

**INTRODUCTION TO  
John Mills Van Osdel European Journals  
1874-1875**

by Burtram Collver Hopkins II  
(2<sup>nd</sup> great grand nephew)

John Mills Van Osdel (1811-1891) was Chicago's first architect. After several long years of work helping design and re-build the city after the 1871 Chicago fire, at the urging of his doctor he decided to take some time off from his busy architectural practice which he now shared with his nephew John Mills Van Osdel II (1838-1909). In 1874 he and his wife Martha McClellan (1817-1895), his adopted daughter and niece Martha Van Osdel (1849-1924), and adopted daughter Julia Callahan (1854 - 1890) embarked on an extended European vacation. Mr. Van Osdel had no biological children, but adopted three during his lifetime.

During their extensive travels through Europe, John Mills kept handwritten journals from the time he left Chicago on May 11, 1874, until the time he returned with his family on May 14, 1875. These journals were handed down through generations until they finally rested with his great grand nephew, Paul Franklin Allen (1916-1994), in California. Upon Mr. Allen's death and that of his wife Helena Gronlund (1917-2003), his long-time friend and executor of their estates, Phillip Livoni, was given the task of disposing of and/or finding a permanent home for some of his possessions. These included John Mills' three European journals, along with two kept by his adopted daughter Martha.

The journals probably were in Martha VAN OSDEL Pohl's possession when she died in California in 1924, then passed to her sister Clara Winifred VAN OSDEL Spies; then to her daughter Alice Ione SPIES Allen after her death in 1944; and then to Alice's son Paul Franklin Allen upon her death in 1977. According to Mr. Livoni, Mr. Allen first mentioned them to him in 1979. He later came across the journals when helping Mrs. Allen move after Paul's death in 1994.

After extensive research over the years for possible descendants of John Mills, Mr. Livoni made contact with Burtram Collver Hopkins II, who was a 2<sup>nd</sup> great grand nephew, and also a retired architect. Martha VAN OSDEL Pohl is Mr. Hopkins' great grandaunt, as she is the daughter of his 2<sup>nd</sup> great grandfather William Clark Van Osdel, a brother of John Mills. Mr. Hopkins had done extensive research on John Mills and was in the process of writing his biography at the time Mr. Livoni contacted him. Ultimately they were in agreement that the journals should find a permanent home where they could be housed for future reference. After some additional research, a joint decision was made that they should be donated to the Ryerson & Burnham Libraries of the Chicago Art Institute. Mr. Livoni agreed to transcribe the journals, and Mr. Nathaniel Parks, the archivist at the libraries, agreed to scan the journals upon receiving them from Mr. Hopkins.

The intention was to place the journal scans, transcriptions and journal photographs in the Ryerson & Burnham Archives and make them available to the public. This project was of personal importance to Mr. Hopkins, due not only to his profession, but his family history. During his early years, with his parents he often visited his Van Osdel grandmother's brownstone on Blackstone Avenue in the late 1930s and 1940s; and also the nearby Chicago Art Institute, where he often visited on their trips to Chicago due to his interest in art and architecture.