

## History of the Fellowship in the American Institute of Architects

On February 23, 1857, 13 architects met in Richard Upjohn's office to form what would become the American Institute of Architects. The group included H. W. Cleaveland, Henry Dudley, Leopold Eidlitz, Edward Gardiner, Richard Morris Hunt, J. Wrey Mould, Fred A. Petersen, J. M. Priest, John Welch, and Joseph C. Wells, as well as Upjohn's son Richard and son-in-law Charles Babcock. The group sought to create an architecture organization that would "promote the scientific and practical perfection of its members" and "elevate the standing of the profession."

Until this point, anyone who wished to call him-or herself an architect could do so. This included masons, carpenters, bricklayers, and other members of the building trades. No schools of architecture or architectural licensing laws existed to shape the calling.



*Richard Upjohn*

The first steps of this small group of 13 were to change the profession of architecture in the United States profoundly.

At their meeting, the founding members decided to invite 16 other architects, including A. J. Davis, Thomas U. Walter, and Calvert Vaux, to the second meeting on March 10, 1857. A draft constitution and bylaws were read there, and the only change made was to the name of the organization, at that time the New York Society of Architects. Thomas U. Walter, a well-known Philadelphia practitioner, suggested The American Institute of Architects.



*T. U. Walter*

The members ordered a copy of the constitution and bylaws on vellum for signature, as well as printed versions for reference and daily use. On April 13, after a luncheon at Delmonico's restaurant, a small group, led by Richard Upjohn, went to New York City Hall and filed a certificate of incorporation before Judge James J. Roosevelt. As reported in the minutes of the AIA Board of Directors, the judge said he didn't worry about the AIA failing because the members were "aware of the necessity of a solid foundation whereupon to construct an edifice & that consequently he felt assured that we had laid our cornerstone on a rock." Two days later, the members signed the constitution at the chapel at New York University. [AIA national presidents](#)

In 1858 the constitution was amended, enlarging the mission of the AIA "to promote the artistic, scientific, and practical profession of its members; to facilitate their intercourse and good fellowship; to elevate the standing of the profession; and to combine the efforts of those engaged in the practice of Architecture, for the general advancement of the Art." To achieve these ends, the document called for regular meetings of the membership, lectures on topics of general interest, creation of a library, and development of an architectural model and design collection for the use of the membership. To ensure good rapport, the constitution banned all discussions of a religious or political nature from the meetings.

The mission statement remained in effect until 1867, when it was modified to read, "The objects of this Institute are to unite in fellowship the Architects of this continent, and to combine their efforts so as to promote the artistic, scientific, and practical efficiency of the profession." Over time, these precepts have been further refined, but the basic objectives have remained the same.

### **All for One**

In 1884, a rival organization, the Western Association of Architects, was founded in Chicago. This group's membership comprised architects from the Midwest and the South. Chapters formed in several states, and the organization began championing the idea of licensure for architects. By 1888, it was clear that the WAA and the AIA had similar goals and, in some cases, the same members. In 1889, the two groups met in Cincinnati and decided to merge. The merger was approved by a two-thirds majority vote of the WAA, and its membership, property, and records were transferred to the AIA. As part of the negotiations, it was decided the new consolidated group would retain the name "The American Institute of Architects." In return, the AIA agreed to honor the membership nomenclature of the WAA: "Fellow." The AIA had a similar category, but instead of applying it to all members, it reserved the title for a select few. In addition, the AIA agreed to continue the push for licensure.

Over time, membership in the AIA has grown from the original 29 members in 1857, to 11,500 in 1957, to 75,000 in 2005. From the beginning, membership in the Institute was to be limited to practicing architects. Provisions were made to allow associate members to join, as well as honorary members and honorary corresponding members (architects from other countries). Today, the AIA's membership designations are Architect Member (AIA), Associate Member (Assoc. AIA), International Associate Member (Int'l. Assoc. AIA), Fellow (FAIA), and retired (AIA Emeritus); as well as Honorary Members (HAIA) and Honorary Fellows (HFAIA).

### **United in Fellowship**

In the early years, advancement to Fellowship in the AIA was basically self-initiated. Members needed only to state their qualifications and have support for their application from other Fellows. When the AIA and WAA merged in 1889, the WAA members were allowed to keep their title of Fellow, and everyone who was a member of the AIA in that year became a Fellow as well. This included Louise Bethune, who was a member of both organizations. She had broken the gender barrier in 1886 as the AIA's first woman member, and she became the first woman Fellow in 1889.



*Louise Bethune*

In 1920, membership changed the rules of Fellowship so the process for elevation would be more institutionalized. A jury of Fellows would select candidates from the various AIA chapters. Chapter members would then vote on the selected candidates, and those who won the most votes would go before the full membership. The process was changed in 1935 to give full power for selection to the Jury of Fellows, who would consider résumés of work submitted by the applicants.

Then, in 1952 AIA leadership established the College of Fellows an entity within the Institute. Its purpose was to "stimulate and express the opinions and advice of honored and experienced members of the Profession." Over time, the mission statement of the College has evolved and now states as its goal to "stimulate a sharing of interests among Fellows, to promote the purpose of the Institute, to advance the profession of architecture, and to be of ever-increasing service to society." With the establishment of the College of Fellows, bestowing fellowship became more formalized, including an investiture ceremony and convocation dinner held at the annual convention of the AIA.