



Mathias Armbruster

Mathias Armbruster was born on February 24, 1839, to Georg Philippi Armbruster and ? Remlin, in Ebingen, Württemberg, Germany. He was educated in art in Stuttgart, Germany and Paris, France. He also lived in Stockholm, Sweden and London, England. He immigrated to the USA, at the age of 20, in 1859 and settled in Cincinnati, Ohio where he became an art glass and portrait painter before beginning his career of designing and painting theatrical scenery.

At the outbreak of the Civil War he enlisted in the 28th Ohio Volunteer Infantry (O.V.I.) and spent three years in the infantry. He was a first lieutenant and saw action at Bull Run and Antietam. While on duty in West Virginia, he did several sketches on paper (now owned by the Jerome Lawrence & Robert E. Lee Theatre Collection at Ohio State University). They are as follows; 1. Soldiers on picket duty at Flat Top Mountain, WV; 2. Drawing of Flat Top Mountain, WV; 3. (top) – Parkersburg, WV (bottom) Camp Shepherdstown n. Harpers Ferry, WV 7 miles from Potomac; 4. (top) south mountains Middletown, VA (bottom) camp Harpers Ferry n. Sharpsburg, WV. An oil painting that he did of the battle of Antietam is on display at the Ohio Historical Society (Ohioans in the Civil War display). Toward the end of the war, he was sent Columbus, Ohio as a recruitment officer.



Back row; Emil, Albert, Rose, Otto, Katrina.
Front row; Flora, Otto, Pauline & Mathias

After the war ended Matt, as he was known, went back to Cincinnati. On August 28, 1864, he returned to Columbus to marry Kathrina Haegele (she came to USA from Kaisersbach, Germany with mother & sister in 1848), the girl that he fell in love with while he was stationed there. Rev. F. Lehmann wed them at the G.E.L. Church at Fulton and Third Streets in Columbus. The couple made their home in Cincinnati where their first child, **Otto H.**, was born on August 28, 1865 (d. 8/15/08 New York City). The little family moved to Zanesville, Ohio where a second son, **Albert E.**, was born on October 22, 1867 (d. 8/30/65 Columbus, OH). They moved to Columbus Ohio, and into a frame house on S. Front Street. Their third son, **Emil Gustav** was born on 10/18/1869 (d.9/1/16 Columbus, OH) Their first daughter, **Rose O.**

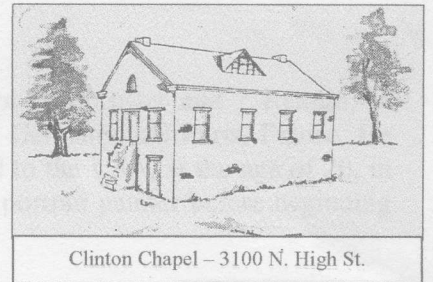
followed on October 29, 1871 (d.12/26/56). Three more children; **Adolph C.** born 10/29/73 (d.5/10/52 Columbus, OH), **Flora** 1/28/76 (d. Columbus, Oh), and **Pauline** born 11/18/78 (d. Cleveland, OH), made the family complete.

At the rear of the family home there was a barn, which had been built during the civil war. Matt tore it down and replaced it with a large brick studio. In 1875 Armbruster & Sons Scenic Studios opened at 249 S. Front St. The studio designed scenery for both the professional and non-professional stage. By 1904 it was advertised as the second largest provider of stage scenery in the country and the only studio that worked exclusively for the theatre. Matt's sons, Otto, Albert, and Emil all did design work at the studio. Otto left the firm in 1891 to become a scenic designer at the Broadway Theatre in New York City. Emil

specialized in doing interior scenery and became the business manager of the studio. Until his death he traveled all over the world marketing the scenery. Matt and his son Albert (specialized in exterior and curtains) designed the majority of the studio's scenery. When Mathias died the studio past into the hands of his son Albert, who ran it until his retirement in 1958.

1889

In 1889 Matt purchased a 29 acre wooded ravine that reminded him of Germany, in what was then the far north end of the city. Being a fan of Norse mythology and the Wagner ring operas, he named it Walhalla (the heaven of fallen warriors). He also purchased the Clinton Methodist Chapel at 3100 N. High Street (it was built in 1838, and had been a stop on the Underground Railroad), which adjoined the property and converted it into the family's home. When he sold 25 acres of the property to a real estate developer in 1908, he helped layout and name the streets for Norse warriors.



Clinton Chapel - 3100 N. High St.



Family home - 3100 N. High St, Columbus, OH

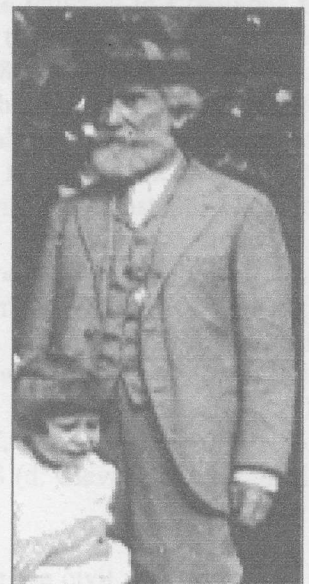
Matt, as he was known, loved nature and enjoyed doing oil paintings. He built a large pagoda at his home and imported grapes for it from all over the world. Much of his time, after his retirement in 1910, was spent working in his garden. As soon as she was old enough, his little granddaughter, Alice (daughter of Emil), was always at his side. She fondly remembered the peppermints that he carried in his pocket to share with her. He was proud of his hollyhocks and rose-of-sharon. He enjoyed reading and spoke four languages. He loved music and played six instruments. He was a member of the Masonic and Elk Lodges. Each winter the family took a train to their winter home on a small lake in Florida near Orlando. Although there was a

horse named Flippy that pulled a surrey with fringe on top, the family also had a car, which Otto drove to Florida each year. Guessing when he would arrive became a game.

He was short in stature but was always a stylish dresser, usually wearing a hat. He had blue eyes, brown hair and wore a mustache and a beard all of his adult life. In his later years he was delighted when youngsters called him Santa Clause. He had a warm, winning personality and adored children.

Matt was considered to be one of the fathers of the downtown Columbus water front beautification idea. He talked to architect Frank Packard, telling him about the beautiful riverfronts in German cities and said that Columbus' waterfront was one of the most terrible looking sections of the city. He suggested that it could be made beautiful with open park space and civic buildings.

He died of cancer on November 27, 1920 at his home in Columbus, Ohio. On his last day he said, "This is a beautiful world but there is still much to be done by man." He was buried at Union Cemetery.



Mathias with granddaughter, Alice, in 1919

Does anyone know where the house is?