



Welcome to The Fine Arts Building

This is your audio tour, 1885-style – in other words, the printed page.

Our History

Designed by Pullman architect and planner Solon S. Beman, this building was completed in 1885 as a showroom and assembly plant for the Studebaker Carriage Company.

Architecturally, the Fine Arts Building was built in a slightly fussier-than-usual, multicolored Romanesque style, with a rusticated limestone and granite, load-bearing wall on the Michigan Avenue frontage. The most prominent features are two large columns that frame the center bay on the first floor, which are repeated, twice as tall, on the third and fourth stories, after being interrupted on the second. The first few floors of the building were originally showrooms for carriages, with the manufacturing functions on the floors above, and the large windows providing ample stage for display.

By the mid-1890s, the building no longer met Studebaker's needs, despite the construction of an annex to the north (still in existence, but altered). Studebaker then commissioned another building, on south Wabash Avenue – also designed by Beman. That building is now part of Columbia College's campus. When Studebaker outgrew that building, they moved their entire operation to South Bend, Indiana, where they ultimately designed and built Studebaker automobiles.

Studebaker maintained ownership of this building well into the 20th century, but its use changed dramatically after the company vacated it. Music publisher and real estate developer (and son of a former mayor) Charles C. Curtiss then became the driving force who transformed the factory and showroom into a prototypical arts center. Originally eight stories tall and topped by arabesque domes over the corner bays and peaked roofs over the bays between, when the building was remodeled in 1898 from yet another Beman design,

the original top floor was replaced and three more added. Inside, the spaces were adapted for use as artist's and musician's studios galleries, offices, shops and theaters.

In the early 20th Century, the Fine Arts Building was a center of artistic and civic activity for the city, the occupants of which had national and international impact on the arts and society as a whole. The Fine Arts Building housed music schools, art and literary clubs even women's suffrage organizations, in addition to the studios of such prominent Chicago artists as sculptor Lorado Taft, portraitist Richard Clarkson and magazine illustrators Frank X. Leyendecker and J.C. Leyendecker, whose works were seen on covers of *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue*.

Frank Lloyd Wright, who once had an office on the tenth floor designed a first-floor bookshop and a gallery in the annex (both demolished). Eclecticist Andrew Rebori, architect of the Madonna Della Strada Chapel on Loyola University's Lake Shore Campus designed the first floor's Studebaker Theater in 1917, in addition to another annex on Wabash Ave., built to house the main building's heating plant. Our fourth floor also contains a Venetian Courtyard complete with fountain and mosaic flooring, which occupies the central light and airshaft for the interior-facing windows.

Literature also found a home here. Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and e.e. cummings were first published in *Poetry* magazine, the offices for which founder and editor Harriet Monroe maintained in the building. The offices for *Dial* magazine were also housed here, as were those of *The Little Review*, which published Carl Sandburg and Edgar Lee Masters. And William Wallace Denslow, illustrator of the original edition of *The Wizard of Oz*, also kept an office at the Fine Arts Building.

Your Tour

Now you are ready to start your self-guided walking tour through the historic Fine Arts Building. The tour will point out historical and architectural points of interest.. Have one of our friendly elevator operators whisk you, in original lift equipment, to the 10th floor to start your tour.

10th Floor

As you exit the elevator, turn to your right and view a pair of the building's original murals. The one on the left, titled "Greek Figures with Mask" was painted by Frank X. Leyendecker (1877-1924). Born in Montabour, Germany, he came to Chicago with his brother, Joseph C., in 1882. He studied professionally at the School of the Art Institute and in Paris. Besides being a painter, he was also a well-known magazine illustrator and designer of stained-glass windows.

The painting on the right, titled "Standing Nymph and Man" is unfinished and its painter is unknown, although it is commonly believed to be the work of one of the Leyendecker brothers.

Now move to the skylight to the right of the main hallway, which is surrounded by these three murals. On the left is Frederic Clay Bartlett's "Woman and Angels". Born in Chicago, Mr. Bartlett (1871-1911) studied at Harvard and the Institute of Art in Munich, Germany. His well-known murals can be seen in other Chicago venues, such as the Council Chamber of City Hall, and both the Second and Fourth Presbyterian Churches.

The bright middle mural is "Nymph with Angel and Parrot" by Oliver Dennett Grover (1861-1927). Born in Earlville, IL, he studied art in Florence, Italy and was a graduate of the University of Chicago. His murals can be found in the Union League Club of Chicago, the Art Institute and the St. Louis Museum of Art.

The third mural here is Martha Baker's "Nude with Veils". Ms. Baker (1871-1911) studied and taught at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and is best known for her miniatures in oil and water color. She won prizes at exhibitions in Chicago, London and the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904.

Now turn around and view the murals around the stairwell. The one furthest to the left is titled "Landscape" by Charles Francis Browne (1859-1920). He studied art at the Boston Museum School, and specialized in landscapes and portraits. He won a prize at the Pacific Expo in San Francisco in 1915, and also taught at the School of the Art Institute. He was also the brother-in-law of local sculptor Lorado Taft.

The middle mural is an untitled piece by long-time Fine Arts Building tenant (room 1014) Ralph Clarkson (1861-1942). He studied art at the Boston Museum School and taught at the School of the Art Institute.

The mural on the right is Bertha Menzler-Peyton's "Four Women and Veils". Ms. Menzler-Peyton (1871-1947) was well known for her oil paintings of landscapes, portraits and murals. She exhibited widely having solo exhibitions at the Art Institute, Detroit Museum of Art and the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C.

Continue your tour by walking down the hall. As you do, you will pass studio 1020 which was used by Frank Lloyd Wright; and studio 1021 which was used by William Wallace Denslow (see wall plaques).

Studio 1022 was previously rented by "Injun Summer" painter John T. McCutcheon.

On your way back down the hall, notice Studio 1038, which was used by Lorado Taft who was the sculptor of many of the statues in Grant Park.

9th Floor

One of the building's longest running tenants is currently occupying suite 939. It is the Chicago Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

8th Floor

Walk down the main hall and around the corner to find....

Of note on this floor is Suite 833, which housed The Fortnightly Club from 1893 to 1920. It now houses the offices and rehearsal space for The Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestras.

7th Floor

The large oil painting to the right of the main hall is of Dame Maggie Teyte, the English-Irish soprano. She is shown in a 1911 performance of Massenet's "Cinderella". The artist is unknown.

3rd Floor

As you pass through this floor, you are walking through the lobby for the (closed) Studebaker Theatre's balcony.

2nd Floor

This is the lobby for the mezzanine level of the old Studebaker Theatre. At the end of the hall is a beautiful stained glass window designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

1st Floor

And here you are once again, in our vaulted-ceiling lobby. Opening into the lobby are the doors for the old Studebaker Theatre, which for many years was The Fine Arts movie theater – a venue for art and foreign language films. It is currently closed and undergoing renovation. You will also notice the archway over the doors to The Playhouse, which housed live theatre performances for many years.

To the left of the stairway is the traditional building directory, and between the elevators is the new electronic building directory, which brings color, images and even movie shorts to those waiting for the elevator.

This is the end of your self-guided walking tour. Thank you for spending some time with us today!