

About Ragdale

LAKE FOREST – The Ragdale Foundation is an artists-in-residence program that enriches the creative spirit, fosters artistic freedom, and infuses the artistic process with a powerful energy burst – the catalyst for creativity. Built in 1897, Ragdale is located on the grounds of Arts and Crafts architect Howard Van Doren Shaw’s summer home in Lake Forest, IL. Today the historic, timeless, and tranquil environment provides a sanctuary for artists-in-residence through the 30+ year old Foundation.

Visual artists, writers, composers, and interdisciplinary artists from around the world apply for highly-regarded two-week residencies. These competitively selected artists live and work in studios or bedrooms and gather for a chef-prepared dinner each evening. Residents’ uninterrupted time at Ragdale is their own, and they use it to create, write, experiment, research, plan, edit, collaborate, rejuvenate, brainstorm, and just plain work.

“At Ragdale, I can fully enter the dream of my own work,” poet Robin Behn says. “I don’t just write more here; I write more wildly, like the prairie itself.” Behn is the author of *Paper Bird*, *The Red Hour*, and *Horizon Note*.

Ragdale welcomed its first residents in 1976, when Howard Shaw’s granddaughter, Alice Judson Hayes, transformed her family’s summer home into a nonprofit artists’ community. Ten years later, she donated the buildings and five-acre grounds to the city of Lake Forest. They agreed that the Ragdale Foundation could continue to operate its program and buildings on a 25-year rent-free lease, which has since been extended through the end of the 21st century.

“As Ragdale enters its fourth decade, it has grown from Alice’s original vision into a thriving arts organization,” Executive Director Susan Tillett says. “Our work to restore the property and build the endowment means that Ragdale will be here to nurture future generations of artists.”

The Ragdale grounds are home to many works of sculptor Sylvia Shaw Judson, Shaw’s daughter, who worked in her Ragdale studio for 35 years. Throughout the grounds one can see Sylvia’s sculptures of small animals and children, the predominant subjects of her art. Her best known work is the *Bird Girl*, which appeared on the cover of the novel *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, by John Berendt.

Ragdale has recently undertaken a restoration initiative to return the buildings and landscape to the state and character of Shaw's 1920s vision. The grounds also boast broad lawns and groves of elms, locusts, and apple trees. To the west, the property lies adjacent to 50 acres of prairie, now run by the Lake Forest Open Lands Association.

Because the creative process can be a mysterious thing, Ragdale offers many public programs to engage the public with its mission. Ragdale artists and writers engage with students through school programs and lead public workshops, readings, and open studios.

Ragdale also offers public tours of its buildings and grounds. Docents share the details of Ragdale's history and architecture, and each tour also includes a studio visit with an artist-in residence. Other major events include "Redmoon Over Ragdale: A Family Day Spectacular," which features performances by Chicago's acclaimed theatre company Redmoon, and artist-led activities; and *A Novel Affair*, a weekend of private dinners with bestselling and esteemed authors in Lake Forest homes.

Bestselling authors Jane Hamilton, Audrey Niffenegger, Alex Kotlowitz, and Gail Tsukiyama, and Chicago artists E.W. Ross, Roland Kulla, and Barbara Cooper are just a few examples of the thousands of creative individuals who have had Ragdale residencies. A central tenet of Ragdale's philosophy is that time and space are not luxuries but necessary elements to creating important new work. Ragdale is proud to offer time and space to generations of artists to come.

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