ONEIDA COMMUNITY MANSION HOUSE HOSTS ACSCNY ANNUAL MEETING

Patricia A. Hoffman, Executive Director, Oneida Community Mansion House

The Oneida Community Mansion House welcomed about forty members of the Arts and Crafts Society of Central New York on a crisp Sunday afternoon in September. Following a delicious luncheon in the original Oneida Community dining room presented by Zabroso Restaurant chef and owner Ruben Lopez, the group held a brief business meeting and then moved to the Big Hall for a presentation by Curator Tony Wonderley.

Wonderley’s talk featured many historic photographs of the site and the Oneida Community and provided an extensive overview of their beliefs, practices, values, and industry. The 93,000 square foot Mansion House was home to the 19th century utopian community, founded in 1848 by John Humphrey Noyes as a communitarian experiment. For thirty three years, the religiously-based Perfectionists challenged contemporary societal views on property ownership, gender roles, child rearing, monogamous marriage, and work. Out of their insistence on selflessness, lifelong learning, and industriousness sprang one of the most impressive manufacturing companies of the 20th century.

After reaching a peak of 300 members, the Community disbanded to become a joint-stockholding company called Oneida Community Ltd. in 1881. Eventually changing its name to Oneida Ltd., the company achieved world-wide recognition for the flatware it produced in Sherrill, NY.

Today, the Oneida Community Mansion House is a National Historic Landmark and living museum with permanent and changing exhibitions, residential apartments, overnight lodging, Zabroso Restaurant, and banquet and meeting space. The wheelchair accessible site is open 365 days a year, excluding major holidays. A variety of activities are available for children and adults including guided and self-guided tours, workshops, lectures, concerts, and other special events.

Following the presentation by Wonderley, the group toured the Mansion House guided by maps and tour guides stationed throughout the museum. Tours reveal an interior key to Community life such as the Big Hall with its exquisite trompe l'oeil ceiling; the Upper Sitting Room that most defined their idea of home; the Community Library where learning and knowledge were encouraged and more than 100 newspapers, magazines and journals subscribed; and the Vestibule and its Cabinet of Curiosities.

The property encompasses 200 acres including the Oneida Community Cemetery (still in use today), historic gardens and grounds, and the country’s first corporate golf course. A Black Walnut tree on the south lawn and a Tulip tree in the Quadrangle were recently designated New York State champions and listed on the Big Tree Registry.

The Oneida Community Mansion House is located at 170 Kenwood Ave., Oneida. Guided tours are available Wed. through Sat., 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., and Sun. at 2 p.m. for a nominal fee. All overnight stays include breakfast and a tour. For more information call 315-363-0745 or visit HYPERLINK “http://www.oneidacommunity.org/” www.oneidacommunity.org.

THE ARTS & CRAFTS SOCIETY OF CENTRAL NEW YORK, founded in 1994, is a not-for-profit educational organization dedicated to the study of the Arts and Crafts Movement through a schedule of lectures, symposia, tours, and other educational programs. Its mission is to help increase public awareness and to promote preservation of the rich cultural heritage in Upstate New York. This legacy includes the work of important architects and craftpersons and holdings in historical collections and libraries.
WRIGHT RESTORED

his past June, the Arts and Crafts Society of Central New York traveled to Buffalo, NY, for the third time in its 15-year history, to visit Frank Lloyd Wright’s Prairie masterpiece, the Darwin D. Martin House Complex. ACSCNY members were eager to see progress on restoration at the site, especially the reconstructed lost buildings — the 100-foot-long pergola, conservatory, and carriage house — as well as the recently completed visitor center, the Eleanor and Wilson Greatbatch Pavilion.

Designed by architect Toshiko Mori and constructed just to the left of the Martin Complex, the new visitor center provoked some controversy and discussion among participants. A pavilion in the true sense of the word, the building’s massive V-shaped roof seems to float above glass curtain walls. The visitor center boasts such state-of-the-art features as interactive touch screen exhibition installations, a visitor orientation video projected as a montage onto glass panel screens, and importantly, sleek, modern restroom facilities.

Some travelers found the building contrasts too sharply with the Wright grouping and the surrounding neighborhood. A few expressed that the pavilion seemed, at least superficially, evocative of the kind of International Style architecture that Mr. Wright himself so abhorred. Be that as it may, this writer experienced the Greatbatch Pavilion as an elegant, serene starting point, with a unique perspective view of the Martin House Complex afforded by its transparent glass walls.

Martin House curator Eric Jackson-Forsberg met us at the Greatbatch Pavilion and personally conducted our tour. Following his greeting, remarks and presentation of the orientation video, Jackson-Forsberg led our group on a stroll that included points of the superbly restored exterior, ground level rooms of the main mansion that are currently undergoing restoration in the final phase of the project, and all of the reconstructed auxiliary buildings. The word “thrilling” doesn’t begin to describe the experience of walking down the open-sided pergola toward the conservatory with its nine-foot high Winged Nike of Samothrace sculpture. It should be noted that some sharp-eyed preservationists in our group were distressed to notice that cracks were already forming in the concrete base of the conservatory.

Last on our tour was the Carriage House, now a spacious home for the Wisteria Gift Shop. A must-visit for any Wright enthusiast, the shop offers everything from derivative tchotchkes that border on the cheesy, to superbly crafted reproductions of furniture and garden sculpture, as well as books, apparel, jewelry, etc.

The people of Buffalo and the Martin House Restoration Corporation are to be commended for achieving what amounts to a treasured gift to the world — the restored Darwin D. Martin Complex.

GEORGE OHR HAS RISEN

n June 2009, a group of dedicated Arts and Crafts Society members traveled to Toronto, Canada to the Gardiner Museum to see the exhibit “George Ohr Rising: The Emergence of an American Master.” Organized by the Ohr-O’Keefe Museum in Biloxi, Mississippi, this show offered an opportunity to see first-hand the works of this unique — and often downright bizarre — artist.

We began our tour of the Gardiner in their contemporary galleries and then moved on to the second floor to see the installation of the exhibit. Although we stepped back in time about a hundred years, Ohr’s work was as innovative and exciting as the contemporary work being produced today. Most of his pieces were functional, or at least began with functional forms, but in Ohr’s hands they were transformed into distinct sculptural forms. Some were delicate and beautiful, with eggshell thin walls and graceful organic forms. Others were strange and sexually suggestive, works that surely contributed to Ohr’s reputation as the “Mad Potter of Biloxi.”

Ohr’s mastery of his medium was not just his control over the ceramic body, but his innovations in glaze technology as well. He experimented not just with the color of the glazes but its texture as well — some were so pocketed with small craters they looked as if they were geologic remains instead of intentional creations. Others brilliantly displayed rich, colorful surfaces that ranged from mossy greens to brilliant blues to rich and opalescent reds. He was also able to carefully marry the form with the colors of the glaze, which resulted in works that were truly representative of his very personal aesthetic.

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BOOK ARTS...

AT THE BIRD

Frank Morigi

On November 5, 2009, members of the Arts and Crafts Society visited the newly renovated conference/presentation space of the Special Collections Resource Center on the sixth floor of SU’s Bird Library. William La Moy, curator of Rare Books and Printed Materials, brought out some of the most beautiful books ever printed for us to peruse. Using a 14th century Book of Hours and a chapter from the 15th century Gutenberg Bible, he discussed the sources of William Morris’ inspiration for printing and book design and the founding of the Kelmscott Press in 1890. Morris designed the type, decorative alphabets and borders and put together a team of artisans to produce handcrafted books. An ink drawing of the letter “O” intertwined with a floral pattern in Morris’ own hand was shown, as were full sized samples of his earlier wallpapers that inspired these motifs. Methods used for printing the original Kelmscott editions – a balance of Medieval, Renaissance and Victorian technology – were explained. Also shown were collaborations with Walter Crane in 1891 for The Story of the Glittering Plain and with Edward Burne-Jones for the magnificent Kelmscott Chaucer of 1896. Other English Arts and Crafts books reviewed were works of Emery Walker, the gray eminence of the private press movement, and T. J. Cobden-Sanderson for the Doves Press, and C. R. Ashbee for his Essex House Press.

In the United States, both Elbert Hubbard and Gustav Stickley were influenced by Kelmscott. Especially interesting were books from the Roycroft Press designed by Dard Hunter and those with hand painted illustrations by the ladies in the Roycroft studio. Work from Stickley included early furniture catalogues, advertising write-ups wherein GS laments the number of competitors, most with the last name of “Stickley”, early issues of The Craftsman magazine ca. 1901 and Craftsman Homes ca. 1909. The presentation concluded with the book The Disappearing City written and designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

“I’m grateful to have had the opportunity to see such great examples of Arts & Crafts books. It was well worth our viewing such wonderful works. Now we’ve gone to Wells College for book binding and other paper arts (hand printing), SUNY-ESF library (Dard Hunter and papermaking) and Bird – what next?”

Kathryn Davis

FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Hello,

We have had a very busy past several months. Our trip to Buffalo and Toronto was a success as well as the one day symposium Women as Visionaries, “Women as Participants.” Our annual meeting this year was held at The Oneida Community Mansion House and I want to thank Pat Hoffman, one of our members and the Mansion House’s executive director, for helping to make this happen.

The interest in the Art and Crafts Period has never been stronger. This is evident through the amount of new exhibitions, books and research being done. As I am writing there are two major exhibitions under way; “Apostles of Beauty” at the Chicago Institute and “A Spirit of Simplicity: American Arts and Crafts From the Two Red Roses Foundation” at the Flagler Museum in Palm Beach, Florida. The catalog that accompanies the Apostles of Beauty exhibition is worthy of the best of Arts and Crafts libraries and focuses on collections in the Chicago area with a concentration on Crab Tree Farm.

The Dallas Museum of Art is preparing a show on Gustav Stickley. The exhibition will open at the Newark Museum in the fall of 2010, travel to the Dallas Museum and close at the Cincinnati Museum of Art in 2011. This will be one not to be missed.

This coming year we have some exciting things being planned as well- a trip to Corning Glass Museum for two Tiffany exhibitions, a talk on furniture designed by architects and a trip to Scranton to see and hear about some of the most important Grueby murals.

I want to thank Lee Jones for hosting our winter party this year in his Charles Umbrecht home. Lee, helped by our long time member Gordon Gray, has an interesting day planned.

This year is also the 100th anniversary of Adelaide Alsop Robineau’s Scarab Vase and the Strathmore Park Association has some interesting things planned. Stay tuned and I hope to see everyone soon.

Dave Rudd

MEMORIAL COLLECTIONS

The Arts and Crafts Society of Central New York is partnering with the Fayetteville Free Library to establish a Memorial Arts and Crafts Library. With our help the FFL has been donated one Arts and Crafts book collection and been promised a second. These will be housed outside the elevator going up to the Stickley Audi Museum in the library’s reading room.

We are in the process of looking for the appropriate case pieces to house these collections with the ability to expand as the collection grows. Because of the value of some of these out of print references our goal is to have locking cases.

We have asked our long time member Joanne Capella to design a book plate for us. This will be printed on archival paper and positioned in each book. If you are interested in helping with this project please contact us or the Fayetteville Free Library.
The Society’s mid-winter party has been set for Sunday afternoon, February 7, from 2 to 5 p.m. at the former home of architect and builder Charles Umbrecht who designed and built a number of noteworthy and distinctive homes in Syracuse and its eastern and southern suburbs in the mid twentieth century. This Onondaga limestone structure, at 715 South Manlius Street, is located just south of the Fayetteville village boundary on FM road, across the street from the southern boundary of Wellwood school grounds, and was designed and built by Umbrecht, who lived in it from its completion in 1938 until his passing in 1969. While not an Arts and Crafts style structure in a strict sense, the home does adhere to many tenets of that ethos, while at the same time incorporating much of what was seen as modern in pre-WWII America.

Gordon Gray will lead tours through the house, pointing out many the interesting features and recounting some of the many anecdotes about its eccentric creator, starting at 3 p.m. and again at 4 p.m. A local son and graduate of Syracuse University, Umbrecht is best remembered outside of the Syracuse area for his work on the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., having been responsible for the design of the outside columns and the tablet surrounds for the Gettysburg address. Indeed, an artist working as an assistant to Mr. Umbrecht in the early 1960s recalls Umbrecht, who was hard of hearing, declining to take a call from President John F. Kennedy inviting him to an event commemorating an anniversary of the memorial. In the Syracuse area, Umbrecht’s focus was on residential architecture - in addition to the design work usually expected of an architect, Umbrecht also acted as the general contractor on his projects, supervising day to day details of the construction. One of his dictates forbade masons the use of a level, Umbrecht insisting that the laying of stones and bricks be done by ‘eye’.

ACSCNY MID-WINTER PARTY

Illustration of the Umbrecht House by Paul B. Fradenberg (1985)

ACSCNY SILENT AUCTION

Please consider donating items for our Annual ACSCNY Silent Auction. For more information, contact Dave Rudd at (315) 463-1568.

ON THE HORIZON

Strathmore Festival: The 2010 summer homes tour will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the creation of Adelaide Alsop Robineau’s Scarab Vase (The Apotheosis of the Toiler, 1910). A companion poster to that published for the Women as Visionaries symposium will be available and Arts and Crafts lectures are being planned. We will need volunteers to help at an ACSCNY booth in the park.

We are commissioning a commemorative poster of the Scarab Vase to be sold at the event.
The ACSNY Board began planning Women as Visionaries/ “Women as Participants: Symposium on Women Ceramists of the Arts and Crafts Movement” in early 2009, first with the concept – a continuation of our 1999 symposium of the same name – next, renewing our association with the Everson Museum of Art and senior curator Debora Ryan, and then, with our extensive negotiations to set a date and a roster of speakers. The New York State Council for the Humanities came on board with a grant that covered about half of our speaker and out of pocket expenses. During the summer a competition was held for a poster to announce and commemorate the event. Steven Ryan, a Skaneateles graphic designer, won with a piece that has received excellent reviews since its release.

In preparation for the symposium, the Everson updated its Arts and Crafts in New York State exhibit with the help of ACSNY members Greg Vadney, curator of the Stickley Audi Museum, and David Rudd, cleaned the Ceramic Center glass display cases so the Arts and Crafts pottery sparkled and mounted a special exhibit, “Women of Rookwood: the Joyce and Elliot Sterling Collection”. The Sterlings were special guests at the symposium.

Our speakers included Patricia Bartinique who gave an overview of “Women in the Arts and Crafts Movement” in the British Isles and the United States. Susan Montgomery discussed women as active potters and artists at various New England Potteries including Grueby, Saturday Evening Girls, Paul Revere and Marblehead and their additional contributions in social work, teaching craft to recent immigrants, the poor and the blind. Ellen Paul Denker explained the technique of China Painting and gave a historic review of work beginning in the mid 1800s. Included was extensive information on the Robineaus as well as such modern artists in the Everson collection as Judy Chicago. Elizabeth Fowler discussed the Women of Rookwood with emphasis on those that were featured in the Sterling exhibit. Examples in a variety of techniques and glaze formulas included works by Sarah Sax, Fannie Auckland, Sadie Markland and Grace Young. From her extensive research, we learned that when spiders and bats, so prominent in Rookwood founder Maria Longworth Nichols’ early work, got together, they produced spats, an important revelation for both the scientific and artistic communities and the reason why collectors are always finding little white spots on their pieces.

About 120 attended the symposium on October 17, 2009 at the Everson’s Hosmer auditorium. We wish to thank all of the Everson and ACSNY volunteers who helped to make this possible. If you don’t yet have your free commemorative poster, stop by Dalton’s and pick one up.

Joyce and Elliot Sterling’s extensive collection of American art pottery includes excellent examples of Grueby, Saturday Evening Girls, Dedham, and Rookwood, of which they have hundreds. They have been collecting Rookwood Pottery for more than three decades, an interest that stems from a family connection — Elliot is a descendant of Maria Longworth Nichols, founder of the Rookwood Pottery. The collection began with a monumental vase attributed to Nichols that had been passed down to Elliot through his ancestors. He and Joyce have since acquired examples of almost every artist who ever worked at Rookwood, in addition to acquiring examples of every form, glaze, and year of Rookwood’s history. Their collection is comprehensive and well documented. The Sterlings share an interest in art history and research and continue to discover interesting details about the objects they own.

“The Women of Rookwood” exhibition on view at the Everson includes 28 examples by various women artists made between 1880 and 1920 (with the exception of a few). The objects are on display in conjunction with the “Women as Visionaries Symposium.”

Although not fully appreciated until late in the twentieth-century, today Ohr is an acknowledged master in American ceramics. After seeing his works in person, it is possible to better understand not only his idiosyncratic talent, but the high quality craftsmanship and quirky details in his works. Seeing this selection in the context of the Gardiner’s larger collection was a wonderful way to appreciate Ohr’s contribution to the ceramic medium.
Upcoming Events

We are scheduling the following events for Spring 2010. Dates and venues to be announced.

April

“TIFFANY TREASURES” AT THE CORNING MUSEUM OF GLASS
Attendees will have the opportunity to make their own art glass piece. Details To Be Announced.

May

CHERYL ROBERTSON “ARCHITECTS AS INTERIOR DESIGNERS”
The Work of Greene and Greene, Wright, Will Price and Stickley designers in the U.S., and Mackintosh, Baillie Scott and Secession designers in Europe. SUNDAY, MAY 23, 2010

June

Trip with The Craftsman Farms Foundation to Scranton, PA to see the Grueby Murals in the Lackawanna Train Station, now the Radisson Hotel. SATURDAY, JUNE 12, 2010

Strathmore Festival — SATURDAY, JUNE 19: 10:00 A.M. TO 5:00 P.M.

Mark your calendars!

For more information, contact Dave Rudd at (315) 463-1568.