

# ROSE IRON WORKS *since 1904*

## **Melvin Rose**

### **Synopsis**

*Melvin M. Rose, Martin's youngest son, was born in Cleveland in 1919. His early years were spent in the home on E43rd Street which eventually became the company's office. Driven by his father's insistence on European education, Melvin was sent to Vienna to live with a cousin and attend school. His training was cut short by Hitler's activities.*

*After quickly completing High School at East Tech in Cleveland, Melvin enrolled in the Cleveland Institute of Art, becoming one of Viktor Schreckengost's first students in Industrial Design. During this time, Melvin learned to create the exquisite sandblasted glass which the company incorporated into a variety of works.*

*Upon graduation, Melvin assisted the family with the conversion from decorative to "war work," industrial fabrication. During this period, however, Melvin also enjoyed working with a number of prominent designers to produce a variety of decorative sculptures and murals.*

*Steve left the firm in 1965 and Milton died in 1969, leaving Melvin at the helm of the company. Melvin's son Bob joined him in 1970 freeing Melvin to once again design the decorative metalwork which has seemed to experience a gradual resurgence since the late 1990s.*

*Currently in his 90's, Melvin works a stringent, daily routine, fondly assisted by his daughter Barbara, designing metalwork for a cadre of loyal patrons. Some of his most rewarding moments are spent giving tours and teaching those interested in our craft. Melvin was honored with the Cleveland Arts Prize for Lifetime Achievement in 2008 in recognition of his artistic design as well as stewardship of our 100 plus year old company.*

### **Biography**

Melvin Rose, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation leader of Rose Iron Works, was born in Cleveland, OH in 1919, the youngest of Martin Rose's three sons. Brothers Milton and Steve were 16 and 18 years older than he, respectively.

Melvin's early years were spent in the small frame house that fronted the property shared by Martin's shop. His earliest memories include metalwork -- the many pieces in their home, his father, brothers and staff working in the shop, and his father modeling various shapes out of clay in the evenings for execution in metal the next day.

He attended Cleveland Public Schools except for two periods when he was schooled in Europe. He went to Hungary at age six with his mother and father and spent half of first grade in a Budapest school. His father, believing steadfastly in the discipline of European education, sent Melvin alone to Vienna at age 11 to live with relatives and attend school. He was headed to the Kunstgewerbe Schule (Decorative Arts School), but his European stay was cut short after four years by the ominous moves Hitler was making in Austria.

He graduated from East Technical High School at age 16, one year after returning to Cleveland. He then enrolled in the Cleveland Institute of Art, becoming one of the first students in Viktor Schreckengost's new Industrial Design program. He also worked part-time at Rose Iron.

Upon graduation in 1940 he joined the firm full-time. The country was bound up in World War II and Rose Iron Works, like all firms, was prohibited by law from using metal for anything but war work. The company had to reinvent itself as a supplier to industry, a tough task for the three brothers who had by then taken over management of the firm.

By the time the war ended, times and tastes had significantly changed. There was ornamental work to be done, but the level of demand was not the same. The company had to develop its industrial base to survive. Melvin took classes in metallurgy, sales and business management. For the better part of two decades, he sold and supervised industrial forging and fabrication work, designed and supervised ornamental jobs, and designed and executed sandblasted, carved glass panels (a skill brought from France to Rose Iron by designer Paul Fehér). His most ambitious glass project was a multi-panel, 30' glass mural designed by Cleveland artist Elsa Vick Shaw for the Dollar Steamship Line.

During the late '50s and the '60s Melvin worked on a number of large projects of his and others' design. Viktor Schreckengost and he produced a large mural for the entrance to Cleveland Hopkins Airport. They also collaborated on murals for Marathon Oil Company. John Paul Miller also worked with Melvin on a sculpture for Marathon Oil. Marathon Oil Co. now displays all three pieces in their Texas headquarters.

In 1965, Rose Iron Works produced a 60' long mural designed by John Risley for the Cleveland Botanical Garden. Other projects at that time included safety awards for Republic Steel designed by Fred Vollman, and the large state seal for the exterior of the Ohio Workers' Compensation Department designed by Robert Morrow.

Melvin took full charge of the business following of his brother Steve's retirement in December, 1965. Son Bob joined him in 1970 and continued to expand the firm's industrial capabilities. By the early '80s Bob took over the helm.

Since then, relieved of the day-to-day responsibility of running the whole company, Melvin has had time to devote to ornamental work, just as the craft itself has been enjoying its own resurgence, nationally and globally. He has also continued to supervise the custom industrial forging work.

Since the late 1980's Melvin has produced a steady stream of architectural and interior metalwork, primarily for private residences. His designs for railings, gates, balcony brackets, chandeliers, sconces, fountains, fireplace screens, drapery rods and other interior hardware grace a significant number of Cleveland's more prominent homes.

Among the items in the public view, his favorites are a railing done to match an earlier one for the Cleveland Museum of Art, and a gate for the Western Reserve Herb Society's portion of the gardens at the Cleveland Botanical Garden.

In 2008, Melvin was awarded the Cleveland Arts Prize Lifetime Achievement Award for Design in recognition of his life-long contribution to Cleveland's

cultural riches. The prize recognized his design work as well as his stewardship of the now 105-year old company and the wealth of historical artifacts and records in the company's private collections.

In addition to working on private commissions, Melvin is now actively involved with Bob in resuming production of some of the outstanding Art Deco pieces that Paul Fehér designed during his tenure with the company.