

## **A House, A Legacy, A Collection**

It is amazing to find that despite the checkered history of the Frederic Remington Art Museum collection, the museum is still a place where one can feel the artist's presence. The number one question asked by visitors is, "Did Remington live here?" The answer is no, but this is the place to know him best. The house that has been the center of the museum since its inception in 1923 is a place Remington surely visited on his many trips to Ogdensburg. In 1900 it was remodeled from its original 1810 appearance by Remington's friend George Hall, with rich quarter-sawn oak interiors where Remington would have felt quite at home. It was as Hall's guest that Eva Caten Remington and her sister, Emma Caten, lived here from 1915 through 1918. The lobby still takes visitors' breath away.

The depth and breadth of the museum's Remington holdings is unmatched. The great majority of items came directly from Eva Remington's 1918 estate. They include annotated scrapbooks, endless pages of notes, photographs - even the cigars that were in his pocket before he died. Much of this Eva Remington certainly retained for posterity. The artist's library is displayed on the second floor of the historic house, near the Remingtons' tall, surprisingly narrow bed and other furniture. The visitor is treated to an exhibit of fine art from the Remington home in the room that was once George Hall's dining room. On the way to the art galleries, one can see Remington's easel, paintbrushes and sculpting stand, and also such diverse items as his hockey stick and his elk's tooth cufflinks.

So, though the artist never lived here, the scope of his possessions here, including his working tools; thousands of notes and sketches; the fact that his widow lived here in the house of his friend; and the contemporaneous aesthetic of the place compound to make one feel that this is where Remington is found. The collection of Remington's paintings, drawings and bronzes represented in this catalog is, of course, the most important thing we have, but it's the combination of all the disparate elements that lets you imagine Frederic Remington here, perhaps smoking cigars and drinking whiskey into the night with any member of his elite circle of friends.

To sit in the wood paneled lobby on any quiet day in the light of Remington's Tiffany turtle-back chandelier, one can feel part of a continuum from the earliest days of the museum, starting in 1923 when the museum (until 1981 the Remington Art Memorial) was staffed by only

one woman, the curator, Sarah Raymond, and after her by curator Ursula Hornbrook. One might expect that the museum and its collection, so far off the beaten track geographically, have slumbered unmolested until the late 20th Century. The history of the collection is far more complex and precarious.

### **The Remington Art Memorial**

Eva Remington (1859-1918), Frederic's widow, left most of her collection of Remington's art, notes, correspondence, working tools and studio props to the people of Ogdensburg in care of the Board of Trustees of the Ogdensburg Public Library. The Remington Art Memorial opened in July 19th, 1923, in the historic Parish Mansion. This core collection still comprises the majority of paintings and bronzes owned and displayed by the museum. The archival elements of the gift -- from the artist's diaries, to hundreds of sketches and photographs, ledgers and checkbooks -- provide information meaningful to researchers looking into any aspect of Remington's work or personality.

The oil paintings Eva Remington left are largely from the last few years of the artist's (1861-1909) life. We know from various records that she sold a good many paintings during the nine years she lived as a widow. An ongoing question for us is, "why did these particular paintings remain to form the museum's initial collection?" Were they her favorites, or the least favorite of the art buyers? The contents of Mrs. Remington's diaries, made available through the generous 1996 gift of Mr. William Deuval, raise quite a few questions about the composition of our holdings. For instance, on Friday, June 27th, 1913, she writes, "In the P.M. I washed Frederic's paintings and varnished them and made a great improvement." Museums and private collectors are now working to remove such old yellow varnish from Remington's paintings. On Thursday, March 18th, 1915, she records, "Went over things in Frederic's desk & burned a lot of photos, etc." We may never know what she deleted from the historic record, or, just as compelling - why she did it. Clearly our holdings were not preserved in a time capsule before they came to us, and sometimes not after they were here.

It is hard to get a good view of the museum's early history, since no files exist pertaining to daily operations until the late 1960's. The archives contain early correspondence between John C. Howard (Eva Remington's executor) and the Library of Congress pertaining to copyright renewals, as well as correspondence between first curator Sarah Raymond and Ricardo

Bertelli at Roman Bronze Works, where most of the bronzes were cast. One must rely on the old minutes of the Ogdensburg Library Board of Trustees and several scrapbooks of press clippings and notes. Creation of formal records of the museum's holdings was not initiated until 1966.

### **Early Patronage**

The museum's first and most important patrons were Eva Caten Remington, who founded the collection with her bequest in 1918; John C. Howard, Remington's lifelong friend and the Estate of George Hall, Howard's employer, which provided the building to house it. The first recorded addition to the museum's holdings was a gift from Remington's friend, fellow sculptor, Sally James Farnham of her busts of President Warren Harding and Marshal Ferdinand Foch. Her bronze, *Horse and Rider*, was already part of the Remingtons' own art collection. An Ogdensburg native, Frederick T. Haskell, donated a diverse collection of minor European and American paintings and bronzes with the wish that they be sold to buy Remington art. The Haskell collection was displayed in one of the museum's crowded rooms. The first purchases of Remington art were made by selling art from the Haskell collection. Some examples are: *The Gallic Captive* (purchased in 1947), *The Last March* (purchased in 1948), and *The Apaches Are Coming* (purchased in 1950).

Frederick T. Haskell also gave the museum a set of Belter dining room furniture and other household items from the family that built and occupied the 1810 Parish Mansion until 1859, when George Parish returned permanently to Europe he auctioned the household property. Parish was so prominent in the region, as a landowner an employer, and the auction so memorable that items auctioned still retain their history. Parish tables, chairs, footstools and candlesticks are still coming to the museum as donations, 140 years later. The Parish House and the history of its original occupants has become an unstated, secondary mission of the museum.

### **Questionable Patronage**

In 1945 Dr. Harold McCracken, who can now be seen as an anti-hero of the museum's collection, began a series of visits to Ogdensburg and Canton to interview those who had known Frederic Remington and to study the museum's art and archives in preparation for his book, *Frederic Remington: Artist of the Old West*, which was published in 1947. McCracken took the initiative to suggest purchases of Remington originals and "Remingtoniana." He actually made the purchases himself, as the

museum's agent, using funds from sales of art from the Haskell Collection. In the late 1940's and early 1950's, when McCracken was involved with the museum, the president of the Board of Trustees of the Ogdensburg Public Library and the memorial was Franklin Little, the editor of the Ogdensburg newspaper, The Ogdensburg Journal. Little was an enthusiastic adherent to McCracken's advice and used his paper to celebrate the museum and rally public support for its activities.

One clipping states that in 1946 Harold McCracken and curator Ursula Hornbrook found a cache of undiscovered Frederic Remington oil studies in an attic room at the museum. This discovery became the impetus for the 1954 sale of 452 numbered items including Native American, Western and military artifacts and 110 oil paintings and studies that comprised most of Frederic Remington's "Indian" or "Studio" collection. Upon the advice of Harold McCracken, the Board of Trustees of the Ogdensburg Public Library sold this collection to Knoedler Galleries in New York for \$10,000.00 in cash and \$10,000.00 worth of painting conservation and re-framing, performed by Knoedler. The Museum used the money to replace the coal-burning furnace and paint the inside and outside of the building. This work was planned and overseen by a Mr. Davison, of Knoedler Galleries. The press focused not on the sale of this collection, but on the accompanying 1955 exhibition at Knoedler, which traveled to a second venue at the Ft. Worth Art Center. The exhibition included many of the museum's bronzes and oil paintings by Remington, loaned by the Library Board. When the museum's art returned and the refurbishments were done, the memorial re-opened with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on June 31, 1955. It is our great consolation that the studio collection was purchased from Knoedler by the Coe family, who then donated it to the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming as the founding collection of the Whitney Gallery of Western Art. Harold McCracken was its first director.

Today it is recognized as unethical by the museum community to sell a museum's collection to benefit its physical plant.

### **Gains and Losses**

Emma Caten, Eva Remington's sister, remained in Ogdensburg after Eva's death and lived in Ogdensburg until her death in 1957. Miss Caten maintained a continual presence at the museum and served on the Ogdensburg Library Board. As Frederic Remington's sister-in-law, who out lived him for nearly four decades, she deserves ample credit for her work to keep Remington's legacy alive. She certainly believed in Harold

McCracken as Remington's long-sought biographer and proponent. There is ample evidence that she gave him many gifts of Remington art and property left to her by her sister. Miss Caten owned a good deal of Frederic Remington sketches and paintings, art from the Remington home, Remington household furniture and other property. Many of these items rejoined the museum's collection upon Miss Caten's death. She gave away an unknown number of Remington items to friends and family. Three separate donors recently gave the museum Remington's paperweight, ivory folding bone and six of Eva Remington's diaries, all of which had belonged to Miss Caten. There are tales of boys receiving original Remington art in payment for shoveling Miss Caten's driveway. It is easy now to lament the losses to the collection from this diverted route from Eva, to Emma, to others.

At an earlier time that we have not been able to determine, an unknown quantity of Remington sketches, torn from sketchbooks, were sold at the front desk of the memorial for 75 cents and \$1.00. We know this because many of our loose sketches still have price marks in the corners. One time, in the early 1990's, two gentlemen visited the museum from Canton, Ohio. They brought with them dozens of these sketches, which had come to them through a relative who had lived in Ogdensburg long ago. The museum can only hope to see the sketches again.

The Remington bronzes in the museum's collection came largely from Eva Remington's estate, with the notable exceptions of the 1985 gift of *Cheyenne #12* from Robert and Lorraine Hollins and the 1991 purchase of the Henry-Bonnard cast #23 of the *Broncho Buster*. The bronzes from Mrs. Remington's estate range from the very good casts of *The Sergeant* and *Polo* to some of the very last legitimate bronzes made at the request of her will.

### **The Maturing Museum**

In 1973 Remington Art Memorial staff re-created Frederic Remington's Ridgefield, Connecticut studio in the west room of the ground floor. They bought and borrowed hundreds of artifacts to approximate Remington's own that had been sold in 1954. The Museum has since found a better solution, in displaying only the artifacts that belonged to Frederic Remington, making no attempt to "recreate" his studio. Museum staff are pleased to have the long-term loan of six of Frederic Remington's guns from the Buffalo Bill Historical Center; part of the 1954 sale. The museum is fortunate to have a loan exchange program with the Buffalo Bill

Historical Center, in which the museum borrows and displays fifteen North Country based oil studies -- also part of the 1954 sale to Knoedler & Co. -- in exchange for one of our major Western Remington oil paintings.

### **Contemporary Benefactors**

The Newell family, whose notable ancestor, Allan Albert Newell, was a boyhood friend of Frederic Remington's in Ogdensburg, has provided the most meaningful patronage since Eva Remington's original gift. In the last quarter-century the Newells have provided major support for two capital expansion projects and a steady stream of support for the museum's priority needs, including, at times, salaries, Remington acquisitions, art and furniture conservation - even the printing of this catalog.

In 1976 William Allan Newell funded an addition to the historic Parish Mansion to provide two modern galleries, an art storage vault and a small archives room. This Newell Wing provided a separate, fire-safe structure for the storage and display of Remington's art. The Parish Mansion was then developed as a historic house, emphasizing its early history (1810-1859) with the Parish family and the three years (1915-1918) when it was occupied by Eva Remington.

The museum expanded again in 1997, adding gallery space and collection workspace in an improved Newell Wing. The wing physically links the Parish Mansion with the historic 311 Washington Street house that provides museum offices and public reception rooms. The improvements go far beyond increasing gallery space and collections work areas. The architect and exhibit designer made sure to carry the 19th Century oak motifs and period colors -- of which Frederic Remington would have approved-- throughout the gallery spaces, providing a visual context for the art and providing visual continuity between the old and new parts of the museum.

### **Collecting Today**

Since 1985, the museum has pursued an acquisitions program, collecting art and property connected to Frederic Remington or the Parish family. Due to the ever-escalating values of Remington art, acquisitions are now almost entirely achieved through the gifts of generous donors. Donations over recent decades have greatly enhanced the museum's already strong collection of illustrations, both works on paper and black and white oil paintings. The museum does purchase Remington letters, sketches and other archival items using funds from its modest acquisitions account. The

museum is currently poised to begin an endowment campaign and has a growing foundation. This funding will further the museum's endeavors to create effective exhibits, maintain and expand a strong collection, improve research capabilities and develop education programming that encourages understanding of Remington and perpetuates a sense of the artist's presence.

**Laura A. Foster**

Curator

October 6, 2000

The mission of the Frederic Remington Art Museum is to collect, exhibit, preserve, and interpret the art and archives of Frederic Remington. The Museum fosters an appreciation for and an understanding of the artist by educating its audience in the visual arts and by providing a context for Remington's life in Northern New York.

The museum is accredited by the American Association of Museums.