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### Paintings in the Vanderbilt Mansion

Dr. Porter's memo to Supt., Roosevelt-Vanderbilt  
N. H. S., dated March 6, 1950, listing and giving  
information on oil paintings at Vanderbilt Mansion/



In reply refer to:  
D6223 VASD

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

March 8, 1950

Memorandum

To: Superintendent, Roosevelt-Vanderbilt National Historic Site

From: Charles W. Porter, Chief Preservation and Use Branch

Subject: Paintings in the Vanderbilt Mansion

In reply to your request of February 8 for information regarding paintings at the Vanderbilt Mansion, I am sending you the following materials taken from the standard sources for biographical data on painters, viz. E. Bénézit, Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des peintres, etc., 3 vols., Paris, 1911-1928; and Thieme, U. and Becker, F., Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart, 28 vols., 1907-1934. For convenience, I shall refer to them below as Bénézit and Thieme-Becker. There is no equivalent in English to either of these works.

The prints, engravings, and mezzotints in your list present a separate problem and will be covered later in a later memorandum. Suffice it to say that those published by Alderman John Boydell are apt to be rare and valuable. You can look him up in the 11th edition of the Britannica.

The unsigned portrait attributed to Sir Peter Lely and the "Man in demi-armor and ruff" also present special problems. If you will send me good photographic copies of these, I may eventually be able to help in their identification. Leaving these two pictures out of account, the most important painters represented at the Vanderbilt Mansion would seem to be Bouguereau, Dues, Schreyer, and Worms (roughly in order of importance.) The Dues and Worms paintings, now hung in a third floor room that is never exhibited, might to advantage be given more prominence. As I remember them, they are in good condition and handsomely framed, particularly the one by Dues.

A quick glance at the collection as a whole discloses these interesting facts:

1. In the Italian-Renaissance-type Vanderbilt Mansion building, there are no Italian Renaissance paintings.
2. There are no American artists represented in the collection.



3. There are no home-painted or amateur pieces, such as might have been found in a fashionable house of the period.

4. There are no family or ancestral portraits.

5. There are no pure landscapes.

6. With two exceptions (which may be copies,) the paintings are all 19th century genre paintings (pictures of everyday life.)

The following biographical sketch of Frederick W. Vanderbilt which appeared in Who's Who in America for 1901-1902, the second edition of that important work, is of some interest in connection with his art collection:

"Vanderbilt, Frederick William, capitalist; b. 1856; s. William Henry V.; grad. Sheffield Scientific School, Yale, 1876. Obtained business training in offices of his father's railroad system, going through every dept. in railroad service. Owns steam yacht, the Conqueror, built in 1889 by Russell & Co., Port Glasgow. Has estate of 600 acres at Hyde Park on the Hudson, and house at Newport, R. I. Residence: 459 5th Av., New York:

From the start, the biographical data in Who's Who has been written written or contributed by the subjects themselves. We may therefore assume that the Who's Who article for 1901-1902 correctly reflects Mr. Vanderbilt's ideas and interests and that his chief thoughts were for the estate at Hyde Park and his specially built yacht. His education had been scientific rather than academic and he appears to have retired early to enjoy the wealth accumulated by his father, William H. Vanderbilt. The father, who had died in 1885, had acquired one of the finest collections of paintings in America. It was, however, a "dealer-made" collection. (See F. J. Mather, C. R. Morey, and W. J. Henderson, The American Spirit in Art, in Pageant of America, Vol. XII, New Haven, 1927, page 51.) That is to say, the father's collection was the work of a busy railroad magnate who had almost an unlimited amount of money to spend on pictures but not much time to devote to collecting and so was dependent upon the wisdom and advice of expensive-minded dealers, mostly representing American branches of great English and French firms. (Pageant of America, XII, 51.)

In view of the great painting collection of William H. Vanderbilt, one would expect the son's collection at Hyde Park to be a very distinguished one. However, of the artists represented, only one, Bouguereau, is listed in Louis Hourticq's Guide to the Louvre, Paris, 1923, which, while not a complete catalogue of the Louvre is reasonably



complete and a quick index to painters of the highest rank. The paintings now in the mansion (the alleged Lely and Man in the ruff excepted) are all 19th century genre paintings, i.e. pictures of everyday life or story telling pictures. These paintings though much sought after and popular in the last half of the 19th century do not bring very much money on the market today, as a general rule. I believe there is not a single pure landscape in all the pictures at the mansion. Certainly the great landscapists of the 19th century, Corot, Rousseau, Danbigny and Dias are conspicuous by their absence and it is odd that in a building intended to imitate an Italian Renaissance palace, there should not be one Italian Renaissance painting. Another important fact is that there is not a single family portrait in the house. It is difficult to believe that Frederick W. Vanderbilt and his wife failed to have their portraits painted. These portraits must have been taken from the house before it was turned over to the government. As the building and grounds are intended by Mrs. Van Allen to be a memorial to her uncle, it is possible that if asked to do so, she may eventually donate the family portraits of Mr. and Mrs. F. W. Vanderbilt. Certainly, without a likeness of either Mr. or Mrs. Vanderbilt, the memorial is a very abstract and impersonal one. From the visitors' angle, it is difficult without such portraits to have the feeling that this building was actually used as a home. In this respect, the Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt with its many family pictures and personal objects is a much more effective exhibit. One feels like a home; the other like a museum. Still another curious fact is that there is not a single American artist in the Vanderbilt mansion list. It is true that American artists were little appreciated by the post Civil War crop of American multi-millionaires, who in their picture collecting were dominated by the idea that it was necessary to collect the great masters and the works of European artists almost exclusively. Indeed, many American artists went to Europe and remained there because the future of an artist was so depressing in the United States. However, after the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 where American art was featured, wealthy Americans began to appreciate American painting as no less worth while than European art and the serious collecting of American paintings began in earnest. As the construction of the Vanderbilt Mansion got under way in 1896-1897, this new trend might have been reflected in the collection of paintings in the house, but it is not. It would seem that the mansion was furnished with a dealer-made or dealer-influenced collection of paintings about the time the building was constructed and that the collection was on the whole, despite the wealth of Mr. Vanderbilt, never changed. Hence it never came to reflect the deeper appreciation of American painting that increased as the twentieth century advanced, and consequently, too, the genre or story telling pictures of everyday life remained, long after collectors' tastes had shifted in the direction of pure landscapes, impressionism and modern art.



The conclusion that the collection remained virtually unchanged from the date of its installation soon after the completion of the mansion is, of course, not the only possible explanation of the character of the paintings. Later additions, representing art collector trends after 1900, could have been removed before the house was donated to the government and the furnishings artificially restored to the period of the decade in which the mansion was built (1890-1900.) In any case, the paintings as they stand would seem to reflect the taste and thought of the American newly rich of that period, uninfluenced by later growth of American taste and thought despite the ripe age of 82 at which Mr. Frederick W. Vanderbilt died in 1938.

Data regarding the painters in the collection, on which the above thoughts are based, is given below, attached, roughly in the order of your own list.

*Charles W. Porter*

Chief, Preservation and Use Branch

Attachment

Copy to: Regional Director, Region One (2) ✓



Information on the Oil Paintings at the  
Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site

By

Charles W. Porter III

March 6, 1960

(From E. Bénézit, Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des peintres, 3 vols., Paris, 1911-1923; and Thieme, U. and Becker F., Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart, 28 vols., 1907-1934.)

In the Study.

1. Oil painting 14" x 22", Cavalier with Gun, by A. Lesrel, 1880.

Adolphe-Alexandre Lesrel was born at Geneva on 19, May, 1839 or, possibly, 1830. He died in 1890 and is classified as belonging to the French School of painting. A member of the Society of French Artists, he exhibited at the salons of that society from 1885-1890, winning honorable mention in 1889. He was much influenced by J. L. E. Meissonier and painted in Meissonier's style. He is now represented in the museums of Rouen, St.-Lo, and Sydney. Prices of his works have been as follows: "Chequer Players," London, 5 March, 1910, sold for £ 115 - 10 s. At the Matthiessen Sale, 1 and 2 April, 1902, in New York, "The Hunter" ("Le Chasseur"), sold for 2, 125 francs (about \$500.) Sources of above data: Bénézit and Thieme-Becker.

On Main Stair Case.

2. Oil painting 2'2" x 1'7", "Gypsies in Field" by Adrien Moreau, 1880.

Adrien Moreau was a painter of historical and genre subjects who was born at Troyes in 1843 and died at Paris in 1906. He belongs to the French School. He studied under Pils and first exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1866. He won a second class medal at the Salon of 1876 and silver medals in 1889 and 1900, the last being at the Paris Universal Exposition. In 1892 he was made a member of the Legion of Honor. His work is represented in the museum of Troyes and one of his paintings was sold in New York on January 8, 1911, for \$1,025. Bénézit; Thieme-Becker.

North Upstairs Hall.

3. Oil painting (large), "Two young Girls," by W. Bouguereau, 1881.



William Adolphe Bouguereau was born at La Rochelle, France, in 1825 and died in the same city in 1905. Of the French School of painters, he won the second class medal at the Salon of 1855, 1st class medal in 1857, 3rd class medal in 1867 (a Universal Exposition), and was awarded the Legion of Honor in 1859. He became an officer of the Legion of Honor in 1876, a member of the Institute of France, 1876 and won a Medal of Honor at the Universal Exposition of 1876. He became a Knight of Leopold in 1881, Commander of the Legion of Honor, 1885, received another Medal of Honor that same year and became President of the French Institute. He was preeminent as a painter of human flesh and in his day was the acknowledged head of academic painting in France if not all Europe. His "The Consoling Virgin," painted in 1877, was bought by the French Government for 12,000 francs for the Palace of the Luxembourg, after the artist had refused twice that amount from private purchasers. At least two other paintings by him are in the Luxembourg. (To be represented in the Luxembourg is just about the highest honor a French artist can expect in his lifetime.) He was also much appreciated in the United States as is indicated by the fact that one of his paintings sold for \$9,500 in 1885. Others at various times, sold for 25,000 francs, 47,500 francs, and 100,450 francs. In 1938, two of his paintings sold in New York for \$850 and \$875 respectively. Benezit; Thieme-Becker; C. E. Stranahan, History of French Painting, New York, 1907, pp. 402-406; American Art Annual, vol. XXXV. (1941-1942).

4. Russian Sleigh Scene by Ad. Schreyer. (Schreyer?)

Adolf Schreyer, animal and landscape painter, was born at Frankfort 9 May, 1828 and died at Kronberg 29 or 30 July, 1899. He belongs to the German School of painters; but studied at Stadel, Dusseldorf, Vienna, France, and North Africa, and settled in Paris, 1862-1870, returning to Frankfort in 1871. He was a member of the Academies of Amsterdam and Rotterdam. He received medals in Paris in 1864, 1865, and 1867 and in Munich in 1876. His works are represented in the museums of Bayonne, Bremen, Cologne, Frankfort, Hamburg, etc. Prices: One of his pictures brought £ 551 in London, 1910; another 65,000 francs in New York, 1902; still another called "Galachian Peasants and Horses" brought \$10,000 in New York in 1902; while "Horses in the Snow" brought 25,500 francs or \$5,000 in New York in 1896. Could this last be your picture? At a sale in New York in 1938, paintings by Schreyer brought \$650; \$1,800; and \$2,500. Another brought \$2,600 in 1939.



Benezit; Thieme-Becker; American Art Annual, vol. XXIV (1941-42).

5. Villegas. Oil painting of Church Fire - 1882.

As there are six painters by this name, it will be necessary to know the initial letter of the painter's first name before data can be supplied.

Mr. Vanderbilt's Bedroom.

6. Portrait of man in demi-armor, no signature or date.

We will try to help identify this, if you send us a picture of it.

South Hall Upstairs.

7. Alleged portrait of Duchess of Cleveland by Lely.

A good photograph is needed to aid in identification.

8. Oil painting, 13" x 19", "Woman in Garden," by Firmin-Girard.

I was much interested in this painting when I was at Hyde Park, as I may also own one by Firmin Girard. The signature on your picture conforms to the authentic signature of the painter, Marie-Francois-Firmin Girard, who habitually signed his name in fair letters as F I R M I N - G I R A R D. A painter of the French School, he was born at Poncin (Ain) 29 May, 1838 and died in 1921. He studied at the Beaux-Arts School in Paris, 1854; worked under Gleyre and first exhibited with his "St. Sebastian" in 1859. He was primarily an historical and genre painter with a very finished style, but also painted some landscapes and some portraits. Among his works are "After the Ball", 1868 (3rd class medal), "Death of the Princess of Lamballe", 1875; "The Girl Flower Vendor", 1872; "Japanese Toylet", 1873; "Reverie", "La Pêche", 1872 (2nd class medal); "Eighteenth Century Wedding", 1879; "Eighteenth Century Baptism", 1883. He was decorated in 1896 and won a bronze medal at the Universal Exposition of 1900. In 1861 he won the 2nd Prix de Rome. Prices: "In the Rosary" brought £ 15 - 15 s. in London, 30 April, 1909 and "Bouquetiere Parisienne" brought \$1600 in New York in 1900. However, another brought only \$320 in 1898. Benezit.

9. Foreign Street Scene by P. W. Keller - Rentlingen, 1880.

In your list the last name is given as Rentlinger but REUTLINGEN is the encyclopedia spelling.

Paul Wilhelm Keller-Reutlingen, a landscape painter of the German School, was born at Reutlingen, February 2, 1854. He was



a pupil of the Beaux-Arts Schools of Stuttgart and Munich and exhibited at Vienna, 1879, as well as at Munich, Dusseldorf, Stuttgart, and Berlin at various times. He won a medal at Munich in 1892. His works are represented in the museums at Frankfurt, Leipzig, Munich, and Stuttgart. Bénézit.

Mauve Guest Room.

10. Water color of a girl with a candle by Lucius Rossi.

Luigi Rossi is probably the painter of this picture. A genre painter of the Italian School, he was born at Lugano in 1853 or 1854 and died in 1923. For the most part, he exhibited at Milan. He was an artist of talent and his works have been frequently reproduced as engravings. Prices: A painting, presumably done in oil on canvas, sold for \$120 in New York in 1908. A water color would be worth much less. Bénézit.

3rd Floor Hall.

11. Water color, Hunting Scene, by Frvernoier.

The name of the artist must be misspelled as no such person is listed among 27,000 painters indexed in Mallet's Index of Artists.

12. Water color of a Hunting Dog, by T. Blinks.

A painter of the English School, born 1860; died 1912 in London. Bénézit.

3rd Floor Guest Room.

13. Oil painting on wood. Interior with group near piano, by V. Palmarelli.

Vincent Palmarelli or Gonzales Vincente y Palmarelli was an historical and genre painter born at Madrid in 1835. He belonged to the Spanish School of painters and died at Madrid in 1896. A pupil of Madrazo and the Academy of San Fernando, he went to Italy and was named Director of the Spanish Academy at Rome (1881). He was a member of the San Fernando Academy and Director of the Madrid Gallery. He received a 2nd class medal at the Paris Universal Exposition in 1867 and at Madrid in 1871. Prices: On 13 June, 1910, "The Pianist," by him was sold in London for £ 2. (This may be your picture.) Another painting sold in New York for \$175 in 1906; while another brought 1,500 francs in Paris in 1882. Bénézit; Thieme-Becker.

14. Oil painting on wood, Spanish fountain scene, by Worms.

Presumably this painter was Jules Worms, only painter of the name Worms listed in the encyclopedias. He was of the French School and was a genre painter born at Paris on 16 December, 1832.



He died in 1924. A pupil of Laloue, he first exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1859 and became a member of the Society of French Artists in 1863. He painted Spanish subjects for the most part. He received medals in Paris in 1867, 1868, and 1869, the Legion of Honor in 1876 and a third class medal at the Universal Exposition of 1876. His work is represented in the Luxembourg at Paris and prices ranged from 3,000 francs in Paris, 1893 to 3,825 francs in 1902. *Bénézit*.

15. C. De Lert.

I have not found him listed, so far.

16. Oil painting. "Lady at the Sea," by E. Dues.

Ernest-Angé Dues, a painter of portraits, genre subjects and landscapes was born at Paris in 1843 and died in 1896 (French School). He was a pupil of Pile and made his debut in Paris in 1868 but his fame really dated from 1874 when he won a 3rd class medal. Other medals and honors followed. He obtained a first class medal in 1879 and the Legion of Honor in 1889. In 1879, his "St. Cuthbert," painted in 1870, was acquired by the government for the Luxembourg. Prices: One of his paintings sold for \$500 in New York in 1896. At a sale in Paris in 1900 his "Young Woman at the Edge of the Sea" (possibly your picture) sold for 235 francs or about \$47. However, in 1883 another picture by him brought 2,020 francs. Today, he is one of the better known French painters of the period. *Bénézit*; Thieme-Becker.

#### Housekeeper's Sitting Room.

17-18. Two water colors by "Charles Meissonier" (Meissonier?).

It is suggested that the signature on these paintings be re-examined for possible error. Presumably the name should be read "Meissonier." Jean Charles Meissonier was a painter of the French School who was born in Paris in 1852 and died 1917. He is probably the Charles Meissonier of your picture. He should not, however, be confused with the much more famous and prominent Jean Louis Ernest Meissonier (1815-1891). In 1939 in New York, a painting by J. Charles Meissonier brought \$810. *Bénézit*; Thieme-Becker; American Art Annual, vol. XXIV (1941-1942).

19. Water color showing two angels by "Chartrass" (Chartran?).

This signature should also be re-examined. There was a painter of the French School named Theobald Chartran who was born at Besançon in 1894 and died at the same place in 1907. *Bénézit*; Thieme-Becker.



In attempting to relate the Vanderbilt Mansion collection to its place in the history of American Art and Art Collecting, the following select bibliography may be helpful:

National Academy of Design, Centennial Exhibition of the National Academy of Design, 1825-1925 (1925), "Preface" by S. H. Blashfield and others.

Corecoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C., De Gustibus --- An Exhibition of American Paintings Illustrating a Century of Taste and Criticism (Washington, D. C., 1949). This work contains a useful bibliography, valuable in itself.

A. Ten Eyck Gardner, "A Century of Women" in The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, December, 1948.

Ishan, B. and Gortissos, R., The History of American Painting (New York, 1936) pp. 608.

Mather, F. J., Morey, C. R., and Henderson, W. J., The American Spirit in Art (Pageant of America Series, Yale University Press, 1927) pp. 354.

Jackman, R. H., American Arts (Chicago and New York, 1928) pp. 561.