

## Home Of The Brave

The Chicago Literary Club has, in its 105 years, had 1383 members - not all of them jet-setting taste-makers, but all able to read, most to observe, many to reason, and some to create. How have they chosen to live? Did the satisfaction of their nesting urges relate to papers heard or members met on Monday evenings? Did ideas here expressed contribute to the architectural renaissance in which Chicago for so many years led the world? The search for answers to these questions is simplified by the fact that Club Papers of the earlier years have been lost, though titles survive in the minutes. Thus one's curiosity is piqued and the mind is stimulated, but not cluttered by content or restrained by fact.

All the following titles and dates are, I believe, correct. The names I will drop are familiar as they belong to past members. This should no more cause salivation than indicating non-members by turning thumbs down should excite pity.

In contrast to the rather fulsome description of the Place Pompidou in Paris as a "creative, multimedia, kinetic, cross-cultural presentation" my ideal of concise architectural criticism came from the widow of our fortieth president. When she asked to see my first house I told her it could be identified by its resemblance to a chicken coop. Presently she telephoned to say that she had seen it and made this request: "Please, never refer to it again as a chicken coop - it's so bitterly true."

The National Trust for Historic Preservation identifies thirty-nine styles of architecture rampant - one might almost say endemic - in the United States and this does not include sub-species such as "Provincial Colonial" or "Louis XIII Ranch" with which realtors have enriched their argot while robbing our comfortable stylistic cliches of meaning. Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, probably the foremost chronicler and currently the ultimate arbiter of architectural history, asserts that "the Gothic style in Europe was the last totally original style for nearly four hundred years. Only the so-called International Modern of the early twentieth century was as independent of the past." In examining some of the first symptoms of architectural independence, I propose to consider Chicago architecture as: Adaptive, Exuberant, Impeccable or Innovative.

On May 19th, 1879 John Crerar was to have edited and read an "informal" at the Club. No doubt he was indisposed for in his stead this was done by Bryan Lathrop. Since neither minutes nor club history tell us what constituted an informal, speculation as to its contents is made futile by the variety of Mr. Lathrop's interests and the breadth of his background. His wife was a beauty who read greek before dinner parties to quiet her nerves. Their family connections were distinguished. His financial acumen was as notable as his integrity. He was a founder and first president of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and gave his remarkable collection of Whistler etchings to the Art Institute. Clearly, only the foremost classicist in America could create

the perfect georgian town-house for such a family, who spent spring in their villa in Fiesole and summers in Maine. Charles Follen McKim of New York, listed by Thomas Talmadge as one of the immortals of american architecture, along with Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Latrobe, H. H. Richardson and Louis Sullivan, was at the time designing the Agriculture Building of the 1893 World's Fair and had already become known for creating the most elegant clubs and mansions of New York and Newport. For the Lathrops he designed an unostentatious house of beauty and comfort, perfectly suited to their taste and to its surroundings, daring to be different not only from his previous work but, above all, from the prevailing fashion - no turrets, no caryatids, no stained glass - just the impeccable proportions which make it a landmark. And that's the way the Fortnightly keeps it today.

While the senior partner of McKim, Mead & White created such perfection on Bellevue Place, the junior partner, Stanford White, designed an elegantly adaptive house on Burton Place. White, however, gained immortality not by design but by designs on Evelyn Nesbitt. In 1906, on the roof of his own creation, Madison Square Garden, he was shot by Harry K. Thaw, her jealous protector. The most devastating of architectural criticisms is still considered to be, "Thaw shot the wrong architect."

William Frederick Poole, a founder of this Club and first librarian of both the Chicago Public Library and the Newberry Library, read a paper on November 11th, 1878 entitled "The Mission and Function of Public Libraries." What guidelines did he lay down and were they followed when Henry Ives Cobb designed the Newberry Library in 1891, the same year in which he joined the Club?

Cobb, a talented and industrious Bostonian, was educated at M. I. T., Harvard, and an abbreviated grand tour of Europe. At the age of twenty-three, to his great surprise, he won a competition for the design of the Union Club in Chicago. To everyone else's surprise, he left his job with Boston's top-drawer Peabody & Stearns and actually ventured west of the Hudson to execute the newly won commission. As it happened, Potter Palmer, a member of the Union Club who had emigrated from New England some years earlier, was then developing his extensive real estate holdings on the near north side. At the same time his wife was developing her extensive holdings in Chicago society. Prairie Avenue already had its leaders, so what could better establish a territorial imperative more than a castle on Lake Shore Drive which at the same time demonstrated the prestige accompanying the purchase of neighboring lots.

For this dynamic couple Cobb, in his first year in Chicago, was asked to design one of the most exuberant of Chicago houses. The current enthusiasm was the so-called "Queen Anne Style" and

such excesses as the Royal Pavilion at Brighton and Schloss Neuschwannstein in Bavaria were the marvels of the photograph albums displayed on marble-topped tables in the most fashionable parlors. Small wonder, then, that the addition of a conservatory on one side, a porte-cochere on the other and plate glass windows in between made a Welsh stronghold into a pregnable urban fantasy. A contemporaneous account of the glories of its interior in Sheldon's "County Seats" describes Mrs. Palmer's bedroom as follows: "All the woodwork of this sumptuous apartment is in ebony and gold. The wall spaces are painted in oil after Moorish designs. The ceiling is carved and entirely of wood; the windows are like those in the palace at Cairo, being entirely of lattice work. At the top of the windows is a moorish arch of ebony and in the arch cathedral glass in different shades of orange and lemon. The settees and chairs are covered with Smyrna rugs; the panelled wainscot is of wood cut into geometrical designs and the chandeliers to match are of gold and garnet glass." I am told that the Everleigh sisters provided a less distracting mis-en-scene.

As he became successful, Cobb's designs became less exuberant and more correctly adaptive - a romanesque Newberry Library, a tudor sky-scraper, a classical Fisheries Building for the World's Fair, the even more classical Federal Building and Post Office, and the original quadrangles of the University of Chicago. His client in the latter project, William Rainey Harper, joined the Club as designs were evolving. One pictures

them digging into the collation while concluding that copies of english gothic landmarks might produce scholars in the cosmopolitan mold of Oxford dons rather than disputatious activists like Abelard or liberated coeds like Eloise.

Of the great nineteenth century engineers - Paxton, Eiffel, Roebling, Eads - only William LeBaron Jenney could have included any sort of education in his resume. Engineering studies at Harvard and in Paris, with summer jobs in the south seas on his father's whalers preceded an extended stint in the army engineer corps during the Civil War. Discharged with the rank of major, he opened an architectural office in Chicago which became the training ground of our foremost architects - Sullivan, Holabird, Roche, Burnham, Root, Shaw, et al. When Major Jenney joined our Club in 1878, the telephone had just been invented, shortly followed by incandescent bulbs and gas street lamps. When he resigned in 1896 the Club had, for the only time, reached its full complement of 250 members. The paper he read on October 27th, 1890 must have been either an historic or a prophetic document. Its title was "An Age of Steel" and only five years earlier he had designed the first steel-framed sky-scraper, the Home Insurance Building. A few years later he joined his former draftsman, Daniel Burnham, in that great effusion of classicism, the World's Fair, and never did another innovative building. Those who argue that it was the elevator rather than the steel frame which made the sky-scraper possible will be glad to know that the first



practical passenger elevator - hydraulic, of course, was installed in Burley & Co.'s West Lake Street store. Need I remind you that Clarence Burley was our twenty-ninth president?

Many alumni of Major Jenney's office read perceptive papers to us 'though not all as seminal as our seven hundred and sixty-second, read at the meeting of December 14th, 1896 which was called to order by General George W. Smith. Among the fifty-nine members present were Cyrus McCormick, Loreda Taft, I. K. Pond, Walter L. Fisher, Dwight Perkins and Louis Sullivan. Secretary Gookin recorded that Daniel Hudson Burnham read a paper entitled "The Lake Front" being, as the minutes say, "an outline of a plan for its improvement and beautification, illustrated by drawings and stereopticon." This turned out to be a sneak preview of the Chicago Plan which he was to unveil before the Chicago Commercial Club on the following March 27th. Of the committee formed to put the plan into effect a majority consisted, of course, of our club-mates.

Some years earlier, in organizing the World's Fair, he had exhorted his fellow architects to "Make no little plans. They have no power to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized.... Let your watchword be Order and your beacon Beauty." In fact, his watchword was Orders, as in classical, and his beacon was the eastern establishment, as in guardians of orthodoxy.

By contrast, his partner, John Wellborn Root, was described by his sister-in-law, Harriet Monroe, as "Too original in his own artistic conceptions to form a style based on the work of any other architect." The partnership of Burnham and Root, formed of a master organizer and a gifted artist who worked in perfect harmony, 'though with diametrically opposed philosophies, understandably filled all my categories at different times. The Monadnock Building is certainly as impeccable in the understated elegance of its form as the Rookery is exuberant with arches, columns, balconies and spiral stairs. Virtually all of the firm's 27 houses (20 of them for fellow members of this Club) were adaptive in design as the conquerors of the prairie found security in instant background and the trappings of an older culture. But "innovative" architecture best describes the work produced while Root was alive.

One evening in 1881 John Root met Owen Aldis at a party. Although both men had been members of the Literary Club for five years, their conversation that evening must have cemented a warm friendship for the next morning Aldis commissioned Root to design the Grannis Block, later transformed by Burnham into the Illinois Trust & Savings Bank - a building whose final glory was the crash and immolation of a blimp on its banking floor.

Owen Aldis was a lawyer and a real estate expert who represented Peter and Shepard Brooks of Boston. These Yankee brothers felt that burgeoning Chicago presented the most fertile ground



for their venture capital. In telling them of the designer of the building they were financing, Aldis wrote " Root is a genius and has more good sense than one usually encounters in an artistic temperament." Did the bold innovations of his designs and construction details stem from his father's daring as a blockade runner in the Civil War or, perhaps, from his own experience at fourteen in being run through the siege of Atlanta to go to school in England?

In this country, Root began his architectural training in the New York office of James Renwick, creator of St. Patrick's Cathedrale, the Smithsonian Institution, and Chicago's Second Presbyterian Church, but he soon felt that the action was in Chicago and switched to Major Jenney's office, where he met Burnham.

Before the Grannis Block was finished the brothers Brooks, through Owen Aldis, commissioned Burnham & Root to design the Montauk Building to be built as soon as, but not until, a tenant could be found. No problem. They leased enough space themselves for the staff which hoped-for business might require, a maneuver of less than usual risk since Burnham had married the only daughter of his first and richest client.

The ten-storey Montauk Building was to be, the Owners specified, " for use and not for ornament. Its beauty will be in its adaptation to its use." Its innovations included floating

raft foundations, fireproofing interior columns, continuing the building operation through-out the winter, and the frugality of its plumbing. Root's doubts about the building's artistic success were expressed in a conversation he reported having with a subsequent client who asked to have the most beautiful building in Chicago but was tormented by one reservation: "Mr. Root", he said, "I like most of your buildings immensely, but I do not like the Montauk." Whereupon Root clapped him on the back and said, "My dear sir, who in hell does?" His artistic concerns were well expressed in the titles of the papers he found time to read to us in his short but frantically creative life: "The Art of Abstract Color", "Idealism and Realism in Art", "Broad Art Criticism" and "A Great Architectural Problem."

John Root died suddenly at the age of forty-one. Years later Louis Sullivan wrote: "John Root had it in him to be great, as Burnham had it in him to be big."

The first big house which Louis Sullivan designed was the home of one of our 1874 members, John Borden. It is remarkable chiefly for its adaptive style - a style which Sullivan later abhorred with such ferocious prolixity.

"Can Architecture Become Again a Living Art?" was asked by Louis Sullivan as the title of his paper at our meeting of December 23rd, 1895 and brilliantly answered in the most distinguished of Chicago's Landmarks. Curiously, he joined the Literary Club in 1886, the year he and Dankmar Adler began

planning the Auditorium, which many consider to be his masterpiece, and he resigned in 1901 just after completing the Carson, Pirie Scott store which many others consider to be his masterpiece. Condit calls it the "climax of the heroic age of the Chicago School of architecture." Although Adler and Sullivan contributed little of importance to Chicago architecture before or after these two buildings, the years between saw an out-pouring of beauty and innovation, the blessings of which we are still counting today. Their Auditorium is, I believe, one of those buildings, rare in the world and unique in Chicago, the beauty of which always equals and often exceeds that of anything produced or displayed in it. To ensure the perfection of its acoustics a temporary theatre seating six thousand was built in the old Exposition Hall and used for two years with every possible type of performance. To adapt the Auditorium to the greatest variety of uses, sections of the ceiling were hinged to close off the galleries for more intimate performances while sections of the stage can rise or sink on hydraulic lifts to provide settings appropriate to massed choirs or glimpses of the inferno. Overlaid with hardwood panels the stage was the scene of balls for eight thousand dancers which, no doubt, put a strain on its air-conditioning - the first ever installed in a Theatre.

In the Stock Exchange Building, so wantonly destroyed to make way for a structure that was artistically bankrupt before becoming financially bankrupt - which occurred before it was

topped out - Adler had designed the first hardpan caissons while Sullivan developed the "Chicago Window" to say nothing of the intricate balusters and the handsome Trading Room now in the Art Institute. The great "Golden Door" of the Transportation Building at the World's Fair exhibited the first indigenous system of integrated ornament, complementing the structure and contrasting with its austere forms, but based on no previous models. The originality and delicacy of his ornament reached perhaps its finest expression in the Getty tomb in Graceland which has been called "a requiem for the dead, an inspiration to the living."

Although Sullivan's architecture is too personal and too closely related to site and purpose to generate a "style", his dicta, such as "Form Follows Function", a bit too dogmatic; his prose too copious and too high-flown - Sullivan's greatest bequest to his adopted city - in fact to the world - may have been the inspiration he gave to succeeding generations of architects. Even before he died, alone and penniless in a linen closet, his draftsmen and associates - Elmsie, Griffin, Van Bergen, Maher and Wright - had carried on his campaign for a native architecture, independent of tradition.

The most famous of these Sullivan alumni was, of course, Frank Lloyd Wright, and so smooth was the transition from the work of one to that of the other that a favorite argument among architectural historians is still "who did what part of the

Charnley House?" James Charnley, son of a Philadelphia banker and graduate of Yale, came to Chicago soon after the Civil War, did very well in the lumber business, joined the Literary Club and, in 1891, asked his fellow member, Sullivan, to design the house at the southeast corner of Astor and Schiller streets. The strong brick masses relieved by a light and open loggia are pure Sullivan, while the more geometric and disciplined bands of ornament clearly mark the first step in the development of Wright's own style.

After two more years of increasing moonlighting, encouraged by his "Lieber Meister", Wright left the office where he had acquired his only architectural education and where he had borrowed the money to build his Oak Park house. His first client was, could you guess, a member of that progressive, forward-looking club assembled here this evening. Winslow Brothers had executed Sullivan's magnificent and intricate ornament in iron and brass and bronze. Herman Winslow thus had come to know the twenty-six year old Wright and, by giving him his first job, a house which recalls Sullivan in front but points to Wright's future prairie style in back, helped to launch a brilliant and tempestuous career. Even in 1893, the year of Burnham's classical "white city", innovation was becoming a tradition.

Although many of his clients were members, Wright never joined the Literary Club. He may not have felt comfortable elsewhere than at the top and our presidents don't succeed

themselves. Once, when admitting that he was the world's greatest architect, he asked, "Is sincere arrogance worse than hypocritical humility?"

In the year that he engaged Wright to plan his new house, Avery Coonley delivered his third paper to this club, "Past History and Present Problems." Fitting possible texts to this title is as diverting as it is futile. Educated at Harvard and M.I.T., Coonley was the grandson, son and husband of suffragettes - no wonder he retreated to the relative calm of the Christian Science Church and an interest in civic and charitable affairs that could be handled from his study. When he gently suggested to his wife that a simple, center hall colonial house in the suburbs would suit them well, he little realised the intensity with which she had pursued her architectural interests at Vassar, nor the thoroughness with which she would insist that he inspect every possible work of Wright's. His next assignment was an equally thorough study of the landscape designs of Jens Jensen and the village plan of Frederick Law Olmstead. The result was the archetypal prairie house, certainly Wright's most complete and harmonious in the middle west and as influential in the course of American architecture as his Robie house near the University of Chicago. Among the components of this total design were silver and china, monogrammed table linen, even dresses for Mrs. Coonley. After ten years of luxury, living in total design, the Coonleys moved to Washington where they rented a very old house without electricity, central heating or indoor plumbing. The contrast



moved Mrs. Coonley to write to a friend, "We at least are testing out the theory that humanity is more vigorous when not too much pampered by civilization."

"People tell you what they want. Give them what they need" was a favorite and useful Wright maxim which, combined with his interest in the Arts and Crafts movement, led him to create furnishings which "everyone could afford". This commendable concern for the aesthetic sensitivity of the masses was the first expressed by designing champagne glasses.

The Arts and Crafts movement evolved in England from the tenets of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood embellished by Ruskin and spread to such diverse places as Yasnaya Polyana, Navajo Kivas and the Weiner Werkstaette. Its guiding spirit and practical genius was William Morris and, "art as the expression of man's joy in his work" was its shiboleth. Quality in material, execution and design set the standard for restoring skills made obsolete by the industrial revolution. This underlined the moral need for harmony in the artistic and social aspects of life.

Whether the fifty-six members assembled on December 7th, 1896 heard about the artistic, technical, moral, or social ramifications of the movement it is unlikely that their attention flagged as Henry Demarest Lloyd read his paper, "A Day With William Morris." Some of those present were members of the Second Presbyterian Church so, when it burned a few years later,

they entrusted its restoration to Howard Shaw, a young architect who had recently studied with Morris, and to the muralist, Frederick Clay Bartlett, briefly a member of this club. As Shaw himself handled hammer and saw, Chisel and trowel with competence one feels that, along with Louis Tiffany, John LaFarge and Sir Edward Burne-Jones who created the magnificent stained glass windows, he and Bartlett and the Church Trustees were true heirs to the builders of the gothic cathedrals.

Another Arts and Crafts enthusiast was Dwight H. Perkins, the architect who added humanity to school design. On October 17th, 1904 he loosed a trial balloon by reading a paper to us entitled "A Metropolitan Park System For Chicago." After six years of dogged perserverance the Forest Preserve District was established and not until half a century later did Warden Jack Johnson begin to complain of standing room only in the County Jail because of the attractive settings for statutory rape thus provided.

John J. Glessner was a member of the Literary Club for fifty-three years during which he read six papers and served on most of our committees. This left him time to take part in the founding of the International Harvester Co., and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, reversing the Chicago River and digging the drainage canal. On December 7th, 1885, he read a paper called "Two Noted Diarists". Only his preference for the low profile keeps me from imagining that he referred to his wife and himself,

since they kept a joint diary for most of their married life. In fact, their diary for that and the following year is full of references to what must be one of the most thoroughly documented houses in Chicago - the beautiful city house designed for the Glessners at the corner of 18th Street and Prairie Avenue by Henry Hobson Richardson.

Their journal records the search for and purchase of a lot in which they were advised and, to some extent, helped by their many friends. Then came the search for an architect in which many more friends helped, "molto con brio" and, in which many architects offered help. Cobb was passed over as too ostentatious. George M. Pullman put in a plug for Solon Beman, a young architect he had brought from Brooklyn to design the Pullman works as well as the surrounding town and, incidentally, the Lake Shore Drive home of his lawyer, Robert Todd Lincoln. Burnham & Root, who had completed eleven houses in that year alone, were passed over. McKim was interviewed in New York and so was the ultra-fashionable Richard Morris Hunt. Finally a New York architect named Potter, whose father, brother and nephew were all bishops, was asked to draw preliminary sketches. Then Glessner's old friend and club-mate, Franklin MacVeagh, who had also asked Potter to do sketches for him, mentioned that he was changing architects. In fact, Mr. Richardson was arriving that very day to talk house with the MacVeaghs and to discuss a new wholesale store with Marshall Field. So said, So done. Next day Richardson inspected the Prairie Avenue property and that evening dined en

famille with the Glessners - a modest repast of only seven courses since the notice was so short. While enjoying a cigar after dinner he sketched a house plan so, although preliminaries from the poor son of a bishop in New York had arrived only that morning, the die was cast. From then on it was only a matter of eating enormous dinners at the Glessners in Chicago or New Hampshire or at the Richardsons in Brookline. No discussion of plans has been recorded but the feasts preceding them fill the diary with mouth-watering detail. How these victuals got to the table is not clear as every page seems to note the unwept departure of a maid. There followed visits to houses designed by Richardson as well as to decorators' shops in Boston and New York to select such things as William Morris designs for rugs and hangings.

The result of complete mutual trust among its creators and clear thinking in its design is the definitive city house presenting to the world at large the promise of a sunny courtyard and warm hospitality behind the protective strength of its granite facade, at once adaptive in detail, innovative in plan, exuberant in its joy in sun and sky and impeccable in the serenity of its composition.

Some years earlier Mrs. Glessner had helped found the Decorative Arts Society and had joined the Fortnightly so it is not surprising that, when the plans became known, the opening salvos bore traces of "the endearing elegance of female friendship". First blood was drawn by a Fortnightly founder whose

husband had just joined the Literary Club. Mrs. Dexter wrote that "a nice bay window on the north side would give them a charming view right down to the lake" - with, of course, the Illinois Central tracks intervening. The Evening Journal amplified this by suggesting that "it does not suit the neighbors that this neighbor should exclude all possibility of watching his windows and finding out what may be doing within doors." Others suggested that the solidity and strength of the design was motivated by a wish for security from anarchists - The Haymarket riots took place that year - without noticing that all the master bed rooms faced the street. Mr. Pullman, the neighbor whose architect had been rejected, asked, "what have I ever done to have that thing staring me in the face every time I go out of my door." Eugene Debs might have suggested an answer. One guest, on hearing that the architect had died before construction started, opined that "this house must have killed him."

Every letter or clipping concerning the house was saved - no matter how unreasonable. However, the enthusiastic and the discerning far out-weighed the carping. Mr. Bartlett, an enthusiastic neighbor who was building his own house at the time, telegraphed the Glessners in New Hampshire: "It looked well in the outset and every layer of granite adds to its beauty. You will be pleased as we are." McKim, one of the rejected architects, considered it the best house he had seen in America. Mrs. Glessner, herself, did not like the elevations at first sight but when the drawings were explained to her she professed herself delighted.

Frederick Law Olmsted, who laid out the planting in the courtyard, announced that it was "the most beautiful house ever put on paper."

More far-reaching were the comments from abroad. Adolph Loos, the Vienesese architect and apostle of pure form without ornament or decoration, admitted copying many of its details. The architect of the Swedish Building at the '93 World's Fair returned to write articles about the house in Swedish magazines. Eliel Saarinen was impressed with the rugged grandeur of the house and considered Richardson a key influence on Finnish architecture.

The first residence built in Chicago was adaptive, being a copy of the last one built in another undeveloped area. It was innovative in its portability. It was exuberant in the designs applied to its exterior. It was impeccable in the purity of its form. It was the first home of the brave - a Teepee. Were the members of this club less brave in their independence of thought and their desire to explore new artistic frontiers?

Herman H. Lackner

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