

Max Adler Biography



Max Adler, - Class of 1883 - (May 12, 1866 – November 4, 1952) was born in Elgin, Illinois to a German Jewish family who emigrated to America in about 1850. He was raised in Elgin and graduated from Elgin High School. As an adult he was a concert violinist in Chicago before he gave up music to become a vice president at Sears Roebuck & Co. after marrying into the family that controlled the company. His wife was Sophie Rosenwald, sister of Julius Rosenwald, who founded Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry. He retired in 1928 to become a philanthropist and was key to the creation of the first planetarium in the Western Hemisphere, the Adler Planetarium in Chicago, which bears his name.

The Adler Planetarium - America's First Planetarium - was founded in 1930 by Chicago business leader Max Adler. The museum is home to three full-size theaters, extensive space science exhibitions, and one of the world's most important antique astronomical instrument collections on display. The Adler is a recognized leader in science education, with a focus on inspiring young people, particularly women and minorities, to pursue careers in science.

In 1928, Max Adler, a senior officer and early stockholder in Sears, Roebuck and Company, decided to invest part of his fortune in a public facility that would benefit future generations of Chicagoans. He learned of the mechanism that could dramatically replicate the night sky that was being demonstrated in Europe and was intrigued enough to personally investigate this instrument. Accompanied by his wife and architect Ernest Grunsfeld, he went to Germany and was so impressed that he donated the funds to construct the first modern planetarium in the Western Hemisphere.

When the Adler Planetarium was opened to the public on May 12, 1930, Mr. Adler explained the reasons for his decision to build it:

“Chicago has been striving to create, and in large measure has succeeded in creating, facilities for its citizens of today to live a life richer and more full of meaning than was available for the citizens of yesterday. Toward the creation of such opportunities I have desired to contribute. The popular conception of the Universe is too meager; the Planets and the stars are too far removed from general knowledge. In our reflections, we dwell too little upon the concept that the world and all human endeavor within it are governed by established order and too infrequently upon the truth that under the heavens everything is inter-related, even as each of us to the other.”

In a further demonstration of foresight, Mr. Adler also acquired an impressive collection of historical artifacts in astronomy, navigation, time keeping, and engineering. These instruments formed the basis of a collection that has come to be regarded as the finest of its kind in the Western Hemisphere and one of the three most complete collections in the world.

Mr. Adler made an agreement with the South Park Commissioners (later the Chicago Park District) to maintain and operate the museum. Philip Fox, Ph.D., a well-known professor of astronomy at Northwestern University, was appointed the first director.

Max Adler died in 1952, but he had lived to witness nearly a quarter century of planetarium success. Other members of his family continued to maintain an interest in the museum, especially his son Robert - who formed the Chicago Planetarium Society in the mid-1950s. Mr. Robert Adler served as the Society president until 1968.