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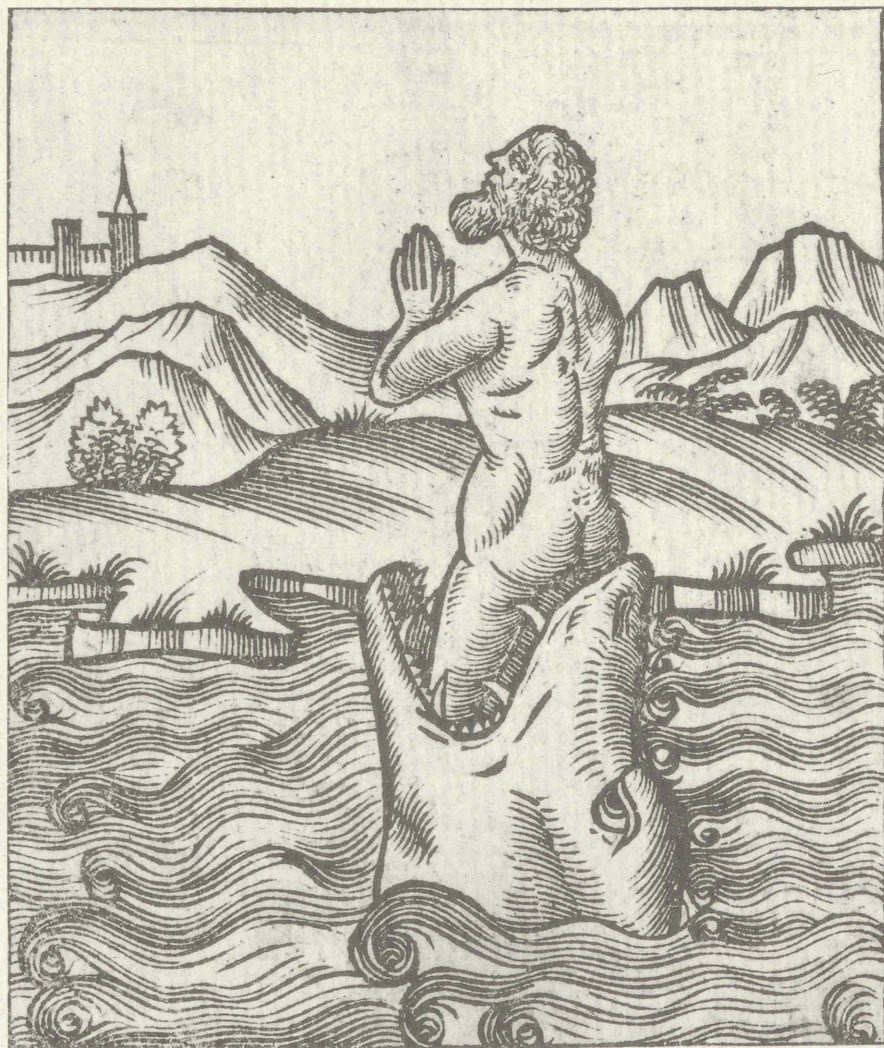
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Dedicated to William Pearson Tolley (1900-1996)

Gustav Stickley and Irene Sargent: United Crafts and *The Craftsman*

BY CLEOTA REED

GUSTAV STICKLEY'S monthly journal, *The Craftsman*, stands as the single most important American publication to emerge from the Arts and Crafts movement. From its first number in October 1901 to its demise in 1916, it explained the international foundations of the movement to a broad audience, engendered interest in the movement's material products, and emphasized the inclusive, democratic spirit that distinguished the American movement from its British parent. Following and enlarging on the social and aesthetic precepts of William Morris, this handsomely designed and finely printed magazine elevated the status of the decorative arts in America by providing them with a theoretical basis, grounded in political as well as social thought, and offering them as measures of a progressive culture. *The Craftsman* gave serious attention to domestic architecture, furnishings, gardening, costume, and fine crafts, including pottery, textiles, baskets, metalwork, jewelry, and stained glass, as arts of significance in a democratic society. The magazine quickly gained an audience of intelligent, educated, middle-class readers and helped them to see that the Arts and Crafts movement was as much about ideas as about objects. It encouraged them to seek what the Philadelphia architect William Price had described as "the art that is life." Perhaps no other magazine of small

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Note: My thanks go to my Syracuse Arts and Crafts movement colleagues, Coy Ludwig and Mary Ann Smith, and to Edward Lyon, archivist of the Onondaga Historical Association, and Karen Rede of the Winterthur Library for their generous help and insights in the preparation of this article.

(or, at best, modest) circulation had such a profound and enduring impact on how home-owning Americans of the early twentieth century thought about their dwellings. There has been nothing like it since.¹

One of the more remarkable aspects of *The Craftsman* and its success was that it came into being and flourished without help from the publishing industry. The two people who conceived, launched, and carried it to rapid success could claim no significant prior experience in publishing. Moreover, they had little in common beyond their belief in the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement. The magazine's publisher, Gustav Stickley, was a furniture manufacturer of little formal education but growing aspirations to be a person of cultural importance. His colleague in bringing *The Craftsman* into being was Irene Sargent, a woman of great learning who had just begun her distinguished career as a university teacher of Romance languages and the history of art and architecture. Stickley, emboldened by the success of his United Crafts furniture manufacturing operation in Eastwood, New York (now part of Syracuse), had much to gain by bringing such a journal into being, but he had neither the literary background nor the editorial skills (let alone the time) to produce a first-class monthly publication by himself. Sargent provided what he needed. According to tradition, Stickley had first sought her out for French lessons before sailing to Europe in 1898. A tradition also suggests that she may have accompanied him as a guide on that trip, but there seems to be no evidence for either claim. Their relationship was, in any event, always professional and never social.²

Sargent began writing for Stickley by January 1901, ten months

1. A complete run of *The Craftsman* can be seen in Syracuse University Library's Department of Special Collections. Wendy Kaplan titled her book *The Art that Is Life* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1987) after the subtitle of Price's periodical *The Artsman*, finding in it a summary expression of the ideals underlying the Arts and Crafts movement.

2. For Stickley, see Mary Ann Smith, *Gustav Stickley: The Craftsman* (Syracuse University Press, 1983). For Sargent, see Cleota Reed, "Irene Sargent: Rediscovering a Lost Legend," *Syracuse University Library Associates Courier* 26 (summer 1979): 3-13; and "Near the Yates: Craft, Machine, and Ideology in Arts and Crafts Syracuse," in Bert Denker, ed., *Substance of Style: New Perspectives on the American Arts and Crafts Movement* (Winterthur, Del.: Winterthur Museum, 1996).

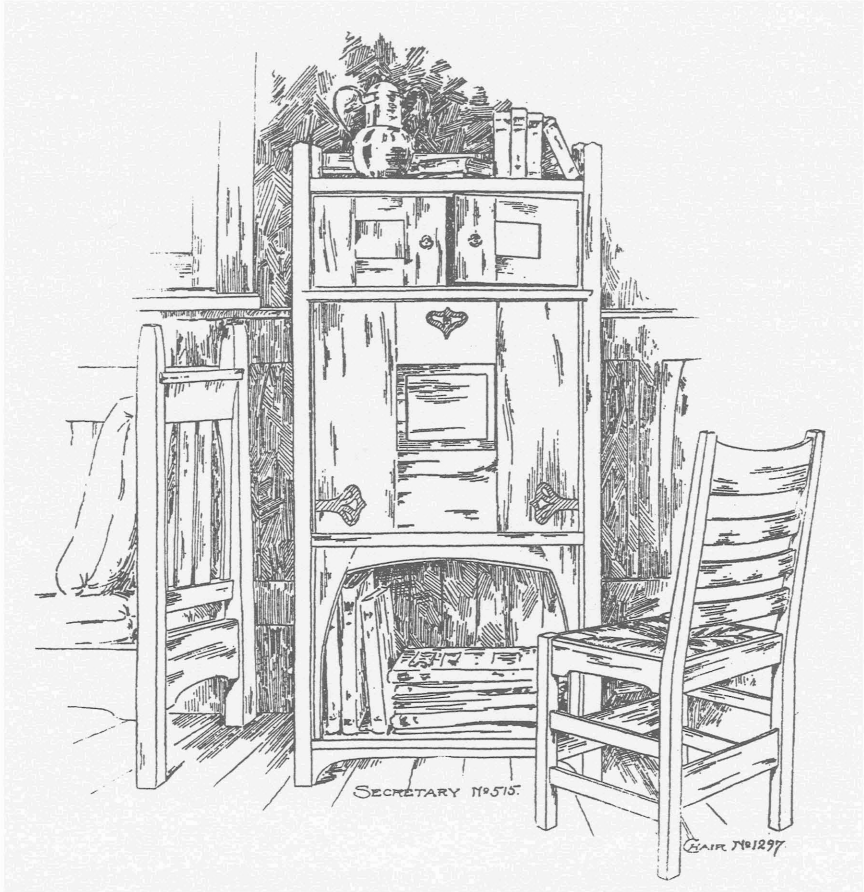
prior to her work for *The Craftsman*. A four-thousand-word manuscript, titled “A Revival of Old Arts and Crafts” and dated 13 January 1901, survives in her papers at Syracuse University, written rapidly in her own hand in a small writing tablet. Virtually verbatim, but with its title altered to “A Revival of Old Arts and Crafts in Wood and Leather,” her essay constitutes the text for Stickley’s first publication, *Chips from the Workshops of Gustave [sic] Stickley*. With the date 1901 printed on the verso of its brown wove-paper cover, this profusely illustrated, twenty-eight-page pamphlet/catalog appeared sometime between January and June of that year. The number of copies printed must have been quite small, for only a few can now be located. Sargent received remuneration for her contribution, but no byline.³

Sargent’s article explicates the historical and the aesthetic basis for Stickley’s United Crafts. On the first page she quotes Thomas Carlyle, that “ornament is the first spiritual need of the barbarous man.” She then traces the arts of ornament selectively through the ages and brings them up to the present, specifically to the new United Crafts furniture line, describing in some detail the company’s adherence to “the ideals of honesty of materials, solidarity of construction, utility, adaptability to place, and aesthetic effect,” ending with this statement:

In thus providing comfort or convenience, assuring utility, and securing thorough construction, harmony of line and refinement of color, in every object that leaves our workshop, we [the workers of United Crafts] feel that we fulfil our duty as artists and craftsmen; that we are working for a definite and high purpose: that is, the improvement of the public taste; that we are putting forth our personal efforts to realize the meaning of an art developed by the people, for the people, as a reciprocal joy for the maker and the user.⁴

3. Irene Sargent Papers, Syracuse University Archives. Stickley’s ledger from 1901 to 1905, now in the Winterthur Library, indicates that he paid Sargent \$50 on 30 December 1900. In addition, he also paid her a total of \$625 for her work in 1901. (Stickley Ledger, Joseph Downs Collection 60, V.76.X101, Winterthur Library).

4. Irene Sargent, *Chips from the Workshops of Gustave [sic] Stickley* (1901).



An illustration from the first *Chips from the Workshops of Gustave [sic] Stickley* (1901).

Earlier in the essay, Sargent had made clear the historical precedents for this new furniture, not for its visible style so much as its principles of design and its avoidance of ostentation.

Now, if it be true, as it has been asserted, that no designer, however original he may be, can sit down today and draw the form of an ordinary piece of furniture, or vessel, or the ornament of a cloth, that will be other than a development, or a degradation of forms used hundreds of years ago, where shall the middle class individual seek the objects that

shall best express his station in life and his own individuality, and best respond to his daily needs? The answer comes quickly. He must seek them among his social and political forebears; among the belongings of the burghers and the yeomen who prepared the way for the democracy of modern times. In the extant examples of the household art of medieval Germany and the Tyrol, of France and Flanders, of the England of the Puritans, he will find the qualities which are adapted to his uses: Good design, sound construction, sobriety, and subserviency of ornament. He has but to create the demand for objects possessing these qualities; since designers and makers well-instructed in this art and craft, stand ready to produce a new household art which shall justify its name.

The “well-instructed” designers and makers who stood ready to supply this furniture were, of course, the workers of Stickley’s United Crafts.

Sargent’s design principles and Stickley’s manufactures both reacted against Victorian taste, especially against the sense of clutter and the often overwrought appearance of that era’s furniture and decorative objects. As Sargent moves in her essay from room to room in an ideal home, she states the principles that should now apply, but she never proselytizes. She abjures Victorian ornament while specifying which pieces of the new era’s clean-lines furniture, such as those available from United Crafts, should be used to achieve better effect. About dining rooms, she wrote:

[N]o article should be admitted that literally does not earn its living: that is, render some actual service to the frequenters of the room. Here especially, the tendency to crowd and multiply the furnishings should be avoided, as there is no surer means of destroying the decorative value of the separate pieces, and of defeating their purpose as useful articles. Free space is in itself an ally of the decorator, and, in the dining room, it becomes a first essential; both for the comfort of the guests and the convenience of the servants, who, if crowded among buffets, china-cabinets,

chairs and tables, require the dexterity of a gypsy in the egg-dance to avoid breakage and disaster. . . . It is easy for the rich man to furnish his dining-room in baronial splendor, but it is possible for the man of the middle class to offer hospitality to his friends amid surroundings equally tasteful, although simple and comparatively inexpensive. This he may do by avoiding the eruptive carving, the applied ornament, [and] the unrefined moldings which have hitherto characterized much of the furniture offered as “*stylish pieces*” in the shops.

In June 1901 Stickley followed *Chips from the Workshops of Gustave Stickley* with another pamphlet, identical to the first except for a title altered to *Chips from the Workshops of United Crafts* and the addition of several tipped-in photographs of United Crafts furniture.⁵ Sargent and Stickley may then have decided that a journal would be more effective in broadcasting the ideas and the spirit of the Arts and Crafts movement to America, and thereby engendering a greater appreciation for his furniture, for they soon turned their attention to the creation of *The Craftsman*. In 1916 Stickley recalled this moment but did not give Sargent, or anyone else, credit for contributing to the magazine’s beginning.

I did not realize at the time that in making those few pieces of strong, simple furniture, I had started a new movement. Others saw it and prophesied a far-reaching development. To me it was only furniture; to them it was religion. And eventually it became religion with me as well. Thus unconsciously a Craftsman style was evolved and developed, a style that gradually found its way into the homes of the people, pushing out a branch here, a branch there, first in one direction and then in another, wherever it met with sympathy and encouragement. . . . The next thing that nat-

5. The second 1901 *Chips* with tipped-in photographs was accompanied by an order form dated 23 June 1901. I am grateful to David Cathers for sorting out the early issues of *Chips* for me. His book, *Furniture of the American Arts and Crafts Movement* (New York: New American Library, 1981), is an important work on that subject.

urally suggested itself was the need of a broader medium of expression for these ideas of craftsmanship and home-making; the need of some definite, organized plan for reaching people who, I felt sure, would be interested in what I was trying to accomplish; some means of getting into direct communication with them, of entering, so to speak, into their very homes. And so, in October [1901], the Craftsman Movement sent forth another branch, full of hope and promise—the first number of *THE CRAFTSMAN Magazine*. . . .⁶

The first number of *The Craftsman* appeared 1 October 1901. We do not know how Sargent and Stickley shared the responsibilities of getting out the magazine. He never identified any editor during its Syracuse years. He signed only a very few articles himself, and hardly any of the editorial matter. He owned the magazine, and certainly approved everything that appeared in it, but planning, obtaining and editing manuscripts, designing and proofing monthly numbers, as well as overseeing in-house printing, required a great investment of time and thought, and Stickley was a prodigiously busy man with many irons in the fire. Sargent took on the daunting task of writing a few articles of real substance and national interest each month and solicited and edited the contributions of others. She wrote less as she and Stickley found more contributors, but less time writing meant more time editing. The magazine had a consistently high literary tone, and it was consistently *her* tone: dignified, precise, learned, elegant in its prose style, and quick-witted in its scholarship. When she began writing for *The Craftsman* in 1901, she was nearly fifty (but claimed to be thirty-nine!). Stickley was forty-four.

Of old New England lineage (though she had been born and raised in Auburn, New York), Sargent received her formal education in Boston and Cambridge. A tradition exists that she studied first at the Boston Conservatory of Music, but if so, her interest in the history of the visual arts and their place in culture soon took precedence, and she turned to Harvard University. Harvard did

6. Gustav Stickley, "The Craftsman Movement: Its Origin and Growth," *The Craftsman* 25 (October 1915): 17–8, 23–6.

not permit women to enroll for courses in those days, but some professors allowed women of exceptional qualifications to audit lectures informally, and this seems to be what Sargent did. Later in her life she reported that she had studied at Harvard with Charles Eliot Norton.⁷ Norton, a friend of both John Ruskin and William Morris, and America's first great teacher of the history and theory of art and architecture, became a central figure in the early development of the Arts and Crafts movement in the United States.

In the 1880s, Sargent traveled extensively in Europe, taking time to audit lectures at the Sorbonne and the University of Rome. She was fluent in five languages. She began teaching French at Syracuse University in 1895, though she did not have a full-time continuing appointment until 1901. She also taught French, Italian, and Spanish at the Syracuse Classical School, a children's day school, from 1901 to 1904. (Her other languages were Latin and German.) She had published on the poetry of Robert Browning and lectured on a variety of subjects to many civic and cultural organizations, but nothing in her earlier experiences suggested how prolific an author she would become when she joined Stickley in the adventure of creating *The Craftsman*.

Sargent's literary contributions to *The Craftsman* still seem impressive, not only in number but also in range of subjects. In 1901 she wrote all the articles in the first two monthly numbers, more than eighty printed pages. In these she set forth the ideals of Morris and Ruskin, and linked Stickley's fast-growing empire inexorably to the Arts and Crafts movement. Thereafter, other authors contributed, though she usually wrote the lead article, which set the theme for the number. In the magazine's first six months, from October 1901 to March 1902, she contributed twenty-six of the thirty-three signed features. During her three and a half years with *The Craftsman*, she made eighty-four signed contributions to the magazine, and others, unsigned. She ended her association with *The Craftsman* magazine in April 1905, when Stickley left the Craftsman Building and moved his offices (but not his factory) to New York City.

It is unclear why Sargent did not continue her association with

7. Irene Sargent Papers, Syracuse University Archives.

Stickley after he relocated. A letter that she wrote on 22 February 1905 to a Boston art educator, Henry Turner Bailey, explains a little, but raises other questions too. She said:

As you have very kindly given me proof of your interest, both publicly and personally, I write to tell you of my decision to sever my connection with *The Craftsman*. My resignation will take effect on the issue of the April number. NEW DEPARTURES are planned for the magazine which appear to me neither wise nor desirable, and my New England blood gives me sufficient obstinacy to resist them, perhaps even against my own interests. My classes in the University occupy only a few hours of my time, and I am anxious to continue writing. If, therefore, you learn of any publication or person desirous of obtaining articles upon the subjects which I am able to treat, or translations from the French, German, Italian, or Spanish, will you keep me in mind and recommend me as far as you are able.⁸

In saying that her classes occupied only a few hours of her time, she probably dealt in understatement. What “departures” would Sargent have objected to? The magazine did not look radically different in the months after her separation from it, though it began to contain more articles per number. A gradual change in emphasis in its contents from historical perspectives to modern events was already underway, however. A review from the *New York Tribune* about the March 1905 number confirms this:

The current number of *The Craftsman* is full of interesting and timely articles on applied arts and kindred topics. There has lately been a distinct advance evident in this magazine, which is losing more and more its character of a trade paper picked out with essays on the arts of other days, and is taking its place as a lively exponent of the modern arts and crafts movement.⁹

8. Irene Sargent to Henry Turner Bailey, 22 February 1905, University of Oregon Library. My thanks to James O’Gorman for calling this letter to my attention.

9. An excerpt from this review was reprinted in *The Craftsman* 8 (April 1905).

As soon as she ceased writing for Stickley's magazine in 1905, she began publishing regularly on historical and contemporary fine crafts in *The Keystone*, a widely distributed and well respected journal of the optical, jewelry, and watch trade. She contributed to other journals as well, publishing, in all, well over two hundred historical and critical pieces, translations, reviews, and poems.¹⁰ During all of these years her writing and editorial work amounted to an avocation. Her primary responsibilities were as professor of the history of fine arts (including architecture) and Italian literature in Syracuse University's College of Fine Arts. Here too she was exceptional, reaching the rank of professor by 1908, and receiving honorary degrees from the University in 1911 (Litt.M.) and 1922 (Litt.D.). She taught until her death in 1930, at age eighty.

Some insights into Sargent's days with *The Craftsman* come from the Rochester architect Claude Bragdon (1866–1946). In 1902 he married Charlotte Coffyn Wilkinson of Syracuse. Her brother, Henry W. Wilkinson (1870–1931), was himself an architect. The two young architects, who were friends, each had a brief association with *The Craftsman*. Both were enthralled by the possibilities of designing houses and domestic furnishings. Bragdon had trained in the office of Charles Ellis in Rochester; Charles Ellis's enormously talented brother Harvey came to Syracuse to work for Stickley as a designer in 1903. Bragdon's letters give us first-hand reports on Wilkinson, Sargent, Ellis, and Stickley from the editorial offices of *The Craftsman*.

On 27 December 1900, Bragdon wrote to his mother that his brother-in-law to be, Wilkinson, was employed at a furniture factory that was a long walk from downtown Syracuse. Bragdon wrote:

This morning I walked six miles [round trip] to the furniture factory where Harry is working. Harry gets one hun-

Sargent may have objected most to Stickley's departure from Syracuse itself, and all that it implied.

10. Cleota Reed, "Irene Sargent: A Comprehensive Bibliography of Her Published Writings," *Syracuse University Library Associates Courier* 28 (Spring 1981): 9–25.

dred dollars a week for his services. . . . Harry has made a great success with his furniture and some of it is certainly very beautiful. It made me ambitious to try something on the same lines.¹¹

Wilkinson was working for Stickley at his factory in Eastwood at the same time that Sargent began writing for him. Wilkinson received \$700 for his efforts. In view of the amount of money he earned, he must have had important assignments. If he indeed designed furniture for Stickley, then he probably also made the skillfully rendered drawings for the nearly thirty illustrations of furniture and domestic settings that appeared in the 1901 *Chips*.¹²

Two and a half years later, beginning on 18 July 1903, Bragdon began a series of letters to his mother,¹³ all written from the Craftsman Building in downtown Syracuse, an imposing Queen Anne structure of 1893, originally designed as a private residence by the distinguished Syracuse architect Archimedes Russell. Bragdon wrote on the United Crafts letterhead. In his first letter he mentions that he has been observing Harvey Ellis as work:

I write this as you see from the United Crafts. I've just had a chat with Harvey who's the same old Harvey, making the same old beautiful water colors in the same old maddeningly simple and easy way. (18 July 1903)

I see Harvey every day. I come to this quiet place [the editorial room] to write letters at a beautiful Stickley desk. . . .

11. Claude Bragdon Family Papers, University of Rochester, Rush Rhees Library. I thank Jean France for calling my attention to Claude Bragdon's letters.

12. Stickley Ledger, Winterthur Library. The ledger is unclear as to whether Wilkinson worked in 1900 or 1901 for this fee. Wilkinson, who graduated in 1890 from Cornell University's School of Architecture, moved in 1901 from Syracuse to New York, where he established himself in the practice of architecture. He remained in New York and New Jersey the rest of his life. One of his early projects was the former Central New York Telephone and Telegraph Company building at 311 Montgomery Street, now the Onondaga Historical Association.

13. The letters from Claude Bragdon to his mother are from the Bragdon Papers at the University of Rochester.

I'm writing an article for Stickley which I hope to finish tomorrow. Miss Sargent praised my first article very highly and said I ought to give up architecture for literature [as in time he did]. Fancy! (21 July 1903)

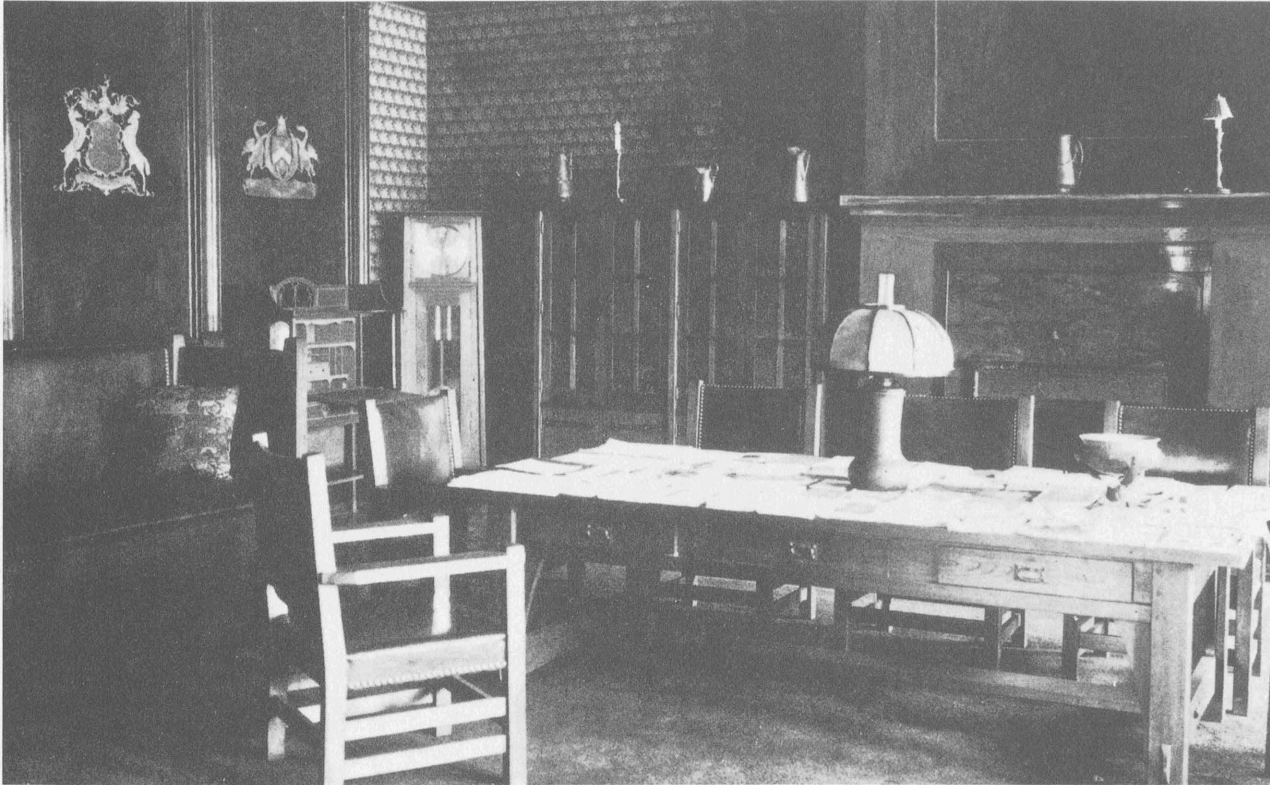
Four days later, he wrote:

Mr. Stickley wants another illustration at once and I've promised to do it this morning. . . . I want to stay through next week. I'm enjoying everything and working a little at the same time. Mr. Stickley liked my first article very much and asked me to do still another. I told him "I'd think about it." (25 July 1903)

[Harvey] is working very hard and looks worn and old, but he's doing great stuff, as good as he has done in his life. The influence of Stickley is just what it should be—it subdues and chastens Harvey's naturally riotous fancy. He's designing a series of covers for the Craftsman. The next number, containing my article and 22 of Harvey's drawings (badly reproduced) will be out Tuesday or Wednesday, and I'll send you a copy. Since I've been here I've written another, about a little house, and made one drawing in addition to the two I brought from home. Monday I'm going to make another, and Stickley is talking now about an article more in the vein of the first one. If he pays 2 cents a word as he agreed about the first one, it's really worth my while to do this, and it's good advertising as well. I guess I told you Wilkinson and Magonigle got two jobs from a little house of theirs published in the Craftsman. (26 July 1903)

Mr. Stickley today gave Char and I a beautiful little desk for our guest room in green oak. It was marked \$27.00 and is about the prettiest thing I've seen. He's evidently disposed to be nice to me. I gave him a \$500 order from the country club the other day and he likes my work in the Craftsman. (1 August 1903)

Finally, on 11 August, Bragdon wrote from Albany, having just left Syracuse:



The Craftsman editorial office, from Gustav Stickley, *What Is Wrought in the Craftsman Workshops* (1904).

In Sizzycuse I saw old Harvey who was working on a stunning poster for *The Craftsman*, and Miss Sargent who promised to give me a decision on another article I sent them very soon.

The success of *The Craftsman* in its first six months brought it a steadily growing number of other contributors. Sargent herself had covered an impressive variety of subjects in its first numbers, from an analysis of Gilbert and Sullivan's satirization of the Aesthetic movement in their comic opera *Patience*, to a discussion of the hand-weaving of rugs in contemporary Ireland; from the Arts and Crafts movement's abiding interest in handicraft as an agent of social reform, to reviews of books on architecture pertinent to the movement. Stickley contributed to these early issues as well, mostly short pieces on precepts of good design, on color, on the virtues of furniture of the kind he made, and other subjects. These statements served his interests as a manufacturer, of course, but they also reflected the genuineness of his commitment to the movement's ideals.

Among the other authors who appeared in the journal, Mary Woolman wrote on London's Haslemere handicraft workshops for women, Mrs. H. W. Graham on traditional crafts in Kentucky, and Edwin Markham on the influence of California missions on late-nineteenth-century architecture. The tone of all *The Craftsman* articles was serious, erudite, and uplifting. This tone distinguished the journal from the larger-circulation, less academic, popular magazines of its time that also responded to the Arts and Crafts movement, such as *House Beautiful*, *Studio*, and *Ladies Home Journal*. Of all these, *The Craftsman* conveys most clearly to later generations the altruism of those who took the Arts and Crafts movement not merely as a body of abstract ideas, or as a source for style in furnishings, but as nothing less than a reform of how Americans lived their lives. Sargent's unpublished essay of 1901 contained the germ of much of this thought.

Just as Sargent in 1901 had preceded her work on *The Craftsman* with a long essay in *Chips* considering the historical precedents for Stickley's "reform" furniture, so too did she follow it—long

after—with a similar essay. In 1926, eleven years after the collapse of Stickley's Craftsman empire and the passing from fashion of the furniture that others came to call "Mission Style"—a term he did not use—Sargent wrote a long essay for a little-known sixty-one-page booklet, titled *Household Furniture: Its Origin from the Bed and the Chest*, for the L. & J. G. Stickley Company in Fayetteville, New York, a firm founded by two of Gustav's brothers, who had become his successful competitors. By then Gustav's contributions as a designer and manufacturer were part of history. Near the end of her essay about the historical evolution of furniture styles, she reassessed what she now called "straight line" furniture, furniture of the kind that Stickley had been making during *The Craftsman* years, and which his brothers had also manufactured. She said that the style had come about naturally and inevitably in response to the requirements of an advanced democratic society. In 1926, however, a quarter of a century after having helped launch the magazine, and when the Craftsman style had fallen from fashion, she put "straight line" furniture into an interesting perspective:

Its austerity was softened by the beauty of its substance and of its surface treatment. But it was massive to excess, it gave the impression of inertia, and was well capable of provoking a disinclination to move and to think in the minds of those subjected to its influence. In its effort to reveal structure, to be frank and simple in expression, it allowed one member to pierce another almost fiercely and permitted an aggressive display of stout wooden pins which made ungraceful projections along the course of the uprights. Furthermore, regarded as a whole, this style carried the impersonal quality to an extreme. It suggested no descent from preceding types and pointed toward no probable developments in the future. It appeared to lack relationship with continuous, progressive life, and therefore, seemed less well placed in private residences than in fine clubhouses and at other points of select assembly, where its soothing color and delightful finish first greeted the eye and the



This photograph accompanied Irene Sargent's obituary in the *Syracuse Journal* of 14 September 1932.

touch, and the short duration of the visit prevented the analysis or even the perception of its irritating finality. . . . Its most intelligent champion was Mr. Gustave [*sic*] Stickley, now retired.¹⁴

At the time, the retired Stickley lived in Syracuse. Whether he had any part to play in the development of this booklet is doubtful. Perhaps he did not even see this reconsidered appraisal of his reform furniture by the writer who had assessed them so differently a quarter of a century earlier, who had worked with him to create *The Craftsman*, and who now saluted him.

14. Irene Sargent, *Household Furniture: Its Origin from the Bed and the Chest* (Syracuse: L. & J. G. Stickley, Inc., 1926). Original manuscript in Syracuse University Archives.