



Gertrude Herdle Moore

by Jean Czerkas

Growing up the daughter of an artist who, during her teenage years, became the first director of the University of Rochester's Memorial Art Gallery, Gertrude Rosalind Herdle was destined to have a career in the art world.

Gertrude was born in Rochester in 1896, the daughter of George L. and Elizabeth Bachman Herdle. At the age of two years, she traveled with her parents to Europe where her father studied painting for two years. When the family returned to Rochester, her father intended to make a living as an artist. In 1902, he became president of the Rochester Art Club. His painting career took a turn in 1913 when he was appointed director of the Memorial Art Gallery.

Gertrude attended School No. 18, graduated from East High School in 1914, and was a Phi Beta Kappa winner of the Anderson prize in fine arts when she graduated from the University of Rochester in 1918. When her father's secretary resigned from the art gallery that year, Gertrude replaced her. She quickly advanced to her father's assistant and became Acting Director in 1922 at age 25 upon his death. She was named director several months later, a position she held for 40 years. When elected to the American Association of Museum Directors in 1923, she became that organization's youngest member and one of only three women museum directors in the country.

In recognition of her work in the field of fine arts, Gertrude Herdle was the first woman presented with an honorary degree of Master of Arts by the University of Rochester in June 1925.

In 1932, Gertrude married Walden Moore, and in the same year, her younger sister Isabel joined the gallery staff as assistant director, a collaboration that continued throughout Gertrude's years as director.

Education was of primary importance to Mrs. Moore. What began as a children's story hour at the gallery grew under her guidance to the Creative Workshop, which celebrated 77 years of operation in 2004. According to Susan Eisenhart Schilling, research curator emeritus and longtime friend and associate of Gertrude Moore, "She was interested in building a balanced collection for the gallery, not only for the education of University of Rochester students, but also for the general public. A special interest in medieval art led to important acquisitions of sculpture, manuscripts, stained glass, tapestries, metalwork, and ivories. In some cases, she was able to interest donors in presenting valuable items to the gallery's collections. Important Monet, Degas, and Matisse paintings came through Mrs. Moore's friendship with donors. Her enthusiasm for pre-Columbian art, African tribal art, American painting, and Oriental art have led to fine gallery collections in these areas.

"Emphasis on education and appreciation of art, creative art classes, and encouragement of local artists through the annual juried Finger Lakes art exhibitions





brought community recognition to the gallery, as did exhibitions displaying American folk art and the crafts of local ethnic groups. Other exhibitions of paintings were organized around a theme such as landscapes, realism, and abstraction."

Gertrude Herdle Moore's search for and acquisition of additions to the gallery's collection became legendary. An exposure to art from childhood, experience under her father's tutelage, her travels, and years of study led to her innate recognition of important art objects.

She was a member of the League of Women Voters, a founding member of the Landmark Society of Western New York, and chairman of the Rochester Inter-Museum Council, whose membership included representatives of various local cultural institutions. She received the Civic Development Award in 1986.

A personal interest, which she considered one of her main hobbies, was a collection of gravestone memorabilia as folk sculpture. From Halifax, Nova Scotia to Charleston, South Carolina, she collected hundreds of photographs as specimens of the 17th and early 18th centuries which she classified into local schools of stonecutting and a system of iconographic symbolism. Her earliest gravestones from Virginia date back to 1653. She found particularly distinctive sculptural styles at St. Paul's churchyard in Nova Scotia; at Bessington and Arlington, Vermont; at the Point of Graves in Portsmouth, New Hampshire; and in the brotherhood burial grounds of the Ephrata Cloisters, a monastery near Lancaster, Pennsylvania, which was founded in the first quarter of the 18th century.

Upon her retirement in 1962, a luncheon, sponsored by the Inter-Museum Council and attended by a distinguished group of over 400 prominent Rochester citizens, was held in her honor at the Chamber of Commerce. Mayor Henry E. Gillette spoke for the city of Rochester; Joseph E. Wilson, president of Xerox, for industry; and Charles S. Wilcox, Chamber of Commerce vice-president, for the commercial community. Rabbi Philip S. Bernstein, speaking on behalf of the community, paid tribute to Gertrude Moore for making the gallery a vital part of Rochester's life, rather than merely an exhibition hall, citing the myriad programs in fine arts, including music and dance, that take place under the roof of the Memorial Art Gallery. Dr. McCrea Hazlett, provost of the University of Rochester at the time of Moore's retirement, said, "I salute a sleuth, a peer, a handicapper, a bargain hunter of such tenacity and shrewdness as to make the shoving females in Filene's basement mere amateurs. I salute, too, a woman of devotion, dedication, courage, and serenity." He also alluded to her proven ability to find neglected masterpieces and add them to the gallery's collection at prices that the institution could afford.

Gertrude Herdle Moore continued her valuable service to the Memorial Art Gallery after her retirement. She died in her home on East Avenue in Pittsford, a house she shared with her sister Isabel, in February 1993.





Location

Section AA, Lot 14

From the *Epitaph*

