CONCERNING HOWARD SHAW 
IN HIS HOME

by Frances Wells Shaw (1926)

with Other Biographical Material
Assembled by the Author
and with a
List of Some of Shaw's 
Architectural Work

Compiled by his Daughter
Evelyn Shaw McCutcheon, in 1977

Brought Together Here By
Paul A. Myers
for
The Howard Van Doren Shaw Society
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By Frances Wells Shaw
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Making out the lists of the facts of Howard Shaw's ancestry, education, honors, list of buildings, etc. has made me want to start a collection of photographs of his work with the dates and addresses where they may be seen. Perhaps one of his four grandsons may become an architect or even his granddaughter. The material is scattered, mostly with the members of his former office. If I do not get them together, I hope someone else may go on with the work.

The material on hand seems so dry and lifeless compared to the picture in my mind of his tireless zeal, personal activity and humorous ways.

For a picture of him as an architect, it would be necessary to consult his office force, the contractors, clients and workmen with whom he was associated.

He first worked during his last college vacation as draughtsman in the office of Jenny and Munide (Louis Sullivan had done the same ten or twelve years before.) He was working there when we were married in 1893 but about a year later started out for himself in an attic on the top floor of his father's house at 2124 Calumet Avenue. Robert Work was his one draughtsman. I had not got used to his concentrated ways at that time, and one day he did not answer the call to luncheon. So I sent up a large paper bag tied at the top and had it left beside him. He soon came down for the bag contained his baby, Evelyn, in her birthday clothes.

His first design, before we were married, was a house for my father in Lakeville, Conn. It was built by a contractor on Wells Hill while Howard was studying and traveling in Europe. That was the only time I ever knew him to desert a house in process of construction. It still stands with its gold cupola which, I am told, is still photographed and sketched by students of Colonial.

Next followed two gray Bedford stone Tudor houses, now vinecovered, at 4843 and 4845 Lake Avenue. They were built with keen anticipation for my sister, Mrs. Charles Atkinson, and her husband, and for our own selves with a door between on the second floor. I think they are as livable as any he ever built, and you may see them across from the little Blackstone Library. Our house is still owned (1926) by the family to whom we sold it when we moved to the North side in 1911.

After these houses for family came the proud moment when he designed a brick barn in Kenwood, and a small residence on East End Avenue for Mr. Henry Thompson. We used to walk by them of a summer evening, and after that I remember no lull and the establishment of a real office in the old Montauk Bldg. downtown.

Writing of our first homes makes me want to tell a little of our marriage on April 20, 1893. I was twenty (plus 10 days) and he was twenty (minus 16 days). I have no recollection of becoming formally engaged to him. I had met...
him when he was the tallest boy in Bournique's
dancing school on 23rd Street. I think we had
an "understanding", with a few ups and downs,
from those days on. I have letters in the chest at
Ragdale to prove it. He just took me for granted
as his property, and I was pleased and flattered
to be so considered. When he was at Yale and I
at Farmington, he used to leave a box of marsh-
mallows under the loose plank of the sidewalk in
front of the house where I lived, and I would slip
out after dark to get it. He was a draughtsman
at Jenny and Mundie and was getting $25.00 a
week when we married. I was proud to wear his
Grandmother's solitaire. Our two sets of parents
promised help if we got stuck, but we lived very
frugally as he was of no mind to be helped
beyond the wedding gift of the house in which
we started housekeeping. In two years' time he
was in his own downtown office, and I never
knew him to have an idle moment.

Here are the homes in which we lived:
1893, after our marriage. Top floor
2906 Groveland Avenue with Charles and
Martha Atkinson (my sister) dividing
the housekeeping.

1894 (during the building of our own
houses - Atkinson's and ours - while the
Shaws were in Europe) at 2124 Calumet
Avenue. HS's office on top floor.

1895 Own English Tudor house, 4843
Lakeview Avenue. Atkinson, at 4843
with door between. Built by H.S.

1899 Lake Forest, Ill. Ragdale on the
Green Bay Road. Built by H.S.

1909 Rented for winter Wm. Hibbard
house, 1618 Prairie Avenue.

1910 Rented for winter John Jenkins
house, 2625 Prairie Avenue

1911 Own Apartment, top floor 1130
Lake Shore Drive. Built by H.S.

1921 Rented apartment and studio for
Sylvia, 305 Fullerton Parkway.

1923 Own apartment, 2450 Lake View
Ave. to date. Built by H..S.

Howard Shaw never had a partner. He
wished to do every detail himself. That trait was
his undoing physically. He was impatient with
anyone who did not do as well as himself. And
he did everything well. Carpentry, brick-laying,
tree planting, gardening, shingling, stone-laying,
sign painting, stage setting, lighting effects and
scenery. At all these occupations he spent busy
Saturdays and Sundays, as long as he could keep
upon his feet. I will never forget his skills with a
brick-layer's trowel, hitting off the corners of the
bricks, for a summer house, with half-timber
work sides, in our back yard at 4843. It is still
there. He and the gardener built the sleeping
porch off of our bedroom at ragdale. When he
got to the tin roof he sent for a roofer. The
union questioned the job, and next day three men
stood in the drive and watched him staining the rafters and posts. He never looked up, and they sent him a tin man that afternoon.

He made a mould for the cement posts that holds the split rails that enclose our meadows. It has been copied many times. He laid the brick rim of our fountain pool, and designed the bowl, and asked me to find a suitable motto in three lines of verse to go around the edge. I hunted and hunted and finally submitted several to him, from which he chose:

"Purling fountain cool and gray
Tinkling music in thy spray
Singing of a summer day"

It was not very good poetry, but it filled the space to his satisfaction, and I never told him until long after that I made it up!

He did most of his designing for his buildings in his mind before he set to work. Then he worked almost every evening of his life except when we went out, but it was not bad because he liked to have me read aloud to him while he worked. At first I could not believe that he could pay attention, so one night when he looked particularly absorbed as I was reading Bleak House, I inserted, in a conversational voice, the opening lines of the Declaration of Independence. He looked up at once and told me just what I was reading. We read chiefly fiction or lighter essays, nothing very abstruse. He loved poetry and never went on a business trip without a volume in his suitcase. He once left my Oxford Book of Verse on the train and bought me a handsome replica with an inscription in it to pacify me for the loss of my "well loved volume" by a villain.

He loved to have children around, his own and the neighbors', and as a result, our children always planned to spend their weekends playing at Ragdale. When he grew older, his grandson did the same. I have a picture of little Jackie McCutcheon helping him carry one end of a heavy plank down the grape arbor; and of the baby, Shaw McCutcheon, sitting watching him build the Berry-Patch Gate.

He always protested at going out to social affairs but, when there, he was always gay and humorous and always glad that he had been made to go.

It is true that Howard Shaw rarely wanted to go out in the evening, but he had a good excuse in addition to his hard day at his office, or supervising buildings. From college days he was the victim of a nervous intestinal reaction in time of nervous strain. Examinations at school, public speaking, any worry always brought on some physical weakness which vanished as quickly as it came. It never interfered with his work. He never took a vacation unless urged by a doctor, and once away he usually became well and vigorous. Considering what he accomplished with this serious handicap, one wonders how much farther he might have gone without. It was very hard for me to be always getting him out of evening social engagements. I could not keep on giving illness as an excuse when the disappointed hostess of the night before might see or hear of him at eight o'clock next morning superintending a building, balanced on a slippery I-beam, five stories above
the street with an icy wind blowing! - demonstrating to a impressed foreman what he considered to be a careful oversight. I have heard workmen pay him the highest tributes, in spite of the picturesque names he called them when their work did not come up to his ideas. But it was embarrassing to explain this conduct of the invalid of the night before!

He had big ideas. He was willing to take public work or responsibility but not leadership or public acknowledgment. Market Square in lake Forest involving the getting rid of the old street front; a harbor for the lake front; a better city plan; a model worker’s village - all these ideas are recorded on stray bits of envelopes. Some of them he carried out.

He worked on charitable boards from a sense of duty, but his heart was with the Chicago Art Institute, in all its activities. He was trustee from 1906, and on the Art Commission and instrumental in helping to found the Burnham Architectural Library and in selecting its first books on one of our journeys to Paris and London. At one time he was urged to be Director.

He often said that happiness was to be found in creative work and he inspired every member of his family to make an effort in that direction. Sylvia Shaw Judson’s bust of her father is a tribute to that belief. We all tried to come up to his standard in one way or another.

One of our happiest times was the preparation for plays to be given at Ragdale Ring, the sunken amphitheatre with the elevated stage and evergreen wings which he had built on the north part of the Ragdale property in imitation of the outdoor theatre in the Villa Gori near Sienna. He made colored masts and forked gonfalons and a circuit of orange lanterns easy to install. He practiced lighting effects of moonlight in the deep glade and sunsets from the wings. We had dancers and stringed instruments, and he worked on the settings, and I worked on the pantomimes or dramatizing of the plays, and when the day dawned fine and auspicious, it was the very happiest time we ever had at Ragdale. That - and the Harvest Moon Bonfires in the Ragdale meadow, and the cider-making every autumn in the Ragdale orchard.

His children and grandchildren will never forget Howard Shaw as he invariably was on Christmas Eve and Christmas morning - the jolliest, funniest, most whimsical person in the world. The ceremonial of stocking hanging, of the surprise tree on Christmas morning, endured from the time of one baby of his own, to the third one; of three grown daughters, three grandsons, a granddaughter, and another grandson on the way. He always put the tacks in for the stockings above the living room fireplace. He always put a glass of milk and a cookie for Santa, and in the morning, singing Jingle Bells, he led the children to peek through the curtain to see of the milk was gone, and the cookie bitten. And it always has so happened to their great joy. There was often a note of thanks in a strange print from Santa himself beside the empty glass.

He never seems to have gone from us. No day passes without his name upon his children’s lips. “I wish Father could have seen
"I wonder if Howard Shaw would have thought that right?" The new evening primrose in the Ragdale garden or the new chairs in the McCutcheon dining room are all looked at through his eyes. Any humorous doings of his grandchildren are submitted in spirit to his appreciation over and over. They rarely visit his grave because he is not in it. The other day the little three-year-old Judson boy said, "I've got lots of friends, but do you know who my best one is? It's my Grandpa." No one knows who told him that. Our last journey to England where we spent the summer, he was much taken with an old shop-front in a gallery at the S. Kensington Museum. He expressed the hope that some time he could give one like it to the Art Institute, and bought a photograph to take home.

On our return he completed the Goodman Memorial Theatre, a great engineering feat underground on East Monroe Street behind the Art Institute. He did the John P. Wilson house at North State Parkway and the country place of Robert P. Lamont on Ridge Road in Lake Forest.

Late the following winter, we went to John McCutcheon's Treasure Island near Nassau, and there, although hardly strong enough to get about, he insisted on supervising the building of a stone watch tower at the entrance to the lagoon, looking toward Nassau. He directed the native builders in every detail, even the hanging of the ropes and pulleys for landing stone, and the arduous job of raising into place an old iron cannon which he had got permission to rescue in the clear waters of Nassau Harbor.

He sat happily in a steamer chair with his hat over his eyes, the children playing about, and the tower growing forty feet up to its suitable, effective Spanish arches with the wrought iron cressets on its crenulated battlemented top. Quietly we enjoyed its amusing dedication with the governor and guests in attendance, while a pirate was hanged in effigy. It was his last building.

He stopped in Baltimore on his way home, hoping to be given in some miraculous way strength to go on with the Brest Naval Monument and the Flanders Field Government work, the Donnelley Tower, and many other things, including a speech he was to make at the 60th convention of the American Institute of Architects to be held in Washington in May. He was asked to be President, but declined and sent word he would not even be able to be there. The night before he died, during his last conscious hour, a telegram came, announcing that he had been awarded the Gold Medal of the American Institute of Architects for his services to American Architecture. "The American Institute during along series of years has four times signalized its approval of living American architects....The roll of honor is now increased by a fifth American name, the ninth of an international group of famous architects....The medal is awarded to Howard Van Doren Shaw of Chicago for distinguished service to American architecture." I read the message to him. It was his bed time. He smiled and said, "Pleased."
The next day he was unconscious and went to sleep in the afternoon not to awaken.

Among his papers I had, in his writing, a request that when he came to die, his funeral should consist of a "short service to be read at the grave with only the family present." He made that request when he was full of concern for many older men who were so often giving of their strength and sympathy at the funerals of their friends. He felt that the practice should stop as demanding too great a sacrifice, willing though it might. I carried out his wished.

It was sad about William Morris, "You can not loose a man like that by his own death, only by your own."

I know his family feels this to be true of Howard Shaw.
HOWARD VAN DOREN SHAW, Architect

Information furnished for
The National Cyclopedia of
American Biography
James T. White & Co.
Publishers, New York

1) Name in full: Howard VanDoren Shaw
2) Born - May 7, 1869 - Chicago, Illinois
3) Father: Theodore Andrews Shaw, 1836-1906 
   wholesale drygood merchant
4) Mother: Sarah VanDoren - daughter of 
   William Howard Van Doren
5) Education: Harvard School, Chicago 
   Yale University, Class of 1890 
   Mass. Institute of Technology 
   Architectural School - 1892
6) Yale, 1890 - B.A.
7) Professional career began: in the office of 
   Jennie & Mundie, Architects, Chicago, 
   1892 for himself: - 1894 - till death
8) Place of business: 
   1) 3rd floor of his mother's house, with 
      one draughtsman
   2) shared office with George Harvey
   3) Mentor Building, Chicago - which he 
      built for Mr. Pike
9) Never had a partner
10) Special commissions:
    R.R. Donnelly & Sons - Printing building 
        - Chicago 
    Lakeside Press Building 
    Market Square, Lake Forest, Ill. 
    Model steel town at Indiana Harbor 
    - for Inland Steel 
    Quadrangle Club - University of Chicago 
    University Church of the Disciples 
    - Univ. of Chicago 
    Racine Memorial Hall, Racine, Wisc. 
    Goodman Memorial Theatre 
    - Art Institute of Chicago 
    Lake Shore Country Club 
    1130 lake Shore Drive 
      - apartment building 
    2450 Lakeview Ave, - apartment building 
    John P. Wilson - town house 
    City & country houses all over the U.S. 
      - and gardens
11) Public Positions: 
    Governing Member of Chicago Art 
    Institute - and Trustee since 1900 
    Governing Member, United Charities of 
    Chicago, 1913 
    Member - State Art Commission
12) membership in Clubs: 
    Yale Club - Onwentsia, L.F. 
    Shore Acres, L.F. - University Club
Cliff Dwellers - Arts Club  
Coffee House, N.Y.C.

13) Honorary degrees, decorations, etc.  
   Fellow of Am. Institute of Architects  
   Awarded Gold Medal of above in 1926  
   Appointed to do U.S. Memorial Chapel  
   on Flanders Field and a Naval  
   Monument at Brest, France -  
   1926 by U.S. Battle Monuments  
   Commission

14) Religious affiliations - Presbyterian

15) Personal traits, etc.  
   Love of his profession  
   Love of constructive work around house & garden at Ragdale, Lake Forest, Ill.  
   Pleasure in his home and family

16) Married: April 20, 1893  
   Wife: Frances Wells, daughter of Moses D. Wells, wholesale shoe merchant (born in Mass.)

17) Children:  
   Evelyn Shaw - married, 1917, to John T. McCutcheon  
   Sylvia Shaw - married, 1921, to Clay Judson  
   Frances Theodora Shaw - married to John L. King

18) Dominating personal characteristics:  
   Constructive mental & physical activity -  
   Love of beauty - both architectural and natural

19) Earliest paternal ancestor:  
   John Shaw, born 1617 - Quaker -  
   came from England on Wm. Penn's 2nd voyage - settled in Plumstead, Pa.

20) Direct line of descent from that ancestor:  
       2nd) James Shaw - 1694  
       3rd) Alexander Shaw - 1734  
       4th) George Shaw - 1740  
       5th) David Shaw - 1796  
       6th) Theodore A. Shaw - 1836 (HVD's father) wife: Sarah Johnson VanDoren, 845 - 1918 from Brooklyn, N.Y.

21) Any important facts regarding ancestors:  
   Sarah VanDoren's family goes back to the first white child born on Long Island - they came from Holland also to General Jeremiah Johnson, 1st Mayor of Brooklyn. S. VanD S. painted well - has pictures owned by Art Institute of Chicago
JOURNEYS OF HOWARD SHAW
With health commentary - in view of what he accomplished in his work.

1893 - Wedding trip -
weakness and stomach trouble
    Returned OK

1896 - New Orleans, etc.
badly rundown - bowel trouble
    Returned OK

1898 - Mt. Clemens
rheumatism of back
    Returned worse than ever

1900 - 1st European trip
(F & H) Clovely etc. frequent attacks of rheumatism
    Returned OK

1904 - 1st Camping trip with Ted Donnelley
All run down; feared TB
    Returned in fine shape

1905 - 2nd Camping trip - Hills
(F & H) Rheumatism - Mother worried about dampness
    Returned OK

1908 - 2nd European trip
(F & H, E & S) Poisoned leg before sailing, bowel trouble in Rome, Paris
    Returned OK

1910 - 1st Nassau
bad rheumatism, couldn't walk much for 3 weeks
    Returned in fine shape

1911 - Bermuda
mild rheumatism (F's back)
    Returned OK

1911 - Yellowstone & Canadian Rockies
(H, F E, S)
    Returned OK

1912 - 2nd Nassau
(F Sick) Returned OK

1913 - 3rd European trip - alone
Strep Throat, sick in Budapest
    Returned OK

1914 - Annisquam -
faralysed - or TB for sure, All in.
"Done for"
    Returned OK

1915 - New England motor trip
Arthritis; stiff neck; tonsils out.

1916 - 3rd Nassau - H & E
Bronchial cough - Cuba -
    Returned OK

1917 - China - H & S
Eye trouble in Japan
    Returned OK
1918 - 4th Nassau (H & F with Atkinsons)
Heart palps; "done for." Bad pneumonia
- sold 1130
  Returned best of health

1919 - 5th Nassau - Bill n' Ethel - Ortolan
- Built Fort
  Returned OK

1920 - 4th European trip (H, F & S) - Frequent bowel trouble, Sick in Montreal, Porlock & steamer
  Returned OK

1922 - 6th Nassau - Bad bronchitis
- all worn out - 3 wks
  Returned OK

1923 - Baltimore.
  All tired out. All organs OK but anemic.

1924 - 6th European - F & H (age 54)
Less endurance, but cheerful, well whole time to Sept. 1924
  Returned OK

Doctors:
- Billings
- Cary
- Davis
- Babcock
- Parmenter
- Capps
- Walker
- Rsenau - Shambeau
- Freer
- Cameron
- Herrick
- McCullough
- Lewis
- Barker
- Cross
- Clough

He died on the eve of his 57th birthday - of Pernicious Anemia but worked actively up to Five Weeks of his death. Was ill in bed in Baltimore for only two weeks - on his return from Nassau May 6, 1926.

All doctors pronounced hearing & other organs normal. Anemic - lack of hydrochloric acid. Must not over-work at his age with his nervous record.
A List of some of Mr. Shaw's work:

R. R. Donnelley & Sons Co.
- Printing Building, Chicago
Lakeside Press Building, Chicago
Ginn & Co. Chicago - Publisher's Building
B.F. Goodrich Office Buildings
- (2) New York City
Market Square, Lake Forest, Illinois
- Civic Center
Model Steel Town, Indiana Harbor
Fourth Presbyterian Church - Chicago,
Parish Buildings of this group
University Church of the Disciples of Christ
- Chicago
Racine Memorial Hall, Racine, Wisconsin
Goodman Memorial Theatre, Chicago
Quadrangle Club, Chicago
Lake Shore Country Club, Glencoe, Illinois
2450 Lake View Avenue, Apartment Building
- Chicago
1130 Lake Shore Drive, Apartment Building
- Chicago
W. B. Martin, Apartment Building, Chicago
G. F. Swift, Town House, Chicago
Edward Morris, Town House, Chicago
Frederick D. Countiss, Town House, Chicago
Fortune Houses (s) - Town Houses, Chicago
W. O. Goodman, Town House, Chicago
Morris Rosenwald, Town House, Chicago
Lester Armour, Town House, Chicago
John P. Wilson, Town House, Chicago
C. C. Bovey, Esq. Town House, Minneapolis
E. L. Ryerson, Country House, Lake Forest, Ill.
George Thorne, Country House, Lake Forest

T. E. Donnelley, Country House, Lake Forest
D. R. McLennan, Country House, Lake Forest
A. G. Becker, Country House, Ravinia
George Pick, Country House, Ravinia
Wm. V. Kelley, Country House, Lake Forest
A.C. Bartlett, Country House, Lake Geneva
Hugh J. McBinney, Country House, Lake Forest
Clayton Mark, Country Place, Lake Forest
Walter Douglas, Country Place
- Lake Minnetonka
B. G. Work, Town House, Akron, Ohio
Jas. M. Willcox, Country Place, Radnor, Pa
Hubbard Carpenter, Country Place
- Lake Geneva
A. G. Thompson, Town House
- Duluth, Minnesota
West View Farms (Robert P. Lamont)
- Country Place, Lake Forest
Warren K. Fairbanks, Town House, Indianapolis
"Ragdale" on Green bay Road, Lake Forest
His own country place.

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