



Lars Potter with portrait painted by his grandfather, Lars Sellstedt

... picture of Mrs. Albert H. Tracy

Focus on Art

Sellstedt Show History Lesson

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Courier-Express Art Critic

MORE THAN AN exhibit of artworks, the season's first display in the Burchfield Center at Buffalo State College is a lesson in history and geneology.

"The Lars Sellstedt Heritage" is a 130-year chunk of the history of Buffalo from 1842 to 1972.

Lars Sellstedt, (1819-1911) was one of Buffalo's earliest and best known painters. He is entirely self-taught and his interest in painting was originally financial — a way for a sailor (him) to earn extra money.

He turned his total energies to art in 1846 when a disability prevented him from carrying out the strenuous duties of a seaman.

"I AM NOW considered the best painter in the city and for 300 miles around," he wrote in a letter to his mother in Sweden in 1846, "and it is beginning to look as if I am coming along fairly well."

Sellstedt is important to us today for several reasons. He was one of those responsible for the establishment of the Buffalo Fine Arts Academy — the Albright-Knox Gallery — and his

descendents have continued that relationship.

Sellstedt the artist was also Sellstedt the historian. The walls in the Burchfield Center are filled with portraits of Buffalo's earliest prominent civic leaders; landscapes of an unpolluted, unindustrial Niagara River; scenes of a busy Buffalo Harbor; and faces of famous area Indian leaders.

WHILE SELLSTEDT was not a great artist, he was a competent painter, working in the traditional, academic style of the day. The second half of the 19th century was a dull one for art in America. Impressionism, and experimentation were bursting upon Europe, while formal traditionalism had a firm grip on American artists.

Sellstedt did what almost all American painters did who wanted to earn enough to eat; he painted portraits.

Monied American families wanted portraits. They were

status symbols (portraits adorned the fine homes of Europe) and they preserved the likeness of loved ones.

The portraits that Sellstedt painted, now in the Burchfield Center, reflect the painting styles and the people of the times: stern, set pioneer faces, faces of a newly created upper class.

MARRIED IN 1856 to Caroline Scott, daughter of a prestigious Buffalo physician, Sellstedt, a Swedist immigrant, was suddenly in the center of the city's bustling social life.

His home and studio at 78 West Mohawk St. became a meeting place of Buffalo's most prominent professionals and painters. The frame home, surrounded by a picket fence, is now part of the site of the Hotel Statler Hilton — along with the homes of other prominent Buffalonians, including Millard Fillmore.

One wall of the Burchfield Center exhibit, installed beautifully by curator Edna M. Lindemann, is a "family wall."

It is a pictorial family tree which goes back to the artist's mother, and William K. Scott, M.D., his father-in-law. The

family tree continues down to Sellstedt's great-great-grandchildren, and includes two paintings by Lars Sellstedt Potter III, now an art student himself.

SELLSTEDT'S grandson, who lived in the artist's home until his own adulthood, Lars Sellstedt Potter, is now 84 years old.

One of the founders of the Studio Theatre School, and an actor in the Buffalo area since the mid 20s, Lars Potter was of invaluable assistance in the assembling of the exhibit which contains many personal effects and journals of the artist. Potter was also a director of the Buffalo Fine Arts Academy for 47 years, and was treasurer for 40 of those years. The Lars Gustaf Sellstedt heritage is a long and continuing one.

The exhibit at the Burchfield Center on the second floor of Rockwell Hall will continue through Oct. 15.