

**Bicknell, Frank Alfred, (1866-1943)**

*A Meadow Brook*, circa 1900

Oil on canvas

Signed lower right

14" x 10"

When Frank Bicknell's family relocated from Augusta, Maine to Brockton, Massachusetts in 1870, the aspiring artist had some small success doing scenes for the *Brockton Illustrated* and illustrations for *New England Magazine*. Living in Brockton also afforded him access to nearby Annisquam, where he spent his summers painting alongside such notable painters as William Picknell (1853-1897), Robert Vonnoh (1858-1933), and Hugh Bolton Jones (1848-1927). Within a decade, Bicknell moved to New York, and in 1889 he exhibited in a gallery show alongside William Merritt Chase (1849-1916). For all his new-found glory, New York remained a temporary stop. In 1890, it was on to Paris where he enrolled in the Academie Julian. Upon his return to the city in 1894, Bicknell occupied a full-floor studio in Stanford White's infamous tower attached to Madison Square Garden. His choice of residence placed him among New York's aesthetic elite and he enjoyed a steady social schedule. By the time of his 1895 trip to California and Japan, paintings by Bicknell could be found in the National Academy of Design, the Boston Arts Club, and the Philadelphia Academy.

Bicknell first visited Old Lyme in 1902, but it was not until 1908 that his name was regularly associated with the Old Lyme Art Colony. He was devoted to Florence Griswold (who allegedly was romantically fond of him), referred to other members of the colony as his "family," and established a relationship with the artist Lewis Cohen (1857-1915), who upon his death willed his home on Sill Lane to Bicknell. As a testament to his significant reputation, Bicknell was invited to paint one of the panels in Miss Florence's celebrated dining room.

His output includes American Barbizon landscapes, Impressionist forest floors dotted with mountain laurel, and highly-keyed views of the Monhegan coast pounded smooth by the ocean. *A Meadow Brook*, an intimate and humble landscape, fits most appropriately into the first category. Bicknell was successful in capturing "the inherent beauty of a simple landscape" (1). He places the viewer among the pasture's tall grass and directs their gaze towards the distance by way of the stream and opening in the wooded horizon. The focus of the composition, however, is a sturdy sun-dappled tree with anfractuous branches. Bicknell utilized a softly vibrating brushstroke to define the foliage and hazy sky, which contrasts harmoniously with the carefully rendered details in the foreground.

Between 1910 and 1920, Bicknell fully occupied his role as a leading member of the American art community. He was named an associate of the National Academy and was an influential member of the Salmagundi, Lotos, and National Arts clubs. From 1919 to 1925, Bicknell served as an associate professor at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, now Carnegie Mellon University. The artist eventually returned to Old Lyme where he stayed in the Cohen house until too infirm to live on his own. He moved to a retirement home in nearby Essex, where he died in 1943.

**Provenance:** From a private New Jersey collection to the gallery.

**Bibliography:**

1. Newspaper clipping, the Cooley Gallery archives.

**References:**

Elizabeth Magee Cloutier, *Lyrical Impressionist: Frank A. Bicknell (1866-1943)*, unpublished manuscript, 1996.

Jeffrey W. Anderson, et al., *Connecticut and American Impressionism* (Storrs: University of Connecticut, 1984), 152.