

DANA-THOMAS HOUSE IMAGE NARRATION

TOUR OF THE DANA-THOMAS HOUSE

(High School Script)

CONCEPT: The Dana-Thomas House is considered to be one -of the best preserved of Frank Lloyd Wright's early Prairie School houses. It contains many of Wright's designs from that period including low horizontal roofs, gently sloped gables, continuous bands of windows, wide overhanging eaves, a large central fireplace, and an open floor plan. The Dana-Thomas House has an extraordinary collection of Frank Lloyd Wright designed art glass in windows, interior doors, bookcases and lamps. The house is filled with original Wright designed furniture. In this house, the architect integrated all design elements giving them the "Wright" touch.

TO THE TEACHER: When Susan Dana decided to remodel the home she inherited from her father, she hired Frank Lloyd Wright, a leading architect of the era. It was her intention that this new residence would help to make Springfield, Illinois a place of culture and fine taste. The beautiful home Frank Lloyd Wright designed for Susan Dana in 1902 is considered to be one of the finest of his Prairie School designs. When Susan Dana was no longer able to maintain her home, it was purchased in 1944 by Charles Thomas, who used the house for the offices of the Thomas Publishing Company. Charles Thomas was careful to preserve the house and managed to retain most of the original Wright furniture. In 1981, the State of Illinois purchased the residence and began the careful restoration of the Dana-Thomas house to preserve its beauty for generations to come.

Image 1: Old Rheuna Lawrence House, (ca.1868), Springfield, Illinois. In 1901, Susan Dana inherited this house from her father, Rheuna Lawrence. [Mr. Lawrence was a politically powerful man who had amassed a large fortune by investing in many enterprises including banking, stock-raising, coal mining, railroading, lumbering, and real estate. He also owned a gold and a silver mine in the west.]

The original house was built of brick in the Italianate Style and had a low, pitched roof, long narrow windows, a porch, columns, and a cupola (lantern shape) on top. Brackets supported the overhanging roof. Susan Dana hired a rising young architect, Frank Lloyd Wright to design and build a house that incorporated the original Italianate house.

Image 2: Dana-Thomas House, Exterior. The resulting redesign of the house resulted in a 35 room, 12,600 square-foot residence and a 3,100 square-foot carriage house. [The original house was no longer visible, and only one room, a parlor with Victorian fireplace, was left intact in memory of Rheuna Lawrence.] The Dana House was designed for entertaining large groups of people. Its gracious beauty leant itself well to Susan's needs. It was used as a meeting place for organizations and charities as well as elegant parties. Susan Dana gave Frank Lloyd Wright an open checkbook to build the Dana house. The house cost approximately \$60,000.00 at a time when an eight-room brick house would have cost \$4,000.00 and a six-room frame house \$1,500.00.

Image 3: Courtyard. The large, rambling Dana-Thomas House is built on a corner city lot. Six-foot high walls provide privacy to the interior courtyard where Susan Dana gave many lawn parties. A thirty-foot-long reflecting pool is located in the yard. Frank Lloyd Wright designed very complex copper gutters for the horizontal roofs. The gutters turned upward in an imitation of oriental architecture.

Image 4: Entrance. As you approach the entrance to the house, notice the large Romanesque arch around the door and the band of windows above. Look carefully at the long narrow brick used on the exterior of the house. Notice how the mortar between the bricks has been carefully "raked" so that the bricks seem to float emphasizing the horizontal plane.

Image 5: Entryway. As you walk through the door, you are greeted by a geometric butterfly motif which is repeated in two arches.

Image 6: Bock Statue. Once inside, you will see a statue of a woman who seems to be building a tower. The statue is named "The Flower in the Crannied Wall" and is created by Frank Lloyd Wright's friend, Richard W. Bock.

Image 7: Reception Area. This is the area in which Susan Dana received her guests. Usually a group of musicians would play on the musician's balcony located above the entrance. (Two other such balconies are located in the house.) When you first enter the reception area, you feel enclosed by the space, but in reality this is a very tall room. Wright varied the heights of his ceilings throughout the house. You may walk up or down three or four stairs and be in a tiny space with a height of six feet and then enter an area where the ceiling soars. The whole house breaks with the Victorian notion of small, closed-in spaces and instead offers wide-open spaces. [A close, intimate feeling can be obtained by closing the heavy draperies.] There are 16 major levels in the house.

Image 8: Reception Area, Arched Fireplace. The large, arched fireplace is typical of Wright's designs. Notice that the fireplace has no mantle, but is simply flush with the wall. From the entrance, the fireplace seems to frame the Bock sculpture.

Image 9: Moonchildren Fountain. Next to the reception space, you are drawn to a quiet seating area where you see a fountain sculpted by Richard Bock called "The Moonchildren".

Image 10: Hallway Glass and Lighting. Frank Lloyd Wright coordinated the art glass designs for 250 windows, doors, and light panels for the house as well as more than 200 light fixtures. The Dana-Thomas house has one of the most extensive collections of art glass that can be seen in a Wright designed house. All of the brass is original to the house.

Image 11: Dining Room. The barrel-vaulted dining room of the Dana-Thomas house is an elegant space. The room is highly symmetrical and graced by a huge table that seats 40 people when expanded. Four butterfly light fixtures hang from the corners of the main room and a musician's balcony is located just above where the

photographer stood to take this picture. A mural around the wall subtly suggests the sumac plants of the Prairie.

Image 12: Butterfly Chandelier and Mural. The dining room mural was painted by George Niedecken in dry fresco on rough-textured plaster. It depicts the midwestern prairie plants of sumac, golden-rod and purple asters. The chandeliers give off a reflection of butterflies in a certain light.

Image 13: Dining Room Breakfast Area, Sumac Windows. At the far end of the dining room, a small breakfast area is located where Susan Dana took her meals when not entertaining. Sumac windows provide a backdrop for this space.

Image 14: Sumac Window. This art glass window is located in the dining room of the Dana-Thomas house. The pattern is an abstract geometric design of a sumac plant. Colored glass was added to the window which was made of zinc earning.

Image 15: Conservatory Hall, Before Restoration. This is a picture of the conservatory hall showing the room before the State of Illinois undertook its restoration. After careful research, it was decided to return the building to the period of 1910, replacing all changes made after that date with copies of what had been destroyed and removing all work of a later period. [Mechanical improvements such as updating the heating and air conditioning and electrical systems were undertaken.]

Image 16: Conservatory Hall, After Restoration. This image shows the conservatory hall as it would have appeared in 1910. It is said that Susan Dana often removed the plants and replaced them with water and swimming goldfish to entertain the many children she invited to the house.

Image 17: Living Room, Glass Door. In this image we see the living room as it appears from the hallway. Notice the leaded glass door at the entrance. This is the room where Susan Dana pursued many of her interests in community and social problems and studied such things as astrology and theology. The windows of the living room provide a spectacular display of color when the light shines through. The chairs in the room represent Wright's design for a reclining chair.

Image 18: Master Bedroom, Art Glass. Susan Dana's bedroom is graced by a huge art glass window. All of the furniture in Susan Dana's bedroom was designed by Wright and it matches the oak detailing that surrounds the walls.

Image 19: Gallery Entry and Butterfly Lamp. At the entry to the gallery you see rich, full-length art glass windows and an elegant glass chandelier. The oak trim and cabinet work are typical of the interiors of the house.

Image 20: Gallery, After Restoration. The gallery is one of three great spaces in the Dana-Thomas house. It consists of two levels. The upper level rises two stories to a great barrel-vaulted ceiling. Frank Lloyd Wright used structural steel to create this large soaring space.

Image 21: A musician's balcony is located on one end above a raised stage. A great open space at the opposite end of the room overlooks the library on the lower level.

Image 22: Library. The lower level provides a library with bookcases and built-in seating. A series of windows let light in from the garden. Another lower level contains a duck pin bowling alley and a billiard room.