



West Chicago
Cultural Arts Commission



SIGNA ROTAE by Buddy Plumlee

Dedication Ceremony Saturday, October 22, 2016, 3:00 p.m.

Welcome Mayor Ruben Pineda

Introduction Anni Holm – Chairperson
West Chicago Cultural Arts Commission

About the Art Buddy Plumlee – Artist r **SIGNA ROTAE**

Historic Connection Sara Phalen – Director, West Chicago City Museum

Unveiling of **SIGNA ROTAE** followed by
refreshments and
Classic Railroad Songs from
Smithsonian Folkways

Acknowledgement

Special thanks to members of the West Chicago Cultural Arts Commission for accomplishing their mission of enriching the lives of all who live and work in West Chicago through the arts with this project.

Anni Holm, Chair
Sara Phalen
Buddy Plumlee
Lew Achenbach
Uwe Gsedl
Ryan Virnich
Rosalinda Delgado
Gail Cannata
Adriana Sarellana
Mandy Rakow (recent past member)
Heide Morris (recent past member)vm

Historic Significance

West Chicago is the first Illinois community created by the debut of the railroads. Early records show that a few settlers owned property in the area of present day West Chicago as early as the late 1830s. In 1849 a town began to form when the Galena & Chicago Union Railroad (predecessor of the Chicago & North Western, now the Union Pacific) arrived from Chicago.

That same year the St. Charles Branch Railroad connected St. Charles with the Galena & Chicago Union (G&CU) here, followed by the Aurora Branch line in 1850. These connections formed the first railroad junction in Illinois and gave West Chicago its first name, Junction.

Because of the number of trains passing through town, water and fuel facilities for locomotives and a roundhouse were built here, as well as an early eating-house and hotel for travelers. As a result, a number of new employees and their families located to this community. The original settlers were primarily English and Irish, with Germans arriving in the 1860s and Mexican immigrants by the 1910s.

John B. Turner, president of the G&CU and a resident of Chicago, owned several acres of land in what is now the center of town. As more people settled in Junction, Turner recognized the chance to make a profit by platting his land and selling off lots. He therefore recorded the community's first plat in 1855 under the name of Town of Junction.

The community continued its growth, and in 1857 Dr. Joseph McConnell and his wife Mary platted a second portion of town just north of John B. Turner's plat. They recorded their plat as the Town of Turner in honor of the railroad president. These two "towns" became informally known as Turner Junction.

By 1873 the community had taken on a substantial and permanent character, so the residents incorporated as the Village of Turner. In 1888 a new railroad, the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern built a freight line through town. It offered free factory sites for any industry willing to locate along its right-of-way. As part of the effort to attract industry, the community changed its name in 1896 to the Village of West Chicago. Area businessmen, particularly Charles Bolles, reasoned that the new name sounded more cosmopolitan, and would help draw prospective factory owners.

In 1888, the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern Railroad laid tracks through town and gave away free factory sites along its right-of-way. As industry located in West Chicago and new jobs opened up, the population increased. By 1910 the population was 2,378 and several new industries had located here including the Borden's milk condensing plant, the Turner Cabinet Company and the Turner Brick Company. The community continues to attract quality business and residential development that contributes to the culturally diverse community that exists today.

SIGNA ROTAE

by Buddy Plumlee





Background on the Medium for *SIGNA ROTAE* - Mosaic

Mosaic artistry has a long history dating back several millennia. It is typically a hand-created work made up of fragmented pieces of various materials that together make an image or design. The ancient Minoans, Greeks, Romans and Byzantines employed it prolifically. They created incredibly detailed and beautiful mosaics to decorate the homes of wealthy citizens, and especially the interiors and exteriors of public buildings. The materials used are generally cut pieces of glass, such as smalti or stained glass, stone, porcelain, ceramics, shells, etc.

But it is not limited to these only, as Plumlee explains, "I, for instance, have used metal objects such as keys and hinges, as well as plastic, mirror, marbles, and so on. It is an additive medium where one piece is placed, and then another placed next to it, and another, etc. Mosaic pieces can be tightly rendered or loosely put together. The tighter the mosaic and the more detailed, the longer it takes to make," he said.

About the Project

SIGNA ROTAE was created over the course of several weekends in September and October 2016. The design of the artwork aptly melds history and art through Plumlee's use of train-related symbols in a colorful stained glass mosaic base upon which sits a weathered train wheel that has been part of the West Chicago City Museum's collection. Both elements reflect the roots of a community which was formed by the first railroad junction in Illinois in 1849, and honor the many railroad workers that have called West Chicago home over the City's 167 year history. And indeed, the placement of *SIGNA ROTAE* at Sesquicentennial Park lends itself to the historic sense of place for which the Park was dedicated in 1998 in commemoration of the City's 150th Anniversary.

About the Artist

- Member of the West Chicago Cultural Arts Commission.
- Works primarily in oil on canvas, watercolor, murals, mosaic.
- Studied painting at Scuola Lorenzo de Medici in Florence, Italy.
- Received Master of Fine Arts degree from The University of Iowa.
- Painting style is allegorical realism.
- Influences are artists Andrew Wyeth, Titian, Odd Nerdrum.
- Lives in West Chicago with wife Christy and their four kids.
- Loves to read poetry, especially Robert Frost.
- Feels very much at home in West Chicago which he believes has a unique charm about it, not your typical suburb.

