



# Dublin Historical Society

DUBLIN, NEW HAMPSHIRE • FOUNDED 1920

Newsletter No. 107

November 2022

## SUSAN H. BRADLEY AND MARTHA SILSBEE: 19th Century Women Painters of Monadnock

For those late-nineteenth century artists who sought to comprehend and capture the elusive beauty of nature, Dublin, NH located at the foot of Mount Monadnock was an alluring place to be. The general enthusiasm for Dublin shared by famous artists including Abbott Thayer (1849-1921), Frank Weston Benson (1862-1951), and Joseph Lindon Smith (1863-1950) helped the town earn its reputation as an artistic center. New research is shedding light on two women artists, Susan H. Bradley (1851-1929) and Martha Silsbee (1859-1928) and their profound connection to this region.



Susan H. Bradley  
(1851-1929)

Both Bradley and Silsbee first appeared in Boston's art scene in the mid 1880s. Silsbee was brought up in Salem, Massachusetts and later settled in Boston's Back Bay at her family's home at 115 Marlborough Street. Independently wealthy, Silsbee never married. She was skilled in oils, pastels and watercolor and first began exhibiting her work in the annual exhibitions of the Boston Art Club in 1885.<sup>1</sup> In 1886, she showed her work with the American Watercolor Society exhibition in New York as well.

Bradley (née Susan Greenough Hinckley) was raised in Boston's Beacon Hill near her maternal relatives and spent the summers in Northampton near her father's family, surrounded by mountains - a motif that would appear in her work throughout her lifetime. At the age of twenty, a family visit to Europe ignited her passion for art, and she returned to Italy four years later to study under painter Edward Darley Boit (1840-1915). In 1878, Bradley began exhibiting her work with the American Watercolor Society. She married Leverett Bradley, assistant to Rev. Phillips Brooks of Boston's Trinity Church the following year. The couple went on to have four children and moved to Gardiner, ME; Andover, MA; and Philadelphia, PA as Leverett took on different Episcopal Church rectorships. Despite a busy personal life, Bradley remained deeply devoted to the development and exhibition of her art.



Susan H. Bradley, *Mt. Monadnock*, Watercolor, 18 x 25 in.;

Private collection, courtesy of the descendants of Susan H. Bradley; Photo by A. West

Ambitious women artists like Bradley and Silsbee faced numerous inequalities in Boston. The city's popular art clubs, including the Boston Water Color Society and St. Botolph Club, excluded women from their membership, leading to fewer exhibition opportunities and places where women artists could meet and exchange ideas. Stereotypes propagated by the press frequently dismissed women watercolorists as amateurs, including those who possessed talent, training, and drive. In 1887, in a historic move, Bradley and Silsbee joined fourteen other women to found the Boston Water Color Club. At first, the club was viewed as somewhat of a novelty, however, over time, through its celebrated annual exhibitions, it won the respect

## DUBLIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

dublinhistory.org  
PO Box 415  
Dublin, NH 03444

### OFFICE

8 Church St  
603-563-8545

### 1841 SCHOOLHOUSE MUSEUM

1179 Main St

### HOURS

9am to Noon  
Monday, Tuesday, Thursday



### BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Judy Knapp, *President*  
Ruthie Gammons, *Vice President*  
Sarah Katka, *Secretary*  
Donna Garner, *Treasurer*  
Phil Gammons, *Assistant Treasurer*  
Laura Elcoate  
Sara Germain  
William Katt

Rusty Bastedo,  
*Museum Curator*

Will Elcoate  
*Assistant Curator*

Celeste Snitko,  
*Archivist*  
EMAIL:  
celestesnitko@dublinhistory.org

Nancy Campbell,  
*Assistant Archivist*  
EMAIL:  
dublinhistory@dublinhistory.org

of the art community. The Boston Water Color Club successfully promoted the work of women watercolorists for nine years, before allowing men to join. It played an instrumental role in increasing the presence and status of women artists in Boston.

Bradley remained an active member of the Boston Water Color Club for decades. She participated in most annual exhibitions and was among the group's top sellers.<sup>2</sup> After relocating to Boston, Bradley was elected to the club's hanging committee in 1906 and 1908 and served on the jury in 1913.<sup>3</sup> Silsbee's commitment to the Boston Water Color Club also ran deep. Not only did she frequently participate in the annual exhibitions but she also took on a leadership role as the club's secretary in 1900 and appears to have held this position at least until 1910.<sup>4</sup>



Susan H. Bradley, *Mt. Monadnock from Lone Tree Hill*, ca. 1890-96, Watercolor, 10.5 x 20 in.; Private collection, courtesy of the descendants of Susan H. Bradley; Photo by A. West

Both Silsbee and Bradley were captivated by the natural beauty of Dublin, and being in close proximity to a community of distinguished artists likely added to its appeal. Evidence of Silsbee's early affection for Dublin is found in the catalogue for the Boston Water Color Club's 1888 exhibition where works titled *Dublin, NH* and *Valley at Dublin* are both included. Silsbee was enrolled in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts' School of Drawing and Painting from 1892 to 1895 and the presence of the school's well-respected teacher Frank Weston Benson in Dublin may have also been a draw to the area. Although she didn't purchase a home in Dublin until 1912, the numerous Dublin-themed titles of her work included in exhibition records suggest that she had been summering there off and on for nearly two decades prior.

In the early 1890s, Bradley spent four summers in Dublin as a student of Abbott Thayer, an eccentric and charismatic painter whom she later referred to as one of her "first masters."<sup>5</sup> Bradley had close ties to another Dublin artist, Joseph Lindon Smith, and his family. In her autobiography, *Background with Figures*, famed American portraitist Cecilia Beaux (1855-1942) recounts the time Bradley introduced her to the Smiths at their home Loon Point, "I knew Joseph Lindon Smith slightly, and Mrs. Bradley had cast me upon their hospitality without further formality. How well she knew them!"<sup>6</sup> An oil painting by Smith of Bradley's oldest sons posing with a white rabbit still remains in her family.

For many Dublin artists, Mt. Monadnock served as a majestic muse. Both Bradley and Silsbee repeatedly painted the mountain from different vantage points. They each exhibited a plethora of works featuring Monadnock and received recognition for them in the press. In 1891, their representations of Monadnock shown in the Boston Water Color Club exhibition were celebrated together:

*In landscapes Miss Silsbee and Miss Bradley carry off the palm. Miss Silsbee's "Monadnock Towards Autumn" (43) has been placed in the most honorable position, which is deserved because of its quality as well as its dimensions. This picture without being labeled, gives evidence of the most thorough study, and it combines interest of detail with breadth and carrying power. In drawing and color it is a work of more than ordinary merit... Miss Bradley exhibits two pictures of Mount Monadnock, which since Dublin became a fashionable resort, has been constantly sitting for his portrait to all sorts of painters. These two pictures are handsome mountain pieces, well-drawn, agreeable and true in color, and giving a good idea of the mountain in a suave mood. "Dublin Lake" (2) is equally praiseworthy.<sup>7</sup>*

In 1893, Bradley received the high honor of having her piece Mt. Monadnock included in the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, in the Fine Arts Palace. The fruitful results of her summers in Dublin adorned the annual exhibitions of the Boston Water Color Club, New York Water Color Club, American Watercolor Society, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and the Chicago Institute of Art for many years. In 1897, *Mt. Monadnock from Lone-tree Hill, Dublin, NH* was included in a loan exhibition at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts along with two of her other mountain-themed works.<sup>8</sup>

While living in Philadelphia, Bradley became closely involved in the community surrounding the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA) and became a founding member of its alumni fellowship in 1897.<sup>9</sup> That same year, she helped to found The Plastic Club (the term "plastic" refers to the state of an unfinished work of art) which provided exhibition opportunities, classes, and a meeting place for women artists.<sup>10</sup> She served as one of The Plastic Club's first vice-presidents. In 1900, Bradley founded the Philadelphia Water Color Club with several members of the city's artistic elite.<sup>11</sup> The club helped watercolorists receive greater visibility and recognition and eventually led to the creation of a second annual exhibition at PAFA dedicated to watercolors in 1904.

Silsbee played an important role in the non-profit art association known as the Boston Art Students Association (which changed its name to The Copley Society in 1901).<sup>12</sup> The group was first established as an alumni organization for the School of the Museum of Fine Arts and later expanded its membership, exhibitions, and classes to outside artists. In the press coverage of a 1895 high society charity event held in Copley Hall, Silsbee is referred to as the group's secretary.<sup>13</sup> For over twenty years, she participated in numerous Copley Society committees, especially those directly related to the group's exhibitions.<sup>14</sup>

Although their personal lives were quite different, Bradley and Silsbee shared many qualities. At a time in history when women artists faced inequalities and repression on account of their sex, Bradley and Silsbee emerged as prominent artists and influential figures in the art world. They played a valuable role in the creation of new art organizations and assumed leadership positions to help these groups achieve success. Silsbee and Bradley were world travelers but held a special reverence for the landscape of Dublin, NH and their time spent there.

- Andrea Sluder West holds a master's degree in museum education and is an artist, art teacher, and direct descendant of Susan H. Bradley.

Note: A fully annotated version of this article is on file at the society's archives.



# Dublin Historical Society Annual Meeting

The Dublin Historical Society held its Annual Meeting on August 24th 2022 at the Dublin Public Library. The meeting presentation was on Dublin Businesses: Old and New, subject of this year's summer exhibition at the 1841 Schoolhouse Museum. DHS Archivist Celeste Snitko moderated a panel of Jamie Trowbridge (Yankee Publishing), Bruce Fox (Friendly Farm) and Max Boyd (Carr's Store), who provided information many of us did not know. For example, Yankee, a family-owned business since its founding in 1935, has 11 family members in the current generation and 22 coming up in the next generation. The family has recently organized the business plan to pass ownership of their publishing

business to be employee-owned. Bruce Fox's father, Allan, started the Friendly Farm in 1965. As a young man, Bruce wanted to create his own Friendly Farm in Pennsylvania but was persuaded by his father to work at the Dublin location until the economy improved and has been there ever since. They enjoy an average of 30,000 visitors a year. When Max Boyd began working at Carr's Store, the morning crew gathering there for coffee included, among others, Beekman Pool and Judge Hampsey of Jaffrey. Conversation was always lively among staff and customers.

- Sara Germain, Trustee, Dublin Historical Society

**At the DHS annual meeting the following individuals were elected officers for the 2022-2023:** Judy Knapp, *President*; Ruthie Gammons, *Vice-President*; and Donna Garner, *Treasurer*. Also elected for three-year terms as trustees were Sarah Katka, Meg Page, and Bronson Shonk.

**Continuing to serve on the board are the following:**

Phil Gammons (*assistant treasurer*), Sara Germain, Laura Elcoate and William Katt. Will Elcoate will be *Assistant Curator* at the museum and Sarah Katka will serve as *Secretary*.

## Recent Acquisitions in 2022

DHS is grateful to receive donations during the year to further our collections. A highlight of some recent acquisitions are the following:

- Army service medals of Major General John Oscar Bagot Sewall donated by his son, Michael Sewall.
- Photos and memorabilia of the Leffingwell Hotel, family members and staff, 1897-1908 from Rachel Bottone.
- Gasoline Engine meet buttons from 1983-2022 to complete our collection of buttons. Also articles about the meet from 1975 and some photos all donated by David Whitney.

- Copies of 92 photos from 1890-1990 of Redtop, original photos of the home on West Lake Road through the remodeling completed by Loring and Susie Catlin, donated by Susie Catlin.

### IN MEMORIAM

*The society reports with great sorrow the loss of the following members since the last newsletter:*

Francis deMarneffe

Nancy Foote

Mr. Albert Greene

Mrs. Helen Greene