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ALWAYS BACK TO HER ART: ELISABETH AUGUSTA CHANT INDEPENDENT ARTIST AND TEACHER

By
Brenda L. Pate

A letter, written to the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce, asked about the town that lay between the river and ocean.¹ Artist Elisabeth Augusta Chant had always sought out areas close to the water, for solace as well as inspiration. Wilmington, North Carolina seemed an ideal location for her to settle, away from the cold winters of Yonkers, New York.² She must have received quite a positive review, prompting her to pack her belongings and board the train that would transport her to her new home. Little did Wilmington, or Chant, realize the impact this move would generate within the Wilmington art community.

HER EARLY YEARS

The train ride gave Chant the opportunity to reflect on her past as she prepared for another change in her life. She was born March 21, 1865, in the village of Yeovil, Somerset, England where she spent her first year with her mother, Elisabeth Wills Chant, and her parent's relatives. Her father, Captain James Chant, worked for the East India Trading Company and did not see his first-born child until she was a year old.³ Captain Chant would sail his ship, the *Cora Linn*, on a regular route between England and the Far East, gathering and dispensing goods for trade. Most of his voyages were lengthy, and James Chant did not like leaving his young family for so long at a time. This separation prompted him to build a cabin aboard the *Cora Linn* so his family could be together. The next time he left port both his wife and his young daughter left with him. For the next six years Elisabeth received an education unlike any other. Her playmates were the children from Far Eastern lands; they spoke different languages and dressed in colorful, exotic fabrics. The foods, music, and sights she experienced on these many voyages became part of the stories she would relate to her grandparents and other relatives whenever the family returned home between voyages. Several of Elisabeth's brothers and sisters were born in lands far from Yeovil: brothers George on the English Channel, and James off the Cape of

Good Hope, and sisters Alice in Hong Kong and Mary in Liverpool.⁴

As the Chant family grew, Captain Chant realized he must find a place to settle with his growing family. He sold the *Cora Linn* and settled in Yeovil where both he and his wife had relatives. Elisabeth would sit with her grandparents and learn about her ancestors. This was the land of King Arthur and earlier, the Celts with their Druid leaders. In the form of stories and songs these tales were passed down from family member to family member for generations.⁵

Land in Britain was scarce and expensive. Work was not always available and James Chant was restless. Promotional fliers posted throughout Britain and the rest of Europe advertised good, cheap, and abundant farmland in America. The American railroads were also expanding westward and there was a great need for laborers. The railroad companies encouraged families to come to America in order to farm the land and live in the newly built towns along the rail lines.⁶ Elisabeth watched as her Father left without her and her mother, and now brothers and sisters, as well. James and

several male members of his family were in the first group of Yeovil pioneers to travel to America. They set-



Image 1:
Portrait of Elisabeth Chant, oil on board Painted by Vollian Rann while visiting Elisabeth in Wilmington. 1925. Courtesy of Cameron Art Museum

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Articles should contain researched primary source material of Lower Cape Fear interest.

Our thanks to all who read and critiqued this piece which aided in the production of this *Bulletin*.

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tled in Hawley, Minnesota, just east of Fargo, North Dakota and began building the homes that would be used by themselves and their families. Elisabeth, along with her mother, grandmother, brothers and sisters followed in the second group, entering the new country by way of New York City, traveling by wagon to Hawley, arriving in the spring of 1873.⁷

For eight-year-old Elisabeth, a child who had already seen many wonderful and exotic sites during her travels to the Far East, the trip overland to her newest home was just one more exciting adventure. Traveling by wagon across miles of unfamiliar landscape, the Yeovil group encountered much dust, rain and snow. Along the route they saw strange, hairy creatures that seemed as big as their wagons. The people they met, both the Native Americans and other settlers, reminded young Elisabeth of her travels to other parts of the world.⁸ Once again she heard people speaking in many different languages and dressing in clothing unlike her own.

Arriving two weeks after beginning their overland journey, the Chant family was together once again. Elisabeth's grandfather set up a general store and became the town's

postmaster.⁹ The Panic of 1873, a worldwide depression, brought work on the new rail lines almost to a halt. Most of the men who had come to work on the rail lines turned to farming. Trying to work the tough land proved to be quite a task. Another factor was the weather, which proved to be harsh and unpredictable. Many families moved to larger towns where they could find work.¹⁰

Three more daughters were born into the Chant family while they struggled to live in Hawley. Hard times prevailed. Elisabeth was thirteen years old when her mother died. Elisabeth now had to expend all her energy to carry on the day-to-day activities necessary in a household that included five younger sisters and three brothers. James Chant decided to move his family to Minneapolis where he became a partner in a meat and provisions company. Soon James remarried.¹¹ Elisabeth, now fourteen, must have felt a bit relieved, but unsure of her place in the family.¹² Now that she had some time for herself, young Elisabeth began to consider what interested her. Perhaps she remembered the excitement she felt whenever she had watched the sign painter, who lived next door to her grandfather's store in Hawley, work his craft. She might have also remembered when, many years earlier, she watched as a Chinese artist painted a likeness of her father's sailing ship. She knew that she wanted to learn to mix together the colors and paint images of things she felt strongly about. The newly opened Minneapolis School of Fine Arts offered lessons in painting and soon Elisabeth was carrying her own brushes and paints to class.¹³

Elisabeth's stepmother considered painting a hobby and strongly encouraged the young woman to enter the nursing profession. Elisabeth's grandmother was well known for the medical assistance she gave to the Hawley community.¹⁴ Perhaps Elisabeth had assisted her grandmother on occasion, and was adept at working with the sick. Elisabeth followed her family's wishes and began her nurse's training at the new Training School for Nurses at Northwestern Hospital, Minneapolis, Minnesota. The nurse's training program required working from sunup to sundown, with very little time for oneself. In 1886, at age 21, Elisabeth became part of the second graduating class from Northwestern. In 1889, Elisabeth secured employment as a private duty nurse with the H. Coffin family in Duluth, Minnesota. Her responsibilities to the family continued until such time as the Coffin's first child was born.¹⁵ Elisabeth now had a secure profession that was acceptable to her family and her social position in society. But this was not what she most yearned for. Armed with her nursing degree, and now the means for procuring an income of her own, Elisabeth began taking evening art lessons at the Minneapolis School of Fine Arts.¹⁶

DEVELOPING AS AN ARTIST

For the next twelve years Elisabeth's life was totally focused on her art. Her friends, her interests, her very existence revolved around the growing art community in Minneapolis. Here, during evening studio art classes Elisabeth met fellow student Margarethe Heisser. The two women developed a close friendship. Elisabeth and Margarethe set up a

studio together at 719 Hennepin Avenue, in the same building that housed the Minneapolis School of Fine Arts. It was a wonderful time for exploring all types of art. Both women already painted in oils, both portraiture and landscapes. In addition to their own work they offered classes “in portraiture, landscape painting, pottery, passe-partout, a type of picture mounting, and in decorative work on panels, screens, and furniture.”¹⁷ Painting expeditions to paint *en plein air* followed by exhibitions to show their work to the public gave the artists opportunity to show what professional female artists could do.¹⁸

In 1898 Elisabeth’s art activities in the Minneapolis community were put on hold for a year. Her skills as a nurse were needed full time for a while.¹⁹ Unrest between Spain and Cuba led to the involvement of the United States. In 1897 President McKinley sent the battleship *Maine* into the harbor at Havana to protect American citizens who lived on the island. When an unexplained explosion occurred on the *Maine*, killing the 260 American sailors aboard, the American people clamored for retribution. Over one million Americans heeded the call to volunteer to help the Cuban people gain their freedom from Spain and avenge the loss of the men from the battleship *Maine*. The war was short, only five months long. Casualties, both dead and wounded, numbered less than 500.²⁰

Elisabeth became the first nurse sent out by the Minneapolis Red Cross Chapter to assist with the war effort. While away from home she wrote letters to her friends and family telling them about life in a military camp.²¹ She wrote an article to her local newspaper, *The Minneapolis Journal*: “With the Army in the Field. A Graphic Account of Military Life-From a Nurse’s Point of View.” She even found time to make a few watercolors. Several months later *The Minneapolis Journal* announced:

October 7, 1899 Miss Chant, who gave up her work for a year to serve as an army nurse in the southern camps, has taken up her artwork with renewed interest and power.²²

In January 1900 the studio of Elisabeth Chant and Margarethe Heisser hosted the annual meeting of the Society of Arts and Crafts. Elisabeth spoke to the members of the society on the subject of “woodcuts.” Woodcuts, a craft popular at the time, made use of designs from the late Renaissance period. The design was transferred to wood that was cut and then inked and printed onto paper. The paper was then used for book covers, pages and even wallpaper.²³ Since 1876, when the Centennial Celebration had been held in Philadelphia, more Americans were being exposed to the ideals of the Arts and Crafts Movement. The first American society was the Boston Society of Arts and Crafts established in 1897. The various Societies regularly held classes, lectures and made space available for craftsmen to work. Periodicals on Arts and Crafts were available by the dozen, helping people to realize that they could be creative.²⁴

While Elisabeth continued to create paintings and teach, she also wrote articles for *The Minneapolis Journal*. Many of the articles included her illustrations. In 1901 Elisabeth and Margarethe closed their studio. Margarethe left for a teach-

ing position at the Moorehead Normal School and Elisabeth, always ready for a new adventure, decided to travel back to the land of her birth. Before leaving the country she obtained a job assignment for herself from *The Minneapolis Journal*. She was to send them articles and sketches of her visit to England, describing the trip from “An American Girl’s Point of View.” Elisabeth traveled to Boston in June 1901, leaving port aboard the *Saxonia*. Her plans were “to travel to Scotland and the English lake country with friends,” she would then be staying with relatives. The paper indicated Elisabeth was “particularly interested in decorative panels, inspired by the poems of Tennyson, and suggestions from the age of chivalry.”²⁵ Paint box in tow, Elisabeth recorded, through thumbnail sketches, sights from her native England. Her paintings of the cottages and landscapes reflected a simpler life, unencumbered by the industrial movement rapidly growing in the world’s larger cities.²⁶

Elisabeth returned to Minneapolis in 1903. That same year the shabby, old brick structure at 719 Hennepin Avenue, where Elisabeth and Margarethe had shared studio space for several years, was torn down. Elisabeth began spending more of her time working as a muralist. Her love of painting, combined with her continued interest in the use of decorative panels, brought her into many homes in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area. In 1906, Mr. and Mrs. Edmund Brooks commissioned Elisabeth to paint six panels depicting landscapes and buildings in Italy. Mr. Brooks, a well-known book dealer in Minneapolis, was so pleased with the panels that he exhibited them in his bookshop before placing them in his own home. *The Minneapolis Journal* reported on the exhibit, which further enhanced Elisabeth’s recognition as a muralist.²⁷

Artists from the Arts and Crafts Society combined with the newly formed Handicraft Guild to set up a space that would be solely run by the artists themselves. This idea was relatively new in the United States. To enlighten the Minneapolis community as to the purpose of the Guild, Elisabeth wrote an article for the March 1908 cultural affairs periodical *The Bellman* explaining the history and purpose of guilds back to the Middle Ages. She continued, “Our twentieth-century promises to show a general revival of the crafts, due to increasing disgust with machine-made products...and a growing appreciation for individuality and beauty of household and personal use.” Elisabeth’s zeal for the Guild’s continued progress kept her in the forefront as an advocate in the art community.²⁸ She began showing her art work in other parts of Minnesota, as well as Kansas, North Dakota



Image 2: *Untitled (Cottage with Thatched Roof)*, oil on canvas, by Elisabeth Chant, 1901. Courtesy of Cameron Art Museum.

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and as far away as Boston. Her contacts with an appreciation of what other art communities were doing inspired her to continue her efforts to promote and support the art community in Minneapolis.²⁹

Elisabeth had ties to the New England area because of friends Alex and Margaret Grinager. The Grinager's summer home in Tuckahoe, New York, near Yonkers, was open to artist friends who sought a temporary retreat from the imposing life of the city. Elisabeth, who had always enjoyed painting outdoors, visited the summer home on several occasions. Other artists from the Minneapolis area visited Tuckahoe, as well. The art colony, of like-minded people, would share their ideas on what they felt was the future of art in Minneapolis.³⁰ Elisabeth's work as an advocate for the Minneapolis arts community did not decline even when she was painting the landscape of New York. She wrote letters to the managing director of the Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts, Theodore Keane, requesting his assistance in forming an Artist League in the city. Her plea to Mr. Keane included this statement: "We need to show that Minneapolis can furnish artistic motifs as well as flour and lumber."³¹

But soon Elisabeth's artistic life was once again placed on hold. Her father, due to the loss of one of his legs, needed in-home medical attention.³² In the spring of 1908 James Chant died. Elisabeth had lost her mother, two sisters, and now her father. Barely two months later, Elisabeth's friend Margarethe Heisser died while on a painting expedition in North Dakota. Elisabeth had to draw strength from a reserve she must have felt she did not have. Her commitments to the community helped her continue on. The passion for her art helped her stay focused. Exhibits of her work were already planned for the next two years. She also had her duties as secretary to the Artists League of Minneapolis. But the need to distance herself from the constant reminders of her losses prompted her in the summer of 1910 to travel once again to the retreat at Tuckahoe. The next year her stepmother died. The little house where Elisabeth had lived with her father, sister Sarah, and stepmother Hannah held too many sad memories. Elisabeth decided that she needed to leave Minneapolis, at least for a while.³³

BREAKAWAY FROM THE FAMILY

After her stepmother's death in 1911, Elisabeth left Minnesota and moved east, settling in Springfield, Massachusetts. She had inherited funds and belongings from her father, affording her a sense of independence. Elisabeth had hoped distancing herself from the rest of the family would free her to live her life, as she chose. In Springfield, Elisabeth could still be involved with the art world, and have little need to interact with her remaining family members.³⁴ With her reputation for design work already confirmed in Minneapolis Elisabeth was able to secure employment with John Putnam Harding, a prominent designer in Springfield. Soon she had commissions to design and paint murals in clients' homes. She rented a three-room apartment where she could have a place to paint and entertain friends.³⁵ The retreat at Tuckahoe was now more readily available to Elisabeth. This "art colony," in a beautiful wooded setting, offered solace for Elisabeth when she felt a needed to leave the city for a while.

Here she could leave her worries behind and concentrate on painting, or just relax and mingle with the other artists.

One area that strongly influenced the Arts and Crafts movement and the consumer market was the opening of trade relations with Japan. An interest in all things Asian soon led designers to plan everything from home interiors, dress, art, textiles and architecture to reflect this influence called "japonisme." Kimono wrappers were designed for the western homemaker to wear around the home. The relationship of the outfit to "freedom from convention and artistic independence" was not lost on those who wore the new garments. The kimono design was quickly adopted to fit the comfortable lifestyle of many artists.³⁶ Elisabeth remembered seeing this style of clothing being worn by native peoples when she traveled to Asia, so many years earlier with her family. The rich colors, patterns and wonderful texture of the fabrics made wearing these garments a pleasure. Soon Elisabeth had incorporated the style into her own everyday wear.³⁷

A new circle of friends and a vibrant art and cultural community allowed Elisabeth ready access to literature, plays, lectures and many forms of entertainment that stimulated the senses and excited the mind. The lecture halls had regularly scheduled events that made available the latest discussion groups and authors. Lectures on just about any topic of interest could be found within the region. One area of special interest to Elisabeth was that of the occult, especially spiritualism, a concept of making contact with the spirits of those who had died. There were other groups who studied the writings of ancient civilizations. These writings were "felt to contain secrets known to ancient civilizations but subsequently forgotten."³⁸ Elisabeth, drawing from her already strong feelings of an association with her ancestral past, must have truly felt drawn to others who spoke and wrote about the world of the occult.

Elisabeth may have felt using tools such as the ouija board would help her get in touch with her departed family members and her friend Margarethe. Elisabeth's beliefs became an important part of her life.³⁹

Feeling comfortable with her new interests and new friends, Elisabeth once again began entering her paintings in exhibitions. Wanting to maintain her Midwest connection to the arts, Elisabeth entered work in a 1917 exhibition held in Minneapolis, Minnesota. While in town, Elisabeth visited her family. In the eyes of Elisabeth's Midwest family her unconventional style of dress, apparent obsession with the ouija board, spiritualism and the occult, caused a reaction that would bring about a change in her life that she could never have imagined. When Elisabeth declared she could talk to spirits, her family felt something drastic needed to be done. Procedures were begun to have Elisabeth confined to a hospital where she could receive treatment to help restore her to her right senses. Elisabeth, unaware of what her family members were planning, returned to Springfield.⁴⁰

On July 23, 1917 Elisabeth was arrested at her home in Springfield, Massachusetts and taken back to Minneapolis, Minnesota. She was charged with insanity and sent to a private sanitarium and later transferred to the state hospital for the insane in Rochester, Minnesota.⁴¹ She was isolated

from her friends and her art. Her lack of any legal rights as a woman kept her prisoner. She no longer had control of her own life. Elisabeth had to draw deeply from her own inner strength in order to survive. There were some women who, after leaving such a facility, wrote about their experiences. They were often well educated and strongly stated they were not insane but had become victims simply by stating their own opinions.⁴² For three years Elisabeth was confined, her creativity stifled. She was not released from her stay in the state hospital until November 10, 1920.⁴³ At this time she was declared competent. Placed under the guardianship of her sister, Alice, the two women made a trip abroad to Asia, perhaps to help Elisabeth remember a better time in her life.⁴⁴ When Elisabeth returned to America she sought out friends who let her stay in their home in New York. She never did return to her family in Minnesota. On the advice of her physician she began making plans to move to a warmer climate. Elisabeth was soon heading south.

HER FINAL MISSION REVEALED

She had chosen Wilmington, NC as an interesting place to settle, with “the river on one side and the Atlantic Ocean on the other.”⁴⁵ Establishing residence at the downtown Orton Hotel, Miss Chant, as she now preferred to be called, notified the afternoon paper *Dispatch* announcing her interest in establishing an artist colony in the Wilmington area.⁴⁶ After this announcement appeared in the local paper, Chant prepared herself to receive the ladies of the community. She knew she would undergo close scrutiny before being accepted into Wilmington’s society. The *Dispatch*, January 17, 1922:

Miss Chant is a guest at the Orton Hotel, where she will remain for several weeks until she has completed all her plans. Several ladies have already called up on Miss Chant and have been delighted with her personality and with her knowledge of art. . . . she has with her at the Orton a few of her productions in watercolor. Her larger paintings are crated, pending selection of a permanent location. Miss Chant thinks possibly that ladies of Wilmington may enjoy seeing her collection, gathered in Asia, of handwork in needlecraft and woven and printed textiles. She has the oriental part of the collection with her, the European portion still packed.⁴⁷

Entertaining was not new for Chant, as she remembered the little Minneapolis studio shared with Margarethe Heisser so many years ago. In those pleasant early days visitors were welcomed with a cup of tea and a hearty discussion on the arts.⁴⁸ Striving to reestablish herself into a cultural community appeared to be one of Chant’s goals in moving to Wilmington.

Even in a hotel room high above her newest home, Chant could not stop painting whatever she saw that interested her. A small watercolor painting from inside the Orton Hotel shows Wilmington’s downtown Front Street.⁴⁹ The bustling seacoast town always held subjects and scenes of interest for a painter’s eye. But the noise of a hotel and the lack of space prompted her to seek other accommodations. She boarded at the Kidder House, 101 South Third Street and began painting

in her upstairs front room.⁵⁰ While out walking one day, Chant spied a vacant cottage at 311 Cottage Lane with a two-story building in the back yard. The owner was away in Boston at the time. Chant received help from Jane Meares Williams MacMillan (Mrs. Henry J.) in leasing the cottage, along with two-story building in the back yard. Soon, Chant had painted the walls in circles and swirls that she called abstract water lines. The floorboards were colored in lavenders, blue, and greens. She busied herself making the space her own. The two-story building behind the cottage, the Hart wine house, became her studio. Artwork was done in charcoal, pastel, oil, watercolor, block printing, cloth design, batik, tie and died work, and jewelry design.⁵¹

Claude Howell, one of Chant’s students, states there were never more than five or six students working at any one time. After class was over the students were allowed to stay and work in the studio, if they so chose. Howell, who took art lessons from Miss Chant when he was a teenager, kept everything he did while under her tutelage. The study of line and space that Chant taught was quite revolutionary for the time. Claude’s sketches and drawings have helped us see how he was learning to build pictures.⁵² Henry MacMillan tells of letters he received from his teacher while he attended camp in the mountains during the summer of 1925. The letters were full of information about the daily activities along Cottage Lane. Words of advice on how to improve his pencil sketches encouraged Henry, even when his teacher was not looking over his shoulder. Chant would sign many of the letters “from your friend.”⁵³

Her students recall a woman who lived each day to its fullest. Her unconventional beliefs, intermingled with the day-to-day happenings of her present life, created an aura about her that tantalized many. Chant took art quite seriously. Her students, who always called her Miss Chant, could expect little praise, but did have instilled in them a love and respect for painting and a pursuit of excellence in their own work. Howell’s observation of Chant’s humor was that “she never laughed but would chuckle, and with a stern look, but a twinkle in her eyes.”⁵⁴ Chant’s willingness to share memories of her many travels abroad with her pupils made a visit to her studio a journey through time, as well as a chance to work on some aspect of art. A still life set up inside the studio might include silk brocades she collected during her travels in Asia. Tubs were kept boiling out behind the studio in preparation for batik and tied and dyed work.⁵⁵ One day on one of Chant’s walks around the city, she happened to pass Rehder’s Florist on Front Street, Henry Rehder, 14 years old and an art student of Chant’s, remembers giving her a flower she had admired. The next day Henry received a painting of that same flower-to treasure far longer than the flower it self would have lasted.⁵⁶

Her students were given their own symbol to use as a signature for their artwork. Chant, in her own work, would often use three small humps that appeared to represent mountains. After holding an exhibit of student artwork in June of 1923, Elisabeth sent their drawings to New York for an exhibit that included art from students around the country.⁵⁷ The *Wilmington Star News* wrote, July 7, 1923, “Judges at this exhibition felt work sent from the Wilmington

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area was superior.”⁵⁸ The art community in Wilmington became a rallying point for this woman who was determined to bring her art experience and the larger art world connections into the very fabric of her new home. In addition to staying quite busy with her own artwork and her art school, Chant, along with other interested artists and supporters of the arts, began meeting at the Orton Hotel to discuss art and the community. This group officially became known as the Wilmington Art League on July 19, 1923. The first project was to organize an exhibition of artwork by Art League members and students. The exhibit was held at the Y.W.C.A., 206 N. Second Street, April 23-May 1, 1925.⁵⁹

The Wilmington Art League, wanting to honor Chant, hosted a tea and reception at the opening of a one-person exhibit of her work. The exhibit, held October 29- November 7, 1925, prompted a statement from the Art League in the *Wilmington Star News*, November 1, 1925, which reflected their confidence in Chant as an art teacher: “Her work with her individual pupils is strong and effective and will prove an endless factor in Wilmington for the future growth of art and art appreciation.”⁶⁰ Chant, using decorative lettering popular for the day, designed the cover for the catalog. Her strong interests in early Egypt, Asia, and in pre-Gothic England were shown during her solo exhibition. Her work, signed using her characteristic symbols, was never explained to her viewers or to her students.⁶¹ Additional paintings in the exhibit included many scenes of landscapes near her new home. The image *Live Oak, Pelican Point*, painted in 1925, was the sound-side home of friends Daniel D. Cameron Sr. and family.⁶²

Being close to water was always a comfort for Chant. She had friends, among them the Gault family who had a home at Lake Waccamaw and Dr. Nesbitt and his family with a home at Wrightsville Beach who would invite Chant to visit when she needed to retreat from the city life.⁶³ Artist friends from outside Wilmington would visit Chant where she would make her studio available for them to use while in town. One friend, Vollian Rann, painted a portrait of Chant in 1925 showing her in her flowing dress and coiled hair.⁶⁴

Although she did not often exhibit her own work, Chant was very interested in helping to educate others about art. The art department of Sorosis invited her to speak on several occasions on such topics as: ideas and Work of the Wilmington Art Center,” “As the Artist Sees It,” “and “About Etchings and Prints.”⁶⁵ Meetings and exhibits of the Wilmington

Art League were held throughout the city. The art community realized the need for a permanent art exhibition space in Wilmington. After much diligent work, by many, the Wilmington Museum of Art opened October 31, 1938 at 225 Princess Street. The opening exhibition was a selection of watercolors from the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It included paintings by John Singer Sargent, Winslow Homer, and George Bellows.⁶⁶ A letter written by Chant to the *Wilmington Star News*, November 4, 1938, states: “We now have a link with great art centers of the world through our own museum.”⁶⁷

In the midst of the community effort to establish an art museum, Chant moved out of Cottage Lane and her wonderful studio. The owner of the property was returning to Wilmington and needed the cottage for herself. Mrs. William Latimer, then a widow living alone, invited Chant to live with her in her home at 126 South Third Street. Chant moved into the front upstairs bedroom, the hallway outside her room became her painting studio.⁶⁸ Her interests and activities within the art community were still an important part of her life. She spoke at Sorosis meetings and wrote letters to the newspaper advocating the need for more support for the arts.⁶⁹ In 1940 a United States Treasury Department grant made it possible for the city of Wilmington to propose a mural project for the recently completed Post Office on Front Street. Chant headed the committee that chose artist William Pfohl, of Winston-Salem, North Carolina. His subject for the mural depicted the Wilmington waterfront of the 1840’s.⁷⁰

Due to declining health Chant left her upstairs room at the Latimer House in 1941 and moved into the Catherine Kennedy Home at Ninth and Princess Street. She began to draw inward and create a world of her own. She no longer wrote articles to the newspaper. Her writings now consisted of very private and personal journal entries that were a comfort to her alone.⁷¹

The Wilmington Art Museum closed the following year on June 30, 1942. The institution, which Chant had been so involved with in helping to establish, closed, not due to lack of attendance by the community, but because of little financial support.⁷²

For six years Chant lived at the Catherine Kennedy Home. She died September 21, 1947 at the age of eighty-five. Margaret Walker, a good friend, saw that Chant was buried in the Walker family plot at Oakdale Cemetery.⁷³ Through the generosity of her many friends, Elisabeth Augusta Chant was able to concentrate fully on her world of art while living in Wilmington. Her stoic nature and passion for total commitment to one’s work left its impact on her students. Today we can look at the role many of Chant’s former students have had in helping establish organizations in the cultural community of Wilmington, NC: Hester Donnelly and Margaret Tannerhill Hall taught classes and helped manage St. John’s Museum of Art, now the Louise Wells Cameron Art Museum, Henry J. MacMillan, was one of the incorporators of The Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, Claude Flynn Howell set up the Art Department at UNC Wilmington, and Miss Emma Lossen taught the first art class at New Hanover High School.⁷⁴



Image 3:
*Live Oak,
Pelican
Point, oil on
canvas by
Elisabeth
Chant,
1925. Cour-
tesy of Cam-
eron Art
Museum.*

Over 100 items from Chant's own artwork and personal belongings can be found in the permanent collection at the Louise Wells Cameron Art Museum, Wilmington, NC. The Latimer House Museum, also in Wilmington, NC, has designated one of its upstairs bedrooms as the Chant Room, with drawings and items used by Miss Chant while she lived at the house. The Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota, the Faribault House, Mendota, Minnesota, and various private collections locally and around the country help keep alive the work done by this dynamic artist and teacher.⁷⁵

After her death, among her possessions were found handwritten journals and small watercolor paintings that related to a very private world. Chant wrote of ad-



ventures and people that did not appear to exist in this world, or of this time. She had never meant to share this collection with her Wilmington friends. It was part of a personal, inner sanctuary she had built for herself.⁷⁶ One of her final paintings depicts a woman in a purple cape walking alone down a winding path.⁷⁷ This image could be seen as Chant saw herself preparing for her final earthly journey. Her deep personal feelings about her Celtic ancestral past, along with a love for the romantic Arthurian legends, combined with her total involvement with the arts, sustained her throughout her life.

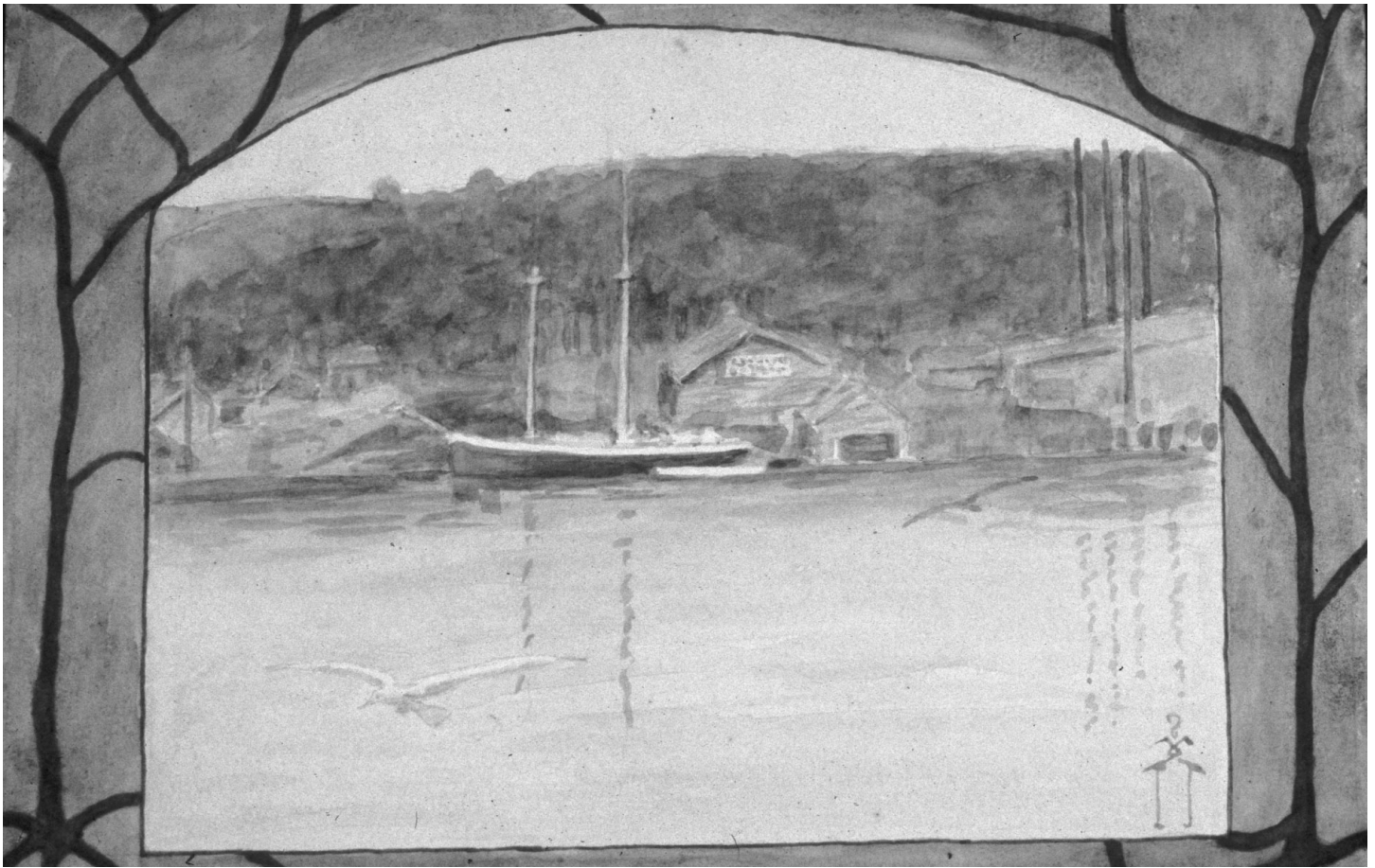
Image 4: *Six Designs: Woman in cape on road to cottage*, watercolor, Elisabeth Chant, n.d. Courtesy of Cameron Art Museum.

NOTES

- ¹ MacMillan, Henry J. *Violet and Gold: The Story of Artistic Activity on Cottage Lane in Wilmington*. Wilmington, NC: Henry J. MacMillan, 1991. 3.
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- ⁵ *Ibid.*
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- ⁷ Chant Archives.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
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- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*
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- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
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- ³² *Ibid.*
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*
- ³⁶ Kaplan. 150. Swinth. 80.
- ³⁷ Chant Archives.
- ³⁸ Campbell, Bruce F. *Ancient Wisdom: A history of the Theosophical Movement*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980. 9-10.
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- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ Chant Archives-Hennepin County Case File C12083, November 1917.
- ⁴² Hubert, Susan J. *Questions of Power: The Politics of Women's Madness Narratives*. Newark: University of Delaware Presses, 2002. p. 59.
- ⁴³ Chant Archives-Hennepin County Case File C12083, December 10, 1920 and March 10, 1921.
- ⁴⁴ Chant Archives.
- ⁴⁵ MacMillan. 2.
- ⁴⁶ *Reaves-Dispatch*. January 12, 1922.
- ⁴⁷ *Reaves-Dispatch*. January 17, 1922.
- ⁴⁸ Chant Archives.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
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- ⁵¹ Hewlett. 34.
- ⁵² Ward, Gwen, producer. Videocassette GWA/146. Claude Howell on E. A. Chant Collection of Louise Wells Cameron Art Museum. 1992. 57 min.
- ⁵³ MacMillan. 6-7.
- ⁵⁴ Ward.
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- ⁵⁶ Chant Archives.
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- ⁶⁵ Chant Archives. Hewlett. 44,45.
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- ⁷⁶ Chant Archives. Lower Cape Fear Historical Society.
- ⁷⁷ Chant Archives.

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Three Landscape Designs: The Messenger of Peace
Watercolor on paper painting by Elisabeth A. Chant, 1922.
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