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COVER: Charles Sprague Pearce, *A Cup of Tea*, 1883, o/c, 27 x 22, Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts, bequest of Annie Swan Coburn (Mrs. Lewis Larned Coburn).

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The Life and Artwork of T. C. Steele

by Craig Hadley
& Mark Ruschman

Indiana artist Theodore Clement Steele (1847-1926) is perhaps the most widely celebrated Hoosier Impressionist painter of the early twentieth 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, Indiana. Yet, few even within

the Greencastle community are aware of the significant historic and modern ties between Steele and the University.

Steele was just sixteen 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,"¹ 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,

From Munich to Brown County: The Life and Artwork of T.C. Steele is on view through June 11, 2017, at the Richard E. Peeler Art Center, DePauw University, 10 West Hanna Street, Greencastle, Indiana, 46135, 765-658-6556, www.depauw.edu/arts/peeler/. A 4-page pamphlet accompanies the exhibition.

Washington C. DePauw.

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





ABOVE: *The Corn Shocks (View of the Hermitage)*, c. 1900, o/c, 17 1/2 x 27 1/2, Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites, permanent collection.

RIGHT: *Washington C. DePauw*, late 19th century, o/c, 29 1/4 x 24 1/4, DePauw University purchase.

LEFT: *Oregon Coastal Seascape*, 1903, o/c, DePauw University, gift of Betty Davis 1954 and David W. Givens.

Weisenberger have created an outstanding collection of works ranging from landscape and still life to historic portraiture.

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).

In July of 1880, the Steele family boarded the S.S. Belgenland and sailed to





ABOVE: *A Day of Clouds (Summer Sky, to the North)*, 1924, o/c, 29 1/2 x 39 1/2, Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites permanent collection.

LEFT: *An Old Garden*, 1887, o/c, 17 1/2 x 27 3/4, Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites permanent collection.

ABOVE RIGHT: *Forest in Summer*, 1918, o/c, 29 1/2 x 44 1/2, DePauw University, gift of Betty Davis 1954 and David W. Givens.

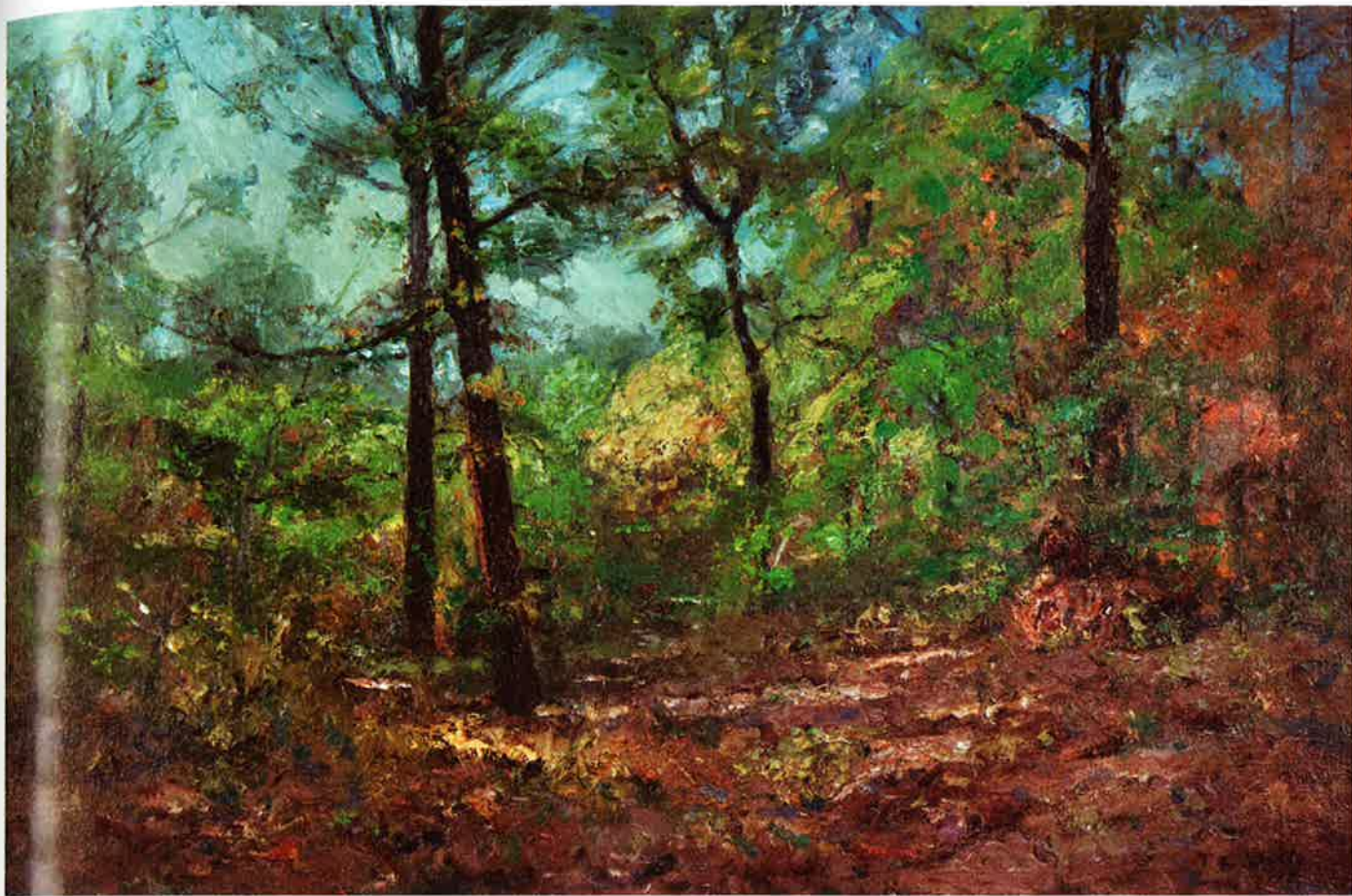
RIGHT: *Portrait of Governor Claude Matthews*, 1898, o/c, 39 1/4 x 29 1/2, Indiana State Museum and Historic Site.



fund his studies abroad, Steele enlisted thirteen patrons, including the collector and gallerist Herman Lieber, to pledge \$100 each in exchange for the promise of future paintings. Instructors at the Royal Academy of Art 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

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



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

In 1898, Steele and Adams purchased a home in Brookville, Indiana, 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, Steele's wife 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





ABOVE: *Evening*, 1919, o/c, 21 x 30³/₄, DePauw University, gift of George Chambers Calvert.

LEFT: *Pergola in Early Spring*, 1919, o/c, 29¹/₂ x 39¹/₂, Indiana State Museum and Historic Site.

ABOVE RIGHT: *Afternoon at House of the Singing Winds*, 1908, o/c, 14¹/₂ x 21¹/₂, DePauw University, gift of Betty Davis 1954 and David W. Givens.

RIGHT: *Flowers*, early August, 1917, o/c, DePauw University, gift of Betty Davis 1954 and David W. Givens.

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 fruit-

ful for the artist. He painted nearly every day and did some of his best work along the Oregon and California coastline.

In search of new places to paint in

1907, the recently remarried artist and his new wife, Selma, purchased sixty acres in Brown County, Indiana, 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.

In December of 1925, at the age of seventy-five, Steele suffered a heart attack. Al-



though he recovered and continued to paint, he became ill the following June and died at home in Brown County on July 24.

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 the Fine Arts' 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.

¹ Clifton J. Phillips and John J. Baughman, *DePauw: A Pictorial History* (Greencastle: DePauw University Press, 1987), page 37.