

Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin County Historian

Vol. XIV

1-29-92

No. 5

KEZIAH DUNN ROYCE, ARTIST



Her paintings are signed "K.D. Royce" which, upon seeing these works, was my first encounter with this local artist. Before I knew anything about this person, it was obvious through her work, that this artist not only had talent and skill but also professional training. Her works in oil and watercolor, particularly still life subjects with flowers, command respect from any observer. They are well done and "read well" in my opinion. Through antique shops, shows and sales one can easily find paintings executed between the years 1875-1925 by amateurs or what we might call "Sunday Painters." It was during this period that many women took up brush and palette as a pastime. With a little artistic experience or practice it was easy to copy an engraving, say from Harpers Bazaar, transferring a small illustration onto a large canvas and calling it your own. The Swiss Alps, famous European paintings, palatial landscapes or some romantic version of the old sugar shack and gathering sap were popular subjects for these would-be artists. And let us not dismiss flowers of very shape, color and variety. For during this same time period china painting was also a popular art form where in particular floral motifs were prevalent. Ladies frequently took some training from a more advanced painter and so local art flourished and perhaps reached a height around the turn of the century.

It is no doubt, that K.D. Royce was a great influence upon many of these Sunday painters because she was a professional. Her obituary notes that she taught painting and drawing at the Phipps Union Seminary for Women in Albion.

Mrs. Royce was born as Keziah Dunn in Buffalo in 1833 and came to Albion in the 1850's where she first attended the Phipps Union Seminary and is listed among the graduates in the class of 1857 as "Kezzie" from Nunda. In the 1870's she then taught at the Phipps Seminary. This was a girls' finishing school comparable to an academy at the time but with live-in accommodations for the stu-

dents. Girls, particularly from wealthy families were trained in the "finer things in life" including penciling, watercolor, oil, Grecian and Oriental painting along with vocal and instrumental music studies. These subjects comprised the arts which were taught along with other subjects such as: Latin, Sacred Philosophy, Literature, Rhetoric, Physiology, Geology and even Gymnastics.

The 1894 Directory of Orleans County lists Mrs. K.D. Royce as an artist. She was a widow at that time and may well have used her art as a practical means or support. The accompanying illustration is a photo of a watercolor painting signed K.D. Royce depicting a pitcher filled with trillium. I judge this picture to have been created around the turn of the century.

Keziah Dunn married Origen Royce Jr. in 1872 and they had one daughter, Orriette Stewart Royce. Mr. Royce was born in 1811 and married Francis Havens in 1833 for his first wife. They moved to Albion in 1853 where he engaged in the hardware business. He was known as a staunch Abolishinist and was active in the Presbyterian Church. Francis died in 1870 and two years later he married "Kezzie" who was twenty-two years younger. They built and lived in a large home on South Clinton Street in Albion which is now the residence of Richard and Sue Howard. Following Origen's death in 1884, Kezzie and Orriette continued to reside there until the death of Mrs. K.D. Royce on May 28, 1917. She was eighty-four years of age. Her most prolific years as a painter, I judge to have been during the 1880's and 1890's.

The Orleans County Council on the Arts Gallery will be featuring an exhibition of local artists entitled Within Our Midst 1875-1925 during the month of February. Gallery hours: Friday, Saturday and Sunday 12 Noon-4 p.m. This special show will open on Sunday, Feb. 2 between the hours of 2-5. Three of K.D. Royce's paintings will be displayed including the trillium shown above.