



# HAWTHORNE

## Fine Art

### **Ann Sophia Towne Darrah (1819-1881)**

Ann Sophia Towne Darrah was born in Philadelphia on September 30, 1819, to Sarah (Robinson) and John Towne. She had an artful childhood as her father was an avid collector and patron of the arts. Her father and brother, John H. Towne, were directors of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Her father was also on the board of the Art-Union of Philadelphia which was established in 1844 to promote the fine arts within the United States.<sup>1</sup>

Darrah was devoted to music, but she began to focus on painting after moving to Boston with her husband, Robert K. Darrah in 1845. In 1849 she began studying under the tutelage of Paul Weber (1823-1916).<sup>2</sup> Darrah's sister Rosalaba M. Towne (1827-1909) was also an artist. The sisters exhibited together at the Fifth Winter Exhibition held at the National Academy in 1871-72.<sup>3</sup> Like many women artists of the time, the sisters used their initials in order to conceal their gender.

In 1874, Darrah received a silver medal for her painting *View in Essex County, Mass* at the exhibition of Charitable Mechanic's Association. A gold medal was given to George Inness while other silver medal winners included James M. Hart, Thomas Hill, and John Enneking.<sup>4</sup> In 1875, Darrah's work was included in a sale of prominent European and American artists at Doll & Richards in Boston. A critic for the *Boston Globe* stated, "Mrs. Darrah, whose strength in a certain direction is equaled by no other female artist in this country, has two little pictures at this gallery, which deserve especial notice. They are not particularly pleasant or sympathetic, but they are put upon the canvas with wonderful force and fidelity to nature."<sup>5</sup>

In 1876, Darrah's painting *Lake Champlain* was exhibited at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition.<sup>6</sup> In 1879, she exhibited several paintings at the Fiftieth Annual Exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Her work entitled *Gathering Seaweed* hung beside a portrait by renowned lady artist Mary Cassatt.<sup>7</sup>

Following Darrah's death in 1881, the *Boston Globe* wrote, "As an artist, she was favorably known, her landscapes and marine views being especially notable."<sup>8</sup> In 1882, a memorial exhibition comprised of over 200 of Darrah's oil and watercolor paintings was held at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston. A critic for the *Boston Globe* noted that the collection was, "well worth study, as well for the intrinsic excellence

<sup>1</sup> "The Art-Union of Philadelphia," *Lancaster Intelligencer*, Tue, Mar 20, 1849, 4.

<sup>2</sup> S.R. Koehler, *The United States Art Directory and Yearbook* (New York: Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co., 1882)129.

<sup>3</sup> *Catalogue of the Fifth Winter Exhibition of the National Academy of Design (1871-72), Including the Fifth Annual Collection of the American Society of Painters in Water Colors* (New York: E. Wells Sackett).

<sup>4</sup> "End of the Mechanic's Fair," *The Boston Globe* (Boston, Massachusetts), Mon, Oct 19, 1874, 8.

<sup>5</sup> "Doll & Richards," *The Boston Globe* (Boston, Massachusetts) Wed, Feb 3, 1875, 4.

<sup>6</sup> United States Centennial Commission, and Francis A. Walker. *International Exhibition, 1876: Reports & Awards: Vol. VII*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880)112.

<sup>7</sup> *Catalogue of the Fiftieth Annual Exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts*, (Philadelphia: Collins, 1879).

<sup>8</sup> "Other Deaths," *Boston Post* (Boston, Massachusetts) · Mon, Dec 26, 1881 · Page 4



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as for the curious development it shows.” The works were later auctioned off to benefit the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.<sup>9</sup>

Today, Darrah’s painting entitled *Glass Head, Manchester, Massachusetts* can be found in the permanent collection of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston. In 1888, a critic for the *Atlantic Monthly* saw the influence in the painting of Barbizon painter Charles-François Daubigny (1817-1878). He lauded the painting for being, “sincere, broad, and almost masculine.”<sup>10</sup>

During her lifetime, Darrah exhibited at the Boston Art Club, the Boston Atheneaeum and the Pennsylvania Academy.<sup>11</sup>

Ann Sophia Towne Darrah died on Saturday, December 24, 1881.

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<sup>9</sup> “Mrs. Darrah’s Collection,” *The Boston Globe* (Boston, Massachusetts), Sun, Feb 26, 1882, 9.

<sup>10</sup> William Howe Downes “Boston Painters And Paintings” *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. LXII - Nov 1888 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company 1888), 654.

<sup>11</sup> *Who Was Who in America, Historical Volume (1607-1896)* (Chicago: A.N. Marquis Company, 1963) 136.