



## THE AIA ARCHITECTS CORNER

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### What is the AIA?

*By George F. Turner AIA*

If we agree to recognize history as a means for measuring our deeds and accomplishments, then it's safe to say that traditions form a basis in society. It has been said that there are four true professions in history; architecture, medicine, law and the "oldest profession".

Regarding the first three; each has a formal organization made up of its practitioners. The medical field has the American Medical Association (AMA). Attorneys join the National Bar Association and Architects join the American Institute of Architects (AIA). Membership to these organizations requires that an individual be licensed to practice that profession. The issuance of a state license is predicated on passing a comprehensive uniform or State-specific examination. A prior academic program for architects, consisting of 4 or more years of study plus a 3 to 5-year apprenticeship must also be met. A design professional with AIA after their name means that person is a Licensed "Registered" Architect (RA) and a member of the American Institute of Architects. Licensure is required to legally use the title "Architect".

There have been many public figures that have been architects. Thomas Jefferson was an architect and Barack Obama aspired to be one. Architects serve in many capacities outside the traditional practice such as preservation, historical documentation, expert testimony, education, critical writing and industrial design, furniture, photography, set design, graphics, fashion and game show host. The historical record of many ancient civilizations rests with the architecture they left behind. Every building has an Architect and our organization is the AIA; The "American Institute of Architects"

Thirteen architects who sought to organize the practice of architecture as a profession by modern standards founded the AIA in 1857 right here in New York City. The mission of the AIA is to elevate the standing of the profession, promote fellowship among its' members and exchange ideas and information with the public. Architecture is a very public art form as well as a scientific one. It is this balance of art and science that keeps architecture moving forward. Prior to the establishment of the AIA, anyone could claim themselves to be an architect. There were no standards of practical knowledge, no licensing laws governing the practice, and no schools of architecture. The AIA was enacted to further the artistic, scientific, and practical knowledge of it's members; to provide a forum for good fellowship; combine the efforts of those engaged in the profession, and for the advancement of architecture as an art form.

There are more than 300 local chapters of the AIA with more than 79,000 licensed architects and associated professionals, 50 state organizations and a national head quarters in Washington DC. The AIA offers continuing education for its' members, government advocacy and advice, community redevelopment, public outreach, and programs for community involvement. The AIA also helps coordinate the building industry. Many architects are volunteer members of community and planning boards where they live and practice. Architects are also actively applying "Green Initiatives" to create a more sustainable environment. AIA members adhere to a code of ethics and professional conduct to ensure the highest standards in professional practice. Embracing their responsibility to serve society, members engage civic and government leaders and the public in helping find needed solutions to pressing issues facing our communities, institutions, nation and the world.

Visit [www.aia.org](http://www.aia.org).

We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us.  
- **Winston Churchill**