

FLORENCE ELY HUNN

1887–1984

Florence “Danny” Hunn was a pathbreaking architect and designer in Chicago who came to the Lakeshore through her family’s ties to Pier Cove. Together with her partner, Mabel “Jims” Warren she lived life challenging expectations for women.

Florence graduated from the University of Chicago in 1911 and studied art at the Academy of Fine Arts and the Art Institute of Chicago where she became a life member. Her unique membership contribution included lectures she gave until the second World War. She was a founding member of the American Institute of Interior Design, serving on the national board for three years and President of the Chicago chapter for two.

She had hoped to become an architect but at that time women were not being admitted to architecture schools. As a result, she associated herself with Mr. Walton, one of the finest creative decorators in Chicago. In 1925 she opened her own shop, the Florence Ely Hunn Studio. From there she worked in twelve states, designing interiors and exteriors until 1955. She specialized in design for wealthy North Shore Chicago apartment dwellers and other clients all over the world. Her design forte was in the American Colonial and English 18th century styles but was one of the first designers in Chicago to favor modernism opening her own modern design shop in New York City.

Barred from earning a license, it was the open-minded Pier Cove-Saugatuck area that gave her the opportunity to practice architecture. Hunn designed several lakeshore cottages, including the Kamman cottage on Lake Shore Drive, one for the Chicago industrialist, A. Finkl (now the Kollenberg-Jones cottage on Campbell Road) and “Tonawanda” on Riverside Drive. She undertook the important restoration of the Martel House on Grand Street for a Chicago industrialist and carried out a variety of local interior design works, including murals for the original Tara in Douglas.

In 1927 she was the architect for one of the area’s most unusual cottages, a very tall multi story cottage high on the ridge overlooking the Kalamazoo River and Lake Michigan named “Tonawanda”.

Known as “Dannie” among her friends, Florence and her companion Mable “Jims” Warren spend their summers at Pier Cove starting in 1913. Florence frequently remodeled their “Doll House” cottage and the surrounding gardens. Dannie and Jims retired to the cottage in 1956. More than 60 years after she blazed the trail, women-owned businesses make up a significant portion of the Saugatuck-Douglas community.

Florence Ely Hunn researched by fellow
Team HerStorian, Carol Peterson

Carol Peterson



The “Doll House”—Hunn’s Pier Cove cottage in 1938.



Illustration of Florence Hunn’s design studio in Chicago.



Shipbuilder John Baptiste Martel’s “Council Oaks” after renovation by Hunn. The house still stands at 359 Grand Street, Saugatuck.



A modernist interpretation of an Arts & Crafts cottage. Tonawanda (1927) combined oversized glazed bricks and tall casement windows to capture dramatic views of the Kalamazoo River.