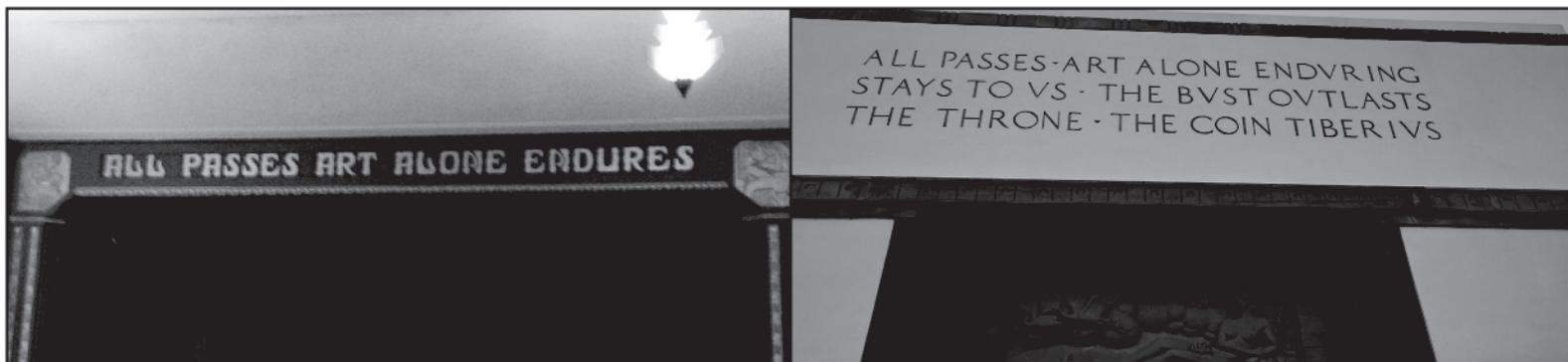


NORTON HALL IS THE EMBODIMENT OF RALPH NORTON'S LOVE FOR THE ARTS



As the Chautauqua Opera Company celebrates the 90th anniversary of both the Company and Norton Hall, it is worth taking note of Ralph Norton's contributions to the hall, which are not well-known. Ralph Norton was the son of Lucy Norton, who in 1929 donated Norton Memorial Hall to Chautauqua Institution. Ralph was the one who carried out the project and whose vision and passion for the arts are expressed in its execution. He chose the architects and sculptors, the architectural style and the ideals to be expressed in the inscriptions and sculptural reliefs.

ALL PASSES ART ALONE ENDURES

Ralph Norton's life was an expression of his conviction that the arts could elicit "the best in human values", as we say of Chautauqua. Ralph had great success in the steel industry, which enabled him to express his true passion: the love of art, music and architecture. He was a serious collector of both art and violins. His art collection grew to be of sufficient size and scope that he built a gallery for it in West Palm Beach, The Norton Gallery of Art. It later became The Norton Museum, which having just undergone a \$110 million expansion, is now one of the preeminent museums in the region.* Ralph established a Trust that endows both The Norton Museum and Norton Hall. The Norton Hall proscenium and The Norton Gallery façade were both inscribed with portions of the Austin Dobson poem, "Ars Victrix: "All Passes Art Alone Endures..."

WHEN YOU DRINK THE WATER, REMEMBER THE MAN WHO DUG THE WELL

Several of Ralph's contributions to Chautauqua are not well known:

- Board of Trustees member from 1923-1944; President 1945-1946
- Donor of Bestor Plaza Fountain (an architectural cousin to Norton Hall) in honor of Arthur Bestor, 1945
- Donor of sculpture in front of Post Office, originally in front of Norton Hall
- Donor in 1937 of backstage area which was not part of the original building
- Creator of Trust, which still distributes significant income annually to the Institution for Norton upkeep

For Ralph the greatest significance of all his contributions to Chautauqua and elsewhere was the transformative power of the arts. He wanted the arts to be as accessible as possible because of their transformative value to humanity. He stipulated that his gallery be open to the public without charge. He took steps to ensure that his contributions would reach people for whom the arts were not usually available. He believed that art of high quality had high transformative value. He believed that as art works its transformative powers, both the art and the human beings change.

At the opening of Norton Hall in 1929 Ralph made a passionate plea for beauty in architecture. Twelve years later at the opening of the Norton Gallery of Art, someone who was a donor to medical research reproached him for not spending his money on something more worthwhile. He replied, "You go ahead and save people's lives, and I'll make their lives more worth living."

- Cynthia Norton, June 2019

*The Norton Museum has just published a book called "Ralph Norton and His Museum", which is available in the Chautauqua Bookstore.