

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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Paris
Architecture

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Visitors to Paris this summer will have an opportunity to obtain a far more comprehensive idea of American architecture than has ever been afforded by any exhibition in the United States.

The architecture section of the Exhibition of American Art 1609-1938, which the Museum of Modern Art has assembled at the invitation of the French Government for a showing in the Musée du Jeu de Paume from May 24 to July 13, is so large that 500 running feet (almost two city blocks) will be required to show it. It will consist of enlarged photographs, charts, maps, plans, a dozen models of historic and modern buildings and a short film giving the history of the skyscraper. Comprehensive captions in French and English will accompany the exhibits.

The earliest dated building shown in the exhibition will be the adobe Governor's Palace at Santa Fe, New Mexico, probably built in 1609 and still in use. There will also be an enlarged photograph of an even earlier building of uncertain date, the church at Acoma, New Mexico, which was built before the Navajo rebellion against the Spaniards in 1599. The church, of adobe walls nine feet thick--scene of Willa Cather's novel Death Comes for the Archbishop--is still used by the same tribe of Indians that built it in the 16th century.

The earliest 17th century buildings in the eastern part of the United States are 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-mediaeval frame house of Elizabethan style. The exhibition traverses three centuries of architecture in all parts of this country up to the present day, the latest example being the new building for the Museum of Modern Art to be completed in December 1938. This will be shown in a model with an almost all glass facade, the lower part transparent plate glass, and the gallery floors a new opaque white glass which keeps out the heat.

The architecture section of the Exhibition of American

Art 1609-1938 has been 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,

Mary Cooke and Elizabeth Mock of the Museum staff. Mr. McAndrew will go to Paris to supervise the installation of the architecture section. In the catalog for the exhibition he 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."

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

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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 would 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.

The exhibition ranges from the early adobe houses 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 dozen or more models are constructed with great attention to exact detail and will give Europeans probably their best picture of American architecture

of the 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. The models are as follows:

Wyckoff House, 1640, Brooklyn, N. Y.
Architect unknown
Lent by Pratt Institute

Parson Capen House, 1683, Topsfield, Mass.
Architect unknown
Lent by Brown University

Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House, c.1700, Rhode Island
Architect unknown
Lent by Brown University

Lefferts House, c.1740, Canarsie, N. Y.
Architect unknown
Lent by Pratt Institute

Monticello, 1796-1809, Virginia
Architect, Thomas Jefferson
*Lent by Architects' Emergency Committee

Hamilton Grange, 1801-02, Convent Avenue, New York
Architect, John McComb, Jr.
Lent by the Museum of the City of New York

St. John's Chapel, 1803, New York
Architect, John McComb, Jr.
Lent by the Museum of the City of New York

Robie House, 1908-09, Chicago
Architect, Frank Lloyd Wright
Lent by the Museum of Modern Art

Philadelphia Savings Fund Society Building, 1931-32
Architects, Howe and Lescaze
Lent by the Philadelphia Savings Fund Society

John Nicholas Brown House, 1937-38, Fisher's Island, New York
Architect, Richard Neutra
Lent by the architect

Museum of Modern Art new building, 1937-38
Architects, Goodwin and Stone
Lent by the Museum of Modern Art

Plywood House, 1938, N. Y. World's Fair
Architect, A. Lawrence Kocher
Lent by the architect

Wood Frame House (to show construction)
Built by students of Brooklyn Technical High School
Lent by Brooklyn Technical High School.

*This model was executed by unemployed architectural draughtsmen as a made-work project of the Architects' Emergency Committee for the region of New York.