The objective of the symposium was to give researchers on northeast Ohio art a platform to present works in progress while they prepare a more ambitious project for Cleveland’s bicentennial in 1996. One of the goals of the Cleveland Artists Foundation is an attempt to define the meaning of the term "Cleveland School" within the painting medium. Are there recognizable stylistic traits among Cleveland paintings which set them apart from other American art works? For a clear picture of Cleveland’s artistic development we have to research the lives and the work of the city’s earliest artists. This has resulted in the exhibition and catalog *F.C. Gottwald and the Old Bohemians.*

Frederick Carl Gottwald (1858-1941) emerged as a significant and influential artist and educator. He exhibited widely not only in Cleveland, but also nationally. Between 1892 and 1898 his work was shown regularly at the National Academy of Design in New York City and praised by critics. It ranges from early academic character studies of older men, Dutch landscapes and Dutch interiors in the tradition of the 19th century Munich School to Impressionist and Post-Impressionist landscapes painted in Italy and southern France.

For 41 years, 1885-1926, Gottwald taught at the Cleveland School of Art, now the Cleveland Institute of Art. He helped this institution grow from the Western Reserve School of Design for Women with few students enrolled into the important art school at University Circle which still graduates successful artists year after year.

How was the development of such a competent artist possible in the unrefined industrial Cleveland of the 1880s? What were the nurturing elements? Research led to the "Old Bohemians." In 1876 this group of artists started the Cleveland Academy of Fine Art known as the Cleveland Art Club in the old City Hall on Superior Avenue.

The club was founded as a sketch club by several enthusiastic artists who felt the need for a space where they could draw and paint together, teach and encourage new artists, and exhibit their own work and the work of other artists. They first met in the studio of Archibald Willard (1836-1918), a respected artist who had recently gained national recognition for the painting *Yankee Doodle,* later known as *The Spirit of ’76,* exhibited at the Centennial exposition in Philadelphia. He was the first artist to occupy space on the 5th floor of the City Hall, which later became the city’s main artists’ quarters with its painted walls and lively artistic activities.

The Art Club met first once then three times a week to sketch from life, with all of the artists taking turns as models. They also went outdoors to paint from nature. Exhibitions were held once or
twice a year and became popular cultural affairs. Started by Willard, De Scott Evans, Sion L. Wenban, and Otto Bacher, the Art Club grew quickly to a membership of 30 and included noted artists Allen Smith, Jr., R. Way Smith, Adam Lehr, and Gottwald who was 18 when he joined. John Semon, who was an active member during the 1880s and 1890s, joined later.

This paper concentrates on Gottwald, who appears to be the most influential in the formation of Cleveland as an art center. We will examine his artistic development and determine what influenced him. There are four discernible stages in Gottwald’s art:

- early realist portraits and character studies
- Dutch interiors and landscapes
- works from Italy in the Impressionist style
- works from Italy and Southern France in the Post-Impressionist manner.

We know Gottwald’s early work mostly from newspaper articles. In 1888 a painting, The Enthusiast, was described as a "life-size, half-length picture of an old man in a flowing robe and clasping in one hand a Bible." The critic praised the expression in the face and the wrinkled, nervous hands.¹ A few months later Gottwald’s painting style was called "essentially German demonstrating a sturdy technical skill," but it was also reported to be "Rembrandtish in character," and painted with vigor.²

The Card Players, 1892, is a good example of this style. With short, choppy strokes Gottwald emphasized the wrinkles of the men’s cheeks and worn hands, in contrast to the otherwise larger brush strokes. Gottwald’s fondness for making character studies of older men suggests a kinship to his first teacher at the Cleveland Art Club, Archibald Willard. Willard emphasized people’s oddities and shortcomings, and many of his paintings are caricatures or depict humorous events, like Three Men Talking. Gottwald on the other hand, because of his Munich training, chose his subjects for their interesting qualities and represented them realistically, as in the Card Players. The spontaneous brush stroke, color that is mixed on the palette, the wet-on-wet technique, all part of Gottwald’s early works, can be traced to the Munich School and Gottwald’s teacher, Ludwig Loefftz (1845-1900), and to Munich artist Wilhelm Leibl (1844-1900) who championed the idea of a painting openly showing the manner in which it was painted.

Gottwald spent three years at the Royal Academy in Munich and graduated with distinguished honors. Part of the Academy training was devoted to portraiture and figure painting, using models dressed in costume like Gottwald’s Head of an Old Man, c. 1884, which was apparently painted during a class: an emaciated old man posed nude to the waist in imitation of a St. Jerome by Spanish artist José Ribera (1591-1652). (Several similar paintings exist in Munich).³ Gottwald’s Munich training continued to be evidenced in his early teaching practices and in his own work. Examples are paintings of models dressed in various costumes, Man in Renaissance Costume, c. 1890, and Head of a Woman (in a Dutch costume), 1890s.
Gottwald's interest in portrait and figure painting lasted well into the late 1890s. When he visited Holland during summer breaks between 1896 and 1904, he returned with paintings of Dutch peasants, such as *Girl Knitting*, c. 1904, interiors depicting family life, and landscapes, especially views of the canals like the *Canal in Dordrecht*, c. 1896.

For some time to come Gottwald was known for his studies of Dutch peasant life and his canal scenes. Contemporary critics applauded these paintings which were presented in local exhibitions as well as at the National Academy of Design, New York City. Newspapers praised his brilliant color, his brush work revealing a multitude of tints skillfully blended, and his mastery in juxtaposing bright complementary colors. The painting titled *Canal in Dordrecht* received a critic's special approval when it was exhibited at the Spring 1897 exhibition of the National Academy of Design, New York.⁴

The public reacted with great surprise when new lighter paintings such as *Cleveland Market*, c. 1895, and *Main Street, Chagrin Falls*, c. 1899, were shown for the first time. However, the obvious influence of Impressionist coloring in these paintings is not surprising. Gottwald knew of Impressionism through his European trips, but also from Impressionist work exhibited in Cleveland. As early as 1891 Monet's *Haystacks in Summer* was exhibited in Cleveland; *Haystacks in Winter* was exhibited the following year.

Cleveland collectors, especially Jeptha H. Wade and Alfred A. Pope, owned several Impressionist works. Pope was one of the first Americans to bring French Impressionists to this country. In the early 1890s five Degas, six Monets, three Manets, a Renoir, and a Mary Cassatt were displayed in Pope's Cleveland home on Millionaires' Row, and he was generous in lending them to Cleveland's Art Loan exhibitions.⁵ Also, Gottwald's boyhood friend Otto Bacher, who visited Cleveland often, had been painting in the Impressionist style since the early 1890s. His paintings owned by the Cleveland Museum of Art, *Nude Outdoors*, 1893, and *Portrait of Mrs. Otto Bacher*, 1891, are good examples.

When Gottwald returned from a visit to the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, he commented: "The Impressionists prevail." Modifying his remark he defined the style as a method which "transmits direct impressions received from nature in outdoor work."⁶ This seems to be the key to the understanding of Gottwald's development: During the 1890s he switched back and forth from painting light-filled works submerged in a purple haze to scenes and interiors in traditional local color, all depending on what he saw in nature.

His style became more Impressionistic when he started to spend summers in Italy between 1907 and 1915. The intense light of Italy gave impetus to Gottwald's new commitment to the light hues, the blue-violet shadows, the purple haze that enveloped his canvas, and the shorter, lively brush
strokes so typical of his work after 1907. Paintings such as *Piazza Apostino Taormina, Italy*, *Umbrian Valley, Italy*, and *Villa on Capri, Italy*, exemplify this mode.

When World War I temporarily put an end to Gottwald’s Italian trips, his painting style seemed to adjust to the Cleveland climate. The few works that we know of this period are somber in color and express a melancholic mood, a great contrast to the high-keyed palette of his Italian work. One of these, *The Dreamer*, c. 1916, received the Penton Medal at the first May Show at the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1919.

Gottwald was again able to return to Italy from May, 1921 to September, 1922, when the Cleveland School of Art granted him a sabbatical year to paint in Europe. His new work dazzled Clevelanders in a November, 1922 exhibition at the Cleveland School of Art Gallery. Newspapers applauded his 24 oils that rendered poetically "the blue sky, bluer water, and the green of ancient olive trees and cypresses." Critics particularly referred to the sunshine which "pervades everything in beams of prismatic light." *Faraglione Rocks, Capri*, 1921-22, appears to have been painted during this Italian visit.

In the late 1920s Gottwald’s work changed again, not in a conscious abrupt effort because of a popular trend, but very subtly. His landscapes from 1926-30, painted in Italy and Southern France after he retired from his teaching position, show Post-Impressionist tendencies. Like most American Impressionists Gottwald had always retained a definition of form in his paintings. In these later works he gave an even clearer definition to his shapes. This influence apparently came from within the Cleveland arts community.

In the 1920s Cleveland artists, such as Henry Keller (1869-1949), August Biehle (1885-1979), and George Adomeit (1879-1967), embraced a style which was influenced by Post-Impressionist painters like Paul Cézanne and Paul Gauguin, who emphasized form, and by Art Nouveau artists who favored linear ornamental designs and heavy outlines. Keller’s and Biehle’s works done at Keller’s summer school in Berlin Heights illustrate this well, as for example: Biehle’s *Farm in Berlin Heights*, c. 1920 and *Creek in the Woods, Berlin Heights*, c. 1921, and Keller’s *Sunflower Patterns*, c. 1914-15 and *Post-Impressionist Garden Picture*, c. 1916-17.

In Gottwald’s work of the late 1920s these trends also become visible. In *Mediterranean Landscape* and *Cemetery Wall* the background vista is still wrapped in a bluish-purple mist, the foreground shapes, however, are outlined and form a solid mass. In *Bay of Nice*, 1927, a sinuous curve divides the shore from the water, similar to the line that runs along the brook in Biehle’s *Creek in the Woods* and the horizon line of his *Farm in Berlin Heights*; and in Gottwald’s *Italian Landscape* trees, bushes and meadows are represented by color fields separated from each other by outlines, a method which Keller also used in *Sunflower Patterns* where blue lines divide the various earth formation of the field.
Could this style be one of the common denominators we are looking for in defining a Cleveland School? This combination of Post-Impressionism and Art Nouveau seems unique and is a style frequently used by Cleveland painters during the 1920s. Even Gottwald who was known for his conservative views on art could not escape this influence in his last works.

After 1930 Gottwald rarely painted. The intense Mediterranean sunlight had injured his eyes and impaired his sight. He moved to California where he died in 1941.

The legacy he left to Cleveland is immeasurable. An accomplished artist whose work was exhibited and admired in many American art centers, he set the standard for quality art in Cleveland. As a teacher he was demanding, yet supportive of a student’s own development. His students included such diverse talents as Charles Burchfield, Henry Keller and Abel Warshawsy.

He might have been known for having conservative views on art, underscored by the Cleveland Leader’s headline in 1914: "New Art? All Rot! Gottwald Declares." Yet, in the same article Gottwald also emphasized that he had always been "in sympathy with some features of the new movement." In any case, art appreciation in Cleveland grew during Gottwald’s years. From the Cleveland Art Club to the Cleveland School of Art, to the Cleveland Museum of Art, Gottwald was an important factor in the city’s development as an art center.

Notes

1. Cleveland Plain Dealer (May 13, 1888), 3, in Gottwald file at Ohio Artists Project (OAP), Mudd Library, Oberlin, OH, Mary Haverstock, Director.

2. Cleveland Plain Dealer (Dec. 2, 1888), 6, Gottwald file, OAP.


4. Cleveland Plain Dealer (April 11, 1897), 24, Gottwald file, OAP.


6. Cleveland Plain Dealer (June 4, 1893), 10, Gottwald file, OAP.

7. Cleveland Plain Dealer (Nov. 26, 1922), CMA Library, Gottwald clipping file.