Ridge Historical Society
RECORD
BEVERLY HILLS, MORGAN PARK, WASHINGTON HEIGHTS & MT. GREENWOOD

French family contributes treasures to Chicago's rich history of art

By Carol Flynn

There is an enclave of historic homes in North Beverly on the land where once stood Upwood, the estate of Thomas Morgan, for whom Morgan Park is named. The mystery house from the last issue of the Ridge Historical Society Record is located there. Did you recognize the house? It is the William Merchant Richardson French House. French was the first director of the Art Institute of Chicago, and older brother of the famous sculptor Daniel Chester French. Here in pictorial essay form is a brief history of the French brothers in Chicago.

William M. R. French (1843 – 1914) was born in New Hampshire of old New England stock which included Daniel Webster. Neighbors included Ralph Waldo Emerson and the family of Louisa May Alcott. French graduated from Harvard in 1864. He served in the Civil War in the Union Army, and then took up engineering and landscape gardening. He settled in Chicago in 1867. He wrote numerous professional articles and art reviews for journals and societies and delivered lectures. In 1879 a new society, the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts, was organized. In 1882, the name was changed to the Art Institute of Chicago. French had charge of the School and Museum from the beginning, with the title of Secretary, later changed to Director. Upon his death, Lorado Taft, well-known sculptor who taught at the Art Institute, wrote a tribute to French in the Institute's Bulletin. Taft described French as, "… [N]o more witty man could be found in a day's journey. He was …whimsical … and drew upon stores of classic lore… [His] last annual dinner … speech [was] as sparkling as the invention of one of our best professional entertainers … and given significance by the earnestness of the man."

W. French served as the Director of the Art Institute for thirty-five years. During his tenure he oversaw the building at the current location at Michigan Ave. and Adams St., which was completed in1893. Within a year, the Art Institute had received its first major gift, a collection of French paintings presented by Mrs. Henry Field. In 1913 the museum startled the city by hosting the Armory Show, a sprawling exhibition of avant-garde European painting and sculpture. Exceptional purchases from that controversial exhibition launched the museum's collection of modern art.

Painting of William M. R. French by Louis L. Betts, 1905, Art Institute of Chicago.

SUMMER 2011
Vol. 40, No. 2

RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
10621 S. Seeley Ave.
Chicago, IL 60643

773/881-1675

ridgehistoricalsociety.org
ridgehistory@hotmail.com

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Tuesday 2 - 5 p.m.
Thursday 2 - 5 p.m.
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or by appointment

Look for the Ridge Historical Society on Facebook.

The French family lives on in photographs

Plaster portrait bust (above) of Alice Helm French by her brother-in-law, Daniel Chester French, 1890. Courtesy of Chesterwood, A National Trust Historic Site in Stockbridge, Mass.

Chesterwood was Daniel French's summer home and studio.

William French married twice, first to Sarah M. Lovejoy from 1879 until her death in 1881; and then to Alice Helm (1864 – 1950), in 1890.

Alice was born in Lake Forest, Ill., and studied at the School of the Art Institute. They had two sons, Henry Helm and Prentiss.

Painting (right) by Alice Helm French, "In the Garden" (Residence of Daniel Chester French), ca. 1915, pastel. Donated to the Vanderpoel Art Association in 1915 by Alice Helm French. Photo by Sidney C. Hamper.

Alice Helm French was an artist in her own right, known for landscapes, figure painting and illustrations. Her works were in several exhibits at the Art Institute between 1891 and 1914. Today, her works are in a number of collections, including the Vanderpoel Art Association at the Ridge Park Fieldhouse in Beverly (96th St. & Longwood Drive, 773-779-0007). John Vanderpoel taught for 30 years at the School of the Art Institute and was a North Beverly neighbor of the Frenches.

The French House. Photo by C. Flynn, 2010.

In 1894, William and Alice built their house at 9203 S. Pleasant Ave. at a cost of $10,000. The house was designed broadly within the Colonial Revival style by architect William Augustus Otis, who helped set up the program of architectural studies conducted by the Art Institute. It is believed that the "Y" in the sidewalk in front of the house is where the hitching post stood for the original Upwood estate of Thomas Morgan.

W. French was active in community activities. He was superintendent of the Sunday School of St. Paul's Evangelical Church of Longwood for 18 years. He also took a special interest in prisoners' aid work and served as vice-president of the National Prisoners' Aid Society. He was also a founding member of the American Association of Museums and its 1907-08 president; art editor of the Chicago Tribune for a number of years; and a member of the Chicago Literary Club from its founding in 1874 until his death in 1914, serving as president in 1912-13.

He was also a member of the Cliff Dwellers, a private club founded in 1907 for people seriously interested in the arts.

The Court of Honor and Grand Basin of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition showing the Statue of the Republic (Chicago, Ill.), wikipedia org

Daniel Chester French (1850 – 1931) was influenced by Louisa May Alcott's sister in his decision to pursue sculpting. He studied at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and in Florence, Italy, before beginning work on commissions. In 1893, his Statue of the Republic was the colossal centerpiece of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

This world's fair, held in Jackson Park and the Midway Plaisance, commemorated the 400th anniversary of the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the New World and was visited by over 25 million people.

The original 65-foot Republic was destroyed by fire in 1896, but D. French was commissioned to make a 24-foot, gilt-bronze replica in 1918 which stands today in Jackson Park.

Daniel Chester French in his studio with a model of the Lincoln statue behind him, ca. 1920. Unidentified photographer.

The Lincoln Memorial which stands in Washington, D.C. is the foremost monument to the first U. S. President to come from Illinois. The structure of the monument was designed by Henry Bacon. The statue of the seated Lincoln was carved in four years by the Piccirilli Brothers under the supervision of sculptor D. French.

The statue of Lincoln is 19 feet high and weighs 175 tons. Since the time of Lincoln's death in 1865, demands for a monument were heard, but it took until 1914 for plans to be agreed upon and financed, with the monument finally finished in 1922.

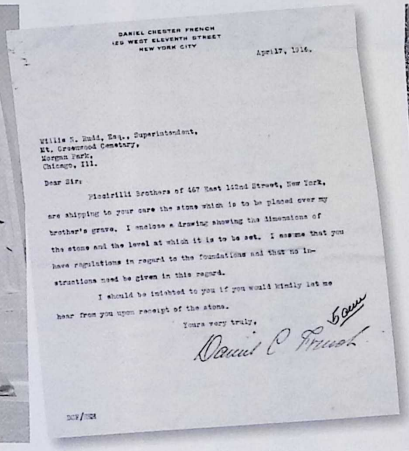
An urban legend associated with the sculpture claims that Lincoln is shown using sign language to represent his initials, with his left hand shaped to form an A and his right hand to form an L.

Historians have observed that, although there are no documents showing that French intended Lincoln's hands to be carved signing, it is possible that it could have been done on purpose because French had a son who was deaf and the family was familiar with American sign language.

Memory, the Marshall Field Memorial, at Graceland Cemetery. Photo by C. Flynn, 2011.

D. French completed a number of cemetery monuments, and in Chicago his most famous commission was *Memory, the Marshall Field Memorial*, at Graceland Cemetery. This masterpiece was completed in 1906 upon the death of Marshall Field at the age of 71 from pneumonia which he contracted while playing golf with Robert Todd Lincoln. French worked with architect Henry Bacon on the monument.

Bacon also made the base on which the Statue of the Republic stands today.



DANIEL CHESTER FRENCH
120 WEST ELEVENTH STREET
NEW YORK CITY

April7, 1916.

Willis N. Rudd, Esq., Superintendent,
Mt. Greenwood Cemetery,
Morgan Park,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir:

Piccirilli Brothers of 467 East 142nd Street, New York, are shipping to your care the stone which is to be placed over my brother's grave. I enclose a drawing showing the dimensions of the stone and the level at which it is to be set. I assume that you have regulations in regard to the foundations and that no instructions need be given in this regard.

I should be intobted to you if you would kindly let me hear from you upon receipt of the stone.

Yours very truly,

Daniel C French

DCF/MH

Copy of letter from Daniel Chester French to Mt. Greenwood Cemetery, 1916. Courtesy of Paula Everett, President, Mt. Greenwood Cemetery.

William French died in 1914 after a brief illness, and was laid to rest in Mt. Greenwood Cemetery. His brother Daniel commissioned a gravestone for his tomb, which was fashioned by the Piccirilli Brothers, the same who did the carving of the Lincoln statue. Alice moved to Massachusetts following her husband's death, but upon her death, was interred with her husband.

Daniel French, whose gravestone matches that of his brother, is buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, Concord, Mass.

Grave of William and Alice French, Mt. Greenwood Cemetery, Chicago, Ill., Photo by C. Flynn, 2011.

Grave of Daniel Chester French, Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, Concord, Mass. Courtesy of Find-A-Grave.com.

Mickelberry's article inspires feedback

By Carol Flynn

RHS received several comments on the article on Mickelberry's Restaurant that appeared in the Winter newsletter.

Jim Joyce from Chicago wrote to us: "I enjoyed the Mickelberry article; people of a certain age enjoy the memories of places from their past. In the case of Mickelberrys, what building now occupies that space? Your article raises questions about other restaurants that once existed in our community. For instance, the Surrey, Snyders, Timberline or Timberlane, 107th& Western, the Swedish restaurant at 112th & Western, Pal Joeys at 103rd & Western and maybe a few others that others will remember. Maybe you could raise the question at a future meeting or in a future newsletter. I believe that your readers would enjoy reminiscing about the way things "used to be." P.S.: The famous Mickelberrys fire in the late '60s at 49th& Halsted was in the meat processing plant that made the famous sausage. Four firefighters lost their lives in that fire."

Answer: Mickelberry's was located at 2300 W. 95th Street, just a block east of Western, on the north side of the street. Today, there is a strip mall there which includes a Chase Bank and a Chipolte Restaurant.

We would be happy to run pictures of other restaurants, or any businesses, from the past.

Betty Hess from Normal, Ill., wrote to us:

"[Here are] Summer of '46 pictures of uniforms and employees of Mickelberry Restaurant. I don't have personal data except that one girl Julie MacKenzie, deceased, is noted on back (Photo on right). I am wondering if the woman in one picture is Mrs. Mickelberry (she was the hostess).

Julie's father was the minister of the Congregational Church in Morgan Park. Julie and I worked from opening to closing with 2 hours off in the afternoon and saved enough to pay our college fees for one year.

A personal story – there was a waitress of retirement age though no one retired then. We called her "old Mary" and the story was that she worked only to pay her horse betting expenses. I [also] had three aunts who worked in various capacities earlier."

Answer: Thank you for the wonderful pictures, which we are printing here. Betty – you didn't tell us if you were one of the waitresses in the pictures! Can anyone identify the others?

House Doctors study our headquarters

By Joseph F. O'Connor, RHS Board Member, House and Grounds Committee Co-Chair

House doctors visited RHS in January when we held the program "Slate and Tile Roofs Do Not Last Forever!" Bob and Carl Lukis of Mortenson Roofing Co. Inc., and Jan Glowacki of Restorations by Marion led a discussion on how to maintain a slate or tile roof, using the Graver-Driscoll House (RHS Headquarters) at age 90 as an example; photos/slides of the condition of the slates, flashing, parapet walls, and chimney were viewed.

RHS has occupied this splendid residence for nearly 40 years. In the ten years prior to RHS occupancy four different families owned the residence. One of the great enemies of slate roofs is short term tenure which often means short term thinking on maintenance issues. It appears that the most significant roofing issue in the house history was the removal of the slate roof from the two car garage at the north end of the house. We are happy to have those slates stored in the garage.

Although we used the Graver-Driscoll House as the example, the points covered in the program are relevant to all homeowners who have slate or tile roofs. The roofing experts helped us identify a number of issues.

Roofing tar is cheap but it ruins slate and accelerates the deterioration of flashing metal. As the mastic weathers it invariably shrinks and cracks. This creates an opening that traps water. The Graver-Driscoll House shows evidence of cracked roofing cement along the steel flashings still in place on our parapet walls and chimneys. What is going on behind those flashings is likely to be deterioration of the mortar in the brickwork. Luckily use of tar on the slate is not wide spread.

Parapet walls are walls that rise above the roof line and are covered by copings. The tops of our parapet walls are covered by beautiful Bedford limestone copings in sections that are about three feet long. Joints between the sections show some loss of mortar and some shifting has occurred. As is the case with the Graver-Driscoll House, these sections of stone are often too heavy for a man to lift safely, and given the height of the needed repairs along the parapet walls, scaffolding and heavy pulleys are a necessary feature of repair work.

Graver-Driscoll House roof area showing how loss of mortar and shifting has occurred. Photo by J. O'Connor, 2010.

Copper valleys are an important part of the high quality roof system originally installed on the Graver-Driscoll House. Roof surfaces that meet at an angle are separated by a valley which serves as a high speed waterway to a lower level. If you remember that running water over time will reduce stone to sand, you will understand that the Achilles heel of any roof is in its valleys. No matter what material a roof is made of, a copper valley is money well spent. Valleys retain moisture longer as ice and snow. The freeze and thaw cycle claws the valley. The best valley surface is copper because it is smooth and will not rust.

The copper valleys at RHS appear to be original and thus 90 years old. Copper eventually fails by wearing thin and small holes appear. An experienced eye is needed to identify these holes. Even a small hole in valley copper can admit a lot of water given the volume carried in the

See House Doctors, page 6

A busy spring At Ridge Historical Society

By Doris Moulton, President

Just like at home it seems that "clean up" fever is working its spell at headquarters. The dining room has been stripped of its 26-year-old wallpaper and it will soon be completely redecorated thanks to the efforts of Joe O'Connor, Herman Schell, Mati Maldre, Nick Pillarella, and the Morgan Park Juniors. The archives room is also undergoing transformation – new storage boxes and shelving units. A new laptop computer and programs have been purchased to greatly facilitate our effort to have all records on computer. (Here we must thank Maureen and Pat Gilligan, Sarah Berkey, Sue Cummings and Peg Kapustiak).

Outdoors, Herman Schell is supervising work on the grounds. Mary and Kurt Olsson and Gwen Stuart have donated American flags for our Longwood Drive flagpole.

We will soon install 15 new engraved pavers on the terrace. A paver order blank is included in this letter. If you don't already have a paver, I hope you will consider adding your family's name(s); or that of an organization which you feel contributed to the community's way of life; or a noteworthy event which should be remembered. I look upon the pavers as part of the historic record of all that is, or was, good about Beverly/Morgan Park. They evoke many great memories.

Hope to see you at the Bike Race party or do simply pop in during the next few months to check what's going on. Have a good summer!

It's good-bye to the 1980s wallpaper in the Graver-Driscoll House dining room. Photo by C. Flynn, 2011

Editor
Carol Flynn

Newsletter committee
Sue Delves
Carol Flynn
Doris Moulton

Designer
Greg Lochow

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A newsletter subscription is a benefit of membership.

Annual dues
Student (<18) $10
Individual $25
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House Doctors, from page 5

channel. The valleys at RHS have some holes, most the size of a pencil lead, and one section of valley has slipped below its intended overlap position. In replacing valleys, the gauge or thickness of copper to be used should be discussed. Flashings on walls and chimneys commonly use 16 gauge, but 20 or even 24 gauge should be considered for valleys and scuppers. Gauge numbers indicate weight in ounces per square foot of copper.

The Graver-Driscoll House has two chimneys. The chimney on the west elevation vents a wood burning fireplace in the living room that has not been used since 1972 when RHS ownership began. The exterior of this chimney is in good shape and it presents a useful point of comparison to the chimney on the north elevation of the house. The gas fired boiler and hot water heater vent through the north chimney which is metal lined. The limestone top has shifted and some mortar in the brickwork above the parapet has popped out. The expansion and contraction caused by the hot gases passing up the flue is the reason why the north chimney demands more attention. The section of the chimney extending above the house wall is most exposed to temperature variation. Because the deterioration has worked primarily from the inside out (thermo-dynamic force), rebuilding the upper section of chimneys on older homes is a common repair.

Our examination turned finally to issue of "oxide jacking" that occurs when structural metal embedded in brick walls begins to rust. The Graver-Driscoll house was built using flat steel lintels to carry the weight of brickwork over the widow openings. We have some of this lintel steel still around and it was not galvanized to resist rust. The house was also built using lime putty mortar that was typical of

See House Doctors, page 7

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House Doctors, from page 6

masonry construction before 1930. This mortar was replaced by cement mortars in the 1930s for speed of application because lime mortar dries slowly. Lime-only mortar is more moisture-breathable and sheds water better. It has the capacity to "self heal" when small cracks occur as they invariably do by using the invasive moisture to reactivate the lime to close the crack. By contrast, cement based mortar dries quickly to inflexible hardness. When shifting or wear opens cracks the invasive water becomes a trapped troublemaker.

Graver-Driscoll House roof area showing damage to the copper flashing. Photo by J. O'Connor, 2010.

The good news is that the oxide jacking above two of our windows has now been discovered and explained as an issue that must be addressed, even though it is not an immediate urgency. It is easy to mistake this problem in its early stage as merely a bit of tuckpoint failure without appreciating the powerful upward driving force that occurs as rusting metal expands. Rusting lintels must be removed and the bricks that are reset after the new galvanized metal is installed should be set in a mortar compatible with the lime mortar used in the original construction.

Every home owner knows there is a ghost lurking somewhere on the premises that goes by the name "the cost of doing nothing". Ridge Historical Society plans to serve this community far into the future. We are confronting our roofing ghost by developing a plan that will address the needed repairs and the costs of these repairs. We will keep the membership appraised of the situation. We also hope that this information will prove beneficial to those of you experiencing similar issues with your historic homes.

Mark your calendar for these exciting events

FRIDAY, JULY 8, 2011, 5:00 P.M. TO 9:00 P.M.

Carl Spencer Memorial Bike Race Party at RHS, 10621 S. Seeley Ave.

Held in conjunction with the Beverly Hills Cycling Classic.

Includes a hot buffet supper; wine, beer and soft drinks; desserts.

Cost: $40 per adult for RHS members; $50 for non-members.

The late Carl Spencer rode his bike in dozens of countries! Photo from RHS exhibit.

See flyer in this newsletter for reservation form or call 773-881-1675 or e-mail ridgehistory@hotmail.com.

Upcoming RHS Programs - June opening date TBA

Down The Aisle, 1860 to 1960

Photo by C. Flynn, 2011

Gowns from our collection worn by local ladies will be shown as well as wedding memorabilia from the past. The exhibit will run to September.

We would be happy to incorporate wedding related ephemera and objects (not gowns) from our readers – on loan, or as a donation to the collection. Please contact Pat McGrail about this at mpmcgr@aol.com.

There is the possibility of one or more teas in conjunction with this exhibit; dates TBA. Watch the Beverly Review and Villager for more information!

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