

# Northrop Memorial Auditorium

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## Introduction

Northrop Auditorium was conceived as the focal point of the Minneapolis campus in 1909 by Cass Gilbert in his development of a campus plan for the University. Though not built until two decades later, Northrop has become much more than a beautiful building; it is a symbol. The history of the University is enduringly intertwined with the history of Northrop Auditorium itself. The construction and completion of the auditorium rather ushers in the modern era of the University, discerning the transformation from pioneer days and the founding, during which the University was hardly more than a small assortment of buildings, into the renowned, progressive institution it became throughout the twentieth century. More than a building for large and important events, more than a portal to the University, more than a façade containing an unofficial motto, Northrop represents the continuing story of the University, its founders and builders, its ideals and goals, its triumphs, hardships and traditions.



## Planning, Fundraising and Construction

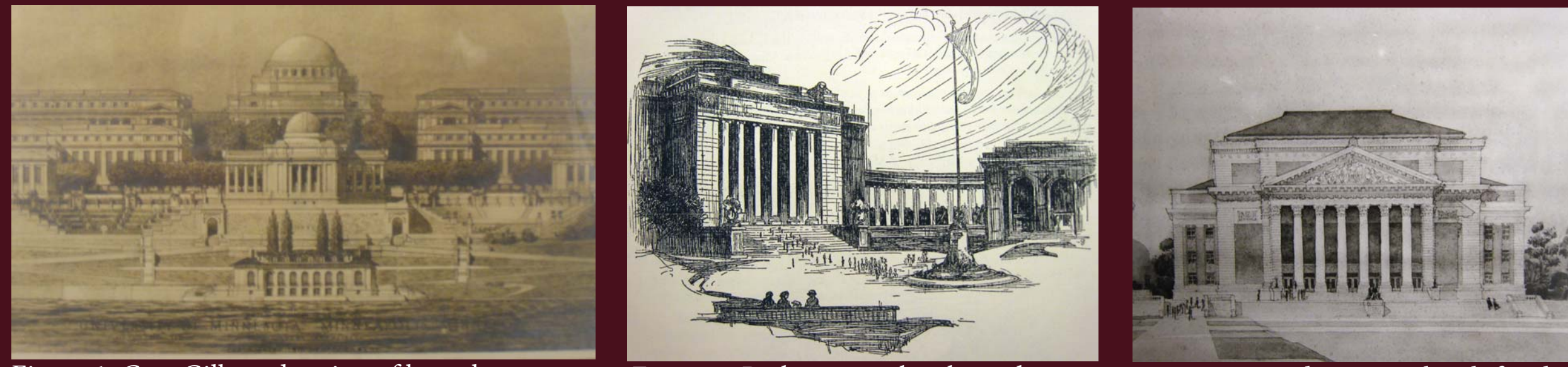


Figure 1: Cass Gilbert drawing of how the campus would look from the river. 1910. Figure 2: Preliminary sketch used in fundraising. 1922. Figure 3: A preliminary sketch for the Auditorium. 1925.

“So great was his power in public address to energize and inspire that this first need, the Auditorium, is to be a memorial to him. It will commemorate forever the spirit of Minnesota and the qualities of manhood and womanhood for which Cyrus Northrop stood.”

--Fundraising Pamphlet, 1922

“A first essential of a true educational institution is a place of general assembly. It is there that students sense their spiritual unity. It is there that they catch the vision of unselfish, disinterested service which University and national leaders of thought may present”

-- Fundraising Pamphlet, 1922

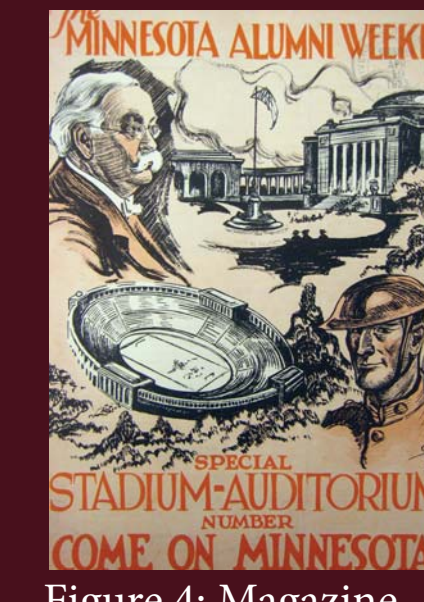


Figure 4: Magazine cover celebrating the campaign. 1922.



Figure 5: During the on-campus campaign, cannons boomed for every \$25,000. 1922.

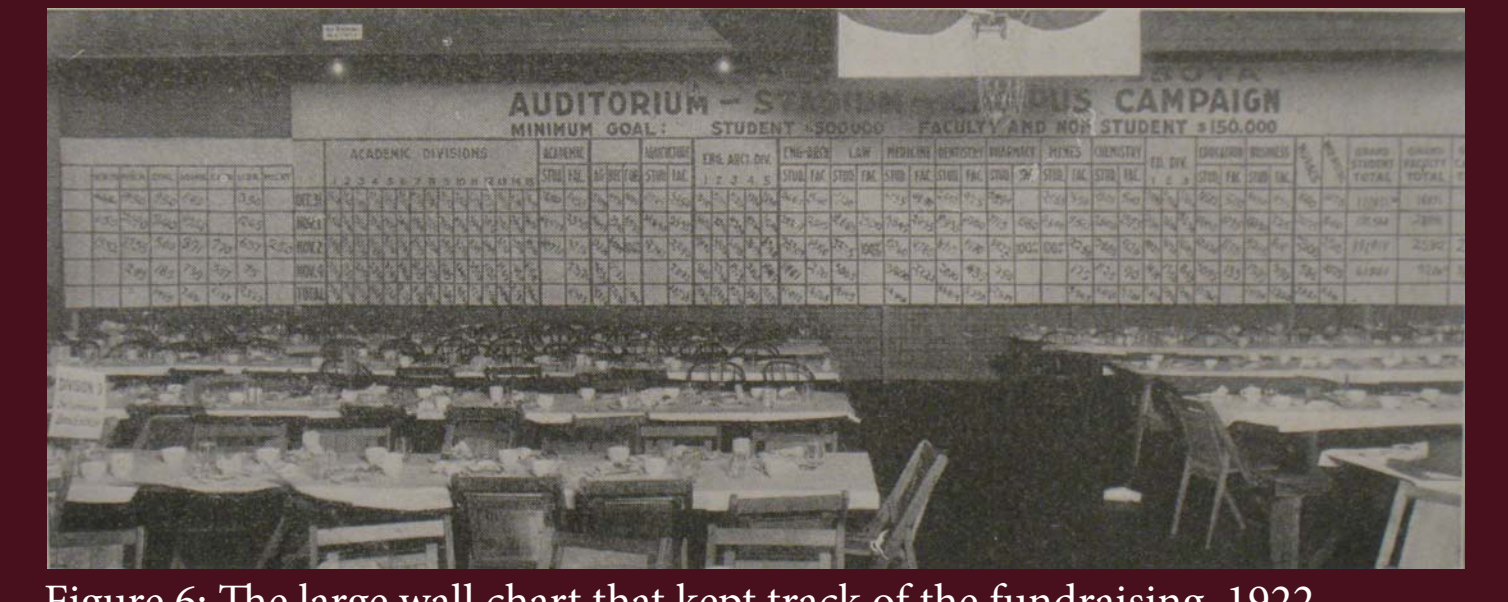
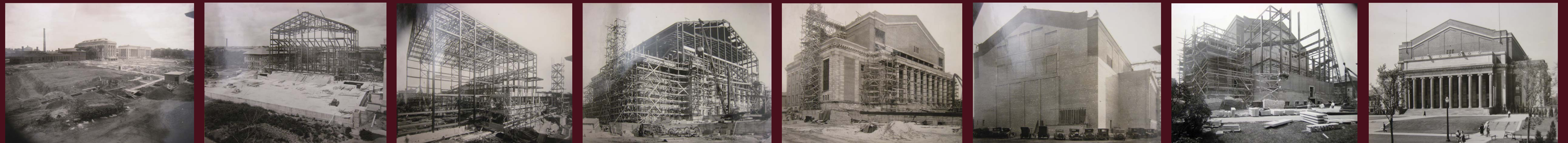


Figure 6: The large wall chart that kept track of the fundraising. 1922.



Figures 7-14: Construction sequence from April 1928 through October 1929. Figure 7 shows the site after the removal of part of the former mechanical engineering building and the medicinal herb garden. Figures 12 and 13 show the temporary back wall and the later extended construction.

“The Regents accept the building with a deep sense of gratitude and a recognition of obligation, and on their part promise to use and keep it, to the best of their ability, for the highest good of the State.”

--Regent Fred Snyder at the Dedication Ceremony, 1929

## The Inscription

The University of Minnesota

Founded in the Faith that Men are Ennobled by Understanding  
Dedicated to the Advancement of Learning and the Search for Truth  
Devoted to the Instruction of Youth and the Welfare of the State

--Carved 1936

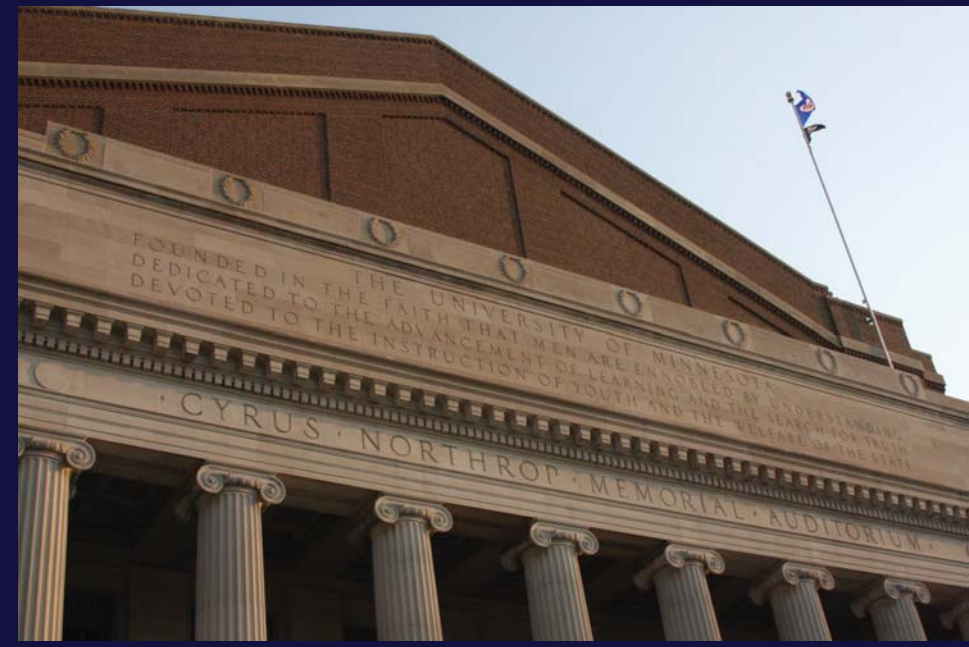


Figure 1: The Inscription as it appears today.

Earlier Suggestions for the Inscription:

Whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things

Founded in pioneer days, the University of Minnesota serves in freedom, the highest interests of the Commonwealth. Here successive generations may be dowered with the wisdom of the past and dedicated to that fearless and unending winning and testing of facts which alone can yield Truth for each new day

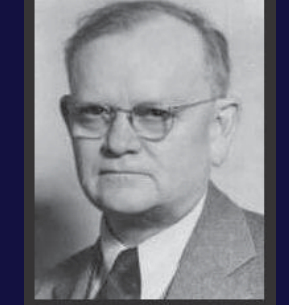


Figure 2: Hartley Burr Alexander, effective author of the inscription.

“The auditorium is definitely the most monumental of the university structures and this façade is the feature which most effectively be regarded as its official portal – where, therefore, the central significance of the institution may most appropriately be proclaimed.”

--H.B. Alexander, 1935

## Building Use



Figure 1: Audience ready for a performance. 1939.

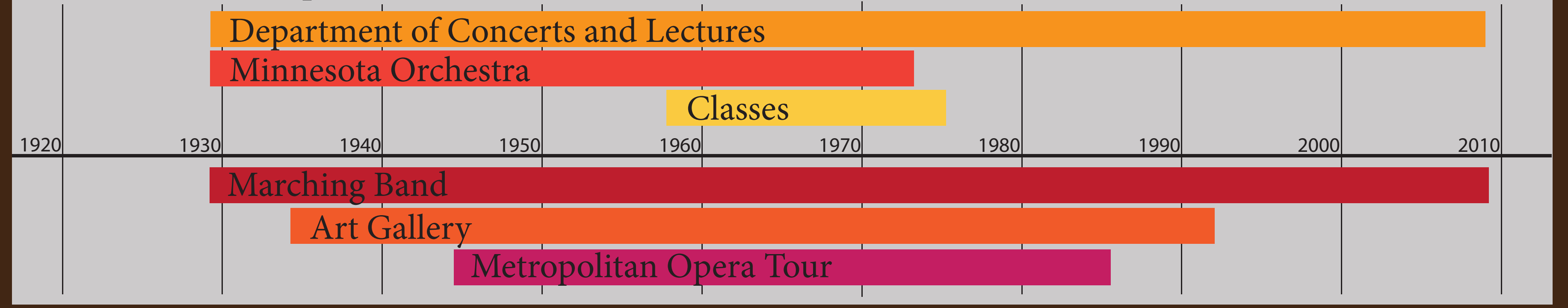
Figure 2: Student working in the University Art Gallery. 1976.

Figure 3: Graduation at Northrop.

Figure 4: Students gather for a memorial service after Sept. 11, 2001.

Figure 5: The U of M Marching Band Indoor Concert. Ca. 1980.

### Tenants of Northrop Timeline



## The Northrop Organ



Figures 1-3: The Organ Console, located on the main floor in the orchestra pit. It connects to the pipes through a series of cables that run through the walls. The console is set on a hydraulic lift so it can lower into the floor.

“The character of the organ in the room is special and rare...There are no visible pipes, just the huge sloping plaster grill in the ceiling and the spotlighted console far below in the pit. The sound is warm, mystical, emanating from an imprecise direction and distance, and completely blended. The intent is to emote, to thrill, to inspire and to bring one into a world of musical grandeur and dignity. This is not a toy; there is no levity, but one can invoke laughter. It is a serious instrument of lofty purpose and result.”

-- Charles Hendrickson



Figures 4-6: The organ's nearly 7,000 pipes are located in a series of six rooms in the Northrop Attic. There are four ranks and 108 stops. The pipes were all handcrafted by the Aeolian-Skinner Organ Company and installed in four sections between 1932 and 1935.

## Additions, Renovations and Remodeling

“In judging the Architectural quality of the auditorium, one must also remember that, in places, the familiar ghost Economy stalked there, wielding an irresistible, restraining influence.”

-- Frederick M. Mann, 1929

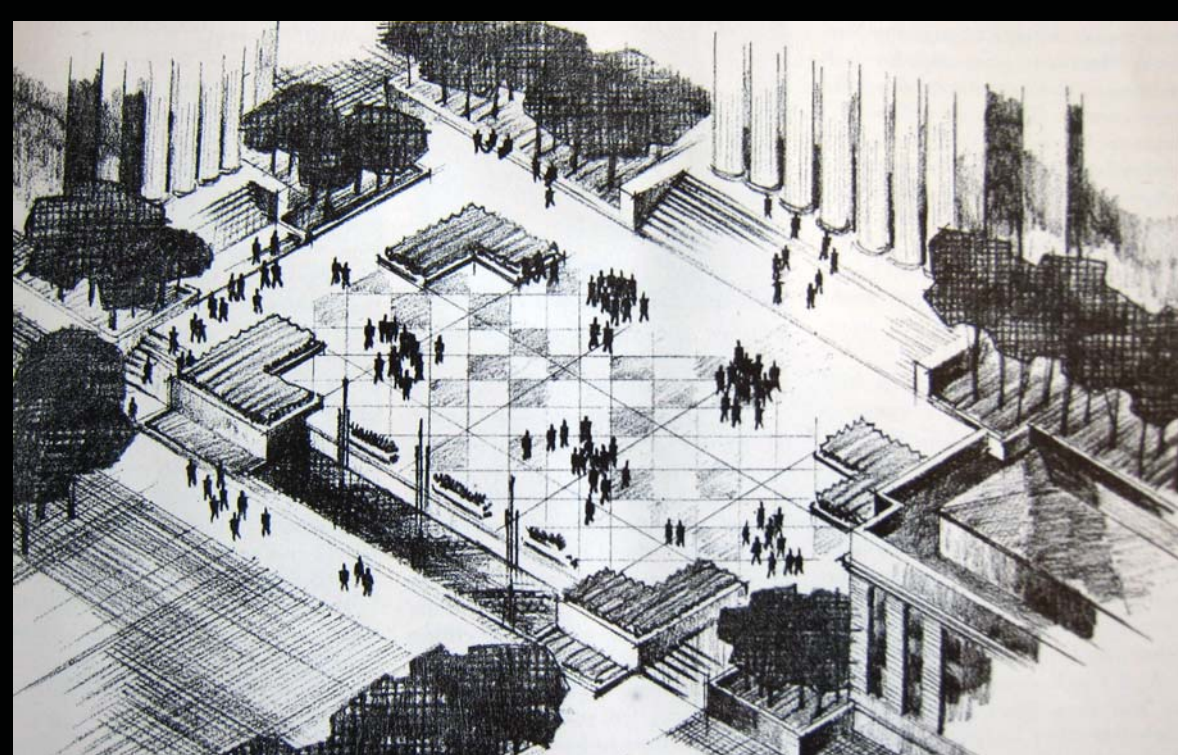


Figure 1: Northrop Plaza was redesigned by Winston Close in the late 1950s.



Figure 2: The world's first all-steel concert shell, complete with Plexiglas reflector panels over the proscenium, was installed in Northrop in 1961. The shell remained until 1969.



Figure 3: The latest Northrop Acoustical shell was installed in 1969. The canopy is still in the auditorium, but the shell proper was discarded in the early 2000s.

“This hardy old perennial grows better with age; it need not wither and die.”

-- Minneapolis Tribune, 1976

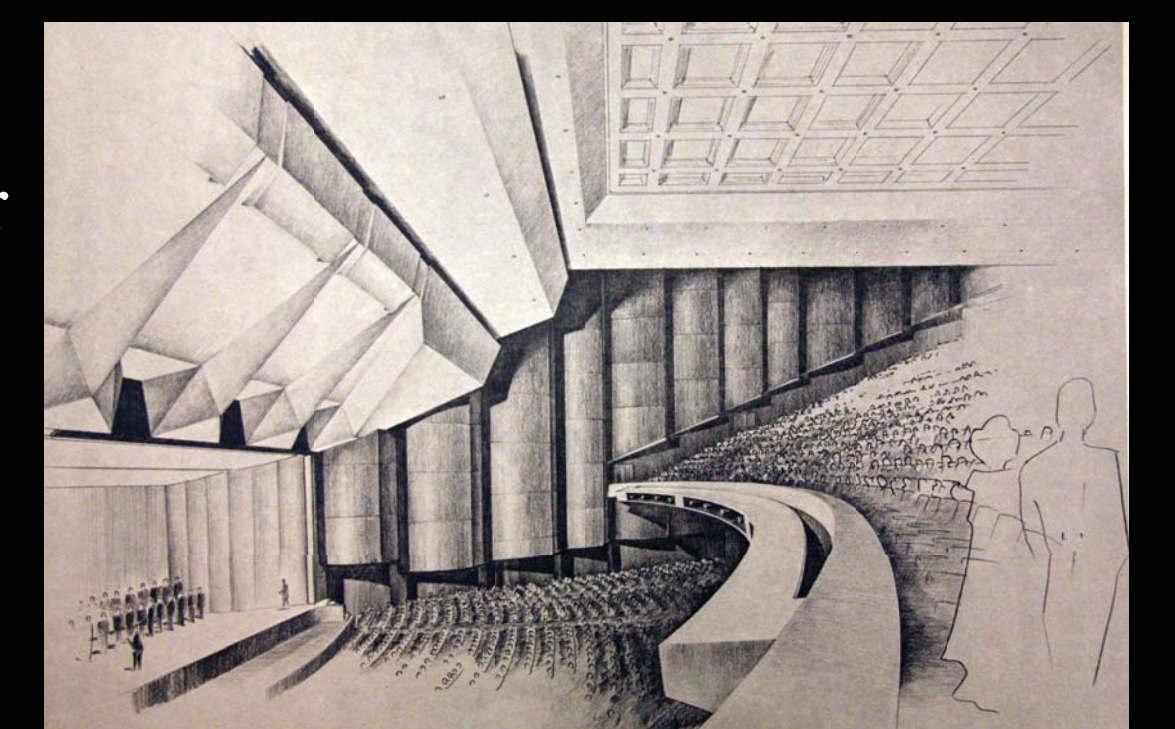


Figure 4: A sketch for a proposed "modernization" of Northrop in 1968.

“If Northrop does not serve students and faculty of this University, if Northrop does not serve the academic priorities of the University, and better serve the community, turn it into a parking structure.”

--Steven Rosenstone, 2008

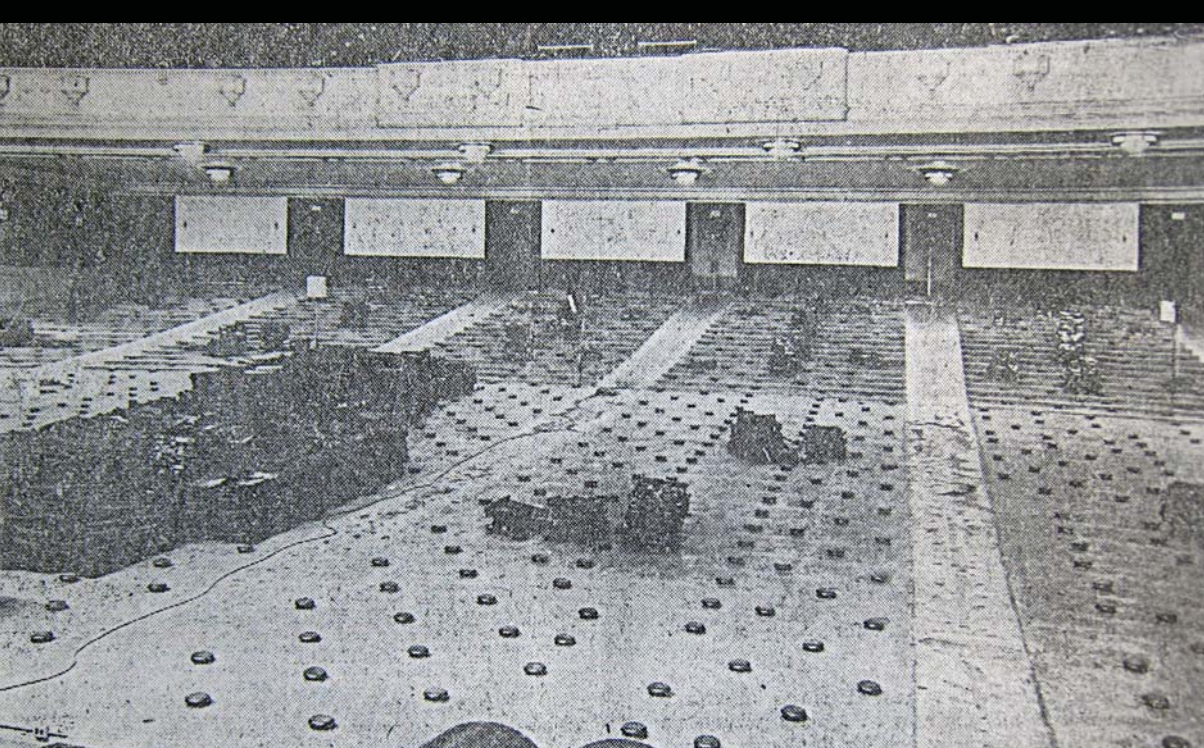


Figure 5: Seats removed from the Auditorium during a major renovation in 1951.

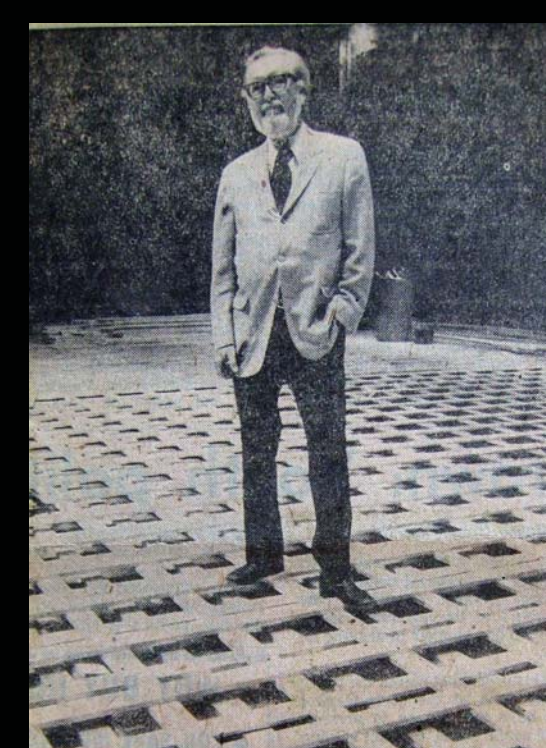


Figure 6: Ross Smith on the Balanchine weave floor installed in 1975.



Figure 7: Part of the ceiling in Memorial Hall collapsed in 2001.

“I do want to see the Northrop Auditorium serve every interest possible on the campus, but I do feel that it is a place which should not be expected to be in use 100%. It should rather be ready always for the highest purposes which it alone can serve.”

--Verna Scott, 1929