

CHILDREN  
*from*  
*the* HILLS

THE LIFE AND WORK OF ADA WALTER SHULZ

by

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# Contents

Acknowledgements / *vi*  
Introduction, by Martin Krause / *vii*

Chapter One / 1  
Chapter Two / 9  
Chapter Three / 17  
Chapter Four / 29  
Chapter Five / 37  
Chapter Six / 42

Chronology of the life of  
Ada Walter Shulz / 50

Paintings Exhibited, Published, and/or  
Documented Regarding Dates / 52

Bibliography / 56

# Photographs

Ada Walter, c. 1877 / 1  
Ada Walter Shulz and son Walter, c. 1899 / 9  
Ada Walter Shulz painting outdoors, c. 1917 / 17  
Ada Walter Shulz and Grandma Barnes, c. 1926 / 29  
Ada Walter Shulz, 1924 / 37

# Illustrations

(Color Plates, Paintings by Ada Walter Shulz)

1 • “Little Mother”  
2 • “The First Book”  
3 • “Pleasant Hours”  
4 • untitled barefoot girl with bucket  
(possibly “Picturesque Alley”)  
5 • untitled girl in red dress carrying infant  
6 • “Wash Day”  
7 • “On the Hillside”  
8 • “The Reader”  
9 • “Story Time”  
10 • “The Story Book”  
11 • “Resting”  
12 • “In the Garden”  
13 • “Mother from the Hills”  
14 • untitled children walking  
home from school  
15 • “The Colored Nurse”  
16 • untitled woman doing wash  
17 • “The Young Artist” or “In the Country”  
18 • “Waiting for a Bite”  
19 • “The Pet Rooster”  
20 • “The Gray Goose”  
21 • untitled woman in iris garden  
22 • “The Pet Duck”  
23 • untitled girl holding duck  
(possibly “The Favorite Duck”)  
24 • untitled children in creek

# Acknowledgments

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No project in my life has ever been accomplished without unwavering emotional support from my mother, Elizabeth J. Perry. And this particular endeavor would never have come to fruition without persistent encouragement, enthusiasm and investment from Jay and Ellen Carter, long time Ada Walter Shulz devotees.

# Introduction

ARTISTS WHO STEPPED OFF the Indianapolis Southern railway at Helmsburg in the first decade of the last century may have felt like pilgrims travelling to a promised land. Brown County, they had heard, was a perfect place.

Brown County was an incongruity. There, in the heart of the middle west, were abundant hills where prairies ought to have been; and Brown County, the precise center of the nation's population in 1905, was still a non-mechanized culture. For the previous 35 years, Brown County had held the dubious distinction of being the only county in Indiana with neither rail nor river connection to the lines of commerce, progress and prosperity. In 1905 the railroad tardily arrived, clipping the northwest corner of Brown County with a single passenger depot at Helmsburg. Previously, the county had been practically inaccessible; thereafter, an easy commute from Chicago via Indianapolis. Only then did artists start to arrive, and they came mainly from Chicago by rail.

"Brown County nestles in the hills, and where there are hills there is bound to be scenery, and where there is scenery there are bound to be artists," was the *Chicago Post's* simple explanation for the popularization of Brown County in 1913. The artists came, certainly, for the scenery—the hills, the changing colors, the purple haze that lay in the hollows and the opalescent atmosphere that was peculiar to the place. But there were other beauty spots in Europe and along the eastern seaboard with just as many hills and just as much scenery. American artists had gathered in those other spots long before Brown County was known.

For the 25 or so artists who disembarked at Helmsburg between 1907 and 1910, Brown County was a more attractive place. Not only was it a fresh and untrammelled sketching ground, but it was "a mighty cheap place to live," exclaimed Adam Emory Albright, who had come down from Chicago in 1908. And for those two reasons, it was "just an ideal place for artists." Board at the Pittman Inn or the Ferguson House was \$4.00 a week. Rooms could be had for \$4.00 a month, and an artist with \$100 could stay the whole summer, all expenses paid. Now accessible by rail, Brown County was also convenient to the cities of the middle west. This was an important consideration for artists who, from time to time, returned to the city. This convenience was an occupational necessity for many of the first generation of Brown County painters.

Most of the first arrivals were weekend painters and week-long commercial artists in Chicago. Overwhelmingly, they were members of the Palette and Chisel Club, founded in 1895, with its club-room in the Athenaeum Building on Chicago's bustling Van Buren Street. Members could restore their interests in the fine arts by drawing from the model, exhibiting their independent work, sketching together in the countryside, and generally escaping the routine advertising and illustrative assignments. The Palette and Chisel Club discovered Brown County.

Adolph Shulz, a member of the club, had been to Brown County in 1900, before the railroad. He shared his enthusiasms for the place with fellow members Harry Engle, L.O. Griffith and Wilson Irvine, who came down from the Windy City in March 1907 to paint winter scenery. Instead, they

facing page:  
Ada Walter, c. 1877 •  
Photographer: Wright's Studio,  
421.5 Main Street  
Terre Haute, IN •  
Courtesy of Ada Walter Shulz family



## Chapter One

“WHAT SHALL I DO WITH THE THOUSAND DOLLARS which you may suppose I received from a wealthy uncle?” Young Ada Walter responded to this question in an 1884 essay for her Grade 9A English assignment. “When this imaginary money was first given to me,” she wrote, “my immediate impression was that I should wish to spend it all for books and pictures, for it has always been one of my greatest desires to have a large library of my own and to possess several handsome paintings made by some of our greatest artists.”

The young girl’s passion for creative beauty never wavered. Examining the life of Ada Walter Shulz in retrospect, indications of her future career clearly emerged throughout her modest childhood.

Ada’s father, John M. Walter, born April 15, 1872, was a native of Pennsylvania. He married his first wife, Sarah Miller, born August 30, 1831, on May 5, 1853. They soon moved to Terre Haute, Indiana, then a small town on the Wabash River. With 8000



Illustration #4 • untitled barefoot girl with bucket by Ada Walter Shulz • (possibly "Picturesque Alley") •  
c. 1909, signed lower left • oil on canvas, size 30.5" x 23.75" • Private Collection



Illustration #8 • "The Reader" by Ada Walter Shulz • c. 1914, signed lower left • oil on canvas, size 30" x 30" •  
Courtesy of the Brown County Art Gallery, Nashville, Indiana • Photographed by Kris Iltis



Illustration #15 • "The Colored Nurse" • by Ada Walter Shulz • c. 1921, signed lower right • oil on board, size 16.5" x 14.5" • Private Collection



Illustration #19 • "The Pet Rooster" by Ada Walter Shulz • c. 1926, signed lower right • oil on board, size 17" x 14" • Private Collection



Illustration #22 • "The Pet Duck" by Ada Walter Shulz • c. 1928, signed lower right •  
oil on canvas, size 30" x 21" • Courtesy of Jay and Ellen Carter



Illustration #23 • untitled girl holding duck by Ada Walter Shulz • (possibly "The Favorite Duck") • c. 1928, signed lower left • oil on board, size 12.5" x 11" • Courtesy of Jay and Ellen Carter • Photographed by Kris Iltis



THE PAINTINGS OF ADA WALTER SHULZ (1870-1928) have enjoyed renewed interest from art collectors throughout the United States. Following the 1998 Indiana State Museum retrospective exhibit, a painting by Ada Shulz sold for more than \$85,000 at a Chicago auction.

Mrs. Shulz lived and painted in Brown County, Indiana, for twenty years. Among predominantly landscape artists, she, alone, concentrated on genre paintings of children playing in sunlight, rural mothers carrying babies, and youngsters with their barnyard pets.

The first published biography of Ada Walter Shulz, this book includes an introduction by Martin Krause, five photographs of the artist and 24 color reproductions of her finest paintings.

RACHEL BERENSON PERRY researched the life and work of Ada Walter Shulz extensively for four years, culminating in a Master's Thesis for the University of Oklahoma and a 1998 retrospective exhibit for the Indiana State Museum titled, "Children and Sunlight: The Paintings of Ada Walter Shulz."

Ms. Perry wrote the introduction to the Indiana University Press publication titled *The Artists of Brown County* by Lyn Letsinger-Miller, has written articles for the Indiana Historical Society's *Traces Magazine*, *The American Art Review*, and is a regular contributor to *Our Brown County* magazine, a monthly publication in Brown County, Indiana.