



Robert Tegen

Portland architect Robert Tegen designed the Boiler Building, which was built in 1910 to supply heat for Providence Academy and a then-new St. Joseph's Hospital to the north across 12th Street. Learn more about him and his work below.

Architect Johannes Frederick Robert Tegen (1879-1948) practiced in Portland, OR from 1909 – c. 1918. Born in Hamburg, Germany in 1879, Tegen, who used the name Robert and a middle initial "F" professionally, immigrated to the United States in 1883 as a four-year-old child with his father, Hans Christian (1853-1917) and mother Ida Oehlen (1815 – 1916) Tegen. They debarked in New York City and went from there to live in Manitowoc, Wisconsin for two years. From Manitowoc, they moved to Milwaukee, WI for six years, and then returned to Manitowoc. Robert's last name is also seen in numerous published sources spelled as "Tegan." On documents that bear his signature, such as his World War I draft registration card, the name is spelled with two e's, and thus that is the spelling used in this biography. Robert's father used the name Christ H. Tegen or C.H. Tegen in his professional practice. C.H. Tegen developed a wide-ranging, successful architectural practice in Manitowoc in residential, commercial, and institutional properties. The family was socially prominent and civically active. Among Tegen senior's significant designs were the Manitowoc County Insane Asylum (1897), Holy Family Hospital (1900), and Manitowoc County Courthouse (1905).

Christ's profession clearly influenced Robert's career path, and sources indicate that the latter learned architectural design basics in his father's office. Formal education included Robert's attendance at the University of Illinois' Preparatory School from 1899-1900. This program was described in the college catalog as being appropriate college preparation for "young men and women, who on account of advanced age or prolonged absence from school, are out of touch with the high school." He continued on to study in the university's architecture program from 1900-1901, graduating with an engineering degree, and served in the campus military battalion while doing so. In 1900, he was awarded the university's 1900 Hazelton Medal for excellence in military drill.

After graduation in 1901, Robert went to work with Milwaukee architect A.E. Eschweiler, but had moved to Chicago by 1903. He worked in an architectural firm there, and married Dublin-born Winifred F. Sweeney (1883-?) in 1904. In late 1908, he returned to Manitowoc for several months to operate his father's firm while the latter was in Europe.



Tegen was living and working in Portland, OR by April, 1909. He practiced primarily as a solo designer but did initially have a 1909-1910 partnership with Francis J. J. Berndt (c. 1868 – 1942), with whom he designed several projects prior to the 1910 departure from Portland of the latter. Joint projects included a 1909 \$15,000 frame and brick Tudor Revival-style home for Elizabeth Cadwell in Portland, Oregon's Portland Heights neighborhood, and in 1910, the largest garage to date on Portland's east side - a \$23,000 project. Winifred Tegen worked in their office as a stenographer.

Tegen collaborated with Berndt on the design for the Sisters of Providence's 1911 St. Joseph's Hospital and related Providence Academy Boiler Building, and also the 1911 Elk's Lodge #823 Building, all in Vancouver, WA. However, given that the partnership ended c. 1910 and no known business records remain, it has not proven possible to determine with certainty to what extent they worked together on these buildings. A hospital elevation drawing circulated in the media in 1910 shows the name of the firm, and in press accounts prior to completion of the buildings, the firm is given credit. In press accounts following completion, however, Tegen is credited with the designs. A similar situation existed with the Elks Building. Berndt departed from Portland c. 1910 and relocated to Oakland, CA, and the partnership ended. By 1912, Tegen had brought in a draftsman, George Harold Smith, to the office, and also Berndt's son Cyril as an apprentice. Cyril remained in the office for a couple years. Other Washington projects, both commissioned by the Sisters of Providence, were St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Yakima, dedicated in 1914, and the 1916 St. Mary's Hospital in Walla Walla, WA. In the case of the latter, planning began in March, 1910, and Berndt was involved at the outset but not completion.

The majority of Tegen's work was institutional and commercial, and frequently exhibited elaborate brickwork designs, replete with dentils, herringbone-patterns, dogtooth corners, and diamond-shaped details, such as are seen on the Providence Academy Boiler Building and Vancouver Elk Buildings. His design for the 1914 Ringler's Cotillion Hall (now McMenamin's Crystal Ballroom and Ringlers Pub), built in downtown Portland, OR especially exemplifies these types of details. Other Portland designs include the four-story 1912 Lipman-Wolfe department store's warehouse (now the East Bank Lofts) located at SE Ash and SE 6th in the East Portland/Grand Avenue Historic District in Portland. For developer A.L. Parkhurst of the Crater Lake Company, he designed at least two commercial properties in Portland - a four-story 1912 brick veneer business block at Third and Burnside, and the two-story Hotel Modern residential hotel (now known as the Modern Rich Apartments) built in 1914 and occupying a quarter block on the northwest corner of 2nd and Couch in the Skidmore/Old Town Historic District. Oregon



projects outside Portland included the 1911 Sacred Heart Hospital (re-named Providence Hospital Medford in 1965) in Medford, OR for the Sisters of Providence and the 1917 Salem Hospital and Heating Plant, in Salem, OR.

Tegen had sufficient work in Canada to justify opening an office in Vancouver, BC in c. 1912 which he may have used until as late as 1916. Among his international commissions were Vancouver, BC's St. Paul's Hospital in 1911-1912 and the 1913 Parish Hall and School for Holy Rosary Roman Catholic Church. Tegen had assistance on designing and/or overseeing construction of the hospital from Alfred L. Vezina (c. 1889 - c. 1932), who worked at various times as an architect, contractor, and estimator in Portland, OR and locations in northern California.

While living in Portland, Tegen was socially and professionally active. The newspaper society columns contained mentions of events he and his wife Winifred attended. Tegen was an automobile enthusiast, and the media documented his family travel activities, including among the latter a 4,200-mile car trip to Mexico and back. In 1913, he served on the American Institute of Architects Oregon Chapter's Interstate Bridge Committee, and in 1918, on the Entertainment and the Ethics and Competition for Public Buildings committees for the same organization. Fraternally, he was an Elk, as was his father.

Tegen remained in Portland until 1919, when records show he sought to become a naturalized citizen, but a San Francisco city directory indicates that he moved south that same year. Winifred was living in San Francisco by 1918. The 1920 census records them living together there, but they were divorced c. 1920. On the occasion of his second marriage in November, 1921, Tegen listed his residence as Manitowoc, though he and his new wife Pearl M. Huggins Kinney (1880-1948) were married in and then lived in Detroit, MI. By 1930, Tegen had relocated his architectural practice to New York City and was living in Bayside, Queens, New York by 1942. For a period of time in the 1940s, he worked for New York City architect Frederick P. Wiedersum. Robert F. Tegen died on October 19, 1948.

Holly Chamberlain, December 1, 2021



Laser scan of Boiler Plant (foreground) and Laundry Building (background), April 28, 2019, Olson Engineering



*The Modern Rich Apartments (formerly Hotel Modern), NW 2nd and Couch, Portland, OR
designed by Tegen in 1914*



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