

## BIOGRAPHY OF LOUIS KAMPER

By  
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Louis Kamper (1861 – 1953)

Born in Bavaria, Germany, Louis Kamper immigrated to the US with his family in 1880. He worked for the firm Mc Kim, Mead, and White in New York from his arrival in the US until he moved to Detroit in 1888. In short order, Kamper had become very well known in the architectural community of Detroit and in 1888 he joined the firm of Scott & Scott and proceeded to found the firm of Scott, Kamper and Scott. His first major commission, the Hecker-Smiley Mansion, was awarded to the firm in 1889. The Hecker-Smiley Mansion help make Kamper a premiere architect and designer to the wealthy and affluent families in Detroit. The completion of the Hecker-Smiley Mansion in 1892 acted as the catalyst that Kamper needed to launch himself and his firm into the spotlight.

Over his career, he designed and oversaw the construction of some of the most notable buildings in Detroit history. After the Hecker-Smiley mansion, he continued to do projects for notable Detroitiers such as the Bagleys, the Merills, the Heckers and the Books. In 1913, Kamper won the commission for the Roseland Park Mausoleum at Roseland cemetery in Berkley, MI. When it was dedicated in 1914, it was the largest public mausoleum in the US. This commission started a succession of projects that would place Louis Kamper in the architectural pantheon of Detroit. After the Roseland Park project, he became the chief architect for the Book family after designing and executing the construction of their estate house located at Burns and East Jefferson. Once the Books realized his talent, the Books chose Kamper to create their vision for Greater Washington Boulevard.

The timeline for Kamper’s projects almost parallels boom times in Detroit in that his greatest projects were constructed during the “good times” in Detroit’s history.

Detroit International Fair and Exposition Building	1889 (made entirely of wood)
Hecker – Smiley Mansion	1889 Architectural Plans 1892 Completed
Hugo Scherer summer home	1898
Kamper Residence	1910
Book Estate	1911
Roseland Park Mausoleum	1914
Book Building	1916
8 <sup>th</sup> Precinct Building	1916
Murry W. Sales Mansion	1917
Cornelius Ray Mansion	1917
Cadillac Sq. Bldg. (Real Estate Bldg.)	1918
Washington Blvd Building	1923
Carleton Plaza Hotel	1923
Book Cadillac Hotel	1924
Royal Palms Hotel (Park Ave apts.)	1924
Eddystone Hotel	1924
Park Avenue Hotel	1924
Consolidated Bank Building	1926
Book Tower	1926
Water Board Building	1928
Industrial Bank Building	1928
Eaton Tower (Broderick Tower)	1928
New Book Tower (81 stories)	1929 (never constructed)

The twelfth major commission by Louis Kamper, the Carleton Plaza Hotel was the first documented hotel project by his firm. The Carleton holds significance and importance in Detroit architectural history in that Kamper used the project to evolve his style for hotel design. Its façade design is a combination of Beaux-Arts and the Chicago school. Its appearance has unique visual characteristics and balancing elements; elements that are not found on other Kamper projects. The layout of the hotel itself was done in a “U” shape, which Kamper went on to use for the Book Cadillac project. This shape allowed every guestroom to have an outside view, which was not yet a common feature. In addition to its shape, the hotel provided guest rooms with individual baths, again another feature that was uncommon at the time. Carleton also had an important social significance that was demonstrated during the Jazz Age. In a segregated city, wealthy and affluent blacks during the 20’s and 30’s came to the Carleton Plaza to listen to some of the biggest names in Jazz.

After more than a decade of being a derelict building, the Carleton Plaza has been granted a reprieve from the wrecking ball and is poised to become a symbol of rebirth for the Brush Park district. With a group of open minded, forward thinking investors made up of the Carola Properties, the Cornerstone group, and Carlton Properties, the Carleton Plaza will become the newest loft style condominium development in the Midtown section of Detroit. The Garrison Company, who has worked diligently with the Cornerstone group to rehabilitate the Carola and the Lamar buildings, will spearhead the redevelopment efforts at the Carleton Plaza. Since becoming involved with the Carola building redevelopment, The Garrison Company has become a premier historic rehabilitation contractor and experts on adaptive reuse of vintage buildings in the Detroit market. Garrison sees itself as more than just a general contractor for Carleton Plaza, but rather stewards of the building. Stewards that will not just reconstruct the building but also assist the building as it begins the newest chapter in its history.

*Lucas McGrail is a Detroit-based architect. He is also a frequent lecturer on Detroit’s architectural history.*