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POTTER PALMER AND THE ART DEVELOPMENT OF THE MUSEUM

POTTER PALMER became President of the Art Institute in 1925. He followed President Charles L. Hutchinson whose contagious enthusiasm had gathered round him a group of public spirited citizens determined to make Chicago known for culture as well as for its materialism. In a sense the groundwork for Mr. Palmer's leadership was already laid but it became his role to transform what was still a *Chicago* gallery and a *Chicago* art school into one of the great art centers of the world.

In the eighteen years of his administration the Institute magnificently expanded. In 1925 our gallery space was considerably smaller; the Mather Addition, the Allerton Wings, and the Industrial Art School were yet to be built. In 1925 the Painting Department (with the exception of the Palmer Collection and a sterling group of Dutch masters) was almost entirely made up of contemporary American art. There was no Worcester Collection, no Birch-Bartlett Gallery, and the Ryerson Collection was



TWO LITTLE CIRCUS GIRLS, PAINTING BY PIERRE AUGUSTE RENOIR, FRENCH (1841-1919). GIFT OF HONORÉ AND POTTER PALMER.

only on loan. Miss Kate Buckingham had just begun to evince her interest in the Print Department and Department of Decorative Arts, and her superb Oriental collections were still in the future. All these significant additions which help to make our museum known throughout the world occurred during Mr. Palmer's regime. Working closely with Robert B. Harshe, our late, great Director, Mr. Palmer led this institution to new heights.

During this period the museum likewise became famous for its exhibitions, the most notable of which were the two Century of Progress exhibits and the Masterpieces of Italian Art and Masterpieces of French Art. In all the details of these great events he took a most active part. His considered opinions were sought by all of us, and we grew more and more dependent upon the soundness of his judgment and steadiness of his faith. These eighteen years showed a comparable advance in the growth of the School from 2,796 to as many as 4,694 students registered in a single year. Meanwhile Museum membership had increased to 19,021 until Chicago's art museum led the world in the number of its members.

It was during that period, directly after Mr. Harshe's death, that Mr. Palmer had an opportunity of observing the inner workings of the museum at close range. As Director pro-tem he came to know every staff member. So sympathetic was his insight and so efficient his direction that all of the staff came to love him as it had always admired him. This relationship was never broken and the curators and department heads always felt they were working with the President, rather than under him.

So Potter Palmer labored for the museum, consistently and tirelessly. His judgment and faith, his energy and devotion are built into the very structure of our organization. The Art Institute and its collections bear eloquent testimony to his wisdom and leadership. His true monument is our history during these years.

Daniel Catton Rich