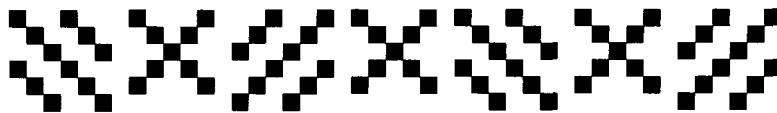




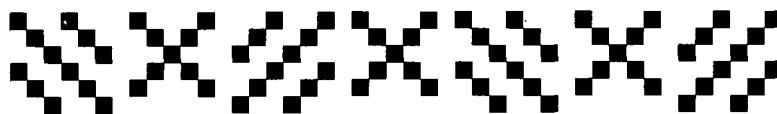
PORTRAIT OF WILLIAM MERRITT CHASE
BY JOHN SINGER SARGENT

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Pupils of William
Merritt Chase, 1905 (05.33).



Genteel Bohemian from Indiana: The Boyhood of William Merritt Chase

*Keith L. Bryant, Jr.**



Nineteenth century Indiana produced a number of nationally and internationally acclaimed artists and writers, but few attracted as much attention, or notoriety, as William Merritt Chase. From the mid-1870s until his death in 1916, Chase played a dominant role in the artistic life of the nation. As a painter he won numerous awards and was designated a National Academician. His works were displayed by the leading museums, and he served on numerous juries for the major art exhibitions. His portraits, landscapes, and still lifes featured bold colors, slashing brushwork, and a bravura style that he learned at the Royal Academy in Munich, Germany. Upon his return to the United States in 1878, Chase began an illustrious teaching career at the Art Students' League in New York, and over the next thirty-seven years he became the nation's leading art teacher at the New York School of Art, Brooklyn Art School, and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. For over a decade he conducted a summer art school at Shinnecock, Long Island, and then began to take art students to Europe each summer to visit the museums and to paint in Holland, Spain, Italy, and England. His pupils would include some of the finest artists of the twentieth century—Rockwell Kent, Joseph Stella, Charles Demuth, and Georgia O'Keeffe, among others.¹

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¹ General works on the life of William Merritt Chase include Katherine Metcalf Roof, *The Life and Art of William Merritt Chase* (New York, 1917); Ronald G. Pisano, *A Leading Spirit in American Art: William Merritt Chase, 1849-1916* (Seattle, 1983); Robert J. Wickenden, "William Merritt Chase," *Dictionary of American Biography*, II, part 2 (New York, 1929), 38-39.

A bon vivant who dressed extravagantly and held open house at his elaborately furnished studios in New York City, Chase became a leader in his profession; yet, his urbanity and cosmopolitanism were only facades for the fundamental values that sprang from his Indiana boyhood. Chase's art reflected his devotion to family, commitment to the work ethic, love of the outdoors, and patriotism toward his country. His basic beliefs were established early in his life, and the subject matter of his art and his commitment to teaching and to his profession reflect the two decades of his boyhood in Indiana where his family had come as pioneers in the 1820s.

The thousands of Kentuckians who immigrated to south central Indiana in the 1820s found a rolling terrain heavily forested with tall oak, walnut, maple, and sycamore trees. Along the creeks elderberry bushes crowded bittersweet and trumpet creeper. In the spring redbud and dogwood provided a profusion of color to be followed by daisies, queen anne's lace, goldenrod, asters, and sunflowers in the summer. Bears, wildcats, wolves, foxes, raccoons, and rabbits roamed the densely wooded hills. Many families bearing the surname Chase settled in Brown, Bartholomew, and Johnson counties in the heart of "darkest Hoosierdom." William, Avery, Abram, George, and George W. Chase and their extended families came to exploit the rich soil along the creeks and to raise cattle on the uplands.²

"Old" Hester Chase brought his family to Brown County and preempted a hilltop at Gnaw Bone, a few miles east of Nashville, the county seat. After his death, "Young" Hester, his son, farmed the land and raised his family. "Old" Hester's grandson, David Hester Chase, grew up on the farm where he was born into this poor but proud family. Life in southern Indiana in the 1830s and 1840s was not far removed from the rough frontier. The few amenities sometimes included a one-room schoolhouse that had infrequent and irregular sessions. The people were not well educated and were suspicious of strangers. Their fundamentalist churches dominated the rural communities, and preachers condemned card playing, drinking, and gambling as mortal sins. A backwoods atmosphere prevailed with recreation found in coon hunts, spell-

² Work Projects Administration, *Indiana: A Guide to the Hoosier State* (New York, 1941), *passim*; Brant and Fuller, pubs., *History of Johnson County, Indiana, from the Earliest Time to the Present . . .* (Chicago, 1888), *passim*; Genealogy Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, comp., *Index, 1840 Federal Population Census, Indiana* ([Indianapolis], 1975), 57; U.S. Sixth Census, 1840, population schedules for Brown County, Indiana (National Archives Microfilm Publication No. 704, Roll 75), 354; Elba L. Branigin, *History of Johnson County, Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1913), 37-54.

ing matches, log rollings, and quilting parties. Poor roads helped maintain the isolation of the region even as the settlers cleared the land and expanded agricultural production.³

Despite difficulties in travel and the seemingly endless tasks associated with frontier life in early nineteenth century southern Indiana, David Chase found time to ride over the Brown County line into the foothills of nearby Morgan County to court Sarah Swaim. Sarah's father, Moses, had been born in North Carolina in 1796 and like his Kentucky neighbors came to Indiana to farm. Moses looked David Chase over with his dark, piercing eyes and consented to Sarah's marriage to this ambitious young man, who planned to leave Hamblen Township in Brown County and move to Williamsburg in southeastern Johnson County to establish a harness shop.⁴

David and Sarah opened the shop in the late 1840s in a typical southern Indiana frontier community. Settled in 1821 by farmers from Kentucky and Ohio, Williamsburg developed around a dry goods store located on the Edinburgh and Morgantown Pike. A range of low hills swept up from the south, bearing off in a westerly direction. The south branch of Nineveh Creek curved through the town, its banks covered with wild grapevines. The town grew slowly during the next decade, and because another community in the northern part of the state already claimed the name Williamsburg, the post office changed the town's name to Nineveh after the township. David Chase located his shop on one of the tree-lined dirt streets and occupied a small frame home located in a wooded area nearby. There, on November 1, 1849, seventeen-year-old Sarah's first child, William Merritt Chase, was born.⁵

Within two years David acquired a partner in Benjamin I. Keaton and built a two-story brick general store with a new frame home behind the mercantile. Although some of the farm families

³ Indianapolis *News*, December 15, 1906; Edward Eggleston, *The Hoosier School-Master* (orig., 1871; New York, 1961), *passim*; Branigin, *History of Johnson County*, 37-54.

⁴ Portrait of Moses Swaim, Registrar's File, 74.243, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, Indiana; Indianapolis *News*, December 15, 1906. David H. Chase paid his poll tax in 1848 in Hamblen Township, Brown County. Charles Blanchard, ed., *Counties of Morgan, Monroe and Brown, Indiana: Historical and Biographical* (Chicago, 1884), 745.

⁵ J.H. Beers & Co., pubs., *Atlas of Johnson County . . .* (Chicago, 1881), 69, 70; David D. Banta, *A Historical Sketch of Johnson County, Indiana* (Chicago, 1881), *passim*; unidentified newspaper clipping quoting a letter from Carrie Chase Roberts to Carolyn Gant of Nineveh, Indiana, William Merritt Chase Archives (Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York); photograph of William Merritt Chase birthplace, 1927, Frank M. Hohenberger Collection, Number 3 (Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis); photograph of Chase birthplace, Chase Vertical File (Stout Library, Indianapolis Museum of Art).

were leaving Johnson County in the 1850s and heading west to Illinois and Iowa, others stayed and participated in the decade of Indiana's greatest growth.⁶ Railroad construction created new markets for agriculture, and mines and quarries were soon opened; yet, in 1852 the state legislature authorized volunteer vigilantes to arrest horse thieves, an indication that "civilization" had not yet completely arrived. As corn production increased, farmers constructed larger two-story houses and expanded their barns and outbuildings. Nineveh grew and soon had Methodist Episcopal and Christian churches and a school building for Districts 2 and 3. Along Cincinnati Street new stores emerged, as did a sawmill, blacksmith shop, and slaughter house. Houses sprang up along Georgetown Road, Washington, West, and South streets. Sarah helped organize the Methodist church, which erected a building in 1853. The firm of Chase and Keaton prospered, and David also farmed one hundred acres west of town. The Chase family also expanded in size with the arrival of George W. and Amanda.⁷

Nineveh matured in the 1850s. Fewer families raised chickens and pigs in their unfenced yards; the school met more frequently; and Mrs. Lacey, "the school marm," had additional pupils, including young "Merritt" Chase. Sarah Chase was undoubtedly ready for Merritt to attend school for his behavior was not untypical of rural boys. Once she left him with neighbors while she went on an errand and told him not to pick the ripe pears on the neighbor's tree located in the front yard. When she returned, the fruit remained on the tree, or at least the cores were there, as young Merritt had neatly eaten several of the pears as they hung from the tree.⁸ Merritt played ball with the town children and probably swam nude in the creek in the summer time. A neighbor would remember him as "a right smart chunk of a boy."⁹

One of Merritt's schoolteachers taught drawing after the regular session ended, and soon the boy was making pencil sketches

⁶ Credit Reports, Johnson County, Indiana, Volume 52, Entries 211 and 233, R.G. Dun and Co. Collection (Baker Library, Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration, Boston); Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850-1880* (Indianapolis, 1965), *passim*; St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, February 4, 1917.

⁷ *Indiana: A Guide to the Hoosier State*, *passim*; Indianapolis *News*, December 15, 1906; *Atlas of Johnson County*, 20-21, 27, 47, 70; Branigin, *History of Johnson County*, 368-69; *History of Johnson County from the Earliest Time to the Present*, 557; St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, February 4, 1917; Roof, *Life and Art of William Merritt Chase*, 2-3; Credit Reports, Johnson County, Indiana, Volume 52, Entry 233, R.G. Dun and Co. Collection.

⁸ Roof, *Life and Art of William Merritt Chase*, 2-3; Logan Esarey, *Indiana Home* (Bloomington, 1953), *passim*.

⁹ Indianapolis *News*, December 15, 1906.

of animals, trees, and buildings in his drawing book. He drew pictures of his family and friends and "Uncle Sammy" Dunham at his cobbler's bench. Soon his bedroom walls were covered with pencil and watercolor drawings. His teachers found him sketching when arithmetic and spelling had been assigned, and even his schoolmates failed to appreciate his talents. He later recalled: "I am not sure that it is a bad thing to go to a school, as I did, where the boys threw things at me, and asked if there was nothing else I could do."¹⁰

While his brother George said that all Merritt had to do was to make a few marks to create a picture, during their early adolescence George had to hold the head of one of his father's calves between his knees so that his brother could do the calf's portrait in house paint. "My knees got tired and the calf got tired, but Bill didn't. He kept on painting till he had finished the job."¹¹ Like all brothers Merritt and George had their rivalries. When David Chase offered to take his eldest son on a buggy ride to Franklin, the county seat, George offered Merritt his pony if he could be the one to go. Merritt took the pony, but when David returned and found out about the trade, he forced Merritt to give the pony back. Merritt would remember the incident many years later and resent the parental intervention.¹²

Although war clouds gathered in Indiana in the late 1850s and early 1860s, the state's population boomed and the railway network expanded. Hoosiers argued vehemently first over the slavery issue and then the question of secession; nevertheless, Indianapolis, the center of the state's economy and politics, grew from a town of eight thousand in 1850 to a small city of eighteen thousand a decade later.¹³ David Chase decided to sell his business in Johnson County and to relocate in the nearby state capital.

Chase and Keaton had remained in business in Nineveh until 1858, when David acquired a new partner and renamed his firm Chase and Mathews. The new company did a "fair country business." They were "prompt and honest" and were "good for small bills." By 1860 the firm had become Chase and Schofield, and the new partner added to the meager capital. While considered "good men" and "honest," there was not much future in Nineveh. Old-timers would remember that Chase had ten thousand to twelve thousand dollars in capital after his property was sold, but it is

¹⁰ Roof, *Life and Art of William Merritt Chase*, 3-4.

¹¹ Unidentified and undated newspaper clipping, Chase folder, Clipping File (Cincinnati Museum of Art, Cincinnati, Ohio).

¹² Roof, *Life and Art of William Merritt Chase*, 5-6.

¹³ Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era*, *passim*.

doubtful he had one tenth of that amount to invest in another business. In 1861 the Chase family moved only thirty-seven miles to Indianapolis. In terms of the culture and society the distance was much further, and the impact on young Merritt would be marked indeed.¹⁴

Twelve-year-old Merritt might well have been excited about moving to the state's capital and largest city. Indianapolis increased in size to over forty-eight thousand people during the 1860s and became a major trading center. While the state capital reflected the "puritanical" views of its rural hinterland,¹⁵ there were theaters—Adelina Patti gave two concerts in 1863—and touring opera and theatrical companies visited the community regularly. For the adolescent Chase life must have become a great adventure, for who could have resisted watching a balloon ascension or attending the circus or perhaps seeing President-elect Abraham Lincoln when he spoke at the Bates House Hotel on February 11, 1861, on his way to Washington. And, of course, there was a whole city to explore. Long tree-shaded streets in a rectilinear pattern linked the two-story homes in the residential areas with the business center on Washington Street. The newly arrived immigrants crowded the stores in the business blocks and created the atmosphere that had attracted David Chase.¹⁶

Located in the Glenn's Block on East Washington Street, between Meridian and Pennsylvania, the New York Boot and Shoe Store, owned by Chase and Adelbert Dawes, was only one of many new businesses in the three- and four-story structures in the city's central district. Dawes had been in the shoe business for several years and was considered "fast" and "fond of women." Chase and Dawes were men "of limited means" who owned no real estate and had stock valued at only five thousand dollars. They did a good business and were thought to be honest and reliable.¹⁷ The Chases lived nearby at 20 North Delaware, and from there each morning David and his son went to the store to sell the latest merchandise. Merritt worked at the store when school was not in session and probably caught the eye of the ladies who shopped for shoes. David Chase created a separate room for

¹⁴ Credit Reports, Johnson County, Indiana, Volume 52, Entry 233, R.G. Dun and Co. Collection.

¹⁵ Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era*, *passim*.

¹⁶ Jacob Piatt Dunn, *Greater Indianapolis: The History, the Industries, the Institutions, and the People of a City of Homes* (2 vols., Chicago, 1910), I, 138, 147, 158, 202-16.

¹⁷ *Indianapolis City Directory and Business Mirror* (Indianapolis, 1863), 14; *Indiana: A Guide to the Hoosier State*, 68, 210; Credit Reports, Marion County, Indiana, Volume 67, Entries 174 and 284, R.G. Dun and Co. Collection.



WILLIAM MERRITT CHASE, c. 1861

reproduced from Katherine Metcalf Roof, *The Life and Art of William Merritt Chase* (New York, 1917; reissue, New York, 1975), opposite 6.

ladies so that they could try on footwear out of public gaze. Enveloped by Victorian modesty, they slipped on shoes and walked about on the room's red carpet while the handsome young Merritt with his narrow lips and wide eyes brought more shoes for them to inspect. Years later Chase remembered that he had a genius for selling shoes to ladies; his secret was to sell a pair one size smaller than that which they had been wearing.¹⁸

While young Merritt may have felt that he was an accomplished salesman, his father was clearly not succeeding in his business. He acquired a new partner and a new location in 1864 in a venture called Chase & Cady Ladies' Shoe Store across Washington Street from the old store. A year later he became a partner in Chase, Ludington and Cady at the same site. David Chase moved his family to another residence at 159 Virginia Avenue as his business fortunes declined. Within a year his name was removed from the partnership, and by 1867 he had opened David H. Chase Boots and Shoes Wholesale and Retail next door to his old store. Credit reports continued to stress his good character but also his lack of business acumen. The high rent on the store precluded profits, and his home, valued at \$1,200, was heavily mortgaged. Business directories for 1867 and 1868 listed as a salesman in the store one William M. Chase, who was a most unhappy young man.¹⁹

After the family moved to a house on East Michigan Road on the outskirts of the city near the Deaf and Dumb Institute, Merritt attended a district school. From the Chases' pleasant country home he walked to school with George, Amanda, and other children, but once there he spent most of his time drawing pictures of Indians on the blackboard with colored chalk. As one of the older boys, he helped the smaller children, and when the ground was covered with snow, he pulled two little girls on a sled to and from the district school. He called them his "Red Riding Hoods" as they wore that style of dress, which was then much in vogue. But he was not happy. He disliked clerking in the store and felt that he was not accepted by the other boys. A very sensitive adolescent, Merritt dreamed of running away from home,

¹⁸ Indianapolis *Times*, December 21, 1948; Roof, *Life and Art of William Merritt Chase*, photograph opposite 6; William Merritt Chase, "Lecture to Art Students," January 15, 1916, typescript (Thomas J. Watson Library, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City).

¹⁹ The vagaries of David Chase's business ventures can be traced in *Indianapolis City Directory and Business Mirror* (Indianapolis, 1864); *Indianapolis City Directory* (Indianapolis, 1865); and *Edward's Annual Directory* (Indianapolis, 1865-1866); Credit Reports, Marion County, Indiana, Volume 68, Entry 369, R.G. Dun and Co. Collection.

but his affection for his mother deterred him. He had responsibilities to work in what was an unsuccessful business, and he had to help with the expanding family. There would eventually be five younger brothers and sisters.²⁰

Much to his father's continued annoyance, Merritt spent many of his working hours drawing on brown wrapping paper or standing on an iron grate in front of Lieber's Art Store looking at the chromos in the windows. Indeed, he got frostbitten toes on one occasion while staring at the lithographs. His school books were covered with drawings, and just at the busiest time of the day in the store he would be behind a counter working with colored pencils while customers waited. His behavior infuriated David Chase, who sought to save his business and feed his family while his eldest son drew pictures. Sarah Chase encouraged Merritt, and her penchant for decorative works made with colored feathers, a Victorian rage, may have heightened his interest in working with his pencils. She saved the drawings in his books and even at one point became a reluctant model. Merritt decided to make a plaster cast of his mother's face without knowing how, and the plaster hardened so rapidly that he had to chip it off her face, thus frightening his brother and sister. A second try led to a successful cast. David Chase was undoubtedly happy that no permanent damage had been done to his wife, but he remained irritated at all the drawings on the white shoe boxes at the store.²¹

Members of the family did become increasingly interested in the drawings of themselves that young William made. He drew a rather tender portrait of Sarah Chase holding baby-sister Carrie on her lap. The crude technique reveals an untrained young man seeking to please his family. Another drawing, possibly of his grandmother, shows an elderly lady, a smile on her face, sewing the pants of a very angry, bare-legged little boy who stands next to her. Chase called it "His Only Pair of Pants." On a trip to visit an uncle in a nearby community William attracted the attention of the townspeople with a portrait of a young cousin. George Chase recalled that William left drawings wherever he went.²² These crude paintings were but the first of a large number of works

²⁰ Indianapolis *News*, April 25, 1903; Julia Grayson Sharpe to J. Arthur MacLean, July 1, 1923, "Fish" Curator's Historical File (Indianapolis Museum of Art); *Edward's Annual Directory* (Indianapolis, 1867); Roof, *Life and Art of William Merritt Chase*, 5.

²¹ New York *Times*, January 28, 1912; J. Walker McSpadden, *Famous Painters of America* (New York, 1916), 329-31; unidentified and undated newspaper clipping, Chase folder, Clipping File (Cincinnati Museum of Art); St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, February 4, 1917; Roof, *Life and Art of William Merritt Chase*, 12.

²² St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, February 4, 1917.

depicting Chase's family. Throughout his career many of his most sensitive and memorable paintings were those of his wife Alice, whom he married in 1886, their children, his sister, and sisters-in-law. Chase's devotion to his family, established early in his life, would remain one of his most important values. Eventually adolescent rebellion and stubbornness wore down even David Chase. Clearly his eldest son, who insisted that he be called "William," not "Merritt," was not going to be a satisfactory shoe clerk. The father conceded: "William, you have spoiled wrapping paper enough here. Put on your hat and come with me. I am going to take you to Hays."²³

Barton S. Hays occupied a studio on the third floor of the Talbott and New Block Building on North Pennsylvania Street next to the old post office. One of a dozen artists who lived in Indianapolis in the 1860s and 1870s, Hays found work painting portraits and selling still lifes. He, Jacob Cox, James M. Dennis, and others exhibited at Herman Lieber's Art Store, the Indiana State Fair, and the Indianapolis Art Society. Although he initially supported himself as a tinsmith, Cox became Indiana's first professional painter. He had no academic training, but he knew some leading artists in New York, such as Joseph O. Eaton and Thomas Worthington Whittredge. Indeed, Eaton had studied with Cox before going to New York. Hays too was self-taught and initially painted panoramas at a time when vast canvases of historical subjects were very popular. Both Hays and Cox painted rather raw still lifes not unlike those of the eighteenth century baroque period, and Cox produced romantic landscapes. Hays also tinted photographs and operated a Daguerrean establishment. Since the Hays studio was located only a few steps from the shoe store, it would seem that young William had probably been a visitor there before and knew of Cox, who was the center of the city's artistic life. Both Hays and Cox had accepted students before and had taught them their simple and direct techniques.²⁴

Hays charged David Chase twenty dollars per month, and he set his young protégé to work copying in oil a steel engraving of a picture by Rosa Bonheur. Chase later recalled that this teaching technique was "of no earthly advantage to me as an art student,"

²³ Indianapolis News, January 14, 1899.

²⁴ Wilbur Peat, *Pioneer Painters of Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1954), 62, 78, 152-56, 167-69, 180-81, 232; Dunn, *Greater Indianapolis*, 477-78, 480; Arthur F. Janson, "The Hoosier School" (Indianapolis, n.d.), *passim*; *Indiana: A Guide to the Hoosier State*, 127-28; Mary Q. Burnet, *Art and Artists of Indiana* (New York, 1921), 78-112. Janson's "The Hoosier School" is a small brochure distributed to visitors to the Indianapolis Museum of Art as a gallery guide.

but he persevered. One of his first serious paintings was of his father seated reading a newspaper. David Chase still felt that there was a limited financial future for an artist in the family but proudly placed the portrait in the window of his shoe store. William also did some "cattle" pieces that he exhibited. A black and white crayon portrait of Captain Wallace Foster, drawn on brown paper in 1866, showed the considerable growth that William had achieved under Hays's tutelage. Foster, who operated a men's clothing store near the Chase enterprise, reluctantly agreed to pose for the young artist. Working with a crayon in one hand and a slice of wheat bread in the other, William finished the study after two sittings. Foster gave Chase five dollars for the painting, the first commission the artist received, but the oval portrait with its expressionless eyes only hints at the talents young Chase possessed.²⁵

In the late 1860s Chase painted numerous portraits, and his technique and style reflected those of Hays and Cox. He drew a crayon portrait of Mary Elizabeth Browning and painted oils of Benjamin Love, William Orbison, and two lawyers in nearby Franklin, James B. McFadden and William Gurley Munson. The handsome Munson was a friend of the young artist, and Chase painted him in a frontal shoulder-length view. Munson's expression is vague and formal, and his eyes stare straight ahead. There is no hint of the slashing brushwork of the Chase of the 1870s. A flat light illuminates the forehead against the dark background in a camera-like rendering; yet, this portrait of 1868 is decidedly more polished than that of Chase's grandfather, Moses Swaim, painted the year before. William had presented his maternal grandfather in a painting almost wholly lacking in detail and possessing a strong "primitive" quality. Clearly he had learned from working with Hays and from the suggestions received from Cox. Formal portrait painting would ultimately become one of his primary sources of income and fame, and he painted many portraits of his friends, fellow artists, and patrons.²⁶

While Chase matured as an artist, he continued to clerk in his father's shoe shop, and he continued to resent it. Like so many

²⁵ Indianapolis *News*, January 14, 1899, July 27, 1940; William Forsyth, *Art in Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1916), 7; Indianapolis *Star*, January 31, 1910; portrait, "Captain Wallace Foster," Indianapolis Museum of Art; Burnet, *Art and Artists of Indiana*, 172.

²⁶ William Merritt Chase, 1849-1916: *A Retrospective Exhibition*, June 30-July 27, 1957 (Southampton, N.Y., 1957), n.p.; Peat, *Pioneer Painters of Indiana*, 81, 179, 227; portraits, "William Gurley Munson" and "Moses Swaim," Indianapolis Museum of Art; Janson, "The Hoosier School"; William Merritt Chase: *Portraits* (Akron, 1982), 7.

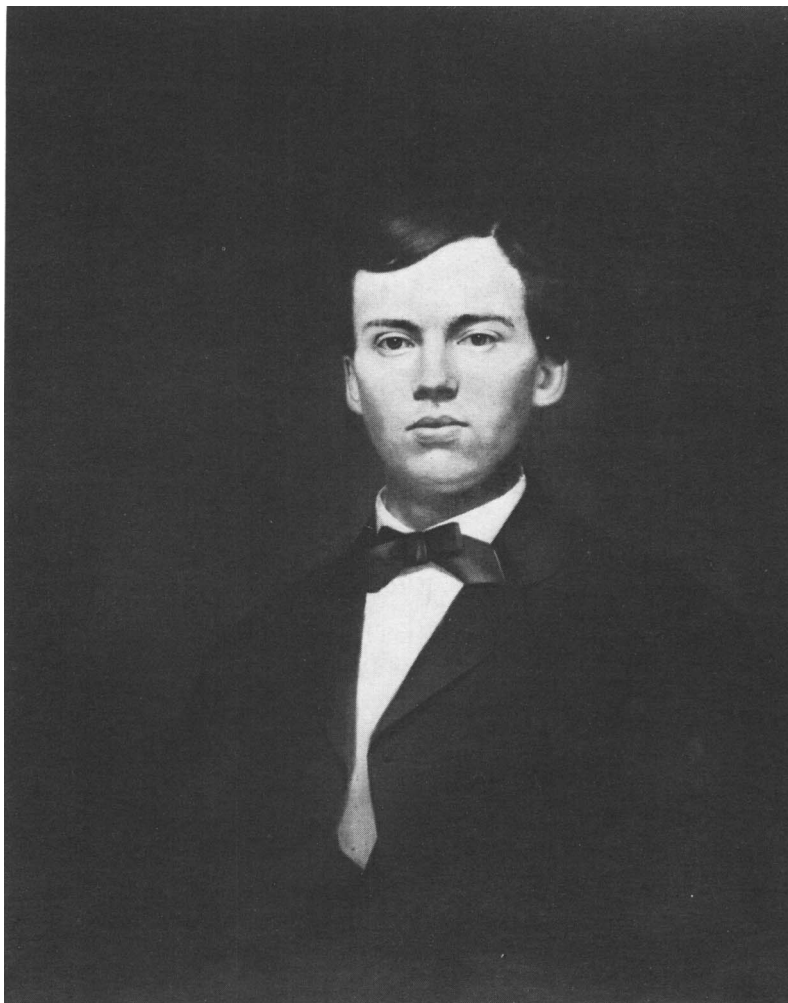


PORTRAIT OF CAPTAIN [WALLACE] FOSTER

Indianapolis Museum of Art, Museum Accession.

other romantic midwestern boys he began to dream of joining the navy and sailing around the world. Another clerk shared information with William about the naval apprentice program and the opportunity to become a seaman on the training ship *Portsmouth*.²⁷ Unable to obtain enough recruits after the end of the Civil War, the Department of the Navy developed an apprentice program and sought young men from the Midwest as participants. From 1866 to 1869 boys between the ages of sixteen and eighteen

²⁷ Roof, *Life and Art of William Merritt Chase*, 8-9.



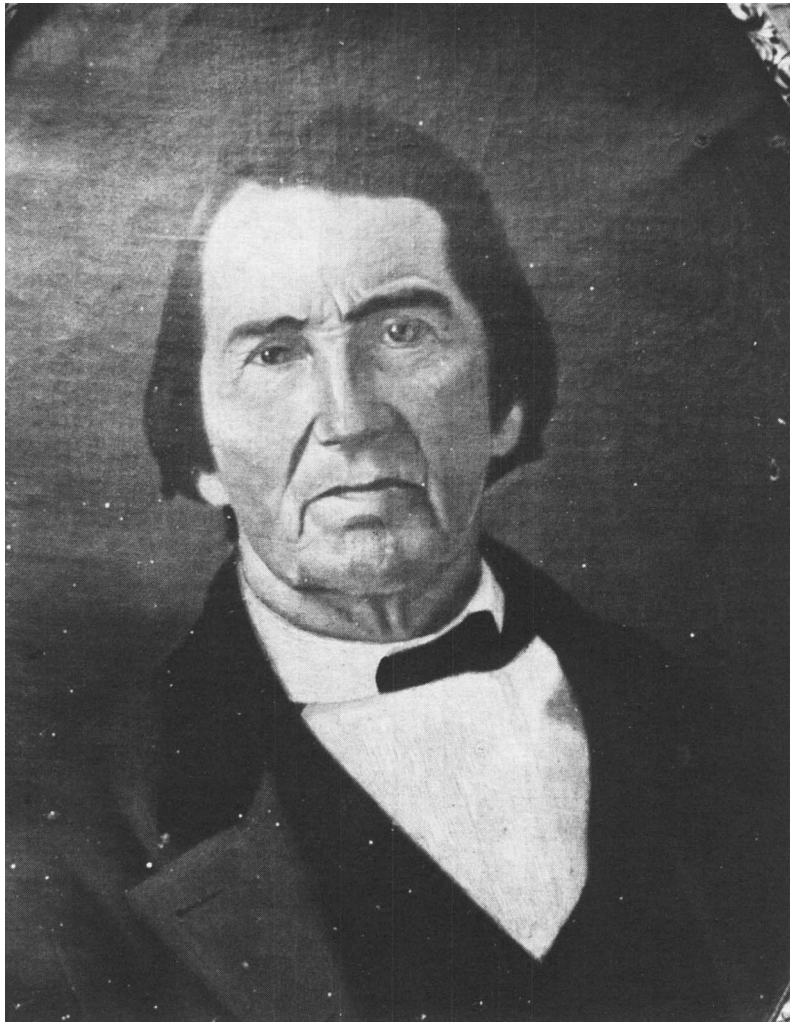
WILLIAM GURLEY MUNSON, c. 1868

Indianapolis Museum of Art, Bequest of Gladys Munson Wurzburg.

were recruited. Scheduled to remain in the navy until they reached age twenty-one, most bolted at the first opportunity.²⁸ Young William and his friend decided to escape their dreary lives as store clerks by enrolling in this rough, hazardous program.

Chase signed apprenticeship papers and traveled east to Philadelphia on July 22, 1867. After a few weeks on the USS *Vermont*,

²⁸ Frederick S. Harrod, *Manning the New Navy: The Development of a Modern Naval Enlisted Force, 1899-1940* (Westport, Conn., 1978), 5-9, 10-13, 17-23.



MOSES SWAIM, C. 1867

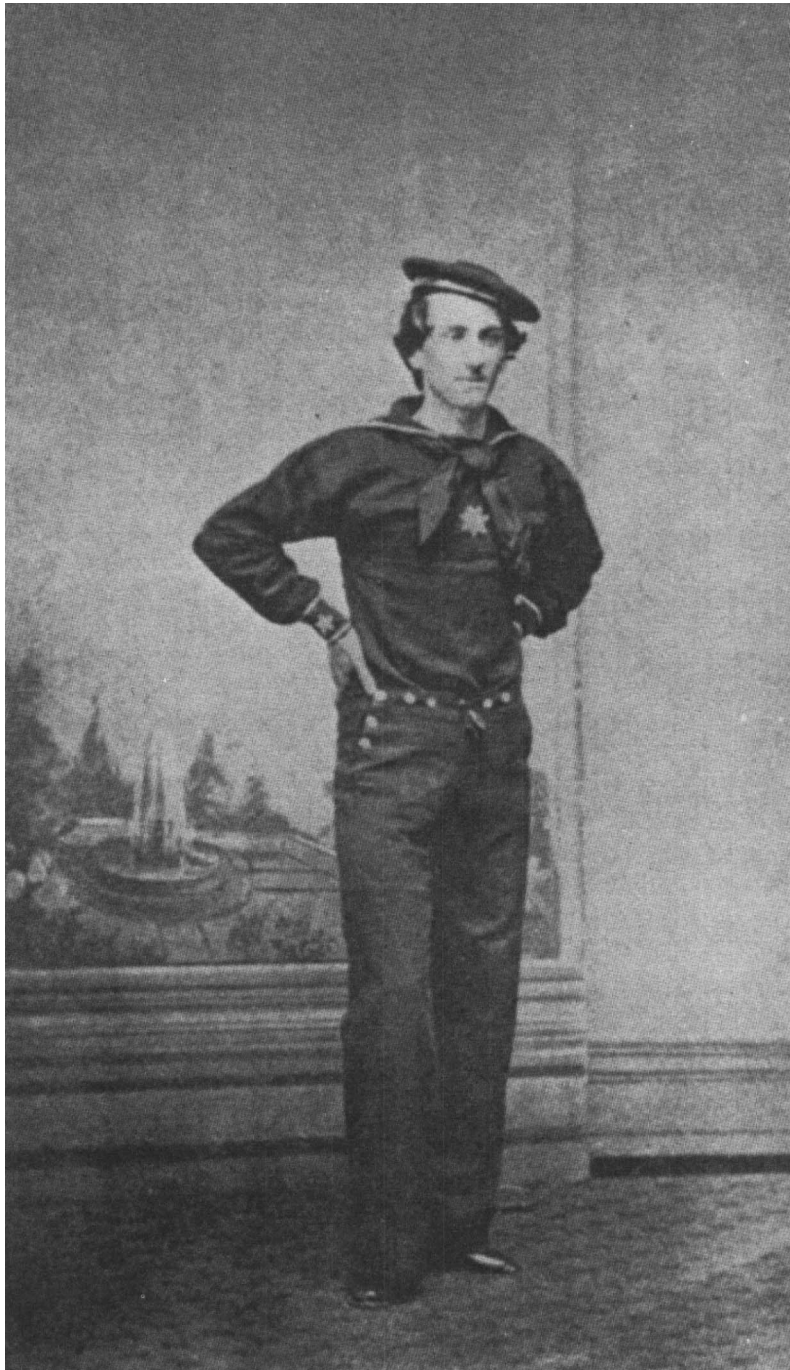
Indianapolis Museum of Art, Mr. and Mrs. Julius F. Pratt Fund.

Chase was transferred to Annapolis where he joined his classmates on the *Portsmouth*. Commissioned in 1844, this once handsome twenty-gun sloop had been part of the United States Far Eastern fleet and had participated in the Mexican War. Her long and distinguished career as a cruiser had ended, however, and the *Portsmouth* was reduced to a cadet training vessel. She had been refitted in June of 1867, and Commander Joseph S. Skerrett was placed in command. It took a crew of 210 to man the 1,022-ton ship, and they were a tough lot. Far from home, sensitive to

criticism, and sick at heart, if not from the sea, William realized that he had made a terrible mistake. The ship's muster roll described this third-class apprentice as a "school boy" 5 feet, 4¹/₂ inches tall with blue eyes, black hair, and dark skin and with a small heart—possibly a tattoo—on his left forearm. The discipline of the ship was unlike any situation William had faced before, and one petty officer in particular gave him many unpleasant tasks. Young Chase and his colleagues did exult when their tormentor lost his foothold one day and fell into the sea, but other than watching one of the officers paint marine scenes, William found no comfort aboard the *Portsmouth*. From behind a longboat he observed the artist at an easel and almost undoubtedly longed for Indianapolis and the security of Hays's studio and his family's hearth. A picture taken of this young cadet shows a thin boy with a rakish look wearing a blue uniform with brass buttons at the top of the pants pockets. Stars decorated the cuffs and the center of his shirt. A porkpie hat set at an angle on his head fails to persuade the viewer that this is a masculine sailor of the seven seas or even a happy young apprentice. After three months William appealed to his father to obtain his discharge, and David Chase went east, arranged for his son's release, bought him a new suit of clothes, and took him home.²⁹

William returned to the house on the outskirts of Indianapolis, and his parents gave him a large room for a studio. He sought out Hays for art lessons and Cox for advice and counsel. He also found his way back to the shoe store. Hays and Cox recognized Chase's maturation and realized that the young artist had learned all he could from them; David Chase concluded that William was not destined for success in the shoe business. While Chase clearly owed a greater debt to Hays, he referred to Cox as his "father in art," and his mentor's help and advice were crucial. William brought his paintings to Cox for criticism though the artist remembered: "He [Chase] was not a pupil of mine, though I often gave him instruction and advice." Both Hays and Cox knew Joseph O. Eaton, who had painted portraits in Indianapolis several years earlier and who had become a teacher at the Na-

²⁹ Pisano, *A Leading Spirit in American Art*, 24; Robert W. Nesser, "Historic Ships of the Navy, 'Portsmouth,'" *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, LII (July, 1926), 1350-52; Howard I. Chapelle, *The History of the American Sailing Navy* (New York, 1949), 436-38; "Complete Descriptive Muster Roll of the Crew of the U.S. Ship Portsmouth," August 21, 1867, Bureau of Naval Personnel, Naval Records Collection of the Office of Naval Records and Library, Record Group 24 (National Archives, Washington, D.C.); Roof, *Life and Art of William Merritt Chase*, 8-10; Samuel G. W. Benjamin, *Our American Artists* (Boston, 1886), 60, 63; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 4, 1917.



WILLIAM MERRITT CHASE AS A SAILOR ON THE *PORTSMOUTH*, 1868

Reproduced from Katherine Metcalf Roof, *The Life and Art of William Merritt Chase* (New York, 1917; reissue, New York, 1975), opposite 10.

tional Academy of Design in New York City. They recommended to William, and to his father, that the young man study with Eaton. Reluctantly David Chase agreed and arranged for several shoe wholesalers in New York City to look after his twenty-year-old son. Armed with letters of introduction to Eaton from Hays and Cox and with letters to his father's business acquaintances, William boarded the train for New York and the 1869 session of the National Academy of Design.³⁰

For the would-be sailor who had been to the East Coast only once before, New York City was a decided shock. Even the train station reflected the commercial boom being experienced by the city as Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt had erected the huge Grand Central Depot at Forty-second Street. William passed under the vast glass roof of the train shed into Fourth Avenue, which was filled with horse-drawn wagons, carriages, coaches, and trolleys. He traveled downtown to seek out Eaton who made him welcome and helped him enroll at the Academy.³¹

The excitement of the city carried over into the nation's leading art school, which, too, was gradually rejecting the past and slowly moving away from classical training methods to an emphasis on technique. Some of the best of the professionally trained artists no longer spent hours laboriously copying earlier works and then using that approach for their own paintings. At the urging of some instructors the young artists were being taught to paint with bolder strokes, to use more color, and to abandon minute detail for simpler lines, but the conservative landscapists who dominated the Academy refused to support the demands to "modernize" the curriculum following the new European approaches. What an exciting place for the boy from Indiana to find himself and to discover other young men who shared his zeal.³²

Several of Chase's colleagues at the Academy later became distinguished artists, including first-year student J. Alden Weir and Albert Pinkham Ryder, who had entered a class the year before. They studied at the Academy and often worked with senior

³⁰ Peat, *Pioneer Painters of Indiana*, 177-78; Clara E. Clement Waters and Laurence Hutton, *Artists of the Nineteenth Century and Their Works* (Boston, 1894), 133; the Cox quotation is in the *Indianapolis News*, November 13, 1879, and January 14, 1899; Burnet, *Art and Artists of Indiana*, 88, 90; "Ishmael," "Through the New York Studios," *Illustrated American*, V (February 14, 1891), 616, 618.

³¹ Clarence P. Hornung, *The Way It Was: New York, 1850-1890* (New York, 1977), 8-9, 44.

³² Peat, *Pioneer Painters of Indiana*, 99, 159-62, 230; H. Wayne Morgan, *New Muses: Art in American Culture, 1865-1920* (Norman, Okla., 1978), 78-84.

painters who gave private lessons. Chase's primary instructor was Lemuel E. Wilmarth, who did broaden the curriculum as a result of his studies in Paris and Munich. Chase also studied with the generous Eaton, who had loaned the young Hoosier his studio while he made a trip to Europe and who in the 1860s was a benefactor to many young painters. Upon Eaton's return William obtained his own studio in the YMCA Building at Fourth Avenue and East 23rd Street across the street from the National Academy. Eaton remained a friend and mentor and painted an attractive portrait of his protégé. The portrait shows a handsome young man whose most distinguishing facial features were a rather prominent nose and a full mustache.³³ What stories William must have had for his parents, Cox, and Hays when he returned to Indianapolis in April after his first winter term at the Academy.

Chase again worked with Hays until the fall term of the Academy began. He set up an easel in Hays's studio on Meridian Circle where David Munsey, a still life painter, also shared space. Clearly Chase had moved beyond Hays after only one session in New York. He worked with a well-organized palette and with masterful brushstrokes. During this summer Chase painted a large genre scene of an elderly German barber cutting the hair of a weeping youngster as well as portraits and still lifes.³⁴ His aptitude for the latter subjects would soon prove to be of substantial fiscal importance as well as artistic fulfillment.

After Chase returned to New York and the Academy for the spring term in 1870, David Chase's financial reversals continued, and he lost the last of his investment in the shoe store. From 1867 on he had failed to make any money from the business, and credit reports suggested that he should liquidate the firm. His old friend Schofield joined him again as a partner and endorsed his notes, but by March of 1870 the business was dissolved, leaving David Chase "worthless." He wrote his son that he would not be able to provide further support for his education as an artist. In New York the devastated William sought Eaton's advice as to how to continue his training. The older artist counseled him to seek por-

³³ W. Lewis Fraser, "Open Letters: 'The Century's American Artist Series,' William Merritt Chase," *The Century*, XLV (November, 1892), 156; Dorothy Weir Young, *The Life and Letters of J. Alden Weir* (New Haven, Conn., 1960), 13; William H. Gerdtz, *American Impressionism* (Seattle, 1980), 71; Roof, *Life and Art of William Merritt Chase*, opposite 18; Lois Marie Fink and Joshua C. Taylor, *Academy: The Academic Tradition in American Art* (Chicago, 1978), 1-14.

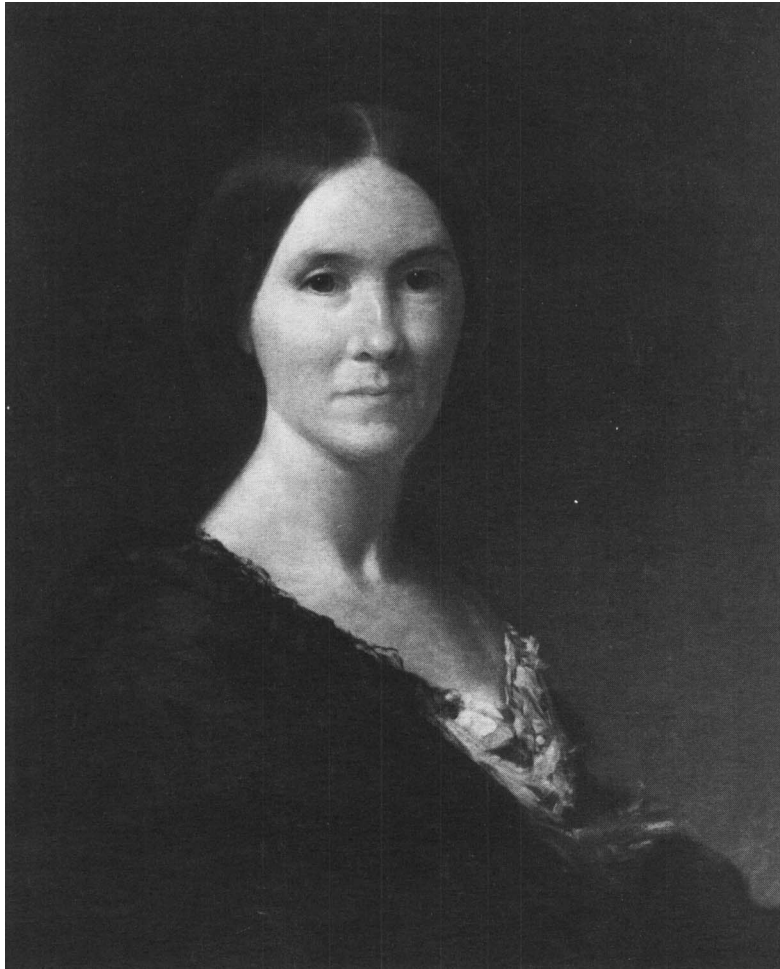
³⁴ Indianapolis News, December 5, 1916; Dunn, *Greater Indianapolis*, 480.



PORTRAIT OF WILLIAM MERRITT CHASE BY J. O. EATON, PAINTED
IN NEW YORK IN 1870

Reproduced from Katherine Metcalf Roof, *The Life and Art of William Merritt Chase* (New York, 1917; reissue, New York, 1975), opposite 18.

trait commissions in Yonkers, where Eaton made his home, and to paint still lifes of fruits and flowers, which were much in vogue among upper middle-class Victorian families. Chase's portrait of Margaret Creighton Bateman of Shelter Island, New York, shows Eaton's influence both in monetary and artistic matters. A far more delicately painted portrait than that of William Gurley Munson, the Bateman painting reveals that Chase's technique, particularly in delineating the dress, had advanced substantially. Mrs. Bateman's expression reveals little of her personality, but there is a light touch in the V-necked dress and the yellow rose



MRS. MARGARET CREIGHTON BATEMAN, C. 1870

San Diego Museum of Art, Post Office Box 2107, San Diego, California.

at the bodice.³⁵ Chase focused his efforts on portraiture and still life, and at the Forty-sixth Annual Exhibition of the Academy in 1871, he showed "Blue Plums" and "Catawba Grapes," both of which were for sale, and a portrait of fellow art student W. S.

³⁵ *Edward's Indianapolis Directory* (Indianapolis, 1869); Credit Reports, Marion County, Indiana, Volume 69, Entry 488, R.G. Dun and Co. Collection; portrait, "Margaret Creighton Bateman," San Diego Museum of Art (San Diego, California); Abraham David Milgrome, "The Art of William Merritt Chase" (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Art History, University of Pittsburgh, 1969), 12-14.

Macy. The painting of catawba grapes demonstrated by its extreme detail that the influence of Hays and Cox had not been entirely lost and suggested that the academic training of the Academy had in some respects stifled his development.³⁶ While there had been some changes in the methods of the Academy, the older instructors still emphasized drawing rather than painting, and the pupils spent hours preparing copies of casts in the academic manner. Chase made drawings of painstaking accuracy that pleased the instructors but came to bore the young artist.

Although Chase hated the tedious classes at the Academy, he found other aspects of the artists' life challenging and stimulating. There were his friends among his fellow artists, such as Weir and Ryder, and the new Metropolitan Museum of Art, which opened in the spring of 1871 and presented the Academy novices with a broader range of western European art, especially the paintings of the Renaissance. At the Academy Chase found that to enter "a classroom filled with casts of the antique is as disenheartening as to go into a graveyard";³⁷ nevertheless, he continued to improve his technique, broaden his concept of style, and earn enough money painting fruit and flower still lifes and portraits in Yonkers to stay at the Academy and to purchase a railway ticket to visit his family in St. Louis.

Following the loss of his business, David Chase had moved his family to St. Louis, and William decided to visit them and later to open a studio there. In New York the competition for portrait commissions was keen, and it appeared that the mid-western city offered better prospects. Too, his expenses would be less, and he could help the large family of Chases.³⁸ Accounts differ as to when William established himself in St. Louis. There is evidence that he visited his family at Christmas in 1869; certainly by the fall of 1870 he had settled in the city and had opened

³⁶ Milgrome, "The Art of William Merritt Chase," 12-15; Wickenden, "William Merritt Chase," *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. II, part 2, p. 38; Kenyon Cox, "William Merritt Chase, Painter," *Harper's*, LXXVIII (March, 1889), 550; Maria Naylor, comp. and ed., *National Academy of Design Exhibition Record, 1861-1900* (2 vols., New York, 1973), I, 157-58. Other still lifes from this period include "Still Life with Fruit," Parrish Art Museum (Southampton, New York); "Still Life with Watermelon," private collection, Birmingham Museum of Art (Birmingham, Alabama); and "Still Life," Phoenix Art Museum (Phoenix, Arizona). The latter is of red and yellow apples and is highly detailed.

³⁷ Ronald G. Pisano, *William Merritt Chase* (New York, 1979), 12; McSpadden, *Famous Painters of America*, 331; the quotation from William Merritt Chase is from "Talk on Art," *The Art Interchange*, XXXIX (December, 1897), 127.

³⁸ *Indianapolis News*, January 14, 1899, December 5, 1916.

a studio in the Insurance Exchange Building. Unable to afford a studio by himself, he moved to the YMCA Building where he shared the large rooms of James W. Pattison, an artist only five years his senior. Chase found a small group of painters living in St. Louis, several of whom had been educated abroad. Conrad Diehl, who had studied at the Royal Academy in Munich and with Jean-Léon Gérôme in Paris, taught art students in the city. Paul Harney taught at the School of Fine Arts at Washington University after having studied at Munich for two years. A landscape painter of some note, Pattison was in charge of the art department at Washington University, and he introduced Chase to his fellow artists.³⁹

"Will" Chase, as he now styled himself, found St. Louis a booming city on the banks of the Mississippi River. Steamboats lined wharves piled high with cotton bales and general merchandise. The city's Union Depot witnessed vast crowds of immigrants arriving with hopes of finding work in the breweries, shoe factories, and railway car works, and thousands of farmers and tradesmen headed westward to the Rockies or California. A cosmopolitan population thronged the streets at the center of St. Louis to gain access to its thriving stores, banks, and theaters. Iron-front commercial buildings lined the business district, bearing witness to the city's postwar prosperity. Will hoped that the prominent families of the city would want to enhance their new homes with his paintings of fruit and flowers.⁴⁰

At their studio at Fifth and Olive streets Will Chase and Pattison eked out a precarious living. Will exhibited his large floral and fruit pieces at a local art store. While Chase would later denigrate his work in St. Louis, some of the paintings revealed his growing talent. His "Floral Still Life with Hummingbird" is not unlike the work of Martin Johnson Heade, a popular realistic painter of flowers and birds in the period. This highly detailed oil of red roses, tall grasses, and white flowers in a triangular arrangement with a small grey-brown hummingbird near the top is a typical Victorian still life but is done with considerable verve. These "hard and minute" works kept his artistic career going for three long years. He received a few portrait commissions,

³⁹ Unidentified newspaper clipping, W.B. Steves Scrapbooks (Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri), XLVI, 165; "William Merritt Chase: A Leader," manuscript in George Washington Stevens Papers (Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.), Reel D34, frames 664-65; *Indianapolis News*, December 5, 1916; J. Thomas Scharf, *History of Saint Louis City and County . . .* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1883), II, 1626-27.

⁴⁰ Work Projects Administration, *Missouri: A Guide to the "Show Me" State* (New York, 1941), 301-305.



FLORAL STILL LIFE WITH HUMMINGBIRD

Indianapolis Museum of Art, Gift of Carl B. Shafer.

and the studio he shared with Pattison soon had many visitors who came to watch the intense, dignified young painter from Indiana. Pattison recalled that Will carried himself so well and with such dignity that he appeared much older than twenty-one. He seemed to be “astonishingly clever and self-centered even at that early period.”⁴¹

⁴¹ Virginia Gerson to Ala Story, undated, Ala Story Papers (Archives of American Art); Janson, “The Hoosier School,” *passim*; painting, “Floral Still Life with Hummingbird” (Indianapolis Museum of Art, dated August 30, 1870, and signed

One of the visitors to the studio was John Mulvaney, a local artist who had only recently returned from Munich. The stories Mulvaney spun about the Royal Academy, the Munich museums, and student life in Bavaria fired Will's imagination and dreams. Mulvaney's experiences and his conversations with Pattison about French art made Chase's own work seem even more dreary. Pattison had studied in Boston and revealed to Chase the impact that William Morris Hunt had made on art there as a result of Hunt's training in France. Mulvaney had studied with Alexander Von Wagner and Karl Von Piloty in Munich, but he had also traveled to Paris, Berlin, Vienna, and Amsterdam and had actually seen the old masters that Chase had observed only in books and magazines. Munich offered a far less academic form of instruction, according to Mulvaney, and students had more latitude stylistically. Certainly Will must have been impressed by Mulvaney's sketches with their direct and vigorous brushwork. Will's enthusiasm for Europe in general and for Munich in particular knew no limits except his pocketbook.⁴²

William lived at 414 Olive Street in the heart of the commercial district in St. Louis, and a large metal sign on the YMCA Building proclaimed the location of his studio. His earnings remained meager, and a photograph taken during this time shows a dark, brooding, heavily lined face with a large drooping mustache. The fur hat and coat that Will is wearing in the picture heightens the sense of foreboding shown on his face. Part of his unhappiness may have been the strained relationship with his father. David Chase still did not approve of his eldest son's vocation, and his own financial plight may have exacerbated the feeling that Will should seek a more lucrative profession. The Chases had three more mouths to feed after the arrival of Charles, Carrie, and Hattie. Will's brother George recalled that Sarah Chase sympathized with the young artist but that their father did not. Will felt that his father considered him "the black sheep of his family," though "I had my good mother always as a support

"Will Chase"); Peter Mitchell, *Great Flower Painters: Four Centuries of Floral Art* (Woodstock, N.Y., 1973), 87; New York *Evening Post*, April 27, 1907; James William Pattison, "William Merritt Chase, N.A.," *House Beautiful*, XXV (February, 1909), 50; quotation is from James William Pattison, *The World's Painters since Leonardo* (New York, 1906), 240.

⁴² St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*, May 3, 1908; Indianapolis *News*, December 5, 1916; W.A. Cooper, "Artists in Their Studios," *Godey's Magazine*, CXXX (January, 1895), 291-92; Cox, "William M. Chase, Painter," 550.



PHOTOGRAPH OF WILLIAM MERRITT CHASE TAKEN IN ST. LOUIS
ABOUT 1872

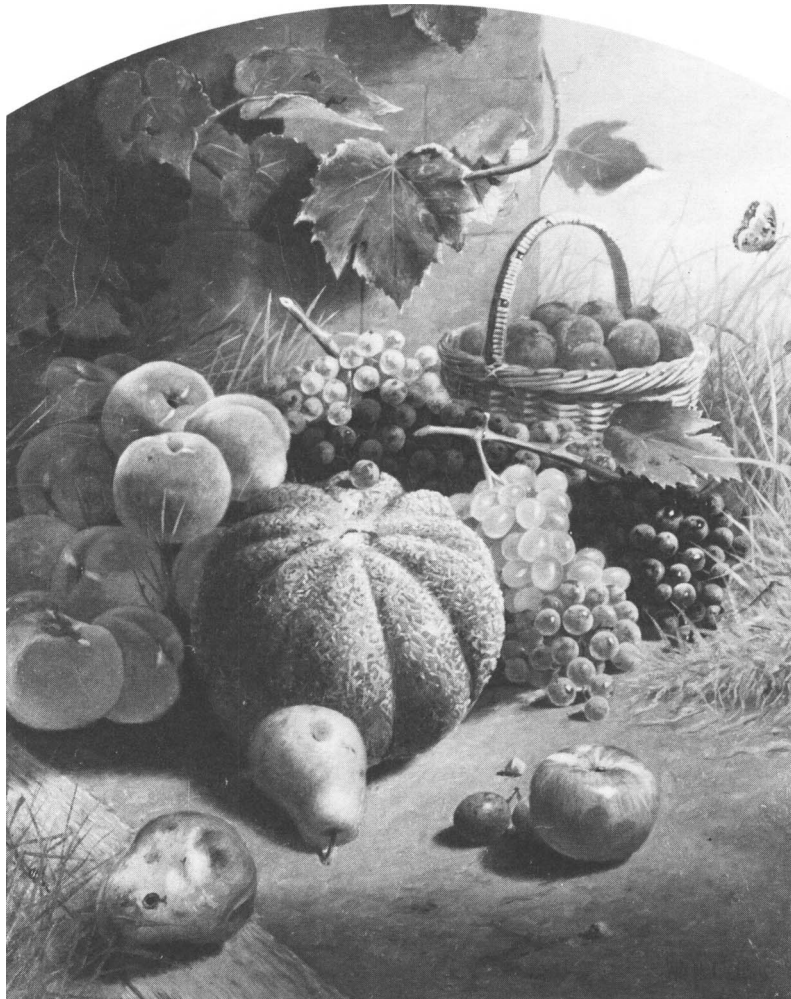
Reproduced from Katherine Metcalf Roof, *The Life and Art of William Merritt Chase* (New York, 1917; reissue, New York, 1975), opposite 24.

in the way of encouragement—always ready to frame the little-things I did and hang them up”⁴³ Sarah Chase came to Will’s studio to visit, and Pattison recalled her as a sweet-faced, gentle lady very much concerned with her son’s career. Will may have tried to please his father by clerking briefly at the mercantile store of Dodd, Brown & Company, but he simply was not interested in a business career. Perhaps David Chase’s concern about Will’s fortunes were somewhat alleviated when in 1871 his son won several awards at the Eleventh St. Louis Fair. Among the 525 entries in the Fine Arts Department were several by Will Chase. He won first prize of twenty dollars in the category “Head, Cabinet Size,” but it was his still life that attracted attention. The official report on the fair commented that “Mr. Wm. M. Chase [showed] several tantalizingly real looking fruit pieces.” One of the latter took second in the fruit-painting category and a prize of ten dollars. Local businessmen who belonged to the St. Louis Agricultural and Mechanical Association donated the prizes, and a St. Louis collector of American art, Samuel A. Coale, provided many of the art awards. William recalled that his father’s views did change and that while walking downtown with him they met an acquaintance to whom Will was introduced as “my son the artist.” Over time his father came to take pride in his son’s accomplishments.⁴⁴

Will’s artistic talents also came to the attention of some St. Louis businessmen and art patrons. Several stories, some of which must be apocryphal, purport to explain how Chase attracted their notice. One story has a banker reporting to Pattison on Chase’s arrival in St. Louis: “There is a young man here who paints so well that I dare not tell him how good he is.” Such a comment seems a strong sentiment about a twenty-one-year-old with only two sessions of the National Academy of Design behind him. George Chase remembered that Chase’s first studio was in a building that housed the office of Captain W. R. Hodges, an art connoisseur,

⁴³ Gould & Aldrich’s *Annual Directory of the City of St. Louis* (St. Louis, 1872), 160; Roof, *Life and Art of William Merritt Chase*, opposite 24; Indianapolis *Star*, March 25, 1917; “Address of Mr. William M. Chase before The Buffalo Fine Arts Academy, January 28th, 1890,” *The Studio*, new series, V (March 1, 1890), 121-22; Pisano, *A Leading Spirit in American Art*, 25.

⁴⁴ Lars Gaston de Lagerberg, “James Gaston Brown,” *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society*, VII (April, 1951), 308; *Seventh Annual Report of the [Missouri] State Board of Agriculture* (Jefferson City, 1871), 75-77; Roof, *Life and Art of William Merritt Chase*, 24-25; Elsie May Smith, “A Girl That Everybody Likes: A Study of ‘Alice,’ with a Glance at William M. Chase and His Work,” *School-Arts Magazine*, XII (February, 1913), 372; Pattison, “William Merritt Chase,” 50.



STILL LIFE WITH FRUIT, 1871

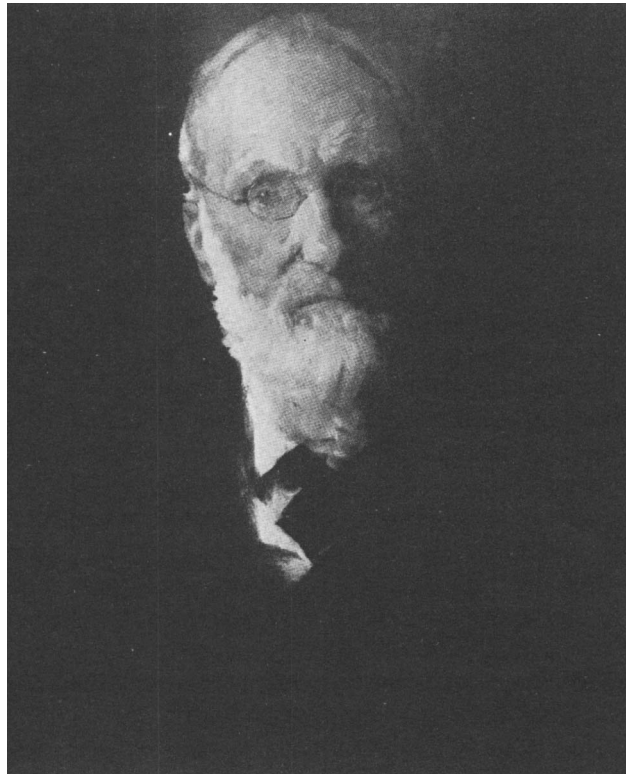
William Merritt Chase, oil on canvas, The Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, N.Y., Littlejohn Collection.

and that Hodges brought the young artist to the attention of Samuel M. Dodd, a wealthy merchant. There has also been the suggestion that Will worked briefly for Dodd's dry goods store, and he did sometimes trade his paintings to merchants in exchange for clothes and other necessities. Too, Samuel A. Coale had given the prizes that Chase won at the fair. Whatever the explanation, Hodges, Coale, Dodd, and Charles Parsons, the pres-



AFTER THE SHOWER

Indianapolis Museum of Art, John Herron Fund.



PORTRAIT OF MY FATHER (DAVID HESTER CHASE)
 C. 1895

Indianapolis Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Carrie Chase Roberts.
 Reproduced from "Two Portraits by Chase," *The Bulletin of the
 Art Association of Indianapolis, Indiana, John Herron Art Insti-
 tute*, XXXVII (April, 1950), 15.

ident of a local bank and the Union Depot Company, and several others decided to aid the young artist.⁴⁵

Following his meeting with Mulvaney and their discussions about the Royal Academy at Munich, Will's desire to study in Europe was virtually unbounded. His business acquaintances discussed the youth's desire and approached him with a proposition. Hodges asked if he wished to go to Europe. "My God," he replied, "I'd rather go to Europe than go to Heaven!" Hodges then proposed that Chase attend an academy in Europe for two years supported

⁴⁵ Quotation is from Pattison, "William Merritt Chase," 50; *Indianapolis Star*, March 25, 1917; Walter B. Stevens, *St. Louis: The Fourth City, 1764-1909* (3 vols., St. Louis, 1909), I, 677, 451, 318.

by his business friends. They would each provide three hundred dollars for a total of \$2,100, a very handsome sum. In return, Will would send each of them a picture to repay the money that he had been advanced. He also agreed to help them acquire European paintings for their collections.⁴⁶ Will prepared to depart for Europe in 1872 filled with an excitement that he had never known before and with a longing to learn that he had felt for almost a decade.

Never again would Chase live in the Middle West, and only occasionally would he visit Indiana and Missouri. Neither his European training nor his life in New York, however, caused him to abandon his heritage. While James T. Flexner has suggested that Chase and other midwestern artists sought to live down what they considered American crudities, Chase's life and art reflected many familial and regional values.⁴⁷ Clearly Chase carried with him throughout his career a sense of the importance of natural settings, and his love of the out-of-doors remained a central factor in his life and his work. He became famous for his paintings of Central Park in New York City and Prospect Park in Brooklyn as well as his many landscapes of Shinnecock, Long Island. The Shinnecock paintings reflect the glory of the wild flowers, shrubs, and trees of what was then a tranquil rural area of the northeast. Chase also revelled in the company of family and friends, a trait developed early in his life, and before and after his marriage to Alice Gerson she would be his most faithful model. Their eight surviving children proved to be the delight of Chase's life and the subjects of numerous portraits and genre scenes. Although Chase would abandon "flower painting," he loved still life, especially works depicting fish and fruit in settings which emphasized common kitchen wares of brass, glass, and pottery, again perhaps a reflection of his origin.

Even as Hays and Cox had provided training, friendship, and encouragement for a struggling youth, Chase became a "father" of American art. He had hundreds of students in New York City, Brooklyn, and Philadelphia, many of whom became leading artists in the twentieth century. While his "art children," as he called them, generally rejected his approach to art—though not his commitment to technique—they respected him and praised his warm

⁴⁶ St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, February 4, 1917; Indianapolis *News*, January 14, 1899; Roof, *Life and Art of William Merritt Chase*, 25-26; Thomas B. Brumbaugh, "William Merritt Chase Reports to St. Louis from Munich," *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society*, XV (January, 1959), 118-24; Cox, "William Merritt Chase, Painter," 550.

⁴⁷ James Thomas Flexner, *The Pocket History of American Painting* (New York, 1957), 98.



PORTRAIT OF MY MOTHER (SARAH SWAIM CHASE), 1892

Indianapolis Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Carrie Chase Roberts.

hospitality and encouragement and his dedication to professionalism.⁴⁸

Chase's strong sense of patriotism, particularly as it related to art, perhaps reflected most strongly the artist's continuing belief in his early values. Throughout his later career Chase argued for a distinctly "American" art and for artistic independence from Europe. Although he traveled abroad frequently, Chase urged

⁴⁸ Ronald G. Pisano, "The Teaching Career of William Merritt Chase," *American Artist*, XL (March, 1976), 26-33, 63-66.

students to attend schools in the United States and to paint “American” subjects. While some artists in the progressive era espoused reformist political causes as well as “modern” art, Chase remained steadfast in his commitments as a member of the national artistic establishment. Unlike John Singer Sargent and James Abbott McNeill Whistler, he would not become an artist-in-exile. Years later when he recalled his decision to return to the United States in 1878 after six years abroad, Chase declared: “I was young; American art was young; I had faith in it.”⁴⁹

Like Winslow Homer, whose father had been a hardware dealer; Albert Ryder, whose father sold coal; and Thomas Eakins, whose father was a Quaker writing master, Chase created reality from his own experiences.⁵⁰ Unlike fellow Hoosier James Whitcomb Riley, who had also been born in 1849 and who would spend a lifetime writing about Indiana, Chase abandoned the Midwest as a home, but he did not leave behind the values and the experiences that he acquired there. The subjects of his paintings, as well as his personality, reflect his life along Nineveh Creek in Johnson County, on Delaware Avenue in Indianapolis, and on Olive Street in St. Louis.

⁴⁹ New York *Evening Post*, quoted in “Chase’s Americanism,” *The Literary Digest*, LIII (November 11, 1916), 1250.

⁵⁰ Virgil Barker, *American Painting: History and Interpretation* (New York, 1950), 667.



DOROTHY [CHASE], 1902

Indianapolis Museum of Art, John Herron Fund.