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AMERICAN DECORATIVE ARTS



THE CRAFTSMAN

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Below is a reprinted article from Gustav Stickley's "The Craftsman" magazine. The Craftsman was printed from October 1901 to December 1916 and was devoted to the American Arts and Crafts Movement. [Reprint archives.](#)

THE STORY OF THE ARCHITECTURAL LEAGUE: BY SAMUEL HOWE

Vol X #1 April 1906

The story of the development of the Architectural League, which had its origin in the Architectural Sketch Club, formed in the autumn of 1879, is extremely interesting, not alone because of the men--most of whom are still living, very active,--but because of its personal success. These Club meetings seem to have vitalized the men, pressing them to exertions, which even to-day make their mark upon the hillsides of many cities of the Union. Most of these meetings were held in the rooms of Howard Walker and William A. Bates at 45 West 35th Street. The members were F. H. Bacon, William A. Bates, Alfred E. Barlow, P. P. Furber, Cass Gilbert, Thomas Hastings, Clarence Johnson, John Reilly and C. H. Walker. Most of these were members of the firm of Herter Bros., decorators. The following year the name was changed to the Architectural League, in view of the affiliation of decorative painters and sculptors. In the spring of 1881, as most of the members had gone abroad to study and travel, a new organization was formed, containing among others Charles I. Berg, Clarence H. Blackall, Arnold W. Brenner, Edward H. Clark, John L. DuFais, John H. Duncan, William C. Hazlett, John Beverley Robinson, J. A. Schweinfurth, Bernard Vonnegut and Daniel W. Willard. On February 18 the following were elected as the first officers: Daniel W. Willard, President; Clarence H. Blackall, Secretary; and John H. Duncan, Treasurer. The meetings were held on the upper floor of a building on the North side of 14th Street, between Broadway and Fifth Avenue, and were followed during the winter of 1885 by monthly dinner meetings at Morellos' restaurant, the walls of which were hung with foreign sketches by the members who had lived abroad. There is a singular charm in following the history of any movement. Who, for a moment, would connect the drawings of to-day with the sketches of some twenty-one years ago in the days of the old Architectural Sketch Club, consisting of some eight or nine young men all in the employ of the leading decorator of that time, who met at the rooms of their fellows for the informal weekly Sketch Party? The men took turns in suggesting a project, devoting all that evening to its solution and the sketches became the Property of the one proposing the scheme. Was not this realistic? The direct personal solution unaided, each man standing on his own merits, rendering his conception with whatever material he preferred--watercolor, pen and ink, pencil or chalk. These sketches live in the portfolios of the same men, who to-day, singularly enough, are at the head of large operations directing others. They believed in individual efforts, personal endeavor. In 1892 the League, as one of the component bodies of the American Fine Arts Society, took up permanent quarters at 215 W. 57th Street, where the Expositions and annual dinners are now held. Membership in the Architectural League in New York is to-day recognized by the Consuls of the United States upon presentation of proper certificate, and the courtesy of free admission with permission to sketch and study in foreign art galleries is granted by authorities. It will be remembered that the Architectural League of America includes the Architectural Clubs of all large cities; the National Sculpture Society and the National Society of Mural Painters. It stands for the allied arts. Its membership is not wholly practising artists, but includes many people interested and most active in high architectural standards and municipal affairs generally. The Architectural Club of San Francisco which has recently accomplished a good deal of useful work, has lately joined the organization.

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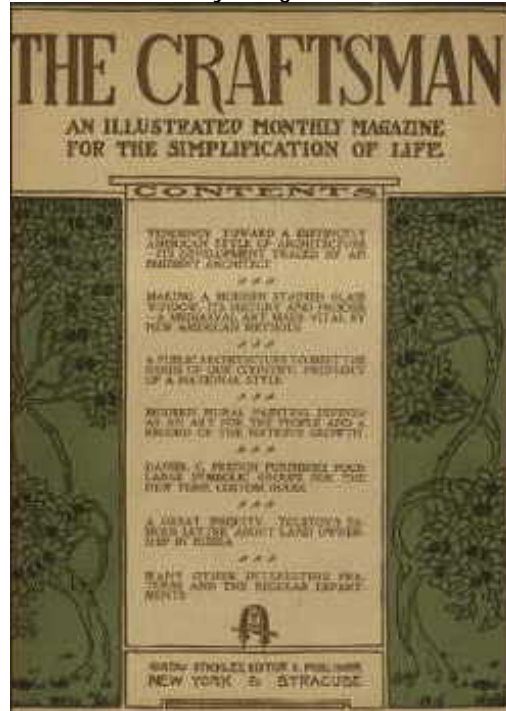
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Harvard University has given three scholarships in architecture



to be competed for by members, and during the meetings just closed there has been considerable talk of the publication of an annual, epitomizing the work of its members during the year. The meetings in New York led to no little discussion; to many visits to prominent buildings famous for their engineering structural qualities, as well as aesthetic value:

to some delightful

entertainments at the studios of local workers; and to more than one somewhat startling statement of a critical nature. Unquestionably, the presentation of architectural projects, architectural ideas, by means of drawings and models is considered more important every year. The members have shown a graceful consideration for the feelings of their fellows, in the selection of drawings for expositions. There is less display of mediocre work. Fewer feet are given to drawings valuable for themselves rather than for the designs they illustrate. There are fewer drawings than ever before; the standard is higher. Attendance at the lectures has been excellent and the lectures "Beaux Arts' Society and Atelier Work," "Architecture in the Far East," "Technical School in Pittsburg" are singularly appropriate and significant. The first giving a manly free statement of the best method of self-culture in architecture; of the relation between the master and the pupil; a side-light on the most satisfactory and wholesome method of permitting the student to be won by skillful and conscientious tuition as well as providing him with a vigorous critic at his elbow. The second reminding us that the Oriental spirit still throbs in the breast of those who have any romantic ideality in their natures. Yet surely no one needs to be told how much American decorations and architecture owe to the Orient. The third is so splendidly given in the caption that it seems almost presumptuous to add any word here, nor is it possible to say much without the repetition of description furnished by the lecturer, who by the way, has just been appointed professor of architecture to the College he has built--a worthy tribute. The designs which line the walls of the American Fine Arts Galleries reflect great credit on the Architectural League of this city. This active society has just reached its manhood; it is celebrating its coming of age, this being its twenty-first Annual Exhibition. Joining other societies, its work in addition to designing large buildings is--so we are told--shaping public character, public morals. It is perhaps in realizing the importance of this that the society has become more strict with itself. It is now no easy matter to join this body of practical workers in architecture. Applicants for membership have to submit to informal examination; they must present drawings--not pictures,--portraying the skeleton, the geography, the philosophy of their various designs, before their application is entertained. The Architectural League, nothing if not practical, commences its twenty-second year of service by reforming itself.

