



Lilian Clark Westcott Hale (1881(0?)-1963)

“A Hartford Biography”
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Lilian Clark Westcott Hale, “the girl from Sigourney Street” was apparently not born in Hartford as is often believed, but she spent the first 20 years of her life there and was certainly formed by its influence. Since she left Hartford for Boston in 1900 she does not appear to have played an active part in the large art scene that existed in Hartford at the time. But, she certainly knew many of its figures as teachers, fellow students, and neighbors.

The time and location of Lilian Westcott Hale’s birth is disputed. Her marriage license, exhibition history, gallery biographies published during her lifetime, and her daughter Nancy Hale all say she was born December 6, 1881 in Hartford, Connecticut. However, a birth certificate for Lillie Coleman Westcott found recently in the Bridgeport Archives at the Connecticut State Library by researcher and biographer Elizabeth Kelleher states that she was born December 7, 1880 in Bridgeport Connecticut. Her *Boston Globe* obituary says she was born in Hartford December 7, 1881. Since the family was living in Hartford at the time of Lilian’s birth, it is possible that she was born during a business trip to Bridgeport, the headquarters of her father’s company.

Her father was Edward Gardner Westcott and her mother was Harriet Clark. Her father was, for many years, a superintendent for the Adams Express Company of Hartford and later the Secretary and Treasurer of the Bridgeport Sharp’s Rifle Company, later named the Bridgeport Lee Arms Company. He worked in the Hartford office of the Company. Her mother’s father was a “hell-fire preaching, Presbyterian minister”, who had been a missionary in Chicago when the streets were still of mud.

Lilian was the youngest of three daughters. Her oldest sister Mary D. (called Dolly), died at age nine of a ruptured appendix. Her second sister Anna Gardiner (called Nancy) studied the violin from an early age. Lilian, who studied art, also from an early age, was very close to her older sister Nancy, viewing her almost as a surrogate mother since she had been largely responsible for taking care of Lilian when she was a child.

The family lived at 106 Sigourney Street on Asylum Hill in Hartford near the corner of Farmington Avenue. The house no longer exists, but was probably where the parking lot of the funeral home on the corner is today. The family must have been relatively prosperous since this neighborhood was one of Hartford's best at the time. There were many large estates in the area and Nook Farms, the home of Mark Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe, was just a few blocks away. The Westcotts belonged to the fashionable Asylum Hill Congregational Church on Asylum Street, a couple of blocks away from their house, where the Reverend Joseph H. Twitchell was pastor. Twitchell was an intimate of Mark Twain. Twitchell's daughter, Harmony Twitchell, married Charles Ives, the noted American composer.

Most of the information regarding Hale's early years comes from her daughter Nancy Hale's book, "The Life in the Studio". Her childhood was apparently not a happy one. In addition to the early death of her older sister, which was a life long trauma for the family, both her father and mother were prone to illness. Nancy remembers her "tiny, sharp-tongued Grandmother Westcott" frequently exclaiming, "I am utterly prostrated!", and "We must be resigned". Harriet Westcott was said to have been, "horrified and outraged by what she found in marriage" and swore her daughters would never bear children. But, she also *"never waivered in her determination to give her two talented daughters the best training, one in the violin, the other in painting"*, in spite of her exemplifying *"penny pinching New England at its harshest. And there was always her back – so painful that the doctor sometimes applied red-hot irons as a counterirritant. For all she pattered about our house briskly on little satin-slipped feet, she used to say that if she were to do what she really wanted to she would never get out of bed at all."*

Hale's father was apparently quite successful in business early on, and played a part in inventing a new type of sighting device for guns. He traveled widely in Europe trying to sell his invention. There were some shady dealings on the part of his business associates which deprived him of what he felt his fair share of the profits from his invention and continued to concern the family long after his death. He became increasingly ill with inflammatory rheumatism, gout, and asthma. On December 31, 1897, at age 65, he died of Bright's disease. Hale was 15 or 16.

All of this obviously took a toll on the young Hale. Her sister Nancy later told Lilian's daughter that when Lilian was four she said, *"I don't like to here on earth. I want God to come and take me back."*

After her husband's death, Harriett *"kept things going by taking in boarders and giving piano lessons."* She also continued to support her daughters' pursuits in music and art.

With this support, the teen-aged Hale continued to pursue her love for art. Hartford at the time had a thriving art scene. Hale attended Hartford High School where Nelson Cook White was teaching art. (There is no mention of her studying with him, but she probably knew of him.) Dwight Tryon, William Merritt Chase, and Dawson Dawson Watson taught at the Art

Society of Hartford. Charles Noel Flagg had started the Flagg Night School for Men (later named the Connecticut Art Student's League) where Walter Griffin also taught. Alan Butler Talcott opened his studio around the corner from the Westcott residence on Asylum Street. Her near contemporaries, James Britton, Russell Cheney, James Goodwin McManus, Albertus Jones, and Milton Avery were all studying art in Hartford in the late 1880's and 1890's.

Her earliest acknowledged teacher was Elizabeth Stevens at the Hartford Public High School.

Mrs. Elizabeth T. Stevens, her earliest teacher, remembers when she left the Hartford Public High School and began to devote all her energy to art. She was the daughter of Edward G. Wescott of Sigourney Street, at one time connected with the Lee Arms Company. She was a beautiful young girl, Miss Stevens recalls, with so much talent, so much individuality in her work even then, that her teacher hardly dared offer suggestions lest the twig be bent and its growth stunted. (The Hartford Courant, February 12, 1928)

Recognition of her talents came early. She is said by some sources to have, studied at the Connecticut Academy of Fine Arts. However there appears to be no evidence that this organization had a school. It is more likely that this was intended to say the Art Society of Hartford where William Merritt Chase taught, since a Hartford Courant article that appeared on April 8, 1923 states, "As a little girl, Mrs. Hale was given a prize scholarship to the Hartford Art School (then called the Art Society of Hartford) and studied under William M. Chase". In 1899 she studied with Chase at his summer school at Shinnecock, Long Island. Mabel English, a fellow Hartford painter who was 20 years older than Hale, also studied with Chase at Shinnecock around this time. It is likely that the two knew each other.

In 1900 The Art School awarded her the Hartford Paige Scholarship to study at the school of the Boston Museum of Fine Art. It is easy to imagine that at age 19 or 20, she welcomed the opportunity to escape from her somber Hartford home life. From 1900 to 1905, she studied at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts with Edmund Tarbell. Philip Leslie Hale was also teaching at the same school, but family records and The Hartford Courant say that she actually met Hale in 1901 at the home of his Uncle, Charles Perkins, in Hartford. On June 11, 1902, she married Hale in Hartford and they set up a house in Dedham, Massachusetts. He was 16 years her senior, the same difference in the age of her parents. Although Philip was born in Boston, he had long time Hartford and Connecticut family ties. He was related to the famed Connecticut Revolutionary War martyr, Nathan Hale (his great-great uncle), to the writer Harriet Beecher Stowe who lived in Hartford (his great aunt), and to Katharine Seymour Day, the Hartford painter and preservationist who saved the Twain and Stowe houses in Hartford (his cousin). Philip also taught at The Hartford Art School from 1911 until 1918.

Although they lived apart, her mother's attitude with regard to children continued to influence Hale. According to Nancy Hale, several years after Philip and Lilian were married Harriet Westcott took Lilian's sister Nancy to Europe for the winter to pursue her violin studies. Philip said to Lilian, "*Let's have a baby, quick before she gets back.*" The result was their daughter Nancy who was born May 6, 1908.

Hale's career continued to blossom. She had more portrait commissions than she could handle and regularly received glowing reviews from the critics. As a native born daughter of Hartford, she continued to receive notice in the Hartford newspapers. The Hartford

Courant, on April 8, 1923, reported she had been awarded the Beck Gold Medal for best portrait at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art.

"At her exhibit at the Arlington Galleries in New York last spring, Royal Cortessoz (perhaps the most influential New York critic of the time) is reported to have exclaimed: 'There is no woman in the world of art today who rises to greater heights and few men are her equal.'"

James Britton, a fellow Hartford artist knew Philip Hale in New York through his critical writing, and also met Lilian Hale several times in New York. In 1926, he visited Frances Hudson Storrs in her Prospect Avenue house in Hartford and they talked fondly of Lilian Hale.

February 18, 1926

(Mrs. Storrs) "Says Mrs. Hale worked with Chase and used to put her paper or canvas on the floor to work. Chase would say 'Madame I would suggest that you put your work on an easel' but she never did. 'She had her own way about everything and I guess still has.' Mrs. S. tells me how lovely Mrs. Hale was in those days and I tell her that she still is very beautiful. (Misc Volume 4 page 117)

In 1927, Hale was elected an Associate of the National Academy of Design and became a fellow in 1931.

In 1927, Philip Hale died of a ruptured appendix, the affliction that had taken her older sister's life many years before. A year later her mother died at the home of her sister Nancy on the Hudson north of New York City.

She was devastated by the death of her husband and mother, but slowly regained her spirits and resumed her painting. She continued to live in Dedham until 1955. She spent summers in Rockport Maine in a studio she and Philip had inherited from his painter sister Ellen Day Hale. In 1955 she moved to Charlottesville, Virginia to live with her daughter Nancy.

In 1963, her daughter convinced Hale to join her on a trip to Italy. They visited Venice, Rome, and Florence where Hale saw much of the art that had been so important to her husband. On the return voyage, two days before they were to dock, Hale announced to her daughter that upon arriving in New York, she was going to fly to Minneapolis to visit her sister Nancy, who was living in a nursing home. While in Minneapolis Lilian Hale suffered a heart attack and died on November 7, 1963. She is buried beside her husband in the Forest Hills Cemetery in Jamaica Plains, Boston.

Although she moved away when she was about 21, that she always influenced by her years in Hartford is apparent from a poignant passage in Nancy Hale's book.

"At first, too, it seemed terrible she'd had to die way out there; away from me, away from home. But then I began to see where home was, for her – not where home is for me. The world that had my father in it constituted, for her, the outside world. Her own parents had a different set of struggles altogether. Perhaps the place she picked to die in came closest, because of my aunt's presence, to what was left of a world my grandmother departed years ago."

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(Lilian Westcott Hale, "Youth", litho on paper, 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ ")