

Cleveland's Hubbell Connections

Benjamin S. Hubbell

(11 July 1867-21 Feb. 1953), architect active in Cleveland (1895-1930), who played a major role developing University Circle and who, with W. Dominick Benes, was responsible for designing several Cleveland landmarks, including Cleveland Museum of Art (1916) and West Side Market (1912), was born in Leavenworth, Kansas, to Peter Hanford and Sophia (Still) Hubbell. He graduated from Cornell with an M.S. in architecture in 1894. Within 2 years, Hubbell was a partner in Coburn, Barnum, Benes & Hubbell (1896), a year later establishing a partnership with Benes--Hubbell & Benes (1897-1939). In 1916, when Hubbell & Benes were designing the Cleveland Museum of Art, they also exhibited drawings placing proposed cultural buildings in the Wade Park Oval along formal, symmetrical axes in an informal park-like setting, reflecting the Beaux-Arts planning concepts utilized at the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition, as well as the Group Plan placing of public buildings around a formal mall in downtown Cleveland. While many portions of Hubbell & Benes's plan were not developed in detail, they established the general character for the area. Hubbell is credited with helping form the University Improvement Co. in 1918, to preserve the neighborhoods and open spaces in the Wade Park area, which eventually led to the construction of University Circle. Hubbell married Bertha M. Tarbell on 17 June 1895 and had a son, Benjamin S., Jr., and a daughter, Virginia. They lived at their home, "Playmore," in Mentor, Ohio.

The architectural firm of Hubbell & Benes designed several of Cleveland's most noteworthy buildings. W. Dominick Benes (1857-1935) began working for the firm of Coburn & Barnum in 1876, and Benjamin S. Hubbell (1867-1953) joined the firm in the mid-1890s. By 1896 the firm had evolved into Coburn, Barnum, Benes & Hubbell. The latter two architects then struck out on their own in 1897.

Their first major project was Wade Memorial Chapel (1901) in Lake View Cemetery. Other projects in Cleveland include the Citizens' Bldg. (1903); the Cleveland School of Art (1905), demolished; the Mather College Gymnasium (1908); the West Side Market (1912) and the designs for adjacent (unbuilt) structures; the YMCA (1912); and the Illuminating Bldg. (1915) on Public Square. Perhaps the firm's most important building was the Cleveland Museum of Art (1916). At this time they also drew up plans for cultural buildings around the Wade Park Oval. Afterwards came the Masonic Auditorium (1921); the Plain Dealer building (later used by the Cleveland Public Library) at Superior and E. 6th (1922), demolished; and, in 1927, the Phyllis Wheatley Assn. building, St. Luke's Hospital, and the Ohio Bell Telephone Co. The latter is considered Cleveland's most important early skyscraper and is noted for its Modernistic (Art Deco) style. The firm gained a reputation for its fine classical revival and early commercial structures. Hubbell and Benes is considered one of Cleveland's leading architectural firms of the early 1900s. Although Benes died in 1935, the firm continued under this name until 1939.

Charles Herman Hubbell

(1 Nov. 1898-7 Oct. 1971) was one of the most recognized the commercial aviation artists in the country. He created over 500 paintings, many of which are part of the Western Reserve Historical Society's Crawford Auto-Aviation Museum collection. Born in Lakewood, Ohio, to Herman and Elizabeth (Kunitz), Hubbell attended public schools, graduating from Lakewood High School in 1916. He attended Hiram College (1916-1918) before joining the Naval Air Service during World War I. Stationed in Buffalo, N.Y. Hubbell redesigned experimental planes at the Curtiss airplane factory.

In 1919 Hubbell began painting in watercolors. He enrolled in the Cleveland School of Art, graduated in 1923 and, by 1924, was exhibiting his work in group shows. Hubbell became a licensed pilot in 1927, later flying many of the aircraft he painted. In 1928 he switched to oils and, in 1930, began the first of many one-man exhibitions. In 1934 Hubbell was commissioned by Fred Crawford, chairman of Thompson Products, to paint past winners of the Thompson Trophy Air Race. Hubbell started his own free-lance commercial studio in 1935 and created a calendar series published by Thompson/TRW (1937-1972), with Hubbell remaining as TRW's free-lance artist until 1969. Today many of his paintings are in the permanent collection of the Western Reserve Historical Society's Crawford Auto-Aviation Museum in Cleveland.

In 1939 Hubbell wrote and illustrated *Famous Planes and Pilots and Record Breakers of the Air*. He founded the Thompson Gallery of the Air in Euclid, and his works are represented at the Smithsonian Institution, Air Force Academy and Truman Museum. Hubbell was twice married. In 1923 he married Ethel Pease (divorced 1951). They had two sons, Gordon and Roger. In 1954 Hubbell married Cora Kelly. He was a member of Lakewood Christian Church and is buried in Lakewood Park Cemetery.

The Crawford Auto-Aviation Museum showcases nearly 200 antique, vintage, and classic automobiles and aircraft ranging from an 1897 Panhard et Levassor (the first enclosed automobile) to Bobby Rahal's 1982 March Indy Car (the first winner of the Cleveland 500). The collection documents the technological and stylistic development of the transportation industry, with a focus on early automobiles created in Cleveland. Between 1898 and 1931, more than 80 automotive models originated in the Cleveland area.

While its role is not widely known, Cleveland played an important part in the early decades of aviation. With one of the largest and busiest airports in the world throughout the 1920s and 1930s, a booming aviation manufacturing industry, and the legendary National Air Races, hosted by Cleveland from 1929 to 1949, aviation remained a significant factor in the city for several decades.

The Aviation Collection of the Crawford Museum began in the earliest days of the museum's existence, when it was called the Thompson Products Auto Album. Under the guidance of noted aviation artist Charles Herman Hubbell, the staff of Thompson Products sought out and acquired aircraft that held a special place in Cleveland's history, such as Bumble Bee, the first plane in Cleveland, or the various aircraft that participated in the National Air Races.