When Harold Spitznagel chose Sioux Falls, South Dakota, in which to set up his architectural practice on 9 June 1930, he could not have known that his firm would one day rank among the largest in the Upper Midwest. Over four decades, Spitznagel built a reputation for excellence and integrity on his skills as a designer, his convincing and cordial manner, and his easy familiarity with the people and business community of the region. He approached each project as if he owned the structure he had been commissioned to design, thereby bringing to the work both a personal and professional interest in its success. From modest beginnings as a one-person office, Spitznagel’s company grew into a prestigious firm with branches in several cities that employed hundreds of people. The architect’s own character traits—high expectations, tight organization and discipline, fairness, and an ingrained sense of humor—dominated the office atmosphere and led to the camaraderie and heightened sense of teamwork that distinguished the firm from many others. Spitznagel expected, and received, a high degree of proficiency from his staff. He monitored them closely, critiquing and rewarding, always concerned with the quality of their work as well as their personal welfare. In return, he earned the respect and devotion of his employees, who produced the best results possible and contributed to his rise as one of the most prominent architects in the region.

Harold Theodore Spitznagel was born in Sioux Falls on 7 December 1896 to Mary and Charles Spitznagel, owners of the Model Bakery at 226 South Phillips Avenue, where the family lived for several years.
Harold Spitznagel built his practice, established in 1930, into one of the leading architectural firms in the Upper Midwest. He appears here in his later years.

Harold Spitznagel graduated from Washington High School and studied at the Art Institute of Chicago before transferring to the University of Pennsylvania, from which he received a bachelor's degree in architecture in 1925. As a student, he won the American Institute of Architects and Arthur Spayd Brooke medals for design. He also held memberships in the Architectural Society of the University of Pennsylvania and Tau Sigma Delta and Sigma Xi fraternities.¹

¹ "Record of Qualifications and Experience of Harold Spitznagel, Architect, Sioux Falls, South Dakota," 1 July 1942, Box A, Harold Spitznagel Papers (N 25), Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis (this collection is hereafter cited as Spitznagel Papers). Charles Spitznagel was born in Germany about 1853; his wife Mary was a native of Iowa.
Spitznagel's first job was in the office of Herbert Foltz, a well-established architect in Indianapolis, where he worked for about six months after graduation. He then moved to Chicago and was employed with Burnham Brothers, a large firm that specialized in commercial structures, in 1926, and Graven and Mayger, popular designers of motion-picture theaters, in 1926 and 1927. From 1927 to 1929, he worked for Schmidt, Garden, and Erickson, which, a decade earlier, had been one of the nation's leading architects of the Prairie School style and remained one of Chicago's top designers of commercial, hotel, and housing projects. At Graven and Mayger, Spitznagel was placed in charge of designing and, possibly, supervising construction of a $700,000 hotel, theaters valued at $2 million, and various commercial projects. Schmidt, Garden, and Erickson gave him responsibility for the design of several hospitals and commercial structures.

With substantial experience under his belt, Spitznagel was ready to set out on his own and returned home to open a practice. He later said that because of the Great Depression he was "more or less forced into the practice of architecture" in Sioux Falls and that having "drifted from one firm to another . . . decided it would be best to come back and starve at home." The young architect rented an office on the third floor of the Western Surety Building at Eighth Street and Main Avenue for fifteen dollars a month and remodeled it into a cool art-deco space of clean, uncluttered lines, featuring a desk of glass block. Spitznagel's first commission was the design of a new façade for a bakery, for which he was paid in baked goods, a common practice at a time
when many people were strapped for cash. A sprinkling of residential projects followed in the next two years, all of them alterations or minor additions to existing homes.\(^5\)

In 1932, Joseph Schwarz, Jr., asked Spitznagel to join him in designing the new Sioux Falls Municipal Building (City Hall). Schwarz, whose father had been a pioneering South Dakota architect, received the commission in 1931, but closed his practice soon after enlisting Spitznagel's aid. Spitznagel persuaded John A. Schoening (1898–1968), a former colleague at Schmidt, Garden, and Erickson, to move to Sioux Falls and work with him. Schoening found the business climate in Sioux Falls to be more vigorous than anticipated and stayed with Spitznagel for the next thirty-five years.\(^5\)

For the Municipal Building, Spitznagel departed from Schwarz's traditional tower design and created a structure in the late art-deco, or moderne, style, which was solidly in vogue in the mid-1930s and which Spitznagel would employ again. The exterior is clean and simple. As Spitznagel remarked, it was "probably the first local public building designed without a cornice—and it received considerable adverse criticism."\(^7\) Situated at the intersection of Dakota Avenue and West Ninth Street, the building consisted of three floors, including the basement, and housed the city offices and the police department. The interior featured three frescoes on the east wall of the Commissioners' Room (City Council Chambers) painted in 1936 by Edwin Boyd Johnson (1904–1968), granite carvings over the entrances, and limestone plaques above the windows. A hallmark of Spitznagel's


\(^6\) Ibid., [pp. 1–2]; “Record of Qualifications and Experience”; Balchen, “Practice Profile,” p. 37. Joseph Schwarz (1858–1927) was born in New York City and moved with his family to La Crosse, Wisconsin, in 1861. He trained in architects' offices there before relocating first to Rapid City in 1884 and then Sioux Falls in 1887, where he remained the rest of his life. His son Joseph Schwarz, Jr., took over his practice in 1927. The younger Schwarz (1893–1966) was born in Sioux Falls and received his education as an architect in Pennsylvania. He operated his father's office until about 1934 when he appears to have left the state. He died in Fort Myers, Florida. “Joseph Schwarz,” Architects Research File, Northwest Architectural Archives. Construction on City Hall started in 1934, was completed in 1936, and brought the firm $420,000. “Record of Qualifications and Experience.”

\(^7\) Paulson, “The Spitznagel Organization,” [p. 2].
The interior of Spitznagel's first office in Sioux Falls already reflected his interest in simple, clean, modern elements. (Photograph by Hedrich-Blessing Studio, Chicago)
work became the incorporation of art as an integral part of a building’s design, partly as a result of meeting artist Palmer Eide of Augustana College. The Municipal Building greatly boosted the visibility and financial condition of Spitznagel’s firm, and a steady flow of work began to come into the office. In 1936, Spitznagel and Schoening also designed residences for George Rice in Flandreau and Lyle Olson and Dr. C. P. Schneider in Sioux Falls.  


The exterior of the Sioux Falls Municipal Building was designed in an art deco or moderne style, with clean, straight lines and simple architectural detailing. Early in his career, Spitznagel hired the firm of Hedrich-Blessing, among the top architectural photographers in the United States, to record his work. He later remarked that he had seen the firm’s work in magazines and been impressed with the images’ dark, dramatic skies. (Photograph by Hedrich-Blessing Studio, Chicago)
The inclusion of artwork, like these frescoes by Edwin Boyd Johnson in the Commissioners’ Room of the Municipal Building, became a trademark of Spitznagel’s designs. (Photograph by Hedrich-Blessing Studio, Chicago)

The next year, Spitznagel and Schoening designed the distinctive Sylvan Lake Lodge in the Black Hills for the State of South Dakota. The previous building on the site had burned in June 1935, and the Custer State Park Board was anxious to have it rebuilt. The board tried to attract Frank Lloyd Wright, who came to South Dakota at the invitation of Senator Peter Norbeck and toured the Black Hills in September with Norbeck and Spitznagel. Wright was willing to design a building that would not be of the “extremely exaggerated in rusticity” type but, rather, one that would be distinctive and “entirely different in
Nestled into its woodland setting, Sylvan Lake Lodge exhibited Art Deco design elements such as decorative chevron woodwork on the exterior.

design and make-up” than any other such structure in the area. When the board asked Wright and several other architects for preliminary sketches, however, Wright declined to compete for the job. The board then turned to Spitznagel, who produced a rustic log-and-stone structure that blended beautifully into its forested surroundings. The exterior was local stone and shingled siding laid in a zigzag pattern; the interior featured knotty pine, leather furniture, and open trusses in the main lounge, which had plank floors. The same year, the firm

10. For an in-depth examination of the issues that led to Spitznagel’s selection as architect for the Sylvan Lake Lodge, see Suzanne Barta Julin, “Art Meets Politics: Peter Norbeck, Frank
The interior of Sylvan Lake Lodge was simply furnished with modern leather chairs and simple wood tables. The chevron motifs echoed the structure’s exterior. (Photograph by Hedrich-Blessing Studio, Chicago)
completed residences for Henry Bailin, Harrietta Bach, George Hult, Dr. S. A. Donahoe, and R. W. Bailey, all in Sioux Falls; a grade school in Ellsworth, Minnesota; and remodeled studios for radio station KSOO in Sioux Falls.\textsuperscript{11}

Despite the depression, Sioux Falls was growing, and the firm did well. In 1930, the city had a population of 33,362; a decade later, it had grown to 40,832, bringing a concomitant need for new schools, government buildings, and housing. Toward the end of the 1930s, the local economy was showing clear signs of economic recovery, and new and prestigious residences were being constructed in Sioux Falls and elsewhere. The clientele consisted mainly of affluent business and professional men and women whose incomes were rising as the business climate improved. In 1938, Spitznagel and Schoening designed an addition to Lincoln School in Sioux Falls and a department store in Brookings for Russell Cole. They also produced plans for a clinic for Dr. W. A. Dawley in Rapid City and residences for F. P. Hall, Sam Fantle, Jr., Max Rysdon, and Homer Caplan, all in Sioux Falls, and a house for Dean Serles in Brookings.\textsuperscript{12} Spitznagel's firm was one of only a few practicing in the city at the time and thus did not have to compete strenuously for work. Their most important competitor was Perkins and McWayne (later McWayne and McLaughlin).\textsuperscript{13}
A clear indication of the upturn in the region's economy was the commission for a motion-picture theater, the Hollywood Theater in Sioux Falls. Spitznagel’s first, and only, such building was designed and constructed in 1938–1939 for L. D. Miller and was a gem of streamline moderne design. Clad in tan brick, it featured gently curving walls of blue-gray porcelain-enameded steel on the façade that invited patrons to come in. Fluorescent fixtures, a novelty in 1939, provided cool, subtle lighting in the lobby. Outside, a thirty-six-foot vertical marquee rose above a rectangular canopy. Ever true to his trademark desire to incorporate artwork into his buildings, Spitznagel installed a curving photographic mural in the lobby and foyer. The mural, forty-five feet in length, consisted of about a dozen four-by-eight-foot panels, each containing a montage of images illustrating the history of the motion-picture industry. A gracefully curving stairway led from the lobby downstairs to a lounge and restrooms. The auditorium was set at an angle to the lobby for roominess, visibility, and better acoustics. The theater opened to great fanfare on 20 December 1939 and was demolished in 1990. In 1953, Spitznagel revisited it to design a cinemascope screen.

In 1939, Spitznagel and Schoening completed Irving School at Eleventh Street and Spring Avenue in Sioux Falls. The two-story building discarded the neoclassical-revival theme prominent in institutional architecture at the time and featured patterned tan brick, large windows that brought ample natural light into classrooms, and deft touches of the streamline moderne, seen especially in the use of glass block framing doorways and sleek stairways molded in terrazzo. A one-story wing at the south end of the building housed a library and administrative office. Residences were also completed that same year for attorney T. M. Bailey in Sioux Falls, E. W. Stephens in Pierre, and


Similar to the streamlined, modern automobile designs of the late 1930s, the Hollywood Theater in Sioux Falls featured a sleek, flat exterior of blue-gray porcelain-enameded steel. (Photograph by Hedrich-Blessing Studio, Chicago)
This interior view of the Hollywood Theater shows a portion of the large photographic mural that decorated the lobby. (Photograph by Hedrich-Blessing Studio, Chicago)
Dr. Ray Lernley in Rapid City. John Morrell Foster, owner of the giant John Morrell and Company meat-packing business, commissioned the firm to design a guest house for his estate on the heights above the Big Sioux River south of Sioux Falls.¹⁵

Spitznagel's and Schoening's largest project in 1940 was a new cell block for the South Dakota State Penitentiary at the north edge of the city. Later that year came the erection of the Sport Bowl, a combina-

¹⁵. "Record of Qualifications and Experience." The total cost of these projects was $299,000, making 1939 the firm's biggest year since 1936, when the Municipal Building bumped the total to almost twice that amount.

Next door to the Hollywood Theater, the Sport Bowl also featured an exterior of modern-looking, porcelain-enameled steel panels. (Photograph by Hedrich-Blessing Studio, Chicago)
Like many of Spitznagel's other residential buildings, the Laird Apartments were designed in a Colonial Revival style with the windows and entrances balanced symmetrically. (Photograph by Everett Kroeger, Sioux Falls)

In 1940, Spitznagel won a commission to design an extensive remodeling of the façade and interior of the Carpenter Hotel on South 16. Ibid. The cell block cost $75,000; the theatre, $65,000; and the apartment building, $63,000.
Phillips Avenue for the Eppley Hotel Company. The result was a soft streamline-moderne treatment inside and out. The street-level façade was clad in porcelain-enamelled steel panels, as used in the Sport Bowl. The design conceit was one that Spitznagel would return to several times in the near future. The architect made the lobby areas cool and inviting through the use of gently curving wood, plaster, and metal forms that enticed the visitor to discover what was around the next corner. A striped tile floor led guests to the registration desk, defined by vertical fluorescent lighting, and to an adjacent elevator. Other structures completed that year included a building for the History Club and a small brick-and-tile visitors' building for the John Morrell and Company plant, both in Sioux Falls. The latter housed a photographic panorama depicting various images of meat processing and food preparation situated around a horseshoe-shaped lecture auditorium. Recessed fluorescent lights illuminated the auditorium, and the building was air-conditioned, still a relatively new feature in 1940.17

In 1941, the firm's commissions increased in number, but revenue generated fell by almost fifty thousand dollars. Their largest building was an office for the Central Electric and Telephone Company in Sioux Falls. The multistory brick-clad structure became a prominent landmark at the corner of Dakota Avenue and West Tenth Street and remained the telephone company headquarters for years. The architects also designed an office building for John Morrell and Company and extensive alterations to the Behrens Building (National Bank of South Dakota), originally designed by Weary and Alford of Chicago and built by Pike and Cook of Minneapolis in 1917. At the time of its construction, it was the tallest structure in downtown Sioux Falls. The firm also designed an Early American Revival residence for Dr. B. O. Mork, Jr., in Worthington, Minnesota, and residences in Sioux Falls for Harold Levinger, David Jewett, and Mrs. Frank Baysore.18

18. The Mork house was featured as the “House of American Heritage” in Popular Home 3 (Dec. 1946). The article brought more than thirty requests for copies of the plans; at least one such request resulted in construction of a similar dwelling in Massachusetts. Plans sold for twenty dollars apiece. Paulson, “The Spitznagel Organization,” [p. 5].
The interior of the Carpenter Hotel included a striped tile flooring, curving wood, and plaster and metal design features. (Photograph by Hedrich-Blessing Studio, Chicago)
An article Spitznagel wrote in 1960 provides a glimpse into his professional and business philosophy, adopted early in his practice and adhered to throughout his career. To be successful, Spitznagel believed, an architect must have the full confidence of his clients. Without such a relationship, he wrote, the client “will do nothing but hamper the work of the architect with the resultant penalty from so doing. Too frequently, an owner . . . cannot get the building completed quickly enough. The client often forgets, or does not wish to remember, that once the building is constructed, its faults and its virtues will be there to confront him for the next 40 or 50 years.” In addition to “employ[ing] the best available talent and giv[ing] the architect ample time,” Spitznagel noted that “careful consideration” should be given to the cost and permanence of materials and the proper selection of colors. Clients further needed to “advise him honestly as to the funds which he expects or can expend on the construction and, most important, clearly state the requirements of the building. The architect will have relatively little knowledge of the operation and thus the . . . success or failure of the venture could conceivably rest on the clarity with which the client can convey his thoughts to the architect.”

Spitznagel reiterated these ideas five years later in a seminar entitled “The Press and Community Building” at the University of Minnesota. He acknowledged the public perception of the architect as “some dilettante garbed in a smock and a beret, whose chief purpose in life is to apply costly ornament to what might otherwise be an economical and logically conceived building.” Clients needed to know, he stressed, how an architect carries out the design of a structure and be aware that it was incumbent on them to “provide such preliminary information as an accurate survey of the property and soil tests, and work with the architect to develop the program, which includes the spatial requirements and relations between those spaces in the building, the activities taking place in them and their physical requirements.” Spitznagel concluded, “There is an old saying, that while the lawyer’s mistakes are behind bars and a doctor’s errors are buried the architect’s blunders confront him as long as he lives. . . . In the end

one gets about what he pays for and a higher cost building, unless it is ineptly designed, usually is a better structure."

As Spitznagel and Schoening were embarking on their second decade in business, the total involvement of the United States in World War II dictated a shift in focus for the firm. Beginning in 1942 and continuing for the next three and one-half years, virtually the entire output of the country’s factory-produced goods would go to the war effort. World War II brought with it a dramatic upturn in building, most of it connected in some way to the conduct of the war, along with a need for architects to help design new structures. In July 1942, Spitznagel drafted his “Record of Qualifications and Experience,” a document that included a list of his commissions through 1941, a statement that he was seeking work, vitae for himself and Schoening, and a list of engineers, contractors, draftsmen, and lawyers who had either worked for Spitznagel as consultants or, in the case of Don Douthit, as employees.

During the war, Spitznagel became director of housing for the Sioux Falls Army Air Field, a huge facility that trained radio operators for bomber groups in the European and Pacific theaters. The base housed upwards of forty thousand men by war’s end, when it was functioning as a processing center for the transfer of troops from Europe to the Pacific after V-E Day. Spitznagel designed military housing for the base in Sioux Falls and facilities at Rapid City, Edgemont, and Custer. Schoening worked for the Army Corps of Engineers during the same time. The firm maintained its offices in downtown Sioux Falls with virtually all of its work consisting of defense contracts. No building materials were available for projects that had not been federally authorized.

20. “The Role of the Architect,” in “Papers from the Seminar on the Press and Community Building,” Northwest Architect (May–June 1963): 25–27. Spitznagel had begun his address with his customary humor, stating, “Although you are totally unaware of the fact, my appearance here has already met with loud and sustained applause. That this occurred nearly a month ago when I announced to my employees that I would be absent today, is beside the point.”


One of the few nonmilitary commissions of 1942 was the remodeling of a former automobile dealership located across the street from the Municipal Building in Sioux Falls to house facilities for the local United Services Organization (USO). The USO had been founded the previous year as a nonprofit agency to provide food, entertainment, and shelter for homesick United States servicemen throughout the world. The remodeling consisted of building a new entrance, lounge, and activity rooms. After the war, the building housed a chapter of the Veterans of Foreign Wars on the ground floor and, in the 1950s, the Filter Center for the Ground Observer Corps, an auxiliary of the United States Air Force, on the second floor.\textsuperscript{23}

When World War II ended, Spitznagel and Schoening resumed their practice, and the pace of work quickly increased over the prewar years. Several projects of note were carried out between 1945 and 1950. In 1945, the firm remodeled an old one-story building on south Main Avenue into Johnson’s Furniture Store. The original structure was widened and deepened, and a second story was added. The façade featured large show windows with a centrally located entrance framed in green marble and recessed beneath a steel-and-aluminum marquee; the remainder of the façade was faced in tan brick with a vertical sign rising theater-style from the marquee and the store name in large moderne-style letters on the upper left quadrant of the façade.24

That same year, Augustana College in Sioux Falls hired Spitznagel to develop a campus plan for future expansion. His plan called for Old Main to be remodeled for administrative offices, East Hall to be altered from a women’s dormitory to a men’s dormitory, two new wings to be added to the administration building for classrooms and laboratories, and a new women’s dormitory to be constructed. Only the last of these options became reality.25

The year 1946 saw the remodeling of the Toller Drug Company store in Sioux City, Iowa. The store featured Spitznagel’s typical cool, streamlined moderne décor. When he returned to the office after winning the commission, he celebrated by throwing jellybeans into the air. The design, nominated by the Sioux City Chamber of Commerce, won a prize in the second international Store Modernization Show in New York City. Barkalow’s, a candy and tobacco store at the corner of Ninth Street and Phillips Avenue in Sioux Falls, occupied the ground floor of an old office building that had had its upper four floors chopped off, leaving an abbreviated structure of two stories. Spitznagel redesigned the exterior recalling the Sport Bowl, in part, by cladding the façade with interlocking vertical aluminum strips to create a robust industrial appearance that intentionally contrasted with the ashlar Sioux quartzite of the second story. The entrance was

24. Ibid., [p. 6].
deeply recessed and flanked with large windows, permitting passersby to view the inviting activities and goods within.\(^{26}\)

In 1945, Spitznagel had purchased several residential lots north of the Veterans Administration Hospital in Sioux Falls and chose one of them on which to build the forty-five-hundred-square-foot home that became his residence. Completed in 1946, the house at 1209 Holly Drive was featured in the July issue of *Popular Home* to showcase new building methods and materials utilizing products manufactured by the United States Gypsum Company. The “Research Home” embodied “postwar building materials and appliances” and was ambitiously touted as “the nation’s first real home for the years to come.” It was a one-story rambler with a double garage and large picture windows in the rear affording views from its hilltop site. The exterior was sheathed in brick and vertical redwood siding. The interior held a number of built-ins: closets, cupboards, bookcases, desks, and hidden storage spaces.\(^{27}\)

In the late 1940s, the firm received a commission for a residence for Mr. and Mrs. Russell Cole in Brookings. The house appeared in a feature article in the March 1952 issue of *Better Homes & Gardens* that credited Spitznagel with the design and Franz Lipp of Chicago with the landscaping. The side and back yards were surrounded by a high louvered privacy fence that blocked the view of activities within but allowed air to pass through, bringing relief from the hot summer sun. With its vertical cedar siding and rosy brick cladding, the rambling one-story house echoed the Research Home and anticipated the 1950s suburban Populuxe styles with its large double garage as a prominent

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element of the street façade, a nine-paned picture window, and an unobtrusive recessed entrance tucked between the window and the garage.  

In 1948, Augustana College tapped Spitznagel to design a new women's dormitory, which was originally part of his 1945 campus plan. Groundbreaking occurred in 1949, and workers completed construction the following summer. The building, named Tuve Hall in memory of Anthony G. Tuve, president of Augustana Academy in Canton, South Dakota from 1890 to 1915, housed 160 women. Faculty member Palmer Eide designed the furnishings.

Perhaps the largest commission of 1950 was the Huron Arena in Huron, South Dakota. Voters approved a bond issue to finance a building to serve a variety of uses, including sports and entertainment events, in December 1949, and design work began in earnest shortly afterward. The arena could hold up to sixty-eight hundred people depending on how the seating was configured. Permanent seating for thirty-eight hundred would be installed in the balcony, with roll-out temporary bleachers on the main floor. Tangent arches that eliminated the need for columns or latticed trusses made unrestricted viewing possible. The arena was finished and dedicated in 1952 and was the largest such structure in the state for a decade until the construction of the Sioux Falls Arena in 1960–1962, also designed by Spitznagel's firm. Its interior plan strongly resembled the one at Huron.

Around the same time, the firm finished the Ottumwa Country Club in Ottumwa, Iowa. The club house was set on a concrete foundation on a shallow hillside; the exterior of the lower floor was clad in brick, the upper demarked by Spitznagel's favored vertical redwood


30. "Huron Arena—Huron, South Dakota, Summary of Estimated Costs," Spitznagel Papers. Spitznagel estimated in November that construction of the building would cost a little over $754,000, or about forty-three and a half cents per cubic foot. Its final cost was about $900,000.
boards stained driftwood gray. A screened porch on the rear overlooked the golf course. Inside, the entry area and reception desk were lighted by a row of square clerestory windows, an element that Spitznagel employed in several other structures, including his own office building a few years later. The club house was sprinklered for fire protection in advance of the code requirement of later years.31

Spitznagel and his rapidly expanding company had long since outgrown the office in the Western Surety Building and in 1939 moved to the eighth floor of the Behrens Building, housing the National Bank of South Dakota, at Ninth Street and Phillips Avenue. In 1945, the architect took space on the ninth floor and located the drafting room there. Communication between the two floors took place through an office intercom, the beginning, as the firm’s historian Duane P. Paulson later recalled, of the firm’s “electronic appetite.” In 1952, the company organized as Harold Spitznagel and Associates. William Bentzinger (1916–1994), a Masonite salesman who had worked for Spitznagel part time since 1942, joined the staff full time in 1945 as a project coordinator and designer, as did Jim Lucas, whose brother Evan Lucas joined them the next year. Wallace S. Steele (1925–1986) was added as design coordinator in 1952. David L. Rosenstein (1924–2005) also came on board that same year as chief mechanical engineer, and John L. Loveland (1927–1993) and Duane Paulson (b. 1925) entered the office in 1954 as chief electrical engineer and production coordinator and engineer, respectively. The company was incorporated in 1958 as Harold Spitznagel & Associates, Inc. By 1970, the firm had a staff of thirty-two.32

Another relocation was in the offing as the firm outgrew its space in the Behrens Building. In 1950, Spitznagel purchased a lot at the corner of West Twenty-sixth Street and Summit Avenue and constructed a two-story office building on the site in 1952–1953. The ground floor and basement were leased out, while the architects occu-

pied the second floor. Off-street parking adjacent to the building along the Twenty-sixth Street side accommodated employees and clients. The second floor was sheathed in gray-stained vertical redwood planking; the ground floor was clad with pink brick. The interior was built with bar joists to provide clear spans and eliminate load-bearing walls, thus making it possible to move partitions freely. The main drafting room featured a row of north-facing windows that provided plentiful, but softened, light. The building served as headquarters for the firm for twenty years, when it moved to its current location at 1110–1112 West Avenue.  

While Spitznagel and his employees were noted for their serious approach to design matters, the architect and his staff reveled in humor and practical jokes. A wooden chicken was given as a prize to the person who made a mistake. People who made rude noises within the hearing of others were fined ten to fifteen cents per occurrence, with the money going to fund the annual Christmas party.  

In 1961, while Spitznagel was out of town, his staff converted the office building into a service station with the cooperation of the Skelly Oil Company, which rented offices on the ground floor. The transformation, complete with fake gasoline pumps in the parking lot, stacks of tires and oil cans, and banners and signs that mimicked a real service station, was so realistic that cars stopped in to fill up and irate neighbors protested to city authorities about an undesirable commercial operation in their midst. When a flight delay postponed Spitznagel’s arrival at his office until 9:30 p.m., strings of lights were obtained on the spur of the moment and draped across the parking lot. His reaction upon arriving was one of bewilderment and then amazement at the elaborate hoax.  

In 1963, Spitznagel and his wife Engla embarked on a round-the-world trip. During their absence, the employees made their boss’s office “disappear” by walling up and painting over the entrance door.

and the door leading into the drafting room. Staff also substituted strangers for regular employees, so that when Spitznagel returned to work he could neither locate his office nor find anyone he could recognize. Meanwhile, the staff was in the basement, listening on the intercom with glee.36

During the typical workday, of course, Spitznagel and his employees directed their considerable energy and creativity to design projects. If the firm became noted for specializing in any type of building, it was probably the design of educational and ecclesiastical facilities. Between 1960 and 1970, Spitznagel & Associates designed twenty-four churches. The Church of Saint Mary in Sioux Falls, designed by Bill Bentzinger in 1958, won a silver medal from the Architectural League of New York. Its rectangular nave was pierced by tall vertical stained-glass windows that flooded the interior with dappled light and featured a brick veneer on concrete-block backup. The carillon bells hung in a trio of masonry columns, standing apart from the church much like a campanile. The interior, which seated 850 people, was faced in Winona travertine beneath a roof of laminated wood beams and purlins. The windows were designed and fabricated by stained-glass artist Emil Frei of Saint Louis and Robert Harmon of Arcadia, Missouri, and alternated with the Stations of the Cross, painted by Robert Rambusch of New York.37

First Presbyterian Church in Sioux Falls, designed by Wally Steele and built in 1957–1958, has a tent-shaped nave that seats five hundred worshipers. In keeping with Spitznagel’s emphasis on incorporating art into his buildings, a Palmer Eide ceramic mosaic bearing symbols portraying events in the life of Christ graces the chancel wall. Of special note is the chapel, whose ceiling slants down behind the altar to meet a grooved wood screen. An unfinished brick wall on one side is pierced by staggered slot windows.38

Our Savior’s Lutheran Church was erected in 1958 on Thirty-third Street directly south of Augustana College in Sioux Falls. Like the

36. Ibid., [p. 303].
Selected List of Spitznagel Commissions, 1930–1974

Henry Bailin Residence, Sioux Falls, 1935
Municipal Building (City Hall), Sioux Falls, 1936 (with Joseph Schwartz)
Harrietta and Ruth Bach Residence, Sioux Falls, 1936
Sylvan Lake Lodge, Custer State Park, 1936
R. W. Bailey Residence, Sioux Falls, 1937
T. M. Bailey Residence, Sioux Falls, 1937
P. R. Billingsley Residence, Sioux Falls, 1937
F. P. Hall Residence, Sioux Falls, 1937
H. L. Caplan Residence, Sioux Falls, 1938
Hollywood Theater, Sioux Falls, 1938
John Morreli and Company Visitors Building, Sioux Falls, 1939
E. W. Stephens Residence, Pierre, 1939
W. R. Laird and F. P. Hall Apartment Building, Sioux Falls, 1940
Sport Bowl, Sioux Falls, 1940
Mrs. Frank Baysore Residence, Sioux Falls, 1941
H. Levinger Residence, Yankton, 1941
Central Electric and Telephone Company, Sioux Falls, 1941
Calvary Episcopal Cathedral remodeling, Sioux Falls, 1945
Union Savings Bank remodeling, Sioux Falls, 1945
Garrott Candy Company (Bremer Arcade), Minneapolis, Minn., 1946
John Morrell Foster Residence, Ottumwa, Iowa, 1947
George Scudder Residence, Sioux Falls, 1947
Russell Cole Residence, Brookings, 1948
R. E. Hubbard Residence, Watertown, 1948
H. W. Ortman Residence, Canistota, 1948
J. J. McNally Residence, Sibley, Iowa, 1948
Laverne Hubbard Residence, Watertown, 1948
E. C. Olson Clothing Company remodeling, Sioux Falls, 1947, 1949
Tuve Hall, Augustana College, Sioux Falls, 1949
State Office Building, Pierre, 1949
Whetstone Valley Electric Association Building, Milbank, 1949
P. R. Billingsley Residence, Sioux Falls, 1950
Henry Billion Residence, Sioux Falls, 1950
A. E. Godfrey Residence, Sioux Falls, 1950
Ottumwa Country Club, Ottumwa, Iowa, 1950
Huron Arena, Huron, 1950
YWCA, Sioux Falls, 1951
Tri-State Mutual Grain Dealers Fire Insurance Company Building, Luverne, Minn., 1951
Mikkelson Library, Augustana College, Sioux Falls, 1952
First Congregational Church, Spencer, Iowa, 1953
Salem-Zion Mennonite Church, Freeman, 1956
Hanel Motor Hotel, Minneapolis, Minn., 1957
Mount Rushmore Visitors Center, Keystone, 1957 (with National Park Service and Cecil Doty)
Spitznagel and Associates Office Building, Sioux Falls, 1957
Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Sioux Falls, 1957
Western Surety Company Building, Sioux Falls, 1957
Church of Saint Mary, Sioux Falls, 1958
First Presbyterian Church, Sioux Falls, 1958
Commons Building, Augustana College, Sioux Falls, 1959
Sioux Falls Arena (Civic Center), 1960
Jehovah Evangelical Lutheran Church, Saint Paul, Minn., 1962
Minnehaha Country Club, Sioux Falls, 1963
East Side Bowling Center, Sioux Falls, 1963
Student Union, University of South Dakota, Vermillion, 1963
First Lutheran Church, Saint Peter, Minn., 1964
Lincoln Senior High School, Sioux Falls, 1964
Gilbert Science Center, Augustana College, Sioux Falls, 1965
American College Testing Program, Iowa City, Iowa, 1965–1970
Fine Arts Center, University of South Dakota, Vermillion, 1966
Lutheran Vespers Stavekirke, Rapid City, 1967
Dining Hall and dormitories, South Dakota State University, Brookings, 1966–1970
HUD Housing for the Elderly, Pipestone, Minn., 1969
Phase II addition, McKennan Hospital, Sioux Falls, 1970
Federal Office Building, Aberdeen, 1970
EROS Data Center, Garretson, 1971
Minnehaha County Public Safety Building, Sioux Falls, 1972
Rapid City Civic Center, Rapid City 1972–1975
Hilton M. Briggs Library, South Dakota State University, Brookings, 1973
Watertown Post Office, Watertown, 1973

Church of Saint Mary, it is a rectangular structure, faced in tan brick and designed by Bill Bentzinger. A narrow bell tower at the rear of the nave is surmounted by a cross. The nave seats 1,020, when combined with the adjacent chapel and narthex overflow seating, and is surrounded by education and administrative facilities. The chancel wall is adorned by a large mural of Christ and the Apostles executed in oil on white-painted brick, with the altar table and cross standing before it. A serene chapel, seating 120, is housed in a wing parallel to the nave. The interior features a massive, free-standing red cross above the black-marble altar table and is lit by a narrow window that illuminates the white-painted chancel wall. The effect recalls Eliel and Eero Saarinen’s Christ Lutheran Church of 1949–1950 in Minneapolis. The exterior chapel wall is covered with a symbol of Christian worship—a cross and heart—in bright mosaic tile by noted ceramist Carol Janeway (1913–1989).39

Another fine religious structure is the First Congregational Church of Spencer, Iowa, designed in 1953 by Wally Steele. It won an award citation in Progressive Architecture’s Annual Design Survey for 1954 and was featured in the magazine’s January issue that year. The awards

39. Ibid.
jury, which consisted of such prestigious architects as Eero Saarinen and Victor Gruen, hailed the design as possessing forceful structure and mass, combined with clean detailing. The nave is essentially an A-frame with exposed structural trusses from floor to ceiling that meet at the ridgeline and, together with cross braces, form the ceiling and walls. The large laminated trusses punch through low ceilings suspended on the trusses along the sides of the church, suggesting side aisles where none exist. At the rear of the nave is a balcony. An elongated “T” on the rear of the nave holds community rooms, educational facilities, and offices.

Spitznagel returned to Augustana College in 1952 to design Mikkelsen Library, named in memory of the Reverend Amund Mikkelsen, president of Lutheran Normal School (the original name of Augustana College) from 1889 to 1891 and 1896 to 1908. Completed in 1955, the three-story library was built partially into a shallow slope near the center of campus. It featured a reinforced concrete frame and was faced in brick with a stone-and-concrete colonnade sheltering the front entrance. Adjacent to it was a stone sculpture of Moses by Ogden Dalrymple of the art department faculty. Two stone-relief panels, “Creatures of Creation,” carved by Dalrymple and Palmer Eide, adorned the façade. A two-story curtain wall with large windows and aluminum panel infills faced the north side of the building.

Three years later, the firm received the commission to design the Sioux Falls Arena. Spitznagel planned the octagonal structure to seat 9,550 for basketball games. Its curving roof line followed the descending rows of seats and almost eliminated two of the eight walls. The remaining six were much reduced in height from those in a traditional rectangular building. A combination of permanent chair seating and bleachers recalled the Huron Arena, and corner seats with reduced sightlines were eliminated. The arena opened in 1962 and is still used for sports and other events.

41. Augustana College, Mikkelsen Library: The Learning Place,” www.augie.edu/library/services/Femti/femti.html. The library was built at a cost of almost $450,500.
42. “Sioux Falls Civic Center, Sioux Falls, South Dakota,” Northwest Architect 24 (Nov.–Dec. 1960): 34. The total cost of construction was $1,417,300, or $12.24 per square foot.
The Sioux Falls Arena opened in 1962 and featured a curved roof line and sloped seating for unobstructed viewing.

Perhaps the firm's most unusual commission was the replica of a Norwegian stavkirke, an all-wood stave church built in 1968–1969 in Rapid City for Lutheran Vespers, a radio evangelism arm of the American Lutheran Church. Bill Bentzinger traveled to Norway to research the construction of such churches and returned with hand-drawn plans for the Borgund Stavkirke dating from 1150. The church in Rapid City was built by Dilly Construction Company of Douglas fir shipped from Oregon. Exterior and interior carvings were made in Norway and on site.43

In 1963, the firm opened its first branch office, located in Huron under the direction of Frank Stitzel. Its initial major project was the Huron City Library. The company subsequently expanded to Rochester, Minnesota, in 1969; Rapid City in 1973; Sheridan, Wyoming, in 1976; and Denver, Colorado, in 1981. Branches were also established in Marshalltown, Iowa; Omaha, Nebraska; and Minnetonka, a western suburb of Minneapolis, with the home office remaining in Sioux Falls.

43. Balchen, "Practice Profile," 42; O. G. Malmin, Chapel in the Hills (Rapid City: Lutheran Vespers, 1969), pp. 17–18. The chapel's cost was $150,000.
The stavkirke built in Rapid City for Lutheran Vespers was the most unusual commission for Spitznagel's firm. Constructed of fir, it is highly decorated with wood carvings. (Photograph by Ken Norgard, Rapid City)
Falls. The company incorporated as The Spitznagel Partners, Inc., later abbreviated to TSP, in 1967.44

As the firm underwent rapid expansion in the 1960s and 1970s, it was called upon to design more and larger buildings, including the I. D. Weeks Library at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion (1962); dormitories and a dining hall at South Dakota State University in Brookings (1963–1965); and the American College Testing Program headquarters in Iowa City, Iowa (1965).45

The year 1970 was notable for several large projects, including the firm’s largest commission to that time, the Phase II addition to McKennan Hospital in Sioux Falls, designed with CRS Architects of Houston, who acted as hospital consultants for the schematic and design development phases of the project. The firm’s second largest project that year was the Federal Office Building at Aberdeen, South Dakota, a joint project with local architects Herges Kirchgasler and Associates. The third major project was the two-story HUD (Housing and Urban Development) Housing for the Elderly at Mitchell, South Dakota.46

The following year saw construction of the Earth Resources Observation Systems (EROS) data center, a federal facility for receiving and interpreting satellite transmissions, near Garretson, South Dakota. Selection of the site resulted, in part, from a survey conducted by Duane Paulson and Gary Stanley for the RCA Corporation to find a location somewhere between Brookings and Topeka, Kansas, that was as free as possible from radio interference, industry, population, and highways.47

In 1972, the firm was commissioned to design the downtown pedestrian mall in Sioux Falls, which closed Phillips Avenue to automobile traffic (reopened in recent years). Other projects included a major ad-

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44. Paulson, “The Spitznagel Organization,” [p. 42]. The Huron office closed in 1968 when Frank Stitzel resigned to open his own practice in Olathe, Kansas. Ibid., [p. 47]. The library was built at a cost of $310,000.
45. Ibid., [pp. 33–34, 37, 41].
46. Ibid., [pp. 55–56]. The total construction costs of the fifty-three commissions that the firm received in 1970 totaled $28 million.
47. Ibid., [pp. 51, 56]. The $5.1 million structure was the largest commission received in 1971.
dition to Edison Junior High School and the Minnehaha County Public Safety Building, both in Sioux Falls, the latter designed jointly with Gauger-Parrish Associates of Saint Paul; and the Rapid City Civic Center. The center was delayed by the disastrous flood in June 1972, and design development was postponed until the following year.

Harold Spitznagel had experienced four years of gradually failing health when he retired from the company on 30 June 1972 after leading the firm for forty-two years. Discovering much about the private man is a difficult task. Because of Spitznagel’s devotion to his profession, family life often took a back seat to his career. The youngest of his three children, Steve, grew up when his father’s business was undergoing enormous growth. “Architecture was the driving passion in my dad’s life,” he recalled. Together with his hobbies of photography, travel, and automobiles (he was often seen zipping around Sioux Falls in an imported British-made MG with right-hand steering), Spitznagel “was not drawn to or distracted by other pastimes.”

In 1974, the last full year of his life, Spitznagel received the Governor’s Award for Distinction in Creative Achievement from the South Dakota Arts Council. In accepting the award at ceremonies held on 7 February, he acknowledged the contributions of professional colleagues and members of the fine-arts community to his success. “In almost every instance where the accomplishments of the architect are recognized,” he stated, “it is seldom realized by those so doing that the recognition is due to a great number of people rather than to the individual effort of a single person. In general, architecture is no longer a solo performance and in nearly every instance, the completed building that the layman sees is the work of scores or hundreds of people. . . . I, therefore, feel that in accepting this award, I have deprived some capable and creative artist of the recognition due him or her.”

48. Ibid., [p. 59].
49. Ibid., [p. 58].
51. Manuscript copy of 7 Feb. 1974 speech, Box A, Spitznagel Papers. Spitznagel stated that of the twenty-four fine artists who had worked with him on building projects, ten were from South Dakota. He was inducted into the South Dakota Hall of Fame in 2006, thirty-one years after his death.
The award and the architect's gracious acceptance remarks form an altogether fitting tribute to the man and his work. Harold Spitznagel died on 26 April 1975, leaving a legacy of design excellence that still graces the South Dakota landscape. His structures stand as the remarkable achievements of a man who invested himself personally and professionally in building a remarkable career.
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