

If you look above, at the frieze, in this corner [at the Cliff Dwellers Club], just below the Howard Van Doren Shaw inspired, barrel vaulted ceiling, you will find the name of Frederick Clay Bartlett stenciled, albeit there is a “k” at the end of “Frederic” where there should be none. The reason for this memorialization is that Bartlett was a founder of the Attic Club, which was incorporated in August 1907. A few months later, the club was renamed the “Cliff Dwellers” in a nod to the Anasazi Indians who dwelled in Arizona and New Mexico.

Hamlin Garland, the first president of the club, had visited the dwellings in 1895 with artists Charles Francis Browne and Herman Atkins McNeil. In fact, Garland wrote about their experience in his book, *A Daughter of the Middle Border*. Fascinated by the local tribes and their history, they brought back many curios. If you are interested, you can see Bartlett’s signature on the incorporation papers, under glass, along the North wall of the club. This leads me into my paper, the title and subject of which, while being a short biography of Mr. Bartlett, states that, “Everywhere you look, there he is.

Frederic Clay Bartlett was one of four children, who, owing to their father’s legacy, were wealthy, and philanthropic. His sister, Maie Bartlett Heard, founded the Heard Museum in Phoenix. Another sister, Florence Dibell Bartlett, founded The Museum of International Folk Art in New Mexico. She also funded free lectures at the Art Institute, held every Thursday evening, for those unable to attend the museum during the daytime. The museum continues to remain open on Thursday nights. His brother, Frank Dickinson Bartlett, a Harvard student, died of appendicitis.

Frederic’s father, Adolphus Clay Bartlett, or “A.C.”, has quite an interesting history. Born in upstate New York in 1844, his lineage traces back to Plymouth, where his ancestors landed two hundred years earlier.<sup>i</sup> A.C.’s father was a prosperous lumber merchant, but died when A.C. was but ten years old. As a boy, A.C. was unusually cheerful and bright, receiving the highest marks in every classroom. In 1863, at the age of nineteen, he departed for Chicago, to enter upon a career in business.

Here he secured a clerkship in the wholesale hardware store of Tuttle, Hibbard and Company. Chicago, with a population of 150,000, was growing rapidly. In another seven years, it would double in size, and in ten more years double again, followed by yet another doubling ten years hence. Hibbard bought out Tuttle, and formed Hibbard and Spencer, with a new partner. By 1867, the company's annual sales of hardware had reached one million dollars. A year later, the firm enacted a revolutionary profit sharing plan. Young A.C., who had risen to head of sales, benefitted handsomely from the new profits scheme. By 1871, now only twenty-seven years old, he had earned and saved enough to buy a partner's share of the expanding company.



Adolphus C. Bartlett

The same year that A.C. had invested everything into the partnership, the Chicago fire wiped out their inventory. However, the firm's owners were enterprising, and they arranged for other wholesalers to fill their orders. With the generosity of both debtors and creditors, they promptly rebuilt the business. By 1903, when A.C. became President of the Company, they occupied an immense eleven-story building on State Street, and an equally sizeable warehouse nearby. The firm would later be known as Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett and Company, which was the progenitor of True Value Hardware.

During his tenure, it became one of the largest hardware wholesalers in the world.

A.C. invested liberally in the common stock of local companies. He became a director of the Chicago and Alton Railroad, as well as the First National Bank of Chicago. He was also a founder and director of the Northern Trust Bank, and close friends with majority shareholder Byron L. Smith. A.C. was a member of many clubs including the Union League, the Chicago, the Commercial, the Caxton, the Quadrangle and our own Chicago Literary Club. He was a trustee of the University of Chicago and for thirty-five years, a

governing member and trustee of the Art Institute. When Daniel Burnham's Plan of Chicago was to be executed, A. C. headed the Finance Committee. The *Tribune* reported that he was the third-wealthiest man in the city. It was into this prominent Prairie Avenue family that Frederic Clay was born in 1873.

Frederic attended the Harvard School for Boys in Chicago, and at the age of fifteen, he entered the prestigious St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire, for two years of study. Reaching the age of eighteen, he followed his ambition, supported by his father, and enrolled in the School of the Art Institute, probably studying under Frederick Freer, who encouraged Bartlett to pursue studies in Munich. At that time, Munich was a considerably more popular destination for budding Chicago artists than Paris. Bartlett, and his life-long friend and Prairie Avenue neighbor, Robert Allerton, stayed in Chicago long enough to visit the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. They were "wildly excited" to see the paintings at the World's Fair. In his autobiography, he said of the experience, "we pledged our lives to the creation of beauty and forthwith determined to leave the security and luxury of home." After the fair, they set sail for Germany.

Bartlett was very talented, and within a year, his German master submitted his student's drawings for entrance to the Munich Royal Academy of Art. Each year, one hundred new students were admitted to the Royal Academy. However, foreigners were limited to just ten new entrants. To Bartlett's surprise, he was admitted. He sent a wire to tell his father of the good news, and later found that A. C. was so proud of his acceptance, he had framed and hung the cable in his dressing room.

In the spring of 1896, he finished his studies at the Royal Academy, and was engaged to Dora Tripp, whom he had met while they were both studying art in Munich. She was the daughter of a prominent White Plains, New York doctor. In the fall of 1896 he moved to Paris to continue his art studies. He proved to be as hard-working and as industrious as his father. He attended morning classes at the Ecole Collin, afternoon classes with Edmund Aman-Jean, and evening classes at the Académie Colarossi. He traveled frequently back to the U.S. to visit Dora, and they were married in 1898. They decided to

live in Paris, as the great artist James MacNeil Whistler had opened a school there. Bartlett was among the first to enroll.

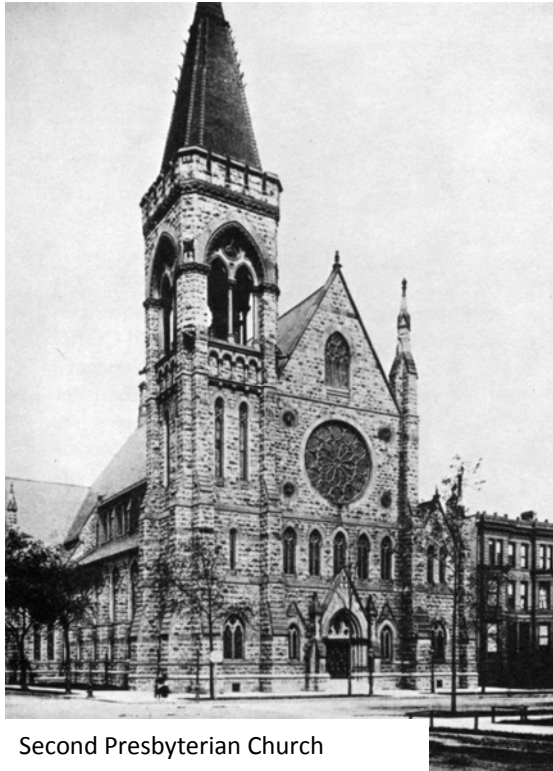
When Whistler arrived for his weekly criticism of the student's works, he stopped at a painting of a figure by Bartlett. After commenting favorably on the feet, Whistler repainted everything except the feet. At the end of class, Bartlett secured the painting in his locker because he had ridden his bicycle to school. The next day, eager to collect his valuable prize, he set out to school in a cab. When he opened his locker, the Whistler painting was gone. Whistler's model Carmen, who was head of the school, regularly absconded with any painting Whistler had touched in class, in order to secure the valuable artworks for herself. (As a footnote to the Whistler painting, the canvas turned up some sixteen years later, at the Pan-Pacific International Exhibition, in San Francisco. Noted American collector, and Whistler patron, Charles Freer, had purchased the work, and loaned it to the exhibition. In San Francisco, Bartlett saw his feet, and Whistler's figure.)

In 1898 Bartlett met the great French muralist, Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, who offered to provide free criticism, if Bartlett would pursue some mural studies. Bartlett later credited the great artist with encouraging him in mural painting, something he would pursue successfully throughout his career. While in Paris, Bartlett was honored as one of the few Americans whose work was accepted by the jury of the Paris Salon.

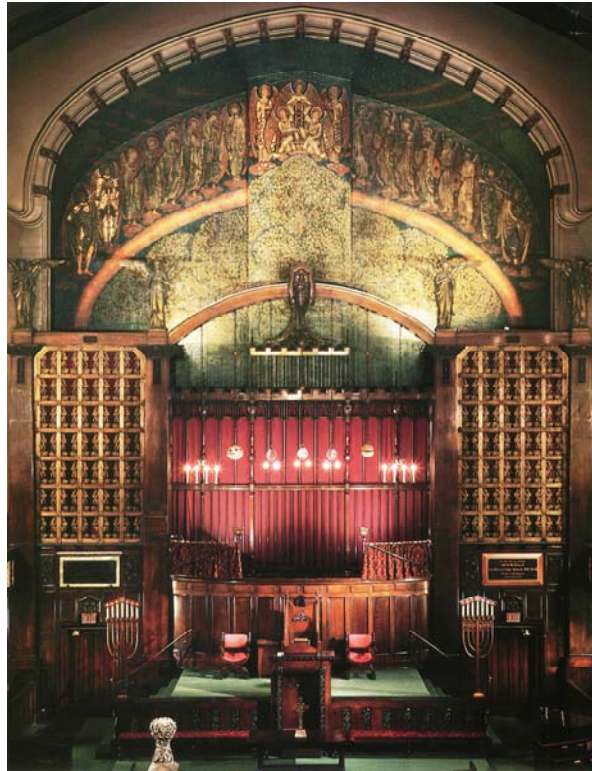
The couple moved briefly to Munich, and then returned to Chicago in 1900, where Bartlett took a studio in the Fine Arts Building, here on Michigan Avenue. Dora cut a stunning figure in Chicago Society. One article commented, "Mrs. Frederic Bartlett was one of the handsomest women seen at the opera on Monday evening. The masses of her pale golden hair showed gloriously...those who know her realize that she is one of the beauties of the city."<sup>ii</sup>

That same year, Bartlett received an important commission to paint the nave, and a series of murals, at the Second Presbyterian Church of Chicago. Architect Howard Van Doren Shaw had hired his friend Bartlett, along with Tiffany, and La Farge, to provide

the interior decorations. Bartlett painted twelve murals to fill the recesses along the sides of the church that were described as, “the crowning feature of the interior.” He also designed the candelabrum, in partnership with Van Doren Shaw. The murals were considered so important at the time, that *House Beautiful* featured them on the cover of their magazine. Today, if you haven’t already seen its spectacular interior, at 1936 South Michigan, you may visit the unchanged structure. It stands nearby the once fashionable Prairie Avenue, where many of its parishioners lived. This is a good example of my paper’s title, “Everywhere you look there he is.”



Second Presbyterian Church



In 1902, the Bartletts built a house at 2901 Prairie Avenue, just two blocks from his childhood home. Designed by Frost & Granger, the residence was named “Dorfred House.” One of Chicago’s great mansions, it contained a one thousand square foot art studio, with a twenty foot high ceiling. Opulent to an extreme, the reception area was known as the “Pompeian Room,” and the house included an Italian Renaissance music room and library with a Louis the Sixteenth inspired dining room. The couple filled their

home with the antiques and artwork they had collected while living in Europe. Dorfred House was featured on the cover of *House Beautiful* and in a full page, special section spread, in the *Sunday Chicago Tribune*. One newspaper article exclaimed that the house, “[had] taken rank as one of the rarest artistic homes of this country.”<sup>iii</sup> Another called it, “probably the most beautiful in Chicago.”<sup>iv</sup> Today, the address contains an expanse of parkland, as most of the Prairie Avenue mansions have long since vanished. A few of his neighbor’s homes still exist, most notably the Glessner House.



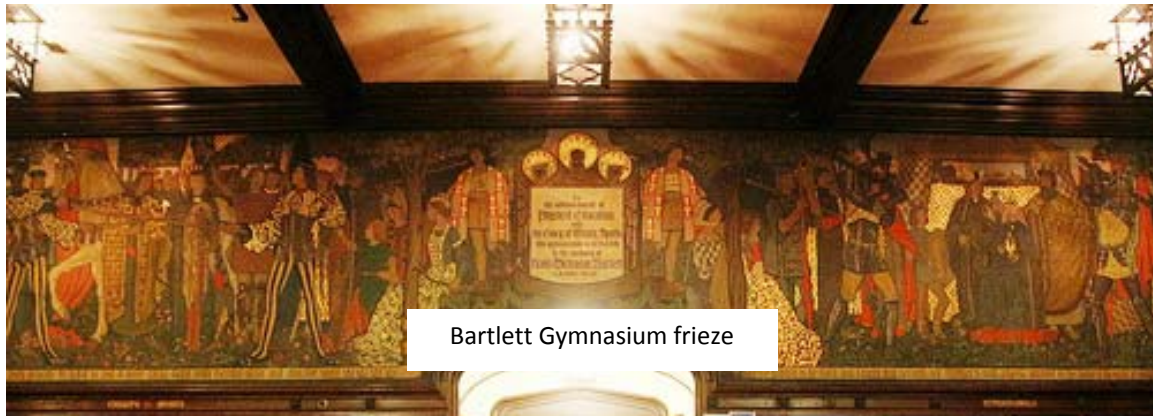
DorFred House

Around this time, Bartlett was interviewed by a newspaper, and asked his views about money and its impact upon an artist. Coming from the son of one of the wealthiest men in America, his comments shed a good deal of light on his character. He said, “If he has money, and art is all in all to him, he will work as hard as though driven to it by poverty....money is an advantage – most of all because it enables the artist to get an education, and the better educated the artist...the better will be his art – that is, if he truly loves his art, and works his best because he loves it.”<sup>v</sup>

In 1904 he completed a mural for the Bartlett Gymnasium, at the University of Chicago, that was built as a memorial to his deceased brother. This mural, which you may view



today, was awarded a Silver Medal at the World's Fair in St. Louis. It is another example of "everywhere you look."



He was extremely busy. In addition to his painting he was also teaching color composition, at the School of the Art Institute. There is no doubt that he was enjoying his love of art through hard work. As the school term ended, the Bartletts traveled to Spain, and then to Germany, where they stayed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century Grünwald Castle, as guests of a fellow American painter, who had rented it.

The following year, there was no let-up in his schedule. He completed a portrait for his father's friend, Marshall Field,<sup>vi</sup> an altar decoration for the Trinity Episcopal Church in Highland Park, lectured on mural painting at the Art Institute and the Chicago Architectural Club, exhibited at the Art Institute in four different group shows, became president of the Chicago Society of the Archaeological Institute of America, exhibited at the Carnegie Institute, and the Society of Western Artists, and over the summer, traveled to Europe.

The Chicago Woman's club commissioned him for a monumental series of murals at McKinley High School, for which he was paid, in today's value, \$30,000. They have since been painted over. Success also came at the easel as the Union League Club purchased one of his paintings from an Art Institute show. It hangs in the club today, and is another example of, "everywhere you look."

McKinley High School



Columnist Harriet Monroe had this to say about him, “the [works] of Mr. Bartlett’s prove not only that he possesses this rare decorative instinct, but that he has trained it to scholarly aptitude by thorough study

of the historic schools. He has preserved his own individuality, however....”

It was the same in 1906, busy, busy, busy. He completed his work at the Second Presbyterian Church, designed an entire “Streets of Paris” set for a hospital benefit inside of the Coliseum, lectured to the Architectural Club, completed decorations and murals for the New Theater in Chicago, won first prize at the Society of Western artists, and exhibited in two Art Institute shows. He also executed the interior decorations of the *House in the Woods*, which was a mansion his father built on the shore of Lake Geneva. Designed by their friend Howard Van Doren Shaw, it accommodated both A.C. and Frederic’s family. Dora was now pregnant with their son. The summer residence was selected by *Ladies Home Journal* as one of the twelve most beautiful country homes in America. It was featured in both *House and Garden*, and *Beautiful Gardens in America*. That it still stands today is a testament to the quality of its construction. It’s another example of “everywhere you look”.





As 1907 opened, Bartlett was honored with a one-man exhibition at the Art Institute, and the birth of his son Clay, who, later in life, like his father, lived the trappings of a



wealthy man, but plied his trade as an artist. Now just thirty-three years of age, Bartlett's work was continually praised in the press. Many columnists appreciated the fact that he didn't need to work, as wealthy as he was, and put his heart and soul into art. This was the year he helped to found the Attic, or Cliff Dwellers Club. He had earlier joined our Chicago Literary Club, but after two years, he found the demands of his work didn't allow him to contribute the time he thought necessary to the club, and he resigned, while his father remained a member throughout his lifetime. With his reputation firmly established, Bartlett was called upon to judge paintings for exhibitions at the Art Institute and other

venues. He was also beginning to attract a more national audience for his easel painting.

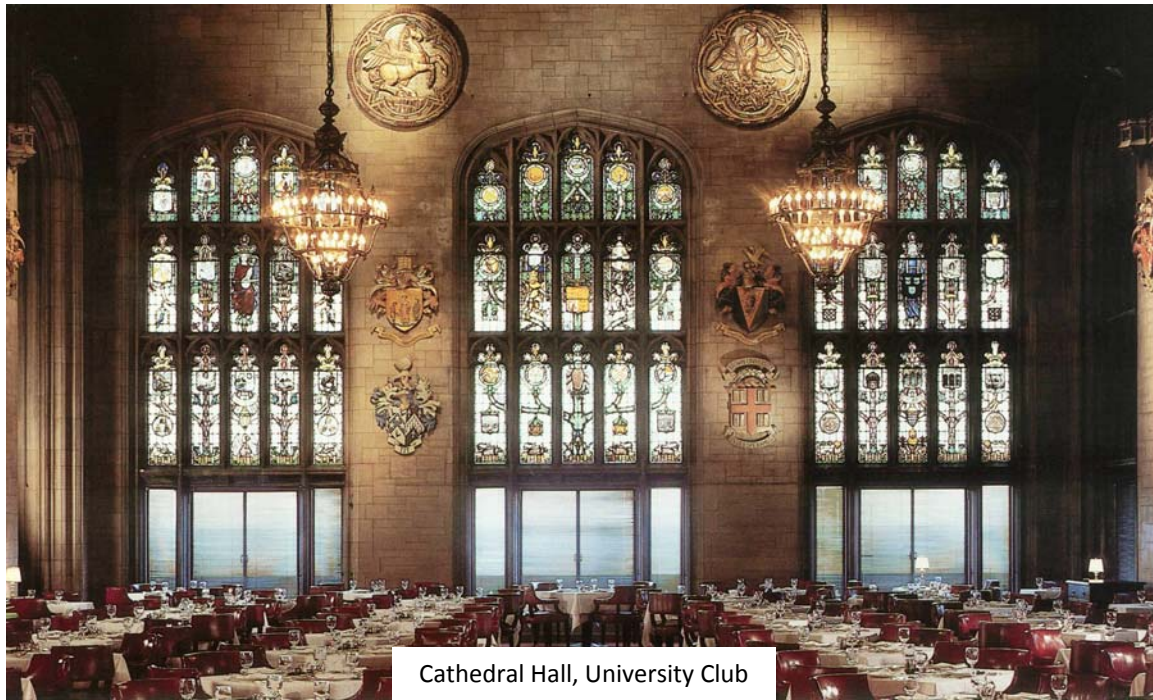
He won an honorable mention at the Carnegie International Annual Exhibition, which in those days was an “HONOR” not an afterthought. The Carnegie curators thought so much of his painting that they purchased it for their permanent collection.

While he completed a few other murals, his most important, and ever-lasting commission, was the University Club, begun in 1908, and completed in 1909. He designed all of the stained glass windows, as well as the ceiling panels on the second floor, which he painted himself, and designed much of the other elements such as the woodwork and light fixtures. His work was deemed so important that the designs were featured at a month-long exhibit at the Art Institute.

Hamlin Garland was one of several people who wrote letters of thanks and praise to Bartlett, saying, “I want to tell you in sound terms the admiration I feel for the work you have done on the new University Club. I feel that you have done the whole west a service in giving to Chicago an interior that is at once splendid and refined and deep-toned. Mrs. Garland joins me in this expression of admiration and pleasure.”

As University Club lore would have it, the directors had asked Tiffany to prepare sketches for the windows of the new Gothic-style building.<sup>vii</sup> Bartlett was also asked to submit sketches, but only as an afterthought. When Tiffany was late in arriving, Bartlett began to discuss his sketches, and as Tiffany entered the room, unnoticed, and saw the presentation, he refused to submit his own proposal, feeling that Bartlett’s was superior. Everywhere you look in the University Club today you can see Bartlett’s efforts. In the lobby, there is also one of his easel paintings.

Busy with the work at the University Club in 1909, he found time to continue exhibiting in annual shows, finished decorations of the Episcopal Church on South Peoria Street, and completed a mural on the tenth floor of the Fine Arts Building, which you can see today, and is another example of “everywhere you look.” He was named by Governor Deneen to the Illinois State Art Commission, as one of eight representatives that included architects, sculptors, and landscape and streetscape architects. This august group had responsibility for the design and beauty of all future state buildings. Unfortunately, it wasn’t active when the current unsightly State of Illinois building was constructed in downtown Chicago.



Cathedral Hall, University Club

In 1910 he won the prestigious Cahn prize at the Art Institute. He helped to organize and fund the Friends of American Art at the museum that year. Through its foresight, the group purchased paintings that hang in the Art Institute today, such as, Grant Wood’s *American Gothic*, and Edward Hopper’s *Nighthawks*; two of the most famous American paintings.

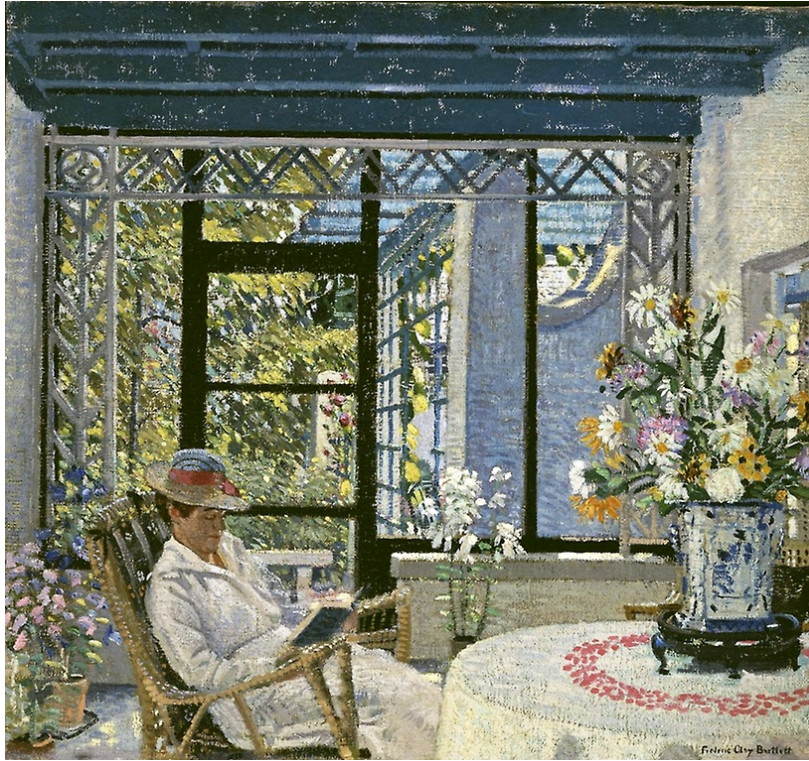
In 1911 Holabird and Roche were commissioned to design a new Chicago municipal building. Bartlett, as one columnist called him, “our millionaire artist,”<sup>viii</sup> was hired to paint a series of enormous murals for the chambers, and for the mayor’s office; a project that took him close to three years to complete. He called them “The Spirit of Chicago” and said that, “Our democratic spirit, our ever-going on with great activity, and the dignity of our labor and commerce have been the chief motive and the governing idea of these decorations.”<sup>ix</sup> *Tribune* critic, Harriet Monroe, praised the work extensively, and explained to her readers that Bartlett was a modern painter, quite unique in his approach. This modern approach, and his modern mentality, would play out over the decade, and blossom into a lasting gift for the city of Chicago. Unfortunately, the murals were destroyed by fire in 1957. All we have left are news articles where some of the works were illustrated. Judging from the time period, and the stylistic features of the works, they are, indeed, strikingly modern for 1913, the year the Armory show came to Chicago. I’d like to take a moment here to thank Clark Wagner for his tireless work in editing my two papers on the Armory show that our Literary Club was so gracious to publish.

Bartlett had, by this time, made such a name for himself that one newspaper commented, “Among the artists [he] stands at the head... Socially he is in such demand that it is a wonder there is time left for his work.”<sup>x</sup> Demands on his time for lectures and visits from admirers were so great, that he left for Bavaria, to work for about six months. While in Germany, he exhibited with the Munich Secession. They were the first of the Secession movements in Europe to break-away from the conventions of nineteenth century painting. Exhibiting with this group was a precursor to his vision of modern art, something that would influence Bartlett, and, as we will later see, impact Chicagoans for another one hundred years.

The Friends of American Art, the group Bartlett had helped to establish, made three choices for their 1913 purchases. One of these was *Blue Blinds*, by Bartlett. Art Institute curatorial records show that the painting was later exchanged for one that is currently in



storage, entitled *Blue Rafters*. I'm surprised it hasn't been sold, like so many other dozens of high quality paintings by Chicago artists, that that have been discarded by the museum.



As befitting any society woman, Mrs. Bartlett was very active in civic causes. Throughout the teens, her name was regularly associated with benefits and charities led by ladies on behalf of the city.

In 1914, New York architects were chosen to design the Fourth Presbyterian Church on

Michigan Avenue, and Bartlett was selected to execute the interior decorations and murals. One *Tribune* writer said that the church was, "The most notable piece of architecture that has been put up in Chicago for a long time." You may see his work in the church today. After an exhausting effort, the Bartlett's left for a long tour of Germany. While there, Frederic chose a number of paintings by avant garde German artists, to send to the Art Institute for an exhibition.<sup>xi</sup>

Throughout the rest of the teens, Bartlett exhibited his paintings. He won a Silver Medal at the world's fair in San Francisco in 1915. A year later, he and Lawton Parker, who was the subject of another of my Literary Club papers, founded the Arts Club of Chicago, with Rue Winterbotham. He was named a life member of the National Arts Club that year, and was accepted into the National Institute of Arts and Letters. His paintings were

juried into important annual exhibitions in Paris, New York, Philadelphia, Omaha, and Washington D.C. Bartlett was now forty-three.

With his wealth and the success in his craft, nothing, unfortunately, could protect him from tragedy. Shortly after he and his wife Dora took a second residence in New York, she died, in March 1917, of an unknown cause. Only thirty-seven years old, she was buried in Graceland Cemetery. How difficult her death must have been. In love since they had met as art students in Europe, she and Frederic were so inexorably entwined.

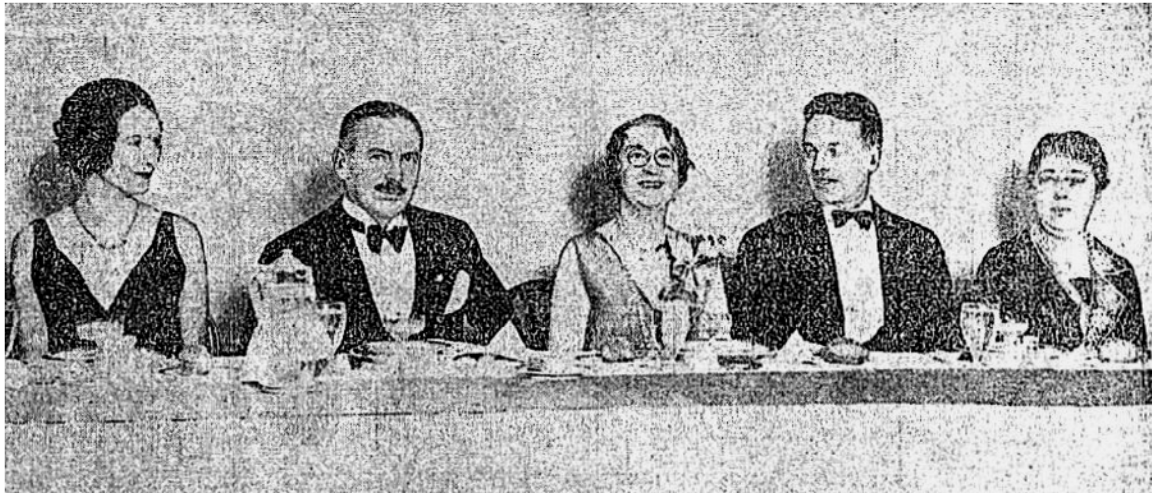
A one-man exhibition had already been planned that would take much of his time, and his mind off the loss of his wife. The show opened at the museum in Rochester, New York, then traveled to the Toledo, Cincinnati, Cleveland and Detroit museums with a final stop at the Art Institute. These museums had patrons with vast wealth, built on industrial expansion, and they housed valuable collections. His attention was also diverted when the U. S. entered World War I; Bartlett served his country in naval intelligence.<sup>xii</sup>

Only a few years after the Armory Show in Chicago and New York, the *avant garde* Society of Independent Artists was formed. The group was backed by wealthy patrons such as Huntington, Arensberg, Whitney, Vanderbilt, and Bartlett. Several artists, who were Directors, were men that today, are considered the most important post-Impressionist artists who resided in this county, including Man Ray, Joseph Stella, John Marin and Marcel Duchamp. The latter, you may recall from my Literary Club paper, had created a huge stir at the Armory show with his cubist painting, *Nude Descending a Staircase*.

At the first Society of Independent Artists exhibition, Duchamp attempted to exhibit a porcelain urinal entitled *Fountain*, under the pseudonym R. Mutt, for which Post-Impressionism, and the artist, would forever be famous. The work was placed behind a partition and not generally on view, however, as the exhibition committee stated that while it “may be a very useful object in its place, its place is not an art exhibition, and it is by no definition, a work of art.” Bartlett would later exhibit his own works with them.



His support of modern art was unusual for a man of his standing and artistic accomplishments. When the extreme Chicago artist group Neo Arlimusc (“Art, Literature, Music”) was formed some years later, Bartlett donated funds to their efforts.<sup>xiii</sup> A local society columnist stated, “...he is a collector of and authority on the moderns and was one of the first Chicagoans to be sympathetic to the cause of the new art.”<sup>xiv</sup> At a dinner and lecture for one Chicago Artist organization, where most of the members were still painting in the impressionist mode, he expressed his views on modern art by saying, “One hundred years from now the world must know WHEN we painted. Our present art should be in tune with the skyscraper, the radio. ...Our architects and musicians are modern. So must be the painter.”<sup>xv</sup>



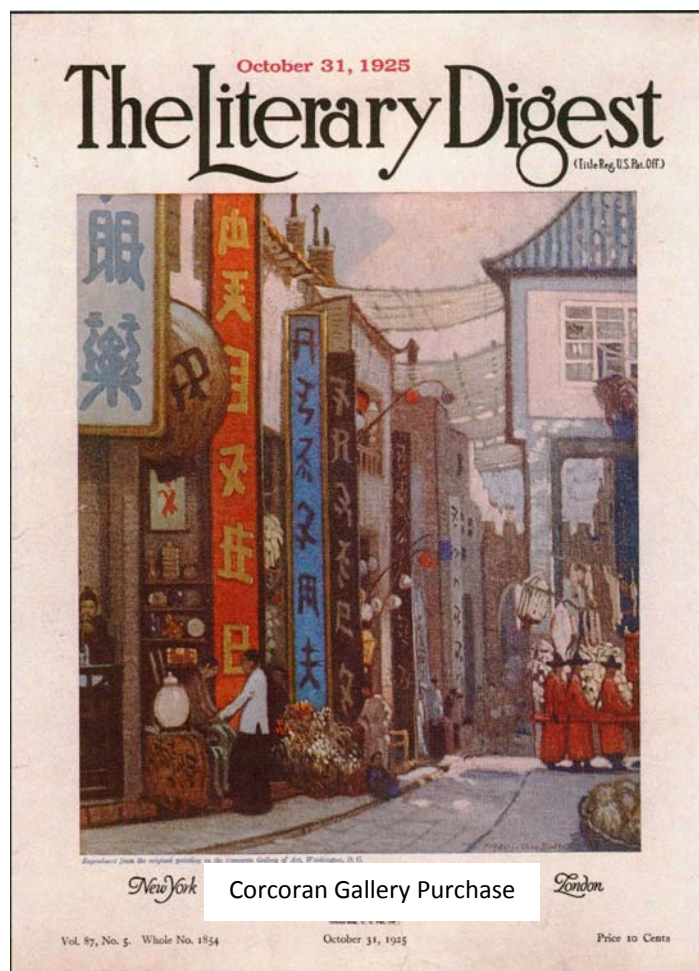
Bartlett, with artist Pauline Palmer to his left, Association of Chicago Painters & Sculptors dinner

Two years after Dora had died, he married Helen Birch, from an old-line Chicago family. Her father was general counsel to the Rockefellers. Never married and just shy of her thirty-sixth birthday, Helen was a Chicago socialite, a published poet and composer, and very close to her first cousin, Mrs. Marshall Field. The couple were married in Boston, in a closed, quiet affair, and then sailed for the Philippines, Japan and China, to honeymoon. Upon their return, at the end of 1919, Bartlett maintained his busy schedule.

EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK, THERE HE IS, THE LIFE AND TIMES OF FREDERIC CLAY BARTLETT

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Travel to the “orient” had provided a great deal of inspiration and subject matter for his paintings. The important Corcoran Museum in Washington DC purchased one of his Chinese subject paintings, from the biannual show that year. The following year, in 1920, the Art Institute commissioned him to paint two large murals in the Ryerson Library. One of these depicted the Great Wall of China. Bartlett donated the works as a gift to the Library.<sup>xvi</sup> Unfortunately, only one of the two murals is barely visible in the back room offices today. He also won the top prize at an Art Institute exhibition that year.



While maintaining a home in Chicago, he and his new wife took up residence in Beverly, Massachusetts, where many of Chicago’s elite summered. The local Beverly newspapers were filled with the comings and goings of Chicago society.

His father-in-law, Hugh Taylor Birch, had previously purchased three miles of ocean front property in Fort Lauderdale. As a wedding present, he gave the couple forty oceanfront acres, on which Bartlett began building a mansion of his own design.

The area was undeveloped,

swampy, and filled with local animals such as wildcats, exotic birds, and other creatures. Frederic and Helen tamed the land and built a magnificent winter home. Today, the Bonnet House, filled with his paintings and murals, is a museum. How he found time to

accomplish so much is a wonder. Before construction was completed, he had to prepare for another one-man exhibition of his works, with an Orient theme, at the Art Institute, in 1921. The exhibit was so popular that it was shown in seven other venues.

The couple traveled to Paris frequently. They had, by now, fully developed their taste and connoisseurship for Post-Impressionism, and made several art purchases. In October 1923, the Art Institute opened a show entitled, “A Group of Modern Paintings from the Birch-Bartlett Collection.” The assemblage was filled with works by Matisse, Cezanne, Gauguin, and Van Gogh. Conservative *Tribune* columnist, Eleanor Jewett, didn’t quite know what to make of the collection, but found enough print to make them sound interesting, although she was critical of the works nonetheless. In an another article Bartlett said, “Studying a group of paintings thoroughly for weeks at a time, going back and forth each time to gain a fresh viewpoint, is a good way to find out whether a picture ‘wears’ well or not.”<sup>xvii</sup>

The couple continued to build their modern art collection. In 1924, they made an important addition, that would forever memorialize Bartlett and his wife, in the annals of art collecting. In a letter written to Robert Harshe, Director of the Art Institute, Bartlett reported on his purchases,

We have had wonderfully good luck in adding to our collection as we were able to get almost by a miracle what is considered to be almost the finest modern picture in France ‘Le grande Jatte’ by Seurat. This [one] is about 11x7 feet [and] every inch of it is Superb. There are 44 personages in it. Have had them all sent to the [Art Institute and] will have to again trouble your shipping [department]. They are mostly all paid for [and] I will be there to arrange details. When they all arrive [I] would be glad to arrange a room of recent acquisitions to the Birch-Bartlett Collection for this Summer or Autumn.

The Art Institute accommodated their newest Trustee by displaying the couple’s art under the title “The Birch-Bartlett Collection of Modern European Paintings.”

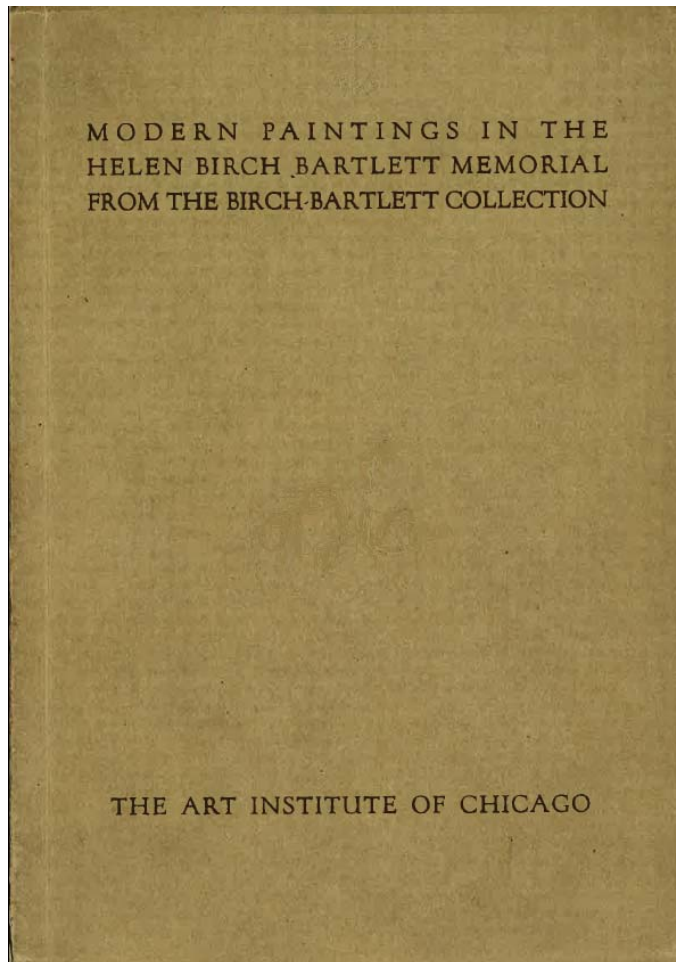
Seurat's work, up to that time, had not been represented in any major collection, save one recent purchase by the Tate in London. Painted between 1884 and 1886, *Un Dimanche a la Grande Jatte*, as was its proper title, had been shown in eight important exhibitions dating from 1886. Seurat painted miniature dots, that when viewed from a distance, formed shades and hues, that he felt would make the colors more brilliant and powerful than mere brushstrokes. He called this form of painting "Divisionism," which is now known as Pointillism.

The provenance of the painting is interesting. When Georges Seurat died tragically, in 1891, at the age of thirty-one, it came to his mother. When she died in 1899, the work descended to Seurat's brother Emile, who, in the following year, sold it for 800 francs to Casimir Brû, a wealthy Parisian doll manufacturer. Brû had purchased the painting as a gift to his daughter Lucie, who worked in the same pointillist style, and who had been a friend of Seurat. In 1901 she married the art critic and painter Edmond Cousturier. It was the Cousturiers who sold the painting to Frederic and Helen Bartlett for \$20,000, or about \$300,000 in today's value. Considering that an Edward Hopper painting and a Giacometti sculpture each recently sold for more than one hundred million dollars, the purchase price of *Le Grand Jatte* was a stupendous bargain.

The next year, in 1925, a month after the collection was shown for the third time at the Art Institute, Helen, in the prime of her life, died of cancer.<sup>xviii</sup> They had been married for seven years.

Grief stricken, Bartlett devised a way to forever memorialize his lost wife, and thrill future visitors to the Art Institute. On January 27, 1926 he submitted a letter to the Board of Trustees, offering the collection of modern paintings, to be known as the "Helen Birch Bartlett Memorial." In addition to the valuable collection, Bartlett offered \$100,000, with the stipulation that the income from the endowment be used to maintain a permanent gallery for the donated paintings. There was some rumbling among the conservative Trustees about accepting such radical art, and dedicating a

gallery for its display, but in the end, the Director of the museum convinced them of the importance of the collection.<sup>xix</sup>



As you might imagine, such an extraordinary gift of art and money came with some covenants. Chief among these was that the collection of twenty-four artworks would always be hung as a unit. If any artworks were hung in the same room as the collection, they were to be of the “same era and point of view,” and the Memorial collection was to always be identified separately. If there was residual money from the return on the invested \$100,000, less collection expenses, it was to be used for the acquisition of paintings of a

similar scope and period.

Bartlett further stipulated that he should have the right, subject to Trustee approval, to add another \$50,000 worth of paintings to the collection. This was a very large amount to buy pictures at the time. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, one could purchase a Van Gogh for a few thousand dollars.

Bartlett created a specially appointed committee that he headed, which could sell from or add to the collection, as long as such art represented the “spirit of the original list.”<sup>xx</sup> For example, he later purchased Gauguin’s *Polynesian Woman with Children*, and



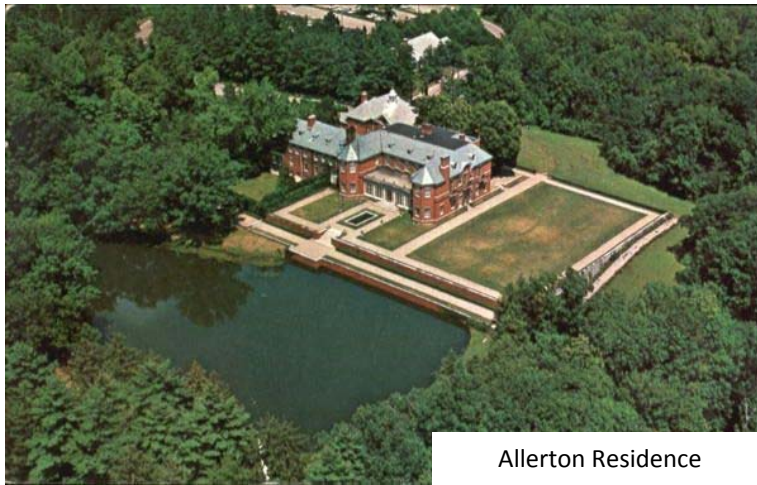
Toulouse-Lautrec's painting, *At the Moulin Rouge*, and donated them both to the collection.<sup>xxi</sup>



Birch Bartlett Collection, Van Gogh

Throughout the remainder of the decade, Bartlett kept busy with travel between Chicago, Ft. Lauderdale, Beverly, Europe and Scandinavia.<sup>xxii</sup> He continued to exhibit his work at several venues. Many of his paintings, from Art Institute exhibitions, were illustrated

in the newspapers; his work was well liked, and considered important.



Allerton Residence

In 1927 he spent a considerable amount of time in Monticello, Illinois, with his childhood friend, and European study companion, Robert Allerton, who had by now, given up on painting, and resided in his large mansion on an

expansive downstate farm. The mansion, and the art-filled grounds, are now owned by the University of Illinois, and open for tours. While there, Bartlett painted a number of murals and wall decorations for the residence, which are still extant today.<sup>xxiii</sup> Another example of “everywhere you look.”



When the New York Museum of Modern Art was founded in 1929, Bartlett served as a Trustee. He was later named a Life Trustee, for his service to the museum and his support of Modern art.



In 1931, Bartlett, who had by then taken a residence at the Philip B. Maher designed apartment building, at 1301 N. Astor, married his last life-mate.<sup>xxiv</sup> Evelyn Fortune was an accomplished painter, who had previously

been married to Eli Lilly, the grandson of the eponymous pharmaceutical firm, and the man who was credited with building the company into a modern corporation. Bartlett's previous wife, Helen, was a cousin of the wife of Indiana Senator Beveridge, and it was Mrs. Beveridge who had invited Evelyn to join their summer residence in Beverly, where she met Frederic. Evelyn's father, William Fortune, was president of a group of telephone companies that became Indiana Bell. He was friends with the Lillys, and was an early shareholder and director. Commenting on the marriage of Evelyn and Frederic, one writer said, "Merging the creative energy of two individuals appears providential when one senses the reach of their combined talent. Having lived through substantial personal histories prior to meeting one another, [they have] a refined appreciation for what they want in life..."<sup>xxv</sup> By the way, Gene Siskel later came to own Bartlett's apartment. The murals Bartlett painted within are still extant.

Evelyn and Frederic embarked on a life filled with travel, collecting, painting, gardening, and the further development of the Bonnet House property. Frederic planted fruit trees, exotic species, and a cocoanut grove. They brought in all sorts of animals including

monkeys, to create their own menagerie. The two artists created new murals, and painted decorative designs for the main house, and shared a vision and passion for new buildings on the property.<sup>xxvi</sup>

In 1933, Chicago hosted *The Century of Progress World's Fair*. The Art Institute held a juried exhibition, of both foreign and domestic artworks, and also organized a show of major paintings from throughout the world. In order to accommodate these efforts, the museum walls had to be completely re-hung, which included the gallery that housed the Helen Birch Bartlett Collection. Bartlett, a Trustee, agreed to the re-hanging as being in the best interests of promoting the museum to a worldwide audience; but only as long as the fair was open. In a lengthy, four-page letter to Director Robert Harshe, Bartlett set out some concrete provisions for the Board of Trustees to consider. Speaking of the donation of the collection, he humbly recounted:

...we felt that we would hardly be justified in keeping [the artwork] to ourselves, and decided to offer the collection to the Art Institute, in which we had always been deeply interested

As he had given funds for a permanent gallery, he recounted:

My sole purpose was to make the Helen Birch Bartlett room as perfect a UNIT as possible and to frame and hang it in such a way as to make it entirely harmonious.

Bartlett had put the word “unit” in all caps to add emphasis. He wrote a following paragraph entirely in capital letters, saying:

...UPON BEING OFFERED THE CHANCE OF MAKING A MEMORIAL ROOM  
TO MY LATE WIFE I WENT ON WITH THE TIME AND MONEY TO THAT  
END...

He continued with this emphatic statement:

When I received a room and paid the required sum for its upkeep, it was my understanding that the room given to me, or some future room, with the privilege of spending my gift in money for its completion, at my own discretion, would remain intact, at least as long as its contents were considered artistically valuable.<sup>xxvii</sup>

This disagreement, about the collection being forever hung together in its own gallery, would play out some two decades later, as we shall see.



Bartlett Studio, Bonnet House

Throughout the thirties and forties, Evelyn and Frederic exhibited their works, albeit on a significantly reduced schedule, and Frederic spent considerable time giving lectures on one of his greatest passions, Modern Art. His last one-man exhibition was held at the National Arts Club in 1946. He died peacefully in 1953 and was buried in Graceland Cemetery. The Art Institute followed his passing with a memorial exhibition of his work in 1954. Unfortunately, Bartlett's son Clay, an accomplished painter in his own right, died two years after his father, at the age of forty-nine.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Almost immediately after Frederic's death a spat broke out between his widow and the Art Institute, regarding the hanging of the Birch Bartlett Memorial collection. You'll remember that he stipulated the collection be hung together, and donated a sizeable sum as an endowment to maintain it. A letter from Evelyn, in November 1954, to the Art Institute director, was quite terse on the matter of how the collection was to be hung.

In 1958, the Art Institute lent "La Grande Jatte" to the Museum of Modern Art in New York, for the first Seurat retrospective exhibition in the U.S. That was the first time the painting left the museum, and it was announced that it never would leave again. Midway through the run of that show, a fire broke out, fortunately leaving the picture unharmed. The Art Institute has always denied subsequent loan requests.<sup>xxix</sup>

Evelyn was determined that the collection should be appropriately hung, as both a tribute to her deceased husband, and, as was Frederic's wish, to his previous wife Helen. Evelyn offered an additional \$150,000 for the building and fitting out of a gallery to be named after Frederic. This gallery was opened in 1962, after which she contributed another half million dollars for a fund in Frederic's name.<sup>xxx</sup> To put this sum in context: if it had been invested in the stock market, it would be worth about seventeen million dollars today, which equals the largest gift the museum has ever received.

In 1982, the Helen Birch Bartlett Memorial Collection was re-hung, with much fanfare, in a newly renovated Frederic Clay Bartlett Memorial Gallery. The works donated by Bartlett were displayed in what was to be a permanent location. The press release stated, "The...Collection includes some of the greatest works by Cezanne, van Gogh, Guaguin, and Toulouse-Lautrec, as well as the first paintings by Seurat, Modigliani, Matisse, Picasso, and Derain on permanent display at the Institute." In conjunction with the re-opening, an exhibition of Evelyn and Frederic's paintings, organized by the Smithsonian Institution, was hung in an adjacent gallery.

In 1997, just shy of her one hundred and tenth birthday, Evelyn passed away in Beverly, Massachusetts. Described as a dainty woman, with a stern composure, she was said to be private, but always gracious. An assistant curator from the Art Institute said at the

time that, “She was completely representative of another age, the age of manners. I had lunch with her three times at her house in Beverly, and we never ate off the same china. Before each lunch, there would be sherry by the fire.”

Not long after her death, the Helen Birch Bartlett Memorial Collection was split-up according to each artist. Today, three Van Gogh paintings from the collection hang in a room with other Van Gogh’s. The Picasso is hung with other Picassos, etcetera. This was clearly not the arrangement Frederic had in mind when he gave the paintings to the museum. Nor was it the agreement of his widow, Evelyn, who donated the money for a permanent gallery as a memorial to her husband.

If you ever come into vast wealth, build a sizeable art collection, and donate it to a museum, remember one thing, no matter what, you will not to be able to control your art, from the grave.

As a summary to this paper, I will quote the Art Institute director, who said at the time of Frederic's death:

He was one of America's first collectors to buy great post-impressionist paintings... at a time when most collectors were still buying Monets and Renoirs and thinking themselves 'advanced.' [He] was talented as a painter and it was with a painter's eye that he judged the great French art of this period. He and his wife Helen Birch, built up a collection of remarkable quality. The center of the Birch Bartlett collection is Seurat's great mural-like painting. This has sometimes been called the greatest painting of the 19<sup>th</sup> century... Frederic gave a gallery of these paintings [that] became the first room of modern art in any American museum... It remains as a monument to its generous collector, the rare example of a group of paintings gathered with deep knowledge, taste, and warm understanding.<sup>xxx</sup>

As we think back on the many examples of Frederic Clay Bartlett's life work, and his contributions to the arts, you'll come to realize, as did I, that "Everywhere you look, there he is."

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<sup>i</sup> A family history dates their coming to 1623.

<sup>ii</sup> Bartlett Scrapbook in the Ryerson Archives, p.7.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>vi</sup> Letter from Marshall Field to Frederic Bartlett, 3/10/1905, Bartlett Scrapbook, Vol. 3, p.8.

<sup>vii</sup> From notes taken in 1937

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid., p.47.

<sup>ix</sup> Ibid., p.46.

<sup>x</sup> Ibid., p.47.

<sup>xi</sup> It's not clear what happened, as there was no such show in that year or the next, except for a one-man exhibition by Albert Bloch, one of the Blau Ritter German group, who were pushing the boundaries of modern art.

<sup>xii</sup> *National Cyclopædia of American Biography*, p.80.

<sup>xiii</sup> Thalia, "Two of Society's Well Knowns Soon to Have Books Out," *Chicago Tribune*, 2/3/1928, p.29.

<sup>xiv</sup> Thalia, "This Weather Sends Many Chicagoans to the Milder Climates," *Chicago Tribune*, 1/11/1929, p.37.



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<sup>xv</sup> “Art Must Reflect Skyscraper Culture, F. C. Bartlett Says,” *Chicago Tribune*, 3/14/1930, p.29.

<sup>xvi</sup> *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago*, “Notes,” Vol. XV, No. 6, November-December, 1921, pp.178, illust. pp.182-183.

<sup>xvii</sup> *Art Institute of Chicago Newsletter*, 10/13/1923, p.195.

<sup>xviii</sup> The exhibitions of the collection are as follows: *Group of Modern Paintings from the Birch-Bartlett Collection*, 9/8-10/22/1923. See, for example, *Art Institute Newsletter*, Dec. 1921 – Dec. 1923 pp.195; *Birch-Bartlett Collection of Modern European Paintings*, 9/3–10/22/1924, and *Birch-Bartlett Collection of Modern European Paintings*, 9/8–10/8/1925. Also see: *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago*, Vol. 19, No. 7, October, 1925, pp.77+81-82.

<sup>xix</sup> William Mullen, “Art Institute exhibit hails benefactors,” *Chicago Tribune*, 11/2/1993, p.L\_A1.

<sup>xx</sup> He added one final stipulation, that the “Trustees [should] put the broadest and least restricting construction on all sections [of the gift letter] so that they should in no way be hampered in carrying out what they consider the best interests of the Art Institute.”

<sup>xxi</sup> Lautrec’s painting was mentioned in Eleanor Jewett, “Harris Gift to Institute,” *Chicago Tribune*, 7/8/1928, p.G4.

<sup>xxii</sup> May Birkhead, “Scandinavia Popular,” *Chicago Tribune*, 6/16/1929, p.i2.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Mme. X, “News of Society: Scribes Journey to Charming Estate,” *Chicago Tribune* 5/29/1927, Sec. 8, p.1.

<sup>xxiv</sup> His residence is discussed in <https://chicagodesignslinger.blogspot.com/2015/02/1301-north-astor-street-chicago-chicago.html>, accessed 3/26/2019.

<sup>xxv</sup> Jayne Rice, *Reflections of a Legacy: The Bonnet House Story*, (Fort Lauderdale: Bonnet House, Inc., 1989), p.77.

<sup>xxvi</sup> The Broward County Historical Commission has published 25 volumes of its historical journal, *Broward Legacy*, between 1976 and 2005. The first volume contained four issues; subsequent volumes contained two issues each. Bartlett, Frederic Clay (1873-1953) Bonnet House 24:1:6; life of artist and Bonnet House owner 22:1:32.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Letter from Frederic Clay Bartlett to Robert Harshe, 7/12/1933, Ryerson Library Archives. Several commas have been added by the author to make the paragraph read better.

<sup>xxviii</sup> He Had exhibited at the AIC, Met, MOMA, Carnegie, and Providence Museum. Signed his paintings “Clay Bartlett.” See, for example: Thalia, “Chicago Views New Look at St. Luke’s Fashion Show,” *Chicago Tribune*, 10/26/1947, p.G2.

<sup>xxix</sup> Alan Artnet, “1 Loan Was Enough For ‘Grande Jatte’,” *Chicago Tribune*, 4/28/1991.

<sup>xxx</sup> Mary Middleton, “Bartlett Gallery Opens,” *Chicago Tribune*, 6/15/1962, p.B14.

<sup>xxxi</sup> “F. C. Bartlett, Noted Chicago Artist, Dies,” *Chicago Tribune*, 6/26/1953, p.14.