

July 16, 1991

Nineteenth-century female area artists were the magnet for over thirty of us at the July 8th GLHG meeting.

Mary Ann Willson and Olive Cheritree were the two artists of discussion for the night. Carol Clement (an animator whose interests include the Catskill Mountain House and an unrealized movie about local female artists) explained the process by which she has come to know these artists and then presented the details of their lives and works; Doug Thomsen (who is restoring a Cheritree house in Oak Hill) complemented Carol's program with his knowledge of the Cheritree family.

Mary Ann Willson and "her friend Miss Brundage" came to Greenville in the early 1800's, Willson working as an artist and Brundage as a farmer. Our knowledge of Willson's work of 1810-1825 comes from the unusual find in an attic of about 20 paintings. Little is known about Willson although her work attracted notice from Thomas Cole. Speculation has it that after Brundage died, Willson left for the west. Today, the name of Brundage Hill (the hill between Ben Buel and Tom Spinner on Red Mill Road, one mile north of Freehold) is nearly the only physical evidence of their existence.

The poignantly tragic story of Olive Cheritree dominated most of the meeting. Olive (daughter of Sheldon and Olive [Botsford] Cheritree) went to school in Oak Hill, somehow developed an artistic talent, went to Europe to study her craft, and became nationally and internationally known. Many of her paintings - of animals, flowers, and portraits - were accomplished in the early 1880's. Religion, an important element in her life, appears to have had a destructive influence on her. In 1886, she began to have "visions" and she felt she had a message to get out, even though the religious hierarchy of that day did not take kindly to women with a message. She later bought property in Catskill near the Hudson River where she took pupils in art. Although she continued to paint, by 1897 she seems to have deteriorated to the point that she was declared insane in 1897 at the age 45 and committed to Poughkeepsie where she was kept until her death when she was 72 years old. Little is known about her life during her institutionalized years.

During the meeting, several paintings were shown, as well as photographs and Cheritree's palette and easel. We July attendees saw a slice of area life usually left for the obscure history books.

The GLHG thanks Carol and Doug for their preserving and sharing their knowledge (and a thank you to June Clark for arranging the program). The program was taped (thanks to Debra Teator) and can be viewed by those who missed the meeting.

The last five minutes of the meeting were reminders: 1) the August meeting is a share session, 2) members were asked to review the captions for the 1992 calendar pictures and 3) members were asked to review the text for the back cover page for the calendar.

over

Other notes:

1. Diane Eckert, 12 Huckleberry Rd, Castleton, NY, 12033 is asking for information about her grandmother Frances (Chadwick) Butler, especially where she may have lived during her years in the Town of Greenville. The 1910 and 1925 censuses show an association with the Palmer family, living in the Sheridan Palmer dwelling (Sheridan's son Maxwell is two years old in 1910). Frances, who married James Addison Bishop, had a daughter Gertrude who married Jesse Butler. Diane speculates that her grandmother may have lived for a time at the Ellis or Randell house on South Street. Help if you can.

2. If you know of photograph collections, please remind me. I have a couple collections lined up for duplication this summer (Shaw - Greenville Center, Waldron - Mt. View Rd, Lambert - Mt. View Rd). With my trusty partner (or is it my trusty partner's trusty partner?), we will shoot those pictures that add to our collection.

3. One last thought on the female artists program. Several people came to the meeting with knowledge of these female artists; I hope the exchange of views and information prompts the continued research and sharing of information. And a thanks to Tom and Sally Dinnell and Helen Van Deusen for their second trip!

4. I will bring to our next meeting those items that were contributed but not displayed. There are goodies, as usual, including "Memories of the Brandy Hill Schoolhouse", diaries, old Greenville Locals, 1787 tax rolls, and more.

5. I still have no answer about Sally Light and the house history seminar (my fault, not hers). I'll try to get an answer by next meeting.

6. Debra and I attended a graveyard preservation seminar in Cooperstown this past week. I'll bring to next meeting my impressions of this seminar and possible consequences for our group.

Sincerely,

*Don Teator*