

Julia Joins Her Family In LeRoy

by Lynne Belluscio

This story has a happy ending thanks to the generosity of a lot of people who opened their wallets to bring a piece of history home to LeRoy. And it wouldn't have been possible, but for the patience and persistence of an art dealer in Florida - - and the concern of a woman in Florida for her grandmother's favorite painting and a tenacious researcher in Ohio who kept immaculate records.

Last year I received an email from Victoria Golden, an art dealer in Florida. She had a portrait of Julia Ingham painted by Phineas Staunton. She was selling the painting for a client in Florida. Many years ago, the painting belonged to an Ingham descendent, Julia Ingham Jones, but for financial reasons, in 1960, she sold the portrait to her good friend, Elva Morgan.

And when Elva took custody of the portrait, she also assumed the care of the story of her friend's ancestor. I've written about Julia Ingham before. She was the twin sister of Emily Ingham, the founder of Ingham University in LeRoy. They were born in Saybrook, Connecticut in 1811. The twin baby girls were given to older sisters to care for.

Emily was raised by her sister Marietta. Julia by her sister Anna. When Anna married Benjamin Franklin Hayes, Julia became his ward. Tragically, Anna died when she was 26. Julia was fifteen. A year later, Julia married her brother-in-law, Benjamin Hayes. They had a son Julius in 1830 and it appears that they lived in Chicago. Benjamin Hayes died in 1850, and Julia moved to LeRoy to join her sisters, Marietta and Emily at the university.

It is believed that at this time, Phineas Staunton, her sister Emily's husband, painted the portrait. And it was passed down through several generations, until her namesake, Julia Ingham Jones owned it.

After Elva Morgan bought

the portrait she tried to learn more about it and even took it to the Ringling Museum to show it to the art curator. But then her memory began to fail and the portrait transferred to her daughter, Gloria Condo.

In 1998, Gloria wrote to the curator of the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C. and he put her in contact with Annette Peck in Ohio. Annette Peck had married into the Ingham family, and became intrigued with her husband's ancestor and artist, Phineas Staunton. She spent several days in LeRoy searching through our records. (It was Annette's research that brought the Henry Clay painting to the attention of Amy Burton in the United States Senate.) Annette provided a vast amount of information to Gloria Condo and visited her to see the portrait of Julia Ingham.

In 2002, Gloria took the portrait to an appraisal show in Gainesville, Florida, and C. Hugh Hildesley, of Southeby's gave her a verbal appraisal and assured her that the painting was indeed valuable, especially since she had information about the artist and Julia Ingham. So Gloria treasured the portrait of Julia Ingham and stayed in contact with Annette Peck in Ohio.

Just recently, Gloria died, and the portrait was passed to her daughter, Cheryl Slechta. She remembered how much her grandmother loved the painting, and even remembered



her grandmother's friend, Julia Ingham Jones, who was related to the woman in the portrait. But it came time to find a good home for the painting, and Cheryl contacted Victoria Golden, the art dealer.

I talked with Victoria recently, and she told me that most art dealers would have just sent the portrait to auction, but she believes that it is vital to at least make the effort to have paintings go to the best possible place. She said, she was honestly skeptical when she emailed "jellodirector." As she said, "Why would someone connected with Jell-O be interested in Julia Ingham's portrait?" Of course I explained all of that, and even told her that we had all of Annette Peck's files. Tucked into the file marked "Florida" were copies of all the correspondence Annette had with Gloria Condo from 1997 and 1998. And again, some letters from 2002, after Gloria had taken the portrait for appraisal. And surprisingly, there was Victoria's business

card, although she doesn't remember having contact with Gloria twelve years ago.

So after many emails and phone calls, we were able to settle on a price that was OK with Gloria Condo's family. They wanted the portrait of Julia Ingham to be reunited with the rest of her family. In the meantime, several donors came forward to help us bring Julia home. Peter Nelson, who had donated money for a painting restoration, agreed to let us transfer his money to this project. Mary Chiafalo, who lives in Ohio, and is a descendent of the Ingham family sent a check. Bob and Sue Jones sent a check and so did Bob and Beth Boyce. So it was meant to be - - after 150 years, Julia Ingham was reunited with her family. Her portrait hangs on the wall facing her two sisters. I think she is faintly smiling.

