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Paul Sargent Autobiography

Paul Turner Sargent

1999

Autobiography of Paul Sargent

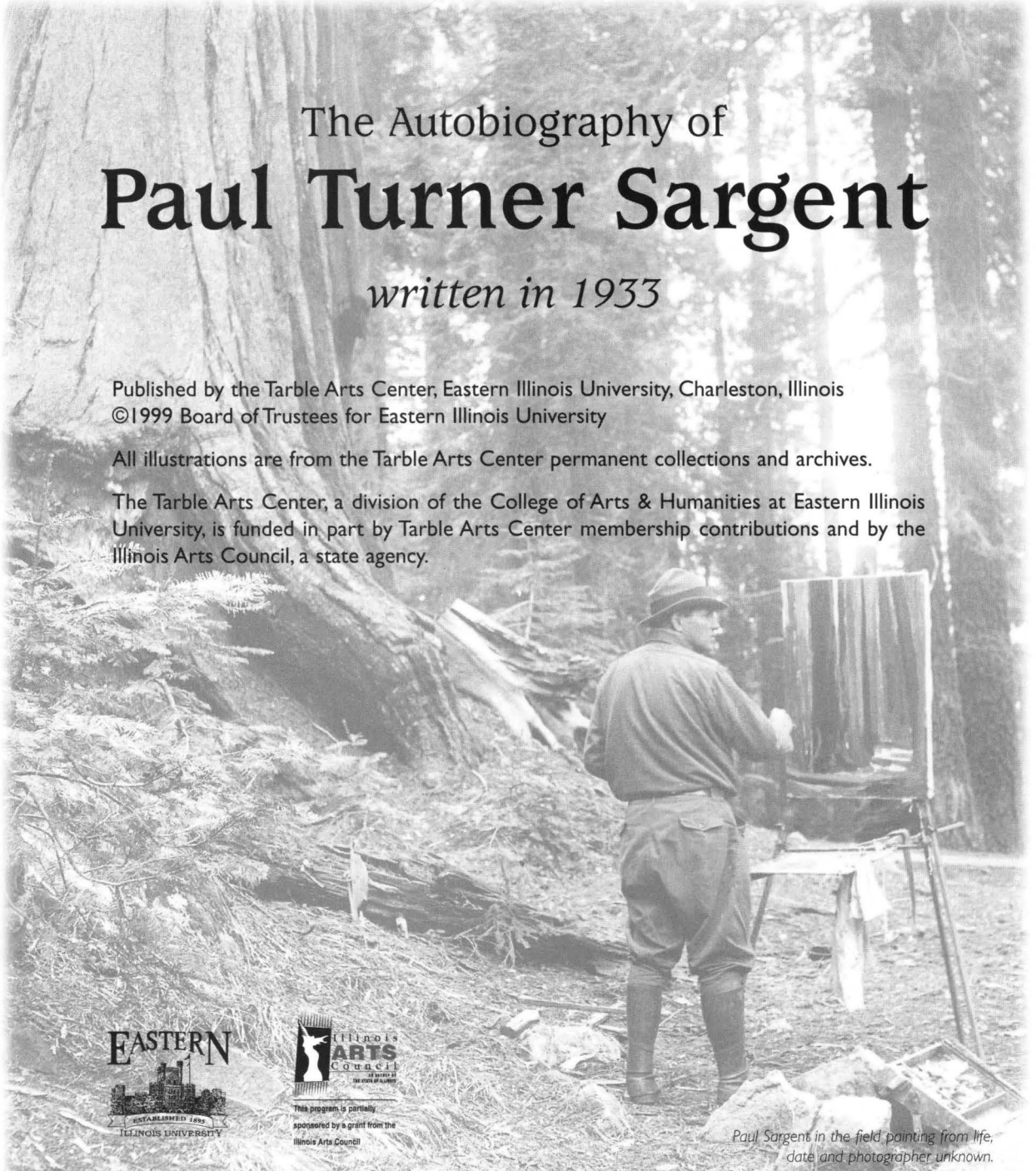
Paul Sargent

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Yellow Oak, 1943,
oil on canvas (30" x 36")

The Autobiography
of
Paul Turner Sargent
written in 1933



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Published by the Tarble Arts Center, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, Illinois
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The Tarble Arts Center, a division of the College of Arts & Humanities at Eastern Illinois University, is funded in part by Tarble Arts Center membership contributions and by the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.



This program is partially
sponsored by a grant from the
Illinois Arts Council

*Paul Sargent in the field painting from life,
date and photographer unknown.*

PAUL TURNER SARGENT (1880 - 1946)

Paul Turner Sargent was the seventh of John and Maria Anna Turner Sargent's nine children. Paul was born, raised, and died at the Sargent family farm in Hutton Township near Charleston, Illinois. His father and grandfather, Stephen Sargent, were prominent and successful farmers who valued education. In 1893 Paul's father left to join the Koreshan religious sect in Estero, Florida. Maria Sargent took over running the farm and household, which she was able to do without sacrificing her children's education.

Paul Sargent studied for a year at United Brethren College (Westfield, Illinois) before transferring to Charleston's Eastern Illinois State Normal School (now Eastern Illinois University) in 1900. While at Eastern Sargent was encouraged in his artistic endeavors. He graduated in 1906 and later that year enrolled at the Art Institute of Chicago. After completing his studies at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1912, Sargent worked as a free-lance artist in Chicago for a few years. He returned to his rural homestead where, except for his travels, he lived for the rest of his life.

In 1920 Sargent began his association with the Brown County (Indiana) artist colony. Thereafter Sargent visited Brown County every fall but three until his death and was a charter member of the Brown County Artist Association. He was allowed to participate in the Hoosier Salon, first held at Marshall Field's in Chicago and later in Indianapolis, for over 20 years. He also participated in the Chicago Art Institute's annual Chicago Artists Exhibition between 1911 and 1923. During his life time Sargent's work was also shown at the University of Illinois (College of Fine and Applied Arts), Brown County Art Association Gallery (Nashville, Indiana), The Sheldon Swope Gallery (Terre Haute, Indiana), Indiana University (Bloomington, Indiana), Liebers Art Gallery (Indianapolis, Indiana), and Eastern Illinois State Teacher's College.

Sargent's early style of academic Realism, characterized by subdued color and heavy paint application, gradually gave way to a more Impressionistic approach, possibly as a result of his association with the Brown County artists. His desire was to "get the color right," as Sargent is quoted as saying. Rather anti-Modern, Sargent was more interested in the expressiveness of Impressionism rather than its theories concerning the physical qualities of color and light. Fundamentally, Sargent remained a Romantic rather than an Impressionist throughout his career.

Paul Sargent died of heart failure in 1946. He was given a posthumous solo exhibition in Eastern Illinois University's Old Main later that year. Paintings acquired from that exhibition and other sources formed the beginnings of Eastern's permanent collection of art. The university's first art gallery, opened as a part of Booth Library in 1950, was named the Paul T. Sargent Gallery. The gallery retained this name in various locations until it was subsumed by the Tarble Arts Center in 1982. Through the efforts of Sargent enthusiasts a gallery within the Tarble continues to bear the name Paul T. Sargent.

Paul Sargent's studio shortly after his death in 1946, photographed by Albert Paul.



INTRODUCTION

This autobiography was written by Paul Sargent in 1933, one year before he won the Nelson Vance Prize from the Brown County Art Association and five years before he was first listed in *Who's Who In American Art*. Sargent was a mature artist with an established style. Although he professes in his autobiography to paint all types of pictures, the vast majority of his output and what he is known for are landscapes. His younger brother and principal biographer, Sam Sargent, once reported that of the 7,000 paintings by Paul Sargent, seventy-five percent were landscapes done within ten miles of the Embarras River in Coles County, Illinois.


Although sometimes identified as an Impressionist, Sargent was not enthusiastic about Modern art. In one of his notebooks he wrote, "Much of modern work has been forced on the public by commercial method," But he added, "Result on regular artists will be good, make them more courageous. Get away from too much realism."

Regardless of the changing styles that the artist noted, interest in Sargent's paintings has endured. This autobiography provides a brief glimpse into Sargent's thoughts and methods as a painter.

My thanks to Robert Hillman, archivist of Booth Library's Archives and Special Collections, for making the autobiography available for publication, and to Albert Paul for donating the photographs of Sargent's studio to the Tarble Arts Center.

Michael Watts
Director, Tarble Arts Center
Eastern Illinois University

*Paul Sargent's studio shortly after his death in 1946,
photographed by Albert Paul.*



The first pictures I remember of making were drawn during school hours at the country school. These, as I remember, were trains and rabbits drawn on a slate. One of the boys at school could draw the legs of a running rabbit better than I could do it so I confiscated his idea and improved on it. One slate full of pictures was held up before the school and commented upon by the teacher - and thus I guess I was launched on the interesting road of art - but did not then know it.

I drew many pictures these days, mostly copies of other pictures in pencil and pen and ink. I regret now the time I spent copying these pictures, and from a larger perspective consider the time practically wasted, as I should have been drawing pictures then directly from life.

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about my progress I might not have taken up art seriously. I took the four year course in school with all the drawing it was possible to get with extra work outside of the regular classes. I had my first cast drawing here, two pieces, one the winged victory, and the other the strong head with the invincible chin which I later learned, much later, was a portrait of Lorenzo of Florence, the greatest patron of the arts of all times - including the present.

My course in school included much science and required many drawings of scientific objects. A laboratory notebook in zoology I have now is interesting. A drawing of a starfish I made then has a note alongside by the teacher, Mr. Hassakissan. The note reads "This drawing is too artistic to be a good scientific drawing." If a drawing must be faulty I prefer that it be in that direction. If I had clearly comprehended then the requirements of a good scientific drawing I could have drawn it. The artistic drawing is much more difficult to make - some scientific minds to the contrary notwithstanding. Eventually I did learn to make scientific pen and ink drawings that would survive the critical inspection of my teacher in botany, Mr. O.W. Caldwell, and I commenced to make for him at this time drawings

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One eventful day in Sept. I entered school at the Art Institute in Chicago. Because I had had some cast drawing I was put in the intermediate class. A month there and I went to the gallery class - making charcoal drawings of the more complicated sculptures in the galleries of the museum. I was promoted to the life class after three months of cast work - the usual time to reach the life class is one year. The work of drawing from cast or life occupied the morning hours and in the afternoon we were free to choose from several kinds of drawing, sketching from models, painting or drawing still life, or work in color from models. I did some of all, but as I remember spent most of my time painting in water color from a costumed model.

After some months or a year in the morning life class drawing in charcoal I was permitted to join a portrait class or the nude life class and worked in both classes at different intervals. For those who know little about art schools and methods of work I will explain that painting and drawing from the nude is considered the foundation for the artist's later work. The human body in its subtlety and complexity is most difficult to draw and paint, and when the student-artist has mastered that he can

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draw anything else "under the sun". (4)
The proper drawing of the human body brings up ~~the~~ the problems of perspective he will find in the landscape or in buildings.

As we became more proficient in our work we took upon ourselves more difficult problems. One of these was mural painting in the afternoons. These were all practical jobs, the paintings were made to fit a particular space in some building it was intended to decorate and were paid for by people outside the school. The composition for a picture commences with a small pencil sketch about 3x4 in. in size. After making dozens of these, loosely drawn scribbles, just indicating the main light and dark masses, we would choose the best. From this small sketch in pencil we made a larger sketch in color drawn exactly to scale (in proportion) to the large one we hoped to make.

These sketches were passed on by the persons wishing the decorations and they selected the ones to make larger. We got some models in proper costume for the particular picture and made a drawing (or study) in charcoal from the model. With these studies and the color composition sketch and plenty of imagination we made the large mural decoration.

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Vincennes. The canvas was, I remember, a little more than 8 ft high and about 6 broad. The nearest figure, Clark, was life size, and showed him and some of his men coming toward you. They are wading water and some are just arrived on land a few inches above water and partly covered with snow. The costumes are mixed. Clark wears a considerably bedraggled uniform of the Revolutionary War officer, but most of the men wear the leather clothing of the hunter and woodsman of that time, and carries the long, flint-lock hunting rifle of that day. This painting was made for the John M. Smyth School in Chicago.

The second decoration I made was painted for the Crippled Children's Home in Chicago. The subject was Robin Hood shooting before the King and Queen. This was a long horizontal panel about 4 ft by 13 ft. Robin Hood stands to left of center, dressed in crimson tights and doublet, pulling the long bow on a target to the right and out of sight. In the foreground are groups of archers, some hunting dogs, and at the left end of panel are seated the king and queen.

The third painting was placed in the Sherman Park field house in Chicago, as one of a dozen or so by all of us students, as a line of decoration over the doors and windows of the large room. My subject this time was Capt. John Smith landing at Jamestown. On a

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shows in the back ground.

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Just then I wanted to paint and cared not at
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accepted. I exhibited thereafter ^{with them} of the time for about ten years. I was home in summer and in Chicago in winter during those years. I was busy painting out doors every summer. In the exhibition of 1922 of Chicago artists I had a large painting "The Water Boy." A boy was seated in the shade of a wheat shock with a collie dog beside him. Marshall Field & Co. bought the right to reproduce it on their calendar. The original afterward was sold to the Burke School in Chicago.

In 1920 I painted in Brown Co. Ind. for the first time. I have been there for awhile every year since but have also painted in other places, Michigan, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania, and Florida, with one trip to Idaho.

When in Fla. in 1925 I painted a portrait of Dr. James Russell Price, a doctor, poet, and lecturer. Dr. Price was very striking in appearance, tall, gaunt with long white hair. Henry Ford saw this portrait of mine in Florida and liked it at first sight, and now has it with him in Detroit.

I paint more landscape pictures than any other kind, although I like all kinds. My idea is that one can specialize too much in painting, so I am working on landscapes, figure paintings, portraits and animals most of the time.

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I have made oil sketches of cattle while they were grazing. I made a framework held by straps over my shoulder. The framework held the palette and board on which the picture was to be painted. I found a cow moving at right angles to the sunlight, (so the lighting would be constant) - and I walked along parallel painting as she grazed. Of course only rough sketches can

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Springtime Reflections,
1945,
oil on canvas
(30" x 36")



Afternoon Showers,
1942,
oil on canvas
(30" x 40")



River in Winter,
1945,
oil on canvas
(28" X 36 1/4")



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Eastern Illinois University
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