

Haan Museum of Indiana Art

Background and History of the Museum For Volunteers and Docents

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Background and History

The Mansion at the St. Louis 'World's Fair

The mansion was the Connecticut Building at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. At the Fair it was covered in a temporary material called "staff" that was mostly Plaster of Paris, a fiber binder and water. The building was meant to represent a gentleman's country home, and was furnished with antiques—including a writing desk used by George Washington during the First Continental congress, furniture that was made for Marie Antoinette, and items that were brought to America on the Mayflower.

The building was patterned after the 1820 Sigourney mansion in Hartford. Lydia Sigourney was a famous poetess, whose home was the center of Hartford's cultural activities.

A member of Connecticut's Board of Lady Commissioners was looking for an ideal front door for the Connecticut Building. She saw the 1760 Hubbard-Slater mansion in Norwich, and asked to take a picture of the entry. The building was being torn down, and she got many parts, including the entire front entrance and a lot of interior columns, wainscoting and trim. Connecticut was trying to show their thrift, and they auctioned off the building at the end of the Fair. Robert Hall from Pittsburg purchased the mansion for \$1,800.

Potter Mansion History

Fanny Potter was from Connecticut and really wanted the building. Mr. Potter bought the mansion from Mr. Hall for \$3,125. The staff exterior was taken off the building and it was disassembled, each piece marked, and then shipped by rail to Lafayette, Indiana.

The Potters hired Wing and Mahurin Architects from Fort Wayne to draw plans to rebuild the mansion as a family residence. Very few changes were made, and the building is almost the same as it was at the World's Fair. The main changes were the addition of the kitchen wing and a porte cochere (structure above the driveway). Rooms for the kids and their nanny were added above the kitchen sometime before 1915.

The three floors and full basement are about 16,000 square feet. The third floor only covers the center part of the house and is finished, but not to the extent of the first two floors.

The second floor contains four sets of rooms, each with two bedrooms and a bathroom. Every bedroom has direct access to a bathroom without going into another part of the house.

There are seven fireplaces, but these have been capped at the roof and plugged with foam for energy conservation. They were all original to the Fair, except for the fireplace in the great hall. None of the trim is stained because homes in the 1700's usually had painted woodwork.

The Backgrounds of the Haans

Bob Haan was born in Tippecanoe County, and was raised on a series of farms in the area. He attended high school in Clinton County at Jefferson High School, now Clinton Prairie. He graduated from Purdue in

1964 with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. After working for a year, he went to the Harvard Business School and received an MBA in 1967. His first job was in Milwaukee.

Ellie Fodrocy Haan was born in Muskegon Heights, Michigan, and graduated from Catholic Central High School. During her teen age years she worked at jobs such as Burger King and the local ice cream parlor. Immediately after high school, she moved to Milwaukee to work and attend college.

Bob and Ellie met at a friend's house in 1968 and started dating immediately. They were married the following year and remained in Milwaukee until 1974, where they had two sons. In the meantime, Bob worked and Ellie continued her education while caring for their sons. The third son was born after they moved to Chattanooga where Bob was transferred.

Starting Haan Crafts Corp

During their three year stay in Chattanooga, they started Haan Crafts, a company that made kits to teach junior high students how to sew. Sales were all by mail, so when it looked like it would be successful, Bob's dad found a space in Otterbein so they could move their business to Indiana.

The company was always innovative, and Bob and Ellie designed a series of sports balls made from pile fabric. They proved so popular with boys in sewing classes that Haan Crafts soon became the dominant supplier to junior high home economics departments across the country. The company was strictly mail order, and they reached home economics teachers through catalogs and posters, and sent orders out by UPS and later Fed Ex.

In 2003, the Haans decided it would be an opportune time to sell the business. They sold it to their largest competitor, and spent their time working on the mansion and improving the art and furniture collections.

Buying and Renovating the Potter Mansion

Bob and Ellie Haan purchased the house from the Potter estate in 1984, closing on December 18. The house was empty because the daughters inherited the contents of the house and the grandsons inherited the building. The contents were sold before renovation was started by the grandsons. Even though the house was in bad shape, they and their three boys moved in and decorated the house for Christmas.

Fortunately the Potter family had made structural repairs while the building was in the estate. The Haans had lived in the neighborhood for 7 years, and often walked past and wished that they could see the inside – they never dreamed that they'd have a chance to buy it.

Bob worked on the electrical system in the kitchen right away, but they didn't start serious renovations until 1992. The Haans hired someone to paint and wallpaper the first five rooms, and papered the last twelve rooms themselves. Other major projects included installing a heating and air conditioning system, wiring, insulation, storm windows and doors, resloping the gutters, installing an alarm system, and putting on a new roof. Bob did a lot of the work himself, and worked closely with contractors on planning and implementing major projects to assure the best results.

The Haans remodeled the kitchen in 2004, and put an elevator where the closet was so that guests with mobility problems could get to both floors. Bob designed the cabinets, which he patterned after the antiques and the architectural elements of the house. The kitchen renovation included raising the ceiling*, adding new crown molding and base molding, and having window and door casings made to match the second floor casings.

*There were verandas across the first and second floors of the mansion at the Fair, and the first floor veranda was shortened to accommodate the kitchen wing when it was rebuilt in Lafayette. The second floor veranda was left intact at the time, so the kitchen ceiling had to be lower than the other first floor rooms in order to fit under the veranda. The Potters later added a wing above the kitchen for the children and the nannie, but didn't raise the kitchen ceiling at that time.

When the old ceiling was removed, contractors found the capital for a column from the veranda. The capital was in good shape because it had only been exposed to the weather for about ten years. Ellie filled holes and sanded off rough areas of the capital so that a mold could be made to replace other capitals that were in bad condition. New capitals were made and installed above the remaining columns.

Building an Art Collection

The Haans started collecting historic Indiana art in 1992. They decided that Indiana art would be within their budget, and it would be easier to learn about Indiana artists than a wider group of American artists. Bob and Ellie started by buying small pieces at auction, and then bought a fairly major piece from an Indianapolis gallery. They soon got a phone call from the gallery offering a collection of eight major Indiana paintings. It was expensive, but they decided that they needed to buy it if they wanted to have a serious collection. At that time, galleries never hung the important pieces – they called the last person that bought a major piece to see if they were interested. The Haans kept buying, so they kept getting great pieces. Within four years they had built a museum-quality art collection, and other museums began to borrow pieces for books and exhibitions about historic Indiana art.

Bob and Ellie felt that Indiana painters were among the best, and that the collection needed to be kept together so that the public could enjoy it. They decided that a museum would be the best way to accomplish that, and started to lay the groundwork for a museum dedicated to Indiana art.

Bob and Ellie decreased their art purchases drastically after they sold their business in 2003. Three TC Steele paintings of his children were offered for sale about that time, and the Haans bought them because they were important for the collection. They hadn't seen major figural works by Steele, and those show a different side of his talent. The Steele painting of "The Old Mills" at Brookville, which is over the drawing room fireplace, is especially important to the collection because it was exhibited in the Central Art Palace at the St. Louis World's Fair.

American Furniture Collection

Bob and Ellie started buying antiques as soon as they were married because it was cheaper than buying new furniture, and of higher quality. After buying the mansion, they bought larger furniture that fit the scale of their new home. When they decided that there might be a museum in their future, they felt

that an Indiana museum should have American furniture, and were drawn to Renaissance Revival in more formal woods like rosewood, mahogany and walnut. Ellie scoured the antique auction ads for the most impressive pieces they could find, and the Museum is now filled with monumental antiques rarely found even in major Museums.

Unlike paintings, major antiques are generally sold at auction, and most of the large pieces came from the East Coast or the South. The most popular piece is a superior grade Wooton desk made in Indianapolis about 1875. There are a lot of Wooton desks, but in 30 years of looking it is the only superior grade Wooton desk that the Haans ever saw in person. The superior grade desks were all custom made, and they were the largest and most ornate desks ever made by Wooton.

Ceramics

Bob and Ellie also collected items associated with the St Louis World's Fair, and the first pieces of pottery in the collection were three massive Weller vases that were exhibited at the Fair. The largest is about 7 feet tall, and won the Gold Prize for the Arts at the Fair. The Haans felt that ceramics would add an interesting touch to the Museum, and started collecting pottery by historic Indiana artists in 2013. Those are mostly functional pottery like vases and bowls.

Bob and Ellie started visiting Indiana's most notable living clay artists in 2014, and purchased their best works. A lot of the work is decorative rather than functional, and that difference expands the possibility for producing unique

forms. One of the artists was quick to point out that his work was ceramics (not pottery) because he didn't view pottery as art. Most of the major pieces in the collection were created by professors who started the ceramics programs at universities across Indiana, and their work reflects their personalities and their interests. Most of the artist are at or beyond retirement age, and sold their best pieces to the Haans because they were excited that ceramics would be featured in a museum.

Mountain Bike Trail

Bob and Ellie rode bicycles since their early years together. They rode a few organized long-distance rides locally before striking out on their own 100-mile rides. They later rode over 300 miles in 3 days a few times, but gave up road rides in favor of mountain biking. There are different challenges, including obstacles and a lot of hills. Their trips began to focus on mountain biking, but there were no trails in Lafayette, and it took a while to "get their legs". Bob built a trail in the back yard in 1998 and they both rode it frequently. He expanded the trail each year, eventually taking it down to Valley Street. When Bob and Ellie went on trips, they were ready to ride! They opened the trail to the public, and over 400 riders have signed disclaimers to ride it.

The Haan Museum

The Haans had already applied for non-profit status for a museum, and in 2013 Bob and Ellie decided that the time had come to get serious about the Museum. They held regular meetings with the Board of Directors, who decided call the mansion the Haan Mansion Museum of Indiana Art, and started monthly tours in May.

Endowments

The Community Foundation was offering matching funds for new money put into Endowment funds, so the Haans established two endowments – one to help cover operating expenses and the other to help cover maintenance. They knew that endowments would be critical to the museum’s long-term survival, and the matching funds were too good to ignore. Bob and Ellie opened an acquisition fund a few years later. Friends opened an endowment at the Clinton County Community Foundation to benefit the Haan Museum. Building the endowments will be a major focus in the near future.

Gifts of the Property to the Museum

The Haans donated the property to the Museum in 2015 so that the Museum would be eligible for grants, and would expect to attract more sponsorships. They felt that as long as they owned the property, the public perception would be that supporting the Museum was really just supporting the Haans.

Bob and Ellie bought a home on Lake Freeman, but still spend most of their days at the mansion as full-time volunteers.

Applying Business Principles to the Museum

The Haans applied a lot of business principles to collecting art and starting a Museum. The biggest difference is that the museum is not a profit-making venture, funds are limited, and the Board of Directors makes the major decisions. The Museum still needs to present the best product possible, provide a meaningful experience, and have a satisfactory bottom line. Museums also need a good membership base, committed volunteers, and community support.

The collecting phase (the product) was very successful. The Haan Museum houses the best collection of historic Indiana paintings anywhere, an astounding collection of Indiana ceramics, and an extraordinary collection of American furniture.

The Haan Museum is very successful at providing meaningful experiences. Guest always seem very pleased with what they see, and many come back and bring out-of town visitors to share the experience. The next challenge was finding ways to share Indiana art and culture on a more regular basis in a way that guests could come free, at a time of their choosing.

Nature Trail

The first step was opening a Nature Trail on the grounds behind the Museum in 2015. During the summer of 2015, Bob converted parts of the Mountain Bike Trail to a Nature Trail that is almost 1 mile long and varies from moderate to difficult. He wrote descriptions for 30 native Indiana trees, and posted other signs describing other features of the woods. The trail was officially opened in October, 2016. The Nature Trail is open free to the public every day, and the bike trail is still in use by local mountain bike riders.

Sculpture Garden

The second step was a sculpture garden with sculptures by Indiana artists, which opened in 2016. During the many visits to ceramic artists in 2014, the Haans noticed that several of the artists made outdoor sculptures, and decided to explore the possibility of putting a sculpture garden behind the Museum. The Board approved the use of the land behind the Museum for a sculpture garden, and Bob and Ellie started acquiring sculptures.

The Haans decided to use more intimate sized sculptures called garden sculptures rather than large public sculptures. They felt that the entire garden needed to be wheelchair accessible, so Bob designed the trail to wind around the back yard so that the slope of the path is less than 1 in 20. A \$50,000 grant from the Indiana Department of Tourism Development and \$22,000 from the Community Foundation of Greater Lafayette were instrumental in making the garden possible.

The wheelchair accessible path meanders past 25 sculptures, including works in bronze, stone, clay, glass and steel. Volunteers identified and purchased or donated appropriate native plants, prepared the ground, planted and watered the plants, and made changes needed for drainage on the hilly areas.

Special Exhibitions and Open Hours

The third step in sharing Indiana art on a regular basis was having special exhibitions and regular hours so that visitors would have more reasons to return. The Board hired Scholer architects to look at the carriage house for special exhibition space. The cost was prohibitive, so three rooms on the second floor of the mansion were chosen for special exhibitions. The first special exhibition opened in September 2016, and the Museum began offering self-guided tours from 1 to 4 pm every Wednesday through Saturday.

Volunteers set up a library of books about Indiana art that can be checked out by members. The library also has books by Indiana authors and sheet music by Indiana composers.

Accessibility and Security

The Museum received an accessibility and security grant from the NCHS Foundation for a wheelchair ramp and security. Two bathrooms were fitted with accessibility upgrades, and a wheelchair ramp has been installed. Security cameras have been installed throughout the Museum and in the Sculpture Garden.

Theater Garden Stage

The Lafayette Civic Theatre's summer youth theater camp was held on the Museum grounds for several years, ending with a performance in the Theater Garden each summer. The performances were held in the grass, with patrons bringing lawn chairs for the lawn. Putting a stage in the theater garden became a priority, and the Museum received \$10,500 over three years from the City of Lafayette to install a stage in the theater garden for the Civic Youth Theater and other programs. It covered the installation of the posts, materials for the stage, and electricity to the stage. Donations and volunteer labor allowed the Museum to complete the project. The space is used for music, poetry and other educational programs.

Fire Detection and Notification System

The Museum received a grant from the Indiana Historical Society to install a system to detect fire, sound alarms and flash lights to alert people who are inside, and notify the monitoring company. This allows the Museum to hold much larger events.

Ongoing Challenges

The challenges for the Museum are:

- ☐ Finding ways to attract more visitors;
- ☐ Building a good membership base;
- ☐ Attracting and training committed volunteers who understand the Museum and its collections so that they can provide meaningful experiences for guests;
- ☐ Building an engaged Board to nurture and support the Museum;
- ☐ Providing educational programs related to Indiana culture;
- ☐ Gaining community support;
- ☐ Attracting more sponsors and grants to support programs; and
- ☐ Building the endowments to make the Museum viable in the long term.

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