LILLY MARTIN SPENCER
AMERICAN PAINTER OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Master of Arts

By
ANN BYRD SCHUMER, B.A.
The Ohio State University
1959

Approved by

Sidney M. Kaplan
Adviser
Department of Fine Arts
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The writer wishes to express her gratitude to Dr. Sidney M. Kaplan for his untiring patience and assistance in the planning and preparation of this thesis.

Appreciation is acknowledged to Dr. Glen Patton for reading this study and for his helpful comments.

Special appreciation is given to Mrs. Lillian Spencer Gates, the granddaughter of Mrs. Lilly Martin Spencer, for having made available to the writer large amounts of private information and materials.

I am greatly indebted to Mrs. Edith S. Reiter, Curator of the Campus Martius Museum, Marietta, Ohio; to Mr. William H. Gerdts, Curator of Paintings and Sculpture at the Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey; and to M. Bartlett Cowdrey of the American Archives. Special thanks is given to Mrs. Otto P. Ream of Miami, Florida; Mr. William Marshall of the Ohio Historical Society; Mrs. Alice Sweet of New York City; Mr. Fredrick Conkling of East Orange, New Jersey; and Mrs. Alice Hook of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Cincinnati. Mrs. Jacqueline Sisson, Fine Arts librarian of the Ohio State University is gratefully acknowledged for her assistance.
The generosity with which private owners made pictures accessible to the writer was memorable. The financial aid given by the Board of Trustees of the Ohio Historical Society, for the collection of research materials, was both generous and essential.

A general indebtedness is acknowledged to the New York Public Library, the Newark Museum, the Cincinnati Museum of Fine Arts, the New York Historical Society, the New Jersey Historical Society, and the Ohio Archeological and Historical Society.

I wish to record my gratitude to my husband whose kind understanding has made the completion of this thesis possible.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Plates</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part I: 1802-1848</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Early Years</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Marietta, Ohio</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Cincinnati, Ohio</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part II: 1848-1858</strong></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: New York City I</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Mid-Century Art Organs</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6: New York City II</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre Art</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7: Graphic Reproductions</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part III: 1858-1902</strong></td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 8: Newark, New Jersey</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 9: Up-State New York</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York City III</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retrospect</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appendix</strong></td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bibliography</strong></td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plates</strong></td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

iv
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plate</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Charcoal Portrait of Young Girl</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Charcoal Portrait of Woman</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Charcoal Portrait of Man</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Judge Joseph Barker</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>James H. Beard's &quot;The Long Bill&quot;</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Self-Portrait</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>&quot;Reading the Legend&quot;</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>&quot;Shake Hands?&quot;</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>&quot;Dignity and Impudence&quot;</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>&quot;This Little Pig Went to Market&quot;</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>&quot;A Sister's Influence&quot;</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>&quot;My Birthday Present&quot;</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>&quot;Fruits of Temptation&quot;</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Group Portrait of the Ward Children</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Nicholas Longworth Ward</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>&quot;Truth Unveiling Falsehood&quot;</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>&quot;The Picnic on the Fourth of July&quot;</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Mrs. Benjamin Harrison</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>&quot;The Centennial&quot;</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Study of Two Figures</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Nineteenth century American painting, from the end of the Federal Era in 1830 to the Centennial of 1876, was primarily an art for the American people. During those years, American society was almost totally lacking in self-consciousness. Pride of self and country was unclouded by introspection. Relatively unaware of the long traditions of European art, they were satisfied with the art produced at home by artists who were also fellow Americans. More often than not, when an American purchased or commissioned a painting or a piece of sculpture from Europe, it was executed by an American artist living there. Gradually, improved conditions of travel and communication with Europe did away with that rather refreshing social naiveté.

The American art of that half-century is varied in style, technique, and subject. Confused in terms of quality, it is, nevertheless, dynamic because of its sincerity. It mattered little whether the artist was trained abroad, at home, or at all. He was judged according to his ability only by those around him. The people then recognized a work of art by its reference to familiar objects, places, or persons.

Reality was the basis for all art criticism during those years. To the degree that the artist recorded reality,
the work became a representation of truth. Credibility was the tie between the mid-nineteenth century American artist and American society.

The mid-century American artists were primarily concerned with immediacies: their surroundings and experiences. They were almost totally unconcerned with the past; few, if any, native historical canvases date from that period. The artists of that time painted the grandiloquent landscapes of America's West; they painted the Amerinds. They painted the many and varied aspects of their contemporaries. Vitally interested in human life and social conditions, these artists painted for the American people.

Many artists of that period were untutored in the studio or professional sense of the word. At the same time, they cannot be referred to as amateurs because there is present in most of their works a professional sophistication of craft. A few studied with artists in Europe while a larger number had some native training. The public did not discriminate between the works produced by the two modes of training.

Uniform criteria for the judging of art works at that time were few or non-existent. Under such conditions, therefore, an artist could achieve a phenomenal success, only to be plunged into obscurity by the succeeding generation. The pages of Henry T. Tuckerman's Book of the Artist:
American Artist Life, published in 1867, note the names of many such artists.

Some of the mid-nineteenth century American artists and their works are now enjoying a mild renaissance. One of these artists who had achieved great nation acclaim during the decades of the mid-century, but who was obscured within a few years, was Mrs. Lilly Martin Spencer. This woman artist is representative, in many ways, of that artistically rich mid-century era.
My attention has been directed to the paintings of that very talented young lady, ... Miss Lilly Martin. To say that I have been astonished at the genius and skill displayed in these remarkable productions would be to express ... feebly the feelings with which I have regarded them ... That a girl so young, all of the avocations and associations of whose life have been so little adapted, ... to inspire a passion for the fine arts, or the slightest acquaintance with their simplest rudiments, -- should have produced such paintings, -- is, to me, I confess, the most astonishing instance of precocity and triumph over difficulty in the arts which I have ever had the fortune to witness, or of which I have ever read.1

1Marietta Intelligence, August 25, 1841. The writer was Mr. Edward Mansfield, editor of the Cincinnati Chronicle.
CHAPTER I

Lilly, born at Exeter, England, in November of 1822, was christened Angelique Marie Martin. Her family was French, from Brittany, and both parents had come to England to teach. Her mother had been raised in a convent. Her father had studied for the priesthood but had reversed his decision to enter the Order. Lilly’s parents were married in England. At the time of her birth, Lilly's father, Giles M. Martin was teaching at the famous Exeter Academy. The unusually high educational accomplishments of the Martins as well as their freedom from constraining conventions were, without doubt, a contributing factor to the artistic career of their first child, Lilly.

In 1830, the Martin Family emigrated to New York City. There, Giles, with three English friends opened a school in order "...to bring a school society...into a liberal and harmonious system of mutual help and protection."3

---

2 She sometimes signed her name "Lily," "Lilly," or "Lillie." "Lilly" was used most consistently and this is the way her parents referred to her.

3 Letter written to M. Martin in Exeter by an English friend, Mr. Hebert. Collection of the Ohio Historical Society, Campus Martius Branch, Marietta, Ohio.
Various accounts are given concerning Lilly's first artistic efforts. One may safely say that she was a precocious child and that her artistic talent was discovered at an early age and encouraged by her parents. This is evidenced by Lilly Martin's attendance in art classes at the old Academy of Design in New York City before she was ten years old. These first lessons were few in number, however, for, due to general family illness during the cholera epidemic of 1831-32, the Martins left New York and moved to the vicinity of Marietta, Ohio.

---

CHAPTER II

Lilly was ten years old when the Martin family arrived at Marietta. Although they had intended going further West, the Martins decided to settle in Marietta, which they found "extremely pretty." The geographical location of this city is at the merging point of the Muskingum and Ohio Rivers, a fact which is largely responsible for Marietta's position as the first settlement, in 1788, under the government of the United States in the Northwest Territory. The French name quite probably derives from Marie Antoinette, given to the area by La Salle who arrived there in 1749. After its acquisition by United States, Marietta apparently retained some attraction for French people settling in this country. King Louis Phillippe of France visited there in 1798.

The Treaty of Greenville, 1795, which ended warfare with the Indians in the Territory, opened the Western frontier. Marietta quickly became one of the largest and most populous settlements between the Appalachians and the far West. By the time of the Martins' arrival in May of 1833, Marietta had lost much of its 'settlement' quality.

---

5The Northwest Territory comprised what is today Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan.
Its population was approximately one thousand; the surrounding county contained ten times that number. Churches, schools, and newspapers had been established.

In July, 1833 Giles Martin was appointed by the Marietta Collegiate Institute and Western Teachers' Seminary as "lecturer and Teacher in the Department of French in this Institution." Three years later the institution became Marietta College.

Mr. Martin purchased one hundred and fifty-five acres of land from the widow of the former Ohio Governor Return Jonathan Meigs, Jr., in August of 1833. He immediately contracted with a Marietta carpenter to build a house. This property, known as Tupperford Farm, was located about five miles from Marietta in Washington County.

It is somewhat difficult to evaluate clearly the role of the early years in Marietta in Lilly's artistic development. Little evidence remains concerning this formative period. Due to Mr. Martin's respected position, the family, which included Lilly's brother, Henry, and sister, Marie, would have undoubtedly been an accepted part of the town's society. The location of their home, however, was far enough from Marietta to hamper close relations with the townspeople.

Lilly apparently had no schoolroom education. This was to be expected since both parents were very well qualified to instruct their children at home. Mr. Martin's large personal library was unusual for that day and place.
Shakespeare, Gibbons, Adam Smith, John Locke, Alexander Pope, Homer, Rousseau, Hume, Smollet, Voltaire, Moliere and many others were well represented, as well as books on world history, mathematics, and optics. At least one book was related to art, Charles Dupere's *Mathematics Applied to the Fine Arts* (London, 1827). Lilly must have greatly benefitted from the opportunities made available by her parents. From Lilly's letters and paintings, it seems apparent that the Martins educated their children quite well even though their rural environment might have tended to encourage labor at the expense of education. Moreover, they seem to have instilled in their children an awareness and appreciation of occurrences around them, a personal independence, a sense of responsibility, and a sincere regard for people.

There is no evidence to show how Lilly first continued her art immediately after settling in Marietta. Six years later, however, in 1839, a local journalist says of her talent:

> I have very recently seen the drawings and paintings of a young girl of this vicinity, and have not only been delighted, but surprised. I cannot refrain from drawing some attention to extraordinary merit.

---


Lilly was sixteen years old when this article appeared. Although the Marietta citizens were relatively unsophisticated in terms of European art, they, nevertheless, knew of various kinds of art being produced at that time in this country. Many of the settlers came to Marietta from the Eastern states, some bringing with them portraits; but nearly all had some knowledge of American art. Itinerant limners occasionally ventured to Marietta bringing with them remanents of the English tradition of Lely or Kneller and often a flavor of Copley's or Stuart's excellent portraits.

Marietta could boast of two citizens who were artists of some merit, Sala Bosworth and Charles Sullivan. Bosworth's parents had settled near Marietta when he was a young boy. After becoming a self-educated classical scholar, Bosworth went to the East where he studied painting at the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts. He returned to Marietta to paint portraits and local landscapes. Charles Sullivan was born in Pennsylvania. Before coming to Ohio, he had studied with Thomas Sully. Sullivan, however, appears to have been primarily a landscape painter. Thus, although living in a modified frontier settlement, the citizens of Marietta would have had some background for the appreciation of paintings.

Newspaper accounts of the day tend to infer that Lilly Martin did not begin to draw seriously, "on a larger
scale," until 1836. Such statements are not in keeping with her early interest in art, attested to by her art classes in New York City. Three extant sketches indicate some background of experimentation. Lilly's parents were interested in their daughter's artistic talent and helped to further it. This is clearly indicated by the early lessons and by the aid they later provided during her first attempts to establish herself as an artist in Cincinnati. Perhaps, to the newspaper readers of that day, the image of undiscovered genius suddenly blooming in the wilderness had greater romantic appeal than the more realistic account of talent advanced through self-denial and hard work.

The phrase "on a larger scale" might well refer to the sketches Miss Martin executed on the plastered walls of her farmhouse. Various accounts are given as to the incident responsible for the beginning of those murals. One writer suggests that the artist, returning from a local social event, was so impressed with one of the dresses worn by a friend that she drew the design on one of the walls of her room. Another account tells of her mother, who was entertaining a visitor, asking Lilly to complete the interrupted

---

8For example see: Cincinnati Daily Gazette, November 9, 1841.

task of bread-making. A continued silence from the kitchen brought Mrs. Martin and her guest to investigate. They found Lilly sketching a portrait of herself (on the kitchen wall) in the act of kneading the bread dough. "One could not conceive of anything more natural. This picture, alone, is worthy of more than I can write, and no one can have any idea of it without seeing it." 10

The walls of the Martin home quickly became one of the local wonders. They appear to have greatly affected their artist's career. The first consequence, arising from their local interest, was to draw the attention of artists Bosworth and Sullivan to Miss Martin's artistic talent.

Only speculations can be made as to the quality of Lilly Martin's drawings before she was about fifteen years old. Her first efforts have not been preserved. The Campus Martius Museum in Marietta, Ohio, has three of her charcoal sketches in its collection. These are undated portraits. Two of these (Plates 2 and 3) are both superior in technique; one (Plate 1) is less distinguished, which might indicate an earlier date of execution. In comparing the one charcoal sketch of a woman with the other, also of a woman but probably later, similarities occur in the stylized folds of the garments and the rather awkward conception of shoulders and ears. However, the stiff, straight-forward, formal

10 Marietta Intelligence, loc. cit.
position of the former becomes a relaxed, casual, off-center figure in the latter. The shading of the areas of flesh, the treatment of lace in a freer manner, inclusion of an entire hand, and a competent realization of facial expression and features, all indicate an ambitious, successful portrait-sketch.

The charcoal drawing of the man is quite similar to that of the more developed, probably later, sketch of the woman. It is relaxed in pose and shows well modelled hands and facial features. Both sketches appear to have required approximately the same degree of technical accomplishment. All of these considerations would tend to indicate that the three charcoal portraits were executed before 1839; the earliest by 1837 and the latter two probably during 1838.

The painters Bosworth and Sullivan, at this time, became important to the young artist's career. They appear to have introduced her to oil paints. Furthermore, they must have encouraged Lilly to continue in art. Although the exact degree of influence of those two artists on her career is undetermined, it is noteworthy that Lilly's first exhibition of her oil paintings was held at the home of Charles Sullivan, in Marietta.

During the early part of 1839, Lilly added color to the sketches on the walls of her home.\textsuperscript{11} From the time of

\textsuperscript{11}The murals are no longer extant. Although the house is still standing, the present owner appeared unaware of their existence.
her first introduction to the oil medium, she does not appear
to have returned to monochromatic charcoal or pencil. What-
ever preliminary studies for her paintings remain are all in
thin oil washes of color. From her efforts in oils, in 1839
until the summer of 1841, Lilly executed fifty oil paintings.
One of these, "The Vow," was ten feet by twenty feet in
size.\textsuperscript{12} Such concentrated work in the medium of oil paints
would tend to indicate that Lilly very likely neglected, or
even ignored, charcoal.

One of her first portraits in oils, that of Judge
Joseph Barker of Marietta, Ohio (Plate 4), is traditionally
dated late in 1839. Although Lilly has transposed some of
the experience gained through the use of charcoal, she also
appears to be aware of the greater possibilities inherent in
the oil medium. This is especially noticeable in the render-
ing of details, such as the definition of the pages of the
book and the refinements in the pair of spectacles. Tech-
nically, there are also many inadequacies, the most obvious
one being the lack of a sufficient light source. This is a
reoccurring problem in the artist's development.

Miss Martin's first exhibition opened August 23,
1841;

...it will continue for a short time only, pre-
viously to proceeding down the river. The rooms

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{12}Edith S. Reiter, "Lilly Martin Spencer," \textit{Museum}
Echoes (Columbus, Ohio Archeological and Historical
Society, May, 1954).}
will be opened every day....There will also be an evening exhibition twice a week...when Music will be in attendance.

Admission for tickets, 25 cents during the day; 37 1/2 cents for the evening.\textsuperscript{13}

Another column in the newspaper urges people to attend since:

"Many...have enjoyed the pleasure of a visit to her studio and will, we do not doubt, most cheerfully avail themselves of the opportunity now presented to encourage an artist of extraordinary taste, talent, and genius."\textsuperscript{14} From this notice it becomes apparent that Lilly Martin was exhibiting her paintings for an admission fee in order to obtain sufficient financial means to advance her talent through instructions in art. The indication that the exhibition was to go "down the river" infers that Miss Martin intended going to Cincinnati, quite probably to study, and was hoping to meet this expense by means of the two exhibitions.

The financial success of the Marietta exhibition must not have been as great as anticipated. Perhaps this was the first in a series of disappointments which were to plague the promising young artist. The local editor chided his fellow citizens:

...the number of citizens who have visited this exhibition is comparatively small. Not the fifth part of those who have been the recipients of Mr. Martin's courtesy at his house for years past have...thought proper to visit the exhibition.

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Marietta Intelligence}, August 19, 1841.

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Ibid}.
We are all aware of the design of this exhibition. It is not the gain of a few dollars and cents, nor is it the desire of applause; but that a young girl whom all admit to possess extraordinary genius may obtain the wherewithal to prosecute her studies in a systematic manner...devoting herself to a vocation which she has been induced by her friends to adopt.\textsuperscript{15}

The exhibition, although not financially too rewarding, and the farmhouse murals gained certain patronage for Lilly Martin. The editor of the \textit{Cincinnati Chronicle}, Edward D. Mansfield, was visiting Marietta at that time to deliver the commencement address at the College. He saw Miss Martin's home and the exhibition which he described with great enthusiasm and length in the Marietta newspaper.\textsuperscript{16} Editor Mansfield assured the artist that she would be well received by the citizens of Cincinnati; moreover, he felt that "...in my opinion, she is a fit subject for the patronage of a gentleman in Cincinnati whose encouragement of the arts has already conferred honor on his taste and liberality."\textsuperscript{17} The gentleman referred to was Nicholas Longworth, the Elder, then patron to the sculptor, Hiram Powers. Mr. Longworth financially encouraged many artists who became relatively important to nineteenth century American art: William Powell, Thomas Buchanan Read, James

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Marietta Intelligence}, September 2, 1841.

\textsuperscript{16}\textit{Marietta Intelligence}, August 25 and 26, 1841.

\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Ibid.}, August 26, 1841.
and William Beard are among these. With the aid and encouragement of Editor Mansfield and Mr. Longworth, Miss Martin was enabled to pursue her original intention, that of study.

The themes of the artist's work may be judged from the Marietta exhibition catalogue of 1841\(^{18}\) and from Mr. Mansfield's descriptive commentary in the newspaper. The subject matter of Miss Martin's paintings consisted of portraits of people whom she knew; family incidents, such as "Le Premier Pas" and "Infancy"; scenes inspired by literature, such as "The Hungarian Princess," "The Nightingale" (from Cowper's poem *Catherine*), and "The Vow"; and humorous and romantic events, probably imaginary in conception of which "The Artist and Cupid" and "The Elopement" are examples. Thus, Lilly Martin's earliest paintings show a broad variety of interests reflected in the subject matter.

CHAPTER III

Lilly Martin is at once the talented child of liberal, continental rearing and the enterprising youth of Jacksonian America.

The middle decades of the first half of the nineteenth century were the heyday of individualism and laissez-faire for the common man. The typical American was an "expectant capitalist, a hardworking, ambitious person for whom enterprise was a kind of religion, and everywhere he found conditions that encouraged him to extend himself."19 There was renewed faith in, and respect for, the individual and his abilities. With existence and freedom assured, Americans had begun the task of rounding out their country. Emphasis was placed on the 'realities' of life. Emerson wrote of man in relationship to the truths of nature. Oliver Larkin calls these people 'nation proud,' and they undoubtedly were. The era must have been exhilarating, the atmosphere and pace stimulating. It is no wonder that Lilly Martin, always sensitive to her surroundings, was infected with this emphasis on 'nativeness,' preferring this atmosphere to that

---

of Europe. A people with a belief in themselves and their country supported native artists and preferred their works to those of European artists. Supported by an enthusiastic, uncritical patronage, art centers were established. Cincinnati was such a center; in the West of that day, it was vital and self-assured. Of itself, it said:

Everyone concedes the preeminence of Cincinnati over other Western cities, during the middle and late nineteenth century, in the fields and art, literature, and public spirit...Cincinnati was older than the other cities, for instance Chicago was a mere fort and trading post when Cincinnati was a city of over twenty-five thousand with a definite social culture...20

Grace Greenwood of the National Press writing in the 1840's about Cincinnati says that "the reputation the city has enjoyed abroad for encouraging sculptors and artists is undeserved--she has always been a hard step-mother to the artists." A Cincinnati editor defends; "...our pretensions are that we have produced the artists of America in number and excellence far beyond our share."21 Many of that day's most famous artists had received some encouragement in Cincinnati. Miner K. Kellogg; John Neagle, whose well-known work, "Pat Lyon the Blacksmith," was painted in Cincinnati; William Powell; T. B. Read; the Frankenstein brothers; the Beards; H. K. Brown; Hiram Powers; T. Campbell; E. F.

20 Edna M. Clark, Ohio Art and Artists (Richmond: Garrett & Massie, 1932), p. 73.

21 Cincinnati Gazette, September 16, 1846.
Fectolas; Inace Williams; J. B. Martin; R. Duncanson; C. P. Crouch; and Worthington Whittredge were a few of the artists active in Cincinnati before the mid-century. The artistic atmosphere of Cincinnati was genuine. It was quite favorable for the advancement of Lilly Martin's career at the time she chose to go there.

To Cincinnati, the flourishing art center, Lilly and her father took the exhibition of paintings, early in November of 1841. Mr. Longworth had advised against this, claiming that "her pictures cannot have that finish of perfection to justify a public exhibition among entire strangers." Although he had not yet seen any of Lilly's works, Longworth, in the same letter, proposed to send her to Boston where she would study with Washington Allistons, stopping on the way to meet "Col. Trumbull, see the collection of his works and obtain useful advice and instruction from him." If she proved worthy after that training, Longworth offered additional assistance and financial support. It is difficult to understand how Lilly could refuse so generous and seemingly sound an offer and so unusual an opportunity. Whatever her reasons, she did refuse, but did so in such a manner as to have retained Mr. Longworth's interest, if not his support. The extent of Mr. Longworth's aid to Lilly Martin is not known.

\[22\text{Letter by Nicholas Longworth, September 18, 1841. In the collection of Mrs. William Spenner Gates, granddaughter of the artist, Rutherford, New Jersey.}\]
Lilly wrote to her mother in Marietta of her first impressions of Nicholas Longworth:

...a little bit of an ugly man came in (much shorter than father)...he came forward and, taking my hand and squeezing it hard, he looked at me with a keen, earnest gaze....His manners are extremely rough and almost coarse, but his shrewd eyes and plain manner hide a man of very strong mind and high and generous heart. 23

Lilly appears to have been equally strong-minded; she refused a subsequent offer by the generous Longworth to send her abroad. 24 This later proposal for foreign travel stipulated that Miss Martin was to study and copy Old Masters to the exclusion of all else, abstaining from any original work. Again, the reasons for her refusal are difficult to ascertain. Lilly appears to have had a rather positive outlook, in general, especially in regard to her own ability. After seeing a "large and splendid" painting by Benjamin West, Lilly writes: "It is most beautiful, but I think that I could do as well..." She most probably rejected Longworth's second offer because she preferred to develop her own ability, through training and study here, rather than to go abroad and copy earlier works of art. This is not to imply that Miss Martin felt that she could not benefit from art works other than her own. Perhaps, since her parents

23 Letter by the artist when she was nineteen years old, November 3, 1841. Collection of the Campus Martius Museum, Marietta, Ohio.

24 Meiter, op. cit., p. 8.
were French and since Lilly herself has lived abroad for the first few years of her life, Europe was less fascinating and held fewer illusions for her. Moreover, living close to the frontier, she had undoubtedly absorbed some of the atmosphere of Jacksonian Democracy and felt that contemporary American artists were those best suited to instruct her.

The first mention of Miss Martin in Cincinnati newspapers was a polite notice: "Amateur artist, Marietta, Exhibits Work." The same writer, after viewing the exhibition, writes enthusiastically and encouragingly about her "extraordinary talent."25 Urging attendance at the gallery, he again points out that the purpose of the exhibition was to procure means for her formal instruction. There is no evidence as to the success of this exhibition either. The first years of Lilly's residence and work in Cincinnati, however, appear to have been quite difficult.

Lilly's father remained with her in the city for a few months, just long enough to help Lilly find accommodations and begin her study. Early in 1842, he returned to his wife and children in Marietta. On her own, Lilly was faced with many hardships. People who had commissioned portraits often failed to return for them and did not pay for their work. Others were demanding and hard to satisfy, as

25 The writer was the editor of the Cincinnati Daily Gazette.
Lilly indicates. "I have changed the cap backwards and forwards two or three times and now, again, she wishes me to change it!" Many people promised the struggling artist that they would come for a sitting but did not meet their appointment. Offers of help often failed to materialize. Lilly wrote of one such failure to her parents in Marietta:

You must not build any expectations on Mr. Symmes getting any money (as) he has not been to see me since you are gone. We must make up our minds to go on our own footing; our own feet are yet the best to stand on, bad as they may be, for if we do (stand) on others, we will be likely to be tripped.  

Probably because of the difficulties which Lilly had encountered, Giles Martin returned to Cincinnati in the late spring of 1842. There he taught French privately to help defray some of the cost of Lilly's expenses. He arranged an exchange with an artist, a Mr. Williams, who agreed to accept French lessons in return for instructing Lilly. Very little is known of the style and technique of Mr. Williams. According to the Cincinnati Daily Gazette, November 3, 1841, Mr. Williams had just established a studio in that city for the purpose of painting portraits. Apparently he was quite able, having studied with Thomas Sully in Philadelphia. The duration of the exchange of instructions is unknown; likewise

---

26 Letter by the artist, March 31, 1842. Campus Martius collection.

the extent of William's influence on Miss Martin since none of his portraits are extant.

Although Lilly's skill was improving, finances were not. Mr. Martin wrote of their condition to his wife in Marietta:

We are pretty much as usual, in reality, not worse, rather better in prospect; but these prospects have been so long delusive, merely tantalising, that they make us believe that it would be quite wrong, foolish to give it up, and yet they yield nothing to enable us to pay our board.\textsuperscript{28}

During those early years in Cincinnati, Lilly appears to have had some contact with James H. Beard, although the amount of formal instruction, if any, which she received from him is not known. However, it seems possible that Beard's was the most important single influence affecting Lilly's career.

James H. Beard was raised in Paynesville, Ohio, where he received his only formal training from an itinerant portrait-painter, Hanks.\textsuperscript{29} That training consisted of four lessons costing fifty cents each. After completing his training, Beard, then fourteen years old, set out through the South and South-West as an itinerant painter, arriving in Cincinnati some fifteen years later. Beard remained in

\textsuperscript{28}Letter by Giles Martin, June 10, 1842. Campus Martius Collection.

Cincinnati until 1870, when he moved to New York City. At that time he was elected Academician by the New York Academy of Design. One of his paintings, "The Wreckers," was among those carefully selected works sent to the Paris Exposition of 1878. "The Long Bill" (Plate 5),30 painted in 1840, can be considered typical of Beard's style of painting during the period of his contact with Miss Martin. The painting is a humorous scene immediately understandable to contemporary observers. The canvas is filled with separate units composed of numerous, carefully recorded details. The actions are specific ones, depicting a precise moment. Although the artist was more concerned with the accurate rendition of details than the effect of his palette, the composition is skillfully and successfully conceived.

Although there is insufficient evidence as to the extent Beard's works affected Lilly Martin's style of painting, one may assume that they were a very significant factor. Quite probably, after having executed numerous drawings and over fifty paintings before she came to Cincinnati, Lilly would have developed a relatively personalized style of her own. She would, therefore, be likely to respond to the paintings of artists whose style and aims were congenial to her own. A letter written by the artist, now in the collection of the Campus Martius Museum, mentions that she had

---

30Collection of the Cincinnati Museum of Fine Arts. Oil on canvas, approximately 19" in width, 36" in height.
heard of Beard while she was still in Marietta and notes that she hoped to be able to study with him in Cincinnati. However, as her comment about the West painting and her refusal of both of Longworth's offers demonstrate, Miss Martin's aims as an artist do not seem to have been those of mere emulation.

Very few of those paintings which Lilly executed during her early years in Cincinnati are known. Only one such canvas is known, probably painted before 1844. The Self-Portrait (Plate 6) is neither signed nor dated. This painting is very similar to the early charcoal portraits in stylization of drapery and lace, and in the omission of any specific background. The colors are used with greater sophistication than is found in the portrait of Judge Barker. The Canvas is much lighter, the features and flesh far better realized than in the earlier portrait. The rather romantic, dramatic pose and the apparent youth of the subject would tend to indicate that the artist was fairly young at the time she executed this self-portrait. This impression is also substantiated by the fact that this self-portrait is one of only two known to have been painted by the artist. The other was painted as a companion piece to a portrait of her husband. It is reasonable to infer that, unless for a specific purpose, Lilly preferred not to paint individual self-portraits. She

---

31 The self-portrait was acquired by the Ohio Historical Society from a relative of the artist. Oil on canvas.
would have tended to use herself as a model only during a rather bleak period in her career. Since she was frequently commissionless during her first years in Cincinnati, and since the canvas corresponds closely to her Marietta sketches, the self-portrait was probably painted early in 1842, soon after Lilly arrived at Cincinnati.

The pose of the self-portrait is rather unusual; the dramatic, full-front view, without self-consciousness, establishes immediate contact with the observer. The look of hair falling over one eye adds a romantic note to the painting. Lilly, at that time, seems to have been concerned with mastering the depiction of skin tones and learning to model realistically in the oil medium. The faintly greenish tone to the facial shading reoccurs in later paintings. At this time Lilly appears not have been interested in realistic minutiae. The fabric of garments received less attention than the flesh areas; garment folds are stylized as patterns rather than plastically conceived. The lace of the dress appears even more archaic in execution since it is contrasted against the well-modelled flesh area. Jewelry has been summarily treated rather than detailed realistically. The foreground was received almost illusionistic treatment as a rather generalized total area. The artist made use of a

32 Letter by the artist (see footnote 25), "I am improving, Mr. Eward says, very fast when I can do any portraits for money and work...with living (models)."
brush loaded with lighter colors and rapid brush strokes upon the dark green of the grass. This gives the impression of a grassy ground rather than specifies a particular locale. Thus, a generalized foreground and a more detailed middle ground, against an abstract background, form a pictorially successful composition. It represents a distinct achievement for a young artist with very little formal instruction.

Lilly Martin studied and painted in Cincinnati for three years before she began to enjoy limited success, first in terms of self-support. Gradually, however, her work grew in popularity. She received more commissions for paintings and began to exhibit her works more widely in the city. The task of establishing herself as an artist was made more difficult for Miss Martin because she was a woman. In mid-nineteenth century America, women did not choose a profession; they worked only out of necessity. They were limited to a few occupations, teaching school or, if not qualified for that, house-work. Women were unable to vote, to hold public office, to own property, to sue for legal action. Of even more serious consequence, the majority of the population, men and women alike, accepted, without concern or question, the belief that women were basically and innately inferior to men. Lilly was one referred to, with supposedly kindly intent, as "the lowest, independent, honest heart."33 Not

33The Cosmopolitan Art Journal, July, 1956, p. 27.
only did her sex act as a deterrent, but her selection of art as a profession increased the difficulty. The hard working American society, colored by the 'Protestant Ethic,' was inclined to contend with artists as unusual beings rather than to accept them on equal terms. The mid-century art organizations did much to improve the public's opinion of the artist.

The Martin parents were, without question, a force supporting Lilly in her quest for a career. It is never easy to oppose the standard, accepted conventions of a time and place. They had educated their daughter beyond the level then considered necessary, or even beneficial, for women. Although Mr. Martin had helped Lilly financially during those first years in Cincinnati, he had not remained with her there, nor did her parents feel that she required their personal guidance. They appear to have been concerned with Lilly's establishing herself than with the accepted convention of rearing young ladies. Both parents were quite active in the women's rights movement. They received over fifty letters discussing the movement from Horace Greeley, Lucretia Mott, Mrs. Bloomer, Mrs. Stanton, and others.35

34 The attitude toward art in the early nineteenth century is indicated by a comment made by the father of the artist, Matthew Harris Jouett: "I sent Matthew to college to make a gentleman of him, and he has turned out to be nothing but a sign-painter."

35 Letters from the collection of the Campus Martius Museum, Marietta, Ohio.
held the arts in high regard, which is to be expected in view of their educational achievements. Lilly not only shared this regard, but she did not feel that there was a stigma attached to her sex. Without these beliefs, she could not have seriously considered art as a profession.

Lilly Martin married Benjamin Rush Spencer of Virginia, August 26, 1844, in Cincinnati. Very little is known about Mr. Spencer, other than his physical appearance, for Lilly, now Mrs. Lilly Martin Spencer, included him in several paintings. He was born in England in 1808, supposedly the younger son of a lord. He and six brothers came to America and settled in Virginia. Unsuccessful in business there, Mr. Spencer moved to Cincinnati where he was an importer of cloth for a time. He did not seem to have been too successful at any occupation, and much of the family responsibility must have been Lilly's. Benjamin Rush Spencer did not seem to object to his wife's pursuit of a career.

A composition of a girl sewing in a landscape setting was quite probably painted soon after Lilly's marriage. Although the work is not dated, it is signed M. Lilly M. Spencer. The first "M" could refer to "Mrs." This is the only known example of her signature which includes the first M., and, therefore it would tend to indicate that the canvas

---

36A letter from the artist's granddaughter, July 14, 1958, to the writer notes that Benjamin R. Spencer "was an Englishman who had lived with his family in north Ireland where his father had been sent to subdue an uprising....He (the father) was Lord Spencer."
was executed soon after her marriage. At that time, it is
reasonable to assume, she would have been most impressed
with the change in her name.

The composition is more complex than any earlier
works now extant; a figure engaged in the momentary action
of cutting cloth, animals in repose, and the surrounding
landscape. By the time of this painting's execution, Mrs.
Spencer had resolved the earlier difficulties with the
representation of anatomy. The subject is in natural pro-
portions, with no awkwardness in the execution of a full-
length, seated figure. The two animals are also skillfully
rendered. The artist was somewhat more interested in textures
than in her earlier remaining works. She employed some
impiastö, in lighter tones, in the garments of the figure and
in the landscape. The impasto of the garments tends to add
greater realism to the drapery whereas the impasto of the
landscape has been used to effect illusionism. A good
compositional device, the less-detailed landscape and the
slightly more detailed animals of the middle ground heightens
the compositional clarity around the central figure.

Although the subject matter of this work\textsuperscript{37} is unknown,
Cincinnati citizens owned many fine native and European col-
lections and, also, many then-famous paintings and collections
traveled to Cincinnati since it was one of the three or four

\textsuperscript{37}\textit{Private collection of Mr. and Mrs. William C. Smith,
Oxford, Ohio. Oil on canvas.}
leading art centers of that day. The figure of the shepherdess would lead to speculation that perhaps European paintings may have influenced the artist. The painting is rather romantic in terms of rustic setting and the idyllic life of a shepherdess quietly and contentedly tending her flock.

Only one other work painted by Mrs. Spencer during the years of her residence in Cincinnati is known.\(^38\) It is a three figure composition of an old gentleman with two small children, a recurring theme in Mrs. Spencer's career. Signed and dated, Lilly M. Spencer, 1845, this painting has been badly retouched by an amateur. In explanation of a similar composition, the artist wrote: "...I wish to represent the two streams of life, Youth and Age, enjoying health and happiness and sweetly mingling in that pure and cordial love which turns the cottage into a Paradise."\(^39\) Although the painting is in poor condition because of the retouching, it would appear that Mrs. Spencer employed a technique of heavy impasto application. There is a tendency for the details to disperse the central interest by the patterning of garment folds, hair, and small objects. The main action takes place directly on the foreground; the middle and backgrounds are merely an abstract dark color.

\(^38\) The painting was purchased at an auction in 1958 by the Ohio Historical Society. Oil on canvas.

Mrs. Spencer's reputation in Cincinnati gradually grew to gratifying proportions. From 1846 onward, she was recognized as one of the best artists in that city. Her popularity and success there were assured. Mrs. Spencer exhibited at every place the art-conscious city afforded: Withington's, various fairs such as the Mechanics' Fairs, Wisewald's Gallery, the many bazaars, and Independence Hall. She frequently exhibited her paintings at the Cincinnati Academy of Fine Arts, which had been established in 1838. Her success in that city corresponds to the city's increased interest in the arts, evidenced by the founding in 1846, of the Western Art Union. Mrs. Spencer exhibited with this organization and was also a member.

Although there is a paucity of material and works from that important Cincinnati period to demonstrate Mrs. Spencer's stylistic development, she left a significant letter, written to her parents in 1847:

Dear Father and Mother, you don't know how very much I have improved in my painting. I mean to try to become a Michael Angelo, if I possibly can....I plan to try to make my paintings have a tendency toward Moral improvement, at least as far as it is in the power of painting. Oh! A fine painting has a beautiful power over the human passions and mankind needs all the more powerful minds can do in the way of writing and painting.40

---

This statement would indicate that Mrs. Spencer's period of study and experimentation was drawing to a close. She felt that she was prepared to pursue a professional career as a painter. In that same year, she exhibited eight paintings at the Western Art Union.

By 1848, Lilly Martin Spencer was recognized as a professional artist, as the catalogue of the Western Art Union indicates:

We come now to the consideration of the works of an Artist, who, in point of rank, as well as...on account of sex, should have been first noticed. We preferred, however, leaving her pictures until last because we did not like to mix up what we had to say of this lady's works with the many unpalatable things we felt bound to say in relation to the works of others.

The Western Art Union, from its establishment in 1846 until the anti-lottery bill passage of 1852, was the most active institution of the arts in what was then referred to as the West. Its effects, through its Transactions, were widespread; members lived in nearly every state, and in nearly every good-sized city in the country. Its purpose was simply "the encouragement and promotion of the Fine Arts." Therefore the institution's enthusiasm about Mrs. Spencer's paintings certainly must have added scope to her reputation, especially statements such as this:

Mrs. Lilly Martin Spencer...we take great pleasure in announcing to persons remote from here the pleasing information of the rapid advances she is making in Art. The fact that a young woman who is wife, mother, and Artist, is next to Frankenstein, the most talented and the most original devotee known
in the profession here is both a compliment and a reflection. The possession of rare endowments and enthusiasm...only could have sustained her in her tedious and cheerless hours of toil, accompanied by their concomitant hopes and fears....We are happy to say that this very talented Artist is becoming daily more appreciated at home and abroad.41

Some of the artists living in Cincinnati were exhibiting their paintings in New York City during the late 1840's. For example, the exhibition bulletin of the Apollo Gallery, "First Fall Exhibition of the Works of Modern Artists," in 1847, mentions two Cincinnati artists works but does not name the painters. It seems probable that, in view of her acclaim by the Western Art Union, Mrs. Spencer would also have exhibited her paintings in the East. The 1848 catalogue of the American Art-Union lists two of her works: "The May Queen" then in the collection of a Poughkeepsie, New York resident and "The Fruit Girl" then in a private collection in Jersey City, New Jersey. That same year, she exhibited one painting, "The Water Spirit," in New York City at the National Academy of Design. She must have been encouraged by the warm reception awarded her paintings in the East because, late in 1848, Mrs. Spencer, with her husband and three children moved to 614 Broadway, New York City.

PART II

1848-1858

Rules for Picture-Buying¹

1. always prefer a modern to an old picture

2. never buy an old picture which pretends to bear a distinguished name, for you will certainly be cheated

3. never buy copies of old pictures, unless you know the artist who makes the copy, and know that he is not a fifth-rate bungler

4. have one good picture rather than many poor ones

5. there are excellent artists in your own country; buy of them instead of going abroad and faring worse

6. If you have ever been deluded into making great bargains in Titians, Vandykes, Claudes, or any other old masters' works, burn them up at once if you can afford it; if not, send them to auction to be sold for what they really are, and for what they will bring

CHAPTER IV

The three years from 1848 to 1851, rather arbitrarily, can be considered Mrs. Spencer's period of initiation to the Eastern art center. Although she did not immediately achieve the equivalent of her Cincinnati success and popularity in New York City, Mrs. Spencer did not suffer financially from the change.

Soon after moving to New York City, Lilly M. Spencer is supposed to have gone to the National Academy of Design where the French artist Prud'homme was the instructor. Mrs. Spencer related that, after she had quickly completed the class assignment, she began to make copies of the various statues and busts which surrounded the classroom. Prud'homme is supposed to have come upon her while she was thus occupied and, after inquiring who she was, to have told her to go home, that he could teach her nothing. Mrs. Spencer does not appear to have sought further formal instruction.

Lilly Martin Spencer continued to exhibit her works at the important National Academy of Design and the American Art-Union in New York City during 1849. She does not seem to have awed by these august institutions. She wrote to the

2 The account is in the collection of the artist's granddaughter, Mrs. Lillian Spencer Gates, Rutherford, New Jersey.
committee of the American Art-Union, in regard to a painting
which she had sold them:

Gentlemen, myself and friends being rather disapp-
pointed at not seeing the Picture you purchased of
me in your exhibition, I suppose that there must be
(in your opinion, at least) some objection to it.
If you would be so kind as to tell me candidly
what displeases you in it, I will endeavor, as far
as reasonably within my power, to obviate those
objections...as I would not wish, by any means,
that the picture should not meet with your entire
approbation.3

That same year, the Western Art Union agreed to pay Alfred
Jones of New York City twelve-hundred dollars for producing
an engraving of a Spencer painting, "One of Life's Happy
Hours," "...to be executed in the mixed style of line,
stipple, and mezzotint."4 The engraving was the first
premium awarded members of that organization, and is the
first record of a graphic reproduction of one of Mrs. Spencer's
paintings. Oddly enough, the artist received no money from
the reproduction. She had, at some earlier time, sold the
painting (probably for a very small price) to Mr. Charles
Stetson, president of the Western Art Union, who 'kindly'
loaned the work for the engraving.

During 1850, Mrs. Spencer was commissioned by Mrs.
E. F. Ellet to prepare a series of designs which were to

---

3Letter by the artist. March 22, 1849. Collection
of the New York Historical Society.

4Transactions of the Western Art Union, 1849
illustrate the latter's three volumes, *Women of the American Revolution*. Popular in their day, selections from both text and illustrations were reproduced in *Godey's Lady's Book*.\(^5\) These are the only book illustrations which Mrs. Spencer executed. Other Spencer paintings, however, were commissioned by magazines and journals.

By 1851, Mrs. Lilly Martin Spencer was a member of the American Art-Union, the National Academy of Design, and the Brooklyn Art Association. She had exhibited eighteen paintings at the first two of those organizations between 1848 and 1852.\(^6\) None of these paintings are now extant, just a little more than one hundred years later. This scarcity becomes more curious in view of the sums paid for Mrs. Spencer's paintings, compared to prices paid for the works of her contemporaries. In the 1852 exhibition of the American Art-Union, only Church's and Woodville's paintings were purchased at prices higher than those paid for Mrs. Spencer's works. Her paintings brought more than those of Bingham, Audubon, Eastman Johnson, and William S. Mount and were equal in value to those of Asher Durand.\(^7\) These facts are

\(^5\)For example see: *Godey's Lady's Book*, 1859, Front-plate, month of July.


\(^7\)See Appendix A.
indicative of the phenomenal success Mrs. Spencer had achieved by 1852; her popularity continued throughout the decades of the '50's and into the early '60's. Her career was closely allied with those times and with the founding of art institutions.
CHAPTER V

The first half of the nineteenth century saw the establishment of successful art organizations. Although few such institutions began functioning as early as 1805, the inauguration date of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, many were founded during the second quarter of the century. The Boston Athenaeum, the New York Academy of Fine Arts, the National Academy of Design, the Cincinnati Academy of Fine Arts, the Boston Museum, the American Academy of Fine Arts, the Apollo Association, the Brooklyn Art Association, the American Art-Union, the Western Art Union, and others were active well before mid-century. The organizations can be separated into two main categories although, basically, their aims were quite similar. The art unions differed in procedure from the other institutions whose primary purpose was to exhibit works of art. Both groups, however, were devoted to American art and American artists. The method they chose to further that belief is the means whereby the two groups may be classified.

Institutions such as the Boston Athenaeum and the National Academy of Design held exhibitions of contemporary American art, usually on an annual basis. To support
themselves, during the mid-century, these institutions purchased works from well-known American artists. Those works, in return, were sold, sometimes for a good profit, during the annual exhibitions:

Receipts from three years of shows at the Boston Athenæum totalled ten thousand dollars and from them a Doughty landscape was purchased for three-hundred and fifty, two Hardings for seven-hundred and fifty, Neagle’s “Pat Lyon” for four hundred, and a Trumbull “Gibraltar” for two thousand.  

Although the works on exhibition would be for sale by the institutions, most of them would have been fairly well-known works of art or works by well-established artists. The younger, lesser-known artists, therefore, were at a decided disadvantage. The exhibitions at these institutions would remain on view for most of the year and the works of art were not changed. The public, naturally, did not frequently visit the exhibition halls throughout the year. On a whole, the exhibition institutions were far more conservative than the art unions.

The art unions are perhaps the most important facet of mid-nineteenth century art and, as such, deserve a more exhaustive study than has yet been afforded them by scholars of American art. The art unions are a phenomena largely resulting from the development of American society at that precise time. They were more membership than exhibition

---

organizations. Membership was open to anyone in the United States who desired to join and could afford the customary fee of five dollars. Membership entitled the holder to the art union's Transactions or Bulletin, to a copy of a "highly finished original engraving" or lithograph, and furthermore, to a chance on a work of art at an annual lottery. The American Art-Union in 1849, for example, had

a membership of 18,960 and receipts from all sources of $104,369.19. The lottery distributed 1,010 works of art (a ratio of more than one to every twenty members) which had cost $73,857.72. These included 460 original paintings; 20 statuettes...by H. K. Brown; 30 sets of six outline illustrations of the Legend of Sleepy Hollow by Darley; 250 Trumbull, 150 Stuart, and 100 Allston medals.9

That organization's membership in 1846 was only 4,457 but, within two years, had grown to 16,475 by 1848. These figures serve to illustrate how very rapidly the public accepted, supported, and encouraged the art union type of organization.

The art unions' Transactions or Bulletin were the only periodicals during the 1840's concerned solely with art. Although there were no illustrations and many pages were filled with statistical information, there were articles on art and reviews of exhibitions written by men qualified enough to do so. Those journals, with their many subscribers, helped to create a mid-century's awareness of art.

The annual premium, a graphic reproduction of a then-famous painting, and the annual lottery of original art works

had two main effects. To encourage membership, the art unions purchased or commissioned a certain number of works from the most famous American artists; Hiram Powers's "Greek Slave" was the main attraction of the 1850-51 lottery of the Western Art Union. They also purchased many works from lesser-known artists, as the total quantity of works in the lotteries was great. Thus, the art unions provided a large market place for the American artist. The second major result of those organizations was related to the expansion of art beyond portraiture. Portraiture had been the dominant art style from early colonial times through to the end of the Federal era. The mid-century American would not have been interested in investing even a small amount of capital to own a portrait or an engraving of someone else's relative.

The concept of art works associated with lotteries appears quite incongruous to us today. However, during the first half of the past century, lotteries, affecting many aspects of daily life, were commonplace. Since faithfulness to nature was the basis for all native art styles, at that time whether landscape, genre, romantic, allegorical, or anecdotal, there was little chance that a lottery winner would be dissatisfied with his prize. Today, of course, there would be no such certainty.

The art union, as Tuckerman rather grandly states:

...represented and promoted the Art-interests of the city...(it) is characteristic of the age; it exhibits the alliance between luxury and work,
society and culture....It emphatically marks the era when Art, emancipated from the cares of kings and Popes, finds sustenance by alliance with commerce and the people.¹⁰

The art unions were brought to an end through legal action apparently resulting from petitiness. The members of the National Academy of Design, it appears, felt slighted by the American Art-Union's purchase policy. An insufficient number of Academy works were selected, the members accused, even though, at one time, the Art-Union had purchased three dozen paintings at a price that freed the National Academy from debt. The Academicians, not as an organization, brought to bear certain pressures in the New York State Legislature. In 1851, legal proceedings were commenced against the American Art-Union as an illegal lottery, which it was adjudged to be before the end of the year. The court action also affected the art unions in other states and, with the exception of the Cosmopolitan Art Association, they no longer continued their successful programs. During 1850-51, many articles were written condemning the art unions as mere lotteries on the grounds that they offered quantity rather than quality and frequently offered works by deceased, rather than living, painters. Primarily they were condemned because they would purchase a work of art from the owner rather than

¹⁰Tuckerman, op. cit., p. 17.
from the artist.\footnote{For an example of these criticisms see: "The Art Unions: Their True Character Considered," The International Monthly Magazine of Literature, Science, and Art, Vol. II, 1850-51, p. 191.} Round-about reasoning like this, encouraged by the artistically powerful National Academy of Design, ended the era of the art unions.

The art unions "quickly made the country art-conscious to such an unprecedented extent that they may be credited with creating the first mass audience here for the studio professional."\footnote{Virgil Barker, American Painting (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1950), p. 460.} The art unions did encourage and support native artists. By so doing, they helped to establish a culturally self-reliant, confident American society.
CHAPTER VI

The second part of Mrs. Spencer's career in New York City can be dated, again arbitrarily, from the passage of the anti-lottery bill in 1852 until her change of residence to Newark, New Jersey, in 1858. Tuckerman wrote about American artists who had gained success and who were "first substantially encouraged, and their claims made patent, by the seasonable commissions" of the art unions. Mrs. Spencer's career indicates that much of her national popularity came about in the same way, due to the patronage of the art unions. By the time of the anti-lottery proceedings of 1852, Mrs. Spencer's success was such that the absence of the art unions had no adverse effect.

In the 1858 exhibition of the National Academy of Design there were included three paintings by Lilly Martin Spencer. One of those was "Reading the Legend" (Plate 7), which she had painted the proceeding year. Now in the collection of the Smith College Museum of Art, the painting was loaned to the Museum of Modern Art and shown, in 1943, in the exhibition, Romantic Painting in America. It was deemed important enough to be illustrated in the exhibition catalogue.\(^{13}\)

\(^{13}\)James T. Soby and Dorothy C. Miller, Romantic Painting in America (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1943), p. 64.
Compositionally, the picture was conceived on a strong central vertical, from the architecture to the seated male figure, relieved by a strong diagonal formed by the two figures and the dog. The rather conservative use of the diagonal is indicated by its limited length and by the profile view of the female figure which refers it back to the strong vertical. This play of vertical and diagonal thrusts serves as an organizational device and as a means to unite more successfully the figures with the architectural setting. The eye will, perforce, return to the repoussoir figure of the seated man, who has his back turned to the observer. As the eye movement thus described would tend to ignore the lower right section of the canvas, the artist employed a bright red color in the lining of the top hat which, by repeating the deeper red hue of the female figure's drapery, unifies the composition.

Considerable interest is derived from the play of light and dark patterns across the surface of the canvas. The colors are fresh and luminous, their range wide and rich. The patterning of the female figure's drapery is less successful, even distracting, in its detail and modulation. The bright red flowers on the elaborate shawl stand out too independently from the remainder of the canvas. The contrived quality of the architecture grates against the accurate realism of the foreground. At the same time, Mrs. Spencer has indicated her virtuosity of technique in the effect of lace
over flesh and fabric, in her ability to depict trees as
generalized areas of foliage, and in the successful illusion
of deep space. There are still inconsistencies and uneven-
nesses throughout the painting, but these are typical qual-
ties of nineteenth century American Romantic painting, of
which "Reading the Legend" is an excellent example.

American Romantic painters, without the benefit of
long artistic tradition, tended to be inconsistent in their
style and technique. As Richardson points out, they were also
conservative, since they were more concerned with acquiring
technical knowledge than with depicting novelties. These
painters stressed the present rather than the past. Mrs.
Spencer, in the romantic "Reading...," depicted contemporary
figures, engaged in a specific action, against an imaginary,
idyllic landscape setting.

Definition of Genre Art

The word *genre* is closely associated with nineteenth
century American art, even though it is a term difficult to
define clearly. Friedlander defines all genre art by a
negative statement:

> Whatever is not of historical, religious or myth-
> ological significance in a picture dealing with
> man and his activities, whatever is *not* characterized,

---

exulted or consecrated by knowledge, thought, or faith, falls into the category of genre.  

Genre art, in any era, has always had widespread appeal since it deals with contemporary people engaged in customary actions. The people depicted are anonymous; the events are familiar happenings. Genre is an emotional, rather than an intellectual, art form.

The painting "Shake Hands?" (Plate 8) may be classified as a genre painting. It was painted by Mrs. Spencer in 1854 and is now in the collection of the Ohio Historical Society where it is a favorite with most visitors. The observer can immediately understand and identify himself with the scene. The setting is a typical mid-nineteenth century kitchen during the preparation of a large meal. The very numerous details are all carefully and accurately recorded. No two apples are alike in size, shape, color, and state of preservation. The apples are not the Platonic ideal of what an apple should be, rather each piece of fruit has been realistically reproduced in its irregular, uneven condition. These were the characteristics desired at that time. There was an overt demand for less generalization, more detail. The Crayon editorialized about the bad habit of our artists of making broad sketches without particular reference to detail—studies of

---

color and effect by which they overlook the minute-ness which actually exists. Their minds, accustomed only to regard in masses the objects received by the eye, cease to notice that they (the objects) exist individually...16

It is difficult to evaluate objectively art works whose character is largely dependent on the popular taste of their day. There can be no doubt that Mrs. Spencer's painting "Shake Hands?" was exceedingly popular during the 1850's. Reproductions, in the form of both foreign-made, hand-tinted lithographs and also steel engravings, attest the painting's success. One journal, which reproduced engravings of the work, wrote:

"Shake Hands" is already familiar from the Paris lithograph made of it, and from the exhibiting of it in Cincinnati, New York, etc. It is one of the few pictures whose popularity increases with every exhibition....Perhaps no picture painted in this country is better fitted for popular appreciation.17

In the present day, when the artist is relatively unconcerned with producing works to suit the tastes of the mythical 'common man,' there is a tendency to regard as poor painters those artists of the past who did aim toward this clientele. The criticism is not necessarily justified. The paintings of Bingham, Mount, and the early works of Winslow Homer are proof of that. However, in the case of Mrs. Spencer, her desire to produce art works pleasing to the common people seems to have

16The Graven, March 28, 1855, p. 203.
temporarily hampered her artistic development. During the decade of the '50's, she painted for "the many." As might be expected, that was also the period of her greatest financial success and popularity.

The changes in style and technique from "Reading the Legend," 1852, to "Shake Hands?" 1854, are quite great aside from the general classification of one as "romantic," the other as "genre." The surface of the later painting is slick and shiny; there is no interest in the play of light and shadow. The flesh areas are glazes of over-bright, crystalize tones. Rather than effectively playing generalized areas against more detailed areas as in "Reading...," Mrs. Spencer allowed no respite for the eye from the profusion of details. The slight tendency in the earlier work for individual textures and patterns to detract from the total unity is paramount in "Shake Hands?" The composition is made up of separate units of detailed patterns, related mostly by the fact that they are part of a limited setting. Only the outstretched hand, which draws the observer into the painting, and the peculiar grimace, which, by its very exaggeration tends to catch the eye, may be considered "artistic" devices, furthering the composition as a whole. The painting, "Shake Hands?" is more a display of craftsmanship than anything else. Compared to it, "Reading of the Legend" is a carefully considered, conservative composition.
This discussion would tend to indicate that those genre works which Mrs. Spencer painted for the many are indicative of a rather stationary period in her artistic development. Her contemporaries were not all oblivious to that quality in her works. The mid-century, unillustrated journal, The Crayon, was concerned with art in a serious and relatively objective manner. In discussing the exhibition of 1856 at the National Gallery, the magazine pointed out how Lilly Martin Spencer's genre paintings appeared to the few:

...Mrs. Spencer has truly a remarkable ability to paint, but unfortunately ruins...her pictures by some vulgarity or hopeless attempt at expression. She paints still-life with unsurpassed delicacy and force, with exquisite color both in tint and quality, and, above all, works with entire freedom from artistic conventionalism....Even as a specimen of flesh painting, we should be willing to place the face of the servant girl in No. 9418 by the side of any American artist's work, but...Mrs. Spencer has no power over transitory expression, and the slightest remove from immobility of features ends in grimace.19

From this statement, it seems probable that Mrs. Spencer's more serious, critical public disliked the same qualities in her work which are considered objectionable at the present time: the fixed expression and the fleeting, momentary appeal of those works, which are, in type, similar to "Shake Hands."

18 Number 94 was a painting entitled "The Young Wife," unfortunately no longer extant.

In 1855, Mrs. Spencer painted "Dignity and Impudence" (Plate 9). John Baur has indicated that, basically, all of America's nineteenth century art can be included under the broad classification of realism. Genre, quite obviously, could be classified under so generalized a category. The painting of 1855, because it does not have human figures as subject matter, can be referred to as realism rather than as genre, in this particular instance. The most important common quality found in both "Shake Hands?" and "Dignity and Impudence" as genre paintings is the over-glossiness of surface. The animal painting is handsome, with rich hues and textures, and the greatly detailed foreground contrasts successfully with the more generalized background. The still-life, or the animals, or the cityscape could easily have comprised the subject-matter for three separate canvases. Although this painting, too, has its immediate sense of light humor, the artist's obvious sincerity and serious technique add gravity to the composition.

Another painting indicative of the stationary period in Mrs. Spencer's career is "This Little Pig Went to Market,"

---

20 Collection of the Campus Martius Museum, Marietta, Ohio. Oil on canvas. The only similarities between Mrs. Spencer's painting and the 1837 painting by Lanseer are those of title and that the subject matter in both concerns two dogs. Mrs. Spencer's work is far more complicated composition than the Lanseer "Dignity and Impudence."
1857 (Plate 10). Engraved on steel as the 1859 premium to its subscribers, the Cosmopolitan Art Journal remarked that Mrs. Spencer "elaborates but never crowds her canvas." The painting is fairly amazing when the great amount of detail and richness of its pattern and color is considered in relation to its small size (12" in width, 16" in height). Virgil Barker wrote of the "amount of detail which would quickly produce boredom except the fact that the painter herself was fascinated with it..." The glossy surface effect of the 1854 and 1955 paintings reaches an extreme here, detracting greatly from the total composition. The brushwork is so tight that a bit of impasto on the cradle's drapery seems out of context. The unusually opulent setting and the small size of this painting would tend to mark it as atypical. It is also noteworthy that instead of an exaggerated grimace, the facial expression of the principal figure has become a genuinely charming smile.

---

21 Collection of the Campus Martius Museum, Marietta, Ohio. Oil on academy board.

22 Virgil Barker, op. cit., p. 513.
CHAPTER VII

Mrs. Spencer had always been interested in the happenings immediately around her. During the middle years of the decades of the '50's, the subject matter of her paintings seem to center primarily in the home. Earlier in her career, Mrs. Spencer had been regarded as a painter of "Fancy and historical pieces...her compositions...generally...taken from Shakespeare, such as 'Lear and his Daughters,' 'Ophelia,'...'Romeo and Juliet.'" The subsequent change to domestic subject matter may be accounted for by two main reasons. Firstly, Mrs. Spencer had thirteen children, seven of whom lived to maturity. During the years between 1853 and 1858, there were undoubtedly several babies who, perforce, kept Mrs. Spencer at home. In addition, there were the inevitable demands of her older children. As might be expected, Mrs. Spencer combined the roles of mother and artist. Evidence of that dual career is found in her work. On the study for a painting entitled "Fi! Fo! Fum!" completed in 1858 and exhibited at the National Academy of Design the following year, the artist noted that the figures "consist of her husband, E. R. Spencer, and herself standing behind the

---

chair and her two beautiful little sons..."24 In explanation of a scene in still another painting, which she sent to Godey's, Mrs. Spencer wrote to the editor: "The idea was suggested by a nursery incident in our own home"25 (Plate 11).

The second principle reason for Mrs. Spencer's concern with incidents which occurred in the daily life of her family, during those years, was probably economic. The anecdotal scenes she painted were very well received by the American public. There was a good, steady market for the "homey," genre style of painting. Mrs. Spencer received many commissions for works of this anecdotal type from various organizations, such as Godey's and the Cosmopolitan Art Association, and also from firms, such as William Schaus and Company, which was Goupil Company's New York branch.

Although Mrs. Spencer's preoccupation with domestic genre painting was relatively short-lived, scholars and critics of nineteenth century art tend to regard her solely in that light, or as a "nursery" painter. Such a classification has come about largely because a great many of the paintings of her children were reproduced in the form of engravings and hand-tinted lithographs. It is worth noting

24 The study, oil wash on cardboard, is in the collection of the artist's granddaughter, Mrs. Gates, Rutherford, New Jersey.

here that the artist apparently signed and dated most of the paintings commissioned by organizations and firms, and those paintings which were sent to exhibitions, whereas she did not usually sign nor date privately commissioned portraits and still-lifes.

The innumerable reproductions of these genre types, the originals of which Mrs. Spencer executed for organizations or firms, are more generally known to the public precisely because of their appearance in mass media. From a numerical standpoint alone, since over a million graphic reproductions from various of Mrs. Spencer's paintings were published, all signed and dated, one could easily conceive of her as a painter only in terms of sentimental reproductions. A large measure of her importance to nineteenth century American art is due to the popularity of her anecdotal paintings, graphically reproduced. These anecdotal works, however, are, again, only one aspect of her painting career. Although they are very indicative of the taste of society at that time, these efforts are often artistically inferior to those works which Mrs. Spencer executed as private commissions.

Although a goodly number of the lithographs and engravings published from various of Mrs. Spencer's paintings

---

26 Both Virgil Barker (op. cit., p. 513) and Oliver Larkin (op. cit., p. 215) refer to Mrs. Spencer as an artist working for reproductions.
are available, there are only three of which the original paintings are also extant. From these three sets of originals and reproductions, it becomes apparent that the graphic duplications are extremely faithful to the original paintings. This is especially true of the hand-tinted lithograph of the work, "Shake Hands?" which was reproduced to scale. The single dissimilarity between the painting and the lithograph is the general color-tone which had been changed from warm in the original to cool in the copy. A French artist, M. Charles Lefosse, lithographer for the Goupil Company's Paris branch, is credited with producing most of the exacting, hand-tinted lithographs published from Mrs. Spencer's paintings. The assumption can be made that probably all of Lefosse's excellent reproductions are quite accurate copies of the original works.

"The Cat's Polka" and "My Birthday Present" (plate 12) are two further examples of Mrs. Spencer's paintings reproduced through the medium of lithography by M. Lefosse. Such original paintings were purchased by a firm or organization and then sent abroad for the lithographer to copy. The final prints were hand-tinted in France and then returned to

---

27 These are the painting and engraving of "This Little Pig Went to Market," the painting and hand-tinted lithographs of "Shake Hands?" and similarly for "The Picnic on the Fourth of July." The original painting of the latter, unsigned, was correctly attributed to Mrs. Spencer in 1948 at which time the lithographic copy was illustrated in Life Magazine, July 5, 1948.
this country for sale. The artist made no profit beyond the purchase price of her original paintings, despite the fact that over a million reproductions were sold.

Indications are that there was also a European market for the graphic reproductions of Mrs. Spencer's paintings. The lithograph of "The Fruits of Temptation," 1857 (Plate 13) carried a title in German, Italian, and French as well as in English. The rise of influence of the Dusseldorf School in Europe and this country during the mid-century increased the demand for story-telling, sentimental pictures. Eugens Neuhaus notes the spread of the "great vogue of the Dusseldorf School" through Europe and the United States:

The Germans, with a natural predilection for sentiment, responded to the French Delacroix's assault upon classicism with the thoroughness typical of their race. They outdid the French Romanticists, who, under the leadership of Delacroix and Gericault, had begun to infuse art with a direct appeal to the emotions by resorting to the dramatic and more humanly interesting subjects found in the life around them. The insistence upon appeal to the heart in terms of everyday life eventually became the special interest of the Germans...30

This popular style of painting was very warmly received by American society because of its close correspondence to native works of art. A Dusseldorf Gallery was established in New York City in the late 1850's. Mrs. Spencer frequently exhibited paintings there. Through the effect of the

Dusseldorf School, a market was created in Europe for Mrs. Spencer's paintings and their graphic reproductions.

The subject matter of the paintings, graphically reproduced, usually derived from incidents in the Spencer home. The little girl of "My Birthday Present" is repeated as a figure in "The Fruits of Temptation." In the latter lithograph, the artist has shown herself, recognizable from other sources, in the doorway, surveying the numerous actions of her children. The nursery scene of the "Cat's Polka" is filled with 'realities': the broken drum, the unkempt stockings, the skipped button. This print, and that of the girl with her new doll, allow the observer to intrude at a specific instant into the childhood realm of unreserved joy over comparatively simple events. "The Fruits of Temptation" print, although still in that light vein, implies a certain degree of moralizing, in both the title and the theme of vanity; the young girl admiring herself in a mirror. It is difficult to conceive how any organization, let alone composition, was imposed on such a profusion of action and detail; that the work is fairly unified is a credit to both artist and lithographer.

Lithographic reproductions of Mrs. Spencer's paintings were exceedingly popular throughout the country. The editor of the Lady's Book praised her, pointing out that her "original designs in New York and in the print-stores
of our own city are the admiration of all window-gazers."

The fact that the editor even mentions Lilly Martin Spencer's name is an unusual instance, indicative of the high position the artist had obtained. *Godey's* frontplate, each month, was an original steel engraving. Whereas the name of the engraver was nearly always given, the original artist was very rarely named. This was true for most of the mid-century magazines which made use of engravings. Implicit in this fact is the emphasis placed by newly industrialized America on the machine, on the production of many rather than the production of one and on a respect for copying as proof of one's talent for realism. This emphasis, in turn, is partially responsible for the availability of lithographs. The mid-century American society welcomed all forms of mass-print production. The National Academy of Design elected M. L. J. Daguerre as their first honorary member in 1839, the year he invented photography. Until the perfection of photography, however, lithographs reached vast audiences:

> From the first experiments in lithography of the American painter Bass Otis, in 1819, down to the decline of this popular art in the eighties, the pictures bought, hung, and treasured by the American people were lithographs.  

Without a doubt, much of Lilly Martin Spencer's national popularity derived from the numerous graphic

---

reproductions published from various of her paintings. She did not, however, produce those paintings for the purpose of graphic reproductions. Her lack of financial gain from the published prints indicates this: "fortunes have been realized from single paintings, which netted her scarcely a song."\(^{33}\) Mrs. Spencer's paintings were graphically reproduced by business organizations, precisely because the subject matter was so very popular with the American people.

The decade from 1848 to 1858, during which time Mrs. Spencer lived in New York City, marks the period of her greatest financial success and national popularity. She was a member of all the major art organizations in that city. She exhibited her paintings there and throughout the country, where they were awarded many prizes.\(^{34}\) Aside from painting for commissions by various organizations and for exhibitions, she executed many privately commissioned works, such as the portrait of the then mayor of New York City, Mayor Morris.\(^{35}\) She was the protegee of the city's "400" social group and received many commissions from them. Mrs. Spencer and her

\(^{33}\)Letter to the editors of the Evening Post (New York City) signed W. T., February 27, 1870.

\(^{34}\)For example: The Massachusetts' Charitable Mechanics' Association awarded her painting "The Power of Fashion" a silver medal in 1853. Unfortunately, the painting is no longer extant.

\(^{35}\)Tuckerman, op. cit., Appendix, p. 622.
family lived at the Langdon mansion, on Aster Place, for a short time, since the artist was a life long friend to Mrs. Sarah Langdon Boosel, the aunt of John Jacob Aster. While Lilly Martin Spencer first lived in New York City, she supposedly\textsuperscript{34} painted what she considered to be her masterpiece, "Alegria," based on Byron's poem, \textit{Childe Harold}, which was purchased by Elias Howe, the inventor of the sewing machine.\textsuperscript{35}

The later years of the decade brought about no lessening of Mrs. Spencer's successful career. At that time the center of art in this country was definitely New York City. It would seem probable that New York City would be the most beneficial residence for an artist. However, in 1858, Mrs. Spencer, with her family, moved from that city to Newark, New Jersey.

\textsuperscript{34}Undated, untitled newspaper clippings in the collection of Mrs. L. S. Gates, Rutherford, New Jersey, as well as family information support this statement.

\textsuperscript{35}Efforts to trace this important painting have resulted in failure.
PART III

1858-1902

Let not my justice, gallantry and wit,
A Lily Martin Spencer here omit,
The humor of the lower life she shows,
Wherein but few superiors she knows.

John Frankenstein\textsuperscript{1}

\textsuperscript{1}John Frankenstein, \textit{American Art: The Awful Attitude} (New York, 1864), p. 105.
CHAPTER VIII

In April of 1858, Lilly Martin Spencer moved from her Bleecker Street address in Manhattan to 461 High Street, Newark, New Jersey. Her reasons for leaving the artistic atmosphere of New York City are difficult to discover. The choice of Newark was probably due to several factors: Mrs. Spencer's still growing family, her friendship with Nicholas Longworth (who had formerly resided in Newark) and with Marcus L. Ward, the New Jersey statesman who was related by marriage to Mr. Longworth, and her acquaintance with the painter Rembrandt Lockwood,\(^2\) whose studio she purchased in 1853.\(^3\)

The property at 461 High Street, Newark, was owned by the former New Jersey governor, Marcus L. Ward, who rented it, with a purchase option, to Mrs. Spencer for two years. However, Mrs. Spencer did not buy the property and in 1860, the Spencers moved to 294 High Street, Newark. Here they remained for nineteen years.

Mrs. Spencer's national popularity was such that the move from New York City saw no immediate decline of her


\(^3\)*Cosmopolitan Art Journal*, II, 1858, p. 209.
success. In the years soon after her change of environment, Mrs. Spencer continued to exhibit throughout the East and 'near West,' finding a ready market for most of her paintings. During these years, her studio was, according to description:

...at the foot of her garden, a large building, with its walls covered by sketches, casts...where the artist labors assiduously. Visitors from distant cities come here to see her paintings, and she usually has several in progress at the same time."4

During the years of her residence in Newark, Mrs. L. M. Spencer exhibited in New York at the National Academy of Design and the Cosmopolitan Art Association, in Boston at the Athenaeum and the Mechanics' Fair, and in Philadelphia at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and the Centennial of 1876. She continued to execute paintings on commission, both for private individuals and various organizations, such as Godey's and the Cosmopolitan Art Association. In 1860, Mrs. Spencer was awarded first place at the New Jersey State Fair in three classes of painting: figure, animal, and still-life.5 Her most recent works could have often been seen at Campbell's Frame Shop, 265 Broad Street, Newark. "Celebrating the Victory at Vicksburg," also known as "The War Front at Home," (acquired by the Newark Museum in 1944 through the Wallace M. Scudder bequest) is one of the many paintings which Mrs.

---
5Newark Daily Advertiser, September 7, 1860.
Spencer executed in her Newark studio and first exhibited at Campbell's shop.

The setting of this painting (1855) is the artist's home; the subject-matter represents the enthusiasm with which the news of the victory at Vicksburg was greeted. Although the scene implies emotional lightness, the event was undoubtedly very serious to Mrs. Spencer. At least one of her sons, Angelo Paul, fought in the Civil War, having been commissioned early from Annapolis due to the exigency. In this painting, the too-glossy surface of earlier days has all but totally disappeared. Several actions are taking place in the single composition, but all are subsidiary to the central theme. Oliver Larkin has stated that "the figures...were held together only by their enthusiasm." Yet this is not quite accurate. Although it is quite true that the composition is filled with detail and episode, the closure achieved by the figures and by the repetition of color patterns provide a measure of unity. Mrs. Spencer's more serious concern with the events of that war is demonstrated in other paintings.6

The continued popularity of the artist during the early years of her Newark residence is indicated by the following statement:

Mrs. Lily M. Spencer (is)...still at her Newark studio laboring late and early over her pressings

6The Newark Daily Advertiser, May 25, 1866, discusses two of those paintings, "Shoddy the Maker, Shoddy the Wearer" and "Home is for the Brave." Neither are extant.
commissions. Step by step this lady has advanced in her profession, until she is now conceded rank with the best artists this country has produced in her special departments of fruit pieces and... characterizations. Her pictures command large prices and are richly worth all they command.

As previously mentioned, Mrs. Spencer did not usually sign nor date privately commissioned portraits and still-lifes. Therefore, many of those paintings have gone unnoticed for the lack of proper attribution. At the same time, it is very important that these privately commissioned works, usually superior in technique and sentiment to those works executed for firms and organizations, be credited to Mrs. Spencer. Knowledge of these paintings adds importance to the artist's role in nineteenth century American art.

In 1920, the eminent patron and philanthropist Marcus L. Ward, Jr., bequeathed to the Newark Museum, among other works of art, two unsigned, undated, privately commissioned paintings. Both works are portraits of the Ward children, Joseph, Marcus Jr., Catherine, Francis, and Nicholas. These paintings may now be attributed, with fair accuracy, to Lilly Martin Spencer. Though the writer would be inclined to make this identification on stylistic grounds alone, there is added evidence in documentary form confirming the attribution.

In 1857, when Mrs. Spencer and Mr. Ward signed their legal agreement concerning the property at 461 High Street,

---

Newark, no money was exchanged. Instead, Marcus L. Ward put himself on record when agreeing to accept, in lieu of cash, three paintings, as follows:

one large full length picture of four figures—likenesses of his said Ward's children; one portrait of Mrs. Ward, and one handsome fancy piece ...all to be painted in her best manner by Mrs. Spencer.  

Actually, this document applies to only one of the Newark Museum's two paintings of the Ward children, but the companion-piece is so similar in style and conception as to indicate that the same artist executed both works. The large, \footnote{9} full-length picture of the four Ward children, formerly attributed to Thomas Buchanan Read, \footnote{10} was certainly executed by Mrs. Lilly Martin Spencer, quite probably on 1858.

The group portrait of the Ward Children\footnote{11} (Plate 14) has been recognized for some time as a significant example of nineteenth century American art. The work was loaned to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1939 and was included in a retrospective exhibition of three hundred years of American art.

\footnote{8}Property agreement between the artist and Marcus L. Ward. From the collection of Mrs. Gates, Rutherford, New Jersey.

\footnote{9}Oil on canvas, height 92", width 68 1/2".


art. It was considered important enough to be illustrated in the exhibition catalogue, but for want of more accurate information at that time, this group portrait was attributed to Thomas B. Read. The same work also appears in E. P. Richardson's book on American painting in which the author assumes the former attribution to Read. He does, it must be noted, recognize the painting's position in the art of the past century.

This group portrait, in execution and spirit, is a fine example of those works executed by Mrs. Spencer for private commissions. By 1858, the highly probable date of this painting, the artist was not only an experienced technician but had been exposed for over a decade and half to the various methods and styles then to be found in the New York area. It is not surprising, therefore, that Mrs. Spencer used a painterly technique to further the effect of the total composition rather than merely as a precise rendition of color patterns. The color tones in the Ward children's portrait tend to maintain their purity even in the areas of greater depth. In contrast to this purity, a certain degree of muddiness is to be found around the edges of nearly all the color areas, a characteristic of many of Mrs. Spencer's

---

13 E. P. Richardson, op. cit., plate 171, p. 143.
paintings. Icey to deep blues, deep, rich golds and browns, and bright reds and greene compose the palette. The canvas achieves its luminosity largely on account of the relationships of bright and contrasting areas of color, rather than because of any specifically delineated light source. The momentary quality of the children's grouping, as if they were captured in paint at a specific instant, is characteristic of nearly all of Mrs. Spencer's paintings. This sense of transiency serves to form an immediate link between the observer and the scene represented.

The amount of detail and the degree of visual accuracy in the execution of a Spencer painting are amazing. They are more amazing, still, in terms of the large size of this canvas and the small size of Mrs. Spencer. She was under five feet in height and was, following the generalized attribution to all women at that time, considered to be frail. The luster of polished wood, the glimmer of soft silk, the crispness of white eyelet embroidery, and the richness of heavy velvet appear with great vitality under the energetic brush of this diminutive artist. Fortunately, Mrs. Spencer realized something which many of her contemporary painters did not: that a great number of details in every area of a composition results in a mere restlessness or agitation of pattern. (As has been noted previously, Mrs. Spencer herself, in the enthusiasm of a moment, did not make the most effective use of her realization.) Although the
central area of the group portrait is composed of a great
number of accurately reproduced details, the artist has
included more simple floor and background areas. These
quieter areas create a better total composition by focusing
the observer’s attention on the grouping of the children and
at the same time helping to alleviate excessive tensions
which might be created by the highly detailed central area.

The children’s portrait in question is representative,
in several ways, of its period in American art. The monu-
mental size of the canvas alone indicates the taste of mid-
nineteenth century society; people who had means, built and
decorated on a grand scale. The almost total absorption in
painting with accuracy and detail had its counterpart in
literature and in the geographic expansion of a people inter-
ested in a present rather than a past. The immediate experi-
ence was significant with its specific awarenesses and
actualities, rather than with more abstruse observations and
situations.

The second of the two paintings by Mrs. Spencer
bequeathed to the Newark Museum by Marcus L. Ward, Jr., is
a full-figure portrait of Nicholas Longworth Ward¹⁴ (Plate
15). The relaxation of the figure and the freer brush work
would indicate that this portrait was painted after the large

¹⁴Nicholas L. Ward (1852-1857). The artist included
the name, Nicholas L. Ward, in the painting on the silver
golet. Oil on canvas, height 50”, width 40”. 
group portrait. Undoubtedly, the painting is a posthumous portrait of Nicholas L. Ward.\textsuperscript{15} Many of the stylistic qualities of the group portrait are found in the single figure portrait also. There is the rich, bright palette; the great interest and accuracy in the depiction of detail; an emphasis upon the same textures of wood, velvet, and eyelet embroidery; and the inclusion of similar objects, alike in kind, number, and placement—rug patterns, table and cover, and drapery background. There is also the recurring theme of a chair in both compositions, employed as a unifying device. The floral arrangement on the table has been depicted with great care and is a good indication of the artist's interest in still-life painting as well as portraiture. The child in this painting, like those in the former, is engaged in a specific and momentary action, that of offering the observer a piece of fruit. Again, the action serves the same compositional purposes in both paintings.

This portrait is an engaging, charming painting, and one feels that Mrs. Spencer was very much in sympathy with this work. This sympathetic attitude is rather characteristic of artists at that time:

Artists brought to the observation of their world a simple directness of approach which is combined with the idealism of their sentiment—a deep affection for and acceptance of their subject arising

\textsuperscript{15} Mrs. Spencer painted one other posthumous portrait, that of Tulford McGuffey, in 1871.
from a feeling of oneness with their world... their method (was) to relate their observations to sentiment on one hand and to actuality on the other, so that the artist's poetic feeling and the observer's simple experience of having lived may meet in one transparent image.  

Through documentary as well as stylistic evidence, the large, group portrait of the Ward children can be safely assigned to Mrs. Lilly M. Spencer. Although no documentation is available for the single full-figure portrait, the stylistic evidence mentioned indicates a high probability that it was executed by the same artist. Mrs. Spencer left written indications to the effect that Marcus L. Ward commissioned and purchased many of her paintings. Of these, only the two portraits are now known. Happily, these two paintings are excellent examples of Mrs. Spencer's mature artistic effort.

Bartlett Cowdrey compares Mrs. Spencer with Horatio Alger on two counts: "prodigious output and the uplifting moral tone of her works."  

Perhaps the greatest single similarity between the two nineteenth century Americans was their naiveté. This quality is indicated by many of the titles Mrs. Spencer gave her paintings: "Blind Faith," "For Better or Worse," "Gentle Waining," "Peace and Happiness," "Shoddy the Maker, Shoddy the Wearer," "There's Many a Slip  

--- 

16 Richardson, op. cit., p. 13.

17 B. Cowdrey, "Lilly Martin Spencer, 1822-1902," American Collector, August, 1944, p. 5.
'Twixt the Cup and the Lip," and "Youth and Age." The inclusion of such moralizing themes extended even to portraiture.

In 1870, Comptroller Connally of New York City commissioned Mrs. Spencer to execute four full-length figure portraits of his daughters. Due to a technical difficulty, the artist chose to repaint the portrait of one daughter, Mrs. Fithian. Although the four final portraits are no longer available, the unacceptable first portrait of Mrs. Fithian remained in the Spencer family. The canvas is extremely handsome. The colors are rich and pure in tone, with no muddiness around the edges of the color patterns. The rendering of lace over satin is of trompe-l'oeil character. The day-dreaming expression of the subject, contemplating a full-blown rose, is a sentimental approach to portraiture. The degree of romanticism contrasts, perhaps too abruptly, with the highly realistic details of the gown and jewelry. Mrs. Spencer entitled Mrs. Fithian portrait "We Both Must Fade." Such moralizing was so popular during that time that Thomas Latto, the poet, wrote of the portrait:

See! from those priceless jewels in her bower
The queenly Beauty turns her neck away,
And Eyes that pale not 'neath the diamonds' ray,
Muse in their loveliness on one sweet flower -
Whose bloom alas! has reached its fated hour.

18. Collection of Mrs. L. S. Gates, Rutherford, New Jersey. Oil on canvas, 84" in height, 60" in width.
Mist I, too fade, my youthful freshness toned
To sombre hues, - these winning graces All, -
The charm depart, and Autumn sigh its wail
O'er splendors lost, by parted friends bemoaned.

The flower may die, this breathing Rose will live
Nor Time shall strew her petals on the gale, -
Such calm assurance can the painter give;
Ages unborn shall greet with pleased surprise
The tender radiance of those pensive eyes.

Mrs. Spencer sometimes used her paintings to comment
on the prevailing social injustices, usually the disparity
between rich and poor. She often made use of companion
paintings to point out those conditions, which by their
necessary brevity appear more humorous than serious today.
One companion-pair she entitled "Beauty Barbarized" and
"Beauty and Barbarism." The first work depicts an obviously
poor and very unhappy little girl, sitting on a kitchen
table while her mother shears the too-bothersome curls. The
setting is the interior of a log cabin, with all details
shown. The companion-piece shows a contrast: a lavish set-
ting, an equally unhappy little rich girl, suffering the
time-consuming task of having curls put into her hair. The
social implications are rather simple and for an artist to
trouble to point them out implies a rather disingenuous
nature.

An interest in portraying moral concepts in paintings
could, quite understandably, lead to an interest in allegory.
Allegorical paintings were a well accepted feature of mid-
century American art. Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand, Samuel
Morse, and others made use of it in landscape. Lilly Martin
Spencer's most famous painting was an allegorical work entitled "Truth Unveiling Falsehood." It was supposedly three years in the making, completed in 1869. Two additional panels, "Might is Right" and "Right is Might" were originally planned to flank the central painting of "Truth..." An anonymous benefactor enabled Mrs. Spencer to devote all her energies to this triptych, however, for some reason the side panels were never executed. Although Mrs. Spencer was still residing in Newark at that time, she appears to have rented a studio in Manhattan at 5 Waverly Place, where she painted the allegory. The project was so famous, in its day, that fairly regular notices appeared in the newspapers, describing the state of completion. An 1870 notice admonishes the "Lovers of the Beautiful and True" not to go abroad for art but to visit at the home of the great painting, "Truth Unveiling Falsehood." Upon completion of the painting, Childs and Company of New York City rented it from the artist, at which time it was insured with Lloyd's of London for twenty thousand dollars. The rental fee was one-hundred and fifty dollars per week. Mrs. Spencer appears to have regarded the work so highly herself that she twice refused offers of twenty thousand dollars for "Truth..."

Although the original painting cannot be found,19 a study (Plate 16) remains. The work appears to be technically

19 The writer, in attempting to trace the large (approximately 6' in width, 8' in height) canvas, found that it had been in storage in New York City from 1902 to 1951.
superior, in many ways, to other of the artist's paintings. The figure of Truth is placed on the axis of the canvas, her weight, shifted toward the lower figure of Innocence, balances the figures on either side. The artist made use of a repoussoir figure in the lower left, again to effect movement into space. Although this is only the study, the application of paint is much freer than in the artist's earlier technique. There is no wealth of detail to detract from the generally painterly use of color. The luminous quality is highly successful. Mrs. Spencer has arbitrarily made use of light both to further the composition and to add to the symbolic meaning of the figures. Greater emphasis has been placed on the curvilinear and the sculpturesque than on the patterns of detail. The realistic effect of flesh though the sheer drapery in the figure of Truth is a trompe-l'oeil achievement. The present day observer, accustomed to the simultaneity of the Cubist movement, accepts the dual view of the beast without question. Although Mrs. Spencer was undoubtedly referring to the inner character of Falsehood, at last revealed by Truth, she has made use of a shifting viewpoint in a way reminiscent of later Cubist developments.
The painting was regarded by its contemporaries as one of the masterpieces of the age. In 1870, Thomas Latto wrote these lines:

Not brighter is the morning sun,
Breaking upon a cloudless sky,
Than Truth's celestial form and face,
Whose Home is on Heaven High;
Nor darker that unblest abode
In human hearts, wherever error dwells,
Than Falsehood's Frightful (inner) face,
Whose Hut is in the Hells.

This is the only painting which Mrs. Spencer executed in the allegorical style.

Another work which Mrs. Spencer did during the years of her New Jersey residence is "The Picnic on the Fourth of July - A Day to be Remembered." It is also a canvas of monumental scale. "The Picnic..." was the last painting by the artist known to be reproduced in the form of hand-tinted lithographs (Plate 17). This painting was illustrated in Life Magazine about ten years ago as a typical example of nineteenth century romantic painting in America. It was correctly attributed to Mrs. Spencer, since the illustration was taken from a signed lithograph.

---

Mrs. Spencer described, in detail, the symbolism associated with each figure (Appendix).

In the private collection of Mr. Henry J. Guicker, New York City.

Approximately 5' in height, 7' in width.

Stylistically, the technique is inferior to that of the allegory and the two Ward children's portraits. The multiplicity of actions and the profusion of textures tend to distract greatly from the central action. The brushwork is very tight; the painterly technique has been abandoned. However, this work is a good example of the broad category referred to as American romanticism. The rustic scene of the river, with boys wading, a sailboat in the distance, broad trees and deep woods, is an idyllic setting within which the various actions occur. Rich costumes and color, music, good food, excitement, mischief, and fun provide a general tone of relaxation and enjoyment. The shy lovers, screened by the foliage, away from the crowd, are an obvious indication of the artist's interest in the romantic style of painting. Emphasis on the present is found in the contemporary dress of the figures and in their momentary actions. All episodes take place during that most typical of American holidays, the Fourth of July.

During the last decade that Lilly Martin Spencer lived in New Jersey, there was a gradual decline in her popularity. At the same time, her artistic development broadened, as indicated by a number of paintings remaining from those years. She had become less preoccupied with exacting details, and more concerned with the effect of total composition. In complete control of the oil technique,
she no longer experimented with glossy surface effects to add luminosity to her works. The facial expressions of her figures had become more subtle; their actions less obvious. Perhaps, having experienced a lessening of national acclaim, Mrs. Spencer was no longer concerned with painting works for popular appeal. First a craftsman, and then indirectly, an illustrator, Mrs. Spencer became an artist of greater dimensions during the last years in Newark.
CHAPTER IX

In 1880, Mrs. Spencer and her family moved to Blue Point, near Poughkeepsie, in up-state New York. The earlier move from New York City to Newark had weakened her personal contact with New York. However, the change of residence to near Poughkeepsie appears to have totally severed her connections with the art world. The Centennial of 1876 was the last recorded exhibition to which she contributed. 24

Mrs. Spencer's reasons for moving to up-state New York are unknown. Perhaps she wanted to retire from painting; this is doubtful, however, as she was far too enthusiastic about her career. Very likely the change of environment resulted from some family decision. Shortly after the death of her husband in 1890, Mrs. Spencer resumed painting. Ten years later, in 1900, she returned to the city of her greatest triumph, where she continued her career.

There is almost a total lack of evidence concerning Mrs. Spencer's life from 1880 to 1900. Apparently, she

---

24 The belief that the painting "Truth Unveiling Falsehood" was exhibited at the Columbian Exposition of 1893 (E. Reiter, op. cit., ; B. Cowdrey, op. cit.) appears to be without foundation from the Exposition's catalogue of paintings.
executed very few paintings during those decades. She made no attempt to exhibit her works publicly. Mrs. Spencer did become a close friend to the lawyer and agnostic, Robert G. Ingersoll, who also lived near Poughkeepsie. There is the likelihood that Mrs. Spencer knew the elderly Ingersoll before she had moved to up-state New York. During the three years which she had maintained a Manhattan studio to paint the allegory, "Truth Unveiling Falsehood," that studio had been filled with the intellectuals of the day, Anna Randall Deihl, Henry Ward Beecher, William Cullen Bryant, Wallace Bruce and others. It would seem probable that the philosophic minded Ingersoll would have been among those who visited the studio.\textsuperscript{25} Mrs. Spencer's friendship with Robert Ingersoll may have been a contributing factor to her move to up-state New York. Sometime before 1900, she executed a portrait of Ingersoll with two of his grandchildren.\textsuperscript{26}

Before 1890, the Spencers changed their residence from Blue Point to a home they called Rocknest, at Crum Elbow, across the Hudson from Poughkeepsie. Here,

\textsuperscript{25}An undated, untitled newspaper announcement of the artist's funeral states that Mrs. Spencer was the "life-long friend of Col. Robert Ingersoll,"--from the collection of the artist's great-granddaughter, Mrs. Otto F. Ream, Miami, Florida.

\textsuperscript{26}The present location of the original painting is unknown. A very poor reproduction is found in The Phrenological Journal and Phrenological Magazine, August, 1900, p. 48.
supposedly, Mrs. Spencer kept a gallery composed of a large number of her paintings.\footnote{27}

Shortly before the death of Benjamin Rush Spencer, the family apparently moved into Poughkeepsie, maintaining a summer home near Highland, New York. Mrs. Spencer executed the portraits of three Highland citizens: Dr. Ganse, his wife, Georgiana, and a Miss Julia Denton.\footnote{28}

In 1890, Lilly Martin Spencer painted the portrait of Mrs. Elizabeth Cady Stanton\footnote{29} one of the leaders of the women's rights movement. The artist exercised all the technical and compositional knowledge she had gained earlier. The application of paint is free; the brush strokes create a certain degree of texture in themselves. The setting, therefore, is less defined and more atmospheric in nature. All details are subordinate to the forceful quality of Mrs. Stanton's face.\footnote{30} The painting is conservative, and seems

\footnote{27} Fredrick Sweet, Lilly Martin Spencer (typewritten monograph), 1945. Collection of the New York Public Library.

\footnote{28} The Highland Mid-Hudson Post, September 14, 1944. When the writer traveled to Highland to see these portraits, she was informed by the town's librarian that Miss Denton's portrait had disappeared; Mrs. Ganse's had survived a fire, but had been badly retouched; and Mr. Ganse's had been allowed to burn on the same occasion for, according to verbal communication, no one had liked it too well, anyway.

\footnote{29} Oil on canvas, 29" in width, 36" in height. Collection of Mrs. L. S. Gates, Rutherford, New Jersey.

\footnote{30} The stylized curls of the subject's hair are due to the fact that Mrs. Stanton wore a wig rather than to a regression in Mrs. Spencer's ability.
to follow the tradition of English eighteenth century portraiture: the three-quarter view of the sitter, the inclusion of part of a landscape as the background. As a conservative portrait, it is successful. It captures much of the character of the strong-willed, dynamic reformer.

Sometime between 1889 and 1893,\textsuperscript{31} Mrs. Spencer painted the striking portrait of Cary Harrison (Plate 18),\textsuperscript{32} wife of Benjamin Harrison, President of the United States at that time. The near-profile view is unusual in nineteenth century American portraiture. The face, well modelled dimensionally, is the focal area of the composition. There is no distraction from over-worked details. The painterly quality of the plum colored velvet gown is richly, yet subtly realized; the ruffle and jewelry at the neck of the garment serve primarily to accentuate the face. The portrait characterizes an alert, pleasant, rather humorous, personality.

In these last two portraits; Mrs. Spencer has avoided an exclusive concern with realities and, instead, makes use of a freer, more illusionistic style. Through a heightening of tonality and restriction of detail, the artist has

\textsuperscript{31}President Harrison sent a letter of commendation to the artist on the success of his wife's portrait. His term of office was 1889-1893. The letter is in the collection of Mrs. Gates, Rutherford, New Jersey.

\textsuperscript{32}Oil on canvas; 24" in height, 20" in width. Collection of Mrs. Gates, Rutherford, New Jersey.
emphasized the sitter’s face. She has, in consequence, achieved more unified compositions here than in some of her earlier works in which the various detailed sections often compete with each other for preeminence.

**New York City**

When Mrs. Spencer returned to New York City in 1900, she referred to herself as a “veritable Rip Van Winkle.” She had had little or no direct contact with the art world for twenty years. Although the New York art center had changed considerably during those years, Mrs. Spencer re-established her career. Her studio and home was at 902 Columbus Avenue in Manhattan, where she began to receive old friends and new commissions.

One of these commissions, “Greek Slave,” for a Mr. Charles Corey of Tuxedo Falls, New York, was completed early in May, 1902. The painting was still in the artist’s studio on May 22, the day that Lilly Martin Spencer, almost eighty years old, sat for the last time before her easel. She died at work.

Mrs. Spencer left three unfinished paintings, one of which was only a study. Among these unfinished works, “The Centennial” (Plate 19) was the most ambitious undertaking.

---


34 Collection of Mrs. Lillian Spencer Gates, Rutherford, New Jersey.
It was over four by six feet in size and contained more than forty figures. In terms of artistic development, it compares quite favorably to her other (extant) large group painting, "The Picnic on the Fourth of July."35 Both paintings similarly employ a "cavalier," or running-type, perspective involving many figures engaged in many different activities. However, there are also great differences between the two works.36

The landscape setting of "The Picnic..." does not fully function as a unifying devise for the composition. The setting is too detailed, too textured, and too brightly colored in its own right, and hence, not subordinate to the figures. The interior setting of "The Centennial," on the other hand, has been successfully integrated with the whole composition. It is less detailed and more subtle in tone than the landscape setting and does not rival the figures in importance as an independent theme.

Since sections of the partially finished "Centennial" are complete in themselves, Mrs. Spencer's procedure can be seen. Apparently, it was her practice to paint-in generalized areas of lightly tinted oil washes, probably following a

35See Page 79 ff., Chapter VIII, Plate 17.

36It should be reemphasized that "The Picnic..." was probably executed for an organization who reproduced it in the form of hand-tinted lithographs.
fairly specific study. She then gradually reworked these wash areas in greater detail, keeping the whole composition more or less in balance. Completed areas, therefore, are found distributed throughout the painting. Generally, faces in "The Centennial" are in an advanced stage of completion while garments and other details are less finished. The interior, background setting is largely complete.

"The Picnic..." and "The Centennial" make use of the same devise to create a focal point: a single, centrally located figure in a frontal position establishes contact with the observer. In the former painting, however, the minutiae of detail and the amount of unrelated action prevents concentration on the central figure. "The Picnic..." is composed of a series of independent units organized into a whole largely because they occur within one landscape setting. The individual units of "The Centennial," on the other hand, are all carefully related to the central figure. The setting does not compete for importance, nor do the figure groupings. All figures have been so arranged that their importance is achieved by the extent to which they further the entire organization.

This painting, "The Centennial," tends to indicate that the artist was more aware of, and concerned with, the problem of compositional unity than at any time since 1853,
when she painted "Reading the Legend." The "Centennial" figures are more voluminous and form a more genuine part of the space around them than do the figures in "The Picnic..." The latter shows more of a surface conception. "The Centennial" indicates that Mrs. Spencer was completely in command of facial expressions and could depict relatively subtle emotions even in so large a number of figures. However, expression of emotion is subordinated to the total effect of the composition. Another indication of the artist's main concern with the picture as a totality is found in the almost complete absence of realistic minutiae and texture in the finished areas of the canvas. This last work of Mrs. Spencer's is, in many ways, her best.

The study (Plate 20) found in Mrs. Spencer's studio at the time of her death serves to illustrate how much freer the artist's technique had become. It seems doubtful that she would have added detail upon detail to a work as nearly realized in its general form as this one. Tonal areas have already been successfully balanced; texture has already been introduced by the broad strokes of the brush. The addition of great detail would have actually negated much of the underlying work.

During the twenty years that Mrs. Spencer lived in conservative up-state New York, it is extremely doubtful that

---

\[37\] Plate 7, p. 47 ff (Chapter IV).
she would have had access to any late nineteenth century European paintings at that time. After 1900, however, when she had returned to New York City, she might easily have had some contact with the works of Barbizon painters or French Impressionists. The only instance which might possibly be considered real evidence of Impressionist influence on the artist is the figure of a man in the unfinished canvas, "The Prodigal's Return," (Plate 21).\(^ {38} \) But judging by the greater freedom of technique found in the portraits of Mrs. Stanton and Mrs. Harrison, the freer style seems to have originated with the artist herself. There is no strong evidence to support an hypothesis of important outside influence during the last phase of the artist's career. Lilly Martin Spencer's final paintings tend to indicate that the artist had begun to work in a relatively different style during the last decade and half of her life. This capacity for artistic growth, especially at her advanced age, speaks well for Mrs. Spencer's sincere concern with painting.

It should be noted that any study of Mrs. Spencer's career is decidedly hampered by the disappearance of many of her paintings. According to members of the artist's family, Mrs. Spencer's oldest daughter, Lilly Caroline Spencer Redding, who was unusually attached to her mother,

---

\(^ {38} \) Unfinished. Oil on canvas, width, 36", height, 29".
went to England with several hundred (!) of Mrs. Spencer's paintings.\textsuperscript{39} This event took place shortly after the artist's death in 1902. Lilly Caroline remained in England for several years. When she returned to the United States, she brought back with her only eighteen of the paintings having sold nearly all the rest. This family account receives substantiation from the fact that two of Mrs. Spencer's paintings, "Dignity and Impudence" (Plate 9) and "This Little Pig Went to Market" (Plate 10) were returned to this country in the 1940's by London dealers.\textsuperscript{40} In the opinion of the writer, the great bulk of Mrs. Spencer's paintings are still to be found in England.

\textbf{Retrospect in Brief}

Lilly Martin Spencer's career corresponds to the development of post-Jacksonian America. She represents those times in many ways. Raised on the frontier by cultured, progressive parents, Mrs. Spencer became a successful, popular artist. She had virtually no professional artistic training; and the inconsistencies present in her work illustrate this. However, her paintings are part of the

\textsuperscript{39} Both the artist's granddaughter, Mrs. Gates, and the artist's great-granddaughter, Mrs. Neam, support this account.

\textsuperscript{40} There is the likelihood that "Reading the Legend" (Plate 7) and "Celebrating the Victory at Vicksburg" could have also returned to this country from England. All four paintings were on the New York art market during the early 1940's.
unselfconsciousness of America's mid-century society. Her paintings are artistically sincere, romantic, and enthusiastic. They are not sophisticated. These qualities are precisely among those which characterize the society of the day, which was essentially a folk-culture undergoing a dynamic growth. Each one of Mrs. Spencer's paintings is a witness to her contribution to nineteenth century American art at home.
APPENDIX A

Lilly Martin Spencer's Known Exhibition Record
(according to available catalogues)

Marietta, Ohio

1841

Infancy
The Hungarian Princess
The Tomb
The Nightingale
Portrait
The Bathing Maid
Cupid
The Infant and Time
The Elopement
The Dreaming Girl
The Artist
The First Born
The Gentleman and his Dog

Cincinnati, Ohio

Western Art Union, 1847

Boy and Fish
Child at Breakfast
Mother's Prayer
Tamborina
Prisonor's Wife
Mariner's Wife and Children
Peace and Happiness
Fruit Piece

Western Art Union, 1848

The Flower Girl
Boy in his Element
Boy and Fish
Hindoo Girl
Fruit Piece
Appendix A (Contd.)

Ladies' Gallery, 1854
Mother and Child

Cincinnati Academy of Fine Arts, 1868-69
Pic Nio

New York City, New York

National Academy of Design
1848
No. 32. The Water Spirit

1849
No. 133. Domestic Happiness

1850
101. Portrait of a Lady
103. Portrait of a Mother and Child

1851
142. The Drummers' Portraits

1852
12. Portrait of a Gentleman
333. A Future President
338. Power of Fashion

1853
310. Il Penseroso
368. L'Allegro
371. Reading the Legend
Appendix A (Contd.)

National Academy of Design (contd.)

1854

50. C. Cameron
293. Portrait of a Lady
294. Portrait of an Infant

1856

86. The Young Husband
94. The Young Wife

1858

105. Fi! Fo! Fum!
573. Gossip

American Art-Union

1848

263. The May Queen
272. Fruit Girl

1849

Mother's Prayer
Disputed Possession
Hush! Don't Wake Them
91. Thoughts on a Flower
228. Youth and Age

1851

86. A Present from the Country
161. Hesitation

1852

217. Hamlet and Ophelia
244. The Jolly Washerwoman
Appendix A (Contd.)

Cosmopolitan Art Association

1856
Day Dreamer
Kiss Me and You'll Kiss the 'Lasses

1857
How Tempting
Don't Touch
L'Allegro
Il Penseroso

1858
Fi! Fo! Fum!
Meditation
The Last Home

1859
This Little Pig Went to Market

1860
Nothing Else to Do
Grandpa's Prodigies
The Evening Beauty

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts

1861
53. My New Pants

1862
142. Speculation
150. Tribulation

Centennial of 1876

998. Will You Have Some Fruit?
APPENDIX B

List of works by Lilly Martin Spencer which were made available for this study in the form of the original paintings, or lithographs, engravings, and photographs of the paintings.

A Sister's Influence

Barker, Judge Joseph
Beauty and Barbarism
Beauty Barbarized
Blowing Bubbles
Bo-Peep!

Cat's First Polka
Celebrating the Victory at Vicksburg
Centennial, The
Choose Between

Dandelion Time
Devol, Francis (charcoal)
Devol, Maria (charcoal)
Dignity and Impudence

Fi! Fo! Fum!
Forsaken
Fruits of Temptation

Ganse, Mrs. G. R.
Girl Sewing
Grandfather and Children
Grandpa's Prodigies
Grass Butter

Harrison, Mrs. Benjamin
Hush!

Ingersoll, Robert G.

Kitchen Scene

Landscape with Figures
Landscape with Figures
Appendix B (Contd.)

Martin, Marie (charcoal)
McGuffey, Tulford
My Birthday Present

Oh!

Picnic on the Fourth of July
Pure Milk
Prodigal's Return, The

Reading the Legend

Self-Portrait (1842)
Self-Portrait (ca. 1865)
Shake Hands?
Spencer, Benjamin Rush
Stanton, Elizabeth Cady
Students, The

Take Your Choice
This Little Pig Went to Market
Truth Unveiling Falsehood

Unfinished Study of Girl
Unfinished Work of Two Figures

Ward Children Group Portrait
Ward, Nicholas Longworth
We Both Must Fade

Young Wife's First Stew
Young Students, The
APPENDIX C

List of documented portraits painted by Lilly Martin Spencer.

Bayley, Archbishop
Barker, Judge Joseph
Bryant, William Cullen

Cameron, C.

Denton, Julia
Douglas, Stephen A.

Fithian, Mrs.

Ganse, Dr.
Ganse, Mrs.
Grant, General U.S.

Harrison, Mrs. Benjamin
Hutchins, Mrs.

Ingersoll, Robert G.
Irving, Washington

Martin, Giles
McCollan, General G. B.
McGuffey, Tulford
Morris, Mayor

Self-Portrait (1842)
Self-Portrait (ca. 1865)
Sherman, General W.T.
Spencer, Benjamin Rush
Stanton, Elizabeth Cady

Van Buren, Martin

Ward, four children
Ward, Governor Marcus L.
Ward, Nicholas L.
Ward, Mrs. M. L.
Wilcox, Ella Wheeler
APPENDIX D

TRUTH UNVEILING FALSEHOOD.

Painted by Mrs. L. M. SPENCER.

This description of the picture before you is given, that you yourself may be the judge whether the painting renders the ideas described. One thing must be remembered, that it is Allegorical, by which means a great number of ideas or facts can be rendered in the most vivid and impressive manner; but, in order that this end may be fully attained, the allegory must be strictly consistent with the facts or ideas to be represented, whether it pleases or displeases the preconceived opinions of the spectator. And, indeed, in this case the allegory must be as impartial in its treatment as the subject treated upon, which is

TRUTH UNVEILING FALSEHOOD.

Truth is the centre figure. Falsehood on the left with Ignorance at its feet. On the right is Confidence resting against Truth, with Innocence in her lap. The Picture is intended to represent and contrast the beauty and power of Truth (under whose protection all that is good prospers), with the opposite results under the deceiving cover of Falsehood, where the monster Selfishness (originator of all man's evil passions) is enabled to destroy human trust and human Innocence, typified by a helpless babe entrusted to it by Ignorance, in which, and the consequent misery and degradation, it keeps mankind through its false attributes.

Truth is represented as a spiritual being, to typify its eternal principle. It is represented as shedding light, as that of a rising day on all around, because Truth dispels the darkness of Ignorance, as day does that of night.

The face of Truth is calm, passionless, and inscrutable, for in Truth there is neither love nor hate. It is not through revenge that it exposes villainy, but because it is a law of the great All, that light will banish darkness. It is not from love that it protects Confidence and Innocence, but because it, with them, are affinities. Naught can change its calm, for it is the source of all power. Under its mere presence, the veil and mask of Falsehood arise and are dissolved by the attraction of Truth, as the mists and fogs of night, on the earth's green surface, disappear at the approach of the morning sun, for "the guilty conscience needs no accuser."

The fallen crown is symbolical of the power of Truth over the "Divine Right of Kings," which must fall when Truth is near. Ignorance groveling at the feet of Falsehood is frightened, not at the brutal monster Truth unveils; for through the prejudices and superstitious fears, engendered by Ignorance and fostered by Falsehood, she refuses to look or hear; and her weak and perverted vision is dazzled and horrified by the beautiful light of Truth; and she buries her grey and dishevelled head in the folds of what she has always and still supposes to be her only support and protection; but which gorgeous velvet and ermine are the results of wealth and power, craftily obtained at the sacrifice of Justice and Humanity. Even vegetation is blighted beneath the foot of Ignorance.

Quite the reverse is the case on the other side of the picture, where Confidence and Innocence, protected by Truth, nestle against the pure and simple robe in blissful security; for only through Truth can Confidence last, and only Innocence can bear undazzled its beneficent light.

The beauty of this figure (the young mother) is intended to be different from that of Truth. It is human, warm, palpitating, frail, tender, loving; utterly in need of Truth's strong presence for protection and guidance.

Truth is represented assuming the human form, not by any means (we are sorry to say) because humanity, or especially female humanity, are types of Truth, because it is humanity that needs Truth to enlighten and protect it, and woman in particular, that her smile and her words, which are the first that mankind in its innocence looks up to, may not teach it error.

LILLIE M. SPENCER.

101
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


**Periodicals and Articles**


*Godey's Lady's Book*. 1858, 1859, 1860, 1862, 1869.


Exhibition Catalogues

Chicago World's Columbian Exhibition Revised Catalogue. Chicago: W. B. Conkey, 1893.

Cincinnati Academy of Fine Arts; Catalogue, 1860-69. Cincinnati, 1869.

Lilly Martin Spencer, Ohio Historical Society, 1959.

The Transactions of the Western Art Union. Cincinnati; Ben Franklin Printing House, 1847.


Newspapers

The Boston Journal, December 30, 1876.

The Cincinnati Gazette, 1839-1846.

Cleveland Plain Dealer, December 22, 1946.

Daily Cincinnati Chronicle, 1841-1846.

World (New York), September 22, 1901.

Unpublished Material

Studies

Flagg, Edmund, "Catalogue of Miss Martin's Paintings," Marietta College Library, Marietta, Ohio, 1841. (Typewritten.)

Nyé, Mrs. Minna Tupper, "Early Artists of Washington County," Campus Martius Museum, Marietta, Ohio, 1911. (Typewritten.)

Sweet, Fredrick, "Lilly Martin Spencer," New York Public Library, New York City, 1946. (Typewritten.)

Diary

Martin, Giles. Diary of the Martin Family. Campus Martius Museum, Marietta, Ohio, M.D. (Ink on Vellum.)

Letters

Bole, Margaret to Mrs. Angelique LePetit Martin, May 18, 1851. Collection of Campus Martius Museum, Marietta, Ohio.


Martin, Giles to friend. August 22, 1832. Collection of Campus Martius Museum, Marietta, Ohio.

Martin, Giles to friend, September 2, 1833. Collection of Campus Martius Museum, Marietta, Ohio.

        to his wife, June 10, 1842. Collection of Campus Martius Museum, Marietta, Ohio.

Martin, Lilly to her mother, November 3, 1841. Collection of Campus Martius Museum, Marietta, Ohio.

        to Mr. and Mrs. Martin, March 31, 1842. Collection of Campus Martius Museum, Marietta, Ohio.

        July 18, 1847, Collection of Campus Martius Museum, Marietta, Ohio.

Hebert, Mr. to Giles Martin, July 30, 1829. Collection of Campus Martius Museum, Marietta, Ohio.

Longworth, Nicholas to Mr. Hildreth, September 18, 1841. Collection of Mrs. Lillian Spencer Gates, Rutherford, New Jersey.

Schaus, Herman to Mrs. Lilly Martin Spencer, June 14, 1898. Collection of Mrs. Lillian Spencer Gates, Rutherford, New Jersey.

Spencer, Mrs. Lilly Martin to the committee of the American Art-Union, March 22, 1849. Collection of the New York Historical Society.


Other Sources

Booklist of M. Giles Martin's Library. Collection of the Campus Martius Museum, Marietta, Ohio.
Contract between Giles Martin and the Marietta Collegiate
Institute and Western Teachers' Seminary, July 20,
1833. Collection of the Campus Martius Museum,
Marietta, Ohio.

Correspondence between Mrs. Lillian Spencer Gates, Rutherford,
New Jersey, and writer, July, 1958 to present.

Correspondence between Mrs. Otto P. Ream and writer, April,
1958 to present.

Personal Interviews. Mrs. Edith S. Reiter, Curator, Campus
Martius Museum, Marietta, Ohio, Spring, 1958 to Spring,
1959.

Personal Interviews. Mrs. Lillian Spencer Gates, Rutherford,
New Jersey, July, August, September and December, 1958.

Personal Interview. Miss Lent, Librarian, Highland Free
Library, August 15, 1958.