

History

1897 Chicago architect [Howard Van Doren Shaw](#) (1869-1926) designed and built the American Arts and Crafts style Ragdale House and Barn as a summer retreat for his family. The Shaw family was a creative one: Howard himself an architect, his mother Sarah a painter, his wife Frances a poet and playwright, and his daughter Sylvia a sculptor.

1912 Shaw built the [Ragdale Ring](#), the outdoor theater where the family and friends staged several of Frances Shaw's plays for the Lake Forest community through the 1930s. With benches to seat an audience of over 200 and rows of evergreens to create the stage's wings, the Ragdale Ring became a very popular entertainment spot of the day. Carl Sandburg and Vachel Lindsay were friends of the Shaws and are said to have attended plays at the Ragdale Ring.

1943 The [Meadow Studio](#) was built on the prairie as a sculpture studio for Shaw's daughter Sylvia Shaw Judson (1897-1978). Sylvia worked there for 35 years, and many of her pieces feature animals or children. Her most famous sculpture is the *Bird Girl*, which was featured on the cover of the novel *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*.

1976 Shaw's granddaughter, poet [Alice Judson Hayes](#) (1922-2006), created the [Ragdale Foundation](#), a nonprofit artists' community providing a peaceful place for artists to work. She initially managed everything from admissions, to cooking, to mowing the lawn.

1980 The Foundation reacquired the [Ragdale Barnhouse](#) from the Preston family, who had purchased it from the youngest Shaw daughter, Theodora, in the late 1940s and remodeled it in the 50s. The addition of the Barnhouse made it possible for Ragdale to house twelve artists and writers at a time. Both the Barnhouse and the Ragdale House were added to the National Register of Historic Places.

1986 Alice Judson Hayes donated the buildings and the five-acre grounds to the [City of Lake Forest](#), preserving the Ragdale property. They agreed that the Ragdale Foundation could operate its program and buildings on a 25-year rent-free lease.

1991 The [Friends Studio](#) was constructed, providing live/work spaces for visual artists, composers, choreographers, and performance artists. This large, well-lit space also functions as a place for performances and exhibitions.

2001 The Ragdale Foundation Board and Executive Director Susan Tillett secured a [99-year lease](#) with the city of Lake Forest, ensuring Ragdale's long-term future as a thriving artists' community and asset to Lake Forest.

2005 Ragdale completed a [\\$4.5 million capital campaign](#), which funded the renovation of the Barnhouse, upgrade of artist facilities, and restoration of Shaw's landscape, as well as built a \$2.5million endowment.

2006 In this bittersweet year, the Ragdale Foundation mourned the loss of its founder [Alice Judson Hayes](#) and celebrated its [30th Anniversary](#). Highlights included a spring Ragdale Preview Day with free tours and open studios; a fall program entitled Home Sweet Ragdale: A Family Open House; and *TIME + SPACE: Ragdale Foundation 30th Anniversary* Exhibition at the Chicago Cultural Center (Nov. 17, 2006 – Jan. 13, 2007).

2008 Ragdale reopens a newly built [Meadow Studio](#) which is constructed in partnership with Illinois Institute of Technology College of Architecture's Design/Build class.

2010 **Ragdale embarks on a \$3 million renovation of its crown jewel – The Ragdale House**