

Saving a National Historic Landmark: Rehabilitation of the First Christian Church Tower in Columbus, Indiana

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Photo Credit: Evan Hale, Indiana Landmarks

Abstract

Designed by renowned 20th-century architect Eliel Saarinen in 1942, the 166-foot-tall freestanding mass masonry bell tower of First Christian Church serves as the first Modernist-style structure constructed in Columbus, Indiana, a city now lauded as a hub of contemporary architecture. In this talk, Emily Whelchel, PE, with ARSEE Engineers, Inc., will share insights from the structural forensic investigation, repair design, and construction phases of a \$3.2M masonry rehabilitation project undertaken in 2023 to restore this National Historic Landmark. Despite the many challenges, including decades of previous repair efforts, over a mile of brick cracks, and severe water infiltration, ARSEE Engineers worked together with an incredible project team to rehabilitate this Modernist icon, so it can be enjoyed for years to come.



Ms. Emily A. Whelchel, P.E., joined ARSEE full-time in 2016 after having worked with ARSEE as a co-op student since 2011. At ARSEE, Emily has worked in investigation and repair of building façades, analysis and repair of structural systems, and design of steel, concrete, and wood structures. Her projects include historic structures, educational, industrial, and religious facilities, and libraries. She is a member of the Indiana Structural Engineers Association and Chi Epsilon, Tau Beta Pi, Phi Kappa Phi, Phi Beta Kappa Honor Societies. Emily holds BSCE (Structures/2014) and MSCE (Structures/2016) from Purdue University.