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Thomas S. Noble: "Made for a Painter" [Part II]

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Thomas S. Noble: “Made for a Painter”

James D. Birchfield

Part II*

The opening of the McMicken School of Design in 1869 is recognized in Cincinnati as one of the most significant steps leading to the establishment of the University of Cincinnati, the Cincinnati Art Museum, and the Art Academy of Cincinnati. The leaders of the community took great satisfaction in their achievement and in the choice of Thomas S. Noble as principal.

The jealousy and resentment of a small coterie of local artists, however, could not be contained. Partisans of Charles T. Webber and Israel Quick, teachers in the earlier art school, were vocal, if pseudonymous, in attacking the Trustees for going to New York for a Paris-trained artist and passing over what they regarded as the obvious talents of Cincinnati’s native painters. They were even more outraged that this intruder was to be paid an astonishing $2,000 per year. A polemical correspondence raged in the Cincinnati Commercial for over a month among A.B.C., D.E.F., G.H.I., J.K.L., X.Y.Z., and other controversialists. X.Y.Z. vilified “one Noble, an artist from some Eastern city, whom the said Trustees have recently, by advice, doubtless, of incompetent persons, engaged to teach the pupils of the McMicken Art School, corner of Third and Main streets, at a respectable salary.”1 The Trustees of the McMicken Fund, opined X.Y.Z., owed a profound apology to his local colleagues. One Paul Palette, commenting on “The War of the Alphabet,” proposed a witty five-point settlement within which “Mr. Thomas S. Noble shall publicly acknowledge the impropriety of coming to Cincinnati and establishing himself as an artist without permission from Messrs. X.Y.Z. & Co., the said city not having been properly fenced in.”2

X.Y.Z., said G.H.I., had attempted to “create the impression that an imposter in art had slipped into the warm places of the clique that regards itself as the impersonation and glory of modern art in its highest state of development; when, in point of fact, it was not the artist who sought for the position, but the Trustees of the McMicken School who sought him.” The trustees, disclosed

*Part I appeared in the previous number of The Kentucky Review.
Thomas S. Noble, A.N.A., Witch Hill, or The Salem Martyr, 1869, 72" x 48 1/4" (New-York Historical Society, New York)
G.H.I., had for two years put the school into the hands of “these tremendous painters who estimate the artistic skill of their little fingers at a higher value than the entire avoirdupois of other members of their profession”; the result was a steady drop in enrollment from twenty-six pupils to a half-dozen. They had enjoyed “all the opportunity they could ask for to establish a splendid school of design,” but they had failed.\(^3\) X.Y.Z. rebuffed G.H.I. for “indecently assaulting the resident artists of this city.”\(^4\) Next, fourteen resident artists declared themselves to have “no sympathy with any course of conduct having for its object the injury of any gentleman who may choose to locate among us as an artist.”\(^5\)

An amused New York Evening Mail shared Cincinnati’s turmoil with the metropolis. “In the world of art in New York,” rebutted the Evening Mail, there is no question as to Mr. Noble’s high order of talent.”\(^6\) Although New York spoke on Noble’s behalf, neither the trustees nor Noble himself replied to the nameless plaintiffs of the Commercial’s columns.

In spite of the jealousy of a number of Cincinnati artists, Noble’s works continued to be praised for their merits. At the time of his departure from New York, Noble was preparing The Salem Martyr, a canvas he completed in Cincinnati. It was shown at the 1869 Cincinnati Industrial Exposition, where it took a silver medal.\(^7\) At the 1870 Exposition, The Price of Blood won a gold medal with the first prize for paintings in oil.\(^8\) In 1872 Noble was again a silver medalist with Forgiven.\(^9\) In 1876 The Tramp was shown at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition.\(^10\) The Price of Blood appeared in the 1888 International Exposition at Glasgow. Also, in 1895, The Polish Exile brought a bronze medal at the Cotton States and International Exhibition in Atlanta.\(^11\) In addition to steady productivity in landscape, historical, and genre scenes, Noble was also one of Cincinnati’s most popular portraitists. He produced likenesses which are still prominently displayed today, including paintings of his old friend George Ward Nichols (1831-1885), first president of the School of Music; Joseph Longworth (1813-1883), one of the founders of the Art Museum; Reuben Runyon Springer (1800-1884), the Frankfort, Kentucky-born wholesale grocer who gave generously to build the Cincinnati Music Hall; and David Sinton (1808-1900, father of Mrs. Charles Phelps Taft), who helped underwrite the cost of a building for the Art Academy.\(^12\)
Thomas S. Noble, A.N.A., The Polish Exile, circa 1882, 45" x 35"
(Private Collection; from a glass-plate negative in the possession of Jack and Jan Geis, Georgetown, Kentucky)
In spite of the growth and recognition of the art school, Noble's firm position in the Cincinnati social establishment, and his popularity among his pupils, both the institution and its principal continued to be objects of the animadversions of a group of local Hamilton County artists. This circle remained quite unpersuaded by Nichols's utopian social vision, and saw the role of the local program not as one to produce draughtsmen and skilled industrial designers but as a proper school of the beaux arts. Much was made of this perceived deficiency by the aggrieved artists, who exploited it with deliberate sophistry and wringing of hands.

Early in 1870 the artist who was to become Noble's successor thirty-four years hence, Francis Duveneck (1848-1919), entered the Munich Art Academy for formal training. A native of Covington, Kentucky, he was one of the Cincinnati community and was a church decorator by training. Returning to Cincinnati in 1873 Duveneck sought to support himself as an artist; in addition, he conducted a sort of école particulière, an evening class at the Ohio Mechanics Institute, where he taught drawing and, unlike the School of Design, painting from life, including the nude. In the fall of 1875 Duveneck, with his pupils Henry Farny (1847-1916) and John Twachtman (1853-1902), returned to Munich. At about the same time, two of Duveneck's disciples, Kenyon Cox and Alfred Brennan, inspired by the Munich influence against "the patient, easy-going, always 'smooth' art circles of Cincinnati," were given permission to conduct a life class at the School of Design. Included in the group were two of Noble's close associates, Will P. Noble and Will Humphreys. In the room below the Art School's regular classes, "there was constant slashing about and slapping on of color"; meanwhile, Professor Noble's students nearby "painstakingly and with patience without limit copied and elaborately finished to the most finicky detail" their drawings from antique casts. Noble's calls upon the secessionists were "brief and far between as any good-mannered angel's visits."14

The lure of studying art in Munich after the example of Frank Duveneck began now to draw numerous Cincinnatians to the Bavarian capital. According to an 1881 account in The American Art Review, the excursion "Munichward of so many Cincinnati artists has, in some measure, been caused by the influence of nationality, the great body of German residents furnishing the most considerable portion of the art students."15 In contrast to the description of the advanced qualities of the Munich school, the
Thomas S. Noble, A.N.A., Mary Rosamond Noble as a Child, Reading, 1876, 9 1/2" x 12 1/4" (Private Collection)

decadence of French art (the background of Noble's training) is hinted by the Review's critic. While Paris remained the chief European art center throughout the nineteenth century, the Munich fixation of the Cincinnati painters reached an intensity that invited ridicule; indeed, a colorful brochure parodying the visitors' guides to the 1881 Cincinnati Exposition displays a caricature of the Ohio expatriates, or "Duveneck Boys," and laughingly refers to them as a "'Munichy' crowd." The critic of the *The American Art Review*, however, dismisses the elite collectors of the Cincinnati establishment as old-fashioned and indifferent; the German-trained artists of the future "have had but little support or patronage from the city which was the place of their nativity, or the scene of their first efforts in art." This discordant theme echoes again in an interview published on 18 November 1881 in the *Cincinnati Gazette*, "A Talk with Duveneck; How Artists in Our Midst Are Ignored." Here Duveneck deplores the inattention of Cincinnati to its home artists as well as the failure of the art school to seek their guidance in its administration, an issue much promoted by a local
clique at the time of the school’s beginning over a decade before.

Noble was intrigued by the local passion for Munich. In the spring of 1881 he requested a leave of absence in order to study in Munich himself. He was issued his passport on 4 June 1881, and on Friday, 17 June, he attended a crowded farewell reception given by current and former pupils at the school. Immediately, the pseudonymous voices of the anti-establishment spoke from the pages of the *Cincinnati Commercial*. "It is a mystery to my mind," wrote the envious Trebor, "how eighteen hours of work per week, and but seven and a half months in the year, can so wear a man down, mentally and physically, that he should require a whole year’s rest; especially when you take into consideration the large salary attached to that much work, which is nearly $3.50 per hour, or $2,500 per annum." Another critic, writing as "Festus," attacked the tradition of "that old worn-out theory of study from the antique." "Let us turn the whole school into life classes, draped and nude," argued Festus, "classes on nature in everything." A yet more forward aesthete, Roger Wilson, decried "the utter destitution of taste for real art in Cincinnati." In the ensuing turbulence of debate it was argued, on the one hand, that the school experimented too much and, on the other, that the curriculum was too inflexible; the board was attacked, and Noble’s assistants were attacked, as well.

In Munich, meanwhile, Noble studied at the Academy with Alexander von Wagner (1838-1919), the genre and landscape painter. He also observed and reported to the school in Cincinnati on the methods and classes established by the Academy’s director, Karl Theodor von Piloty (1826-1886), who spoke of Noble’s old teacher, Couture, as "the genius who demonstrated the methods and rekindled the flame of the old masters." Noble’s Munich interval proved a very productive period for an artist whose time had been largely consumed by the management demands of the School of Design. The list of his paintings enumerates a number of works accomplished abroad at this time, with the German association prominently indicated. These include, for example, *A Bavarian Girl; Muenchner Herr; Muenchner Frau; Torso of a Munich Woman; Black Madonna, Interior, Munich Museum; Shrine on Exterior of Frauen Kirche, Munich; and An Old Resident of Munich*. Noble visited Italy, France, Belgium, and England before returning to Cincinnati with the stamp of Munich impressed upon his credentials.
Upon his return to Cincinnati in 1883, Noble found himself in the midst of significant changes in the administration and ultimately the physical setting of the school. In 1880, and again in 1882, Charles West (1811-1884) contributed a total of $300,000 towards the funding of an art museum in Cincinnati. The
Thomas S. Noble, A.N.A., View of Mt. Adams from Bellevue, Kentucky, 1877, 11 1/2" x 17 1/2"
(Collection of Jack and Jan Geis, Georgetown, Kentucky)
condition of the first gift of $150,000, that it be matched by the community, had been rapidly fulfilled. As a result, the Cincinnati Museum Association assumed control of the School of Design from the University of Cincinnati. Also, in 1884 the Longworth family established an endowment for the now newly renamed Cincinnati Museum Association Art School. Reuben Springer and David Sinton provided funds for a suitable building, designed by James W. McLaughlin, in Eden Park to house the school.

By the early 1880s a reaction had begun to set in against the strident philosophical themes of the Arts and Crafts Movement. The Aesthetic Movement now, with its emphasis on “art for art’s sake,” brought renewed regard to the value of arts which had no obvious utilitarian function. Cincinnati, abreast of the trends, subordinated (without eliminating) the industrial design features of its art school, and unashamedly embraced high art in Eden Park. The new Art Museum was opened in 1886, and in November of 1887 the newly founded Cincinnati Art Academy was inaugurated with Thomas S. Noble as the Chairman of the Faculty. The transition to the status of an Art Academy called for Noble to add to his observations of the Munich Academy an understanding of the American art schools of the northeast. After a round of visits, he presented a lengthy report to Gen. Alfred Traber Goshorn (1833-1902), Director of the Museum Association, with specific recommendations on the liberal use of draped and undraped life models along with requirements for lighting, equipment, the library, lectures, and additions to the curriculum. In addition, Noble prepared a textbook for use in teaching perspective.27 By the following spring, Noble felt that he could describe to the *Times-Star* his total satisfaction with the direction of the Academy.

“We claim that ours is the model school of the kind in the United States,” said Prof. T.S. Noble, of the Art Academy. “There are really but three institutions of this description in the country that can at all stand comparison with it. These are the Art League, of New York, the Pennsylvania Academy of Art, at Philadelphia, and the Boston Art School. We claim that this Academy approaches the standard of the best European high art schools at least as closely as do the institutions of the East, while we teach industrial art also.”28

At this point Cincinnati could feel at last that it boasted a true art
school, not one for the preparation of commercial artists alone.

The civic contentment which ought to have reigned following the establishment of the Art Museum and the Art Academy, however, was seismically disturbed by an unhappy political development. Noble’s early years in Cincinnati had been favored with the warm support of the socially powerful; but gradually these early enthusiasts for the artistic development of Cincinnati began to fade away. The year 1878 saw the death of Larz Anderson, who had interviewed Noble in New York in 1868; 1883 took Joseph Longworth; in 1884 the Kentuckian Reuben Springer died; and in 1885 Noble lost his great champion, Col. George Ward Nichols. Nichols’s wife, Maria (1849-1932), was the daughter of Joseph Longworth, one of the five original founders of the Art Museum and donor of $300,000 to the Art Academy. In 1880 Mrs. Nichols herself founded the Rookwood Pottery. In 1886, following the death of Colonel Nichols, she married Bellamy Storer (1847-1922), who would be elected to Congress in 1890. In 1887 she was studying under Noble at the Art Academy, and in March of 1890 she was proposed as a candidate for the Board of Directors of the Museum. The sentiment against a woman on the board was immovable, however, and Maria Longworth Nichols Storer was mortified not to have been elected. In her fury, she determined to attack the Cincinnati art establishment which had rejected her. Her revenge would be the summoning of Frank Duveneck, the acid critic of the Cincinnati art world.

Mrs. Storer guaranteed Duveneck $3,600 per year to conduct a class in painting in a specially designed studio, situated beneath the dome of the Academy and lighted by a skylight forty feet long. The Duveneck class began on 1 November 1890. The ever-gentlemanly Professor Noble, described by Mrs. Storer as having “everything on his shoulders from the cellar to the roof,” expressed no resentment at his old friend’s arrogance, but offered immediately “to assist this class in every way in his power.” The class lasted through the spring term of 1892 and included both the patroness and her daughter. When Mrs. Storer’s vanity was sufficiently repaired, Duveneck returned to Europe and was not to be associated with the Art Academy again until 1900, when he became an instructor in oil painting.

While Noble battled with leaky roofs and “rude incidents” at the Academy, his students reassured him of his art and work. Caroline Lord (1860-1927), who was later to teach at the Art
Thomas Satterwhite Noble, 1896; photographic study (Private Collection) used by Noble's pupil John Ward Dunsmore for an oil portrait in the New-York Historical Society

Academy, wrote from New York in 1890: "I wish so much, Mr. Noble, that people here could see your pictures. I think it is a shame that you are not represented in the National Academy exhibitions &c when your pictures should be where they could be seen and appreciated by a greater number of people." And from Munich R.W. Lane wrote to Lewis Lutz, "Give my best to Prof.
Noble. Tell him the Academy is all OK in Cincinnati."

In mid-1894 Noble again visited Europe and in Paris intended to arrange for the annual scholarship student to be admitted to study at the Académie Julian. So favorably had Rodolphe Julian (1839-1907) been impressed by Noble’s Cincinnati students that he offered, to Noble’s considerable surprise and elation, to add a Prix Julian of two years’ free instruction to the American school’s own foreign scholarship. While in Paris he also met with William-Adolphe Bouguereau (1825-1905), the history painter Jean Paul Laurens (1838-1921), Ferdinand Roybst (1840-1920), Jean Joseph Benjamin-Constant (1845-1902), and the sculptor Denis Puech (1854-1942). He also attended the Exposition Universelle.

Noble had been a member of the old Cincinnati Sketch Club, and he remained active during the period of the nineties, which saw the organization of the Cincinnati Art Club as well as the Society of Western Artists, of which he was later made an honorary member. Noble participated in the Art Club’s local activities and in the exhibitions of the Western Artists in Cincinnati, Detroit, and Indianapolis. He also showed in other exhibitions both local and distant.

Noble, approaching the age of seventy, continued on with the administration of the Academy until the fall of 1904. His retirement was now encouraged by the trustees, and he reluctantly assumed the honorary title of Professor Emeritus. Gen. A.T. Goshorn, the first director of the Museum Association, had died in 1902, opening the position to his assistant, Joseph Henry Gest (1859-1935). Gest, an amateur landscape painter, had studied in Hanover from 1872 to 1875 and met with Duveneck in Europe in 1892; he became vice-president of Mrs. Storer’s Rookwood Pottery in 1902. Whether or not Goshorn had welcomed Duveneck’s departure following the gratification of Mrs. Storer’s pique, Gest was probably responsible for bringing the now middle-aged champion of the German style back to the Academy in 1900 as an instructor in oil painting. In anticipation of Noble’s inevitable retirement, Duveneck would be properly groomed as successor to the aging Chairman of the Faculty.

In 1904 Frank Duveneck at last assumed the chairmanship, the position to which, with the forensic aid of Trebor, Festus, and the lesser Cincinnati painters, he had aspired since the 1870s. The Bavarian ideal, personified in Duveneck, had at last triumphed in Hamilton County. Ironically, with the operation of the school now
his responsibility, Duveneck's productivity, as had Noble's, dropped off markedly. One critic writes that "his name was no longer prominent in the national art press" and another that "his concepts and techniques were considered old-fashioned by many of the younger teachers and pupils." As a further irony, in 1886, shortly after Noble's exploration of the Munich style, Duveneck married Elizabeth Boott (1846-1889), a pupil of Noble's old master Couture. Now Duveneck's once myopic devotion to Munich was tempered by an interest in the technique of the great French artist, and indeed he bequeathed several of Couture's paintings to the Cincinnati Art Museum.

Aside from his genuine talents as an artist, Duveneck's local appeal arose from his being of the native town stock, and also from the strong German bias of the sizable immigrant community of which he was a part. Unlike Noble, Duveneck had none of the patrician claims which would ally him to the older generation of elite Cincinnatians which included, in the case of such figures as Larz Anderson and Reuben Springer, some who were born into the plantation culture of agrarian antebellum Kentucky. Unlike Duveneck's, Noble's training in art was direct and unambiguous. He had begun with the ambition of being a painter and had gone early both to New York and to Paris to realize this intention. Such decisiveness clearly set him apart from many of the Cincinnatians of the Munich School whose careers had humbler, less glamorous beginnings as lithographers (Henry Muhrman), woodcarvers (Duveneck and Ferdinand Mersman), decorators of window shades (John Twachtman), and ornamenters of water-coolers (Henry Farny). The contrast between the two figures is heightened by the flamboyant anti-establishment bravura of Duveneck when cast against the conservative, soft-spoken, and accommodating manner of Professor Noble. Although there was an element of Victorian reticence in Noble's make-up and a prudent cautiousness in his operation of the school, reports remaining from his pen show his eagerness to keep the school in a progressive posture vis-à-vis other schools, and a willingness to send forward the recommendations of the school's pupils as well as to make recommendations of his own favoring the use of the controversial life models.

Revered though Noble was by the students, Duveneck's desire to eclipse the memory of his old rival enjoyed such success that even today one can read in the Encyclopaedia Britannica that
Duveneck was dean of the school from 1888, some sixteen years prior to his actual appointment. To assure his association with the institution, Duveneck gave an extensive collection of his own canvases to the Museum. In 1936, the museum’s fiftieth anniversary was marked by a comprehensive exhibition honoring his work. By contrast, no one today will find on view in the public galleries of the Cincinnati Art Museum any of the works of Prof. Thomas Satterwhite Noble, the foremost Cincinnati artist of his day.

The terms of Noble’s retirement were that he would receive $1,000 per year for three years following his departure. He did not remain in Cincinnati but moved back to New York, where he hoped to become associated with the New York School of Industrial Art. He settled at Bensonhurst, on Long Island, and continued to sketch and paint; he concentrated on small seascapes and produced well over a hundred of these colorful miniature marine studies, a surprising foil to the gigantic canvases of his early career. As his health failed and his pension neared its conclusion, he sought to interest the trustees of the Cincinnati Art Museum in the purchase of one of his paintings. Facing an operation, Noble offered *The Polish Exile, Old Sailor, Via Crucis, or Idle Capital* to them for $1,000, to be paid monthly as if a continuation of his pension. On 30 January 1907, three months before his death, he wrote the museum’s Board of Directors, “I feel that I would like to be represented permanently where I devoted so many of the best years of my life, and that my name may be placed on record in the Institution which has been, and will ever be, the greatest interest in my life.” The trustees demurred, and after his death they continued to rebuff the appeals of the artist’s widow and daughter Grace to acquire an example of the painter’s work for the permanent collection.

Thomas Satterwhite Noble died on the evening of Saturday, 27 April 1907, at the Presbyterian Hospital in New York City. On the day before, he had undergone the operation he had been anticipating since the end of January. His remains were returned to Cincinnati by train. Following the funeral at the home of his daughter Lillian (Mrs. Edward F. Herschede), he was buried on Tuesday, 30 April, at Spring Grove Cemetery, where he had designed for the chapel the stained glass windows of the Ascension.

Following Noble’s death there were major exhibitions of his
work in Cincinnati, Chicago, St. Louis, and New York. The press carried laudatory reviews of each showing and featured photographs of the more celebrated paintings. The Chicago Evening Post described Noble's Solitude, a study of the Sphynx and pyramids at sunset, as "painted with such intensity of feeling for the mystery of time and solitude as to bespeak the very spirit of the poet and dreamer innate in the artist." Sunrise, A Misty Morning it compared to the work of Corot. The technique," reported the New York Times, "is that which pupils more docile than Manet, who left Couture's studio in the year Noble entered it, drew from Couture's instruction; but [Noble's] pictures show a sturdier conception of character than the feeble old Frenchman ever managed to grasp." "It is a pleasure," wrote the critic of American Art News, "to see and study the works of this sturdy old painter, so strongly influenced by Couture, and to note his strength and correctness of drawing, and his fine rendering of expression." The New York Evening Mail praised the simplicity of The Polish Exile and found not only vigorous work but
"excellent modeling, and a delightful lighting of the flesh" in the Torso of a Munich Woman. Out of Work is "a picture of strong pathos, and so is the study of an old man of Munich."\(^{49}\)

An examination of Noble's paintings shows that he excelled in a variety of styles and subjects. He considered himself, in the tradition of his master Couture, foremost a painter of historical subjects; but Noble was versatile also as a painter of portraits, landscapes, genre subjects, and, at the close of his career, marine views. His most celebrated paintings—The Slave Mart, John Brown Led to Execution, Margaret Garner, The Price of Blood, and The Salem Martyr—were accomplished in the few years before he accepted responsibility for the School of Design. While many paintings of the Cincinnati and Munich years are of great merit, the early canvases brought him the national fame which could come only with the favor of the New York press; in his withdrawal to Cincinnati he surrendered his visibility among the country's most influential critics.

Noble's early works, furthermore, responded effectively to the gothicism of American Victorian taste. The violence and brutality of their subjects bore a kinship to the terrors of Poe or to the morbidity of Hawthorne or to that of the popular English laureate Tennyson. The title of John Brown Led to Execution mirrors in taste as well as in words the sentiment of such a painting as E.H. May's Lady Jane Gray Led to Execution. In manuscript notes, perhaps for a lecture at the School of Design, Noble refers to Poe's suggestion that the death of a beautiful woman provides the most moving circumstances for aesthetic treatment.\(^{50}\) Noble's Witch Hill, showing the figure of a Puritan girl, hands tied, led to the stake, is just such an affecting situation; likewise, the painter's Forgiven, which depicts the reclining form of a lovely young suicide. Although the last work was a cause scandale among the Cincinnatians at the Industrial Exposition of 1872, it took the silver medal.\(^{51}\)

The inhumanity of The Slave Mart, a reminiscence possibly of slave auctions witnessed at the court house in Lexington's Cheapside, was a timely image which caught the imagination of a country then in the shadow of its greatest national crisis. Similarly, the tragic drama of Margaret Garner capitalizes thematically on the trauma of slavery in an ironic view of murder, committed by a compassionate slave mother upon her own offspring. The Price of Blood, another vignette of grotesque
Americana, reduces the public *Slave Mart* to a private transaction. It depicts a planter’s sale of a mulatto youth to a slave trader. The painting’s title cues the viewer to a father-son relationship not only subordinated to outrageous greed but further made repulsive by the underlying social corruption of illegitimacy and racial exploitation. Other Noble paintings, such as *The Anarchist, Idle Capital,* and *The Polish Exile,* place strong emphasis on unpleasant economic and political topics. They are social statements, not decorative images. Ironically, with shifts of public taste, Noble’s later reputation suffered to a significant degree for the same reasons it had earlier gained notice. A Cincinnati journalist writing in 1896 made the following sympathetic observation: “Noble has been condemned because his subjects have not chanced to please the multitude. They are considered morbid, and, as the subject does not attract, the qualities of painting and science of composition and treatment are ignored.”

The great and timely moral *tableaux* of thirty years before tended still to overshadow new directions in Noble’s art to which even explicit references to Munich could not alert the public mind. Yet such works as *The Jester, Rebellion in a Sideshow,* *Torso of a Munich Woman,* and *Cleaning Antiques* show the remarkable breadth of Noble’s imagination and talent.

Several of Noble’s works should be tied here to their Kentucky associations. *Via Crucis,* portraying a Trappist monk, was accomplished only after repeated visits to the Abbey of Gethsemani at Bardstown, and Noble actually acquired the Trappist habit in which the model was posed. Of *Forgiven* the *Lexington Daily Press* recorded the following:

Mr. Noble is now at Olympian Springs, in Bath County, Ky., preparing a magnificent picture to exhibit at the Exposition in Cincinnati. This painting represents a death-bed scene in a log cabin, and we are informed by a number of our citizens, who through the kindness of Mr. Noble, have been permitted to examine it, that it is a perfect picture and represents fully the scene intended.

Perhaps it was at about this time, too, that Noble executed his replica of Oliver Frazer’s portrait of Richard H. Menifee, which hangs today in the Bath County court house at Owingsville. Noble’s *Cattle Market—Old Lexington* may well have depicted the
Thomas S. Noble, A.N.A., The Jester, 1877, 36" x 26" (Collection of Jack and Jan Geis, Georgetown, Kentucky)
Thomas S. Noble, A.N.A., Rebellion in a Side Show, circa 1886, 48" x 72" (Private Collection, New York; from a glass-plate negative in the possession of Jack and Jan Geis, Georgetown, Kentucky)
area just north of the present Fourth Street, behind Thomas Hart Noble’s hemp factory, which served for a period as a stockyard; and it was probably while living at Bellevue in Campbell County in 1871 that he conceived *A View of Mt. Adams from Bellevue, Kentucky*. There is also a charcoal landscape drawing entitled *In Kentucky*. The historian Richard Collins hoped in vain that Noble would “perpetuate upon canvas” the “great scenes in Kentucky history.” None of the artist’s youthful efforts from Lexington in the 1840s seems to survive.

A pupil, Frank P. Scearce, attempted to establish a School of Drawing and Painting in Lexington. The curriculum offered at Masonic Hall, on Walnut Street, was to include “all kinds of Drawing from Flat, Life, Still Life and Nature,” with lectures on the principles of perspective. The *Lexington Daily Press* of Thursday, 1 July 1875 carried a warm letter from Professor Noble of the School of Design, Cincinnati, to Gen. Samuel Woodson Price, praising the enterprise. “Mr. Scearce has a decided talent for art,” wrote his mentor, “and as I have never relinquished the interest that was born with me in my native place, old Lexington, I can recommend to you Mr. Scearce as a gentleman and artist worthy to be entrusted with carrying out the design that we have so often discussed, viz—the starting of an Art School in Lexington.” Below the letter, General Price endorsed Noble’s comments as follows: “The opinion of Prof. Noble as to Mr. Scearce’s qualifications as teacher of drawing is entitled to much value, as he has a deserved national reputation as an artist.”

Unhappily, Frank Scearce soon after gave up his art school for more lucrative pursuits, culminating in his arrest for embezzlement and forgery in June of 1893. A number of Noble’s other students emulated him by pursuing careers in art education. Lewis Cass Lutz (1855-1893), who accompanied Noble to Munich in 1881, was later to teach at the Art Academy of Cincinnati. Vincent Nowottny (1854-1908) and Henry Lewis Meaken (1850-1917), who also studied in Munich, taught, too, at the art school, as did Caroline Lord. John Ward Dunsmore (1856-1945), directed by Noble to Couture, founded the Detroit School of Arts in 1890 before returning to Cincinnati in 1894.

Because few of Noble’s paintings are in the permanent collections of public galleries they are seen today only infrequently. Part of the reason for this is economic, since his paintings have almost always been associated with exceptionally...
high prices. The Slave Mart was originally valued at $10,000 and John Brown at $5,000.57 The Salem Martyr was exhibited at the 1895 Lexington Manufacturer’s Exposition at $2,500.58 At the 1907 retrospective show the replica of the lost Slave Mart was offered at $15,000, The Salem Martyr at $20,000, and John Brown at $25,000.59 The market value of the first seventy priced items totalled $246,600, nearly a quarter million. (Compare a priced catalog of the 1896 Cincinnati spring exhibition which lists sixty-eight priced items by various artists totalling only $14,385.) While a few canvases have survived obscurely in Cincinnati, a large number stored elsewhere in a warehouse were badly damaged by a fire in 1925. Ignominy reigned when The Sybil, pierced by a coatrack, was sold as a Duveneck by a Cincinnati antiques dealer to help decorate a theatre in the midwest. (The Sybil is now in the permanent collection of an important Southern gallery, the Greenville County Museum of Art, Greenville, South Carolina.) However, when a major historical canvas reemerged in 1982, it was described as “An American Masterpiece Rediscovered” and priced at $175,000 by a New York gallery. Sailing, a three-by-four inch miniature seascape went at auction to a dealer in May of
Figures possess an eloquence of their own, and little could better demonstrate a renewed reverence for Noble's capabilities. After a period of neglect, Noble is slowly coming to be recognized by art historians for important contributions to American painting. In 1970 Marchal Landgren included John Brown in a scholarly exhibition called American Pupils of Thomas Couture, and in 1980 Albert Boime discussed the artist's work sympathetically and at length in the essay 'Thomas Satterwhite.

1983 for $275, or approximately $23 per square inch wholesale. Figures possess an eloquence of their own, and little could better demonstrate a renewed reverence for Noble's capabilities.
Noble Casts Couture’s Spell in America.” In 1874 the revised edition of Lewis Collins’s History of Kentucky spoke of Noble as “probably the most distinguished of the living artists (painters) of Kentucky,” and Noble’s portrait was included with those of Joseph Bush, Matthew Harris Jouett, and Joel T. Hart in an engraved composite of “Kentucky Artists.” Noble was of too young a generation, perhaps, to be included in his teacher Samuel Woodson Price’s Old Masters of the Bluegrass (1902); but colorful and appealing as that charming title phrase may be, it is of too narrow a scope to describe one of Kentucky’s most important and influential artists. Although Noble’s impact on the Ohio Valley region was keenly appreciated from the 1870s until the painter’s death in 1907, it is necessary in a retrospective view to acknowledge those years following the Civil War when Noble was a nationally celebrated figure whose work drew the attention of Mathew Brady and Harper’s Weekly, was viewed in the Capitol, and praised in the national and international press. Noble’s move to Cincinnati in 1869 established him no less significantly as a major force in interpreting and adapting European aesthetic influences to American art education. As his career is reappraised and his remaining works reexamined, Thomas S. Noble will continue to enjoy increasing recognition and acceptance as an influential figure in the history of American painting.

NOTES

The author of this study wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Mr. R. Bruce Smith, who photographed for publication works from the Geis Collection.

4“The Artists and the Trustees of the McMicken University,” Cincinnati Commercial, 18 February 1869.
5“The McMicken Art Controversy. The Artists Not to be Included in the War of the Alphabet,” Cincinnati Commercial, 21 February 1869.
6“Fine Arts in Cincinnati,” New York Evening Mail, 27 February 1869. See also “To the Editor of the Commercial,” Cincinnati Commercial, 7 February 1869; “Art and the McMicken University,” Cincinnati Commercial, 8 February 1869; “To the Editor of the Commercial,”


Winners Among the Ohio Exhibitors at Atlanta,” Cincinnati Enquirer, 22 November 1895.

Canvases of Nichols and his successor Peter Rudolph Neff are at the Cincinnati Conservatory (Baur Room) and Music Library, University of Cincinnati; Longworth, Springer, and Sinton hang in the library of the Cincinnati Art Museum. “The two painters living in Cincinnati who appear to have been most patronized by Cincinnati collectors were Thomas S. Noble (1835-1907) and Joseph O. Eaton (1829-1875),” according to Joseph E. Holliday, “Collector’s Choice of the Gilded Age,” Cincinnati Historical Society Bulletin 28 (Winter 1970): 300.


18McLaughlin, p. 49.

19Passport No. 1789, Noble Archives. (According to this document, at age forty-six Noble stood five feet, eleven and three-fourths inches tall and possessed a high forehead, hazel eyes, aquiline nose, medium mouth, bearded chin, dark brown hair, dark complexion, and round face.) "The Last Day . . . Reception to Messrs. T.S. Noble and Mr. L.C. Lutz," *Cincinnati Commercial*, 18 June 1881.


24*Cincinnati Art Academy, Circular*, 1891-92.


70 THE KENTUCKY REVIEW
Noble at this time was having a specially-constructed studio installed in the top floor of his home at 350 (now 2312) Kemper Lane, Walnut Hills. "Among the Studios," *Cincinnati Times-Star*, 21 November 1890; "The Duveneck Class," *Cincinnati Times-Star*, 21 October 1890; "Under Favorable Auspices: The New Painting Class Begins its Work," *Cincinnati Times-Star*, 22 October 1890. Noble may already have been on probationary terms with Mrs. Storer for a long letter to the *Cincinnati Gazette*, dated 19 March 1878, praising Mary Louise McLaughlin, president of the Cincinnati Pottery Club, for recreating in America the Limoges faience. Mrs. Storer, as proprietor of the Rockwood Pottery, cheekily preferred to credit the discovery to herself. As a demonstration of her insistence, when the catalog of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago attributed the faience to Miss McLaughlin, Mrs. Storer ordered the catalog revised to satisfy her own claims. See Callen, *Women Artists of the Arts and Crafts Movement*, pp. 84-85. The potter's brother, James W. McLaughlin, was the architect for the Cincinnati Art Academy.


A.L.S., T.S. Noble to J.H. Gest, Cincinnati, 28 April 1890, on leaking roof; 16 May 1890, on rude incidents, CAM Archives.

A.L.S., Caroline A. Lord to T.S. Noble, New York, 1 February 1890, CAM Archives. (Just as Noble returned from the Munich Academy, his name was removed from the rolls of the National Academy of Design because of his failure to participate in the annual exhibitions.)

A.L.S., R.W. Lane to Lewis Cass Lutz, Munich, 11 January 1891, CAM Archives.


A.L.S., J.H. Gest to T.S. Noble, Cincinnati, 16 August 1904, Noble Archives; "Prof. T.S. Noble Leaves Cincinnati Art Academy," *Cincinnati Times-Star*, 27 August 1904. See also the account of Noble's retirement in


44A.L.S., T.S. Noble, Bensonhurst, Long Island, to the Board of Directors of the Cincinnati Art Museum, CAM Archives.


51For the controversy over “Forgiven” see “The Opening of the Art Department of the Exposition,” Cincinnati Commercial, 3 September 1872; “Noble’s ‘Forgiven,‘” Cincinnati Daily Gazette, 19 September 1872; “May an Artist Paint Sadly?,” Cincinnati Daily Evening Star, 24 September 1872; Cincinnati Daily Gazette, 27 September 1872; “Forgiven” or
56 A real estate developer, Scearce was arrested in June of 1893; on 17 June he escaped, only to be sentenced on 8 December to ten year's imprisonment for forgery. See Clay Lancaster, Vestiges of the Venerable City (Lexington: Lexington-Fayette County Historic Commission, 1978), pp. 142-43. I am indebted to Mr. Walter E. Langsam, of Covington, Kentucky, for the reference to Noble's letter on Scearce.
57 "Noble's Great Picture—Last Sale of Slaves in America," unidentified clipping, Noble Archives; St. Louis Home Journal, 16 May 1868.
58 Catalogue of the Art Loan Gallery at the Lexington Manufacturer's Exposition, Lexington, Kentucky, December 17, 1894-January 8, 1895, p. 7, item 70.
59 Exhibition of the Work of the Late Thomas S. Noble, for Many Years Principal of the Art Academy of Cincinnati, Art Museum: Eden Park, October 19th to November 10th: 1907, items 3, 2, and 1; from a catalog marked "Priced J.R.F.," CAM Archives.