

T. C. STEELE

STATE MEMORIAL

Belmont, Indiana



Originator of the Brown County Art Colony, Theodore Clement Steele brought the Hoosier state a world-wide reputation as an art-center. Today in Brown County, the estate of the noted artist is maintained as a State Memorial.

Located near Belmont and consisting of 211 acres, the estate was transferred to the Indiana Department of Conservation by Mrs. Selma N. Steele, the artist's widow, shortly before her death in August, 1945. It includes some 300 paintings by a man who began his career as an artist at the age of five when he first painted with materials obtained from a sign painter.

T. C. Steele was born near Gosport, Indiana, September 11, 1847, and by the time he was 13 he was winning prizes at Indiana fairs for his art work. After graduation from Waveland Academy, Montgomery County, he studied

at Chicago and at the first Indiana School of Art, where he practiced the difficult art of portrait painting. In 1880 he journeyed to Europe for study at the Royal Academy in Munich. On his return five years later he made Indianapolis his home and continued with his work painting portraits of the best known men and women of the state, among them Benjamin Harrison, Charles W. Fairbanks, James Whitcomb Riley, W. H. H. Miller, Mrs. May Wright Sewall and Mrs. Catherine Merrill.

The Brookville period of his life lasted six years and while there he produced many of his best landscapes. During the summer months he spent in Brookville he succeeded in capturing on canvas the natural beauty of the Whitewater Valley. As time went on, Steele became more and more absorbed in landscape painting and it was, perhaps, for this reason that he and his wife made their first trip to Brown County in March, 1907.

Inspired by the picturesque scenes he encountered, the artist found subject matter best suited to his brush. In a comparatively remote and lonely wilderness there came into being the rambling, spacious house and lofty studio, situated 600 feet above the surrounding country. Although of little value for agricultural purposes, the land yielded an unending crop of pictures with its great variety of trees, ravines, tiny streams, its rounded hills, the views into the purple distances and its changing aspects under the play of sun and cloud.

The memorial is filled with the results of the painter's work, pictures from his days in Munich and the Brookville period, Brown County landscapes, portraits by Mr. Steele and portraits of him by other artists.

The residence, a large studio and a smaller one (previously a guest house) now make up the memorial buildings, and are fitted with many of the T. C. Steele paintings. In one corner of the large studio visitors may view the artist's last completed landscape and another canvas which death left unfinished. The residence is not open to the public.

Another interesting feature is the Trailside Museum, a historic log cabin that stood for many years in a settlement five miles south of its present location. It stands at the edge of the forest where three trails begin. These trails were once explored by the artist and are the Wild Flower Trail, the Whippoor-Will Haunt, the Pecker-Wood Trail and the Path of Silences. Visitors may travel down these scenic paths once used by Mr. Steele in his quest for subject material.

Recognized and honored throughout his career as one of Indiana's foremost artists, T. C. Steele was elected to many important art juries. His life, rich in years and accomplishments, came to a close on July 24, 1926.

Mr. Steele was the dean of Indiana artists, endowed with a rich appreciation of nature as well as art, and combining a high intuitive intelligence with a remarkable capacity for study and concentration. The T. C. Steele State Memorial is a fitting tribute by Indiana to a talented son.

INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
DIVISION OF STATE PARKS
State Office Building
Indianapolis, Indiana 46209

