

Vanderpoel Art Association turns one hundred years old

By Carol Flynn

The Vanderpoel Art Association (VAA) was founded in 1914 as a memorial to John H. Vanderpoel, a Beverly Hills resident and artist, who was best known as a premier art instructor at the Art Institute of Chicago. VAA is located on the second floor of the Ridge Park Field House at 9625 S. Longwood

Drive. The gallery is open on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m., Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., or by appointment at 773-779-0007.

VAA contains over 600 pieces of art, mostly paintings, with some drawings and sculptures. Over 100 Chicago artists are represented in the collection - key artists who helped

shape Chicago's art history, including Lorado Taft and Macena Alberta Barton. In addition, the VAA collection includes works by Mary Cassatt, Edward Dufner, Daniel Chester French, Maxfield Parrish and many other noted artists. This impressive collection was assembled almost entirely through donations.

The collection and gallery is named for Dutch-born artist John H. Vanderpoel (1857-1911). The Vanderpoel family emigrated from Holland when John was 12, settling in Chicago. According to literature from VAA, a playground injury caused young Vanderpoel to be

hospitalized, where out of boredom he began drawing. His talent was readily apparent, and he became obsessed with becoming an artist. Employed in a shop selling wall paper, he used the backs of the rolls to practice his art. His employer fired him "before the whole of the store's supply was ruined."

He was awarded a scholarship to the Academy of Design, which eventually evolved into the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1880, he was appointed assistant art instructor, and later a fellowship allowed him to study in Paris. Returning to Chicago, he mounted exhibits, and was named head

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Frank Weston Benson (left to right), sculpture of "The Entomologist Viereck" by Charles Grafly, unidentified man, John H. Vanderpoel, Martin Ryerson (most likely), and Ralph Elmer Clarkson at the 1893 Columbian Exposition. Source: Joel Dryer

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instructor at the Art Institute. He exhibited five paintings and was a juror for artwork at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

His book *The Human Figure* became a standard textbook for art school students and led to Vanderpoel developing a reputation as one of America's foremost authorities on figure drawing. One of his students at the Art Institute was Georgia O'Keeffe, who praised Vanderpoel as "one of the few real teachers I have known."

Vanderpoel took a leave of absence in late 1910 to

move to St. Louis to head a museum and establish an art program. In May of 1911 Vanderpoel suddenly died from a heart attack. He was survived by his wife, Jessie, and two children, Dorothy and David. Vanderpoel is buried in Mt. Greenwood Cemetery.

Vanderpoel's Beverly Hills friends and supporters formed the Vanderpoel Memorial Association shortly after his death. One of their first actions was to petition the city to name a street and an existing school for him, hence Vanderpoel Avenue, and the John H. Vanderpoel Elementary School at



In 1910 John Vanderpoel moved to St. Louis to head up the drawing and painting division of the People's University Art Academy. Vanderpoel (in the dark coat) is standing in the center. This photograph appeared in "The Siege of University City," by Sidney Morse, published in 1912.

9510 S. Prospect Ave.

In 1914, his friends bought one of Vanderpoel's paintings, "The Buttermakers," and installed it in the Vanderpoel School. Artists were invited to contribute works to continue this memorial. While in St. Louis, Vanderpoel had become friends with John A.

Campbell, who became instrumental in gathering and maintaining the VAA collection for 35 years.

By 1929 the collection was too large to be housed in the school and arrangements were made with Ridge Park District to move the collection there. In 1933, the Chicago



"The Buttermakers" by John H. Vanderpoel was the first painting in the collection, purchased by the Vanderpoel Memorial Association. It is one of only a few paintings actually paid for by the VAA; almost all others have been donated. It hung in Vanderpoel School for many years before moving to the Ridge Park gallery. Photo by C. Flynn.



The John H. Vanderpoel House at 9319 S. Pleasant Ave. still stands today. Matilda Vanderpoel reported that her brother John moved into this house in 1897. Matilda also revealed that the initial "H" in her brother's name didn't stand for anything - it was used to distinguish him from his father and another brother, Jan. The family always called John "Van" as his nickname. Photo by C. Flynn.



"Landscape," an oil painting by Arno Bretsnyder, was received by VAA in 1969. Photo by C. Flynn.

Park District was formed and took over Ridge Park. The Chicago Park District has stated, "One of the truly great community assets ... is the Vanderpoel Art Gallery in Ridge Park. The far-sighted residents of this community who conceived this institution and labored for its success deserve great credit for their service to the ... City of Chicago."

From 1969 to 2003, VAA partnered with the Morgan Park Academy to display the collection in a gallery at the Academy. That gallery closed when the Beverly Arts Center was built, and VAA returned to Ridge Park.

Other Beverly-area artists

The VAA collection includes works by several Beverly-area artists. One is Arno Bretsnyder, who lived by Ridge Park and studied

under Vanderpoel at the Art Institute. He joined a group called "Sanity in Art" which was a reaction against modernism. His Impressionist oil painting, "Landscape," represents his work at VAA. In addition to landscapes, he also was known for his Western paintings depicting subjects like the Pony Express.

Alice Helm French is represented by her 1915 pastel, "In the Garden." Alice was born in Lake Forest, Illinois, and studied at the Art Institute, where she met her future husband, William M. R. French, the first executive director of the Art Institute. In 1894, they built their house at 9203 S. Pleasant St., where it still stands as a Beverly landmark. French's brother was Daniel Chester French, the sculptor who created the Lincoln statue in the Lincoln Memorial



"In the Garden" was painted by Alice Helm French, who lived in Beverly with her husband William M. R. French, director of the Art Institute. The Frenches help establish VAA. Photo by C. Flynn.

in Washington, D.C. Alice's "In the Garden" was painted at the residence of Daniel Chester French on the east coast and donated by Alice to the Vanderpoel collection in 1915. Alice is sometimes credited with giving the name "Beverly" to the northern section of the Ridge, following a visit to Beverly, Massachusetts.

Vanderpoel's younger sister, Matilda, was also a painter and an instructor at the Art Institute. She lived in Beverly at 9319 S. Pleasant, down the street from her brother's house. Matilda shared family history with VAA, and donated her personal sketch books and other materials.

Matilda spent her summers in Gold Hill, Boulder County, CO, where the family also owned property. She loved it out there and many of her paintings are landscapes from this area. Several of her paintings are in the VAA collection, including "Abandoned Mine Shaft."

Newsletter space permits only a very brief introduction to the Vanderpoel Art Association. There is no place else like it in Chicago; a local gallery with a world-class collection of fine art. Rich in history and culture, it is a true "destination spot" in Beverly and a visit there should be on any art-lover's or history

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buff's "to-do" list.

Research in progress

Who came first to Beverly – William M. R. French or John H. Vanderpoel? This question is an excellent example to demonstrate how the historians of RHS can help research a topic.

French was the first executive director of the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC), a



Matilda Vanderpoel was John's youngest surviving sister, an artist and instructor at the Art Institute. Matilda and John both had Georgia O'Keeffe as a pupil. Picture from www.boulderhistory.org.



"The Abandoned Mine Shaft" was painted by Matilda Vanderpoel, who was instrumental in furthering the collection named in memory of her brother. Photo by C. Flynn.

position he held for 35 years. He was in this position when John H. Vanderpoel was hired as an instructor at the AIC school. French had a home built at 9203 S. Pleasant Ave. in 1894. John Vanderpoel moved to 9319 S. Pleasant in 1897, according to Vanderpoel's sister, Matilda. For years, French has been credited with persuading Vanderpoel to move to Beverly. Everyone "knew" this to be so; it has been in the literature that way for decades.

But Sid Hamper, chairman of the board of the Vanderpoel Art Association, remembered coming across an address in the history files of the gallery – 10352 S. Walden Parkway – that he thought had been an earlier address of someone in the Vanderpoel family – Vanderpoel's

father, perhaps? He thought it was likely that Vanderpoel had a connection to Beverly prior to the arrival of the Frenches. This led Linda Lamberty, RHS Historian and an expert genealogist and researcher, and Carol Flynn, RHS Newsletter Editor, off on a quest to find out when the various parties arrived on the Ridge.

Using census data, newspaper articles, old address directories, and other records, the following information, presented in chronological order, was discovered:

1889 – A Chicago directory listed both John H. Vanderpoel and his father living at 1157 S. Western.

1890 – John H. Vanderpoel married Jessie Elizabeth Humphries in Chicago on Dec. 23; French also married Alice Helm in 1890.

1891 – A Chicago directory listed Jessie's parents living at "W. Meridian near Tracy Ave." in Calumet Township. Tracy was 103rd Street, West Meridian was Walden Parkway.

1893 – A daughter, Dorothy, was born to Jessie and John at the Tracy address on December 17. The VAA also has a calling

card in its collection which reads, "Mr. & Mrs. John H. Vanderpoel, At Home Thursdays in February, Tracy Avenue." The card is not dated but does show that the Vanderpoels lived on Tracy.

1900 – The U.S. Census lists John and Jessie Vanderpoel and her parents as living (renting, not owning) in the house at 9319 S. Pleasant.

Note that the new research findings show two things. First, it was John's in-laws, the Humphries, who lived in Beverly. And second and most important, this new research now puts John H. Vanderpoel in Beverly by 1893, at least four years earlier than he was presumed to have first arrived here, and a year before the Frenches had their house built on Pleasant Ave.

It cannot be said with complete certainty that Vanderpoel preceded the Frenches to Beverly until more research is conducted on the Frenches – did they have a connection to Beverly before building their house here in 1894? At press time, the investigation was still on-going!

Jack Simmerling's legacy of preservation and history

By Carol Flynn

John J. "Jack" Simmerling (1935-2013) was well known in the Ridge communities as a talented artist and the owner of the Heritage Gallery on 103rd St. His paintings grace the walls of many residences and businesses in the area. But Jack was also an avid historian and preservationist. He was a founding member of RHS.

Jack was the owner of the historic Ingersoll-Blackwelder House 10910 S. Prospect Ave. The Italianate back of the house was built in 1874 for grain broker John Ingersoll, and the Queen Anne front was added in 1877

by the Blackwelders, prominent citizens of the time. Isaac Blackwelder was at one time Morgan Park Village President, and his wife Gertrude was the first woman to vote in Cook County following the 1913 law that allowed women to vote for more than just school officials.

When Jack bought the Blackwelder House, it was in a dilapidated state. He told stories of how the roof had caved in, allowing the elements to freely invade the interior. The main internal staircase was so covered with ice and snow, you could literally sled down the stairs from the second floor bedrooms to the first floor entrance

hall. But Jack lovingly restored the house and his family spent many years there.

As a teen-ager, Jack became enthralled with the historic mansions in Chicago, particularly those in what is now the Prairie Avenue Historic District, centered around the Glessner House Museum at 1800 S. Prairie Ave. In the late 1800s, Prairie Ave. was the place to live. Socially prominent businessmen such as George Pullman, Marshall Field, Philip Armour and William Kimball among others all had mansions built in the area, employing some of the leading architects of the day. Richard Morris Hunt,

H. H. Richardson, Burnham and Root, and William LeBaron Jenny were just some of the architects who designed buildings erected in the Prairie Ave. district.

But by the early 1900s, the area began to fall into decline, and by the time young Jack discovered the mansions, many were in ruins and being demolished. At that point, Jack began a lifelong quest to preserve as much as he could of the legacy of these fine buildings. He captured many views of the homes in his paintings, and rescued a wealth of architectural and internal design features from the homes as they came down.

One of the most touching projects of a teen-aged Jack was to reconstruct in miniature the facades and interiors of some of the houses. Primitive though they may be as architectural models, these miniatures take on folk art status and



Jack Simmerling's miniature representations of Prairie Ave. mansions are now on display at the Glessner House Museum. Many of them were restored for and displayed at RHS's Small Wonder exhibit in 2005. Photo by C. Flynn.

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RHS raises new flag for Veterans Day

By Carol Flynn

RHS celebrated Veterans Day, November 11, 2014, by raising a new U. S. flag on the front lawn of the Longwood Drive side of the Graver-Driscoll House, RHS Headquarters. The flag was donated by Elaine Spencer in honor of her late husband, Carl Spencer; and Marilyn Stone, RHS member, mother of RHS Historian Linda Lamberty, and a good friend of the Spencer family. Carl Spencer was a Board Emeritus member of RHS. Born on Flag Day (June 14), Carl had a strong patriotic allegiance to the flag, and always saw to it that RHS had a new flag regularly.

The Morgan Park Woman's Club, headed by President Doris Moulton, held its November meeting at RHS that day to be able to participate in the event. MPWC provided a nice repast of appetizers and desserts and beverages for those in attendance.

Boy Scout Troop 609 from the Morgan Park Baptist Church served as Honor Guard to post the new flag

and retire the old one, played "Reveille" and led the attendees in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. Several veterans were able to attend, including Bill Sandstrom, past RHS Treasurer and Board member emeritus, who served in the U.S. Navy; Cliff Hullinger who served in the U.S. Army; and Harry Tunnehill, who served in the U.S. Marines. RHS President Edris Hoover officiated at the event.

By way of a little history ... Veterans Day was originally founded as

Armistice Day in 1919 by President Woodrow Wilson, to recognize the ending of World War I at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918, when the Armistice with Germany went into effect. Following World War II, the idea was expanded to celebrate all veterans.

In 1954, Congress replaced "Armistice" with "Veterans."

Veterans Day celebrates all who have served in the U. S. military. It is distinguished from Memorial Day, the last Monday in May, which remembers those who died while serving.



Veterans Day was celebrated at RHS with the raising of a new U.S. flag donated in memory of Carl Spencer. Photos by Greg Lochow.

Annual Fund appeal underway

RHS members and supporters recently received the annual fund appeal letter from President Edris Hoover.

RHS is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit, private organization. We receive no public funds except in grants we may obtain. Donations

help support the costs of maintaining the collection and the building, assisting patrons in research, and educating the public through programs, exhibits and publications.

As a special incentive, all donors whose contributions

are recorded by January 31, 2015, will be entered into a drawing to win a one-week, two-bedroom time share accommodation in Orlando, Florida or St. Martin, N. A. A generous board member is donating this prize, which can

also be exchanged for use at over 1000 international resorts, depending on availability. The winner's name will be drawn at the RHS Annual meeting on February 8, 2015.

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have come to represent Jack's devotion to preserving history.

In 2005, Jack visited RHS during one of the showings of Small Wonder, the dollhouse and miniatures exhibit that RHS ran through the Christmas holidays. He mentioned to Linda Lamberty, now RHS Historian, that he had done these miniatures a good 50-55 years previously, and that he still had them in storage. Linda asked, and Jack agreed, to lend the miniatures to RHS for Small Wonder. Carol Flynn, the owner of the Dollhouse Corner and a major exhibitor and presenter at Small Wonder, cleaned and restored Jack's minis and they went on display. This was the

first time the dioramas had seen the light of day in decades.

Jack displayed these miniatures in his home following Small Wonder. By now the Ingersoll-Blackwelder House had taken on the aura of a museum, as Jack displayed many of the items he had rescued from buildings. He later allowed RHS to mount an exhibit of some of his other artifacts.

During the years, Jack had become a friend and benefactor to the Glessner House Museum. The Glessner House, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, was built in 1886-87 and is one of the few surviving mansions in the Prairie Ave. district. It was built for John and Frances Glessner, who had a farm implement

business that eventually merged with other businesses to become International Harvester. In his later years, Jack made arrangements for his collection of Prairie Ave. artifacts to transfer in its entirety to Glessner House.

Jack's collection has finally returned home to Prairie Ave. On Dec. 1, the Glessner House opened the Simmerling Gallery of Prairie Avenue History. At this point, it is just a small exhibit of some of Jack's collection and the rest of the items are in storage, but plans

were announced to raise funds to build out a larger permanent gallery. Information on the Glessner House and the Simmerling Gallery can be had from the website www.glessnerhouse.org, and by contacting the museum at 312/326-1480 or glessnerhouse@sbcglobal.net. A visit to this unique house and its collections, not only that of Jack Simmerling but also many fine items from the Arts and Crafts Movement, is well worth the time and effort.

Mark your calendar for this exciting event

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2015

RHS Annual Meeting and Program

Details will be forthcoming – save the date!

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WINTER 2014 ISSUE



Boy Scouts honor veterans on November 11

Boy Scout Troop 609 from the Morgan Park Baptist Church served as Honor Guard to post a new flag in front of the Graver-Driscoll House. Veterans in attendance included Bill Sandstrom (left), who served in the U.S. Navy; Cliff Hullinger, who served in the U.S. Army; and Harry Tunnehill, who served in the U.S. Marines.

Full story on page six. Photo by Greg Lochow.