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TRAFFORD
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Alice Bemis Taylor

by
Julia Ryan Wills

with a foreword by Judith Reid Finley

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2005

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Cover: Photograph of Alice Bemis Taylor's portrait by Walter Wilson, which is on permanent display at Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center. Courtesy of Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center

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Foreword

Alice Bemis Taylor (1877-1942) exerted an important influence on the Colorado Springs community during the early years of the Twentieth Century. Her generous philanthropy resulted in the construction of both the Colorado Springs Day Nursery and the Fine Arts Center, which houses Mrs. Taylor's extensive collection of southwestern art. The Taylor memorial organ and concerts at Grace Episcopal Church remain among her other legacies, many of them unsung by chroniclers of local history. For Alice Bemis Taylor worked quietly and without fanfare, guarding her private life and rarely allowing herself to be photographed.

Julia Ryan Wills (called Judy by her friends) became fascinated with Alice Bemis Taylor through an interesting family connection. On February 28, 1960, Julia and her husband, Matt, were invited to Sunday dinner at the Santa Fe home of her cousin, John Gaw Meem, the eminent architect, and his wife, Faith. It was the first time Judy had seen her cousin since she was a girl. Faith's aunt, Alice Bemis Taylor, had become a friend and patron of John's in 1928. In 1932 she had commissioned him to design the Colorado Springs Fine

Arts Center. Aunt Alice also persuaded John to hire Faith to work in his office. Faith's qualifications included a degree from the Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture (a women's affiliate of MIT).

John Gaw Meem of Santa Fe was John Gaw Meem IV. He and Judy shared a Virginia background. Judy's grandmother, after whom she is named, Julia Halsey Meem was the daughter of John Gaw Meem II. The Meem family home, Mt. Airy, was located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Nancy Meem Wirth, Faith's and John's only child, and Judy, therefore, have a common great grandfather, John Gaw Meem II. Nancy has always called Judy "Julia," as do most of her family in Virginia. Because of her deep affection for Nancy and her parents, Judy chose to describe Alice Bemis Taylor's life in a paper she prepared in 1995 for the Woman's Literary Club on the assigned theme, "Colorado Women."

Founded in 1892 during an era when women yearned for stimulating educational opportunities outside the home, the club is one of the oldest of its kind in the Pikes Peak region. Currently, it meets seven times each year to discuss papers presented by members on a topic chosen annually by the program committee.

Judy Wills had joined this distinguished group in 1985. She made an immediate impression as a person of quiet enthusiasm, intelligence, and charm. At her lovely Broadmoor home, Judy hosted the group three times with the warm hospitality of a true Virginia gentlewoman. In October 1987, she presented her first paper on the correspondence between Martha Washington and Abigail Adams. This was followed in March 1991 by a study of Jehan Sadat, the widow of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat. But her later presentation of the life of Alice Bemis Taylor remains as Judy Wills' finest contribution to the Woman's Literary Club.

This paper reflected such thorough research that it has added significantly to the scant body of knowledge about this venerable Colorado Springs woman. Typewritten copies have been placed at the Fine Arts Center Library and at the Special Collection of Colorado College's Tutt Library. Recognizing the value of wider distribution of information about Alice Bemis Taylor, Judy's family decided to publish her paper with rare photographs of Mrs. Taylor for the benefit of all those interested in local history. It was carefully planned as a surprise for Judy and more importantly as a loving tribute.

Born in Richmond, Virginia, in 1936, Judy attended public and private schools in Charlottesville through the tenth grade. After her graduation from the National Cathedral School in Washington, D.C., she went to Mount Holyoke College, where she graduated in June 1958 with a major in French Literature. That same month she married a law student, Matthew B. Wills, at the University of Virginia chapel in Charlottesville. In 1959, they made their home in Colorado Springs, where Matt had decided to practice law. Their four children, Carter, Matt, Aurelia, and Ellen, were all born at Penrose Hospital in Colorado Springs.

Judy's principal devotion has always been her family; nevertheless, she found time in recent years to serve on the governing board of a distinguished school, National Cathedral School, and to write a scholarly paper about one of Colorado Springs' most illustrious women. Like Alice Bemis Taylor, Judy is modest and shuns publicity, but her contribution to local history will remain as an enduring gift to the community.

Judith Reid Finley
April 2005

Alice Bemis Taylor

Before reading my paper, I would like to tell you about some of the preliminaries that led to the writing of it. When I began to research material on Alice Bemis Taylor – exhausting the resources of the Pioneer Museum, the Local History Section of Colorado College, the Palmer Wing of Penrose Library, even the scrapbooks at the Hearthstone Inn (the childhood home of Alice Bemis Taylor – now on the National Register of Historic Places), it became apparent that there was a dearth of information about Mrs. Taylor personally. It was possible to trace her major philanthropies, but even those were given with so little fanfare that they told nothing about the giver save that she was a wealthy woman who obviously cared about her community, and who guarded her privacy. There was absolutely no primary source to turn to except some correspondence between John Gaw Meem, the architect, and Alice Bemis Taylor, the donor, housed in the Fine Arts Center library, and written during the construction of that facility. The best sources at this point were newspaper clippings and a beautiful tribute to Mrs. Taylor, written by Vesta Tutt and presented

to Colorado College and President Benezet on the occasion of the dedication of Taylor Hall, November 2, 1956.

In desperation, I called Mrs. Lillian Armit, a long-time secretary of Mrs. Taylor, and trustee of the Bemis Taylor Foundation from 1936 until its dissolution in 1974, and, eventually, a co-executor of Mrs. Taylor's estate. Mrs. Armit gave me the name of a young woman who works for the Park Department and who had recently interviewed Mrs. Armit extensively about Alice Bemis Taylor. Denise Oldach and I met for two hours pooling our information and sharing our enthusiasm and affection of this great lady who had done so much for institutions and individuals in Colorado Springs, and who, sincerely, wanted no recognition for it. We both felt that Alice Bemis Taylor was a lady of such stature and quality – with such a great heart – that we would sing her unsung song as best we could.

During her philanthropic years, the press dubbed her "Lady Bountiful." She has been called a "Benefactor – one who gives aid, especially financial aid." Rather *beneficent* is the adjective which best describes her to me: "characterized by, or performing acts of, kindness or charity; producing benefit." This she did for individuals, as well as institutions, whether it was tuition for Colorado College students, payment of an operation, or odd jobs for the out-of-work laborer during the Great Depression so that he might put food on his table. And as the *Colorado Springs Evening Telegraph* stated after her death in 1942, "It has been said of her that her benefactions knew no race, color or religion." Vesta would agree. In her tribute of November 2, 1956, she said, "In the book *Who's Who in Colorado* Mrs. Taylor listed her hobbies as early American glass and architecture. But her greatest interest was that of helping her fellow-man." If documented, these countless gifts of kindness might overwhelm her major philanthropies, but it is to those philanthropies that we must turn.

To grasp the foresight and the scope of Mrs. Taylor's philanthropies, let us close our eyes and imagine ... Colorado Springs without the Day Nursery, without the Fine Arts Center, without the music of the Taylor Choir and the organ (one of the West's finest at the time of her death), which she gave to Grace Episcopal Church in memory of her husband Frederick Morgan Taylor – a tribute to his love of good music – but gave it for the benefit and enjoyment of the citizens of Colorado Springs. She twice gave large sums of money for the maintenance of the organ and for the endowment of the Taylor Memorial Concerts, which, typically for her, she wished to be given "late in the afternoon or in the evening so that those coming from work might enjoy them."

Mrs. Taylor gave to the maternity ward at Glockner Hospital in 1923, endowed the Community Chest and founded the Bemis-Taylor Child Guidance Clinic, which she endowed for ten years, feeling that if the citizens of Colorado Springs found this important they would then sustain it. It was her wish, her duty, she felt, to share what she had. She called it her "New England conscience," but the challenge was not to do too much, not to do too little.

She was the first woman trustee of Colorado College and her many large gifts to its Endowment Fund sustained it during times of financial stress and helped to ensure its stature. But she also addressed the *specific* needs of the students and college: scholarships, a bus for the use of the students in the geology department, a sun room for the use of girls living at Montgomery Hall. She was a generous benefactor of the Y.M.C.A., a supporter of the Civic Symphony Orchestra – "Keenly interested in the advancement of music along with all arts" the *Colorado Springs Evening Telegraph* said. She was a collector of rare and first edition books, and many of these were later given to Coburn Library. In 1927, Mrs. Taylor

created the Bemis-Taylor Foundation "as an avenue to contribute to charitable institutions of her choice." This was ten years prior to the creation of the El Pomar Foundation (1937). It seems that in so many ways, she carried the banner that her parents carried before her.

Both of Alice Bemis Taylor's parents were New Englanders whose families had come to this country from England in the 17th century. Her father, Judson Moss Bemis, was born in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, May 3, 1833. His name was chosen in commemoration of a local clergyman. He was a self-made man and a brilliant businessman. With little education, no experience, and \$2,000 in savings from a clerking job in Chicago, he started, at the age of twenty-five, a bag manufacturing company which became the world's largest manufacturer of textile and paper bags.

Alice Cogwell's family had lived in this country for 200 years when she was born in Ipswich, Massachusetts, on January 5, 1845. She and Judson Bemis met in St. Louis through a letter of introduction. They were married on November 21, 1866, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Bemises had five children, three of whom survived to adulthood: Albert Farwell, Maude, and Alice. When Alice was four years old the Bemis family moved to Colorado Springs in search of a cure for a throat ailment which Mrs. Bemis had contracted.

On his retirement as President of Bemis Brothers Bag Company in 1909, Judson Moss Bemis turned his energies to philanthropic interests. He was a trustee of Colorado College from 1912-1919. He gave several buildings to Colorado College, including Bemis Hall; and he gave \$100,000 in 1914 to establish the Judson Moss Bemis School of Business. In 1920, Colorado College conferred upon Mr. Bemis a Master of Business Administration degree. The president of the college, Mr. Duniway, said in his presenting address: "Judson Moss Bemis, a Trustee of Colorado College. For many years, sympathetic with visions for

its future, freely giving time and money for their realization; assisting his wife to make lighter the burdens of aspiring youth who seek higher education; founder of a great business built upon probity; a true Master in business." In the end, according to an article in the *Pueblo Star Journal and Sunday Chieftain*, April 8, 1956, Judson Bemis was one of the college's greatest benefactors. Only General William Jackson Palmer and W.S. Jackson had given as much to the institution.

Judson Moss Bemis said, "Stand for that until you have mastered it. Stand at the head of your class. Stand at the head of your business. Stand at the head of your profession. Stand upright physically and morally. Stand for character that it may be equal to a shining light on the hilltop ... in your ideas aim at the sun. You may hit the moon, but if your aim is the level of the earth, you will hit nothing higher. If you stand all your life for right principles and leave your country better than you found it, your day in the world has been worthwhile." Mr. Bemis, said Vesta, valued the "blessedness of drudgery;" however, when Mr. Bemis died in 1921, he left an estate of \$1,500,000. It is estimated that his philanthropies equaled \$25,000,000.

Vesta describes Alice Cogswell Bemis as one "who had the heart and will to bring all the happiness she could to others." She was also public spirited and had a tremendous interest in the development of Colorado Springs. She was a founder of the Day Nursery in 1897 and gave generously to the endowment of this institution, which provided day care services for the working mothers of the community. She gave land and funds to the local Y.M.C.A. so that their gymnasium could be built; and she was a founding member of the first woman's club in Colorado Springs, the Wednesday Art Club. Founded in 1885, it was formed to discuss the current state of the arts. Upon his wife's death, Mr. Bemis wrote a

letter to the president and members of the Wednesday Art Club. In it he said that the major portion of the small library on art accumulated by his wife during the last ten to fifteen years of her life was to be "put in your hands to hold in trust primarily for the benefit of the Wednesday Art Club so long as it may continue, and thereafter to pass to the unconditional ownership of Colorado College. As long as the Club exists, it is our wish [his and his three children's] that the collection should be held for the use of its members. However, if you can provide opportunities for the public and students of Colorado College to consult and enjoy these books without undue injury to them it would give us pleasure and make the books of greater usefulness." Usefulness – a theme in the lives of the Bemis family.

Alice Bemis Taylor was born in Newton, Massachusetts, October 15, 1877. When her family moved to Colorado Springs the town was barely ten years old and she was four. It was a small, friendly community with a decidedly English flavor. There were, as Vesta points out, "no paved streets and less than 100 telephones. People walked or bicycled, rode in buggies, runabouts and occasionally a four-in-hand." The Bemis family rented a house on Weber Street while their home at 506 N. Cascade was being built. On Weber they lived not far from the William and Helen Hunt Jacksons and the Howbert family. The Tom Parrishes and Mr. and Mrs. W.F. Anderson were also neighbors.

It appears that Alice Bemis' childhood was idyllic. Mrs Bemis, Albert, Maude and Alice moved into 506 N. Cascade in 1885, and although Mr. Bemis maintained his residence in Boston for business purposes, he visited the family when he could. Vesta tells of a group of eight young friends who met for "bowling at the stables back of the Dickey house at 1206 N. Cascade Avenue; for skating in the winter when the driveway of the Curr House at St. Vrain and Tejon was flooded and roller skating in the Temple Theater. There were picnics in

the Garden of the Gods and parties at Glen Eryie or at the home of Dr. and Mrs. William Bell at Briarhurst. Tennis was played on courts which were on the corner where Coburn Library now stands and all the young people rode horseback" – a sport which Alice Bemis Taylor enjoyed for the rest of her life. She became an avid and accomplished equestrian.

Mrs. Bemis encouraged her daughter to develop the "habit of reading aloud in a small circle of friends or family." This proved to be a life-long pleasure. Until the end of her life Mrs. Taylor read aloud with three devoted friends, Margaret Anderson, May Howbert, and Louise Fisher Blood. Each member subscribed to the *Atlantic Monthly* and they would meet to read and discuss its articles and to enjoy current books of serious nature. "One member of the group would read while the others sewed," Vesta recounts.

Alice Bemis was educated in private schools. When she was fourteen she went abroad with her family and at nineteen she spent a year abroad with her mother and sister Maude, studying and traveling. Mrs. Armit describes her as a humble person who had the strict New England characteristic to do everything "just right." She loved the outdoors and, of course, her horses. She was private and shy, but fun – had a sense of humor and knew how to enjoy things, from people and nature to art. She was particularly at ease in a small group. In a large group she would allow someone else to be in the foreground. She was a member of the Congregational Church, and deeply religious.

As she would wish, Alice Bemis' personal life remains private. She was twenty-six when she married Frederick Morgan Taylor in 1903. The newspaper noted in large black print "Wedding of Miss Bemis and Frederick Morgan Taylor was quietly celebrated yesterday." It goes on to say that the marriage occurred in the Bemis residence, 506 N. Cascade Avenue, with a small circle of relatives and long-time friends as witnesses. Miss Katherine Adams

attended the bride as maid-of-honor. The groom was unattended. There was no photograph, just this notice placed in among the news.

Mr. Taylor was a stock-broker, a New Jersey native who had come to Colorado Springs with his mother and sister – a sportsman who loved fishing, hunting and an outdoor life. He was also the nephew of President James Taylor of Vassar College (Mrs. Taylor gave generously to Vassar throughout her life. Her interest was enhanced when her nieces, daughters of Farwell and Faith Gregg Bemis were students there). The Taylors built a home at 1238 Wood Avenue where Mrs. Taylor gradually assembled a collection of rare and first edition books, many Western Americana. The Taylors and the Charles Tutts shared a cabin in the mountains at Lake Uneva, Colorado, a place beloved by both families. The Taylors also had a cabin in the Adirondacks. They had one adopted daughter, Alice Doree. When Mr. Taylor died in 1927, Mrs. Taylor's brother, Albert Farwell Bemis, then President of Bemis Brothers Bag Company, sent a secretary to help his sister – one Olive Burke, who would be with her until Lillian Jackson Armit – fresh out of Colorado College – became her secretary in 1934. Mrs. Armit would become Mrs. Taylor's devoted friend, a Trustee of the Bemis-Taylor Foundation and, eventually, a co-executor of her estate.

There must be three things which helped to shape the major philanthropies of Alice Bemis Taylor's life: an inner compulsion (as Vesta put it) to share what she had; the Bemis Building Bug, as Mrs. Taylor, herself, described it, with its fascination for architecture; and a fervent desire to bring beauty to the lives of those who had little or none. And it seems to me that it is in the Day Nursery and at the Fine Arts Center that we can best see, touch, and emotionally feel the reach of Mrs. Taylor's generosity and the kindness behind it.

Mrs. Taylor was board president of the Day Nursery when she announced that she



Undated photograph of Alice Bemis Taylor with her daughter, Alice Doree Taylor.
Courtesy of Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center.



Undated photograph of Alice Bemis Taylor with her daughter, Alice Doree Taylor.
Courtesy of "Special Collections," Tutt Library, Colorado College,
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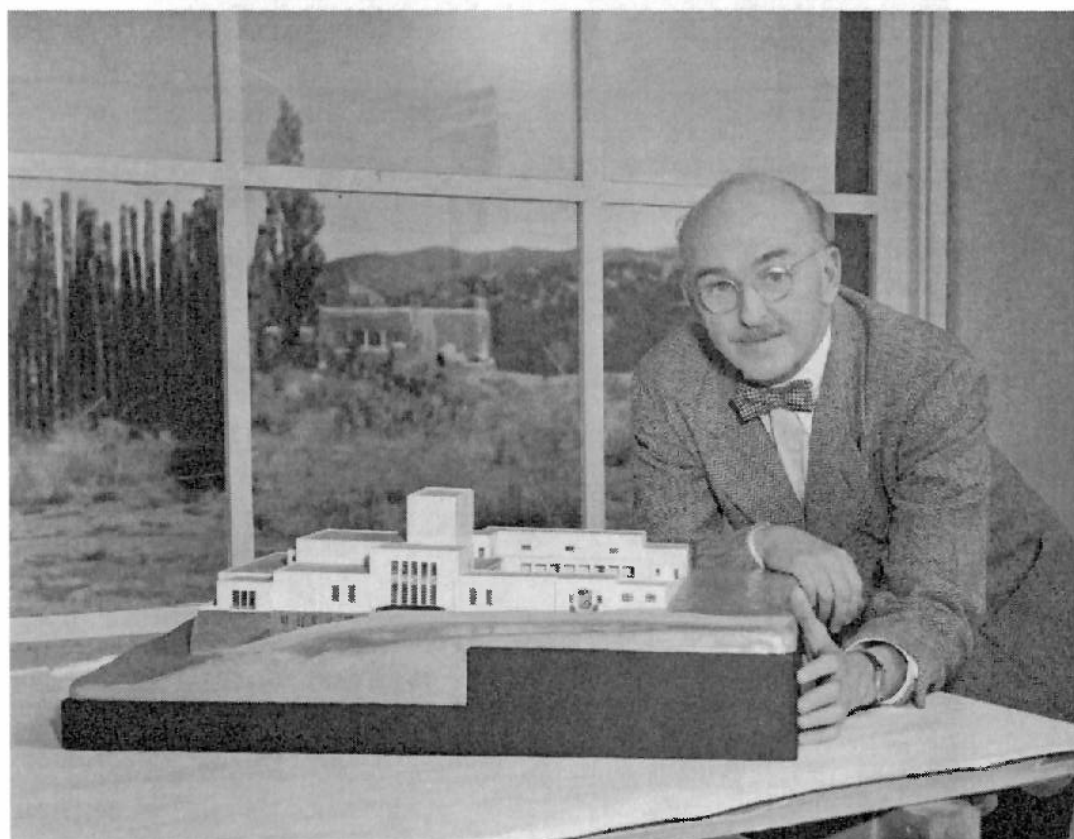
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Undated photograph of architect John Gaw Meem with model of Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center. Courtesy of Nancy Meem Wirth of Santa Fe, New Mexico.



Photograph of John Gaw Meem and Faith Bemis Meem on their wedding day in 1933. Courtesy of Nancy Meem Wirth of Santa Fe, New Mexico.

would "provide a building in order that the work of the society might be put on a permanent basis." The building would be given in memory of her mother, Alice Cogswell Bemis, a founder of the Day Nursery in 1897 and a legacy of \$160,000 left her by her mother would be used for the structure. A lot, 90' x 190', was secured at Rio Grande and Tejon Streets and the architect William Stickney of Pueblo was employed with an Englishman, John Gray, as his assistant. Mr. Gray would insist that every detail of craftsmanship be correct. The building took 1-1/2 years to complete.

On December 20, 1923, more than forty children were moved into their new home (the Day Nursery was originally residential). With them moved a matron, under whom were six nurses, a cook, and a janitor. The Day Nursery was completely equipped for the comfort, sheltering and care of children of working mothers, many of whom came from tubercular families. It was also – inside those solid and protective walls – a place of great beauty designed and executed with painstaking care to create a refuge of beauty, wonder and imagination in the lives of children who had little or none. We know it well: multi-colored quarry tiles skip their way down the hall to the dining room with its child-sized oak tables, benches and chairs, its stained glass vignettes of whimsical animals and fish. Alan Tupper True's storybook murals and quotations catch the eye in the original playroom. The details of craftsmanship are endless.

Mr. R.E. Alderson, the master builder and contractor, said this about Mrs. Taylor: "Mrs. Taylor was a very brilliant woman who had a great grasp of details. She could follow architectural plans and ideas as well as any professional builder. She had vision. I respected her very much."

The Day Nursery opened formally with a children's party on Christmas Day, 1923. The

Nursery was dedicated on that day to all mothers and all children (a poignant gift from a woman who had no children of her own). Mrs. Taylor must have been pleased – she gave each man who had worked on the job a twenty-dollar gold piece. She was the largest single contributor to the Day Nursery, for years its acting and later its honorary president; and, in her will, Mrs. Taylor left funds for its maintenance and operation. Yes, indeed, Mr. Alderson, Alice Bemis Taylor had a vision.

John Gaw Meem and Alice Bemis Taylor were introduced in Santa Fe in 1928 by their mutual friend, the sculptress, Eugenie Shonnard. He was thirty-four, the leading exponent of the Spanish pueblo revival style of architecture and, according to architectural historian Christopher Wilson, "entering the prime of his career ... beginning his most creative work." Mrs. Taylor was fifty-one, a recent widow who had begun collecting Native American art of the Southwest the previous year (her interest at this time was in Indian textiles, particularly Navajo weaving). They found much in common. She was a supporter of the Committee for the Preservation and Restoration of New Mexico Mission Churches, a passionate interest of Mr. Meem's. He introduced her to Southwestern Spanish folk art, the Santos, which would become the nucleus and most valuable thrust of her collection. Mrs. Taylor liked Meem, liked his work, and within a few months commissioned him to design a small chapel in memory of her husband at La Forêt, the 500 acre summer estate in the Black Forest which she had purchased after her husband's death. The chapel was designed in the Spanish Mission style, constructed of logs and built in the shape of a cross. The words of St. Francis over the rear entrance to the Chapel Court read, "When Christianity ceases to be an enthusiasm, it ceases to be." (This was John Meem's first accomplishment in Colorado Springs. His work at the Fountain Valley School followed the next year.) In a real sense,

a partnership had been formed. In the summer of 1931, Mrs. Taylor asked Mr. Meem to design an addition to Coburn Library at Colorado College, a museum for her Indian and Southwestern collections and a guest house for her Black Forest retreat. She also asked him to find a place in his Santa Fe workshop for her niece, Faith Bemis, who had recently lost her job with an architectural firm in New York (two years later John Meem and Faith Bemis would marry). The Bemis Building Bug was in full swing and happily for John Meem, as the depression set in, his firm was thriving.

It is not clear why the Coburn Library project never came to fruition. Mrs. Taylor was anxious that work begin as soon as possible in order to give employment to local stone masons. John Meem completed working drawings for an addition to Coburn Library. When the contractor's estimate of \$410,000 came in too high, he did a second set of plans for an independent building. Mrs. Taylor had arranged to reactivate the quarry at Glenwood Springs, which had furnished the sandstone for the original library. In fact, an April 29, 1932, edition of the Colorado College *Tiger* (courtesy of Judy Finley) stated, "that the first cargo of peachblow sandstone had already arrived" and stone cutters were at work. It has been suggested that Mrs. Taylor felt that a "cultural resource of stature and quality for the entire community" would best benefit the people of Colorado Springs during the depression. Whatever the reason, early in 1932, Mrs. Taylor's interest and \$410,000 set aside for the library would be redirected to a museum project – a project which would be called "the crowning achievement of a major philanthropist" and which would be, according to Bainbridge Bunting, Meem's masterpiece, earning him "national and international recognition and establishing him as the southwest's leading architect."

According to Lillian Armit, the concept of a Fine Arts Center simply evolved. The initial

catalyst was Alice Bemis Taylor's wish to make her anthropological collections available to the public. At that time the collection was stored – chock-block-full in her basement at 1238 Wood Avenue. Mrs. Taylor had in mind a small museum and had approached the Broadmoor Art Academy as early as 1930 to purchase a portion of their property on Cascade Avenue as a site. Word spread. The Music Club, the Drama Club, the Art Academy itself vied for space in her proposed building. Strong personalities entered the picture: Mrs. Meridith Hare, a newcomer to Colorado Springs and President of the Broadmoor Art Academy's building committee, was a wealthy New York intellectual, knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the avant-garde art movement; Boardman Robinson, her protégé and Director of the Art School had an "international reputation as an artist, teacher and political radical"; Julie Penrose had been a founder of the Broadmoor Art Academy in 1919 and had given her land on Dale Street and her home to house the Academy. It was a heady bunch. The concept of a civic plaza was considered and rejected; the Spanish Pueblo style of architecture seemed the logical choice; but, in the end, by the summer of 1932, a revolutionary concept of a single-building arts center had been formed – to be built on the site of the Broadmoor Art Academy, and to house all of the arts: drama, music, art school and galleries, a library for Mrs. Taylor's 6,000 volumes of Americana and the Taylor Museum for Southwestern Studies, as her collection would be called. Not only was the multicultural, single-building concept unique in this country, the notion of a modernistic, monolith slab, concrete civic building with aluminum doors and windows must have set our town of 30,000 abuzz (concrete had been used locally only for utilitarian purposes such as the Denver University Stadium and the sheep pens at the Denver Union Stockyards). It speaks to Mrs. Taylor's vision that she embraced this concept completely – and it is evident

from their correspondence that the dialogue between architect and donor was the moving force behind the concept and the realization of the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center – a monumental structure – a \$600,000 facility (the original estimate was \$471,590 - \$600,000 probably includes furnishings) built over a period of two years in the depth of the depression. Work was begun in 1934. It was Mrs. Taylor's concern that jobs be made available to the unemployed.

A February 19, 1935, issue of the *Boston Christian Science Monitor* noted, "Colorado Springs has started the construction of a \$500,000 Fine Arts Center. A project unique in the Western United States and with little precedent in any American Civic Arts Center, the purpose of the institution here is to bring together under one roof the plastic arts, music and the drama, thereby stimulating with the best available material art consciousness and appreciation in all its forms, with interrelation wherever possible." Mrs. Taylor stated to the staff in 1938 that the Center's major charge was "the task of building a program of community service in the Fine Arts." And at a special meeting of the Board of Trustees at the C.S.F.A.C., held Thursday afternoon January 14, 1937, Mr. C.H. Collins presiding and with Mr. W.W. Postlethwaite, Miss Laura Gilpin, Mrs. W.G. Elmslie, Mrs. C.H. Boissevain, Mrs. Stuart Dodge, Mr. H.M. Corning, Mr. Francis M. Froelicher, Mr. Lothrop (Director), Mr. Robinson (Art Director), and Mitchell Wilder (Director of the Taylor Museum) in attendance, it was announced that Mrs. Taylor had established an Endowment Fund for the Fine Arts Center; and that it was "her desire from the total income received 8/15ths should go toward the maintenance of the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center and 7/15ths for the Taylor Museum for Southwestern Studies." She leaves no doubt of her interpretation of and wishes for this new cultural facility. She also wrote the

Board, "May I urge you to keep the announcement of this gift from the newspapers, and I beg of each one of you to keep it, in so far as possible, to himself. It gives me great pleasure to be able to do this, and I trust that you will feel a security in having the funds in the name of the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center."

Mrs. Taylor donated additional land to expand the Fine Arts Center property, donated the money to construct the building and endowed the Center's operation originally. She also continued to contribute to the endowment fund for the Fine Arts Center until her death. Thereafter, the Foundation also made substantial contributions to the Fine Arts Center, continuing until its dissolution in 1974. Alice Bemis Taylor was indeed, as Denise Oldach suggested, the Mother of the Fine Arts Center.

Mrs. Taylor was deeply involved in every detail and every decision surrounding her new project. John Meem wrote on April 29, 1935, "I found the comments you made in the booklet most interesting and am very much impressed with which you have gone into certain technical details. Certainly if you were a man, you would have been in the building game." She also remained sensitive to the individual. A dispute over the extension of Dale Street which involved a Mr. Love, the City Council and public officials almost brought the project to a halt. John Meem writes Alice Bemis Taylor on January 20, 1934, in what must be thinly disguised anguish: "I had a long letter from Betty Hare, telling me in detail about the whole situation. She feels that the whole City Council and all public officials are in favour of the original plan going through. She said that Mr. Love had seen you and that *you could see his point of view*. I know just how you feel in your desire not to hurt anybody's rights or feelings. Just the same, I think Mr. Love's cause is not nearly as important a one as yours and that his reasons for objecting are not fundamentally valid. I therefore hope

that he will see the light and will withdraw his objections and that if he doesn't, the City Council will feel that your project is such an important one – affecting as it does the welfare of the public, and no one else – that they will go ahead in spite of Mr. Love.” Among the letters at the Fine Arts Center library is a rather amazing one from Faith Bemis Meem to her Aunt Alice. It is dated June 4, 1934. It reads:

Dear Aunt Alice,

Since you were here John and I have been thinking and talking more about Mr. Lothrop and the need of some such person as a director for the Arts Center. Both of us feel *very* strongly that to really make this whole project live there must be such a person both to arouse sufficient interest in the general public and also to tie together the different parts of the Art Center.

I know from all that you said while you were here that you think Mr. Lothrop is an excellent person for the job ... It seems to me this first year while the building is in progress is a time when a good director would be doing some of his most valuable work. I am sure that Lothrop or any other person of his caliber would be a tremendous help to you both on the sorting down and arranging of your material but far more in organizing the whole combination of the different activities of the building. I believe it is going to be a beautiful building (even though perhaps I should be more modest about my husband's design!) and is going to be such a rare and exciting combination of art, music and drama that it just must be run by

a top notch person in a tip notch way ! ... of very vital importance that a top notch man be set to work this autumn. Of such importance that John and I would like *very* much to give you one third of this man's salary for the coming year ... having a man like Lothrop on the job this year is as important as the steel trusses holding up the ceiling. If you feel that you just can't (put up 1/3) may John and I write to the Trustees asking if we may put up half the money for the first year's salary? I would far rather it be anonymously given as it doesn't seem like just the thing for the architect and his wife to be doing.

Time magazine took note of the “Divertissements” arranged by Mrs. Hare for the week-long festivities marking the opening of the Fine Arts Center in April 1936. It read, “Colorado Springs, at the foot of Pikes Peak, looked forward this week to a cultural renaissance. Due to arrive were such Eastern artistic notables as painter Walt Kuhn, Manhattan dealer Marie Sterner, collectors A. Conger Goodyear, Thomas Cochran, and Mr. and Mrs. Cornelius Bliss.”

“In an auditorium in a brand new ivory-colored concrete and aluminum building these, and those residents who like to think of Colorado Springs as ‘the Boston of the West,’ were to hear Albert Spalding fiddle, watch Martha Graham dance, hear Soprano Eva Gauthier sing” – and so on. According to Marshall Sprague, Miss Graham's barefoot interpretations of “Frontier,” “Frenetic Rhythm,” and “Ekstasis” sent many of the audience into a “stunned and uncomprehending stupor.” Mrs. Taylor, who footed the bill of the extravaganza, took to her bed for a good part of it.

At the time of the opening of the Fine Arts Center, the city, as a token of appreciation, presented to Mrs. Taylor a silver plate. Acting Mayor Ben H. Stewart read the inscription:

Be it unanimously resolved by the City Council of Colorado Springs that the citizens of this community hereby express by permanent record their gratitude and appreciation to Mrs. Frederick M.P. Taylor, for her many works of philanthropy and gifts for the promotion of education and science

First, for the creating and endowing of the Fine Arts Center enriched with her own collection of Indian relics and history.

Second: The commodious Day Nursery, for the comfort and sheltering of children.

Third: the many other examples of Mrs. Taylor's munificence and public spiritness [sic] for which every citizen of this community is indebted. For all these and her many other works of philanthropy, public and private, the citizens of the community express their grateful thanks and appreciation.

Mrs. Taylor chose to accept this honor in the privacy of her office at the Fine Arts Center with only a few friends present.

On June 23, 1942, the obituary in the *Colorado Springs Evening Telegraph* announcing her death features a picture of Mrs. Taylor accepting that plate. Private, reserved, shy of publicity, she would not have approved. To invade her privacy one bit more: Alice Bemis Taylor's will reveals a concern for the individual. There were many personal bequests for friends, family and servants but it is striking that the major portion of her fortune was left

to nourish and sustain the institutions in which she believed: the Fine Arts Center, the Day Nursery and Colorado College. To Colorado College she left a bequest of \$400,000. Her hope was that \$325,000 would be used to build a new library and that \$75,000 would be used to remodel Coburn Library "for the housing of the library of the El Paso County Medical Society to be known and designated as the 'Lewis Hugh McKennie Memorial Library'." She also left a fund of \$200,000 to the Colorado Springs Community Chest for the purpose of creating the Colorado Springs Community Trust Fund. "After Mrs. Taylor's death, the remainder of her estate upon settlement went in the Bemis-Taylor Foundation which she had established in 1927 as a vehicle for her philanthropies. In 1944 the Bemis-Taylor Foundation donated the La Forêt property to the Colorado Congregational Conference – now the Rocky Mountain Conference of the United Church of Christ. The Foundation trustees wished for the property to serve a community use."*

Lillian Armit stated that the Bemis-Taylor Foundation was constantly involved with the Fine Arts Center, the Day Nursery and other community needs. "In addition," said Mrs. Armit, "in 1969 the Foundation and El Pomar donated the funds (\$50,000 from the Bemis-Taylor Foundation and \$250,000 from El Pomar) to the City of Colorado Springs for purchase from a private owner of the land on which the White House Ranch is currently located. This helped the community preclude the possibility of having this land, so near to The Garden of the Gods, developed." (Very few people are aware of this gift.)

"The Bemis-Taylor Foundation was dissolved in 1974 with the last of the Foundation money funding the things that Mrs. Taylor was the most interested in: principally the Day Nursery, the Fine Arts Center – and Colorado College."

In Mrs. Taylor's obituary, the *Colorado Springs Evening Telegraph* also featured a photo-

graph of the Fine Arts Center and the Day Nursery. The caption over the photograph of the Fine Arts Center read "Unsurpassed for Beauty and *Useful* purposes." Over the photograph of the Day Nursery the caption read, "*For the Comfort and Sheltering of Children.*" It went on to say that "thousands have received its fine gifts in the 19 years [of its existence]."

As Alice Bemis' father spoke to the company town of Bemis, Tennessee, on April 19, 1908, - a town to which Bemis Brothers Bag Company had given the Y.M.C.A., three public schools, the City Auditorium, the Bemis Union Church, and \$50,000 in stock to be set aside as a trust for its Sunday School and Day School - he said:

"Our actions speak for themselves and are louder than words ... Our company thinks it is better to extend its business and furnish good homes, a good place to work in, good schools for work[ing] people, than spend its earnings in extravagant riding in \$10,000 automobiles. We think success in a Christian view is not measured by the amount of dollars a concern may make. We think success should be measured by the amount made and the amount of money disbursed in the betterment of mankind generally and our operatives in particular."

Alice Bemis Taylor's actions speak louder than any words could. She loved her community and cared deeply about its welfare. By example, reared to lead a useful life and to put her worldly goods to useful purposes, she felt her responsibilities heavily. "Life had not been easy" for her she told Lillian Armit. Her burden was: not to do too much, not to do too little. She was one of those rare people, as Vesta so beautifully put it, "who could envision the lofty enterprise, but who found time to execute the daily kindness." She was a beneficent lady. Though she wanted no recognition for them, her many philanthropies

left her community better than she found it. We are the happy recipients. In her ideas she had aimed at the sun. Her day on this earth had been worthwhile - and, yes, Alice Bemis Taylor, we sing your song.

(Footnotes)

* Information on Bemis-Taylor Foundation from Denise Oldach.

