

Lillian Gleason Annin and Her Fish Portraits

by Lynne Belluscio

Her name was Lillian Gleason Annin. She was only seventeen when she graduated from the Fine Arts College of Ingham University in 1887. This last Sunday, two of her paintings, dated 1894, in the collection of the Big Springs Museum in Caledonia were unveiled. They had been cleaned and restored at Westlake Conservators in Skaneateles.

The paintings a rainbow trout and a brook trout are in their original frames. They are quite impressive, although when the review panel met downstate to determine which applicants would receive the grants for art restoration, a couple of the panel members questioned the importance of fish paintings. (They were from New York City. What do they know about the Caledonia Fish Hatchery!) I was a member of the panel and quickly pointed out that not only was the artist a graduate of Ingham University, (and gave them a brief history of Ingham) but Lillian's brother, James Annin, Jr. was instrumental in the pioneer development of fish propagation along with Seth Green of Caledonia and the fish "portraits" were of great importance to the community. So the panel agreed to give a grant to Big Springs for the restoration of the paintings. In the meantime, I have tried to learn more about Lillian Annin, the painter of fish.

She was the youngest of seven children of James and Pricilla Annin. Her older brother, James Jr. was born in Boston in 1850, but the family soon moved to LeRoy, where the rest of the children, Charles, Frank, Elizabeth, Hattie, Herbert and Lillian Gleason Annin were born. Lillie, as she was later to be known, was born on February 4, 1870. Her older sisters, Hattie and Lizzie (Elizabeth) both attended Ingham. Hattie graduated in 1879. It is



Bovee, a library interior by Miss Bryant, a very fine trout study by Miss Annin, and a dog's head finely executed by Miss Stuart. Miss Stuart's fruit pieces were fine, while Miss Annin and Bryant showed some excellent still-life studies." (So it appears that Lillian had painted fish for graduation as well as the 1894 paintings.)

The alumnae records indicate that Lillian Annin was an Assistant Art Teacher at Ingham for one term

and then in 1888 taught at Nyack on the Hudson. The following year she was in charge of the art department at the Indianapolis Institute. She was also on the staff of Ohio Western Reserve University. At the age of thirty seven she married Claud Pettin-gill at Bellingham, Washington. Lillian painted in the Seattle area for many years and is listed as a rare and collectible artist from the region. I discovered one small seascape of hers on the internet. She died in 1929.

also possible that Lillian's brother Charles Henry Annin attended Ingham for a semester in 1876, when several other men were enrolled in the College of Fine Arts. Lillian was enrolled in the Preparatory Department in 1879, when she was eight. She studied under noted artist Lemuel Wiles. She graduated in 1887 and was the youngest of the four students in the Fine Arts graduating class. She also served as class secretary. The *LeRoy Gazette* published an account of the 1887 graduation:

"After the hall exercises, the class and audience repaired to the North side of the Art College Annex and witnessed the tree exercises. The class tree, which was duly encircled by the students, was marked by a stone monument cut from our native lime rock with rough faces and the figures '87 inscribed upon it. The senior charge was delivered by Miss Annin and contained many bright hits at the Juniors who replied through Miss Hendee, who returned all criticisms most cleverly and with interest. After the replies the usual class manuscript was burned and the exercises closed by singing the class ode ...

At the Art College the exhibition of the work of the students was this year extensive and together with the paintings of the instructors and few by Mr. Irving R. Wiles, formed a very attractive and interesting exhibit ... Of course the interest at this time centered particularly on the pictures of the graduating class. It is the custom for the class to leave entirely original pictures as their graduating efforts, choosing their own subjects. These were displayed together and included a view of Buttermilk Falls by Miss

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