

## Robert J. Wickenden

Robert J. Wickenden was born in Rochester, England of American Parents in 1861. When Wickenden was thirteen his family returned to the United States and settled in Toledo, Ohio. He lived in Toledo until 1880, when he moved to Detroit, Michigan where he began teaching and taking art classes. While in Detroit the artist painted landscapes of local scenes, and began painting portraits of prominent Michigan residents. One of his important subjects was James E. Scripps a wealthy Detroit newspaper publisher. Scripps was instrumental in the founding of the Detroit Museum of Art. Robert Wickenden was chosen to paint a portrait of Scripps, "Not as a publisher or rich business man, but as he preferred to be seen - as a collector and connoisseur of art, architecture and rare books." This portrait was donated to the Detroit Museum of Art.

Wickenden next moved to New York and then on to Paris. In Paris he studied with Herbert Merson. During these years, he was recognized as part of the mainstream of the Academy of Arts.

He debuted in Paris in 1884 and exhibited in the Paris Saloon from 1888-1918. He also exhibited in Munich 1888, Chicago 1893, Lyon 1894, and in Paris in 1900. He gained accolades for two portraits of England's King Edward the VII. Wickenden eventually returned to the United States and settled in Brooklyn, New York where he died in 1931.

Much of Wickenden's work was genre work, work that depicted everyday scenes of life during his times.

Virginia Morgan donated *A Cup of Cold Water* to the KIA in November of 1988. It is an oil on canvas, and has a small engraved plaque that quotes the bible, "Whosoever shall give a drink unto one of these little ones a cup of water only...he shall in no wise lose his reward."

This painting shows a woman, perhaps a grandmother offering a cup of water from a well to a young girl. The artist frames the picture three frames. One a gold ornate frame, a frame of green vegetation, and the well opening. We see the grandmother sustaining the child by offering her water from the well. This gesture may be seen as a metaphor for the passing of nourishment, and sustenance, even knowledge from one generation to another. The child accepts the cup and drinks from it. The artist provides us with wonderful details in the natural setting, as well as insights into human relationships.

**Artist Profile Name: Robert J. Wickenden**

**Date of Birth: 1861, Rochester, England**

**Date of Death: 1931, Brooklyn, NY**

**Education/ Training:** Robert J. Wickenden was born of American parents in Europe in 1861. At age thirteen his family returned to the United States and settled in Ohio. He lived in Toledo until 1880 and then moved to Detroit. In Detroit he held classes, did landscapes of local scenes, and painted portraits of well know Michigan people. He moved to New York City and eventually to Paris to study. Two of his portraits of King Edward VII of England found special favor with British Royalty.

**Influenced by other Artists:**

In Paris Wickenden studied with Herbert Merson, and was considered a part of the mainstream of the Academy of Artist. He debuted in Paris in 1884 and exhibited in the Paris Saloon in 1884-1888.

During this period Wickenden held exhibits in Munich, Chicago, Lyon, Canada, and the U.S.

**Media: Oils on canvas**

**Title of work in KIA: "A Cup of Cold Water" - The gift of Virginia Morgan to the KIA in 1988. "Whosoever shall give a drink unto one of these little ones, a cup of water only...he shall in no wise lose his reward." (Quote on brass plate on frame)**

**Medium: Oil on canvas**

**Date: 1889**

**Where this work fits in the Artist's career: This work was done in 1889. At this time he was studying and working in Europe.**

**Artist's Statement or Philosophy: Much of the artist's work was genre work, pictures that depict everyday scenes of life during his time. He was also well known as a portrait artist. His art seems to reflect a dedication to contemporary life and themes.**



ROBERT J. WICKENDEN  
*A CUP OF COLD WATER* 1889  
Oil on canvas

This gentle scene of an elderly woman giving a small child a drink is an example of the genre work of Robert Wickenden. This painting reflects the everyday scene one might have encountered during Wickenden's lifetime. The title, a biblical quote from the book of Matthew, seems quite appropriate for the theme and the time. The passage quoted on the frame nameplate could be paraphrased "Whoever shall give a drink of cold water to a little one shall certainly receive his reward." The woman, (is she the child's grandmother?) is caring for the child's immediate need of a cold cup of fresh water and at the same time showing the love she holds for this youngster. The painting was given to the K.I.A by Virginia Morgan in 1988 and was reproduced for the cover of the November, 1990 KIA newsletter "Forum."

Although he seems to have been well known during his lifetime, not much appears to have been recorded of Robert Wickenden's personal life or of his artistic accomplishments. He is described as an American painter. He was born of American parents in Rochester, England in 1861. The family returned to the United States when Robert was 13 and settled in Toledo, Ohio. A few years later they moved to Detroit where Robert studied and taught art classes, probably in his late teens. He appears to have become well known locally as a portrait painter, painting such personages as Michigan Governors and their spouses. Wickenden's paintings of Montreal snow scenes were particularly well received. He also was a lithographer and writer. As so many young artists of the time, he traveled to Paris where he exhibited in the Paris Salon in 1884 at age 23. He evidently gained fame as a portrait painter while living in Europe as he was commissioned to paint a portrait of King Edward VII of England. Two of these portraits hang in Canada, one in the Parliament building in Ottawa, Ontario and one in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

In his later years he returned to the United States and settled in Brooklyn, New York where he lived until his death of a heart attack in 1931 at the age of 70.