The Trustees, Administration and Faculty of the UNIVERSITY OF PUGET SOUND cordially invite you to attend the opening of ABBY WILLIAMS HILL MEMORIAL GALLERY IN KITTREDGE HALL and a retrospective exhibit of the works of Abby Williams Hill

February 6, 1961 Monday

Eight to Ten (p.m.)
Many years ago, probably about 1955, I received a call one day from a lady who said she would like to bring her aunt to my office and have me meet her. I was pleased to arrange for an appointment and shortly after a very kindly lady, named Mrs. Romayne (Ina) Hill and her niece came to my office. The niece was the wife of the editor of the Tacoma Labor Advocate.

Ina Hill was the daughter of Abby Williams Hill, an outstanding artist of the Pacific Northwest fifty or sixty years earlier. Her nature paintings were so outstanding that the Northern Pacific Railroad had employed her to paint pictures that could be used in their depots to promote and encourage people to come to the Pacific Northwest on their immigrant trains. Abby Hill often went out into the wilderness for two or three months to paint mountains, streams, waterfalls, trees and the other beauties of the Pacific Northwest.

Since Ina Hill, Abby's daughter, was in her late sixties or early seventies, she asked me if there were any way by which the University could be interested in housing her Mother's pictures. She said the Metropolitan Museum in New York had offered $1000 for one of the pictures and was interested in purchasing some of the others, although definite offers had not been made. However, the offer to sell one of the pictures was turned down because they did not want to separate one picture from the rest of the collection.

Ina Hill was one of three children adopted by Abby Williams Hill—a boy named Romayne and two girls who were sisters, Ina and Eulalie. These young
people went with her on her trips in the summer to paint. Ultimately, the son, Romayne, married the daughter, Ina.

When the railroad had finished with the promotion of traffic westward, the Hill pictures were sent to Tacoma and stored here. Abby Hill built an apartment house in Tacoma, facing Wright's Park, on G Street, and named it Hillcrest, using the family name. The income from the Hillcrest was used to supplement the family income.

After Abby Hill died, the three children were left a sizable estate and they moved to San Diego.

In our discussions, we told Ina Hill that we would be interested in housing the Abby Williams Hill collection and that they could deed the Hillcrest Apartments to the University for a three-life annuity and the University would pay the income from the apartments to them as long as any one of them lived. The agreement was structured according to our annuity plan, through the Finance Committee of the Board of Trustees. The Hillcrest was deeded to us and the pictures were to come to us, and most of them did. Mrs. Hill had loaned some pictures to the minister of First Presbyterian Church in Tacoma and they are still there. She also took a few of the pictures to San Diego and they are still in her home at the present time.

The Hillcrest had not been maintained as it should have been, although some of the people living there had been there for thirty to thirty-five years. Immediately, upon securing the Hillcrest, we had to do some renovation and
we were constantly under pressure by the fire department to make other im-
provements, which we continued to do as income provided. However, the
annuity was such that it took practically all the income to pay the Hill family.

Part of our agreement stated that when we moved the Art Department
out of Jones Hall and into Kittredge there would be the Abby Williams Hill
Memorial Gallery where the pictures would be hung and rotated every three
to six months. Also, we had agreed that the pictures could be checked out
by various offices at the University for their use and a careful accounting
would be kept of the location of each picture.

Almost every year, Ina Hill came up to Tacoma from San Diego, I al-
ways took her to lunch and we had a very delightful time and a very interesting
relationship. Her sister, Eulalie, became senile and died and later her husband,
Romayne, died. He had been very interested in machinery, engines, submarines,
airplanes, etc. As of this date, June 1, 1979, Ina Hill is the only survivor of
the three. At her death, all the pictures are to come to us and we will continue
to carry out the agreement of exhibiting the pictures and rotating them in the
Gallery.

Abby Williams Hill was one of the outstanding women artists in early
American painting, particularly as it relates to the Pacific Northwest. Profes-
sor Ronald Fields, who is one of the outstanding professors in the Art Depart-
ment at the University of Puget Sound, has been very much interested in the
work of Abby Hill and has written a special monograph on her and her work
which will be published in one of the art magazines of the Pacific Northwest.

It is his feeling that she was most outstanding in her contribution to early American painting.

One of the interesting sidelights, so far as the University of Puget Sound is concerned, is that William W. Kilworth, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, saw some of the Hill paintings when he was a young boy in Kansas and they attracted him to the Pacific Northwest. He bought an immigrant's ticket on the railroad from the midwest to Seattle, sat up on the train all the way in the coach, for a fare, I think, of about $14. He became successful in real estate and established the Washington Handle Company which provided 70 per cent of all the broom handles in the United States. He was a very outstanding benefactor of the University and gave it distinguished leadership through many years.

R. Franklin Thompson
June 1, 1979
THE ART DEPARTMENT
UNIVERSITY OF PUGET SOUND
presents
THE ABBY WILLIAMS HILL COLLECTION
FEBRUARY 6th THROUGH 26th
Abby Williams Hill was born in Grinnell, Iowa. She began her formal training at the Chicago Art Institute at the age of nineteen. There she was a pupil of Mr. Spread, founder of the Institute.

From there her study of art took her to the Art Students League in New York where she studied with Mr. William Chase. Eventually the lure of Europe and its cultural offerings led her to Munich, Germany. In Munich she studied with Hermann Haase.

Having returned to the United States, her prominence as an artist grew and she was eventually employed by the Great Northern and Northern Pacific Railroads as a painter of the American Scene.

Mrs. Hill participated in many important exhibitions. A brief resume of these exhibitions must include the First World's Fair in Chicago in 1893, the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis in 1904, the Jamestown Centennial in Hampton Roads, Virginia, in 1907 and the Alaska Yukon Pacific Exposition in Seattle in 1909.

The study of women artists on the American frontier is made difficult by the fugitive and personal nature of the records, and by the fact that there was no well defined artistic or intellectual milieu to provide the comparative assessments that come from competitive exhibitions in galleries or from professional critics. Public recognition was often limited to the small circles of art clubs and occasional references in local newspapers. The case of the Northwest artist, Abby Williams Hill (1861–1943), is in this respect typical. She is virtually unknown today, and her oeuvre, basically intact, still awaits significant exhibition. But her career was exceptional among frontier artists in that her early work, at least, enjoyed wide exposure and brought some measure of fame.

She was unusual also in that, being a woman, she was nevertheless commissioned to paint landscapes of some of the most rugged terrain in the country. She must have been, if not the only woman, then one of the very few to be so employed. She possessed a pioneer spirit and a devotion to the natural world which she represents distinctly apart from the academic idealization of nature or the sentiments associated with the American "Barbizon" artists. Her contribution to the later nineteenth-century landscape movement illustrates a unique adaptation of the "modern" painting styles of the end of the century, put to the use of documenting America's last discovered
and least exploited rugged scenery.

Abby Hill's extant work, more than a hundred canvases of landscape and Indian studies, spans a period of 50 years, from the 1880's to the 1930's. Her early acclaim came from works commissioned by the State of Washington and two major railway companies, the Great Northern and Northern Pacific and thereafter shown at several major exhibitions: the Chicago World's Fair of 1893; the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, 1904; the Lewis and Clark Exposition in Portland, Oregon, in 1905; the Jamestown Centennial Exposition at Hampton Roads, Va., 1907; and the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in Seattle in 1909. In the later years of her life, for a variety of reasons, she received less attention. Since she did not wish to sell her work, none of her paintings after 1907 was exhibited during her lifetime. After 1909, family responsibilities had denied her the opportunity for the intensive work of the first decade of her career, and, like the Progressives of the period, she was much occupied in those years with social issues, such as educational reform and the situation of the handicapped and the blacks. Eventually her reputation owed more to her social work than to her painting, but to the end of her life she remained in her own mind first of all the artist.

This essay is an introduction to Abby Hill, her education and training, and an examination of selected canvases from her first commissioned works, the Great Northern Series, produced in the summer of 1903 and exhibited in St. Louis the following year.
Abby came to the Pacific Northwest with as good an education as could have been provided for an essentially native trained woman artist of her era. In 1882, she had left her home in Grinnel, Iowa to study in Chicago with H. F. Spread, whom she later identified as one of the founders of the Chicago Art Institute. In 1884-86, she taught painting at Bertier en Haut, a small finishing school for girls in Canada. In 1888, she joined the Art Student's League in New York where she studied for almost two years with Chase, Beckwith and Clinedinst. Chase was, by far, the most important influence on her work; he was both teacher and friend.

It was probably Chase who introduced her to the techniques of the French Impressionists as well as the bravura brushwork and tonalities of the so-called Munich school. Aspects of both styles are incorporated in her early canvases. Impressionistic qualities dominate background areas where there is a vagueness of form and a general lightness of key. Scumbled greens and browns suggest earth tones, but are generally employed as contrasts to the foreground objects which define distance. The Munich style, on the other hand, was absorbed with greater purpose: noticeable in her early work, the heavy brushwork becomes more and more dominant in her later canvases. In her hands, the contrasts of light and dark are not so obviously pronounced, nor is there the force of brushwork or boldness of color of the Chase canvases in this style.

Abby's assimilation of styles or techniques presumably represents a facile achievement without any traditional or
recognizable theoretical basis. Her diaries and letters, hundreds of pages in length, never discuss technique and only rarely mention contemporary artists and their work. Although she had a great admiration for numerous painters from the Renaissance through the Romantic period and was particularly well read in German and English Romantic authors, there is no evidence that she established a relationship between any of these styles or ideas and her own work. One might expect to see in her canvases some indication of her vital interest in social reform, but this is not the case. The lack of theoretical sophistication may result from conditions of training at the League in the late 80's, where the sexes were separated in class and where the women's classes, although concerned to teach skills and develop judgment in design and composition, provided little philosophic discussion.

The pressing issue for the women students was to avoid public suspicion of their moral character. The Directors, sensitive to general feeling, had provided safeguards: "Admission to classes was granted . . . providing, of course, that the character of the candidate was first approved." Allaying public concern about the propriety of women's classes, a newspaper columnist noted in 1881:

It is a workshop in the strictest sense, and they were fully engrossed by the necessity of having their task nearly completed before the Professor came to pass judgement and make suggestions regarding their work. Anything further from any sense of impropriety could not be imagined, simply because there is no suggestion of sex about the matter. The girls were students, not women; and their plain, short dresses of dark blue . . . possessed not the faintest tinge of coquetry.
A sensitivity to public mores, conservative religious convictions, and an absence of elite intellectual inquiry (particularly of topical aesthetic concerns), guarantees a conservative choice of subjects and, to some degree, expressions. Narrative paintings, floral studies, portraits, still lifes, and landscapes were acceptable and proper. Although very few of Abby's works before 1890 remain, her letters and diaries record numerous studies of landscape, floral and genre scenes. Her mature work was based almost entirely on the landscape and personalities she encountered in the west.

Abby married Dr. Frank Hill in 1888, and in 1889, they moved to Tacoma, Washington where their only child, Romayne, was born with a partially paralyzed left arm and leg. For the next ten years, she was occupied as wife and mother, producing only a few canvases, oil sketches and pencil drawings. Because Romayne's handicap required him to be educated at home, and because Abby wanted more children, she adopted three girls and was "Mother" to many more young people, some of whom lived with the Hill family for weeks, others for years. Abby attempted to provide them with an education: she taught them French, German and English through exercises, diaries and letters; music with her violin and piano; history and geography through her own extensive collections of maps and books; and biology conveniently through field work, finding, classifying and drawing plants, animals and marine life.

Abby's best classroom was the campsite she occupied in summers located on Vashon Island in Puget Sound. Throughout
the weeks, she and her children studied, sailed, hiked and sketched, returning to town only for provisions or unavoidable social obligations. Dr. Hill joined them on weekends. She describes their preparations:

We must have "town clothes" and we must have a botany outfit and we must have a bag of books and we must have a sketching outfit and we must have articles for preserving specimens and we must have an outfit for insects, and--and by the time these musts were piled on the beach and added to them tents, bags, provisions--no one could have disputed the party's right to the name of Hill.8

Camping gave her the environment to which she was suited, though it was not the environment in which she had been reared. As an artist and musician, who was fluent in German and French and had traveled in Europe,9 she had the social graces that were praised in the society columns of the period, and Tacoma society was all the more affronted that she disdained the genteel life. Her ungenteel attitude to dress and toilet was incorrigible. "I am not at home in the world of fashion," she wrote in her diary of 1901,

and I cannot reconcile myself to spending on the stylish at the expense of the practical and good. I should like to wear cloth like men do, made simply and of styles that change but little. I should like to wear it until it is worn out and that is considered mannish. I am utterly spoiled by my ideas about dress. People are ashamed of my looks when I have on a gown of the best material, fitting well, well made but dating two or three years back.10

"I was cut out," she said, "for the wilds."11 Love of nature--particularly rugged landscape--had been her principal reason for moving to the Northwest and to Tacoma, then the major city on Puget Sound. In the East the region and the city were advertised in dazzling terms. The "Star of Destiny," a design
by one of the city's early promoters, extols Tacoma: "famed throughout the world for beauty of situation and environment, unsurpassed mountain scenery, greatest timber belt in the world, diversity and immensity of natural resources," etc.\textsuperscript{12}

Nor was Abby disappointed in the wildness of the Northwest. She was to travel frequently through the Cascade and Rocky Mountains on her way to the East visiting family or seeking medical help for her son, delighting in the mountain landscape, which she saw in unabashedly romantic terms:

. . . the rocks in the Kicking Horse canyon were quite bare, the water rushed on at a more tremendous speed. Mt. Hunter was partly obscured by snow, after /that/ there were miles of dead forest. Great bare streaks down the mountain sides showed where a landslide or avalanche had torn its way.

. . . After we had passed the Great Divide, the scenery was even wilder. Great bare rocks towered far above us, catching the light when we were in shadow. One could fancy they saw castles of the grandest architecture with carriage ways winding up to them, then again there were towers seemingly built of stone in designs wonderfully wrought. Our eyes ached with the constant watching, yet we were unwilling to miss a particle of the grand panorama we were passing. First we looked from one side of the car and then from the other. The best description I can give you is to take you some time.\textsuperscript{13}

From that particular trip East in 1901, Abby returned through the South and Southwest to southern California, where she produced some works around Millwood, California and the King's River Canyon. Then she proceeded north to Mt. Adams, Trout Lake and the Columbia River, making the sketches which were to be the impetus for the Great Northern commission.

Like other railway companies, the Great Northern was interested in artists for pragmatic rather than aesthetic purposes. The company's western terminus in Tacoma provided a
direct route to the Orient with vast opportunities for the exploitation of the timber and mineral resources of the Northwest. But the company's land holdings, granted by Congress, were profitable only if great numbers of people could be enticed to settle in the Northwest, and so the Great Northern in turn became interested in hiring artists to publicize the more promising aspects of the territory. Hearing about this, Abby took a collection of her recent sketches to Seattle for an interview with the General Passenger Agent. He was apparently reluctant to give such a difficult assignment to a woman; one can only assume that she was persuasive, and her work the best available.

The contract designated the advertising purpose for her paintings, but not the particular number of canvases or the sites to be portrayed. By December of that year (1903), the newspapers recorded that twenty-one of the canvases were to be sent to the St. Louis fair to advertise the beauty of the Northwest scenery—and, of course, the access provided to it by the Great Northern and its branch lines. In lieu of a cash payment for the contract, Abby had negotiated for thousand-mile tickets for each of four persons and repossession of the canvases after the fair.

The assignment itself was formidable. She was required to depict some of the most rugged and inaccessible scenery of the Cascade Range and her single advantage was a letter of introduction to the employees of the railway company urging them to offer whatever assistance possible for her work. Abby had
never attempted works of this caliber and had no particular model on which to base her tactical or artistic approach.

She made five camping/painting trips into the Cascade Range each lasting anywhere from nine to forty-four days. As a woman, she necessarily took her children with her. It took considerable confidence, courage and administrative skill to organize baggage, children and supplies, and to manage, in absentia, the usual domestic responsibilities at home. Some destinations required days of travel on trains, handcars, stages, steamboats, horseback and finally miles of walking in intense heat or cold, across wilderness or snow fields.

The difficulties she recorded indicate her frontier spirit and strong will. On the precipitous Horseshoe Basin trail, a rattlesnake stampeded the pack train, and Abby held her horse across the trail to check the runaways. In the upper Chelan: "Snake came and looked at me, big landslide came down behind me, Indians came galloping up." On the Chelan Gorge: "It has been the most difficult sketch I ever made owing to the heat and its being so out of the way, . . . when I left my paint in the sun, the tubes got so hot I could not hold them in my bare hands." On Mt. Index: "Rains, work on the Index under awning and umbrella / . It/ drips on me." On the divide of the Cascades: "I start Basin picture. Pitch my awning on a rock, very windy, have to sit astride." Mosquitoes buzzed her, train cinders fell on her freshly painted canvases, and frightening crews of Italian and Japanese workmen turned up on branch lines. The last camping trip was
terminated by a late August snowstorm which left Abby and her company stranded in a small tent with a faulty stove, unable to get heat or prepare food for two days and one night. It is impossible to reconstruct from the available records an exact chronology for her work on these trips, but the following list is based on a reading of her 1903 Daybook and a correlation of her scanty references to the four principal areas in which she painted.

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<td>1. Tumwater Canyon, Afternoon</td>
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<td>2. Tumwater Canyon, Storm</td>
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<td>15. The Unveiling of Mt. Index</td>
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<td>Lake Chelan</td>
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<td>12. Sunset at Head of Lake Chelan</td>
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<td>18. Fir Trees, Lake Chelan</td>
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<td>Mountains above Lake Chelan</td>
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With some works missing from the series and no exact chronology of the production available, a study of the stylistic development of these canvases can only be tentative. Nevertheless, some observations can be made.
The unifying characteristic of these canvases may be observed in the technical approach. The general composition is established by a thin wash which remains uncovered in much of the background area. Subsequent applications are successively thicker until the final definitions of the trees, rocks or shrubbery in the foreground are described. Background areas are often spotted with a rich paint texture but are so light in key that they are only noticeable at close range. Concentration is generally centered. Both color and line tend to lose definition as they reach the edges of the canvas. The texture of the canvas shows to such an extent that some works would be called "sketches" were it not for the clarity of individual passages. While some works demonstrate rather intense patches of color and a loose brushwork, others are quite subdued with more attention to detail. The differences may result from various factors quite apart from Abby's development as an artist: the choice of subject, the relative ease or speed of execution, or the difficulty of location.

Based on compositional format, the canvases divide into three general groups. The first group, showing a more traditional approach to mountainous landscape painting, includes six canvases as the most obvious examples—Mt. Persus, Morning Light (Fig. 3), Looking Down Lake Chelan (Fig. 5), Glacier Peaks, Spring Sunshine (Fig. 9) and Mt. Booker near Lake Chelan (Fig. 12)—with the two Horseshoe Basin canvases (Figs. 10 and 11) as slight variations on the compositional scheme. In each work, the diagonal lines for recessive planes converge toward the center of the canvas.
The dark clusters of trees in each work serve a multiple function; they establish the sense of scale, provide a bracket to limit the scope of vision, and pivot attention on the major subject—the distant peaks. The dark and scumbled foliage of the trees also provides a counterpoint to the subdued treatment of the distant plane.

The second group differs from the first in having more consistent and expressive brushwork, with far less attention to recessive planes. To some extent these technical and compositional features are the results of the choice of subject: rushing water, storms and snow. The canvases of this group include **Tumwater Canyon, Afternoon** (Fig. 1), **Sunset Falls** (Fig. 2), and **Glacier Peaks, During Storm** (Fig. 8), the last of these giving the clearest demonstration of the style. Except for the suggestion of trees in the lower left corner, there is nothing to determine scale or depth. There are very few clear outlines; the brushwork appears spontaneous, almost obliterating distinctions between mountains, snow, clouds and trees.

The final group is distinguished by abstract painterly qualities, in the sense that presentation is more obvious and more interesting than subject. **Snow in Forest near Index** (Fig. 4), **Chelan Gorge** (Fig. 6), and **Fir Trees, Lake Chelan** (Fig. 7) are not grand panorama but unique studies of texture and color. The snow scene is a rich but subtle orchestration of dappled, pastel tones. It has an obviously studied diffusion of form and a feathered quality of color modulation that strongly suggests Impressionism. The Chelan gorge may be her least
successful landscape, for, confronted by that immense rough-hewn gulf, she seemed more conscious of texture and color than of scale or depth. The scene is abstracted to six basic forms, each with its own uniform character of color and brushwork. For example, the dark rock formation at the left is essentially a broad flat mass of color, with the highlights and shadows drawn as irregular, vertical bands of color, while crevices are sketched by lines of ungraded brown and black. Her consciousness of the color scheme is perhaps best indicated by her depicting the sky as tan. Similarly, the treatment of the fir trees contains some clear passages in the center, but the tree top and rocks at the bottom of the canvas are merely suggested. All three of these canvases have a flat appearance which sets them apart from the rest.

The canvases were much acclaimed, but one reads through almost all of the contemporary commentary without finding any indication that the writers had some idea of the relationship of the series to the broader issue of western landscape history.

There is, first of all, the indulgent and grandiloquent description in the Great Northern brochure put out to illustrate the series. The writer is concerned to show how desperately impressive are the scenes that Abby had painted. (Did the writer assume that Abby's own style of depiction was sensational and that he must match it in this way, or was he trying to compensate for the lack of pretentiousness in the paintings themselves?) He revels at the prospect of "the furious torrent of Bridge Creek, plunging and roaring over its granite bulwarks
in a perfect paroxysm of rage . . ."

The mountains tower higher and more precipitously with every mile; cataracts keep up a perpetual music; traces of frequent avalanches make the horses' footing seem precarious, though they pick their way cautiously and surely, testing every step . . .

Vast walls and minarets of granite and porphyry, waterfalls and cataracts of dizzy height, glaciers and snow fields, parks and alpine glades of infinite variety, characterize all these canyons alike. Amid their bewildering variety and extent, the explorer might well pause in doubt as to any possible superiority of one over the other. It is safe to affirm that nowhere else in the United States is there such an aggregate of all the combinations of mountain phenomena of the grandest pattern. 26

The fact is that, though Abby in her Diary was capable of purple prose herself, as an artist she did not exaggerate or romanticize the western scene as some of her predecessors did. Non-professional critics, who relied simply on their own experience, apparently felt that her work was the near perfect mirror image of nature. When the miners from the Horseshoe Basin had come to Abby's cabin to see the paintings, she recorded their comments:

"That's the real stuff, boys, no need to come to see the Basin if one can see those." (Abby's guide, on the other hand, had not been convinced: "Mr. Purple does not like my pictures, because trees on the mountains do not show plain enough." ) 27

Local newspaper critics were also impressed by the ver-similitude. When, in December, 1903 and April, 1904, the canvases were shown in the Masonic Lodge and the City Library in Tacoma, the New Herald reported:

It was certainly an astute arrangement, a veritable stroke of genius on the railroad's part, to engage such a magnificent advertisement of the scenery along its route, a collection which will stand alone as the only thing of its kind at the fair. Where all other
roads will be depicted in cold black and white photographs, here will be the scenery itself, with the atmosphere and the morning or evening light upon it—for Mrs. Hill painted every brush stroke on the spot, not depending on sketches or photographs to be filled from memory . . . . 28

But invariably, for local critics, the issue was not the distinctive quality of the landscapes but how Mrs. Hill's talents might best be used for the economic benefit of the railroad and the region—no small consideration inasmuch as each was dependent on the other. One journalist leveled a diatribe against the community too ignorant to appreciate its best artist—or its art critic:

. . . now that she has entered the field of the professional, . . . it is a pity that Tacoma has not taken advantage of it. It is true, much enthusiastic talk was indulged in, but no definite proposal made, and now Tacoma has lost its chance to be advertised, at least for the Portland exhibit—the Lewis and Clark exposition. Where is the public spirit of the Ledger /sic/ and News (sic/, that they do not suggest such things for the advantage of their city? The Ledger reporter finds time and space to record the "sketching tours" of every little amateur in town, and goes off into mistaken rhapsodies over all the weak attempts at art displayed from time to time in store windows, dignifying a squirt of chrome yellow by the name of golden rod, because it is so labeled, and a flat green ace of spaces as a clover leaf, for a similar inadequate reason: yet when a genuine artist, a credit to the city of her residence, is chosen by two of the big organizations of the country, distinguished over all other artists in all the cities reached by those railroads, not a word is said about it . . . .

For my own part, having had the benefit . . . of daily access to studios where /there/ were pictures by Carolus Durand and by some of his confreres of the Paris Salon, I feel that the unconscious absorption of the best in art qualifies me to observe that Mrs. Hill's painting is good. There is in it a perception of values and effect; the artist paints as she sees, thus catching the evanescent moment, or the first hint of the pearly gray dawn before it has taken on the colors of the day, or the brooding quiet of a twilight sky. A set of pictures of Tacoma's surroundings from Mrs. Hill's brush would be an invaluable advertisement of our city in the East. 29
The city fathers and newspaper editors, to whom this advice was directed were apparently hesitant. When Abby was discussing a second commission, this time for the Northern Pacific Railway, the same writer continued to rail.

It has been hoped that Mrs. Hill could have advertised Tacoma ... What more inspiring theme for an artist than our scenery? And what a world of good it would do the city. An official of the Great Northern said the other day that the pictures would be an advertisement worth $10,000 to them, and he is not a man to overestimate his assets, either. Tacoma has always suffered from the hands of daubers who somehow obtained a "pull" on the powers that distribute such work; our library is a chamber of horrors in consequence, and our exhibitions at expositions have been lamentable. The "next time" let us call on Mrs. Hill to represent us in our proper colors.30

One canvas from the series received special attention, not for its artistic merit, but its name. The subject was a mountain known to the guides and miners in the area only as "The Mountain,"31 and the canvas, when shown in Tacoma, was dubbed "No Name Mountain."32 Since the railway company was preparing a brochure and would require titles, Abby wrote to the National Geological Survey in an attempt to determine its proper name. The Survey responded by offering her the privilege of naming it, and she chose "Mt. Booker" to honor Booker T. Washington whose Tuskegee Institute she had visited in 1902.

Controversy flared. The Seattle Post-Intelligencer ran a lengthy article with the subtitle: "Geologic Survey Applied the Name at the Request of a Tacoma Artist, but Says It Did Not Know Booker Washington Was to Be Honored." The Great Northern office in Seattle evaded responsibility for Abby and her paintings:

While the geological survey speaks of her as being in the employ of the Great Northern railway at the general
offices of the company in this city this is denied ... but her pictures have so impressed the officials that they very probably will be secured for the railway's exhibit at the fair. 53

Finally, when the canvases had been put on display in St. Louis, local opinion was content with solid self-congratulation: "According to reports from St. Louis, Tacoma is the best represented and best advertised of the Northwest cities at the World's Fair." 34

The canvases were a success because they satisfied the pragmatic requirements of the commission, also the aesthetic requirements of those familiar with the wilderness images. We may assume that the Great Northern company hired Abby to provide accurate pictorial descriptions of specific sites along their lines. And if one is to accept the evaluations of the miners and local critics, the landscapes are realistic. Certainly, they are not of the same category as the composed, idealistic, picturesque, or moody landscapes that are generally classified under the rubric of romantic art. But the distinctive quality of Abby's work lies somewhere between realistic illustration of nature and romantic "improvement" of it.

Abby had a profound admiration for the natural world and her understanding of the function of art was inexorably bound to nature. She wrote, in 1897:

Art ought to teach people to love nature better, ought to lift them, cheer them. If I did not believe this, and that it could do it and has done it, I should never paint again and it should not cost me a pang. 35

Oliver W. Larkin suggests that the religious and moral interpretation of nature was one of the principal reasons for
the continuing viability of American landscape painting in
the late nineteenth century. In Abby's case, reverence for
a moral nature required that she convey the mystique and grandeur,
showing the natural world ultimately as the evidence of Divine
benevolence, but also that she stay close to literal tran-
slation. She did not need to create "illusions;" she did not
need to contrive or force the natural world to conform to the
artificially "picturesque" images required by a clientele un-
familiar with the actual site. She writes that she "looks for
a foreground," suggesting that pictorially she did little to
alter the scene before her. Yet, the product of her efforts is
not objectivity, but a testament to nature as it was designed
to be. The details are there but they do not obstruct the
overall sense of wonder, not of what might be, but of what is.
To extend the argument, one could say of many other landscape
painters of the era, that instead of dealing with the facts of
nature as they occur and can be comprehended with some sense of
indigenous design, they deal instead with nature as possibility;
they begin with nature and paint their subjective extensions ex-
pressed in facile technique, imaginative design or with anthro-
pomorphomic attributes. Abby's work records her particular sense
of nature recorded through its selected facts.

One may question why there was little professional in-
terest in these early canvases—indeed, in the entire collection.
The published judgments from the period are, at best, by amateurs.
The canvases reflect none of the then current progressive trends
in American painting which might have attracted the attention
of professional critics. They are obviously conservative, late manifestations of a movement that had enjoyed immense professional and popular appeal in the 19th century. But it is the popular appeal that makes these works significant. The railway commissions and fair exhibitions doubtless aimed at the broadest possible audience. For this reason alone, professional critics would disregard railway or state exhibits, but the public would not, and did not. While this series of paintings does not represent the avant-garde; they do, on the other hand, demonstrate the pervasive, popular notion that art, based on nature, is a constant reminder of the condition to which the human spirit can aspire. Abby wrote, in 1897, "We need beauty, grace, pleasing lines. . . . When I have been unable to paint, nature has supplied the want and one always has beauty in nature if they seek it."38 This is kind of "folk" romanticism which is not based on a well defined theoretical or philosophical basis, though it relies on some of the generalizations associated with the romantic movement. It is art for laymen.

Abby was to complete one other significant commission. In 1904, officials of the Northern Pacific came to Tacoma to view the Great Northern collection39 and subsequently employed her to produce a series of canvases for their company, principally the Yellowstone Park Line. The summer of 1905 was spent in completing this collection which was exhibited that autumn at the Lewis and Clark Exposition, Portland, Oregon.

While in Yellowstone, Abby made friends with a number of Indians. She returned to the Park in 1906 and there, as
well as on the Yakima Reservation in western Washington, she produced a number of Indian studies, principally portraits. Some of these works were exhibited at the Jamestown Centennial Exposition and at the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition. She was awarded two gold medals at the Seattle fair.

By 1907, the Canadian Pacific and Union Pacific had also sought contracts with Abby, but she deferred for two years in order to take her children on an extended bicycle tour of Europe. She was to have been joined by Dr. Hill, but in 1909 he became seriously ill. For the next twenty-nine years, her energies were largely directed to his care. He was prescribed a periodic change of scene, so camping became their life-style. They followed the seasons from the Canadian Rockies to the Southwest until they settled in southern California in the late 1920's. She continued to paint, however, and the subjects for her later canvases were predominately scenes from the National Parks.

The collected works of Abby Hill are remarkable for several reasons. Almost the entire body of her mature work is intact. Her landscape subjects range from southern California's Laguna Beach and the parks of the Southwest (Yosemite, the Tetons, the Grand Canyon, Bryce Canyon), to the Cascade Range in Washington, and the Canadian Rockies. Finally there are the important Flathead, Sioux, Nez Perce and Yakima Indian studies. Together, these works comprise a significant record of popular values and individual achievements that can not be left as mere footnotes to an historic movement.
FOOTNOTES


2For all the fair exhibitions, her works were shown in the Washington State or Women's buildings. For the Chicago fair, Abby was commissioned to do a copy of one of Stuart's portraits of George Washington--present location unknown. The works for the St. Louis fair are discussed in this paper. For the Portland fair, Abby painted at least sixteen landscapes; exactly how many were shown is unknown. There were probably no more than six Indian subjects sent to Hampton Roads. At the Seattle fair, both Indian subjects and landscapes were shown but there is no record to indicate specific titles.

3In 1957, Mrs. Romayne B. Hill presented to the University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, Washington the collected works of Abby Williams Hill. They were shown in the University's Kittredge Gallery, February, 1961. The gift of the artist's papers came in 1976.

4The name of H. F. Spread comes from the brief biographic sketch which appears in Thomas William Herringshaw (ed.) American
The date for this period of study is established by letters
to Abby in Chicago during this year. The Chicago Art Institute
Incorporated in 1879 but no records are available to identify
the early instructors or class lists.

5 The date of her initial study at the League is established
by correspondence from Abby's stepmother, dated February 5, 1888,
in which she comments that Abby has "passed examination and won
the coveted position with the league."

Chase was to remain a friend for several years. The names
of Beckwith and Clinedinst come from the brief biographical
entry for Abby in the American Art Annual, vol. XX (Washington,
from the League indicate that she studied there Oct. 1879 to
Feb. 1880, resuming study in 1889 with an Instructor named Fitz,
and again in 1892 through May 1893 (Correspondence: Rosina A.
Florio to Ms. Kristi M. Veseth, March 30, 1977). Only the 1889
date could be feasible. Abby can positively be placed away from
New York through the earlier and later dates.

6 Marchal E. Landgren, Years of Art (New York: Robert M.

7 Ibid., p. 51.

8 MS Diary, 1900-1901. July 11, 1900.

9 Abby and Dr. Hill were in Europe in 1896-97. While he
pursued post-doctoral work in medicine, Abby studied with a
Hamburg illustrator, Hermann Haase. Additionally, she was a
student of Political Economy at the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität in Bonn.

10 MS Diary, 1900-1901. February 14, 1901.

11 Ibid.

12 The design was by Allen C. Mason. Among Mason's various business endeavors, he was a dealer in real estate and a newspaper editor. In 1887, "Mason had a budget of sixteen thousand dollars a year for ads publicizing Tacoma in eastern papers, primarily those of New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. In many of these, he used his "Star of Destiny." Patricia A. Sias, An Examination of Influences on Selected Tacoma Architecture 1890-1914 (University of Puget Sound: unpublished MA thesis, 1971), p. 59.


14 The contract is in the Collected Papers, Notebook B.

15 Abby did not have to earn her living by painting. However, she assumed the major burden of her children's education and considered travel to be an important item of their training.

Although the canvases were returned immediately after the fair, the railway company must have had reproduction rights to the series. Local legend tells that the canvases were subsequently exhibited in midwestern railway stations and even identifies particular individuals, now deceased, who saw the works in Kansas or other depots and came to the Northwest to settle.

16 MS Daybook, 1903.

17 Ibid., July 29.

18 Ibid., June 8.
References to "start," "sketch," and "work" appear frequently throughout her 1903 Daybook with only five entries indicating that specific canvases were finished.

Abby often kept daybooks with brief entries and one day per week was usually set aside for correspondence. Based on the daybook entries, she wrote lengthier comments, usually numbering the pages, but rarely giving specific dates to the passages. She referred to this writing as Letter Diaries in that they were mailed to relatives who read them, then passed the pages along to others until they were returned finally to Dr. Hill where they remained. The 1903 Daybook indicates which days she wrote, but the lengthier records are not extant.

Three of the available canvases from this series are not included in this discussion: Looking Across Lake Chelan closely resembles other Chelan canvases; Path Through Forest is a small, dark, broadly painted work unrelated to the scale and character of the others in this series; and the Rhododendrons canvas is not a landscape. The locations of all the other works which are not illustrated are unknown. See following note.

According to the evaluation list for shipping the canvases to St. Louis, this work was the property of the Great Northern Railway. Its present location is unknown. A copy, by Abby, is in the private collection of Mrs. Kipper, Seattle, Washington.
26 Scenic Washington along the Line of the Great Northern Railway (n.p.: 1904), pp. 8, 9. The brochure, distributed at the fair by the Great Northern Company, illustrates all of the canvases except the Rhododendrons.

27 MS Daybook, 1903. August 15.

28 Tacoma New Herald, April 22, 1904.

29 Ibid., July 23, 1904.

30 Ibid., June 25, 1905.

31 MS Correspondence: Mrs. Frank Hill to Mrs. Weyer, March 17, 1940.

32 Tacoma Daily News, January 1, 1904.

33 Seattle Post-Intelligencer, April 22, 1904.

34 Tacoma Daily Ledger, June 5, 1904.

35 MS Letter Diary, 1897. n.p.


37 MS Daybook, 1903. May 31.

38 MS Letter Diary, 1897. n.p.

39 Tacoma Daily Ledger, April 26, 1904.