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Arts

Evelyn Bartlett, Patron of Art And Ornament, Dies at 109

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Correction Appended

Evelyn Fortune Bartlett, an art patron who was a major benefactor of the Art Institute of Chicago, died on Tuesday at her home in Beverly, Mass. She was 109.

Alert until a few weeks ago, Mrs. Bartlett was also an ardent gardener and farmer, something of an eccentric and a master of detail. In the lush gardens she cultivated at Bonnet House, a 35-acre estate in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., she could recount how and where every plant, ornament and tile was bought and installed. She grew many varieties of orchids, put black and white swans in the estate's ponds and bought 30 to 40 monkeys for its trees.

Mrs. Bartlett was equally particular with her farm in Essex, Mass., which was called Bothways. Besides the usual cows, sheep and chickens, it was also home to two llamas and an emu. For visitors, she would recite various species she raised. But she would also serve many of them, along with the vegetables she grew, for lunch. Asked if eating the animals bothered her, she replied, "I run a farm, not a zoo."

Described as a small, dainty woman with a stern face, she was said to be private but invariably gracious. "She was completely representative of another age, the age of manners," said Courtney Graham Donnell, an associate curator at the Art Institute. "I had lunch with her three times at her house in Beverly, and we never ate off the same china." Before each lunch, there would be sherry by the fire.

Mrs. Bartlett was the daughter of William Fortune, who for many years was president of the Indianapolis Telephone Company as well as other telephone companies and a director of Eli Lilly and Company. Her first marriage was to Eli Lilly, the pharmaceutical concern's founder, from whom she was divorced around 1927.

She married Frederick Clay Bartlett, a Chicago-born artist, architect and patron of the arts, in 1931. Shortly thereafter she took up painting, moving quickly from watercolors to oils and developing her own style. Her pictures -- vividly colored portraits, still lifes and flower paintings, bore little resemblance to her husband's murals, landscapes and figurative works, executed in muted tones.

Mr. Bartlett and his previous wife, Helen Birch, had been among the first Americans to collect Post-Impressionist works, assembling a priceless collection of paintings by Cezanne, Picasso, van Gogh, Matisse and Seurat that went to the Art Institute upon Helen Birch Bartlett's death in 1925.

The collection included Seurat's legendary "Sunday Afternoon on La Grand Jatte." After Mr. Bartlett died in 1956, Evelyn Bartlett donated money to construct a gallery named after him and to provide for the presentation and preservation of those paintings, known as the Helen Birch Bartlett collection.

A later marriage to Daniel Huger ended in divorce in 1969.

Mrs. Bartlett donated many paintings and sculptures to the Art Institute. Although she did not live for very long in Chicago, her interest in the city's art scene continued. When works in the galleries she supported were rehung six years ago, she traveled to Chicago to see them. At her death, she was an honorary governing member, life trustee, sustaining fellow and member of the Old Masters Society of the Art Institute.

No immediate family members survive, a spokesman for the Art Institute said. Mrs. Bartlett bequeathed Bothways, the farm in Essex, to the Massachusetts Trustees of Reservations, a preservation organization, and Whitehall, her home in Beverly, to the Beverly Hospital. Bonnet House was turned into a museum in Fort Lauderdale several years ago, but she retained the right to live there and spent each winter on the estate.

In 1982, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington organized a retrospective exhibition of her work and Mr. Bartlett's that also traveled to the Art Institute. Feted among friends at a gala dinner in the gallery in Chicago, Mrs. Bartlett seemed delighted but made no speech. "She was," Ms. Donnell said, "much too shy for that."

Correction: July 4, 1997, Friday An obituary of the art patron Evelyn Fortune Bartlett yesterday misidentified her first husband, Eli Lilly. He was the grandson and namesake of the founder of Eli Lilly & Company, not the founder.

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