

Stanford White

Architect (1850–1906)

White began his architectural career as the principal assistant to HENRY HOBSON RICHARDSON. In 1878, he joined CHARLES MCKIM and WILLIAM MEAD to form McKim, Mead and White, which became an incubator for American architects.

White designed many outstanding buildings including Madison Square Presbyterian Church, the Villard Houses, the Washington Square Arch, Judson Memorial Church on Washington Square, and of course the Century, one of more than 50 club buildings his firm designed. Others include the Harmonie, Players, Union, the Knickerbocker and the Metropolitan. The very social Stanford was himself a member of many of the clubs, and in 1886, he joined the Century, a club that years earlier had turned down his father.

White had a major influence in the “Shingle Style” of the 1880s, and the Newport cottages for which he is celebrated: the magnificent Rosecliff is a prime example. The firm also designed the Newport Casino, now the Tennis Hall of Fame. A number of outstanding buildings in the Berkshires—the inland Newport—that White designed are still standing, including the Berkshire Theatre (originally the Stockbridge Casino) and Naumkeag, which was the summer home of JOSEPH CHOATE. The impressive garden at Naumkeag, designed by Fletcher Steele, was added later.

With his wife Bessie, White took annual trips to Europe that combined pleasure and business. There he would buy antiques, paintings and sometimes whole rooms for himself and for clients. Back home, White was known for his lavish and scandalous parties, which the adoring Bessie chose to ignore. White was attracted to beautiful women and, in 1906, this penchant finally did him in when he was shot and killed at the theatre rooftop of Madison Square Garden, which White had designed. The murderer was Harry Kendall Thaw, the jealous millionaire husband of Evelyn Nesbit, a beautiful young model, with whom White had once been intimate. The newspapers sensationalized the murder, and it became known as the Trial of the Century.



White's son LAWRENCE GRANT WHITE, writing about his father's death, "On the night of June 25th, 1906, while attending a performance at Madison Square Garden, Stanford White was shot from behind [by] a crazed profligate whose great wealth was used to besmirch his victim's memory during the series of notorious trials that ensued."

