

The Fine Arts Building, Chicago



PART OF THE LAKE FRONT, CHICAGO. THE FINE ARTS BUILDING IS THE SECOND FROM THE LEFT, THE ART INSTITUTE ON THE EXTREME RIGHT

THE FINE ARTS BUILDING IN CHICAGO BY ELIA W. PEATTIE

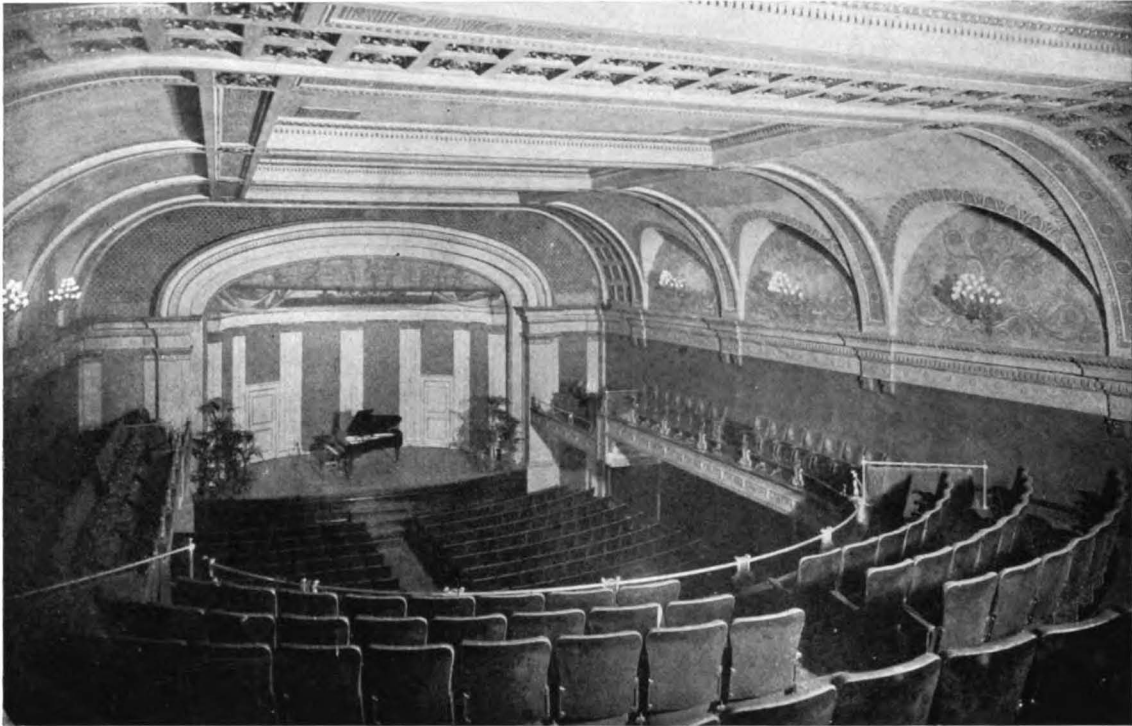
THE Fine Arts Building in Chicago is remarkable among such enterprises as housing within its walls so great a proportion of the artistic, intellectual, literary and educational interests of a great city. The building is occupied by sculptors, painters, actors, musicians, writers, illustrators, etchers, gold and silversmiths, carvers, decorators, publishers of special editions, teachers of elocution and expression, the drama and the cognate arts; dealers in the antique and the curious, sellers of pictures, prints, pianos, books, porcelains, fine furniture, laces, linens. To some extent the various arts and crafts have grouped themselves. The musicians congregate on certain floors; the smiths and decorators show themselves to be neighborly; the educational interests are to be found together, and the artists, making for the skylights, take themselves to the tenth floor. Here is to be found a congenial confraternity. The painters have united in placing original mural decorations upon the walls, and on the occasions—and they are many—when social affairs are given the studios are used in common. Here the Little Room, that insouciant, vagrant academy of folk “who do things” in a literary or artistic way, has its twilight meetings in the studio of a well-known portrait painter, and here it holds its satiric theatricals, its masques and banquets.

In respect to its centralization of interests the building, which was opened in 1898, has few counterparts, and locally it has, of course, outdone its predecessors. The hall, built by Thomas B. Bryan where the first art exhibition was seen in 1859, was a

studio building. Uranus H. Crosby's million-dollar opera house drew the artists of the city together in its studios and attracted the public by its exhibition rooms and galleries, where the founder's collections might be seen. Before the fire of '71 the Ayer Building at Monroe and State streets showed an innovation in excluding the musicians. Readers of E. P. Roe may remember a scene in this building in “Barriers Burned Away.” Judge Lambert Tree ventured a studio building, but on the north side of the river, and for such an enterprise position is all-important. In short, the Fine Arts Building, though it stands in a line of succession in the growth of the city's artistic life, does not so much borrow importance from that fact as lend importance to it. Of course, it can hardly be said that the realization of the founders of the building, the Studebaker brothers, and Mr. Charles C. Curtis, with whom the scheme originated, was accomplished—in so far as it has been accomplished—at once. Although a generous response was made, with promptitude, upon the opening of the building, it has taken years of patience, persistence, elimination, selection and sustained enthusiasm to bring about the success which has now undeniably been achieved.

In addition to the space allotted to studios and shops there are no less than three auditoriums in the building. One of these, originally intended for musicales or illustrated lectures, was, early in its history, converted into the Studebaker Theatre. As such it was opened in 1899 by Mr. Henry W. Savage's Grand Opera in English, and for two years the Castle Square Opera Company played to audiences which, to the last, demonstrated their appreciation of the educational opportunity afforded by the fine artistic presentations of the best operas

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THE MUSIC ROOM ON THE MAIN FLOOR

given by these singers, at popular prices. In this theatre have appeared the Russian players, Nazimova and her confrères, on their first visit; here, too, have been given the first performances and initial runs of the operas of Frank Pixley and Gustav Luders, and of the operas and plays of George Ade;

here Arnold Daly has shown the quintessence of Bernard Shaw; the Ben Greet players have appeared in Shakespeare, light opera and romantic drama, and here, only the other day, Sara Bernhardt uttered her mellifluous farewells.

On the same floor with the theatre—that opening from the street—is a music hall in which audiences of an interesting character have listened to chamber music of the finest quality, to private musicales, to the lectures of Edward Howard Griggs, Dr. Louis K. Anspacher, the performances of the Théâtre Française, the lectures of the University of Chicago Extension, the Shakespearean festivals of the Chicago Woman's Club.

The Assembly Hall, much used by clubs and societies, is on the tenth floor. This is the meeting place of numerous organizations, which, having rooms adapted only for everyday use, require a large hall for special occa-



THE COWAN ROOMS ON THE MAIN FLOOR

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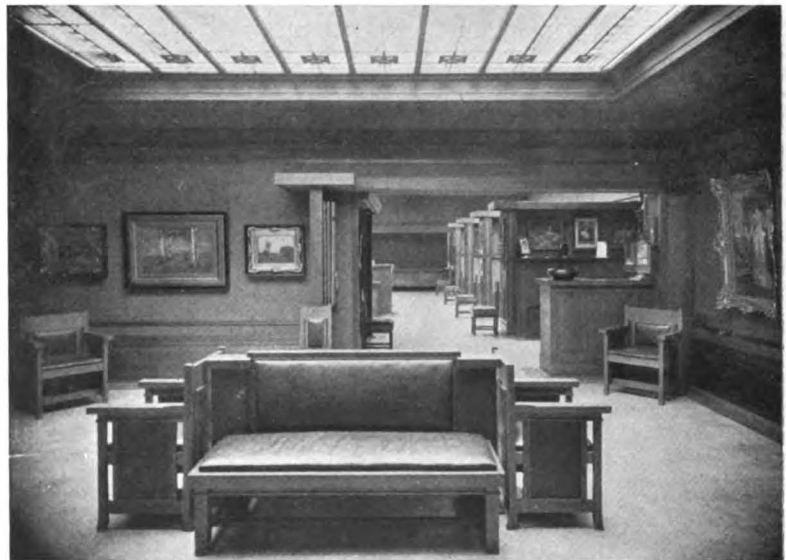
THE ROULLIER GALLERIES ON THE SEVENTH FLOOR

sions. The building is the home of some of the most interesting societies in Chicago. The Chicago Literary Club, composed of a group of gentlemen of many professions, with a taste in common for literature, and the Caxton Club, an organization devoted to bibliography, share the same reserved and admirable apartments; the Chicago Woman's Club, one of the most disinterested and effective organizations of women, has capacious rooms, furnished in luxurious comfort; the Colonial Dames, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Chicago Kindergarten Association, the Amateur Musical Club, the Illinois Equal Suffrage Association, the Catholic Woman's League, the Alliance Française, the Theatre Française, the Young Fortnightly, the College Club, the Wednesday Club, the Thursday Club and various welfare clubs of one sort and another meet in this building, almost all of them having rooms of their own. Here, too, meets The Fortnightly, the oldest of the women's social and literary societies

in Chicago—an organization of Brahmin caste, with a high reputation for its literary product.

On certain days of the season the place is alive with a vivacious company. Wednesdays and Saturdays are particularly notable occasions. The *matinées* bring their crowds, the chances are favorable for a lecture or a musicale in the Music Hall, the clubs hold their weekly meetings or give their receptions, there will be teas and "at homes" in the studios, and after formalities are over the crowds pour into the quiet book shop, into the picture gallery, or seek the shops in search of prints.

In the inauguration of this building and in the conducting of it the officers have shown themselves to be largely disinterested. The effect upon a tremendously energized, industrial city of such a building, fostering as it does the higher aspirations and qualities, is not to be calculated. And this accords with the idea of the founders from the first, that the building should have such a stimulating influence.



THE THURBER GALLERIES ON THE FIFTH FLOOR