

Reading Girl Returns to Books



The Reading Girl, a marble statue by the American sculptor John Adams Jackson (1825 to 1879), was placed on the main level of Mudd last week, beginning residency in her third Oberlin College library.

Jackson was a prominent artist in his time, noted for his skillful treatment of then-favorite themes: *Eve Mourning over the Dead Body of Abel* was perhaps his most popular work. He also did portrait sculptures of prominent people: Henry Ward Beecher, William Lloyd Garrison, and others.

He was admired for his ability to subordinate the inconsequential details of contemporary dress to his subject. Marcia Goldberg, Oberlin Historian of American sculpture, says this was a major concern for the nineteenth-century portraitist when he did not dress his subject in a Roman toga. *The Reading Girl* wears a lace-trimmed dress and sits on a brocaded stool, but these details are not immediately apparent.

Aaron A. Healy of Brooklyn purchased *The Reading Girl*, which was modeled by Jackson in Florence in 1869, for \$2,500, and fourteen years later gave her to Oberlin. Healy's uncle, Professor A. H. Currier, at the dedication of Spear Library in 1885, noted her "singular fitness" for the library of the college that "first opened its doors to young women seeking higher education. "

She moved from Spear to Carnegie when that building opened in 1908 and stayed for over forty years on the second floor there in the large reading room near the circulation desk. A partition built mid-century deprived her of her place; she was moved downstairs to the entrance lobby

where, lacking constant supervision, she was subject to vandalism. About 1960 she was sent to the basement of the art museum for storage, and in 1975, when the museum staff prepared for the building of the Venturi addition, she was moved to the barn behind Johnson House. Last week William A. Moffett, Director of Libraries, rescued her and had her placed in Mudd.

"Perpetual youth and unfading beauty are among her charms," said Currier at the Spear dedication, but Moffett notes she shows signs of neglect, if not of age: some fingers and toes are missing. Because she "is not of a piece" with the first level decor, he thinks she might eventually be located somewhere else in Mudd.

"But for now," he says, "battered and marred though she be, *The Reading Girl* is back."

-- Oberlin College *Observer*, 30 October 1980

