

Retro Ramblings

By: Douglas Love, Grand Trustee, Napa Parlor #62

In the heart of Sacramento, just a few blocks away from Old Town, the California State Railroad Museum, and the State Capitol there is a Victorian, Italianate mansion, which houses an invaluable treasure. It is the Crocker Art Museum, the oldest art museum in the Western United States, and one of the premier art museums in the country. The Crocker may be overshadowed by the art museums in San Francisco and Los Angeles, but that does not mean that it isn't worth a visit.

The mansion that is the original part of the Crocker Museum was built in 1853 by banker Benjamin Franklin Hastings and purchased in 1868 by Edwin B. Crocker, former California Supreme Court Justice, lawyer and elder brother of Charles Crocker, of Central Pacific Railroad fame. Born in 1818 in New York, by the 1840's Edwin was practicing law in Indiana and was a former member of the Liberty Party and an abolitionist. He was selected as a delegate from Indiana to the Free Soil Party convention. He and his wife moved to California in 1852, and he chaired the first meeting of the California Republican Party in 1856. He was appointed an Associate Justice of the California Supreme Court in 1863 by Governor Leland Stanford and stepped down in 1864 after Justices were elected. In 1865, he became counsel to the Central Pacific Railroad of which his younger brother Charles and Stanford were owners along with Collis Huntington and Mark Hopkins. He was the Central Pacific's legal counsel while the Transcontinental Railroad was being built. A month after the driving of the Golden Spike at Promontory Point, Utah in May of 1869, EB Crocker suffered a stroke and retired from his legal practice.

With his legal practice at an end, Crocker, his wife Margaret, and his family traveled Europe and began collecting art. After two years, the Crockers returned home with over 700 paintings and 1344 drawings. In 1871, Crocker commissioned Seth Babson, architect of the Stanford Mansion, to design a building to house his art collection. The gallery building was completed in 1874, and originally contained a bowling alley, skating rink, grand ball room, a natural history museum, and a library. At the time, Crocker's collection was the largest private collection in the United States and held more paintings than the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Edwin Crocker died of complications from his stroke in 1875 and left the gallery and mansion to his wife and daughters. The gallery became a social hub in Sacramento and Mrs. Crocker hosted many luminaries of the era including Queen Lili'uokalani, President Ulysses Grant, and Oscar Wilde. In 1885, the gallery was given to the City of Sacramento and the California Museum Association to be held in public trust.

The Crocker Art Museum underwent an expansion in 2010 with the addition of the Teel Family Pavilion. Today, the museum not only holds an extensive collection of European art, but also extensive collections of California, Asian, and art from Oceania, as well as a ceramics collection ranging from the Neolithic to the modern. Of special note are "The Fandango" and "Sunday Morning at the Mines" by Charles Christian Nahl as well as works depicting California by Thomas Hill, Edward Deakin and Albert Bierstadt. Notable among the European works are several portraits and religious paintings by Dutch and Flemish masters such as Pieter Brueghel the Younger..

The museum located at 216 O Street in Sacramento and is open from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm, Wednesday through Sunday and 10:00 am to 9:00 pm on Thursdays. Tickets are \$15.00 for adults, \$10.00 for college students, seniors and the military, \$8.00 for youth ages 6-17, and free for those 6 and under. For more information about the museum and special events please visit the museum's website at: <https://www.crockerart.org/>

GETTING THERE: From 414 Mason Street. Get on Interstate 80 East from 5th Street. Continue on I-80 East to US 50 toward Sacramento/South Lake Tahoe/Capital City Freeway. Take Exit 3 to Downtown Sacramento/Jefferson Blvd. Keep left onto CA-275/Calbadon Parkway. Turn right onto 3rd Street and then turn left onto O Street.