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UMI

THE LIFE AND WORK OF ALSON SKINNER CLARK

by

DEBORAH EPSTEIN SOLON

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2004

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THE CITY UNIVERISTY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

THE LIFE AND WORK OF ALSON SKINNER CLARK

by

Deborah Epstein Solon

Adviser: Professor Kevin Murphy

Alson Skinner Clark (1876-1949) was born in Chicago, and attended The Art Institute of Chicago. In 1896 he moved to New York City to study with William Merritt Chase at the Art Students League and subsequently enrolled in Chase's new school, The Chase School of Art. Chase's instruction—his love of painting *en plein air*, and his freedom in the handling of paint—had a profound influence on the young artist.

In the fall of 1898, Clark attended James Abbott McNeill Whistler's school in Paris, the Académie Carmen. Although he remained for only a brief period, Clark's admiration and emulation of Whistler's aesthetic was enduring. Ill health forced Clark's return to America in 1901. While recuperating he met and married Atta Medora McMullin, and by 1902 the couple settled in Paris. The Clarks traveled within Europe during the first decade of the century—through France, Italy, Spain, and Dalmatia, and they spent a portion of 1906 in Quebec.

In 1913 the couple visited the Panama Canal Zone—the first of two trips—where he painted the construction of the Panama Canal: eighteen paintings were exhibited at the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition. When the United States entered World War I, Clark, who had returned to America in 1914, enlisted in the Navy and was assigned to France as an aerial photographer.

His stint in the military resulted in an ear ailment, forcing him to seek out a mild climate. In 1919 the couple visited California, and subsequently relocated to Pasadena the following year. He became an instructor, and eventually director, of the newly formed Stickney Memorial School of Art. The landscape of California and

Mexico offered constant inspiration, and Clark maintained a prodigious travel schedule.

By the mid-1920s Clark was commissioned to paint several major public mural projects in Southern California, yet he continued, when possible, to paint the state's deserts, mountains, beaches, and historic missions. Although Clark's primary association has, until now, been to California, an investigation of his life and career confirms his position as a significant proponent of American Impressionism throughout this country and abroad.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is the culmination of nearly fifteen years as a graduate student. Its realization has, until this point, been interrupted by the challenges and triumphs that life brings: in my case, those included a move across the country, the illness and death of my father, the birth of my daughter, and my work as a curator in California.

The decision to complete my dissertation has been facilitated by family, friends, and colleagues who have offered endless support and assistance. I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee. Professor Kevin Murphy has generously given his time and provided excellent and insightful criticism. He has been a constant source of encouragement, and I am indebted to him for seeing me through this project. It is fair to say that I would never have completed this degree without the years of prodding, cajoling, and support from Professor William H. Gerdts. He believed that I should—and could—write this dissertation, even when I had lost faith in my own ability. His cogent and thorough criticisms have made this a more complete and worthwhile study. Professor Gerdts has shared information and allowed the use of his personal library. The example of his tenacious and exacting scholarship has guided my research and writing. Professor Diane Kelder and Dr. David Dearinger have generously given their time and attention to this project. I am grateful for their close and thoughtful examination of the text.

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I am indebted to the staff of the Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C. who allowed access to the unmicrofilmed Alson Skinner Clark Papers. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Phil and Marian Kovinick (Archives of American Art, San Marino, California). Both dedicated researchers have selflessly offered their time and expertise to assist in gathering archival material that was essential to this study.

Many colleagues, collectors, and dealers have provided information on the whereabouts of Clark paintings and work of related artists. I would especially like to acknowledge the following individuals: Dan Abiri, Paul & Kathleen Bagley, Kathleen Updyke Barrett, Gerald Buck, Chonita Earle, Ranney & Priscilla Draper, Robert & Susan Ehrlich, Whitney Ganz, Roberta Haltom, Josh Hardy, Robert Hicklin, Colleen Hoffman, William and Daryl Horton, Dr. Andrea Husby, Patrick Kraft, De McCall, Michael McCue, Earl & Elma Payton, Ray Redfern, Andrew Schoelkopf, Jason Schoen, Jean Stern, George Stern, William Selman, Dr. Jessica Smith, and Tom & Barbara Stiles.

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Other colleagues have shared their time and expertise. In particular, I wish to acknowledge Gina D'Angelo, Janet Blake, Wesley Jessup, and Terry Neff. My friends, on both sides of the country, have acted as cheerleaders on innumerable occasions. Although it is not possible to specifically name each one, I do wish to recognize two individuals. Leonie Kramer and Jeannette Morck have seen me through this often difficult and trying period. They have shepherded me through the process, constantly cheering me towards the finish line.

My family, including my brothers and my mother, has patiently offered support and buttressed my spirits. Although my father passed away many years ago, I heard his voice in my head urging me to finish. Finally, I wish to thank my husband Neil, and my daughter, Alexandra. Both Neil and Ali have made adjustments in their

lives so that I might work on this study. They have endured periods of neglect, and accommodated my schedule in order to allow me the time and energy to successfully complete this huge undertaking. It has been a luxury to pursue my scholarly work, and I am forever indebted. It is to both of them that I dedicate this work.

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Introduction

The name Alson Skinner Clark (1876-1949) is hardly a familiar one, even to those intimately involved in the study of American paintings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The reasons for his obscurity are, in certain respects, explicable, and in other ways less so. His student career—which included classes at the School of The Art Institute of Chicago, the Art Students League of New York, the Chase School of Art (later renamed the New York School of Art), and the Académie Carmen in Paris—paralleled some of the most successful American painters of the period. He counted William Macbeth in New York and William O'Brien in Chicago among his dealers. An expatriate for a significant number of years, Clark was a more peripatetic and intrepid traveler than many Americans who lived abroad. He exhibited throughout America during his lifetime, and was a respected teacher in his mid-career. All of these elements should qualify him for at least modest recognition in the annals of art history.

However, Clark's life—and ultimately the obscuring of his career—was influenced by his move to Pasadena, California in 1920. While Clark spent a portion of his career living in Southern California, and painted California with verve and enthusiasm, he is best understood as a cosmopolitan artist whose career encompasses—but is not necessarily defined by—his time in the Southland.

Thus, the intent of this dissertation is twofold. The first mandate is to make sense of Clark's life and work. Very little has been published on this artist; even the

few published sources are peppered with inaccuracies.[1] The second objective is to use Clark as an integral nexus between artists who worked on both coasts. As an artist who was critically acclaimed throughout the country, he is an excellent vehicle to examine the larger methodological problem of why and how Impressionists working in California have often been excluded from the mainstream: viewed as separate, and often perceived as unequal. Although it is not the mandate of this dissertation to explore the general issue of regional painting, Clark's primary identification with California has impacted on his standing in the larger scheme of American Impressionism. Therefore, the issue of "cultural nativism," or the hyper-regionalist bias of many California critics, will be explored. Finally, it is necessary to examine whether Clark's travels—especially those to more exotic locales—were chosen in a calculated manner to satisfy the public's appetite for unusual subjects. Did he envision a larger strategic potential for sales and recognition?

The impetus for preparing this dissertation developed while I was curating the exhibition "In and Out of California: Travels of American Impressionists" (Laguna Art Museum, 2002). Clark was one of a number of artists included in the show, and I was only marginally familiar with his work. Ultimately, I found Clark to be an artist whose oeuvre was yet to be fully discovered or appreciated. It is my hope that by examining the foundations of his career, and consequently evaluating how the artist

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[1] The two main sources on Alson Clark are Jean Stern, *Alson S. Clark* (Los Angeles: Petersen Publishing Company, 1983); Jean Stern, "Alson Clark: An American At Home and Abroad," in *California Light 1900-1930* (Laguna Beach: Laguna Art Museum, 1990), p.113-136. The original catalogue was based almost entirely on an interview conducted in 1956 and 1957 with Clark's wife, Medora, for the Archives of American Art. While fascinating, Medora's recollection of dates and places is unreliable. Stern's ensuing essay corrected many of his original inaccuracies, however, subsequent original source material has surfaced that further sheds light on Clark's life and career. I am grateful to Jean Stern for his assistance on this project.

fits into the greater scheme of American Impressionism, this dissertation will aptly serve both the man and his lifetime of achievements.

The dissertation is divided into six chapters. Chapter One examines the artist's early training—his studies with William Merritt Chase in New York City and Shinnecock, Long Island—and his initial trip to Europe, which included a brief stint at James Abbott McNeill Whistler's atelier. This chapter sets the stage for Clark's artistic coming of age.

Chapter Two begins his early professional career and personal odyssey. In 1902 he married Atta Medora McMullin, who became his lifetime partner and greatest supporter. The couple traveled extensively during the first decades of the twentieth century and Clark's stylistic development—a fascinating admixture of elements from the teachings of Chase and Whistler—are examined in his travelogue of works.

Chapter Three is devoted to Clark's series of the construction of the Panama Canal. Painting *en-plein-air*, Clark chronicled the excavation and the building of the enormous locks that eventually connected the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. As a result of his Herculean efforts, Clark was permitted to exhibit eighteen of these works at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco.

Chapter Four traces the Clarks' return to America after World War I, and the period spent in New England and Charleston, South Carolina. Clark's devotion to Impressionism is further solidified, and his fame throughout museums and galleries in the United States is documented. The chapter continues as Clark enlists in the Navy

as America entered the war, and it concludes as Clark returns to America—and relocates to Southern California.

Chapter Five spans the years approximately 1919 to 1922. Clark's military service (he was an aerial photographer) resulted in an ear ailment, forcing the couple to seek residence in a warm climate. They moved to Pasadena, where Clark began to paint the landscape and the landmarks of California. From his interest in the decaying missions—such as those in San Juan Capistrano, and San Gabriel—to the desert, Clark's art became an integral element in the growth and standing of the Southern California art community.

Chapter Six (the final chapter) looks at the last period of Clark's eclectic life. A mature artist with an established reputation, Clark continued to travel—but closer to home. He developed a true affection for Mexico, visiting cities such as Cuernavaca, Mazatlan, and Taxco. By the late twenties, Clark began to paint murals: huge productions that required a modification of his working methods and stylistic adjustments. The chapter also examines the larger and pressing conundrum of how artists who lived in California—despite their cosmopolitan backgrounds—have often been segregated. To be certain, there were Impressionist painters in California for whom the term "regional" is an apt description.[2] However, Clark's continued travels (even once settled in California), and his ongoing relationships with collectors and dealers throughout the United States, calls into question whether his predominant association with California is accurate. Through Clark, it will be argued that many

[2] Such artists might include George Kennedy Brandriff, Frank Coburn, Frank Cuprien, Sam Hyde Harris, Hanson Duvall Puthuff, Jack Wilkinson Smith, and Karl Julius Yens.

Impressionist artists living in California were a vital part of the fabric of American Impressionism, and need to be evaluated within that context.

Chapter One

Student Days

The story of any life is an admixture of elements. Luck, misfortune, talent, opportunity, physical capabilities or incapacities, historical setting: any and all of these elements can play an essential role in an artist's development. Alson Clark's (1876-1949) early years (1876-1900) spanned a momentous and turbulent period in history of the United States. The country was still in the throes of recovering from the Civil War. In spite of continuing political and financial difficulties—including an economic depression beginning in1873—art in America advanced to another level during the decades of the 1870s and 1880s. Great institutions, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (1870), and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (1876), along with any number of universities and libraries, were founded. It has been skillfully argued that the Centennial was the point of departure for American Renaissance, a period rife with social contradictions, but one which allowed the arts to flourish on a grander scale than ever before.[1]

As Clark was maturing into a young adult in his native Chicago, American painters were facing a conundrum that would continue to plague them into the first decades of the new century. European training was still *de rigueur*—the private academies and ateliers in Paris were overflowing with young Americans—however, those who repatriated were confronted with an aesthetic change of taste. The predominance of cultural nationalism was becoming part of the American dialogue.

An 1893 article in the *Boston Evening Transcript* railed that "the majority of those who return . . . prove . . . unsuccessful in advancing our native art." Regarded as anemic when forced to "stand on their own feet, [they were] no longer sustained by competition, technical advice and by the suggestions derived from their artistic surroundings . . . "[2] American critics were unwilling to praise so-called substandard imitations of "foreign" art, deemed irrelevant to a burgeoning nationalistic pride. Perhaps some of the most revealing critical commentary came in response to William Merritt Chase's scenes of Central Park, Manhattan and Prospect Park, Brooklyn (Chase's relationship to Clark will be discussed later in this chapter). Chase's serial investigation of both parks—constituting a new urban landscape—and his studies of the individuals who used those parks were noticed and applauded by critics.[3] According to one commentator, Chase was "boldly and consistently original, seeking out his subjects in the neighborhood of New York City and painting them without any regard to the conventions of any school . . . ." He added that such vistas "indeed suggest to our wandering landscape artists that they should not keep their eyes hermetically sealed while in their own country."[4]

The discourse became even more vitriolic on the eve of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. A reviewer reminded his colleagues:

> The critics who go to Chicago next summer will not desire expressly to see and study the work . . . of those nominal Americans who are virtual Europeans in thought, style and sentiment . . . . What they will look for is art that is national—American in subject and manner.[5]

The Columbian Exposition, the most significant cultural event of the decade, attracted over twenty million viewers between May and October. The Fine Arts Building had an astounding ten thousand works—approximately half were paintings.[6] The

American installation of eleven hundred oil paintings betrayed a strong gallicization, providing plenty of ammunition for cultural nationalist critics to express discontent. Although we cannot be certain that Clark visited the Exposition (no documentation exists), it seems highly likely that he would have attended. And it was against the backdrop of this growing national artistic debate, and particularly in the city that played host to the watershed exhibition, in which Clark gained his early artistic footing.

Much of Clark's life is described through his diaries and letters (beginning in 1889), and the diaries of his wife, Medora; however, little primary material remains regarding his childhood. For that information, we are dependent upon the recollections of Medora, interviewed on the subject of Alson's life and career in 1956 and 1957 as part of the Oral History project for the Archives of American Art.[7] Musing on his early interest in art, she stated:

> I think the desire to draw was always extant with Alson Skinner Clark. When he was nine or ten years old, it made itself manifest—and obnoxious as well—to his church-going parents, for during the long Sunday sermons he surreptitiously recorded the bonnets and bald pates in front of him in the only place available at the time—the frontispieces and blank rear pages of the family hymnals.[8]

Medora goes on to recall that Alson's "professional" career began in grammar school. The curriculum included free-hand drawing, so Alson sold drawings for fifty cents to those boys who found themselves lacking in artistic ability. [9] This talent (or these wiles) did not elude his parents, who focused some of that creative energy by enrolling him in three evening classes at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago between October and December 1887.[10] Alson's childhood was privileged. His father,

Alson Ellis Clark, served in the Massachusetts 45th Regiment during the Civil War, and later moved to Chicago. His mother Sarah, a formidable woman who played a key role in his life, was orphaned and raised by her sister, Mary, and her uncle by marriage, Mancel Talcott. Sarah and Alson Ellis were married in 1869, producing four children: Mancel, Alson Skinner, Edwin, and one daughter, Mary Emily, who died in 1871.[11]

Although Alson Sr. was from an impoverished background, he created a highly successful commodities business at the Chicago Board of Trade. So successful, in fact, that in 1882 the family purchased a small island in one of the "Thousand Islands" of Alexandria Bay, New York on the St. Lawrence River. They dubbed the island Comfort Island, named after Old Point Comfort Virginia, where they had summered with Mary Emily (Mamie) during happier days. The family constructed a home and spent summers at Comfort Island well into the twentieth century.[12] In 1889, with his financial situation firmly established, Alson Sr. left the disposition of his business to his brother, and embarked on a two-year trip around the world with his wife, three children, a maid and a tutor.

The young Alson kept a diary for 1889, carefully recording the cities they visited, including the following: Naples, Sorrento, Genoa, Rome, Florence, Berne, Interlaken, Zurich, Salzberg, Vienna, Dresden, and Berlin.[13] At thirteen, Alson's observations were often pedestrian; he wrote about the food, weather, and his studies. However, he did note that the family visited a large number of museums, galleries, and churches. Moreover, he was fascinated by opera, and kept a running list in the

diary of the performances they attended.[14] Music continued to play a role in his life, as Clark studied and played the banjo.

Although the impact of his European experience is difficult to assess, it was, undoubtedly, a defining period for the nascent artist. When they returned, he completed his studies at the Chicago English High and Manual Training School. Determined to pursue a career as an artist, he convinced his parents to allow him once again to attend The School of the Art Institute of Chicago—now as a full-time student. Records indicate that he took six courses from October 1895 through June 1896.[15] In a letter to his friend and closest confident, Amelia Baker, he wrote on October 11, 1895: "I am going to start at the Art Institute Monday, but don't know a soul in the class and they will probably be all girls, but I am not scared."[16] Instruction at the school followed a traditional program of academic training (mostly dependent upon French principles), which included requisite drawing from casts and still lifes before advancing to the live model.

The artist's diary from 1895 is not extant, so we must rely on Medora's recollections of Alson's experience at the school. Apparently Clark was uninspired with the first year requirement of drawing from casts. When he found the courage to ask his instructor to be advanced to "life" class, Medora recounted that the two argued: "The instructor adamantly maintained that Alson should remain in casts . . . and followed up his ultimatum by announcing that he considered Alson Clark completely without talent and his wisest council would be to abandon art. Alson gathered up his belongings and left."[17] Even if the story was embellished over the

years, he did leave the school, resolving to resume his studies in New York City at the Art Students League.

Ultimately, the decision to study at the Art Students League would be life altering. His parents were supportive; however, his mother Sarah was clearly uncomfortable with the notion of Alson living alone in New York City, so she went with him. During his first year, he lived with his mother and family friend, Amelia Baker at a flat on 77th Street and Columbus Avenue. Alson blazed the trail, preceding them in New York City to look for lodging. He wrote to Amelia, " I am getting New York down, but don't like it at all."[18] His mother and Amelia arrived on November 3, 1896, and Sarah noted in a diary: "For two years Mela and I have talked of spending a winter in New York, in Bohemian fashion, and have searched for a good reason for doing so, in vain till this time. Alson, however, came to the rescue in his desire to study art with a New York master, and made it seem a necessary thing to do."[19]

If this living situation was extraordinary, equally unusual was the fact that the three kept a joint diary for that year, rotating entries. Alson sketched profusely throughout the book, the sketches often reflecting the day's activities. Although almost no student work exists, these charming and often complicated sketches are a clear indication of his promise (see figs. 1.1 and 1.2). Many were also whimsical, reflecting Clark's sense of humor.

The diary entries characterized life at the Art Students League and particularly included observations of William Merritt Chase. The League followed a traditional academic course of study: drawing from casts, and later drawing and painting from life. The curriculum included supplementary courses—composition and modeling—

in addition to anatomy.[20] The literature on Chase is extensive and need not be reviewed in-depth for this study, however, Chase's significant impact on Clark warrants our understanding of the master's persona and aesthetic viewpoint.[21] Sarah Burns has described Chase the following way:

> One of the most viable of that cosmopolitan generation of painters born in the 1850s and trained abroad during the 1870s and '80s, the mature Chase cut an authoritative figure. He continued to inflect his appearance with distinguishing marks of identity—a flowing tie (the "Chase cravat") and a round, flat-brimmed hat—but he bound these accessories firmly into the code signifying the successful, refined, artistic gentleman . . . . A highly public figure, Chase projected a particular pattern of artistic behavior associated with the most up-to-date, enterprising modes of art practice. He was prominent among a considerable number of contemporaries who shaped themselves in this mold, which rejected anything more than cosmetic eccentricity and sought to construct an image of competence, discipline, social skill, organization, and managerial acumen. [22]

As Burns suggests, Chase's self-conscious mode of dress and behavior—or any additional quirks—did not interfere with, but rather contributed to his pronounced impact upon an entire generation of American painters. At the Art Students League, the Chase School of Art, and at the Shinnecock Hills Summer School of Art (merely a sampling of his teaching venues), Chase fashioned and molded his neophyte students.

When Clark arrived at the Art Students League in 1896, Chase's ten-year tenure at the school was about to end.[23] Chase resigned that year, and established his own school. Many League students, including Clark, followed him. He encouraged his students to immerse themselves in works of the great masters, such as Velasquez and Hals, but ultimately to incorporate those lessons into a unique viewpoint: "Absolute originality in art," he stated, "can only be found in a man who has been locked in a dark room from baby-hood . . . . Since we are dependent on others, let us frankly and openly take in all that we can . . . . The man who does that with judgment

will produce an original picture that will have value."[24] Chase rejected the notion that a painting needed to be either narrative, or invested with a moral imperative: "People talk about poetical subjects in art . . . there are no such things. The only poetry in art is the way the artist applies his pigments to the canvas. A yellow dog with a tin can tied to his tail would have been enough inspiration for a masterpiece by a consummate genius like Velasquez."[25]

Clark sympathized with Chase's methods, including drawing immediately from life, and allowing instruction in drawing and color simultaneously. Chase also cleverly offered incentives—in the form of monthly prizes—and a scholarship for second year students to attend the Académie Julian in Paris. [26]A supportive instructor—even when brutally honest—Chase was loath to completely discourage his fledgling charges. Clark recounted a moment in their weekly criticism when the master, having nothing positive to say regarding a student's picture, managed to compliment him on the way he held his brush.[27]

After a few months at the school, Clark wrote "this morning got a good crit from Chase and like his instruction very much. He thinks as I do that after a man is taught to draw he cannot be taught to paint, but must have it in him."[28] He also developed a close relationship with various classmates, including Marshall Fry, J. Coggeshall Wilson, Melvin Nichols, Eugene Ullman and Lawton Parker. The first semester had its share of triumphs and disappointments. One diary entry for March recorded: "This morning I went to the studio and had a good crit on both of my drawings. And also had a crit on my painting, the first I have tried." [29] The following week he lamented: "This morning went to Chase and got a fair crit on my drawing,

but he thought my painting was a big joke."[30] Clark was a determined student, and consciously self-critical: traits that he retained throughout his student career. A source of his frustration, no doubt, was his dubious health. He was repeatedly ill, and entries throughout the diary record that he went to the doctor to have his stomach "pumped." These gastrointestinal ailments plagued him for several years, ultimately resulting in an operation in 1900. When the semester ended in May, Clark spent a month at his family's home on Comfort Island, but he left in June for Shinnecock, Long Island to attend Chase's Shinnecock Hills Summer School of Art.[31]

The Southside Railroad Line reached the east end of Long Island in 1868, hastening its growth. Wealthy New Yorkers discovered the pristine beaches and shores, and by the 1890s, the area boasted the first incorporated golf course in America, along with a first-class hotel.[32] Wealthy summer residents—feeling a cultural void—raised funds and persuaded William Merritt Chase to open a summer school of art in Shinnecock, Long Island. Between the years 1891 to 1902, students literally invaded the area during the summer. Practicing Chase's mandate to paint *en-plein-air*, aspiring artists filled the local fields.

Clark's colleagues that summer included Eugene Ullman, Marshall Fry, Charles Webster Hawthorne, and J. Coggeshall Wilson (known as Willie). Clark roomed with Ullman and Willie in a farmhouse. A short distance away was the Art Village, the nucleus of the community, which housed a studio and cottages. He wrote to Amelia:

> The station is two and half miles from the house and we go to the village for our mail. The "art village" is only one half mile from here and the studio and some of the students are there. The landlady is the queerest person you ever saw. She talks all the time . . . . The country around here is fine for

> painting and I have done some sketches every pleasant day . . . . Ullman, one of the fellows who was with Chase last winter is boarding here also and he is a big help in inspiring anyone to go to work and made some good starts.[33]

Clark's diaries and correspondence offer an insightful and blunt assessment of the routines. Students worked independently, going to Chase for criticism at various times during the week. Clark recorded several of these experiences: "I went up to the studio and got a good crit on a ton of the sketches. There were a lot of folks there and some rotten work."[34] Several weeks later he remarked: "This morning I mounted some canvases and the went up to crit . . . . Chase congratulated me on my boats."[35] Adjusting to painting *en-plein-air* occasionally involved a few mishaps. Clark recalled how one morning he "went down to the beach with a 28 x 44 and worked along the surf. I got along pretty well, but lost my palette by the waves taking it out to sea."[36] Medora remembered another slight *faux pas*:

> This was before the days of the automobile and Alson laughingly recalled rigging up a contrivance for carrying his paint-box and his easel on his bicycle, and suspending his canvas around his neck like a necklace, where he felt its safety was assured. It was, on the first trip out, but on the trip back a brisk sea breeze sprang up, the canvas caught it like a sail, and like a sail reversed its position, so that Alson arrived home with a replica of his seascape on his sweater.[37]

Life at Shinnecock also involved a fair amount of leisure time. One of Clark's passions was kite flying; a hobby he practiced with abandon on Comfort Island and dabbled in at Shinnecock. The informality at the summer school also allowed students greater access to Chase. One day, Clark and Ullman "hired a rig and drove to Chase—he showed us all the stuff in the studio and had a delightful time." [38] Chase and his large family lived in a house designed by Standford White's firm, a short

distance from the village. His house, studio, and children provided ample subject matter for the master during his summers at Shinnecock.

Instead of remaining the entire season, Clark left at the end of June for Comfort Island, but not without regrets. "I am very sorry to leave this place, as I have had a good time and learned a lot. If I come next year I will miss all the folks I have known this year in the worst way."[39] However, the young artist also had deep personal ties that were satisfied by his time with family and friends on the island. This period became especially precious in the wake of his move to New York and separation from his loved ones. Returning to New York after the 1897 summer hiatus, Clark reported in a letter to Amelia: "I went to the studio this morning and found quite a number of the old fellows there, Miller, [Melvin Nichols] Nic, [Marsall] Fry, Ullman, Colby and [Frank Marseden] London, although [J. Coggeshall] Wilson isn't back yet. Ullman has a studio downstairs and wants me to go halves with him, but I don't want to board in that building."[40] Instead, he rented an apartment at 82 Lexington Avenue, complete with a fireplace and antique furniture. In spite of the commodious surroundings, Clark longed for the emotional support of family and friends. He confessed to Amelia:

> I miss not having someone to talk to about the day's success and failures and adventures, and the good reading and drinking times we had last winter . . . . I will probably miss our flat family a lot more before the winter is over.[41]

Living alone for the first time precipitated growing pains, forcing Clark to confront the shenanigans and enticements of adult life. For example, behavior at the studio could be less than decorous:

> On Friday we had a terrible time at the studio as new man sent in a treat and

> four fellows got pretty well loaded and when I went around to get a drawing about two-thirty I found them singing and dancing and the model gone home, so we took them down to a studio downstairs and straightened them out.[42]

He continued to equivocate regarding his progress. On the one hand, he lamented, "It seems funny now that I try to think my work is good enough to be accepted, and yet know all the time that it will not be."[43] Alternatively, he observed, "Chase said I was doing much better than last year."[44] Right after Thanksgiving he had a breakthrough, receiving an award at a significant concours. [45] However, by January 1898 he was once again feeling ill at ease. "I am going to work hard," he wrote, "and see if I can't do better in my work although I can see I am improving, but I am not doing half I can."[46]

That February, Clark had an unexpected experience: " I painted a figure last week and Chase came around and worked on it and made a daisy thing of it, so I have kept it, as it is almost a 'Chase' although I did put on the color but he pushed it around and made it fine."[47] The painting, *Early Nude* (fig. 1.3) includes an inscription on the verso reading "Prof. W. Chase worked on this." The work retains a devotion to outline, but paint is loosely applied in large, bravura brushstrokes—definitely reflecting Chase's influence (and in this case, his own hand).

One of the remarkable aspects of studying with Chase was the master's personal relationship with so many artists, both American and European. In 1897, Clark recorded that Frank Duveneck was visiting at the school.[48] Present for a visit the following year was the European artist, Giovanni Boldini, characterized as a "witty fellow—little short, fat Frenchman." [49] Many students cultivated important friendships, and Clark was especially fond of Ullman (whom he called Ully).[50]

Ullman was an excellent influence, a strong inspiration, a good friend, and the two often worked together in the afternoons in Ullman's studio. By March 1898, even the self-effacing Clark had to admit: " I am working hard now and painting most of the time and I find that it helps my drawing a great deal as I have to see the big masses and the planes much better . . . . I get surprised at the work I am doing now compared with the bad stuff I did last winter."[51]

Nonetheless, Clark continued to miss Amelia's companionship. The previous year's skepticism about New York turned into fascination and wonder, and he longed to share it with her:

> I know so many more things to do and have discovered so many interesting spots on my solitary journeys. No one enjoys those things the way you do and they will not linger around the ships and are always looking at their watches and saying they ought to be home and all such nonsense.[52]

As soon as the semester ended in late April, Clark left New York for Watertown, New York, the closest city to Comfort Island and Amelia's hometown. He and Mela (her pet name)—spent a great deal of time together—and Clark visited with his family. It should be noted that Amelia was Clark's best friend, but never a love interest.[53] The two remained close even after Clark's marriage to Medora.

He left in June for another summer at Shinnecock, and, together with Ullman and two other students, rented a farmhouse. The large grounds included a corncrib, barn, two chicken houses and twenty chickens. Their neighbor allowed the boys to construct a make shift golf course on her lot.[54] Golf, along with other social activities, was not to be taken lightly. The Fourth of July party included barrel, potato, and egg races, along with various other activities.

In spite of the bonhomie of his colleagues, Clark missed Amelia. "I had a fine half hour in the center of the field watching the sunset and letting my imagination have complete swing for the time being," he wrote. "You are about the only one I know of who knows how to enjoy a sunset. If the boys go out with me they begin to tell of the meat and crackers they have to get tomorrow. What does meat and crackers got to do with a sunset, anyway?" [55]

Musing on the sunsets did give way to the more practical concerns—especially criticism from the master. Twice during that summer, once at the end of June and again at the end of July, Chase kept works that Clark submitted for criticism; and at the latter date he offered a substantial compliment: " [Chase] said he considered one of them the truest things he had ever seen done in his class. I expect to leave here a week from Tuesday, and I will be very sorry to go as I am getting much interested in my work and am getting along, I guess."[56] Apparently, he was not sorry to leave his accommodations, remarking "I took a wagon and left the terrible old place for the last time thank goodness. I never left a place before without regret."[57]

Interestingly enough, Clark's diary for the summer does not discuss his impending plans to leave for Europe in the fall. He had considered the possibility of going abroad since the beginning of the year, as Chase fully supported his students' exodus to study in Paris.[58] According to Medora, there was substantial correspondence and debate that summer regarding the merits of different trans-Atlantic steamships.[59] Directly from Shinnecock, Clark returned to Comfort Island for several months. Once again, he does not record his reservations about leaving his

family until November, when the reality of his voyage was imminent: "My dear Mama, how I hate to leave her for so long. I do love her so." [60]

On November 5, 1898—along with his classmates J. Coggeshall Wilson (Willie) and Melvin Nichols (Nic)—Clark sailed for Europe on the S. S. Marquette. On board, they met William Schumacher, another art student bound for Europe. The trip across the Atlantic was mostly uneventful—they played shuffleboard, read, walked the decks—but rough seas eventually won out. To Amelia he wrote, "started to have rough weather on Sunday morning and have rolled and pitched ever since. Sunday it was all guess work with me whether things were going to stay put in my stomach or not. My dinner only staid [sic] long enough for me to get to the side of the ship . . . ." [61]

Arriving in London on November 16, the group immediately sought out the museums. The British Museum offered works by Raphael, Titian, Rubens, and Michelangelo. They also visited John Singer Sargent's studio.[62] The National Gallery was particularly noteworthy:

> We have been seeing the sights and galleries since we arrived. Yesterday we went to the National Gallery and we enjoyed so many fine pictures. Velasquez has six masterpieces there and there are two beautiful Hals. We staid [sic] in front of those most of the time although there were some fine Rembrandts and others we admired. I am going to get reproductions of all . . . .We went to the Kensington Galleries on Thursday and saw the cartoons by Raphael . . . . They are not great in technique or brushwork, but the beautiful harmony of color and the bigness of them and composition is surely wonderful.[63]

In spite of London's appeal (aside from the weather), the group needed to reach their final destination. They left for Paris on November 23 and were met by their colleagues Lawton Parker and Eugene Ullman, both of whom were already

established with studios and apartments. Taking up temporary residence at the Hotel Minerve, they began to look for studios the following morning. The process was slightly disheartening, Clark complaining that they were all "gloomy and dirty."[64] They decided to temporarily share a studio with Ullman and remain at the hotel. In the meantime, they went to visit the Académie Julian, Clark finding it "disgusting."[65] Clark was not the first American to find the conditions at Julian less than appealing. Henry Ossawa Tanner, who worked at Julian's from 1891 to 1896, was quite blunt:

> The Académie Julian! Never had I seen or heard such a bedlam—or men waste so much time. . . . I had often seen rooms full of tobacco smoke, but not as here in a room never ventilated—and when I say never, I mean not rarely but never, during the five or six months of cold weather. Never were windows opened . . . . Fifty or sixty men smoking in such a room for two or three hours would make it so that those on the back rows could hardly see the model.[66]

Luckily, the process of securing an apartment was less daunting than expected, and they quickly engaged a place at 17 Rue Dragon.[67] Within a few days, the group enrolled at James Abbot McNeill Whistler's atelier, the Académie Carmen (named for his long time model Carmen Rossi), located at 6 Passage Stanislas in Montparnasse. Clark's initial reaction was that the school was "rotten."[68] In certain respects, the decision to join Whistler's atelier was surprising. Whistler was difficult, vitriolic and pugnacious—the antithesis of Chase. He spent a career alienating clients and other artists, Chase among them.[69] His ill behavior was notorious, although Sarah Burns has noted that this persona was, in fact, deliberately cultivated:

> Whistler's version of himself, and his versions of the artistic personality, were formulations successfully compounded to attract, intrigue, and amuse in an era of surfaces, publicity, and consumption. By so inimitably displaying 'artistic temperament' he performed the act of an artist as few

others could."[70]

Nonetheless, Whistler's complex personality—and difficult temperament—did not easily lend itself to teaching instruction, undoubtedly contributing to the school's failure in 1900. Clark observed: "Whistler is a funny little fellow and is nervous as can be. He makes a noise like he is grooming a horse when he paints."[71] Will Howe Foote, a fellow student at the school and friend of Clark's, recounted in his later years some of Whistler's antics:

> When he did appear among the students, Whistler would do so in full dress—cane, gloves and all—followed by an attendant. When the great man was moved to do so, he would pause before a cringing student's wet canvas and, using the tips of his gloved fingers, inscribe corrections into the paint. He would then cast the soiled glove aside, accept a fresh glove from the attendant, slip it on, proceed to the next student.[72]

By the end of December, Clark wrote that he and his colleagues had "quit the Whistler school for good as there is no room to work and we are now busy in the studio all day."[73] In fact, they did not leave, but attended intermittently, the remainder of the time hiring models to work in their studios.[74] He confided to Amelia: "I am sort of in that stage where I know a lot about what I would like to do but can't do it and no master could help me figure that out. I have to grind it out for myself and when I have gotten through that stage I will go back to Whistler again and get some more good." [75]

In spite of himself, Whistler's art was the embodiment of the ideals of the Aesthetic Movement, as defined in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's seminal catalogue, *In Pursuit of Beauty* (1986): "Whistler . . . took the central principles of aestheticism—the expression of beauty through the formal qualities of art—to its extreme".[76] Subjects were an opportunity to explore color and form. His insistence on

"harmony of color," achieved through thin washes of similar tonalities, was an antidote to the high-key palette and divided brushwork of Impressionists. He favored spatial "arrangements," or the juxtaposition of objects used as an exploration of aesthetic relationships.

Clark thoroughly admired Whistler's art, writing to Amelia: "Whistler's portrait of his mother always looks better the more one sees of it and one cannot see it too often." [77] Going to the gallery at the Luxembourg, he "had a fine look at the Whistler and all the other good works. One likes the Whistler more and more one sees it."[78] On New Year's Day, 1899, Whistler had a small soirée for his students at his studio—one of the rare relaxed and social moments with the master. He provided champagne and cigarettes, but more important was the insight Clark acquired regarding Whistler's working methods:

> He showed us several of his starts and finished pictures. They were elegant and really almost came up to the Old Masters. His things are so simple that you look at them a moment and everything comes out but nothing pushes itself forward so that you notice it specially but see the whole thing . . . . He arranges his palette very queerly. He first has black, then raw umber, light red, burnt sierra, Prussian blue, burnt umber, some more black, vermilion, raw sienna, yellow ochre and white . . . . His studio is very dimly lighted and all the walls are of a warm, dark pink.[79]

Unfortunately, almost none of Clark's early student work in Paris, c.1898-1900, remains. However, beginning with extant work from 1901, it is clear that Whistler had a profound effect on Clark (even the way he later arranged his own palette).[80] This will be discussed in detail as various paintings from the first decade of the century are presented later in this chapter and into the next.

Although Clark would have preferred his own studio, on Christmas Eve, 1898, he and Wilson rented a studio on Rue Bouissounade. The studio came complete with

"draperies, rugs, still life, a big suit of armour, tables, model stands and two little bedrooms for storage." [81] He and his companions frequented museums and galleries. The Louvre was a particular favorite, despite his complaint that the paintings were not "well arranged and the pictures are 'skied' in lots of cases and all sorts of jumbles." [82] Although Clark was acclimating to life in France, he was ambivalent about his progress. "You never saw such a horribly uncertain painter as I am," he wrote. "One day I can paint and get quite tickled with myself and the next day and for a week I can't put down a thing that suits me or anywhere near it and feel quite discouraged."[83] And he was feeling alienated from family and familiar surroundings, lamenting: "I had sort of an attack of the blues and would have given money to see somebody else." [84] This melancholia even left him wondering if he could sustain a long-term relationship.[85]

In March, Clark had his first experience with the vagaries of the Parisian art world; that is, he entered his first work in the Salon des Beaux-Arts. [86]His observation of the experience is worth recounting:

> Wednesday Wilson and I went to the Salon to see the stuff carried in and all of the awful things that went in—I never saw such a lot of bad painting. The wagons come up to the entrance and take their wads of pictures in and there are crowds of people watching the stuff enter. I have quite little hope that that [my picture] will pass the jury but one can never tell as there is a great deal of "pull" in the Salon, and as I have not studied under any Frenchmen I may be thrown out. I don't care what happens although of course I would rather it be in than out. Exhibitions after all, are a kind of farce. [87]

In spite of the bravado, he longed for recognition at the Salon. Rejected in April (his particular submission is not known), he wrote, "It doesn't matter to me at all as I haven't a reputation to make and there isn't much honor in being in unless you

get in squarely as only very few do . . . ."[88] However, inclusion continued to be his goal, and his first acceptance came in 1901 (which will be discussed shortly).[89] Whether coincidentally or not, Clark felt especially homesick and lonely after the Salon rejection.[90] His stomach ailments were becoming more acute, but nonetheless he and Wilson left Paris in April to visit the Netherlands, stopping in Brussels, Antwerp, Haarlem, and Amsterdam. The trip was productive, but his physical infirmities became increasingly unpleasant. "I have had a rotten month," he recalled, "not having anything to show for my work and being sick most of the time . . . . I have had more headaches than usual and cannot sleep at night so am discouraged with the whole thing and would like in the worst way to go home and have something done to get well." [91]

Clark returned to Paris and sought more medical advice. The diagnosis: he needed an appendectomy. By early twentieth century medical standards, this was a relatively serious operation, and he doubted whether his parents would even consent.[92] His spirits were low and his work was suffering. Taking a circumspect view, Clark booked passage back to America on June 1, persuaded his parents to acquiesce to the surgery, and scheduled the operation in Chicago for the first week of July.[93]

After recovering for several months, Clark returned to Paris in November—not without some reservations, but determined to stay at least one more year. [94] He organized a studio at 7 Quai Voltaire and settled in. " I am in my own studio and have been here almost a week. It is fine and now that I have bought some draperies the place begins to look furnished . . . . This living alone is fine and beats last winter's

scheme all to pieces. I feel at home in Paris now and I guess will have a fine time this winter." [95]

In fact, Clark did begin to feel at home in Paris beginning that winter of 1900. Aside from the news in March that he was "chucked" from the Salon, the years 1900 to 1901 were both productive and transitional. Clark began to paint the city of Paris—the parks, the bridges, and the buildings. Medora recounted that once Alson organized the requisite permit from the city to paint *en-plein-air*, he began to adapt to painting in front of the public. [96] Unfortunately, few of these works are extant. Luckily, Clark was a dedicated archivist and photographer. Beginning in approximately 1901—and continuing through the 1930's—the artist kept either note cards or notebooks documenting his works, many with small black and white photos attached.[97] Paintings such as *Snow in the Luxembourg*, 1901, *Ile de la Cité*, 1901, *Fall in the Luxembourg*, 1901, and *Rooftops, Paris*, 1901 (all location unknown) were dutifully recorded and photographed.[98] It is difficult to get a true sense of these rather small works solely from inadequate reproductions; however, they all appear to be rather atmospheric and tonal.

Clark's first major success came in 1901 when *The Violinist*, c.1901 (fig.1.4) was accepted—and hung on the line—at the Salon. A Chicago newspaper article suggested that "the happiest man in all Paris . . . was Alson Clark, a young Chicago artist. Miss Fortuna presented him with a notification from the jury of the coming Spring salon in the art center of the world that of five pictures submitted by Mr. Clark, one had been accepted."[99] *The Violinist* is the first clear indication of Whistler's impact on Clark. A solitary figure (the model is unknown) holding a violin

and poised with a bow—as if about to play—is placed in a background of an austere room. Muted tones, with an atmospheric emphasis on brown and green, create a somber and rather brooding mood. The overwhelming sense is of an arrangement—of the placement of the solitary individual with an instrument, and the exploration of dark color—as opposed to interest in personality or a narrative. Clark's reliance on Whistler would become even more pronounced within the next few years. *In the Fog*, 1903 (fig.1.5) a hazy, obfuscated environment with just the slightest suggestion of figures, and *Moonlight in Brittany*, c. 1903 (fig. 1.6), a noctural scene, are clear indications of the master's sway.

With the success of his painting at the Salon still very fresh, Clark remained in Europe for the spring and part of the summer. He set off to Brittany, to a town called Le Pouldu, with a group of friends, among them Frederick Frieseke. Clark had actually visited Le Pouldu the previous summer, but this year the group spent nearly three months. Clark and Frieseke shared a similar student history. Both attended The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, overlapping during the years 1895-96. As Clark's diaries for those years are not extant, it is not certain whether the two met in Chicago, although it is possible. Undoubtedly they became acquainted when both studied with Chase at the Art Students League in New York. [100] Frieseke preceded Clark in France (he left for Paris in 1897), and the two became close friends once Clark arrived in Europe. Frieseke described their holiday in Le Pouldu:

> We are staying in a private house, a fine old country house, part of it built in 1728, so it says on the sun dial . . . .The country seems so lovely and the sea and the river, too . . . . It seems so peaceful down here. The people are slow and I like everything.[101]

Le Pouldu was already an established art colony, hosting the likes of Paul Gauguin, Childe Hassam, Walter Griffin, and John White Alexander at various times. It has been suggested that artists working in Le Pouldu were typically associated with the *Bande Noire* or "Black Gang," a faction of the Nabis closely identified with Charles Cottet and Lucien Simon, who painted depictions of Breton locals in rather dark tonalities.[102] Clark had studied briefly with Simon and Cottet at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière.[103] One of Clark's paintings from his first summer, *Landscape, Le Pouldu, France*, c. 1900 (fig. 1.7) is a sketchy rendering of the surrounding landscape with a single house in the background and just the slightest suggestion of two figures working in the field. Both the palette and composition may be a reference to the paintings of the "Black Gang."

At the end of the summer, Clark returned home to America and spent time at the house on Comfort Island. In the fall, he rented a barn in Watertown from Amelia's parents, and converted it into a studio. His decision to stay in Watertown that fall changed the course of his life in ways he could have never envisioned. It marked the beginning of his professional career, and heralded a new chapter in his personal life.

Clark's experiences, both in New York and in Europe, exposed him to a level of sophistication and training that he could have never received in his native Chicago. Like so many young American art students who studied abroad, their experiences were often both heady and occasionally humiliating. Clark needed to study French (he took lessons) and to learn to navigate through the unfamiliar French academic and

exhibition process. However, the tremendous resources and the highly charged artistic community in Paris mitigated these difficulties. Clark began to develop a personal vocabulary—and even though still strongly under the influence of both Chase and Whistler—he passed through the novitiate stage to slowly emerge with his own point of view.

[1] See Richard Guy Wilson, et al., *The American Renaissance, 1876-1917* (Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1979).

[2] "American Art of the Future, "*Boston Evening Transcript*, February 6, 1893; as quoted in Laura Meixner, *An International Episode: Millet, Monet and Their North American Counterparts* (Memphis: Dixon Gallery and Gardens, 1982), p. 148.

[3] For an excellent assessment of Chase's park scenes see Barbara Galllati, *William Merritt Chase: Modern American Landscapes* (New York: Brooklyn Museum in association with Harry Abrams, Inc., 1999).

[4] "The Slaughter of Mr. Chase's Paintings," *Art Amateur* 5 (April 1891), p. 115.

[5] "Boston Art at Chicago," *Boston Evening Transcript*, January 14, 1893, p. 15. The following year, critic Hamlin Gardland stated: "Art, to be vital, must be local in its subject; its universal appeal must be in its working out, in the way it is done . . . . The Impressionist is not only a local painter, in choice of subjects he deals with the present . . . . He does not feel that America is not without subjects to paint because she has no castles and donjon keeps. He loves nature, not history." See Hamlin Garland, "Impressionism," in *Crumbling Idols: Twelve Essays on Art Dealing Chiefly with Literature, Painting, and the Drama* (1894) new ed., (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960), p. 104; as quoted in H. Barbara Weinberg, Doreen Bolger, and David Park Curry, *American Impression and Realism, The Painting of Modern Life 1885-1915* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art with Harry N. Abrams, 1994), p. 30. For a discussion of cultural nationalist issues around the time of the World's Columbian Exposition, see ibid., pp. 30-33.

[6] H. Barbara Weinberg, "Frieseke's Art Before 1910," in *Frederick Carl Frieseke: The Evolution of an American Impressionist* (Savannah: Telfair Art Museum with Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 54. See also Carolyn Kinder Carr, et al., *Revisiting the White City: American Art at the 1893 World's Fair* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of American Art and the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 1993).

[7] A copy of the transcript interview of Medora Clark, "Biography of Alson Skinner Clark," by Margaret Truax Hunter, Part I (1956) and Part II (1957), is in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Although it is a valuable source of information on the painter, Medora's recollection of specific dates and places is often inaccurate. Nonetheless, her observations and perceptions regarding Alson remain significant (hereafter Hunter Part I or Part II).

[8] Hunter, Part I, p. 1.

[9] Ibid., p. 2.

[10] Information on Clark's transcript from was obtained from Lori Daniels, Academic Records Specialist, Registrar's Office, School of The Art Institute of Chicago.

[11] I am grateful to Edwin H. (Toby) Clark for genealogical information on the Clark and Skinner families.

[12] Deborah Clark provided information regarding the island's name. I am grateful to Ms. Clark for all of her assistance.

[13] Clark's diaries (hereafter Clark Diaries) are part of the unmicrofilmed Alson Skinner Clark Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (hereafter ACP).

[14] Ibid., Clark Diaries, 1889.

[15] For information on his studies see note 8.

[16] Clark to Amelia Baker, October 11, 1895, Deborah Clark Family Archives. Amelia Baker played a key role in Alson's life before he married Medora. He kept up a consistent correspondence with her, even after his marriage. Amelia kept the letters, which are now in the possession of Deborah Clark who graciously shared them with the author (hereafter DCFA).

[17] Hunter, Part I, p. 6.

[18] Clark to Baker, October 1896, DCFA.

[19] Joint diary of Sarah Clark, Amelia Baker, and Alson Clark (1896-97) is owned by Ellen Clark, and was generously loaned to the author. References to that diary hereafter will be known as Ellen Clark Family Archives (ECFA).

[20] Weinberg, "Frieseke's Art Before 1910," p. 56. See also John C. Van Dyke, "The Art Students League of New York," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 83 (October 1891), pp. 688-700.

[21] For Chase see the following: Ronald Pisano, *William Merritt Chase: A Leading Spirit in American Art* (Seattle: Henry Art Gallery, 1983); Barbara Gallati, *William Merritt Chase* (New York: Harry Abrams, Inc. with the National Museum of American Art, 1995); Barbara Gallati, *William Merritt Chase: Modern American Landscapes* (New York: Brooklyn Museum in association with Harry Abrams, Inc. 1999).

[22] Sarah Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in the Gilded Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp.22-23.

[23] An attempt was made to find Clark's student transcript from the Art Students League. Unfortunately his transcript, along with documents of various other students who attended the school at the same period, is lost. I am grateful to Stephanie Cassidy, Archivist, Art Students League, New York, for her assistance.

[24] "From a Talk by William Merritt Chase with Benjamin Northrup of the Mail and Express," *The Art Amateur* 30, 3 (February 1897), p.77.

[25] Peritton Maxwell, "William Merritt Chase—Artist, Wit and Philosopher," *The Saturday Evening Post* (November 4, 1899), p. 347.

[26] Pisano, *William Merritt Chase*, p. 96.

[27] Hunter, Part I, p. 8.

[28] Alson diary entry, February 3, 1897, ECFA.

[29] Ibid., March 6, 1897.

[30] Ibid., March 10, 1897.

[31] For information on Chase and Shinnecock see the following: D. Scott Atkinson, "Shinnecock and the Shinnecock Landscape," in *William Merritt Chase, Summers at Shinnecock*, 1891-1902 (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1988); Katherine Cameron, "The South Fork: Southampton, Shinnecock Hills, and William Merritt Chase," in *The Artist as Teacher, William Merritt Chase and Irving Wiles* (East Hampton: Guild Hall Museum, 1994); H. Barbara Weinberg, Doreen Bolger, and David Park Curry, *American Impressionism and Realism: The Painting of Modern Life, 1885-1915* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art and Harry Abrams, 1994), pp. 105-117; Deborah

Epstein Solon and Will South, *Colonies of American Impressionism: Cos Cob, Old Lyme, Shinnecock and Laguna Beach* (Laguna Beach: Laguna Art Museum, 1999).

[32] See D. Scott Atkinson, " Shinnecock and the Shinnecock Landscape," p. 16.

[33] Clark to Baker, June 7, 1897, DCFA.

[34]Clark Diaries, June 7, 1897, ACP.

[35] Ibid., June 21, 1897.

[36] Ibid., June 26, 1897.

[37] Hunter, Part I, p. 9.

[38] Clark Diaries, June 22, 1897, ACP.

[39] Ibid., June 30, 1897.

[40] Clark to Baker, October 27, 1897, DCFA.

[41] Ibid., Clark to Baker, November 4, 1897.

[42] Ibid., Clark to Baker, November 1897.

[43] Clark Diaries, November 13, 1897, ACP.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Clark to Baker, November 27, 1897, DCFA.

[46] Clark Diaries, January 30, 1898, ACP.

[47] Clark to Baker, February 22, 1898, DCFA.

[48] Chase and Duveneck were old friends. In fact, Chase's portrait of Duveneck, *The Smoker*, won an honorable mention at the Paris Salon in 1881. See Pisano, *William Merritt Chase*, p.149.

[49] Clark Diaries, March 22, 1898, ACP.

[50] Prof. Pierre Ullman, the artist's son, was kind enough to furnish information on the relationship between his father and Clark.

[51] Clark to Baker, March 1898, DCFA.

[52] Ibid.

[53] The author has reviewed extensive correspondence between Amelia and Clark. Nothing in these letters, or in his diaries suggests any romantic involvement.

[54] Clark Diaries, June 14, 1898, ACP.

[55] Clark to Baker, July 1898, DCFA.

[56] Ibid., Clark to Baker, July 28, 1898.

[57] Clark Diaries, August 3, 1898, ACP.

[58] Jean Stern, "Alson Clark: An American At Home and Abroad," in *California Light 1900-1930* (Laguna Beach: Laguna Art Museum, 1990), pp. 114-15.

[59] Hunter, Part I, p. 10.

[60] Clark Diaries, November 2, 1898, ACP.

[61] Clark to Baker, November 8, 1898, DCFA.

[62] Clark Diaries, November 18, 1898, ACP.

[63] Clark to Baker, November 20, 1898, DCFA.

[64] Clark Diaries, November 24, 1898, ACP.

[65] The Académie Julian was founded by the painter Rudolphe Julian. As opposed to the Ecole des Beaux-Art, entrance to Julian's did not require an examination. Students paid a nominal fee to work under the tutelage of artists such as William Bouguereau, Benjamin Constant, and Gustave Boulanger. See Lois Marie Fink, *American Art at the Nineteenth-Century Paris Salons* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1990); see also Catherine Fehere, "New Light on the Académie Julian and Its Founder," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 103 (1984), pp. 207-16.

[66] Henry Ossawa Tanner, "The Story of an Artist's Life, II: Recognition," *World's Work* 18 (June 1909), p. 11770; as quoted in Weinberg, "Frieseke's Art Before 1910," p.58.

[67] Clark Diaries, November 26, 1898, ACP.

[68] Ibid., November 28, 1898.

[69] For an account of the difficulties between Chase and Whistler see Pisano, *William Merritt Chase*, pp. 77-81.

[70] Sarah Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist*, p. 243. The literature on Whistler is extensive. See, for example, David Park Curry, *James McNeill Whistler at the Freer Gallery of Art* (Washington, D. C.: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1984); Richard Dorment, Margaret MacDonald, et al., *James McNeill Whistler* (London: Tate Gallery, 1994); John Walker, *James McNeill Whistler* (New York: Harry Abrams in association with the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1987).

[71] Clark Diaries, November 30, 1898, ACP.

[72] See Nicholas Kilmer, "Frederick Carl Frieseke, A Biography" *in Frederick Carl Frieseke, The Evolution of An American Impressionist*, p. 15.

[73] Clark to Baker, December 20, 1898, DCFA.

[74] Stern noted that his models included a woman called Pauline; a young Italian woman named Louise; and Miss Whitcomb, a model he shared with Will Howe Foote. See Stern, "Alson Clark: An American at Home and Abroad," p. 115.

[75] Ibid., Clark to Baker, February 7, 1899.

[76] See Doreen Bolger Burke, "Painters and Sculptors in a Decorative Age," in *In Pursuit of Beauty, Americans and the Aesthetic Movement* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of New York, 1986), p. 334.

[77] Clark to Baker, January. 6, 1899, DCFA.

[78] Clark Diaries, January 3, 1899, ACP.

[79] Clark to Baker, January 6, 1899, DCFA.

[80] Clark wrote to Amelia that he now had "Prussian blue and Indian red on my palette, and you know what howlers they are if not used with moderation." January 1899, DCFA.

[81] Ibid., Clark to Baker, December 24, 1898.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid., Clark to Baker, February 2, 1899.

[84] Clark Diaries, March 12, 1899, ACP.

[85] He wrote "I could fall in love but think after all I will be an 'old bach' that is if I work hard. If I should be with a very fascinating for a girl for a while where I was idle I'd be afraid I would fall in love . . . . You ain't good natured or forgiving enough to fall in love and are too selfish about the ones you like. You are also indifferent and take offence too easily." Ibid., March 31, 1899.

86 There were two Salons into which one could submit: the Salon sponsored by the Société Nationale des Artistes Francais and the Salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts. The Beaux-Arts was formed in 1890 by a group of dissenters from the Artistes Francais. The new Salon was viewed by its founders as more "democratic," and more willing to accept younger artists. For information on American art at the Salons see Fink, *American Art at the Nineteenth-Century Paris Salons.*

[87] Clark to Baker, March 24, 1899, DCFA.

[88] Ibid., Clark to Baker, April 11, 1899.

[89] Even in 1904, writing to Amelia he complained " I am going to have a figure in [the Salon] this year if I bust in the attempt." Ibid., January 1904.

[90] He wrote, "I don't know when I would like to see the folks more than tonight, as I am half sick and kind of lonesome." Clark Diaries, April 15, 1899, ACP.

[91] Ibid., April recapitulation. He also wrote to Amelia: " I have not written you for a long time, but it wasn't because I had forgotten you, you may be sure. If you read this with mama [sic] don't read it aloud as it would worry her. I haven't been feeling very well and so have not felt like doing anything. I have been to see a Dr. in Paris who gave me some stuff but it doesn't seem to do much good and if I don't feel better soon I am going to fly the coop for America and see some big man." Clark to Baker, May 1899, DCFA.

[92] Clark Diaries, May 3, 1899, ACP.

[93] Medora recounted that Clark's parents were "horrified at the suggestion of an operation. There had been few such appendectomies at the time. Alson was firm, and eventually in Chicago he had his appendix removed and made the front page of the leading Chicago newspaper with so rare an event." Hunter, Part I, p.16.

[94] Writing to Amelia while on board the ship, he lamented: "I was so sorry for myself yesterday that I wanted to swear this would be my last trip to Europe and I would work in America next year . . . . I have sort of recovered from the blues but I have never had such an attack before. I would have given any money to go back to New York after the first day. I am now over that and will work . . . this winter and then go back to stay." Clark to Baker, November 6, 1899, DCFA.

[95] Ibid.., Clark to Baker, November 26, 1899.

[96] Medora recalled an episode when: "Alson was seated on a stool, his box on his lap, painting a doorway in one of the narrow little streets of the Left Bank. It happened to be opposite one of the municipal free soup kitchens, and when he was well along with his subject, a down-at-the-heels man with a cane and a dog on a leash emerged from the kitchen wiping his mouth on his sleeve. A pair of dark glasses were suspended around his neck, and a sign 'Aveugle' [blind] reposed on his coat. He spotted Alson, came over, looked with much appreciation at the painting, talked for a bit, finally adjusted his glass, and set off, his dog leading, and he histrionically tapping the cobbles with his cane. There was no apology for his
faking . . . ." Hunter, Part I, p. 14.

[97] The author has collected these notebooks and cards from a number of various sources, and has produced a source book that, for the first time, incorporates all of this material.

[98] The reproductions were often not more than two inches square, and many have faded with time. Including the reproductions of many of these would be useless.

[99] Unidentified newspaper clipping, 1901, ACP.

[100] For information on Frieseke see Kilmer, et al., *Frederick Karl Frieseke: The Evolution of An American Impressionist.*

[101] Ibid., p. 20.

[102] See David Sellin, "Frieseke in Le Pouldu and Giverny: The Black Gang and the Giverny Group," pp. 74-75, in ibid.

[103] Clark's studio mate in Simon's atelier was the American painter George Aid. For information on Aid and his circle see Michael McCue, *Paris & Tryon: George C. Aid* (North Carolina: Michael McCue, 2003). Jean Stern claims that Clark also studied briefly during with the Czech designer Alphonse Mucha and the artist Luc-Olivier Merson. Clark does not refer to these artists in his diaries or correspondence and I can find no evidence to support that he studied with either. See Stern, "Alson Clark: American at Home and Abroad," p. 115; see also Stern, *Alson S. Clark* (Los Angeles: Peterson Publishing Company, 1983), p. 11.

Chapter Two

Marriage and Early Career

The first part of Clark's career is characterized by the dual influence of both Chase and Whistler. Although Clark's interest in Impressionism fully blossomed by the teens, his devotion to Whistler's aesthetic is still strongly reflected in his early oeuvre. The next phase of his career and personal life is informed by his marriage, an impressive travel schedule, and the development of his personal vocabulary. In 1901, Clark settled at his Watertown studio for the long and snowy winter, producing works such as *Snowstorm Watertown*, 1901 (location unknown), *Snow in Watertown*, 1902 (location unknown), and *An American Winter, 1902* (fig. 2.1). Watertown was a small, provincial city near Lake Ontario and the Canadian border (fig. 2.2). Not surprisingly, Clark was the only professional artist working in the area, and, in addition to his own work, he taught drawing classes to some local students. When he required a model for portrait painting, Atta Medora McMullin (known as Medora), a local girl with whom Clark was acquainted, agreed to pose. Medora recalled: " A painter was . . . not completely understood nor exactly welcome, and posing was completely new to me, but I dressed in a costume he had selected and, accompanied by my mother, descended to the studio." [1]

From that point on, Medora regularly posed for Clark—and love bloomed—in spite of the artist's apprehensions. "In the evening I would have liked to have seen Medora," he noted, "but stayed home and wrote. I have no more business in marrying than the man in the moon for I am fickle and can't help myself. It is a misfortune and not a fault."[2] On the one hand, he didn't want to "deceive her," by allowing the

relationship to progress, but just a few days later he wrote, "In the afternoon she posed. I could not work, as I wanted to tell her that I loved her but could not. We sat by the fire knowing each other's minds."[3] By the end of January, Clark professed his love and the two decided to marry. He confessed, "I love her so much that I could give up anything for her."[4]

Although they had not known each other very long, it was a passionate meeting of the hearts as minds, as she described:

> It is certainly so wonderful how love can grow. Starting with a feeble, doubtful root it gathers strength each day . . . . I find it queer how a man who has known me only a few short months should understand me better than my family and people who have known me my entire life and that I should be willing to leave all my associations and go into strange places with him.[5]

Clark was overwhelmed by his feelings: "We seem to be so suited and I could be anywhere with her and can now be perfectly happy, for I have analyzed my unhappiness and know it was about my family."[6] Although never explicitly stated as such, it appears that Clark's family was originally resistant to the idea of his marriage to her, yet he would not be deterred.

During the winter of 1902, Clark worked on *The Black Race* (fig. 2.3), a winter scene that depicts a wash along the Black River near Watertown. Bare vertical trees stabilize the foreground, leading back to a row of squalid apartments. The river is partially frozen, the scene bleak. Jean Stern has observed that in both subject and treatment, this work evokes the influence of Robert Henri and The Eight (the group did not actually receive the epithet until 1907).[7] According to Stern, the work "is a somber winter scene on the sluice, or race, on the river near Watertown . . . . Its provocative subject—urban despoilage—has parallels in the work of the 'Ash Can

School,' which frequently focused on the downtrodden, and on the seamier elements of city life."[8] Although this painting may be reminiscent of their works, we must be careful to not to confuse Clark's interpretation with the often hard-boiled social commentary of The Eight. Clark did not sanitize his scenes, nor did he invest them with a subtext or social agenda. On March 8 he submitted this work to the Society of American artists, and on March 24 he received an acceptance letter.[9] Unfortunately, the work was not singled out in the *New York Times* review of the exhibition.[10]

That March was an especially noteworthy month. With Medora's help, Clark organized his first solo exhibition in Watertown of several dozen small paintings. Clark was always cognizant of his financial obligations, writing on the eve of the exhibition that "tomorrow begins my career as an artist and with that the knowledge that some of my works may bring us our living."[11] His financial situation never approached dire; in fact, Clark was more fortunate than most artists. In the 1890s, his father purchased the Wadsworth-Howland Paint Company (later renamed the Jewel Paint Company), in the hope that his sons would enter the business. Ultimately, the boys were uninterested (although Mancel was involved for a period of time), but the business did provide an outside income for the artist and his siblings throughout their lives.

The exhibition included small works—the boulevards and cafés of Paris, St. Germain, The Luxembourg Gardens, and Montmartre. Medora described a thrilling, if not terrifying experience for all concerned:

> There is nothing so exciting, so tremulous, so breath-taking as the preparation for the first show, and I have always been grateful that I was in on it, though at the time I hardly understood what it was all about. . . . The hour which we had set—two o'clock—on account of the light bewildered the Watertown

> viewers a little, but the subject matter of the pictures bewildered them still more. They were used to a form of isolated native art with floral pieces predominant, and Paris street scenes were practically unknown in their world.[12]

Approximately forty people attended, and a few pictures were sold; Medora considered the event a "grand success."[13] From Watertown the paintings traveled to Chicago for an exhibition at the Anderson Galleries. This, in fact, was his first major exhibition and included works such as *Ile de la Cité*, 1901, *Snow in the Luxembourg*, 1901 (fig. 2.4), and *The Violinist*.

The critical response was overwhelmingly positive for the "Chicago boy," with a consensus that the "young man certainly has decided talent."[14] One critic noted, "a rare collection of paintings has been on exhibition at the Anderson Art Gallery . . . . The artist has been abroad some time . . .[and] indeed his exhibition is quite credible. He paints broadly and with discrimination and grasps the picturesque."[15] The *Chicago Tribune* declared, "popular opinion has decided that it is a very promising display for a young artist . . . . Mr. Clark has a style of his own. It is suggestive of Japanese reminiscences, is refined and pleasantly frank . . . . The sentimental does not interfere with the boldness of using masses."[16] It was recognized that Clark was a neophyte, but one with tremendous potential; and certainly Whistler's influence could not be ignored.[17] The reviewer for the *Chicago Times Herald* summed it up in the following way:

> These forty pictures are tangible tokens of an unusual talent that will undoubtedly achieve recognition when it has reached its full development. It is not claimed for these pictures that they are the masterpieces of a finished artist, but rather a collection of studies from the brush of a very clever student. The predominating charm of all his work is in the harmony of tone, which lies in the streets, quais, and rooftops of Paris.[18]

On the heels of this success, Clark traveled to New York City in April to see *The Black Race* at the Society of American Artists exhibition.[19]

This was a defining period for the artist. With his career launched, and a new love, he even toyed with the notion of converting to Catholicism:

> Atta [Medora] is so fortunate in good faith and I hope God will help me to love him for tonight I believe in him and believe he has put us together for our happiness. It seems almost profane to talk with others of Atta, as she is such a saint in all ways and I feel my unworthiness of her, although she has been so fortunate in being here and able to love God with her beautiful nature. May God help me to know him as she knows him and take the devil out of my soul.[20]

Up until this point, Clark's connection to religion, of any sort, was minimal. Evidently, he perceived (at the time it was written) that a divine intervention brought him and Medora together. The way he characterized Medora—as a "saint"—is also worthy of some consideration. The insights from Clark's diaries were completely personal and never intended for public consumption: through these blunt and unmediated sources we are voyeurs into the artist's heart and soul. This idolization of Medora was, at least partially, the musings of a young man in love and on the brink of marriage. Alson was a romantic, and remained so throughout his life. As his later correspondence will attest, the two sustained a love affair long after the newlywed bliss retreated; and she was an unwavering source of support and encouragement, completely convinced of his genius and unlimited potential.

Clark's abilities were challenged on a larger scale when he accepted a mural commission in 1902 for an elementary school in Chicago. Although an unlikely choice—having had no experience as a muralist—the school under construction was to be named in honor of his great-uncle and successful businessman, Mancel

Talcott.[21] As noted earlier, Mancel and his wife Mary raised Clark's mother, and the families were close. It is safe to assume that nepotism played a role.

His choice for a subject was the Pied Piper of Hamlin, an allegory based on the Robert Browning poem: an unusual selection, at best, focusing on the disastrous repercussions of lying (fig. 2.5).[22] The Inventory of American Painting only lists five other Pied Piper images—just one preceding Clark's. Given the lack of prior examples, this subject was a particular visual challenge for the young artist. A large enterprise—twelve feet long and four feet high—it was intended to grace the main hall of the school (it remains extant).[23] He worked on the mural throughout the month of July, using local children as models for the many figures.[24] Clark was pleased with the outcome, and the mural was installed that September. He did have some problems articulating the scale—particularly the juxtaposition of the children in the foreground in relation to the background—yet the overall composition does manage to maintain its integrity. This early interest in mural painting was a precursor to the role mural painting would play much later in his career, in California.

Clark and his fiancée were married on September 30, 1902. A notice appeared in the *Watertown Daily Times*, October 1, 1902, announcing the nuptials. [25] On October 18, they left for Europe on the S.S. Minnetonka for a planned residence of undetermined length, arriving in Paris on October 30.[26] Very fortuitously, the couple found an apartment the following day at 6, Rue Victor Considerant, signed the lease and moved in on November 7. Alson wrote that we "woke up in our new place this morning very happy and pleased to be here."[27] Medora described the apartment:

> The rental, one hundred francs a month—about twenty dollars—was more than we could afford, but it was a charming apartment with two fireplaces,

> each topped with mirrors, and a stone balcony running all across the front. It was the balcony that sold it to us, and in a way it proved a sound investment for it was used in many motifs with figures afterward.[28]

The kitchen was rudimentary—but perfectly functional—and they kept a flat English tub under the bed, which allowed for a bath each morning. Once a week they allowed themselves the luxury of a long, hot bath at the local bathhouse.[29]

In November, Clark recorded that he was attending the Académie Viti with Willie (J. Coggeshall Wilson).[30] He continued to paint Parisian scenes, embracing varying aspects of the city, such as two views of construction from his apartment, *From Our Window Paris*, 1903 (fig. 2.6) and *From Our Window, Construction*, 1903 (fig. 2.7). Both images focus on the masonry workers in the foreground, but the former encompasses a more comprehensive view, including the cemetery of Montparnasse in the middle ground and a view of apartments in the background.[31] From small studies of boats on the Seine (fig. 2.8), to vignettes such as the *Place Saint Michel* (fig. 2.9) and Whistlerian figure studies such as *Repose* (fig. 2.10), Clark was testing his versatility as an artist.

Not long after the Clarks settled in their apartment, Frederick Frieseke (whose friendship with the artist was introduced in the previous chapter) returned to Paris and settled into rooms just above the couple at 6 Rue Victor Considerant. In fact, Medora wrote that Frieseke actually lived with them before finding his own accommodations.[32] Among the constellation of American artists in France during the early 20th century, Clark friends included such notables as Lawton Parker, Will Howe Foote, Henry Hubbell, Richard Miller, and Guy Rose. However, he was especially close to Frieseke in these early years. In his study of Frederick Frieseke, Nicholas

Kilmer has noted that before Frieseke married, the Clarks provided him with "familial stability and comradeship. The three shared meals and evenings of Parcheesi or bezique." Medora even "sewed his buttons on." [33] Clark and Frieseke spent many evenings playing billiards together and discussing aesthetics. Frieseke painted from the Clark's apartment balcony (fig. 2.11), and often used Medora as a model, in works such as *The Green Sash* (fig. 2.12), awarded a silver medal at the St. Louis Exposition in 1904 and later purchased by William Merritt Chase.[34]

The artists shared a deep appreciation of Whistler, and explored images of women in their boudoirs—both nude and clothed. There was a clear dialogue between the two, and a comparison between Frieseke's *Sleep* (fig. 2.13) and Clark's *Reclining Nude* (fig. 2.14) is one of several pairs that could be evaluated. In this instance, the artists present sleeping, recumbent women in an interior setting. Each figure is painted in creamy flesh tones and reclines on white bedcovers. Both paintings have erotic overtones that are nonetheless tempered by the somnambular state of the sitters (making them less available). Clark and Frieseke are, of course, referencing their academic study of the nude, and maintain a devotion to outline. Nonetheless, loosely painted passages in both works suggest their impressionistic leanings. Both artists maintained this duality of technique—as did so many American painters—successfully integrating a myriad of interests and influences.

Scenes of clothed women in interiors—particularly women in front of mirrors or holding mirrors—were of interest to both. Frieseke's *Reflections* (fig. 2.15) and Clark's *Medora with Handglass* (fig. 2.16) and *Powder Puff* (fig. 2.17) incorporate the reflective device, by then a familiar leitmotif. While emulating Whistler both

formally and thematically, they were also influencing each other—as well as looking at other artists in their extended circle such as Miller and Parker.

Medora's recollections of their years abroad together are an invaluable record of conditions for American painters in Paris during the early years of the twentieth century. At first, Clark was one of the only married men, and the couple's apartment became a gathering spot for friends and acquaintances. Artists sought out each other for moral and occasionally financial support, for intellectual discourse, and for fun. Medora recounted that many in the group were musical, so they rented a piano—in spite of the financial obligation. Occasionally, discussions on the merits of different painting techniques were heated :

> The burning question that year concerned Velasquez. There were two schools of thought, one which claimed he glazed, and one which claimed he didn't. The earnest arguments around our fire, pro and con, would consume an entire evening. [35]

Medora often simply observed discussions, and she occasionally (but not often) resented participating in various events. "The Hubbells' had a tea this afternoon which was positively the stupidest thing we ever got into," she observed. "I never saw anything so pointless and Hubbell is such a large bag of wind and Mrs. H with all her ideas about feelings in paintings."[36] Life did start to take on familiar patterns: Sundays were spent at the Louvre or viewing a current exhibition, and they often attended a church service. Daylight was precious and their finances limited, so the couple regularly retired to bed early instead of going out—contrary to what some of their American friends liked to imagine was a boisterous Parisian social life.

The painters worked assiduously during the winter in order to prepare for the spring Salon. As part of that preparation, they analyzed each other's works—by

invitation—offering blunt assessments.[37] Many assisted each other when it came time to actually deliver the paintings to the Salon, often renting and sharing wagons. They even exchanged formal clothing, worn at Salon openings. Medora remembered: "Many painters didn't possess the required outfit, so there would be a hurried return to some base, a quick exchange, and the frock coat and hat would make a second trip to the Salon on a smaller but happy man."[38] During the spring of 1903 Clark submitted *Snow in Watertown* to the Salon, but the work was rejected.

The Clarks were looking ahead to the summer months of 1903 when a friend who had traveled in Brittany the previous year suggested they pool resources and rent rooms in an old château in Rochefort-en-Terre.[39] The town was isolated—five miles away from a train station—and it retained its unspoiled Breton charm. Clark was lured by the possibility of painting the medieval architecture and the local population. They rented the château, complete with a cook and servants, and integrated themselves into the life of the town. On Tuesdays and Fridays they attended the markets, becoming immersed in the local culture, food, and costumes. Medora described this scene:

> Each inhabitant, young and old still wore the costumes; the man, velvet-bound straw Breton sailors, with velvet streamers hanging down to their waists, long loose blue linen smocks—sometimes embroidered—the women, double coiffed black long loose-sleeved bodies, full skirts, ground length, small folded woolen shawls, and woolen or silk for fêtes—aprons with bibs.[40]

Clark memorialized these events in works such as *Breton Market, Rochefort* (fig. 2. 18). He found the town, with its medieval architecture and unspoiled landscape, a worthy subject in, for example, *Rochefort-en-Terre* (fig. 2.19) and *A Breton*

Homestead (fig. 2.20). Clark's palette continues to be limited and somewhat dark—especially in the latter—but his brush stroke is lively and bold.

When the Clarks returned to Paris during the fall of 1903 he resumed his fascination with painting the city. In both *The Latin Quarter*, 1904 (fig. 2.21) and *Bridge Builders*, 1904 (fig. 2.22), the artist retreated from his rather dark and limited palette of the previous years, using sunlight to bathe his canvases and experimenting with a wider range of colors. *The Latin Quarter*, with its infusion of light and clear delineation of shadows, captures the immediacy of life in that bustling section of Paris. *The Bridge Builders* continues Clark's interest on the theme of construction—seen earlier in *From Our Window* (fig. 2.6)—this time focusing on the major task of erecting a bridge. Once again, Clark seizes the ephemeral, freezing a brief moment from its construction. This large, exhibition size work (30 x 38) was seen at several venues, including the Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition of 1904, and the Society of American Artists in 1905. Although the *New York Times* reviewed the formidable Society show (nearly five hundred paintings were exhibited), no critical notice was given to Clark.[41]

Correspondence in 1904 from Clark to Amelia substantiates that he was intentionally working on a larger scale: "I am busy as possible now with my stuff. I am doing some of my street scenes on a larger scale and getting on very well with it. I think these are the first serious efforts I have made to do that [and] I hope to improve a lot."[42] Where he acknowledged progress, he expressed frustration with the inadequacies of the Salon to Amelia: " I am anxiously awaiting the result of the Salon this year and am sure I have one in for a dealer here said so . . . . All of the boys seem

to have had a bad time at the new Salon this year and I don't know as it pays to send there any more as there are so few works exhibited."[43] Despite his equivocation, *Stone Cutters* was accepted and exhibited at the Salon for that year.[44] Nonetheless, he suggested that the couple might return to America, as he was "awfully tired of waiting over here for something to turn up, and . . . one never sells anything in France, where at home there are so many more opportunities to do that."[45]

In fact, by the spring of 1904, Alson's work was selling rather briskly in America[46]; and he was represented at the Society of American Artists exhibitions for 1903 and 1904. (The *New York Times* does not cite Clark's work in its reviews for either year.)[47] Between sales, and some unexpected financial support from Clark's parents, the couple found themselves willing and able to finance an Italian expedition.[48] This was an extended trip—lasting through the months of April and May—and included cities such as Genoa, Pisa, Rome, Naples, Pompeii, Florence, Bologna, and Venice. In Venice, they met up with Lawton Parker and his wife. Italy's beauty was consuming and its treasures alluring.

Clark's notebooks document that he sketched continuously on this trip. He painted the streets of Naples (fig. 2.23) and St. Mark's in Venice. Many images are unlocated, however, a few, including *The Nestling City, Genoa*, 1904 (fig. 2.24) and *Forests of the Masts, Genoa* are extant (fig. 2.25). The latter work, with vertical masts of the boats establishing the foreground, is a complicated and successful composition.

By that fall, he had completed a number of Italian pictures: fourteen were exhibited at The Art Institute of Chicago in October.[49] The season was capped by a visit from his parents, who, according to Medora, stayed until the following summer

(1905). [50] In addition to his street scenes, Clark painted several figure studies during that fall and winter. The artist's interest in figure studies was introduced earlier in the chapter, and, throughout his life, Medora was his primary model.

Once again, Clark's documentation from his notebooks provides far more comprehensive insight into the artist's oeuvre than we would otherwise have. Medora in costume, such as in *The Black Fan*, 1905 (fig. 2.26), resonates with Whistler's influence. In fact, he specifically deemed works "Whistlerian," on the back of many of his note cards, unabashedly stating his indebtedness to the master. A study for *La Toilette* (fig. 2.27), including a fashionably clothed woman placed front of a mantle with a mirror (with a notation referring to Whistler on the verso of the note card) is a precursor to perhaps his greatest homage to Whistlerian portraiture, *The Necklaces*, 1905 (fig. 2.28). Medora, clothed in a flowing gown, stands with her back to the viewer as she examines different necklaces. She is placed in front of an elegant mantelpiece. A mirror above offers the viewer a reflection of her profile, focusing on her elongated neck and bare shoulders. The décor, including the floral wallpaper, jar on the mantle, and carpet, suggest Oriental influences. Certainly, *The Necklaces* is easily compared to a work such as Whistler's *Symphony in White, No. 2, The White Girl, 1864* (Tate Gallery, London).[51] The points of affiliation are visually explicit, and the underlying focus in both compositions is the relationship of aesthetic elements—while traditional notions of portraiture are challenged.

During the summer of 1905 the couple visited Liege, Brussels, Antwerp, and Amsterdam. Medora specifically commented on how they were impressed by the paintings of Vermeer, Franz Hals and Gerard Terborch.[52] On July 12, they boarded a

ship in Antwerp bound for New York City, arriving twelve days later. After a brief stay in New York City they left for Watertown, spending the rest of summer dividing their time between Comfort Island and Watertown. In the fall, Clark established a studio in Chicago. He always felt an affinity to Chicago, particularly when his parents were alive. However, Clark was well aware of New York's primary commercial importance, and during this time he began to document a critical and ongoing relationship with the New York art dealer, William Macbeth.

William Macbeth spent his career waging a persistent (and often uphill) battle to convince the American public of the efficacy of purchasing American, rather than European paintings.[53] An immigrant from Ireland who began his career working for a print dealer in Brooklyn, Macbeth became the standard bearer for the promotion of American painting, writing that "the work of American artists has never received the full share of appreciation that it deserves, and the time has come when an effort should be made to gain for it the favor of those who have hitherto purchased foreign art exclusively."[54] He was a trusted friend and advisor to artists and clients alike, and a twentieth-century tastemaker.

The first extant correspondence between Clark and Macbeth dates from October, 1905, as Clark noted: "I am sending you today via American Express seven paintings which you so kindly asked to see. The two winter scenes are American . . . . I have several other American pictures I can let you have later."[55] Clark specifies them as "American," making a clear distinction between these and his European scenes. Several months later, Macbeth facilitated the sale of one of Clark's paintings, *Snow in Watertown*, to William Merritt Chase. Naturally, Clark was honored merely

at the master's notice. " I feel it a great compliment," he wrote to Macbeth, "to have as great an artist as Mr. Chase take an interest in my picture, and would be glad to let him have it for one hundred and fifty dollars."[56] When the deal was consummated a few months later, Clark once again acknowledged his indebtedness. " I feel deeply complimented of Mr. Chase's favor and wish to thank you for your kindness in aiding to place my work with such a distinguished man."[57]

The winter of 1906 was a watershed for Clark in several ways. The major event of the beginning of the year was a one-man exhibition of his work at The Art Institute of Chicago from January 2 to January 21.[58] Medora recounted that the exhibition opened in the midst of a fierce blizzard, but frigid conditions outside did not affect the warm response. A total of forty-five canvases were displayed, the selection ranging from scenes of Paris, Italy, and Brittany, to portraits.[59] Critics were enthusiastic and complimentary. The reviewer in the *Chicago Post* noted: "Mr. Alson Skinner Clark's . . . canvases, including portraits, sketches of Paris and Venice and other old-world haunts are in the spirit of men of the new salon who are painting from observation and taking their ways along the lines of art interpretation without the traditional methods of the older coterie." He further concluded, "The old school artist led us to expect finished pictures, complete in composition and brush work. The man of the new salon studies values of color, light, tone, and to him any bit of city or garden or roadside life furnishes pictures told briefly and to the point."[60] *The Bridge Builders* (fig. 2.22) was especially singled out for its "treatment in color values."[61] The critic for the *Chicago Record Herald* also acknowledged that particular painting.

"*The Bridge Builders*," he declared, "is striking and admirably conveys the hurry and bustle of activity."[62] He went on to praise the entire exhibition:

> Alson S. Clark . . . as a member of the new salon, represents his versatility in technique. Picturesque rooftops, scenes in Brittany, Paris, Naples and London are effectively shown with fine appreciation the picturesque side of those delightful places. In the snow scenes, Mr. Clark demonstrates a judicious knowledge of color values and method of treatment which is valuable for comparison with the work of artists who are adhering to more conservative methods. This artist believes that a picture should be decorative in character, but not necessarily garish in color, but expressive.[63]

The convincing atmospheric effects of *In the Fog* (fig. 1.5) were recognized as an analogue for a state-of-mind. "Another of the strong introspective paintings is *In The Fog*," noted one critic. "This artist has accomplished that most difficult of feats, the transmission to the beholder of the feeling of actual physical repugnance engendered by the spirit of the mist. He has not painted a scene. He has painted a human emotion."[64]And Harriet Monroe, who would become a staunch supporter of the artist, gave a positive, if tempered appraisal. "Mr. Clark's exhibition is unequal, but considering the artist's youth, promising and shows a certain amount of real achievement. He is most successful in street scenes and garden scenes, glimpses of crowds or rooftops by night or day, and at his worst in portraits . . . . Better than any single picture, I like the free and joyous spirit of [all] of them. It is this which charms, which convinces me that this young painter has real merits in him, in spite of his present incompleteness."[65]

Medora bubbled with enthusiasm, stating that she had "never had a prouder moment in being the wife of such a really great man."[66] She also suggested that, for the first time, Clark felt "established," giving voice to the young artist's self-doubt.[67] However, by mounting a successful exhibition in his hometown—in fact, at the

institution where he studied—the artist took an emotional step forward in his confidence and maturity. Before the exhibition ended, Clark wrote to Macbeth, asking if he might be interested in taking some of the pieces for sale in New York.[68]

Medora described the winter of 1906 as a very social one for the couple, and the entertaining was often quite formal: "People gave many dinners for us that winter; we dined out almost every night. The men were always in tails and white ties, the women in elegant décolleté gowns and long white gloves, only the fingers of which were removed and tucked in at the wrist, after the assemblage was seated at the table." [69] Despite the social obligations, Clark worked fervently during this period in Chicago. One of his more unusual works from this period is the interior of the *Carson Pirie Scott and Company Store*, 1905 (fig. 2.29). The landmark department store—built in stages between 1899 and 1904—was the architectural brainchild of Louis Sullivan, the father of modern architecture, and the prophet of the modern commercial skyscraper. It was still relatively new when Clark surveyed one section of the bustling store, capturing the movements of the patrons (mostly women) as they shopped. Clark's technique in this work is highly impressionistic. Figures and merchandise are merely suggested by dabs of color and brush stroke. The focus is on spontaneity and immediacy: time is suspended. His freedom in the handling of paint has, until this point, never been more pronounced. This work represents a significant step—a point of departure—for his practice of Impressionist techniques. This is not to suggest that he devoted himself wholly to Impressionism from that point on. It does, however, make an interesting contrast to the more "Whistlerian" inspired paintings that inform the early years of his career.

It has already been established that Clark was an avid painter of Paris; his interest in urban life was transferred to Chicago during his stay in 1906. Always affable, Clark befriended one of the bridge tenders on the Chicago River, who allowed him to paint in the lookout of the State Street Bridge. From this vantage point, looking out across the bridge that crossed the Chicago River, Clark produced *The Coffee House*, 1906 (fig. 2.30). The painting was named for the coffee warehouses found in that area that secreted a constant aroma of coffee.

The scene is relatively bleak—a cold winter's day in the warehouse district—smoke billowing from factories and a haze covering the frozen streets. Figures, just barely recognizable, make their way across the blustery bridge. The palette is muted, mirroring the overall sensibility. Jean Stern has posited a relationship between this scene and the *The Black Race*, 1902, once again suggesting a nexus between Clark and the urban realism of Robert Henri and The Eight.[70] Superficially, this seems like a valid comparison. However, it is a question that bears further discussion since Clark did necessarily share the group's agenda.

Although Clark did not discuss Robert Henri, he was undoubtedly well aware of his art. Both artists exhibited at the Society of American Artists, and, perhaps more significantly, William Macbeth represented each.[71] Henri was a rising star in the constellation of the New York art world. However, Henri and The Eight shared a fundamental underlying philosophy towards urban realism. Clark, on the other hand, was never an ideologue, and the banner of urban realism was not a *cause célèbre*; nor was he overly interested in promoting nationalistic art. In some strategic ways he was an opportunist, offering, if possible, to send Macbeth "American" as opposed to

European scenes—clearly Macbeth's primary interest, if not necessarily his own. Clark functioned outside the orbit of political or social causes, using different subjects as a vehicle to explore various painting techniques.

The Coffee House, for example, is an amalgamation of Whistlerian tonalities and impressionistic techniques. The image is broadly painted and loosely rendered, reflecting Impressionist brushwork. However, Whistler's muted palette has been grafted on top of this structure, allowing the artist to accommodate two different sensibilities. The painting was exhibited at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1906 and awarded the prestigious Martin B. Cahn Prize.[72] The painting was also exhibited at the Society of American Artists in April 1906 and at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1907. It should be noted that Clark painted the State Street Bridge from other viewpoints, including a relatively small, yet effective work with water in the foreground and the bridge in the background (fig. 2.31). To add yet another accolade to that year's successes, Clark learned in the spring of 1906 that his painting, *La Toilette* (unlocated), was accepted at the salon of the Societé Nationale des Beaux Arts.[73]

The couple spent the summer of 1906 relaxing at Comfort Island, but, ever intrepid, they planned a trip to Japan for that autumn. Whistler undoubtedly fueled his interest in Japonisme, but, by the early twentieth century, Japanese design and color elements were an omnipresent element in both American and French art. The quest for expanding his horizons was a constant theme in Clark's life. "Painting," he wrote, "is like fishing. One cannot have luck every day in one's catch, sometimes an artist finds a big picture during his day's sketching, sometimes a little one, sometimes

nothing worthwhile; but the uncertainty gives zest to the sport."[74] The plan was to embark for Japan from Québec, and so the couple arrived in Québec the first week of November with every intention of proceeding to the Orient.

The trip to Japan never materialized. They were overcome with Québec's beauty, and Medora knew from the first day that the original plan would be derailed. "We crossed the ferry and took a cab up a steep hill like a mountain side to the Château Frontenac . . . . The views from it are magnificent. There is so much dignity and majesty in all and in the late afternoon I have never seen anything more poetic."[75] And not to entirely forget pedestrian concerns, Clark became increasingly anxious that Japanese cuisine would be unpalatable—having been warned off raw fish—making his stay in the charming, European-influenced town of Québec that much more enticing (and gastronomically satisfying).

The couple settled in at what Medora described as a lovely lodging house, and they often ate meals at the hotel Château Frontenac. Clark immediately began to sketch and paint *en-plein-air*, in spite of the occasional sub-zero temperatures. The Clarks were certainly no strangers to cold weather—Watertown, in particular, could be brutal during the winter—however, they had not intended to remain in Quebéc, and needed appropriate clothing. Clark often needed snowshoes to reach his destination, making it difficult to back away from a picture in progress in order to get perspective. After a few falls, he apparently devised a technique that worked, lessening the amount of time he spent in the snow rather than on it.[76]

Much more demanding was the challenge of devising a method to keep his paints from freezing. With the help of a tinsmith, Clark developed an ingenuous solution to the problem; they forged a long tin double palette with a place for a charcoal burner inside, and a chimney at one end, thereby allowing the paints to stay warm.[77] In order to reach a more remote destinations, he hired a driver and a caleche, a sleigh that comfortably accommodated passengers, and, in his case, easels, paints, etc. The driver would drop him off at a particular spot in the morning, and, hopefully, return to collect him at the end of the day.

Clark was quite prolific during those months in Canada, painting primarily landscapes and cityscapes, all draped in pristine white snow. Although he had previously painted winter scenes in Watertown, Chicago, and Paris, his palette was now considerably brighter. *Winter in Québec* (fig. 2.32), a large work, emphasizes the beauty of the snow-covered terrain. The white snow offered a perfect vehicle to explore reflections and shadows. The blue sky and the lake in the background are suggested in the bluish/purple highlights on the snow in the foreground. Light infuses the scene, helping to create a palpable crispness. *From the Ramparts* (fig. 2.33) is a view looking down over the city; in fact, this may be a vista looking out from the Château Frontenac. Québec is divided into lower and upper portions, and punctuated with steeply pitched roofs that allow snow to fall off. Clark depicts a sweeping pedestrian bridge that dominates the foreground, with snow-covered rooftops in the background. Rooftops were a favorite subject of Clark's (several Parisian scenes have already been cited), and he continued this interest throughout his career. Once again, the canvas is drenched in light, and the landscape enveloped in a carpet of white.

Another work, *Winter* (fig. 2.34), is a view of the partially frozen St. Lawrence River with blocks of floating ice.

Of the paintings by American artists who had previously worked in Québec, Albert Bierstadt's View of *Québec from the St. Lawrence River*, c. 1880 and *View of the Parliament Buildings*, c. 1880 (both National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa) are relatively early examples.[78] Frederic Edwin Church visited and painted the city in the late nineteenth century (see *View of Québec*, Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Connecticut). By far, one of the most prolific American artists working in Québec during the first decade of the twentieth century was Birge Harrison. Several extant paintings include *Floating Ice* (fig. 2.35), *Sunset From Québec* (fig. 2.36), and *The Lower Town, Québec* (fig. 2.37).[79] According to Andrea Husby's comprehensive study of Harrison, he first visited Québec in the winter of 1901, and returned during the winter months for several succeeding years.[80]

Like Clark, Harrison was drawn to snow scenes, allowing him to explore the atmospheric effects of snow and light. In fact, Harrison wrote about Québec, observing how "every ray of sunlight has been courted—every porch, every projection which could cast a shadow has been rigidly suppressed. And how admirable are the high-pitched roofs?"[81] It seems likely that Clark and Harrison overlapped in Québec during the winter of 1906; interestingly enough, neither artist suggests that they were acquainted. Making this even more bewildering is the coincidence that Harrison stayed at the Château Frontenac, and Medora specifically

noted that they often ate at the hotel. In fact, it appears that Clark did several murals of Québec in the Château Frontenac that winter, destroyed several years later in a fire at the hotel.

Given the lack of any documentary evidence, it is impossible to conclude that the artists' knew each other. However, a comparison between several works reveals striking (if coincidental) similarities. Both painted bird's-eye views (see figs. 2.33 & 2.37), each painted panoramas of the frozen St. Lawrence River (see figs. 2.34 & 2.36), and both were fascinated by the architecture particular to the area. Furthermore, both artists often employ a foreshortened perspective, allowing the viewer to almost hover above the snow-covered city. Perhaps proof of a relationship between the two artists will emerge at another time. Until then, the possibility that they were acquainted (or even painted together) remains purely speculative.

By that December (1906), Clark had amassed a number of works that he thought worthy for sale; and he contacted Macbeth. " I had intended to go to New York this fall to see you," he wrote, "but was unable to do so as I found a good opportunity to come to Québec at that time. The winter has been in full swing here for some time and it is the most interesting place to paint in the winter of any that I have chanced to be in. Would it be too much to ask of you if I might send some my canvases a little later, as I am sure they would interest you. The subjects are, in most cases cheerful, that is to say in sunlight."[82] One of the five paintings sent to Macbeth was *Grey and Gold* (fig. 2.38). The title is obviously an homage to Whistler. However, as Clark stated in his letter to Macbeth, the work is bathed in light—a key element in so many of his paintings from this period.

Before the couple left Québec in the spring of 1907, they made one daring trip to the logging camps in the Laurentian Mountains. Arriving in the town of Saint Pacome, Medora stayed behind, as women were not allowed in the logging camps or the "bush," as it was called. The weather was appalling—temperatures occasionally hitting forty below—but Clark remained for two weeks. Not surprisingly, according to Medora, he only painted a few small panels. However, the experience was extraordinary. "A painter is fortunate," she observed, "for often his way leads to primitive places where he has an opportunity to be a part of another era, and this had been one of them."[83]

When winter turned into spring—and the glistening white powder of snow melted into slush—the Clarks decided to return to Paris, this time to an apartment on the Boulevard Saint-Jacques. The major event of the spring was an acquisition of a tri-car, characterized by Medora as "the lowest form of automobile life." A combination motorcycle/passenger car, it was the latest rage in Paris as a replacement for horse-drawn delivery trucks, but few individuals owned one. The scene of the two riding on this vehicle must have been comical: Clark, wearing a waterproof leather suit, and chauffeurs cap, while both he and Medora donned goggles. In inclement weather, they threw an oilcloth apron over themselves and the contraption in order to keep dry.[84] The car spat and sputtered, and could not make it up sharp inclines, forcing them occasionally to dismount and push the vehicle. Nonetheless, it did allow the freedom to move about independently, and the Clarks spent the summer and fall of 1907 exploring the châteaux country, visiting sites that included Fontainebleau, Chenonceau, Blois, and Chinon.

From this trip he produced enough small works for an exhibition that began in Chicago in 1908, and spent the next eighteen months traveling to numerous venues—including the Worcester Art Museum, The John Herron Institute, The Detroit Museum of Art, and the Albright Knox Gallery. The works were all small, generally in the format of seven by nine inches. Clark had already demonstrated his interest in architecture through the Parisian street scenes. *Château in France* (fig. 2.39) and *Château of Chinon* (fig. 2.40) are studies that continue in that vein—except this time they represent the imposing, stately residences found in the French countryside. Despite the more formal architectural details of the structures, Clark's stylistic approach remained spontaneous and fresh.

The response to these exhibitions was overwhelming positive. A reviewer in Buffalo noted, "The collection of paintings by Alson Skinner Clark illustrating the French châteaux country has arrived . . . . These works are especially interesting to one who has visited Touraine and Brittany, and also to those interested in French history, or who have enjoyed the romances of Balzac and Dumas."[85] The reaction in Detroit was equally as enthusiastic:

> A one-man exhibition which attracted a great deal of attention during the month of February was that of paintings of the French châteaux country by Alson Skinner Clark of Watertown, NY. . . . In these studies the artist has not sought out for wonderful technical or color effects, but he has expressed himself with simplicity and directness. His colors are harmonious and one is charmed with the pictorial qualities of the scenes before him. The artist has not been so jealous of his art as to distract you with it, but has rather concealed it.[86]

Clark also encouraged Macbeth to show these as a group before they were individually sold.[87]

The Clarks were in America during 1908 and part of 1909, spending time on Comfort Island. During that period he did a significant number of portraits of Medora, along with several images of boat races on the St. Lawrence. Working at the island and in Watertown was always a welcome interlude, yet he felt isolated from his colleagues. Clark submitted a few works to Macbeth in March 1909, and the dealer was unimpressed with the results. Although rebuffed, the artist was grateful for the feedback. "I do not feel at all surprised that you did not like the picture from the [Pennsylvania] Academy and I am glad to get criticism on it. It is hard up here to do my work, for being the only artist in the city, I have only my own judgment to go on." [88] This speaks volumes to the importance of the bonds forged between him and his circle in Paris, and the significance of interaction between artists. Nonetheless, Clark was tenacious. The following month he asked Macbeth to consider an exhibition of new, as of yet unseen work.[89]

In the spring of 1909, the couple had a propitious meeting with artist F. Luis Mora, a friend from the early days in New York. Mora had been to Spain the previous summer and wished to return; he suggested that the couple join him for the coming summer. An equally intriguing dimension was that Spain was not the most common destination for American painters.[90] Ultimately, they stayed for five months.

Spain was all they had hoped for—and more. Medora called it "a marvelous country, everything Alson loved to paint, and he worked feverishly, producing beautiful canvases."[91] One of the first stops was Malaga. Looking down from the hillsides into the harbor, Clark captured the scenic beauty in works such as *The Rising*

Sun, Malaga (fig. 2.41). The canvas is awash in light, peppered with color, and loosely rendered.

One of the more remote and unspoiled locations that beckoned was the town of Casarabonela. The town had no rail line, nor even a road; the only access was a mule trail. Clark described the journey:

> It is a tiny mountain village in the province of Malaga, about twenty miles from the coast . . . . It is built up the mountainside, and to get to it we had to ford a river and several streams. We waited three weeks in Malaga for the rivers to dry enough so that we could cross. I believe no other American had ever preceded us there, and the place is of course unknown to travelers. It is Moorish in origin, and there are some beautiful Moorish remains in it . . . . You can imagine how picturesque it all was and what pure types of mountaineers we saw. It made the hardships we suffered justified, and it makes the series of things I did there rather unusual in subject.[92]

Always interested in architecture, he recorded the unique Spanish structures, such as *The Tower of Giralda, Seville, Spain* (fig. 2.42). Clark's original intention was not to visit Granada, however, a last-minute decision brought them to the city; ultimately they remained for a month. According to Medora, it was the Alhambra that provided Clark with some of his best painting opportunities. "The Alhambra, unspoiled, as yet practically unrestored, and with colorfully dressed gypsies still living in many parts of it had unlimited motifs. The place was a continuous surprise . . . ."[93]

From Granada they proceeded to Madrid, finding lodging in a hotel on the Puerta de Sol. That square served as the inspiration for one of Clark's large paintings, *The Plaza of the Puerta del Sol* (fig. 2.43). The busy plaza, surrounded by buildings, offered a myriad of elements: streetcars, horse-drawn carriages, pedestrians, and

donkeys all form a kaleidoscopic whirl. This work, in particular, is reminiscent of the cityscapes of Monet and Pissarro, executed from elevated vantage points. While Impressionist sensibilities are clearly echoed in many of the Spanish works, Clark still maintained an aesthetic duality. *Plaza del Sol at Night* (fig. 2.44), for example, is a clear homage to a Whistlerian nocturne.[94] Using a shorthand notation for the delineation of figures, lights, and buildings, the elements virtually blend into visual harmony. Clark's stylistic virtuosity—easily moving between sensibilities—is a leitmotif of his work from first decade of the century, and an element of his ongoing search to find his own voice.

The Clarks' time in Madrid was consumed with visiting the Prado. After the first visit they emerged "groggy, almost speechless, at what we had seen. We staggered across to one of the empty cafés, lunched and sipped, and feebly tried to put into words, just some of the emotions about a collection which had swept us completely off our feet."[95] They returned daily to the Prado, absorbing as much as possible. Clark did ask and obtain permission to sketch in the galleries. Velasquez would have seemed the likely choice of a master to copy; but he surprised even Medora when he chose Rubens', *Portrait of Marie de Medici.*[96]

After brief stops in Toledo and Segovia, the couple left Spain and returned to Paris. Clark was anxious to organize his Spanish paintings for an exhibition in America, and they returned home in December. In spite of their frequent journeys, it should be remembered that travel conditions were often less than ideal. "We were always crossing back and forth in the winter months to take advantage of the cheaper rates," recalled Medora. "The trips were rugged and frigid, and ocean-liners still after

all these years mean to me ice-covered bows."[97] Arriving in Chicago in January 1910, Clark organized a show of the Spanish paintings that opened at the O'Brien Art Galleries on the second of March. The exhibition of thirty-eight canvases was a success; seventeen were immediately sold. Clark then asked Macbeth to exhibit some of the canvases that were still available. Macbeth's response was positive, Clark writing, "I am more than delighted to know that you are favorably impressed by them."[98]

With the success of the Spanish paintings still fresh, the Clarks left for Europe, returning to Paris by June. Part of that summer was spent in Normandy with Eugene Ullman and his family. As Jean Stern has correctly noted, Clark's paintings of Normandy from this period are very much in the milieu of William Merritt Chase's beach scenes from Shinnecock.[99] Two images, both titled *Sunset Normandy* (figs. 2.45 & 2.46), can easily be compared to Chase's *At the Seashore* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) or *Shell Beach at Shinnecock* (Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma). Placed against the backdrop of the shoreline and horizon, Chase's beaches seem endlessly elongated. In formal terms, Clark has certainly absorbed this strategy. Both paintings suggest a tremendous expanse of land moving onward in either direction. In each, Clark chose sunset, and not the bright light of day (although there are other Normandy scenes in full daylight).[100] The canvases are enveloped with a soft light, dominated by purple and pink hues. A muted yellow provides a backdrop, allowing the swirl of pastel colored clouds to endlessly extend against horizon in either direction. Purple shadows and

highlights, typically favored by Impressionists, are carefully woven into the fabric of these works.

Clark's stylistic move towards Impressionism—slowly, but not exclusively—is evident throughout the first decade of the century. He continued to reference Whistler, to occasionally employ a more tonal palette, but certainly with less frequency as the decade progressed. Stylistic transitions are often gradual, rather than startling. Clark's shift towards Impressionism occurred incrementally. Having said that, the Clarks were invited to Giverny in August of 1910. It would be tempting to think of Clark's "conversion," or an epiphany to Impressionism as having been sealed in Giverny; but such an assumption would be inaccurate as he still maintained a lingering devotion to Whistlerian strategies. However, working among the colony of American Impressionist painters present in Giverny, Clark's palette brightened, he focused more on fugitive light, and he began to apply paint more broadly.

The American art colony at Giverny has been the subject of various studies, and most thoroughly investigated by William H. Gerdts.[101] For the purposes of this dissertation, it is not necessary to review all of the literature. However, it is necessary to understand the dynamics of Giverny—and to examine the personalities who were there—in order to fully understand Clark's response to the colony.

Giverny is a small village located on the Epte River, approximately forty miles northwest of Paris, and close to the railroad town of Vernon. The geographic proximity and accessibility to Paris via the train line lured painters to this small town. Nonetheless, as Gerdts has noted, "Giverny was not a particularly picturesque village .... The town was quite insular and some of the local inhabitants had not visited

Paris since childhood . . . ."[102] Whether or not the town itself had great appeal, the landscape surrounding it was a siren call to artists. Several factors helped to encourage and nurture the colony of Americans who resided in Giverny, but undoubtedly the most compelling reason that artists arrived (at least initially), was the presence of Monet, who moved there in 1883.

Several generations of American painters made their homes in the small village: some remained during the year and others remained only for the summer months. Monet did not fraternize with most of the Americans. However, he did have a close relationship with Theodore Robinson and Theodore Butler (who married Monet's step-daughter, Suzanne Hoschedé). In fact, Guy Rose offered a fascinating account of Monet's association with the colony:

> Monet himself with the chief object of interest in the place, although he always looked very forbidding and would have nothing to do with the students. While he took no notice of them, they all knew his whereabouts, and many were the little schemes to make his acquaintance. It look a very innocent new-comer to stop and watch him as he painted by the roadside; and even then success was seldom, for as that head turned slowly round and those compelling eyes regarding the intruder, he found himself moving slowly past, when Monet would go to work again. Yet among us all we kept track of what he was doing; and the day he threw his picture into the river in disgust, it was not long before that stream was patrolled by the young Americans looking for the treasure.[103]

The first generation of American painters in Giverny included artists such as Theodore Robinson, John Leslie Breck, Lilla Cabot Perry, Willard Metcalf, and Theodore Butler. These artists focused mostly on landscapes, from sweeping panoramas of lush hillsides, to more intimate views of gardens and local structures. The Hôtel Baudy (established in 1887), eventually became a magnet for American painters, and much of the focus was informed by social interaction. The small town

accommodated a diverse group of individuals—primarily those in the arts—who sought the company and amusement of their fellow artists.[104]

By the time Clark arrived in Giverny, a third generation of Americans were in attendance, including Frederick Frieseke, Richard Miller, Lawton Parker, Guy Rose, Edmund Graecen, and others.[105] Most of this group knew each other from either Chicago or from Paris, and, of course, Clark was very well acquainted with both Frieseke and Parker. As Bruce Weber suggests, this circle of painters is noted for portraying female figures in a highly decorative Impressionist style.[106] They painted each others' wives and children posed in landscape settings, drinking tea, and walking in the gardens—and they often depicted the reclining female nude, in this case, hired models. Their use of color was bold, and their coloristic approach was characterized as a rational adaptation of Fauvist color experiments. One critic wrote that the experiments in Giverny were "made in a sane and intelligent direction, which is a relief these days of new departures where too frequently form is ignored and all grace is lacking in the effort to obtain something new and startling. You shall fine none of this here, but, on the contrary, a logical search for luminosity, for light and atmosphere."[107] Frieseke, Rose, Parker, Graecen, Richard Miller and Karl Anderson exhibited together in 1910 at the Madison Gallery in New York, eventually adopting the epithet the "Giverny Group."

Beginning in late 1910—at the invitation of Lawton Parker and his wife—the Clarks' spent time in Giverny. [108] Medora described the first evening's sunset as "glorious, and the country was beautiful." [109] As the American community was exceptionally tight-knit, social activities were nearly as important as painting. Medora

recounted that they visited with many couples, including the Frederick MacMonnies, the Butlers, and the Arthur Frosts.[110] The women sewed, made tea, and socialized. They were also enlisted as models, Medora noting that she posed for Parker on the veranda of his home.[111] Lawn tennis, badminton, and exploring the hillsides were also popular recreational activities.

Weather permitting, the artists often painted side-by-side. Frieseke and Clark even collaborated on a work, each doing half; Medora declared Frieseke's half as "crude" and Alson's as "masterly."[112] Although Clark did several works in Giverny, very few have surfaced. Interestingly, no figurative paintings are known, and specifically no nudes—a predominant aspect of the Giverny work of both his close friends Parker and Frieseke. His note cards document a number of landscapes, such as In *the Valley of the Seine, An Autumn Afternoon, Giverny,* and *The Banners of Autumn, Giverny* (all unlocated). Black and white reproductions include the *French Countryside* (fig. 2.47) and *Haystacks* (fig. 2.48). Medora even referred to one of his works as a "Monet haystack."[113] Perhaps the best extant example from this period is *Summer, Giverny* (fig. 2.49). As Gerdts has correctly noticed, the composition is strikingly similar to Theodore Robinson's *A Birds-Eye View, Giverny* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).[114] In terms of technique, Clark used dots of color to create the wildflowers in the foreground. A barely recognizable figure is placed in the right background, while the slightest suggestion of houses and hillsides inform the background. Carefully positioned dabs of color—red, lavender, yellow—provide accents, and the brushwork is loose. The painting represents a culmination of Clark's move towards embracing the tenets and techniques of Impressionism.

The Clarks left Giverny in late August, but returned for another visit in late October, Medora poetically writing: "There is something very individual about this Giverny mist, with that sun a strange red striving to burn through it. The sun assumes the beauty of a woman in a chiffon veil and takes on that same sort of mystery that she does."[115] Aside from its mysterious qualities, living in Giverny presented artists with various mundane challenges. To begin with, the prices of everything—from food to real estate—were highly inflated.[116] And, figuratively speaking, the American community was highly incestuous. They lived, played, painted, and argued all within full sight of each other. Ultimately, Medora did not find it a convivial atmosphere. "The more I reflect on the possibilities of Giverny as a place to go, the less I care for it," she wrote. "The petty jealousies . . . the fights, the spying on you by your neighbors all works up to the least attractive place . . . to spend a season. Then the similarity in all of the work. I . . . have kept out of it."[117] Any art colony has its share of inner machinations, and certainly Giverny was not exempt. We can only assume that Clark felt likewise (or desperately wanted to appease his wife), as this was the last significant amount of time that the couple spent in Giverny.

When they returned to Paris in the fall of 1910, Clark organized another show at the O'Brien Art Galleries in Chicago—this time of his Normandy scenes. He was aware that the tenor of this work was substantially different from the upbeat and colorful Spanish paintings that had recently sold so well, but he was determined to have another exhibition. William O'Brien agreed to take the paintings for February 1911, but it was clear from the outset that they did not have sufficient commercial appeal. Medora recalled the scene:

> William O'Brien had been waiting with eagerness for Alson's new show. When the Normandy pictures were set up in his gallery for a preview, his instant disappointment was evident. Obviously, for him it was a frightful let-down. He was polite, but very restrained. He didn't cancel the show, for he was tied to the dates and personally fond of Alson, but he quickly reverted to silence.[118]

The exhibition was a financial failure, and Clark was disappointed, but not discouraged. However, he decided a change of scenery was in order, and in May he left for New Orleans to visit family and see the city. The couple spent the summer on Comfort Island, where Clark produced several brilliantly Impressionist depictions of the island. Two works, both titled *Thousand Islands, New York* (figs. 2.50-51), each focus on the island's vegetation and location. A photograph looking out from the island to the water documents the sweeping vistas (fig. 2.52). While Clark never dissolved forms—always maintaining structure and integrity—he did combine two Impressionist techniques in these images. Water is rendered in rather large, blocky strokes, similar to, for example, Renoir's depiction of water in *La Grenouillère,* 1869 (National museum, Stockholm). However, his technique for the vegetation included large dots of color placed loosely, but closely, side by side. This juxtaposition creates a carefully constructed visual counterbalance, and Clark is able to very successfully integrate and unite his compositions.

The couple returned to Paris in the fall, and Clark became especially interested in lithography. He had previously dabbled in the medium, however, in December 1911 he wrote to his mother that he, along with four other artists, had purchased a press and were hoping for "great results from this game." [119] Lithographs, of course, were cheaper and easier to sell than oils. He worked in that

medium throughout the rest of his career, honing his skills and producing some very worthwhile images.

That fall Clark became acquainted with the Czech artist François Simon.[120] Simon had planned a visit to his family in Prague in January, and invited Alson to join him. The weather was cold, but chilly conditions never deterred the artist. He wrote to Medora, "This morning I went out to paint for the first time and had a bully time . . . .We went down to the river and I did a sketch of the old bridge in the haze and sunlight. It was very cold, so I staid [sic] less than an hour."[121] He may well have been referring to *Charles Bridge, Prague* (fig. 2.53), a small sketch obviously produced quickly and on the spot. He did several small sketches of the city, all tonal and loosely rendered.

Traveling with Simon gave Clark access to people and places he might not have normally confronted. One particular conversation he described to Medora is worth recounting in detail:

> I had quite a discussion with a bunch of Cubists the other night. If I had been listening to Czech I would have been just as strongly convinced of my own reasoning as I was. We spoke English, however . . . . . They are quite a fuzzy bunch of mad artists, Cubists, Expressionists, etc. Some of the things I have seen Greco [El Greco] would have been ashamed at himself . . . . It seems they draw that way purposely (odd) and also that is so much expressive of feelings than it could otherwise be (must have eaten something indigestible). The color is not really necessary (fine). There isn't any such thing as "correct drawing," everyone sees it differently (think how strange the world must look to a Cubist).[122]

Clark had not previously expressed his ideas in writing regarding the various "ists" and "isms." Living in Paris, he was no doubt exposed to the most modern trends, but

did not wish to personally explore avant-garde techniques. However, he was clearly disparaging of the cutting-edge art and its theoretical basis.

After returning from Prague, Clark announced new travel plans: they were to leave for Dalmatia in the spring. Dalmatia (now part of Croatia) was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Aside from the American artists Martha Walter and Alice Schille, who visited Dalmatia in 1909, very few Americans had ventured there.[123] Their first stop was the port of Zara (now Zadar, see fig. 2.54), and from there, on to Sebeniko (now Sibenik, see fig. 2.55). The couple failed to realize that spring in Dalmatia could be cold, and after a few chilly days they took a boat to Spalato (now Split). With the weather improving, they found Spalato charming, Medora commenting:

> In the foreground there was a deep harbor, filled with boats of all types, with gaily painted hulls, and myriads of masts, and in the background wonderful very old buildings lined along the quays like a stage set . . . . Besides the hundreds of motifs along the quays, Spalato was full of winding streets, for it is a very old city, and there were peasants in costume everywhere and there was continuous life and movement.[124]

Spalato was a major center, with open-air markets occurring almost daily. The variety of costumes, people, and wares fascinated Clark. In *Bazaar, Spalato* (fig. 2.56) and *Market Day* (fig. 2.57), the artist explored the riot of color. Different costumes distinguished individuals from specific towns, and the peasants were unlike any group Clark had previously encountered. Particularly intrigued with the costumes from the town of Sinj, the couple spent a few days in this remote village.

Clark worked continuously, and produced a considerable number of canvases. His notebooks document paintings such as, *Castle Towns, Porta Aurea, Song of the Nightingale, At Sunset, Spalato, Sunlight of the East, and Diocletians Palace* (all

unlocated). Dalmatia had offered endless inspiration, and the artist was eager to return to Paris to organize the work for a possible exhibition in America that winter.

Given the tepid critical and financial response to his Nomandy scenes at O'Brien's in 1911, the artist was determined to mount a successful exhibition. In January 1913 a show of twenty-four Dalmatia paintings opened at O'Brien Art Galleries. According to Medora, on opening night William O'Brien was "radiant." The critics bubbled with enthusiasm, the success of this enterprise overshadowing and obscuring the previous show. Harriet Monroe, critic for the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, wrote a glowing review of an artist she described as "rapidly becoming a brilliant painter:"

> The present exhibition of twenty-four paintings of Dalmatia, by Alson Skinner Clark, at O'Brien's shows that this young Chicago painter has gained much in facility of style and definiteness of aim during the last two years. He found in this strip of land along the east coast of the Adriatic a country of noble scenery, rich color, fine old architecture, and picturesque costumes: and he has painted with manifest enthusiasm everything he saw . . . .[125]

Specifically referring to *Bazaar, Spalato*, she observed that "the brightly colored costumed figures are handled as skillfully as an operatic chorus, with the old red roofed houses for the orchestra and the blue sky for the star's soprano voice above them. Indeed, this is operatic region and these pictures are full of lyric suggestion."[126]

At the end of the review, Monroe engages in some very interesting rhetoric, worth quoting in detail:

> What depth of insight, what tragic passion of the souls is it which makes the difference? Is it within range of the wandering modern artist who puts on canvas his eager delight in one country after another expressing impartiality on the picturesque charm of Spain Holland, Dalmatia, or Bengal . . . . On the whole, I am inclined to believe that the greatest art must be indigenous, must be

> rooted deep in ancestral habits, and enskied by ancestral dreams. This notion is disconcerting to us moderns, for nobody is indigenous nowadays: nations and individuals seem to be whirling along into the melting pot, and if art is to be saved it may be through a new cosmopolitanism, through widening of the indigenousness to include the four corners of the earth and the universal sky. In that case, the great artist of the future will need to be a much bigger man than he of the past, to outface and outlast these obliterating immensities of the new age.[127]

Monroe's observations are provocative. In essence, she suggested that the efficacy of nationalistic art was becoming moot, as increased communication and ease of travel dissipated artificial boundaries. (Today one might refer to this as a form of "globalization.") Artists were more apt to travel around the world—and their art reflected those experiences. Clark could certainly be held up as the epitome of that observation. He saw the world as his canvas, although he never denounced or derided his own heritage. And when we consider what Monroe called the "immensities of the new age," certainly in terms of technology, communication, travel, and geopolitical conflicts, Clark's unwavering quest for knowledge put him at the center of a new cosmopolitanism.

The question remains whether or not Clark's choice of exotic locales was a conscious effort on his part to please the critics—who were often hungry for new imagery—or if Clark chose his destinations as part of an overall strategy that would help to sell his pictures. To be sure, Clark wanted and needed his work to be commercially successful. It has already been suggested that he was mindful of his financial obligations. However, no evidence suggests that he specifically targeted specific locations with a larger scheme in mind. He ventured to places that satisfied his own desire for new sources. And, he hoped that his own enthusiasm for more

unusual places would be communicated through his paintings, ultimately resulting in sales.

For Clark, the first decade of the century was filled with milestones, including his marriage, and the first major exhibitions and critical responses to his work. Clark began to forge bonds with commercial galleries that would last (in some cases) throughout his career. The year 1913 was to be yet another turning point in Clark's career. He was about to embark on one of his most ambitious projects, a series of paintings of the Panama Canal. The making of the Panama Canal was the largest engineering project of the twentieth century, and the creation of Clark's series of the Panama Canal was fraught with challenges he had never before encountered. As usual, Clark's curiosity thrust him in new directions.

[1] Hunter, Part I, p. 17.

[2] Clark Diaries, January 10, 1902, ACP.

[3] Ibid., January 20 & 23, 1902.

[4] Ibid., January 28, 1902.

[5] Medora Clark Diaries, February 28, 1902, ACP. The Alson Clark Papers at the Archives of American Art also holds Medora's diaries and letters.

[6] Ibid., Clark Diaries, February 23, 1902.

[7] Jean Stern, "Alson Clark: An American at Home and Abroad, " p. 117. For information on The Eight see Elizabeth Milroy and Gwendolyn Owens, *Painters of a New Century: The Eight & American Art* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Art Museum, 1991).

[8] Ibid.

[9] Clark Diaries, March 24, 1902, ACP.

[10] For reviews of this exhibition see "The American Artists," *New York Times*, April 17, 1902, section 1, p. 8; see also "Some Pictures at the Society, " *New York Times*, April 20, 1902, section 2, p. 24. The painting was also exhibited at The Art Institute of Chicago (1903) and at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (1904).

[11] Clark Diaries, March 9, 1902, ACP.

[12] Hunter, Part I, p. 18

[13] Medora Clark Diaries, March 10, 1902, ACP.

[14] Ibid., "Pattison's Art Talk," unidentified newspaper clipping, [April 1902].

[15] Ibid.., *Watertown Times*, unidentified newspaper clipping, 1902.

[16] Ibid., *Chicago Tribune*, unidentified newspaper clipping, [April] 1902.

[17] In "Pattison's Art Talk," the critic states, "evidence of his year with Whistler are plainly discoverable also. It is not dark painting, but it is the suggestive handling, like Whistler's."

[18] *Chicago Times Herald*, unidentified newspaper clipping, ACP.

[19] For the Society of American Artists, see Jennifer Martin Bienenstock, "The Formation and Early Years of the Society of American Artists, 1877-1884," Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, 1983. Clark exhibited at the Society of American Artists every year between 1902 and 1906. His entries included *The Black Race* (1902); *A Watering Place* (1903); *Playground in the Luxembourg* (1904); *The Bridge-Builders* (1905); *The Coffee House* (1906). See Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, American Art Exhibition Catalogs, reel N456, frames 275, 293, 305, 316, 344, 349, 363, 377, 382, 397,411, 424, 438, 449, 463, 482, 489, 499.

[20] Clark Diaries, March 26, 1902, ACP.

[21] Medora claimed that Talcott was a Forty-Niner, and one of the founders of the First National Bank of Chicago. See Hunter, Part I, p. 19. For genealogical information on the Skinner and Clark families, the author is grateful to Edwin Clark, the artist's grandnephew.

[22] The subject of the Robert Browning poem is a piper who helped a town rid themselves of rats. Using his musical charms, he lured the rodents away, and, in return, was promised a large sum of money. When the town elders refused to pay the debt, the piper used his musical charms to lure the children of the town away from their homes, never to be seen again.

[23] The mural remains at the Mancel Talcott School, 1840 West Ohio Street, Chicago, Illinois. The author acknowledges Mrs. Marcella Richman for her assistance in identifying the work.

[24] Clark Diaries, July 17, 1902, ACP.

[25] "Happy Wedding Ceremonies," *The Watertown Daily Times*, October 1, 1902. The author acknowledges Joe Sizoo for providing this newspaper article.

[26]Clark Diaries, October 30, 1902, ACP.

[27] Ibid., November 8, 1902.

[28] Hunter, Part I, p. 21.

[29] Medora described the scene at the bath house: "The ladies section in the bath house was very much smaller than the mens—I suppose because French women were too occupied to give up an afternoon to such frivolity, but I look back on those moments as some of the most pleasing of the year. You paid for your bath, in advance, at the desk, one franc, and if you wished—we always wished—five sous more for what was known as a 'bain garni' which meant that before the bath was drawn, the tub was lined with a huge linen sheet. An attendant drew your bath and when you were ready to emerge, you rang for her, and she brought you a warm linen peignore and a towel." Ibid.

[30] Clark Diaries, November 24, 1902, ACP.

[31] Stern, "Alson Clark: An American at Home and Abroad," p. 117.

[32] Hunter, Part I, p. 20

[33] Nicholas Kilmer, "Frederick Carl Frieseke: A Biography," p. 25. The author is grateful to Mr. Kilmer for his assistance.

[34] Ibid., fn 39.

[35] Hunter, Part I, p. 23.

[36] Medora Clark Diaries, June 9, 1902, ACP.

[37] Hunter, Part I, p. 25.

[38] Ibid., p. 26.

[39] Stern suggests that they traveled with Lawton Parker, Frederick Frieseke, and Guy Rose. However, Medora wrote that they traveled with "a bachelor friend of Alson's," but does not specify who that was. See Stern, *Alson Clark*, p. 16; see also Hunter, Part I, p. 26. It is possible that the group included

the three artists, as Sellin notes in 1903 Frieseke declined Richard Miller's invitation to teach with him in Holland, looking into the "prospect of joining Clark, Parker, and Guy Rose on a Breton excursion . . . ." See Sellin, "Frieseke in Le Pouldu and Giverny: The Black Gang and the Giverny Group," in *Frederick Carl Frieseke*, p. 77.

[40] Hunter, Part I, p. 28.

[41] "Portraits and Figures at Art Exhibition: Nearly Five Hundred Pictures and Statues Are Shown," *New York Times*, March 26, 1905, p. 7.

[42] Clark to Baker, March 25, 1904, DCFA. It appears that Amelia was acting as a conduit for his work in America, making certain that paintings were properly shipped to various exhibitions.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Reference to the 1904 Salon is made on the *Stone Cutter* notecard, part of the collection in the possession of the author.

[45] Clark to Baker, March 25, 1904, DCFA.

[46] Clark noted the names of several collectors of his early work, including Miss Goodale, Mrs. E.W. Brooks, Mr. Sharp, Mr. Farwell, Mr. Hilbert, and Mrs. G.B. Carpenter. See Clark notebooks, possession of the author.

[47] See "Art Notes," *New York Times*, March 15, 1903, p. 7; "The American Artists: Figure Pictures and Snowscapes Form a Notable Part of the Show," *New York Times*, April 3. 1904, part I, p. 9.

[48] Hunter, Part I, p. 32.

[49] See Peter H. Falk, *Annual Exhibition Record of the Art Institute of Chicago, 1888-1950* (Madison, CT: Soundview Press, 1990).

[50] Hunter, Part I, p. 32.

[51] See Stern, "Alson Clark: An American at Home and Abroad," p. 119. Stern also examines in detail the Whistlerian influence on another early portrait, *The Green Parasol*, 1906 (Private Collection).

[52] Medora Clark Diaries, July 9, 1905, ACP.

[53] For information on Macbeth, see Gwendolyn Owens, "Art and Commerce: William Macbeth, The Eight and the Popularization of American Art," in *Painters of a New Century*, pp. 61-86.

[54] As quoted in ibid, p. 61.

[55] Clark to Macbeth, October 27, 1905. See Macbeth Gallery Records, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel NMc5, frame 849. I am grateful to Phil and Marian Kovinick for information from the Macbeth Gallery Records.

[56] Ibid., Clark to Macbeth, December 7, 1905, reel NMc5, frame 851.

[57] Ibid., Clark to Macbeth, January 1, 1906, reel NMc5, frame 852. Stern notes that when the sale of Chase's estate was held between May 14-17, 1917 (American Art Galleries) that two paintings by Clark, *Urban Landscape*, and Watertown *in Winter*, were both still in Chase's personal collection. Stern, *Alson Clark*, p. 53, note 3.

[58] See "Exhibition of Paintings by Alson Skinner Clark," The Art Institute of Chicago, January 2 to January 21, 1906. I am grateful to Lynne Maphies, Department of Modern and Contemporary Art, The Art Institute of Chicago, for furnishing a photocopy of the catalogue. Stern incorrectly notes that there were fifty-seven paintings in the exhibition, and that they were mostly of Brittany. The catalogue of the exhibition only includes forty-five pictures, and the subjects included, but were not entirely Brittany. See Stern, "Alson Clark: An American at Home and Abroad," p. 118.

[59] A notice appeared in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 3, 1906, ACP.

[60] "Art Exhibitions Next Week," *Chicago Post*, January 6, 1906, clipping file, Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, The Art Institute of Chicago. I am especially grateful to Peter Blank, Reference Librarian, for citations and copies of reviews from Clark's one-man 1906 exhibition in Chicago.

[61] Ibid.

[62] "The Yellow Scarf by Alson S. Clark on Exhibition at the Art Institute," *Chicago Record Herald*, January 14, 1906, clipping file, Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, The Art Institute of Chicago.

[63] Ibid.

[64] *Chicago Chronicle*, January 31, 1906, clipping file, Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, The Art Institute of Chicago.

[65] Harriet Monroe, "The Glasgow Painters and Others," *Chicago Examiner*, January 3, 1906, clipping file, Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, The Art Institute of Chicago. For other reviews see also "Chicago Art Echoes," *American Art News* 4, 14 (January 13, 1906), in ibid; "New Year Brings Interest in Art," *Chicago Journal*, December 29, 1905, in ibid.

[66] Medora Clark Diaries, January 2, 1906, ACP.

[67] Hunter, Part I, p. 35.

[68] Clark to Macbeth, January 16, 1906, Macbeth Gallery Records, reel NMc5, frame 853.

[69] Hunter, Part I, p. 25.

[64] Stern, "Alson Clark: An American at Home and Abroad," p. 118.

[71] See Elizabeth Milroy, "Modernist Rituals and the Politics of Display" in *Painters of a New Century*, p. 26.

[72] See Charles Caffin, "Current Pennsylvania Academy Exhibition," *Brush and Pencil* 19, 1 (January 1907), ACP. While Caffin does not review the painting, he does note that "Philadelphians will be glad of an opportunity of seeing Alson Skinner Clark's "Coffee House," which was awarded the Cahn Prize at the Chicago Institute last year."

[73] See "American Art in Paris and London Exhibitions," *Brush and Pencil* 17, 5 (May 1906), p.186. Clark also had three works exhibition at the Society of Western Arts, held at The Art Institute of Chicago. See "Annual Exhibition of the Society of Western Artists," *Brush and Pencil* 17, 1 (Jan. 1906), ACP.

[74] "Exhibitions at the Chicago Galleries, *Art Journal*, 35 (February 1917), p. 155. Courtesy of Dr. William H. Gerdts, Gerdts Art Library, New York City.

[75] Medora Clark Diaries, November 2, 1906, ACP.

[76] Hunter, Part I, p. 38.

[77] Ibid.

[78] For a more complete survey of cityscapes of Québec see Inventory of American Paintings, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[79] Other works include, *Québec by Moonlight* (University of Arizona Museum of Art), *The Wharves of Québec* (University of Minnetsota, Gleensheen), and *Québec From the Harbor* (formerly High Museum of Art).

[80] See Andrea Husby, "Birge Harrison: Artist, Teacher and Critic," Ph.D. dissertation, Graduate Center of the City University of New York, 2003, p. 119. I am grateful to Dr. Husby for her assistance.

[81] Birge Harrison, "Three Beautiful Cities," *Art and Progress* 3 (June 1912), p. 606. I am grateful to Dr. Husby for this citation.

[82] Clark to Macbeth, December 18, 1906, Macbeth Gallery Records, reel NMc5, frame 858.

[83] Hunter, Part I, p. 39.

[84] Ibid., p. 43.

[85] "Exhibition of French Chateaux Country Pictures at the Albright Gallery," *Buffalo Express*, March 2, 1909. See Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Charles M. Kurtz Papers, reel 4824, frame 8. Courtesy of Phil and Marian Kovinick.

[86] "Alson S. Clark's Paintings," *Bulletin of the Detroit Museum of Art*, 3 (April 1909). See Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Detroit Institute of Art Scrapbooks, reel D12, frame 234.

[87] Clark to Macbeth, August 5, 1908, Macbeth Gallery Records reel NMc5, frame 861.

[88]Ibid., March 13, 1909, reel NMc5, frame 864. Clark was undoubtedly referring to one of two pictures that were included at the The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts exhibition for 1909: *Market Place*: *Quebec* (no. 660) or *Quebec in Winter* (no. 662).

[89] Ibid., April 25, 1909, reel NMc5, frame 865.

[90] Medora claimed that according to a friend at the American Embassy, only fifty-five Americans registered to be in the country that summer (Hunter, Part I, p.52). Whether or not this number is precisely accurate, it is clear that the number of Americans in other countries, such as France, Germany, Holland and Italy, for example, exceed those in Spain.

[91] Ibid., p.45.

[92] Clark to Macbeth, June 24, 1910, Macbeth Gallery Records, reel NMc5, frame 871.

[93] Hunter, Part I, p. 47.

[94] See Stern, "Alson Clark: An American At Home and Abroad," p.121.

[95] Hunter, Part I, p.48.

[96] Ibid., p.49.

[97] Ibid., p.51.

[98] Clark to Macbeth, April 25, 1910, Macbeth Gallery Records, reel NMc5, frame 870.

[99] Stern, "Alson Clark: Am American at Home and Abroad," p. 126.

[100] Clark's notecards contain titles such as *Evening Sands, Urville, The Sand diggers, Urville, Village by the Sea, Urville* and *The Wave, Urville*, all unlocated.

[101] William H. Gerdts, *Monet's Giverny* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1993). See also Gerdts, *Lasting Impressions: American Painters in France, 1865-1915* (Evanston: Terra Foundation for the Arts, 1992).

[102] Gerdts, *Monet's Giverny*, p. 9.

[103] Guy Rose, "At Giverny," *Pratt Institute Monthly* 6 (December 1897), p. 81.

[104] Gerdts, *Monet's Giverny*, p. 101.

[105] An interesting study on Giverny, with an emphasis on these painters, is Bruce Weber, *The Giverny Luminists: Frieseke, Miller, and Their Circle* (New York: Berry-Hill Galleries, 1995).

[106] Ibid., p. 7.

[107] "Art and Artists," *New York Evening Globe*, December 23, 1910, p. 7; as quoted in ibid., p. 10.

[108] Medora Clark Diaries, August 19, 1910, ACP.

[109] Ibid.

[110] For a full account of the members of the colony see Gerdts, *Monet's Giverny*.

[111] Medora Clark Diaries, August 21, 1910, ACP.

[112] Ibid., October 26, 1910.

[113] Ibid., August 28, 1910.

[114] Gerdts, *Monet's Giverny*, p. 200.

[115] Medora Clark Diaries, October 21, 1910, ACP.

[116] Arthur B. Frost wrote that "prices of everything have been adjusted to the American pocket," Arthur B. Frost to Augustus Daggy, September 19, 1908; as quoted in Gerdts, *Monet's Giverny*, p. 157, note 3.

[117] Medora Clark Diaries, October, 27, 1910, ACP.

[118] Hunter, Part II, p. 54.

[119] Alson Clark to Sarah Clark, December 7, 1911, ACP. Clark's etchings and lithographs are fascinating, but it is not the mandate of this dissertation to explore them.

[120] Simon is best known as a color-etcher. Clark and Simon became friendly in Paris, where Simon assisted Clark in learning the elements of color etching, and Clark helped Simon learn to use a lithographic press. See Stern, *Alson Clark*, p. 25.

[121] Clark to Medora, January 18, 1912, ACP.

[122] Ibid., January 22, 1912.

[123] For information on Martha Walter see William H. Gerdts, "Martha Walter: A Retrospective," *American Art Review*, 14 (October 2002) pp. 150-161. For Alice Schille see Gerdts, *Alice Schille* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 2001).

[124] Hunter, Part I, pp. 62-63.

[125] Harriet Monroe, "Clark's Art Gains in Style and Aim," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 19, 1913, p. 4.

[126] Ibid.

[127] Ibid.

Chapter Three

The Panama Canal

On the heels of Clark's successful exhibition of the Dalmatia pictures, the couple decided to take yet another trip: this time to visit the Panama Canal Zone. According to Medora, Alson's friend, the writer Henry Kitchell Webster, encouraged the artist to visit while the canal was still under construction.[1] Tourist expeditions to the Canal Zone were not uncommon. Thousands had visited by 1913, necessitating special tour guides and trains. According to one account, the groups "looked no different from the Sunday crowds on the Boardwalk at Atlantic City. Gentlemen wore white shoes and pale straw hats; ladies stepped along over the grass in ankle length skirts and carried small, white umbrellas . . . ."[2] While this paints a very civilized picture of the situation in the Canal Zone, the magnitude of this project—and its attendant problems—cannot be overstated. David McCullough, author of an impressive tome on the Canal's construction, has offered his assessment:

> The creation of the Panama Canal was far more than a vast, unprecedented feat of engineering. It was a profoundly important historic event and a sweeping human drama not unlike that of war. Apart from wars, it represented the largest, most costly single effort ever before mounted anywhere on earth. It held the world's attention over a span of forty years. It affected the lives of tens of thousands of people at every level of society and virtually every race and nationality. Great reputations were made and destroyed. For numbers of men and women it was the adventure of a lifetime. Because of it one nation, France, was rocked to its foundations. Another, Columbia, lost its most prized possession, the Isthmus of Panama. Nicaragua, on the verge of becoming a world crossroads, was left to wait for some future chance. The Republic of Panama was born. The United States was embarked on a role of global involvement.[3]

When the Clarks left for Panama in March of 1913, the canal project was nearing completion after nearly thirty years of construction: the last ten were the most

intensive. As McCullough so eloquently states, this massive project was unlike anything previously undertaken. Its success—or failure—was to shape the twentieth century. Just to put the enormity of this project into perspective, it is necessary to consider the following statistics. The maximum work force was reached in March 1913, with a total of over 44,000 men actually on the job. The project cost $375,000,00, and, to that date, was the single most expensive construction project in United States history. By July 1914, a total of 238,845,587 cubic yards had been excavated during the American construction era.[4] When the work was at its height, the United States was excavating the equivalent of a Suez Canal every three years. The total spoil excavated in the Canal Zone would have formed a pyramid 4,200 feet high, or more than seven times the height of the Washington Monument.[5] Although it is not the mission of this dissertation to exhaustively examine the building of the Panama Canal, understanding the basic historical sequence of the Canal's history is germane to this study, and to the artists who ultimately painted it.

The value of a route to connect the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans was recognized in as early as the sixteenth century. It was not until the nineteenth century that surveys confirmed two viable possibilities: either a passage through Nicaragua or one across the Isthmus of Panama. In 1876, an international company obtained a concession from the Colombian government—which owned the Panama Canal Zone— to dig a canal across the Isthmus. The enterprise failed four years later, and a new a French company, *The Compagnie Universelle du Canal Interoceanique*, was organized by Ferdinand Marie de Lesseps. De Lesseps, the builder of the Suez Canal,

was convinced that a sea-level canal could be constructed in Panama, just like the one he had successfully completed in Suez.

With the confidence of the Suez project behind him, de Lesseps terribly miscalculated the scale of the Panama project; not to mention the ravishing toll that malaria and yellow fever would take on the workers. His company failed in 1889, and with it French investors were devastated. Disgraced and discredited, he and his son were eventually tried in France for fraud and corruption of public officials.[6]

Nonetheless, de Lesseps efforts were not without some merit. He initiated an infrastructure—including offices and dock facilities—in addition to constructing the Panama Railroad, which would ultimately become the lifeline of the project. By 1894, a new company, *Compaigne Nouvelle du Canal De Panama*, was incorporated with the intention of resuming work on the project. However, it was soon evident that any undertaking of this enormity would require the commitment of a nation; and the United States was the obvious heir to the enterprise.

In 1899, the United States Isthmanian Canal Commission (assembled by President McKinley) endorsed an alternative tactic: a Nicaraguan route for a canal was now favored. The French debacle in Panama cast a pall on the location, and it appeared likely that support for a canal in Nicaragua would be approved by Congress. According to McCullough, "as extraordinary as it may seem in light of what was to transpire, by the start of 1902, not a single politician of importance had ever declared himself in favor of a Panama Canal. The idea had no constituency, whereas the enthusiasm for Nicaragua, within Congress and without, appeared to be overwhelming." [7] The advent of Theodore Roosevelt to the Presidency— after

McKinley's assassination in 1901—gave an even stronger urgency to the construction of a canal. Roosevelt saw it as a vital means of securing United States naval supremacy, and he was dedicated to the idea of expediting the process—of creating the Canal as part of his legacy.

While it appeared that support for a Nicaraguan canal was all but assured in Congress, a last minute bit of political engineering by individuals—who stood to profit considerably from a canal in Panama—literally paid off. Ultimately, lawmakers were persuaded that active volcanoes in Nicaragua posed a continual threat to any canal. On June 19, 1902, the final Senate tally approved a Panama Canal route by a mere eight votes.[8]

Having finally resolved the question of where to build the canal, it was now incumbent upon the government to secure a treaty with Colombia. The proposal was to pay the Republic of Colombia a lump sum of $10,000,000 cash, plus an annual rent of $250,000. The Columbians equivocated, and with the fate of the canal in the balance, Roosevelt decided to take another course of action. He had a palpable disdain for the Colombian government, which he viewed as insignificant, isolated, and unstable. "Those contemptible little creatures in Bogotá," he wrote, "ought to understand how much they are jeopardizing things and imperiling their own future."[9] Given his obvious intolerance, the subsequent course of events was not terribly unexpected; the United States helped to foster and militarily support a Panamanian independence movement. A "revolution" of sorts followed, with a new Republic of Panama born as the outcome. Not surprisingly, a newly independent—and politically unsophisticated—Republic of Panama ratified a treaty with the United States in

December 1902, granting a concession in perpetuity to a Canal Zone, and, in return, was given the sum of $10,000,000.[10]

The official United States canal construction began in May 1904. However, before the Americans could even begin to deal with engineering issues, they had to face two enemies that had plagued the French: yellow fever and malaria. According to McCullough, the entire Isthmus was considered a "mosquito paradise." [11] The consistent temperature allowed the constant breeding of insects, and the local custom of storing water in earthenware jars fostered an unchecked environment for larvae. It was estimated that if both malaria and yellow fever were not eradicated, the annual death toll might run between three to four thousand individuals. Dr. William Crawford Gorgas, known as the outstanding authority on tropical disease, was enlisted to battle this enemy. Massive efforts to eliminate the mosquitoes were successful, and, by 1905 yellow fever was essentially eradicated from the Isthmus. Malaria was also brought significantly under control, with the death tolls decreasing substantially between 1906 and 1913.[12] However, as McCullough points out, the success of the medical efforts was relative; black workers were still dying disproportionately to white workers. In fact, segregation by color took its toll in the form of substandard medical care, housing, food, and schools for blacks. Medora's observations on the conditions of white workers in Panama will be discussed shortly, but it should be noted that she, like so many other white observers, saw life in Panama from a rather skewed perspective.

The Clarks' decision to leave for Panama was hastily made, and they embarked from New York to Panama in March 1913. They arrived in Colon, and took

a train across the Isthmus to Ancon, Medora recalling that, "the freedom with which a pleasant United States brakeman opened the door to the straw-seated coach was pure American."[13] Rooms were secured at the Hotel Tivoli, complete with private bath and telephone.[14] Although preparations for Clark to paint the Canal Zone had not been prearranged, a set of circumstances proved serendipitous. The supreme commander of the project by this date was Colonel George Goethals.[15] Clark knew Goethal's daughter-in-law, and he contacted her for assistance and introductions.[16] The way paved, Clark was allowed unobstructed access to the construction sites. According to Medora, Goethals "stretched regulations to fit Alson's needs."[17] They had access to the passenger, observation, and the labor trains; Goethals even provided assistance for Clark to transport materials. The days were long, the temperature hot, and it was a challenge to find the appropriate setting. Clark wrote to his mother:

> This is such a busy place for me I never get time to write more than a postal. We get off on the 6:40 train in the morning, getting up at 5:30 or so and get back at noon, leave for lunch and go off again at the one-thirty, getting in at seven, and after dinner get to bed. It is lovely here, better than I expected. I have been painting one of the locks in the morning and sun just coming up when we arrive. In the afternoon at present I go to the Culebra Cut where all the blasting has been going on and the slides, and I paint there. It is wonderful all over . . . .[18]

Medora generally did not accompany him. Instead, she stayed behind and attended to practical matters, not the least of which was large amounts of laundry, given the need for Alson to change clothing several times during the day. Clark's output in Panama was nothing short of amazing; he painted the locks, the various "cuts," (Culebra being the most famous), the lock chambers, the cranes, the slides (a major source of irritation), and the railroad. And, interestingly enough, these works vary stylistically from highly impressionistic to more tightly constructed and defined.

In order to understand what these paintings represent, it is necessary to have a rudimentary notion of how the canal worked. Once the idea of a sea-level canal was abandoned—and a decision in favor a lock canal finalized—a dam was built at Gatun to fuel the locks, creating what was then the largest artificial lake in the world. Three locks (or pairs of chambers) at Gatun raised or lowered ships eighty-five feet vertically. Another set of locks was placed on the Pacific side at Pedro Miguel, and two sets at Miraflores—in all, twelve chambers. Water flowed in and out of the locks through culverts, or drains, in the walls of the locks. Each chamber was closed at both ends with steel gates. The critical element, of course, was the flow of water, which lifted ships above sea level to the surface of the Gatun Lake, floated them across the Continental Divide, and deposited them in the opposite ocean.[19]

The locks were the engineering and structural marvels of the canal. As McCullough has noted, "they were something much more than monumental; they did not, like a bridge or a cathedral, simply stand there; they worked."[20] The scale of the structures was Herculean; the walls were one thousand feet long and eighty-one feet high. They required the installation of 4.5 million cubic yards of concrete, ninety-two steel gates, hundreds of valves, and 1500 electric motors that regulated the movement of water.[21] The enormity of this undertaking is highlighted in works such as *Pedro Miguel Lock, Panama* (fig. 3.1) and *First Dredges Through the Gatun Locks* (figs. 3.2-3). In both cases, the viewer is placed looking down at the precipice of these enormous caverns. A scale is established by juxtaposition of workers to the construction site; in reality, a single lock placed on its end would have been the tallest structure in the world at that time.[22] That Clark would even take on the challenge of

depicting these behemoths is a testament to his resolve. Impressionist techniques dominate passages —with divided color, and sketchy brushwork—but simultaneously there is an adherence to line and form. The subject is not obscured by his methods, and, conversely, his handling of the paint serves to make the subject that much more visually appealing.

The locks were constructed of concrete that was poured from huge buckets. Due to the structural constraints of Pedro Miguel and Miraflores, huge cantilever cranes, some in the shape of a gigantic "T's," were erected in lieu of cableways to move the buckets. Clark documented these in *Big Cranes, Miraflores* (figs. 3.4-5). The cranes moved on tracks, clearly evident in the work, and were self propelling. The "T" cranes were for mixing. One arm brought sand, gravel and cement to mixing stations located at the base of crane. Another arm transferred the fresh concrete to the chamber cranes, which then poured the buckets into the appropriate places. The viewpoint in this work is from the base of the chamber, looking both down the corridor and up the walls. Individuals walking along the tracks appear tiny in comparison to the equipment and the outer wall. McCullough described the experience of standing in one of these chambers as "looking down a broad, level street nearly five blocks long with a solid wall of six story buildings on either side; only here there were no windows or doorways, nothing to give human scale."[23]

The lifeline of the project was the Panama Railroad; it carried men, food, water, and supplies wherever needed. In 1905, John Stevens assumed the post as Chief Engineer of the canal project. He spent a portion of his career as a railroad engineer for the Great Northern Railroad and was famous for navigating the Marias

Pass, which provided passage over the Continental Divide.[24] Although the French had built a railroad, Stevens immediately surmised that it was inadequate. Under his authority, the railroad was completely refurbished. New tracks were built, bridges and poles replaced, and repair shops and locomotive sheds were constructed. Virtually all canal construction was associated with the railroad. Given the wet weather conditions, and the attendant mud, no other form of transportation would have been as efficient. By the end of 1906, the railroad personnel numbered nearly twenty-four thousand men.

The central role of the railroad is demonstrated in two paintings, *Work at Miraflores* (fig. 3.6) and *In the Locks, Miraflores* (fig. 3.7). These images are closely aligned, and it may be possible that the former, smaller picture was a study for the latter, larger canvas. In both instances, the viewer is looking down into the construction pit. Our point of reference is the railroad cars—all spewing smoke—that dominate the middle ground. Clark's debt to Impressionism is certainly clear in his staccato brushwork and shorthand notation, lavender shadows, and saturation of each canvas in light. The puffy clouds of smoke, in particular, are merely suggested by dabs of white, blue, and pink. One cannot help but reference Monet's pictures of the trains in their shed at the Gare St. Lazare.

While the locks were engineering marvels, the magnum opus of the canal was the excavation at Culebra, a nine-mile stretch between Bas Opiso and Pedro Miguel. The struggle to excavate Culebra lasted from 1907 to 1913. Medora visited the Culebra Cut on various occasions, offering her observations:

To appreciate the Culebra Cut, which is the key to the whole place, to

> understand the activity, the energy, the push, the absolute defiance of nature in undertaking the enterprise, and to sense its spirit, it is necessary to tramp through it, and this not once, but many times . . . . [25]

She went on to describe the sensation of actually being in the cut with the whirlwind of activity:

> To be stalking ties, with a dirt train behind you, tooting defiantly in a struggle to outdo the other din, and the warning screech of a coming blast ahead, and the steam-drills and steam-shovels below you, and gang of men laying tracks or changing ties, or lading dirt-trains or carrying dynamite . . . . I can't enumerate a twenty or thirty ring industrial circus, nor can I possibly give any thrill of it . . . . You have to be down there and among the men . . . . [26]

Culebra was also the site of one of the worst slides. At first, cracks in the ground appeared, then large portions of the slope disintegrated. However, this instability often occurred years after the initial cracks. The final stage culminated when the entire slope collapsed. Just to put these events into perspective, 7,000,000 cubic yards of dirt fell away during a slide on the west bank of Culebra in 1912.[27] Clark painted Culebra in various iterations. *Panama Canal, Culebra Cut* (fig. 3.8), is one of the artist's most impressionistic renderings of the construction. Painted in high key colors with aggressive brushwork, the work is an intricate assemblage of patterns. The boldness of execution speaks to the intensity of the subject—a massive undertaking that pitted the forces of nature against the tenacity of the human spirit.

In the Cut, Contractors Hill (figs. 3.9-10) is certainly more subdued in its hues compared to *Panama Canal, Culebra Cut*. However, the intensity of the work in that cut was formidable. The primary explosive used to carve out the canal was dynamite. Approximately 61,000,000 pounds of dynamite were ignited: to that date, this accounted for more explosive energy in the aggregate than had ever been expended.[28] According to McCullough, "the noise level was beyond belief."[29] The path in

Contractors Hill was particularly noisy, as the walls were rock, and the reverberations of sound were overwhelming. Amazingly, Clark was capable of working amidst all of the noise, confusion, and constant distractions.

While the Canal Zone provided steady inspiration, Panama City and Ancon were also magnets. Medora recounted:

> Alson was torn between his desire to work there [Panama City] and his zeal to work on the canal. He would often go down into the city and paint the sun-lit façade with their balconies, architecture new to him, or the open doorways with the contrast of shadow within . . . .[30]

These interests are discernible in works such as *Panama City Plaza* (fig. 3.11), *Panama* (fig. 3.12), *Washday, Panama* (fig. 3.13), and *View of Ancon* (fig. 3.14). Clark's enduring interest in architecture and costumes was piqued by the colorful clothing and homes of the black workers (mostly West Indian.). The tremendous discrepancy that existed between living conditions for black and white workers has already been suggested. Medora described, with pride, the situation for white Americans:

> I have always looked on any man who took his family and embarked for the wilds of Panama as possessing a fortitude and daring that was almost unequalled [sic] . . . . Each family has its home; usually the buildings shelter four families, its government inspected water supply, its screened verandas, its bath its range, its lighting . . . . There are public schools and high schools . . . . Could living be simpler, and its problems more reduced? I became convinced that it is the spot in which to rear a family.[31]

While this paints a agreeable picture of life in the Canal Zone, the reality for black workers was far more grim—and certainly more deadly. Some twenty-five to thirty- thousand black men and women did the heaviest labor (approximately seventy-five percent of the work force). Jim Crow laws flourished, establishing a strict color demarcation line. Housing, schools, trains, churches, and forms of entertainment were

strictly segregated, and hardly equal. The housing Medora describes was only for white families. Single black men lived in overcrowded barracks, and those with families often established inadequate, ramshackle villages comprised of makeshift housing from scraps of lumber and corrugated iron.[32] Although the black labor force far outnumbered the whites, the average amount of money expended annually for entertainment and recreation of white married workers was seven-hundred and fifty dollars; for the average, unskilled black worker, that figure was fifty dollars.

These images do not reference either the social stratification or the vast discrepancies in living conditions based on race. For Clark, the West Indians were visually fascinating subjects, and not a means to pursue a particular social or political agenda. However, Medora's comments substantiate McCullough's assertion that white observers paid very little attention to the role of the black laborers, in spite of their disproportionate numbers to white workers.[33] In fact, Clark's depictions of the canal's construction bespeak the optimism of American ingenuity. They reinforce both the real and perceived imperative of this undertaking, but completely ignore the human toll extracted during the epic enterprise. Workers were routinely injured or killed during the construction (aside from the tropical diseases), but none of the paintings address either the hazardous conditions or even offer a slice of life within this very circumscribed world. Clark was overwhelmed by the engineering feats and organizational extent of the project, and that alone was his main interest.

Medora wrote to Clark's mother in April 1913, reflecting on Alson's response to this new environment:

> Alson seems to have struck his stride and is doing perfectly wonderful things, I think. He already has seven big canvases complete, and I think will have ten

> before we leave . . . . It is such an unusual place, for everybody is interested in the one thing, and you can't help but feel the tenseness of it all the time. Even at night you feel the activity in the tranquility and I think that spirit of energy and enthusiasm is very contagious. It seems to have spurred Alson on to almost superhuman effort . . . .[34]

Indeed, Clark's efforts were prodigious. However, the onset of the rainy season made it difficult to work; he was also running low on supplies. They decided to go back to France for the summer, and return to Panama in the fall—in time to see the center of the dyke destroyed and the flooding of the Cut. The trip to Paris took over three weeks. Back in the studio, Clark carefully scrutinized his progress. Word of his canal paintings was already spreading, as he wrote to his mother: "I guess you saw notice in the *New York Herald* that I was exhibiting the first paintings of the Canal Zone. That may be an editor's story, but there were a good many people [who] looked at them anyway."[35]

In June 1913, Clark began a correspondence with John Trask, Director of Fine Arts for the forthcoming 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. Evidently, Clark sent Trask a letter with a few photographs of the paintings from the Canal Zone. A copy of that letter is not extant; however, it appears from Trask's response that Clark asked to exhibit the Panama paintings as a group at the Exposition. Trask's reply is worth quoting in detail:

> I recognize quite fully the value of your suggestion and the desirability showing your pictures in this Exposition as a group because of the wide public interest which they will arouse, and I am venturing to write you quite frankly. The giving of a gallery to you is going to arouse some criticism on the part of the many painters who would be glad to have galleries for their own work, but who will not get what they want; but criticism is going to be aroused anyhow, and the knowledge I have of your past, the respect I have for it, and your assurance that these Panama pictures are fully up to your standards leads me to a rather radical step; and I shall have to ask you to help me convince the people that we have done wisely . . . . You shall be at liberty

> to exhibit these paintings in Europe as you desire, but I shall be glad if in exhibiting any of them in Europe you will announce or cause to be announced that they are part of a group of paintings made in the Canal Zone which are to exhibited as a whole group at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition . . . May I say I applaud your energy in having made the canvases on the spot; that I recognize the difficulties you have surmounted, and I appreciate also your willingness for cooperation with the Exposition. While I cannot but recognize, as you will, that in giving a gallery to you the Fine Arts Department is, in a way, bestowing an honor upon you. I feel it is a worthy bestowal and I do recognize the unselfish attitude you have assumed in regard to the exhibition.[36]

Clark never suggests that his impetus for painting the Panama Canal was the possibility of exhibiting works at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. That said, he was aware that the planning of the Exposition was well under way. Once in Panama, and pleased with the quality and quantity of work he was producing, Clark viewed his celebratory images of the canal as completely compatible and appropriate to the focus of the exposition. In that respect, he recognized the potential for a professional opportunity and pursued a goal.

Trask was in favor of granting the artist a room at the Exposition, in spite of potential repercussions. With such an honor, Clark joined the ranks of luminaries who were similarly honored in San Francisco, including James Abbott McNeill Whistler, John Twachtman, Edmund Tarbell, Frank Duveneck, William Merritt Chase, Childe Hassam, and John Singer Sargent —arguably some of the most respected artists of the period.

His inclusion alongside some of the most significant artists of the period should not be underestimated. The Panama-Pacific International Exposition commemorated the completion of the Panama Canal, and the 400th anniversary of the discovery of the Pacific Ocean. Held in San Francisco, it showcased the city's

phoenix-like resurgence from the rubble of the 1906 earthquake and fire. More than two million people visited the Exposition, which opened in February 1915. The centerpiece of its architecture was the Palace of Fine Arts, designed by Berkeley architect, Bernard Maybeck.[37] The Palace of Fine Arts contained one hundred and twenty galleries, representing works by painters from England, Norway, Spain, France, and a host of others. And as William Gerdts has suggested, the Exposition "enshrined" the preeminence of American Impressionism.[38] However, not only did it showcase what Gerdts has referred to as the "Old Master," American Impressionists, but many of the younger generation. Ernest Lawson and Robert Vonnoh won gold medals; Willard Metcalf received a medal of honor. Clark's good friend, Frederick Frieseke, won the grand prize.[39] Clark's prominent inclusion in this major exhibition underscores his significant place among his peers.

The Clarks spent the summer of 1913 in Paris getting ready to leave once again for Panama in September. Clark wrote to his mother, "Yesterday I went over and secured passage for Panama to sail September 9th from Antwerp . . . . I think that we really must go to Panama again and try to make a 'killing' with a good show. I want some pictures with water in the Canal, and I guess that will do it . . . ." [40] Not only was he referring to financial success, but he was also hoping for a positive critical response on the order of the acclaim of his Dalmatia paintings.

Medora described the couple's return to Panama as a kind of "home-coming, so many people welcomed us." [41] As Clark had envisioned, they were present for the blowing of the dyke. Medora remembered, "We were included in all the ceremonies with as much courtesy and consideration as though we, too, had been a part of the

work. It was exciting to be present at the culmination of the vast project, to witness the actual final dividing of the North and South continents by a water which our government had built."[42] Clark once again resumed a rigorous painting schedule—but he had not accounted for the volatility of the weather. "The work is going well now and I will have a lot to show although there will not be as much as I did last spring," he wrote to his mother, "when the weather was settled and you could always depend on your day. When it rains here it is as if someone turned over a bucket of water on you and let it go . . . ."[43] He did manage to accomplish his goal of painting some scenes with water "in" the canal—and not just the construction. *Moving the Trestles* (fig. 3.15), with water in the foreground, probably depicts the demolition of the railroad tracks that were unnecessary once the canal was flooded.

It should be noted that there was considerable concern over the aesthetic of the canal. Just before it opened, the sculptor Daniel Chester French and the landscape architect Frederick Olmsted, Jr. were sent to Panama for a consultation (of sorts) on how to improve the appearance of the locks. Their report was more than a little surprising:

> The canal itself and all the structures connected with it impress one with a sense of their having been built with a view strictly to their utility. There is an entire absence of ornament and no evidence that the aesthetic has been considered except in a few instances . . . . Because of this very fact, there is little to find fault with from the artist's point of view. The canal, like the Pyramids, or some imposing object in natural scenery is impressive from its scale and simplicity and directness. One feels that anything done merely for the purpose of beautifying it would only fail to accomplish that purpose, but would be an impertinence.[44]

By late October, with the festivities completed, the Clarks left Panama for New York and then went directly to Chicago. Clark wasted no time organizing an

exhibition of his Panama pictures. Three paintings were shown at the annual exhibition at The Art Institute of Chicago, and a collection of thirty-one Panama paintings opened at O'Brien Art Galleries in Chicago in late November.[45] The critics were laudatory, witnessed, for example, in the *Chicago Evening Post*:

> He was ready to keep his vision sensitive and ready to appreciate the unusual, for what could be more unexpected and out of the ordinary views of a traveler than "the big ditch." Its frenzied activities, its stupendous heights, and awful chasms; its titanic undertakings to conquer tropical nature, under the superb arch of a southern sky and the daily glory of the equatorial sunshine . . . . sees the unrestricted enthusiasm of the painter . . . . and vitalizes the thirty-one pictures. We who have not seen Panama and have heard but the echoes of the marvelous work are impressed by the awesomeness and are, for an instant, transported into the steamy atmosphere and the blaze of midday sunlight.[46]

The reviewer then went on to make some pointed observations, particularly relevant in light of the dialogue that encircled the International Exhibition of Modern Art—commonly known as Armory Show—that opened in February 1913. She stated: "Pictures such as these shatter the theories of the technicians that art is, after all, design and a clever way of laying on paint and that a subject is insignificant. Mr. Clark . . . has gone far beyond the old rule, using his brush, color, and canvas as the means to interpret actual scenes. He painted rapidly under the stress of direct impressions what, to many, would be unpaintable landscapes."[47] At the very least, this was a tacit indictment of Modernists whose abstract works had caused such a stir earlier in the year. Subject was still significant; and, in Clark's case, the subject was the driving inspiration.

Clark had every intention of marketing these scenes prior to the opening of the Exposition, and from Chicago an exhibition of twenty-six paintings opened in January 1914 at Vose Galleries in Boston. Vose was one of the most prestigious

galleries in New England, and Clark actually solicited the gallery in October, asking if they might consider an exhibition of the Panama paintings; and they agreed.[48] The critical response in the Boston press was positive:

> The special interest that attaches to the Panama Canal as it draws near completion is manifested in the eagerness with which all sorts of pictures of the great ditch and its surroundings are sought out by the public. In Alson Skinner Clark's series of twenty-six oil paintings of Panama, now on exhibition at the Vose Galleries, the paintable qualities of the Canal Zone are made more than ever obvious; not only the canal itself, but the towns and villages of Panama, and the adjacent landscape . . . . Mr. Clark is an excellent painter, and he has the faculty of sharing his evident enjoyment in these scenes with his public.[49]

From Boston, the paintings went to the Toledo Museum of Art in March 1914. Despite the encouraging reviews, sales were sluggish. Some paintings were sold prior to the Chicago exhibition, and O'Brien managed to sell a few. However, it appears that nothing was sold in Boston. The curator at the Toledo Museum acknowledged, "this year seems to be a very poor one for painters, as well as for dealers, as the American public has not invested in works of art to any extent."[50]

Indeed, the year 1914 was difficult in ways that most could never have expected. After the Chicago exhibition at O'Brien's, the couple returned to Paris so Clark could work on Panana paintings specifically for the Exposition. He labored feverishly that spring, and they decided to spend the summer traveling. Before leaving on the second trip to Panama, Clark purchased a "hupmobile," a rudimentary type of automobile from a friend. They did not have much occasion to use it that summer or fall, but the couple decided to visit the vineyard country in France during the summer of 1914, ending up in Rochefort-en-Terre; Medora's sister accompanied them. Amazingly, they were painfully unaware that Europe was on the verge of war,

and were shocked when the town crier announced a mobilization during the first week of August. Clark's naiveté—or perhaps disbelief—regarding the gravity of the situation is clear in a letter to his mother:

> The police came down the street on the run to the mayor's house to tell him they had received the news of the mobilization. As I went down the street there were little groups at every doorway, little groups of women weeping and some of the men trying to comfort them, while the more hysterical of the women could be heard in the houses . . . . I think the thing for us to do is to stay right here until we get a chance to leave for home. You see, prices will go up terribly in Paris, and it will be almost impossible to stay there while we are perfectly safe . . . . Perhaps when you get this all will have blown over and there will not be anything to worry about.[51]

The familiar patterns of life quickly ceased. The government commandeered the railroad, and recruits left for the battlefield; bare necessities were at a premium. They had no currency in hand, as it was impossible to cash a check. Fortunately, their innkeepers were sympathetic, assuring them meals and a place to stay. Clark offered the mayor the use of his car, and the two often made evening trips on military errands. Writing to Clark's mother, both Alson and Medora reiterated that they felt safe, in spite of a decree that was issued instructing all foreigners to register with the government, or be subject to arrest as a spy.

They decided to leave Rochefort for Paris when a letter with cash arrived from their banker. Travel by automobile was dangerous, so they abandoned the car in Rochefort and took the train. Back in Paris, they were now faced with the conundrum of getting themselves—and the Panama pictures—to America. Having determined that the pictures could not be shipped by freight, the Clarks secured passage on a ship, rolled the enormous and heavy paintings, and carried them as luggage. This, in itself,

was an ordeal. That the paintings were not abandoned in Paris is a huge credit to the Clarks' tenacity.[52]

In December 1914, Clark held one more exhibition of the paintings in Chicago prior to the San Francisco Exposition.[53] John Trask was present and pronounced that the paintings "exceeded my fondest expectations." Once again, the reviewers were very enthusiastic:

> These large canvases are a pictorial account of an "Epic of Industry," that vast human undertaking of cutting the mountain chain, the backbone of the continent and making a waterway from ocean to ocean. And not only are they an illustrated history, but aside from their subject values they represent American landscape painting in the spirit of the present. The realism is tempered by the veil of the artist's idealized vision and the truth of recording is not less true because it is translated in the language of art . . . . The color schemes are enchanting. Nature has given the joyous keynote for skies, sunshine and tropical vegetation, and they are as Mr. Clark has translated them in some mysterious way the breezy feeling of blowing wind or the stillness of heat at midday. The spell of the tropics and the critical eye of everyone about him made Mr. Clark paint as he had never painted before. The pictures are far ahead anything he has ever done.[54]

The prelude to the Exposition seemed very encouraging. Clark's work had been enthusiastically received in several different venues, and there was little to suggest that the reception at the Exposition would be any less welcoming The couple had intended to be in San Francisco for the opening, however, the unexpected death of Sarah Clark in February 1915 precluded any travel plans for the immediate future.

As Trask promised, Clark's eighteen paintings were hung together in gallery number seventy-three.[55] He was awarded a Bronze Medal for *In the Lock, Miraflores*, and the public reaction was encouraging. However, the critical reaction in San Francisco was less sanguine. The most acerbic commentary came from Eugen Neuhaus, himself a painter, and the head of the department of art at the University of

California, Berkeley. Neuhaus served on International Jury of Awards, and his in-depth review of the paintings, *The Galleries of the Exposition*, was highly critical and dismissive of Clark's efforts. "In Gallery seventy-three," he wrote "Alson Skinner Clark has been given the privilege of almost an entire gallery, without any other justification than historical interest in his shallow Panama scenes."[56]

We can only surmise (since no correspondence is extant) that Clark was surprised and unsettled by this rather vitriolic assessment. Nonetheless, he brought the paintings back to Chicago for an exhibition at the Art Institute in September 1916. The show featured the same works that were in the Exposition, however the critical reception was the antithesis of the harsh comments from San Francisco. Lena McCauley, reviewer for the *Chicago Evening Post*, was highly enthusiastic:

> Alson S. Clark's paintings of the Panama Canal in the making have been hung in gallery 47 of the Art Institute this week. These are the eighteen great canvases that contributed a striking note to the national history at the Panama-Pacific Exposition at San Francisco . . . . So splendid are these pictures and so curiously interesting in a graphic way that the viewer without his attention distracted should be able to give his entire appreciation to them. . . . . And, so with a sense of their importance, one should take the unjaded interest at the opening of the season to the first autumnal show in the galleries and revel in the color and the romance of the great undertaking as pictured by Mr. Clark.[57]

The critic in the *Chicago Tribune* was even more resolute. "No one should miss this historic group," he wrote. "To go directly to them with a sense of the magnitude of Mr. Clark's artistic conquest is to win an appreciation of the splendor of the canvases . . . . They mark the high tide of the work of the painter . . . ." [58] In the aggregate, the Panama pictures could be considered a critical success—but not a financial windfall. It appears that Clark painted at least over forty Panama pictures (including those that were not specifically of the construction), and essentially

divided the works into two groups: the paintings shown prior to the Exposition—in Boston, Toldedo, and Chicago—constituted one group. The other cluster was specific to the Exposition and then later re-exhibited *en masse* at the Art Institute of Chicago show in 1916. It is unclear whether or not Clark would have preferred the Exposition paintings to remain in tact; neither he, nor Medora, discussed that issue. However, Clark was a pragmatist, and (as previously noted) wrote about his desire to sell these works. Considering the scale of certain individual paintings, it would have been a challenge finding a venue or an individual collector that might have wanted, or could have accommodated, such a group.

To be certain, anyone who undertook the challenge of painting the canal was charting completely new territory. Although Clark's pictures were highly unusual, it should be noted that he was not the only artist who painted the construction in the Canal Zone. Two individuals, in particular, Jonas Lie and Joseph Pennell, preceded Clark in Panama.[59]

Like Clark, Lie produced a series of large canvases (see figs 3.16-26), some measuring fifty by sixty inches. [60] Stylistically, they are highly impressionistic, even more schematic and broadly rendered than most of Clark's paintings. From his depictions of Culebra, to the lock chambers and cranes, Lie has captured the spirit and immensity of the undertaking.

Lie's Panama paintings were widely exhibited. Just to cite a few examples, they were shown at: Knoedler Gallery, January 1914; The Buffalo Fine Arts Academy, October 1914; The Detroit Institute of Arts, May 1914; The Rochester Memorial Art Gallery, October 1914; the Panama-Pacific International Exposition,

1915; the Pratt Institute, March 1915; and the Portland Art Association, March 1917.[61]

Critical reaction to these scenes was equally as positive as was the response to Clark's paintings. When on view at Knoedler Gallery, the paintings were described as "valiant and ambitious works, sure to interest the public in general, sure to disturb the lover of things sedate in art, sure to create a little talk and reasonably sure to be remembered once seen."[62] *The New York Times* declared "usually a painter confronted by wonders of any kind falls into a curious insignificance in their presence. A man's success in grappling with a subject of this character is, in fact, almost of measure of his stature as an artist, and Mr. Lie's public will feel its faith in him richly justified by the imaginative power he has shown in his interpretations of this Herculean struggle between man and nature."[63] In Detroit, a reviewer reminded his readers, "Jonas Lie is a big painter . . . . That was generally conceded before his trip to Panama and his collection of paintings of the Panama Canal . . . . He has caught the spaciousness, height and depth, he has interpreted the conquering labor and the engineering genius that have gone into the building of the canal, he has placed before us the moist, hot climate, the verdure of the tropics . . . but always in conformity with good design, harmonious color and seen through a personal temperament.[64]

We know that Clark and Lie were acquainted and that they overlapped briefly in Panama sometime during in the early spring of 1913.[65] It is unclear whether, perhaps, the painters worked together at any point. Clark had certainly painted *en-plein-air* alongside other artists (especially at Giverny). However, neither Medora nor

Clark mentions that the artists painted together. Nonetheless, it does prove worthwhile and interesting to juxtapose a few similar scenes. Clark's *Panama Canal, Culebra Cut* (fig. 3.8) and Lie's *Across the Canal at Culebra* (fig. 3.25), are both painted from similar vantage points. Both images are broadly rendered, and this image, in particular, is one of Clark's most schematic and impressionistic canal scenes. Each includes railroad trains bellowing smoke as they carry away dirt from the cavernous pit at Culebra. And although Culebra was the most problematic of all the excavations, both artists highlight the enormous accomplishment of the task, as man overcomes the forces of nature.

Certain parallels can also be drawn between the composition of Clark's *In the Cut, Contractor's Hill* (fig. 3.9) and Lie's *Activity, Culebra* (fig. 3.22). In each case, the viewer is literally placed on the train tracks, in the center of the cut. Bracketed by rocks, the tracks provide a deep recession into the background that terminates in a large expanse of sky. The similarity of these compositions is intriguing, especially since the enormity of the canal project offered a myriad of different compositional options. To be clear, these parallels only exist between a few extant images; others are completely unrelated, which, in fact, makes these comparisons even more stunning. Given the lack of documentary evidence it is impossible draw any definite conclusions, but these similarities certainly warrant a degree of reasoned speculation.

The most prominent artist who preceded both Clark and Lie in the Canal Zone was Joseph Pennell. An American who spent most of his life as an expatriate in Europe, Pennell's etchings and lithographs were familiar in periodicals such as *The Century, McClure's* and *Harper's.* His interest in travel resulted in several travel

books written in collaboration with his wife, Elizabeth. Pennell's successful efforts in the Canal Zone paved the way for artists such as Lie and Clark.

In January 1912, Pennell arrived in Panama, and he remained through March of that year. The results of that trip were twenty-eight lithographs of the building of the canal and descriptions of Panama City. These images were included in two books, *Pictures of the Panama Canal*, and *Pictures of the Wonder of Work.*[66] The former book includes a preface written by the artist with observations on his stay in Panama. "I did not go to Panama," he wrote, "to study engineering—which I know nothing about; or social problems—which I had not time to master; or Central American politics—which we are in for; but to draw the Canal as it is . . . ." [67] Once he announced his intention to visit the Canal Zone both the *Century Magazine* and the *Illustrated London News* agreed to print some of his drawings. He was completely impressed—and occasionally overwhelmed—by the intensity and scale of the work. Allowed a good degree of latitude by the administrators to paint whatever was of interest, his carefully rendered lithographs are an interesting counterbalance to the large-scale paintings done by the later artists (see fig. 3.27). Nonetheless, the optimistic spirit of the project is first evident in Pennell's work. Steam shovels, cranes, trains—all working in concert to accomplish a goal—are at the heart of this series. This spirit of accomplishment was born in the imagery of the Pennell and carried through to his successors.

The period between Clark's trips to Panama, his return to America, and the exhibition of the canal paintings was undoubtedly very demanding. The canal pictures had been a formidable undertaking, and their exhibition marked the end of a period of

Clark's career. He was now a fully mature artist whose work had garnered national and international recognition. He was both lionized and occasionally vilified by the critics, but his paintings had found an audience. Although his commitment to Impressionism was solidified, Clark (like so many Americans) practiced a modified Impressionist style. Devotion to line, drawing and structure were never abandoned, but, instead, integrated into works dominated fugitive light, daring color, and bold brushwork. Ultimately, the challenge of painting the Canal Zone—and often on a large scale—set the stage for the ambitious murals he would paint in California (these paintings will be discussed in Chapter Six). The demands of painting the Canal Zone also forced Clark to test the boundaries of his skill. He had never attempted a "series" of scenes, and was certainly untried with a project of this magnitude. His work in Panama represented a crucible of sorts, and Clark overcame many obstacles to pass this difficult test.

This conclusion of this period is also characterized by the death of his mother, Sarah.[68] Clark's mother loomed large in his life. In his youth, they were particularly close and he saw her as a great advocate and comfort. What seems to be a very normal detachment developed after Clark's marriage to Medora; however, they enjoyed a close relationship, despite the distances and the long period between visits. Clark wrote to her frequently, and was especially concerned that she not be anxious regarding their situation once war broke out in Europe. The Clarks spent the summer of 1915 at Comfort Island. They began to travel again during the fall, this time in America, as they rekindled relationships and looked forward to new experiences.

[1] Hunter, Part I, p. 76.

[2] David McCullough, *The Path Between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977), p.543. To date, McCullough's work is the most exhaustive examination of the building of the Panama Canal.

[3] Ibid., p. 11.

[4] The cited figures are from Bob Wernet, *The Panama Canal History Timeline*, www.battleship-newjersey.com/panama/usconstruct.html.

[5] McCullough, *The Path Between the Seas*, p. 529.

[6] Ibid., p. 222.

[7] Ibid., p. 270.

[8] The two individuals who so skillfully managed to champion Panama were William Nelson Cromwell and Philippe Bunau-Varilla. For various reasons, both stood to profit considerably from a canal in Panama, rather than Nicaragua. Intense lobbying was capped by one final dramatic move—Bunau-Varilla sent a one centavo Nicaraguan postage stamp to each senator three days before the deciding vote. The stamp proudly displayed the volcano Momotombo in full eruption. Apparently that last bit of propaganda sealed the fate of a canal through Panama. See Ibid., p. 323.

[9] Ibid., p. 340.

[10] The extraordinary account of these events can be found in ibid., pp. 329-402. The canal was turned over to Panama in 2000.

[11] Ibid., p. 416.

[12] Wernet, *The Panama Canal History Timeline*, p. 1.

[13] Hunter, Part I, p. 78.

[14] The couple arrived without reservations, and the hotel was booked. However, the manager of the Tivoli hotel was Peter Goyer, former Chief Steward of the Red Star Lines, the steamship company that Clark regularly used. He recognized the couple and immediately had them situated. See Stern, *Alson Clark*, p. 25.

[15] Three individuals ran the canal project at various times. They were John F. Wallace, a civil engineer. The second, John Stevens was selected to replace Wallace in July 1905. Colonel George Goethals, who saw the project to its completion, then replaced him.

[16] Hunter, Part I, p. 81.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Clark to Sarah Clark, March 27, 1913, ACP.

[19] Wernet, *The Panama Canal History Timeline*, p. 2

[20] McCullough, *The Path Between the Seas*, p. 590.

[21] Ulrich Keller, *The Building of the Panama Canal in Historic Photographs* (New York: Dover Publications, 1983), p. 43.

[22] McCullough, *The Path Between the Seas*, p. 591.

[23] Ibid., 590.

[24] Ibid., p. 461.

[25] Medora Clark, "The Zone From a Woman's Point of View," p. 10. Typed manuscript, ACP.

[26] Ibid., p. 11.

[27] McCullough, *The Path Between the Seas*, p. 552.

[28] Ibid., p. 545.

[29] Ibid., p. 544.

[30] Hunter, Part I, p. 82.

[31] Medora Clark, "Zone From a Woman's Point of View," p. 12.

[32] McCullough, *The Path Between the Seas*, p. 578.

[33] Ibid., p. 575.

[34] Medora Clark to Sarah Clark, April 2, 1913, ACP.

[35]Ibid., Clark to Sarah Clark, June 1913.

[36] Ibid., John Trask to Clark, June 24, 1913.

[37] For information on the Exposition see, for example, William H. Gerdts and Will South, *California Impressionism* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1998), pp. 188-200.

[38] William H. Gerdts, *American Impressionism* (New York: Artabras, 1984), p. 306.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Clark to Sarah Clark, August 5, 1913, ACP.

[41] Hunter, Part I, p. 85.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Clark to Sarah Clark, October 23, 1913, ACP.

[44] McCullough, *The Path Between the Seas*, p 630; as quoted in Gerstle Mack, *The Land Divided* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1944).

[45] The works at the AIC included *Panama Street; Morning, Ancon Hill, Panama; and Gold Hill, Panama.*

[46] Lena M. McCauley, *Chicago Evening Post*, November 25, 1913, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Vose Galleries of Boston, reel 4593, frame 37. Courtesy of Marian and Phil Kovinick.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Vose Gallery wrote to O'Brien's in Chicago: " We received a letter in October from Mr. Alson Clark saying that he exhibits with you and would like to show his paintings in our galleries. He writes us asking to arrange the dates with you, and expressing a preference for the last two weeks in January." Vose to O'Brien, November 4, 1913, ACP.

[49] "Fine Arts," *Boston Transcript*, January 15, 1914, Vose Galleries of Boston, reel 4593, frame 538.

[50] Almon Whiting to Clark, April 11, 1914, ACP.

[51] Ibid., Clark to Sarah Clark, August 2, 1914.

[52] Medora supplied an informative, and often moving account of the events. Alson secured passage on a ship with the assistance of the American Embassy, and the group traveled to Le Havre—through streams of Belgian refugees—finally sailing on an ill-equipped vessel for America. As they pulled into New York City harbor, Medora remembered: "Alson and I always loved to see the Statue of Liberty come into view, and this time, after the long solitary ten-day crossing, it was hard to refrain from weeping as her slow emergence from the mist took on a new significance." Hunter, Part I, p. 94.

[53] From Medora's description, it appears that Clark held a private opening of his work at in a large attic room on the third floor of his parent's home that served as a temporary gallery for this exhibition. Hunter, Part II, p. 3.

[54] Ibid., unidentified newspaper clipping, December 14, 1914.

[55] The paintings included: *Sosa Hill From the Quarry; The Cut From Empire; Big Cranes, Miraflores; Three Hills From Culebra; Gates, Pedro Miguel; Cuaracaha Slide; In the Cut; Dredges Under Gold Hill; Moving the Tressel [sic]; Culebra Slide; The Cranes, Miraflores; In the Lock, Miraflores; Pedro Miguel Locks; In Tropical Waters; Panama From the Pacific; Gold Hill From Culebra; First Dredges Through Gatun.* See Catalogue of the Department of Fine Arts, Panama-Pacific International Exposition (San Francisco: The Wahlgreen Company, 1915), p. 12.

[56] Eugen Neuhaus, *The Galleries of the Exposition: A Critical Review of the Painting, Statuary and Graphic Arts in the Palace of Fine Arts at the Panama Pacific International Exposition.* (San Francisco: Paul Elder, 1915), p. 83.

[57] Lena McCauley, "Art and Artists," *Chicago Evening Post*, September 28, 1916, ACP.

[58] "Art," *Chicago Tribune*, October 3, 1916.

[59] Lie and Clark overlapped for a short period, Medora writing that both Lie and Charles Bittinger, who was also visiting the Canal Zone, left for home in the beginning of April 1913. Medora to Sarah Clark, April 2, 1913, ACP.

[60] The West Point Museum owns twelve of these works, which were donated in honor of Colonel Goethals, a West Point graduate. I would like to thank David Reel, Curator, and West Point Museum, United States Military Academy for providing images of the Lie paintings in the collection. An additional Jonas Lie canal scene, *Conquerors, Culebra Cut, Panama, 1913*, is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The West Point Museum also has a collection of watercolors

of the canal by William Pretyman. For information, see exhibition checklist, "Art of the Panama Canal: A Selection of Art and Artifacts Commemorating the Transfer of the Panama Canal from the United States to the Republic of Panama," West Point Museum, United States Military Academy, [2000].

[61] I am grateful to Marian and Phil Kovinick for information on the exhibition of Lie's Panama paintings.

[62] "What is Happening in the World of Art," *The Sun*, January 4, 1914, p. 2, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Henry McBride Papers, reel NMB2, frame 18.

[63] "At Home and Abroad," *New York Times*, January 4, 1914, Part 5, p. 15, Archives of American Art, New York Public Library Art Division, reel 58, frame 552.

[64] "American Painter Wins Big Pittsburgh Prize," *Saturday Night*, May 9, 1914, Archives of American Art, Detroit Institute of Arts Scrapbook, reel D13, frame 531.

[65] See note 55.

[66] See Joseph Pennell, *Pictures of the Panama Canal* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1912.) See also Joseph Pennell, *Pictures of the Wonder of Work* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1916).

[67] Pennell, *Pictures of the Panama Canal*, p. 13.

[68] Clark's father had already passed away. Stern suggests that he died sometime in the spring of 1912. However, the Death Certificate, Alson Ellis Clark, Cook County, Illinois, records the date of death as January 15, 1911. See Stern, *Alson Clark*, p. 23. I am grateful to Toby Clark for information on the death certificate.

Chapter Four

The Great War

With World War I raging in Europe, the Clarks remained in the United States, traveling to the East Coast and to the South. Impressionist strategies dominate his work of this period, as he painted the New England landscape and the city of Charleston, South Carolina. The relative calm of their lives was interrupted when Alson enlisted in the Navy in 1917, and was sent overseas. He became an aerial photographer for the military, allowing him to combine a lifelong love of photography and his commitment to the American effort abroad.

The spring of 1915 was spent sorting through Sara Clark's personal items, and the Clarks were unable to attend the Panama-Pacific Exposition. Clark gave up his studio in Watertown the previous fall, and they spent the summer at Comfort Island where he constructed a new studio over one of the boathouses. By late fall, it was clear that certain decisions were imminent. They could not remain on the island during the winter—the frozen river making travel impossible—and plans of going to San Francisco had been abandoned. Clark determined that he wanted to remain in the East, to once again paint the snow that so intrigued him in the Midwest, Québec, and Prague. They accepted an offer from Charles and Edith Bittinger to visit the couple in Duxbury, Massachusetts. Charles Bittinger was among the circle of friends that the Clarks knew from Paris in the early part of the century. According to correspondence from Medora to Sarah Clark, Bittinger also spent a fair amount of time with the couple in Panama in 1913.[1]

Medora recalled that the snow-blanketed landscape provided great inspiration: "Snow in the country was once again a tremendous privilege: Alson loved the frozen cranberry bogs, the drifted snow on the fine old gateposts, the varied patterns of the white on the evergreen, and he painted continuously."[2] *A New England Winter* (fig. 4.1) and *Snowscene, Duxbury* (fig. 4.2) confirm that Clark was once again intoxicated by the snow and winter landscape. His notebooks confirm that he produced several works in Duxbury that are unlocated, including *The Pines* and *Cranberry Bog.*[3] These are quintessential New England scenes, and what we have come to expect from Clark as an artist who immersed himself in the landscape at hand.

They decided not to impose unduly on the Bittingers', renting a room in Jackson, New Hampshire, at an inn in that was open for the winter. The inn was set in the woods, and Clark was equipped for working out-of-doors, having brought the snowshoes that served him so well in Québec. Medora remarked after their arrival: "His joy the next day when he set forth on snowshoes into the woods, with canvas and easel, was unlimited, and when he returned his pride was equally divided between his picture and the fact that he still retained a nimble technique on snow shoes."[4] One of Clark's most successful efforts from this trip is *Frozen River, Jackson, New Hampshire* (fig. 4.3). The chill emanating from this frozen scene is palpable. Cool colors dominate, with purple and blue shadows reflecting off of the white snow. Glimpses of the river are suggested by blocky brush strokes, and the background trees are just barely articulated.

Their peaceful stay in New Hampshire was interrupted by a frightening turn of events. Medora recalled that as she was returning from a long walk one afternoon, an

usual amount of smoke was coming from the direction of the inn. Realizing the implications she frantically returned, only to find Alson safe and some (but not many) of their belongings recovered. While all present escaped unscathed, the building, nonetheless, burned to the ground. Clark lost one painting in the fire, but managed to save his easel and paint boxes. The following day they left for Boston and eventually returned to the Bittingers' for several weeks.

The summer of 1916 was spent at Comfort Island, and in the fall they returned to Chicago. In September, Clark saw his Panama Canal pictures exhibited at the Art Institute of Chicago: it was the first time he had seen them as a group. As previously noted, the critical reaction was overwhelmingly positive. According to Medora, "Alson basked in belated glory."[5] That fall, Henry Reinhardt and Sons in Chicago solicited Clark for an exhibition of his work. He was anxious to exhibit several of his French and new Comfort Island pictures that had not yet been seen, and eagerly consented. The January 1917 show featured a small, yet selective group of eighteen paintings.

Chicago critics were enthusiastic. "One fact stands clear after a visit to Reinhardt's this week," claimed one reviewer. "Those people who know Alson Skinner Clark only from his views of the Panama Canal Zone . . . do not know this artist at all. I was one of those people. Now I know different . . . . Alson Skinner Clark ranks . . . with our best landscape painters."[6]

Yet another critic offered a positive, if not tempered review of Clark's abilities:

> Alson Skinner Clark's latest paintings on exhibit at Reinhardt's galleries prove one happy thing: Clark does not worship consistency for consistency's

> sake. That is, he paints what he sees in the technique that the subject demands. He paints landscapes in high colored impressionism, contrasting colors roughly in order to reproduce the spirit of the scene. He paints interiors and pictures of houses clearly, explicitly, smoothly . . . . Again he varies in "Windy Hill Farm" where a highly decorative touch, almost posterish, becomes evident. This variety represents nothing of growth or process in Clark. It stands for no distinct stages in his development. The pictures are all modern things, done according to mood and subject . . . . It is better to hunt the truth in each new situation, irrespective of whether or not you may be led away from consistency with former performances.[7]

Several issues are raised. In order for Clark to successfully master a range and variety of subjects he consistently broadened his scope, not relying on past successes as a barometer of future triumphs. If we examine *Windy Hill Farm* (fig. 4.4), the brick exterior of a farmhouse in the Thousand Islands, the critic's assertion that this is "posterish" comes into question. Although it is unclear exactly what the author intended by that phrase, the work is well composed and skillfully rendered. It is not "illustrative" in the derisive sense, but a clear example of his interest in delineating aged and worn architectural facades—attributes that give homes and buildings their unique character—and what would become a leitmotif in Clark's oeuvre.

According to Medora, the show was a financial success, and so the couple accepted an offer from friends to join them on a "short" trip to Charleston, South Carolina.[8] Although the exact dates are unclear, they probably arrived in late January or early February, and remained through at least the first part of April. [9]Aside from a brief stay in New Orleans, Clark had not spent any considerable time in the South. Charleston is a fascinating city whose history—both its decline and rebirth—was omnipresent in its streets and buildings. The city's cultural zenith was during the antebellum period, and the devastating ramifications of the Civil War took its toll on Charleston well into the twentieth century. [10] In her study of the Charleston

Renaissance, Martha Severns noted that the year 1901 was a critical turning point for the city, with the establishment of a Navy Yard on its north perimeter. By World War I, the Charleston Navy Base employed over ten-thousand people, fueling the local economy.[11]

Tourism—always an excellent way to raise revenues—became a focal point for local business leaders. By the early twentieth century, Northerners were beginning to rediscover the charms of Charleston. The painter Birge Harrison spent several winters there, and praised its individual charm—also recognizing two other cities, New Orleans and Québec, for their unique character (for a discussion of Clark and Harrison in Québec see Chapter Two).[12] Interestingly enough, all three were cities that Clark visited and found eminently paintable.

As Severns has observed, Charleston's cultural renewal was inextricably tied to concept of the city as a tourist destination. Several noted artists visited Charleston between 1914 and 1940. Childe Hassam and Edward Hopper came for the mild climate and scenery. Some came at the invitation of local friends. Others, like the Clarks and their friends, were intrigued by the city's growing reputation.[13] It was generally uncommon for Clark visit a city based on its tourist image. (In fact, while the Clarks visited major cities in Europe, it has been noted that the couple often sought out remote destinations.) However, Charleston had character and history: elements that were always magnets for Clark. Medora immediately recognized this trip as a boon for Alson, as the "old houses, the iron work, the balconies, the massive gates, the many church spires, and the beautiful walls gave promise of infinite motifs."[14] In fact, the Clarks remained in Charleston long after their friends departed.

They settled in a pleasant but aging boarding house, "The Matthews House," where the owner, Miss Matthews, rented her front chamber. Clark immediately began to paint.

Severns observed, "every major city has a set of iconic views of its landmarks and characteristic sites. Distinctiveness and recognizability are key to the selection. For a city like Charleston, that was consciously trying to package itself as 'America's Most Historic City,' it is not surprising that historic buildings emerged as the icons repeatedly associated with the city's heroic past and present charm . . . ."[15] One particular landmark favored by both local and visiting artists was the Church of St. Michael's. The icon was painted by Birge Harrison in 1919 (fig. 4.5) and drawn by Childe Hassam in 1925 (fig. 4.6). St. Michael's is located at a major downtown intersection between Meeting and Broad Streets. It "loomed" over City Hall, the County and Federal Court Houses, and the Post office.[16] The ubiquitous image could be found in nineteenth century engravings and picture postcards, making it, by the early twentieth century, a totemic image of Charleston.

Both Harrison's and Hassam's views are axial, looking down Meeting Street. Clark eschewed this view, opting instead to paint the church from an alley on the south side of its graveyard in two nearly identical views, *St. Michael's, Charleston* (fig. 4.7) and *St. Michael's* (fig. 4.8). Even though the focus is certainly on the church—the spire prominently rising—trees obscure a portion of the building. The paintings are less about the historical significance of the church in the larger context of Charleston, than they are an investigation of a complicated (and successful) pictorial scheme.

Part of Charleston's tremendous attraction was in its architectural diversity, its "dynamic interplay of high style and vernacular."[17] The alleyways and inner courtyards held a treasure trove of paintable subjects, as did the main thoroughfares, seen in *On the Battery, Charleston* (4.9). One of the most popular vernacular buildings was a three-story tenement complex known as Cabbage Row, or Catfish Row, immortalized by DuBose Heyward in his novel, *Porgy*.[18] The complex was given the epithet "Cabbage Row," when vegetable merchants claimed the area and placed their daily offerings on either end of the street.[19]

The dilapidated eighteenth century row of houses provided Clark with perfect material. In two paintings, both titled *Catfish Row, South Carolina* (figs. 4.10-11), the artist chose two different vistas: the former, a truncated view of the derelict row houses, and the latter, a free-standing structure with three figures. In both instances, one is struck by the tactility of the exposed surfaces. Worn brick—faded and discolored— provides the surface for variations of color, light, and shadow. Wood shutters, chipping and badly in need of a fresh coat of paint, cover the windows. Lavender shadows predominate, and, in now typical fashion, Clark has incorporated both carefully described and loosely rendered passages. Parenthetically, the popularity of Cabbage Row ultimately led to its restoration and gentrification. Clark's images stand as a slice of Charleston history that was ultimately rewritten. The artist's fascination with aging and crumbling structures—not just architecture, but actual deterioration—emerges in earnest at this juncture. This interest culminates in both California (painting the Missions) and in Mexico, and will be addressed in the next two chapters.

The house where the couple boarded was, according to Medora, a "fragile shell, falling apart uniformly, everywhere."[20] Clark was an accomplished carpenter, and took it upon himself to help restore the aging abode. On the south side of the house were railings that were "painfully decrepit."[21] Clark painstakingly repaired the rails, and memorialized his efforts in *The Galleries, Charleston* (fig. 4.12), which was, in Medora's opinion, "not only a product of his brush but also of his hammer."[22]

While the locals were skeptical, but cordial towards the newcomers, Clark—always affable—managed to win many hearts during their stay. Even their slightly curmudgeonly landlady who "gave no board" would occasionally offer the couple a home cooked meal from her kitchen. Clark painted the exterior of that kitchen, focusing on the wonderful aged bricks and windows, in *Miss Mathews' Kitchen* (fig. 4.13), and a similar, but slightly larger version in *Charleston* (fig. 4.14).

The tranquility of their world was shattered when the United States entered World War I on April 6, 1917. The Clarks abruptly left Charleston for Chicago. At age 41, Clark was hardly a candidate for conscription. Nonetheless, he believed that his ability to speak French and his familiarity with the French countryside could be useful to the military. He enlisted in the Navy, writing to friends: "Of course it is darn hard to go, but if I can be of any use in this trouble I feel it is up to me to help. I have never considered myself much of a French scholar, but I imagine I will be some use . . . ."[23] Clark was commissioned as an ensign, and assigned as a recruiter to the Ninth Naval District, next to their home on Comfort Island. Their home became a headquarters for both officers and enlisted men, and Clark began a successful recruiting campaign. Medora related that during this period Clark did not paint. He

was "as detached as though it had never been his vocation," but instead devoted all of his efforts to his military obligation.[24]

In November, Clark's sailing orders arrived. He was reassigned to France to serve as an interpreter, and had a mere two days to organize his belongings and report to New York City for departure. They had little time to dwell on the events. Clark left on November 3, 1917, with Medora watching as the boat launched. That night he wrote to her: "We have sailed . . . . I know you know it, but you were a brick as you always are in any emergency. I will always tell you in every letter that I adore you, for I do more and more, but tonight I was making a brave fight to keep up and know that you are doing the same."[25] The trip across the Atlantic was uneventful (the risk of German submarines ever present), and when he arrived in Paris, Clark was disappointed to learn to that his language skills were not compatible with the Navy's needs.

Ultimately, it was Clark's interest and knowledge of photography that determined his position. Clark had his own darkroom at Comfort Island, owned many cameras, and was an accomplished photographer. As noted, Clark photographed his work and compiled notebooks with identifications and descriptions. He often traveled with cameras (particularly in the later years), documenting his landscape subject, as well as photographing his friends and family.

The Navy required a clerical personnel manager, someone responsible for identification photos of the soldiers in France; Clark was given the assignment. He wrote to Medora: "I have bought a whole photographing outfit for the place, including all printing and developing stuff, and have an assistant in place . . . . We are

turning out lots of work now . . . . Best of all, when I get through here I am going all over the areas where we have aviation stations to do the same thing . . . ."[26] By December, Clark had a staff of three men working for him on the photography project, and he was involved with the "Welfare Office," which tried to provide small comforts for the troops.[27]

Clark was immediately introduced to the perils of war. Paris was plagued by air raids and blackout, and his Parisian studio was damaged by ordinance. He traveled frequently, writing, for example, that the situation in Lens, France was especially appalling: not a single home was left unscathed.[28] By March 1918, Clark had been promoted. "Did I tell you in the last letter," he wrote to Medora, "that I have been dubbed 'official photographer,' in fact I have orders reading that way. This is quite an advance for me . . . . It is quite an opening and I trust I will make good at it for it is a thing I love to do . . . ."[29] Alson and Medora kept up a prodigious correspondence during the time he was abroad. The letters were numbered, and often written on consecutive days.

Clark's duties were significantly augmented in May 1918, when he was sent to London to train as an aerial photographer. A letter to Medora proclaimed that "yesterday I had my first lesson in school and did well . . . . We were given photos and an ordinance map and were to locate the spot where the photo was made on this map . . . . I have all kinds of schemes in view now when I get back to France. I shall advocate starting a school for photographers there to give them the same training, taking the best of this present bunch of men as teachers."[30] Aerial photography literally entailed hanging out of an open plane (an F2A flying boat) while taking

photographs. Medora recalled that the job's inherent (and obvious) perils were compounded by "fly-boy" pilots, who enjoyed practicing stunts while Clark precariously dangled out of the plane.[31]

Clark was stationed in various cities throughout France and England. He was in London when the armistice was announced on November 11, 1918, and, fortunately, was one of the first soldiers to receive orders to return home. Clark sailed into New York harbor on December 24, 1918 where Medora met the ship. His return to civilian life took a bit of adjustment—the variety of foods and modern conveniences, such as indoor heat—seemed strange at first. They spent Christmas with Charles and Suzette Dewey, with whom they had traveled to Charleston three years prior, and Clark began to re-acclimate.

Clark did not speak of, or express through his paintings, the horrors that he undoubtedly witnessed in Europe. However, his military service left one clear consequence: he was completely deaf in one ear. After consulting a specialist, the problem was deemed temporary and treatments were recommended. Nonetheless, the doctor counseled Clark to live in a mild climate, one that would not aggravate his condition. This presented certain choices. "We knew nothing of warmer American country," remembered Medora. "Neither California nor Florida appealed to Alson, but California had one lure—mountains;" that, in spite of her observation that they were "unconsciously prejudiced against it [California] through its promotion literature."[32]

The blatant boosterism and hyperbole that pervaded the promotional literature on California has been studied and will be investigated in the next chapter.

Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to briefly introduce the concept now, particularly since it was just this type of propaganda that, in fact, could have rendered the opposite of the desired effect—witnessed specifically in Medora's observations.

Much of the promotional literature on Southern California in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was financed by the railroads and the tourist industry.[33] One of the most determined promoters of the Southland was Charles Lummis, who took over the publication of *Land of Sunshine Magazine* in 1894. As a transplanted Easterner, Lummis became a zealot in his endorsement of life in Southern California. His magazine touted the region's salubrious climate, exquisite scenery, and the area's unlimited potential.[34] The literature on California's virtues reached rather epic proportions. For example, in 1914 a writer in the journal *Western Art* waxed poetic, if not a little passionate over California's charms:

> No matter what may be the belief of one as to a future life—few there are, if any who do not at some time during the present life desire for their own an ideal condition of existence. Many there are who have journied [sic] to the confines four terrestrial world in search of an ideal land . . . . and they have found such a land—as near as may be—in the Southland of California. And they have called it the "Land of Heart's Desire."[35]

While clearly the siren call of California beckoned—the population of Los Angeles doubled between 1890 and 1900—the blatant propaganda was not necessarily an inducement for all who arrived. Yet, the Clarks could not avoid certain realities: California had the temperate climate they required. Rather reluctantly, they boarded a train for Los Angeles and arrived in February 1919. On the trip Clark announced to Medora, "painting was a thing completely of the past, and that he never cared to paint again . . . . Alson had never been anything but a painter, and I

wondered what he planned to do with the rest of his life—or of our lives."[36] Although Clark's diaries do not refer to this rather radical position, we can speculate on the motivation for his pronouncement. Having just returned from the horrors of war, his career as a painter may have seemed trivial. In fact, once Clark enlisted in the military (even as a recruiter in Watertown) he did not care to paint. Adjusting to civilian life entailed more than becoming reacquainted with daily routines; it also required looking ahead to the rest of one's life without the burden of the recent past.

Their arrival in Los Angeles marked a significant line of demarcation in their lives. Ultimately, Southern California would become their home. Once in Los Angeles, and surrounded by the wealth of scenery, Clark's desire to paint returned. His spirits were buoyed, and he slowly regained his artistic and emotional footing. While his main contacts were in the Midwest and East Coast, Clark managed to carve out a niche for himself in this new environment. Relocating to California signaled a new start for his career, and forced the artist to confront life's challenges without the safety net of established friends and colleagues.

[1] Medora Clark to Sarah Clark, April 2, 1913, ACP.

[2] Hunter, Part II, p. 6.

[3] See photocopies of Clark's painting notebooks in possession of the author. As previously noted, Clark's notebooks were acquired from a number of different sources, including the Alson Clark Papers at the Archives of American Art and members of Clark's extended family.

[4] Hunter, Part II, p. 6.

[5] Ibid., p. 12.

[6] Unidentified newspaper clipping, [January 1917], ACP.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Hunter, Part II, p. 13.

[9] Medora notes that they left after Clark's January 1917 exhibition at Reinhardt's and stayed until the United States entered World War I on April 6, 1917, returning to Chicago and then Watertown shortly thereafter. See Ibid.

[10] The most comprehensive study of Charleston's art and culture is Martha Severens, *The Charleston Renaissance* (Spartanburg: Saralandland Press, 1998).

[11] Ibid., p. 4.

[12] Ibid., p. 5.

[13] Ibid., p. 13.

[14] Hunter, Part II, p. 14.

[15] Severns, *The Charleston Renaissance*, p. 47.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., p. 73.

[18] Heyward once lived across the street from the complex, transforming it into the primary setting for his novel, and later the Broadway production of Porgy and Bess.

[19] Severns, *The Charleston Renaissance*, p. 73.

[20] Hunter, Part II, p. 14.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Clark to Joe and Sal, [1917], ACP.

[24] Hunter, Part II, p. 16.

[25] Clark to Medora, November 3, 1917, ACP.

[26] Ibid., Clark to Medora, November 24, 1917.

[27] Ibid., Clark to Medora, December 20, 1917.

[28] Ibid., "Alson Clark Tells of Bombing Raids," *Watertown Standard*, [1919].

[29] Ibid., Clark to Medora, March 4, 1918.

[30] Ibid., Clark to Medora, May 5, 1918.

[31] Hunter, Part II, p. 19.

[32] Ibid., p. 26.

[33] For an interesting study of social issues surrounding the growth of Los Angeles and its relationship to painters, see Susan Laundauer, "The Culture and Consumption of Plein-Air Painting," in *California Impressionists* (Georgia: The Georgia Museum of Art and the Irvine Museum, 1996), pp. 11-51.

[34] For information on Lummis, see William H. Gerdts and Will South, *California Impressionism*, pp. 129-130. See also ibid., pp.15-16.

[35] Frederick Roland Miner, "California—The Landscapists Land of Heart's Desire," *Western Art*, 2, 1 (June/August 1914), p. 31.

[36] Hunter, Part II, p. 28.

Chapter Five

The Land of Heart's Desire

Will South has stated that, "one of the biggest boons for California Impressionism in the 1920s, when it was beset by an increasing number of challenges, was the relocation of Alson Clark to Southern California." [1] In fact, that is an apt and insightful observation. However, it was never necessarily the Clarks' intention to remain permanently in California. I would posit that he did not expect the landscape in California to be as compelling as the exotic sites he had previously visited and painted. He arrived for health reasons, but ultimately remained out of a growing attachment to the landscape and to his adopted city of Pasadena. The temperate climate allowed him to paint *en-plein-air* most of the year. He became fascinated with the desert—where he had never before painted—and eventually constructed a small studio in Palm Springs. The mission buildings—in their dilapidated states—satisfied Clark's appetite for historical architecture. Prior to his first visit to California, he was unaware of the beauty or character of the aging missions. And, perhaps, the availability of these sites, coupled with the climate and diverse landscape, further encouraged Clark's eventual relocation to the state. His decision to remain certainly enhanced the artistic climate, and underscored the importance of Impressionism in Southern California.

The Clarks arrived in Los Angeles on February 13, 1919 and settled at what Medora described as a less than charming hotel in the center of the city; the following day Clark went to see an ear specialist.[2] He was prescribed a daily regimen of ear

treatments, requiring that they stay in the immediate environs. One particularly fascinating anecdote involved the couple eating at a tearoom and discovering what Medora deemed a "good collection of contemporary art, most of it from the brushes of friends," on the wall. "We even found some of our own property, chairs, costumes, and such in the canvases, so we formed the habit of dining there, feeling less forlorn with such association."[3] Unfortunately, she did not enumerate a list of painters, or the name and location of the restaurant. One could speculate that works by Guy Rose, John Frost, Frederick Frieseke, or Richard Miller—all of whom were friends of the couple from the Giverny days and had connections to California—may have adorned the walls.[4]

After several weeks, Clark's doctor agreed to allow him a few short trips in and around Los Angeles. The couple ventured to San Gabriel, where Alson was immediately drawn to the aging structure of the mission. After this first trip he went to an artist's supply store, secured an easel, stool, paint box, paints, and panels.[5] For the next week Clark returned to the mission several times, writing that this had been a "splendid month. Feeling like painting again. Ear nearly normal."[6] Clark produced several small works of the Mission San Gabriel during these visits. Two similar views, both titled *Mission San Gabriel* (figs. 5.1-2), explore the building's weathered and battered façade. Painted from slightly different viewpoints, the loose brushwork helps to underscore the crumbling brick front wall. Considering his interest in architecture, such scenes are not surprising.[7]

His fascination with mission ruins was further piqued when the couple visited Mission San Juan Capistrano in the beginning of March. They were "unprepared for

the beauty of the mission; we stopped at the gate to absorb it."[8] A priest introduced himself as Father O'Sullivan. After Clark made introductions—and added that he was a painter—they were shocked to discover that the Father was familiar with his work. Apparently he dabbled in art, followed the history of American painting, and was an admirer of Clark's. Father O'Sullivan arrived at the mission in 1910, determined to revitalize and restore its past architectural glory; he and the Clarks would ultimately become good friends.[9] Medora quickly realized that a prolonged stay in Capistrano was inevitable, and she arranged for the couple to rent a room and a studio at a local boarding house. They returned to Los Angeles for a few weeks, gathered some belongings, and arrived back in Capistrano in mid-March.

The history of the California missions are inextricably linked to the state's identity. That history, however, has been written—and rewritten—several times during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Artists gravitated to the missions, generating ubiquitous images. A great number of these are reproduced in the exhibition catalogue *Romance of the Bells,*[10] which explores the iconography of the California missions. Although an in-depth analysis of that iconography is not required here, it is necessary to understand why the missions became such a focal point for painters.[11]

The Spanish colonization of California—through a chain of twenty-one missions located throughout the state—began in 1769. However, the entire mission enterprise was a Spanish response to encroachment of the Russian Empire in Northern California from their colonies in Alaska and the Pacific Northwest.[12] In theory, the Crown's investment in the missions would be limited: they could be

organized by a few padres, protected by a small number of soldiers, and were intended to be self-sufficient within several years. The native population would be converted to Christianity, Hispanicized, and eventually the mission lands would be turned over to the local population to govern as Spanish subjects.[13] That plan ended when Mexico received its independence in 1821 and claimed California.

Father Junipero Serra founded Mission San Juan Capistrano on November 1, 1776—ironically, at nearly the same historical moment as the American Colonies declared their independence from England.[14] One of the most ambitious and significant accomplishments at this mission was the construction of a great cathedral. The cornerstone was laid in 1797, the building completed in 1806. Although a formidable structure—with several domes and a bell tower—its still could not withstand the powerful earthquake that shook Southern California on December 8, 1812. The building was decimated, leaving only rubble and the remnants of walls in its once majestic place.

In the wake of the devastating earthquake, the fate of the mission became even more tentative as the territory of California changed from Spanish to Mexican hands, and finally to American control. The exchange of power had little effect on the already beleaguered indigenous population forced to live and work at the mission. As James Rawls points out, the native Indian population suffered dramatically throughout the period of colonization, in spite of the colonizers.[15] European diseases devastated the Indians, and while the Franciscan missionaries and their supporters touted the missions as "protectors" of the native population, contemporary accounts suggest otherwise. In his seminal study of Southern California, Carey McWilliams

claimed that over 60,000 Indian deaths were recorded at the Missions between 1776 and 1833, mostly from disease.[16] French and English observers chronicled the Spanish victimization of the native population, describing their plight as nothing short of indentured servitude.[17] Rawls posits that the vitriol aimed at the Spanish may have been an attempt "to show the failure, the inadequacies, the backwardness of Spanish efforts in California."[18] The reality of the efficacy of the missions may lie somewhere in-between these divergent observations.

Nonetheless, the characterization of the mission as a destructive institution was easily embraced by anti-clerical Protestants, and fit into the zeitgeist of Manifest Destiny; in fact, it was further exaggerated in California:

> There developed, in a sense, a regional variation of the American expansionist rationale of the 1840s, Manifest Destiny. This regional variation might be styled the "California Imperative," a belief that the superior land of California demanded or required a superior people to develop it. The California Indians were clearly not up to the task; neither were the Spanish-speaking Californians with their backward, oppressive institution of the mission.[19]

Rawls' observation is critical with respect to a form of a "cultural nativism" that developed in California during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The impact of cultural nativism (an acute variation of the pro-American sentiment, or cultural nationalist dialogue) on art in California will be discussed in detail. However, it is certainly possible that the seeds of this collective consciousness—of the preeminence of California, and ultimately that of California scenes and painters in California—were sown at this juncture.

Adding to the hyperbole of the mission lore was the publication and popularization of Helen Hunt Jackson's novel, *Ramona.* McWilliams stated: "Some day the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce should erect a great bronze statue of

Helen Hunt Jackson . . . as it was she who was almost solely responsible for the evocation of its Mission past."[20] Jackson's life and work has been the subject of many articles and books.[21] By the early 1870s, Jackson had written several poems, novels, and essays under pseudonyms (including the novel *Mercy Philbrick's Choice*, 1876). She first visited California in 1872, developing a fascination with the American West and Native Americans. This interest was translated into political activism, as Jackson became a crusader for the rights of Native Americans in the West. In 1881 she published *A Century of Dishonor*, chronicling the plight and mistreatment of the Western tribes by the government and white settlers. That same year Jackson was dispatched to California by the *Century Magazine* to research and publish a series of articles on the Mission Indians. By definition of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Mission Indians included only those living in the three southernmost counties of California, rather than the descendents of all Indians who were once confined in the missions. By 1882 Jackson had been named a Special Commissioner for Indian Affairs by President Chester Arthur, and she was back in California in 1883 on a fact-fact finding trip.[22] Based on the experiences of these various trips to California, and her "research," Hunt decided to write a novel centering on the plight of the Mission Indians.

Published in 1884, *Ramona* followed the life of an orphan girl of mixed cultural heritage. (Her father was Anglo, her mother Indian). Raised by a Spanish woman with a strong prejudice against the Indians, Ramona was unaware of her lineage. Ultimately, the heroine has an ill-fated marriage to a Mission Indian shepherd, Alessandro (who is later murdered). Through this relationship, Jackson was

able to explore the inequitable conditions of Indian life at the California missions; obscured, nonetheless, in a veil of romance and mystery. As one of the first novels set in Southern California, it further fueled the Mission fascination—even though the book was denounced as a "travesty of history" when first published—and spawned an industry of "Ramona" promotional items, a play, an opera, three motion pictures, as well as a Ramona pageant.[23] Even Clark was swept into the craze, painting what was reputed to be Ramona's wedding site (fig. 5.3).

By the mid-nineteenth century, the missions had fallen into complete disrepair. Stones and pieces of wood from the dilapidated Mission San Juan Capistrano were cannibalized to repair other structures. Rawls notes that in their decrepit state, the "mission as ruin, demonstrated beyond a doubt the superiority of the new order in California. It became a symbol of the righteousness of the American action in seizing California . . . ."[24] After California attained statehood, the mission at San Juan Capistrano was returned to the Church.[25] By the 1860s, the land around it was parceled out to settlers to develop small farms, and when the Santa Fe Railway established a railroad stop at Capistrano, the town was, quite literally, put "on the map."

With the railroad came tourists, real-estate developers, and potential property owners. In general, property development in California is inextricably tied to land and water rights; and so it was in San Juan Capistrano. However, Capistrano was also home to an aging mission whose murky history could easily be rewritten, especially to attract tourists to the ruins. Charles Lummis, publisher of *The Land of Sunshine*

(noted in the previous chapter), spearheaded not only the restoration of the mission, but essentially helped to author its revisionist history. [26]

Lummis, who was also president of the Landmarks Club of Southern California (originally the Association for the Preservation of the Missions), aggressively promoted the restoration of the missions, and Mission San Juan Capistrano was his personal crusade. Not only did he wish to restore the structure, but also to polish its tarnished image. Lummis was pivotal in fostering the "Mission Myth," spinning romantic tales and legends of the mission's halcyon days that appeared in his publications. The reality of the imposed hardships upon the Indians was altered into accounts of benevolent missionaries who transformed aboriginal, uncivilized individuals into god-fearing Christians. Laura Bride Powers, in her 1892 article "Missions of California" clearly mirrors Lummis' sentiments:

> There lies about these ruins an air of subdued sublimity; the effect of the mind of the beholder is elevating. There comes before one visions of the patient, plodding padre, toiling on from year to year, unmindful of his disappointments and deprivations—preaching, baptizing, confirming, anointing, and when at last, his earthly toil is ended, here he laid him down amid the scenes of his labors, far from his kin and land of birth. These crumbling walls that enclose his sepulcher are mute monuments to his greatness.[27]

Equally astounding was the effort to position the missions as a central part of California history, once again articulated by Powers:

> Italy has its ruins, its Coliseum and its Forum; Germany its castles that hide among the crags of the Rhine; and Spain its slumbering Alhambra, whose fountains have long ceased to flow. With equal pride California points to its ruins. True, they cannot boast of great antiquity, neither do they tell of nations fought and conquered; their tale is of the heroic deeds of noble men, who yielded fame and fortune for the glorification of God in the then heathen California.[28]

Given the state's scant political history—and the pervasive East Coast perception of California as rugged, untamed, and not fully civilized —the missions provided California a modicum of social history. Or to put it another way, the missions validated an historical continuity. Californians—both then and now—seem afflicted by a "cultural envy" of the East Coast. The Southland had no Mayflower Society, nor a local chapter of the Daughter's of the American Revolution. Its new citizens (not including the indigenous population) could not trace a lengthy family lineage. The European conception of civilization—in the form of art, architecture, and a literary culture—was still in its relative infancy. Therefore, despite the dubious circumstances, the decaying mission buildings became a vessel for the transmission of traditions.

Although Clark was undoubtedly aware of the mission legends, his main interest was in its crumbling and mellow colored walls, its courtyards, fountains, and flora. Notebooks document a significant number of paintings produced that spring—some of them quite large. The courtyard, surrounded by an arcade, was a favorite spot. *The Golden Hour* (fig. 5.4) and *The Cloister* (fig. 5.5) utilize different viewpoints to explore beautiful arches that constituted one of the many arcades. The *Shade of the Cloister* (fig. 5.6) situates the viewer in the immediate foreground looking down the corridor of the wood-beamed arcade (this was also a popular view for many artists). Pots of flowers adorn the terra cotta tiled walkway, while vegetation grows up around the columns. The work is masterfully constructed, relying on a complicated architectural perspective. The scene is bathed in a soft, mellow light with lavender shadows. Clark did several iterations, with just the slightest distinctions (see

fig. 5.7-8). In one variation, the observer is placed outside the arcade amidst the bounty of overflowing vegetation that adorns the walls and the paths (fig. 5.9). One might suggest that the architecture and vegetation reminded him of the Alhambra in Spain.

For Clark, the ruins of the great stone church, with its arbitrary forms, and crenellated brickwork—particularly decaying exterior surfaces—were inspirational. Although similar, *Sunlit Ruins* (fig. 5.10) and *Ruins* of *San Juan Capistrano* (fig. 5.11), examine slightly different angles. For the latter, he used blue highlights—a rather unusual, but successful tactic. Exposed layers of brick vary from shades of burnt sienna to ochre, and the keen tactility of the surfaces is achieved by bravura brush strokes and layering of paint. Clark's standpoint—cropped and intensely focused—underscores the dignity of this artifact, even in its ruinous state.

Although Clark was not known for his nocturnal scenes, *Moonlight, San Juan Capistrano* (fig. 5.12) is a small, nocturnal view of the outside wall of the church. The night sky is dark, and the structure is bathed in moonlight. The walls appear ethereal in this dark, mysterious world. Stylistically, Clark is referencing Whistler—even at this late date—and it is a departure from his other, clearly impressionistic works.

A brief comparison of Clark's mission paintings to a few of the many other artistic interpretations of Mission San Juan Capistrano yields some interesting conclusions. Artists began to paint the missions in as early as 1850s. As noted, he popularity of Mission San Juan Capistrano coincided with the arrival of the railroad. Parenthetically, the Capistrano railway stop was also a transfer point for those waiting

to catch the buggy to the San Juan Hot Springs Resort (some thirteen miles to the East). While they waited, many individuals found themselves drawn to the structure.[29]

According to Jean Stern, the mission's popularity (for artists) crested by the mid-1920s.[30] Early renditions of the buildings include Henry Chapman Ford's *Mission San Juan Capistrano*, 1880 (fig. 5.13). A highly delineated and tightly constructed image, it contrasts with the work of Impressionist painters who began to paint the mission at the turn-of-the-century, such as George Gardner Symons' *San Juan Capistrano Mission,* 1900. (fig. 5.14). Mission San Juan Capistrano's decrepit buildings and colorful vegetation were a lure for Impressionist painters into the early twentieth century, the grounds certainly becoming one of the more popular spots for painting *en-plein-air.* Most artists depicted the archways filled with vegetation, the distinctive courtyard, or the dilapidated ruins of the chapel building.

William Wendt, a resident of Laguna Beach, enthusiastically painted Capistrano during the teens and into the twenties (see, for example, *Mission San Juan Capistrano*, fig. 5.17). In fact, many residents of the neighboring town of Laguna Beach—artists such as Anna Hills, Joseph Kleitsch, and George Brandriff—found the mission and its grounds both enticing and geographically accessible. Arthur G. Rider produced various iterations of the mission, including *Mission Garden* (Irvine Museum, Irvine California) and *Flowers, Capistrano Mission* (Collection Paul and Kathleen Bagley). Perhaps the most significant—in terms of comparison to Clark—is *Capistrano Ruins*, 1930 (fig. 5.15). Although this work dates from nearly a decade after Clark's *Sunlit Ruins*, Rider's interest remains the crumbling exterior of the building bathed in light and shadow. In its degenerating state, the building becomes a

totemic image for California's history. However, the structure also offered the artist a pictorial challenge in terms of delineating its mottled and uneven surfaces, and resolving its architectural peculiarities.

Colin Campbell Cooper visited and painted Mission San Juan Capistrano, preceding Clark in 1916. He did several interpretations of the exterior views of the courtyard with its potted plants and natural foliage, including *Mission San Juan Capistrano* and *Mission Courtyard* (both Irvine Museum, Irvine, California). Cooper also painted the area immediately in and around the mission, including the Capistrano railway station, and the dirt road (now the Ortega Highway) that now led into the mission. A most interesting comparison can be drawn between the distinct similarities of Cooper's *Mission Corridor, San Juan Capistrano* (fig. 5.16) and Clark's *Shade of the Cloister*. Painted from nearly identical viewpoints, both artists explore the variety of surfaces—the wood beamed arcade ceiling as in contrast to the brick floor—the deep spatial recession, effects of light and shadow, and a variety of flora.

Like other artists, Clark periodically returned to paint the missions during his career. The decomposing structures offered him the opportunity to explore exterior surfaces weathered by time. By now, such imagery was familiar in his oeuvre. However, it also suggests an ongoing fascination with historical California. One could argue that historical subjects always intrigued Clark: either by historical architectural structures in Europe or on the East Coast, or by history-in-the-making in Panama. By the mid-1920s, Clark's interest in California history would culminate in large, didactic murals that will be discussed in the next chapter. His early exposure to the missions undoubtedly encouraged and fueled this emerging appeal.

Before the Clarks moved to San Juan Capistrano, they serendipitously encountered Guy and Ethel Rose in Los Angeles. The couples were acquainted from Europe, but Clark was unaware that Rose was back in Los Angeles. The Roses' returned to California in 1914, where Guy quickly became the leading exponent of Impressionism in the state.[31] According to Medora, "he and Alson were delighted to find each other, and we were overjoyed to have a friend in Los Angeles at last."[32] Rose generously offered them a letter of introduction to a long time resident of San Juan Capistrano—a Mrs. Vanderleck. The Vanderlecks welcomed the Clarks' into their home and their lives, and, according to Medora, they provided "continuous glimpses of old California." The artist remained in Capistrano until nearly the end of June.[33]

Traveling in the area, Clark visited Laguna Beach, the well-known artist colony located only a few miles away.[34] As previously noted, numerous artists who either lived in, or visited Laguna Beach painted the mission; one of the most noted was William Wendt (fig. 5.17). According to Clark's diary, he went to visit Wendt, although he does not specify whether they were previously acquainted.[35] However, both had lived and worked in Chicago—and Wendt continued to exhibit in the Midwest after he moved to the West Coast—so Clark may have been familiar with his work.

This was a very productive period, and he declared his "ear cured" by mid-May 1919.[36] However, Medora was ill. His diary entries reflect concern, but never specifically state the problem.[37] At the very least she was unhappy, but Clark does not specify the reason. They returned to Los Angeles with the intention of leaving

California by the end of June. Before they left, Clark took a large leap of faith; he purchased a small plot of land with a shack on the Arroyo Seco in Pasadena, explaining to Medora that they could make it a "temporary home until France is back to normal."[38]

The couple arrived in Chicago at the beginning of July, and soon after left for Comfort Island. As the early winter approached they decided to spend part of November in Old Lyme, Connecticut with Harry Hoffman and Lawton Parker, both close friends from France. By this date, Old Lyme was long established as an Impressionist art colony that, in many respects, still revolved around the Florence Griswold House.[39] Florence Griswold turned her boarding house into a haven for artists in the beginning of the twentieth century, and she became the "grande dame" of the Impressionist colony. From Childe Hassam to Edmund Greacen, Willard Metcalf, Harry Hoffman, and so many others, Old Lyme was a magnet for an important admixture of artists who painted and socialized in this unique atmosphere.

Hoffman and Clark painted together at the mill in Old Lyme, a popular spot for artists as demonstrated in Edward Rook's *Swirling Waters* (fig. 5.18). Clark's autumnal scene, *The Mill, Old Lyme* (fig. 5.19) includes the remnants of colored leaves on the large arching tree branch. The old brick mill was a wonderful architectural element, and served as a surrogate canvas on which Clark painted shadows of denuded trees.

After spending November and part of December in New England, the Clarks returned to Chicago for Christmas. There, he arranged for an exhibition of his California paintings to open at Henry Reinhardt and Sons in February 1920.

Immediately after Christmas they returned to California (bringing their long-time housekeeper, Lena) to inspect the recently purchased "shack" in Pasadena. Arriving on January 1, 1920, Clark wrote: "This morning had hard time trying to get to Pasadena. Flower carnival."[40] The "flower carnival" was the Tournament of Roses Parade, a well-established Pasadena tradition by that date. (The first Rose Parade was held in 1889.)

Arriving at their new digs, 1149 Wotkyns Drive, Medora remembered: "Suddenly we had a home; we unlocked it and went in to explore."[41] Through their years of travel, the couple was accustomed to rather rudimentary living conditions, yet Medora's initial recollections are worth quoting in detail:

> There were four rooms, one with a crudely built-in buffet; and as a sort of afterthought a lean-to kitchen with a sink, which drained with simplicity, out on to a rose bush; but there was, to our joy, a single bulb to a room electricity, a luxury we had never before possessed. "It's a castle," I felt compelled to announce . . . .[42]

Personal items shipped from Chicago and Comfort Island had already arrived, and the task of making the shack into a castle began in earnest. Their first night was memorable, but for the wrong reasons. A torrential winter downpour tested the mettle of their frail roof, leaving nothing short of an interior flood. The couple was not deterred. The next day Clark purchased a car, and Medora proclaimed, "with its purchase we had become established Californians, for a car in California makes you master of the landscape."[43] Clark immediately began to paint, writing that he was "awfully happy."[44]

Nonetheless, their living quarters needed renovations. Anticipating their situation, Alson's brother Edward, an architect, had sent them to California armed

with a letter to Reginald Johnson, a well-established Pasadena architect. Johnson recommended that they not only enlarge the house, but also move it to a different spot on the property. "Our roots were going down fast," Medora remarked.[45] Clark also required a separate studio. Construction on the project began in late January. According to Clark's diaries, Medora became ill, but work continued.

In mid-February, Alson left for Chicago to see his paintings on exhibit at Henry Reinhardt and Sons. The exhibition featured works previously noted, including *Sunlight Ruins, San Juan Mission, The Golden Hour*, and *In the Shade of the Cloister.* Although he was upbeat, he was also anxious about leaving. "How I hated to go," he wrote.[46] The exhibition consisted of sixteen works from the previous year and it was a critical and financial success. A reviewer for the *Chicago Evening Post* declared:

> Mr. Clark gives the impression that he enjoyed the sunshine and the spell of the surroundings as he painted and certainly never has he sent canvases of more impelling charm and a somewhat exotic beauty. Personally, he is among the fortunate who can surrender to the atmosphere in which they are seeking treasure, be that what it may. The tide of returning tourists is rich in pictures from the Old Missions, their cloisters and gardens, but not a one has yielded to the dream or rewarded hungry eyes with such as those . . . .[47]

A critic in *Art News* acknowledged, "His work displays sensitiveness to textures, color values, and intricate effects of light and shadow, flecked with reflected light. He has painted the old missions of California as never before."[48] With the war over, the public and critics were once again eager to turn their attention to art; Clark's canvases struck a familiar chord.

Clark was pleased with the results, but left for California the day after the exhibition closed. Arriving home on March 3, he found Medora recovered and work on the house and studio steadily progressing. Clark spent much of that spring

traveling to Palm Springs, Redlands, San Juan Capistrano, and Laguna. He renewed a friendship with Arthur Burdett Frost and his son John Frost—whom he knew from France—and were now living in Southern California. At the end of April his studio was completed.

Nearly concurrent with the studio's completion, they became involved in an imbroglio with the local authorities over property rights. Long abandoned city plans to build a drive—which would have crossed their property—had been resuscitated. Unfamiliar with real estate conflicts, they may have acquiesced to the city if their old friend and neighbor, Edward Butler, had not interceded. Butler also owned property that would have been affected (they purchased their lot from him), and he organized a legal team to fight the plan. Ultimately Butler was successful.[49] This incident marked a crossroads. They could have easily packed and returned to Paris—essentially cutting their losses—but instead they chose to stay and fight for their new home.

During the summer Clark began work on a major portrait of Medora on their newly constructed terrace. *Reverie* (fig. 5.20) depicts Medora reclining in a chair. Dressed in a white frock with pink accents, she holds a large, green striped parasol. Her shawl is gracefully draped over one arm of the chair. With her head turned away from the viewer, eyes closed and arms draped, she appears asleep. She is positioned against a backdrop of loosely painted foliage that acts as a foil to her carefully articulated figure.[50]

The iconography of women with parasols in late nineteenth and early twentieth century art is quite extensive. Clark's good friends Lawton Parker and Frederick Frieseke often included parasols as an accessory for their models, as seen in

works such as *Spring Blossoms* (5.21) or *The Garden Parasol* (fig. 5.22). In his article, "The High Cost of Parasols, Images of Women in Impressionist Art," Bram Dijkstra argues that far from being a benign prop, it was symbolic of a woman's diminished place in the male-dominated society. His umbrella thesis (if you will) is the following:

> Hugely popular social interpretations of evolutionary theory had decreed that the European American male was the most evolved specimen of intelligence to be found in the known universe and that woman was, at her best, the ornamental jewel in his crown. Her elegant, leisurely presence in his world was meant to demonstrate the advanced level of mastery he exerted over his domestic environment.[51]

According to Dijkastra, the parasol is a shield between a woman and the sun: the sun being a metaphor for the intellectual and temporal world:

> The parasol protects the whiteness of her skin, and the whiteness is the emblem of her fully evolved being as a reproductive machine in service to man's glorious intellectual future. This woman's parasol, then is the ultimate symbol of her full submission to her passive function in the world of evolution.[52]

How (if in any way) does this interpretation apply to Clark's painting? It applies in as much as Clark's attitudes were derived from the zeitgeist of the period. Whether consciously or unconsciously, it could be argued that Clark mirrored the predominant ideology. However, nothing in Clark's own writing, or the correspondence with him, suggests that Clark's work had any hidden agenda, despite Dijkstra's assertion that painters of Clark's generation "reinforced the dominant ideological platitudes."[53]

By August of 1920 Clark wrote, "Have made more progress this month in my work than ever before. Awfully interested and keen on it and delighted to think I can have an uninterrupted summer of work, for I haven't had the opportunity for

years." [54] He purchased a Dodge truck, and with his friend and fellow artist Everett Warner—who was visiting from the East—refurbished the vehicle for painting expeditions.[55] They traveled to Mount Whitney and then to the desert. According to Medora, he "learned for the first time [the desert's] beauty in sunrise and sunset, with the fragrance of desert verbena and primroses in full bloom."[56]

The desert was easily accessible and during the 1920s he often traveled to Palm Springs, eventually building a small studio there in 1924. In the early 20s, John Frost frequently accompanied him, producing works such as *Devil's Playground* (fig. 5.23).[57] Clark's desert scenes are ubiquitous, and, in all fairness, are uneven in quality. He is at his best in works such as *Desert Verbena* (fig. 5.24), *Mt. San Gorgonio, Palm Springs*, (fig. 5.25), *Snow Covered Mountain* (fig. 5. 26), and *Desert Scene* (fig. 5.27) where the muted palette reflects the soft, modulating desert light and the compositions are peppered with colorful vegetation. Less successful are, for example, *Desert Wash* (fig. 5.28), *Smoke Trees*, (fig. 5.29) or *Desert Rose* (5.30), whose compositions are too pedestrian and repetitive.

Clark continually maintained his devotion to Impressionist practices—to painting quickly *en plein-air*. However, the divided brushwork and flickering, fragmented light seen in earlier paintings from Giverny, the Thousand Islands, or Panama (see fig 2.51, or 3.8) are absent in many desert scenes. Instead, larger areas of unmixed colors, with an almost scratchy surface texture, dominate the canvases.

At this juncture, it is necessary to introduce some background material that places Impressionism in California within its historical context. Since the early 1980s, a spate of books and catalogues have surveyed the climate (literally and figuratively)

that allowed Impressionism to take root and flourish in California—even at the same moment when its popularity was diminishing in other parts of the country. In Clark's case, he arrived in California with a highly developed Impressionist aesthetic, honed over the course of study and travel abroad. His work was immediately embraced, and he was heralded as an emissary of the style.

Impressionism remained viable in Southern California even as Modernism, with its various "ists" and "isms" began to engage it in an aesthetic controversy. On the most basic level, it is necessary to recall that even into the early twentieth century, relatively few artists lived in Southern California. The small community was faced with a lack of viable institutions, and until the second decade of the century there were no significant exhibition spaces, no galleries, no art museum, or patrons.[58] By the early 1920s, at least one critic recognized that the artistic community could simply not flourish without a significant infrastructure: that ultimately, continual sunshine was not the sole ingredient for inspiration and success. " If we are to hold painters for reasons other than our climate and our tourists, we must give them the goods they need, and an appreciative atmosphere to live in. How else can we expect to cultivate the talents of our own young people growing up without the joy of knowing what is good in music, art and literature ? . . ." [59]

Like Clark, many artists who settled in Southern California after the turn-of-the century did so for health reasons. Clearly, the climate and colorful vegetation were a natural mix for painting *en-plein-air*, and, by extension, to the strategies and tenets of Impressionism. So while Impressionism's predominance may have lasted

longer in California, its many practitioners arrived later than those in established cities, such as New York, Chicago, or Boston.

As the "myth" of California (highly supported by promoters and real estate developers) characterized the Southland as Edenic or Arcadian, the landscape assumed an elevated status. California's "natural history," found in ancient forests and unspoiled terrain, served as a legitimate substitute for didactic historical tableaux. And if landscape painting was not the only choice, it was clearly the most popular one.

William Gerdts noted that the year 1911 was a watershed for Impressionism in California.[60] By this date the actual term "Impressionism" frequently appeared with respect to artist exhibitions at the California Art Club, whose membership included the most significant Impressionist painters in the Southland.[61] In 1911, Antony Anderson, critic for the *Los Angeles Times* (and the great apologist for Impressionism) declared: "By now we are getting accustomed to Impressionism in Los Angeles. Few of us dare to laugh at it, for fear that we may become the butt of our own jokes. We are beginning to take it seriously, to study it, to enjoy it."[62]

Impressionism was further buoyed in 1917 with the establishment of the Laguna Beach Art Association. In many ways, the town of Laguna Beach seemed an unlikely venue for a thriving art colony. Although the city is only approximately seventy miles from what we now consider downtown Los Angeles, at the turn-of-the-century it was geographically isolated. Beginning in 1887, Laguna Beach was accessible via the El Toro stop on the Santa Fe Railway, followed by a stagecoach trip through the twisting canyons. The stage ran regularly only during the summer

months (July fourth through Labor Day), and once a week the remainder of the year. If the weather was especially inclement, there was no transportation. A motorcar finally replaced the stagecoach in the first decade of the century.

In 1917, the town had a little more than 275 residents. The streets were still unpaved, water needed to be drawn from wells, electricity was not fully operable, telephone service was not introduced until 1923, and the main access route along the coast, the Pacific Coast Boulevard (now the Pacific Coast Highway), was not opened until 1926. Living conditions in Laguna Beach were rudimentary in comparison to Los Angeles, one of the first cities to benefit from modern technology such as streetlights and telephones.[63]

Nonetheless, Laguna's insularity—nestled between the Pacific Ocean and the San Joaquin Hills—is precisely why artists gravitated to the region. The unspoiled environment and salubrious climate easily accommodated painting *en plein-air*, and by the teens the community was recognized as an Impressionist colony.[64] The extensive list of Impressionist artists who worked in Laguna Beach during this period included William Wendt, Edgar Payne, Anna Hills, Gardner Symons, Guy Rose, Donna Schuster, Joseph Kleitsch and Granville Redmond. The town's prestige was further enhanced when the Laguna Beach Art Association was formed, and an art gallery founded in 1918. With limited resources, Laguna went from being a relatively small artist enclave to the most important center for Impressionist painting in Southern California. Compared to other relatively large cities, Laguna's achievement was formidable. For example, the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science and Art (not specifically devoted to art) was not opened until 1913; and the

Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego (now the San Diego Museum of Art) was not established until 1926.

North of Laguna Beach, in Pasadena, Guy Rose was helping to spread the gospel of Impressionism from his teaching base at the Stickney School of Fine Arts. When Rose returned in 1914, few art academies existed in Southern California. Most notable was the Art Students League of Los Angeles (founded in 1906) and in the late teens, the Otis Art Institute (not formed in 1918). The Stickney School of Fine Arts was established in 1914. Miss Susan Stickney, a prominent supporter of the arts in Pasadena, donated the building—originally constructed in 1888 to house the Shakespeare Club. (It was located at the corner Lincoln and Fair Oaks Avenues.) Initially under the auspices of the Pasadena Music and Art Association, the school's first director, C.P. Townsley, was an acolyte of William Merritt Chase, and its first instructor was Jean Mannheim.

Expectations for the institution were high. *The Pasadena Star News* declared in July 1914, "It will not be merely a local institution, but is expected to attract pupils from all over the state and probably from other states."[65] The curriculum included still life, *plein-air* landscape, portraits, and life class.[66] In 1915, Rose replaced Mannheim as the instructor and the Roses' eventually became caretakers.[67]

In a review of the first student exhibition held in June 1915, the critic Mabel Urmy Seares was highly enthusiastic:

> Pasadena may well be proud of the first year's work of her new art school . . . Throughout the whole exhibition, and underlying each piece of work one finds a spirit of intelligent study and earnest effort which gives a character of superiority to the school and lifts it at once out of the mercenary superficial class . . . .We may ask ourselves how it happens that in a far off western town students of art should have such advantages. The answer is that . . .

> the Art Association, composed of people who know the best the world has to offer, determined to bring that best in the teaching of art to Pasadena. [68]

Rose remained an instructor until he accepted the position of director in 1918. Three years later, with enrollment at the school growing rapidly, Rose persuaded Clark to join the faculty. Medora recounted that "Alson was always interested in serious young students, so he took on his duties at the Stickney School, mostly night classes with tremendous fervor."[69] Rose suffered a debilitating stroke in 1921, and soon thereafter Clark became director. He remained director through at least 1931, devoted to the institution and its goals.[70] Clark's value to the faculty was fully recognized. According to Elizabeth Bingham:

> Alson Clark is an artist whose best work is impregnated with fineness. Years of experience with his tools have given him the power to conceal his craftsmanship and years of companionship among the most successful of contemporary artists have taught him discrimination and discipline. He has seen the great masterpieces in the museums of their own countries and competed with the enthusiastic students of the great schools of Paris. All these contrasting experiences have given him not only a stimulating joy in doing his work, but also a keen appreciation of the work of others. The latter quality grows rarer in the younger generation and the students of the Stickney school in Pasadena are fortunate to have so valuable an influence as Alson Clark.[71]

By far, the most salient event of 1921 was the birth of the Clarks' son, Alson Jr., on July 12. Medora's health had been unpredictable, but in February 1921 they discovered she was pregnant. In a February diary entry, Clark wrote it was "the most wonderful month of my life."[72] After nearly twenty years of marriage, they were both delighted. However, the initial euphoria was tempered by the rigors of caring for a newborn. Accustomed to tremendous freedom (not to mention quiet), Clark wrote in his diary for August that "my paintings days are over, I fear."[73] That statement was

premature, for, in reality, he spent a good part of the late summer and early fall traveling locally and painting with Orrin White and John Frost. His notebooks document trips to Banning, Hemet, the High Sierra and Palm Springs (see figs. 5.31-33).

Although Clark continued to focus on landscapes, he did not abandon figure painting. Both *Reflections* and *The Arrangement* (figs. 5.34-35) depict partially clothed women seated behind a desk. The women avoid the viewer's glance, but their state of undress proffers an enticement. These works are also interesting from another perspective. The title, *Reflections*, clearly refers to the mirror in the background, reflecting a fractional view of the nude figure. However, her attitude—eyes cast downward—can be interpreted as pensive or reflective.

This interpretation seems more intriguing in comparison to *The Arrangement*. The title itself has Whistlerian overtones, referencing an aesthetic grouping. While both women are similarly posed, the model in *The Arrangement* is not seen against the backdrop of a mirror, nor is she in an equivalent emotional state. What unites these images (aside from subject) is Clark's bold, bravura handling of paint and color.

Another milestone in 1921 was Clark's first solo exhibition in Southern California. That year, Earl Stendahl, the most powerful dealer in Los Angeles during the 1920s, opened his gallery at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. In May, Clark began discussing the idea of an exhibition with him; by December twenty pictures were on view, including both East and West coast scenes. Antony Anderson hailed the show:

> [Clark] has always been interested in painting of beautiful old architecture . . . and now he is in Pasadena, though it was not the architecture that brought him

> here, but the beauty of the climate which allows him to paint out of doors all year round. His studio is on the edge of the Arroyo Seco, on the Pasadena side. Mr. Clark's studies of walls and architectural ruins are beautiful, full of color, impeccably drawn . . . . Alson Clark loves California. He paints our landscape with the same clear vision and same sure hand that we note in all of his other pictures.[74]

Concurrent with Clark's first major West Coast exhibition, he was also exhibiting a painting at the Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., and his work was still included in annual exhibitions at The Art Institute of Chicago. With his reputation now solidified from coast to coast, Clark was sanguine. " This has been a wonderful year for us," he wrote. "The baby is our greatest jewel and joy. The bank has been good to us and the factory and my work has jumped ahead."[75]

The area immediately in and around Pasadena provided continual inspiration. He could literally paint the Arroyo Seco or the San Gabriel Mountains from his backyard (see figs. 5.36-37), and he occasionally used his home, with its white stucco walls and red tiled roof, as a subject (fig. 5.38). Clark's output was copious during the first few years of the 1920s. He produced landscapes (fig. 5.39), seascapes (fig. 5.40) and even genre paintings, such as *The Fruit Pickers* (fig. 5.41) or *California Picnic* (5.42). The latter two—both painted in approximately 1922—underscore the chasm between social classes and economic conditions during an explosive period of the state's growth.

While it is tempting to suggest that Clark was commenting on social conditions in these two genre paintings, it is unlikely that his interpretation was socially or politically motivated. He found the subjects compelling—but certainly not

as a vehicle for social protest. However, a comparison between the two is worth pursuing as a reflection and indication of the growing dichotomy of lifestyles and socio-economic strata in California at that period.

Individuals in *The Fruit Pickers* are not shown laboring, but rather at rest. By the 1920s, farm workers were an integral part of the Southland's economy. In fact, the Southern California economy boomed with the help of this cheap (if not exploited) labor force. Very few farms were family owned; the majority of the land was owned by large commercial organizations. The citrus belt—the primary area for growing oranges and lemons—extended from Santa Barbara to San Diego. According to Carey McWilliams, "it is difficult to emphasize sufficiently the importance of the citrus industry to the development of Southern California."[76] The fruit industry flourished in the first few decades of the twentieth century, and the stakes were high. "To pick an orange in Southern California, unless you are an employee working under the direction of a foreman, is a perilous undertaking," stated McWilliams. "If performed surreptitiously, it is likely to invite a blast from a shotgun, a jolt from an electrically charged wire fence, or a sentence in jail." [77]

Cultivating and harvesting crops was highly labor intensive. For nearly the first two decades of the century, the majority of the citrus farm workers were either Chinese or Japanese; by the 1920s, they were replaced by Mexican laborers. Living conditions for workers and their families were often primitive. Many survived in makeshift shanties on the outskirts of the citrus towns, with no plumbing, running water or governmental services.[78] Workers in The *Fruit Pickers* are part of this culture. Tents are pitched in the background, with one, more permanent structure at

the left. Chickens and dogs run freely in the foreground; horses and covered wagons, familiar icons of early, pre-industrial California are prominently displayed.

Despite its title, *California Picnic* is primarily a landscape and a study of intricate cloud formations.[79] Nevertheless, the foreground includes three automobiles—parked in an open field—whose well-dressed owners leisurely mill about. While this is not the California of menial laborers, still using horses and wagons for transportation, automobile ownership, in itself, was not necessarily restricted to the wealthy. According to one author, by 1925, every other Angelino owned an automobile.[80] However, for those who were impoverished—Mexican farm workers, for example—travel in and around Southern California without an automobile was difficult. Whether or not Clark was conscious of it, these images represent the iconography of the "old verses the new," which became a constant theme in California art and literature. The community was developing under layers of "cultural litter," at once attempting to define itself as a modern metropolis and still retain its historic traditions.[81] Clark's work captures an ironic moment—a "machine in the garden,"—where modernity and tradition were colliding.[82]

The activities in *California Picnic* take place in an open meadow (possibly at the foot of the San Gabriel Mountains); the only structure is a solitary house in the right foreground. Although significant parcels of undeveloped land still existed, large areas—as pictured here—were becoming increasingly scarce. In 1924, the Rose Bowl stadium was built in the Arroyo Seco. Freeways and housing subdivisions transformed the landscape, creating more of an "autotopia" than the promised Utopia.[83]

Clark spent his first few years in California exploring different sections of the state. In the spring of 1922 he took his first of several trips to Mexico. Accompanied by his friend, Garret Van Pelt, the trip was fairly brief (Medora suggesting that he did not want to leave their family for too long), but enlightening. Clark filled a number of sketchbooks and took hundreds of photographs.[84] In May of that year Medora was ill once again. Clark wrote, "I am really worried about Dora. She is sick. She must get hold of the cause as she suffers."[85] Expressing tremendous angst, he suggested that she might require surgery: "This has been the most distressing month I ever had. Am utterly discouraged and up a stump about Medora. If something isn't done for her she will be awfully sick."[86]

Inexplicably, she recovered the following month. They rented a house in La Jolla for the summer (and did for several summers thereafter), remaining until late October. Clark was drawn to San Diego's mission and historic buildings, as in *The Court of Montezuma* (fig. 5.43), and to the pristine shoreline (see figs. 5.44-5).

The fall of 1922 marked another defining moment. Until then, the couple maintained their Paris apartment and studio, still referring to their home in Pasadena as temporary. Medora never imagined Alson would "abandon Paris;" however it became untenable to maintain both residences. They decided to make California their permanent home, enlisting the assistance of a friend in Paris to pack the contents of the apartment and studio and ship it to Pasadena.

Medora described combing through the contents of her prior life—a much more formal one—that required white gloves, veils, and "all the frills of Parisian life."[87] Clark welcomed the "French easels . . . the wonderful rolls of French canvas,

the sheaves of beautiful French lithograph and etching papers, the sketch books, and even the tubes of slightly hardened paint."[88] Clark's oeuvre was shaped by his European experiences. He arrived in California a fully mature artist, but his intrepid nature never wavered. During the next several years, he took various trips to Mexico. The architecture, landscape, and indigenous population of cities such as Cuervanaca inspired another aspect of his art.

Clark's first few years in California set the stage for the last two decades of his life, which will be discussed in the next and final chapter. It could be argued that Clark had the best of all possible worlds. His response to California was to transfer his established interest in landscape and historic architecture to the state's distinctive characteristics. California's scenic diversity offered continual inspiration, and the missions satisfied his fascination with historical buildings. For the first time in his life he owned a home and started a family, and he managed to keep his name in the national spotlight. However, beginning in the early 1920s, certain critics in California began to suffer art historical amnesia in respect to his life and work before arriving in the Southland in 1919. Although one could argue that Clark's paintings may not have been the most recognizable—specifically in relation to the best known American Impressionists of the period— Californians who saw his Panama paintings at the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition knew of Clark's earlier and more exotic work. Clark's situation is a good vehicle to explore the general effects of cultural nativism, or the over-zealous attempt by critics to glorify the state and the accomplishments of its painters.

Clark's predicament was similar to the experience of many cosmopolitan artists who migrated to California, ultimately finding that their work was associated primarily with the state and not viewed in a larger context. And in Clark's situation, it is necessary to understand his overall oeuvre—and not only his work in California—in order to truly grasp the scope and diversity of his career.

[1] See Will South, *California Impressionism* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1998), p. 234.

[2] Oddly enough, Medora recounted that the lodgings were named "Hotel Clark." See Hunter, Part II, p. 30.

[3]Ibid.

[4] See Nicolas Kilmer, "Frederick Carl Frieseke: A Biography," p. 34. According to Kilmer, Frieseke was in Los Angeles in 1911 to visit his father and new stepmother. In a review in the *Los Angeles Times*, Antony Anderson mentioned five Frieseke garden scenes that he had viewed at the Kanst gallery. See "Art and Artists," *Los Angeles Times*, December 31, 1911, part 3, p. 13.

[5] Hunter, Part II, p. 30.

[6] Alson Diaries, February recapitulation, 1919, ACP.

[7] Many artists painted depictions of Mission San Gabriel, including Guy Rose's *San Gabriel Mission*, 1919 (The Fleischer Museum, Scottsdale) and *San Gabriel Row*, 1919 (Irvine Museum, Irvine California).

[8] Hunter, Part II, p. 33.

[9] They remained close to Father O'Sullivan for many years. In fact, when Clark purchased land and built a studio in Palm Springs, he also purchased land and drew plans for a home for the Father on the adjacent piece of property. Ibid., p. 60.

[10] Jean Stern, et al., *Romance of the Bells* (Irvine: Irvine Museum, 1995). The list of painters who worked at the Mission San Juan Capistrano is copious, but an abbreviated version includes: Charles Percy Austin, Elizabeth Borglum, George Brandriff, Colin Campbell Cooper, Fannie Duvall, Anna Hills, Joseph Kleitsch, Arthur G. Rider, Guy Rose, Frank Sauerwein, Donna Schuster, Elmer Wachtel, William Wendt, and Edith White. For the pre-Impressionist period see George Watson Cole, "Mission and Mission Pictures: A Contribution Towards an Iconography of the Franciscan Missions of California," *News Notes of California Libraries* 5 (July 1910), pp. 390-412.

[11] For information on mission images see Norman Neuerburg, "The California Missions in Art, 1786-1890," in *Romance of the Bells*, pp. 85-96; see also Jean Stern, "The California Missions in Art, 1890-1930," pp. 15-19, in ibid.

[12] For information on all the missions see Gerald Miller, "The Mission: A Story of Romance and Exploration in California," pp. 19-43, in ibid.

[13]Ibid.

[14] The mission was moved to its current site in 1778, but its original location is still a mystery. Documents indicate scarcity of water as the main reason for changing locations. See Pamela-Hallan Gibson, "Mission San Juan Capistrano," p. 46, in ibid.

[15] For an excellent assessment of the mission as a symbol see James Rawls, "The California Mission as Symbol and Myth," *California History* (Fall 1992), pp. 342-361.

[16] Carey Mc Williams, *Southern California*, p. 32.

[17] For a detailed explanation see ibid., pp. 21-48.

[18] Rawls, "The California Mission as Symbol and Myth," p. 345.

[19] Ibid., p. 347.

[20] McWilliams, *Southern California*, p. 71.

[21] For Jackson see for example Evelyn Banning, *Helen Hunt Jackson* (New York: Vanguard Publishers, 1973); John R. Byers, Jr., "The Indian Matter of Helen Hunt Jackson's Ramona: From Fact to Fiction," *American Indian Quarterly* 2 (1975), pp. 331-346; Abigail A. Hamblen, "Ramona: A Story of Passion," *Western Review* 8 (1971), pp. 21-25; Karl Keller, "Helen Hunt Jackson: Pioneer Activist of Southern California," *Seacoast* 2 (March 1981), pp. 60-65; Wayne R. Kime, "Helen Hunt Jackson," *American Literary Realism* 8 (1975), pp. 291-292.

[22] For additional biographical information on Jackson see "Helen Hunt Jackson," www.theglassceiling.com/biographies.

[23] Ibid., p. 73. See also Susan Landauer, "The Culture and Consumption of California Plein-Air Painting," p. 36.

[24]See Rawls, "The California Mission as Symbol and Myth, " p. 349.

[25] For a full history see Gibson, "Mission San Juan Capistrano," pp. 52-60.

[26] For information on Lummis see Landauer, "The Culture and Consumption of Plein-Air Painting," p. 36.

[27] A series of articles on the missions appeared in *The Californian*. See Laura Bride Powers, "The Missions of California," *The Californian* (September 1892), pp. 547-556. For information on the missions see Helen Hunt Jackson, *Glimpses of California and The Missions* (1883; new edition, Boston: Little Brown, 1902); Vernon J. Selfridge, *The Miracle Missions* (Los Angeles: Grafton Publishing, 1915); Paul C. Johnson, ed., *The California Missions* (Menlo Park: Lane Book Company, 1965); John T. Doyle, "The Missions of Alta California," *Century* 41 (January 1891), pp. 289-402.

[28] Powers, "The Missions of California," p. 547. Rawls has noted that the "missions provided a means for asserting a kind of superiority to or at least a parity with, the traditional cultural centers of the East. The missions, viewed now as a part of the history of the United States, became California's Plymouth Rock and Jamestown." See Rawls, "The California Mission as Symbol and Myth," p. 356; for his interpretation see Mc Williams, *Southern California*, p. 71.

[29] See Gibson, "San Juan Capistrano," in *Romance of the Bells*, pp. 62-63.

[30] Stern, "Art in California: 1880 to 1930," p. 73, in ibid.

[31] For the most complete study of Guy Rose, see Will South, Harvey Jones, et al. *Guy Rose: An American Impressionist* (Oakland: The Oakland Museum in Association with the Irvine Museum, 1995).

[32] Hunter, Part II, p. 37.

[33] Ibid., p. 39.

[34]For information on the Laguna Beach art colony see specifically: Neeta Marquis, "Laguna: Art Colony of the Southwest," *International Studio* 70 (March 1920), pp. xxvi-xvii; "Thousands of Art Lovers from All Parts of the World Visit Laguna Beach Gallery Annually," *The Woman's Star* 4 (August 1924); Marion Munson Forrest, "Artists' Colony is Greatest Asset of Laguna," *Laguna Beach Life*, June 26, 1925, p. 6; "Story of Old Laguna Told," *South Coast News*, July 8, 1938, p. 5; Merle

Ramsey, *Pioneer Days of Laguna Beach* (Laguna Beach: Hastie Printers, 1967); Janet Dominik et al., *Early Artists in Laguna Beach: The Impressionists* (Laguna Beach: Laguna Art Museum, 1986); Patricia Trenton, ed. *California Light*;
Susan Anderson, Bolton Colburn, et al., *Impressions in California: Early Currents in Art, 1850-1930* (Irvine: The Irvine Museum, 1996); Deborah Epstein Solon and Will South, *Colonies of American Impressionism.*

[35] Clark Diaries, May 18, 1919, ACP.

[36] Ibid., Clark Diaries, May 11, 1919.

[37] He recorded that "Dora had a tantrum and rotten night. Discouraged." "No sleep. Dora restless. Did no work, but wandered about all day long." Ibid., Clark Diaries, May 30, and June 3, 1919.

[38] Clark purchased the land from Edward Butler, a successful Chicago businessman and art collector whose hobby was painting. Butler was one of Clark's major patrons (based on information in the Clark notebooks), and he occasionally studied with the artist in Paris. Butler was visiting Pasadena when he discovered that the Clarks were in Capistrano. Butler visited with Clark, and offered the artist parcel of a larger real estate purchase he was making in Pasadena. See Hunter, Part II, pp. 41-42.

[39] For Old Lyme see Jeffrey Andersen, Susan Larkin, et al., *Connecticut and American Impressionism* (Storrs: University of Connecticut with the William Benton Museum of Art, 1980); Jeffery Andersen, William H. Gerdts, et al., *En Plein Air* (Easthampton, New York: Guild Hall of East Hampton; Old Lyme, Connecticut: Old Lyme Historical Society, 1989); Deborah Epstein Solon and Will South, *Colonies of American Impressionism.*

[40] Clark Diaries, January 1, 1920, ACP.

[41] Hunter, Part II, p. 43.

[42] Ibid., p 44.

[43] Ibid., p. 45.

[44] Clark Diaries, January 7, 1920, ACP.

[45] Hunter, Part II, p.47.

[46] Clark Diaries, February 14, 1920, ACP.

[47] Ibid., *The Chicago Evening Post*, February 7, 1920.

[48] Ibid., *Art News*, February 28, 1920, p 5.

[49] For a full account see Hunter, Part II, pp. 51-52.

[50] *Reverie* was exhibited at the California Art Club exhibition in October of that year.

[51] Bram Dijkstra, "The High Cost of Parasols, Images of Women in Impressionist Art," in *California Light*, p. 33.

[52] Ibid., p. 42.

[53] Ibid., p. 43.

[54] Clark Diaries, August 31, 1920, ACP.

[55] At approximately the same moment as Warner was visiting, both artists' work were included in an exhibition at the Duxbury Art Association. Clark's contribution was The *Cloister, Capistrano.* See exhibition catalogue, Duxbury Art Association, Third Annual Exhibition, July 31-August 14, 1920.

[56] Hunter, Part II, p. 53.

[57] Frost painted many desert scenes and his work was occasionally exhibited in tandem with Clark's. See Stendahl Galleries, "Paintings by Alson Clark, John Frost, Armin Hansen, Robert Vonnoh, Guy Rose, and William Wendt," [December 1923], ACP.

[58] For information on the art community in Southern California pre-1900 see Nancy Moure, *Loners, Mavericks and Dreamers, Art in Los Angeles Before 1900* (Laguna Beach: Laguna Art Museum, 1993).

[59] Elizabeth Whiting, "Painting in the Far West," *California Southland* (February 1922), p. 8-9.

[60] See William H. Gerdts, "Images of the 'Land of Sunshine': California Impressionism," *All Things Bright and Beautiful: California Impressionist Painting From the Irvine Museum* (Irvine, CA: The Irvine Museum, 1998), p. 35. Nancy Moure suggests that while Impressionism was known in the late 1890s, it was eclipsed by a Barbizon influence in the early 20th century and did not reappear in any significant way until about 1913-1915. See *Loners, Mavericks, and Dreamers,* p. 70.

[61] The California Art Club, established in 1909, was the successor to the Painters' Club, founded in 1906. See Gerdts, "California Impressionism in Context," *California Impressionism*, p. 42.

[62] Antony Anderson, " Art and Artists," *Los Angeles Times*, December 31, 1911, part 3, p. 13; as quoted in Gerdts, *All Things Bright and Beautiful*, p. 35.

[63] See Landauer, "The Culture and Consumption of Plein-Air Painting," p. 42.

[64] For the Laguna Beach art colony see Solon, "What Made Laguna Beach Special," in *Colonies of American Impressionism*, pp. 49-99.

[65] "Miss Stickney is Donor of Building," *Pasadena Star News*, July 31, 1914, p. 4.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Hunter, Part II, p.54.

[68] Mabel Urmy Sears, "Pasadena's Art School," *Pasadena Star*, June 18, 1915, p. 9.

[69] Hunter, Part II, p. 54.

[70] In 1929, the management of the school was taken over by the Pasadena Architectural Club. Throughout the years the school maintained an impressive faculty, including Conrad Buff, Lorser Feitelson, and Arthur Millier. In 1934 the original building was finally razed to make way for a new facility. For Stickney Memorial Art School see: "New Step Taken to Make Pasadena Art Center," *Pasadena Star*, May 9, 1914, p. 1; "Art School Registering Students," *Pasadena Star*, October 5, 1914, p. 14; "Architectural Club Plans Announced," *Pasadena Star News*, August 30 1929, Stickney Memorial Art School Clipping File, Pasadena Public Library; Ibid., "Art at Stickney Hall," *Pasadena Star News*, January 29, 1930; Ibid., Catherine Mortiner, "Stickney Memorial School," *Pasadena Star News*, January 27, 1932; Ibid., Frank C. McClean, "Stickney School Traditions," *Pasadena Star News*,

May 18, 1934. For this information I am grateful to Natasha Kahn, Research Librarian, Pasadena Public Library.

[71] Elizabeth Bingham, "Art Exhibitions and Comments," unidentified newspaper clipping, ACP.

[72] Ibid., Clark Diaries, February 1921.

[73] Ibid., Clark Diaries, August 10, 1921.

[74] [Antony Anderson], " Of Art and Artists," *Los Angeles Times*, December 18, 1921, part 3, p. 37.

[75] Clark Diaries, December 1921, ACP. The " factory" was the Jewel Paint Company. It was still part of the family holdings and provided him with a separate income.

[76] McWilliams, *Southern California*, p. 207.

[77] Ibid., p. 223.

[78] Ibid., p. 218.

[79] The work was exhibited in 1923 at the opening of the Maryland Galleries, Stendahl's gallery at the Hotel Vista del Arroyo in Pasadena.

[80] Scott A. Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile: The Making of a Modern City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 92. For this citation, I am grateful to Matthew Roth, Staff Historian, Automobile Club of Southern California.

[81] McWilliams, *Southern California*, p. 228.

[82] Leo Marx first used the term "machine in the garden" in his seminal work, *The Machine in The Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Idea in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

[83]For this term see Landauer, "The Culture and Consumption of Plein-Air Painting, " p. 43.

[84] Hunter, Part II, p. 56.

[85]Clark Diaries, May 18, 1922, ACP.

[86] Ibid. Clark's diary for that year abruptly ends in June 1922. To date, there are no additional extant diaries.

[87] Hunter, Part II, p. 58.

[88] Ibid.

Chapter Six

An Artist Sensitive to Beauty

After many years of spontaneous travel plans, and a *laissez-faire* attitude towards owning a home, the birth of their son encouraged the Clarks to seek more structure and stability in their lives. Yet, despite his new domestic situation, Clark's wanderlust had not waned over the years. He felt compelled to travel once again, but this time to areas a bit closer to home. Entranced by Mexico during his first trip in 1922, he quickly organized another trip in 1923 with his friend and fellow artist Orrin White.

In March 1923, the *Los Angeles Times* noted, "The lure of Mexico is strong upon Alson Clark . . . . He will go as far as Manzanillo by boat, and then, by slow stages he will pass inland to Mexico City and down to Cuernavaca. After that he will hunt up a mule and ride to a town called Tasco [sic] where there is an eighteenth-century palace in a pleasant state of decrepitude—just Alson's sort of subject."[1] In fact, images of majestically decaying buildings were now long associated with Clark's oeuvre, and he was aware of their commercial value. *Laguna Life*, the local Laguna Beach newspaper observed, "Alson Clark and Orrin White have gone in . . . search of new themes for the brush. Old Mexico is their El Dorado, and Mr. Clark, who is one of those fortunate individuals who never loses their early enthusiasms, hopes to find a natural continuance for the work begun in Spain." [2]

Considering the interval between the two trips, it may be an overstatement to suggest this was a "natural continuance." Nonetheless, his Spanish paintings were very well received and Clark anticipated that the Mexican subjects (with their clear

Spanish influence) would be at least equally as successful. He proved willing to exhibit subjects that were unusual and challenging—tempered by his need (and desire) to have some measure of commercial success. However, this is not to suggest that Clark developed an overall strategy for traveling in Mexico based on whether or not the sites he visited would have commercial interest. In this case, Mexico's history, culture and architecture were the artist's primary concern; and, on a more basic level, he had never visited the country. That the fruits of this trip might yield financial rewards only added to the overwhelming appeal.

Despite his maturity, Clark still grappled with insecurities. Writing to Medora from Cuernavaca, he was circumspect: "I am anxious to have you see the pictures for you know I think more of your judgment than anyone else's."[3] He also clearly missed his family. "I have a great slogan now, and that is I keep saying to myself when I am painting, 'Remember you are painting for your wife and your baby,' and I just do my very best."[4]

In a rather self-deprecating note, the *Los Angeles Times* published the contents of a postcard from the artist. "This [Mexico] is a fine place for a painter (there is lots of beer) and a lot of paint and sweat has been spilled on this trip. Some of the names here look as if the painter had been nervous or overcome by drink. All of which means, I am having a bully time."[5] In spite of his innuendos otherwise, Clark worked steadily and criticized his companion for idleness. " I am really shocked about how little Orrin knows about the painting game," he wrote. "He can't paint trees, I thought he could. He has been painting from the roof almost altogether, for, of course, he can't do figures or houses and I don't know really what he can do

here . . . . Orrin is lazy and conceited about his work, and of course can't get anywhere that way. We are having a good time in a way, but it isn't thrilling. I'm working so hard it doesn't bother me at all."[6] Clark's criticism of White seems unusually harsh. While White has not been the subject of a major study, his work was included in many exhibitions, including shows at Stendahl Art Galleries.[7]

In fact, Clark declared he had "never worked more successfully" than on this trip.[8] Judging from the number of paintings documented in his notebooks, this may well be true. He claimed to be "sticking to streets and figures as I can do those and I love to do them and they sell as well . . . ." [9] To expedite and facilitate getting around, he hired a boy to carry his paint box and easel. The sidekick apparently also lit cigarettes, bought food, helped him visit the local haunts and rent a burro when necessary.[10]

Cuernavaca was nothing if not inspiring. Every street corner, every arch, and piece of decaying brick beckoned the artist to create large and impressive canvases. Architectural devices—arches within arches that led to doorways where space receded into the far distance—fascinated him. Two works, both titled *Sol Y Sombra* (figs. 6.1-2) are variations from the same viewpoint. A large arch anchors each composition. While the faces of the figures in the foreground are obscured, the sombrero and traditional costume bespeak the Mexican/Spanish heritage. Richly textured brick and walls, achieved through sketchy application of paint, are covered in lavender shadows. Clark draws the viewer into the painting, almost layer by layer through the arches, culminating through an open doorway in the background.

A third, similar canvas, *Cuervanaca* (fig. 6.3) allows for a completely unobstructed recession into the distance. One striking aspect of this work—besides its substantial size—is its exhibition history. Clark recorded it exhibited at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C. (1923), in Detroit, Chicago and Toledo (1924), and Los Angeles (1926). Without a doubt, the artist kept up his prodigious exhibition schedule throughout the country, Medora commenting how his multitude of activities was "dizzying." [11]

Cuernavaca's streets, arcades, alleyways, churches (see figs. 6.4-6), and the fabric of life are all echoed in his many representations. *Early Morning, St. Angel* (fig. 6.7) is a combination of architecture, landscape, and the local population.[12] *Lure of the Fonda* (fig. 6.8), represents a snapshot view down one of the many vistas. *The Road to Cortes* (fig. 6.9) again situates the viewer looking down—this time over the town nestled in the hillside. He was particularly stirred by one church, describing it "as the most beautiful and fanciful little church that I think I ever saw . . . . The door is a wonder. There is a wide moulding around it of tile, the most lovely blue with a very elaborate design and outlined by an old white border. The body of the church has been painted a cool pink which has weather and shows yellow beneath . . . . The whole is capped by a beautiful little grey stone belfry with blue tile as decoration. I am going to start a big one of this tomorrow."[13] It is certainly possible that *San Gerinimo* (fig. 6.10) was the structure that captured his imagination.

Some of Clark's most successful efforts were painted from rooftops, offering a bird's eye view of the city with its architectural landmarks and brilliant sky in the background. Two nearly identical views, *Roofs Cuernavaca* (fig. 6.11) and *After the*

Shower, Cuernavaca (fig. 6.12) are panoramas. Colors—orange, pale lavender, blue and green— are skillfully integrated. The latter was awarded first prize in the Southwest Museum Annual Competition of 1923.

Despite his progress, the many months spent in Mexico left him emotionally exhausted. "It's dreadfully hard to stay away," he wrote to Medora. "You don't know what courage it takes . . . . I imagine the precious baby is talking more all the time and doing new things. I am just crazy to see him."[14] Nonetheless, he returned with enough paintings to organize an exhibition in San Diego that August. Twenty-two paintings, all of Mexico, marked his first exhibition at the San Diego Museum in Balboa Park. The show was an immediate success, both critically and financially. San Diego critics were laudatory:

> Mr. Clark . . . the internationally known painter, has recently returned from Mexico City and the surrounding country, and to the discriminating art collector and art lover who has followed the work of Clark, especially in the paintings of old walls and buildings in France, this opportunity to see the marvelously colored buildings of Old Mexico is a rare one . . . Clark has returned with all the enthusiasm of an explorer. Color, color everywhere . . . . What a lesson for our own building and how Clark has brought this to us in his canvases not only as pictures of surpassing loveliness, but as object lessons to profit by.[15]

The San Diego Union expressed a similar sentiment. "The paintings of Old Mexico which Alson Skinner Clark is showing in the San Diego Museum art galleries have aroused so much enthusiasm that it is both fit and proper that something more should be known of the painter himself." Apparently the artist was not as forthcoming about his personal life, allowing the works to speak for themselves. The critic diplomatically observed that Clark had "the modesty of a genius." [16]

From San Diego, the exhibition traveled to the O'Brien Art Galleries in Chicago. Medora recalled: "Mexico was new to Chicago, too, and it welcomed Alson's treatment of a new country with delight and shared his enthusiasm in presenting it. To his surprise, it surpassed all his other shows in interest and sales; and he was bewildered but pleased with the results."[17] The critics once again recognized the relationship to his earlier Spanish subjects, but still applauded Clark's originality:

> Paintings of Old Mexico by Alson Skinner Clark arriving at the House of O'Brien cause everyone to ask why more painters do not go to Mexico for inspiration as well as for the abundance of material in natural landscape, Spanish architecture and picturesque native life . . . . The hasty traveler, in a conducted party goes the way of the tourist, seeing Mexico City much like any other city in the world, especially those of the European continent. But the painter, knowing the peculiarities of strange cities as does Mr. Clark, leaves the beaten highway to meet Mexico herself as barbaric and alluring as a gypsy walking along the byways.[18]

The *Chicago Evening Post* especially acclaimed *Carmen Gate, San Angelo* (fig. 6.13), recording that it was "mellow toned, seeming to conceal with secrets of bygone days within the confines of its enclosure . . . . Study the picture and the surfaces take on the colors of an Oriental rug, and the walls speak of its history and forgotten past."[19]

With the tremendous success of Chicago, many (but not all) of the paintings went to New York for an exhibition at Grand Central Art Galleries. (At approximately this date, he established a relationship with the gallery that lasted throughout the remainder of his career.) Clark's willingness to immerse himself in different cultures—proven over and over again in France, Spain, Dalmatia, Panama and now Mexico—was a thread that wove through the patchwork of his career. It is

with this understanding that his emerging characterization as a "California artist," starting in the mid-1920s, seems incongruous.

Several points need to be made at this juncture. While Clark spent the latter portion of his career in California, this study has demonstrated that over half of his career was spent elsewhere. One observer believed that "California can justly claim Alson Skinner Clark as her own. Although born in Chicago, and spending most of his time in foreign lands, it is here that he always returns with his canvases."[20] Although the reviewer clearly acknowledged that Clark spent a good deal of time abroad, it was his intention (however contradictory) to help California "claim Clark." That said, the beginning of Clark's transformation to a "California" painter in the eyes of the critics and public may be traced to well-intentioned, but overly zealous critics.

Sonia Wolfson concluded that Clark "used to deplore the scarcity of paintable habitations in America, but in California has found ample scope for his fondness for architectural subjects. Always a sun worshipper, too, California has proved an ideal painting ground . . . ." [21] As the critic for the *Los Angeles Times* until 1926, Antony Anderson's promotion of Impressionism—and his fervor for things Californian—had a powerful impact on the critical dialogue. In Clark's case, Anderson began to shape his transformation beginning in 1923:

> All globe-trotting artists land at some time in Southern California, and not a few of them unfurl their tents and decide to remain here forever and a day. It seems to be actually true—therefore—what we have seen and heard so often stated in print and out—that Southern California is the Mecca of painters. For many years, Alson Clark has been a pilgrim and a wayfarer, carrying his painting-kit with him from place and place, and judging from the pictures we have seen, having a mighty good time. But he hadn't found Mecca. Four years ago he came to Southern California and remained.[22]

Clearly, the scope of Clark's career and accomplishments was extensive. To suggest that Clark had found his artistic "Mecca" in California is an exaggeration. And, Anderson infers that he knew of Clark's pre-California painting, from the works he saw when Clark was a "pilgrim" and a "wayfarer." It is not my intention to diminish the artist's twenty-five year association with the state. However, Clark, like many other artists who relocated, found themselves in a dilemma not necessarily of their own making. Although established, successful, and well-heeled, Clark's reputation (and that of others) became tied to the rampant boosterim of the period. His life prior to California was often dismissed, and, at worst, ignored. This ghettoization of artists, a type of hyper-regionalism made more potent by a form of artistic amnesia on the part of critics, afflicted the reputation of many artists in the West.[23]

The developing sentiments in California at the turn-of-the-century need to be seen against the backdrop of what was already a highly charged debate. As previously noted, the seeds of a developing cultural nativism—the belief that California was not only superior to Europe, but to the rest of America—may have roots in the distaste of the botched Mission system. For those who believed that California was blessed land, superior talent and ingenuity was needed to reap its bounty. In 1894, a Chicagoan who visited Southern California identified a strong regional pride: "It is a strange characteristic of those people there, an interesting but harmless hallucination that each one believes he possesses from his own veranda the finest view in Southern

California . . . . It is a queer country, but, after all, it is gratifying to find that there is some corner of the world where everyone seems to feel a contentment with his lot that arises almost to the dignity of a passion."[24]

Bolstered by the unrelenting power of real estate interests, the Chamber of Commerce, and even the Automobile Club of Southern California, the Arcadian characterization of the Southland reached a fever pitch in the teens. Such sentiments were easily grafted on the parlance or "artspeak" of the period. California was hailed as a crucible for artists—and its artists deemed "pioneers."

> The Art of the West, full of vigor and promise of youth, reveals the same dauntless qualities of fearlessness and strength that stirred in the pioneer of early days, prompting them to leave the conventions, customs and ease of the East and willingly brave the hardships of a new land in order that they might more freely shape their own lives in their own way. The artists, imbued with the same pioneer spirit have boldly shaken off every influence superimposed upon them from the outside and are doggedly blazing their own trail to success or failure, content to rise or fall, by the honesty of their own ideas and efforts. This forceful spirit certainly leads them into perilous places, through waterless deserts, and over jagged mountain peaks, so that the weak, becoming disheartened, are content to remain in some unfertile valley rather than continue their unchartered way . . . . With but few exceptions, the Western artists have had practically no training, following only the guidance of their own genius, throwing aside what little schooling they happened to pick up in their student days.[25]

This moving missive might be even more effective—if, in fact, it was accurate. Most artists working in Southern California were hardly artistic pioneers. Trained in the major art centers of the United States and Europe, many, like Clark, arrived in California with a mature aesthetic. They were cosmopolitan individuals—well heeled and educated—who, for various reasons, settled in or visited the West.

California's isolation from the mainstream was constantly voiced in the early twentieth century and still holds currency today. " I am convinced," wrote one

commentator in 1916, "that students of American art have missed a source of interesting study by neglecting to follow the trend of art on the Pacific Coast. This is partly due to the isolation of this sunset land from art centers of the East and Middle West. Yet, there has been much willful neglect, and in order to clear the vision a profound research will eventually be necessary on the part of the apathetic."[26] The early twentieth century critic Alma May Cook believed that isolation would "prove a blessing for which we should thank a kind but unappreciated fate. Because of our distance we are self-dependent and therefore more self-reliant. We but hear of the latest 'style' in art. The newest 'ists' and 'isms' are but names to us".[27] Although Clark may have eschewed Modernist "isms" in his own work, he was not unfamiliar with the current trends. In fact, he had previously spoken very bluntly regarding his distaste for Cubism and Expressionism (see Chapter Two).

Raising the specter of isolationism accomplished several things. In theory, it insulated artists in California from the harsh criticism of the East: How could Western artists, laboring in the backwaters, possibly be expected to keep up with the most avant-garde trends? Conversely, nearly anything artists produced in Southern California—whether good or not—was equally applauded. A distinct lack of discrimination overcame many critics: things "Californian" were often unconditionally praised.[28]

While an explosion of revisionist art history was being generated in the 1980s regarding Eastern artists, basic factual understanding of Impressionist artists in California was just beginning to be unearthed. Groundbreaking exhibitions, such as *California Light* (1990), promoted what was "Californian about California art;" in

this case, the answer was "light." Unfortunately, one could argue that the basic premise was flawed, as climatologist Arnold Court wrote (cited in a footnote), "not enough spectral measurements of daylight in various parts of the country are available to document any differences between California coastal daylight and daylight found elsewhere."[29] The exhibition needed no justification, particularly since the thoughtful essays contributed to the lean body of scholarship on Impressionism in California.

And Southern California was not just a bastion for traditional art. By 1919 Stanton MacDonald-Wright, founder of Synchromism, moved to Los Angeles.[30] Modernist art was actively promoted through his teaching and proselytizing. When Arthur Millier replaced Antony Anderson as critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, the supporters of more "traditional" art were dealt a fairly serious blow. Millier was, at times, an especially vitriolic detractor of Impressionist painting.

While it is true that Los Angeles lacked the cosmopolitanism of Paris or London, painters in Southern California could reasonably expect modern conveniences that were absent in Europe. The Clarks were certainly not strangers to rudimentary living conditions: for example, the interior construction on his studio in Palm Springs was never completed, and Clark happily camped in the desert for many years. However, perhaps as he (or Medora) approached middle age, the need for certain basic amenities was a bit more pressing. Discussing the distinctions between California and Europe, Medora acknowledged:

> Background has an enormous influence on the painter . . . . Briefly, he must get a punch from what's about without sensing the punch. That's why Europe has fed the painter. Spain is rampant with such spots, so is France; but both countries are barren of Mazda bulbs, jiffy heaters, open plumbing, sewers, floorplugs and gas at 22 ½. The painter is human; he doesn't in the least object to having the rough spots smoothed for him,

> and thrown in with a landscape which stirs. He accepts with pleasure modern conveniences, when they roll alongside continuous inspiration.[31]

In fact, Los Angeles was transformed into a modern city during the 1920s. The "boom and bust" cycle of economic prosperity—so intensified in the Southland—was on the upswing. The population literally exploded, the price of real estate skyrocketed, and the economic growth of the state—tied in so many ways to the burgeoning Hollywood film industry—was on an upward trajectory. The infrastructure that nurtured the arts, including schools, patrons, museums and exhibiting organizations, all began to flourish.

Perhaps one of the most compelling arguments for Clark to be understood in a national context during his years in California was his enduring relationship with collectors throughout the country. From the Midwest to the East Coast, Clark's work was placed in various collections outside of the state, including, for example, the following: Charles Dahlinger, Pittsburgh, PA (*San Juan Mission*, 1919); Mrs. C.T. Boynton, Highland Park, IL (*San Jacinto, San Fernando Mission,* 1920); Mrs. Higgins, Brooklyn, NY (*The Arrangement*, 1921); Miss M.E. Dodsworth, Englwood, NJ (*Arroyo in the Flood,* 1922); Mrs. Wheeler, Evanston, IL (*The Opal*, 1923); Mr. Ruben Donnely, Chicago IL (*In the Arroyo*, 1926); Mrs. Hutchinson, Ottuma, Iowa (*Street Cuernevaca*, 1925); and George Higginson, Boston, MA (*Mexico*, 1927). [32]

One of Clark's most prestigious collectors and friends—both before and after he relocated to California—was Edward B. Butler, a Chicago philanthropist, art patron, and painter. Extant records indicate that Butler began to collect Clark's work in 1912 (*The Blue Wagon, Spalato,* unlocated), and he continued to purchase works through the twenties (*Montezuma's Garden,* 1923, *Cathedral Corridor*, 1924, both

unlocated).[33] Edward B. Butler was one of the founding members of Butler Brothers, a large Chicago based mail order firm.[34] By the late 1880s, Butler became a leading figure in the Chicago art community. He was the chairman of the finance committee for the World's Columbian Exposition, and a Trustee of The Art Institute of Chicago.[35]

Butler's interest in art extended to collecting, and he amassed a collection of George Inness paintings: eighteen were donated to The Art Institute of Chicago in 1911. Over the years Butler added paintings, and endowed a room for the care of the collection.[36] It is likely that Butler and Clark were first acquainted in Chicago. Butler was also a painter (he began to exhibit at The Art Institute of Chicago in 1911 under an assumed name) and, according to Medora he "came to Paris each spring, for a period of painting with Alson and to scout for Inness canvases which he had begun collecting."[37]

Butler began to spend winters in Pasadena sometime in the mid-teens, where he enthusiastically painted the Southern California landscape.[38] As previously noted (Chapter Five), the Clark's purchased their parcel of land in Pasadena on Wotkyns Drive from Butler (who also built himself a studio on the same street). The connection between Clark and Butler cannot be underestimated. Until the collector's death in 1928, he was a prominent member of the art communities both in Chicago and Southern California. Clark's inclusion in Butler's collection (with the likes of Inness) is certainly a testament to his reputation in the Midwest. And, interestingly enough, when Butler wanted to study painting, it is to Clark whom he turned as his teacher and mentor.

Clark was nothing if not effective at balancing his diverse interests. In light of that, he strongly identified with the growing Pasadena art community. In 1925, he accepted a project that became an important landmark in his adopted city. That year, the Pasadena Playhouse, a local theater, began construction on a new building. When the architect suddenly resigned, Clark was asked to assume responsibility for completing the project. At first blush, he seemed an unlikely candidate. However, a major focus of the project was the interior decoration and the creation of a decorative curtain, and he was perfectly capable of designing both. With the assistance of Dwight Gibbs, a local architect, Clark navigated the architectural issues, and enlarged his studio to accommodate the surfeit of materials and drafting tables.[39]

The theater design was a Spanish/Mexican influence, so Clark once again visited Mexico for fresh ideas and inspiration. According to a newspaper article, "Alson S. Clark . . . has proceeded on a brief trip to Mexico for the purpose of assimilating ideas concerning the final decorative effects for the new community playhouse . . . . Typical of the artist, Mr. Clark has devoted his time for several weeks entirely to the task of appropriately decorating the new theater. For eight weeks he worked on a model of the stage and proscenium, striving after harmonious effects and securing some remarkable results."[40] The trip to Mexico also served the dual purpose of gathering new material for a future exhibition.

Clark remained away for a month while construction was ongoing. He returned, among other things, to the task of painting the huge main curtain. The subject was a Spanish galleon under full sail—appropriate to the theme of the theater.[41] However, he must have been pondering this subject for some time; in fact,

he had previously painted a similar image. *The Princess Departs* (figure 6.14) a large Spanish galleon with a small boat in the foreground was exhibited in 1924 at Stendahl Galleries (it would also be shown at Grand Central Art Galleries in 1925).

Clark accepted the project early in the winter and the Playhouse opened in May, placing him on a fairly tight deadline. In fact, he enlisted the assistance of students from the Stickney School to help paint the huge curtain, measuring approximately twenty by thirty-two feet.[42] Smaller versions were (figs. 6.15-16) were eventually enlarged onto the huge surface. The curtain itself debuted to rave reviews. A critic described the scene: "When the famous drop curtain, painted by Alson Clark, as a labor of love for the new Community Theatre, Pasadena, made its initial descent at the opening play, 'The Amethyst,' last Monday night, there was a spontaneous burst of applause that must have gratified the accomplished artist."[43] Medora recalled the experience: "An artist, a singer or an actor, is familiar with applause, "but when the Galleon curtain was revealed there was a thundering burst of admiration from the entire house, with cries of not 'author,' but 'artist.'"[44]

In general, the entire enterprise was a departure for the artist. He was interested in historical subjects in the form of the Missions, but this was different. The subject was unusual, and stylistically it was relatively tightly painted and highly delineated. Working on this scale was a challenge, but its successful completion became another facet of his eclectic career.

With the success of the Playhouse, Clark was offered another major commission in 1925. J. Harvey McCarthay, a native Californian and wealthy entrepreneur, was building a theater in Los Angeles. In classic American Renaissance

fashion, he asked a number of artists to collaborate on its construction and decoration. Clark's associate from the Playhouse, architect Dwight Gibbs, agreed to design the interior, Frank Tenney Johnson agreed to paint the drop curtain and its flanking murals, and Henry Lion was commissioned for freestanding sculpture.[45] McCarthay asked Clark to create a set of murals chronicling the history of California.

Although Clark had just completed the curtain for the Pasadena Playhouse, his experience as a muralist was limited. Aside from the Mancel Talcott School mural (1902), and the murals at the Château Frontenac in Quebec (lost to a fire), he had not accepted mural commissions. However, as a student he painted murals in his home on Comfort Island that are unknown to the public. Beginning in the early 1890s, Clark used the walls of the downstairs rooms and main stairwell of his Comfort Island home as a huge canvas, decorating them with Japanese style motifs and scenes. Japanese women in costume, oriental screens, lotus blossoms, Japanese umbrellas and chops adorn the surfaces (see figs. 6.17-20).[46]

Clark's fascination with *Japonisme* would have naturally been fostered by Chase and later by Whistler; the use of Japanese motifs by each is well known and documented. Clark's figures are highly accomplished, accentuating their intricate costumes and headpieces. Unlike his mentors—who frequently painted women in kimono—he rarely painted women in Japanese costume. One unusual image from his notebooks is *Rhapsody,* 1905 (fig. 6.21). In general, references to *Japonisme* tend to be more oblique and subtle: occasionally a glimpse of oriental pottery or wallpaper. Why he chose not to translate this interest to easel painting is unclear, and perhaps additional paintings will emerge in time.

His early interest in mural painting seems to have gone untapped. Large mural projects generally require a significant dedication of time. Clark was constantly traveling, and may not have wanted to commit to any long-term enterprise. He also did not teach until mid-career, leaving him without the help of willing assistants who, in such situations, often worked for their teachers on major projects (as in the Pasadena Playhouse curtain). And finally, perhaps no one asked—until Henry McCarthay. However, Clark had already proved that he could paint on a large scale, and, by this date, he was a leading figure in Pasadena. Ultimately he was enticed by the possibility of a challenge.

McCarthay did not dictate the subjects, but mandated that they represent the history of California. A native Californian, he intended the murals as a didactic tableaux. In fact, a Historical Committee was established that solicited individuals to either loan or donate historical items to its "museum," promising that the items would be properly exhibited at the theater.[47] The concept for the project was infused with a large dose of cultural nativism, an effort to establish the state's historical relevance. To ensure Clark's accurate interpretations of the details, McCarthay financed a "research" trip to San Francisco, Monterey and finally to Sacramento, where the artist spent a week examining documents at the State Library.[48]

Clark settled on seven historical themes: *The Founding of Los Angeles; Jedediah Smith at San Gabriel; End of a Long Day; Arrival of the Oregon at San Francisco; Commodore Sloat Taking Monterey; Governor Burnette Leaving for San Jose; and the Passing of the Pony Express* (figs. 6.22-28). He worked up large-scale

preliminary sketches, and then, with a set of weights and pulleys especially designed for his studio, painted the murals.[49]

Each subject was carefully considered—remembering his patron's mandate—but also mindful that the compositions needed to be visually appealing. They were not only large, but complicated: some integrated figures, buildings, and ships.[50] In fact, until this point, Clark had not attempted such a large grouping of figures in any one scene. While certain Panama Canal images included workers, none to the extent of these murals.

In *The Founding of Los Angeles* (fig. 6.22) Governor Felipe de Neve, Spanish ruler of Alta California consecrates the pueblo of Los Angeles on September 4, 1781. Its establishment was celebrated by a mass—as the Franciscan padre raised the cross—with the local population and Spanish settlers looking on reverentially. As the mythology of Yankee fur traders endured, Clark further glorified their status in *Jedediah Smith At San Gabriel* (fig. 6.23). Smith, along with a band of fur traders, was famed to have been the first white visitor to come overland into California. Crossing the Cajon Pass, he arrived at San Gabriel Mission in November 1826; Clark depicted his welcome by Father Sanchez. Various elements are reminiscent of earlier Mission and Mexican paintings, particularly the architectural surfaces and foliage.

Covered wagons and wagon trains were icons of the old West. The struggle to reach California was epitomized by vulnerable bands of travelers in their fragile shelters enduring innumerable hardships. In *The End of A Long Day* (fig. 6.24), the party has camped for the evening and attends to the rituals that were part of life on the

trail. The bleak landscape foreground is a foil to the activity in and around the covered wagons along the horizon.

One of the great commercial ventures of the mid-nineteenth century was the Pony Express, inaugurated in 1860. Its fearless riders were the legends; many could ride a hundred miles a day and bring dispatches from as far away as Missouri to the West in just over a week. When the railroad began to spread its tentacles throughout California, the Pony Express became antiquated. *The Passing of the Pony Express* (fig. 6.25) chronicles the first passenger train at Truckee, California on May 11, 1869. It's locomotive, *Governor Stanford* billows smoke in the background, signaling the beginning of a new era. On the right, the Pony Express Station, once an integral part of the town, is no longer viable.

California was accepted as a state into the Union on August 13, 1850; however, it was not until October 13, 1850 that the news actually reached San Francisco. The telegraph was still in its infancy, so important communication was often delivered by ship. The *Arrival of the Oregon at San Francisco* (fig. 6.26) depicts the arrival of the vessel in the San Francisco harbor that carried the news of California's new status.

Clark's recent experience painting the Spanish galleon may have inspired him to attempt a scene with large ships. *Commodore Sloat Taking Monterey* (fig. 6.27) depicts two large schooners sitting off the coast of that city. In order to secure this part of Alta California for the United States, Commodore Sloat landed two hundred and fifty soldiers on the Northern California shore. On July 7, 1846—without

incident—Sloat took possession of the Mexican colony in the name of the United States.

California's first constitution was adopted in October 1849 and ratified by election that December: Peter H. Burnett was chosen as the state's first governor. *Governor Burnett Leaving for San Jose* (fig. 6.28) illustrates Burnett's departure from San Francisco to San Jose. He holds the proclamation signed by President Pierce admitting California to the Union. In addition to these murals, Clark painted three small historical portraits: James Wilson Marshall, John Augustus Sutter, and Emperor Norton.

The opening of the theater was highly anticipated. "The new house will be a poetic tribute to the courage and adventure which marked those early gold-mining days. It will recall the romances, the passions, the ecstasy which made the California of pioneer days most fabled in history."[51] When it opened in May 1926, the response was congratulatory. " Historical oil paintings by Alson Clark," observed one critic, "whose studies of old Mexico's architecture have been so admired for their atmosphere, coloring and poetic qualities are a notable feature of the vestibule . . . . All together a splendid gallery of historic Californiana."[52] The entire project was lauded, but Clark's murals were especially singled out. "In the foyers and above the stairs as well as in the lounge room the mural decorations are hung, seven in number representing some of the thrilling scenes in the history of early California," wrote Alma May Cook. "Nothing theatrical, these paintings are colorful but not bizarre, brilliant but not flamboyant, striking but not catchy—they are a gift of art to history in dramatizing and visualizing that which we too often forget in our interest in everyday

affairs."[53] They received national attention in January 1927, when the *American Magazine of Art* reproduced the entire series.[54]

Seen in situ, they must have been impressive. Unfortunately, the theater was destroyed in 1969, and the murals sold. *Commodore Sloat Taking Monterey* entered a private collection, and the other murals are currently unlocated.[55] Inadequate black and white reproductions restrict stylistic conclusions, but it appears that he integrated a duality of styles, the defined and tight drawing occasionally punctuated with freely rendered passages.

California did not boast a surfeit of mural painters or large-scale murals prior to the 1930s and the advent of the Works Progress Administration. However, it is necessary to briefly examine some of the images that were painted prior to or concurrent with Clark's project. On a most basic level, large-scale mural painting is often associated with significant public buildings or private homes and wealthy patrons: Southern California had few of either before 1900. By the turn-of-the-century—as fortunes of wealthy magnates accumulated in Northern California—mural decoration there became more widespread. However, early mural paintings in San Francisco by artists such as Arthur Mathews or Domenico Tojetti were destroyed during the earthquake and fire of 1906.[56]

A major exhibition of mural painting was mounted at the San Francisco Panama-Pacific International Exposition in 1915. Many of the subjects depicted historical and allegorical themes, and the list of mural painters included the following: Robert Reid, Milton Bancroft, Arthur Mathews, Childe Hassam, Charles Holloway, William de Leftwich Dodge, Frank Vincent DuMond, Edward Simmons,

and Frank Brangwyn. In his comprehensive review of the art at the Exposition, Eugen Neuhaus bluntly expressed opinions and criticism of the works.[57]

Mural painting began to emerge in the Southland during the teens. For example, Maynard Dixon was commissioned to paint a quasi-historical mural for the home of Anita Baldwin McClaughry in 1912 (fig. 6.29).[58] The mural, *Victory Song*, a procession of Native Americans in seen in traditional costume, was certainly a precursor to Dixon's preoccupation with the Southwest.[59] By the 1920s, mural painting was part of the curriculum in certain Southern California art schools. The Chouinard School of Art, for example, included classically trained mural painter Frank Tolles Chamberlin as a member of the faculty.[60]

The most significant assemblage of historical murals in California was produced c. 1927-1932 for the Los Angeles Public Library building at 630 West Fifth Street by Albert Herter, Dean Cornwell, and Julian Garnsey.[61] The building, designed by Bertram Goodhue and Carelton Winslow, was built in 1926. That Albert Herter was commissioned for this project is not surprising. His oeuvre included mural paintings and portraits, and he directed the Herter Looms (where hand woven textiles were created). In 1914, along with the artist Jesse Arms Botke, Herter produced seven murals for the St. Francis Hotel, San Francisco.[62] His mural work was also featured at the Wisconsin State Capitol; Academy of Science Washington; and the Hartford State Capitol.[63]

Herter's eight historical murals were painted in his Santa Barbara studio, and, in 1928, hung in the now-closed Hope Street tunnel entrance to the Central Library (they were later moved their current location in the History Room).[64] He originally

painted six murals, including: *The Landing of Cabrillo at Catalina Island*; *The Building of a Mission*; *Fiesta at a Mission*; *Raising the Flag at Monterey*; *Finding of Gold in '49*; and *Relief Ship at San Diego.* They were later augmented with *Jose Gaspar de Portola*, and *Juan Bautista de Anza.* Mabel Urmy Seares praised the murals, noting that Los Angeles was in need of public art that could teach and inspire. "So alluring is our landscape, so deceiving is the thoughtless praise of our guests and friends passing through the country entour" said Sears, "or in the mood to think of everything beautiful, that most of our students turn to landscape before they have mastered the drawing of the human figures. No great art has been made up of backgrounds. Life, both of the humanity and of the spirit needs nobler forms for its expression."[65]

A juxtaposition of Herter's *Raising the Flag at Monterey* (fig. 6.30) and Clark's interpretation of the same subject, *Commodore Sloat Taking Monterey* (fig. 6.27), reveals very different artistic interpretations. Clark has chosen the moment the invading force lands on shore. The focus of the painting is actually the two large schooners moored at sea along the coast. As already suggested, the work is a combination of two stylistic strategies: closely articulated in its description of the ships, but more freely or impressionistically rendered in his depiction of the sea. Herter chose to memorialize the moment when Commander Sloat raised the flag over the Custom's House. Although this polished academic interpretation seems almost photo-journalistic, a close examination of the figures joining Sloat on the balcony reveals not only soldiers, but also a Native American and a pioneer woman. Herter

has taken some artistic license, specifically referencing those who would be affected by the outcome of the Mexican War.

Cornwell was commissioned to paint a series of murals in 1927 after winning an open competition for the project, and the work was not completed until 1932.[66] His complicated program includes some three hundred figures, and ambitiously depicts the history of California in twelve scenes. The four principal murals, each measuring forty by forty feet, include: *The Founding of Los* Angeles*; Discovery Era*; *Mission Building Era*; and *Americanization of California.* Eight smaller panels, each 12 feet by 19 feet, are symbolic interpretations of the beginning of arts and industry, along with conquering the elements. They include: *Art; Industry*; *Commerce; Education; Earth; Air; Water; and Fire.* The four elements—earth, air, water, and fire—are pictorialized through the accomplishments of man. Fire, for example, is interpreted as the production of kiln baked pottery; water is represented by a water wheel. The benevolence of the Spanish missionaries is reiterated throughout the mural program, as the Fathers convert the heathen Native Americans and supervise their daily activities (see figs. 6.31 & 6.32).[67]

Clark's Carthay murals were ambitious (and Cornwell could have seen them), but Cornwell's scheme was even grander; they cover nearly 9,000 square feet of canvas. When the first eight were unveiled in 1932, critics were highly complimentary. "At last, the Dean Cornwell mural painting, long awaited at the Los Angeles Public Library, have arrived," wrote Made Clover. "[The artist] has put five years of enthusiasm of youth, the untiring energy of genius and the skill of long years of study in this great piece of work. . . . He has dreamed himself into the spirit

of early California, spreading across his canvases a pageant of human pathos, beauty, love, tragedy, hardship and victory that spell the history of this romantic state."[68] However, a more objective appraisal of the murals reveals that they are problematic. Many are overly crowded with figures and objects, making them difficult to interpret. In fact, Cornwell had little experience as a muralist. His background was as an illustrator, and the murals are more illustrative than painterly. [69] Nonetheless, this project was a mammoth undertaking and a significant moment for mural painting in Los Angeles.

Although Clark was preoccupied during 1925 and 1926, he managed to mount two exhibitions: one at Grand Central Art Galleries (October 1925) and the other at O'Brien Art Galleries (March 1926). Once again, scenes of Mexico were praised: "Alson Clark is showing recent paintings of Mexico at the House of O'Brien. His is the vision that sees the unusual in the tropical world. An old story, fresh zest . . . . Mr. Clark paints better than ever." [70] The *Chicago Art News* declared: "Mr. Clark has a real feeling for color. And his canvases are evidence that, amid a riot of color, he has had the sense and the taste to be restrained and discriminating . . . . His color seldom becomes pretty or sweet."[71]

After several exhausting projects, he spent June through October 1926 with his family at Comfort Island. Medora wondered if the Eastern foliage would entice him to remain; however, Clark had other plans.[72] The dimensions of the Carthay Circle Theater murals proved his studio inadequate: large commissions required more space.

When they returned to Pasadena, he purchased a site on Pasadena Avenue and, with the help of architect Reginald Johnson, built an enviable studio. Two-stories—with a mezzanine, a sleeping porch, bathroom, and patio—it was a painter's paradise. The physical space was as extraordinary as what the artist filled it with: he purchased a lithographic press, set up a book binding section, and bought equipment for making ship models. [73] He taught classes in the studio, but still found time to travel and paint the desert, and kept up correspondences with his friends in the East. He remained especially close with Harry Hoffman, inviting the artist to visit. Hoffman replied, "your invitation sounds very attractive . . . but what will happen I don't know."[74] Although their visits were sporadic, they remained close friends.

By 1927, the American economy was in flux. Clark's income was supplemented from his interest in the family paint company, but business was contracting.[75] In April, the Vice-President of the company announced the downturn: "Business is not what it has been in years gone by . . . . No one seems to feel very certain about the future and are, therefore, not carrying heavy stocks, but they can't do business without paint and it is only a question of a short time now when they will obliged to buy."[76] The situation became increasingly dire by August. "Business has not been very good . . . . When you get to where you need money, we can of course take care of you. If necessary, we can apply it on the note we owe you. In fact, under the circumstances you would probably be getting greater returns from the work you will be able to turn out in your new studio than the company is paying you in interest, however, we will meet your views whatever they are."[77]

Neither Clark nor Medora expressed concern over financial matters, but clearly the situation was distressing. He kept an ongoing correspondence with many galleries, particularly O'Brien and Grand Central Art Galleries. In August 1927, Clark received a response from O'Brien confirming their interest in his nude studies, but they were cautious regarding sales.[78] In a clever marketing effort, Grand Central hung several paintings on the S.S. Belgenland of the Red Star Line—along with sale catalogues—for the summer voyages.

Considering the indecisive economic climate, Clark maintained a strong presence and attracted clients. In 1928, when construction began on the Pasadena First Trust and Savings Bank (now Sanwa Bank) Clark was offered a commission to paint four large murals, each ten by sixteen feet wide. The subjects were the major California industries: oil, shipping, the motion pictures, and horticulture (figs. 6.33-36).

He eagerly agreed, especially since the new studio easily accommodated large-scale painting. The subject of these murals, as opposed to the Carthay Circle Theater, was contemporaneous history: California's accomplishments, in the form of modern industries. All four murals are extant and relatively well preserved. *Oil* (fig. 6.33) and *Shipping* (fig. 6.34) are carefully drawn and visually complex. The figures represent physical strength and agility, as men either unload heavy cargo from ships or labor on the oil riggings. A counterbalance of physical forces predominate: people pull, push, heave—or in some cases—rest. In general, these are successfully presented and executed.

The remaining two, *Motion Pictures* (fig. 6.35) and *Horticulture* (fig. 6.36) are less successful. Figures are not as well articulated (all four murals should have been stylistically similar), and they lack an overall cohesiveness.[79] Occasionally, small-scale studies simply do not translate on a larger-scale. That predicament seems to have afflicted the latter two, affecting the efficacy of the entire project; however, not in the eyes of several critics.

According to the *Pasadena Star News*, "these beautiful panels, ten feet wide by sixteen feet high, are the work of Alson Clark, Pasadena Painter, whose Spanish galleon on the curtain of the community Playhouse is representative of his flair for color and suggested motion . . . ." [80] He was praised for "making a real contribution to the growing use of mural painting in the adornment of business and public buildings."[81] In fact, this observation is significant, especially in light of how important mural paintings became in the following decade through the Works' Progress Administration. Clark understood the potential power of art in public spaces, and he was willing to test the boundaries of his capabilities, even if his efforts were not always completely successful. Concurrent with his mural commissions, he continued to paint Impressionist landscapes *en-plein-air*, traveling, when time permitted, to the desert. Clark never abandoned Impressionism, even if major commissions dictated other strategies.

By 1929, the economic downturn was precipitous, culminating in the devastating stock market crash and the beginning of the Great Depression. Financial reverses were widespread, with artists suffering equally, if not more, by a lack of disposal income. Art may be an integral part of life, but dire conditions dictate

difficult economic choices. Many artists simply could not find buyers or patrons; instead, some bartered their work for food, groceries or essential services, such as a visit to a doctor or a dentist.[82]

Given the economic climate, Clark was fortunate to receive a major commission that year from The California Club, a private men's club. A new facility on Flower Street in Los Angeles was under construction (the club and the building remain today) .[83] The architect, Robert Farquhar, required murals for the Ladies Reception Area, now called the Gold Room. Medora recalled that this commission was "without restrictions," and that Clark believed the decorations "should not be frivolous, but should be feminine and light."[84]

Ultimately, he produced eight large oval portraits of women in costume, each measuring seventy-two by forty-eight inches (figs.6.37- 44). He was certainly no stranger to portrait painting, although normally not on that scale. The new studio, once again, proved itself indispensable. Each woman is clothed in a different, colorful costume and placed against an unadorned, colored background. He chose the costumes carefully, "not period pieces, but something epochless of pleasing color and design."[85] Each sports a different dress, hairstyle, and is posed in a slightly varied position: some look out directly at the viewer, others avert their glances. The costumes range from traditional Spanish and Mexican design to early twentieth century fashions. Once again, he employs duality of techniques. Outlines of the figures are tight and highly structured; however, passages of the costumes are more freely and loosely executed.

It has been suggested that the model for all eight was a woman called "Viola." It is furthered asserted that "Viola" was a source of tension in the Clark household.[86] Clark knew and used Viola Vanderleck—the daughter of the San Juan Capistrano family he met through Guy Rose—as a model (fig. 6.45). However, speculation that Viola was the model for these particular paintings is incorrect. In fact, Viola Vanderleck was no longer living on the West Coast by this date.[87] A nude portrait, titled *Viola*, came on the art market in the early 1990s, but the sitter's actual identity is still questionable.

The allegation of a relationship between Clark and Viola is family lore, and no archival evidence supports such a claim. If, in fact, the Clarks had specific marital difficulties, it was not discussed. Neither Alson nor Medora's diaries post-1922— a potential source for such personal information—are extant. Clark wrote adoringly of his wife and child, and Medora's oral history of Clark does not allude to any family discord. Whatever private difficulties they may, or may not have shared, did not significantly impact their life together or his career.

When the California Club opened in August 1930, the murals were singled out for praise.[88] A critic noted that the "foyer of this dining salon is a veritable 'room of fair women' whose walls bear many exquisite panels by the distinguished painter, Alson Clark."[89] While painting the murals, he managed to organize his first major exhibition of easel paintings in nearly three years at Stendahl Art Galleries.[90] Many of the paintings in the 1930 exhibition—scenes of La Jolla, Palm Springs, and San Diego—were painted the previous year; others included Mexican paintings from his earlier trips.[91] The public and the critics were delighted:

> Clark is one of the most poetic of our resident painters, one who, despite a cosmopolitan past, caught in an unusual degree qualities of color and composition that are singularly Californian. California as a land of bright, glowing sun-dried grass and earth makes a strong appeal to him, and he searches for the delicate transition of color and shade that are not easy to detect in the brilliant flora of the desert and among the strongly lighted poplars, and cottonwoods of the Owens Valley, the Mojave Desert of the country north of Pasadena.[92]

Even Merle Armitage, who could be an acerbic critic, praised the exhibition (albeit in a measured way): "I have always thought of Alson Clark as a very fine decorator, for he has a splendid sense of pattern and conventionalized forms . . . . His work always charms and delights, and even though it is not profound, he is one of the really good painters of our Southwest, infusing his every canvas with true and authentic feeling for the place."[93]

Despite his love of the Southwest, Mexico had a siren call. Medora acknowledged that "after his initial trip to Mexico, I think his primary interest was always that country, for it contained everything he loved to paint—the mountains, the hill towns, the markets, the street life, beautiful buildings, mellow walls, and above all the peons and burros in ceaseless groupings."[94] In early April 1931, Clark organized another trip to Mexico, stopping first in Mazatlan:

> Have found a little street where there is any amount of material, in fact, there is loads everywhere. I am getting onto the game now and these went fine . . . . Tomorrow night we leave for Guadalajara and arrive on Wednesday afternoon. We will be there probably until Sunday. Of course, I look forward to each place, but am really aiming towards Taxco, for I believe I will find the cream there. It will be better probably, as one can get out big canvases and walk a short distance to work.[95]

Getting to Taxco proved a bit more challenging than expected; in fact, the journey was harrowing. The driver of his bus was arrested for speeding, redirected to

another small town, and forced to pay a fine. Roads were dangerous and unpredictable, "with grades and turns you never saw." [96] In the end, the trip was worthwhile. " Really, this is the greatest place," he wrote. "There are seven thousand houses to be seen and the Cathedral at the top, and all the houses with tile roofs, and placed at all kinds of angles . . . . All the narrow streets, being steep and winding, are always a picture."[97]

Similar to his past Mexican trips, the scenery was inspiring. An aging wall or doorway, especially with figures, was irresistible. *Peons at the Gate* (fig. 6.46) offered the combination of all three. A weathered wall—with hints of yellow, pink and lavender—is punctuated by a semi-circular door, surmounted by a small sculpture (possibly of the Virgin Mary). Two peons are in the foreground, one kneeling and one standing. Freely painted, often with just a dab or color to articulate clothing or faces, the work is reminiscent of his earlier Mexican paintings and scenes of the missions.

Taxco was known for its magnificent cathedral. According to his correspondence, Clark climbed to the church's roof and painted looking down at the vista with its red roofs and houses. He also painted the church from a point below, looking up. " I am so pleased to have completed two big things of the Cathedral today," he wrote to Medora, "things I started a week ago that I was kind of worried about their outcome, for they are very subtle subjects in this light and full of detail. If you miss any of this, you miss the charm of the picture." [98]

He may well have been referring to *Taxco Cathedral* (fig. 6.47). The landscape is terraced, with red roofs creating a series of steps that lead the viewer up to the Cathedral and the mountains in the background. The composition is artfully

nuanced. Not surprisingly, Clark was referred to as a "technical Houdini" and "an atmospheric miracle man."[99] His genuine affection for Mexico and its people are reflected in his many and varied works, and by this trip the artist was fluent in his vocabulary. He exuded a confidence and maturity that comes with a unique mixture of familiarity and curiosity.

As always, he was drawn to the colorful market place (fig. 6.48), and the circuitous streets. In a letter to the *Pasadena Star News*, the artist observed that Taxco was the "oldest place, most primitive in many ways," that he had visited.[100] He returned home that summer with enough paintings for a new show, and by the fall the latest Mexican scenes were shown at Grand Central and O'Brien Art Galleries. [101]

According to Medora, the family intended to visit the East that summer, until Alson, Jr. became ill: ultimately, Clark went alone. He took a room a room at the Salmagundi Club in New York City (he was a member), and visited galleries and friends. Medora's recollections of dates is often a bit vague and imprecise, so it is difficult to know exactly how long Clark stayed in New York, or if he was present for the Grand Central Galleries opening. However, he did attend the opening at O'Brien Galleries in early November, which was considered a major social event.

Attendance was by invitation only—the guest list included the Consul General of Mexico—and the event included a Mexican dinner and a dance recital. Once again, Clark was warmly received by the public and the pundits. "Here is an exhibition that no one should miss," declared Eleanor Jewitt. "This is neither sentimental or sloppy painting. It is keen interpretation of an architecture which is old and romantic; it is painting such as we see too little of in these days of garbled meaning and

misproportioned conceits."[102] The critic for the *Chicago Post* concluded, "more than one picture is made satisfying with scarcely more detail than the outline of a wall or the dash of color in a red-tiled roof to lend it charm. It is concentrated sunlight, more than anything else, that one feels in these Alson Clark paintings . . . ."[103]

With another successful exhibition completed, Clark returned to California; he was immediately asked to participate in another collaborative project. Olvera Street, in the Mexican quarter of Los Angeles, was about to undergo a renovation. A newspaper columnist referred to this section as "the most interesting and 'atmospheric' thing in Los Angeles; the last bit of its old Spanish beginnings . . . ."[104] The street was to be turned into a promenade for pedestrians, with an area for merchants. The centerpiece of the plaza was a theater, for which Clark was asked to design the color scheme for the interior and select various interior details; he even volunteered to draw eight sepia murals depicting Hispanic life and customs. [105]

The theater, christened "Theatro Leo Carillo," after the Hispanic actor who was born and raised on the street, opened on April 22, 1932. Unfortunately, the theater company was short-lived and the building destroyed. At this juncture, the author has not been able to locate reproductions of the murals.

By the early 1930s, a new phase of Clark's career began in the form of decorative projects, particularly those for private residences. We can only speculate as to this change of direction. Clark's interests were always diverse, and he could not resist a new challenge. A critic observed that Clark "had a thirst for experiment. Nothing must go untried."[106]At the very least, he continually tested the boundaries of his potential. On a more pragmatic note, the early 30s represented the depths of the

Depression, and he may not have been in a financial position to reject paying commissions, however unlikely.

In 1932, architect (and good friend) Gordon Kauffman completed a residence for the Malcom McNaugton family in Bel Air. The interior designer (Ray Glass) could not find suitable wallpaper for the entrance hall, and Clark was asked to design and fashion unique wallpaper for the space. He settled on the theme of the English countryside, a choice favored by the McNaughton's who were of English descent. Photographs of the project are not extant, but a description in a newspaper article provides some information:

> They are charming scenes, done on a surface about four feet high and include a square towered country church in England where one images the history began, with baptism, a marriage or, perhaps a funeral. There is a scene of a fertile field, against a fold of hills with a plow at work. Other views, a panorama, is done with the grace of and enthusiasm of one trying a new trick and loving it.[107]

The actual logistics of creating the wallpaper were novel. Clark fashioned a method—specific to the project—but one he was later able to reproduce for other commissions. He tacked long strips of wallpaper to board panels to create a uniform surface. Using dry paint powder mixed with water, he applied color with both sponges and brushes. A paperhanger then placed the completed paper on the walls, covering it with a coat of shellac. The effect was a surface without seams, giving the illusion of an uninterrupted flow.[108]

This initiated a steady stream of decorative commissions. He painted murals for dining rooms and libraries in private residences and in clubs, such as the University Club in Pasadena. He created screens with gold leaf backgrounds (fig

6.49) and decorated a frieze of Pompeian figures at the Gymnasium of the Polytechnic Elementary School in Pasadena (fig. 6.50). Clark was nothing short of a chameleon, adjusting himself to different projects and maintaining a constant stream of commissions, where other artists simply could not thrive in difficult economic times.

Having said that, in 1933 Clark made a major decision; he wanted to drive across the country. He purchased a Chevrolet truck, completely refurbished it for traveling, and set out across America with Medora and Alson, Jr.[109] His intention was to slowly meander, allowing ample time to stop and the opportunity to paint. Such a trip, especially in the 1930s, was nothing short of a luxury. In a period where the daily struggle was often overwhelming—John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, the epic novel of Depression era hardship was published in 1937—it is difficult to imagine the Clarks embarking on such a journey. We must assume that Clark's finances allowed him this flexibility.

Ultimately the family traveled for over one year and logged nine thousand miles. However, the last portion of the trip was marred. Before returning to Pasadena during the summer of 1934, they decided to spend one month camping in the High Sierra. Medora recalled that it was to be "luxury camp," with tents, sleeping bags, folding chairs and tables, and even an assortment of imported canned delicacies.[110] They engaged a guide/cook, and left their truck at an elevation of five thousand feet; the rest of the journey was made on horseback. The scenery was brilliant, but the terrain difficult and the altitude (at fourteen thousand feet) high.

Aside from Clark's stomach ailments as a young man—and his ear ailment as a result of the war—he had been remarkably healthy. Therefore, it was surprising and frightening when found it difficult to breathe. The group quickly descended to a low altitude, where Clark's breathing returned to normal and they returned to Pasadena the following day. Despite this rather inauspicious ending to a remarkable trip, Medora did not regret even what little they saw of the High Sierra.

Clark's interest in lithography has been noted throughout this study. Although an investigation of Clark's career as a lithographer is the mandate of a separate essay, it is necessary to point out that he became increasingly involved with the medium during the 1930s. An exhibition of his lithographs was held, for example, at Stendahl Galleries in 1934 and 1936; and he was awarded a one-man lithographic show at the Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego in January 1937. The International Printmaker's Society chose Clark to do the Annual Patron's Print in 1936, which he printed on his own press. He experimented working directly on large lithographic stones (Bavarian limestone), using them, as it were, to draw *alla prima.* The response to Clark's lithographs was overwhelming positive, one critic observing that "Mr. Clark has captured the beautiful simplicity found in pure line drawings, the harmony of fine tonal qualities, and the spontaneous treatment known only to fine artists."[111]

Clark and his family spent the summer of 1935 in Coronado, while the artist exhibited a work at the San Diego California-Pacific International Exposition. By early the following year the artist decided to return to Europe. The Clarks' had not been in Europe since the artist returned from his military service during World War I.

His indefatigable interest in traveling has been well documented in this study, but why, at this juncture, did he wish to return to Europe?

The answer is unclear; however, one can engage in some reasoned speculation. Clark was now over sixty—certainly not an old man—but someone probably more aware of his mortality. He spent a good part of his earlier career in Europe, and had very positive memories of his life abroad. Perhaps this was an appropriate period to return, and to examine Europe from the perspective of a fully mature artist.

They left from Los Angeles, traveling the route via the Panama Canal. Clark had not visited the Canal since 1914, and the prospect of actually sailing through the locks was alluring. They booked passage on a Holland-America freighter (the SS Delfdyke) with only twenty-five passengers. The schedule was entirely flexible, without definitive times for either pulling into or embarking from ports. Their ultimate destination was Paris, but the voyage took a circuitous route.

Indeed, the trip through the Panama Canal was memorable, and the ship stopped in Colon, Panama for several days. They disembarked in Liverpool, England, traveled to London, hired a car and drove through Holland and Belgium before boarding a train to Paris. The couple had not been to Paris in over twenty years, and they were forewarned that the city had changed (not necessarily for the better). However, Medora reported that "Paris, after almost twenty years looked the same. From our dormers in the fifth floor of the hotel we looked out on familiar scenes, the bridges, the bookstalls, and the boats along the Seine, cafés, greyed buildings, even the great two wheeled carts loaded with cabbages or lettuce or strawberries."[112]

Clark once again found the city of Paris irresistible. From the vantage point of their fifth floor window, he painted images such as *Rooftops, Paris* (fig. 6.51). Broadly painted—with a freedom of brushwork absent from his most recent mural commissions—Clark's dedication to Impressionism is apparent when left to his own devices. He saw Paris very much through the same youthful eyes that interpreted that magical city decades previously. And, while Clark had gained stylistic maturity and tremendous artistic experience in the ensuing years since his last visit to Paris, he never lost faith in the basic tenets of Impressionism, although the style was long *retardetaire* in the view of many.

While the couple enjoyed what would be their final trip abroad, they opted to return to California instead of remaining in France for the winter. Paris was still enchanting, but clearly it represented a period now long past, and a prolonged residence abroad was no longer desirable. They returned to California—happy to have been away—but equally as pleased to be back.

Clark's popularity remained constant throughout the 1930s. While the battle in California between the Modernists and the Conservatives (Impressionists were considered part of the *ancién regime*) had raged for years, Clark remained unaffected by the bold experiments of his peers. He was proud of his artistic heritage, and his technical prowess. Any doubts concerning his relevance could offset by the two generations of collectors who had avidly acquired his works. When Stendahl Art Galleries moved to new quarters on Wilshire Boulevard (in spring of 1937), a Clark exhibition was featured as its opening show, including recent European paintings and works from Mexico and California. Alma May Cook, a staunch defender of Clark's

work throughout the years, remarked that it was "a rarity these days, [to see] an art exhibition devoted to the more subtle qualities of beauty of color impressions."[113] The significance of Earl Stendahl and his gallery cannot be underestimated. Stendahl's list of clients—and roster of artists—included the most prominent individuals in the Southland. That Clark's profile at Stendahl remained consistently high is a testament to his reputation and the ongoing commercial interest in his work.[114]

He continued to exhibit in museums and at major exhibitions—with a one-man show at the San Diego Museum of Art in 1938—and his work was included in the Golden Gate International Exposition (1939) that commemorated the completion of the Oakland Bay Bridge and the Golden Gate Bridge.[115] By 1940, Clark was awarded what Medora deemed as "perhaps his most satisfying exhibition" at the Los Angeles County Museum.[116] Clark specially selected the paintings, representing a cross-section of his now long and highly successful career. It was a small exhibition—just twenty paintings—but included pieces from Panama, Chicago, Taxco, Cuernavaca, France, New England, and California. From Los Angeles the exhibition traveled to the Crocker Gallery of Art in Sacramento, the Stanford University Museum of Fine Arts, and finally to the Haggin Memorial Museum in Stockton, California. In Sacramento, a critic for the *Sacramento Bee* found the show refreshing and heaved a literally audible sigh of relief:

> The exhibit of oils of Alson Clark now being shown in the E.B. Crocker Art Gallery undoubtedly will be one of the most enjoyed and popular exhibits of the season. After the tortuous rapids and whirlpools of surrealism, post-impressionism, and ventures into the abstract, the canvases of this artist are like peaceful, tree fringed pools. Here in these some two dozen canvases by a painter who knows his business is beauty untroubled by neurotic probings, intellectual experimentation or social propaganda: here color is soothing, ingratiating rather than strident and piercing.[117]

In 1941, when Clark was sixty-five years old, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, signaling America's entrance into World War II. While the artist was anxious to contribute to the war effort, he could not tolerate the exhausting pace of a factory job. Always an innovator, he organized a workshop of artists and craftsmen who produced—at a less frenetic speed—instruments for the military.[118] Relatively few art exhibitions were mounted during the height of the war years, but Clark did manage to show lithographs in various venues throughout the country.

The end of hostilities in 1945 brought both celebration, and the grim reality of the human devastation wrought by a litany of incomprehensible atrocities. The world had been inexorably altered. For millions, in all parts of the globe, a history of traditions and rhythms of life were forever gone. On a personal level (although certainly not due to the same circumstances) Clark's life also changed. He developed a heart condition, rendering him unable to drive. Life in Southern California without a vehicle can be paralytic, but Clark substituted his love of traveling and painting *en-plein-air* for figure painting. At the urging of a young man who had given up art as a full-time career, but still wanted to paint, the two engaged a model that posed daily in Clark's studio. The young art student and august master spent several happy years happy side-by-side. Clark was productive, and even continued to send works to exhibitions. Typical of this period is *The Dressing Room,* 1947 (fig. 6.52). Familiar motifs—a woman holding a mirror, a Louis XVI chair—are still part of his vocabulary. A woman leans over a seated girl, carefully dressing her hair, while the seated girl admires the handiwork in a mirror. Both are clothed in white, feminine flowing gowns. What does distinguish this work is its illustrative character. The entire

scene is carefully drawn, and it lacks the spontaneity of his earlier pieces. Nonetheless, the composition is artfully composed and carefully executed.

By October 1948, Clark's health was compromised. Suffering a severe bout of pneumonia, he spent four months convalescing. In March 1949, he was allowed to resume work in his studio. Medora described the day he began to paint once again as "joyous," and the artist returned to his lifelong passion. For Clark it would be a new beginning, but, ironically, the simultaneous end of his career. He suffered a stroke the following morning. Left paralyzed in his right arm and unable to speak, the artist passed away a week later. In her inimitable fashion, Medora remembered, "my son and I could only rejoice that he had in his lifetime been denied only one small week of the use of that wonderful right arm."[119] Her personal grief was mitigated by the knowledge that, above all, Clark was an artist; and the inability to practice his art would have been a tragedy far greater than death.

[1] " Brief Commentary on Various Events," *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 1923, part 3, p. 31.

[2] "Art Notes," *Laguna Life* 10 (June 23, 1923), p.1.

[3] Clark to Medora, [June] 1923, ACP.

[4] Ibid.

[5] "News From Mexico City," *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 1923, part 3, p.38.

[6] Clark to Medora, June 9, 1923, ACP.

[7]For information on White see Nancy Dustin Moure, *Publications in Southern California Art 1, 2, & 3* (Los Angeles: Dustin Publications), p. 273.

[8] Clark to Medora, June 8, 1923, ACP.

[9]Ibid., Clark to Medora, June 9, 1923.

[10]Ibid.

[11] Hunter, Part II, p. 59.

[12] According to Clark's notebooks, this work was exhibited at the Corcoran Gallery, Washington, D.C. in 1924.

[13] Clark to Medora, June 16, 1923, ACP.

[14] Ibid.

[15] "Paintings of Old Mexico Now Exhibited at Park Gallery," *San Diego Union*, August 5, 1923, ACP.

[16] Ibid., "Walls and Fabrics Have Been an Inspiration to This Art," *San Diego Union*, August 19, 1923; see also "Rare Paintings of Old Mexico Are Seen in the Art Museum Gallery," *San Diego Evening Tribune*, August 18, 1923.

[17] Hunter, Part II, p.59.

[18] *Christian Science Monitor*, November 26, 1923, ACP.

[19]Ibid., "Carmen Gate, San Angel," *Chicago Evening Post*, November 13, 1923.

[20] Ibid., "Alson Clark, Globe-Trotter Artist," unidentified newspaper clipping, c. 1923.

[21]Ibid., Sonia Wolfson, "Alson Clark's Brush Rich in Beauty and Grace," unidentified newspaper clipping.

[22] Antony Anderson, "Of Art and Artists," *Los Angeles Times*, January 7, 1923, part 3, pp. 19, 37.

[23] For a discussion of these issues see Deborah Epstein Solon and Will South, *In and Out of California: Travels of American Impressionists* (Laguna Beach: Laguna Art Museum, 2002).

[24] "Southern California Scenery," *Land of Sunshine* (August 1, 1894), p. 64.

[25] Eloise J. Roorhas, "The Indigenous Art of California: It's Pioneer Spirit and Vigorous Growth," *The Craftsman* 22 (August 1912), p. 489.

[26] Everett Carroll Maxwell, "Development of a Landscape Painting in California," *Fine Arts Journal* 34 (March 1916), p. 138.

[27] Alma May Cook, "What American Art Means to California," *Art in California* (San Francisco: R.L. Bernier, 1916), p. 74.

[28] For a discussion of this see South, "In and Out of California: The Participatory Nature of Early California Art," *In and Out of California*, p. 31.

[29] Quoted in McManus, "A Focus on Light," *California Light*, p. 16.

[30] See Will South, *Stanton Macdonald-Wright and Synchromism* (Raleigh: North Carolina Museum of Art, 2001).

[31] Medora Clark, "European Landscape Verses California," *California Southland*, ACP.

[32] References to these individuals are found in Clark's notebooks. While Clark was inconsistent about recording who purchased his works, he did record the sale price. Unfortunately, that was noted in an alphabetic code that corresponded to different numbers. As the author's skills as a cryptographer are limited, the code remains unbroken.

[33] As noted in Clark notebooks, possession of the author.

[34] For Butler's biography see *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York: James T. White and Company, 1903), Volume 10. For information on Butler I am grateful to Phil and Marian Kovinick.

[35] See the following obituaries: "E.B. Butler Summoned by Death," *Pasadena Star News*, February 21, 1928, Part II, p. 15; "Edward Butler, Merchant and Art Patron, Dies," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 21, 1928, p. 3; "Merchant of Chicago Dies Here," *Los Angeles Times*, February 21, 1928, p. 17.

[36] *See Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago*, 3 (January 1912), p. 36. After Butler's death, the Art Institute of Chicago organized an exhibition of the Inness paintings that he had donated. See *The Edward B. Butler Collection of Paintings by George Inness* 1825-1894 (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1930). The provenance of certain paintings is particularly noteworthy, many formerly in the collections of American art patrons such as Thomas B. Clarke or William T. Evans.

[37] Hunter, Part II, p. 41. For a record of his exhibitions see *Art Institute of Chicago Exhibition Record*, p. 177.

[38] Butler exhibited works from California at the AIC beginning in 1916. See for example, *California Hills*, 1916; *Bishop Mountain, California*, 1917; *Early Spring, California*, 1919; *Near the Desert, California*, 1920; *California Coast*, 1922.

[39] Hunter, Part II, p. 62.

[40] "Sets out for Unique Trip to Mexico: Alson Clark to Study Special Effects for Playhouse Scheme," unidentified newspaper clipping, ACP.

[41]Both the theater and the curtain are still extant. The building is designated as an historical landmark and any renovation has remained true to the original design. The curtain still hangs above the stage, however, it is made of asbestos and cannot (for health reasons) to be raised or lowered. I am grateful to Ellen Bailey, Archivist, The Pasadena Playhouse.

[42] Stern, *Alson Clark*, p. 43.

[43] "Alson Clark's Drop Curtain," *Saturday Night*, May 22, 1926, ACP.

[44] Hunter, Part II, p. 62.

[45] Johnson's curtain depicted the George Donner party crossing Donner Lake. Hanging on either side were companion pieces, one entitled "The Miners," and the other "The Indians." The subject of the fourth mural was California's first theater, opened in 1849.

[46] Alce Ann Clark Cole, a member of the Clark family, took these photographs in 1973. They were intended as a lasting tribute to the wonderful Victorian home and its fascinating history. I am indebted to Toby Clark for sharing these family treasures.

[47] An "invitation" from the historical committee" suggested "it is planned to make the Carthay Circle Theatre a museum of early California material. An invitation is therefore extended to all lovers of the Golden State who have relics worthy of presentation," further promising that the theatre was a "fireproof structure." See "invitation," ACP.

[48] Hunter, Part II, p. 65.

[49] Ibid. One of the preliminary sketches depicting "Governor Burnett Delivering the Charter," was recently offered for sale at auction. See Christie's, May 3, 200, lot 87.

[50]The murals averaged approximately fifty by eighty inches.

[51] "Memorial to California Pioneers," May 22, 1926, unidentified newspaper clipping, ACP.

[52] Ibid., "Saturday Night," unidentified newspaper clipping, May 29, 1926, p. 2.

[53]Ibid., Alma May Cook, "Colorful History of Early Life Vividly Pictured," unidentified newspaper clipping.

[54] *American Magazine of Art*, January 27, 1927, pp. 24-25.

[55] The *Commodore Sloat* mural was sold through Petersen Gallery, Los Angeles. For an illustration see Stern, *Alson Clark*, p. 45.

[56] For a brief exploration of mural painting in California see Nancy Moure, "Mural Painting to 1960," in *California Art: 450 Years of Painting and Other Media* (Los Angeles: Dustin Publications, 1998), pp. 253-269. A major study of mural painting pre-1930s has not yet been undertaken.

[57] See Neuhaus, "The Murals," *Art of the Exposition*. See also Hamilton Wright, "Mural Decorations at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition," in *Art in California* (San Francisco: R.L. Bernier, 1916).

[58] See Moure, *California Art*, pp. 254-55.

[59] For Dixon see for example Donald Hagerty, *Desert Dreams: The Life and Work of Maynard Dixon* (Layton, Utah: Peregrine Book, 1993).

[60] For Chamberlin see Ruth Westphal, ed., *Plein-Air Painters of California, The Southland* (Irvine: Westphal Publishing, 1982), pp. 48-51.

[61] The building and the murals remain extant. Garnsey's murals are literary, rather than historical, depicting episodes from Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe.*

[62] For a review of those murals see Charles De Kay, "Seven Murals by Albert Herter," *International Studio* 52 (April 1914), pp. 37-42.

[63] See "Albert Herter Murals, History Room, Los Angeles City Public Library," in clipping file, Department of Art & Music, Los Angeles Public Library. I am grateful to David Gonnella, Reference Librarian, for his assistance.

[64] Ibid.

[65] "M [abel] Urmy Seares, "The Herter Murals in Los Angeles," Ferdinand Perret Research Library of the Arts and Affiliated Sciences, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 3857, frame 1025. I am grateful to Phil and Marian Kovinick for this citation.

[66] See "Beach Sunlight Draws Cornwell Here for Study," *The Miami Sun,* part 3, January 6, 1928 in Dean Cornwell Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 3782, frame 911. I am grateful to Phil and Marian Kovinick for their assistance on the subject of mural painting in Los Angeles.

[67] For reproductions of the murals see "Mural Paintings by Dean Cornwell in the Rotunda of the Los Angeles Public Library," in ibid, reel 3782, frame 1074.

[68] Madge Clover, "Saturday Night, July 9, 1932, Ferdinand Perret Research Library of the Affiliated Arts and Sciences, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 3869, frame 911.

[69] For Cornwell see Patricia Janis Broder, *Dean Cornwell, Dean of Illustrators* (New York: Balance Publishers, 1978).

[70] "Chicago Art Notes," *Christian Science Monitor,* March 25, 1926, ACP.

[71] Ibid., "Chicago Art News," unidentified newspaper clipping, March 23, 1926.

[72] Hunter, Part II, p. 66.

[73] Clark's interest in lithography began in Paris, where, as was noted, he had a press. He became active in the International Society of Printmakers and had exhibited in their exhibitions during the mid-20s. Clark was a facile printmaker, but it is not the mandate of this dissertation to examine his prints.

[74] Hoffman provided some fascinating news on the art community in Lyme. "Lyme is very up and coming. Growing too fast entirely for me . . . . They want to make Lyme safe for the high hats. The same old standbys are here with a lot of new ones. Burr still has the billiard. Footes are blooming, Miss Florence younger than ever. Rook has a new house just above Miss Florence's . . . . Chadwick is now in Wilmington." Henry Hoffman to Alson Clark, undated, ACP.

[75] In the late 1920s, the company changed its name from the Wadsworth-Howland Paint Company to the Jewel Paint Company.

[76] Dan Murphy to Clark, April 1, 1927, ACP.

[77] Ibid., Dan Murphy to Clark, August 19, 1927.

[78]Ibid., William O'Brien to Clark, August 1, 1927.

[79] The murals were reproduced in "The Art of Mural Painting in California," *Touring Topics* 22 (March 1930).

[80] "Alson Clark Murals Feature Southern California's Four Great Industries," *Pasadena Star News*, January 3, 1929.

[81] "The Editor's Own Page," unidentified newspaper clipping, September 1929, ACP.

[82] Jesse Arms Botke wrote about bartering her work. See Patricia Trenton and Deborah Epstein Solon, *Birds, Boughs, and Blossoms: Jesse Arms Botke* (Los Angeles: Karges Fine Art, 1995). According to Medora, Clark began to seriously barter his art for items and services when they first came to California. On different occasions, he bartered for a grand piano, a group of frames from a cabinet maker, a cache of decorative tiles, and (my personal favorite) a life contract for two pounds a month of chocolate from one of Chicago's best known candy makers. See Hunter, Part I, pp. 90-91.

[83] For information on the California Club see Nancy Wall Dustin Moure, *The Paintings of the California Club* (Privately Published, 2000). Throughout the twentieth century, Club members collected and donated significant works of art. Today the club has a noteworthy collection, however, it remains open only to members and their guests. William Horton graciously provided information on the California Club.

[84] Hunter, Part II, p. 71.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Nancy Moure, *The Paintings of the California Club*, p. 34.

[87] A nude, *Viola*, was offered for sale a Butterfields, June 13, 1993, lot 896. Viola's daughter, Chonita Earle, provided valuable information regarding her mother.

[88] See "New California Club Building Opens Today," *Los Angeles Examiner*, August 25, 1930, pp. 3, 6. I am grateful to William Horton for this citation.

[89] "Beautiful Structure In Hope Street to Replace One at Fifth and Hill," *Los Angeles Express*, August 20, 1930.

[90] Beginning in 1929, Clark began to exhibit fairly consistently again, particularly including works at the Pasadena Society of Artists. For example, his works were included continuously between 1929-35 and 1945-48.

[91] Information on what was in the show, along with small photographs, is in the Clark notebooks, possession of the author.

[92] *Los Angeles Times*, "Art Reviews Briefly Told," March 9, 1930, part 3, p. 16. Western critics were still attempting to both legitimate and elevate art produced in California. According to one writer: "If the emphasis is to be on American art from now on, where does the Western artist come in? He certainly doesn't figure very largely in the press barrage from the East. What's the matter, is he no good? Of course he's good, in a few cases as good as the best. America is a state of mind, but not yet a country as far as art is concerned. We all may use the same toothpaste, but we certainly do not know the same artists in different parts of the country. We don't wait for New York to o.k. our architecture before it's built. We build our own and live in it. Why wait for New York to o.k. our artists then? They

live here, in our environment, and express it as well as we let them. How about getting behind them and backing our own little Renaissance right here. Who knows but time may say it was the best part of the great American Renaissance." See "American Renaissance Hailed as Paris Flops," *Los Angeles Times*, November 29, 1931, p. 16.

[93] Merle Armitage, "Topics of the Town," unidentified newspaper clipping, March 17, 1930, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Ferdinand Perret Research Library of the Arts and Affiliated Sciences, reel 3854, frame 1059. Armitage was a famed critic, impresario, and designer in Los Angeles. He counted artists such as Pablo Picasso, Paul Klee and Wasily Kandinsky among his friends. Armitage also holds the dubious distinction for coining the term "Eucalyptus School," a phrase that became a derogatory reference to Impressionist painters in California. See "The "Eucalyptus School," *Los Angeles Times*, September 16, 1928.

[94] Hunter, Part II, p. 72.

[95] Clark to Medora, April 6, 1931, ACP. Clark wrote that he was accompanied by "Carleton," probably his friend Carlton Swift. It seems that Swift was sketching, as well as studying the indigenous flora. See "Pasadenan Painting Old Mexico Scenes," *Pasadena Star-News*, May 6, 1931, p. 2. I am grateful to Phil and Marian Kovinick for this citation.

[96] Ibid., Clark to Medora, April 15, 1931.

[97] Ibid., Clark to Medora, April 18, 1931.

[98] Ibid., Clark to Medora, April 27, 1931.

[99] Sonia Wolfson, "Topics of the Town", July 1931, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution Ferdinand Perret Research Library of the Arts and Affiliated Sciences, reel 3854, frame 1062.

[100] "Pasadenan Painting Old Mexico Scenes," *Pasadena Star News*, May 6, 1931, p. 2-3.

[101] Not only paintings, but also a series of lithographs were a product of this trip. A number of the images were reproduced in *Touring Topics*, October 1931, which helped to popularize them.

[102] Eleanor Jewitt, "Exhibition of Alson Clark Canvases Opens Today," *Chicago Tribune*, November 9, 1931, ACP.

[103] Ibid., Tom Vickerman, "Sunlight Streams of Alson Clark's Mexico Paintings," *Chicago Post*, November 10, 1931.

[104] Ibid., "Saturday Night," unidentified newspaper clipping, September 17, 1932; see also "Alson Clark to Decorate New Theater," *Pasadena Star News*, April 13, 1932.

[105] Hunter, Part II, p. 74.

[106] Madge Clover, "Saturday Night," September 3, 1932, unidentified newspaper clipping in Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Ferdinand Perret Research Library of Arts and Affiliated Sciences , reel 3854, frame 1017.

[107]Ibid.

[108] Hunter, Part II, p. 76.

[109] According to Medora, Clark "put in a rear seat, built racks under the roof to accommodate canvases, an easel and finishing rods, constructed a combination pantry and folding picnic table on the running

board, placed a pocket for maps behind the front seat, hung a loose oilcloth sack with towels and soap beside it, had a ten gallon emergency water tanks, with a spigot slung beneath the body, and of course, installed a radio, all without encroaching on the space for luggage." Ibid., p. 79.

[110] Ibid., pp. 79-80.

[111] "Saturday Night," February 10, 1934, unidentified newspaper clipping in Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Stendahl Art Galleries Papers, roll 2717, frame not legible. See also Alma May Cook, "News of Art World," February 13, 1934, in ibid; "Lithographs Exhibited at Stendahl's," February 17, 1934, in ibid.

[112] Hunter, Part II, p. 86.

[113] Alma May Cook, "News of the Art World," *Los Angeles Evening Herald and Express*, April 17, 1937, Archives of American Art, Stendahl Art Galleries Papers, reel 2717, frame not legible. I am grateful to Phil and Marian Kovinick for this citation.

[114] In 1937 Clark took on a pro bono project of assisting in The Pasadena Garden Club to decorate the Pasadena Dispensary, a free medical clinic. He painted a series of sepia murals on the outside walls, and supervised the decoration of several patios. He remained associated with the Dispensary long after the project was completed, and, at his death, a garden was planted in his honor. Hunter, Part II, pp. 87-88.

[115] His entry was *The Great Range At Last*. Also in 1939 he exhibited watercolors at the California Water Color Association and was made a member of that organization. Clark's interest in watercolor increased, and he was given a one-man exhibition at the La Jolla Gallery of Art in August 1941. Ibid., p. 94.

[116] Ibid.

[117] "Clark Exhibit at Crocker," *The Sacramento Bee* [February 1941], ACP.

[118] Hunter, Part II, p. 96.

[119] Ibid., p. 98.

Conclusion

News of Clark's death quickly circulated.[1] Condolences poured in from all corners, but perhaps some of the most poignant responses were from life-long friends on the East Coast—the artists with whom Clark had shared his youth in Paris. Harry Hoffman wrote to Medora, "it isn't necessary I know to tell you how terribly we feel in the loss of Alson. We always counted you among our dearest friends, and have regretted the whole continent continued to be between us."[2] Everett Warner acknowledged that "for the last quarter of a century we have been separated by the entire width of the United States, so have seen little of each other, but the memory is still fresh of the good times we had together in the earlier years." He implored Medora not "grieve too much, because Alson had a long life, and a full, rich life."[3] Lawton Parker's second wife spoke for the couple. "Of all the people I have met since knowing Lawton, Alson is the one friend he has spoken of constantly. I have heard how popular he was in Paris . . . . Of all Lawton's friends, Alson was the most loved, not only because of his integrity as a good artist, but of more importance was the fact he was a humorous, generous, kind and interesting person."[4]

Clark's focus was always his art, however, he never refused a game of billiards, played golf throughout his life, and installed a badminton court in their home in Pasadena (badminton was little known in America after World War I, and the set was acquired in England). His scrupulous integrity was unquestionable, and his commitment to his art uncompromising. As this study has demonstrated, Clark was highly prolific. His only significant hiatus was during his military service in World War I. Although he equivocated momentarily after his discharge from the

military—suggesting his painting career was over—Clark's passion for his work could not be extinguished.

Clark's peregrinations took him across the globe, and each new place inspired works that were appreciated both by art connoisseurs and the general public. Once in California, he was still able to maintain relationships to museums, galleries, and collectors throughout the country. His artistic virtuosity allowed him to move easily between easel painting, mural painting, and large decorative projects. Clark's years as a teacher impacted a generation of young students who benefited from his experience and versatility. Throughout this study Clark's primary identification with California has been challenged, and he is an excellent example of why accepted wisdom must be tested, and retested, in emerging scholarship.

Clark's lifetime was framed by the country's Centennial at one end, and the beginning of the Cold War on the other. This era was characterized by enormous innovations in the fine arts, as well as dance, theatre, and literature. Artistic styles waxed and waned, with only the cognoscenti being fully aware of the most cutting-edge style *du jour*. It was never Clark's intention to push the envelope of artistic experimentation. He remained a devotee of Impressionism throughout his life, and made no apologies for his convictions. As one writer noted, "Alson Clark is sufficiently important to be independent of the top prevalent painting for the approval of other artists."[5] Like any individual who spends a lifetime at their vocation, his output varied in quality. However, in general—especially considering the length of his career—Clark remained tremendously consistent. Many of his works easily rival those of artists who are the most critically heralded American Impressionists.

Unfortunately, in the context of what become the parameters for critical appreciation after World War II—especially given the mandate from critics and collectors for constant innovation—Alson Clark's work slowly slipped into obscurity after his death. Retrospectives were held at the Pasadena Art Institute (1951), the La Jolla Art Center (1953) and O'Brien Galleries (1954). In 1960, a small exhibit of his work mounted by Terry De Lapp Galleries in Los Angeles, and the following year Hirschl and Adler Galleries in New York City held a show and sale of some small works. It took nearly ten years for a significant group of Clark's paintings to be exhibited at the Robert Schoelkopf Gallery in New York City, and until 1983 for Petersen Gallery in Los Angeles to publish the first comprehensive study of the artist.

Clark was described as a man "sensitive to beauty."[6] Larger philosophical issues of beauty aside, this is probably an apt characterization. To be sure, Clark's notion of beauty—often in the form of decaying walls, panoramic rooftop views, bridges, desert vegetation or scenes of historical California—was highly personal. Yet, he painted his subjects with optimism and a *joie de vivre* that was contagious. His works were not simplistic, but neither were they fraught with an underlying emotional angst that triggered analytic soul-searching; that was never part of his agenda. Alson Clark spent a lifetime painting the world around him; and he invited the public to share in his journeys.

[1] See obituaries in *The New York Times*, March 24, 1949; *Star News*, March 22, 1949; *San Diego Union*, March 23, 1949.

[2] Harry Hoffman to Medora Clark, April 4, 1949, ACP.

[3] Ibid., Everett Warner to Medora Clark, April 5, 1949.

[4] Ibid., Mrs. Lawton Parker to Medora Clark, April 7, 1949.

[5]Ibid., Henry Noyes Pratt, "Clark Exhibition of Paintings Draws Enthusiasm of Pratt," *The Sacramento Union*, February 9, 1941.

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