

Lost Artifacts?

III. The Anna Lea Painting

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As noted below in the response to the previous column, the F. J. Moore Portrait Collection at MIT is apparently no more, though an examination of its holdings, as reproduced in the book by Smith (1), shows that most were not unique, one-of-a-kind, items, and that both copies and originals of the various photographs, lithographs, paintings, statues, etc. are to be found elsewhere, so the loss for the history of chemistry community, though unfortunate, is not irretrievable. There is, however, one possible exception to this statement, which is reproduced in the accompanying figure. This appears on page 124 of the Smith book and carries the title "Founders of the Coal-Tar Dye Industry: The Synthesis of Alizarin," as well as the following extended caption:

From a painting in the possession of the Chemistry Department of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The title of this picture and the subjects named [left to right: Graebe, Hofmann, and Liebermann] are more or less conjectural. It is an oil painting by Anna M. Lea, dated 1869. It was on January 11, 1869 that Graebe and Liebermann, at a meeting of the Berlin Chemical Society, with Hofmann as the presiding officer, announced their discovery of the synthesis of alizarin and prepared the dye before the audience. This was an epochal date and made a sensation throughout the chemical world. Efforts to learn the history of the painting and how it came into the possession of MIT have been fruitless to date. Anna Lea was painting in Dresden and Paris in 1869. "Her father through his business interests had something to do with coal-tar dyes," writes a member of the family. President Crafts of MIT [and of Friedel-Crafts reaction fame] resided in Paris for twenty years (1874-1891) carrying on his chemical researches and may have secured the painting.

A search by Deborah Douglas of the MIT archives and museum has failed to uncover the current location of the painting which is apparently no longer in the possession of MIT or its chemistry department. Does this painting still exist and, if so, where is it presently located?



References and Notes

1. H. M. Smith, *Torchbearers of Chemistry*, Academic Press: New York, NY, 1949.

Readers having information relating to the above artifacts or questions of their own which they would like to see addressed in future columns, should send their comments and questions to Dr. William B. Jensen, Oesper Collections, Department of Chemistry, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH 45221-0172 or e-mail them to jensenwb@ucmail.uc.edu.

Response to the Previous Column

At the suggestion of Ronald Smeltzer, an e-mail correspondence was initiated with Deborah Douglas, the current Curator for Science and Technology at the MIT Museum. Though able to uncover documents collaborating Smith's account of how the Moore Portrait Col-

lection came into being, she reports that no traces of it are currently to be found at MIT, whether in the chemistry department, the archives, or the museum. This raises the further question of how severe this loss is to the history of chemistry community, the answer to which forms the basis of this issue's column as given above.

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