



THE GLESSNER FAMILY



John and Frances Glessner commissioned Henry Hobson Richardson to design for them a house that would reflect their ideas about home, family and society. The family divided their time between Chicago and New Hampshire. Mr. and Mrs. Glessner were married for more than sixty years and had a lasting impact on Chicago during their time here. Their children, Frances and George, both moved permanently to New Hampshire and influenced those around them, too.



JOHN GLESSNER

John Jacob Glessner was born January 26, 1843, in Zanesville, Ohio. While his father served in the Ohio legislature, John ran the elder Glessner's Zanesville *Times* for two years. In 1863, John moved to Springfield, Ohio, to begin a seven-decade-long career in the farm implement industry, beginning with a post with Warder, Child & Co, which in 1866 reorganized into Warder, Mitchell & Co. John became a junior partner and in 1868 moved into the Macbeth home as a boarder. John met Frances Macbeth, whom he married in 1870.

The couple moved to Chicago. In 1879 John became a full partner in the renamed Warder, Bushnell and Glessner. In 1882, Mr. John commissioned Isaac Scott to design a new headquarters for Warder, Bushnell & Glessner on Jefferson St. Four years later John became sole vice president of Warder, Bushnell & Glessner. International Harvester emerged in 1902 from McCormick, Deering, Plano Manufacturing, Milwaukee Harvester Company, and Warder, Bushnell & Glessner, ending the "reaper wars." John was named a vice president and served as chairman of the executive committee.

John Glessner played an active role in civic affairs. At times, he served on the boards of the Citizens Association of Chicago, Chicago Relief and Aid Society, Chicago Orphan Asylum, Rush Medical College, and the Art Institute of Chicago. He also participated in the Chicago, Union League, Quadrangle and Chicago Literary Clubs as an active member. Perhaps most significantly, he served as a trustee of the Chicago Orchestra Association. He was also a prolific writer, producing many short pieces relating family history--including a tribute to his wife after her death--as well as more obscure topics like potatoes and snakes.

He died on January 20, 1936, a week before his ninety-third birthday. By the time of his death, the Prairie Avenue neighborhood was no longer the prominent residential area it once was. Mr. Glessner nevertheless passed his house, nearly intact with all its treasures, to the American Institute of Architects with the intent that it be preserved for future generations. Those close to him remembered Glessner as a quiet and modest man whose industry and intelligence seem to have had a profound, though at times barely visible, effect on everything around him. Although his name is not as well known as some of his contemporaries, such as Marshall Field or George Pullman, his influence on the development of Gilded Age Chicago was considerable and his impact is still felt in many cultural institutions in Chicago today.



FRANCES GLESSNER

Sarah Frances Macbeth was born January 1, 1848, in Urbana, Ohio. In 1851, her father headed west in search of gold, remaining in California until 1854, before taking jobs in New York, where he worked for fifteen years, visiting the family in Ohio twice a year.

In 1860, Frances's family moved to Springfield, Ohio, where they took in John Glessner as a boarder. The couple married in 1870 and moved to Chicago. While living on Washington Street, Frances organized a series of gatherings for women interested in lectures and readings about the latest books; this would be the precursor to the Monday Morning Reading Class she would initiate at the home on Prairie Avenue.

In 1879, Mrs. Glessner began keeping the diary she would write for the next forty years, providing insight into daily life at the Glessners' house. Her husband would frequently complete diary entries whenever she was ill. Mrs. Glessner was a talented seamstress and needleworker, and visitors to the house will see her pieces on display. She was also a silversmith, accomplished pianist, and avid knitter; she gave away many of her silver pieces as gifts and purportedly knitted more than 500 sweaters for children, employees, and servicemen. She studied with A. Fogliati, a master jewelry craftsman of Hull House, and Madeline Wynne, a noted Chicago silversmith; in 1904 Frances set up a workbench in the basement of her Prairie Avenue mansion and began producing simple and elegant objects. Her pieces bear her hallmark, a "G" encircling a honeybee, iconography for another interest: bee keeping.

Mrs. Glessner was also a patron of the fine arts. She co-founded the Chicago Chamber Music Society and was also an active member of the several other social and philanthropic organizations, including the Fortnightly Club, Antiquarian Society of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Colonial Dames and the Decorative Arts Society. She attended all rehearsals and performances given by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, one of her greatest passions.

In 1893, William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago, asked Mrs. Glessner for advice on how to introduce faculty wives to women of the city. Mrs. Glessner started the Monday Morning Reading Class, which met for two hours every other Monday from October to May. During the first hour, the women sewed and listened to a professional reader; during the second hour, there was music, a lighter reading or a lecture. Membership in the class was by invitation only, and the class continued until 1930, when her failing health made it impossible to continue.

In his memoirs, *The Story of a House*, John Glessner described his wife with much admiration. ""She had a clean and wholesome and orderly mind, a heart overflowing with love for family and friends and for all in any need," he wrote "Her remarkable sense of the value of color and fabric and form and arrangement were what made our three homes in Chicago so attractive."

Frances Glessner died at 84 on October 20, 1932.



GEORGE GLESSNER

George Macbeth Glessner, the oldest child and only surviving son of John and Frances Glessner, was born October 2, 1871, just a week before the Great Chicago Fire raged a block from Mr. Glessner's office and left the family's house on Park untouched. Three years later, Frances gave birth to their second son, John Francis. When the baby died at eight months old, George asked that the name John be attached to the front of his own name.

An early case of hay fever left George in delicate health. The family's doctor advised the Glessners to spend the summer hay fever season away from Chicago, someplace where George would be free from it. In 1884, Mr. Glessner began building an estate in New Hampshire, on land he had purchased the previous year. The Rocks became a wonderland for George and the Glessners' summer home; the family spent nearly five months of the year there.

George's hay fever also resulted in a series of tutors at home, later in the schoolroom of the mansion on Prairie Avenue. He was, by all accounts, a precocious learner. In 1884, George printed a collection of poems and photographs in a volume entitled *The Little Joker*. He also loved tinkering with anything mechanical. George installed a telegraph in the houses of six nearby friends so that they could communicate with each, as well as a fire signal repeater so that he would be notified of the excitement of any area fire.

Photography was George's lifelong passion. He owned at least three different cameras and developed many of his photos in his basement chemical laboratory at the house on Prairie Avenue. Within the first year that the family lived on Prairie Avenue, George extensively documented the house and its contents. He kept meticulous records with detailed labels on each photograph and negative, and his photographs were used during the restoration of the house.

After graduating from Harvard in 1893, George joined his father at Warder, Bushnell and Glessner, first as a purchasing agent and, later, as an assistant manager. He married Alice Hamlin in June 1898, four months after his sister's wedding, and the couple had four children: Elizabeth, born in 1899, Frances, in 1900, John, in 1902, and Emily, in 1904. In 1902, with the organization of International Harvester, George was named utility manager of the company in which his father was vice president. He would come to play a major role in the management of The Rocks, which employed over seventy people, and George and Alice eventually settled permanently at The Ledge on family's estate in 1916. In New Hampshire, George got involved in politics, representing the town of Bethlehem in the state legislature for four terms, between 1913 and 1927. At the same time, he oversaw the operations of the Bethlehem Electric Company and the Lisbon Light and Power Company.

In December 1928, George contracted influenza while he and Alice were visiting their daughter Frances in Paris. His health improved but appendicitis and pneumonia soon followed. He died in January 1929.



FRANCES “FANNY” GLESSNER

Frances Glessner was born on March 25, 1878, the youngest child and only daughter of John and Frances Glessner. Mrs. Glessner often wrote about her daughter in the journal she kept for forty years, and describes her as a delightful, clever and precocious little girl. Because of her brother George's poor health, Fanny was tutored at home with George.

After they moved into their Prairie Avenue home in 1887, the Glessners spent their winters in Chicago and their summers in New Hampshire at their estate, The Rocks. There, family friend and renown craftsman Isaac Scott built her a two-room log cabin, furnished with 3/4 size furniture. Scott and Fanny were very close, despite the difference in ages.

Fanny's early adult life unfolded in much the same way as the lives of other wealthy girls at the time. She never attended college and instead spent fourteen months in 1896 and 1897 touring Europe with her mother's sister, Helen Macbeth, and in November 1897, five months after her return, she made her formal debut in Chicago society. Four months later, on February 9, 1898, she married Blewett Lee, a law partner of one of George's friends. They later moved into one of the twin townhouses at 1700 S. Prairie Avenue that the Glessners had built for their children. Fanny's marriage with Blewett Lee was rocky, brightened briefly by the births of three children--John Glessner Lee in 1898, Frances Lee in 1903, and Martha Lee in 1906--they later divorced.

In 1938, Fanny took up permanent residence at The Rocks, and her life after that was more unusual. For a time, she sold antiques and produced needlework before giving in to her growing interest in legal medicine. Her friendship with George's Harvard classmate, Dr. George Burgess Magrath, had already piqued her enthusiasm and her philanthropic spirit--in 1932 she had given \$250,000 to Harvard University to create a chair in Legal Medicine, and in 1934 she had given a collection of 1000 volumes to the Magrath Library of Legal Medicine. In 1943, New Hampshire named her State Police Captain; at the time, she was the only female police captain in the country. She created a series of eighteen miniature crime scenes, the Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death, drawing on the miniature model-making she had been doing since childhood. Captain Lee also initiated what became a prestigious, biannual seminar in homicide investigation. Erle Stanley Gardner, the author of the Perry Mason novels and one of the few laymen allowed to attend the seminars, dedicated *The Case of the Dubious Bridegroom* to her. Gardner wrote that Fanny had a logical, orderly mind that was suited for police work. He described her as a perfectionist, with a warm heart and a keen sense of justice.

Fanny died at the Rocks on January 27, 1962. She was 83.

