

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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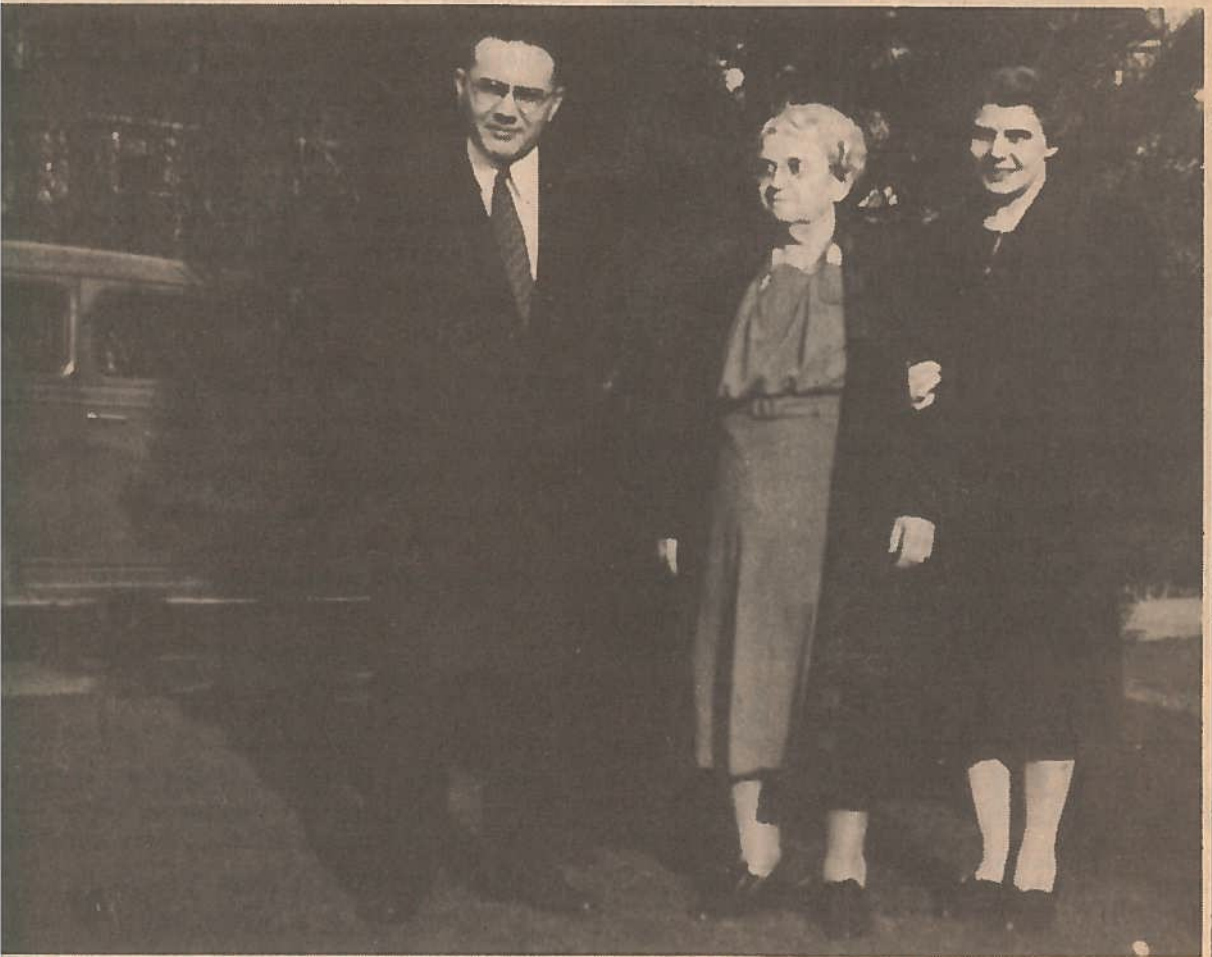
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CLARA DAWES CRAGBON 1861-1943

*"Art is the child of Nature; yes her darling child, in whom we trace the features of the mother's face."
Longfellow*



Someone once said: "Many persons feel art, some understand it; but few both feel and understand it." Clara Dawes Cragbon was one of the few who both felt and understood it. Art was an intuitive part of her very being. Her goal, as she stated, was to make three paintings a day. That is one prolific artist! Over her life time Mrs. Clara Cragbon of Holley painted hundreds of small watercolor paintings for which she was probably best known. However, she worked in other media including china painting, oils, pencil and pastel. As a self-taught watercolorist she specialized in ethereal and atmospheric landscapes as well as local scenes. Her paintings have a freshness about them which gives them a timeless quality. Soft greens, blues, browns, lavenders and muted yellows predominated her watercolors. The work I've run across is normally matted and framed either in gold polychrome or mahogany veneer frames. Her name usually appears in a lower corner of the work simply as "Cragbon", although recently I have attributed a small watercolor signed "C.C." to her. Aside from her watercolors she also had self-taught ability in the handling of oils. These paintings are very apt to be much darker in appearance and do in character, appear to be antique. Mrs. Cragbon was also very clever in all kinds of crafts which included making furniture for doll houses and crocheted rugs.

Her outlet for the sale of this work included the Orleans County Fair, the Monroe County Fair and a store in Batavia, plus word of mouth. Throughout her painting career her work was in great demand for which she had won many prizes at various exhibitions in Western New York.

Mrs. Cragbon was born April 30, 1861 in Owaso, Michigan to Martin C. and Juliaette Reed

Dawes. During the 1880's on a visit to an uncle in Holley, N.Y. she met Arthur T. Cragbon whom she married in 1886. He died in 1926 in Brockport where they had resided for a short time. Mr. Cragbon was the trolley master i.e. he was in charge of the Brockport BL&R trolley depot. However, Mrs. Cragbon resided most of her life in Holley where she died at her Geddes Street home on July 26, 1943.

She was a member of the Holley Baptist Church and the Friendly Bible Class and was for many years an active worker in both church and Sunday School. Mrs. Maejel Cragbon, her daughter-in-law recently told me that Clara Cragbon and her husband Arthur were two of the finest people she ever met. The accompanying photo, taken in 1940, shows Clara Cragbon center, with her two children, the late Dayle Cragbon of Brockport and the late Gladys Johnston of North Tonawanda.

Mrs. Cragbon left her mark upon Orleans County through her art work which occasionally appears in shops, house sales and auctions today. To give you a better idea of what to look for and how to recognize her work, come to the Annual Art Show at the Cobblestone Museum in Childs May 10 7-9 or May 11 from 12 Noon to 5 p.m. This year's Art Show will feature another landscape painter from the Town of Murray, Paul Parks, whose works represent scenes in oil from the Western New York area. However, three small paintings by Clara Cragbon will also be on display showing what another local artist created many years ago.

Artists like Clara Cragbon from the past and Paul Parks of today provide us with a chance to both feel art and understand it through their various techniques as they interpret the world around us.