



HAWTHORNE  
Fine Art

**WILDER DARLING (1855[?]-1933)**

*Wood Gathering*

Oil on canvas

18 x 12 ½ inches

Signed lower right: WILDER DARLING

Wilder Darling, known as the “Dean of Toledo painters,” had a long and successful career in Holland and his native Ohio. He is most praised for his genre scenes of Dutch peasants, whom he observed during his prolonged stays in the country.

Little is known of Darling’s early years. He was born in Sandusky, Ohio in the mid-1850s (various archival documents list his birth year from 1854-56.) It is certain that he discovered his talent for painting as a teenager and decided to make it his career at that early age. He first began his artistic studies in Cincinnati, perhaps at the McMicken School of Design under Henry Mosler (1841—1920). Sometime in the mid-1870s, he made his way to Munich where he most likely attended the informal painting classes conducted by the figure and portrait painter, Frank Duveneck (1848—1919). An outcast from the core Cincinnati artistic community due to his Catholicism and German heritage, Duveneck had sought refuge abroad at the Munich Royal Academy in the late 1860s, and by 1878 had opened his own school. His students became known as the “Duveneck Boys”; it is possible that Darling was among them. Darling later officially enrolled in the Munich Royal Academy, and most likely trained with Jean-Paul Laurens in Paris.

Darling was studying with Henry Mosler in Paris by 1887, who he probably first met while in Ohio, and then with Fernand Cormon (1845—1924) the following year. In 1896, Darling settled in Laren, a small Dutch town that was popular with The Hague School painters and later adopted by many American painters who sought a life unspoiled by modernization. Like these other painters, the Dutch peasants and the rural landscape became Darling’s favorite subjects. By 1902, Darling split his time between Laren and Toledo, Ohio (which was near his hometown of Sandusky), and only quit his trips to Holland when World War I made travel to Europe impossible.

*Wood Gathering* is a quintessential example of Darling’s Dutch genre scenes. A young peasant girl, no more than ten years old, is collecting scraps of wood to bring back to her home for her family’s fire. She is dressed in traditional clothes of rough homespun shirt and skirt, with a red vest and a small Dutch bonnet covering her hair. Centered in the middle of the composition, she looks out at her viewer while cradled in the curve of worn grass beneath her feet and an arch of branches above, and framed from



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behind with a roughhewn plank fence and walls of a neighboring stone cottage. The painting betrays the strong influence of Rembrandt in both its muted colors and dim light. This painting is an archetypical vignette that documents the simple, old world lifestyle that was fading in the face of modernization.

Once permanently settled in Toledo, Darling sought to establish an artist colony in the community. He became a strict yet admired teacher who taught drawing and urged his students to explore the avant-garde styles of impressionism and post-impressionism that had travelled from Europe and were beginning to take hold in America; this work earned him the accolade mentioned above. He continued painting well into his seventies, and died in Toledo in 1933. His legacy as both an artist and a teacher continue to be honored with retrospective exhibitions, particularly in his home state of Ohio.