

**LAURA ABIGAIL
RUTHERFORD
CLUBB
1873-1952**



**WORLD-CLASS
ART IN
RURAL
OKLAHOMA**

Laura Rutherford married Ike Clubb in July 1892, settling in Kaw City after the 1893 Land Run. When oil was discovered on their ranch in 1919, the cattleman bought more cattle and land while the schoolteacher bought art.

Laura was born in Cave Springs, Missouri in September 1873. Graduating from Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas, she became a pioneer schoolteacher in a small sod schoolhouse before teaching oratory at Oklahoma State Baptist College (now OBU).

Kaw City, between Ponca City and Shidler, was established in July 1902. It was bordered by the Kaw Reservation and Osage Reservation. Situated in a fertile agricultural region, the town was prosperous by 1919 because of its business with Indians, farmers, and cattlemen. With his new wealth, Ike built the Clubb House Hotel. When Laura bought her first painting for \$12,500, Ike protested, "I could have bought a trainload of cattle for that!"

Laura spent a year traveling through Europe, visiting great art galleries and invested in art treasures, filling her opulent home with paintings, antiques, rugs, books and linens. On September 20, 1930, Harlow's Weekly called it the "finest private collection of paintings in the world" but soon Laura needed more space.

She moved her collection to the lobby and the rooms of the Clubb Hotel. It included works by Gainsborough, Thomas Moran, Gilbert Stuart, Corot, William Chase, and Bonheur. The star of the exhibition was Kirchbach's "Christ and the Children", an enormous \$125,000 canvas that dominated a wall of the lobby.

Visitors from all over the world came to see the paintings, but a 1923 flood and the Great Depression caused the town to fall on hard times, with many oil-wealthy citizens moving to larger cities. Several California museums sought the collection, but Laura felt the collection should stay in Oklahoma.

Philbrook Art Center, created in 1939 when Tulsa oilman Waite Phillips donated his Villa Philbrook mansion to the city, became the ideal place to display Laura's impressive art collection. In 1947, she donated most of her artwork to "assure that the paintings would be available to the public for years to come."

The arrival of the collection by police escort became a media event on March 27, 1947. "It became a bedrock of our collection at the time," said Thomas Young, librarian/archivist. Ike and Laura, a 1931 Oklahoma Hall of Fame inductee, continued to live at the Clubb Hotel until Ike died in September 1951 and Laura died at age 78 in January 1952.

The death knell for Kaw City came when the Kaw Dam on the Arkansas River was constructed in the 1960s. The town was forced to move to a new site nearby. Most buildings were torn down, including the Clubb Hotel in 1971. The original town went underwater permanently in 1976, becoming Kaw Lake.

Kaw City will always be remembered for Laura Clubb's million-dollar collection of over 200 world-famous paintings that attracted thousands of art lovers to this small Kay County town, population 900!