

Gertrude Penfield Seiberling (1866-1946)

Gertrude Penfield Seiberling was born in Willoughby, Ohio on January 23, 1866, the youngest of four children of James Wakeman and Elsie Ferguson Penfield. She attended the Lasell Seminary in Auburndale, Massachusetts, from 1883 to 1887. It was there that she befriended Harriet Seiberling, F.A. Seiberling's younger sister.

Gertrude and F.A. were married on October 12, 1887. The couple lived in Akron and had seven children. Their sixth child, Grace Wenonah, born August 4, 1901, died seven months later from bronchial pneumonia.

Gertrude was an accomplished opera singer, performing at the White House in 1910 for President William Howard Taft. Her greatest impact, however, came from her involvement in regional and national music associations. She was a charter member of the Tuesday Musical Club and St. Cecilia Choral Society.

She was also president of the National Federation of Music Clubs from 1919 to 1921, travelling over 25,000 miles and visiting 21 states to promote musical enrichment and appreciation. As a result, 21 state federations joined the National Federation and the number of member clubs grew from 400 to 1,000.

While she was president, Gertrude started a new department, the Junior Department geared towards the music education of children. She also facilitated the creation of a four-volume study course in music appreciation titled "A Study Course in Music Understanding." The four volumes covered music fundamentals, music appreciation, musical instruments and the history of music. Gertrude wrote the accompanying pamphlet, which instructed users as to how to gain the most from the course.

She stepped down from the presidency in 1921, but remained on the board of directors until 1929, serving as the finance chairman in 1924, and the education chairman in 1928. She also remained active in the Ohio Federation of Music Clubs, the state chapter of the national organization. She remained active in the Tuesday Musical Club, carrying the title of honorary president until her death in 1946.

A founding member of the Akron Garden Club in 1924, Gertrude was an avid gardener and enjoyed spending hours in the gardens at Stan Hywet Hall. In her later years, Gertrude renewed her love of painting and generated a prolific body of art work. She exhibited at the National Academy of Design in New York, and the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C. She was also a member of the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors in New York (now The National Association of Women Artists), as well as the Women's Art League in Akron.

In 1933, Gertrude submitted an urban landscape painting titled "Closing In" depicting a streetscape with an Acme grocery store in the foreground, and large tree in the background to the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors in New York City for consideration in their spring show. Despite her relative obscurity in the art world and the first time she had submitted a work, "Closing In" received honors from the judges.

Gertrude also spent time exploring her spiritual side. Raised in the Methodist faith, Gertrude was a devout Christian. After marrying F.A. and moving to Akron, the Seiberling's joined Trinity Lutheran Church where Gertrude was active in the choir. In 1933, like her daughter Irene and daughter-in-law Henrietta, Gertrude became interested in the Oxford Group, a spiritual group that sought enlightenment and self-improvement in companion with organized religion. Gertrude remained a follower of the Oxford Group into the 1940s when it was renamed Moral Re-Armament, traveling frequently to attend conferences in other parts of the country.

Gertrude's health began to fail in the late 1930s. She experienced heart and circulation issues as well as arthritis in her knees and ankles. Gertrude's memory also started to fade later in life. She passed away on January 8, 1946, from heart complications while taking a nap at Stan Hywet Hall.