

## In the Shadow of Paul Mountain: E. Hunt Barrett's Views of Sweet Briar



Elizabeth Hunt Barrett's name may not be familiar to most in our present-day community, but she occupied a beloved niche in the hearts and minds of students and faculty who walked the campus in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Two things fascinated her here: the panoramic view of campus looking west from the rise of hills at Mt. St. Angelo along Old Stage Road, and trees. In her views of Sweet Briar she exaggerated the height of the Blue Ridge (particularly the shoulder of Paul Mountain always visible from campus) and in some cases made the buildings look grandiose. But in all, one senses a deep peace and gracefulness that is true to the College's character. Barrett's trees are phenomenal. Thick oil paint slathered on with a palette knife, delicate veils of watercolor, and the loose draftsmanship of gouache all reveal a painter of sophistication and skill. It is clear from the rough board she used in many works that she worked outdoors, putting her vision down directly and swiftly rather than sketching and then returning to her studio for a more polished product.

Barrett, who was born in 1863 in New York, trained at the National Academy of Design.<sup>1</sup> Though detailed information is scarce, it is apparent that she also studied in France, The Netherlands, and Switzerland. She continued to visit Europe regularly throughout her long career. A survey of exhibition catalogues from the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century shows that Barrett exhibited in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago for decades (particularly exhibiting watercolors), showing her work under the name E. Hunt Barrett. A profile of the artist published in Sweet Briar literary magazine, *The Brambler*, in 1924 concluded:

"She is an entirely delightful person but one of her most delightful traits is her modesty. Her own estimate of her many years of success is, 'I have never taken any big honors and I've never gotten any very big prices but I've had lots of fun.'"

Barrett and her husband Edward—a journalist turned gentleman farmer—married in 1897 in Katonah, Westchester County, New York. They lived in rural Bedford and Mt. Kisco, New York, but found themselves increasingly uncomfortable with new neighbors from the city crowding into their rural retreat so turned their faces southward for a warmer climate. On the advice of a new acquaintance in

---

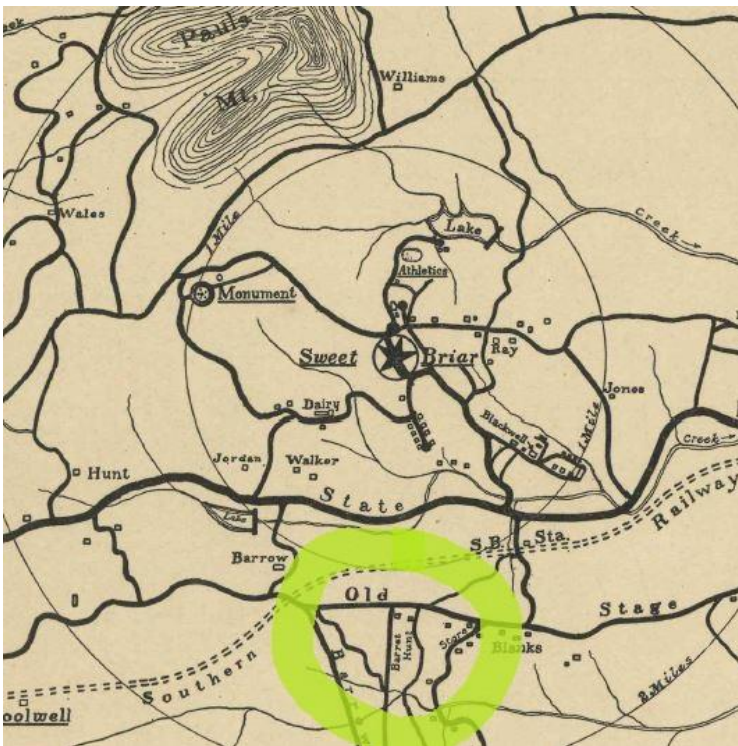
<sup>1</sup> Arthur Nicholas Hosking, ed. *The Artist's Year Book* (Chicago: The Art League Publishing Company, 1905), p. 8; Peter Hastings Falk, ed., *Who Was Who in American Art*. (Madison, CT: Sound View Press, 1985), p. 35.

## In the Shadow of Paul Mountain: E. Hunt Barrett's Views of Sweet Briar

Lynchburg, a Mr. Drummond, they moved to the Amherst area in the middle 1910s and settled in a remodeled farmhouse, formerly called "Rose Hill".<sup>2</sup> This was situated across what we know today as Route 29, near Sweet Briar's sister estate, Mt. St. Angelo, property now occupied by the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. In recent years the area of their farm was disturbed by construction of the Lynchburg expressway.

According to *The Story of Sweet Briar College*, the Barretts were quite friendly with the Sweet Briar community and welcomed students to their home for refreshments after long walks across the rolling hills.<sup>3</sup> The artist seems to have exhibited routinely on campus and also gave painting lessons.<sup>4</sup> All the works shown here have come back to College through the generosity of alumnae, faculty families, and local residents. All are from the Sweet Briar College Art Collection and Galleries, or from the collection of the Sweet Briar Museum.

No contemporary mentions of the Barretts have been found in Sweet Briar publications after 1926.



However, U.S. Customs passenger lists for travelers returning from Europe record the Barretts' home address as Amherst (1926) and Sweet Briar (1929).<sup>5</sup> A 1929 map of hiking routes printed by the Sweet Briar Athletic Association shows the Barretts' home across the highway. *The Story of Sweet Briar College* suggests that their house remained a destination for the community into the early 1930s.<sup>6</sup> Research has yet to reveal when or why the Barretts left Amherst, but the artist (who died in 1955) and her sister are buried together in Bedford Union Cemetery, Bedford, New York.

Karol A. Lawson  
Director  
Art Collection and Galleries  
and The Sweet Briar Museum

<sup>2</sup> Natalie Dew, "Some Sweet Briar Neighbors," *The Brambler* vol. 1, no. 3 (March 1924), pp. 13-14. This article indicates the Barretts moved to Amherst in 1913. *The Story of Sweet Briar* gives the year as 1915. By 1917, Barrett listed her address as "Amherst" in *The American Art Annual*, Florence Levy ed., (New York: American Federation of Arts, 1917), p. 421.

<sup>3</sup> Martha Lou Lemmon Stohlman, *The Story of Sweet Briar College*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press for The Alumnae Association of Sweet Briar College, 1956), pp. 117-118, 179.

<sup>4</sup> *The Brambler* vol. 4 no. 2 (December 1926), p. 9. Dorothy Carnine Scott (1903-1993), a painter and the wife of a Sweet Briar science professor, is known to have taken lessons with Barrett. See *Who Was Who in American Art*, pp. 554-555.

<sup>5</sup> Information on the passenger lists was kindly provided by Mary Kathryn McIntosh of Lynchburg and the Jones Memorial Library (Lynchburg) staff.

<sup>6</sup> *The Story of Sweet Briar College*, p. 179.

In the Shadow of Paul Mountain: E. Hunt Barrett's Views of Sweet Briar

Checklist of the Exhibition

Works are listed alphabetically by title and then by date.

*Autumn Woods* ca. 1915-1935  
oil on board  
18 x 24 inches  
Gift of Lynn Prior Harrington '58 and Kay Harrington  
DC.2000.021

*Beech Trees (Autumn Woods)* ca. 1920  
gouache on paper  
13 3/8 x 11 inches  
Gift of an unidentified donor  
ACG.1966.024.e

*Beech Tree in the Sweet Briar Woods* 1930  
oil on board  
10 x 8 inches  
Gift of an unidentified donor  
ACG.1966.024.b

*Dusk Over Sweet Briar from Mt. St. Angelo* 1931  
oil on board  
16 x 20 inches  
Gift of an unidentified donor  
ACG.1966.024.d

*Red Roof Tops in Normandy* 1929  
oil on canvas  
10 x 8 inches  
Gift of an unidentified donor  
ACG.1966.024.a

*Three Trees* ca. 1915-1935  
gouache on paperboard  
19 7/8 x 14 1/8 inches  
Gift of an unidentified donor  
ACG.1966.024

*Tree (Purple Tree)* ca. 1915-1935  
oil on board  
23 3/4 x 15 3/4 inches  
Gift of an unidentified donor  
ACG.1966.024.g

*Trees* ca. 1915-1935  
oil on board  
25 1/2 x 23 1/2 inches  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ryland Hunt  
ACG.2014.003

## In the Shadow of Paul Mountain: E. Hunt Barrett's Views of Sweet Briar

*View of Sweet Briar* ca. 1915-1935  
gouache on paper  
12 ¾ x 18 ¾ inches  
Gift of an unidentified donor  
ACG. 1966.024.i

*View of Sweet Briar*  
*(View of Sweet Briar from the Dairy Road)* 1928  
oil on board  
13 x 15 ¼ inches  
Gift of Jessie L. Coburn Laukhuff '33  
DC.1993.008

*View of Sweet Briar* ca. 1930  
oil on board  
14 x 17 inches  
Gift of an unidentified donor  
DC.1997.061

*View of Sweet Briar College* ca. 1928-1929  
oil on board  
13 ½ x 15 inches  
Gift of Jean Cole Anderson '31  
undetermined accession number

*View of Sweet Briar from the Hill*  
*above the Railroad (Old Stage Road)* ca. 1928-1929  
oil on board  
13 x 15 ½ inches  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Webster Harrison  
SB8.891

*Winter Woods* ca. 1915-1935  
oil on board  
14 x 19 ¾ inches  
Gift of Lynn Prior Harrington '58 and Kay Harrington  
DC.2000.017

*Woman Hanging Clothes on a Line,*  
*Normandy* ca. 1900-1920  
gouache on paperboard  
15 1/8 x 11 inches  
Gift of an unidentified donor  
ACG. 1966.024.h

KL 10-27-2015