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PREVIEW

THE BIOGRAPHY OF HENRY HOWARD BAGG

by

John S. Clabaugh

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Interdepartmental Area of Administration,
Curriculum and Instruction

Under the Supervision of Professors Marvin Spomer and Robert Egbert

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 1997

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THE BIOGRAPHY OF HENRY HOWARD BAGG

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GRADUATE COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

THE BIOGRAPHY OF HENRY HOWARD BAGG

John S. Clabaugh, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 1997

Advisors: Marvin Spomer and Robert Egbert

At a time when his contemporaries have biographies written about their life and retrospectives dealing with their art, Henry Howard Bagg (1853-1928) has no more than two paragraphs written about his accomplishments. Knowledge of his work exists only in the form of two or three works in several museums and collections. Yet, Bagg is considered the most prominent "pioneer" artist painting in Nebraska between the "explorer" artists of the early 1800s and the "college artist/educators" of the 1920s.

Bagg is considered the earliest of the "pioneers" who came to Nebraska because of a need for new opportunities or a settled livelihood and, in some instances, out of a missionary zeal to bring culture and enlightenment to the prairie.

By studying the life and work of Henry Howard Bagg, the researcher hopes to provide an informed impression of the overall character of Bagg and his art works that may lead to a reevaluation of the significance of Bagg among scholars of American art.

The purpose of this study was to develop a biography of Henry Howard Bagg that illustrates the life of the artist at the turn of the century. The goal was to determine certain turning points in his life that may have impacted his works of art, illustrations, and teaching methods.

The study was conducted to encourage the public to consider his combined roles as artist, illustrator, and educator. His popularity as a teacher, as well as a highly collected artist, prompted inquiry into the artist's stature in the community in early Nebraska and the place of the artist in the community today.

The results of this study may prove of interest to art historians, scholars, and collectors of art for the purposes compiling material for archives, individuals, and collections; supplying more reliable resource material and an expanded listing of works; and providing research records about other artists of the same era.

PREVIEW

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J. S. C.

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CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHY OF H. H. BAGG

Introduction

Henry Howard Bagg (1853-1928) was a prominent early Nebraska artist and illustrator. He is thought of as being one of Nebraska's first art educators. This information and two more paragraphs describing his life and accomplishments are all that was available in terms of scholarly research on this artist. He was one of the most prominent artists painting in Nebraska between what are called the explorer artists of the early and late 1800s and the college artists of the 1920s. Norman Geske, author of Art and Artists in Nebraska, listed Bagg as one of Nebraska's "Pioneer" artists.

This author's relationship with the subject of Henry Howard Bagg has been shaped by personal experiences. In the early 1980s, I joined the staff of the Department of Art at Nebraska Wesleyan University. My position was relatively similar to that of Professor Bagg's, that of Head of the Art Department and instructor of painting, drawing, and art education. In addition to my full-time work in the art department, I too have done some illustration, although not as extensively as Bagg. My health and family situations are also somewhat similar.

Henry Howard Bagg's life is recounted in the first chapter of this dissertation. Little about his life comes to us through his writing. The life stories of the family, held together with census and directory dates and

addresses that confirm the whereabouts of Bagg and his family, account for much of the information about Bagg's life.

Many of the early stories come from the few written manuscripts that were available to the author. Most of the later stories come from the grandchildren of Henry Bagg and are remembrances of children who were under the age of 15 at the time of the incidences and over the age of 80 when they recounted the stories; therefore, the stories lack dates, addresses, and references (see Plate 1, Photograph of Henry Howard Bagg).

What the author wishes in reading this account is that much of the good and the hard times of Bagg's life will become apparent, such as the early death of his father, the trials of his mother, the depressions of the 1890's, and the struggles with poverty in his own family.

Henry Bagg was always the chief provider of his family--an ever-expanding one at that. At the time of his death, he was a major benefactor for 14 grandchildren and various cousins and family members, which was truly an outstanding enterprise for a 75-year-old man who had always been in poor health.

Bagg was well over six feet two inches tall, extremely thin, and had a high soft voice that cracked with age. His daughter, Olive, commented that he stood so erect he would seem to sway in the breeze as he walked. His stature and actions were much like Abraham Lincoln's (a relative through marriage). As he sat at his easel, he would cross his legs in the same manner as Lincoln. He had a high brow and deep-set eyes. They were martyr's eyes that showed suffering for things he could not do to relieve others.¹ He is remembered as almost a saint by his family. Stories about

Plate 1

H. H. Bagg, Photograph, Collection of Willard Dye



him come from grand- children of individuals who knew him as a part of their life, and that knowing was so significant the stories about encountering him as the artist, educator, or illustrator were passed through the generations of their families.

The Life of Henry Howard Bagg

Henry Howard Bagg, known as H. H. Bagg, was born on June 30, 1853, the only child of Dr. Henry Bagg and Francis (Fanny) Greene Bagg of Wauconda, Illinois. Little is known about his early childhood; however, he often spoke of living on a large estate on Bangs Lake with a canoe and a pony with which he would explore the streams and woods of Illinois. His father was a country doctor, and his mother was a principal and music instructor teacher in a girls' seminary. She was gifted in art and music and encouraged her son in his artistic endeavors.² Fanny's artistic ability is apparent in several pencil sketches signed by her, which now belong to the Dye family. Her son apparently acquired her musical talent, for he dabbled in the music business twice in his life, and he was able to pass that ability on to his own children who could sing and play instruments.

Fanny Greene Bagg was a student at the Troy Female Academy (now Emma Willard School) in Troy, New York in 1834. After graduating from the Troy Academy, she worked as a tutor in arithmetic, French, and piano at a plantation in Virginia. Fanny was listed as a teacher in the 1843 census in Lanesborough, Massachusetts. In 1840, she was listed as a teacher and head of the household, with three other females, in the census

of Lanesborough, Massachusetts. She married when she was 35 and moved to Illinois with her new husband, Dr. Henry Bagg.

The Bagg/Greene family had a long documented history. H. H. Bagg inherited the Greene family Bible, which was passed down to the first-born female through generations of the Greene family. As the only child in his family, Bagg retained the Bible--a 1599 copy of the Geneva Bible--until he passed it on to his daughter at his death. The Bible was brought to this country by Fanny Bagg's ancestor, John Greene, a surgeon who arrived in Boston on June 3, 1635, with his wife and six children. There they met Roger Williams in Salem, Massachusetts and eventually joined Williams at Providence Plantation in Rhode Island. A later member of the Greene family was Nathaniel Greene, a member of George Washington's staff during the Revolutionary War.³ (See the Bagg family tree in Appendix A.)

The Bagg family also came from England to Massachusetts and settled in Lanesborough in northwestern Massachusetts, as did the Greene and Pettibone families (whose descendants included H. H. Bagg's wife, Ida). It was in Lanesborough that H. H. Bagg's grandfather, Aaron Greene, died in April of 1842.

By the 1850 census, H. H. Bagg's parents lived in the bustling, post-pioneer village of Wauconda, both cited as being from Lanesborough. Many other Lanesborough people appear in the census in Wauconda and Hebron. Bagg's father, Henry Bagg, was probably educated at Tittsdale Medical College near Lanesborough. The family has only one story about Dr. Bagg, and that is of his late night visits to his patients. His father was a country doctor (a typical one). He had a horse named "Dolly," who would

take him through the bitter storms and cold, making his rounds of the sick and suffering. Often he would be so tired after his late calls that he would wrap the reins over the dashboard and old "Dolly" would take him home.⁴

H. H. Bagg was born June 30, 1853, as Howard Henry Bagg (later he called himself Henry Howard Bagg). As a child in Wauconda at Bangs Lake and later as a teenager in Aurora beside the Fox River, he grew up attuned to the mysterious primordial forces that crouched beyond the villages and their surrounding farms. Howard and the other boys cherished their surroundings. Both locales were--and remote portions still remain--a wild world of beauty.

In a 1921 article in the Lincoln Star, Bagg recounted his early inspiration for becoming an artist, which gives us a small account of his boyhood.

When just a lad of ten or twelve summers, he saw an artist at work. The whole process so fascinated him that he and his chum determined then and there to become artists. While the other boys played marbles and whittled sticks when not in small town mischief, Bagg and his pal slipped into the woods with pencil and slips of paper to sketch. They saved their pennies and finally got together enough money to buy some secondhand tubes of paint. Then the real fun began.⁵

In the 1860 census in Wauconda, H. H. was seven years old, living with his father, mother, and his mother's sister, Betsy Greene. Dr. Bagg died on January 5, 1864, during the Civil War, although it may not have been due to the conflict. The family then moved to Aurora, Illinois in 1868. The census of that year indicated that Mrs. Bagg was a tailoress and agent of Hinckey's Knitting Machines and of Connecticut Mutual Benefit

Insurance Company (although this may have been a pension). The family lived at the corner of South Fourth and Western Avenue in Aurora. The 1870 census indicated that Fanny Green Bagg was 57 years old and owned property; H. H. was 17; Betsy Green was 67; and Lucy Green Cole was 71 (Fanny's other sister who came to live with them in Aurora). Lucy brought one child and her husband, William Cole, a retired farmer who was 76.

In the 1872 census, H. H. Bagg was listed as an art student "born ill." Bagg was always in frail health. According to the family, H. H. had diabetes, and his father fed him pumpkin seeds and cured him. Other family members suggested that Dr. Bagg cured Henry of diabetes by giving him "August Flower" tonic. In later years, H. H. would call the family together and announce that he was going to die, which scared the family.⁶ It appears that Bagg was a borderline diabetic his whole life; he ate as many as five small meals a day and carried sugar with him to supplement his low blood sugar at times. This may have accounted for his extremely anemic look and thin build.

In 1932, the Aurora (Illinois) Beacon's historical columnist, Lutz White, published a series of letters from Aurora citizens on the subject of remembering Howard Bagg. Four columns contain information about Howard Bagg's Aurora years. The most personal portrait of an adolescent Howard Bagg was given by a contributor who left only the initials C. S. S.

Dear Lutz

I knew Howard Bagg, the artist, who you mentioned last Sunday; knew him well but not intimately; in fact I believe they had but few intimate friends, although he was highly respected and admired, due to his ability as an artist.

At school I thought him to be the tallest and at the same time the thinnest individual I had ever seen. Rude boys dubbed him "Seamless Bags." They would approach him and say, "Come down here, Baggs, and I'll kick you." To all of this he was good natured and would pay not the least attention. When walking he always kept his arms close to his sides. With head in the clouds, both figuratively and literally, he commanded attention.⁷

In 1869, at age 17, Bagg began his formal studies with Professor Martin Woodruff in Aurora. After three years of training from Professor Woodruff, Bagg was listed in the census as a "landscape painter." Woodruff had been listed in the 1858 census as a medical student, but by 1888, both Woodruff and Bagg were listed as prominent landscape artists "having produced some of the finest gems of art at which the people of the county have been privileged to look, and, as should be the case, their work grows better as their experience and years increase."⁸

Woodruff may have studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Art, for he is mentioned as living as an artist in Philadelphia in the 1860 census of that city. Soon thereafter, he returned to Aurora and continued painting, until he left that community in 1901.

While studying art with Martin Woodruff, H. H. Bagg made frequent trips to visit artists' studios and art schools in Chicago. At this time, Bagg began a long association with the Art Institute of Chicago, selling his work through their exhibitions, patterning his own instructional practices as preparation for that school, and sending his daughter Olive and many of his students to the Art Institute to study art.

On November 12, 1878, H. H. Bagg married Ida Pettibone of Lanesborough, Massachusetts. There is much information to suggest that Howard and Ida were cousins, for both have Pettibones from

Lanesborough in their lineage. The ceremony took place in Hebron (McHenry County), Illinois and was conducted by P. T. Styer, pastor of the N. E. Church. John Mebovich and Elvira Bigelow were witnesses. At that time, Bagg listed his occupation as an artist.

In 1880, H. H. Bagg and his wife, Ida, lived with his mother, Fanny Bagg, and two aunts, Lucy Greene Cole and Elizabeth Greene, at 86 South Fourth Street in Aurora, Illinois. His occupation was listed as "landscape painter." Ida's occupation was listed as "keeping house," and "no occupation" was listed for his mother and aunts. Records indicate that during this year he accepted a position as an art instructor at the Jennings Seminary for girls in Aurora. The financial arrangement for his lessons is not clear, but it might be speculated that he received a portion of the tuition from each girl who entered his classes, as was the case in most of his other teaching assignments. With this type of instructional arrangement, he would not be teaching "full time" and would set the hours of his own classes. This would leave him ample time to pursue his painting.

Not much was mentioned about Ida Bagg by the family, other than grandmother liked "Leonard best." She had lived with the Bagg family for many months, for she and H. H. had filed "intentions" before getting married. H. H. Bagg's grandmother, Sally Pettibone (July 15, 1795-March 11, 1841), was Ida's grandfather's sister. Therefore, there must have been an early acquaintance between the two. Daniel Pettibone, Sally's brother and Ida's grandfather, had married Lydia Lincoln, a relative of Abraham Lincoln. Howard Bagg, H. H. Bagg's grandson, mentioned that his grandmother was very English in her speech and mannerisms. "She seems