



# HAWTHORNE

## Fine Art

### **Thomas J. Cowell (1832-1910)**

Thomas J. Cowell was born in 1832 in the Isle of Man. The first-born child of Margaret and Thomas Cowell, he immigrated with his parents to Albany while still an infant. In Albany, The Cowell family grew from a family of three to a family of eleven. Cowell's father was employed as a constable.<sup>1</sup>

While little is known about Cowell's life, census records indicate he was employed as a copper plate printer as early as 1850.<sup>2</sup> During the 1850's, Cowell married Julia Keenan and resided in Albany with his wife, mother-in-law, and sister-in-law.<sup>3</sup> Cowell and his wife had four children.

By 1861, Cowell was a partner in the printing firm Gavit & Cowell. Located in Albany's Exchange Building, Gavit & Cowell were bank note engravers and offered engraving on steel, wood, and stone.<sup>4</sup> The following year, Cowell served as Alderman in Albany's 8<sup>th</sup> Ward. He also worked as a lithographer with Murray & Co. also located in the Exchange Building.<sup>5</sup>

Cowell's partnership with Gavit appears to end in 1864 and by 1870 Cowell was employed as a stationery dealer. He continued with this line of work for more than three decades.<sup>6</sup> His onetime business partner, John E. Gavit, was influential in forming the American bank note company. An art connoisseur, Gavit was a supporter of the Hudson River School. His son, Joseph Gavit, married Fanny Breese Palmer, the daughter of renowned sculptor Erastus Dow Palmer.<sup>7</sup> Gavit's engraving can be found today in collections including the Albany Institute of History and Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Worcester Art Museum.

Following the death of his wife Julia in 1889, Cowell married Margaret Jane Donovan in 1892. Thomas J. Cowell died in 1910.

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<sup>1</sup> 1850 United States Census, Albany, Albany, New York, digital image s.v. "Thomas Cowall," *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>3</sup> 1860 United States Census, Albany, Albany, New York, digital image s.v. "Thomas Cowell," *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>4</sup> 1861 City Directory, Albany, New York, *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>5</sup> 1862 City Directory, Albany, New York, *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>6</sup> 1870-1898, City Directory, Albany, New York, *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>7</sup> "Biography/History of," *A Guide to the Palmer-Gavit Family Papers*, Albany Institute of History & Art accessed via [albanyinstitute.org/library-collection-finding-aids.com](http://albanyinstitute.org/library-collection-finding-aids.com).