

THE LIFE, WORK, AND IMPRINT  
OF ELISABET NEY

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THE LIFE, WORK, AND IMPRINT  
OF ELISABET NEY

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## CHAPTER I

### BACKGROUND INFLUENCES UPON ELISABET NEY

#### Introduction

The writer who said that a prophet is not without honor save in his own country certainly described Elisabet Ney, noted woman sculptor, and Edmund Montgomery, eminent scientist and philosopher. This husband and wife combination, each distinctive in his own field, has produced works needed by posterity for a well-rounded cultural development. At least, this is the opinion of Arthur Schopenhauer, the German philosopher, who wrote: "Perhaps you know the sculptress, Ney; if not, you have lost a great deal."<sup>1</sup> Also, Lorado Taft, the American art critic and sculptor, said of her: "Elisabet Ney is one of the most interesting of characters as she is one of the best equipped of woman sculptors."<sup>2</sup> The former based his statements concerning the artist's achievements upon her early works--upon a career successfully acclaimed by leading Europeans of the middle nineteenth century. The latter received his ideas from the sculptress' accomplishments in Texas--accomplishments made in a wilderness amid bitter denunciations and hostile criticisms.

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<sup>1</sup>Helen Zimmern, Schopenhauer, p. 242.

<sup>2</sup>Lorado Taft, History of American Sculpture, p. 214.

Between these statements lies the life, work, and imprint of a personality. No complete story of her actions can be termed a mere biography. Her actions, simple though dynamic, seem to radiate into a living being full of force and of impulse. Her birth in Westphalia, the artist's studies in Munich and Berlin, her wide and extensive travels, in addition to her final settlement in Texas tended to make Elisabet Ney a cosmopolitan. In addition, she was a firm advocate of an international state, a state based on the ideals of democracy. In speaking of an allegiance to one country she says:

And though I truly am devoid of what we could call patriotism (I had this to avow over and over again in Europe) the appellation Texas has a charm for me, a charm of a peculiar kind, in nearing it, such as no part of the wide world has; as if it constitutes the nucleus containing all in all that gives the charm to life for me . . . It is a true joy of feeling which is mine as I awake--of expansion--such as I think I never felt before, or at least not since in years.<sup>3</sup>

By this, one can picture the soul and the spirit of a great personage. Yet, it is the picture of a cramped soul--one which is inhibited and bound by the creeds and beliefs of a narrowed world which was not ready to accept international democracy.

#### Resume of International Democratic Tendencies

The definition of democracy by Abraham Lincoln as being "a government of the people, by the people, and for the

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<sup>3</sup>Bride Neill Taylor, Elisabet Ney Sculptor, p. 89.

people"<sup>4</sup> was not comprehensive enough in scope to satisfy the conception of Elisabet Ney, his contemporary. To her, it was more than a form of government. It was a movement based on evolution throughout the ages. It was a way of life which had evolved through the centuries. To this artist, democracy included the rudiments of the short-lived Athenian democracy, even though she was aware of many modern critics' attitudes toward Athenian democracy who claim that instead of its being a democracy "it was only an aristocracy which rose on the ruins of one much narrower."<sup>5</sup> Democracy to her also embraced the law and order of the Romans; it stresses the Hebrew ideal of the family; its spirit is found in education, the home, the church, the school, and in religion. Political socialism combined with industrial communism was also stressed by her. Hence, one can understand that Elisabet Ney desired to combine the best essentials of all democratic tendencies to form the complete Utopia for freedom. However, Elisabet Ney is not alone in these thoughts, since many of the world's great poets have had visions of internationalism. Rudolph M. Binder, an outstanding writer on internationalism, says:

The prophet Micah told of the time when the people of the earth 'shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.' Dante had his Monarchia of peace; Podiadebrad his New Europe, Henry of Navarre his Great

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<sup>4</sup>John Bartlett, Familiar Quotations, p. 456.

<sup>5</sup>Lyman Abbott, Spirit of Democracy, p. 2.

Design, William Penn his United States of Europe, and Emanuel Kant his Perpetual Peace, with its allied state of nations and the federation of the world. Always such plans and dreams have proved futile. The world was not ready, because people could not think in international terms.<sup>6</sup>

Elisabet Ney took her place beside these immortals who thought in terms of world problems. Like these, however, she was doomed to disappointment at their apparent failure. Yet, at that very age, certain democratic tendencies were being directly felt in Germany, the artist's home land.

#### German Thought in the Nineteenth Century

Although there were direct democratic tendencies invading Germany during Elisabet Ney's life-time, there are several factors which explain their failure to take complete hold on the popular mind. There was a lack of unity among the German peoples. Even though democracy demands freedom of the individual, it also advocates the establishment of a group or national consciousness. There was no German nation until the late 1800's. Instead, the territory of central Europe was divided into some 300 units. Each was an absolute monarchy, ruled by a duke or a count. Each considered itself a "divine right" monarchy--a form of government which existed until the 1900's. Each had its own court, collected its own taxes, and maintained individual armies.

Elisabet Ney, an ardent advocate of democracy, was

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<sup>6</sup>Rudolph Binder, Major Social Problems, p. 233.



reared in this environment. She understood the relations between the Hapsburgs and the Hohenzollerns. Being born in 1833 in Westphalia, geographically the center of the social and economic change, she saw the democratic principles and ideals downed time and time again during the major revolutions of the nineteenth century.

However, at the same time certain forms of democracy were being recognized. Just prior to her birth, serfdom was abolished by the Edict of Emancipation (1807). At the same time another movement--education instead of armed force--was launched to unify Germania. Binder sums up the situation as follows:

The various treaties of Westphalia established one important principle--that of freedom, or rather, toleration, since the two contending parties, Roman Catholic and Protestant, had found their forces balanced during the Thirty Years' War. The chief provision was that 'all and each of the contracting parties shall be held to defend and maintain all and each of the dispositions of this peace, against whomsoever it may be, without distinction of religion.'<sup>7</sup>

A large stumbling block was thus removed from inter-German cooperation by the general acceptance of this provision.

During this second quarter of the nineteenth century, democracy spread and became increasingly to be felt as a vital force. Some of the tangible results of this growth were: the Prussians Customs Union, the new railroads, and industrialism which tended to unify the German States and at the same time to give the individual more privileges and more of

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<sup>7</sup>Rudolph Binder, Major Social Problems, p. 235.

the responsibilities of government. Concerning this latter factor, industrialism, we may note that the industrial way of living and the spread of democracy or representative government both go hand in hand.<sup>8</sup>

Elisabet Ney, a young woman filled with democratic ambitions, for a time took hope that she could realize her dreams in Germany. However, her dreams were inhibited by the conservative reaction of 1850, brought about by the monarchists, who in desperation began to strengthen their positions. Her principles of internationalism were not tolerated. The Bismark wars during the 1860's did not aid her state of mind either. In desperation, she and her husband turned to America--Utopia.

In reality the dream which lured them across the water was one with which they had played with from their earliest youth--one that had fascinated others before them. Holding firmly to a belief in the perfectibility of humanity, they had a vision, which the most child-like simplicity, they were certain was easily to be realized,--a vision of a happy community located in some arcadian spot, where, surrounded by the unspoiled beauties of nature, aided by the influence of the purest art, and cared for by a beneficent science, each individual was to develop, unhampered, according to his own nature. The result was to be a sweet harmonious grouping of the highest ethical ideals, yet entirely independent.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, one notes that, although not international in scope, there were direct democratic tendencies invading Germany immediately prior and during Elisabet Ney's life. One by one the "divine right" monarchs disappeared with the

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<sup>8</sup>Harold Rugg, Changing Governments and Changing Cultures, p. 238.

<sup>9</sup>Taylor, op. cit., pp. 517-518.

rise of industrialism, the custom unions, railroads, and religious freedom.

However, in regard to this latter, Westphalia in the 1830's was the scene of religious divergencies. There is no question that the struggles among the various religious groups to assert their individuality and to make themselves a force affected the sculptress. She was conscious that in this middle land, her home, protestantism in the form of Lutheranism of the north was attempting to meet on equal footing the Catholicism of Southern Germany. Individual religious freedom of thought was therefore recognized as a prerogative.

Yet, because of heredity, for all of the artist's lineage were Roman Catholic, more than because of environment, Elisabet Ney was an enthusiastic member of the Church during this plastic period of her early life. She religiously attended mass, not only for the communion service but also in order that she might study the statues and friezes of the Cathedral. In fact, she acknowledged that in the early morning glow of light through the stained-glass windows of the church, the marble took on a sudden softness and flexibility which tended to bring out individual human traits of each image.<sup>10</sup>

Many of her first carvings were drawn from her early Christian teachings. These include: "The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian," "Saint Sebastian Glorified in Heaven,"

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<sup>10</sup>Dallas News, Nov. 8, 1925.

a "Head of Christ," and "The Madonna." Bride Neill Taylor says that "these represent not only the ideals of her childhood, but her gratitude to the art-loving, broad-minded bishop to whom, first of all, she owed it that she had escaped into the world."<sup>11</sup>

Certainly the Church furnished a background for this enigma of the nineteenth century. For, apparently, in her youth Elisabet Ney entirely conformed to her own church. It was gradually that she began to develop a concern for the rights and feelings of people of other sects. This feeling became a part of her democratic ideologies, although her concern for the German people themselves was never anything but passive.

Home environment played a major role in determining the artist's career. Elisabet Ney lived with her father, her mother, her older brother, and her younger sister. On the maternal side she was a descendant of Polish exiles; on the paternal side she came of the family which produced Marshal Ney, Napoleon's great commander. It seems that to be a sculptor had been this artist's ambition since her mother had read to her a story of the young girl Sabina von Steinbach, who helped her father chisel statues for the Strassburg Cathedral. Then, too, her father was described as an artisan. He earned his living by making statues for cemeteries, and sometimes by chiselling out statues for churches. His hobby

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<sup>11</sup>Taylor, op. cit., p. 32.

was carving in wood. Since Elisabeth Ney was his chosen companion, she naturally inherited an enthusiasm for such workings. In fact, even her odd mode of dress--a brief skull-cap fitted tightly on the head and a long flowing Grecian robe loosely fitted from the shoulders to the knees--was copied from her father's example. Bride Neill Taylor describes it as "something entirely unlike anything worn by other men of that day."<sup>12</sup>

As a result of these influences, it is little wonder that Elisabeth Ney was not content to be a German hausfrau, but rather agreed to disagree with the customs and modes of living then in vogue. In breaking with certain conventions of dress and thought, she came to realize that the individual should be free to live his life as his conscience guides.

#### Concluding Remarks

Psychologists of the time are not in agreement as to whether heredity or environment plays a more conspicuous part in the evolution of mankind. All are practically agreed, however, that only through a fusion of the two can an individual achieve harmony. Elisabeth Ney was a personage who found a successful median between the two influences. Even though democratic tendencies were apparently checked during her life in Germany, the undercover current for freedom and even for internationalism found room to grow in the woman's

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p.6.

thinking. It is true that Germany in name was autocratic, but certain historical backgrounds tended to introduce democracy to Germany; for example, the disappearance of the theory of the divine right of kings, the spread of the industrial revolution, the rise of nationalism, the abolition of serfdom, the development of education, the Zollverein, and religious toleration in Westphalia. All of these furnished a hereditary background for Elisabet Ney's internationalism.

However, her immediate environmental conditions did not hinder or inhibit her desires for freedom. Catholicism, her religion, was dogmatic, yet it allowed for individual freedom. Home conditions favored freedom of expression. Artistic tendencies were prevalent--in the stories read to her by the mother, in the father's occupation, in the girl's desires, and in the parent's mode of living. Individually, a superior intelligence and a keenness of observation gave her the powers to formulate a reasonable and an orderly theory of life.

These things make her fully as interesting to the student of the history of humanity as she is to the student of the history of art. It was because of them that public interest in her lifetime swirled about her, both in the old world and in the new, as about a storm center, and made her always the subject of strongly conflicting opinions. To a world half informed, as this world seems ever destined to be, the instinctive mood is that of the censor; but to that inner group of friends who knew the daily happenings of Elisabet Ney's life more intimately, a very different temper governs the final estimate. With singular unanimity their feeling shows it more and more, and as time passes, in an immense compassion, a tender refusal to pass judgment.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 123-124.

CHAPTER II

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF ELISABET NEY

## CHAPTER II

### A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF ELISABET NEY

#### The Westphalian Period

Elisabet Ney was born in Munster, in Westphalia, Germany, in 1833--three years before Texas became a political entity in the new democratic land of America. In fact, it is probable that the staid Westphalians at that particular time never thought of Texas as a political state. Likewise, the same lack of acquaintance with Westphalians existed among Texans. Yet, it took only one personage to link these two countries together with a common bond. The common bond was the art of sculptoring; the personage was Elisabet Ney.

The artist was born on January 26, 1833. She was christened, according to the baptismal records of the Cathedral in Munster, Francisca Bernadina Willhelmina Elisabet Ney<sup>1</sup> by the bishop of the diocese on January 28, 1833. This incident shows that the family of the child were devout Catholics. The father, John Adam Ney,<sup>2</sup> was a nephew of Marshal Ney, the French general who was shot in the Luxembourg Gardens at Paris for giving his squadron of men over to Napoleon, his former commander. He is described in the same baptismal

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<sup>1</sup>Southern Messenger, Oct. 15, 1936.

<sup>2</sup>Texas Fine Arts Association, Elisabet Ney Museum, p. 2.



register as an artisan, earning his livelihood by making statues for cemeteries and sometimes for churches. The mother, Elisabeth Wernze Ney,<sup>3</sup> was a descendant of Polish exiles who had immigrated into Westphalia because of political instability in the mother country. In addition to the child Elisabeth, there were two other children--an older brother and a younger sister. However, the reckless spirit of adventure which a family with such forbears should have manifested seemed to have settled upon the middle child, for both the older boy and the younger girl were content to perform the placid and routine works as required of them.

The reverse of this was Elisabeth Ney's destiny. This restless spirit, the dashing temperament, her unconventional attitudes, the desire not to lead the sweet uneventful life of a German hausfrau, produced a rebel--a rebel at an early age. Perhaps, she still was a child, in her parent's eyes at least, when she announced her intentions of going to Berlin to study the art of sculpture. It is possible that these parents thought that they could break the will of the girl; however, no amount of persuasion by mother, father, relatives, neighbors, or friends could change the will of the child, a young maid of eighteen.

She readily admits that it was not the demand of her soul for artistic expression which drove her to such a

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

decision. Rather, it was the desire to meet the great personages of the world and study them.<sup>4</sup> Why she, a woman, chose sculpture for this medium of meeting is hard to comprehend. Perhaps it came unwillingly from the stories read to her as a child by her mother; it is probable that the occupation of her father influenced the rebel; it is known that the hobby of the father--that of woodcarving--interested Elisabet Ney. Also she was enthusiastic concerning the individual dress of her father. He always wore a hat and a cloak made from his own design by his tailor, a neighbor. It was composed of a fitted skull-cap or tam, a long flowing, loosely-fitted Grecian robe and leggings--something entirely unlike the manner of dress of the other men of that day. It is known that she followed her father's mode of dress throughout her life. Doubtless, as in this, she followed her father's example in the demand for freedom.

Yet freedom of thought and of occupation did not come so easily to Elisabet Ney. No girl had ever done such a thing! She would have to leave home! She would be in a class with boys! She would be tutored by men! She would be scandalized! She would be thrown against an unbelieving world which might jar her ancestral faith in Catholicism. She could not go!<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Esse Forrester O'Brien, Art and Artists of Texas, p. 262.

<sup>5</sup>Alice Twichell, "Art Museum Reminds of Elisabet Ney's Work," Daily Texan, January 19, 1932.

However, she went on a hunger strike and refused to eat. Days passed into weeks as she grew quite thin and pale. It began to look as if she really would die. The parents, in desperation, turned to the bishop who undertook the parental duty. He, too, lost, and yet he won a compromise. He tried reason with the would-be sculptress, but recognized an unsurmountable obstacle when he saw one. The child would have to go--but to Munich, a Catholic center and not to Berlin, the seat of the Lutheran dissenters. Also in Munich were family relations with whom Elisabeth Ney could live in order that she might be properly chaperoned.

Hence, in 1852 Elisabeth Ney went to Munich under careful and well planned supervision. She immediately applied to the Academy of Arts, a private school, for entrance. Of course, the answer of the board of directors was "No." However, she stood her ground, and gently, but firmly, approached each director and won her point. The directors' final stand was made on the plea that the presence of a girl in the academy would interfere with class work. All she asked was a trial, agreeing to withdraw should such interference seem to threaten. Thereafter, Elisabeth Ney entered the School of Art--on trial. Of course she was properly chaperoned. She remained in the home of a family friend; a professor, and elderly man of the school, escorted her to and from classes each day; the Munich students conducted themselves as young gentlemen. She won her point and stayed in the school of art for the next two years.

It was feared in the Academy of Art that her beauty would corrupt the class, for she was "very tall and slender, even classic in the effect she produced with a mass of short auburn curls all over her head."<sup>6</sup> However, the young men in the classes were immune, for this young independent beauty was not interested in men. Yet, this was before she met a young student of science, Edmund Montgomery, from the University of Heidelberg. He was a tall, slender man whose hair fell in black curls on his broad shoulders. He was a Scotsman studying medicine and physiology at German universities. As an enthusiastic and ardent advocate of revolution and democracy in Germany and Scotland, Elisabet Ney saw that his opinions and manners were even more radical than her own. Through his influence the artist developed a plan of life even bolder than the already bold one she had planned for herself back in her Westphalian home town.

Marriage or love leading to marriage were the last thoughts of her scheme of life, since marriage to her meant the subjugation of women. Yet, Elisabet Ney did not mean to lose Edmund Montgomery. As a husband she said "No," but as a "best friend," she held him to the end of her life. It was ten years after their first meeting that he persuaded her to marry him, even though he was the controlling force in her destiny always. Bride Neill Taylor, Elisabet Ney's

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<sup>6</sup>Bride Neill Taylor, Elisabet Ney, Sculptor, p. 16.

friend and biographer, states:

When one re-capitulates the many resemblances which formed a bond between them, it seems inevitable that they should have been drawn together; both had the attractiveness of unusual personal beauty, brilliant minds and daring souls; behind each was the pride and power of a great family name; both were ardent idealists and both in rebellion against the limitations which the conventions of their world drew about them; both had, likewise, a truly tragic incapacity for the practical. To write the list thus, is but to say that they had no choice but to love one another.<sup>7</sup>

This love, developed in Munich was the one thing which influenced and determined the life of both. The story of each would have been a different tale should these two rebels have never met. In particular, Texas probably would have never known the personality of Elisabet Ney.

One other personage among the artist's friends in Munich left its effect upon Elisabet Ney. Cosima Liszt, the daughter of the celebrated pianist and the wife of von Bulow, her father's pupil, was the sculptress' intimate friend. Through Cosima von Bulow, who later became the wife of Wagner, the artist became familiar with the best music and musicians which Germany had to offer. Since music at that time was the chief joy of German life, Elisabet Ney was living in the acme of culture and refinement. Truly, her dream of meeting and of studying the great personalities of the world was gradually becoming a reality. But she must leave, to expand, as it were.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 12-13.

### The Berlin Transition

Elisabet Ney, however, did not leave the life which Munich offered because it was not soul satisfying. In fact, it would be hard to imagine how life anywhere could have been more pleasurable and exciting than that of the capital city of Westphalia. In addition to the usual forms of amusements found in social centers, Munich offered to the mentally alert literature, art, music, science, and democracy such as the world had never seen. So the artist did not abandon Munich because of the lack of cultural advantages, but rather because her ambition was to study the art of sculpturing under Germany's leading sculptor, Christian Rauch.<sup>8</sup>

Rauch, as court sculptor of the Prussian Kings had his studio in Berlin. Therefore, in 1854, at twenty years of age Elisabet Ney appeared in the art world of Berlin. No doubt, her beauty and charm, added to the fact that her name bore a historical significance which Berlin respected, did much to aid the sculptress to establish herself. Since Rauch was her goal, she interviewed him first. Rauch, to rid himself of a would-be sculptress, commanded that she submit to him a composition so that he might judge her capacities. She accepted, submitted, and was quickly established by her chosen teacher in an adjacent studio to his.

Through Rauch, Elisabet Ney was able to obtain all the tutoring the art critics of Berlin had to offer. Even though

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

the master sculptor disliked teaching, he devotedly spent his spare time aiding and teaching his protegee. Through him, although the opposition in Berlin was as severe as that of Munich, Elisabet Ney received a scholarship in the Berlin Academy of Art. Hence, for a formative period of six years, Elisabet Ney studied in the art circles of Berlin, being admitted freely even though her benefactor, Rauch, had died in 1857. Nevertheless, she was still proving to herself as well as to others that the road of art aided or permitted her to know the great personages of the world--the life-long ambition of this artist.

Among the personages whom Elisabet Ney met during this Berlin Period who influenced her life were Gottfried Keller and Arthur Schopenhauer. Keller, the Swiss and German poet, fell ardently in love with the sculptress. Because of his delicate nature and his aesthetic background, even Elisabet Ney, the non-conformist and the lover of freedom, was compassionately moved. However, the scientific thinking of her "best friend" overcame these amors even though Keller pressed his suit. Many critics show Elisabet Ney as the heroine of Keller's last novel, Der Grune Heinrich, so strongly did he love her.<sup>9</sup>

Arthur Schopenhauer, the German philosopher, was another of the greatest of the great persons of that day. He, like

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<sup>9</sup>Baron von Oppell, "The Strange Life Destinies of Elisabet Ney and Edmund Montgomery," Hibbert Journal, XXXVII (July, 1939) 561.

Rauch, was an old man who was nearing the end of a successful career. All wanted his company; few ever gained admittance. Elisabet Ney, against womanly odds, persuaded the writer to let the "unknown and over-bold madchen"<sup>10</sup> make his bust. During the sittings, a friendship grew. Frequently, Schopenhauer and the sculptress could be seen taking long walks together. He asked that she even stay after the bust was finished, but she left, realizing that another link in her chain of great personages had been added. Of her, in an unpublished letter, he said: "I never thought that there could be such a charming and an attractive girl. We harmonize perfectly together, and somehow as soon as she enters the room, at once I am cheerful."<sup>11</sup> From Schopenhauer Elisabet Ney completed her philosophy of life. He firmly set in her the idea of complete contempt of accepted social ideals. He finished what her best friend had begun--that of alienating her completely from the religious ideas of her childhood. All this, she abandoned, and began to construct her theory of life based on a "mixture of idealism, materialism, and radicalism."<sup>12</sup> That she did not suffer a spiritual damage was probably due to an innate purity of mind and the early influence of the ascetic ideals of her mother.

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<sup>10</sup>Taylor, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>11</sup>von Oppell, op. cit., p. 262.

<sup>12</sup>Ettie M. Doughty, "Elisabet Ney," Epic Century, VI (November, 1939), 6.



## Sursum

For Elisabet Ney the time of triumph was at hand. Rauch had died in 1857 and Schopenhauer in 1860, but through their patronage and her own vivid personality this artist was firmly established in the art world of Berlin, yea, in the art world of Europe. During the next decade Fraulien Ney advanced from girlhood to maturity--both in the physical and in the artistic sense. It seems that upon the death of Rauch his ability and his prestige descended upon this woman. It became a word of fashion to have one's bust or statue made by the sculptress. Few people since the world began have had such a complete success. Her dream "to know the great persons of the world" was a firmly established reality. From these personages, Elisabet Ney molded her works and her individual conduct. Being easily impressed, from each individual she received ideals and convictions which guided her conduct. Truly she was a part of all that she had met.

Among these people whom Elisabet Ney contacted during the 1860's were: Jacob Grimm, the writer; Alexander von Humbolt, the historian; Varnhagen von Ense, the nobelman; Cosima Liszt, the music critic; George Ebers, the German Egyptologist; Ludwig II, the "mad king" of Bavaria and the leading patron of art in his time; Prince Otto von Bismarck, the Prussian chancellor; Richard Wagner, the German musician; Justus von Liebig, the Prussian scientist; George V, the blind king of Hanover; Friedrich Kaulbach, the portrait painter of

of royalty; Wohler, the Westphalian scientist; Giuseppe Garibaldi, the liberator of Italy; von Bulow, the pupil of Liszt; Engelbert von der Mark, the curator for the museum at Munich, later to bear Elisabet Ney's name; Walter von Plettemberg, the physicist; Empress Kriedrich, mother of Kaiser William II; Joachim, the violinist; and Stockhausen, the singer.<sup>13</sup> All of these, writers, historians, musicians, researcher, nobility, scientists, painters, statesmen, influenced the artist. Add to these the patrons and the friends of these "four hundred" of Europe whom Elisabet Ney contacted, and one can readily imagine the circle in which she was a part. In fact, she literally became the fashion, not a part, simply because she alone traveled in such varied and learned groups.

Dr. Edmund Montgomery at that time too was enjoying success pursuing his scientific research on the island of Madeira. This Atlantic Ocean island, four hundred miles west of Portugal was a sort of winter health resort and playground of the aristocracy of Europe. In particular did the elite people of England and Germany go there. Since Dr. Montgomery, after studying at Bonn and Heidelberg and taking his doctor of medicine degree at Wurtzburg, had been a lecturer in physiology at St. Thomas' Hospital in London, he had attracted a patronage which was providing an excellent monetary income as well as a small portion of fame.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Texas Fine Arts Ass'n., op. cit., pp. 1-4.

<sup>14</sup>Taylor, op. cit., p. 28.

At this time Elisabeth Ney's fame reached its first snag as a result of her failure to compromise with the Bavarian government concerning some technicality in sculpturing. Not knowing what to do, she immediately joined her "best friend" at Madeira, telling him of her difficulties. He pointed out to her other difficulties which would involve both of them should they not marry and yet live in intimate companionship with each other as she desired. At these she scoffed, but nevertheless, for the first time in her life she submitted to a will stronger than her own. Baron von Oppell, a contemporary German collector of Ney-lore, comments:

Her biographer feels unable to account for Elisabeth's strange obstinacy on this point, observing quite rightly that she might have easily kept her name of Ney, as an artist, to satisfy her pride and yet have published her marriage. I cannot help thinking that her attitude is fully explained by her character. To begin with, this woman really had genius, and as a genius she would have something of a male in her, and the man of genius must have freedom. Added to this comes her combative nature--her enjoyment of fighting the prejudices of society, and her confidence in her own power to beat society and force it to admit her views contrary to its own code. Then again we have her woman's obstinacy in continuing to pursue this aim even after her intelligence must have shown her that it was unattainable. She loved her "fairy prince," but the idea of subordination which marriage implies for a woman in the eyes of the world although she knew that he would never have to enforce it, was intolerable to her. So he remained to the end her "best friend," but in the full meaning of the term. Edmund loved her, he also had something of a genius in him and consequently understood her, and therefore, agreed.<sup>15</sup>

On November 7, 1863, they were married in the office of the British consul at Funchal, Madeira. Both gave their ages

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<sup>15</sup>von Oppell, op. cit., p. 563.

as twenty-eight even though the sculptress was thirty; Edmund Montgomery was listed as a bachelor--the artist as a spinster; for rank or a profession the husband signed doctor of medicine, the wife left the space blank. Although both firmly believed they had a spiritual union far more binding than any man-made ordinance could produce, nevertheless, for conventional attitudes, this couple submitted to the galling ceremony of marriage.

The following three years were quietly, but happily, spent by Elisabet Ney and her "best friend" at Madeira. Each followed the pursuit of his choice--the woman, sculpture; the man, science. Yet each met upon a common plane which to them was Utopia--the perfect essence of freedom. The doctor built her a villa-studio combination. He, in turn, occupied his own residence. Of course society was horrified. Some believed them to be married; others knew positively the opposite. Public condemnation fell on the artist alone, but in this she was entirely satisfied, only throwing herself with more ardor into her work.

Among the pauses in their works, Elisabet Ney and Edmund Montgomery found time for extensive traveling.<sup>16</sup> Frequently they returned to London and to other parts of the British Isles for rest and relaxation. At other times they explored the antiquities of the world--Greece, Asia Minor, Egypt.

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<sup>16</sup>Elizabeth Brooks, Prominent Women of Texas, p. 77.

In 1866, while spending the summer in Tyrol and in Italy, a third party joined them. Crescentia Simath, the daughter of a book-binder at Innsbruck, became their personal house-keeper. "Cencie" was destined to serve in this capacity for the remainder of their lives. Frequent journeys through central Europe aided the pair to keep in contact with their friends and the affairs of state.

In 1867 they returned to Munich with the intentions of living there definitely. Of course their friends received them with the usual acceptance into society. Yet, there were, as usual, the gossip-mongers who desired to know the relations between the artist and the scientist. "Was she a respectable frau or a disrespectable fraulein?"<sup>17</sup> To all appearances she was the latter since she had clung to her maiden name and since even the Doctor--to humor her--referred to her as Miss Ney. He had gained considerable prestige and money by this time, so he bought Elisabet Ney a studio and a home in one of the most restricted areas of Munich. Here she received her commissions to sculpture the remaining pieces of her European work.

In 1869 Edmund Montgomery moved into his villa with Elisabet Ney, even though she still claimed and maintained that she was Fraulein Ney. Of course, since all of her friends were mystified as to the proceedings, the artist was becoming

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<sup>17</sup>Taylor, op. cit., p. 34.

a source of public scandal. Also, she was severely criticized by the patrons of Wagner. At this time, the cultured people were split into two camps concerning the king's patronage of Wagner. The scientist and his wife were in the anti-Wagnerian group purely because of a personal matter, for it seems that they should have welcomed the revolutionary music of their contemporary.<sup>18</sup> However, Cosima Liszt, the former wife of von Bulow and friend of Elisabet Ney, was now the wife of Wagner--all of which was legally done. The sculptress, a bridesmaid at Cosima Liszt's first marriage, bitterly opposed this second marriage because of spiritual consequences. Hence, this doctor and his lady became the leaders of the opposition to Wagner.

The social elite of Munich could not understand the stand Elisabet Ney took concerning her friend's marriage when in reality she appeared to be as irregular as any of the Munich set. Gossip produced tales, and tales produced scandal. Her disappointment with the Bavarian government concerning the placing of certain statues was still unsettled. Her attitude concerning the King and Wagner did not aid her state of mind either. More gossip followed. As a result she became restless with a world which seemed bent on hindering her well laid plans for democracy and freedom. She longed for a land where the individual might develop unhampered by monarchial

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

rule, or social and material restrictions. There was a Utopia, and they must find it. Naturally they turned to America--a land unhampered by prejudices, a land where Sursum (Onward, Upward) could be any free man's motto.

#### The American Phase

At this particular time, some friends of Elisabet Ney and Edmund Montgomery were founding a "brotherhood of man"<sup>19</sup> colony near Thomasville, Georgia, under the leadership of Baron Vico von Stralendorff of Mecklenburg--Schwerin, Germany. This young German nobleman had married in October, 1870, Margaret Elisabeth Russell, a young Bostonian who was interested in the cause of freedom for the Southern negro. The Montgomerys were lured to this colony through the influence of these friends who were interested in theories of social independence, intellectual freedom, and the uplift of the Southern negro.<sup>20</sup> Here they settled--after traveling from Bremen to New York by ship, thence to Tallahassee by rail, and then to Thomasville, Georgia, by water<sup>21</sup> with the hope for a great work in their respective fields.

For the time being, life in the colony was pleasant enough. Edward Russell, the father of Margaret von Stralendorff who operated a mercantile agency in Boston, wrote the following

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<sup>19</sup>Jane Y. McCallum, "The Founding of Formosa," Austin American Statesman, June 7, 1925.

<sup>20</sup>Clara Ogden Davis, "The Odd Life Story of an Odd Woman," Dallas News, November 8, 1925.

<sup>21</sup>Doughty, op. cit., p. 5.

to his sister:

Margaret writes very cheerful and amusing letters. Doctor Montgomery and Miss Ney are domiciled with them until Vicco's home at Mecklenburg Farm is enlarged and fitted for their occupation. Dr. Montgomery has bought two farms next beyond Vicco's and Miss Ney is as much interested in all the details, buying seed and (illegible), as any of them, and don't like to be left out of any business consultation though she has not the first idea of business. She wears bloomers and other outre' costumes that she calls practical.<sup>22</sup>

The Montgomerys frequently visited in Boston. The Russell's introduced them to the congenial scientific atmosphere of New England which at that time was concerned with the metaphysical questions and the transcendental ideals of Concord. Whole summers were spent in Maine; the winters were taken up in Georgia. Short excursions were made to Baltimore, then the leading center for philosophical discussions and theorizing. Through these educational conferences Edmund Montgomery met Charles A. Lane, the nearest friend he had in his American life.

However, the Baron's health failed so that the von Stralendorff's had to give up the Thomasville, Georgia, plantation which the wife's father had bought for them. They returned to his ancestral home in Germany near Weimar. There, in June, 1872, he died of tuberculosis. Since Edmund Montgomery also had a weakness in his chest, Elisabet Ney and the Doctor sought some other desirable place in America to live, for to go back to Germany would have been to admit

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<sup>22</sup>Taylor, op. cit., p. 51.



defeat--a word unknown in the vocabulary of this husband-wife combination.

Elisabet Ney and Edmund Montgomery probably had heard of Texas while they were residents in Germany, through the "League of Nobility" of Mayence. The affairs of German immigrants to Texas were handled through this association, a cooperative affair directed by the political states of twenty German princes. This German company cooperated with the Fisher-Mueller Colonization Company of Houston. Probably through this publicity Elisabet Ney left Thomasville, Georgia, and journeyed, alone, to Texas.<sup>23</sup>

By boat she went to Galveston. There she contacted the German consul, Julius Runge,<sup>24</sup> to tell him of her desires. The consul in turn referred the artist to his friend, Robert Leisewitz of Brenham. This real estate agent knew of a desirable plantation, Liendo by name, which might please the artist. Upon viewing the grounds, which reminded her of the great estates of her native land and yet retained the added zest of being close to a primitive wilderness, she said, "Here is where I shall live and die."<sup>25</sup> After asking a few questions, she paid the cost and historic Liendo Plantation was theirs.

Their coming to Texas opened an entirely new life to Elisabet Ney. In the first place, the complete break with

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<sup>23</sup>Doughty, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

her illustrious past was a reality. New interests came along to fill the gaps. Her husband naturally soon took his appointed place as a leader in Waller County. Here, he won the admiration and the respect of the local gentry. Nevertheless, he always found time to be devoted to his scientific investigations. He spent hours, even days at a time experimenting with his cell theories--always trying to discover the natural difference, if any, between the animate and the inanimate. Of course Elisabet Ney was enthusiastic concerning these procedures. "To have her best friend thus fronting alone the giants of science and breaking his lance against such awe-inspiring foes as Verchow and Huxley gave unending satisfaction to her ambitious and aggressive soul."<sup>26</sup>

Secondly, an entirely new interest consumed the artist's time. In the midst of the trials and of the sufferings during the Georgia experiment, she and Doctor Montgomery became the parents of two boys, one only sixteen months older than the other. The older child, Arthur, (named after Schopenhauer) was a year and a half old while the baby, Lorne, (named for the Marquis of Lorne) was only an infant at the time of their coming to Liendo. For one portion of her life Elisabet Ney forgot the art of sculpturing in stone. How she herself felt concerning the subjugation of her "god" for that of her children is summed up by the artist herself: "I was busy with a

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<sup>26</sup>Taylor, op. cit., p. 65.

more important art, the art of molding flesh and blood."<sup>27</sup>  
 Dr. Montgomery also enjoyed discussing this phase of their lives. Frequently he would say, "She was a wonderful mother, the most passionately devoted that could be imagined."<sup>28</sup>

In regard to these children, Arthur, the older, became ill the first summer of their stay at Liendo and died the following fall. At Liendo, the parents cremated the body. Dr. Montgomery kept the remains of ashes with him the remainder of his long life, the urn of ashes being buried with him in the same casket. The mother made a plaster cast of the dead body of the infant, wrapped and packed its clay model, and stored it in a prized trunk of hers. Years later Lorne, the remaining son, found this after the death of both parents.<sup>29</sup>

Elisabet Ney now concentrated all of her efforts on Lorne, her only child. She desired that he be endowed with all of the cultural knowledge and background of his parents, thus producing a human being with the mentality of a genius and yet being able to enjoy the smaller things of life. It is possible that this could have been accomplished but for one thing. Of course, these distinguished immigrants caused much speculation among the natives of Waller County and

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<sup>27</sup>von Oppell, op. cit., p. 270.

<sup>28</sup>O'Brien, op. cit., p. 264.

<sup>29</sup>"Elisabet Ney Studio Mecca of Art Lovers," Daily Texan, February 2, 1928.

Hempstead, Texas. It was a mystery why these two were living here. In addition, the lax methods of living combined with a broad conception of life more or less shocked the conservative Southern aristocracy who were in the throes of "complexes" anyway because of the post-Civil War days.

Lorne Montgomery, because of gossip, became estranged from his mother. As the breach widened, Edmund Montgomery took a hand in the affair. For the second--and the last--time in his life he overruled the wishes of his wife.<sup>30</sup>

Lorne was sent East to a private military school. Later, he joined Theodore Roosevelt and his calvary of "rough-riders" as they came through Texas during the Spanish American War. Because of his valiant services on the battlefield, Lorne Montgomery was given a military funeral upon his death in 1913. He is buried in Arlington, our national cemetery, in Washington, District of Columbia.

The interruption of her plans for the development of the child left Elisabet Ney alone and without any thought to occupy her mind. Liendo was ceasing to be a source of inspiration or interest since it was becoming a financial burden. The negroes were parasitic in nature, having been taught that by the experimentations in Negro freedom conducted by the owners. Cencie, with her practical common sense, managed the plantation. Doctor Montgomery took refuge

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<sup>30</sup>Taylor, op. cit., p. 68.

in his scientific treatises and experimentations. Since the artist also faced the hostile criticisms of her neighbors, she was alone in the wilderness--cut off from all objects of art on which she could expand her talents.

Of course she became restless and ill at ease. The scientist tried to sell the plantation, but there were no offers. Both having decided that the most likely location to settle was Austin, every possible effort was made to form connections which would make their living in the capital city a reality. Governor Oram M. Roberts seemed to open the way in 1879 by requesting that Elisabet Ney come to Austin to aid the governmental officials in drawing up architectural plans for the proposed new capitol building. But yet ten more years of impatient waiting passed while Elisabet Ney lived at Liendo. Finally the centennial exposition at Chicago in 1893 opened an avenue of escape into the advantageous town of Austin. She was commissioned to make statues of Stephen Fuller Austin and Sam Houston for the Texas State Building at the exposition. These works, praised by the leading critics of the day, firmly won for her in the new world the praise and adoration afforded her in the old world.<sup>31</sup>

In view of a new era in her career, Elisabet Ney and Edmund Montgomery raised sufficient funds to build a studio for the artist in the Hyde Park Addition of Austin.

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

In 1892 she moved her sculptor's tools from Liendo to her studio, Formosa--named in remembrance of those days spent on the island of Madeira. Ex-governor Roberts aided by the Woman's Columbian Exposition Committee helped Elisabet Ney to find friends in Austin. Soon the salon in Hyde Park became the mecca for men and women who desired to see Texas progress in a cultural way. These friends, through state appropriation mostly, secured sizable commissions for the artist in order to provide her with a livelihood.

Commissions came to the studio from many of the great or the "near-great" of Texas during the succeeding years.<sup>32</sup> Her motto of life--to meet and study the great of the world--still held, for truly, she did work for many of the outstanding personages of Texas. Her American works include: Colonel W. L. Prather, president of the University of Texas; Samuel Houston, Texas patriot; Stephen F. Austin, father of Texas; Albert Sidney Johnston, Civil War hero; Jacob Bixler, a leading educator; Steiner Burleson, son of Honorable Albert Sidney Burleson; Oram M. Roberts, governor of Texas; W. P. Hardeman, the rancher; John H. Reagan, the railroad commissioner; Francis R. Lubbock, governor; Joseph B. Dibrell, state senator and judge; Joseph D. Sayers, governor of Texas; Guy M. Bryan, nephew of Stephen F. Austin; Mrs. Cairrie Pease Graham, daughter of Governor Pease; Laurence Sullivan Ross, governor of Texas; Sir Swante Palm, Swedish Consul to Texas; and

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<sup>32</sup>Texas Fine Arts Ass'n., op. cit., pp. 5-6.

William Jennings Bryan, the American statesman.

Naturally, the undertakings required that she obtain the best marble with which to work. Since American quarries did not contain a grade fine enough, Elisabet Ney made three trips to Europe in quest of materials. The first of these, in 1895, took her back to Berlin and Munich, after an absence of almost twenty-five years. She took with her several busts of her Texas work to be copied in marble and to offer direct evidence to the Europeans that she had taken her place among the "great persons" of Texas. Her appearance created a sensation. Once again she was the center of public notice and honor. In fact, life was so full and so complete that she did not return to America for over a year. During this absence she sold her studio at Munich, shipped her remaining works to Austin, settled her dispute with the Bavarian government, visited her brother and the graves of her parents in Westphalia, and sculptured many new commissions. The two other trips to Europe, in 1902 and in 1903, were to Italy, not Germany, in quest of marble to finish several of her Texas commissions.

As the years passed, more and more Formosa and Elisabet Ney became the mecca for all those in Austin and the State who sought to pioneer in cultural advancement. Her eccentric dress, her irregular habits, the impromptu social affairs, her charming, yet brisk, manner all combined to produce a coveted personality.

Through all of this she never neglected Edmund Montgomery, for, to her, he still, as ever, was her "best friend." He lived and studied at Liendo; she worked at Formosa. Yet, frequent visits with each other combined with almost daily letters served to strengthen the tie which had bound them throughout life. Of course he was with the artist at her death which occurred in her studio on June 29, 1907. In speaking of her death he says:

How consoling a persuasion it must be, that those have who believe in personal immortality. I can not bring myself to have this persuasion, but I would never rob anyone of it who possesses it. Indeed it is the greatest consolation in my loneliness to know that Elisabet at her death had the happiness of this belief, which she entertained with the same conviction that she was right as she had everything she had undertook or thought during her life.<sup>53</sup>

It is true that Elisabet Ney, raised a devout Catholic, renounced the teachings of the Church at an early age. Throughout her entire life she made art her god above every other value. Yet, immediately before her death, an inner urge, one speaking with all the thoughts and experiences of a lifetime, compelled her to reaffirm her belief in the Church. To Elisabet Ney, this was merely a continuation of her accepted motto of life--Sursum--"Onward, Upward."

#### Concluding Remarks

"Onward, Upward" did form the basis upon which Elisabet Ney constructed her life. In doing so, she defied convention

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<sup>53</sup>von Oppell, op. cit., p. 573.



her entire life; feminine instincts were throttled; she disregarded religious beliefs and creeds; art was her god, a god which permitted her to enjoy her ambition of meeting and of studying the great personages of the day. These personages were indeed of world-wide scope, because of her life in Germany and in America. "However, despite her own personal triumph, the slow progress of her plans for art in Texas and the ruins of her plans for her children made life seem but a hollow mockery."<sup>34</sup> Yet her life has left its imprint. Friends and critics look back upon Elisabet Ney's work as a natural gift, trained by a master, influenced and moved by the triumphs and successes of the old world, seasoned and strengthened by the crude and tragic surroundings of a new Texas, and expressed by the hand of a woman whose ambition made her stand out as a great woman sculptor.

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<sup>34</sup>"Elisabet Ney Studio Mecca of Art Lovers," Daily Texan, February 28, 1928.

CHAPTER III

PERSONAL NARRATIVES CONCERNING THE ARTIST AS RELATED  
BY HER CONTEMPORARIES

## CHAPTER III

### PERSONAL NARRATIVES CONCERNING THE ARTIST AS RELATED BY HER CONTEMPORARIES

#### Introduction

As in the life and works of any particular human being, certain incidents, some small and some humorous in detail, concerning the happenings of Elisabet Ney stand out in the thoughts of the people who were directly or indirectly associated with the artist. By means of these, a few of the most interesting and unusual characteristics of the sculptress might be shown which in turn will aid the student of Neylore in understanding certain traits of the life of the woman. Anecdotes relating to her life in Europe are meager because of the scarcity of individuals in Texas who knew her in the old world, but, at present, stories concerning the artist and her undertakings in the Lone Star State are numerous because of the many, many people who daily lived and worked with the artist.

#### The European Period

Nothing is more illustrative of her life and of her character than the few recorded stories one finds concerning the life of the artist in Europe. The first of these, chronologically speaking, happened when she was still quite a

small girl, but even then showed her aggressiveness and independence of nature which so characterized every event of her coming career. Unlike the other girls of her time, Elisabet Ney wore her clothes fashioned after those of her father which, in turn, were unlike anything worn by other men of that day. She and her father were walking together one day when another small girl in passing them looked at the unusual pair and offended them by laughing aloud at the unusual combinations. Elisabet Ney quickly turned and caught up with the stranger. She stood in front of her so as to prevent her passing and for a brief, but effective, moment modeled her costume for the child. "Now laugh if you wish to," Elisabet Ney said, fixing her with a stern eye. But the little girl did not 'wish to'. She was scared into solemnity."<sup>1</sup>

The second story concerning the personal incidents in the artist's life did not appear until the sculptress had attended the Berlin Art Academy and had received the sculptural blessings of Christian Rauch. Her first great accomplishment was in modeling the bust of Schopenhauer, the renowned cynic and woman hater. Only after gentle but forceful persuasion was the sculptress able to model the philosopher, and then the work began under strained relationships. However, the work from day to day proceeded with less difficulty until both persons finally felt at ease while working together.

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<sup>1</sup>Bride Neill Taylor, Elisabet Ney--Sculptor, p. 6.

One day the artist was completely absorbed in her work but slightly glanced up in time to see Schopenhauer studying her with a puzzling smile. Upon her questioning him concerning the intense look, he replied that if at all possible, he was trying to discover a trace of a small moustache on the face of the sculptress, for it became more evident and impossible for him from day to day to believe that she was a woman so masculine was her work and ideas.<sup>2</sup>

Her individuality of character is further emphasized by her dispute with the Bavarian government concerning the placement of certain of her statuary for a public exhibition during her feud with the Wagner advocates. One of the aids of the King, puzzled concerning her actions, insisted to her that she was a sphinx and not a woman. Very soon after this conversation, the artist presented this great man with a statue-- a statue of her own bust but attached to the body of a lion which had been sculptured by a friend who made statuary of animals. Today, the bust is among her collected works in the Elisabet Ney Museum in Austin. Then, it was the only reply she made to her friends who could not understand the enigma.<sup>3</sup>

The one remaining story of her European period showing her to be quick in repartee concerned the artist and her

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>3</sup>Alice Twichell, "Art Museum Reminds of Elisabet Ney's Work," Daily Texan, January 19, 1932.

relationship to King Ludwig II, the patron king of art during the nineteenth century. His permission to allow Elisabet Ney to make his statue marked the acme of the success of the artist. As usual, the sculptress did little at first toward actual work except to personally study the King as he went about the palace. Upon the first sitting she quietly but efficiently scrutinized the King, studying her royal subject to appraise every line and feature which should be emphasized. The King became displeased and ill at ease under this close inspection and commanded the artist to begin her work. "I will begin, your Majesty, when I am ready," was the sole reply of the artist.<sup>4</sup>

Hence, throughout her European career, one can depict evidences of outstanding individuality, individuality which triumphed over all difficulties and obstacles and carried her successfully through many close episodes. It is but natural that her personal will could not be broken, neither in her bitter trials and turbulent days in Texas where due to its proximity so many personal narratives are numerous.

#### The American Phase

Among these, is one which showed her personal regard and high estimation which she held for her husband, Doctor Montgomery. Although the world at large will probably never understand the personal relationship and the intimate

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<sup>4</sup>Taylor, op. cit., p. 38.

understanding these two had, it can at least appreciate the fact that these two never ended nor began a year without the company of each other to strengthen and to guide them through the coming year. If the Doctor were on one of his numerous writing trips in Mexico or Colorado, or if he were alone at Liendo, he and Miss Ney always spent New Year's eve together. Sometimes she journeyed down to Liendo; more often he went to Formosa in Austin. But nevertheless, December the thirty-first and January the first always found them together. During these days they, and they alone, reconstructed their lives through mutual understandings and agreements and formed a pattern of life which, in turn, strengthened each--even if for the most part of the next year they would be separated.<sup>5</sup>

However, Elisabet Ney, in this separation, was not alone, for Austin offered to the artist many outlets which the plantation at Hempstead did not give to the hermit philosopher. Many people remember the polite, but genuine, social visits the artist made to her set of friends in and around the capitol city. One, in particular, showed the extreme affection Miss Ney had for children even though to many the cold classic features of her physique and thought hid this from view. One afternoon a group of children were playing in the yard of a home in Austin when they saw Elisabet Ney approaching. One little fellow immediately ran to the artist calling, "Tante

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<sup>5</sup> Statement by Laura B. Harris, personal interview.

Ney, Tante Ney (Auntie Ney, Auntie Ney).<sup>6</sup> She almost smothered him in her embrace as she swept the child from his feet and triumphantly carried the small babe with her into the house. Her motherly instinct, the womanly love for children, the desire to love and to be loved, vividly could be seen in the facial features of the artist by the casual observer who by accident perchanced to view the incident.<sup>6</sup>

Even as the sculptress visited intimate friends in their homes, so did these friends, political leaders, and visitors of note receive the hospitality of the Ney household at Formosa. Evenings spent behind her house in the garden by the artificial lake were delightfully refreshing to all comers so invitations were eagerly sought. After most of the educational tete-a-tetes came the refreshments, consisting usually of clabber milk. She never paused to consider whether her friends enjoyed the type of food she relished. Fresh bread she abhorred, so she sliced it the day before it was to be eaten, strung it with a slender thread, and hung it in the wind to dry thoroughly before assimilation. Mostly a vegetarian, her diet consisted of raw vegetables. Lettuce, raw carrots, nuts, milk, and eggs were her favorite foods. The story is told that friends, as on numerous occasions, came to the social rescue of Miss Ney on one particular occasion by providing "punch and cookie" refreshments after the

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<sup>6</sup>Statement by Mrs. J. R. Swenson, personal interview.



sculptress had invited the legislature to a tea in her garden at which there was much talking and congeniality but no tea.<sup>7</sup>

However, at one of these teas (and Miss Ney had prepared a drink!) the artist and a guest almost came to a tragic ending. Miss Ney was honoring the social set and debutantes of Austin. Colonel M. M. Shipe, an Austin merchant, invited his hostess to take an automobile ride in his car, named the "Steamer." The story is that:

Miss Ney and he went riding, that is started riding after many stalls and the breakage of Miss Ney's cut glass tumblers and bowl which was on a table in the yard. The car started and the driver could not stop the same. As a result, the car tore the table into splinters.

The car looked as if it would burn, and at the bottom of a hill Colonel Shipe yelled, "Get out, Miss Ney, and run like hell!" Miss Ney calmly replied, "Why Mr. Shipe, are not we going to ride anymore!"

Mr. Shipe became almost incoherent with fear and anxiety.

He knew that it would soon be too late.

"No, damn it, and if you don't get out quick, we'll both be blown to bits!"

Miss Ney jumped; we both ran.

Later a cautious examination revealed that all 136 boiler tubes had burned out.<sup>8</sup>

Yet, not all of the rides of the artist turned out as disastrously as this particular one, chiefly because Miss Ney did not possess an automobile. Residents of Austin remember her as the driver of a two wheel gig upon which was a large saffron-colored umbrella. She drove to it a spirited blood-bay stallion named Pasha. The scene of the two reckless

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<sup>7</sup>Statement by Mrs. J. W. Rutland, personal interview.

<sup>8</sup>"They Still Do," Austin American Statesman, March 26, 1939.

spirits, the woman and the Arabian horse, striving for supremacy, and yet each cooperating with the other, will long be remembered by the old time residents, for to control the animal the artist had to firmly grasp a rein in each hand.<sup>9</sup> When this steed died she had its skin cured and thrown over a low box on a landing leading to the tower room. Here she slept during the summer months until her death. In the winter she slept on a small balcony, eight by ten feet, on a small rope hammock in the large studio.

The studio named Formosa was the pride and joy of Elisabet Ney, partly because it symbolized her days of sursum at Madeira and partly because it spelled for her freedom and life in the new world. One evening after the right wing of the studio had been completed which, in turn, finished the architectural plans, the sculptress decided to have a small dedication ceremony for her studio. Her guests for the occasion were the Bicklers, a family long associated with educational enterprises of the capital. For the ceremony she requested that Camellia Bickler sing. This young maiden chose for her song and an aria from "The Barber of Seville," a favorite song of the sculptress. She sang from the tower room to her audience which had assembled in the garden in front of the house. This completed the dedication, a dedication, though simple in detail, which came from the heart to be remembered forever by those present.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Statement by Mrs. J. R. Swenson, personal interview.

<sup>10</sup>statement by Mrs. E. von Brieson, personal interview.

Within this studio Miss Ney created most of her Texas works, always studying her anatomy charts and living models to truly portray the likeness. For example, the artist by request consented to make the Scherr grave monument at Fredericksburg, but she desired a living model in order to portray certain angel faces appearing on the marker. For that purpose, she took Steiner Burleson, the infant son of Honorable Albert Sidney Burleson, to her studio and stripped him of his clothes. She allowed him to play about in the huge room and to amuse himself by emptying a huge basket of waste paper piece by piece in the burning fireplace, for it was a cold, raw, wintery day. All the while, Miss Ney quietly sat in a corner observing all of the details she needed to complete the projected monument.<sup>11</sup>

Another example which showed the thorough workmanship of Elisabet Ney may be cited from the Albert Sidney Johnston sarcophagus. In order to accurately portray the dead general, the artist obtained from the widow of the commander the sleeves of a coat worn by her husband. Upon their arrival at Austin, Albert Sidney Burleson let Miss Ney model his arms and hands for the memorial while wearing the actual sleeves of the general. Hence, the hands one views at the memorial are in reality, those of another great Texas hero who was a personal friend and admirer of the artist, Elisabet Ney.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Statement by Miss Emma Burleson, personal interview.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

During the last illness of the artist which was contracted in Italy as a result of breathing too much marble dust, Doctor Montgomery came up from Liendo and stayed with her until her death. Miss Emma Burleson, a devoted friend, waited on the artist during her last illness. The following is an incident that she related:

A tender, companionable expression of their devotion is shown by the taking of medicine which she detested. He would say, "Elisabet," as Miss Burleson stood with medicine in hand. Elisabet would make a face at the spoon and shake her head. Then, "Elisabet, Miss Burleson is waiting for you to take your medicine!" Still the frown and headshake. Then in a stern voice as though speaking to a badly spoiled child, "Elisabet Ney!" and she always took the medicine then.<sup>13</sup>

However, Doctor Montgomery was alone with her when she died. As it was her wish to be buried in Liendo, he returned, alone, by train with the funeral cortege, arriving at Hempstead during the night. There the Doctor paid several negroes, negroes whom Miss Ney had previously befriended, to carry the body to Liendo and to prepare the ground for burial rites. Doctor Montgomery placed the coffin under some trees in the yard at Liendo--trees which they had planted together. Witnesses of the burial were the Doctor, the several darkies, and a lone friend of the two. Rites were completed in the gathering lightness of a new morning for the world, but for Elisabet Ney, it was Sursum.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Statement by Emma Burleson, personal interview. Found also in "Elisabet Ney Famous Texas Sculptor," Southern Messenger, October 15, 1936.

<sup>14</sup>Statement by Mrs. Laura B. Harris, personal interview.

### Concluding Remarks

The foregoing stories, the majority of which are unpublished material, help to portray to the followers of Elisabet Ney certain of her human traits and characteristics which otherwise would not be recorded for posterity. They show Miss Ney to possess a brilliant mind, as an almost unfathomed genius. In addition, she had an invaluable sense of humor, always being quick in repartee. Her life motto of "Sursum" made of her an untiring workman, a laborer who never retired until death withdrew her from all physical labor.

CHAPTER IV

ELISABET NEY'S EXPRESSIONS OF ART--

A RESULT OF HER ENVIRONMENT

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### ELISABET NEY'S EXPRESSIONS OF ART-- A RESULT OF HER ENVIRONMENT

#### Introduction

Lorado Taft, a leading art critic of the American school, has always stood for the practicability of art. In particular, he desires that the field of sculpturing be sane and practical, so that one might be able to create life from the marble slab with which he is working. In his numerous lectures throughout the country, he has stressed time and time again: "If we could but create true simplicity, and kill false simplifications,"<sup>1</sup> the American School of Art would become established and would be treated with respect by the other various schools in our time. Furthermore, he fully admits that to have artistic development, one must have background upon which to build. America, culturally speaking, is young. Its infant and immature works does not give a vivid conception for creative youths who desire to enter the "modeling and molding" field. America might be well groomed in mechanics, but mechanics without meaning and interpretation does not give a forceful creation. As a result, all of our young sculptors of the present time are desirous of at least one thing--to have the

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<sup>1</sup>Lorado Taft, The History of American Sculpture, p. 599.

opportunity of studying in an older country, preferably Italy, in order to absorb some of the rich, traditional masterpieces of the preceding generations. If that be accomplished, the young artisan then desires the proper tools and equipment of a successful sculptor. There truly is no fine marble in the United States, sculpturally speaking. Again, it is to Italy that the apprentice turns, since the richest and finest marble quarries of the world are located there. Also, to be a successful sculptor, one cannot lead a life of isolation and contempt for the world. He has to experience the thrills and the pulsations of the artistic subject in order properly to interpret these in stone. No substitution by vicarious experiences can be of value, because technique is never sustained without constant reference to the best. Again, due to his American heritage, the young artist, to be successful, must travel abroad. Hence, it will only be after decades of time that America, like these older centers, will be able to look to its past for strength, for guidance, and for further development.

In regard to these latter influences, Elisabet Ney was scores of years ahead of her American contemporaries.<sup>2</sup> The expressions of the masters of the ages were at her fingertips, as it were. Artistic creation and evaluation were characteristic traits of a large percentage of the people.

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<sup>2</sup>"Elisabet Ney--Art Missionary," Austin Statesman, July 25, 1928.



Each large metropolis had its art institute and academy of fine arts directed by some local, but professional, artist. Most cities had their cathedrals and universities where one naturally and inherently absorbed the cultural atmosphere of the past generations. Vicinal neighbors to her fatherland included Italy, Greece, and Egypt where most of the remains of classical antiquity were housed. Tools and equipment were prevalent, being cut by leading journeymen and licensed masters of the day. Native stones were the finest to be found. Companionship with other struggling apprentices easily could be obtained. As a result, these background influences aided Elisabet Ney in overcoming many difficulties. This was especially true during her later American phase because this rich cultural heritage afforded her a cultural expression far in advance of that of her other contemporaries.

#### The Westphalian Period

These particular influences upon Elisabet Ney were a direct result of the early life and formative period of the young artist. Westphalia had a particularly rich heritage for its background. Its topographical location, its peoples, its immediate hinterland all tended to place a refined inheritance at the disposal of anyone within its borders who would grasp the opportunity. Elisabet Ney responded to these stimuli, the result of her modeling being some of the most quaint, if not the most remarkable works of her career.

Included among those of this period is a model of a dog,

presumably a devoted pet of the sculptress during her early life in Munster. Even though the subject was composed before the artist had received any tutorship whatsoever, it makes the followers of the life and works of the artist wish she had attempted more of the animal figures because of its life-like, though simple and plain, qualities.<sup>3</sup> This composition resulted from the child seeing her father mold some group statuary for a church mission. Hence, even the first imprints of the artist came as an outgrowth of her living habits and environment.

Catholicism along with Elisabet Ney's idea of meeting the truly great of the world furnished the impetus for her first group of works modeled during this era. These included: "The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian;" "Saint Sebastian Glorified in Heaven;" "Head of Christ;" and the "Madonna."<sup>4</sup> From these one concludes that the patron saint of the artist was Sebastian, the saintly protector against strife and pestilence. Of course, he was the favored saint of a family whose forebears wandered in exile throughout the European continent. During the early Munster period of her entire Westphalian phase it was only natural for her to conceive the busts of the "Virgin Mary" and of "Jesus Christ," for here again these were truly the only great people she had met and had absorbed portions of

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<sup>3</sup>J. W. Battle, "Elisabet Ney Gave First Great Impulse to Art in Texas," The Dallas Morning News, June 26, 1938.

<sup>4</sup>"Elisabet Ney--Famous Texas Sculptor," Southern Messenger, October 15, 1936.

their personalities. These meetings, though not in a physical sense, were a result of a deep religious faith and experience--felt only by her within this epoch. In regard to form, no impressionistic element ever entered into her sculpturing at all. Rather, the strict orthodox teachings of a frugal and rigid German Catholic family firmly implanted into the mind of the beginner the idea of rigidity and exactness of form--always picturing ideals as people saw them.

Of her apprenticeship days in Munich, one learns very little concerning the actual work of the un-tutored, yet the willing hands of the sculptress. It is a known fact that at this time she was an inseparable friend of Cosima Liszt. Among her early works is the bust of Saint Cecilia, the Roman virgin of the first century and the patron saint of music. Although some attribute this work to Donatello, the Viennese sculptor of the fourteenth century whose patrons were the Medici family, many art connoisseurs believe that this particular "Saint Cecilia" was composed by Elisabet Ney during her Munich days at the Academy of Arts.<sup>5</sup> Possibly it is an expression denoting the appreciation of the friendship of Cosima Liszt who opened to the artist the avenues of approach to musical appreciation and interpretation.

Hence, in these first works--as in all--of Elisabet Ney one can readily detect their relationship to her immediate

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<sup>5</sup>Texas Fine Arts Association, Elisabet Ney Museum, p. 5.

surroundings and environmental attitudes. All are correct in form; none are influenced by impressionistic ideas; their propriety of attitude and their power of truth and of expression aided the artist in these aemobic attempts to sometimes reach even the pathetic as well as the sublime. "These represent not only the ideals of her childhood, but her gratitude to the art-loving, broad-minded bishop to whom, first of all, she owed it that she had escaped into the world."<sup>6</sup>

#### The Berlin Transition

So far, however, all of the compositions of Elisabet Ney's "great personages" had been in the abstract form. They had resulted from her basic conceptions and ideals rather than from actual contact with living human beings. During the Berlin transitory stage under the tutelage of Rauch, the artist became more and more desirous to limit her ambition of meeting the truly great of the world to living contemporaries. By studying these great of her time she hoped to find in them a part of her personality which would in turn aid her in depicting a true image in marble. Sculpturing to her was a medium of expression whereby she could be near those whom she felt could be of benefit to her. In scanning the continent, the sculptress found at least three men whom she desired to know--Schopenhauer, the German philosopher; Garibaldi, the Italian liberator; and Bismarck, the

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<sup>6</sup>Bride Neill Taylor, Elisabet Ney--Sculptor, p. 24.

Prussian military statesman. In turn, during this transitory period, these three men directly molded the political ideas and the social ideals of the sculptress from immature thoughts to those of a matured person.

The first of these, Schopenhauer, was one of the greatest of the great personages of that day. Of course he did not desire a bust made of himself, much less composed by a woman. Nevertheless, he modeled for the sculptress a bust whose "fine lips and intelligent forehead are eloquent of the powerful, sure stroke with which they were created."<sup>7</sup> During the many sittings there developed a friendship--as Elisabet Ney desired--which made a difference in the lives of both. She opened to him a new insight in regard to woman. He firmly set in her the contempt and utter disregard for accepted social ideals. Definitely she turned from the religious ideals which had so strongly influenced her in the past and began to construct for herself a new theory of life. This theory was based on the pessimism and the contempt by Schopenhauer of the accepted ideals which she so vividly and so characteristically showed in the bust of this master.

From the second, Garibaldi, Elisabet Ney received, or rather strengthened, her ideas concerning freedom. For her wedding trip the artist chose Italy because of its artistic temperament and its rich heritage of the refined values of

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<sup>7</sup>Elizabeth Eldridge, "Sursum," Virginia Quarterly Review, IV, (October, 1928), 556.

the ages. At that time Garibaldi was beginning his campaigns of freedom and unity of the Italians. He heard of the Fraulein Ney who was visiting in Rome to study the wealth of the ancient and Renaissance sculpture about her. Upon his invitation, she visited the liberator in his home of Caprea long enough to make a bust of the revolutionist. There, she further clarified her ideals as she molded into marble the thoughts of one whose very image spoke of freedom.<sup>8</sup>

From the third, Elisabet Ney received, during this metamorphic stage, tenets for success. None other than Bismarck, the iron chancellor and Prussian military genius, could be more appropriate to give these to her. Upon the command of William II, the Prussian King, Bismarck consented to sit for the sculptress. As a result, only Elisabet Ney has put the features of Bismarck in stone, the other statuary of him being replicas of the original.<sup>9</sup> However, it is said that during the frequent sittings the man of blood and iron freely talked of politics with the designer, a custom which he never followed with anyone else. The firm lines, the square features, the frank openness of the composition, all reveal that quality of success and tenaciousness which was a part of her own personality.<sup>10</sup> Each in turn was strengthened by

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<sup>8</sup>Baron von Oppell, "The Strange Life Destinies of Elisabet Ney and Edmund Montgomery," *Hibbert Journal*, XXXVII (July, 1939), 565.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 565.

<sup>10</sup>Eldridge, *op. cit.*, p. 555.

the contact, for each saw in the other inherent qualities which each needed for a more rounded personality.

Therefore, one sees that the Berlin transitory period tended to bring Elisabeth Ney more on to a worldly level or phase. Previously, she had been dealing with abstract values of a spiritual world. During this phase she continued her conquest of knowing intimately the outstanding men of her time, but now she turned to human beings. Her cultural training and educational background was completed. She now sought the contemporaries of her age--those like her, who held certain views as truths concerning their personal make-up. In studying with them she was able to see in their personalities her similarities and extremes. This avenue of approach was made possible through the medium of sculpture--the portrayal in stone of the thoughts and desires of man.

#### Sursum

That she was successful in the field of sculpturing during the next decade and a half may be proven by a list of works she executed during this triumphant period. By this time, Rauch and Schopenhauer had died, but the power and influence of their patronage combined with the ambition and desires of the artist had firmly established Miss Ney within the art world of Europe. The art mantle of Rauch seemed to descend upon her, for it became the vogue to have

a work executed by the favorite pupil of the founder of the Berlin School of Sculpture.<sup>11</sup> Her childhood dream and that of a young maiden was more than realized. However much these illustrious friends directed the activities for a successful career, they even more so determined the influences which fixed in her a philosophy of life, for Elisabeth Ney was still volatile enough to receive from each friend she studied some ideal which strengthened or weakened certain of her convictions. "Placing the names of her friends beside the names of the subjects of her works, we could trace the history of the powers which shaped her."<sup>12</sup>

Among these, one discovers two busts, those of John Adam Ney and Elisabeth Wernze Ney. Although estranged from her parents when she entered the Berlin Academy of Art, Elisabeth Ney, more than anyone else, realized the debt she owed to her father and mother for the rich heritage they bestowed upon her. In gratitude, it is pleasing to note that she remembered these two as "great" and that she included them among her gallery of personages. Other persons among her close friends and relatives whom she studied to sculpture were Rauch, her teacher and finisher; Edmund Montgomery, her husband and co-worker in advocating certain ideals; and a bust of herself, representing the artist at the height of her popularity when she was in her early

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<sup>11</sup>Taylor, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 23.



thirties.<sup>13</sup> This latter she kept with her throughout her life. At present, it is on a dressing table in her bedroom at Liendo, near Hempstead, Texas.

Since religious and political freedom seemed to be her ideal, Elisabeth Ney next directed her efforts toward meeting the leaders who might in some way introduce these thoughts to the German peoples. Among the kings whom she contacted was George V, King of Hanover. Shortly before the royal family went into exile because of the absorption of Hanover by Prussia, Elisabeth Ney spent several weeks at the royal palace making a portrait of the blind king. While there, the court artist, Kaulbach, ardently fell in love with her. He painted the picture of the woman which critics cite as one of the best examples of his work. This portrait now hangs in the Art Museum at Hanover. It shows a sort of cold classicism of which the artist was quite proud, even though the Doctor pronounced it as unsatisfactory.<sup>14</sup>

The other kingly commission Elisabeth Ney executed was that of Ludwig II of Bavaria. This marked the acme of the success of the artist, since this "mad king" not only was a political monarch but also the greatest patron of art at that time. His gathering madness made him desire that every portion of the composition of the artist portray that "I am the King."

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<sup>13</sup>Texas Fine Arts Ass'n., op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>14</sup>Taylor, op. cit., p. 26.

His haughty and reserved air began to melt away from day to day as he saw the portrayal emerging. With that, the artist could meet his personality with her own, thus being able to picture the king actually as he was. The statue at present is in the garden of the palace of the King at Schloss-Linderhoff, not far from Munich. Baron von Oppell, a German art critic and collector of Ney-lore, expresses his opinion of the statue as follows:

I walked out the back entrance of the castle, facing toward the east, into the open. There, in the shade midway up a grassy slope of fresh green surrounded by trees, standing on a high basement, a white marble statue arrested my attention. As I approached, I saw that it represented a young man, evidently the king, in what looked to be some medieval Spanish Order, his right hand lightly placed on his hip supporting a cloak loosely thrown over his shoulders, while his left was hanging beside his sword. His head, covered with curls, was thrown backward, and as I looked at his face, I saw in it--in the way the eyes were set and in the shape of the mouth--madness approaching, as I have never seen in a face before. The ordinary man may become a raving lunatic, homicidal, or whatnot. But it needs at least the possibility of a genius for the madness I saw in that face--the capability of feeling, be it but for moments, the beautiful story underlying this world of ours. And above all it needs real genius to understand such madness so as to be able to represent it. Wondering who was the artist, I looked at the base of the statue and saw engraved ELISABET NEY FECIT 1870.<sup>15</sup>

Many critics have thought that this statue lacks the technical skill of some of the other works of the artist. It could have been the strained circumstances under which the work was completed which produced this. However, most agree that the composition is rich in imagination and in poetic insight.

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<sup>15</sup>von Oppell, op. cit., p. 557.

This tends to make the work of one of the most interesting of those that the sculptress composed.

That she went off at a tangent in her study of science and the physical phenomena of the world is an established fact because of the human busts she made during this period. Included among these were: Paula Joachin, the wife of the violinist and the sister of George Ebers, the German Egyptologist; Wohler, the Westphalian scientist; Walter von Plettenberg, the physicist; Justus von Liebig, the Prussian scientist; Jacob Grimm, the writer; Alexander von Humboldt, the historian; and Engelbert von der Mark, the curator for the museum at Munich. Concerning these, Lorado Taft, the American art critic and historian states that "to say that her sculpture is great, or even uniformly good, would be to use little discrimination." However, he further writes that "her portrait busts from life of Bismarck, Liebig, Humboldt, Kaulbauch, Garibaldi, and many other notables were highly esteemed in Munich."<sup>16</sup>

During this time she was still mindful of her native Westphalia. Her successful career had, in part, justified the art loving bishop who made it possible for her to study. In part, her career also had consoled her mother and father even if they suspected what the outside world had done to the faith of their daughter. Hence, she returned at this time to her native city, upon the request of the Munster officials,

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<sup>16</sup>Taft, op. cit., p. 213.

to compose a number of statues and busts of local heroes as ornaments for the new town hall. For two years she was accepted as a prophet--honored artist in her native haunts. By working steadily and faithfully all of the while she successfully completed her appointed tasks. Apparently, by her success, she had proven her cause.

Munich, not to be outdone by its neighbor, Munster, then engaged Elisabet Ney in a similar project, though on a much greater scale. Ludwig, the King, planned a building which was to be the most noted example of architecture in the entire country. The building was to house the Polytechnic Institute which was to contain the busts of the notables of Germany. The sculptress received the commission to execute the busts of the leading chemists, Liebig and Wohler. These were located upon their completion at either side of the entrance to the chemistry department. Concerning them, Hermann Huefer, the director of the Polytechnic Institute School of Art, commented that they were the outstanding examples of art for that decade.<sup>17</sup>

Elisabet Ney headed one other large scale art exhibit during her European epoch. The German officials commissioned her to be responsible for the Teutonic division of applied arts at the Paris Exhibition of 1867. Her individual contributions included the busts of Garibaldi and Bismarck which faced each other at the entrance to the German building.

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<sup>17</sup> von Oppell, op. cit., p. 556.

In the background with his philosophical attitude was her bust of Schopenhauer. Because of the sharp criticism she received for displaying the "heads" of two rival nations together in such a fashion, the artist never attempted any public exhibition again. To understand and to apply herself was the goal of her life--to cater to the whimsical demands of a fickle public was beyond reason, as far as the artist was concerned.

One other type of sculpture--that of the abstract--appealed to the artistic impulse of Miss Ney. Doubtless, this was due to the quizzical and philosophical attitude she received from her husband. One group included the "Genie of Sleep and Death" which was exhibited, though unfavored, at the Paris Exposition.<sup>18</sup> The advanced thinking of the artist, her disregard for public favor, her breakage with the past, and her assumption that sleep and death were one naturally caused bourgeois disapproval.

The most noted of this abstract creation and probably one of the best known of her works was entitled "Sursum," meaning onward, upward. In it Elisabet Ney pictured her philosophy of life, a philosophy in force during the height of her career. The artist sculptured this work during her stay at Madeira immediately after her marriage to the Doctor. The nude group included a boy and a girl, arm in arm. Both

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 556.

are looking upward expectantly, moving toward a height. Yet, one can detect that the boy is leaning slightly upon the girl for support. The lass even seems to be pointing the way--ever upward, ever onward. "This work is chastely pure with the coldness of her medium and yet with the restraint of a finished artist."<sup>19</sup> Little did the artist realize that sursum was gradually pushing, expanding her into an entirely different environmental atmosphere.

#### The American Phase

What this new environment of America held, Elisabet Ney did not know. She did realize that whatever the turn of events might be, she, as an artist, should receive as much personal gain as possible. However, from a sculpturing viewpoint, the creative genius of the artist lay dormant during the first decade and a half of her so-journ here. Valvera Moore describes it thus:

During these years, Miss Ney was in a measure subdued by the strange and gruelling atmosphere of the new land. Texas pioneering was not an artistic creation; neither was it a fairy place chipped from marble. It was a rough unchiseled country where to live was hardship, to work involved sacrifices, and to dream was denial. Those few settlers who were scattered about the vicinity were of the stock of conservative Southerners and looked upon Miss Ney and her emancipated ideas with disapproval. 21

Even though apparently subdued, Elisabet Ney's Goethean

<sup>19</sup>Eldridge, op. cit., p. 559.

<sup>20</sup>Valvera Moore, "Elisabet Ney," Texas Monthly, III (April, 1929), 528.

gospel of salvation through ceaseless striving kept her pushing ever upward, ever onward. Of course this first part of the Texas period involved the struggle with herself, not that of artistic creation. This husband-wife combination had come to the new world instilled with the ideas of personal freedom and international democracy. Philosophically, these whims were solid and of good value, but physically or in reality, these ideas were impractical as well as impossible in the rough country of Texas. So Elisabet Ney went through a period of personal adjustment, an adjustment to a new habitat and to new interests, but always with the eccentric individuality so characteristic of her. In the following, Ettie M. Doughty gives a personal description of the artist at this particular time:

When Elisabet Ney first came to Texas she was an imposing looking woman, above average height, with pleasing features and voice, dark blue eyes, and darkening, reddish-brown hair which she wore bobbed and in curls. She dressed for work in a blouse and a short black velvet divided skirt or bloomers, with leggings, German peasant style, while for social dress she adopted long, loose-fitting robes.<sup>21</sup>

From this one is able to obtain a personal view of the artist; however, it is doubtful if one will ever be able to know her true thoughts and ideals during this epoch.

Yet, one can surmise that the artist did become restless. The disintegration of Miendo, the practicability of "Cencie," the break with her son, the writings of the Doctor, all began

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<sup>21</sup>Ettie M. Doughty, "Elisabet Ney--The Enigma of the Nineteenth Century," Epic-Century, VI (November, 1929), 5.

to show the sculptress that she did not logically fit into this scheme of life. Her ambition to meet the great of the world through the medium of sculpturing had been temporarily thwarted. Always desirous of realizing her wants, she determined again to pioneer by sculpturing, this time in the capital city of a strange new land which had no art heritage whatsoever to build upon.

Elisabet Ney permanently went to live in her studio at Austin, Texas, in 1892, never returning to Liendo save only for short visits at frequent intervals. This studio, Formosa, was a one and a half story stone structure whose native shrubs and pastoral qualities created an ideal environment in which the artist could work. Fortunately a commission, though only a commission in name, soon opened to the artist a way for her actually to create and mold works of sculpture in Texas.

At this time, in 1893, Chicago was celebrating a centennial exposition which required each of the several states to be represented. Mrs. Benedette B. Tobin headed the Texas commission of women whose duty was to help raise funds for the Texas Building at the Chicago Exposition. Former Governor Roberts, whose plantation was adjacent to that of Liendo, introduced the chairman of the Texas commission to Miss Ney. This resulted in the artist receiving a contract to make statues of Sam Houston and Stephen F. Austin for the Texas Building at the Chicago Exposition.<sup>22</sup> Of course there were

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<sup>22</sup>Taylor, op. cit., p. 76.



financial difficulties, since the commission was as poor as the artist, but, nevertheless, Miss Ney saw opening to her at last the goal for which she had been longing with such piteous intensity during that long, long decade of unhappiness at Liendo.

It is probable that no other event in the life of the artist ever gave her more genuine joy than this particular commission for which she cheerfully donated her work. It was a small opportunity, because, unlike the triumphs of her girlhood, this opening came only after bitter trials--when life seemed to be unendurable. Life, for her, began all over again. She entered into her work with a will which overcame the many hindrances and difficulties that resulted from the crude methods under which she labored. When the Chicago Exposition opened, the statue of Houston was ready, but not the one of Austin.

With intense gratitude and pride, the Texas commission set up the work in a conspicuous place in the Texas Building. The art committee of the fair critically examined the work, enjoyed its depth, and offered to place it in the museum of fine arts at the grounds in order that more people might view the piece of sculpture. However, the Texas commission would not part with the work, particularly since more and more visitors continued to praise the work. All were desirous to know more about the unknown sculptress who lived in Texas. Thus, in Chicago, the Texas people learned that a well-

equipped sculptor had been with them for almost a generation.<sup>23</sup> Concerning these statues, for she soon finished that of Austin, Lorado Taft says that "her standing figures of men are as un-masculine as such interpretations by women always have been, but whatever their deficiencies, the results never fail to be sculpture."<sup>24</sup>

No longer was Miss Ney subdued by the strange democratic atmosphere of the new land. She quickly became the center of a group of friends who desired that Texas expand culturally. These friends knew that they must aid the artist--to produce acceptable works. However, the artist herself knew that she required these personages before she could work. Her desire to meet and to know intimately the great of the world still was as great as ever. Sculpturing, to her, was the medium of obtaining this obsession.

According to her idea, the greatest personages of any group politic was the leading and directing officials. Hence, she determined first to make the portraits of the highest officials of the state in order to obtain documentary evidence that she had assumed her natural place among the leading citizens. In particular did she sculpture several busts of the governors, including those of Roberts, Lubbock, Ross, and Sayers. Of these, that of Governor Sayers seems to be

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>24</sup>Taft, op. cit., p. 214.

the most finished and the best liked. Other dignitaries who sat for a bust by the artist include W. P. Hardeman, the rancher and financier; John H. Reagan, the state senator; Mrs. Carrie Pease Graham, daughter of the governor; and William Jennings Bryan, the American statesman. Most of these busts were treated in the old fashioned way which gave each reproduction bare shoulders and chests. Lorado Taft states that "even thus, with their eyes left blank, they are strangely alive."<sup>25</sup> He further adds that "the details of the features are epitomized with great discrimination and with an easy mastery of form which is unknown to the majority of our sculptors."<sup>26</sup>

During this period one also traces that the artist was vitally interested in establishing a school of fine arts at the University of Texas. Time and time again in letters and in personal addresses she petitioned the legislature to found an art school.<sup>27</sup> She even offered her services free of charge should the plan become a reality. In this, she assumed the position taken by the most advanced teachers of the day; namely,

That the progress made in the world's activities and in the improved methods required in pursuing demand for trained labor, and, consequently, of throwing out of employment such numbers of untrained hands as to disturb the equispose of social industries and bring distress upon large classes of worthy and willing people; that in order to relieve this plethora of unskilled labor, the

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>H. Y. Benedict, A Source Book Relating to the History of the University of Texas, p. 214.

new conditions must be met by trained young men and women to labor in the new fields according to the new methods, that upon this training depends the success, if not the safety, of the government; and that technical instruction should, as a consequence, be engrafted upon the State's present system of free education and eleemosynary aid.<sup>28</sup>

Although the artist was too advanced in her thinking concerning the educational system of the state for her time and as a consequence never accomplished her desires, her association with the University officials influenced her to do several portraits of this group--again producing works as a result of her environment. These include: Doctor W. L. Prather, President of the University of Texas, 1899-1905; Senator and Mrs. Joseph B. Dibrell; a statue of her husband, Doctor Edmund Montgomery, who was instrumental in founding the Texas Academy of Arts and Sciences; Mr. and Mrs. Julius Runge, patrons of the University; Guy M. Bryan, nephew of Stephen Fuller Austin who inherited the Austin papers which he classified and gave to the University of Texas; Jacob Bickler (death mask), a leading figure in the educational life of Austin and Texas; and Sir Swante Palm, Swedish consul to Texas who in 1897 gave his library to the University--a collection which at that time exactly doubled the number of books in the University of Texas library.<sup>29</sup>

During this Texas period Elisabet Ney composed two works for cemeteries in addition to those for her gallery of personages.

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<sup>28</sup>Elizabeth Brooks, Prominent Women of Texas, p. 78.

<sup>29</sup>Alice Twichell, "Art Museum Reminds of Elisabet Ney's Work," Daily Texan, January 19, 1932.

The Schnorr Monument of Fredericksburg is a result of her creation. Even though she was not personally acquainted with the family, Elisabet Ney, because of the love she had for humanity in general, and for mothers in particular, consented to mold a marker for a baby of a family of German immigrants. The other monument, that of General Albert Sidney Johnston in the State Cemetery at Austin, is considered by many to be the outstanding work of the sculptress. This was made possible by the Texas Division of the Daughters of the Confederacy which forced the legislature to provide funds for the sarcophagus. Lorado Taft describes it thus:

It shows the dead general lying upon the litter on which he was carried from the field; the flag of the Confederacy is thrown over the body and falls to the ground on either side. The conception is vivid; the touch of realism of the rude bier localizes and accentuates the drama, while the use of the simple drapery gives grace, and, above all, sculptural unity--the face and the hands being evolved, as it were, from a simple monumental mass. This is a work of high order. . . .<sup>30</sup>

Two abstract compositions complete the entire efforts of the artist during this period. Of these, the "Head of a Young Violinist" appears to be the more romantic. This the artist kept alone in her reception room at Hyde Park, just opposite the place she usually sat when entertaining visitors. Frequently her gaze would stray to this piece of work during a spirited conversation, for, in reality this was a portrait of Lorne made at the age of fifteen during one of the short periods that he was home from military school. Elizabeth

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<sup>30</sup>Taft, op. cit., p. 215.

Eldridge describes the work as:

A bust of a handsome youth turned slightly to one side. . . his expression does indicate that his whole soul is filled with an inner spiritual devotion. Her maternal love intensified by his cruel blow of neglect of her prompted this strange show of affection.<sup>31</sup>

However, Miss Ney always spoke of this work as the head of a young violinist.

Her last bit of sculpture, that of Lady Macbeth, was finally executed late in life. Even though the artist was almost seventy, since the age of nineteen she had entertained visions of portraying her own soul in stone through some abstract means. Now she had reached the stage where all circumstances were in harmony enough to produce the desired mood for sculpturing the composition. The work shows Lady Macbeth as she appeared in the sleep-walking scene. The anguish in the face of stone portrays the suffering in the life of the artist. Lorado Taft spoke of it as one of the "most expressive and eminently sculptural conceptions among recent American ideals."<sup>32</sup> Yet, true to form, Elisabet Ney never quite finished--for her life had not quite run its course--the composition. She was content to leave it in the plastic stage, a stage in which she could remodel the features should her life, in turn, be changed into other channels. With this, she was pleased to rest her case, not to gain the plaudits of public acclaim but rather to satisfy that soul searching inner urge of Sursum--ever onward, ever upward.

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<sup>31</sup>Eldridge, op. cit., p. 559.

<sup>32</sup>Taft, op. cit., p. 215.

### Concluding Remarks

Elisabet Ney was a strange woman whose sole ambition in life was to meet the great personages of her day. This ambition was successfully achieved through the medium of sculpturing, a medium so well developed that an outstanding American sculptor said of her:

There are few of our statuaries who think so distinctly and invariably in terms of their art as does Miss Ney. After seeing her works one is convinced that it would be impossible for her to trifle with the marble. The purely picturesque, the literary motif, the anecdotal-- these make no appeal to her. She could not conceive a subject in such a fashion, even inadvertently. Hence, her sketches and compositions are admirable . . . The details of the features are epitomized with great discrimination and with an easy mastery of form which is unknown to the majority of our sculptors.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, she was a genius unfathomed, a lone woman proclaiming a lone cause without any authority, save herself, whatsoever to which she must account. "She came bringing a message of beauty in stone and in return paid the price all pioneers pay in blazing the trails over which all civilization has not hitherto traveled."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 214-215.

<sup>34</sup> Moore, op. cit., p. 527.

**CHAPTER V**

**THE IMPRINT OF A PERSONALITY**



## CHAPTER V

### THE IMPRINT OF A PERSONALITY

#### Introduction

We pass; the path that each man trod  
Is dim, or will be dim, with weeds.  
What fame is left for human deeds,  
In endless age? It rests with God.<sup>1</sup>

These sayings of the muse are, in part, true. However, the perpetuation of a so-called genius must run parallel with the life and works of the person in order that none of the important details concerning the virtuoso might be omitted in the critical estimate. Yet, time, more than anything else, determines the worth of a certain value, and far too often so much time has elapsed between the death of an artist and the general appraisal of his contribution that many characteristic traits of the personality of the individual are lost. This results in a rather meager sketch of the individual without any special reference to the person's interpretation of his own specific works. However, this seems to be the general run of history, so truly one's fame in its totality only rests with that unseen force.

Then too, it is always difficult to give a critical estimate of social values because no criterion or yard stick has ever been introduced successfully to measure these abstract

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<sup>1</sup>Alfred Lord Tennyson, "In Memorium," canto LXXIII, The Home Book of Verse, p. 2902.

values. In regard to a critical estimate concerning Elisabet Ney, no attempt will be made to prove her social value as far as her works in the European continent and in Texas are concerned. Rather, certain lasting imprints will be shown, imprints of a physical nature, yes, but nevertheless, imprints which have their social value.

### European Imprints

Proof of the imprint of Miss Ney upon the European continent may be cited by her biographical entry within the German encyclopedia.<sup>2</sup> That she was honored by her fellow countrymen is evident, but the natural question of why was this so is more obscure. That she was an outstanding personality is proven by the number of personages she contacted throughout her career. These people were not restricted to one field of endeavor either, for they ranged from alpha to omega in the scale of human accomplishments. That she could find a part of her personality reflected in each of the lives of her associates showed her wide range of versatility.

With her most pronounced accomplishment, that of sculpturing, Elisabet Ney left a vivid imprint upon Europe. Of course she is remembered as the outstanding woman sculptor of the modern period. Her gallery of the portrait busts of nearly a score of the leading professional and political men of the continent is proof enough for her entry for

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<sup>2</sup>"Elisabet Ney," Der Grosse Brockhaus, XIII, 348.

posterity. A number of her individual conceptions are listed in the outstanding art galleries of Europe. Her public enterprise at Munster, the decorations of the Polytechnic Institute of Bavaria in Munich, the statue of King Ludwig II in his palace at Schoss-Linderhof, her oil portrait by the artist Kaulbach in the Art Museum at Hanover, all tend to show the dynamic influence Elisabet Ney played upon the lives of the Europeans she contacted. In addition to these, the national government of Germany named one of its outstanding art centers the Elisabet Ney Museum. In 1932, a new art gallery at Munster was dedicated to its three outstanding women, women who were recognized by all to be the greatest of the city. These included, a daughter of a Baron, a princess of the royal house, and a sculptor--Elisabet Ney.<sup>3</sup>

#### Liendo

Even as Elisabet Ney assumed her small place in the affairs of a turbulent continent, she also took her natural place among the leading personages of Texas upon her entrance into the state in 1872. However, this was more pronounced and even seemed to be on a larger scale since Texas, topographically and culturally speaking, was not nearly so large as the environment from which she came. Hence, although some desire to define the Texas period of the artist as an anti-climax to her European career, many others show that

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<sup>3</sup>Esse Forrester O'Brien, Art and Artists of Texas, p. 267.

her imprint upon Texas society is even more marked than the European phase, not because of the growth and bigness of the sculptress but rather because of the littleness of Texas. As a result, the name of Elisabet Ney and the beginning of artistic enterprise in Texas are synonymous terms.

That Elisabet Ney should choose Liendo instead of any other home was fortunate indeed, for here the artist made her first lasting imprint upon Texas history. This huge two story mansion near Hempstead, Texas, had been the social center of Texas for the past two decades. Built in 1853 by Colonel Leonard Groce, the home was always open to visitors and to travelers. The house itself was frame, although brick, made by negro slave labor of clay and straw, was used extensively for the cellars and for some of the out houses. Typical of the Southern style, a large hall, both upstairs and down, ran from the front to the back of the house. A huge gallery, it too being on both levels, with four doric columns, ran across the front of the house, facing south. Downstairs, to the east, were two spacious bedrooms; to the west side of the hall were two other large rooms, the parlor and the dining room. Upstairs were a number of huge bedrooms, the ceiling being very high. Today, all of these are as they were in the days of splendor at Liendo. Other things of a smaller build have disappeared. For example, none of the numerous outhouses and negro homes are standing; the bachelor's hall is gone; the sunken rose garden and numerous brick walks are buried beneath a layer of dirt; the sole reminder

of the old Groce schoolhouse is one of the hand hewed foundation timbers--now used for a well support.<sup>4</sup>

The records show that in 1841 Colonel Leonard Groce, the son of Jared Groce, the first white American man to bring cotton and negro slaves into Texas, bought a tract at Liendo from Justo Liendo, a Mexican immigrant to Texas who had headrighted this land in present Waller County. Records in the archives of the University of Texas show that:

I, Thomas F. McKinney, attorney in fact for Jose Justo Liendo, for fifteen hundred dollars have sold to Leonard W. Groce part of a . . . five league survey . . . all that lies west and north of Pond Creek; supposed to contain three thousand acres, more or less.<sup>5</sup>

The rest of the estate came into the possession of the Groce family in 1849 when the county clerk sold it at auction for taxes amounting to \$16.45, Leonard Groce paying Senor Liendo two thousand dollars for the rest of the plantation.

Among the numerous outstanding events which occurred during the Groce regime were: the entertainment of all the noted dignitaries of the State, including Judge Keese Blake, J. A. Wharton, J. W. Throckmorton, and Sam Houston; the conversion of the plantation into Camp Groce for the Confederacy during the Civil War; the organization here of the immortal Terry's regiment of Company B--Eight Texas Calvary of the

<sup>4</sup>As told to this writer by Mrs. Laura Harris, the present owner of Liendo.

<sup>5</sup>Eusibia Lutz, "Liendo," Southwestern Review, XVI (January, 1931), 190.

Civil War; the quartering of General Custer and his men there during the Federal military occupation during the Reconstruction Period; and the large scale raising and ginning of the sea island cotton with negro slave help.

However, after the war the huge plantation could not profit as before. Colonel Groce sold the farm in 1866 to Mr. and Mrs. Philip S. Clarke. They were not able to operate it profitably so in 1867 the property again returned to the Groce estate. Here Colonel Groce lived at Liendo until his death in 1873. In this same year the estate was sold to Doctor Edmund Montgomery and Miss Elisabet Ney. The present owner of the house is Mrs. Laura Harris, widow of Captain G. W. Harris who came from South Dakota to Texas in 1905 to live at Liendo, buying it in 1910 from Edmund Montgomery but granting to him the privilege of living there until his death.<sup>6</sup>

Because of the historical significance of the home three miles southeast of Hempstead on state highway number six, the Department of Interior at Washington has declared:

That the historic building known as Liendo Plantation has been selected by the advisory committee of the historic American buildings survey as possessing exceptional historic and architectural interest and is worthy of most careful preservation for the benefits of future generations, and a record of its present appearance and condition (1938) has been made and deposited for permanent reference in the Library of Congress.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>J. K. Stephens, "Edmund Montgomery," S. W. Review, XVI (January, 1931), 200.

<sup>7</sup>H. B. Fox, "Years of Neglect Threaten to Ruin Home of Famed Texas Sculptress and Philosopher," Dallas News, Nov. 20, 1939.

Also, the Texas Centennial Marker Commission recognized the worth of Liendo Plantation by placing the following words upon a marker in 1936 at the historic residence:

LIENDO  
 A PLANTATION HOME  
 BUILT IN 1853  
 BY LEONDARD W. GROCE  
 THE SCENE FOR MANY YEARS  
 OF LAVISH SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY  
 PURCHASED MARCH 4, 1873  
 BY DOCTOR EDMUND DUNCAN MONTGOMERY  
 (1835-1911)  
 WORLD FAMED PHILOSOPHER  
 AND HIS WIFE  
 ELISABET NEY  
 (1833-1907)  
 PIONEER SCULPTRESS OF TEXAS  
 RETAINED AS THEIR HOMESTEAD  
 THROUGHOUT THEIR LIVES  
 BOTH ARE BURIED ON THE GROUNDS<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, if Elisabet Ney had not conceived any sculpture at all during her Texas period, her imprint upon the social and political affairs of Texas would have been felt since throughout her Texas life she was the owner of one of the most romantic, if not the most historic, homes of the Lone Star State.

#### Formosa

When Elisabet Ney went to Austin in 1892 to take up permanent residence there, she and her husband believed that the long awaited new period in her career was about to begin. By their united cooperation, they were able to raise sufficient money to build a practical studio for the sculptress in the

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<sup>8</sup>Harold Schoen, Monuments Erected by the State of Texas to Commemorate the Centenary of Texas Independence, p. 146.

Hyde Park addition of north Austin. Since the Doctor and his wife never were practical as far as business and financial matters were concerned, their funds were limited. However, they were able to complete the modest stone studio named Formosa in remembrance of the Utopian days spent on the island of Madeira. This studio consisted of a story and a half hand-cut stone structure with an added tower room overlooking the spacious grounds. One large, main studio with a north exposure and a smaller studio-reception room combination composed the ground level. Ample living quarters were provided for in a lower basement and in the half story above the studio level. Carved angel faces formed the decorations of the huge entrance while at either side of the door were niches for statues. A cornerstone with the single word "Sursum" carved into the stone completed the physical make-up of the house itself.<sup>9</sup>

The first view of Formosa furnishes a distinct surprise to the visitor. "Its tower and embattlements peering from among the surrounding trees and shrubbery gives the impression of an old world castle in miniature that has been transferred from its setting on some isolated mountain craig of the Bavarian Alps to this puzzling new environment"<sup>10</sup> of Texas. Truly upon opening the garden gate one naturally feels

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<sup>9</sup>Elizabeth Elbridge, "Sursum," Va. Quar. Review, IV (October, 1928), 554.

<sup>10</sup>Jane Y McCallum, "Historic Texas," Austin American Statesman, June 7, 1925.



the charm and environment of another world. To this gate a bell was attached to warn the artist against possible intruders. The garden itself produced an added charm because of its quaintness. In speaking of the present condition of the garden, Mrs. J. W. Rutland, the current caretaker, writes:

Many of the locust trees that she loved, and which she so generously shared with her friends when the prolific roots sent up fresh shoots in the spring and summer, are still there, and two of the century plants which she planted are standing like sentinels by the walk leading to the south entrance . . . Native cedars, intermingled with a later planting of arbor vitae, ligustrum, pomegranite, and crepe myrtle trees, form a stronghold for the venerable wild grapevine which rises from the soil by the east fence, across the full length of which it sends its branching arms.

The wild plum tree is still on the banks of the creek--a reminder of her friends of the joy with which Miss Ney announced the approach of spring by bringing them the first snow-like buds, scarcely opened. An improvised table built around the old oak tree was the center of the visiting group of friends whom she was prone to have about her on Sunday afternoons to enjoy her garden retreat near the little lake.<sup>11</sup>

This garden retreat soon became the mecca for the people of Austin who desired that the state push ever onward, ever upward. There, in these evening meetings, conversation dealt largely with the broader aspects of life, giving to many a listener a fuller intellectual vision. Miss Ney always acted the perfect hostess--to the stranger giving the impression of extreme reserve as acquired by personal contact with the royal courts, but to the intimate friend giving her utmost to be frank and genuine. At times, the Doctor attended these

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<sup>11</sup>Mrs. J. W. Rutland, "Elisabet Ney's Garden," Gossip, July 21, 1931.

assemblies, adding intellectual thought and ideas to the discussions. However, if he were not present, the artist frequently quoted sayings of his almost daily letters to the guests. With these gatherings, Miss Ney firmly stamped her imprint upon Texas society, an imprint which will traditionally grow with each succeeding generation.

Yet it is not directly for these "Ella Maxwell" parties that Formosa is treated as a shrine by the citizens of Texas, but rather for the ideals which are symbolized within its walls. Here Elisabet Ney created her Texas work, work which is of the highest order, sculpturally speaking. It was the first home in this country of an internationally famous artist. It was the first house ever built specifically for art in Texas. In describing this imprint, Jane Y. McCallum in a poem entitled "Formosa" says:

Genius dwelt here,  
 And dreamed and worked.  
 Obeying with a proud alacrity  
 The stern behests of Sculpture's muse.  
 Here, gladly,  
 Were the visions of the past forgotten,  
 And truer, nobler plans for greater worth  
 Were formed and cherished.

And while the hand of sorrow,  
 Oft pressed upon her brow the thorny crown,  
 Here, she learned  
 The priceless value of true friendship,  
 The joy of fame, and peace at last.  
 Speak softly, . . . tis a hallow spot,  
 Its memories fill the heart with sympathy,  
 For her, whose genius was its soul.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Theresa Moore Hunter, "Formosa," Austin American-Statesman, June 14, 1925.

### The University of Texas

Formosa and Elisabet Ney left a direct imprint upon the University of Texas which will ever be recorded in the historical annals of the school. During her so-journ in Austin, the artist became one of the outstanding patrons of the school. Unofficially, she became a part of the atmosphere of the campus, for here, and only here, she found a natural element which would in a small measure compare with the circles in which she traveled while in Europe. One seldom saw the artist at any public occasion, save those which were University sponsored. "Lecture, concert, commencement--whatever the occasion--the audience came to look to the lower box on the left of the auditorium for her familiar figure in its distinctive garb and to think of her as a natural part of all that was creating the cultural power of the State's highest educational forces."<sup>13</sup>

Miss Ney further realized that if the state were to advance educationally, certain strides for the advancement of culture through art must of necessity be made. Her frequent contacts with boys and girls who dreamed of art as their life's calling compelled her to urge upon the legislature, her friends, and the faculty of the University a plan for a school of art in Texas. She preferred the location to be in Austin, and, if possible, to be in conjunction with the State

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<sup>13</sup>Bride Neill Taylor, Elisabet Ney--Sculptor, p. 92.

University. The artist freely offered her services should such a plan be adopted, the state being required only to furnish material aid. However, general public indifference, a public not yet groomed to the artistic level, willed the project not to materialize, that is not until only two years ago when the University of Texas began its school of fine arts.

Hence, although her hopes did not materialize until three decades after her death, Elisabet Ney did give the impetus for a school of fine arts in connection with the University of Texas. It was the desire of her heart that the youth of Texas be given the proper stimulus as well as the opportunity for artistic development in Texas. This resulted in her willing approximately all her sculpture to the University of Texas,<sup>14</sup> with the hope that by so doing she might, though dead, still have some part in bringing to pass her dream for a school of art for Texas youths.

#### Texas Fine Arts Association and the Elisabet Ney Museum

After the death of Miss Ney neither Doctor Montgomery nor the University knew how to carry out the wishes of the sculptress, since neither he nor the State University was in a position to provide funds to care for the large collection. Mrs. Ella Dancy Dibrell, the wife of Judge Joseph B. Dibrell of Seguin, came to the rescue by purchasing the studio from

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<sup>14</sup>"Texas Art Began with the Founding of the Ney Studio," Daily Texan, April 8, 1938.

Doctor Montgomery, who was almost compelled to sell it to pay for outstanding debts. Mrs. Dibrell desired that Formosa be maintained forever as a memorial to its originator. Under this arrangement the University accepted the collection of sculpturary with the understanding that the collection was to remain in the studio without any charge to the school for rental or for care.

Then in April, 1911, a group of friends of Miss Ney met at Austin to organize the Texas Fine Arts Association in order, as stated in its constitution, "to preserve both the memory and the art collection of Elisabet Ney, and to develop art in the truest sense in Texas."<sup>15</sup> This organization, incorporated in 1911, took over the management of the studio and the collection which should be under the joint control of the regents of the University and the officials of the Association. At present, the Association holds an annual meeting during the first week of May at the address of the studio, Forty-fourth at Avenue H, at which plans are formulated for the furtherance of the art interests in Texas. The present membership consists of five hundred and fifty patrons classified according to the amount paid in dues. Active membership costs \$2.50 yearly; associate membership, \$5.00; sustaining, \$10.00; and life, \$100. Each associate chapter pays \$2.50 annually to the Texas Fine Arts Association.<sup>16</sup> The organization throughout the years has striven to obtain

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<sup>15</sup>Taylor, op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>16</sup>"Texas Fine Arts Association and the Elisabet Ney Museum," American Art Annual, XXXIV (1937-1938), 447.

public recognition of the artist and to collect all Ney-lore within Formosa, now renamed the Elisabet Ney Museum. In this way the name of the sculptor is being preserved and coming to have a historical significance. The appreciation of her works is growing along with the efforts to make the Museum the art center of Texas.

Valvera Moore states that:

Those who visit the studio and learn the story of Elisabet Ney will realize that within the blackened walls are sown the agony of a breaking heart, the joys of triumph, and the thrill of old world memories that hark back to the time when fifty years ago a woman with the fire of genius within her that not only had stirred royalty, connoisseurs of art, and great leaders of Europe, but which finally planted the seed of inspiration in Texas, where the finest of her work was done.<sup>17</sup>

Hence, the Elisabet Ney studio of Formosa as an art center gradually nears more of a reality from day to day.<sup>18</sup>

The members of its association desire that the museum serve as the hub of a wheel of art activity for the state and yet not interfere in any way with the development of the larger cities as art centers. Here would be continued the collection of Texas sculpture. A library would be maintained, containing documents of every sort relative to Texas art. Incidentally, that library began with the presentation of thirteen letters of Miss Ney by Hally Bryan Perry and

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<sup>17</sup>Valvera Moore, "Elisabet Ney; Texas Sculptor," Texas Monthly, April, 1929.

<sup>18</sup>"Elisabet Ney Museum as Art Center for Texas Nears Fact," The Dallas Morning News, June 19, 1930.

Guy M. Bryan of Houston.<sup>19</sup> All of this, has as its headquarters Formosa, the studio in the capital city where art had its beginnings in Texas--a building around which has grown stories of romance and history, a building which like its founder has left its imprint upon Texania.

#### Miscellaneous Remains

That Miss Ney was a sculptor commanding the attention of the art circles of the United States, and in particular those of Texas, her adopted state, may be shown by the numerous groups of isolated pieces of sculpture which through various agencies and personal gifts have been isolated from the main collection as found in the Ney Museum at Austin. Outstanding among these which are exhibited away from Texas are those cast in bronze of Houston and Austin at Statutory Hall in Washington, District of Columbia. The United States government, to honor two outstanding heroes of the several states, founded the National Hall of Fame in the site of the old hall of the House of Representatives, late in the nineteenth century. Early in the twentieth century, Texas appropriately unveiled its contribution--those of Austin and Houston as depicted by Elisabet Ney.<sup>20</sup> These were modeled from the casts made by the artist for her contribution to

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<sup>19</sup>Minnie Lee Thornton, "Ney Letters Presented to Art Society," The Dallas Morning News, May 4, 1930.

<sup>20</sup>Esse Forrester O'Brien, Art and Artist of Texas, p. 192.

the Chicago Exposition in 1893. One other work of Miss Ney-- that of Lady Macbeth--may be viewed in Washington at the National Museum. Mrs. Lillie Haynie of Austin, Texas, modeled this statue for the sculptress even though the artist portrayed her own tragic personal feelings into the facial features.<sup>21</sup> One other group, "Sursum," is housed in the Art Institute at Chicago in tribute to Texas' only internationally famous woman sculptor.<sup>22</sup> This later work was composed in Germany. It was received from Bavaria, for early in 1868 this abstract creation became the property of Liebig, the President of the Bavarian Academy of Science and Curator-General of the Scientific Collections of Bavaria, who received "Sursum" as a gift from the citizens of Munich as proof to him of the high esteem in which he was held.<sup>23</sup>

Concerning the isolated works of the artist in Texas, the better known of these include: the sarcophagus of Albert Sidney Johnston in the State Cemetery at Austin; the grave marker of the infant Elizabeth Emma Schnerr at Fredricksburg; the personal bust of the artist at Hempstead; and the marble statues of Houston and Austin in the rotunda at the capitol building at Austin. In addition to these, there are several

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<sup>21</sup>"Elisabet Ney--Art Missionary," Austin Statesman, July 25, 1928.

<sup>22</sup>"Elisabet Ney Famous Texas Sculptor," Southern Messenger, October 15, 1936.

<sup>23</sup>Taylor, op. cit., p. 35.



compositions which belong to the families who patronized the sculptress during her so-journ here. The public school systems of Houston and Galveston own works of the artist through the generosity, respectively, of Mrs. J. B. Dibrell and the Julius Runge family. A composition of the artist was given to the Carnegie Public Library of Dallas, Texas, by a patron of both the artist and the Dallas library. In 1915, the Fort Worth Museum of Art received its first piece of sculpture of Miss Ney from Miss Varner Linn Brown in memory of her mother. Several years later a companion piece was donated from the Brown private collection in memory to Tom Linn Brown, the artist. Both of these marble compositions, the "Head of Christ" and "Garibaldi," were among the European works of Miss Ney, being cast in Italy before the artist came to America.<sup>24</sup> In addition to these tangible imprints many contemporary artists and sculptors of Texas remember the kindly, though critical and frank, personal commendations of the artist which in turn spurred each apprentice to better and clearer creative enterprise. Hence, throughout the state are many imprints, tangible or abstract, which the artist left as a heritage to the coming generations.

#### Concluding Statements

The heritage which Texas received from Elisabet Ney is one which any state should take pride. Her record of

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<sup>24</sup>O'Brien, op. cit., p. 196.

achievement in Europe alone left certain definite imprints which cannot be easily erased. In addition, her shorter but more effective career in the Lone Star State proved that she was a sculptor of note. By various channels--Liendo, Formosa, the University of Texas, The Texas Fine Arts Association, the Elisabet Ney Museum, miscellaneous works and commendations-- Elisabet Ney has left the imprint of an outstanding personality upon Texas people, an imprint which, if taken inversely by an individual, would become a personal incentive for each person heeding the call of Sursum.

CHAPTER VI

"FOOTPRINTS ON THE SANDS OF TIME"

## CHAPTER VI

### "FOOTPRINTS ON THE SANDS OF TIME"

#### Summary

Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime,  
And, departing, leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time.<sup>1</sup>

Elisabet Ney was a strange woman, a woman who with all her oddness truly left her imprints on the sands of time. Her nature, even to those who knew her best, was inexplicable. This dated from her youthful days of childhood in the Westphalian capital until her death seventy years later at the capital of Texas. From her birth in 1833 until her death in 1907, the ambition of the sculptress was to meet the great personalities of the world, study them, and in return, see a part of their own personal thoughts reflected in her own particular thinking. This ambition--nurtured through the medium of sculpture--imprinted her life upon two continents, carrying her successfully into all habitats and into every strata of society. "Bearing these things in mind, friends look back upon Miss Ney's work as a natural gift, trained by a master, influenced and moved by the triumphs and successes in the old world, seasoned and strengthened by the tragic

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "A Psalm of Life," Hoyt's New Cyclopedia of Practical Quotations, p. 243.

surroundings of a new Texas, and expressed by the hand of a woman whose God given ambition made her stand out as a great woman sculptor."<sup>2</sup>

### Conclusions

Therefore, from the life and works of Elisabet Ney the following conclusions may be drawn which show the imprint this woman has made upon the world in general and upon Texas in particular:

Her life motto of Sursum, meaning ever upward, ever onward, is ever applicable to the life of any individual who has definite goals and ambitions to attain.

Her democratic ideals concerning freedom of expression, of thought, and of life were Utopian ideals which are still far in advance of our present day thinking.

Her gallery of personages whom she contacted upon the European continent included the outstanding personalities of her time, proving that she herself was a woman with a remarkable personality.

Her European works show Elisabet Ney to be the leading woman sculptor of the contemporary period.

She was the first artist of international training and renown to live and to work in Texas.

She was the first woman sculptor of Texas.

Her studio, Formosa, now the Elisabet Ney Museum, was

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<sup>2</sup>"Elisabet Ney Studio Mecca for Art Lovers," Daily Texan, February 2, 1928.

the first building ever erected for the sole purpose of art in Texas.

The history of art as a public development in Texas began with the efforts of Miss Ney.

Through her contact with the University of Texas, Elisabet Ney was the first person to take the initiative in arousing the people of Texas to think in terms of art education.

Her biography was the first book ever written relating directly to the development of art in Texas.

Her sculptured portraits and busts of the heroes and statesmen of Texas has left to the state a rich heritage which otherwise would have been nil.

As the one time owner of the famous Liendo Plantation, the artist will be forever recorded in the annals of Texas history.

Adding together these tangible imprints of the sculptor upon Texas lore produces for the interested individual certain social and abstract values which are immeasurable. Yet these abstract values directly provide a more rounded cultural development of the individual personality, of the State taken collectively, and in turn, of posterity.

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**APPENDIX**

APPENDIX A

Elisabet Ney

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APPENDIX C

Formosa

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APPENDIX D

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## APPENDIX E

### List of Works of the Artists

#### I. First Studio--American Collection

- A. Col. W. L. Prather, President of University of Texas 1899-1905.
- B. Sam Houston.
- C. Stephen F. Austin.
- D. Schnorr Monument, Fredericksburg.
- E. Albert Sidney Johnston.
- F. Jacob Bickler (Death mask), A leading figure in the educational life of Austin and Texas, 1872-1902. Founder of the Texas German and English Academy. Founder of Bickler's Academy, Austin.
- G. Infant of the Friend of the Artist (Death mask).
- H. Col. W. L. Prather (Death mask).
- I. Steiner Burleson, son of Hon. Albert Sidney Burleson.
- J. Oran M. Roberts, pioneer, writer, statesman, historian.
- K. W. P. Hardeman.
- L. Sam Houston.
- M. John H. Reagan.
- N. Francis R. Lubbock.
- O. Lawrence Sullivan Ross.
- P. Joseph B. Dibrell, the man who put through the bill appropriating funds to place the statues of Houston and Austin in the State and National Capitols.
- Q. Stephen F. Austin.
- R. Joseph D. Sayers.
- S. Sketch for the Statue of Stephen F. Austin.
- T. Guy M. Bryan, nephew of Austin.
- U. Mrs. Carrie Pease Graham, daughter of Governor Pease.
- V. Lawrence Sullivan Ross.
- W. Sir Swante Palm, Swedish Consul to Texas, 1869-1899. He bequeathed his library to the University of Texas.
- X. William Jennings Bryan, made during Mr. Bryan's stay in Austin, winter of 1899-1900.

#### II. Second Studio--European Collections

- A. John Adam Ney, father of Elisabet Ney.
- B. Elisabet Wernze Ney, mother of Elisabet Ney.
- C. Jacob Grimm, 1859.
- D. Small Bust. Subject unknown.

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\*Texas Fine Arts Association, Elisabet Ney Museum, n. d.

- E. Giuseppe Garibaldi, 1865.
- F. Joseph Joachim, Hanover, 1867.
- G. Little Girl, Berlin, 1896 (daughter of a lady of Berlin).
- H. Paula, wife of Joachim and sister of George Ebers, German Egyptologist.
- I. Sketches for statues of national heroes made for the town hall of the artist's native town, Munich
- J. Prometheus Unbound.
- K. Count Werther, 1868, Munich.
- L. Christian Rauch, teacher of Elisabet Ney--founder of Berlin School of Sculpture.
- M. Ludwig II, King of Bavaria, 1864.
- N. A Philanthropist of Berlin, 1896.
- O. Lady Macbeth, now in the National Museum at Washington, District of Columbia.
- P. Prince Otto von Bismarck, 1867.
- Q. Justus von Liebig, 1864.
- R. Portrait of Elisabet Ney, made by herself. It represents the artist at the heights of her popularity in Europe when she was in her early thirties.
- S. Sketch for a Portrait, subject unknown, 1896.
- T. St. Cecilia (attributed to Donatello).
- U. A Lady of Berlin, 1896.
- V. Lorne Ney Montgomery, son of the artist. Made at their home place, Liendo Plantation, when the subject was about fifteen years old.
- W. Dr. Edmund Montgomery, Madeira, 1864.
- X. Study for Statue of King Ludwig II, 1864.
- Y. Dancing Girl, found in Pompeii. The head, shoulders, and arms are restorations made by Elisabet Ney.
- Z. Life Cast of Lower Part of Face and Shoulders of Elisabet Ney.
- AA. Walter von Plettenberg.
- BB. Engelbert von der Mark--sketches for German national heroes, Westphalia.
- CC. Life Casts.
- DD. Subject Unknown.
- EE. Arthur Schopenhauer, 1869, Frankfort.
- FF. Life Cast. Subject unknown.
- GG. Reduced Figure of the Statue of Lady Macbeth before the drapery was applied. It was made by the artist in preparation for forthcoming works.
- HH. Cast of shoulders, arms, heads, legs, feet, ears, etc.
- II. Photographs of the statue of King Ludwig II, as it now stands in the gardens of the Palace of Lindenhof, not far from Munich.



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#### Personal Interviews

Mrs. E. von Brieson (nee Camillia Bickler)

Miss Emma Burleson, art leader of Texas; devoted friend of Miss Ney; sister of Albert Sidney Burleson.

Mrs. Laura B. Harris, present owner of Liendo.

Mrs. J. W. Rutland, present caretaker of Formosa.

Mrs. J. R. Swenson (nee Jennie Bickler).