

Lockwood de Forest & Frederic Church at Olana

by Evelyn D. Trebilcock

The young Lockwood de Forest (1850-1932) was among the few artists that Frederic Edwin Church (1826-1900) chose to encourage and mentor. In time, their relationship grew into one of collaboration. Church influenced de Forest as a painter, decorator, and collector and de Forest in turn helped Church infuse his home with a splendid variety of decorative arts from India.¹

Church and de Forest were related through marriage and their families were

close. Lockwood had his first significant interaction with the older and successful artist on a family trip to Europe. The families crossed paths in Rome; de Forest recorded in his diary for December 14, 1868, "This afternoon went to some antiquity stores with Mr. Church, where there were a great many curious things, but almost all expensive."² April 1869 found Frederic and Lockwood both in Greece. Together, they sketched the Acropolis, the younger artist learning from the veteran. De Forest had previously trained with Herman Corrodi, a German-Swiss artist work-

All the Raj—Frederic Church and Lockwood de Forest: Painting, Decorating and Collecting at Olana is on view from May 11 through November 2, 2014, the Sharp Gallery at Olana State Historic Site, 5720 State Route 9G, Hudson, New York, 12534, 518-828-0135, www.olana.org. A color brochure with an essay written by guest curator Roberta Mayer accompanies the exhibition.

ing in Rome, but it was sketching with Church that really set de Forest on his journey to becoming an artist.

Over the next decade, back in the Unit-

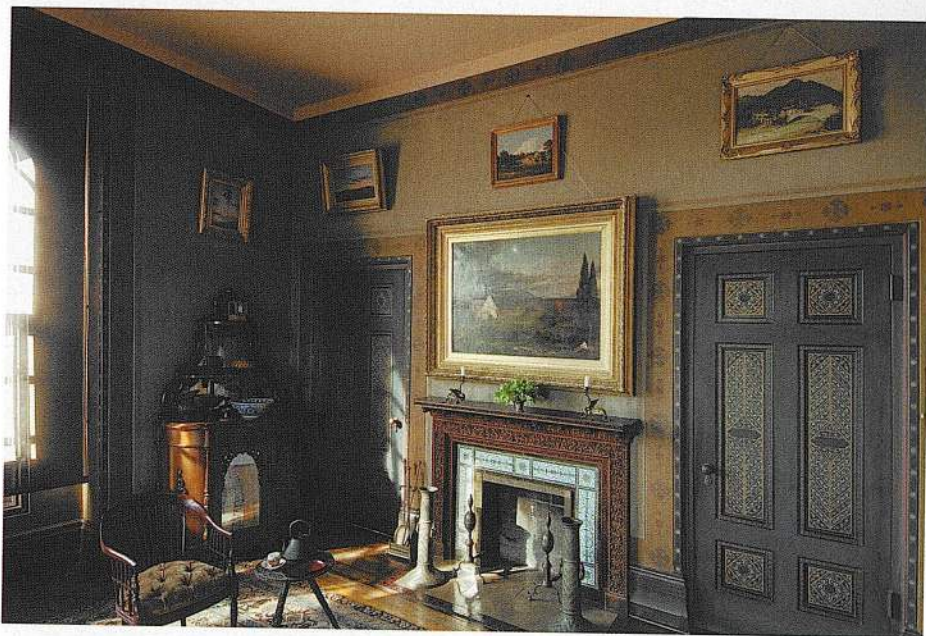




ABOVE: Frederic Edwin Church, *Winter Sunset from Olana*, 1872, o/paper, 13 x 20 1/16, Olana Collection.

RIGHT: *The East Parlor of the House at Olana with fireplace mantel by Lockwood de Forest, Indian bowl on the étagère and carved Indian tripod table*, photograph, 2008, © Nicholas Whitman photographer.

LEFT: Lockwood de Forest, *Indus Valley, India*, September 20, 1881, o/paper card, 12 1/2 x 17 3/4, Olana Collection, gift of Frank and Patricia Goss.



lamic architecture. De Forest witnessed Church's design process; he noted that the older artist made hundreds of sketches for all aspects of the house, from the facades to interior stencil patterns and stair railings. "I staid with him painting in his studio and

going over his plans for the house he was building, and studying all the books on Persian and Oriental Architecture in the evenings."³ Lockwood's stays at Olana not only improved his painting skills but also developed his interest in exotic design.



ABOVE: Lockwood de Forest, *Bank of the Nile, Opposite Cairo, Egypt*, 1879/86, o/c, 30 x 48, Gerold Wunderlich & Co., New York.

LEFT: *The Studio of the house at Olana with fireplace mantel and curio cabinet* by Lockwood de Forest, photograph, 2008, © Nicholas Whitman photographer.

RIGHT: Lockwood de Forest, *Winter Sunset from Olana*, 1872, o/paper, 10 x 13, Olana Collection, gift of Friends of Olana.

BELOW RIGHT: *Corner of the Court Hall of the house at Olana with carved niche* provided by Lockwood de Forest, photograph, 2008, © Nicholas Whitman photographer.



In 1877 Church and de Forest along with friends and fellow artists Horace Wolcott Robbins and Sanford Robinson Gifford explored the Mount Katahdin area in northern Maine. Their adventure was recorded in "Camps and Tramps about Ktaadn," published the following year in the popular journal *Scribner's Monthly*. The

article, illustrated with engravings done from their sketches, playfully described their canoeing, hiking, and sketching.

After his fall excursion to Maine, Lockwood made his second trip to Greece and Egypt. Church may have encouraged de Forest to select Egypt as a worthy artistic subject. In 1868, during his trip to the

Middle East, Church had wanted to travel up the Nile, but unable to find suitable accommodations for his family in Alexandria, could not carry out his plan. In the course of his journey, de Forest sketched a village scene along the Nile on March 29, 1878 that would become the inspiration for his finished painting *Bank of the Nile, Opposite Cairo, Egypt*. Egypt proved to be a successful subject for de Forest; one of the paintings was selected for the American section of the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1878.



It was also in the late 1870s that de Forest joined the Society of Decorative Art in New York and formed relationships with artist and designer Louis Comfort Tiffany, textile artist Candace Wheeler, and painter-colorist Samuel Colman. His new partnership with Tiffany, along with the growing American and British interest in Indian craft, served as the impetus for his first trip, in 1881, to India, where he purchased goods for their company. He later commented, "I made up my mind that more could be learned from the East than anywhere else, so I started to make a study of the Architecture and all the arts and crafts of India."⁴ His fascination with Indian craft and decorative arts would become his primary professional focus.

India also served as a honeymoon destination for Lockwood and his bride Meta. During their eighteen-month-long adventure, de Forest provided Tiffany with a variety of products, including jewelry. More



than just a buyer, de Forest established a workshop in Ahmedabad specializing in carved teak and commissioned furniture in

Kashmir for export to the United States. At the same time, he secured contacts to assist
(continued on page 127)

Tarbell (continued from page 67)

bard, Marie Danforth Page, Marguerite S. Pearson, and Lilian Westcott Hale.

Urbane, yet unassuming, Tarbell continued to paint his favorite subjects: be it his family in outdoor scenes, domestic interiors, still life, such as *Still Life with Roses and Two Jars*, or portraits and equestrian subjects, as in *Mary and New Castle Poppy*, while also teaching full time at the Museum School. All was well until 1912, when the School Board brought in Huger Elliott, ex-director of the Rhode Island School of Design, as Supervisor of Educational Work. This appointment did not sit well with either Tarbell or Benson, who believed the curriculum and the running of the school should be left to the artists best placed to understand its requirements. Tarbell, in particular, resented being told how to teach, and was even more incensed at being lectured on how to paint by the new Superintendent, whose original training had been as an architect.⁸ Unable to accept what he saw as an intolerable situation, Tarbell resigned his position at the Museum School in December 1912, quickly followed by co-director Benson.

Straightway, they turned their attention to a startling new problem. With the New York Armory show currently extolling the aesthetics of a precipitate, and pervasive, trend for modern art, the Boston traditionalists found many an exhibition venue abruptly unavailable. Tarbell and Benson therefore determined to create a gallery of their own, based on the rigorous standards of the Boston School in which they practiced. There was no shortage of artists wishing to join, including the talented and influentially connected Lilla Cabot Perry, who was instrumental in determining that the newly formed Guild of Boston Artists started on a sound footing. Suitable premises were quickly found on prestigious Newbury Street and, through the ingenious idea of selling \$100 bonds to artist members and patrons, the property was not only purchased, but also suitably renovated to become one of the most impressive galleries in Boston. Tarbell was elected first President of the Guild and served eleven years in that capacity.

Among the works to be seen in this current exhibition are his refined portrayals of *Mrs. Jonathon Sawyer* and *Henry Clay Frick*, a self-portrait, and the more informal *Edmund*, *Mary* and *Sergius*, all of which

eloquently describe the sophistication of the Boston School method hearkening back to the genius of Vermeer and Velázquez, or as Tarbell described it, “Making it like....”⁹ It was an expression Tarbell frequently employed with students like Gammell and Hibbard, who in turn, taught it to their own pupils, thus perpetuating an artistic approach whose foundation stretched back to the Renaissance.

In later years, although not in good health, Tarbell continued to paint and teach. Throughout his professional career, he strove to blend the best of the European impressionist style with his earlier academic training to capture fleeting effects of light and atmosphere while painting “en plein air” and “alla prima”—out of doors and at first attempt—to create the ultimate heightened effect of light on the object. He was clearly less concerned with texture and form than he was with the overall effect of light and shade. Look into the shade of Tarbell’s work and you will see the strong color of reflected light even within the shadows. Gammell remembered Tarbell remarking, shortly before the latter’s passing, “Here’s hoping I can make one that really looks like it before I’m through.”¹⁰

Painting the truth was Tarbell’s prime motivation and he practiced to the letter his own philosophy, that “a painter should ‘draw the Thing as he sees It for the God of Things as They are.’”¹¹ And that philosophy—painting what you see, rather than what you know—has remained the basis and the guiding principle of those who would perpetuate the tenets of the Old Masters: Velazquez and Vermeer, including “chiaroscuro is what makes pictures rich; compose by masses of light and dark, warm and cool, and make objects swim in the air.”

In announcing Tarbell’s untimely passing, the *Boston Traveler* reported:

Edmund Tarbell contributed to America’s place in the world of art. To him and his work Europe turned its eyes in admiration, as did the whole people in America. Tarbell’s works were honest works. In him was none of the transient sensationalism which brought notoriety to others. Tarbell canvases will be speaking to the world centuries from now. His character was as true as his art.¹²

The Tarbell Charitable Trust, which owns the majority of the works in this exhibit, was established by the late Daniel W. B. Tarbell, of New Castle, New Hamp-

shire, to preserve and make available, for public enjoyment and education, his personal collection of paintings, drawings and preparatory sketches handed down through his family.¹³

¹ John E. D. Trask, “About Tarbell,” *American Magazine of Art*, 9 April 1918, p. 221. Quoted in Laurene Buckley, *Edmund C. Tarbell: Poet of Domesticity* (New York: Hudson Hills, 2001), p. 110.

² Artist Paul Ingbretonson, current President of the Guild of Boston Artists.

³ Dora M. Morrell, “A Boston Artist and His Work,” *Brush and Pencil*, Vol. 3, #4, January, 1899, p. 194. Quoted in Patricia Jobe Pierce, *Edmund C. Tarbell and the Boston School of Painting (1889-1980)* (Hingham, MA: Pierce Galleries, 1980), p. 45.

⁴ Sadakichi Hartmann, “A National American Art,” *Art Critic* 1 (March 1894), pp. 45-49, reprinted in Jane Calhoun Weaver, *Sadakichi Hartmann, Critical Modernist: Collected Art Writings* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 68-76. Quoted in Buckley, *ibid.*, p. 45.

⁵ Kenyon Cox, *Edmund C. Tarbell*. n.p., n.d., Web, Feb. 3, 2014, www.guildof-bostonartists.org/EdmundC.Tarbell.htm.

⁶ Robert H. Gammell, “IV Edmund C. Tarbell, N.A. 1862-1938,” *The Boston Painters: 1900-1930*, Ed. Elizabeth I. Hunter (Orleans, MA: Parnassus Imprints, 1986), pp. 67-86.

⁷ Irma Whitney, “Edmund Tarbell’s Death Removes Great Figure in Boston Art World,” *Boston Herald*, September 11, 1938, p. 36.

⁸ Walter Muir Whitehill, *Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, A Centennial History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 433.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Gammell, p. 68.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Gammell, p. 67

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Gammell, p. 67.

¹² “Great American Painter Dies,” *The Boston Traveler*, August 3, 1938, p. 16.

¹³ “Edmund C. Tarbell: Works from the Tarbell Charitable Trust.” *Groton Herald*, 15 Dec. 2013, n.p., Deborah E. Johnson, Web, Feb. 3, 2014, www.groton-herald.com/main.asp?SectionID=29&SubSectionID=101&ArticleID=2200.

de Forest/Church (continued from page 91) with the procurement of rugs, ceramics, and metalwork. By 1883 de Forest was working on his own, designing and importing furnishings and interiors for a number of clients including Tiffany, his brother Robert de Forest, James Clair

Flood of San Francisco, Mary Elizabeth Garret in Baltimore, H.C. Albright in Utica, and his mentor Frederic Church.

Having witnessed the design of Church's Persian-style house at Olana, de Forest was ideally suited to select items such as carved teak mantels and various case furniture pieces from Ahmedabad and painted furniture from Kashmir, which Church integrated into the existing interior beginning in 1883. Other pieces reveal a more collaborative process between Church and de Forest. The dining room mantel, for example, was specially commissioned and executed following Church's own designs. Perhaps because of their close relationship, Church was the recipient of a particularly choice object: a carved niche, identified by de Forest as exemplary. "My Indian workmen presented me with the finest piece of wood carving I have ever seen.... It is in the form of a wall bracket. The idea for it was taken from the minarets of one of the Mosques in Ahmedabad."⁵ A few years later, when in 1888 Church added a studio wing, he ordered

from de Forest carved teak for a mantel, a large curio cabinet, and a custom made balustrade for the room joining the studio to the house.

Throughout the period that he focused on his decorating business, de Forest continued to sketch. In his later years his style changed, reflecting the work of the Barbizon painters as well as a personal style. His studies are moody, the landscape simplified and the palette less colorful. Regardless of the style, de Forest's passion for sketching derived from his time with Church. After Church's death in 1900, de Forest often returned to Olana to visit the family, and on many of these occasions he made spontaneous studies of the wonderful views from the property.

The remarkable interiors created by Church and de Forest remain intact: the house reflects their collaboration and elements of Indian design can be discovered in almost every room.

¹ This article draws heavily on the work of Roberta A. Mayer, *Lockwood de Forest: Furnishing*

American Art Review (ISSN 0092-1327) is published bi-monthly by American Arts Media, Inc. at 12807 Sagamore Road, Leawood, Kansas, 66209. The subscription price is \$26.95 for six issues. Foreign subscriptions are no longer available. Periodicals postage paid at Shawnee Mission, Kansas and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: send address changes to: American Art Review, P.O. Box 1090, Stratham, NH 03885-1090. Printed in USA.

the Gilded Age with a Passion for India (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008).

² Lockwood de Forest Diary, December 14, 1868, de Forest Papers, microfilm 2732: quoted in Mayer, *Lockwood de Forest*, p. 27.

³ De Forest, undated manuscript, de Forest Papers, microfilm 2730, frame 20: quoted in Mayer, *Lockwood de Forest*, p. 32.

⁴ Lockwood de Forest, *Indian Domestic Architecture* (1919) MS., De Forest Papers, microfilm 2732.

⁵ Ibid; quoted in Mayer, *Lockwood de Forest*, pp. 128-129.

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