

## Emily Howard (1836-1914)

**Emily Aminta Howard (1836-1914)** was born on October 30, 1836. She was the first of seven children born to Baptist **missionary** parents, Reverend Hosea and Theresa Howard, in the former nation of Burma (now Myanmar) in the city of Moulmein. The Howards conducted their work at the Missionary High School in that city for the first 16 years of Emily's life, until the parents' ill health **necessitated** the family's return—or first **voyage**, in the case of the children (Emily, sisters Mary and Louisa, and brothers David, Hosea, Jr., and Charles)—to the United States.

The months-long journey by ship from southeast Asia to the eastern coast of the United States was very difficult for the family. The ship encountered hurricane-force winds and waves that ultimately sank their ship the *Madura*, with much of the cargo still onboard. Rev. Howard wrote a letter about the events on the ship to fellow missionaries of his who remained in Burma. Rev. Howard wrote about how, having been on the sea since March 1, the ship with its crew of 24 and 12 passengers, entered **turbid** waters with waves “high, irregular, and often conflicting with one another.” These conditions persisted from roughly March 11 until March 20, when a “heavy **lurch**” of the ship sent a **cask** of water through a skylight immediately above the cabins below. Broken glass and bent metal rained down on the passengers—mildly injuring Rev. Hosea and Charles Howard, and water flooded the cabins. However, the worst was yet to come. Three days later on March 23, the *Madura* found itself in the middle of a hurricane and without a **mast**, sails, **rigging**, and **bulwarks**—which had all been carried away by the storm. Fortunately, two U.S. ships—the *Blanche* and the *Columbus*—came upon the damaged *Madura* and saw to its rescue. The Howards eventually arrived in Bloomington, Illinois eight years later in 1858 by way of New York City and Massachusetts.

Emily Howard attended school in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. She then taught classes in piano, vocal performance while living in New York City with her family. Not long after her arrival in Bloomington, she began recruiting students in piano, voice, **melodeon**, and organ. By the mid-1860s, Howard had expanded her class offerings to include oil painting, crayon drawing, and guitar.

In addition to private lessons, Howard was hired to teach music, French, drawing, and painting at Conover's Bloomington Female **Seminary** from at least 1869 to 1871. The school was located at 507 E. Grove Street, and was said to be the second best residence in Bloomington at the time. The school year was divided into two terms of 16 weeks each, with two weeks vacation for the holidays. A “regular course” cost \$12 in advance per term (approximately \$340 in 2017 dollars), with additional costs for subjects ranging from Latin or Greek, French or German, Drawing, Painting in oil or watercolors, Music on piano or guitar, with an additional cost for extra practice on piano. **Boarding** costs included furnished rooms, fuel and gaslights, and washing. Students could also board with private families for a lesser charge. In the 18 years that the school was in existence, more than 500 young women attended courses there.

In 1883, Howard began teaching guitar in the then department of music at Illinois Wesleyan University, and by 1891 was appointed Director of the School of Painting and instructor of landscape and still life in oil in the College of Arts. Howard continued to offer private lessons while employed at the university.

To the fortune of her fellow residents of Bloomington, Howard did not limit her creativity to the instruction of her students. She knew that “art has its positive influence, not only in developing character but in making life better and more useful,” and thus regularly performed concerts and **exhibited** her works throughout the region. In February 1870, Howard performed a

**rendition** of “Home to our Mountain” at a concert benefitting Marie Litta, world-**renowned** opera singer, Bloomington-native, and cousin of Howard’s close friend and fellow artist Almira Ives Burnham. Howard also **lent** her musical talents, often as a **substitute**, to various local churches.

In February 1883, Howard hosted her first major art exhibition from her **parlors** at East North Street. Over 300 hundred people attended to view the “beautiful display of finely executed paintings, productions of Miss Howard and her students.” The exhibition featured works of oil, **china**, crayon, pastel, and satin. A vocal and instrumental performance by Howard and her students completed the reception.

In May 1906, the History Club purchased one of Howard’s paintings with the intent that it would be the “**nucleus**” of a public art collection for the Withers Public Library. Some of the collection is now preserved within the permanent collection of the McLean County Arts Center. Other prominent purchases of Howard’s work includes the sale of a painting titled, “A Study of Books,” to a resident of St. Louis, Missouri, by way of an art dealer in the same city; as well as the sale of a painting depicting a basket of corn—which was intended to **adorn** the walls of the Corn Belt Bank in Downtown Bloomington—to a man of Boston, Massachusetts.

Howard also served on the board of Withers Public Library (today known as Bloomington Public Library) and was an early member of the Bloomington Art Association after its **reorganization** in 1922.

Emily Howard died in Louisville, Kentucky on June 10, 1914 of “**infirmities** of old age” following a “long period of illness.” In 1909, Howard had moved to Kentucky to live with her sister Mrs. Louisa Clelland, but was living at a care facility at the time of her death. An earlier attempt to preserve her eyesight through surgery had failed, and at the end of her life, Howard was completely blind. However, though tragic for an artist, it was said that she was “always cheerful” in spite of her “**affliction**.” Emily Howard was buried next to her parents and her brother Charles at the city cemetery (now Evergreen Memorial Cemetery) in Bloomington.

The McLean County Museum of History holds two paintings of Howard’s in its permanent collection. Both oil-on-canvas, still life paintings came as a donation from Timothy Ives in 1996, having been displayed at the boyhood home of former Governor of Illinois and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Adlai E. Stevenson II, located at 1316 E. Washington Street in Bloomington. One features a glass of water next to a bunch of grapes, draped over three red apples, with a few grapes loose from the bunch. The painting, purchased by Helen or Lewis Stevenson in the 1890s, is framed in a **gilded gesso** wooden frame with an **ornate** raised edge by Mandel Bros. in Chicago. The second is of a metal pan turned on its side and spilling out eight peaches onto the grass. The painting is framed in a gilded gesso over wood frame with a molded edge. It once belonged to Alice Fell and was later displayed at the Stevenson home.