

"The Only Miss Beaux": Photographs of Cecilia Beaux and her Circle

THE RICH VARIETY of photographs and other materials relating to Cecilia Beaux in the collection of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts is the result of several factors. She was born and educated in Philadelphia, studied briefly at the Academy, and later became one of its most well-loved faculty members during her sixteen-year tenure. In addition, her sister and other relatives provided Beaux with a life-long connection to the city.¹

Two of her relatives ultimately donated art and documentary resources which now form the core of the Academy's Cecilia Beaux collection. Beaux's nephew, Henry Sandwith Drinker, served on the board of the Academy for over forty years, and became its seventeenth president in 1959. His fondness for his aunt and her work led to his gifts of drawings and oil sketches, and the research materials for his catalogue of her work.² In 1989 Drinker's daughter, Cecilia Saltonstall, presented the seminal Beaux work, *Les derniers jours d'enfance*, bringing the total number of the artist's oils then at the Academy to eleven. Her recent gift of an important group of photographs of her great-aunt cements the Academy's position as a major study center for the life and work of the artist.

These photographs are the most significant part of the archival collection, because they provide new and very intimate glimpses into Beaux's life. There

¹ A detailed list of the Academy's Beaux holdings appears elsewhere in this volume. The majority of Beaux's personal papers, including correspondence and scrapbooks of clippings and memorabilia, are housed at the Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Art.

² His research materials include photographs of all works in the catalogue, *The Paintings and Drawings of Cecilia Beaux* (Philadelphia, 1955), and correspondence with the owners.



Fig. 1. Interior with figures (left to right) Robert Redfield, May Whitlock, and Cecilia Beaux. Photograph, 1885–86. This and all other illustrations in this essay: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; gift of Cecilia Saltonstall through Tara Leigh Tappert.

are over sixty loose photographs of the artist, her family, friends, and her homes, and two photograph albums, all of which document the people and events in her circle. Like similar collections relating to Thomas Eakins or William Merritt Chase,³ they provide a direct and striking view into her world. Unlike those collections, it is primarily the non-professional, social aspect of the artist's life that is documented.

³ See Ronald G. Pisano and Alicia Grant Longwell, *Photographs from the William Merritt Chase Archives* (Southampton, New York, 1992) and Susan Danly and Cheryl Leibold, *Eakins and the Photograph* (Washington, D.C., 1994).



Fig. 2. Cecilia Beaux and Emma Leavitt reading in their studio on Chestnut Street, Philadelphia. Photograph, 1889–90.

The loose photographs include a group of images taken in her early Philadelphia studios, which present *tableaux vivants*. In a tea table scene (fig. 1), taken about 1885, Beaux stirs her tea, while her cousin, May Whitlock, hands a cup to Robert Redfield, the well-known Philadelphia photographer.⁴ Whitlock's oriental hooded cloak and the carefully arranged folds of Beaux's dress suggest a deliberate composition. In another photograph, a seated Beaux, and Whitlock, holding a peacock feather fan, mimic the poses of the figures in a Japanese screen behind them.

⁴ The pictorialist photographer Robert Redfield (1849–1923) was an important member of the Philadelphia Photographic Society. His visit to Beaux's studio is tantalizing evidence of what must have been a circle of contacts for Beaux in the world of Philadelphia art and photography.



Fig. 3. Beaux and Emma Leavitt after a tea party in their studio on Chestnut Street, Philadelphia. Photograph, 1889–90.

Beaux's second studio, shared, like her first, with her cousin Emma Leavitt, is the setting for several of these photographs taken about 1889. The young women posed for an unknown photographer, creating tableaux of genteel lady painters in their artfully arranged studio (fig. 2, and Yount fig. 2).⁵ The room is decorated with standard artist's accoutrements such as rugs, wall hangings, decorative objects, furniture, and numerous mounted reproductions of European art. A tea party image (fig. 3) reveals more of their studio décor, and suggests, via the hazy image of a man's profile reflected in the mirror, and the many teacups on the table, an event just concluded. All seven *tableaux vivants* have been mounted, and two are on

⁵ For another of these studio views see *Cecilia Beaux and the Art of Portraiture*, exhibition catalogue, National Portrait Gallery (Washington, D.C., 1995), 2.

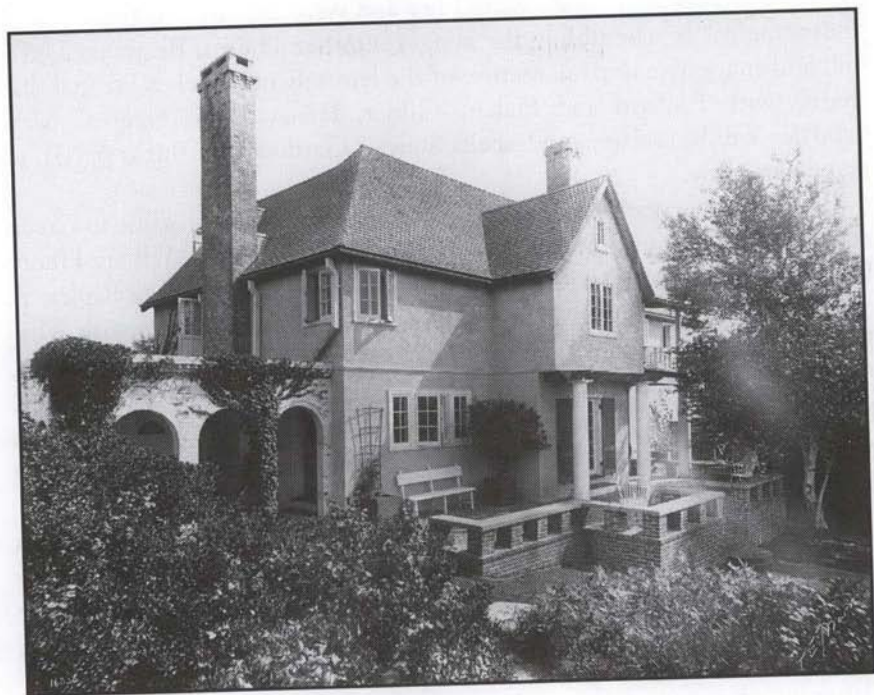


Fig. 4. Green Alley, Cecilia Beaux's home at Eastern Point, Gloucester, Mass. Photograph, ca., 1920, by T. E. Morr.

gold-edged, beveled boards. The motive for this care was probably the preservation of a fondly remembered image rather than presentation or display.

The tableaux images reveal a playful and imaginative side of Beaux, even in these early years of her career. The two photograph albums pick up the story about fifteen years later, after Beaux began spending much of each year at Gloucester, Massachusetts, her summer residence for over four decades. With more than three hundred snapshots of her beloved home, "Green Alley" (fig. 4), and of guests, parties, picnics, and beach scenes, the albums document the relaxed atmosphere of her private and social life, a side of Beaux the world has rarely seen before.

Beaux's summer home at Gloucester constituted a salon for guests from the highest social and intellectual circles of Boston and the eastern seaboard.

Many members of the elite visited her and were captured in these casual photographs.⁶ In assembling the images into her albums, Beaux created a rich and suggestive documentation of the leisurely upper-class lifestyle she shared with Richard and Helena Gilder, Henry Davis Sleeper, Mrs. Schuyler Van Rensalaer, and Isabella Stewart Gardner (see Burns fig. 5), to name just a few.

The academic worlds of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton also came to Green Alley in the persons of intellectuals such as William James, William Henry Howell, Samuel Wolcott, Arthur Twinning Hadley, and Alfred Ripley. A coterie of young Harvard men, captured on film during visits with Miss Beaux, included Franklin D. Roosevelt, Leaverett Bradley, William James, Jr., and Dallas McGrew, the young architect who designed Green Alley. Historians of Boston's social and academic milieu will find numerous treasures in the cultural and biographical jigsaw puzzle on these pages (see Burns figs. 6, 7).

One of Beaux's favorites, A. Piatt Andrew, the Harvard economics professor who first introduced Beaux to the Gloucester area, appears in many photographs. Several images in the earlier of the two albums document the 1908 "Roman Supper for A. P. A.," a costumed dinner party for Andrew, attended, according to Beaux's inscription, by Isabella Stewart Gardner. Other lighthearted events such as picnics and theatricals attest to the delightful atmosphere of artistic and intellectual camaraderie that made Green Alley a beloved destination.

The most direct references to Beaux's painting career in the albums are the many casual photographs of her portrait sitters, among whom are Bryn Mawr College dean, Marion Reilly, Mrs. Richard Low Divine, and Dr. William Henry Howell, dean of the Medical School at Johns Hopkins University. Only two fellow artists appear in the albums. The sculptor Malvina Hoffman is seen with several friends in three photographs. The illustrator Thornton Oakley, one of Beaux's closest friends and one of the few men for whom she developed an emotional attachment, appears often (fig. 5). The image reproduced is one of seven which record a visit to Green

⁶ Beaux identified the photographer for about ten percent of the album images. All are guests, friends, or members of her circle. The amateurish technique and composition also suggest that either Beaux herself, or friends such as A. Piatt Andrew or Dallas McGrew, took these shots. The author is grateful to Tara Tappert for sharing her extensive knowledge of the people and events in these albums.



Fig. 5. Beaux and Thornton Oakley at Green Alley. Photograph, 1907.

Alley by Oakley in 1907. This suite is mounted on different paper than the rest of the album pages, and is inserted into the 1907–1908 section, presumably out of a desire to secure these important memories in their proper place.

There are seven views of the exterior of Beaux's Green Alley studio, which was a large, separate building on the property. Of four views of the interior, one badly focused shot reveals a smiling Beaux surrounded by her canvases, and there are no shots of her at work. Her rigid and well known schedule of mornings sequestered with her painting would have precluded such intimate and distracting photography. Like so many artists of the era, she used antique furnishings and decorative arts to create an aesthetically pleasing and impressive interior space in which to work (fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Beaux in the vestibule of her studio at Green Alley. Photograph, 1917.

The visual biography presented in the albums covers the third and fourth decades of Beaux's lengthy career, concluding with several young soldiers visiting Green Alley in 1918. After World War I, her life and social circle at Gloucester seem not to have been the subject of further photography. This is probably the result of fewer and different visitors to Green Alley, her advancing age, and a somewhat curtailed painting career after her 1924 hip injury.

Individual photographs of Beaux, either formal portraits or casual studies, are found in both the albums and among the loose photographs. They document her appearance from age twelve to sixty. Five professionally made, but unfortunately anonymous, portraits from the 1890s show what a lovely young woman she was.⁷ Beaux was also captured quite beautifully in many quiet moments at home, in the woods, or on the beach (fig. 7). These solitary images suggest the way she impressed people—proud, confident, and stately—feelings surely reflected by William Merritt Chase when he in-

⁷ One of these has been published in Tara Tappert, "Artistic Ambitions: Cecilia Beaux in Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Heritage* 22 (1996), 21.



Fig. 7. Beaux seated in the loggia at Green Alley. Photograph, 1913, by Dallas McGrew.

scribed a photograph of one of his works "to the only Miss Beaux, from her great admirer."⁸

The social and artistic world revealed in these photographs enlarges not only our knowledge of the details of Beaux's life, but also of the circle of friends and contacts she created to nurture herself in the absence of a traditional family. For a woman who was considered by many to be aloof and somewhat prickly, Beaux left a surprisingly intimate document, unlike that of any other American woman artist of the era.

Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

CHERYL LEIBOLD

⁸ PAFA Archives.



The first of these is the fact that the
 sun is not a solid body, but a
 fluid, and that it is composed of
 gas. This is evident from the fact
 that it has a spectrum of absorption
 lines, and that it is surrounded by a
 corona of gas. The second fact is
 that the sun is not a single body,
 but a system of many bodies, each
 of which is in motion. This is evident
 from the fact that the sun is
 surrounded by a system of planets,
 and that these planets are in motion
 around the sun.

The third fact is that the sun is not
 a single body, but a system of many
 bodies, each of which is in motion.
 This is evident from the fact that the
 sun is surrounded by a system of
 planets, and that these planets are
 in motion around the sun. The
 fourth fact is that the sun is not a
 single body, but a system of many
 bodies, each of which is in motion.
 This is evident from the fact that the
 sun is surrounded by a system of
 planets, and that these planets are
 in motion around the sun.

The fifth fact is that the sun is not a
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 This is evident from the fact that the
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