

"Where The Sidewalk Ends"

The development of Cincinnati's early buildings along the north shore of the mighty Ohio River exemplified a combination of convenience, aesthetics, and ignorance. Settled in 1788, our city was chosen by its founders to be built along a flat, natural levee, providing a commanding up and down river view of the Ohio, as well as being strategically opposite the mouth of the Licking River which flowed from the heart of the Kentucky wilderness. Situated between the two Miami Rivers - the Little to the east and the Great to the west, Cincinnati's site was selected because it represented one of the largest, flat valley basin areas on the Ohio allowing for future growth. This location was much more promising than the other early neighboring settlements of Columbia and North Bend which were more constricted by nearby hillsides. Building along the river's shore made perfect sense from the standpoints of convenience, aesthetics, and river commerce; however, after a few annual spring floods, the development of Cincinnati moved northward for at least residences, churches and major public buildings to avoid the potential devastation of the river's muddy waters.

Fourth Street became the avenue of choice because of its elevated location, safely perched above the river's worst floods. By the 1820's, Fourth Street had become a very fashionable residential address with many elegant Federal and Greek Revival styled-homes lining it. One of the street's original remaining buildings epitomizing the early tastefulness and splendor of this thoroughfare can be seen in our own Literary Club. Having been built in circa 1820 as a dignified residence for William Thorns, its Federal style, symbolized by its classic millwork, brickwork, and detailing, has continued to provide a lasting reminder of our city's early heritage. In fact, the finest residential district in the first half of the nineteenth century in Cincinnati was bounded by East Fourth Street on the north. Pike Street on the east. East Third Street on the south, and Broadway on the west. One of Cincinnati's early civic boosters, Charles Cist, described the following in his Cincinnati in 1841: Its Early Annals and Future Prospects: An "intelligent guide" would take a visitor up Broadway from the river to Fourth Street, where one would note "a row of modern palaces" to the east. Upon examination of the western portion of Fourth Street with its well-paved streets, sidewalks, landscaping, and public buildings, the visitor would remark "these people have taste to improve and spirit to enjoy, as well as industry to acquire." Walking eastward along Fourth Street today, one passes the modernized Lytle Park which successfully conceals thousands of automobiles and trucks that travel through a series of tunnels for Interstate 71. Completely unaware of the noise and air pollution of the traffic underfoot. Fourth Street, Lytle Park, and some of its surrounding buildings were constructed over the expressway to maintain the solitude, elegance, and blissful existence at this end of the downtown area. Fourth Street terminates at Pike Street where an

imposing limestone and black wrought iron gate provides a fitting ending: this is where the sidewalk ends.

Whether as a visitor of Cincinnati in the nineteenth century or as a pedestrian today, one building has prominently reigned for 185 years as Fourth Street's most important and revered. Beyond the dignified, gated barrier lies a venerable edifice which was completed in 1819-1820 as a "country seat" situated on a mound at the outskirts of this developing city. We know it today as the Taft Museum of Art, but it was originally named "Belmont" and was the residence of several of Cincinnati's most prominent families: the Baums, Longworths, Sintons, and Tafts. Although it has always maintained a notable position of distinction, this residence has certain secrets which, in spite of research, remain undiscovered. The most important question relating to the house has continued to be: Who was the original architect or builder? In 1987, the Taft Museum's director at the time, Dr. Ruth K. Meyer, organized a symposium and publication on the subject which helped to dispel some long-standing attributions which included Benjamin Henry Latrobe (1764-1820) and James Hoban (1762/65-1821), the latter being the first architect of the White House in Washington, D.C., while the former also did remodeling work on it. The speakers at the symposium believed that the design of the Taft Museum was a collaboration between the client, Martin Baum (1765-1831), and one of many hundreds of master builders who flocked here to the fastest growing city in America during the first half of the nineteenth century. However, this hypothesis doesn't fully take into consideration the elegant detailing and planning which is evident throughout the house. From the stylish use of Adamesque oval windows placed at the second floor and covered with delicate ironwork tracery to the use of a raised "English" basement allowing the home to achieve a "piano nobile" design, this sophisticated result seems to belie the theory that a master builder was the primary designer.

The answer to this question of Belmont's architect may exist in further research of the home's original owners, Mr. and Mrs. Martin Baum. As one of Cincinnati's earliest and most important families, few today are aware of the extent of the Baums many interests and contributions to our city. On June 12, 1886, Literary Club member, H. A. Rattermann delivered a paper on Martin Baum which has lent an important review of this early settler's activities and our city's first entrepreneur. It is believed that Baum was born in 1765 at Hagenau in lower Alsace which at that time was part of Germany. His parents, John George and Elizabeth Baum, left Alsace after Martin's birth and emigrated to Philadelphia in 1772. The Baums settled in New Hanover in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania and then, after the Revolutionary War, they removed to Hagerstown, Maryland. Martin's father was a merchant and owned a so-called "country store" in which they acquired some wealth. This enabled Martin Baum to be well-educated with his studies having included the Classics, Latin, Greek, French, Theology, and Medicine: the latter

exposed him to pharmacy, botany and chemistry as well.

Martin Baum used his medical background to serve on the staff of General Anthony Wayne as a pharmacist in his Army in 1794. With the conclusion of the Indian War in 1795, Baum settled in Cincinnati where he established himself as the leading merchant in the community. In 1802, Baum erected the finest business establishment, and he became the great merchant of the West whose trade extended all over this new country. In 1803, he organized the Miami Exporting Co. which was a combination bank and commission house for farmers.

In order to improve travel time to New Orleans, Baum devised the building of barges which were propelled with sails and long poles that allowed two round trips per year — a vast improvement over flat or keel boats which took up to 12 months for one round trip. These barges enabled goods such as rice, coffee, tea, sugar, tools, hardware, and other dry goods to be supplied to the growing Ohio River valley.

Because the falls at Louisville were a major impediment to the regularity of barge traffic, Baum organized the Jefferson Ohio Canal Company in 1818 in order to create the building of a canal around the falls.

In 1807, Baum created a multi-storied sugar refinery along the Cincinnati shore and, in 1810, he erected the first iron foundry in the West. A few years later, he established the first steam mill as well. By 1817, the Cincinnati Woolen Mills was established in which he was one of the stockholders. According to Rattermann, "these various enterprises caused Baum to gain for Cincinnati some of its best and most useful citizens, engineers, draughtsmen, artisans, etc." Baum traveled to Baltimore frequently to encourage newly arrived German immigrants to come to Cincinnati to give them employment in one of his business establishments. With these frequent trips to the East, Baum could have met Latrobe or another architect and become aware of their current work before building "Belmont".

Besides these manufacturing and commercial activities, Baum also introduced wine growing to Cincinnati. His vineyards were located along the western and southern slopes of Mt. Ida (now Mt. Adams) and in the rear yard of his Pike Street home. In 1802 or 1803, Baum hired a vintner, Jonathan Starbler, to plant his vineyards, garden, and orchard. By 1821, the orchard, located half-way up Mt. Ida's slope, was changed to a place of amusement called the "Apollonian Garden" by Starbler for Baum.

Baum also helped to cultivate learning in Cincinnati by establishing the Lancastrian Society in 1813, which would become the Cincinnati College in 1818. In 1817, he was among the founders of the Western Museum; of the Literary Society: 1818; of the Society for the Promotion of Agriculture in the West: 1819; and of the Apollonian Society: 1824 (this latter group, a musical organization, had its meetings in the previously mentioned "Apollonian Garden.")

In 1817, when the Bank of the United States established a branch office in Cincinnati principally because of Baum's insistence, he was chosen as its president and director. In this same year, Baum purchased the major portion of what is now Toledo, Ohio and thus became one of the founders of that city, originally known as Port Lawrence. Once established, he urged the building of a canal as early as 1818 in order to link Lake Erie with the Ohio River.

Baum built a new cotton mill in Cincinnati in 1829, established cotton depots in the South, and became the founder of another town, Florence, Alabama, where he built large cotton warehouses.

All was not perfect, however, given the Panic of 1820 which caused Baum to lose a large amount of his riches. He had begun the erection of his new home, "Belmont", at Fourth and Pike Streets in 1819, but continued with its construction despite these financial reversals. This panic happened when the Bank of the United States in Washington, D.C. refused to accept notes of collateral sent to it by the branch in Cincinnati. These notes were mainly issued using land as collateral, and Baum was hit especially hard with his many speculative real estate ventures. Baum soon put his home up for sale, but given the economic depression, no one else could afford such an elaborate, expensive home. He and his family decided to move into "Belmont" anyway, and resided there until Baum was forced to deed his home to the Bank of the United States in 1825, but not before giving a party, the size of which Cincinnati previously had not seen.

When Baum deeded his home back to his bank, he only returned half of the property's original nine acres by splitting it at Deer Creek which flowed where Eggleston Avenue is today and bisected Baum's land. By retaining this four and one-half acre tract of land east of Deer Creek for himself, he retained his Apollonian Garden property on Mt. Ida and built in circa 1828 an even larger three story home overlooking the city and Ohio River. This latest elegant Baum residence lasted over one hundred years and was memorialized in a sketch and prose by the artist/author Caroline Williams in her book. The City on Seven Hills. She stated that the Baum home on Mt. Adams was razed for the Fifth Street/Columbia Parkway Viaduct construction in the 1930's, and that it was sadly missed.

In determining the attribution of "Belmont's" architect (if it even had one), as well as Baum's later home on Mt. Adams, scholars have only looked to his background while ignoring his wife. In 1804, Martin Baum married Ann Sommerville Wallace, a union which, according to historian Richard Cote, "brought him social prominence." Mrs. Baum was the daughter of Robert Wallace, Sr., a captain in the First Company of Artillery of Philadelphia in the Revolutionary War, and his wife Rebecca Chambers, daughter of David Chambers and Edith Claypoole of Philadelphia. The Chambers and Wallaces were close personal friends of George and Martha Washington, and Rebecca Chambers descended from a long line of English and French nobility along with Oliver

Cromwell for added zest. The Wallace family still possesses a china coffee [um](#) which President Washington is reputed to have used, and their home in Philadelphia, where the [Washingtons](#) were entertained, was still standing in 1912 and may still be in existence.

With such socially prominent parents, Mrs. Baum was exposed to Philadelphia's finest homes and manners and came to Marietta, Ohio in 1801 at the age of nineteen with her family. Marrying Martin Baum in 1804 and moving to Cincinnati, she joined her sister Rebecca and brother-in-law. Judge Jacob [Bumet](#), in making Cincinnati a center for cultural enrichment and civilized living in this western outpost. Because of her background and connections, Mrs. Baum may have been the one to exert influence over the design and decoration of her new home of "[Belmont](#)".

After the Baums left "Belmont", between 1826 and 1829, Mrs. Ann Wood leased the house from the bank and operated a school for young ladies and utilized the home's name for her establishment.

In 1829, Nicholas Longworth, the city's wealthiest citizen, purchased "[Belmont](#)" for \$29,000.00. Originally from Newark, [N.J.](#), Longworth, an attorney by vocation, had embarked in a sideline which made him the city's topmost capitalist by trading in real estate. Most legal clients at that time paid Longworth in land and with the redoubling of the city's population every ten years, Longworth received land initially valued at \$10.00, but later worth hundreds of dollars. In fact, Longworth became so wealthy that he had the dubious honor in the 1850's to be second only to John Jacob [Astor](#) as America's largest taxpayer. By the time of his death in 1863, Longworth's fortune had reached fifteen million dollars, a staggeringly large amount in those days.

Longworth also became Cincinnati's first major art patron and collector. Celebrated sculptor Hiram Powers and artist Robert S. [Duncanson](#) are two persons who greatly [benefitted](#) from Longworth's largesse and benevolence. He also purchased a major work of art by the renowned artist Benjamin West which was entitled "Ophelia and [Laertes](#)". Measuring 109" x 152 1/2", it was for many years the largest painting to come over the [Alleghenies](#) and once hung on "Belmont's" Music Room's walls; it now is part of the Cincinnati Art Museum's collection.

When Nicholas Longworth died, "Belmont" was retained by his widow until her death in 1865. The home was then leased to Francis [E. Suire](#), a druggist who aspired to the high life, but soon fell short.

David [Sinton](#), a self-made man originally born in Ireland in 1808, purchased the home from Longworth's heirs in 1871, and set about remodeling the home which was now over fifty years old. Having been raised in eastern Ohio, Sinton left home as a teenager to seek his fortune. He found employment in various establishments along the frontier such as inns, hotels, and dry goods stores until he entered the iron industry in his twenties. By 1847, he had come to Cincinnati and later

greatly prospered by the Civil War: this allowed him to be an active investor in Cincinnati's public utilities and real estate. In purchasing "Belmont", he desired a proper residence in order to present his daughter, Anna, to society. Although Sinton did not share Longworth's interest in collecting art, he did at least realize that any successful Cincinnati should be concerned with the city's culture, and he became one of the founders of the Cincinnati Art Museum.

In 1873, Anna Sinton married a prominent Cincinnati attorney, Charles Phelps Taft, and they moved into "Belmont" with her father, David. Alterations to the home occurred during this period including a new wing for Sinton's own use, and changes to the fenestration in order to be seen as up-to-date and fashionable.

Upon David Sinton's death in 1900, he left a fortune to his only daughter Anna, and this allowed the Tafts to pursue the collection of major European and American artwork and Chinese porcelains. Through frequent trips to Europe and New York, the Tafts assembled a fine collection which includes great masters such as Rembrandt, Steen, de Hooch, Van Ostade, Gainsborough, Turner, Ingres, Millet, and Corot. Not to be accused of too much European art worship, the Tafts also selected works by American artists such as Sargent, Duveneck, and Farny. It is a conservative, solid, tasteful collection of paintings that reflected the Tafts' own views.

Fortunately for Cincinnati, the Tafts appreciated "Belmont" and considered it as the remaining example of residential splendor in the downtown area. With many commercial and industrial buildings being constructed all around their beloved home, the family was quite concerned about "Belmont's" future after their deaths. Because of this as well as their art collection, they set up the foundation of the Cincinnati Institute of Fine Arts in 1927. The Tafts determined that they would live in the house until their deaths, at which time it would be restored to its original Federal style and converted into a public museum to showcase their art collection. The only deviation from this restoration to its 1820's origins was the restoration of the Foyer's significant landscape murals attributed to Robert S. Duncanson which date from a later time period, circa 1850.

Walter P. Siple, a former member of the Literary Club, became the director of the Cincinnati Art Museum which, at the time of the Taft's generous gift, also oversaw the Taft Museum's operations. Siple very capably undertook "Belmont's" restoration, and he worked closely with Mrs. Taft in making certain that her and her late husband's wishes were incorporated into this early example of historic preservation (Mr. Taft passed away in 1929). The new museum opened on November 29, 1932 and was seen as a major complement to the Cincinnati Art Museum's collection. By the time Siple retired as director of both the Art Museum and the Taft in 1949, the two institutions were desiring independence from each other, and by 1951, the hiring of Katherine Hanna as the new Taft Museum director made this separation from the Art Museum complete.

Under the directorships of Katherine Hanna (1951 -1983) and Dr. Ruth Krueger Meyer

(1983 - 1993), they acted as excellent stewards maintaining the house and its art collection. Under Meyer's administration, a scholarly, exhaustive, and thoroughly researched handbook was published, covering not only the Museum's entire collection, but also the history of 'Belmont' and its occupants.

If the Taft Museum of Art is located where the sidewalk ends, it is also the place where two buildings collide. The original restoration of the Taft was completed in 1932, and it became necessary after seventy years to prepare this early nineteenth century wooden structure for the twenty-first century. In particular, the electrical system was totally antiquated and the museum in recent years had had some frightening scares with overloaded electrical panels melting and releasing smoke into a facility holding priceless, centuries-old artwork and furniture. Besides the overtaxed electrical system, the heating, ventilating, and air conditioning (H.V.A.C.) system was inadequate to meet today's museum standards in controlling temperature and humidity fluctuations.

Beyond these problems needing to be upgraded, the current director, Phillip Long, his curatorial staff, and the Fine Arts Fund board, which oversees the Taft, all felt that a new auditorium, temporary exhibition space, and more parking were also necessary. All of these problems and inadequacies didn't just occur recently: the previous director, Dr. Meyer, had recommended that the Taft purchase the old Earls Insurance Building located across the street from the museum at 311 Pike Street at Lytle. This charming Tudor Revival building was available for less than \$1 million pending negotiations, and it would have provided the necessary space for the museum's administration and curatorial offices as well as storage. It also contained a large conference room for board meetings and educational gatherings. By moving these things out of the Taft, it would have allowed much needed square footage to become available for museum visitors and would have lessened the demands upon the mechanical systems. This proposal would have allowed the Taft to be just a museum, a building dedicated to highlighting the architecture and its collection with all other support services having moved across the street. Proposed in the late 1980's, it was deemed to be too expensive and extravagant at the time. However, after the recent \$22.8 million addition and restoration project, it now looks like a bargain by comparison.

Instead of moving the support systems across the street, the current museum administration of Phillip Long wanted to initially build two new wings onto the original home, but plans were later scaled back to just one. As is the case with many recent projects in Cincinnati, it was felt that the museum needed to hire an out-of-town architect in order to get the best possible design service, and so Ann Beha and Associates of Boston was selected.

Where two buildings collide is at the poorly designed connection between the Taft's existing building and Ann Beha's new wing, located along the north edge of the rear garden and built off the former office suite of the director. Rather than paying close attention to the original

building's exquisite details, the architect chose to be oblivious to the Taft's cornice lines by making her new building at least several feet higher and having its parapet slam into a gable with no sense of grace, understanding or respect.

This new wing pays "lip service" to the original house by mimicking its white wood siding. Siding was selected as the new wing's "skin" in order to relate to the original house. Although this seems to be an example of sympathetic architectural **contextualism**, upon closer observation it is revealed that the new siding is twice as wide as the original.

The **fenestration** in this new museum wing recalls the windows of the mid-Victorian era and are described as 2/2 (or 2 large panes over 2). Instead of looking at the Taft's Federal-styled 6/6 windows (or 6 panes over 6), Ann Beha selected fenestration which did not match the original's size, style, shape, proportions, or **muntins** in favor of something that merely worked for her addition. If she wished to specify a different style **of fenestration**, then at least the spacing or rhythm of the **Taft's** original windows could have been adopted, but this was ignored as well.

The Taft's east face, visible from **Mt. Adams** and the Fifth Street Viaduct, has always been important to the museum's image. Unfortunately, the view of the new wing from the east looks like an oversized 5-1/2 story wooden shed with a "splattering" of randomly placed windows across its facade with no concern for symmetry, rhythm or proportion. The two story base of the wing is composed primarily of painted concrete block accented with a few large openings covered in utilitarian metal mesh. A less attractive facade could not be designed, and it is shameful that \$22.8 million cannot buy a better design which would be more sensitive and befitting a museum of this caliber.

Viewing the Taft's rear landscaping used to reinforce its image as an enclave in an otherwise concrete jungle of highways and factories, with its previously lush formal garden designed by noted landscape architect. Henry **Fletcher Kenney**. This verdant green oasis, filled with towering trees, beckoned visitors as readily as if it were a mirage in the desert, except this was real and not a figment of the imagination. Instead of treating this lovely garden as sacrosanct, it was seen as being expendable, so all of the trees, flowers and shrubs were destroyed in order to make room for more parking. The new garage, which only increased parking slots from about three dozen spaces to 67, was forced to go in place of the garden due to the museum's limited lot size. However, the **Taft** is surrounded in the rear by acres of virtually unusable and undesirable land which is below a maze of concrete and steel bridge superstructures and piers. Certainly, an attempt should have been made to acquire this land for a new parking garage in order to preserve the museum's beloved garden. With a number of large corporations nearby, such as Procter and Gamble and Western' Southern Life Insurance Co., there is obviously a demand for parking spaces beyond the **Taft's** needs, and a much larger garage could have been built with the possibility of its profits even going to the museum's

coffers.

With the new garage mostly underground, it will prevent large trees from being planted, because there is no room for their root structure. The Taft Museum also could have chosen to restore the new garden to landscape architect Kenney's original design, since there has been ever-increasing respect and interest in his career. Instead, the new garden has at least half of its space covered in concrete pavers with the rest of it composed of grass, flower beds, and small trees not requiring much soil depth for their roots. Its design has nothing to do with Kenney's plan, nor with Baum's or Longworth's landscapes either: in spite of this property being an historical site, history was given little, if any, credence.

A significant portion of the Taft Museum's renovation was a reinterpretation of its interior decoration. When Mr. and Mrs. Charles Taft gave their home and collection to the city as a museum, they could have easily opened the doors to the house which would have revealed a Victorian decor with much emphasis on eclecticism. This choice would not have cost them anything, but they decided that this rare Federal-styled wood framed mansion as one of the few remaining examples of its kind located west of the Alleghenies should instead be restored to its original circa 1820 design. The local architectural firm of Garber and Woodward was hired at that time, and our late club member Woodie Garber remembered fondly his research and design work that was done in his father's office in bringing this treasured home back to its original glory. Although there was not much historical information or depictions of the home in its earliest days, there was a color lithograph of the front facade done to memorialize the Golden Wedding Anniversary of Nicholas and Susan Howell Longworth, dated Christmas Eve, 1857: this aided architects and historians in bringing the house to its Federal design origins after having been remodeled to be Italianate by David Sinton and the Tafts. Garber and Woodward studied the architecture of other early buildings in the area, and that information complemented their excellent training in classicism. As Walter Langsam stated in his book, Great Houses of the Queen City. "their discreet work achieved a sense of unified authenticity that has often deceived later observers."

Besides replicating early design motifs for the Taft's first restoration, some items, such as antique wooden mantels, were purchased from homes in the area of the same circa 1820 time period, further reinforcing the look of authenticity. With this recent renovation, though, these historic antique wooden mantels have been replaced with what are purported to be "Federal Rococo": one is black with gold veining Egyptian marble; the other is a dark grey King of Prussia marble. To use the term "Federal Rococo" in a museum press release to describe these mantels is analogous to saying "streamlined baroque" or "restrained fussiness". The Federal Period in America dated from 1790-1830 in which our forefathers interpreted architecture in terms of classical ideals from

Ancient Rome and its republican style of government. It was noted for its symmetry and balance, as well as its overall delicate, refined detailing - such as the Taft's oval second floor windows, the dentil moulds incorporated into the exterior cornice, and the large sunburst fanlight over the front door. The inspiration for this American style was developed by Robert Adam (1728-1792) with his brother, James (1730-94) from Scotland. They toured the Continent of Europe studying the monuments of Ancient Rome, and they returned to London to become the leading English architects in the eighteenth century, and their influence was felt in America and even Cincinnati through pattern-books.

Contrary to the belief of the Taft Museum's director and curators that these two new marble mantels are Federal (or, as they say, "Federal Baroque"), they are more likely late Greek Revival dating from the 1850's noted for its "masculine boldness" according to Walter Langsam with "an elaborate vocabulary of 'authentic' classical detail, often taken out of architectural context and distorted in scale." The boldness of the Greek Revival style is in reaction and contrast to the daintiness and refined elegance of the Federal period. The mantels could also be an early version of Italianate or even Rococo Revival as evidenced by the mantels' sinuous, curvaceous lines, yet heavy in their execution and feeling. It seems incongruous to have replaced two Federal period wooden mantels in two Federal period rooms with Victorian-era 1850's marble mantels. Former curator, David Johnson, dismissed the previous wooden mantels as "provincial", and he felt that originally these rooms must have had marble ones given the sophistication of the house. Yet his opinion is not substantiated by any known facts, since it would have been very expensive and extremely difficult to transport marble mantelpieces from the East over the mountains in 1819-1820. There are also no known examples of marble mantels in Cincinnati homes from this same time frame. These major alterations to the galleries of the Taft appear to be based merely upon the capriciousness of its director and former curator who wanted marble rather than wood.

With the first restoration of the Taft from home to museum, completed in 1932, Siple, as Director of both the Cincinnati Art Museum and this new Taft Museum, delivered a paper to the Literary Club entitled "The Taft Museum". He outlined his and the Taft family's intentions which were "to provide a dignified background for the Taft collection (of art) - this background (is) to reflect the feeling of a home of the first quarter of the nineteenth century." He goes on to say: "It is surprising how successfully the architecture of the early republic lends itself to the exhibition of the collection. There is an abstract unity derived from classical ideals in this period which does not force itself upon the spectator. The restraint shown by the designer of this house, the logical manner in which halls and rooms lead into one another, make for enjoyment of the objects of art." Under Siple's direction, the interior was restored back to its 1820 origin as much as possible. He discussed in his paper that they discovered traces of the original tinting of the walls — powder blue, lemon

yellow, and gray-green — which were then reused. Upon further inspection, he also discovered that the woodwork's original color was a pure white, and that there was evidence of early nineteenth century wallpaper borders having been installed. Siple subtly transformed this Federal home into an art museum allowing the eclectic and felicitous combination of objects from different moments in time in order to provoke and satisfy. Under his skillful leadership, the architecture, decor and artwork all combined sympathetically with each other with no one element overpowering another. The attitude in the recent redecorating of the house seems to be based more upon whim than historicism. The result of this current effort has been to create cacophony, with interior architecture, artwork, carpeting, drapery treatments, mechanical vents, and lighting all conflicting with one another in a discordant atmosphere. The newly redecorated interior would be seen by Walter Siple as unharmonious as a decorator showhouse in which each room is in jarring opposition to the next space, with no concern for visual continuity. Each gallery has its own color scheme and individual wall-to-wall carpeting of intricate geometric-patterned goods that collide at each door opening.

A chronological touring approach was also selected for the redecoration of the interior which seems reasonable in theory, but, in reality, it completely disregards the architectural layout and history of the house and the way it had been furnished. In the 1880 wing designed by William Martin Aiken (1855-1908) for Mrs. Taft's father, David Sinton, this Colonial Revival example has now been selected to house the early Federal gallery and a Medieval Treasury, an attempt at Gothic Revivalism. Conversely, the earliest Federal-era rooms were altered to be designed in the later Rococo Revival style because that is how it worked sequentially with the chronological touring approach. This was selected because it was easiest for the docents to guide the public through the museum, and the results have been to turn the house into a showhouse primarily of varying Victorian-era decor for each room and make it into a museum of material culture.

In the Dutch Gallery where the Taft's seventeenth century Dutch genre and landscape paintings are exhibited, an audaciously designed black and golden straw-colored faux parquet carpeting was selected to recall inlaid floors in Dutch paintings. The house would never have had a carpet like this in the 1820's, and its bold, wild faux graining is very disconcerting as one tries to concentrate on the artwork. To complicate matters, an authentic toile de Jouy textile was used for window treatments which in tone is complementary with the paintings, but unfortunately is in total opposition with the geometry and colors of the carpet. As one tries to concentrate on viewing the paintings, it becomes almost an impossibility due to the boldness of the patterned carpet creating an Escher-like effect in which foreground and background conflict. The faux grained-look of the carpet, instead of simulating wood, has an appearance which more resembles a vermiculated surface, causing the whole room to have a swirling motion sensation.

In the Main Foyer, the room's walls have very impressive landscape murals which were

commissioned by Longworth and attributed to artist Robert S. Duncanson. While conserving these murals, it was discovered that there were faux-grained coffered panels painted as a dado below the landscape scenes. In choosing to paint the dado and wood trim in tones of brown instead of the previous white, a dilemma has resulted: the restored Federal front door with its sunburst fanlight and side lights has also been faux grained in brown. The problem is that by the time the murals were commissioned, Longworth had also remodeled this front entrance by replacing the Federal doorway with an Italianate arched design without any glass surrounds. By telling the public that this space has been restored, it becomes deceitful to have faux graining on Federal doors that were no longer existing in 1852. Instead, the doors should have remained their original white to distinguish them from the later dado.

The Dining Room in its present plan was expanded by the Taft family in the Adam style by local architects Eizner and Anderson in 1910-1913. This remodeling extended an existing room and created a small breakfast nook, separated from the main Dining Room with the use of a pair of columns and an overhead soffit spanning between them. A breathtaking ornamental plaster medallion ceiling worthy of the Adam brothers also was added to this space. Because the room was altered in the early twentieth century, many photographs exist showing exactly how the room looked upon its completion, and it is therefore bewildering to report that this room was not restored in keeping with these original images. Over the years, the columned opening to the breakfast nook had been removed and which could have been easily restored. Wall colors, carpeting, drapery treatment, furniture, and placement of artwork all could have been returned to this circa 1910 reality, but were not. For example, the new carpet is an informal Turkey print based on a design created for John D. Rockefeller's home in the Hudson River valley called "Kykuit": this is instead of a formal oriental rug of a different coloration and which is more in keeping with the Adam style of the room. The new drapery treatment, dripping in peach silk accented with powder blue lining and scalloped-edged floral embroidered sheers, is a design which would be more appropriate for a ladies' boudoir, but totally out of keeping with the neoclassicism of the room's architecture and very distracting when seen with the Barbizon School paintings lining the walls.

Interior decoration is by nature temporal, because of the inherent fragility of materials used, whereas architecture is more permanent. Therefore, reinterpretations of interior decor will often vary over time from changes that are made. Architecture for museums, on the other hand, is built of bricks, mortar, and steel and cannot be readily altered without much expense and inconvenience, and the architecture of these facilities is often given a life in perpetuity. This realization is why the architectural design of the Taft's new wing is so distressing, as compared to its decor which will need replacing in twenty years due to changes in style, wear, boredom, and obsolescence. In designing a new building, if the floor plan does not meet basic functional requirements and

necessary adjacencies, then it will fail. No amount of decorative embellishment can compensate for a flawed floor plan that simply doesn't work. The new Taft addition which has all of the charm and finesse of a Holiday Inn Conference Center, also suffers from a poorly conceived floor plan. With the creation of the new underground garage, most visitors will arrive at the museum by way of the garage elevator rather than through the new entry doors. As the elevator doors open, a visitor is presented with the question of which way to proceed. Although there are several halls and a staircase to add to the confusion, the proper direction is to move forward through the long Tea Room Cafe, dodging people, tables and chairs on one's way to a doorway at the opposite end of the space. Once passing through this opening, a visitor discovers the main reception desk hidden around the corner where neither visitor or receptionist can see one another until the former happens upon the latter. In a facility that needs revenue from museum visitors, this is a ridiculous planning scenario which defies both logic and common sense.

The charm of the Taft Museum of Art has always been its intimate scale which allowed visitors to be transported back to an earlier time of grace and elegance while never losing its feeling as a home. By adding this asymmetrical wing to this rather symmetrical home and by doubling the museum's size, this wonderful domestic scale has been lost in favor of the institutional. In the past, the Taft seemed like an enclave - a bastion of residential civility in Downtown Cincinnati - which has rarely been achieved or equaled. Thomas Jefferson's "Monticello" maintains this home-like feeling in spite of its success in drawing thousands of visitors daily. It is a shame that upon our watch we have allowed the current renovation of the Taft Museum of Art to lose this very special quality which cannot be recaptured without the act of demolition befalling its appendage.

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