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DES MOINES HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HISTORYGRAM

DesMoinesHistoricalSociety.org

Oakwood Estate and J. S. Carpenter, the Des Moines Guru of Fine Art



Figure 1 West face circa 1913 from book "Artwork of Des Moines" showing awnings and screened in porch.

The 13-acre property named Oakwood estate was named by its owners J. S. Carpenter and his Spouse Florence L. Carpenter because of the old growth oak forestation. The James Sansom Carpenter House was significant to Des Moines cultural history from 1906 to 1939. The Carpenters' art collection was deemed by art critics as one of the finest collections of etchings and lithographs in America. The house held the Carpenter collection of 125 paintings and 350 etchings. J. S. Carpenter was also known as Sannie or Sandy after his oddly spelled middle name. J. S. Carpenter, a bridge building magnet, founded the Des Moines Association of Fine Arts in 1916. The Association members each

contributed \$ 100.00 annually for the purchase of paintings and sculptures. The members also received a 25% discount on art purchased at Association events. Carpenter was known as the Guru of fine arts by the Des Moines community.

Visiting artists and dignitaries came to Des Moines to sell their art and often stayed with the Carpenter's at Oakwood. Carpenter was president of the Association from its inception until his death of heart disease in 1939. The Association transformed into the Edmundson Art Museum in 1940 under the auspices of Association Executive member, and Carpenter's close friend Jay N. (Ding) Darling. Darling as President of the Edmundson Art Foundation merged the original collection into the present day Des Moines Art Center. When the art market soared in the early 1990's most of the art acquired by Carpenter and the association were sold by the Des Moines Art center.



Figure 2 Great room ceiling.