

**THE BUFFALO FINE ARTS  
ACADEMY ORGANIZED  
NOVEMBER 11, 1862:  
INCORPORATED DECEMBER 4,  
1862**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649347995

The Buffalo Fine Arts Academy Organized November 11, 1862: Incorporated December 4, 1862  
by Willis O. Chapin

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**WILLIS O. CHAPIN**

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THE  
BUFFALO FINE ARTS ACADEMY.

ORGANIZED NOVEMBER 11, 1866. INCORPORATED DECEMBER 4, 1866.  
GALLERY OPENED DECEMBER 23, 1862.

A HISTORICAL SKETCH

COMPILED BY  
WILLIS O. CHAPIN.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
L. G. SELLSTEDT, N. A.

PUBLISHED BY THE ACADEMY,  
January, 1899.

THE BETHLEHEM-BEEHIVE CO.,  
COMPLETE ART-RENDERING WORKS, BUFFALO, N. Y.

## INTRODUCTORY.

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### EARLY ARTISTS OF BUFFALO,

BY L. G. SELLSTEDT.

ONE of the first artists of note who made Buffalo his home was, if I am not mistaken, an Englishman by the name of Tuttle. He was a pupil of Benjamin West, and a careful and conscientious painter. His work was among the older and wealthier citizens, and many of his portraits may be seen in the houses of their descendants. He was a friend of the late Dr. William Shelton, then a young man, whose portrait he also painted. He must have flourished here in the latter part of the thirties; he was no longer living at my advent to Buffalo in 1842.

About this time another portrait painter by the name of Jackson must have been here. He, too, did a great deal of work among the first families, and his pictures show him to have been an artist of skill and precision.

A little later Buffalo contained quite a number of artists of more or less prominence or merit. Among them was one Carpenter, of whom I know little except that he must have had considerable facility with the brush, judging from what few works I have seen attributed to him.

The next that occurs to my memory was Matthew Wilson, also an Englishman and closely connected by marriage with one of the best families in the city. Mr. Wilson added to his skill as an artist many smaller accomplishments, being a witty leader of society as well as an expert chess-player. When I came to Buffalo he was in Europe, studying, as he has told me, under the celebrated French painter, the late Couture. I did not make his acquaintance until 1852, when he returned to resume his painting here.

I commenced my art studies in 1842, though these were frequently interrupted by the necessity of earning money in other ways to pay my way. In choosing art for my future profession I was encouraged, I might say induced, by my landlord, one Captain Black, who had himself been a student of art under Gilbert Stuart, though his life had been almost entirely spent on the ocean. All honor to his memory. He guided me in the purchase of



materials, but I cannot say he was of any further assistance in my art studies. I would willingly avoid all allusion to my own difficulties but that it leads me naturally to speak of him who was nearest connected with my early struggles, William Wilgus, a native of Buffalo, who had studied under Professor Morse in New York, in company with Daniel Huntington, Page and others who have lent lustre to American art. My first visit to an artist's studio was to that of Wilgus, to whom I had been recommended, and it was from him I received my first hint in actual painting, and it was from him years afterward that I received the first encouraging word so necessary to a sensitive art student. Mr. Wilgus died young of consumption; had he lived and enjoyed fair health I do not think he would have had at this day a superior in the country as a portrait painter.

Besides painting the portraits of many of our most distinguished citizens, he painted many Seneca Indians—no one ever painted the real Indian so well. I am sorry to add that nearly all his Indian portraits were lost in the fire that destroyed the residence of the late Caleb Lyons of Lyonsdale, a gentleman of known culture and liberality, who had purchased the whole lot.

Contemporary with Wilgus was one Gale, a poor painter with great pretence. He, too, painted portraits, but his great ambition led him to larger work. There was an exhibition of some of these at the old American Hall: Adam and Eve, large as life, and Job lying naked, covered with beautiful carbuncles and boils, also life size. Mr. Gale disappeared from Buffalo very suddenly, and, so far as I know, never was heard of any more as an artist.

About the same time there was in Buffalo a very clever miniature painter by the name of Dickinson. I never became acquainted with him, but I remember him as an old man who used to go about in a long blue cloak. His works were excellent. One of them I have had reason to scan closely, having made a large oil copy of it for the late Miss Porter of Niagara Falls, to be placed in the Historical Society here.

I must not forget to mention Rev. Benjamin Van Dusee, for a time an engraver, then a pupil of Wilgus, who promised well, but subsequently divided his time between wood engraving and ministering to the souls of men. I believe he has lately resumed his painting.

In 1847 Thomas Le Clear appeared in Buffalo. It is unnecessary for me to speak of his talents as

an artist, since long before his untimely death he was acknowledged among those who stood at the head of the profession.

William H. Beard made Buffalo his home in 1850, when his great genius was at once discovered by his brother artists. His reputation as an artist is now world-wide. Few, except his most intimate friends, can fully appreciate the sterling qualities of his nature.

Then there was Augustus Rockwell, whose lovely character was so well known and esteemed by his friends, and whose works, whether portraits or landscapes, were so acceptable to his patrons that his name almost became a household word.

At this time Andrew Andrews, an old actor, but a clever amateur landscape painter, while filling the place of stage manager at the Eagle-street Theatre found time to vary his histrionic duties by keeping a school of painting. Nearly all his pupils were women, but there were two or three young men. Among these was our distinguished townsman, C. C. Coleman of Capri, Italy, then a youth of sixteen. I also recall A. B. Nimbs, who painted portraits, and Joseph Mecker of western landscape fame, having later made his home in St. Louis, where he died. Later on came A. W. Samuels, a