

**Emily Parker Groom**  
**Wisconsin Artist**

1875-1975





*Emily Groom at 1972 Retrospective*

To view this paper on-line, in color and to view the 450 documented paintings by E.G. please visit [www.emilygroom.com](http://www.emilygroom.com)  
All the paintings in this paper were done by Emily Groom unless otherwise noted.

## Prologue

On March 15<sup>th</sup> 1972 over seven hundred people gathered for a retrospective exhibit and reception at the Charles Allis Art Library to honor one of Milwaukee's best known and loved citizens, Emily Groom. The occasion also celebrated the artist's ninety-seventh birthday, which fell two days later on St. Patrick's Day.

Forty-six of the people present had loaned their own "Emily Grooms" to the show, some dating back to 1910. Emily herself contributed a few recently executed watercolors that were distinguished by their more impressionistic style, due to her failing eyesight. As an art critic present said; "the paintings show a firm hand in their execution and a wonderful sense of color."

Emily personally greeted all of the guests, remembering the names of most, and she thoroughly enjoyed seeing old friends. It was a mixed group: many were patrons, a few were her contemporaries, and others were a generation or two younger. One-time neighbors, former students from her various art classes, and friends with whom she had traveled all gathered to celebrate Groom's artistic legacy and friendship. Whatever age or walk of life, these people had one thing in common: they all loved Emily Groom.

Margaret Fish Rahill wrote in the Retrospective Brochure: "The response to the event was almost overwhelming...so many offers to lend paintings or to help in any way to celebrate Emily Groom. The exhibit tells not only of her importance as an artist but also of her genius for friendship."

## Family History: England to New England 1831 to 1875



*Thomas Groom I*



*Thomas Groom & Co. Stationers*

### **Thomas Groom I and Emily Lambert Parker**

Emily's paternal grandfather, Thomas Groom I (1811-1888) came to America from Birmingham, England in 1831, leaving behind two sisters and a brother.<sup>1</sup> He briefly stayed in New York, where he worked for David Felt Stationers, located at 245 Pearl Street. From there he made his way to Boston where he clerked for Willard Felt at 82 State Street. In 1833 he bought Willard Felt's business and renamed it Thomas Groom & Co. Stationers, also known as Stationers Hall. Thomas managed this thriving business for

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<sup>1</sup> He is called Thomas Groom I as the first in the United States, but his father was Thomas Groom of Shrewsbury, England (1767-1842), who married Mary Burton (1782-1815) and they had four children, Thomas, Mary, Sarah, and John.

over fifty years during which time he kept in close contact with his siblings in England. Communication was facilitated by his profitable business which required and financed regular trips to London and Paris to purchase the latest in office supplies. He knew the names of the Cunard ships that landed in Boston, as well as the names of their captains, with some of whom he socialized.<sup>2</sup> Thomas' first crossings were by sail, soon to be replaced by steamships which went weekly from Liverpool to Boston via Halifax.



*Willow Hall*

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<sup>2</sup> Cunard Steamships Ltd. was founded in 1840 by Samuel Cunard, a businessman from Halifax, Nova Scotia. He had a contract from the British government to carry mail from Britain to North America on a fleet of steamships that would maintain a weekly service, first from Liverpool to Boston via Halifax, but later the western terminus was New York.



Thomas settled in Dorchester, Massachusetts, and in 1842 purchased the home he later named Willow Hall.<sup>3</sup> He married Emily Lambert Parker (1807-1888), the daughter of Millie Lambert Parker and Major Nathan Parker.<sup>4</sup> Thomas and Emily had six children: Thomas II (1836-1855), Emily (1838-1889), James (1841-1852), Mary (1843-1935), Samuel (1845-1878), and John (1848-1935).



*Thomas Groom family photograph l-r(Emily Parker Groom, John Groom, John Throgmorton Middlemore, Thomas Groom I, Samuel Groom, Mary Groom)*

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<sup>3</sup> Willow Hall was named for a tree believed to be the largest of its species in the United States. Later, when the house was torn down for development, the tree at 5' from the ground measured 29' 4" in girth and was 60' tall. It was thought to be well over 200 years old (from unnamed newspaper clipping).

<sup>4</sup> Emily L.P. b. Boston (5/18/1807), d. Dorchester (3/4/1888). Millie b. Cohasset (12/17/1775), d. Dorchester (6/16/1859). Nathan P. b Roxbury (8/30/1768), d?

It was important to Thomas that he maintain close connections to members of the family who had chosen to stay in England so that his children would know their cousins. Thomas' children, and later his grandchildren, often accompanied him on his trips to Europe. His wife, Emily, rarely joined him. While she was away on one of their trips abroad, son James (age 11) took ill and died. Emily never went abroad again and was often reluctant to leave home.

The English cousins, in turn, made prolonged trips to the United States to visit the Groom family. One of Thomas' nephews, John Throgmorton (Throg) Middlemore, went to the Medical School of Maine and Thomas' daughter, Mary, attended school in England in 1859-60.<sup>5</sup> The English visitors were shown the sights and at various times traveled to Washington, Philadelphia, Niagara Falls, and even to Texas and Wisconsin. The American cousins visited their Middlemore cousins in England and traveled with them on the continent. It was understood by both families that these travels were good for the young people on both sides of the Atlantic.

Thomas especially enjoyed the companionship of his daughters, Emily and Mary, to whom he wrote many letters, and from whom he requested replies. When his daughters married he incorporated their husbands into the family and continued to stay in close touch by mail and frequent visits.

After a second son, Thomas II, passed away at age nineteen, mother Emily began to take to her bed for days or even weeks at a time. The two youngest sons, Samuel and John, were not yet teenagers. They attended Chauncy Hall School in Waltham, MA .

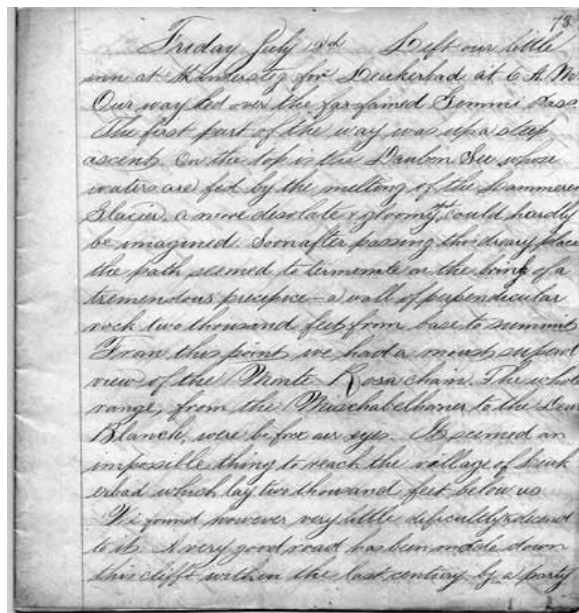
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<sup>5</sup> The Medical School of Maine which Bowdoin College was authorized to establish in 1820. It was closed in 1921. John Throgmorton Middlemore was a member of the class of 1866. It was a two year course and upon graduation, he did not feel qualified to practice medicine. Five years later he considered it, but gave up the idea. See Tho.Groom Letters.op.cit.pg.21

They also went to Gleason's farm in Wayland where they could spend a week or so learning about farm chores and country living. The Gleason's were both family friends and a source of fresh dairy products.

In the summer of 1867, when Samuel was twenty-two and John was nineteen, they accompanied their father to England to visit relatives and to see the Paris Exposition. Sam and John traveled in the south of England and then joined the rest of their family and the English cousins in Paris. John also managed to do some climbing in Switzerland with his friends before the Paris rendezvous.

Sam wrote home that the Exposition was "immense." He also noted in the same letter that: "We thought it most fortunate that eight of us could have got rooms all in the same house, at this crowded time. Our agent here secured them for us, met us at the station, had our luggage passed & returned to the Hotel with us & dined." Travel with their father was first class. When Sam and John resumed their travels alone in southern England after the Exposition, it was more casual. John wrote no letters, but kept a record of what they saw at the Exposition in a neat little diary written in Spenserian script.



*John Groom's diary in Spenserian script*





*John Groom, oil*

## **John Groom**

It is hard to know how much John may have been affected by growing up in a house with so much sadness. He was a bit of a maverick and certainly the baby of the family and was somewhat indulged. As a boy, he would sometimes miss church and stay home with his mother, which may have been a comfort to her. He seemed to live in the shadow of his brother, Samuel. Sam was a devout and interested member of the Unitarian Church. He won gold medals at Chauncy Hall School and was a dutiful and devoted son. In his letters, Sam would sometimes reassure his parents that “Johnny” had written his letter to someone else in the family. He covered for his brother’s lack of communication, and gave other indications that he was looking out for him.

The Groom family was very loving, but tended to be reserved and circumspect, and most often made their feelings known in notes or by proxy. In a letter dated August 8, 1872, Thomas wrote from London to his wife, Emily: “I was much pleased with John’s letter. I will take good care of it and see you have it back. I hope and trust he will do well. His tastes are very peculiar.”<sup>6</sup>

No letters from John exist. Most of what is known about John has been passed down orally by bits and pieces, often in more or less hushed voices. It seems that John, with his unconventional tastes and wanderlust, was a disappointment to his family. It must have been especially frustrating for his father that John did not follow in his older brother Sam’s footsteps by settling down in New England and going into the family business, (which occasion was proudly proclaimed in a printed announcement dated 1/1/1869).

Some of the tidbits of John’s life and his escapades have been passed down in the Groom family in the form of stories that border on tall tales. According to family lore: John loved to sail and made his way to Australia “before the mast”; he was employed as a tree topper by the Bradley Lumber Company in Wisconsin;<sup>7</sup> while climbing in the Rockies John was caught in an avalanche that buried his friend; and he went West to work on the railroad and became very sick, possibly with polio.<sup>8</sup> Whatever the cause, he was left with a useless arm and a lame leg. During his illness out West, he was taken to a saloon, where a missionary intervened. It was a life-saving coincidence -the missionary’s wife knew John’s sister, Mary! Arrangements were made for John to be taken home in a

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<sup>6</sup> See Samuel Burton Groom 1845-1878 Letters (pg 18) Transcribed from the original by Nancy Denny Solodar, 1998

<sup>7</sup> Later the W.H.Bradley family would take John’s son, Thomas III, to their summer home in Tomahawk, WI, to be a companion for their son.

<sup>8</sup> As reported by granddaughter Pat Groom Reed.

boxcar to New York and then to Dorchester. It is unclear exactly when these adventures took place, but they probably happened between 1869 and 1873.

In 1868-9, at the age of about twenty, John began to build a home and barn between Sun Prairie and Madison, Wisconsin, on what was called “the Madison Road” now Highway 151. He named his place “Floral Hill Farm”. His parents visited him there in September 1869. In a December 18, 1869 letter to his daughter Mary, Thomas I wrote: “Ask Charles [Reverend Charles L. Hutchins, Mary’s husband] when he has leisure to write a short note to John urging upon him the importance of his attending church on the Sabbath Day. He has sadly neglected that job.”<sup>9</sup> There is no word of what his parents thought of John’s home, but when John’s older brother Sam visited in November it was “a real Indian summer” and Sam remarked that John “is exceedingly pleasantly situated,” and that “on a clear day the view is magnificent.” He also says the house is elaborate and will take about three years to finish.<sup>10</sup> The farm consisted of 123 acres and included a red horse barn. The house was very attractive, supposedly somewhat modeled after Willow Hall, the Groom’s Dorchester home, though much smaller. According to an article by Alexius Baas, in the Madison *Capital Times* (9/11/53), John’s house was:

A two-story structure built of solid brick, with a foundation of native stone topped by Vermont granite which probably reached Milwaukee by boat and was then hauled to its destination by oxcart. The downstairs had 11½-foot ceilings and tall, eight paned, green shuttered windows with carved

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<sup>9</sup> See Thomas Groom 1811-1888 Letters (pg 17) Transcribed from the original by Betsy Denny Warner 2000.

<sup>10</sup> See Samuel Burton Groom Letters op.cit. to sister Emily 11/4/69 pg 21

stone caps and solid stone sills. The upper story had square topped dormers and five bedrooms.<sup>11</sup>



*Floral Hill Farm*



*Floral Hill Farm*

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<sup>11</sup> The house may have been completed by the next owners when John ran out of money.



*Floral Hill Farm barn*

In the same article the writer theorized about the owner: “Some notion of his extravagance may be gained from the fact that he and his neighbor to the northeast laid out a half-mile race-track on their adjoining farms. He kept fast horses and fast company generally.”

While building Floral Hill Farm John hired a stonemason named Robert Pirie, who came from Aberdeen, Scotland with his wife, Anna Hart Pirie. They lived for a while in Newburgh on the Hudson, New York, and came to Sun Prairie, Wisconsin after a son drowned in the Hudson River.<sup>12</sup> We know little of these Pirie’s except that Robert was a Civil War veteran and Anna Hart was very pretty, had a lovely singing voice, and was an avid reader.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Information from Pat Groom Reed, The Grooms oldest grandchild who lived in Milwaukee as a child.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Pirie & his son-in-law to be, Christopher Columbus Shockley (who married Robert’s daughter, Margaret Pirie on 5/31/1864), went to the Civil War together. Robert Pirie was wounded at Bull Run.



*Anna Pirie (Groom)*

Robert and Anna had three daughters.<sup>14</sup> Anna Pirie (1847-1939) was their middle daughter. She was an excellent horse woman with chestnut hair, said to be the same color as her horse. John Groom fell in love with her. John, however, was on the verge of bankruptcy and had to sell his beautiful house. It may have been at this point in John's life that he took off for Australia or the West or both. Although the timing of those events is unclear we do know that he was back in Sun Prairie in 1873 when he married Anna Pirie and the young couple moved to Massachusetts. The Thomas Groom family might have been disappointed to have John marry the daughter of a stonemason, but they came to realize that this Scottish woman was not only very thrifty, but an excellent seamstress, and a practical woman who took good care of their impractical son.

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<sup>14</sup> Margaret Pirie Shockley (12/7/1843-6/1/1934), Anna Pirie Groom (12/24/1847-1939), Jessie Pirie Spurr. Jessie was younger than Anna and lived in Milwaukee, married to Henry H Spurr, a 40 year officer in the Home Bros. Grocery Co. on Mason & Jefferson Sts. Later he and his son Robert had a grocery at 3133 N. Oakland.



Sadness continued to haunt the Groom family.<sup>15</sup> Samuel Burton Groom passed away at the young age of thirty-three which left John, now thirty, as the only son and heir left to manage Thomas Groom & Company Stationers. Unfortunately, John did not have the temperament for the family business, or any other steady occupation. He continued to receive financial help from his father. When Thomas I passed away, he left his daughters' inheritance outright to each of them, but he wisely put John's in a trust. Years later members of the family would refer to John in hushed tones as "a remittance man."

To his grandchildren, however, John was sweet tempered, had a twinkle in his eyes, and always seemed to have a delightful little surprise in his pocket or in the drawer of his desk. He also appeared to be a semi-invalid who spent much time on a chaise lounge in the high-ceilinged study at the back of the house. His children and wife called him "father" and treated him with respect. His oldest son, Thomas III, when in his nineties, had tears in his eyes as he recalled that his father had worked as an "ordinary laborer" for the Bradley Lumber Company.

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<sup>15</sup>In 1871, John's brother-in-law, Francis Parkman Denny, died of consumption. He left John's sister, Emily, with five young children. Samuel Burton Groom, died in 1878, also of consumption.

## New England to Milwaukee 1875 – 1893

### Wayland to Milwaukee

John and Anna settled in Wayland, Massachusetts, on what might have been part of the Gleason's farm, where John was given the job of taking care of the horses. While they lived there Anna gave birth to four of their six children; Emily Parker, the subject of this paper (1875-1975), Thomas III (1876-1973), Maud (1878-83), and John Jr. (1879-1957).<sup>16</sup>



*John Groom (rear), l-r Thomas Groom III, Mary Groom, Emily Parker Groom*

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<sup>16</sup> Wayland is not far from the family home in Dorchester. John was born in 1879. The family moved in 1880. He died in Milwaukee. There's no record of his birth.

When Anna and John invited his parents, Thomas I and Emily, for dinner, Anna burnt the roast and burst into tears. Grandfather Groom, ever a kind and loving person, comforted her and told her she would never have to cook again—and as far as we know she did not.

John was not able to settle down permanently in the East. It is not clear if he made an effort to go into the family business, or, for that matter, was even invited to. It has been rumored that at some point, either while the family lived in Wayland, or when they later went back to visit in Dorchester, John took the Keely Cure, the Alcoholics Anonymous of its day.<sup>17</sup> In 1880 the family moved to Milwaukee.<sup>18</sup> This must have been a loss to Emily's grandmother, as she and Emily had become great friends. A letter, dated March 8, 1883, sent by her grandmother to young Emily after she had moved to Milwaukee read:

My Darling Emmie,

I want to write to you very much, but I am so weak I cannot write myself, so I have asked Grandpa to write, and I shall tell him just what to say, so it will be the same as if I wrote myself. If you know how much pleasure your note gave me, which I received about 10 days ago, you would write often. It made me feel very happy, it assured me you had not forgotten your dear Grandma. I shall never forget the happy days, when you used to come over to see me, every day, and come up stairs to my room, and sit by my side and do some sewing, or look at nice picture books, and you were always so quiet and good and we had so many chats together. You see

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<sup>17</sup> As reported by granddaughter Pat Groom Reed.

<sup>18</sup> The Grooms lived on E. Wisconsin Ave in 1880, at 529 Cass St ('81-'83) where Mary (1882-1945) was born, and at 254 Farwell Ave. ('83-'91) where Sam (1889-1963) was born. They moved to 957 Cambridge Ave. (later to become 1903) in 1891. This was E.G.'s home for 82 years.

how much pleasure your little note has given me, that you surely will write again very often, say once a week or every two weeks at least, and then you will keep me feeling more and more happy. I am glad you like your school, tell me all about it in your next letter. When you are a little older, perhaps you will come and make me a visit. How much I should like to come and see you, if I had only strength enough to go so far from home. I have not been outside the room for nearly six months. I think of you all every day, and wish I were able to go and see you. I shall think of you on the 17th-your birthday, 8 years old-I want to send you a Birthday present-what should you like? Grandpa joins me in much love to your Papa, Mamma, Maudie, Tommy, Johnnie and the darling baby, which you all love so much.

Ever your loving & affectionate, Grandma

Even though Emily was only five when the family left New England, she undoubtedly was drawn into this loving family by her grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Her aunt, Mary (Groom) Hutchins took Emily to Appledore Island, in the Isles of Shoals off the coast of New Hampshire.<sup>19</sup> Throughout her life, Emily maintained close ties to her family in the east.

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<sup>19</sup> This was where Celia Thaxter, a nineteenth century poet, artist, and gardener, had her lovely gardens. Childe Hassam visited and painted Thaxter in her garden. Emily later credited her aunt with having inspired her to go into art.

## **Background: Milwaukee – a very German community**

By moving to Milwaukee, the Grooms found themselves in a very different culture. There were three major waves of German emigration to the United States. The upper Midwest, and in particular the port of Milwaukee, were often the destinations.<sup>20</sup> The early route followed by German immigrants to Wisconsin was by steamboat up the Hudson River to Albany, then by canal or railroad to Buffalo, and finally by steam or sailboat to the port of Milwaukee, a trip lasting about ten days.

The journey from New York to Milwaukee was greatly reduced after rail service was made available all the way to Chicago via Detroit during the 1850s. By 1870, as the population in the Midwest doubled, Germans represented one half of the population. In Milwaukee, where there were 1000 Germans in 1840, there were 400,000 by 1910.<sup>21</sup>

A complex mixture of political, social, economic, and religious events in what was, for much of the nineteenth century, a divided Germany, caused this large exodus. These Germans, though not a very adhesive group when they arrived, found a common cultural and ethnic bond as they began life in the United States. There were many thriving German settlements in Wisconsin and in the other states of the upper Midwest, but Milwaukee became an industrialized boom town with a unique way of life—a city that was nicknamed “Little Munich” and “German Athens”.<sup>22</sup>

As these people from Bavaria, Saxony, Prussia, and other German-speaking regions began to assimilate with each other, they developed an ethnic awareness after

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<sup>20</sup> The first immigration wave, 1845-1855, came mainly from Germany’s southwest; the second, 1865-1873, mostly from the northwest; and the third, 1880-1893, was from the northeast, an area dominated by Prussia and included many from Eastern Europe.

<sup>21</sup> See Richard Zeitlin’s 1977 *Germans in Wisconsin* published by the Wisconsin State Historical Society.

<sup>22</sup> *Germans in Wisconsin* op cit. pgs 14 & 24.

coming to America. The following description from Richard Zeitlin's *Germans in Wisconsin* describes the German social life, much of which:

...revolved around their numerous musical and athletic societies, free-thinking organizations, horticultural societies, cultural clubs, socialist groups and religious organizations. A strong German-language press and the informal institution of the beer hall also played key roles in assimilating Germans within their own communities and in making the transition from European to American society easier and pleasanter. Indeed, until 1914, and the dislocations caused by the First World War, one of the most distinctive attributes of the German-American experience was a rich and well-organized social life.

While the sense of community and solidarity fostered by German immigrants may have eased their transition into American life, it may also have slowed it—allowing some to remain wholly immersed in German language and culture. *The Germania*, a Milwaukee-based daily paper, was the largest German newspaper of its kind in America. Settlers contributed funds to build and maintain private German-language schools, and the National German-American Alliance, an organization dedicated to preserving German language and culture, had over two million members. To quote from the documentary *The Germans are Coming*: “The Deutschman had little reason to seek company outside of their own.”

The First World War put an end to this, forcing German Americans to choose sides in the ongoing conflict:

Between 1915 and '17 the National German Alliance sent relief money to Germany and Austria, but by 1917 the Germans who helped found



Milwaukee were gone. The U.S. declared war on Germany. There was a ground swell of ethnicity cloaked in patriotism. The Milwaukee Journal urged the Germans to shed their ‘Germanism’ and eventually the Deutch Club became the Wisconsin Club; German/American Banks changed names; *Germania* became *Milwaukee America*.<sup>23</sup> For most Americans World War I brought a final break with the fatherland. German names became just American names.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Art Scene in Milwaukee**

Although there had always been a few resident and itinerant artists of English-speaking backgrounds in Wisconsin and Milwaukee, the far more important thrust in the art world of Milwaukee came from these German immigrants among whom were many well-trained artists. Foremost among these was Henry Vianden (1814-1899) who arrived in 1844 as an accomplished artist and remained in Milwaukee to teach and encourage the development of many younger, and often German, artists.<sup>25</sup> Some of his students who became successful in the art world were Robert Koehler (1858-1917), Robert Schade (1861-1912), Frank Enders (1860-1921), and the very successful Carl von Marr (1858-1936) who traveled to Germany to study and teach for a number of years. The early schools of art, galleries, and professional societies were in large part due to the work of these men and women of German background.

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<sup>23</sup> According to the Milwaukee Public Library *Germania* became *Germania Herald* 1913-18 and later the *Milwaukee Herald*.

<sup>24</sup> From the Wisconsin Public Television video “The Germans are Coming.”

<sup>25</sup> It is interesting that both Viandan and Emily Groom liked to paint en plein air along the Wisconsin River, both had a cottage/studio in the country, and both loved gardening. They are both buried in the Forest Home cemetery.

A group of talented immigrant German artists came to the city in 1880 to work on very large, mural-like, paintings called panoramas. The interest in this type of painting was short-lived, but many of these fine artists remained in the area to work and live. George Peter (1859-1950) became the staff artist for the Milwaukee Public Museum in 1923 and Richard Lorenz (1853-1915) was probably the most influential teacher since Vianden. Some of Lorenz's students were Alexander Mueller (1875-1935), George Rabb (1866-1943), and Gustave Moeller (1881-1931). Mueller founded the Wisconsin School of Art that eventually was incorporated into the Milwaukee Normal and, later, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He was also Chair of the Art Department at Milwaukee Normal School. Raab was a teacher at Mueller's school and later (1902-1922) the curator of the Layton Gallery where Moeller succeeded him. Emily eventually exhibited her work at the Milwaukee Art Institute (MAI) with all three of these men, Mueller, Rabb, and Moeller, between 1918 and 1925.

### **The Grooms settle in Milwaukee 1880**

This was the Milwaukee that in 1880 became home to Emily Groom, and although the Groom family had friends, they were far from being involved in the social life of Milwaukee. Emily's heart never entirely left New England. She was proud of her connections there and she made many trips to New England during her lifetime to see her relatives and to paint. However, she must have become aware over the years, of a sometime feeling of smugness on the part of "Easterners" toward "Westerners," (as anyone west of New England was known). Allusions to this sentiment appear in Thomas Groom's obituary in a Boston paper in 1888. After a long description of his business acumen, his kindness and philanthropy, and his character "a perfect representation of the

English Gentleman”, the article names his survivors: “Mr. Groom leaves two daughters and one son. One of the daughters is the widow of F.P. Denny of Brookline, and the other the wife of Rev. C.L. Hutchins of Medford. The son is a resident of a Western city.”



*Margaret Pirie (Schockley)*

Moving back to Wisconsin also meant that Anna Pirie, Emily’s mother, would again be near her older sister, Margaret (12/7/1843-6/1/1934) who had married Christopher Columbus (C.C.) Shockley in 1864 and lived in Boscobel, Wisconsin. Anna Pirie and her sister were close, and Boscobel, on the Wisconsin River, became a wonderful area for Emily to explore and paint. The Grooms often went there to be with Margaret Pirie’s family and Emily did many of her paintings in the area.

The first home the Grooms had in Milwaukee was on 217 E. Wisconsin Avenue and this was a very temporary one. Within a year, in 1881, they moved to 529 Cass Street

where they stayed until 1883, moving next to 254 Farwell Avenue.<sup>26</sup> One day John Groom was out walking and he ran into a man on Cambridge Avenue who wanted to sell his home. The home was built in 1876 and was one of two identical tall cream-brick Victorian houses, with a curved front stairway, fourteen-foot ceilings, and parquet floors.<sup>27</sup> The gentleman told John that he had built the homes so he and his wife would be next door to their daughter. The daughter and her husband had subsequently moved to California and the heartbroken parents no longer wanted to live there. John and Anna bought the house at 957 North Cambridge Avenue in 1891<sup>28</sup>. Emily Groom grew up in the cream brick house and made it her home for the next eighty-three years.



*1903 North Cambridge Avenue, awning on the right*

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<sup>26</sup> Mary Pirie was born 1882, when the family lived on Cass Street. It was also here that Anna took care of her brother, Frederick, who worked for the St. Paul railroad. He had an accident which required his leg to be amputated. The leg became infected and he died while living with his sister. Samuel Burton was born in 1889 when the family lived at Farwell Avenue.

<sup>27</sup> According to Barbara Nestingen, (a later owner), George and Louise Knowles were probably the builders.

<sup>28</sup> The address later became 1903 North Cambridge Avenue



*1903 North Cambridge Avenue*

Life for the Grooms on Cambridge Avenue mirrored the life at Willow Hall in Dorchester, though it was not as elaborate. The Grooms lived formally; meals were served in the dining room, certain decorum was observed, parents were addressed as “Father” and “Mother,” and the children were raised to be respectful to adults and to each other. The grounds included a relatively small back yard and the staff of servants was comprised of a single cook.

One of the first things Anna did in the new home was to have rings installed on the high ceiling of the long upstairs hall. As she was quite short she used these to stretch herself, but the children used them to travel up and down the hall.

Along with being practical, Anna was a careful and thrifty mistress of the home. She could sew anything from braided rugs to hats. She set up a sewing room upstairs and

kept her children and grandchildren (including their dolls), in beautifully sewn, if not always stylish, clothes. The smocking on the girls' dresses was exquisite, but the granddaughters did not appreciate the matching bloomers. Anna did not show much affection toward her grandchildren, none of them remember being kissed or hugged by her. With a melodious contralto voice, Anna was always keen to hear her grandchildren sing—for better or worse.

## **A Young Emily**

Emily, the oldest of the children, was a high-spirited child. In a letter written (6/9/1885) by her cousin, Mary Groom Denny, who was visiting her Milwaukee relatives on Farwell Avenue, nineteen-year-old Mary speaks disapprovingly of ten-year-old Emily:

Emily took the car [street car] and went over to see her Aunt Jessie. She did not come home and her mother got anxious about her so after tea went over for her. She found her there expecting some one to come for her.

Alice & I were left with the children & I put them to bed. Such good little things why they were all in bed in half the time they usually are. I enjoyed it so much that I told Aunt Anna I wished that she would go out oftener.<sup>29</sup>

Emily recalled that the children in the family were usually chastised in notes left in their bedrooms, perhaps stuck on a mirror, and that the misdemeanors were not mentioned in conversation and the admonitions were often delivered by proxy. This had also been true of the Dorchester home. Just as Thomas Groom I had asked his son-in-law, the Reverend Charles Hutchins “to write a short letter to Johnny” to remind him of his

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<sup>29</sup> From The Denny Family at Walnut Hill pg. 35 Letters & Diaries transcribed by Nancy Denny Solodar 1999.



church duties, so John himself, when confronted with a rebellious sixteen-year-old Emily, asked his seventy-eight year old Uncle John (in England) to write a letter to her:

110 Heath St. Hampstead, London N.W.                      Sept. 22, 1890

My Very Dear Emily,

It was a happy thought of your dear father, that my next letter should be addressed to you, which I have the greatest pleasure in doing. Though separated by the great Atlantic, we are yet very near to each other in loving affection. If it were only a narrow stream that divided us I would give you such a hearty shake of the hand, but as the big ocean won't allow of this, we must be satisfied to throw kisses across to each other, and as there is no carriage or footage to pay, we need not spare them. I am so glad your dear father has written; his recent letter has quite cheered me, for it tells me what a loving, united, happy family you are at No.254. He has given me a peep into your home, and there I see "A fruitful Vine" in the center, and five lively "Olive plants round about the table." (Psm 128.3). I am delighted to learn that the tallest of these plants, now 16 years old, is a most useful part of the structure, a "corner stone," and not only most sensible, but highly ornamental, "polished after the similitudes of a palace" (Psm 144.12). I also gather that while your darling Mother is preeminently THE Vine, you are the young Vine, the little Mother, or sub-matron. But we must not leave your beloved father out in the cold. He is the most important personage, for he is the 'House-band', or husband, binding you all together in one united family. He has a hard battle to fight for his beloved ones at home; so he needs all the love and attention you

can bestow upon him. No doubt now and then you prepare some little surprise for him, in the way of a present, or some delicacy, nice fruit or pretty flowers. Perhaps you have not yet been elected President of the Woman's Temperance No.7 but I suppose you are in some way connected with the movement, one in which I am greatly interested. I am only sorry that, thro' increased weakness, I cannot do more for this very other good work. Pray forgive me, dear little mother, for troubling you with this long letter. With warmest love to dear Father & Mother, & all the "Olive Plants."

Fm yr Much affectionate Uncle, John Groom (1812-1895)



*A young Emily*

It is only to be imagined how Emily reacted to this letter from her great uncle in England! Emily never did marry, and chose to devote herself to her art—not to a husband and children.

As a child Emily attended a pioneer kindergarten at Miss Ogden’s School on Albion Street in the basement of the Unitarian Church, where, it is likely, art was part of the activities. She was also able to take Saturday morning art lessons at the home of Miss Alida Goodwin, who taught drawing at South Division High School as well as at the All Saints Cathedral Institute from which Emily graduated. Emily recalled early art lessons in an interview with the Milwaukee Journal when she said: “we kept shoeboxes of crude supplies on our laps, sharpened our charcoal with sandpaper, and, after each lesson, cleaned up the charcoal-dusted floor.” At the Cathedral Institute there were few, if any, students of German origin and, as Emily’s art education continued, her training as an artist took a somewhat different course from that of most of the German-speaking artists in the area.



*Early pencil sketch of brother Sam Groom*



*Thomas Groom III at 19*



*Thomas and Emily Groom*

In 1893 Emily's brother, seventeen-year-old Thomas III, left Milwaukee to go to Boston where he was needed in the family business, Thomas Groom & Company-Manufacturing Stationers.<sup>30</sup> To do this Tom gave up any thought of college and some of the fun of his early adult life. Emily and Thomas were very devoted to and supportive of each other. She appreciated the sacrifices he had made to take over the family business and he always encouraged and respected her choice to pursue a career. She worked hard at becoming a competent artist and later at using her talent and energy to both paint and sell her art. She taught at the same time in order to augment her own and her family's income.

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<sup>30</sup> Both Thomas Groom I and his wife, Emily, died in 1888 and their daughter Mary's husband, Charles L. Hutchins, an Episcopalian Minister, became Trustee of the firm, with Mr. George Hobson in charge until Thomas III came into the business.

# Emily the Artist

## Formal Training

Emily enrolled at the School of the Chicago Art Institute in 1895. Her choice of the CAI school was natural not only because, at the time, it was very accepting of women students, but it was also relatively close to home. The records of this period in Emily's life are a little sketchy. Emily herself indicated, and the record shows, that she attended the CAI between 1895 and 1899.<sup>31</sup> In an article in the *Milwaukee Journal* Emily is quoted as saying that the first two years at the CAI "were a sort of nightmare. You sat in front of the cast (of a work of art) and you had to copy it so perfectly that people didn't know the difference between your drawing and the cast." This statement might have been a bit exaggerated as her actual transcript indicates that only some of her first year classes were Elementary (still life) and she moved out of that category in a few months to "A" ("Advanced" or "Antiques").<sup>32</sup>

An archivist reported that in 1897-1898 Emily was one of the very few students taking a double curriculum: 'Life Class' under John Vanderpoel, Frederick Freer, Pauline Dohn, Frank Duveneck, William Merrit Chase and Caroline Wade, as well as the 'Normal Class' courses, which were geared toward future careers as art instructors. Teachers there were Jeanette Buckley (director), Alice Fitch, Mary Scovel, Anna-Lee Stacey and others." She received an "Honorable Mention" a number of times.

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<sup>31</sup> Information comes from a transcript from the School of the Chicago Art Institute

<sup>32</sup> Her second and third year classes were labeled either "A" or "L" (Life) and all were labeled "L" the last year.

The following description from one of the researchers there is helpful in understanding the path towards admission into the school, and the hierarchy of the coursework:

To get admitted to the School of the Art Institute it was necessary to submit a sample of your work, some kind of portfolio, and only the most promising students were accepted. However, once admitted, students followed a study path entirely based on their abilities and artistic progress. It took some students three years or so to advance from an Elementary course (i.e. still life) to the Advanced level (i.e. Antiques), and then again some more to reach the highest level of instruction, (Life Class). Other students moved through these levels very quickly (as did Emily, but she stayed on). Some students remained in the Life Class for 3 or more years, fine-tuning their talents and skills before trying to make it in the competitive world as an artist. Diplomas from fine arts schools, highly reputed as they were, were not the same as degrees from accredited universities and colleges. Additional courses have now been added to the core curriculum to provide students with transferable degrees and credits.<sup>33</sup>

John Vanderpoel, one of Emily's instructors when she was a third and fourth-year student, was a well-known art teacher, particularly adept at drawing the human figure, and he wrote a book on the subject. Like most of his students, Emily appreciated his instruction. He had a hunchback, and Georgia O'Keefe, who also studied with him at the

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<sup>33</sup> Kelly Fitzgerald, Bart Ryckbosch and Barbara Toczydlowska, researchers at the AIC, were all helpful.

Institute, described him as a “kind and generous little man—one of the few real teachers I have known.”

After graduating from the CAI on June 16, 1899, Emily spent a year at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts School where she studied under Edmund Tarbell and Frank Benson, both well-known artists and teachers. Another teacher in Boston was Philip Hale. He was married to Lillian Wescott Hale, a fine artist in her own right, who exhibited a number of times with Emily.

It was while Emily was studying in Boston that she became attracted to watercolor, the medium that she eventually used to produce most of her paintings, and with which she was most identified. She spent hours contemplating the Winslow Homer and John S. Sargent watercolors at the Boston Museum and later was attracted to the watercolors of John Marin. She grew to prefer this medium to oil “because there is such a large element of chance in the watercolor medium. You can work at oils to get just exactly the result you intend, but you can’t rework watercolors.” She did, however, produce some fine work in oil and other mediums.

## **Teaching and Exhibiting**

In 1901 Emily spent the summer in Sun Prairie painting. She began an oil portrait of her father that ended up in her attic as she was never satisfied with it. When the leaves began to turn, Emily began teaching for the first time. Her sister, Mary, had just attended Milwaukee Downer College and it was likely through this association that Emily was first spotted as a possible teacher for the college.<sup>34</sup> The new and capable President of

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<sup>34</sup> Founded in 1895 and moved to the north side of Milwaukee in 1899. The college was originally chartered in 1855 as the Wisconsin Female College, organized by the Wisconsin Baptist Educational Society. It became incorporated and non-sectarian in 1862. For a while it was called the Fox Lake College

Downer College, Miss Ellen Sabin (1895-1921), asked Emily to join the faculty as an art teacher. Her first assignment was to teach dress design, a branch of art she had not studied. Miss Sabin offered her some advice; “If the figure is rotund, vertical stripes: if slim, a horizontal pattern...” whereupon Emily accepted the job and applied herself to the task. Shortly after this, she was asked to take on a class of teachers as art instruction was to be introduced to the public schools. Emily quickly proved herself. In 1902 Emily was asked to set up an art department at the college and she remained there until 1917, when she stopped teaching to concentrate on painting. She resumed teaching in 1935.

While busy with her new career as a teacher she entered her first major exhibit, showing *A Portrait of Mrs. Rollin B. Mallory* at the Tenth Annual Exhibition of the Art



*Mrs. Rollin B. Mallory oil*

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(or Academy). In 1884, after a bequest of Jude Jason Downer, the name was changed, in 1886, to Downer College. In 1895 a merger with Milwaukee College created Milwaukee-Downer College and its first President was Ellen C. Sabin.



Students League of Chicago at the CAI in 1904. The portrait received this review, along with a photograph, in the League's bulletin (pg 186 & 190):

Emily Groom's portrait of Mrs. Rollin B. Mallory, of Milwaukee, is most excellent as a likeness as well as a picture. Miss Groom teaches at Downer College, Milwaukee, and those students who come to the Institute are more than usually well prepared to enter its classes.



*Emily painting plein air*

In 1906 she spent some time painting plein air along the Kickapoo River in Wisconsin, and she continued to enjoy painting outdoors whenever possible for years to

come.<sup>35</sup> She had this to say about painting in the winter, “You can work outside when it is ten above zero. How? Mittens—a hole in the palm for the brush does the trick.”

## Travels Abroad

In 1907-1908 Emily and her good friend from Milwaukee Mary (Chin) Dexter spent most of a year in England, Scotland, and on the Continent. This experience was one of the most pleasurable and broadening of her life. Her grandfather’s nephews (sons of Mary Groom Middlemore), John Throgmorton Middlemore (1844-1924) in Birmingham, and John’s brother Thomas Middlemore (1842-1923) in Scotland, hosted Emily and Mary during much of their visit.

It was on this visit that Emily met her second cousin, Sarah (Sally) Dorothea Middlemore, who was also an aspiring artist. Sally was the second of Sir John Throgmorton’s eight daughters and one son (who inherited his father’s title). These two cousins bonded immediately and, along with Chin, who was more of an art historian than an artist, they all enjoyed their time together with unusual exuberance.

In the fall of 1907 Grace Young, another friend from Milwaukee, joined the trio, and they took lodgings in London for the winter. Chin wrote, and Emily illustrated, the charming *Diary of the London Lodgers*, a testimony to the high spirits of the four women. In this diary Chin announces the *Dramatis Personae*:

Miss Young, American Spinster, traveling abroad ostensibly in search of health but, in the opinions of those best calculated to know, for pleasure and a special course in economics [she handled the group’s expenses and dealings with the landlady]. Miss Groom, American Artist, Spinster, at

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<sup>35</sup> Plein air is a French expression which translates to “open air.” It is used to describe the act of painting in an outdoor setting.

work in the Stratford Studios where by diligence she hopes to perfect herself to such a degree that she may astonish and delight her friends and wondering pupils at home. The Household realizes that a budding genius dwells among them...., Miss Middlemore, English Artist, Spinster, and cousin to Miss Groom. It is to her perseverance and unerring judgment that the Household happens to be located in their present lodging, she having visited nineteen recommended apartments before locating the one and only. Although the youngest of the quartette her knowledge of life and customs have caused her to be looked up to and consulted upon all subjects from A to Z....Encyclopedia Britanica (sic) was the only name by which the others could express appreciation of her universal knowledge and Britanica she will be to the end of this chapter<sup>36</sup> ....., Miss Dexter, American Spinster, Appreciator of Ancient Art, who knows the name of every artist who has ever lived and all he did. Her burning zeal for further knowledge causes her to haunt libraries & Museums daily and when her vacant seat is noticed at luncheon it is realized that she is adding to the already wonderful store of knowledge in a manner that will reflect glory upon the Household.

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<sup>36</sup> Sally (Dorothea) was the youngest of the four and sometimes referred to by Mary as “the child.”



*Diary of the London Lodgers*

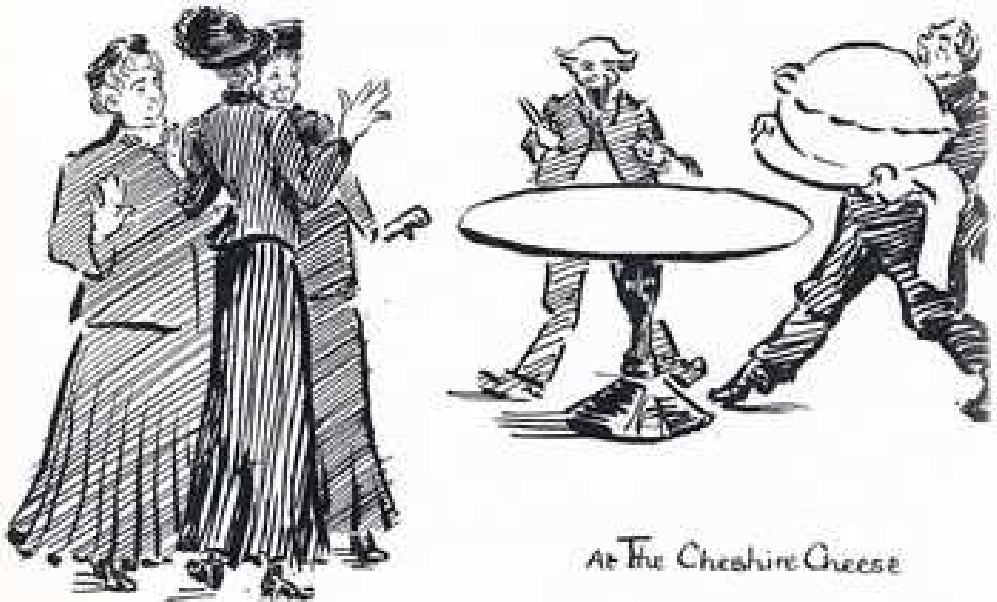


*'Ow are yer gittin on, Lidies ?*

*"Ow are yer gittin on, Lidies?"*



Misses  
Young,  
Dexter as  
Groom, as  
helped out  
of a hans-  
some as



At The Cheshire Cheese

*Top: Misses Young, Dexter and Groom are helped out of a handsome cab*

*Bottom: At the Cheshire Cheese*

The “Household” was a busy one. Emily wrote in a postcard (10/10/07) to her brother Tom in Boston:

We are having a splendid time—Dorothea, Mary D., Grace Young and I in Lodgings together in London! Today some of us went to Canterbury. We are seeing outside things now while the weather is good. Go into a studio soon.

Emily wrote in another postcard (12/3/07) to her mother that she would be going to Forelands (Sally’s home in England) for the Christmas holidays and that she would be taking part in a Christmas play there with the Middlemores. Chin and Grace Young went to Germany for the holiday.



*Rehearsal for the play Pickadilly*



*Emily Groom*



*Sally Middlemore*

Emily and Sally spent the winter months studying with Frank Brangwyn (1867-1956) at his studio. Brangwyn was a well-known and versatile painter, etcher, colorist and teacher who at age fifteen worked for William Morris, preparing designs for aspects of Morris' Arts & Crafts output. At age seventeen he had a painting accepted by the Royal Academy. Brangwyn was well known for his British historical paintings, especially of the sea. His interests also included Orientalism, Impressionism, book illustrations, and murals. He had a particular fascination for bridges and windmills and did the illustrations for two books on bridges.<sup>37</sup> When the London art publication *The Studio* started a series of "Famous Water-Color Painters", Brangwyn was the first in the series. In 1926 *The Studio* published *The Etchings of Frank Brangwyn* with reproductions of over 330 of his

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<sup>37</sup> From *Prints & Drawings by FRANK BRANGWYN with some other Phases of his Art* by Walter Shaw Sparrow - London: John Lane, The Bodley Head New York: John Lane Co. MCMXIX

etchings. Sally undoubtedly took instructions in etching, but it is not known just what aspect of art Emily pursued in the Brangwyn studio; it might well have been watercolor.

The four women enjoyed their sojourn in London and became very close friends in the process. Emily was then thirty-two, had studied at the Chicago Art Institute and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts School, and had done some teaching. Sally was twenty-four, had graduated from the Slade School of Fine Art, in London, and wanted to become an artist. She indeed became an accomplished etcher. Chin appreciated art and had a talent for writing. She became the scribe for the group, and we have her to thank for the records of this period. Emily herself seldom took pen to paper, except to sketch.

On April 20, 1908, Emily wrote to her father that she and Chin left London for Dover where they boarded the “toy boat for Calais at 1:00 o’clock. A very rough crossing—enough said.” In Paris, they walked to La Madeleine and the Garden of the Tuileries, got lost, and took a cab back to the hotel. The next day she sent a post card to her brother John: “We need a man here in Gay Paris. When we get home we (Chin & I) will tell you where we lunched today by mistake. Ooh! The Channel, and it’s between me and home!”<sup>38</sup> After seeing the sights in Paris, including the Salon, which Emily deemed “poor”, they went to Lausanne which Emily wrote was “simply ideal” and then to Milan where they met Emily’s uncle by marriage, Reverend Charles Hutchins who, Emily noted on a post card, was “very pleasant and polite.” They also crossed paths with Chin’s parents and other members of the Dexter family in Florence, where Mr. and Mrs. Dexter were celebrating a wedding anniversary. Emily wrote on a post card: “It is simply heavenly; looking out over Florence (from Fiesole) and the beautiful hills beyond. Mary & I have our sketching books with us, but it is too beautiful to spoil.” They went on to

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<sup>38</sup> Emily’s father derided her qualities as a sailor! He himself loved to sail.



Siena and Venice—missing Rome because of “heat, fleas and expenses”—but Chin wrote two nice essays about Italy, which Emily illustrated.<sup>39</sup> They left for England and the Franco-British Exhibition in London (which did not impress them) via Lake Como, Switzerland (“the best yet”), the Rhone Glacier (“more exciting than the Kickapoo trip!”), and Paris where Bastille Day celebrations commenced two days prior with “dancing in the streets, music, flags, banners, such gaiety I never saw.”

On July 13 she sent a card to her nineteen-year-old brother, Sam, who was not close to their New England cousins like Emily and Tom were: “I’m delighted with you—tell me how much you love Sunapee, Boston, & Everybody! When will you be home?” Emily’s brother, Sam, had indeed gone “East” and was visiting their cousin Emily Groom Denny in Sunapee, New Hampshire.<sup>40</sup> Emily Denny wrote a letter to her brother, Frank Denny, in Brookline, MA, in which she reported on how young Sam was doing:

....You are beginning to wonder whether I am going to mention Sam. We nearly used him up I think yesterday on his first cross-country walk in the heat, though he kept up a brave front. He is not used to hills. He and Tom have the rooms at Mrs. Williams’. He is quiet and more like Mary than Emily or John. We are rather an old and sedate party for him, but still he is fitting in very well, and will probably enjoy his second week much more than his first when he feels better acquainted. He had a pretty strenuous week before he arrived, and was always the first of the five men to go to sleep when I read aloud after dinner! He enjoys the bathing and is a good

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<sup>39</sup> Emily illustrated three travel diaries written by Mary Lois Dexter: An Italian Hilltop (San Gimignano Italy); St Anthony’s Day in Padua ; and Hoy, An Orcadian Isle, all vividly describing their travels.

<sup>40</sup> Really New London, N.H. The summer people bathed in Little Lake Sunapee, and there was a Big Lake Sunapee as well as a nearby Mount Sunapee, so the area was referred to as “Sunapee.” The extended family and other friends stayed at a lovely farm cum boarding house (Messers) especially in July. Later Emily Denny built her own house on Davis Hill and the Sam Groom family spent the month of August as her guests—swimming, boating, hiking and picking blueberries

paddler. We have an extra canoe this week. Tom is enjoying very much having him here, and I am sure it is good for him. <sup>41</sup>

During the rest of the summer of 1908 the two cousins and Chin Dexter traveled to Scotland, and spent about five weeks visiting Thomas and Theo Middlemore at Melsetter House, their home on the island of Hoy which lies at the southern end of the Orkney Islands in the North Sea, off the coast of Scotland.<sup>42</sup> The Melsetter estate consisted of the main island of Hoy and its southern section called Walls which is attached to Hoy by a narrow strip of land at the end of Longhope Harbor—a harbor that extends inland some five or six miles from Scapa Flow, thus almost cutting Hoy in two. Included in the estate were two much smaller islands, one of which was uninhabited. <sup>43</sup>



*Melsetter House, Hoy wc*

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<sup>41</sup> Life in Sunapee for the Denny family and others was full of physical activity, hiking, bathing, & boating.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Middlemore (1842-1923). In 1881 he married Theodosia Anderson MacKay b.1861. In 1898 they bought the Melsetter Estate. Thomas had maintained a residence at Rousay in Northern Orkney until 1898.

<sup>43</sup> Melsetter House is located on the southern tip of Longhope harbor, facing Pentland Firth, the open channel connecting the North Sea and the North Atlantic and separating Orkney from the mainland of Scotland. From *Some Account of the Family Middlemore* pgs. 232-3.



*Hoy-Orkney Islands*

During the Second World War the estate was taken over by British Naval Personnel, (including at times, Winston Churchill) and Melsetter House served as headquarters for the battle of the North Sea. The protected harbors of the Orkney Islands provided safe havens for the navel ships. At that time one room of Melsetter House was named “the Map Room.”

Sir Thomas Middlemore, owner of Melsetter House, was known as the “Laird”, and the fishermen/farmers who lived on the land were “Orcadians”. They lived in small cottages called “crofts”, which were scattered over the estate, so that some had to get to Melsetter by boat.



*Sir Thomas Middlemore*



*Crofts on Hoy wc*



*The travelers being greeted by Thomas Middlemore at Hoy .*

Travel arrangements to Hoy were quite complicated. The two young Americans managed to arrive late and realized their thoughtlessness when Theo later explained to them; “what a lot of machinery would be put out of gear if the appointments were made light of, if, for instance, guests didn’t arrive on Melsetter when expected.” Regardless, they had an unforgettable experience visiting this remote island which one could only reach after an often choppy boat ride from Thurso, on the Scottish mainland, to Stromness, in the Orkney Islands, and from there to the small island of Hoy. Again, it was Chin who wrote about their visit on the island. It is worth quoting a little of Chin’s description of its stark beauty that can be discerned in Emily’s paintings, some of which were done years later from sketches:

The first glimpse of the Island, in leaving Scotland, is of weather-beaten, red sandstone cliffs rising abruptly out of the sea, whose foam encircles it like a white, leaping flame. Back from the cliffs rolls the land in a

succession of treeless, round-topped hills. The Island shimmers like mother of pearl through the filmy mist, purple, lavender and gray. Guarding this Island on the north from fierce Atlantic waves is a great, isolated rock called the 'Old Man of Hoy': black and solemn it looms through clouds and storms, or in the infrequent sunshine, faintly red.<sup>44</sup>



*Cliffs at Rackwick, Hoy wc*

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<sup>44</sup> From *Hoy, An Orcadian Isle* by Mary Lois Dexter Illustrated by Emily Parker Groom



*Meekly Led by Maid*

Chin goes on to describe life in this seventeenth century house, with its formal living, attended by maids who emptied their trunks and laid out the proper clothes for dinner—a totally different way of life for the two Americans.

Later, after the travelers had returned home, Sally’s letters to Emily and Chin (from Paris, where she was studying) were wonderfully chatty and full of news of her own and her family’s doings. She enthusiastically shared her feelings about the current art world, a subject that was fascinating to all of them. She also expressed her fondness for her cousin: “I admire your push and go, Emily”, and her hope that they could be together again soon.



For Emily, the experience on Hoy made a lasting impression. She had a marvelous time and experienced quite a different way of life with her affluent and sophisticated English cousins. Sally's father, Sir John Throgmorton Middlemore (who had studied medicine in the U.S.), was a member of Parliament. He was knighted in 1919 for his charitable work.<sup>45</sup> He also had an impressive art collection. Sally's uncle, Thomas Middlemore and his wife, Theo, had no children, and they lived a very privileged life, spent partly in London and in Italy when they were not at Hoy. In a letter written later, Theo reminded Emily that she should not be too impressed by appearances, but it would have been hard not to be. Emily's family in Milwaukee was not active politically and had few pretensions of interest in things intellectual or in the arts. In her later years Emily remarked that her parents were "very ordinary people". She remained deeply affected by her trip to Hoy.



*Water and Gulls, Hoy* wc

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<sup>45</sup> Leaping Over Oblivion by Rosemary Hughes Smith 1993





*Orkney Harbor wc*



*Kirkwall Harbor, Orkneys wc*

## The Wider Art World -1890's to WWI

To understand Emily's early career, it is important to explore the historical and artistic context of the turn of the twentieth century. Though Emily's work is not situated within the avant-garde, she was stimulated and influenced by many of the period's artists. In the years prior to World War I, art in the United States had been strictly controlled by the Academy, which made it difficult for artists who did not stay within its formal boundaries to exhibit their work in popular venues. Several art schools such as the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Chicago Art Institute, and the New York Academy of Design, loosely comprised the Academy. Exhibited paintings were juried by members of the Academy, and members themselves had first chance at hanging their own paintings in the limited space available. It was in these years that the world of art was changing, particularly in Europe, and in America there were some early rumblings.

In 1897 a group of established artists (most of whom were born in the 1850s or earlier) seceded from the Society of American Artists. They felt that too many paintings which varied too widely in quality were shown. "The Ten", as they became known, were Frank Benson\*, Joseph de Camp\*, Thomas Dewing, Childe Hassam\*, J.Alden Weir\*, Willard Metcalf\*, Robert Reid, Edward Simmons, Edmund Tarbell\*, and John Twachtman.<sup>46</sup> Their first show was held in 1898 at the Durand Ruell Gallery in New York. They are all listed among the Impressionists and they remained popular for years to come.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Emily showed with the artists who are starred.

<sup>47</sup> See Amy Fin Collins' *American Impressionism*

In 1908, the Macbeth Gallery in New York put on the first show of “The Eight” (five of whom were later a part of “The Ashcan School”). The paintings of The Eight (Robert Henri\*, George Luks\*, John Sloan\*, William Glackens\*, Arthur B. Davies\*, Everett Shinn, Maurice Prendergast,\* and Earnest Lawson\*) were not revolutionary in technique, but in content.<sup>48</sup> They were a group of “urban realists” who depicted the poverty and the raw edges of life, rather than the genteel living rooms and pretty landscapes which had been the stock in trade of the Academy.

A group of twenty-five American artists that included some of The Ten and The Ashcan Painters, got together to form the American Association of Painters and Sculptors. Their intention was to awaken the American art world with a huge exhibition of contemporary European art. This resulted in the Armory Show of 1913, which proved to be a watershed for American art.<sup>49</sup>

The planning of this massive show, designed to exhibit the best examples procurable of contemporary art without relation to school, size, medium, or nationality, took place in large part on a commuting run between New York and Greenwich, Connecticut.

In a very short time a small group of people sailed to Europe and corralled a large number of paintings by artists whose names would come to define Western art in the twentieth century. Upon returning, they collected a fairly representative sample of the work of American artists and procured the 69th Regiment Armory in New York City, which was large enough to hang 1,600 paintings.

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<sup>48</sup> Emily showed with the artists who are starred.

<sup>49</sup> This international art fair is still taking place in New York.

According to Alexander Eliot, the contrast between the European and American art at the Armory Show of 1913 was quite evident:

What the academicians and their supporters failed to realize was the fact that the Salon no longer mattered in School of Paris painting. The art of Europe was undergoing a deep and far-reaching revolution, and from that revolution were to come the reinforcements for an assault on the entrenched positions of the academicians in America.

Parading along the burlap covered walls were canvases by Cézanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Picasso, Braque, Matisse, Derain, Rouault, Bonnard, Duchamp, Dufy, Leger—the entire School of Paris in all its fantastic array. There was also a sampling of American art looking wan and wistful by comparison.<sup>50</sup>

The Armory Show was well advertised, so that few were unaware of its existence. Fewer still left the exhibit without some idea of what they thought about Duchamps' *Nude Descending a Staircase*. For better or worse, American artists and American art would never be the same.

## **Woodstock**

In August of 1912 Emily had the opportunity to study in Woodstock, New York, at the Summer School of the Art Student's League of New York. This period was once again well documented in the form of letters by Chin Dexter, who was her companion during her stay. They were to attend the last two months of the summer school, which had been in session since June first. Chin arrived there a few days ahead of Emily and

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<sup>50</sup> See Alexander Eliot's 1957 *Three Hundred Years of American Painting*.

managed to find Mr. Herrick who ran one of many boarding houses in the area. He directed her to Mrs. Hanson who had an available room, “clean as wax.” The two friends settled in for the school session, receiving criticism of their art from Mr. Goltz and John Carlson, and later, Charles Cochran. Birge Harrison, still the nominal head of the Summer School and the most popular teacher, did not appear until sometime later.



*Woodstock c.1912-1913 oil*

The Woodstock Summer School of the Art Student’s League of New York was noted for its teaching of landscape painting and characterized by romantic realism. In all types of weather the students set up their easels in fields, in woods, by streams, and on roads, where few automobiles were seen. They attempted to capture what they could directly from nature. John Carlson’s book on landscape painting, published in the 1920s, speaks lucidly about the keen observation and technical skills needed to transcribe nature onto

paper or canvas. The initial painting was usually a *pochade*, a small work done on location in one session which might later be expanded in the studio.<sup>51</sup>

During the summer session paintings could be submitted twice a week for a casual critique. There was also a more formal critique to which paintings could be brought on Saturday mornings and hung on the wall. Approximately two hundred students studied at the school during the summer, and it took commitment and patience on the part of the teachers to manage a few constructive words for each submitted work. There did not seem to be any division of the students by ability or prior training, but the instructors managed to individualize the large group. Teachers encouraged and gently directed those who needed it, while offering stronger words of criticism to the more seasoned students.

Emily was no beginner by this time. She came to Woodstock primarily for the help Birge Harrison might give her:

Among the teachers, Birge Harrison was certainly the closest to his students, yet few are left who knew him. He was a thin man wearing old-fashioned spectacles; never conspicuous other than that he usually wore a watermelon pink necktie with his tweeds. When talking with him one saw his kindly smile and the twinkle in his eyes, and soon become aware of a man of varied experiences and tolerance. Of late (i.e. 1959) he has been associated with a moribund form of painting, yet he always told his pupils that if their art remained in a rut it would die; that the true artist must be an innovator, and he encouraged them to be themselves and never to copy him. He had studied with Sargent in the atelier of Carolus Duran in Paris

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<sup>51</sup> Pochade (po-shad) French- a small sketch or study, esp. in oil, done out of doors in preparation for a finished painting. The Random House Dictionary of the English Language – Unabridged

and had made a name for himself before coming to Byrdcliffe.<sup>52</sup> Three summers later he organized the Art Students League Summer School in Woodstock Village, which under his direction became nationally prominent.<sup>53</sup>

According to Emily, Birge once told her that until he saw a sunrise of hers, he would have no faith in her. To which she later responded; “I prefer to get my impressions of warm sunlight at the other end of the day. I revel in sunsets and let it go at that. Sunrises are too early. Uncle Birge thought that one ought to be familiar with every single mood of nature, that and artist ought to watch the landscape 24 hours a day.”<sup>54</sup>

During the summer at Woodstock, Emily reunited with Marion Bullard who was also living in the village. Marion had arrived in Woodstock several years before as a widow, and in addition to her painting, she had become an active part of the local social scene. Chin and Emily saw a good deal of her while there and she must have made their lives more pleasant by introducing them to interesting people.

Emily and Chin decided to stay in Woodstock for the winter. In a letter to her family Chin described how they found a studio—a necessity if they were going to continue to paint during the cold weather:

September 14, 1912 –We have a studio! They are in such demand that we were almost in despair over the matter, and our rooms are so small that it is hard to see what we are doing. You see we must have a winter house and a warmer one. While Emily and I were working on the ‘state road’ we

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<sup>52</sup> An artist colony (still functioning today) founded in 1902-03 in Woodstock, New York.

<sup>53</sup> *Woodstock History and Hearsay* Saugerties, New York. Catskill Mountain Publishing 1959.

<sup>54</sup> *Milwaukee Journal* (12/5/24 and 1/4/25)

saw an empty house with ox horns on the sign and ‘Sauer Wolvern Meat Market’ over the door. We jumped at the same moment for a house and soon found the owner. Mr. Brouwer said they were going to fix it up as a studio next spring; the butcher had failed. We said: ‘why not now?’ So there it was all settled. They are going to put in a large north window, put everything in good condition, and add a chimney. The walls are vivid green so if we will buy building paper or burlap, they will put it on and in the spring move the house back from the road under a maple tree, broadside on instead of end on, all for five dollars a month for a year if we want it. Emily thinks she will stay here where she can get criticism when she needs it. The school proper ends the first of November. About 15 artists will then take up their winter quarters here and work all winter long. Any of these men and women will give us criticism for \$5.00 on a month or two weeks work, or, what is better, they are apt to drop in and talk things over.<sup>55</sup>

The months of serious painting were broken up by several trips to New York, and for Emily, to Boston. They went to see George Bernard Shaw’s *Fanny’s First Play* and saw the Academy exhibit which they deemed “poor.”

In March Emily and Chin traveled to New York City where the League held an exhibit of the summer session student’s work, in which both women had pictures hung. The International Show (the formal name for the Armory Show in New York) was also an important attraction for them on this visit. Chin reported:

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<sup>55</sup> Emily talked about a “cottage” where fellow artists gathered because she was a good cook. She also talked about learning to cook at Woodstock. It may have been there during the winter session that their cottage was a gathering place.



We met Evelyn Ellsworth on the street and she took us to supper and then to The International Show, where we stayed bewildered but amused. It's absolutely necessary to get accustomed to the walls before criticizing, and tomorrow Mr. Cooke [probably Charles B. Cooke, considered one of the resident Woodstock intellectuals] will take us through.<sup>56</sup> That fact relieves our minds, for explanation is absolutely necessary to an understanding of their art.

From there they went to Philadelphia where The Ten were exhibiting. According to Chin, it was “a splendid showing and worth coming down to see alone.” They had been invited to stay with friends, which was lucky since money had run out in New York. The Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts had accepted Emily's watercolor *A White House* for their spring show.<sup>57</sup> They of course went to see Emily's painting: “It looked well in spite of hanging over a brilliant red canvas, a very severe test.” They thought the show was excellent, “far superior to the Academy show” they had seen in New York in January. *The Milwaukee Sentinel* (1/31/1913) called this “the most important exhibit of the year,” adding; “Miss Groom has been painting snow this winter and making exceedingly interesting studies.”

Among the group at Woodstock, Emily had been gaining a reputation. In late October, Chin wrote home:

Emily's was the best on the wall. Mr. Carlson went back to it again and again – referred to it in other crits. He said it came very near being a great thing, so good, in fact, that his criticisms were very slight. Afterward he told Emily that “she was a painter and making enormous strides.”

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<sup>56</sup> The walls of the Armory were covered in burlap

<sup>57</sup> Emily showed *A White House* (#470 emilygroom.com). A watercolor of a white house in snow.

Then, in November Chin writes:

Emily is doing very good work. Everyone considers her on the high road to excellent painting. The artists here wanted her to send a canvas to the Academy (New York) but she hadn't a frame and the time was too short to get one, so she gave up the idea.

The reputation of the Summer School and of the Woodstock art colony was probably at its height when Chin and Emily were there. The period of tremendous changes in the American art scene, for which the Armory Show was a catalyst, was followed by the cataclysm of the First World War. The changes swept away the still conservative Academy control and with it much of what artists like Birge Harrison and John Carlson had stood for. Landscape painting, of the sort taught in Woodstock in 1912 and 1913, was soon considered quaint and old fashioned by the new adherents of "modern art."

## **Emily's Career Takes Off**

In 1909 Emily began her long connection with the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC), exhibiting in the 21st Annual Exhibit of Watercolors, Pastels & Miniatures by American Artists. This was soon followed by three more exhibits at the AIC; in 1913 at the 26th Annual American Painters and Sculptors (AP&S) Exhibit where she showed *Cloud Shadows* (one of her best), and in 1914 exhibiting twice, at the 18th Annual Exhibit of the Society of Western Artists and at the 27th Annual Exhibit of American Oil Paintings & Sculpture.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Cloud Shadows*, Oil. Now owned by the Milwaukee Art Museum (MAM)— an excellent example of Emily's sky and clouds. It was on display at the American Embassy in Oslo, Norway for a number of years—on loan from MAM. It will soon be on exhibit at the Wisconsin Museum of Art in West Bend..



*Cloud Shadows d.1914 oil*

In January 1914, while in Milwaukee for Christmas, and before a second trip to Europe, Emily participated in a two-person show with her friend Marion Bullard at the F.H. Bresler Gallery in Milwaukee. Marion's address was given as Macbeth Gallery, 450 Fifth Avenue, New York City. This connection may have opened the doors for a greater exposure to the art world for Emily. Macbeth Gallery later handled some of her paintings.

In March of 1914 Emily entered the first Wisconsin Painters & Sculptors Exhibit held at the Milwaukee Art Society. Some of the artists showing were Gaetano Busalacchi, Susan Cressy, Wm.Schuchardt, Francesco Spicuzza, Raymond Stelzner, Dudley Crafts Watson, Mabel Key, Richard Lorenz, Gustave Moeller, George Raab, Jessie Schley, Adolph Schulz, and Ada Walter Shulz.<sup>59</sup> Emily was one of the younger painters exhibiting.

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<sup>59</sup> WP&S/WAAM Centennial catalogue (West Bend Art Museum) "A Place in History" by Janet Treacy pg.25

## World War I Begins

In 1914 Emily was in Europe again, traveling first class on a prolonged visit starting on June 6th and lasting to the middle of October. She was with various friends from Milwaukee: Grace Young (Gay), Laura Chapman (Miss Chapman), and Mrs. Alice Chapman, and others whom they joined along the way. These friends and patrons of Emily's were happy to subsidize her trips so that she was able to join them.

Emily sailed on the Kaiserin Augusta Victoria of the Hamburg/American Line. She landed at Cherbourg on June 17 and went right on to Paris. The travelers motored for the most part in a chauffer-driven car, but would take trains now and then. They traveled in France and Switzerland and stayed at the best hotels. A journal she kept indicates that sightseeing—castles, rivers, waterfalls and mountain scenery—kept them quite occupied. In spite of the alliances of Russia and France against Germany, Austria, and Italy, war was not in the air or on most people's minds. On August 4<sup>th</sup>, England entered the war.

The first mention of war in Emily's journal was when they arrived at Interlaken at the Victoria Hotel: "War declared--great unrest & anxiety... Aug 11th – next mail-London "Times" of August 4th gave situation. Germany's advance through Belgium & ignoring Belgium's neutrality"

Emily continued to send and receive letters from the United States as well as from Sally, who was living in Argentat, France, and Mary Middlemore, who was in England. It was now clear that the cousins could not meet as planned. Indeed, Emily and Sally, who had become dear friends, would never meet again. Unlike Emily, Sally became very much caught up in the tragedy and dislocation of war.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> During the war, Sally worked for a Quaker relief group on the Polish-Russian border and married a Russian refugee. He was stateless, so they could not live in England and so they eked out a precarious



*Sally Middlemore's etchings of war refugees*

In the August 16th entry of her journal Emily wrote: “Hear of death of Mrs. Woodrow Wilson.” They were in Interlaken from August 1st to September 23rd taking many side trips. Emily tried to sketch, but had to stop as so many children gathered around her. They then went on to Geneva, perhaps as a step closer to home. The last entry in this sketchy journal was written on October 17, in Geneva: “Card Party for R.C. [Red Cross] fund...had tea with Dutch Consul, Mr. Keene & Mr.? told of trip from Geneva to London & return—soldiers in the corridor of train – lying on floor.” As the homeward-bound travelers passed by train from Paris to Dieppe in November 1914 Emily did sketches of refugees in a railroad station. These sketches are the only evidence of the effect of war on Emily’s art, indeed there was very little evidence of war in the art being produced in the Midwest at the time.

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existence on the Continent, coming close to real starvation during WWII. Sally’s niece, Ro Hughes Smith, wrote to Emily in 1949 saying that Sally was in frail health and had lost her teeth. After her husband died she returned to England and a more comfortable life.



*Emily's sketch of woman selling newspapers, London, Nov. 9, 1914*

## **Emily Shows in Earnest**

From 1916 through 1920 Emily exhibited eighteen times. She made arrangements to show her work in many places, including five times at the AIC, (the 28th, 29<sup>th</sup> & 30th Annual Exhibits of American Oil Paintings & Sculpture, and the 30th & 31st Annual Exhibits of Watercolors, Pastels & Miniatures); and twice at the MAI, where, in 1918, she received a 2nd Honorable Mention and in 1920 she won the Art Institute Medal of Honor.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Twenty percent of sales from this exhibit went to the Red Cross fund



*Untitled painting – winner of gold medal in Saint.Paul*

She showed at the St. Paul Institute in Minnesota at the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Exhibitions of the Works of Northwest Artists, winning the Gold Medal there in 1917 for a painting of a barn (oil), which was acquired by the Institute for its permanent collection.<sup>62</sup> It was done in the broken brushwork style of Robert Spencer, whose work she had seen in Pennsylvania. Her fellow artist, Francesco Spicuzza, won the Silver Medal for a watercolor.

Emily exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts twice, in 1917 and in 1918.<sup>63</sup> One of her paintings, *The Viaduct*, showed the influence of the Ashcan School. A critic wrote “It was difficult, when looking at Miss Emily Groom’s ‘Viaduct’, which received second honorable mention, to believe this bold and powerful portrayal of the great outdoors to have been done by a woman.”<sup>64</sup>

Sometime in 1918 Emily made a trip to California to paint; she entered three of these paintings in the 30th Annual Watercolor Show at the Chicago Art Institute. Emily never spoke of this trip, and she never painted California again. Of the 450 and some

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<sup>62</sup> Sponsored by the American Federation of the Arts & included: MN., IA., WI., IN., MT., ND., & SD.

<sup>63</sup> The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts founded in 1805 is the oldest art institution in the U.S.

<sup>64</sup> Milwaukee Sentinel (5/6/18)

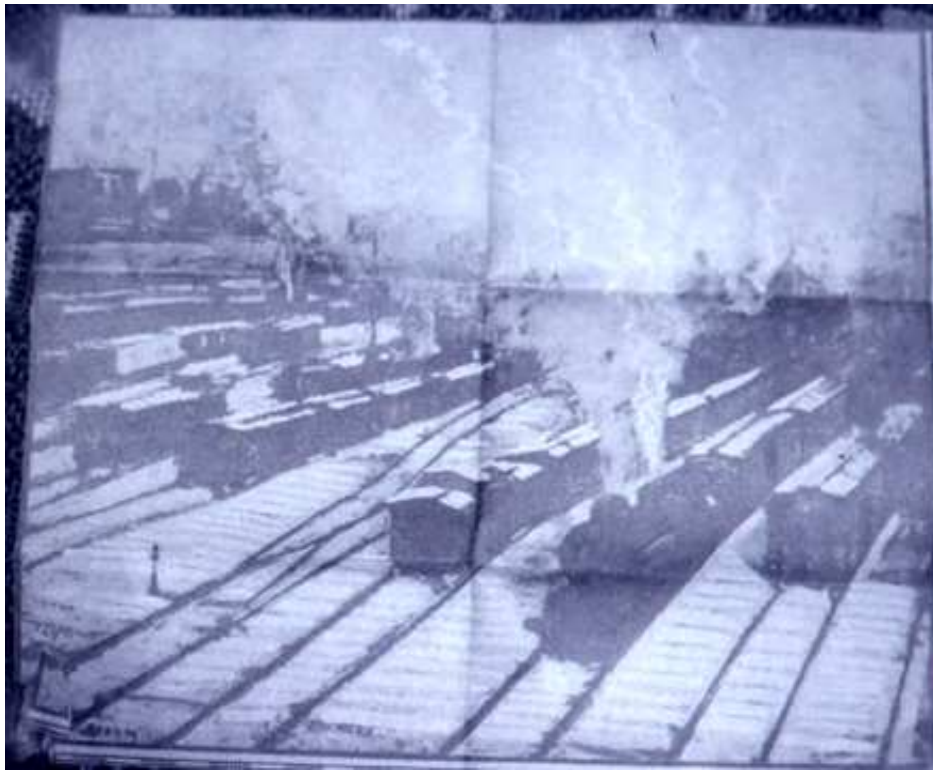


paintings that have been located, only one looks like it might have been painted in California. She later said “It is so much easier to be yourself when you do [paint] your own country”. She was probably already deciding that Wisconsin was hers to paint.



*Wisconsin Landscape*





*Newspaper photo of Smoke*

In 1919 Emily entered the Wisconsin Painters & Sculptors exhibit at the Milwaukee Art Institute with one painting, *Smoke*, which the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (4/20/19) labeled “the surprise of the show...locomotives belching smoke in billows of white and sooty dark red of freight cars—unusual power...indicates rare ability”.

In 1920 she moved into a studio on Jefferson Street in Milwaukee’s Third Ward. This probably reflected the interest she had in doing plein air cityscapes from 1919-1922. She did not keep the studio for long, but she did produce some interesting paintings of downtown Milwaukee during that time.

She showed at the National Academy of Design in New York City, by invitation of the American Watercolor Club. She also entered the Twelfth Annual Exhibition of Paintings by American Artists held at the City Art Museum of St. Louis, where the

paintings to be shown were selected by a jury for the first time.<sup>65</sup> The jury members were John Carlson, Child Hassam, E.H. Wuerpel, and R.A. Holland. To assure a certain quality in the exhibit there were also a number of Loaning Galleries which selected the works to be shown: Geo.Elkins, Robert W. Macbeth, Chas.Woodbury, Wm. E. Benjamin, F.C. Rand, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and Messrs. M. Knoedler & Co.

Emily also showed at several small galleries. She exhibited at Doll and Richards Gallery in Boston. Four Milwaukee artists showed at the J.H.Edwards Galleries in Duluth, Minnesota in 1917: Emily Groom, Frida Gugler, Mabel Key, and Francesco Spicuzza. The same year she showed at the F.H.Bresler Gallery in Milwaukee.

As part of her drive to succeed as an artist, Emily joined, often by invitation, a number of art organizations. Participation in these organizations was probably necessary to partake in some exhibits. As early as 1904 she joined the Chicago Gallery Association and at some early date she became a member of the Concord Art Society in Massachusetts. A number of other affiliations followed:

- 1913 – Wisconsin Painters & Sculptors (WP&S), a charter member (Emily won WP&S awards six times over the years).
- 1917-The Society of Western Artists and awarded their gold medal in 1917.
- 1921-The New York Water Color Club and awarded a purchase prize in 1928
- 1924/5 – The Philadelphia Water Color Club
- 1926 – American Watercolor Society one of only three artists from Wisconsin at the time
- 1926-National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors

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<sup>65</sup> Emily had contacts with several of the other exhibiting artists. Edmond Tarbell was a teacher at the Boston Museum, Birge Harrison and John Carlson were teachers at Woodstock. Marion Bullard was at Woodstock and showed with Emily in Milwaukee. John Folinsbee and Charles Rosen, both of New Hope, PA. had shown with E.G. at the 113<sup>th</sup> Annual of the PAFA, and both came to Milwaukee in 1919 to show with Emily at the Bresler Galleries.

- 1930s-Artists Equity
- 1951- Wisconsin Watercolor Society



*Mary enjoys the snow*



*Emily strikes an artistic pose*

## **The Studio**

In 1917, as the United States entered World War I, Emily took a leave from teaching at Milwaukee Downer in order to devote full time to painting. She and her sister Mary made one of the most important decisions of their lives. They purchased an acre of Howard Greene's Brookhill Farm land in Genesee, Wisconsin, and on this acre they built a cottage/studio. They christened it "Windover", because the wind often blew constantly, and sometimes fiercely, across the land. The Studio held a very special place in Emily's life and inspired much of her art. It was also important in Mary's life. Mary and Emily

were devoted sisters. Neither one married, but Mary loved children. She was pretty and full of fun and probably would have married, but her parents had become dependent on her. She was the driver in the family and often helped her mother by doing most of the fine work in her sewing. She was also an enthusiastic gardener in Genesee. Emily once labeled a photograph of Mary working in the garden by writing on the back of it: “Mary, at work in her studio.”

The original, tiny, prefabricated Aladdin house was covered with weathered shingles. The inside was simple, with rough wood and plaster walls. There were two tiny bedrooms, a small kitchen with a pump to raise rainwater from the cistern, a living room, and a little screened front porch with a long, canvas, flat swing suitable for sleeping on hot nights. The pale pink walls of the small living/dining area were punctuated with decorative plates hung along a rail. The room also contained a round table for four that had a reversible rattan top on its collapsible wood base. One could use the surface, with a small raised edge, for a reading table with a lamp, or turn it over to make a dining table by adding a pretty tablecloth.<sup>66</sup> Four old, painted wood chairs that Emily found in New Hope, Pennsylvania, took care of the seating, and some of Anna Pirie’s fine braided rugs added charm to the room.

In 1922 the cottage was enlarged by adding a studio room designed by Will Schuchardt, an architect and good friend.<sup>67</sup> The new room ran the depth of the house, several steps lower than, but open to, the living room. Wood beams ran across the high ceiling and six long windows facing the north provided ample light to the studio.

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<sup>66</sup> Made by her brother Tom’s wife, Sarah, who was a master potter.

<sup>67</sup> Born 1854, Mr. Schuchardt was a Cornell graduate and City Planner for Milwaukee. On his wedding trip he was commissioned by the city to study low-cost housing in Europe. This inspired him to design the “Garden Homes” project in Milwaukee.



*The Studio*



*The Studio addition*



*Mary in her studio*



*Mary and her mother Anna Pirie*



*Mom and Dad visit*

According to the *Milwaukee Journal* (12/6/24): "...gray monk's cloth is on the walls, with the only deep color in the room supplied by a long Chinese tapestry that hangs from ceiling to floor, fire-colored, embroidered silk. Miss Grace Young brought it from China as a gift to the artist."

Since Emily herself is quoted in the same article as saying, "I keep my workroom neutral in tone so that my color sense will remain keen, so when I bring my pictures indoors I can judge them correctly." One wonders how long the brilliant tapestry stayed in the studio. Two steamer chairs provided comfortable seating for reading in the evening. A cot for seating or snoozing was at one end and the ever-present easel and art supplies were at the other.

An airtight wood stove, under what had been an exterior window in the kitchen, provided necessary warmth in early summer and late fall. A furnace was in the basement, and it heated up everything in a hurry, as long as one knew how to work the drafts, and few did, so this wasn't used much after the stove was installed in the studio. A two-hole outhouse attached to a shed completed the amenities. Indoor plumbing came later.

In the living room over the front door (in the early days) was a shotgun presented to Emily by a friend who thought she should have some way to encourage an unwanted guest to depart. She said she once did point it at someone who was a bit too persistent in staying around. He left. Summer storms were more of a threat. Lightning often struck nearby, occasionally bouncing around the studio from one metal point to another, knocking out the power and making the telephone and stove do strange things.

The telephone was operated with a crank, which connected it to the operator in town. Emily's neighbor, Mrs. Jones, was intrigued by this phone, and felt free to use it whenever she had the need, or desire. Her farm was across the road, and she provided an

awesome sight when she arrived at the front gate in a haze of flies. She sometimes came, not to use the phone, but to collect her pigs, which had come to enjoy Emily's bountiful vegetable garden. It was Mrs. Jones' great pleasure to attend local funerals, and she seldom missed one. She wore her funeral best under her everyday clothes and removed the top dusty layer when she arrived in her horse cart.

There was a white board fence in front of the studio along Highway ZZ with a gate for cars and another for people. A wide border of mixed petunias decorated both sides of the path leading to the house and a pear and cherry tree stood in front of the house, where a pink window box full of begonias added to the colorful welcome. A grass walk, edged by lilacs, separated the orchard from the grape arbors. At the end of the walk stood a white iron bench. Emily once agreed to allow a couple to be married at the end of this path during lilac season. There was some clucking when she heard that following the nuptials the wedding party had gone skinny-dipping in a nearby pond. The rest of the property was surrounded by a wire fence, which kept out the grazing cows. Drinking water came from Brookhill Farm via a pipe laid near the surface, making the studio less usable in the winter. The soil had a clay-like consistency which made gardening difficult until much compost and manure from the nearby farm were added. Over time, Emily and Mary planted fruit trees, lilacs, grape arbors, raspberry and currant bushes, strawberry beds, flowers, and vegetables, which flourished with the help of a large compost pile.

Richard "Dick" Philipp, another architect friend, later lived about a quarter of a mile down the road. Emily and he carried on a friendly, but pointed competition regarding garden produce and agricultural techniques. Dick would arrive at the studio (often on his small sit-down lawn mower) to show off a prize apple or squash—which he always took home with him. He was an early believer in "Organic Gardening" as



preached by J.I. Rodale from Emmaus, Pennsylvania. Emily followed her own, less rigid rules, and usually ended up with juicier apples and larger squash. She had cheated, in a way, by becoming a good friend of John Maas, the big, slightly stuttering head herdsman at the adjoining dairy farm of Howard Greene. It was John who kept Emily supplied with well-rotted cow manure and regaled her with stories of his job as cattle inseminator at Brookhill Farm. She, in turn, gave him art lessons. He surprised her once by painting her inconspicuous mailbox with the brightest colors he had, to make a statement on Highway ZZ.

Emily was recognized and admired by many locals, including the proprietor of Stags Tavern, in Genesee Depot. Her gate was always open. A birthday poem written for her in 1957 ends:

We know her warm welcome, a sun in our sky.  
We have, as her neighbors, what money can't buy.  
Oh wise is the world to give ribbon and prize  
for seeing the world through our Emily's eyes<sup>68</sup>

Although the drive from Milwaukee to Genesee was only about thirty miles, in the old days it involved a good part of the day. Emily and her sister Mary would now and then enjoy a picnic on the way. Emily sometimes stayed at the Studio in the winter, painting the snow and frozen land. She could call Howard Greene to get the local weather reports and road conditions before setting out. As time went on the Studio served mostly as a fair weather retreat and a place to paint flowers and Waukesha County farms and sky. Emily considered the clouds of Waukesha County the best.

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<sup>68</sup> Written by her neighbor in Genesee Depot, Mary Sargent

At the Studio, away from parents, a formal Victorian house, and the demands of teaching and city living, Emily could immerse herself in her three loves: painting, gardening and cooking. As she once said, “If you are going to be an artist and single, you’d better learn to cook.” The bountiful gardens and orchard at Genesee provided produce for the meals as well as subjects for many paintings, while the sale of the paintings helped make it all financially possible. The work of gardening, in turn, made for good appetites for the food. A lunch menu included shirred eggs (a specialty), fresh asparagus, and orange muffins hot from the electric stove. Emily’s meals were fresh and mouth-watering, enhanced by a lovely presentation. The dining table was set with celadon dishes on a charming cloth and a pitcher of flowers fresh from her garden. When in season, the aroma of fresh sugared strawberries filled the room. Once the strawberries reached the right consistency Emily and Mary conserved them in glass jars. The scene was paintable, and Emily, with her artist’s eye, had created her own canvas.

## **The Changing Art Scene in Milwaukee**

The art world had seen a lot of changes and Milwaukee was no exception. The growing pains of the first decades in the development of art education and of exhibition venues in Milwaukee and across Wisconsin were over, and, although there were political battles to be fought, the place of art and art exhibition was secure. Art departments in various schools had been started and were flourishing. Alexander Mueller’s Wisconsin School of Art 1900-1910 was incorporated into the Milwaukee Normal, where Mueller was Chairman of the Art Department, and later the Normal School became the Wisconsin State Teachers College which was, in turn, incorporated into the University of Wisconsin System in 1956. Milwaukee Downer College had

moved to the north side of Milwaukee and maintained the strong art education program that was started by Emily in 1902. Lawrence College in Appleton and Stout Institute in Menomonee opened art departments in 1901 and 1903.

In 1913 George Raab, Charles Allis and Louis Mayer founded the Milwaukee Art Commission, organized to approve public projects and gifts. The same year Wisconsin Painters and Sculptors (WP&S) was formed from a reorganized Society of Milwaukee Artists. George Raab, who was curator of the Layton Gallery, was the first President. Emily was one of the thirty original members, along with Dudley Crafts Watson, William Schuchardt (the architect) Richard Holberg, Francesco Spicuzza, Mable Key, and Gaetano Busalacchi.

The Milwaukee Art Institute (MAI) was formed in 1916 from the Milwaukee Art Society. Emily Groom was on the first board. The MAI was a strong proponent of the WP&S as well as of Wisconsin art and art education. Emily, along with many other Wisconsin artists of the period, reaped its benefits until it was closed in 1955, to be replaced by the Milwaukee Art Center (MAC) and eventually the present Milwaukee Art Museum (MAM).

The Layton School of Art, on the premises of the Layton Art Gallery, (which opened in 1888 and was the first permanent gallery in Milwaukee) was founded in 1920 by Miriam Frink and Charlotte Partridge, one of Emily's fellow teachers at Downer. Gerrit Sinclair, a friend of Emily's, and an artist whom she admired and showed with many times, was the first teacher hired, and he remained there until his death in 1955. Emily also taught part time at the Layton for sixteen years starting in 1927. One of her classes was "Figure Drawing" which she had studied and was adept at, but which she seldom incorporated into her own paintings.

During the 1920s the WP&S became more politically involved. The faculty of the new Layton School of Art were all WP&S members. The 7th Annual Exhibition at the Milwaukee Art Institute of the WP&S included the Wisconsin Society of Applied Arts (WSAA), though they each had their own jury of selection and separate awards. At their 8th Annual Exhibit the WP&S stood their ground (after a public outcry for the removal of a controversial sculpture) and abided by a statement in the program to “not be governed by rules laid down by a group of laymen.” The membership was growing and they were looking for more publicity and better venues for sales. In 1925 Paul Hammersmith, president of the WP&S and the Milwaukee Art Institute (MAI) tried to make the April Exhibit more important by inviting artists who had left Wisconsin to exhibit—especially Carl von Marr.

In March of 1925 the MAI held an exhibit from the Chicago Art Institute, which consisted of paintings purchased by the CAI by means of a support group named Friends of American Art. This inspired the MAI to propose that Milwaukee follow the example of Chicago with “Friends” donating a smaller amount of \$100 each, for three years. It is not clear whether this proposal was adopted.

Milwaukee was a friendly place for artists to live and work. The arts were supported by educational institutions, patrons, the business world and the newspapers. The *Milwaukee Journal* and to a lesser degree, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, promoted and documented art. The Gallery of Wisconsin Art occupied the fourth floor of the Milwaukee Journal Building. From 1924 to 1931 the *Milwaukee Journal* curated exhibits there that combined “the advantages of a sales room with the publicity of a newspaper.” and the art critics of the day certainly got space in the local papers.

Although Emily was not one of the most politically active artists of the period, she was certainly part of the scene. In 1927 she was the Vice President of the WP&S under Paul Hammersmith as President. The Secretary was Alexander Tillotson and the Treasurer Ray Stelzner. Two of the new members that year were Schomer Lichner and Robert von Neumann, both of whom were her friends. During this period the WP&S reached out to Women's Clubs, the Madison Art Association and businesses (for award money) and, of course, to the *Milwaukee Journal*. Emily was supported by the Milwaukee Woman's Club, both as an organization and by its individual members.<sup>69</sup> She rarely spoke in public, but she once gave a talk to the Janesville Woman's Club on "Artists I Have Known."

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<sup>69</sup> Some of Emily's best paintings are displayed today at the Women's Club in Milwaukee.

## The 1920s

The 1920s were good times for the country in general—and for artists in particular. They were some of Emily’s most productive years. She was able to enter exhibits that were located in the Midwest and on the East Coast. She not only had the energy to do this, but the cost of framing and shipping was reasonable. Her type of art was still in demand and she had made a place for herself in the regional art world. Family members were in good health and not least of all—she had the Studio in Genesee. When she remodeled this delightful retreat in 1922, adding a studio and indoor plumbing, she was able to pay for it by selling floral panels to the Woman’s Club and to Mrs. John L. Yates.



*Mixed Flowers oil*

Emily turned increasingly to watercolor. Almost all of her exhibited paintings were watercolors and many of these were painted plein air. In 1921, at the 29th Annual Exhibit of the New York Watercolor Club held at the Fine Arts Society Gallery, the Board of Control selected her painting, *Doorway, Salem* for a purchase prize. The Board explained in a letter that “your picture was an admirable example of pure water-color.”



*Essex #1 (Essex, MA). d.1924 wc*

In May of 1922, accompanied by her friend, Grace Young, she spent a month in Tryon, North Carolina, sightseeing, visiting, and painting. In November and December of 1924 she was in New England again, painting plein air on the Concord, Essex, and Charles Rivers. She spent that Christmas with family in Boston. In early 1925 her fourteen watercolors of these Rivers were on display at the MAI, in a one-person-show that the *Milwaukee Journal* labeled “the symphony of the three rivers.” This exhibit was reviewed in the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, *Christian Science Monitor* and the *Milwaukee*

*Journal* (1/18/25) where the art critic reported, “The Charles River is the bluest and most solitary. The Essex River winds below village and church and the Concord River bends around New England houses, under a lowering sky.” During this late winter exhibit at the MAI, Emily was painting in the Boscobel area, south toward Fennimore and along the Wisconsin River toward Wauzeka. She stayed with relatives in Boscobel. In April of 1925 there was a separate exhibit in the front gallery of the MAI where Emily’s recent watercolors of Boscobel in winter were shown along with paintings of Esther Christensen, Francesco Spicuzza, and Elisabeth Tellings.



*Boscobel in winter wc*



In the summer of 1926 Emily returned to New England, painting in Massachusetts—in Haverhill, Marblehead, Essex, and Oxford (where she had relatives). In October the Thomas Whipple Dunbar Galleries in Chicago exhibited nineteen of her watercolors, mostly done in New England. Emily entered an exhibit, held in connection with the Women’s National Exposition at the Shortridge Galleries in St. Louis, MO. She won one of seven \$500 awards for *A New England Doorway*. In the exhibit’s catalogue, while extolling the beauty of New England door-ways in general, the writer adds: “In Miss Groom’s paintings there is an entirely evident joy in their conception, and brisk freshness of expression which designates water color as the ideal medium for her. Whether painting summer or winter her water colors express the same vein of freshness and spontaneity.”



*Side Street, New England wc*

During this decade Emily exhibited at the Milwaukee Art Institute four times and at the Art Institute of Chicago seven times. Emily also managed to enter a number of

other exhibits: Art Association of Indianapolis at the John Herron Art Institute; Sawyer Foundation in Oshkosh, Wisconsin; Milwaukee Journal Gallery of Wisconsin Art; New York Watercolor Club at the American Fine Arts Society Gallery; Baltimore Watercolor Club at the Peabody Institute; Philadelphia Watercolor Club Annual Exhibit; National Academy of Design in New York; twice at the State Historical Society in Madison, WI; and the Hug & Sarachek Art Galleries in Kansas City, MO where she took first prize.

A critic for the *Kansas City Star* (1/17/21) wrote: “In all of them are luminous skies and wild, sedgy spaces, full of that feeling for the out of doors which so many well-intentioned painters miss.”

The paintings Emily showed at the Philadelphia Watercolor Club Annual Exhibit were also part of a “Rotary Exhibit,” by the American Federation of the Arts at the American and N.Y. Watercolor Clubs. These exhibits were called “Circuit Shows” and they went to Erie, PA, Manchester, NH, Rochester, NY, Elmira, NY, and Oberlin, OH.

Emily took part in the Macbeth Gallery Exhibition of Water Colors by Distinguished American Artists, where she showed *Stream in Winter* done in Boscobel, and *Zinnia in a Pewter Teapot*. *The American Art World* (12/12/25, a New York publication) in its report about the exhibit, mentioned Emily Groom as “a newcomer who shows a brilliant clarity—and a command of technique.” Emily was in good company. Among those showing were Frank W. Benson, Arthur B. Davies, Paul Dougherty, Childe Hassam, W. Emerton Heitland, Winslow Homer, Felicie Waldow Howell, Hayley Lever, Jerome Myers, Joseph Pennell, Maurice Prendergast, and Chauncy Ryder.



*White Peonies wc*

During these years Emily worked hard at improving upon her skills as an artist- and she had studied with some of the best teachers. She experimented with different media, techniques, and subject matter and she produced some very fine works. At the same time she taught part-time at the Layton School of Art and she showed her paintings in the wider art world which was mostly concentrated in the East. All of this demanded an effort that took time as well as money. It was not easy. According to Richardson in *A Short History of American Painting*, the New York art community saw itself as the center of all cultural activity and consequently seemed to overlook regional art that did not fit into its artistic aesthetic. From shortly after World War I, smart young wits in New York City had used 'Middle Western' as an omnibus term of contempt for all they despised in the United States. A little ditty, said to have been told by an art critic of the time, went:

Oh pack up my grip for a trip on a ship, where the scene at least is variable,

For East is East and West is West, but the Middle West is terrible.

Emily proved herself a strong, independent, and capable woman. She had developed quite a following and socialized with many of her Milwaukee patrons, who admired her decision to have a career rather than a family. Her nieces remember a time when they were quite young and were at the Cambridge Avenue house when Emily was entertaining some socialite friends. The girls were ushered to the upstairs sewing room with bread, milk and applesauce for supper to keep them out of the way. The older one decided this was no way to be treated and, taking the younger with her, ran away. They were escaping down the street when Emily discovered them missing and ran after them. In the process, she fell down and tore her silk stockings. When she caught up to the girls, she grabbed the older one and shook her all the way home while the younger one trotted ahead, doubled over with laughter. Unlike her sister, Mary, Emily had little interest in small children and little tolerance for their antics.



*Emily*

## Depression Years

The Stock Market crash in 1929 ushered in the Great Depression of the thirties, changing everything and most everybody's life. The art world was hit early and hard. In 1933 President Franklin Roosevelt initiated the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP).<sup>70</sup> It was operated under the Civil Works Administration (CWA) and administered by the U.S. Treasury Department to provide employment for artists. The PWAP operated in sixteen regions. Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota comprised Region Number 10. The emphasis was on local participation and 2,500 artists participated in this region. Charlotte Partridge chaired the Wisconsin section and, according to the 1933-4 report to the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, Emily was listed both as one of the area planners (on Partridge's committee) and as an exhibiting artist. The project was short-lived, lasting from December 8, 1933 to June 30, 1934 when it ran out of money, and other programs took its place. A letter to Emily, dated 11/14/34, from Edward Bruce who worked in the Treasury Department, refers back to his association with her in regard to PWAP and asks for her cooperation in a new project.<sup>71</sup>

No more was known about Emily's part in the PWAP until October of 1997 when Jim Laird from Waupun, Wisconsin, contacted one of Emily's nieces. He had been able to locate the niece on the Internet because she had responded to an attempt by the Smithsonian, as part of the Bicentennial celebration, to catalogue all the artists in the U.S. who were active between the World Wars. Laird informed her that two paintings which were hanging in the Waupun Heritage Museum (originally a Carnegie Public Library)

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<sup>70</sup> Roosevelt had been urged to do this by his friend, the muralist George Biddle, who had seen the Mexican murals.

<sup>71</sup> Bruce, a lawyer, Treasury consultant and part-time painter picked up on Biddle's idea, passed on by Roosevelt.

were signed by Emily Groom. The paintings, *Fox Farm* and *Turkey Farm* are both 25" x 30" and neither painting resembles any of Emily's other known works.<sup>72</sup> A retired school teacher, Minnie Drummy, who was one of the people instrumental in forming the Historical Society in Waupun and in creating the museum, remembered the art show in the basement of the Library, organized to help "the starving artists of Milwaukee". She was teaching at the time and took her class to see the month-long exhibit. Apparently a local committee selected Emily's paintings from the show.



*Fox Farm d.1934 oil*

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<sup>72</sup> On the back of each painting there is an old label that reads: "Wisconsin # 82 Public Works of Art Project, 10<sup>th</sup> Region. Emily Groom, 1903 N. Cambridge Ave., Milwaukee. *Fox Farm* (or *Turkey Farm*) oil, Del. 2/17/1934. Approved 2/17/1934.



*Turkey Farm d.1934 oil*

By 1934 the PWAP was replaced by the Section of Painting & Sculpture in the Treasury Department. It commissioned murals and sculpture for hundreds of post offices, schools and courthouses. Later, in 1935, under the Works Progress Administration (WPA) the Federal Art Project (FAP) was created under Harry Hopkins. The FAP supported and encouraged all kinds of arts and crafts and much of it was displayed in public spaces, thus increasing the public's awareness and appreciation. Charlotte Partridge, with Miriam Frink, again became an administrator of a WPA program (Creative Painting and Sculpture). Elsa Ulbricht (1885-1980), a Milwaukee native, "attracted national attention by organizing a WPA handicrafts project in Milwaukee."



The FAP allocated money to state organizations that could administer programs independent of the federal government.<sup>73</sup>

The 1930s were a time of change for the WP&S. The WP&S wanted a permanent meeting place, a published magazine of its own, and a new Milwaukee Art Institute with its own publicity agent. However, the fight of the moment was just to keep the Old County Courthouse available for MAI exhibits. The WP&S was also making efforts to have joint ventures with the Madison Art Association, Woman's Clubs and other societies. In 1937 the WP&S (founded 1899) joined three other art groups: the Society of Applied Arts (founded 1929), Milwaukee Print Makers (founded 1935) and the Milwaukee Artists Guild (founded 1937). This combined group became an affiliate of the Artists Union of Chicago. They attended the WPA convention and supported major Midwest exhibits. Their platform was basically to support an expanded MAI, encourage WPA involvement, support a State Art Foundation, and create art programs in all public schools. Emily became a member, and at one point made a trip to Chicago for the cause. It may have been at this time that she joined the union Artists Equity.

Emily's career was also affected by the Depression. There were fewer major shows, some of which she did not enter, and even fewer sales of paintings. Money was a worry for Emily. Her family's business in Boston, from which she received some income, was also going through hard times. In addition to economic troubles, her sister Mary was diagnosed with cancer in 1932.

Emily continued to teach at the Layton School of Art. She originated and participated in "Grab Bag" sales to raise money to assist Layton students. Small watercolors, charcoals, or prints would be shown for a week, then wrapped and sold for a

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<sup>73</sup> Wisconsin Art History – Foundations of Art in Wisconsin. Wisconsin's New Deal Art op.cit pg. 22



dollar each. Emily herself contributed small (1/4 size) floral watercolors, Third Ward, and farm scenes. This way of making money seems to have happened only in 1935 and 1936. Chances are the effort of doing a small painting was not worth it!



*The family at Cambridge Avenue(l-r Mary, Anna Pirie, John, Emily)*

In 1935, Emily's father, John Groom, passed away. A well-loved and cared for man, he proved to have a strong constitution in spite of his physical frailties. His wife, Anna, had figured one morning that at two eggs for breakfast every day, he had consumed 41,260 eggs. This was in the days before cholesterol became a concern, and he lived to be eighty-seven.

At age 60, relieved of some caretaking duties and needing to provide more income for the family, Emily returned to her teaching at Milwaukee Downer College. Her Tuesday morning Ladies Extension classes became something of an institution. At

times she had up to fifty students working in three studios and she managed to give each student her personal attention. She was not only an excellent teacher for these women, many of whom developed into quite competent painters and supporters of the arts, she was also a friend and role model. A note written after her death by her friend, Carl Riter (a fellow artist and teacher at Downer) says, “Emily had a great following among women especially, who not only bought her paintings and entertained her, but who came to all exhibitions at the Downer Gallery in which she was involved.”

It appears that women were a large part of the art world in Wisconsin. In *The Story of Wisconsin Women*, in which Emily is mentioned, there is a paragraph which reads: “The influence of women on the arts in Wisconsin is clearly revealed in the gift of public and semi-public monuments and single works of art. Up to 1898, with the exception of the donations to the Layton Art Gallery in Milwaukee, all but one of these gifts came from women.” Women continued to take a great interest in art, a reality that was very much encouraged by the multitude of Woman’s Clubs.

In spite of the difficult times, Emily herself rarely missed a beat. She was not one to whine or mourn about the past—and she certainly had not lost her drive to paint. Emily and her fellow artists were also fortunate to live in Milwaukee, where there was still strong market for Wisconsin art.



*Lotus 1935 oil*

In 1935 Emily was commissioned by architect Richard Philipp to paint six tondos of lotus blossoms (the “Magnificent water lily”).<sup>74</sup> The paintings were to be hung in the Lotus Room of the newly remodeled Plankinton Hotel in downtown Milwaukee. The colors corresponded with specially loomed drapes by William Morris. She did not take that job lightly. According to the *Milwaukee Journal* (9/5/35):

She spent the summer visiting places where she could sketch the lotus for the paintings, often rowing out into the water to do this, and sitting in the sun, making one sketch after another. She visited Silver Lake, near Palmyra where she found creamy and blue blossoms; Beggs Isle, on Oconomowoc Lake, where she found pink blossoms with 2ft. leaves; Horseshoe Lake near Prairie du Chien; Lake Mendota; a cranberry marsh

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<sup>74</sup> Tondo - a round painting on wood—taken from “rotondo.” The Plankinton Hotel was built in 1867.

near Tomah; and Humboldt Park in Milwaukee where she found blue lotus.

The two types of lotus found in Wisconsin, according to the *Milwaukee Journal*, “are the American, which is creamy and blue, and the Indian, which is an exquisite pink.” The same article enthusiastically reported, “They [the tondos] make one of the most delightful groups of decorative work ever executed in the state.” The paintings were done in oil on round board 30 inches in diameter. They originally had simple round frames and each was placed on its own panel in the new Lotus Room. Lamentably, the hotel suffered a fire and was torn down. The whereabouts of the paintings was unknown for some years but four of them have been located, one of which is in the Milwaukee Public Museum.<sup>75</sup> A small (12” x 17”), unframed gouache of lotus blossoms has also been found.<sup>76</sup> It has a penciled map (presumably drawn by Emily) on brown paper attached to the back that indicates how to get to in Madison Lakes Monona and Mendota.

Emily enjoyed herself as she did her water lily studies. She did some lily studies at Beggs Isle, on Oconomowoc Lake, while staying with a neighbor of John Beggs, the owner and at the time, wealthiest person in Wisconsin.

Emily continued to enjoy painting with watercolors, plein air. In January of 1935, she painted again in the Boscobel area, this time going as far as Soldiers Grove on the Kickapoo River. She kept hand warmers in her pockets and produced a group of watercolors which were later shown in a one-woman exhibit at the Layton Art Gallery.

She was also very much inspired by the flowers that she planted at Genesee. Emily procured special petunia seeds that produced flowers of exceptional size and color (which

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<sup>75</sup> An old brochure from a Milwaukee Auction Gallery shows a picture of the two “missing” tondos with the lotus blossoms a creamy yellow.

<sup>76</sup> Gouache is a technique of painting with opaque watercolors prepared with gum.

she continued to harvest and generously shared with family and friends). Petunias adorned the front walk to her studio. They were one of her favorite flowers to paint and this period became what could be called her “Petunia Period”. According to the *Milwaukee Journal* (2/28/37), regarding a show in the Neenah Public Library, nine of Emily’s eleven florals were “petunias—in old jars, against a pink door at Genesee, etc.” and the newspaper labeled them “little pieces of perfection.” At the same show, writing about a watercolor with white turkeys in the foreground, the article observed “like the flower paintings, the landscapes have been done with a minimum of effort by an artist who has a thorough mastery of her paper and paint.” From the AIC show in 1937, exhibit Director Robert Harshe picked Emily’s *Petunias* for a three-year tour of Art Museums in the United States.

During the 1930s Emily made several other excursions outside of Wisconsin. In 1936 a National Art Congress was held in the International Building of Rockefeller Center in New York City. Emily was one of twelve Wisconsin artists picked to exhibit by a committee appointed by Governor Robert LaFollette. She showed *Girl in Pink*. The other artists picked were Gerrit Sinclair, Alexander Tillotson, Peter Rotier, Myron Nutting, Forrest Flower, Charles Thwaites, Howard Thomas, Robert von Neumann, Robert Schellin, Schomer Lichtner, Al Sessler, Harold Gebhardt, and George Dietrich. A show honoring those selected for the National Art Congress was held at the Layton Art Gallery in May of the same year (*Milwaukee Journal*, 5/24/36). Each painter displayed one painting plus a photograph of the painting shown in New York City.

In 1936-7 Emily made an Eastern trip which included the Barnes Foundation in Merion, near Philadelphia, and the Phillips Memorial Gallery in Washington. In 1938 she showed *Petunias* at the Fine Arts Society Gallery in New York. Alden Jewell of the *New*

*York Times* wrote: “Among the watercolors that in particular cannot but be judged products of an accomplished brush are those by Emily Groom.”<sup>77</sup>

An unusually diverse collection of works representing the broader art world of the times was exhibited at the Chapman Memorial Library of Downer College—the first art exhibit to be shown there.<sup>78</sup> According to the *Milwaukee News-Sentinel* (3/13/38):

The nucleus of the show was a group of paintings collected by the late Miss Alice Chapman which included a wash drawing by Gainsborough, a Child Hassam, a Benson, a Brangwyn, a Heitland, a Joseph Israel landscape, a water color by Carter (the Egyptologist), a Colman (English) *The Stirling Castle*, a Signac (French), two paintings by G.Grosz (German) loaned by Harry Bogner and by the MAI, an Alexander Wyant, a Joseph Pennell, a Floyd Pauley and a Baron von Mayfell.

Emily showed several landscapes and one of her watercolors was loaned by Mrs. John P. Kohler.

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<sup>77</sup> As quoted in *The Art Digest – The News Magazine of Art* Vol X11 New York, N.Y. 2/1/1938 no.9

<sup>78</sup> Miss Alice Chapman ordered the Teakwood Room from a sample of carved teakwood at the Chicago World’s Fair of 1892-3. The wood was hand carved in India and the room built to order for Miss Chapman’s music room. In her will she left this room and a paneled room to be incorporated into the library of Downer College. The ceiling there was stenciled aluminum paint, with small medallions designed by Emily Groom. All of this has been moved to Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin.



*Idle boats in New England harbor wc*

In August of 1938 Emily went on a painting visit to Nantucket with Mrs. George Miller and her daughter Isabel, both close friends and patrons. The *Milwaukee Journal* (11/10/38) reported on the exhibit of the Nantucket paintings at the new Chapman Memorial Library:

In the first group Miss Groom painted on the wharves—showing idle fishing craft moored to the docks. Views of old houses on Main St., the historic mansions built by whaling captains in Nantucket's heyday are hung together. A third group shows rooftops seen from the old mill at the top of a hill and the countryside in a rosy mist that blanketed it after a rain.



*Lighthouse - Nantucket d.1938 wc*

Maritime scenes were another of Emily's favorite subjects. She painted them in Sussex, Marblehead and Nantucket as well as Milwaukee and Hoy.

Later in 1938 she once again took a studio on North Jefferson Street in Milwaukee, only two blocks from the Layton. During that time she painted the Third Ward and the fire tugs on the Milwaukee River, becoming a somewhat familiar figure on the Cherry St. bridge as she stood sketching in the cold.



*Fire Tugs wc*



There were other indications that Emily's watercolors had not gone unnoticed. Her watercolor *Cedarburg Mill* was used in Adrian Bury's 1937 book *Watercolor Paintings of Today* as an example of "a truthful impression suggested by leaving the paper white for the snow." Her watercolor, *Covered Bridge*, was chosen to be reproduced in the 1938 *The Studio*'s spring edition of the *London Art Review*, edited by the same Adrian Bury, who commented: "There is a hint of Monet, the French master of light, in this scintillating view of a river bridge and foreground foliage." This publication also featured the etchings and watercolors of Emily's teacher, Frank Brangwyn.

In 1939 Emily's mother passed away. Anna Pirie's strong and thrifty nature had been a major force in the family. She and her husband had raised a very close and devoted family as evidenced by the wonderful care their daughters gave them. Emily and Mary had chosen not to marry, though their decisions may have been influenced by the fact that their mother locked herself in her room at the very mention of such a thing. This was the year that Emily's good friend, Alice Chapman, also passed away.

Emily and Mary stayed on in the family home with Bertha Eichmeier, the housekeeper, who was part of the family. Bertha was an excellent cook, and at one time had been the pie maker in the restaurant of the Milwaukee Road Depot. She took a proprietary interest in everything and everybody in the house. She was also a Christian Scientist who claimed that coffee knew nothing about keeping people awake. Bertha helped make it possible to maintain the large home in the city as well as the Studio in Genesee. Emily and Mary loved being at Genesee as much as possible. Bertha preferred a more "civilized" life. She did, however, spend nights in Genesee during the canning season, to help with the preserving of summer harvests of strawberries, raspberries and currants.

## The 1940s

The 1940s brought more changes in Emily's personal and professional lives. Another close friend and traveling companion, Grace Young Johnston, died. Grace was one of a number of friends/patrons with whom Emily had traveled and it is clear that these friends appreciated Emily's lively and knowledgeable companionship. The handwritten letters Emily received from these friends were often long and detailed like the ones Alice Chapman wrote from Cairo, Paris, London, and Santa Barbara, giving first hand news of art shows, friends abroad, general strikes in England, paranoia in Paris—all from the safe haven of first class hotels and chauffeur driven automobiles. Emily's friend Katherine Merrill, an accomplished artist and etcher herself, who had spent time with Sally in England and France, also brought news to Emily from across the "Duck Pond." These letters usually indicated that the writer would be having a better time if Emily were there.

Emily had outlived her older friends and was losing her contemporaries, but her positive nature, quick wit and keen mind allowed her to make new friendships that sustained her and kept her vital for most of her one hundred years. She appreciated people of all ages and social positions and was a sincere and responsive listener; from a congenial friendship with actors Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, to a compassionate response for a struggling art student, ("Now THAT is a fine spot of color!") Emily had something to give.<sup>79</sup> She once said that the best art critic she ever had was the garbage man who came weekly to Cambridge Avenue in a horse-drawn vehicle. On one occasion, when she had disposed of a number of canvasses, she watched from the window as he

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<sup>79</sup> Alfred and Lynn summered nearby at Ten Chimneys in Genesee Depot, Emily shared gardening and cooking tidbits with them. She also gave Alfred some art lessons.

went through the pile, carefully looking at each one, and placing it either under his seat, or, more likely, back into the trash.

In April of 1941 she exhibited at the Neville Public Museum in Green Bay and, later the same month, at the Layton Art Gallery. In November of that year, Milwaukee's Mayor Zeidler opened the Sales Gallery, "one of a number started throughout the country to launch 'Art Week' for the purpose of making each community a little more conscious of the work its own artists and craftsmen are doing." (*Milwaukee Sentinel* , 11/18/41). One of Emily's paintings, *Wisconsin Landscape*, was the first painting sold and was bought by a representative of Thomas Watson for IBM's permanent American Art Collection.

Before the year was out the Layton Gallery had a one woman show called *Watercolors of Wisconsin Landscapes* which featured Emily's work. Included was the painting *Our Wisconsin*, commissioned by Marie Kohler to hang above the fireplace in the UW-Madison Family Resources Cottage.



*Our Wisconsin. d.1941 wc*

At the same time the United States found itself in another World War. During World War II Emily's youngest brother, Sam, published *Groom's War Bulletin* as both advertising for Thomas Groom & Co. Stationers of Boston and to provide a place where customers could learn about wartime shortages, rules, and government regulations. Emily drew political cartoons for her brother's bulletin, and enjoyed lampooning Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo.



As with WWI, Emily's life was relatively unaffected by the war, but she followed events carefully. She was a devoted listener to Roosevelt's Fireside Chats. She was also a great admirer of Winston Churchill whose picture remained in her parlor as long as she lived in her Milwaukee home.

Between 1942 and 1944 Emily managed to show three times out of state, once at the National Academy Galleries, in New York, and twice at the Philadelphia

Association of Fine Arts. She didn't show again in Wisconsin until 1944 when she had a one-person-show, Orkney Islands, in the Chapman Memorial Library at Downer College. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* (5/14/44) exulted about the paintings: "...They are so good, in their freedom, in the exultation of their long, broad brush strokes, in their never mudd, or tentative color....that they dwarf that exhibition of winter landscapes she had here a couple of years ago, which marked a new high in her work. For our money, they're among the best things she's done."

Emily retired from Layton in 1943. Mary, who had been courageously fighting cancer for thirteen years, was bedridden. Emily and Bertha were caring for her. Two years later Mary required morphine to manage her pain, which Emily and Bertha administered and which was kept in the sewing room wardrobe as she was too weak to provide it for herself. In October, Mary ended her own struggle. She was found in her bed with the morphine on her bedside table.



*Mary Groom*

After Mary's death Emily and Bertha remained in the family home. Emily would ask Bertha to join her at the dinner table, always referring to her as "Mrs. Eichmeier". Bertha always referred to Emily as "Miss Emily". Bertha ended up staying with the Groom family a total of forty years, leaving only after her eyesight was too poor to continue working. Not one to feel sorry for herself, Emily threw herself into her work after her sister's death. In January, 1946 she had a one-woman-show at the Oshkosh Public Museum. Concurrently, she showed at the MAI in the Kearney Memorial Regional Exhibit, "the best contemporary painting of six Midwestern states" (*Milwaukee Journal*, 1/20/46).

After the death of her sister, Emily's Lady's Extension Class at Downer College raised the funds to give Emily a trip to Guatemala. Emily invited her niece Betty Groom to accompany her to the Central American isthmus. Betty Groom recalled the six-week trip:

Not many people were traveling, and there must have been all of 25 or 30 tourists in the small country who met and re-met each other at the few inns available to travelers. It was said that a group of German Fascists had been poised in the country to take over Guatemala— along with the rest of the world. At any rate, they were a disappointed lot. One, a local coffee baron in the north, was seen riding through town on horseback lashing out with his whip at anybody who had the misfortune to be within range. Apart from this frustrated group of Nazis, the country existed far from the world of wars and heavy industry, and was an idyllic place to wander, sketch and photograph. Emily drew to her heart's content and later painted a good many watercolors from these sketches. She loved the strong faces and

bodies of the Indian women, and made a number of finished charcoal drawings of them as well.

In Mexico City, on the way to Guatemala, Emily had been very excited at the prospect of seeing works by the Mexican muralists, Rivera, Orozco and Siquieros. There had been much political controversy in the United States about the murals that these politically radical artists had painted. The taxi driver who took the two women on this venture, one of those Mexico City madmen, turned out to be a communist sympathizer and a great fan of these muralists. He became more excited than his passengers as he was given his destination, and rocketed through the chaotic traffic shouting 'Spanglish' politics as he went. The murals were powerful, but the memory of the ride was even more so.



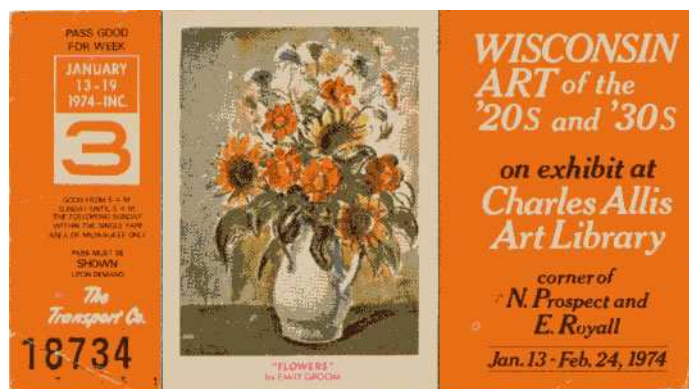
*Guatemalan village d.1946 wc*



*Guatemala d.1946 charcoal and crayon*

Upon her return, Emily wasted no time in producing a series of watercolors and charcoals of Guatemala. This is the only time in her career that she focused on figure drawing, inspired by the strong features of the native Guatemalan women. She also explored a more vivid color palette. She showed this collection twice in the year following her trip; at the F.H. Bresler Gallery and at Milwaukee Downer. The *Milwaukee Journal* (3/30/47) said of her exhibit: “Miss Groom has previously shown galleries of watercolors...devoted to a single locale. She began with Charleston. Then came Nantucket, then the Orkney Islands. Now Guatemala—alive with color.”





*Flowers bus ticket, 1947*

Simultaneously the MAI held the Wisconsin State Annual Art Show, an Upstairs (officially accepted)/Downstairs (rejected) affair. Emily exhibited in both, showing *Flowers* upstairs. This watercolor was reproduced on a bus ticket to advertise the show. The *Milwaukee Journal* (4/6/47) reported that *Flowers* was “painted with that regard for the beauty of blossoms that forbids the Garish.”

In the fall of the year there was a joint exhibition of oils by Emily Groom and Gerrit Sinclair. “Emily Groom showed four landscapes and two florals. She said she had to do hundreds of drawings of corn in tassel before she dared to paint it in the foreground. She also painted poison ivy on the fence, ‘wicked but handsome.’” *Milwaukee Journal* (10/12/47).

In 1948 Gimbels Department Store teamed up with the Milwaukee Art Institute to sponsor the Gimbels Wisconsin Centennial Art Collection. Twenty of the best artists in the state were invited to paint and twelve additional pieces of work were selected by jury, all with a \$250 commission offered by Gimbels to inspire them to their best work. Gimbels offered an additional \$4,150 in prize money—the largest award ever offered at a Wisconsin art exhibition. Emily was one of the twenty artists selected. The organization committee consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Zadock from Gimbels, Bert Cummings

from MAI and Charlotte Partridge from Layton School. Governor Oscar Rennebohm was the honorary chairman of the sponsoring committee. The purpose was to show the rest of the country what fine artists were in Wisconsin and to create a historical record of what the state looked like at its centennial. The paintings were to be donated to a museum after the exhibition.

Emily also took part in the Layton Art Gallery's Wisconsin State Centennial Exhibition of Contemporary Wisconsin Art and the Centennial Exposition of Contemporary Art at the Waukesha Public Library. As the decade ended Emily showed *Guatemalan Watercolors* at the Chapman Memorial Library and entered a Christmas exhibit at the Layton Gallery.

The post-war expansion had begun and change was coming at a faster pace. These great economic and social changes brought more pressures to bear on the art world in Milwaukee. It became much more competitive. The GI bill made it possible for many veterans to go back to school. More students were choosing to study art, and their choice of art schools had expanded. Sister Thomasita Fessler established the Cardinal Stritch Studio San Damiano in Waukesha. The art world had also continued to become much more politically aware. The WP&S headquarters were in the Milwaukee State Teachers College and more art teachers were active in the organization. The Annual Exhibit of Wisconsin Art was now jointly sponsored by the WP&S and MAI and open to all artists in the state (though the paintings exhibited were still selected by a jury). The days of patron-sponsored art and individual attention showered on a relatively small group of artists was coming to an end. Now Emily was the "Old Guard". But she by no means disappeared from the scene. She continued to teach at Downer and most importantly, she continued to pursue her passion, painting.

## The 1950s

Several Milwaukee women's groups formed a War Memorial Committee with the intent of building a war memorial on the lakefront. The idea developed into plans for a building that would house the county veteran's organizations and an art center. The War Memorial Committee, MAI and Layton Art Gallery combined their efforts and after a few years Eero Saarinen was hired to design the Milwaukee County War Memorial Center. Its motto was, "To honor the dead, by serving the living". The MAI and Layton Art Gallery combined their collections and created the Milwaukee Art Center.<sup>80</sup> Emily Groom was appointed a member of the original Board of Directors of the Milwaukee Art Center.<sup>81</sup>

Emily was quite satisfied to play a lesser role in the greater art world and to take part in smaller exhibits. Most of her exhibits were now at Layton or Downer. She enjoyed the reputation and respect she had rightfully earned as well as the stimulation she found in knowing and showing with younger artists.

The Wauwatosa Women's Club had a show, *Three Accomplished Artists*, in which Emily showed with Dorothy Meredith and Robert von Neumann. Sometimes she would show paintings she had on hand, but often she would create new paintings from old sketches. That year she was also commissioned by Charles Zadok to paint a carnation for the 56th Annual Carnation Show.

Charles Zadok was a great supporter and collector of the arts. In 1951 he sponsored three Wisconsin art exhibitions: *Wisconsin, the Playground*; *Wisconsin at*

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<sup>80</sup> It later became the Milwaukee Art Museum, MAM.

<sup>81</sup> Other members of the original Board of Directors were: Elliot Fitch, Max Friedmann, Wm. C. Frye, Charles Isley, Will Ross, Mrs. William Vogel, Mr. Frederick K. Hansen, Mr. Henry J. Wojcik, Mrs. William Chester, Mr. Douglas Van Dyke, and Robert von Neumann.

*Work; and Wisconsin Airscapes and Landscapes.* For the latter exhibit, Mr. Zadock employed a small plane to fly a group of artists over Devil's Lake. Emily was one of the artists in the plane and she declared it, "an exhilarating experience." She produced several watercolors painted from that new vantage point.



*Devil's Lake from the air wc*

That winter, while waiting for a bus, Emily, at 76, slipped on the ice and broke her hip. The doctor who set her hip remarked that Emily had the bones of a forty-year old. By summer Emily was working as usual in her garden in Genesee. Sometime later, her friend and patron Isabel Miller gave her an electric chair for the steep stairway in her Cambridge Avenue home. When Emily finally got around to using it she commented: "When Isabel had that installed, she said I might not need it now, but someday I would. Anyway, it has stopped me from sliding down the banister."

In November and December of 1952, Milwaukee Downer held a show of the newly formed Watercolor Society of Wisconsin.<sup>82</sup> Each of the eight charter members showed three paintings including; Emily, Tom Dietrich, Peter Rotier, Earl Gessert, Robert Von Newmann, Gerald Landt, Marion Bode, and Dorothy Meredith.

Flowers continued to be a favorite subject for Emily, who had lots of them to inspire her in her gardens at Genessee. She often brought buckets of them to her Tuesday morning Ladies Extension Class at Downer. The janitor at the school was known to remark, "There's Emily, loaded again." Her favorite flowers to paint were petunias and zinnias. Peckham Junior High bought an Emily Groom watercolor of geraniums as a gift to the school. This is the only painting of geraniums that is known.



*Pink Geraniums wc*

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<sup>82</sup> This Society took root in Emily's living room on Cambridge Ave.



*Emily Groom*

In the fall of 1954, she began exhibiting works of Wisconsin watercolorists in her home, commission free. She wanted potential purchasers to see the works in a natural setting. She was inspired to do this by the illness of Gerrit Sinclair, a fellow artist she had worked with at Layton and shown with often. They were both trained at the Art Institute of Chicago, but she was fifteen years his senior. A number of artists took advantage of this new venue.<sup>83</sup> Eighteen paintings were sold during the first two weeks. She had a special appreciation for watercolors because, as she told a *Milwaukee Journal* reporter (12/12/54):

I must have selected watercolor as the medium because it is my favorite.

Watercolor fits into a house whether it is modern or old. There is no

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<sup>83</sup> These included Carl Riter, Marian Bode, Robert von Newmann, Peter Rotier, Donna Miller, Edmond Lewandowski, Earl Gessert, Tom Dietrich (Lawrence College), Aaron Bohrod (U.W. Madison), Dorothy Meredith, Ruth Grotenrath, Burton Potterveld, Edward Boerner, Lucia Stern, and Gerrit Sinclair, who died in 1955, twenty years before Emily.

medium more permanent, and it is just as important as oil. I think that John Marin with his watercolors topped anything in the United States...every painting to be shown must be framed in a way that is exactly suited to it. Too many beautiful pictures are Cinderellas who go to the party in their old ash covered gowns instead of in the silks and satins that belong to society. Of course they do not make a hit.

The next year Emily took part in what was called the MAI Allied Art Center Program. The purpose was to have rotating exhibitions sent to Allied Art Centers in Wisconsin. Jane Foster Doud selected the centers and the MAI's Gaar Lund helped pick the paintings.<sup>84</sup> This particular exhibit was hosted at the Wriston Art Center at Lawrence College in Appleton. In February this rotating exhibit went to the Stephenson Public Library in Marinette. Emily did not participate after that, and the attempt to "rotate" the art may have ended there.

The next few years marked a period of conflict in the art world between the Old Guard and the younger artists. Emily was part of the Old Guard, whose era officially closed in 1955 when her friend and great supporter of the arts, Charles Zadok, resigned as Vice President of the Milwaukee Art Institute Trustees over a policy dispute. The Gimbels art collection was later donated to the MAM. Charles Zadock moved to New York and left much of his highly regarded personal collection to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In October of 1955 Downer College sent out formal invitations for the opening of a *Retrospective of Twenty-six Watercolors by Emily Groom*. According to the *Milwaukee*

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<sup>84</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s Mrs. Doud, a painter and collector of Wisconsin art, would load up her car with paintings to hang in offices, banks, factories and businesses in and around Milwaukee, replacing them every four months in an effort to bring art to the people. She and many others were also involved in suburban art shows, held outdoors (sometimes hanging the works on clotheslines) to advertise and sell Wisconsin art.

*Journal* (10/30/55) "there were eight Genesee watercolors, three Orkney Seascapes, Guatemala portraits and landscapes, Nantucket fishing boats, tug boats on the Milwaukee River, and still lifes; all done in the last twelve years."<sup>85</sup>

At the annual Milwaukee Downer Faculty Show, Emily showed paintings featuring Guatemala, the Orkney Coast, and sunflowers.<sup>86</sup> Of these, Mr. and Mrs. William D. Vogel purchased the two of Emily's *Sunflowers* and two Riter watercolors for the College collection. The same year Thomas Dietrich (late of Milwaukee Downer) arranged an Emily Groom Exhibit at Lawrence College where he was now teaching. In April of 1957 Beulah Donahue interviewed Emily on WTMJ's *Women's World*.<sup>87</sup>

After thirty-seven years of teaching at Milwaukee Downer College, Emily officially retired from teaching her popular Tuesday morning Ladies Extension class in 1957. "Now that I am over eighty, it is high time I retire" Emily remarked. One hundred eighty people, many of them students, attended her retirement luncheon at the Woman's Club. They presented her with \$1,500 and of series of skits about her life. The forty members of her "Housewives Class" mimicked one of their teacher's common remarks; "Let the white of the paper do most of the work in creating light and sparkling colors, and don't be a camera. Be instead selective and brief." Another student, Mrs. Newell Conant read her poem to Emily:

When summer comes to Genesee's blue hills,  
And zinnias outdo themselves for you,

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<sup>85</sup> Some of the paintings were borrowed from the following collectors: A.J. Kieckhefer (*Genesee Landscape*, 1909, oil), M/M. Wm. Vogel (*Zinnias*, watercolor), M/M Alex Bick, M/M Donald Doud, Charles R. Decker, Edmund Fitzgerald, Joseph F. Heil, John B Johnson Jr, Frederic Sammond, M/M Malcolm Whyte, M/M Charles Zadok, Mrs. George Miller, Mrs. Gustav Reuss and Marjory Logan (of the MAI Picture Library).

<sup>86</sup> Other faculty members exhibiting were: Carl Riter, Frank Kulasiewicz and Arthur Thrall (the last two new to the faculty). *Milwaukee Journal* (3/3/57)

<sup>87</sup> Letter on file



We'll cross the miles, and lift our hearts anew  
By your keen wit. The eagerness that fills  
Your forward looking eyes, for us distills  
Always some good in fumbling stroke or hue,  
Yet honestly appraises weakness too,  
Where awkward painting our best effort kills.  
Now, restive to be born, new beauty waits  
In tubes of paint, your brushes broad and thin,  
Your paper yet too elegantly white.  
Yet painting cannot match what love creates;  
That picture of our Tuesdays which have been  
With you, our friend and critic, sheer delight.

The skit by fellow members of the Wisconsin Painters and Sculptors Society portrayed Emily as a skeptic, expressing a low opinion of Picasso. Another skit by the Downer faculty mentioned her foray into displaying art in her home commission-free as her “easy-credit” art fling. They then announced that Emily was to become their artist in residence. Emily was delighted with it all and after returning home that evening she sprawled out on the sofa, threw up her arms and declared; “Tonight, I’ll take my brandy neat.”

The 1958 Milwaukee-Downer College yearbook, Cumtux, was dedicated to Emily. There is a full page photo of Emily, (who always wore a hat to her class), in the classroom appraising a student’s canvas with the inscription:

A vitality that springs up in youth making a character that is loved,  
a personality that lends something of itself to a place it has been,

a beautiful, sensitive spirit...

to all this and to a charming lady

a successful artist

a liberal woman

To Miss Emily Groom we dedicated this 1958 Cumtux.

Emily went right on painting and exhibiting by invitation. In May, 1958 the Paine Art Center in Oshkosh exhibited twenty of her floral watercolors. In 1959 twelve of her works, done in the last dozen years, were shown at the Milwaukee Woman's Club.

Among these were: *Junk in Snow*, *Junk in Late Autumn*, and *Old Woman* (charcoal). In the same year, Mrs. William Vogel donated six Emily Groom paintings to the not yet completed War Memorial Center. In the meantime they were hung at the University Club of Milwaukee, in the women's waiting room. These paintings disappeared, along with any record of them.



*Junk. d.1956 casein*

## The 1960s

Emily's visits to her beloved Genesee had become much less frequent. She was still able to maintain her retreat with the help of her nieces and their children. She also had the assistance of Hazel Throxel, a local woman who worked for Emily for many years. Hazel once asked if her family could come and see the Studio to which Emily replied affirmatively. One Day, Hazel's extended family piled out of the car and proceeded to thoroughly investigate the place without speaking a word to Emily. As they were leaving, Hazel's husband said to Emily "How old did you say you were?" to which Emily replied "I didn't say."



*Emily in her gardens at Genesee*

In 1961 the Jewish Community Center held the Alfred Strelsin Art Exhibit, with the theme of the exhibit “The Brotherhood of Man.” Alfred Strelsin, who sponsored the exhibit, was a New York City businessman, formerly of Milwaukee. Emily entered the exhibit with *Thy Neighbor’s House* a watercolor of a demolished home. Developers had begun destroying old homes on Cambridge Avenue to make way for more lucrative apartment buildings. Emily and her neighbors in the “twin” house, refused to sell.



*Thy Neighbor’s House wc*

The same year she took part in an art display celebrating the 40th anniversary of the City Bank & Trust Co. in Milwaukee. The bank selected paintings by various artists, seven of which were painted in 1921 and seven painted in 1961, to commemorate the anniversary. According to the *Milwaukee Journal*, “Only Miss Groom, an octogenarian of springtime vigor, is represented in both groups.” Emily showed *Asters* and “a daring spacious study of a dining room table with a kitchen vista through an open door.” This was a painting Emily had labeled *Red Tablecloth*, but Mrs. Walter Jackson, the widow of the bank’s founder, loaned an oil also entitled *Red Tablecloth*, so Emily changed the name of her watercolor for the display.<sup>88</sup>



*Red Tablecloth wc*

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<sup>88</sup> Also showing were Max Fernekes, Carl Verburgt, Laurence Rathsack, Gerhard Miller, June Buchholz Landt, Edward Green, Robert.von Neumann and Gerrit Sinclair (posthumously).



Emily became the third person to be awarded the “Friends of Art Award,” by the Milwaukee Art Center for “making the greatest contribution towards encouragement and stimulation of art appreciation in Milwaukee.”

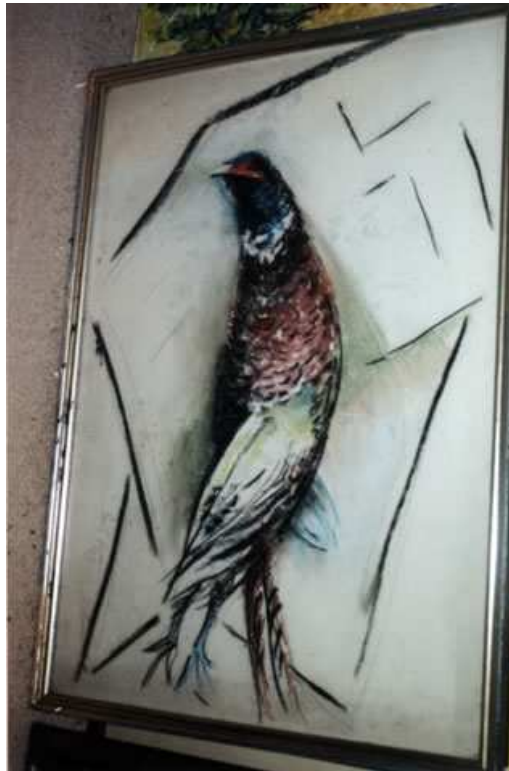
She exhibited in the Wisconsin Watercolor Society’s exhibits in 1962 and 1964 at Mount Mary College and continued to be invited to exhibit at the annual Downer Faculty Show. In 1964, when Downer merged with Lawrence College in Appleton, Wisconsin, the art department that Emily started at Downer in 1902, moved to Appleton. The beautiful teak library was carefully moved there too—along with a number of Emily’s paintings which included *Downer Woods*, *Nantucket Sailboats*, and portraits of the Milwaukee Downer presidents. This was also the year she lost her dear friend Chin.



*Downer Woods oil*

In May of 1965 the Arts Unlimited Gallery had a two person show of Emily Groom and Robert von Neumann. Along with watercolor and pastel florals, Emily showed *Red Tablecloth*, *Dead Pheasant*, and the recently executed *Afterglow* (described

as “a glistening abstraction of a lake sunset”) and of the florals, the same review added, “Vases often done with two curved lines and shadows with a single stroke.” Emily’s failing eyesight forced her to paint in a more impressionist style. At a celebration of Emily’s eighty-ninth birthday Miriam Frink, a co-founder of the Layton School of Art, remarked “There’s one word I always think of in connection with Emily Groom. She is stalwart, both as an artist and a person. She has always been very generous, both with her time and interest. And no question about it, she is well loved!”



*Dead Pheasant, d 1964 wc*

Emily’s great-nephew John Johnston, recounts the story behind *Dead Pheasant*:

In the fall of 1964, when I was 13 years old, I went bird hunting with my godfather Jim Geilfuss. Jim had been teaching me a little about shooting a

16- gauge shotgun and I had become reasonably good at hitting clay pigeons. I think this day, though, was the first time I had really gone hunting and it was an exciting day for me. To make a long story short I was fortunate enough to hit the first bird that Jim's dog Wandy flushed out and we came home with a very lovely pheasant.

When I walked in the door my mother was talking to Aunt Em on the phone and when she saw my prize and described it to my Aunt she asked me to bring it right over so that she could paint it! I thought that would be very cool and my mother drove the bird wrapped in newsprint and me over to Aunt Ems. A few hours later we drove home with a beautiful watercolor of a dead pheasant wrapped in newspaper signed Emily Groom, dated 1964. I remember that the painting surprised me at first because I think I was expecting she would paint the bird in a live action scene and not just a dead bird on crumpled newspaper. Over the years though I have grown to really love the painting and the personal memories it provides. It is one of Aunt Ems works that really does require some explanation!

A number of one-person exhibits also took place and were reported in the *Milwaukee Journal*. In 1962 at the Book Bay where she showed 12 watercolors all done in Genesee that summer; in 1963 at the Wauwatosa Women's Club; and in 1965 at the Artists Showcase, as part of changing exhibits put on by Chapman's Department store.





*Red Cliffs and Gulls, Hoy d. 1970 wc*

## **The 1970s**

Emily continued to paint from memory and from sketches, and made more of a point of dating her canvases, something she often didn't do. In 1970 Lawrence University, (which had absorbed Downer College in 1964), had a show of Emily's works. In 1972 she showed at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Union Art Gallery.

The 1972 Retrospective at the Charles Allis Art Library was a fitting tribute to one of the most widely exhibited Wisconsin artists in the first half of the twentieth century. It was also a tribute to Emily Groom, the talented and resilient person who was born when Ulysses S. Grant was President and lived to see President Gerald Ford in office. She managed to 'keep her eye on the sparrow' through a century of enormous change, surviving and adapting to these changes in general and at the same time, not 'hanging up her hat'. She continued to paint in her own way, perfecting and

experimenting with the skills she had developed, aware of the various movements in the art world but only incorporating what suited her way of painting. Her watercolors were clear and crisp into her nineties even though she herself referred to one of them as “more of a curiosity than a work of art.” Two days after the Retrospective, Emily was interviewed by Barbara Walters in her Cambridge Avenue living room. Viewers watching *The Today Show* heard about the Retrospective at the Charles Allis and the camera zoomed in on a landscape she had recently painted for Dr. Fred Madison, the family’s longtime physician and dear friend.

When the *Milwaukee Magazine* editor, reporting on the 1972 Retrospective, asked Emily how she would sum up her long career she replied:

It’s been absolute pleasure—painting. And I don’t think any pupil I’ve ever had has tried to follow the teacher. Grand nieces and nephews visit often. Ninety-seven is a perfectly incredible age, but inside you don’t feel different. A painter lives in the present, with every day a fresh challenge!

Less than three years later she was bedridden in the Shorewood Nursing Home. Though her body was failing, her mind was still sharp. She could often be found in her bed “having a perfectly lovely time recalling my visit to England and Hoy.” When the minister of her church came to visit her she told him, “Tell my friends that I had a long and happy life and that I was grateful of being born.”

Having lived a very independent life, Emily was not one to give up control, even at the end. When her niece, Mary Poser, came for a visit, Emily asked for some assistance saying, “I did it for Mary [Emily’s sister], you can do it for me.” This was not to be and nature took its course. Just hours before her death when niece Mary asked Emily if she would like a cut up pear, her answer was, “I can do it myself.”

A quote from Robert Beverly Hale at Downer's 100th anniversary seems to sum up Emily's contributions the best:

Now every artist is a teacher actually or by example. That is why I hope that some day we will feel it is as important to sustain an artist in every American community as it is to sustain a clergyman or a doctor. The artist's profession is as old as theirs, but it seems of late that many of us have forgotten our need of him. We have forgotten that his very presence may remind us that it is possible to have a way of life other than our own. We have forgotten that he can open our eyes and hearts and minds to fresh worlds around us, that he can develop us and make us more complete.



*Emily Parker Groom, Artist*

*1875-1975*

## **Afterword** by Elizabeth Groom

This story of the life of Emily Parker Groom was compiled by three sisters, Elizabeth (Betty) Groom, Mary Poser and Helen Johnston—the daughters of Samuel and Helen Groom. It was pieced together over a period of more than 20 years. Helen and Betty started collecting information and photographing all the Emily Groom paintings they could locate, noting their provenance as best they could and placing them in albums. Betty began using old family letters, postcards, newspaper clippings and the memories of many people to write a biography of Emily. Pat Groom Reed (daughter of John and Bertha Groom), another niece of Emily, shared her memories as she grew up in Milwaukee and was close to Emily during her early years. Pat Reed's daughter, Ellen Hofford, has also contributed her recollections of Genesee and Milwaukee. Nancy Swenson (daughter of John and Mable Ruka) who lived in Boscobel, WI where Emily often visited and painted, also contributed to this biography.

Helen visited the Orkney Island of Hoy and saw Melsetter House. Betty spent a couple of days gathering information on Woodstock, NY. Helen has lived in Milwaukee all her married life and spent much time tracking down Emily's paintings to be photographed. Together Helen and Betty visited museums, starting with the Milwaukee Art Museum and its archives, and then proceeding to the archives of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Vanderpoel at the Beverly Art Center in Chicago, and going on to visit a number of Wisconsin museums that had a connection with Emily.

Later Mary took over the project and brought it into the 21st century and the era of computers. After a start with a borrowed city computer, she acquired her own, and with invaluable help from her eldest grandson Christopher Poser, she started to record as much information as she could find about the many shows in which Emily exhibited and

the many artists also involved in these shows, plus other pertinent information. These have all been sent to the West Bend Art Museum. Christopher was instrumental in digitizing and documenting all the photographs of the paintings. Christopher set up a web site ([www.emilygroom.com](http://www.emilygroom.com)) giving access to these photographs and other information. Mary wrote this document using part of what had already been written and adding much new material. She did a good deal of research on her own in many areas including the century of history that spanned Emily's life. In addition she ferreted out a number of interesting new venues and connections to her aunt.

During this twenty-year period, two other sisters (daughters of Charles and Ann Denny) Betsy Warner and Nancy Solodar transcribed from the original pen and ink and beautifully annotated the letters of several of the Denny/Groom families written as they traveled to Europe and in the United States. These were printed and nicely bound. They also typed and bound a delightful history of Sarah Dorothea Middlemore and her eight siblings written by her niece, Rosemary (Middlemore) Hughes Smith which is entitled *Leaping Over Oblivion*. All of these helped to broaden and deepen the understanding of the family, their activities and the times they lived in.

During the same period, the West Bend Art Museum became a major source of information about Wisconsin art and had acquired paintings, (including two Emily Grooms) by many Wisconsin artists. In 2001, Emily was included in their show *Women's Work: Early Wisconsin Women Artists*. The museum has recently changed its name to the Museum of Wisconsin Art and is planning to expand in order to better serve its purpose as a repository for paintings and information about Wisconsin art.

## **About the Authors** by Elizabeth Groom

**Helen Groom Johnston** has been hunting down Emily Groom's paintings— often with the help of Betty—traveling throughout Wisconsin, especially in the Milwaukee area, Minnesota, and Illinois. She has documented paintings in Oslo, Norway (at the United States Embassy) and in Belgium (at the home of an AFS student). She and Betty also made contact with the niece of Mary Dexter, who was able to give us written diaries and letters of her special times with Emily Groom.

**Elizabeth Groom** worked with Helen to find paintings has done a great deal of research into the art of Emily Groom's era as well as other political and social events of the time. She is both directly and indirectly quoted in this biography.

**Mary Groom Poser** is the primary author of this text and has prepared the material in a form that will be appropriate for the West Bend archives. She has also put together a biography of Emily Groom that we hope will be readable for both an artistic reference and for family interest—probably conflicting aims. We have located about 100 more paintings during the last few years.

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This paper would not have been started if not for the hard work of Helen Johnston and Elizabeth Groom and would not have been finished without the hard work of Mary Poser and Christopher Poser.        -MGP