

The Girl: A Tale of a Century

Art, love, business and history all meet in the Hub City

Spartanburg, South Carolina

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markpruett @ hotmail.com



*The Girl with Red Hair,
at the entrance to the Spartanburg Art Museum*

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Who is The Girl?

“An artist must first of all respond to his subject, he must be filled with emotion toward that subject... Paint what you feel. Paint what you see. Paint what is real to you.”

Robert Henri, The Art Spirit, 1923

More than a century after she came to South Carolina, visitors to the Spartanburg Art Museum walk in the front door, look at the portrait facing them, and still wonder “Who is the girl with red hair?” Sitting close, gazing knowingly at the artist, The Girl is slim and beautiful, with deep red hair, expressive blue eyes, high cheeks, a delicate chin, and a small pouty mouth. Her identity has remained a mystery, until now.

Her name is Marjorie Organ, and she has a tale to tell.

She rests at the center of local and American history, and at the crossroads of American art. Her lover Robert Henri painted her, and then married her. She tells a deeply American tale—one of community, dreams, changing times, and love.



*Marjorie Organ,
from womenincomics.wikia.com*

The world of the mills

“All things change according to the state we are in. Nothing is fixed.”

Robert Henri, The Art Spirit



*Spartan Mills, 1909. Image from Library of Congress.
Unseen in the photo, a quarter-mile south, is The Girl, in downtown Spartanburg.
(Note the rapidly-eroding creek in the foreground—intensive cotton farming and
Incompetent soil management soon led to disastrous erosion across the county.)*

To paint a setting for *The Girl's* story, we must travel back slightly more than a hundred years, to the late 19th century. In Spartanburg, a small pre-Civil War textile industry had grown into a busy, gritty, agro-industrial complex. Cotton fields overtook forests and pastures, factory effluent poured into streams and rivers, and smoke belched from locomotives and the high stacks of textile mills.

Drayton, Converse, Arkwright, Glendale, Clifton, Spartan, Beaumont, Arcadia, and Saxon—these and other mills in Spartanburg County churned out fabrics for the growing nation.

Mills were immensely profitable for the owners. For the workforce, the experience was somewhat different. Thousands of people, often women and children, worked brutal hours in appalling conditions, some earning an early grave from accidents, tuberculosis, or brown-lung disease. Most mill workers were white—blacks worked in the cotton fields or the very worst mill jobs (*The Cotton Mills of South Carolina*, August Kohn, 1907, p. 84). Families often lived in company houses and used company-provided churches and doctors. Some were paid in scrip, redeemable for food and other provisions at the company store.

The rampant use of child labor kept wage rates low. A mill family had little choice but to put its children to work as soon as possible. South Carolina had no state law requiring any education at all for children. Some mill-owners built schools, but attendance and expectations were low.

The Girl arrived in Spartanburg in 1907. That same year, at Saxon Mill there were 132 children enrolled in school but on average less than half (65) attended (Kohn, p. 139). One-third of the state's population was illiterate (*The History of South Carolina Schools*, ed. Virginia Bartels, p. 13).

Photographer Lewis Hine was hired by the federal government in the early part of the 20th century to document the lives of immigrants and laborers. He traveled to many parts of the country and, in the process, came to focus particularly on child labor. Working in South Carolina he photographed numerous children working in the mills. The two below, Nerva Wright and Eddie Norton, have a close connection to *The Girl*. Both of these children worked for John Adger Law, owner of Saxon Mill and brother of Margaret Moffett Law, the woman who, as we will learn, brought *The Girl* to Spartanburg.



1912: Child labor in the mills. Nerva Wright and Eddie Norton, both of Saxon Mill.
Photos by Lewis Hine, from Library of Congress collection.

The doctor who liked to read

“Battle against obscurity.”

Robert Henri, The Art Spirit

Founded in 1831, the town of Spartanburg outpaced its surrounding mill villages. The booming textile industry put Spartanburg firmly on the map; by 1880, the town officially became a city. The city and county together held more than 40,000 people. That same year, the Spartanburg Opera House opened in the very center of the city, with city, police, and post offices on the first floor, and a 700-seat opera auditorium on the second. By 1900 the population would increase more than sixty percent to over 65,000.

As the county seat, a transportation hub, and a financial/economic center, the city had a diverse economy, sizeable middle class, and prosperous professionals—people who wanted education and culture to play a larger role in a bright future for the thriving area. However, there still was not even a single public library.

In 1882, one of the city’s prosperous citizens, Dr. Lionel Chalmers Kennedy, died. His wife gave his extensive book collection to the city to start a library. The city was unwilling to contribute tax money, so the new Kennedy Library relied on subscriptions and membership fees. It began with about 600 medical books and 300 others, some donated by local citizens. Two decades later, the library had outgrown its home. The Ladies Auxiliary Club, which ran the Kennedy Library, persuaded the city in 1903 to buy a lot on Magnolia Street for a new public library.



Dr. Kennedy, in Landrum’s History of Spartanburg County, 1900, p. 501

To fulfill their plan of becoming a truly public library, free of subscriptions and membership fees, the club had to build and equip the library. Unable to raise sufficient money locally for the library, the planners turned their eyes northward and contacted the richest man in the world.

The richest man in the world

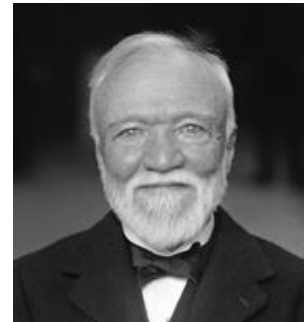
*“Do whatever you do intensely.
The artist is the man who leaves the crowd and goes pioneering.
With him there is an idea which is his life.”*

Robert Henri, The Art Spirit

At the same time the Ladies Auxiliary Club was persuading the city to buy land, they were writing to steel magnate Andrew Carnegie, asking him to build a library for Spartanburg.

Carnegie knew the textile industry well. Born in Scotland to starving textile workers who escaped to the US, Carnegie got his first job, only 13 years old, changing bobbins in a Pittsburgh textile mill. Carnegie also knew libraries—he fell in love with books and with learning when a Pittsburgh man opened up his personal library to working-class boys for a few hours every Saturday night.

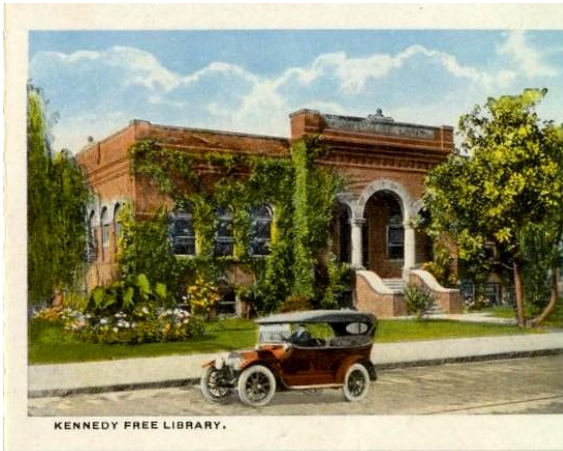
Carnegie’s love of libraries stayed with him his whole life. In 1901 he was 66 years old and had built Carnegie Steel into the world’s largest steelmaker. That year he sold it for \$480 million (the equivalent of about \$372 billion today, as a share of GDP), and spent the rest of his life giving the money away. Libraries were already a favorite project—in 1880 he built a free public library in his hometown in Scotland.



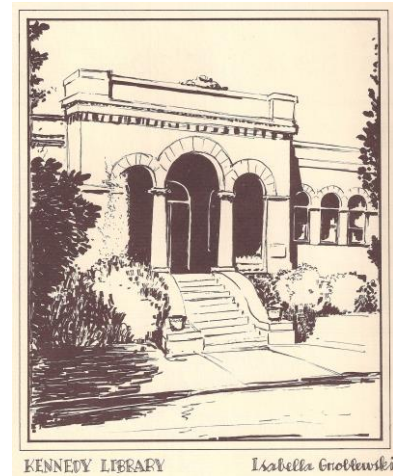
By 1929 his fortune had built more than 2,500 public libraries, all called Carnegie Libraries. His approach was simple—he would finance and equip the building, but local money would have to pay for land, operations, and maintenance. And, he was especially interested in improving opportunities for the poor—in his early thirties he wrote a heartfelt memo to himself saying he wanted to focus on “education and the improvement of the poorer classes”.

Carnegie donated \$15,000 (almost \$9,000,000 in today’s money, as a share of GDP) for the new library. It opened in January 1906 and was named the Kennedy Free Public Library.

The Kennedy Library was one of only two Carnegie libraries not named after the benefactor. Perhaps local citizens resented Carnegie’s Civil War service as the Union’s supervisor of military railways and telegraphs. However, the more likely reason is that it would have been confusing to have two brand new Carnegie Libraries in Spartanburg. In 1904, Andrew Carnegie gave \$10,000 to Spartanburg’s Converse College (a women’s college founded in 1889) to build its own library. In today’s money, that would be the equivalent of \$6,000,000. The Converse Carnegie Library opened in 1905, barely before the Kennedy Library opened less than a mile away. It still stands on the college campus.



*Kennedy Library postcard, 1920s,
from spartasc.com*



*Kennedy Library, by Isabella Groblewski,
from Engagement Calendar published by the Artists' Guild of
Spartanburg, 1961*



Carnegie Library, Converse College

The free spirit from Spartanburg

*“The work of the art student is no light matter... It costs to do this.
If you succeed somewhat you may have to pay for it as well as enjoy it all your life.”*

Robert Henri, The Art Spirit

On March 1, 1907, one year after the new Kennedy Library opened, Spartanburg’s Arts and Crafts Club was started by two local artists, Josephine Sibley Couper and Margaret Moffett Law. Margaret Law was the younger sister of John Adger Law, founder and president of Saxon Mill, where little Nerva Wright and Eddie Norton (pictured earlier) would begin working only several years later.

Born in 1871, Margaret Law would have a life far different than that of the children working in her brother's mill. She grew up in the upper level of Spartanburg County society, in a comfortable but confining world. American industrialization and the Gilded Age at the end of the 19th century brought some new freedoms for working-class and middle-class women, but a rigid social structure constricted life for "high society" women, especially in the South, which was still characterized by a superficially genteel but parochial caste structure, the legacy of a rural economy and slavery.



*Margaret Moffett Law,
picture from Brexton Hotel, Baltimore, www.brextonhotel.com*

Art was one of the few outlets that offered society women a measure of freedom, creativity, and independence. Margaret Law seized that offer. She would leave the social confines of 19th century Spartanburg and enter the 20th century in the bustling North.

After finishing at the new Converse College in 1895 or '96 as the school's very first graduate in art, she boarded a long-distance train to continue her art schooling in Philadelphia. One of her new teachers there was the handsome, dynamic, and outspoken artist Robert Henri (pronounced "hen-rye"). He was in his early thirties, single, and recently back from several years as an artist in Paris. She later said he was the single most important influence in her life. There is little information available on Margaret Law's personal life, but Henri clearly became very important to her as a teacher and friend, and they stayed in contact until his death.

At some point Margaret Law returned to Spartanburg and became active in local arts with her friend (cousin? cousin-in-law?), Emma Josephine Sibley Couper. "Jo" Sibley Couper was another artist with an independent streak. Originally from Augusta, Georgia, she had been forbidden by her father to go to New York to study art. However, immediately upon his death, she sold land she inherited from him and bought a ticket to New York. She later married R. King Couper and moved to Spartanburg. (Margaret's brother John married a Pearl Sibley from Augusta, apparently Josephine's sister.)

At the time that Law and Couper were starting the Arts and Crafts Club, they also were arranging the visit of a large traveling art exhibit to Spartanburg. In April 1907, one month after the club was founded, the exhibit arrived. As noted in the local newspaper (Herald Journal, June 17, 1988), the exhibit was located at the corner of Church and Main in the second floor of a retail building.

The building is long gone, but the exhibit's impact remains. When visitors were asked to vote for their favorite painting, they chose a portrait of a young redheaded woman painted by Margaret Law's mentor and friend, Robert Henri. The exhibit's planners decided to buy it to serve as the nucleus to create a publicly-owned art collection for Spartanburg

Law and Couper started a fundraising drive. People donated small sums, as little as five cents, to buy the painting for \$500. In today's money, that price would be somewhere between \$14,000 and \$300,000 depending on how we make the conversion. \$500 was a great deal of money in 1907.

The largest contribution, almost \$100, came from one man, a newly arrived Greek immigrant fruit vendor named Nicholas Trakas. His descendants still live in Spartanburg more than a century later.

Interestingly, in Henri's public correspondence with the city negotiating the purchase, he never identified the woman who posed for the painting. He called her "the girl with red hair", which would be her only name for more than a hundred years.

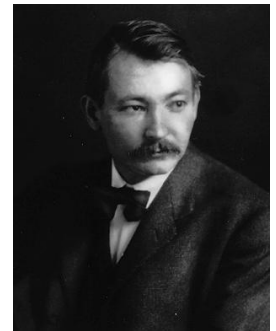
The artist for a new century

*"Be game--take a chance--don't hide...
Go forward with what you have to say, expressing things as you see them."*

Robert Henri, The Art Spirit

Margaret Law moved from 19th century South Carolina to begin the 20th century in the North. Robert Henri was the man who would make that new century a very different place, both for her and for art.

He was born Robert Henry Cozad in 1865. Because of legal problems, his father changed names and gave his children new ones—there is no genealogical meaning to Henri's last name. In 1881 Robert Henri enrolled as an art student in Philadelphia. After spending three years in France, he obtained a job in 1892 teaching at the Philadelphia School of Design for Women (renamed the Moore College of Art in 1932). In 1898, he married one of his students, Linda Craige.



Robert Henri, photo from National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

Henri was at the forefront of a profound shift in the world of art. He became the leader of what is called the Ashcan School art movement, abandoning traditionalism and espousing realism in painting and artistic freedom. He continued to do traditional formal portraits, but he and his students also got out into the streets and painted people and scenes they saw in everyday urban life, some genteel, some on the ragged edges of society. They used new subjects and new styles.

Tired of tradition, Henri was a charismatic and opinionated man. He attracted numerous followers, including newspaper illustrators, who would gather to discuss art and culture.

He split his time between Philadelphia, Paris, and New York. In 1902 he moved permanently to teach at the New York School of Art (now known as Parsons The New School for Design).

By now Henri was already a big name—and an outspoken one. Elected in 1906 to the National Academy of Design, a year later he walked off an Academy art jury and subsequently called the prestigious but rigid group a "cemetery of art".

Henri's wife Linda died in 1905 at age 29 or 30. Soon after, sometime between 1905 and early 1907, he painted the first of his numerous portraits of a beautiful young newspaper illustrator and art student.

The painting by the famous artist went on tour, and quickly became famous in the popular press as “A Girl with Red Hair”. In 1908 it was featured in the February issue of Wilson’s Photographic Magazine in an article on portraits. Robert Henri married the feisty redhead, now age 22, that same year.

The feisty Irish redhead

“Beauty is an intangible thing...[It is never dull and it fills all spaces.]”

Robert Henri, The Art Spirit

Marjorie Organ’s childhood could not have been more different than that of Margaret Law, the woman who would bring her to Spartanburg.

Born in Ireland, Marjorie moved with her family around 1895 to the world’s biggest city, the booming metropolis of New York City. She was less than ten years old. Records differ on her birthdate, placing it in November 1886 (US Census 1900), or December 3, 1886 (passenger lists from ships).

She grew up in a crowded tenement in a teeming, vibrant city. New York was ever-changing and filled with new ideas and technology, foreign tongues and foods, and challenging circumstances, including prejudice against the waves of Irish and other immigrants pouring into the city. However, the intelligent Marjorie took well to her exciting but tough environment, and she grew into a confident, self-reliant, and very opinionated young woman.

She learned aesthetics from her father John Organ, a wallpaper designer. He died before she was fourteen—the 1900 US Census lists her mother Ellen as a widow and head of household. Five of Marjorie’s siblings also lived with them (one had moved out and another had died) in a walk-up tenement at 194 Waverly Place, New York (in the West Village section of Greenwich Village, just north of Christopher Park). The Census lists 43 residents in the crowded building, seven families headed mostly by Irish and German parents.

If we consider her activities as an adolescent and teenager, she was a remarkably precocious girl. By age eleven, she was already entering newspaper creative contests for children, being noted in the August 14, 1898 issue of the New York Herald.

NEVER SAY DIE.

Contributions to this department must be marked "original" and indorsed as such by the author's parent, teacher or guardian.

Prize Winners
for week ending July 30.
SILVER BUTTONS.

BEST poem, "The Children of My Pen," by Jessie E. Sampter, box 144, Arverne, L. I., age 15.

Best prose, "The Schley Chapter's Outing," by Charles A. Stewart, Franklin, Mass., box E, age 11.

Best pen drawing, "The Old Hotel," by Kittle L. Heusel, No. 117 Pacific avenue, Jersey City, N. J., age 18.

Best pastime, "The Feather Game," by Edith Wells Stoussa, Owning's Mills, Baltimore county, Md., age 11.

Best puzzle, enigma, by Vincent Sumner Hayward, Sound Beach Conn., age 13.

Best and neatest puzzle answer to puzzles of July 24, Edward Wolfsohn, No. 28 East 118th street, New York city.

Correct and complete answers also received from C. F. Doan.

Roll of Honor.

GIRLS.

Ella Bruch.	Ethel Stewart.
Ethel M. Leach.	Adrienne Lindsay Tracey.
Eleanor Hutchinson.	Nellie B. Frost.
Jennie Holde.	Minnie Byram.
Daisy Von Nebell.	Ethel Chandler.
Catherine G. Crean.	Edith Spofford.
Kittle L. Heusel.	Fauline Donovan.
Henrietta A. Coggins.	Marjorie Organ.
Ruth R. Abbott.	Florent Felts.
Mildred Sarles.	Marguerite M. Hillery.
Margaret Winslow.	Alice L. Webster.
Anna E. Holbrook.	Elsie Moore.
Marie Von Lengerke.	Louise Struss.
Mae Franklin Norton.	Inez R. Drucker.
Clara Bollman.	Katie Besse.
Rebecca Eisenberg.	

BOYS.

Alfred Bryant Seeley.	Alton Leveridge.
Thomas Schofield.	Ronald Oliphant.
Selden T. Kinney.	Robert H. Palmer.
William C. Blackwood.	John Fitzgerald.
John List Peppard.	Edward J. Erier.
Walter D. F. Wellstood.	Ralph Hawkins.
William Schwenker.	Percy Merton.
Harold Neuhof.	Paul A. Larned.
Edward J. Wolfsohn.	B. Koepslock.
Kenneth Harbison.	Henry Smolensky.

Source: <http://strippersguide.blogspot.com/2013/11/ink-slinger-profiles-by-alex-jay.html>

An Irish Catholic, she went to St. Joseph parochial school, then entered the Female Normal and High School (now Hunter College), the country’s first tuition-free public teachers’ college. The New York Daily Tribune

(June 19, 1900) on its “Only Woman’s Page” notes that Marjorie Organ passed Normal’s entrance exam. She would have been thirteen at the time of the exam.

A teaching career, however, was not for her—she soon dropped out and found a job.

In 1902, when Robert Henri was starting his career at the New York School of Art, Marjorie Organ was hired at age 15 to be a cartoonist in the art department of the major daily afternoon newspaper, the New York Evening Journal. The department consisted of men older than her who illustrated articles, did caricatures, and wrote cartoons. Organ quickly made herself at home, creating *Little Reggie and the Heavenly Twins*, a humorous comic strip that ran for more than two years, as well as other shorter-lived series and cartoons like *The Man Hater Club* and *Strange What Difference a Mere Man Makes*.

During her time at the newspaper, she became part of New York’s art community. She went to galleries and exhibits, made friends, and worked on her own art. Perhaps most important, she enrolled in classes at the New York School of Art.

Her newspaper experiences and her cartoons and illustrations reveal an intriguing personality. Comfortable around urban men, and humorously critical of women she saw as weak and manipulative, Marjorie Organ possessed a young single woman’s mild cynicism about personal relationships. Artistically talented, she was blessed with a wicked sense of humor. Her comic strips reveal an artist who was self-reliant and free-thinking, yet feminine and sexually aware—a thoroughly modern “city girl”.

For his part, Robert Henri was worldly and intolerant of traditionalism and the status quo. Comfortable painting street beggars and millionaires, he loved the earthiness of reality. And, judging by how he painted them—beautiful, sensual, and real—he appreciated, enjoyed, and loved women.

We do not know whether Marjorie Organ met Robert Henri before she enrolled in his class, or if school was their first encounter. We do know that when they met, each found their match in the other. We can see it in the way he painted her year after year, always focused on her face. And, we can see it in *The Girl’s* eyes, the very first time he painted her.

The fates of the players

*“The end will be what it will be.
The object is intense living, fulfillment; the great happiness in creation.”*

Robert Henri, The Art Spirit

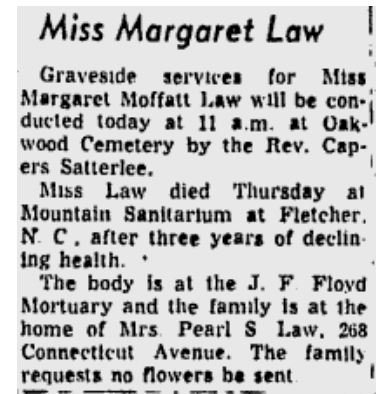
What happened to the three key people: Margaret Law, Robert Henri, and Marjorie Organ?

Margaret Moffett Law and Josephine Sibley Couper, the two artists who brought the 1907 exhibit, both left Spartanburg late in World War I. Both would spend their final years in the mountains just north of Spartanburg—Margaret Law in Fletcher, NC, and Couper nearby in Tryon—and die within a year of each other. Margaret Law spent two decades (1917-1935) on the art faculty of Bryn Mawr College in Baltimore. The Brexton Hotel in Baltimore (www.brextonhotel.com) states that she owned the hotel. Returning to Spartanburg in the 1930s, she was hired by the federal Works Projects Administration to paint a peach orchards mural in the

city post office (the fate of this mural is unknown). She then spent a decade as art superintendent for the public school system. She never married and continued her adventurous, independent life—later in life she drove across Mexico, apparently by herself. She died in 1956, and is buried in Spartanburg’s Oakwood Cemetery.

Her brief obituary, with its misspelled middle name, says little about this remarkable woman, a prolific artist and art activist. Her brother John Law, the founder of Saxon Mill, had died seven years earlier. His wife Pearl Sibley Law, her sister-in-law, was by then more than 80 years old.

[There may be, however, a more substantial remembrance two days earlier, since one source cites an article “Margaret Law, Artist, Dies in North Carolina” Spartanburg Journal, August 2, 1956, p 2. That issue was not found in online newspaper archives.]



Obituary from Spartanburg Herald, Saturday August 4th 1956, p.2

Years later, a 1972 exhibit of Law’s art raised concern about the “benign neglect” and “shocking disrepair” of her work (Spartanburg Herald Journal, April 9, 1972, p. A7). Fortunately, she was “re-discovered” and is now known as a significant figure in the history of Southern art. And, the school that provided her start, Converse College, named a lane on campus after her. A lifelong artist with her own style, she was heavily influenced by her friend and mentor Robert Henri—she found beauty everywhere, often in humble subjects, and imbued her art with a sense of reality.

Robert Henri, the man who painted *The Girl*, continued to lecture, write, organize important exhibits, develop the art world, and paint. His wife Marjorie became his favorite model. His fondness for redheads is obvious in other work, such as his two 1907-08 paintings of Jessica Penn, a professional artist’s model and in two 1913 portraits of girls in Ireland. In 1915, he did four portraits of a redhead he names as Edna Smith who, in a couple of her portraits, seems to resemble his wife Marjorie.

In early 1929, the Arts Council of New York named Robert Henri one of the top three living American artists. He died that summer. Now seen as one of the major figures in the history of American and modern art, his art can be seen in museums in the US and abroad. In 2005, the new Crystal Bridges museum in Arkansas bought his full-length portrait of Jessica Penn at auction for a reported \$3.6 million.

Marjorie Organ Henri died the year after her husband, in 1930, at age 43. In their two decades together, she was an active artist who exhibited regularly. She and her husband were close partners and she took the leadership role in managing their business affairs and relationships.

The Girl: A century later

“Art is, after all, only a trace – like a footprint which shows that one has walked bravely and in great happiness.”

Robert Henri, The Art Spirit

As for *The Girl*, she spent the next century slipping into obscurity—unknown, unnamed, unloved.

Margaret Moffett Law’s dream for the Arts and Crafts Club to establish a substantial gallery of art for the public also received little interest. After acquiring a few other pieces, the club disappeared. Their purchases, including *The Girl*, were displayed in the Kennedy Library.

The Kennedy Library did not get the strong local support which had been promised to Andrew Carnegie, and it barely survived for four decades on donations.

By 1953, after decades of neglect, the Kennedy Library was “dirty, small and leaky“, says a newspaper history of the painting (Spartanburg Herald-Journal, December 15, 1974). By then, the art collection had been mostly forgotten, left to bake in the library’s attic. In 1953, the same year that Margaret Moffett Law’s health began a serious decline, the collection was moved to Converse College, where it ended up in storage again. The Girl was retained by the Kennedy’s head librarian.

It was not until 1947 that Spartanburg County approved a tax to support public library services. In subsequent decades the county built an extensive library system.

In 1963, The Girl moved to a dramatic new public county library. The Kennedy Library was demolished, and Andrew Carnegie’s gift to the city of Spartanburg vanished in rubble.

In the 21st century, Margaret Moffett Law’s dream of a public art gallery finally came into being.

One hundred years and six months after The Girl first arrived in Spartanburg, she moved again, becoming the mysterious centerpiece of the entrance to the brand new Spartanburg Art Museum. The museum held its grand opening in October 2007.

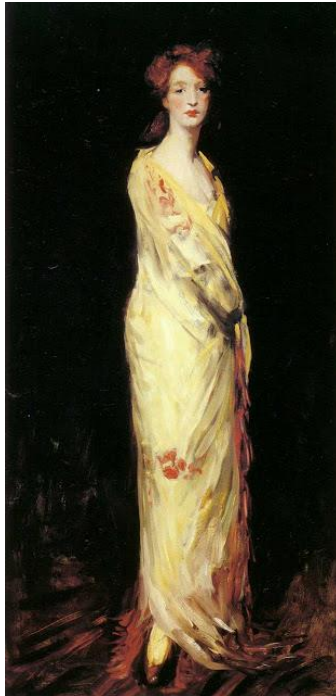
And, now we know who The Girl is—and why she matters. Her name is Marjorie, and she has a tale to tell.

Robert Henri’s favorite redhead

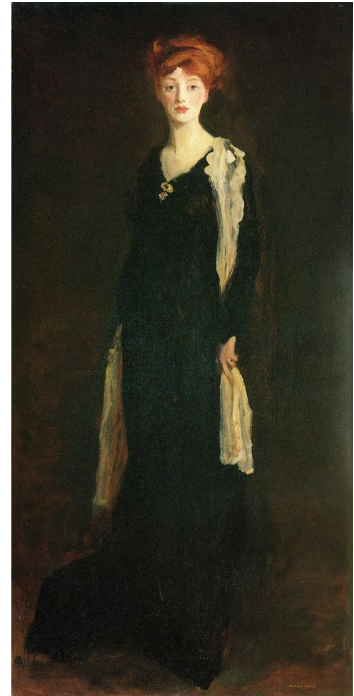
Portraits of Marjorie Organ



The Girl With Red Hair (pre-April 1907)



Marjorie in a Yellow Shawl, 1909



O in Black with Scarf, 1910



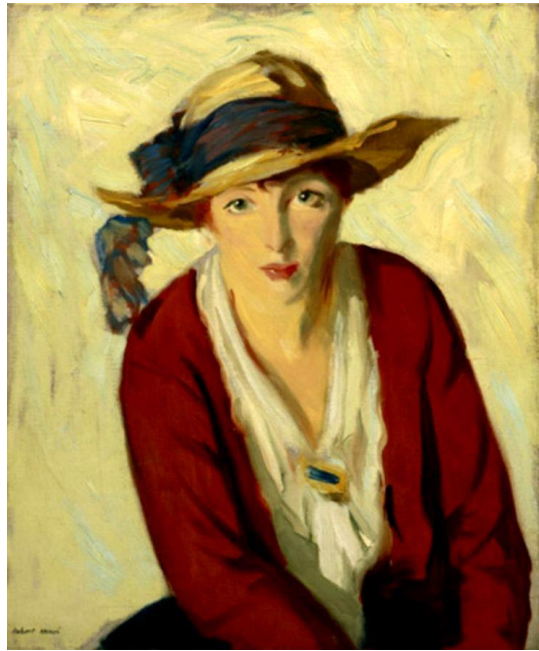
The Brown Wrap, 1911



The Masquerade Dress, 1911



Portrait of Mrs. Robert Henri, 1914



The Beach Hat of Marjorie Organ, 1914
Detroit Institute of Arts, www.dia.org
