

The Arts in Illinois' Fourth District
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I'm sure you all know that the Chicago area abounds in art galleries, theaters, concerts, beautiful architecture, opera, ballet, symphonies and everything else connected with the arts. I suppose the jewel in the crown would be the Art Institute of Chicago. Incorporated in 1879 for the purpose of maintaining a museum and a school of art, it was decided by a number of leading businessmen who were all trustees of the museum that the year of the Colombian Exposition, 1893, would be the perfect time to erect a grand building to accommodate the city's cultural expansion. The famous bronze lions by American sculptor Edward L. Kenneys which guard the entrance were unveiled in 1894, and were immediately adopted by Chicagoans as the symbol of the museum. As you enter the building, the grand staircase rises elegantly to a circular information center to get you started. The second floor galleries house European art which is arranged chronologically from late medieval to postimpressionist. The impressionist collection is world-renowned with treasures painted by Monet, Seurat, Van Gogh and Matisse. There are also fine collections of Oriental artifacts and the 68 miniature Thorne rooms are not to be missed. Another highlight of the museum is the reconstructed trading room of the Chicago Stock Exchange. Designed by famed architects Adler and Sullivan, the Stock Exchange building was demolished in 1972, but the trading room was salvaged from the razing and was intricately reassembled in 1976. The gardens of the museum are spectacular and beautifully groomed, and are a favorite resting place for museum visitors. The school of the art institute, established in 1882, began as the Chicago Academy of Design in 1866. Some of its famous graduates include Georgia O'Keefe, Thomas Hart Benton and Grant Wood whose famous painting "American Gothic" hangs in the museum today.

Speaking of Grant Wood, I must include a story about him that I know you will enjoy. In 1932, the nation was marking the bicentennial of George Washington's birth. At that time, Grant Wood lived in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The local DAR chapter of some 170 members strong were very visible in their annual tradition of celebrating Washington's birthday and, this year, they really went all out planting a George Washington memorial elm on Island Plaza and placing a plaque with the DAR insignia on the tree. This ceremony opened an old wound with Wood because it was very near to a building where he had installed a

memorial window in 1929 and, because of interference from the DAR and the Legionnaires, his window had never been dedicated. Their complaint was that the window had been made in Germany and they felt it was an insult to America's ideals to have had a memorial to our soldiers made in the country of our most recent enemy. He wanted to settle this old account with an organization whose super patriotism and superior airs had kept him from having his work on the memorial window properly recognized. He therefore decided to do a painting which was a spoof of the DAR's worship of Washington and their excessive pride in having descended from the Revolutionary War patriots. He portrayed three women he characterized as people trying to set up an aristocracy in a republic. With their tightly closed mouths and stiff poses, he has depicted them in front of a painting of Washington crossing the Delaware. One of the women holds a blue willow teacup in her long, bony fingers, implying, so Wood thought, ancestral worship. Blue willow china was a much prized family heirloom, having been brought overland from the east by early settler families. The hand holding the teacup is ringless, suggesting that she is a spinster, and all the women with their long necks, beak like noses, piercing eyes and perfectly rounded hairdos, bear more than a faint resemblance to the farmyard creatures in some of his other paintings. In any case, his "Daughters of Revolution" painting was condemned by various groups of DARs as disrespectful and scandalous, and they demanded it be removed from public exhibition. But all these protests came to naught and, after the success of "American Gothic", the public had come to expect this type of painting from Wood, and it was reported that many of the Daughters thoroughly enjoyed his lampoon.

The Goodman Theater, designed by Howard Van Doren Shaw, was built in 1925 and donated to the Art Institute by the parents of Kenneth Sawyer Goodman, a dramatist-poet who died in World War I. Productions here range from Shakespeare to musicals to experimental works.

While on the subject of art galleries, I discovered the Richard H. Love Gallery on East Erie Street. They specialize in American masters from the colonial to early 20th century. But my fascination was in the building which houses the gallery, a historical landmark mansion nicknamed "The Marble Palace", built in 1880 by Samuel M. Nickerson to be used as his residence. It was designed in the Italian Renaissance Revival style and was furnished in grand Victorian splendor.

Just briefly let me mention the Illinois Artisans Shop located in the State of Illinois

Center in downtown Chicago. This was created by Governor James R. Thompson in 1985 and is operated through the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and offers an opportunity for local artisans to showcase their works. There are two other shops in this program also - - the Illinois State Museum in Springfield and the Southern Illinois Artisans Shop in Rend Lake and all feature handcrafted items such as wall hangings, glass bowls, metal sculptures, clothing, dolls and much more.

Orchestra Hall, the home of the Chicago Symphony, is a national historic landmark building erected in 1904 on Michigan Avenue. The Georgian Revival style building was designed by architect Daniel Burnham who donated his services in response to complaints about the vastness of the auditorium theater, which was the former home of the symphony. The hall is also home to the Chicago Symphony Chorus which hosts the annual do-it-yourself Messiah. The current conductor is Daniel Barenboim.

The Auditorium Theater, a Romanesque revival style building designed by Adler and Sullivan, opened three years after the cornerstone was laid by President Grover Cleveland in 1887. It was the heaviest building in the world with its great granite arches. It weighted 110,000 lbs. Its lavish interior featured mosaic floors, stained glass windows, murals on the walls and on the proscenium arch, and gold stenciling. The building was subjected to many changing fortunes over the years, but was beautifully restored to its original grandeur in 1967 and currently presents such theatrical productions as Les Miserables, The Phantom of the Opera and Miss Saigon. The original production of Showboat was staged there over 60 years ago.

Another theater worthy of note is the famed Rialto Square theater in Joliet. Opening its doors in 1926 as a vaudeville and movie palace, it remains today one of the ten most beautiful theaters in the country. Outstanding features include "The Duchess", which is the largest hand cut crystal chandelier in the United States, and the theater's original Barton Grande Theater Pipe Organ. The theater became the property of the Will County Metropolitan Exposition and Auditorium Authority in 1978 after a long period of disuse. Following a \$6 million restoration, it reopened in 1981 as a major performing arts center. It is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The Second City on Wells Street has been entertaining audiences with its signature brand of satire since 1959, and was the starting point for many famous actors, directors and writers including Alan Arkin, Ed Asner, Shelly Long, Dan Ackroyd and Gilda Rainer, to name

a few. The building's ornamental facade came from the once famous Garrick Theater downtown designed by Adler and Sullivan and demolished in 1960.

The Ravinia Festival Park in Highland Park was created in 1904 by a railroad magnate to generate ridership along the north shore. The centerpiece of the project was the Ravinia Theater, with an architectural form inspired by Spanish churches of the American southwest. It featured a pipe organ, excellent acoustics, and tiffany style light fixtures. However, it closed in 1915 as audiences became more and more interested in the newest show business novelty, motion pictures. It remained shuttered for 42 years until 1963, when it was reopened as a venue for folk music, dance and repertory theater. In 1999, Ravinia brought in architects Skidmore, Owings and Merrill to upgrade the facility which had been largely ignored for nearly 90 years. It was rededicated as the Martin Theater in 1995. The theater and four heavy timber gates at the major entrances are the only original structures remaining on the festival grounds which are listed as a National Register District. While its 880 seats now offer performances of chamber music, the 3,100 seat outdoor pavilion hosts an 11-week series of classical, popular, jazz and dance presentations that attract half a million people each summer. It is the summer home of the Chicago Symphony.

At the northern top of Fourth District, we find the famous Woodstock Opera House. It was built in 1889 to house the Woodstock City Hall, the public library, fire department and second floor auditorium. Its architectural style has been described as "Steamboat Gothic", reflecting the cathedral shape of its exterior and the similarities of the auditorium's interior to a riverboat salon. The Woodstock Players provided acting experience for students graduating from the Goodman School. Now famous personalities Paul Newman, Tom Boxley, Betsy Palmer, Geraldine Page, Shelley Berman and Lois Nettleton were among them. The theater is still in use today and our own Kishwaukee Trail Chapter holds their annual honors awards tea there every February.

While mentioning opera, we can't forget the Civic Opera House. The art deco auditorium, built in the 1920s has been home to the Lyric Opera of Chicago since the 1950's when, under managing director Carol Fox, it played host to many of the most famous artists ever to grace the operatic stage.

Moving into the world of architecture, we must mention the great Louis Sullivan who is revered today for the unique style of ornamentation he developed; the Carson Pirie Scott store in the loop provides the most spectacular example of this. Two blocks down

State street is the flagship store of Marshall field, which was designed by Daniel H. Burnham in 1893. Everything is arranged in departments around two atriums, one of which is topped with a glass mosaic dome by Louis Comfort Tiffany, unveiled in 1907. The first of the famous clocks was installed at State & Washington in 1897; 10 years later, a matching one was put at State & Randolph. Each weighs 7 3/4 tons and is of cast bronze, illuminated by lights inside which also keep the works warm and dry. The clock was immortalized by Norman Rockwell on a Saturday Evening Post cover in 1945. It depicts the repairman setting the clock by his own pocket watch.

Probably the most famous architect that comes to mind, however, is Frank Lloyd Wright, who created what is now known as the Prairie School of Architecture. He lived in Oak Park from 1889 until 1909. Twenty five of his buildings still stand there including his own home and studio, and another six survive in the neighboring suburb of River Forest. He was the architect for the Imperial Hotel in Japan. Interestingly, Wright was employed by Louis Sullivan who became his mentor until they had a falling out and he opened his own office in 1893. Over the next 40 years, he became the most influential figure in American architectural history and at the time of his death in 1959 he had completed 638 designs. Many of his buildings are listed on the National Historic Register.

While visiting Oak Park, we cannot forget that it was the birthplace and boyhood home of one of the foremost writers of the 20th century, Ernest Hemmingway. He was born in 1879, spending his first 18 years in Oak Park and attending the Oak Park and River Forest High School where he became editor of the school newspaper in his senior year. He graduated in 1917 and became a reporter for The Kansas City Star, but in 1918 he went to war driving an ambulance in Italy where he was severely wounded. His famous book, "A Farewell to Arms", written in 1929, is said to have been based on this wartime experience between an American officer in the Italian ambulance service and an English nurse. His many famous works earned him a Pulitzer prize in 1953 and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954. You might like to know that his paternal grandmother, Adelaide, was a charter member of our George Rogers Clark Chapter in Oak Park and they cherish their "Hemingway gavel" she once gave them.

I could go on indefinitely describing the many cultural and artistic experiences available to all of us living in the Fourth District, but I close my talk with a look at what seems to have become the symbol of Chicago...an untitled sculpture by Pablo Picasso which was

unveiled by Mayor Richard J. Daley in the Civic Center Plaza in August of 1967.

Onlookers attending the ceremonies expected to see a grand masterpiece. Instead, they were far from impressed. The sculpture, 50 feet tall and weighing 163 tons, is said to be an abstract design of a woman's head, although to many people it seems to resemble some type of big bird. However, it has become an accepted part of the cityscape, and is visited as often as the Art Institute or the John Hancock Center.

I hope, through these thumbnail scetches, you will be inspired to visit and enjoy the arts in Illinois' Fourth District.