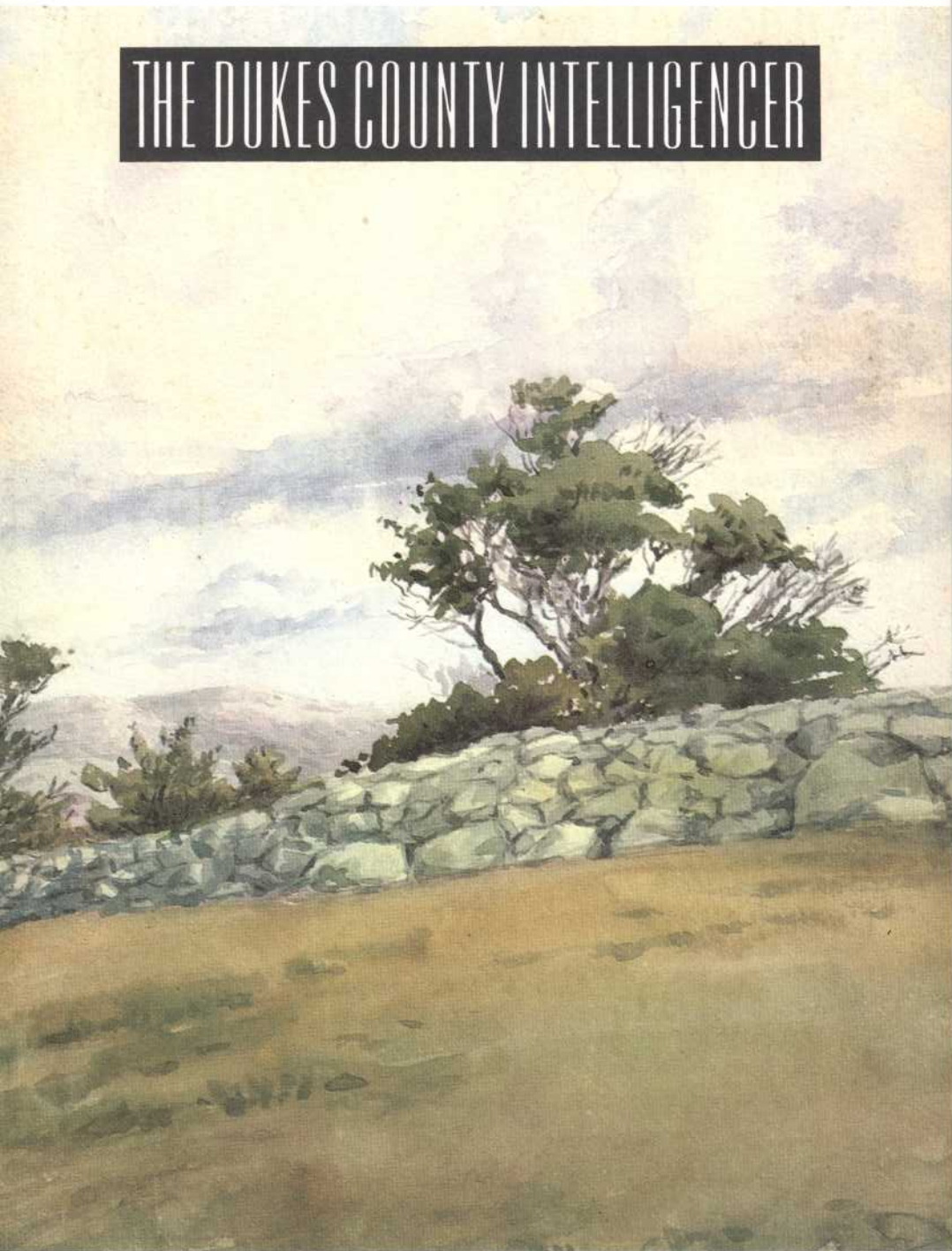


THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER



Amelia Watson

by

HENRY BEETLE HOUGH

THE INNOCENCE painted by Miss Amelia M. Watson on Martha's Vineyard in 1888 and 1889 when she taught art in summertime at a queer old school, the Martha's Vineyard Summer Institute, has never perished. One becomes aware of it still, as vistas are seen in a backward look over one's shoulder. Her landscapes are gentle idyls of a gentle period, and she painted too the landscape of the mind, so that the true life in them persists.

Sometimes hers was an almost tremulous innocence like the fading afterglow, but it was always confident, expressed with authority in a medium as genuine to her as lyricism in any poet. If her landscapes were small and in a critical frame of reference may be called minor, they were nevertheless completely proper to her immediate scene, her purpose, and her own far-off vision. If it were not so, how could so gentle a voice be heard across the boisterous years?

The Martha's Vineyard Summer Institute was odd because it came into existence by a sort of spontaneous germination among the talents of vacation days: an expert teacher of penmanship, a great authority on Shakespeare, a respected botanist — and Miss Amelia M. Watson of East Windsor Hill, Conn. The Institute gathered talent, flourished, and died with the advent of summer schools in colleges and universities which could offer academic credit.

An early bulletin of the Institute describes Miss Watson's program for the Department of Painting: "Lessons will be given in oil, watercolor and pastel. The work will be carried on in all favorable weather out of doors, and will consist of making sketches of the many attractive bits of sea and landscape which the Island has to offer. . . Occasional and inexpensive trips will be taken to some of the quaint towns of the Island . . . pupils will have special opportunity to become familiar with the beauties and characteristics of the Island, and also to receive the full benefit of the air and sunshine."

How proper this was, how confidently simple, how much in the temper of a time when values were known and true, and in a sense, how exclusive. One sees Miss Watson with her pupils appreciating the satiny shingles of an old farmhouse, the shapes of gaff-rigged schooners, the idleness of reflecting waters — and one imagines the admiration pupils and contemporaries felt for the unostentatious but secure attainment of the teacher. It is an admiration, tinged with no small degree of nostalgia and affection, that most of us are bound to feel today.



Tamson Luce's Hill, Lambert's Cove



A Vista





Haven Bound, East Chop



The Eyebrows





Squibnocket Cliffs





Amelia M. Watson