



The Happy Secret

by Carrie Crane

Among the exquisite paintings in the local Boylston Museum, is one graciously donated by Helen M. Knight and her husband Arthur Knight. Mrs. Knight, the grandniece of the temperance orator, John B. Gough, noted that this family heirloom was a favorite of Mrs. John B. Gough and the family referred to as the 'Happy Secret' or '*The Love Letter*'.

Boylston Historical Society & Museum researchers have discovered that it was '*untitled*' and was referred to as '*Portrait of a Woman*' in its first exhibition. The Danish artist, Anthon Henry Wenzler (1832 - 1871), lived and exhibited work in the New York and Pennsylvania area from 1838-1860 before dying in Newport, Rhode Island while visiting



a friend in 1871. He was an active member of the National Academy of Design in New York City where he exhibited numerous portrait, still life and landscape paintings in their annual exhibitions. The National Academy of Design which is still active today, was founded in 1825 to advance contemporary art and design in the United States and was a prestigious organization for artisans.

This oil painting was likely painted during the time of Wenzler's membership with the National Academy, however, the exact date is inconclusive at this time, as the portrait, is not dated.

What we have been able to determine of its provenance is that sometime between 1848 and 1869, this painting hung above the fireplace in John B Gough's library in his Hillside home in Boylston, Massachusetts as captured in his autobiography in the woodcut illustration of that room. How or when he acquired it has not been determined at this date. John B. Gough was known to have entertained artists at his beautiful 30-room home in Boylston. One such renowned artist George Cruickshank drew his illustration for his Dickens work while at Hillside. A letter signed by Mrs. Helen M. Knight when she donated this painting to the Boylston Historical Society and Museum 1980 provided evidence that the painting had been given to her by her great-aunt May (nee Gough) Allen who had died in 1944. May was the daughter of Herbert Gough, the half-brother of John B. Gough. Helen also stated that her Aunt May had remembered the painting as it hung over the fireplace in "Uncle" John's library.

Acknowledgements:

Autobiography of John B. Gough
Boylston Historical Society & Museum Collection, Boylston, Massachusetts
Boylston Historical Series, Filgate, Ch XI, 2012
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[https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.\\$b699219&view=1up&seq=202&skin=2021&q1=Wenzler](https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.$b699219&view=1up&seq=202&skin=2021&q1=Wenzler)
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notes from Helen M Knight
Photograph, Carrie Crane, Boylston, Massachusetts

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