



## Edith Lake Wilkinson - *Music and Fine Arts*

Edith was welcomed into the world on August 23, 1868, by her loving parents James P. and Lucy Lake Atkinson Wilkinson. Her father had ties during the Civil War to the Union and West Virginia Loyal Volunteers while her mother was an art teacher and artist.

In 1888, at the age of 20, Edith moved from her home in Wheeling to New York City and enrolled in The Arts Student League. Her formal training as an artist begins here, where she studied with a number of important American painters, including William Merritt Chase and Kenyon Cox. In 1900, Edith enrolled in Teacher's College at Columbia University where she studied with Arthur Wesley Dow, a leading figure in the Arts and Crafts revival.

In 1902, Edith and her partner, Fannie, traveled to Europe where Edith sketched and painted.

In 1905, after earning a degree in fine arts, Edith joined Dow's summer art classes in Ipswich, MA, where she created a series of charcoals influenced by Dow's interest in applying the design principles of Japanese art.

Starting in 1913, Edith became part of the growing art colony in Provincetown, MA.

For the next 10 years, she spent every summer and fall there, her style switching from the somber palette of her European and New York work to a sundrenched Impressionistic palette inspired by the Provincetown light. During her time there she worked and exchanged ideas with another West Virginian artist, Blanche Lazzell. They both were at the forefront of a group of Provincetown artists who developed what's known as the White Line method of block printing.

In 1922, Edith's parents died of gas asphyxiation in their home in Wheeling. Edith inherits stocks and bonds, providing income to support herself. However, a Wheeling attorney who managed the Wilkinson family estate had complete control of the monies released to Edith and only allowed her a modest monthly stipend. Unbeknownst to Edith, he was slowly siphoning off her funds into his own pocket.

At this time, Edith is known to be productive and fully engaged in the world. However, in March 1924, Edith was admitted to the Sheppard Pratt Institution, an asylum for the mentally ill in Baltimore, MD. Her admittance card describes her as in a "paranoid state." The Wheeling attorney is listed as Correspondent. Released on October 2 that same year, her condition is said to have sufficiently improved.

In February 1925, Edith was readmitted to the Sheppard Pratt Institution, where she would spend the next 10 years. Her possessions, including her artwork, were packed in trunks and sent back to Wheeling to her only surviving relative, her nephew Edward Vossler. Her last known work is dated July 8, 1925. It's a small unmounted canvas titled "Canoe Place" created from memory of the tidal marshes in Provincetown.

In March 1935, Edith was transferred to Huntington State Hospital in West Virginia by her nephew, still described as paranoid and now, at age 66, showing early signs of dementia. The institution is said to be filthy and overcrowded with Edith being seen by a physician only once a month. She was considered a model patient. There she remained until her death on July 19, 1957. She is buried next to her parents in Greenwood Cemetery in Wheeling.

In the 1960s, Edith's trunks are at long last discovered and unpacked by Edward's sister-in-law, Polly Anderson, on a visit to Wheeling from California. Her work was displayed in the Anderson home and inspired her daughter, Jane, to become an artist. Jane brought Edith's work to light in the documentary "Packed in Trunks: The Lost Art of Edith Lake Wilkinson." Edith's work may be viewed in the collections of The Huntington Museum of Art and the Provincetown Art Association and Museum.

The opportunity to know more about Edith and her work has been lost to history. However, the legacy of the art she created enables the celebration of her spirit and the sharing of her story with future generations.