²⁰ Sue White, Saginaw's First Congregational makes beautiful noise after \$500,000 organ renovation (March 21, 2014), http://www.mlive.com/entertainment/saginaw/index.ssf/2014/03/saginaws_first_congregational_2.html

Tiffany window, and demonstrated the organ, including its extra *en chamade* pipes mounted in the choir loft at the back of the sanctuary. Then he took me to the narthex and into the 1957 addition, which includes a small chapel, the interior of which is reminiscent of Dow's churches in Midland, especially St. John's Episcopal.²¹ Dr. Dobbs next led me through the connecting wing to the parsonage entrance, which reminded me of Dow's home and studio entrance, surrounded by white-painted unit blocks with an understated doorway that opens into a larger, high-ceilinged space.²²

The overall effect of this commingling of styles is awkward architecturally, but functional. I think Dow would approve, but Lloyd would not. Lloyd's original design had a minimal narthex (as does Lloyd's St. Luke's Episcopal in Kalamazoo) and the current narthex was added, then added onto, obscuring Lloyd's original façade.²³ The passage from the narthex to the 1957 addition looks tacked-on from the outside, and there is no exterior design logic evident in connecting the church and parsonage. The 1957 chapel stands as an anachronistic testament to the needs of a growing congregation, just as the preservation of Lloyd's church shows reverence for tradition.

Nonetheless, this complex of buildings in Saginaw is the perfect culmination of my sabbatical research because it brings the eras of architecture I wanted to study - and the work of two prominent Michigan architects - together. In class, I try to help students see that the art of the present - that is, any kind of art from architecture to painting to music - would not be possible without the art of the past. Alden B. Dow was part of the American modernist reaction to traditional architecture like that of Michigan architects Elijah E. Myers and Gordon W. Lloyd. In the late 19th century, a few architects defied tradition and attempted to create something completely new, not dependent on the styles of the past. The leaders of this defiance in the United States were Louis Sullivan and, later, Frank Lloyd Wright. Sullivan's and Wright's unique designs and revolutionary artistic rhetoric inspired other architects to break away from the styles of the past, developing new styles after World War I that are lumped together under the



First Congregational Church, Saginaw
Gordon W. Lloyd, 1868

Photo: SM



Mary E. Dow House, Saginaw
Alden B. Dow, 1936

Photo: SM



Entrance to the parsonage
First Congregational Church, Saginaw

Photo: SM

²¹ The chapel was designed by Saginaw architects Frantz and Spence (<http://goo.gl/W3dEgh>); Dow's St. John's Episcopal Church was completed in 1952.

²² Thomas Trombley, Historic South Jefferson Avenue Walking Tour, <http://www.saginawlibrary.org/jeffersonavenue/403SouthJefferson.php>

²³ Trombley, <http://www.saginawlibrary.org/jeffersonavenue/403SouthJeffersonChurch.php>

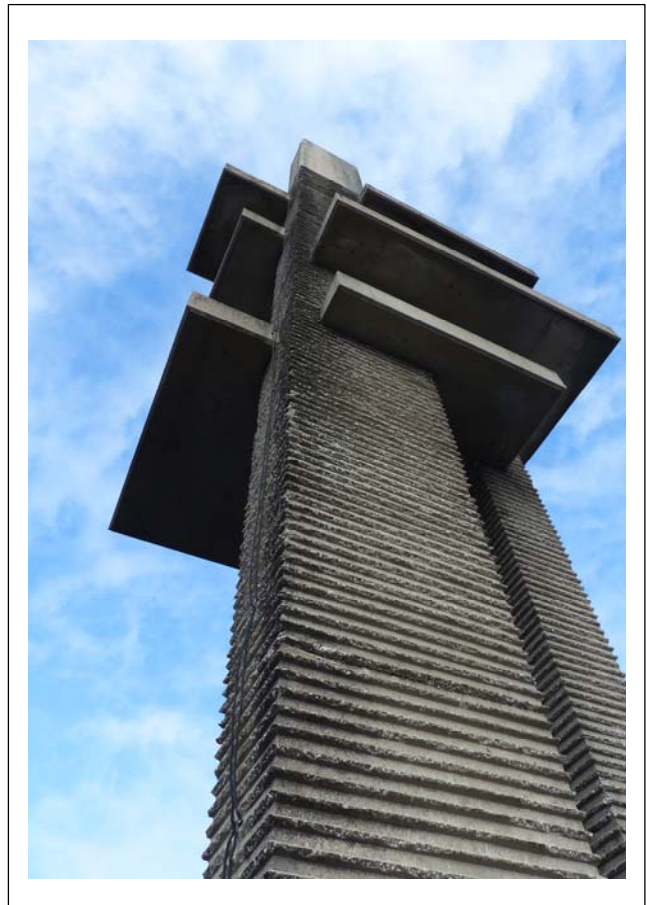
heading, "modern." Inspired most of all by Wright, but also by other modernists, Dow established a niche as the premier Michigan modernist architect.

Dow's design for Kalamazoo Valley Community College is a key example of his mature work, and includes structural elements that fit with his lifelong philosophical questing toward honesty, humility, and enthusiasm - and even toward ultimate reality itself. In the context of Dow's work - and in considering Dow's place in the context of American architecture - it is not too grand to connect the design of KVCC to the architect's deepest philosophical and spiritual thought.

Much of Gordon W. Lloyd's work, of course, is overtly religious: he began his career as a church architect, endeavoring to bring a sense of the divine to the buildings he designed in Michigan, inspired by his observations of Gothic churches in Europe.²⁴ Dow's forebears Sullivan and Wright both wrote extensively about the importance of architecture to human wellbeing, each suggesting architects were the people best equipped to lead humanity forward by virtue of their broad and deep understanding of how humans should live (in individual domiciles and in society). Figuratively, Dow built on the ideas of his predecessors while literally building. Eventually, he wrote about his philosophical approach to life and work, and used language related to those writings to explain his designs to clients like the president and board of trustees of KVCC.

Even with the extensive modifications that have been made to Dow's original plans for KVCC, it is evident when one walks the long glass-lined corridors of the original structure that Dow succeeded admirably. He created a building that functions perfectly for its intended use. It fits naturally into its environment and blends inside and outside in a way that enhances the experiences of those who work and study there. In keeping with his ideas about human balance, the building utilizes colors and textures - both inside and out - to stimulate and soothe the senses.

Dow himself was satisfied with the results at KVCC. In a 1970 letter to KVCC President Dale B. Lake, Dow wrote of the campus, "I honestly believe it is the best college design in the country."²⁵ In 1972 H.C. Allison, the vice president of Alden B. Dow Associates, wrote to Lake, "...your building ... is better by leaps and bounds than anything else; including any other building that we have done."²⁶



KVCC is not the largest or most luxurious building Dow designed, but it is a key work by an architect who is among the most inspired and influential to have worked in Michigan. In addition, it includes a significant exterior sculptural element unique among his works, the study of which can provide insight into the architect's singular philosophy. This is a study I intend to continue in the coming years and to share with my students.

²⁴ Ferry, W. Hawkins: *The Buildings of Detroit: A History*, Wayne State University Press, 1968

²⁵ Dow to Lake, November 2, 1970.

²⁶ H.C. Allison to Lake, January 19, 1972.

Summary of the manner in which the criteria for sabbatical leave proposals were fulfilled:

The following four criteria are listed in "Kalamazoo Valley Community College Guidelines for Sabbatical Leave Proposals." My summary responses follow each item.

A. Likelihood that the proposed activities will enhance the faculty member's professional effectiveness.

- This sabbatical leave has given me a plethora of material from which to draw for my HUM 101 course and future courses in my department.
- The direct experience of the sites I talk about in class - including photos and videos I took - will enhance presentations to students.
- My knowledge of the history of architecture in Michigan has been increased significantly, and I will use that knowledge to advantage in classes that relate to the topic.

B. Likelihood that the proposed sabbatical leave will enhance the institution's ability to fulfill its mission and/or improve service to students or other publics we serve.

- I chose community college teaching as a career, in part, because I believe general education enriches the lives of individuals and, ultimately, the society in which those individuals live. Students (and others) sometimes need to be convinced of the value of general education classes like the ones I teach. One of the ways I try to convince students is by connecting the subjects we study to their own lives.
- My subjects of study during my sabbatical leave are observable in the students' immediate environment: the college itself, and our community and state. When I cover these topics in class, I hope a building like KVCC's Texas Township Campus or St. Luke's Episcopal Church will become more than a building to my students: It will be a tangible connection to what they have learned about art, architecture, philosophy and more.

C. Degree to which the proposed sabbatical leave provides opportunities for refreshment of mind and body, creative challenges, and/or incentives for critical thinking.

- I expect this break from routine to energize me as I return to teaching. As the sabbatical period came to a close, I found myself looking forward to working with students again.
- It was enjoyable to be able to follow a line of research in whatever direction it took me, something I would not have time for in a normal semester.
- Especially in studying Dow, it was a challenge to take all the information I found and form my own mental picture of the man and his work, then synthesize that into something I can use in class.

D. Degree to which the proposed sabbatical leave objectives exceed expectations for routine, ongoing professional development.

- I keep up with my disciplines through copious reading and other research conducted literally daily. Subjects I cover include visual art, literature, music, television, movies, philosophy, history, sociology, politics, and urban planning. Just about any subject can be relevant in my classes, so I think of myself as a generalist and approach my ongoing study accordingly. However, the breadth of these investigations usually requires me to sacrifice depth.
- While I could spend years studying any of the architects or buildings I looked at, my sabbatical leave allowed me to examine them in satisfying depth.

Personal conclusion:

I didn't know what to expect when I applied for a sabbatical leave. I had spoken to many colleagues about their sabbaticals, but I wasn't sure how I would approach it. What I found was that I rediscovered a love for doing in-depth research like what I did in graduate school. Personally, I find academic research rewarding and even ennobling. All academics should take the opportunity to do pure research in their fields whenever possible, even if they aren't going to write a book. For me, this semester was rewarding both intellectually and emotionally, and I expect it to pervade my approach to my job from now on.

My heartfelt thanks to the Board of Trustees and administrators of KVCC, and to the following individuals:

Pag Basgall, Central United Methodist Church, Lansing
Quincy O. Dobbs, Flint Institute of Music
Lynnette Ewbank, First United Methodist Church, Midland
Peggy Ezell, KVCC
Michael Farrell, University of Windsor
Melissa Ford, Saginaw Valley State Univeristy
Michael Hueschen, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Kalamazoo
Cindy Keefe, Alden B. Dow Home and Studio
Dan Maley, KVCC
Jim Ratliff, KVCC
Phyllis Schultz, St. John's Lutheran Church, Midland
Jerri Sierocki, First Congregational Church, Saginaw
Amy Simons, St. John's Episcopal Church, Saginaw
Mary Lou Timmons, Alden B. Dow Archives
Thomas Trombley, Historical Society of Saginaw County
Neal (Scott) Williams, KVCC
Nancy Young, KVCC
Siri, Apple Inc.

Appendix

Alden B. Dow and Kalamazoo Valley Community College

At the time the KVCC Board of Trustees contacted the architectural firm of Alden B. Dow Associates about designing a new campus, the firm's founder was well established as one of the leading architects in the nation.

It was early 1967, and KVCC had not held any classes yet - having only been approved by district voters in August of the year before.

A month after Dow's firm was hired, the college had selected its site in Texas Township. The firm developed a plan that would be rolled out in phases, beginning with an "instant" building made of prefabricated units with redwood siding that was dedicated September 15, 1968, the day before the first classes were held.²⁷

Alden B. Dow (1904-1983) was a visionary architect who designed buildings all over the country, including dozens in his hometown of Midland. Known primarily for his residential architecture, Dow also designed churches, schools, and civic buildings. He designed structures for colleges and universities throughout Michigan, and created master plans for Hillsdale College, Delta College, Northwood Institute (now Northwood University), and the Interlochen Arts Academy. Dow expressed enthusiasm for the KVCC project from the beginning,²⁸ and later said he thought of the KVCC facility as "the best college design in the country."²⁹



A visit to the future site of KVCC's Texas Township Campus, May 8, 1967. From left to right are Trustees Daniel Heathcote, Robert Wollam, Mable Shoemaker, Paul Jackson, and John Barth; architect Alden Dow, Dow associate H.C. Allison; and KVCC President Dale B. Lake. (KVCC Archives photo)

Dow's ideas about architecture in the service of human advancement are evident in the design of KVCC. In all his works, Dow pursued his own concept of "organic architecture," which had been championed by Dow's mentor Frank Lloyd Wright, who had developed his own approach while working in the office of Chicago architect Louis Sullivan. Like Wright and Sullivan, Dow was a strong believer in individualism, and said that each structure should develop based on the needs of the client and its surroundings. But Dow also tried to give his buildings qualities that encouraged "human balance,"³⁰ which for Dow included a connection to nature along with a delight in the spaces, materials, and furnishings of the building.

All of these principles are on display at the Texas Township Campus at KVCC, the original structures of which hug what Dow referred to as "the brow of the hill" overlooking the woods and lake.³¹ Dow wanted to take

²⁷ Paul F. Colebrook, Jr., *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 2, 1968.

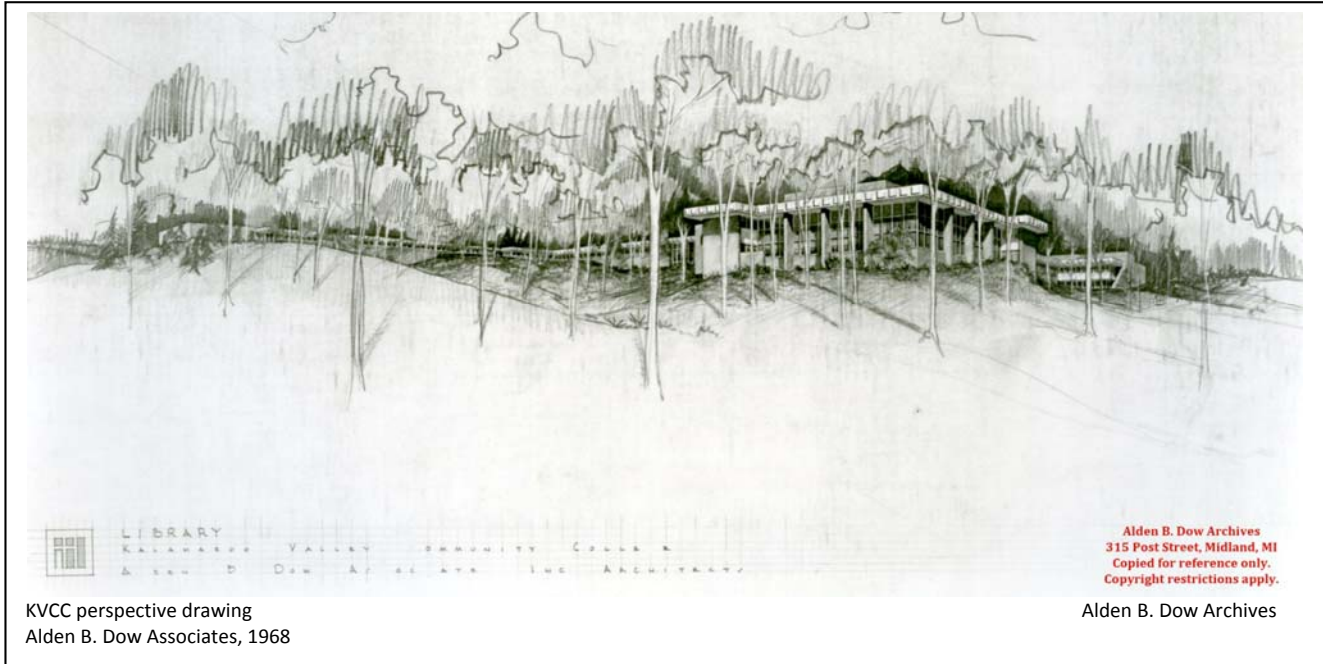
²⁸ James Stommen, *Kalamazoo Gazette*, March 8, 1967.

²⁹ Alden B. Dow to Dale B. Lake, November 2, 1970.

³⁰ Diane Maddex, *Alden B. Dow: Midwestern Modern*, Midland, MI: Alden B. Dow Home and Studio, 2007.

³¹ Kalamazoo Valley Community College Long Range Development Plan, January, 1969 (LRDP). Frank Lloyd Wright named his two estates after the 6th-century Welsh bard, Taliesin, whose name is translated as "shining brow." At Taliesin in Wisconsin, Wright built the estate on what he called "the brow of a hill, leaving the crown, or top, open" (<http://www.taliesinpreservation.org/frank-lloyd-wright/fllw-faq#taliesinname>).

advantage of the topography to allow for views of the woods from various areas of the campus, including the two-level library. His plan followed the natural ridges and valleys around the lake, allowing the southeast side to be on two levels facing the woods and the northeast side to be the primary entrance with access to parking.



The design incorporated extensive areas of glass, especially on the woods side and around the primary garden court, which was the central feature of phase two of the plan. As in many of his other projects, Dow used the same material for walls on both the inside and outside, choosing red-brown facing brick throughout the structure.

The unique feature of Dow's design for KVCC - one that is undoubtedly connected to his ideas about human balance - was the "Tower of Light" to be placed at the main entrance. When Dow was asked by KVCC president Dale B. Lake to explain the tower's significance, he wrote:

Philosophically, it is a lantern in darkness or in light showing the way to discoveries... achievements... and happiness.

Factually, it is a light. It is a vertical line contrasting with the horizontals of the building, thus drawing attention to that spot which is the main entrance to the college.³²

The ellipses in the quote are Dow's, who had an idiosyncratic way of expressing himself, especially when addressing his philosophical views. And the statement is consistent with concepts Dow was developing at this time in his career, which would culminate in his "Way of Life Cycle," first published in pamphlet form in 1976.³³

In fact, Dow's description of the design for KVCC uses language similar to how he described his philosophy. For example:

- A Way of Life Cycle (1976): "Our unique abilities, when put together, naturally create something new...this is called creativity. first you compose all the facts and all the feelings into an expression.

³² Alden B. Dow to Dale B. Lake, November 2, 1970.

³³ Maddex.

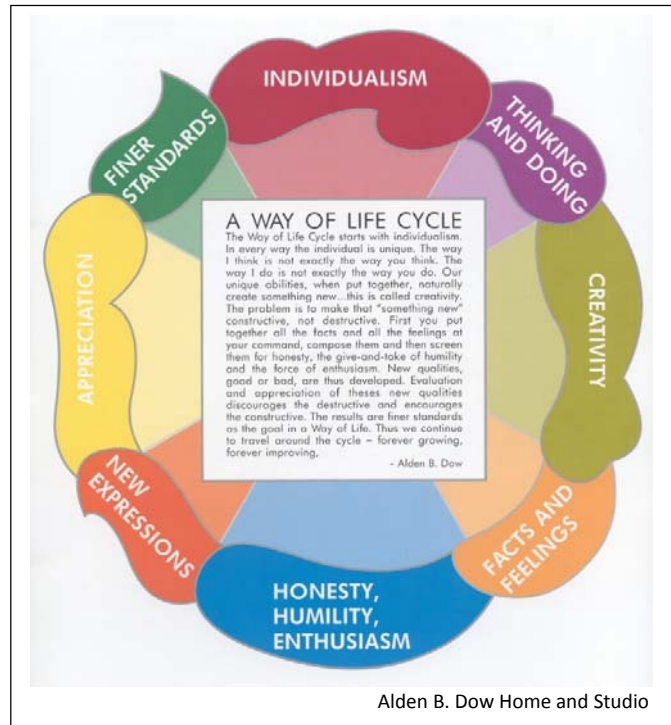
The problem is to make that expression constructive, not destructive. To accomplish this you screen the expression for honesty, the give-and-take of humility and the vitality of enthusiasm."³⁴

- KVCC Long Range Development Plan (1969): "If a building honestly develops its purpose with enthusiasm, keeping an admiring eye on the dramatic and including the give and take of humility, the results will be long-lasting."³⁵

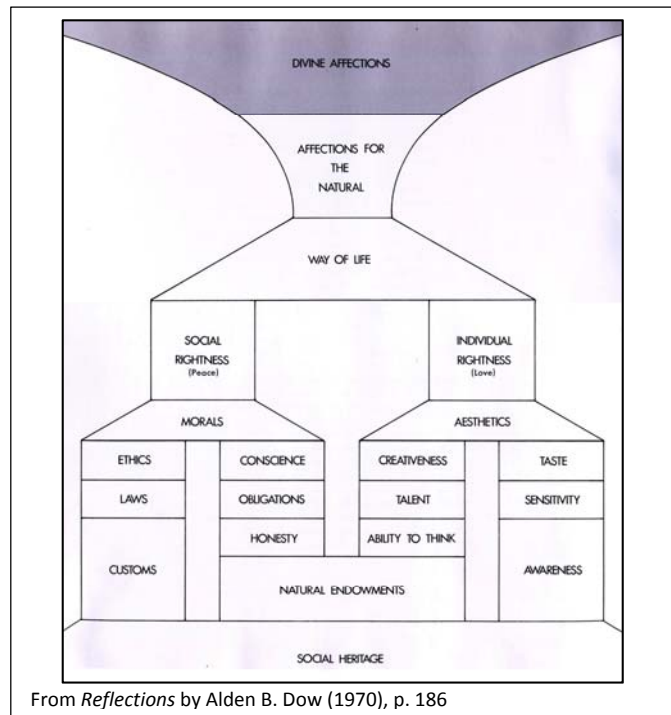
Honesty, humility, and enthusiasm were the three criteria by which Dow evaluated every project he undertook, and they formed the three-legged platform for his philosophy. According to his daughter Barbara Carras, these principles, which Dow referred to as "HHE," were "his basic philosophy of life."³⁶

Dow had a somewhat mystical view of human interaction and achievement, which is illustrated, both literally and figuratively, in his Way of Life Cycle. The diagram he created for the Cycle is reminiscent of a Buddhist mandala, and the statements about the parts of the Cycle have the common-sense-mixed-with-mysticism of some of the sayings of the Buddha. Dow was interested in the Far East, especially Japan, inspired in part by his family's visit there in 1922-23.³⁷

On his way to developing the Way of Life Cycle diagram and description, Dow wrote a short book entitled *Reflections*, which laid out a preliminary description of his ideas with a different diagram. Dow's description of his philosophy in *Reflections* is similar to the one in the Way of Life Cycle, but more comprehensive of human experience and reaching toward an understanding of Ultimate Reality. In diagramming this human quest, Dow chooses the form of a tower rather than a wheel. Dow describes it thus:



Alden B. Dow Home and Studio



From *Reflections* by Alden B. Dow (1970), p. 186

³⁴ Northwood University Alden B. Dow Center for Creativity & Enterprise: <https://www.northwood.edu/creativity-enterprise/about-abdcce/alden-b-dow/default.aspx>

³⁵ LRDP.

³⁶ Timothy G. Nash, "Of Architecture, Philosophy and Individualism: The Alden B. Dow Story," <https://www.mackinac.org/6487>, April 7, 2004

³⁷ Maddex, et. al.

Since the beginning of history, man has been intrigued with the idea that growth can extend beyond this physical existence. Our probes into outer space sharpen this curiosity and expand the frontiers of the mind that contemplates the Divine. I believe that it is in our Affection for the Divine that we extend our own lives to the limits of their capacities. The ultimate growth extends to the Ultimate Source.³⁸

After private residences, Dow designed more churches than any other structures. Dow was a modernist - at least in the same sense that Frank Lloyd Wright was - so it is understandable that he declined to design churches in the traditional way. He did, however, incorporate new approaches to traditional elements of church design, including the steeple.

Like the Tower of Light, Dow's church steeples incorporate geometric forms that could be seen as an attempt to expand their symbolism beyond the Judeo-Christian tradition. The church towers reach up to the "Ultimate Source," built up with bricks and concrete rather than ideas as was the tower in *Reflections*.

Indeed, KVCC's Tower of Light can be seen to have connections to the tower steeples of the churches: It is a dominant architectural feature that draws the viewer's attention to the building and its entrance; and it is composed of three pillars, with four perpendicular slabs connected to each closer to the top than the bottom. Although the Tower of Light looks different depending on the perspective of the viewer, it could be seen as reminiscent of a trio of Christian (Latin) crosses. And, if a connection can be made to Christian symbolism, another can be made to Dow's three principles of Honesty, Humility, and Enthusiasm.

As Dow said, the Tower of Light is meant to show "the way to discoveries... achievements... and happiness." Visually, he must have intended the structure to connect to his ideas about human improvement expressed in the Way of Life Cycle and *Reflections*. And the same connection can be made to the buildings he designed specifically for Christian services.



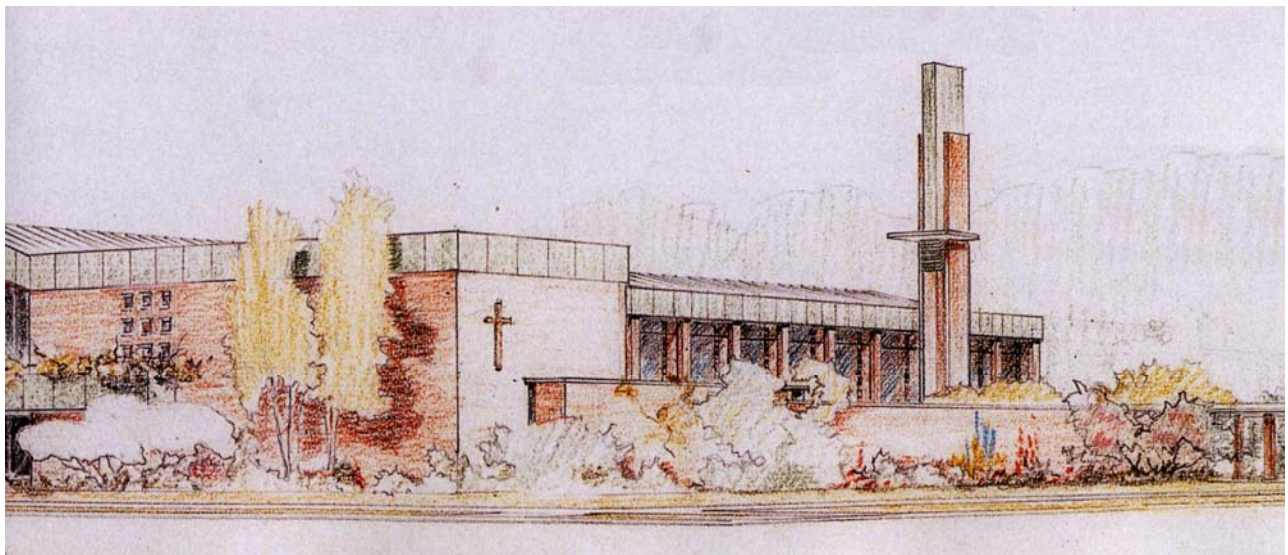
Tower of Light from the roof

Photo: SM

In *Reflections*, he wrote that humans should strive for personal growth to reach toward the "Divine" or the "Ultimate Source." He also applied this expanded concept of growth to his designs for churches. Of First Methodist Church in Midland he said: "The architecture of this church strives to inspire the concept of growth - growth beyond ourselves, beyond walls, beyond this earth, beyond time."³⁹ The original design for this church included a tower/steeple of brick and reinforced concrete with a single horizontal slab extending out from the center. It could have been a visual representation of Dow's concept of "growth" toward the Divine, but it was not included in the final construction.

³⁸ Alden B. Dow, *Reflections*, Midland, MI: Northwood Institute, 1970.

³⁹ Martin E. Marty, "The Architecture of Growth: The Five Dow-Designed Churches of Midland, Michigan," *The Christian Century*, March 27, 1957.



Perspective drawing of the original design for First Methodist Church, Midland

Alden B. Dow Archives

Another of Dow's Midland church designs included a brick tower that was built, and it too can be related to Dow's philosophy of growth. Of this church - St. John's Episcopal - Dow said: "With humility and enthusiasm, this building is trying to show that growth is unrestricted so long as it radiates from the principles of God."⁴⁰

Other churches designed by Dow that include tower/steeple reminiscent of the Tower of Light include First United Methodist Church in Lake Jackson, Texas and Christ Episcopal Church in Adrian, Michigan. The appearance of the steeple of the latter building could be seen to resemble the Tower of Light more than any of the others.⁴¹

Of all of these towers, KVCC's Tower of Light is Dow's boldest sculptural statement in any building of his ideas about human beings "growing" toward personal perfection. It can also be seen as upholding Dow's ideas about the necessity of nature in architecture: what Wright called organic architecture. The tower rises above the horizon of the building like a solitary oak tree in the middle of a field of grain. The posts and slabs of the tower could be seen as stylized trunks and branches reaching up to the sun, seen throughout human history as the source of knowledge.

Another interpretation could be spiritual: the tower aspires toward Ultimate Reality - or the "Divine" - as do most human beings, seeking balance and understanding.

A third view could be intellectual: the tower is reminiscent of those in the Medieval monasteries that were the first universities, or those of the cities of Italy where humanism flourished during the Renaissance. It could also be seen as the product of an intellectual deconstruction and reassembly of an organic or spiritual concept in geometric form.

Organic, spiritual, intellectual: three preoccupations of Dow's that are always at the forefront in his work and thought, can be seen in his design for KVCC, and can be applied when seeking meaning in the Tower of Light. These three quests were undertaken by Dow at KVCC and elsewhere with Honesty, Humility, and Enthusiasm.

⁴⁰ Marty.

⁴¹ Photos of Dow's churches discussed here can be seen at the end of this appendix.

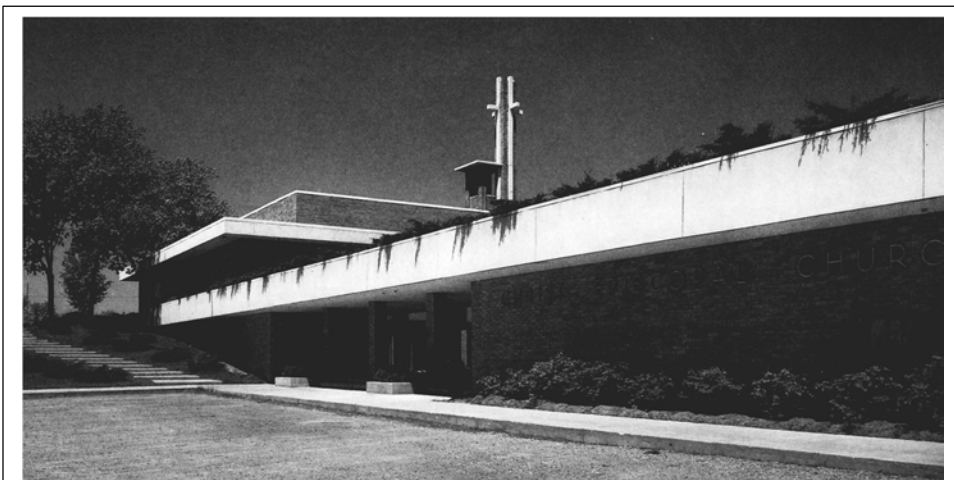
Photos



First Methodist Church, Lake Jackson, TX



Photos by arch-ive.org

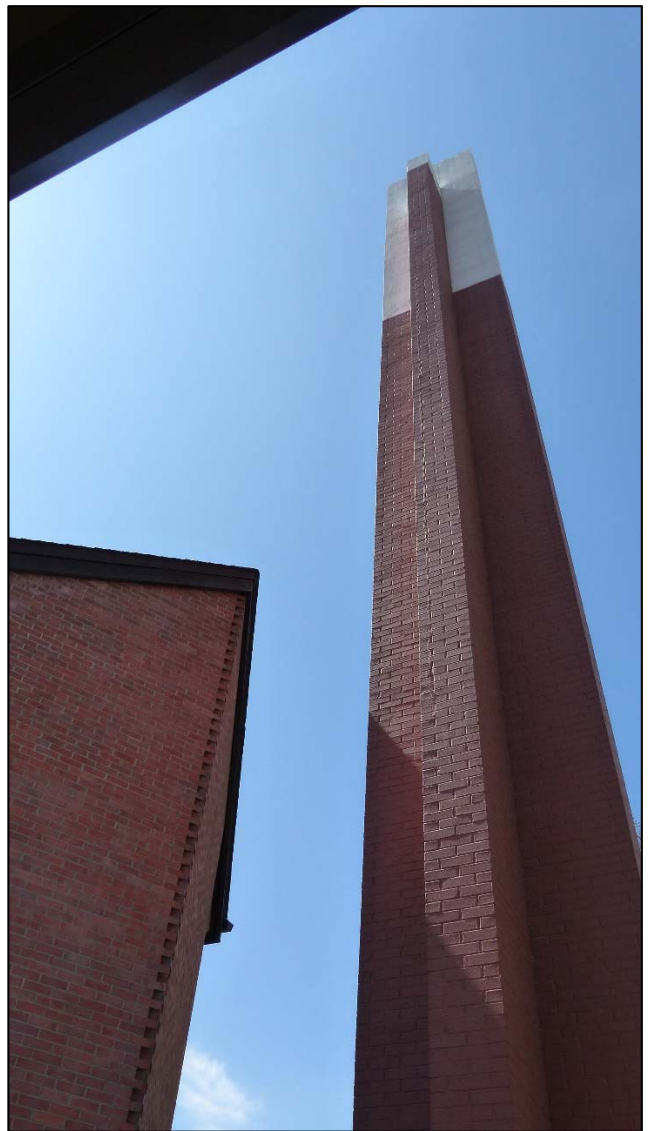


Christ Episcopal Church, Adrian

Photo by Balthazar Korab

Views of St. John's Episcopal Church, Midland (photos by SM)





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