



Mourning Art Finds It's Way to Jamestown By Karen Livsey and Fenton History Center staff

Selinda Boss painted her memorial to her brother William in 1823. Carl T. Hale donated it to the Fenton History Center in 1971. Who were they and how did Carl T. Hale have the painting to donate? Why did it come to the Fenton History Center? Using the research tools at the Fenton History Center, the staff has pieced together the family and the likely travels of the painting based on the family history.

Today the staff tries to get the story about an artifact when it arrives. The donor is asked about the history of the item, its provenance. This all adds to the significance of the piece and adds to the story when it is used in an exhibit.

The painting, an example of mourning art, was created by Selinda Boss in 1823 to memorialize her older brother, William, who had died in 1819 at the age of 18. Mourning prints, which were made so that a person could fill in information about the deceased individual, were coming into fashion at this time. This painting, however, was entirely done by hand with no preprinted version.

Selinda Boss was born in Saratoga County, New York in 1805 to William and Leah (Storms) Boss. The Boss family was still living in Saratoga when Selinda created this painting. The next year she married John Keeler and they soon moved across New York State to Clarendon, Orleans County. They raised a family which included Anna Adelia, who was born in 1834. Selinda's father, William, a veteran of the War of 1812, died

September 19, 1836 and is buried in Clarendon. Her mother, Leah, died in 1858 and is buried in Forestville, Chautauqua County, New York.

Even after the move to Clarendon and then later, a move to Chautauqua County, Selinda could hardly have imagined the additional miles her painting would eventually travel.

According to a note penned on the back of the painting, Selinda gave this painting to her oldest daughter, Anna Adelia Keeler “This small gift is for Ama (sic) Adelia Keeler presented to her by her mother Selinda wishing her to preserve it for the sake of one who love’s (sic) you with all a mother’s love and fondness”. This sentiment may have been the guiding hand and the reason the painting survived the travels and was continually passed down in the family.

Anna Adelia Keeler married Ludolphi Osmer, editor of the *Dunkirk Union*, in 1857 and lived in the Fredonia-Dunkirk area. Selinda (Boss) Keeler died in Fredonia, New York in March 1863. Three months later Anna Adelia packed her family and their possessions, presumably including the painting, and traveled to New Mexico where they hoped her husband’s health would improve. In New Mexico, Ludolphi established a newspaper and three more children were born, making a total of five children in the family by 1870. In the 1870 census for Jamestown, New York, we find Anna Adelia’s oldest daughter back in Jamestown, age 12, living with her paternal uncle, Richard Alden Osmer and his wife, Mary Amanda (Proudfit) Osmer and their two children. Richard Osmer was the partner with William H. Proudfit in the Proudfit Clothing Store in Jamestown.

1871 was the beginning of a series of events in Anna Adelia’s life which must have had a devastating effect. Her father, after a long illness, committed suicide in Worcester, Massachusetts. His body was brought back and buried in Fredonia, New York. The following year, Anna Adelia’s two-year old daughter, Vivian died. Then in 1873, Anna Adelia’s husband died in New Mexico. Sometime after his death and before the 1875 census enumeration in Jamestown, Anna Adelia, her remaining children and apparently the painting returned to Jamestown. In 1874, Anna Adelia’s husband’s sister-in-law, Mary Amanda (Proudfit) Osmer, committed suicide in Jamestown. Mary Amanda was the wife of Richard Alden Osmer, with whom Lillian had been living. The stress of all these deaths must have weighed heavily on Anna Adelia because in 1876, she committed suicide in Jamestown, leaving four children.

By the 1880 U.S Census, Anna Adelia’s children are separated. Lillian, the oldest daughter, was still living with her uncle, Richard Alden Osmer in Jamestown. Ellen Elizabeth was not found in the census. Louis was probably the 16 year-old Louis L. Osmer living in Stockton, California as an apprentice druggist. John Alden Osmer the youngest son, is living in Jamestown with W. H. Proudfit and his wife, Ellen, and listed as an adopted son.

Two years later Lillian marries James Moorkens in Texas. Again the 1880 Census gives us a clue as to why Lillian is in Texas. James Moorkens is living in Tom Green County, Texas in 1880. Also living in Tom Green County, Texas, is Nathan Osmer who is

Lillian's other paternal uncle. We can surmise that that is the link that brought Lillian to the west and to marry James Moorkens. The painting was probably given to her by Anna Adelia at sometime or else the family passed it on to her, maybe because she was the oldest daughter.

Between 1882 and 1895, Lillian and James had four children born in Texas and Mexico. Mary Margaret Moorkens was the second oldest daughter, born in 1887 in Texas. The other children included Adelia Ellen, Florence Lillian and James Osmer. In 1895, Lillian (Osmer) Moorkens died, and in 1905, James Moorkens died.

Mary Margaret was the only one of the three daughters to get married. The painting must have traveled with Lillian through Texas and Mexico and eventually ended up in the possession of Mary Margaret because this is where the link to the donor is found. Mary Margaret Moorkens married Carl Truman Hale in 1915 in Texas. Carl T. Hale was a U. S. Army officer. They had two children, Mary Katherine Hale and Carl T. Hale, Jr. Carl T. Hale, Sr. died in Los Angeles, California in 1968. The following year, his widow, Mary (Moorkens) Hale died.

It must be the son, Carl T. Hale, Jr. who was the donor of the painting to the Fenton History Center in 1971. Carl T. Hale, Jr. was living in Las Vegas in 1968 when his father died, but was in Manchester, Connecticut when the painting was donated. Carl T. Hale, Jr. died in Fairfield, California in December 2004.

Mrs. Joseph Fox of Frewsburg was the person who brought the painting to the Fenton after she received it from Reno, Nevada in 1971. She is thought to be connected to the Hales but at this time we have not discovered the connection.

The painting had to have traveled with the families as a prized possession in order for it to have descended through five generations, over 148 years, to the donor.