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TWO ARTISTS — TEACHER AND STUDENT

BY C.W. LATTIN

From now through the end of October the Cobblestone Society Museum (Cobblestone Church) in Childs will feature an exhibit of watercolor paintings by two local artists. Alvin L. Briggs (1834-1920) and Clara Dawes Cragbon (1861-1943) knew each other as Cragbon took watercolor painting lessons from Briggs, the local master of that medium.

The exhibit is free to the public beginning with an opening reception from 5 to 8 p.m. Sept. 1. Thereafter, the exhibit may be seen free during the regular fall museum hours of 1 to 5 p.m. on Sundays. Also on Sept. 20 is the Village Inn dinner and program of Victorian music at the Cobblestone Church. Call Tillman's Village Inn for reservations.

Twenty-four fine paintings make up this watercolor exhibit, 12 by Briggs and 12 by Cragbon. It's obvious she picked up on certain traits and techniques found in the watercolors by Briggs.

Paintings for this exhibit have been loaned by Joe and Linda Roberts from the Cobblestone Inn, Beverly Leigh, Heather Boyd and C.W. Lattin.

With the exception of a few paintings, all appear to be generic landscapes in our region. The techniques these two artists used are, however, of a timeless quality. The paintings themselves are for the most part as fresh as tomorrow and could easily pass as contemporary works. The antique appearance comes as all these paintings are in their original frames indicating that most were probably executed 100 years ago. The only one in this exhibit that's dated is from 1897.

Now a little biographical information on the artists themselves.

Briggs lived during the 1860s and early 1870s in Childs, then called Fairhaven. Mr. Briggs was widely known locally as a fine artist. His paintings were usually small, rectangular and in a horizontal format. The subject of his work was local scenery, including skies, trees, sometimes sheep and small streams or lakeshore scenes. He once said, "I paint atmosphere." His landscapes were charac-



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terized by being wispy and in very soft pastel colors with greens and blues predominating. His later paintings were often mounted in narrow gold frames.

Locally, his work was proudly displayed, in many well decorated homes, as a status symbol. His paintings were signed in the lower corner as either A.L. Briggs or just A.L.B.

Mr. Briggs and his wife Adeline had three sons. It's said that he once submitted his work for approval to a New York gallery. Apparently, his work was readily appreciated until he was asked to appear in person. Mr. Briggs had a speech impediment and because of this he was rejected by the gallery.

Mr. Briggs continued to work as an artist until his death, sharing a studio at one time with Peter B. West in Albion. Along with painting, he replaced the heads of drums and played snare drum in the Albion Citizens Band more than 100 years ago.

Cragbon, who lived in Holley, painted hundreds of small watercolor paintings, for which she was best known. She once said, "Many persons feel art, some understand it; but few both feel and understand it." Clara was one of the people who both felt and understood it. Art was an intuitive part of her very being. She said her personal goal was to produce three paintings a day.

She was mostly a self-taught watercolorist and specialized in ethereal and atmospheric landscapes as well as local

scenes. Like A.L. Briggs, soft greens, blues, browns, lavenders and muted yellows predominated her watercolors.

Her work was normally matted and framed either in gold polychrome or mahogany veneer frames. She usually signed her name in the lower corner as simple "Cragbon" and it is thought, sometimes with a simple "C.C."

She worked in other media including china painting, oils, pencil and pastel. Her paintings in oil are apt to be much darker in appearance and do, in character, appear to be antique. Mrs. Cragbon also was clever in all kinds of crafts, which included making furniture for doll houses and crocheted rugs.

The outlets for sale of her work included the Orleans and Monroe county fairs and a store in Batavia, plus word of mouth. During her lifetime, her work was in high demand and she won many prizes at various exhibitions in Western New York.