



Emily Sibley Watson

Emily Sibley Watson was a member of one of Rochester's first families. Her generosity as a patroness of art and music contributed much to the enrichment of the city's cultural life. She died February 8, 1945, at her home at 11 Prince Street.

The wife of James Sibley Watson, banker and philanthropist, Mrs. Watson lived to be ninety years old. She was the daughter of Hiram Sibley, founder of the Western Union Telegraph Company, and Elizabeth Tinker Sibley. She was one of three children.

Born and educated in Rochester, Mrs. Watson traveled throughout the world. She and her mother accompanied her father to Russia when he took part with Czarist officials in discussions of a possible telegraph link between the two nations across the Bering Strait. The project was abandoned with the completion of the Atlantic Cable.

In 1913, Emily Sibley Watson founded the Memorial Art Gallery as a memorial to her son, architect James Averell. James, her son by a previous marriage, was 26 years old when he died of typhoid. The original building, designed by Mrs. Watson's nephew-in-law, John Gade, was based on a sketch Averell did of the Malatesta Temple in Rimini, Italy just a few months before his death. Today the permanent collection (more than 10,000 objects) of the Memorial Art Gallery has been called the best balanced in the state outside of metropolitan New York City. In addition to its collection, the Gallery offers a year-round schedule of temporary exhibitions, lectures, concerts, tours, and family activities.

On October 8, 1913, the museum was dedicated. By deed of gift, Mrs. Watson placed the gallery in the custody of the University of Rochester for the people of Rochester. In 1926, she and her husband erected a second wing which doubled the size of the original building.

Throughout the years she made gifts which added to the Gallery's permanent collections of paintings, rare tapestries and sculpture. One such statue was named "Hidden Tribute," commissioned for the museum's opening in 1913. Given by Mrs. Watson to honor her late son James Averell, "Memory" was carved from marble by American sculptor William Ordway Partridge. Today you can find this mourning figure on the second floor, in a niche adjacent to the 20th Century European Gallery. Another outstanding gift to the art gallery was an 11th century French chapel, with original frescoes intact, which was set up in the gallery's Fountain Court in 1939. The gallery's outstanding print collection was started when Mrs. Watson donated an excellent collection of old master prints that her son James Averell had purchased in Europe.





Mrs. Watson was one of the founders of the Genesee Hospital, and with her mother-in-law, the late Mrs. Don Alonzo Watson, contributed to that institution its spacious Watson Wing.

Among the musical protégés who profited by her counsel and financial support was David Hochstein. On February 16, 1892, David Hochstein was born in Rochester, New York, to Russian immigrants Helena and Jacob Hochstein.

Around 1902, Emily Sibley Watson heard young David practicing violin at her neighbor's home. She became instrumental in David's musical career, becoming his benefactor and ensuring that he receive the finest training available. From 1909 to 1912, David studied under Ottakar Sevcik in Vienna with the support of Mrs. Watson. He graduated from the Meisterschule with highest honors. Hochstein was the first American to win triple prizes offered by this institution, and the first student ever to win both One Thousand Crown and First State Prize. In 1913, David studied in St. Petersburg, Russia, with Leopold Auer, considered to be the finest violinist of the time. His stay in Russia was financed by George Eastman, a friend of Mrs. Watson and founder of Kodak.

In 1915, David performed three times in New York City, playing solos with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and Metropolitan Opera. He performed as well in Boston, Chicago and elsewhere in the United States. His performances in London, Berlin, Dresden, and other European cities received rave reviews.

In 1916-1917, Hochstein composed four pieces, which were published by Carl Fisher, the noted New York publisher. He also transcribed two works by Brahms, "Waltz in A minor" and "Waltz in A major."

In October 1917, David Hochstein joined the army to fight in World War I and was assigned to the Infantry Division. In October 1918, Second Lieutenant David Hochstein was killed in the Battle of Argonne. His body was never recovered.

On April 5, 1919, musicians in the Rochester community rallied together for the Hochstein Memorial Concert, attended by an audience of thousands. "In him, America has lost one of her finest artists." wrote Leopold Auer. In 1920, Emily Sibley Watson along with her friend George Eastman founded the Hochstein Music School in his memory. For 84 years the David Hochstein Memorial Music School has served as Rochester's community school of the arts. Enrollment in Hochstein's music and dance programs is open to the entire community, welcoming and nurturing students of all ages, all levels of skill, and all backgrounds





regardless of ability to pay.

In her declining months, Mrs. Watson would sit at the window of her lovely home on Prince Street, which became her link to the outside world. At the end of World War II the Army Air Force students were quartered in the converted Rochester Theological Seminary building on Alexander St. Every day they would march by Mrs. Watson's house on their way to the Armory on East Main St. When the students discovered that Mrs. Watson had made a gift of an intercommunication system in the students' dormitory and had paid for additional improvements to their living space, every day they would smartly salute her as they marched by her house.

Mrs. Watson was survived by her husband and son, Dr. James Sibley Watson, Jr., associate in medicine at the University of Rochester School of Medicine.

In tribute to her memory the Memorial Art Gallery was closed for a day and the flags of the University of Rochester were flown at half staff.

Emily Sibley Watson is buried near her family at Mount Hope Cemetery. The lovely flat stone on her grave was designed by the famous Rochester architect and designer, Claude Bragdon. Bragdon also designed the Watson family monument, an elaborately carved granite Celtic cross. The endless knot motif on the cross is a symbol of reincarnation.

On the day following Mrs. Watson's funeral, the following editorial appeared in the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle*:

Made Community Richer

An indication of the spirit in which Mrs. James Sibley Watson made her contributions to Rochester opportunities for cultural enjoyment is contained in the fact that when she established the Memorial Art Gallery she was particularly interested in making it a place for living art rather than a dead storehouse of treasures. The children's classes and others that have helped carry out this purpose have given the Rochester gallery a reputation and standing among galleries of the country which is respected and recognized by directors of more famous institutions. This interest was backed by generous gifts to the Gallery's collection as well as the initial building and with her husband, the large addition which doubled its capacity. Her interest in the Genesee Hospital, in the Rochester Civic Music Association, her special interest in David Hochstein and the establishment of the School in his memory, revealed her genuine desire to use her wealth for the enrichment of the life of all her Rochester neighbors and for the alleviation of their distress. Neither advanced age nor illness





dimmed her interest in others or her helpfulness. The boys of the Army Air Corps who trained here and marched past her window daily through several months had reason for their daily salutes beyond the material contributions she made to their comfort and recreation. She was a Rochesterian whose name and personality will be recalled for many years as the cultural inspiration of her benefactions persists.

References:

Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle*, February 9, 1945 and February 10, 1945

Hochstein Music School

Memorial Art Gallery

