

# ROSE IRON WORKS *since 1904*

## **Martin Rose**

### **Synopsis**

*Martin Rose, born in 1870 in Csepe, Hungary, grew interested in blacksmithing and began apprenticeship at the age of thirteen. He quickly developed unusually high skills, eventually moving to Budapest to work for Jungfer, the premier shop. After becoming a Master, Martin opened a new shop which also rapidly achieved success. Frustrated with increases in taxes, Martin left Hungary in 1903 and emigrated to Cleveland, Ohio where he established Rose Iron Works in 1904.*

*As his reputation grew steadily, Martin produced a wide variety of commercial work as well as an increasing amount of fine residential metalwork for Cleveland's economic leaders. Rose also traveled to Europe and amassed a collection of Medieval metalwork, used to provide inspiration for both clients and craftsmen.*

*During the late 1920's Martin met and convinced Paul Fehér, one of Paris' finest designers to join the firm. He and Paul introduced Art Deco design to America, creating the finest Deco metalwork produced in our country during the period.*

*Martin led the company through the Depression of 1929 and into the pre World War II period, continuing to produce the area's finest wrought ironwork.*

*Martin Rose's three sons, Steve, Milton and Melvin, who were trained to assist with the management, production and artistic design aspects of the business respectively, gradually took over company management and enabled it to survive the difficult transition to "war work" required by the times. Martin retired after the war and died in 1955.*

### **Biography**

Martin Rose, the founder of Rose Iron Works, was born in 1870, in Csepe, Hungary, with the name of "Mór Rosenblüh." At the age of ten he moved to a nearby village to live with an older brother who had a small store. There he worked as a stock boy, but became entranced by the excitement of a blacksmith's shop which he walked by daily. By his thirteenth birthday he had started work as an apprentice blacksmith, and after four years, in 1887, he became a journeyman.

Eager to improve his skills, he "journeyed" to Budapest that year, and then on to Vienna in 1891 to work and to attend technical trade school where he acquired the advanced classroom learning he would need to qualify for master status. Around 1894 he returned to Budapest, where he was accepted to work in the shop of the famed master blacksmith, Jungfer, Gyula, Hungary's premiere metal smith. Jungfer was one of very few smiths who was licensed to work for Austro-Hungarian royalty. It was quite an honor, therefore, and testimony to Martin's skills, that Jungfer sponsored him when he applied for Master certification in 1897, a requirement before he could open his own shop. Given attitudes in Hungary at the time toward things Germanic, Mór changed his surname to Revész prior to moving out on his own. And then, at age 27, he was ready! He opened his own shop that year. Three years later he married Margit Mahrer,

and the following year, Istvan (Stephen), the first of three children, was born.

Martin's business and his reputation quickly grew. And while the shop was financially successful, its profits quickly started to vanish when the government capriciously decided to raise his taxes. As a consequence, in 1903 Mór decided to move to America, where his brother Bernard had already settled.

He arrived in the States with his wife and son, \$200 dollars and two boxes of tools. At that time he anglicized his first name Mór to Martin, Margit changed her first name to Margaret, Istvan became Stephen and they took on the last name of Rose, a simplified version of Martin's original name of Rosenblüh or Roseblossom. While brother Bernard had remained in New York, Martin almost immediately moved to Cleveland, perhaps because of the city's reputation as a leader in steel-making and metalworking.

Martin's brief first job in Cleveland was working with the Kilby Company, a firm which made equipment to process sugar beets. While working there he also attended night school to learn English. After a few months he moved on to the Morreau Lighting Fixture Company in Conneaut, Ohio, where he worked as an assistant designer and model-maker. There he had a more relaxed work schedule, which allowed some time with his family. After a year or so, however, Martin was eager to re-establish himself on his own and moved his family back to Cleveland.

His first shop was on Cherry Avenue, where he started with just two employees -- a forty-year-old drunk and a fourteen-year-old boy. For a brief time in 1907 he was joined by his brothers Alec and Zigmund, but it turned out not to be an ideal partnership. Four years later he moved to East 43<sup>rd</sup> Street, where the firm has remained for almost one hundred years. He chose the location assuming that downtown Cleveland would grow, and in the belief that, based on the European model of cities like Vienna and Budapest, artisans' shops would be near the core central city.

The front area, where the company's offices are now located, was the family home; the workshop was in the back. To solicit business, Martin made cold calls on potential clients, carrying with him a beautifully hand-crafted iron spray of roses, to show that he could create a quality of work unequalled in the Cleveland region.

For the first few years, the firm mostly produced pieces for commercial use. In time, this work led to commissions for residential decorative ironwork as well. Thus, for example, work for W. Bingham and the George Worthington companies, both significant hardware distributors, led to work with leading architects, such as Walker and Weeks (Bingham Co., Federal Reserve of Cleveland, Epworth-Euclid United Methodist) and Charles Schweinfurth (Trinity Cathedral, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Mather Residence, Union Club), among others. That work, in turn, led to work on mansions belonging to such families as the Whites (of White Motors and White Sewing Machine), Halles (of Halle Bros. Department Store), Mathers (of Pickands Mather & Co., Cleveland Iron Mining/Cleveland-Cliffs), D. S. Blossoms (of Oliver Hazard Payne inheritance), VanSweringens (developers of Shaker Heights and Terminal Tower), Sherwins (of Sherwin Williams Paint Co.), H. L. Vails (of Forest City Publishing/Cleveland Plain Dealer), Criles (of Cleveland Clinic), Ingalls (of Grumman American Aviation,) and the Severances (of Standard Oil, American Linseed, Colonial Salt).

His first "big break," which occurred around 1905-06, was a commission to create driveway and walk gates for the home of Francis Drury (manufacturer of oil stoves marketed by Standard Oil Co.) at 8615 Euclid Avenue. Through

ownership changes, the gates became available to be re-acquired and are now part of the permanent Rose collection.

In 1925-26, to celebrate their silver wedding anniversary, Martin and Margaret made a trip to Europe, their first visit back since they had left for America in 1903. They took with them their youngest son, Melvin, leaving the two older sons, Stephen and Milton, to oversee the operations of the firm. At this time Martin returned to Hungary and Austria, where he acquired many notable pieces of antique ironwork, dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century through the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, now part of our permanent collections.

The business thrived in the late teens and twenties. It reached a size of about 25-27 men around 1925-1926. His success permitted Martin the luxury of his own European travel and that of his sons. His eldest son Stephen traveled Europe in 1927-28. Among other countries he visited, he studied for awhile in Paris with Paul Kiss where he met Paul Fehér. It is through this meeting that Martin learned of Fehér's talents. Middle son Milton was in Europe during 1929-1930 and was able to meet 11-year old Melvin at the ship when he arrived for his extended studies in Vienna.

Upon their return from Europe in 1926, the family moved to an apartment leaving Martin free to plan and start a major remodeling of his shop which took the next 3-4 years. In the end, the remodeling was recognized by the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce as the *"best building alteration in Cuyahoga County in 1930"*, an award of which Martin was very proud.

Martin hired Paul Fehér in 1929, instantly establishing the dynamic relationship which resulted in some of the company's finest work. Timing, however, proved to be unfortunate. Although Fehér stayed for 5 years and accomplished a prodigious amount of work together with Martin, the persistence of the Great Depression ultimately ended their remarkable relationship.

By the mid-30's the shop was down to about 5-6 men, with Martin at times providing the work himself just to retain the most talented of his men. Then in 1939 Martin received the same prohibition as all metal work enterprises: by law, for the indefinite future, metal could only be used for defense purposes. From then to 1945, the company struggled to redefine itself as a supplier to industry. Although the post-war years saw a small amount of ornamental work, the flow was slow enough that Martin became semi-retired. In 1952, he taught a smith for the last time, Frank Dobritch. Thereafter, his health declined until his death in 1955 at the age of 85.

**History by Henry Adams with contributions by Lee Warshawsky, Ellen Stedtefeld and Barbara Rose.**