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New T.C. Steele Painting Uncovered

INDIANAPOLIS — Eighty-six years after the death of Indiana artist T.C. Steele (1847-1926), a new painting has been discovered, much to the delight of the Indiana State Museum. This is the first discovery of its nature in the museum's fine arts collection and is highly unusual in the art world.

The untitled painting, signed and dated "1890" was unveiled today at the T.C. Steele State Historic Site in Nashville, Indiana. It was found when independent Chicago-based art conservator Barry Bauman was restoring "An Old Garden," an 1887 Steele painting from the Indiana State Museum collection. As he removed the canvas from the stretcher, he discovered a second completed painting beneath it, stretched over the same frame. This is rare for an artist of Steele's caliber to do such a thing, and the museum doesn't expect to definitively answer why he did so.

"The discovery was a personal reward for me and an even greater reward for the museum," Bauman commented. "Discoveries of this nature 'don't happen,' but when they do they carry an everlasting satisfaction that a little piece of the history of art is forever realized."

This painting has not been known to exist at least for the past 86 years. His widow authenticated his paintings after his death in 1926 and unknowingly authenticated the back of the "new" painting, identifying it as the 1887 painting stretched over the top. It is doubtful she knew there were actually two canvases on the stretcher.

The museum collection includes more than 300 paintings and drawings by T.C. Steele, as well as several significant paintings by other artists in Steele's personal collection, bequeathed to the state by his second wife, Selma Neubacher Steele upon her death in 1945.

Museum Arts and Culture Collection Manager Meredith McGovern explains, "This historic work broadens the museum's collection of Steele's between 1880 and 1906, when he was painting in Munich and Brookville. During the time between these periods, Steele painted near Indianapolis or on sojourns to Vernon, Yountsville, Spencer and Metamora. He also painted in Vermont, Tennessee, Oregon and California."

Additional research will hopefully determine the location of the painting as well as identification of the lone figure, who some say may be his daughter, Daisy.

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The Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites preserve, interpret and present the material record of Indiana's natural and cultural history to encourage people to discover the world as it was, as it is and as it can be. Visit online at www.indianamuseum.org or the blog at www.indianastatemuseum.wordpress.com.

T.C. Steele State Historic Site is located just west of Nashville in the heart of artistic Brown County. Part of the Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites, the site is where nature's beauty meets the artist's canvas. The home, studio and gardens of this noted Hoosier artist still provide inspiration today through site tours, outdoor painting competitions and artist-in-residence programs. For more information, call 812.988.2785 or visit indianamuseum.org/tc_steele.

Barry Bauman is an Elected Fellow of the American Institute for Conservation. He was formerly the Associate Conservator of Paintings for the Art Institute of Chicago and currently offers pro bono conservation services to museums and non-profit organizations. He has been assisting the Indiana State Museum for over 25 years.

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