



For Immediate Release

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Contact: Bill Jeffway, Executive Director, Dutchess County Historical Society

cell: 845-293-7711

bill.jeffway@dchsny.org

“They Suppose You Are a Gentleman.” Caroline Clowes’ Extraordinary Path to National Artistic Acclaim is more than an exhibition of paintings and drawings. Although Clowes is today considered by some to have been one of the finest American animal and landscape painters in the 19th century, her story is not broadly known.

Through thousands of pages of letters and diaries, the exhibition tells the story of a woman determined to succeed in a field dominated by men. Through her own determination, through the support of nationally renowned artists and educators engaged in the newly emerging Vassar College, and through the multi-generational household of strong women living at the family home, Heartsease, in LaGrange, Clowes was able to shed a remote childhood in Sullivan County woodlands for the national stage.

The Dutchess County Historical Society is pleased to announce that the exhibition, delayed by the pandemic, will open from November 4 to December 31, 2022 at the Locust Grove Estate, Poughkeepsie, site of the former home of Samuel F. B. Morse (special hours and by appointment).

There could be no better or fitting site for the exhibition than Locust Grove, who are generously providing significant space and access for a full exhibition, and offering logistical and other essential support.

Set on a hill overlooking the scenic Hudson River in Poughkeepsie, the not-for-profit Locust Grove Estate includes a historic Italianate mansion open for tours, 200 acres of landscaped grounds with five miles of hiking trails, and a visitor welcome center with art galleries, museum shop, and classrooms for educational programs.

This year alone, Locust Grove will be the scene of hands-on gardening events like “Garden Gathering Peonies,” guided walks through the gardens and carriage roads, events that combine wine, food sunset events, a children’s event called, Fairy House Hunt, the renowned antique car show, an artisan marketplace, and mansion tours, for starters.

The exhibition is made possible through the generous support from the *Members’ Fund of the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center* at Vassar College.

When the painting by LaGrange artist Caroline Morgan Clowes (1838–1904), *Cattle at the Brook*, was featured on the most coveted wall in the main exhibition hall at Philadelphia's 1876 Centennial Exposition, it had been selected because it reflected the absolute best of American talent as the country marked its 100th anniversary.

The November exhibition of Caroline Clowes' work is the first time there has been a dedicated exhibition of her work and is sourced from a recent, landmark donation from the family of the artist to the *Dutchess County Historical Society*. Twenty paintings and a greater number of drawings have been professionally restored and will be on display along with letters, and photographs. In addition to the beauty of her paintings and drawings, the exhibition reveals Clowes' determination to overcome personal loss as a child, and to overcome resistance to her artistic and commercial success in a field entirely dominated by, and exclusive to, men.

By emerging as an artist in the period just after the Civil War, Clowes was confronted by a declining interest in what had been the dominant school of painting: the Hudson River School with its focus on her preferred genre: *landscapes*. Some historians have argued that she helped extend the popularity of the style by creating a new focus on animals within landscapes. The subjects are, for the most part, from her Dutchess County LaGrange neighborhood along the Wappinger Creek, which in and of itself is of interest, or they depict the neighborhood of her home in Florida.

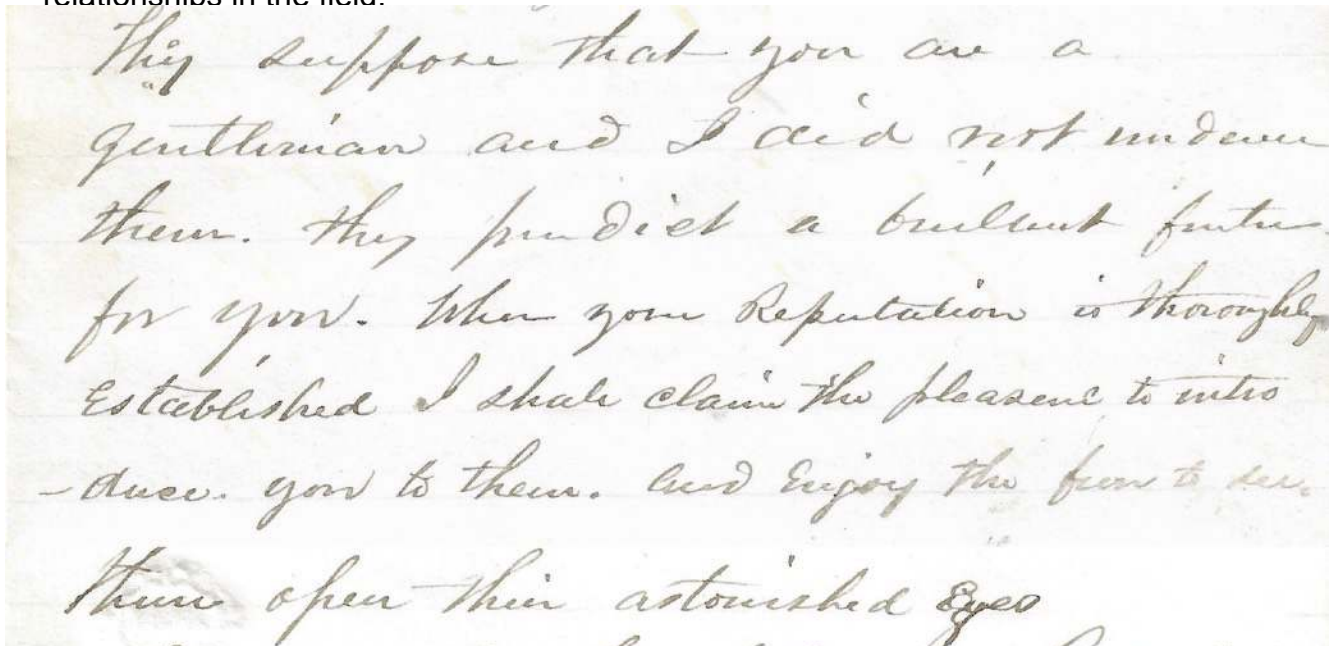
The Executive Director of the Dutchess County Historical Society, Bill Jeffway explains, "Delayed by two years by the pandemic, visitors will be reminded of the power of seeing something in person. I love the words used by the first teacher of art at Vassar College, Henry Van Ingen. He applauded Clowes' work noting its "transparently solid flesh tints!" These seemingly contradictory words are the dimension of her work, a kind of luminosity that she achieved especially in her later work, that can only be appreciated in person, and why many people respond to her paintings by wanting to touch them."

One of the distinct enablers of Clowes' success was the home she found herself in at age 13. Caroline, and her sister Lydia who was two years her senior, lost their mother when they were 2 and 4 years old respectively. The exhibition includes the heartbreaking letter Caroline's mother penned to her 2 year old daughter on her deathbed, four days before Christmas 1840. Their father came to recognize the young girls were not getting the support they needed from his single parenting in the remote woods of Sullivan County, New York. Lydia was placed with extended family in Virginia, and Caroline was placed with extended family in LaGrange, Dutchess County. The exhibition includes a letter Caroline Clowes wrote to her sister just after their separation and right after receiving drawing books and the promise of drawing lessons from her aunt who lived in the same home. "I hope I soon learn to draw well," Caroline wrote in January of 1852. The exhibition will show correspondence of the Paris born and trained painter, Frederick Rondel, who came to Poughkeepsie to teach at a young ladies' seminary at a time when it was known as the *City of Schools*, just prior to the opening of Vassar College in 1862. Then, with the opening of the College in 1865,

correspondence reveals the immediate interest of its new head of Art, the Dutch-born Henry Van Ingen.

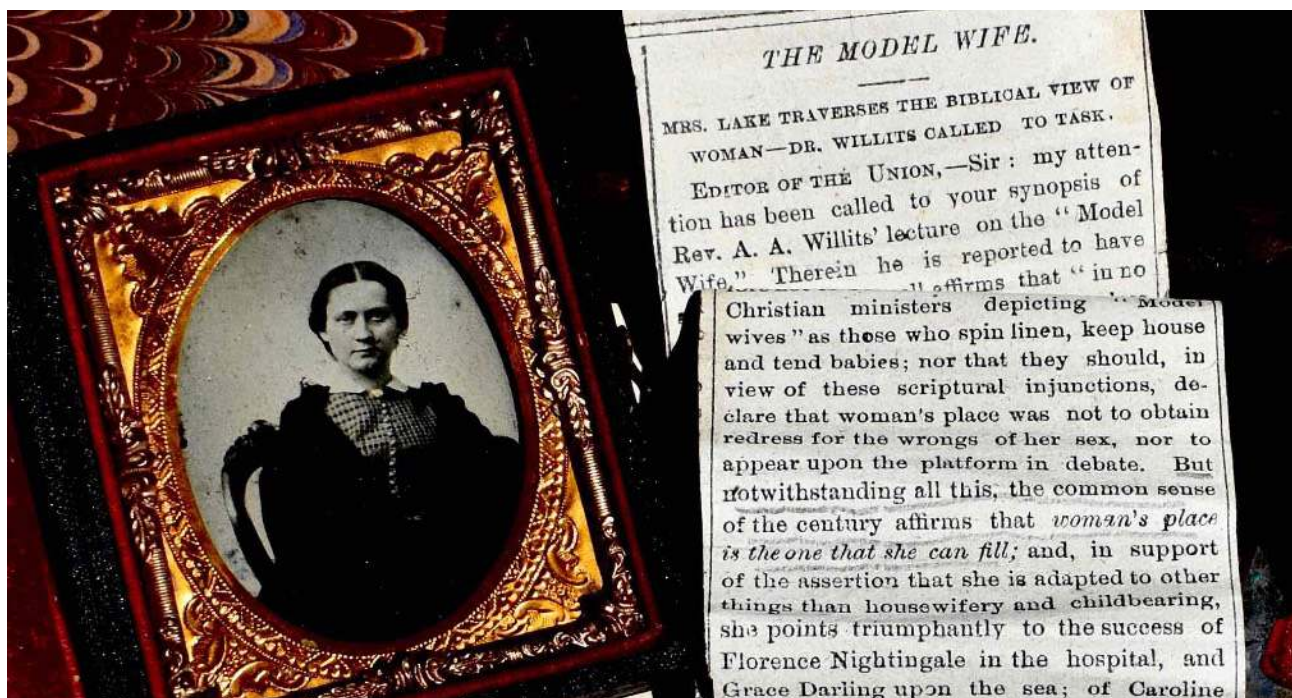
As she progressed in the New York City art world, her leger-de-main regarding her gender can be seen in a letter that will be exhibited. The letter shows that in the instance of her work first being introduced to the influential Goupil's Gallery in New York, by signing her paintings using only her initials, "C.M. Clowes," she was able to mask her gender. Her friend and representative, J. H. Wright wrote to Caroline saying, "They suppose that you are a gentleman and I did not correct them. They predict a brilliant future for you."

Kenneth F. Snodgrass, Executive Director of The Locust Grove Estate explains, "Due to his international fame as the inventor of the telegraph and 'Morse Code,' few people realize that Samuel F. B. Morse was an internationally acclaimed portrait painter in the early decades of the 1800s. In 1826 he helped found the National Academy of Design, an influential group which embraced Clowes' early talent in the 1860s. We are thrilled to host this exhibition for several reasons. One is that it gives us greater insight into local 19th century social and professional life that Morse and his wife participated in among their neighbors. Another is that it reminds us that while Morse put painting firmly behind him later in life, those who knew him were aware of his early talent, and important relationships in the field.



The artist J.H. Wright was literally Caroline's ~~front~~^{END}-man. Representing her work to Goupil's, the largest international art dealer and publishers of reproductions in engravings and prints. Never actively mis-representing her as a man, but passively letting the presumption stand, we can hear the delight in his anticipation of the day this famous dealer comes to understand that Caroline is a woman. He wrote, "They suppose that you are a gentleman and I did not undeceive them. They predict a brilliant future for you. When your reputation is thoroughly established, I shall claim the pleasure to introduce you to them. And enjoy the fun to see them open their astonished eyes. You are on the right path to fame and fortune, be faithful as you always have been "

Two Cows at Wappinger Creek, by Caroline M. Clowes (1838–1904), is typical of the artist's interests in local scenes near her LaGrange, Dutchess County home. It is among the restored works that will be on exhibition in November of 2022 at Poughkeepsie's Locust Grove Estate. *Dutchess County Historical Society Hart-Hubbard Collection*, gift of E. Stuart and Linda Hubbard.



Among the personal items belonging to the artist Caroline Morgan Clowes (1838–1904) on exhibition in November 2022 at Poughkeepsie's Locust Grove Estate, is a newspaper article from 1881 she kept in her purse. Clowes underlined "the common sense of the [19th] century affirms, *woman's place is the one that she can fill.*" That sentiment and ambition required Clowes to overcome the fierce opposition that she, like any woman, faced in becoming a commercially successful artist, a story that is clearly revealed in the exhibition. *Dutchess County Historical Society Hart-Hubbard Collection*, gift of E. Stuart and Linda Hubbard.