



From Munich to Brown County

The Life and Artwork of T.C. Steele

February 2 – June 11, 2017

DePauw University, Richard E. Peeler Art Center

A History Intertwined: T.C. Steele and DePauw University



Indiana artist Theodore Clement Steele (1847-1926) is perhaps the most widely celebrated Hoosier Impressionist painter of the early 20th century. In honor of Indiana's bicentennial celebration, *From Munich to Brown County: The Life and Artwork of T.C. Steele* highlights paintings and sketches drawn from the DePauw University Permanent Art Collection and the Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites. A master of capturing both landscape and the human figure in oil paint, Steele was instrumental in establishing the Brown County Artist Colony near Nashville, Ind. Yet, few even within the Greencastle community are aware of the significant historic and modern ties between Steele and the University.

Steele was just 16 years old in 1863 when he spent a summer in private study with Joseph Tingley, professor of natural sciences, at Indiana Asbury College (now DePauw University). As a naturalist, Tingley also “dabbled in photography and drawing,”² which was the likely focus of young Steele’s lessons. During his lifetime, Steele would return several times to Greencastle to paint portraits of DePauw University faculty, donors and trustees. In addition to painting a portrait of Professor Tingley’s two children, Steele was also commissioned to complete the portrait of former University trustee and namesake, Washington C. DePauw.

Over the course of a century, the DePauw University Permanent Art Collection

“There can be no doubt that Steele’s artistic passion and energy were one and the same as his love of nature. The artist never ran out of inspirational material because the seasons, weather conditions, and hourly light were always changing. His paintings helped viewers in his own time appreciate the previously unnoticed charm and natural beauty of Indiana.”¹

– Rachel Berenson Perry

received 13 Steele paintings, the majority of which are currently on display in East College and The Elms. Generous gifts of artwork from Steven G. Conant '71, Jane and Jim Emison '52, Betty Davis '54 and David W. Givens, and Joan D. Weisenberger have created an outstanding collection of works ranging from landscape and still life to historic portraiture.

In more recent years, several Steele relatives have made substantial contributions to the academic life of the University. Robert M. Steele '69, former director of The Janet Prindle Institute for Ethics, retired in 2014 after eight years of leadership service. Other family members held part-time faculty and staff appointments, while more still are proud to count themselves as DePauw alumni.

1 Rachel Berenson Perry, *Paint and Canvas: A Life of T.C. Steele* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Press, 2011), xii.

2 Clifton J. Phillips and John J. Baughman, *DePauw: A Pictorial History* (Greencastle: DePauw University Press, 1987), page 37.

In closing, I'd like to personally thank Mark Ruschman, chief curator of fine arts at the Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites, for making this bicentennial exhibition possible for our community. Ruschman gave generously of his time and scholarly expertise and was essential in securing the loan of artworks from the Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites, as well as several paintings from the

private collections of direct descendants of T.C. Steele. We sincerely appreciate his commitment to sharing the State's permanent art collection with communities large and small across Indiana.

Craig Hadley
Director/Curator
DePauw University



Cover: *Afternoon at House of the Singing Winds*, 1908
oil on canvas
Gift of Betty Davis '54 and David W. Givens
DPU 2010.3.6

Opposite page: *A Day of Clouds (Summer Sky, to the North)*, 1924
oil on canvas
Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites Permanent Collection

Below: *Forest in Summer*, 1918
oil on canvas
Gift of Betty Davis '54 and David W. Givens
DPU 2010.3.4

Left: *Washington C. DePauw*, late 19th century
oil on canvas
DePauw University Purchase
DPU 164.1



Steele's Artistic Career

The body of Steele's work is generally categorized into three main time periods: Munich (1880-1885), Brookville (1898-1906) and Brown County (1907-1926). During the time between Munich and Brookville, Steele painted in or near Indianapolis or on sojourns around the state, including Vernon, Yountsville, Spencer and Metamora. He also painted in Vermont (1887), Tennessee (1899), Oregon (1902) and California (1903).

The Munich Period: (1880-1885)

In July of 1880, the Steele family boarded the S.S. *Belgenland* and sailed to Europe in the company of fellow Hoosier artists J. Ottis Adams, August Metzner and Samuel Richards to study at the Royal Academy of Art in Munich, Germany. Noted Hoosier painter, William Forsyth, would join the group two years later. To fund his studies abroad, Steele enlisted 13 patrons, including the collector and gallerist Herman Lieber, to pledge \$100 each in exchange for the promise of future paintings. Instructors at the Academy taught their students the use of a subdued palette, working in the "gray manner" of painting. Often the subjects were backlit, creating a strong contrast between the background shadows and the highlighted details of the subject's face.

After five years abroad, the Steele family boarded the Red Star Line's *Noordland* in May 1885 and returned to the States. Arriving in Indianapolis a month later, Steele rented a house at Sixteenth and Pennsylvania Streets known as Tinker Place. Once settled, the artist also rented

(Continued on next page.)



Left: *The Corn Shocks (View of the Hermitage)*, circa 1900
oil on canvas
Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites Permanent Collection

a nearby studio and began painting portraits to repay the patrons who financed his studies in Munich.

The Brookville & Indianapolis Years: (1898-1906)

In 1898, Steele and J. Ottis Adams purchased a home in Brookville, Ind., just outside the town of Metamora. Named *The Hermitage* by the artist's wife, Libbie Steele, the secluded location provided easy access to the scenic landscape and proved to be a favorite gathering place for artists.

While Steele was making great strides in his artistic endeavors in 1899, he and his children endured a devastating loss. After a prolonged illness and bout with tuberculosis, Libbie Steele passed away that fall. With plans to visit relatives and a desire for a change of scenery, the artist and his daughter Margaret (Daisy) boarded a train and traveled west in 1902. They traveled first to Chicago and Minnesota, then through the Dakotas

to Saskatchewan, Canada, and over the Rocky Mountains to Vancouver on the Canadian Pacific Railroad. From there, they traveled south to Washington and through Oregon on their way to Southern California before returning home in late 1902 by way of Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado and Kansas. The change proved to be fruitful for the artist. He painted nearly every day and did some of his best work along the Oregon and California coastline.

Brown County Years: (1907-1926)

In search of new places to paint in 1907, the recently remarried artist and his new wife, Selma, purchased 60 acres in Brown County, Ind., several miles south of the town of Nashville. There the couple built a home and studio on a hilltop overlooking the scenic landscape of Southern Indiana. Inspired by the breezes blowing through the screened porches, they named it the *House of the Singing Winds*. They would eventually acquire additional property and make the home their full-time residence in 1912.

T.C. Steele's Legacy

In December of 1925, at the age of 75, Steele suffered a heart attack. Although he recovered and continued to paint, he became ill the following June and died at home in Brown County on July 24, 1926.

During his lifetime, Theodore Clement Steele was not only revered in his native Indiana and the Midwest, but recognized nationally and internationally for his outstanding portraits and landscapes. From winning a silver medal for *The Boatman* in the 1885 Royal Academy exhibition in Munich; to exhibiting in the Pennsylvania Academy of Art's *101st Annual Exhibition* in 1906, the National Academy of Design's, *Eightieth Exhibition* in 1904, and the *Panama-Pacific International Exposition* in San Francisco in 1915, the artist exhibited and lectured widely, juried numerous exhibitions, traveled extensively and was a popular spokesman for his fellow artists and the artistic sensibilities of the day.

As a final and lasting tribute to her late husband, Selma donated the family home, studio and 211 acres to the State of Indiana, shortly before her death in 1945. This gift, along with 350 paintings, numerous drawings and household contents would become the T.C. Steele State Historic Site in memory of her late husband.

Mark Ruschman
Chief Curator of Fine Arts
Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites