

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

14 WEST 49TH STREET, NEW YORK

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 7-7470

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Museum of Modern Art, 14 West 49 Street, New York, announces that an Exhibition of Three Centuries of American Architecture will open to the public Wednesday, February 15, and will remain on view through Wednesday, March 15. As this will be the last exhibition in the Museum's temporary quarters in Rockefeller Center there will be no admission charge at any time. The hours will remain the same: 10 A.M. to 6 P.M. weekdays, including Saturdays; 12 Noon to 6 P.M. on Sundays.

The exhibition is composed of the architecture section of the large exhibition of American art which the Museum sent to Paris at the invitation of the French Government last summer for a showing at the Jeu de Paume Museum. The architecture section received high praise from the French critics. It was assembled under the direction of John McAndrew, Curator of the Department of Architecture and Industrial Art of the Museum of Modern Art, assisted by Janet Henrich and Elizabeth Mock. Since its return from Paris it has been rearranged as a travelling exhibition by Elodie Courter, head of the Museum's department of Circulating Exhibitions. With the exception of a few models it is substantially as it was shown in Paris.

The exhibition ranges from the early adobe pueblos and churches in the Southwest, the Colonial frame houses in New England, the Dutch Colonial stone houses in New York, the ornamented German Pennsylvania barns, through the developments of three centuries to the skyscrapers, factories and even the oil stations and trailer camps of modern life. The exhibition consists chiefly of enlarged photographs, charts, maps, plans and several models of historic and modern buildings.

The very earliest buildings shown (in enlarged photographs) will be the adobe Governor's Palace at Santa Fe and the church at Acoma, New Mexico. This church, whose adobe walls are nine feet thick, was the scene of Willa Cather's novel Death Comes for the Archbishop and is still used by the same tribe of Indians that built it before this country was settled.

Earliest 17th century buildings in the eastern part of the

United States to be shown in the exhibition will be St. Luke's Church, 1632, in Virginia, and the Fairbanks house, 1636, at Dedham, Mass. The brick church is Gothic, and the original part of the Fairbanks house--it has later additions--is a half-medieval frame house of Elizabethan style. The latest building to be shown will be the new home of the Museum of Modern Art, now almost ready for occupancy. This will be exhibited in model form with glass facade: the lower part plate glass, the gallery floors a new opaque white glass called Thermolux, and the office floors bands of windows.

Although the exhibition includes the work of numerous architects whose names are lost or little known, four men stand out as the major figures in American architecture: Thomas Jefferson, Henry Hobson Richardson, Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright, each a pioneer.

Thomas Jefferson, our architect president, affected by the dilettante enthusiasm for the antique which swept Europe and America toward the end of the 18th century, was the first architect in America or in Europe to turn it to monumental building on a large scale. He reproduced ancient Roman temples in his designs for Virginia houses and public buildings, antedating such use abroad by almost a quarter-century.

Henry Hobson Richardson, at a time of great architectural confusion both in Europe and America, developed a strong individual style of grandeur and dignity. Today we might not recognize his designs as "functional" because he built principally in stone, but he forecast modern principles by building in masonry with the straightforward severity of much modern work. He placed windows not according to traditional symmetrical design but freely, where they best light interiors. Many of his other devices were strikingly original in contrast with the parrot-like imitations of past styles of his late 19th century contemporaries.

Louis Sullivan, true father of the skyscraper, was the first in the world to give architectural expression to engineering developments in steel structure. He designed the outside walls of a tall building simply and frankly as a sheath for the steel cage that was its frame, not as a massive pile of masonry in a travesty of some past style as did most of his contemporaries. For thirty years no other architect surpassed his original skyscraper designs.

Frank Lloyd Wright, generally considered the founder of modern architecture, has held a leading position for three generations not only because of his actual achievements but because of his effect on European and American architecture. The principles by which he built and of which he wrote in the early 90's and 1900's widely influenced young European architects who developed a modern style admittedly based on Wright's principles. Many features of this architecture, now known as the International Style, have returned in the guise of European influence to America, where they originated. His most recent work, equally significant, will also be shown.

In a Museum Bulletin on the Exhibition of Three Centuries of American Art, Mr. McAndrew writes:

"The first buildings the European settlers erected were stringently utilitarian forts and dwellings. (The famous log cabin was not introduced until 1638 by the Swedish settlers in Delaware.) Once securely established, they built churches and a few houses of more conscious architectural character. Though traces survive of French, Spanish and Dutch styles, most of our XVII century types derive from the English buildings which the settlers remembered.

"After 1700, tobacco-rich southern planters and shipping-magnates of New England began to demand monumental settings worthy of their new importance. An imported English 'builder's manual' or 'carpenter's guide' would furnish first an ornamental doorway and then an entire academic facade or even a whole plan. The first building at the College of William and Mary at Williamsburg, Va. (1695), was designed in the London office of Sir Christopher Wren.

"Even the closest American derivations vary from their British models of a generation earlier as a result of being modified by different physical and social conditions. For example, Virginia is hotter than England: verandas appear on planters' houses. England did not know such a development in wood as ours. Sometimes the carpenter-builder would not understand the complexities engraved in his manual, and sometimes he worked from memory, and in consequence a novel form would result.

"By 1700 these variations could form a tradition, particularly in the centers most isolated from Europe. Many New England communities achieved genuine architectural expression in a robust local style - from the severe Puritan faith of the four-square white Meeting House on the village common to the trim snugness of the houses around it. As in painting and sculpture this honest vernacular art has come to be recognized as a serious rival of the elegant importation."

After the exhibition closes at the Museum on March 15 it will be circulated to museums and colleges throughout the country.