

ELISABET NEY BIOGRAPHY

CHILDHOOD

1833 – 1852

Franziska Bernadina Wilhelmina Elisabeth Ney was born on January 26, 1833, in Münster, Westphalia; third child of Anna Elisabeth and Johann Adam Ney. Her mother has been described as ladylike, attractive and devout; her father, big, brusque, bearded, conservative but individualistic. Johann Ney made a comfortable living in Münster as a successful stonecutter, fashioning statuary and gravestones. Anna Elisabeth Ney was a dutiful wife and a devoted mother.

Elisabet Ney's early life in Münster appears to have been a happy and uneventful one. She and



her brother attended parochial schools and their parents worked hard and fancied their children growing up in the manner of themselves.

However, Elisabeth Ney revealed later in her life that she had had "no intention of being a German Hausfrau."

At the age of nineteen, to the astonishment and dismay of her parents, Elisabeth announced that she intended to leave home, go to Berlin and study sculpture with Christian Daniel Rauch, the master teacher of sculpture in Europe at the time. Her parents adamantly refused, saying it was unbecoming, immodest and indecent for a well-brought up Catholic girl to go alone to Berlin. And they further reminded her that women were not

Adam Ney
accepted in the Berlin art schools, much less by Christian Daniel Rauch – it was impossible!

Elisabet countered all her parents' objections to no avail; at last, she resorted to a hunger strike. Her parents called in the Bishop of Münster. After counseling at length with Elisabeth, the Bishop proposed a compromise: rather than going to Berlin immediately, Elisabeth would go first to Catholic Munich where she could stay with friends of her parents and begin her studies with a private teacher. And thus, Elisabeth Ney embarked on a career that would continue to surprise, inspire and mystify.

There are important clues in Elisabeth Ney's early life to her apparently sudden decision to seek a career as a portrait sculptor and also to some of the more idiosyncratic aspects of her life. First, the idea of being a portrait sculptor can easily be traced to her familiarity with the craft and a confidence that she could actually create portraits. As a young girl, her father had allowed her to spend time with him in his studio where she had opportunities to work in clay. Also she could take pride in the fact



that six of the Ney family line included distinguished sculptors, one raised to the nobility. Also, from her mother, Elisabet had heard many times the story of Sabina von Steinbach, the young girl who worked with her father to create the beautiful statuary for the cathedral, Notre-Dame de Strasbourg, in the 13th century that Elisabet would certainly have seen and admired.

Elisabet's ambition to leave Münster for Berlin by her own account "to meet the great persons of the world," can be traced to her love of history and, particularly, to her identification with the legendary family hero, Marshal Michel Ney – military leader, war hero, friend of Napoleon, 1st Prince of Moscow, "Bravest of the Brave." Ney's father regaled the family with stories of Marshal Ney, and one of her father's greatest treasures was a piece of lace – a gift of Marshal Ney which had been presented to the Marshal by Napoleon himself. Elisabet was soon to find that Marshal Ney's name gave her credentials in any company and from the time she inherited the precious lace from her father she wore it on her hat.

Elisabet was undoubtedly proud of her family name and this pride perhaps explains why she was reluctant to relinquish it upon her marriage to Scottish physician Edmund Montgomery. Ney's idiosyncratic manner of dressing can also be directly traced to her father, who, according to Elisabet, always wore a handsome cloak and hat made to his own design by a local tailor. Stories are told of the young Elisabet demanding that she, too, be given clothes made to her own design, a practice continued throughout her life.

EDUCATION

1853 – 1857

The young Elisabet Ney set out for Munich in September 1852. On arrival she immediately applied to the Munich Academy of Art and was summarily rejected. However, she was undeterred. After a period of study in drawing and design with a private teacher, Johann Berdelle, Elisabet returned to Academy officials and requested, again, to be admitted. Finally, they agreed to allow her to attend on a trial basis. It seems the issue was not her talent, but the disturbance she might cause in a class of young men. Four months later, having proven herself to her teachers and to her peers, Elisabet Ney was formally invited to become a regular student in the Academy's school of sculpture. This was an

honor of particular significance because it was the first such invitation ever issued to a woman; the first of many honors that were to come to the young Elisabeth Ney during her lifetime.

In July 1854, Ney graduated from the Munich Academy of Art with highest honors and set out for Berlin to fulfill her dream of studying with the great German sculptor, Christian Daniel Rauch. She was awarded a scholarship to the Berlin Academy of Art on the strength of her high recommendations from Munich. She thus secured the opportunity to study with Rauch who was very much in demand as a noted teacher. Again she prevailed, to her delight and to the surprise of many.

Christian Rauch was a quiet but exacting taskmaster who preferred to work with living models. He emphasized *technic* and demanded that every detail be given painstaking attention from the beginning clay model to the finished marble figure. Ney began her study with Rauch copying Greek nudes and working on realistic portraiture which introduced her to the neoclassical canons of taste, and she worked diligently under his exacting supervision.

Ney's study under Rauch was very important. She established early in her career a fastidious regard for accuracy and authenticity in every aspect of her work, and she was able to combine in her works both classical and realistic elements for which Rauch himself was famous. She proved a worthy student and became regarded by many in the art world as "Rauch's favorite pupil."

During her years in Munich and Berlin the young, impressionable Elisabeth was also provided opportunities for an education of a significantly different kind. In Munich, for the first time in her life, Elisabeth was immersed in the vibrant environment of a beautiful city where everyone seemed to share a sensitivity and appreciation for beauty and art. King Ludwig I had gone to great lengths to beautify Munich for his people, all of whom he thought should be surrounded with beauty. King Ludwig's ideal would later be reinforced for Elisabeth in her association with Arthur Schopenhauer who further insisted on the importance of the arts as "instruments of human enlightenment." A commitment to the



importance of art in the education and betterment of humanity thus formed was to become a guiding principle in Elisabet Ney's life.

In Berlin, Elisabet was able at last "to meet the great persons of the world," a cherished goal she revealed later to a Texas friend. As a student of Christian Daniel Rauch, she was provided an entree into Berlin's leading artistic and intellectual circles.

The most important of these for Elisabet was the home of Karl August Varnhagen von Ense whose late wife, Rahel, had established one of Berlin's most celebrated salons. Stories of Rahel's charm and grace combined with intelligence and quick wit became a model for Elisabet of an educated, confident woman who was respected and sought after by the "great persons" who delighted in her company. Ney was to follow Rahel's example even to the point of changing her name from Elisabeth to Elisabet as Rahel had changed hers from Rachel. Soon, the young Elisabet Ney came to be admired for the qualities she had so admired in Rahel.

During this period of her life, Elisabet not only learned her craft; she also learned to think intelligently and independently, choosing from a rich array of ideas, philosophies and experiences offered through her personal acquaintance with "great persons" and the exciting – and challenging – intellectual and artistic milieu of mid-nineteenth century Berlin and Munich.

MEETINGS WITH GREAT PERSONS 1857 – 1867

In 1857, Elisabet Ney, age twenty-four, was well on her way to achieving the seemingly impossible goals that she had set for herself in Münster a brief five years earlier. She was firmly established as one of Christian Daniel Rauch's most promising young students, and her work was receiving international attention. As an artist, her attention to sculptural detail and to the importance of capturing the essential personality or spirit of her subjects required extended sittings which resulted in her getting to know rather than simply meet the "great persons" she was destined to portray over the next thirteen years. These personages were a veritable Who's Who of nineteenth-century Europe: philosophers, statesmen, scientists, diplomats, and artists, as well as two kings.

Elisabet Ney benefited from her work with these notable figures in two important ways. In response to her talent, charm and genuine interest, most of them became her friends and advanced her personal, social and artistic fortunes through their influence. More importantly, however, there were those who would inspire the impressionable young Elisabet in her idealistic explorations. Others would provide her with valuable insights into the political and social realities of the turbulent times in which she lived. Elisabet thus achieved considerably more than she had originally set out to achieve at the age of nineteen. The years 1857 to 1870 would see the talented, young, eager Elisabet mature into the elegant, poised and confident "Miss Ney, the sculptress," friend and confidante to kings, herself a "great person."

Four notable men whom Ney portrayed were particularly important to her personal and artistic development during this period: philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, violinist Josef Joachim, military hero Giuseppe Garibaldi and the "fairy-tale" King Ludwig II of Bavaria.

In 1857, when Elisabet Ney opened her Berlin studio, she set out to persuade the famous philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer, to sit for a portrait. She and her fiancé, Edmund Montgomery, possibly reasoned that the shock of having a portrait of the elderly, reclusive and misogynist Schopenhauer executed by the relatively unknown young woman sculptor would immediately bring Ney's work to the attention of the public and would-be clients. The shock for Edmund and Elisabet was being how easy it was and the degree of success that Schopenhauer's portrait by Elisabet elicited. Schopenhauer not only agreed to sit for his portrait; the obvious pleasure that he took in Ney's work – and in her company – is documented in a series of letters about "the incomparable Ney" to friends and colleagues. Ney's rendering of his portrait pleased both Schopenhauer and the critics, and "Miss Elisabet Ney" became a name to be noted.

Other benefits were more personal in nature. The surprising ease with which she secured the elderly philosopher's confidence and cooperation and the pleasure that he took in her work and presence must have been a tremendous boost to the young Ney's confidence in her abilities both as a young woman and as an artist. Elisabet's time with Schopenhauer also yielded a significant growth of ideas and ideals. According to Bride Taylor, "He fixed in her that contempt for social ideals." Under Schopenhauer's influence, Elisabet Ney began "to construct for herself a theory of life, a mixture of idealism, materialism and radicalism held in check by an essential purity of mind." Elisabet's readings in Schopenhauer would also nurture a growing conviction of the importance of the arts as "instruments of human enlightenment."

Soon after completing the portrait of Arthur Schopenhauer that would be displayed in the Paris Salon of 1861, Elisabet was summoned to Hanover for her first royal commission of a portrait of King George V of Hannover. The King was so pleased with her work that he commissioned a portrait of Josef Joachim, his court concert master and violinist, as well as a portrait of Elisabet by court painter Friedrich Kaulbach that hangs today Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum Hannover. Elisabet and Joachim established an abiding friendship that would continue throughout their lives.

In Josef Joachim, Elisabet Ney found an ideal that she had not known before: an accomplished, creative, sensitive and kind man who found that his "rambles with Fraulein Ney" made it "easy to believe in poetry" and helped inspire him to create the *Hungarian Concerto*, his most famous work. Joachim also adored his wife, Amalie Weiss, who had put aside her career as an opera singer for marriage and motherhood.

Elisabet visited the Joachim home in 1867 to create a portrait of Amalie, then mother of two with a third child on the way. Amalie's portrait has been cited as a "warm and sensitive portrait of motherhood." In the Joachim marriage, Ney was afforded a new perspective and possibly a new model – for motherhood. Later in Texas, Elisabet Ney re-titled her sensitive portrait of her fourteen-year-old son, Lorne, to "A Young Violinist," a poignant tribute to Joachim and to an ideal she had envisioned for her son so sadly unrealized.

Elisabet Ney's experience in executing the portrait of Giuseppe Garibaldi introduced her to a different kind of man and a different world than she had previously known. Garibaldi, physically imposing, charismatic and a heroic champion of the common people, literally propelled Elisabet into a world of politics, intrigue, and impassioned revolt. His was the *real* world that her now husband,

Edmund Montgomery, had so idealistically described to Elisabet in Heidelberg. In Garibaldi, Ney found another ideal: a truly Promethean figure who had gladly sacrificed himself to bring the gift of freedom to the common people, an ideal shared by the intellectual generation with which Ney identified.

It is said that Ney's *Prometheus*, started soon after Garibaldi's portrait, is a composite of the "Promethean" men in her life: Edmund Montgomery, Arthur Schopenhauer, Josef Joachim and, certainly, Garibaldi whom she once referred to as "the old chained Prometheus."

MARRIAGE 1863 - 1907

During the time Elisabet Ney was developing professionally, intellectually and socially in Munich and Berlin, her private life was taking important shape as well. In 1853, Elisabet met Edmund Montgomery, a young Scotsman, who was a medical student in "beautiful Heidelberg" as they were always to refer to it. As she tells it, she was instantly attracted to Edmund, "tall, with long, blond curls falling to his broad shoulders." He seemed to her romantic soul "like a hero just stepped out of the pages of some splendid book!" Edmund, in turn, recognized in Elisabet appropriately admirable Scottish qualities, "determined, gifted . . . eager to learn."

The two young people spent most of their days together. Edmund shared with Elisabet his revolutionary social and philosophical ideals, and the young Elisabet found that Edmund's ideals "echoed the revolt in her own soul" and "filled her with renewed inspiration." Within a few weeks of their meeting, Elisabet and Edmund, who were hereafter to refer to each other as "best friends," pledged "to lead an ideal life together," a pledge that was unbroken for fifty-four years.

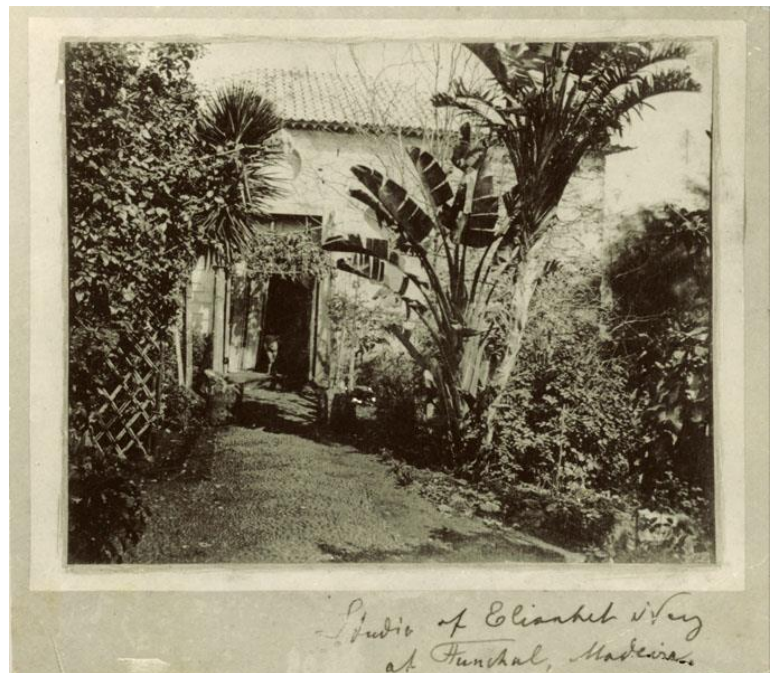
Ten years after their meeting in "beautiful Heidelberg," Elisabet joined Edmund on the island of Madeira where he had established a medical practice. On November 7, 1863, the British Consul duly performed and recorded the marriage of "Edmund Montgomery age 28, bachelor and Doctor of Medicine and Elisabet Ney, age 28, spinster..." For Elisabet and Edmund, their "ideal life together" was an intensely personal and private matter that actually needed no legal or social sanction. As a matter of principle, Elisabet retained her maiden – and

Elisabet

Ney's Studio on the island of Madeira circa 1863

now professional – name and they

referred to each other as "Miss Ney" and "Dr. Montgomery" throughout their lives.



However, it cannot be said that the two lived happily ever after. Early in their marriage they were constantly on the move as they pursued their individual careers and living according to their personally held ideals many times put Elisabet and Edmund at odds with society. After the two were finally together in Georgia and Texas, their idealistic dreams of beginning a new life and of raising a family in an ideal, “new” world ended in personal tragedy and financial disaster. Yet, throughout the years, their commitment to each other and to their shared ideals never failed.

Bride Neill Taylor, Elisabet Ney’s best friend and Texas confidante, aptly describes Elisabet’s and Edmund’s life-long relationship:

When one recapitulates the many resemblances which formed a bond between them, it seems inevitable that they should have been drawn together; both had the attractiveness of unusual personal beauty, brilliant minds and daring souls; behind each was the pride and power of a great family name; both were ardent idealists and both in rebellion against the limitations which the conventions of their world drew about them; both had, likewise, a truly tragic incapacity for the practical. To write the list thus, is but to say that they had no choice to but love one another...

Summing up, Taylor concludes:

The love story of these two must be the very core of any sketch that can be written of them, if there is to be the least illumination whatever. It was the one thing which determined the course of life for both.

Elisabet died on June 29, 1907, at FORMOSA, her Austin studio named in remembrance of her earlier FORMOSA on Madeira where she and Edmund were married. Edmund was by her side. Elisabet and Edmund had been married forty-four years; they had been “best friends” fifty-four years. In a touching letter at Elisabet’s death, Edmund would write:

Some thirty years ago, we together planted with our own hands some very young live oaks, which now have grown into a grove of stately evergreen trees. We resolved to use this grove as our last resting place. Therefore, I had her dear body embalmed and brought here, to be buried early this morning . . . For fifty-four years we have shared life’s joys and sorrows in a most closely knit union. During this entire period not a single week passed, when we were not together without a letter reporting the day-to-day events.

Edmund died at LIENDO four years later, after an extended illness. He was laid to rest beside Elisabet in the oak grove they had planted together thirty years earlier.

ELISABET NEY AND KING LUDWIG II OF BAVARIA 1868 – 1870

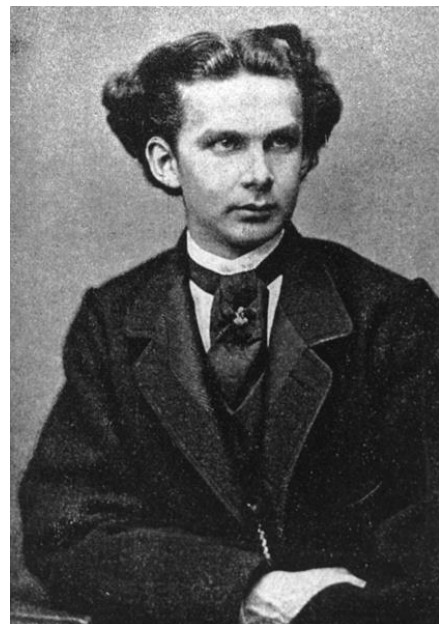
In 1868, Elisabet Ney returned to Berlin where she had been commissioned by King Wilhelm of Prussia to execute a portrait of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. During this time, Ney was summoned to Munich by the advisors of King Ludwig II who were apparently sympathetic to Bismarck. Bismarck, an astute politician, may have found it politically expedient to have someone of Ney's charm and persuasion to influence the young King Ludwig to bring Bavaria into the German confederation envisioned by Bismarck.

However, Ney's two years in Munich as protégé of Ludwig II were much more than a political intrigue. During those last and most productive years of her European career, Ney would complete her most ambitious – and finest – work in the full-length portrait of Ludwig II in addition to three fully

executed marble portraits of "great men" and a set of colossal statuary for the Munich Polytechnikum Institute. She and Edmund were also able to take an extended and memorable trip to Italy, Morocco and Egypt while waiting for sittings with Ludwig who was deeply involved in planning and building his now famous Bavarian castles, and dealing with pressing political intrigues.

Ney first created a portrait bust of Ludwig, who proved an uninterested and difficult model. Ney met the challenge as best she could. She was clever and forthright with the young King who was surrounded at his sittings by an assemblage of people eager to see how the sculptress worked. Under these conditions there was left little opportunity to evoke, much less capture, the personality of her subject. Under pressure, Ney completed the portrait bust, but it did not do justice to Ney's art – or to Ludwig's personality.

Ney's second portrait of Ludwig was quite different. A life-size rendering, the young King was in the full regalia of the Order of Saint Hubert, a costume more appropriate to his sense of aesthetics and to his concept of royalty. Elisabet often wore a flowing white gown when working, and when Ludwig grew restless she would read from *Iphigenia*, a favorite poem loved by the King. Ludwig offered Ney jewels; she refused and asked for flowers. From that time, the studio Ludwig provided Ney in the royal palace was filled each day with a profusion of flowers.



Following the sittings, Ludwig and Ney would sometimes converse into the night. The young Ludwig spoke of his desire for peace for his country and the problems he was having bringing art and beauty into the lives of his subjects. Ney, ever the idealist, counseled the young King to continue his dreams "to bring light into

darkness. . . and to believe that truth and goodness has always been the world-moving force . . . to a higher purpose.”

When the plaster model was almost finished, Ludwig was called away. Ludwig and Ney would never meet again. As fate would have it, Ney was never to complete Ludwig’s portrait in marble. Eight years after the King’s untimely death, a German sculptor executed Ney’s plaster model into marble which stands in the gardens of the King’s Linderhof Palace. Ney would later return to Germany to bring the plaster model of Ludwig’s portrait to her studio in Austin. It is the only portrait sculpture from life that exists of the ill-fated and idealistic young King.

Although Ludwig’s dreams for peace for his country were not realized, his dream to bring art and beauty into the lives of his subjects has been more than realized in the opulence and fantasy of the great Bavarian palaces and castles. "Ludwig's Castles" have continued to awe and inspire people from all over the world, including a young American, Walt Disney, who translated Ludwig's castles with their fantastic caves and grottos into a Magic Kingdom that continues to delight and pleasure millions of people today.

EMIGRATION 1871 – 1873

In July 1870, the Franco-Prussian War began. The political situation in Munich was tense. Ludwig had apparently come under the control of the Prussian sympathizers, having been forced to capitulate to the Prussian



demand that Bavaria join Prussia in the war. Elisabet was no longer useful to the Prussians; she was dismissed and denied access to the King although the marble portrait of the King was not completed.

Although Elisabet and Edmund seemed safe enough in their isolated Schwabing villa, they must have been disturbed by the political deception and intrigue, and worried over the fate of Ludwig and the role that Elisabet had unwittingly played in her time with him.

In December 1870, at age thirty-seven, a life-changing event occurred. Elisabet Ney discovered that she was expecting a child. At about the same time, Edmund received a letter from a young German friend and former patient, Baron Vicco von Stralendorff, who had just married a young American woman and was living in the wealthy American cotton-resort town of Thomasville, Georgia. Baron von Stralendorff wrote that he had "found Earth's paradise" and urged Edmund and Elisabet to join them in this "haven of peace and quiet and beauty."

Elisabet revealed later in life that, from their earliest youth, she and Edmund had shared a dream of living "in a happy community located in some Arcadian spot, where, surrounded by the

unspoiled beauties of nature, aided by the influence of art and science, each individual was to develop unhampered according to his own nature." The von Stralendorff's letter must have seemed like an answer to their dream. A reply was sent accepting the offer – but not giving the exact date of arrival.

However, another letter also arrived; a disturbing one, demanding that Elisabet come to the Prussian Embassy at an appointed time. Elisabet's reply is indicated in her journal entry: "I see that I have lingered in Bavaria in vain. I am not coming to the city today. I am not a creature of selfishness. I am not a slave." Preparations were hurriedly made for Edmund, Elisabet and their devoted Austrian housekeeper Crescentia "Cencie" Simath to leave Munich. After stopping by to say good-bye to her parents in Münster, the three sailed for America.

On the evening of January 14, 1871, Elisabet, Edmund and Cenci left Bremen, Germany, for America. They took only personal possessions, leaving behind all furnishings in their Schwabing villa and, most surprisingly, all of Ney's works created in the palace studio of King Ludwig II. These works, including the original plaster of Ludwig and the unfinished *Prometheus*, would remain in Germany until Elisabet Ney returned twenty-five years later to have the portraits shipped to her studio in Austin.

After a journey of about twenty days, the weary Elisabet, Edmund and Cenci stepped off the train at Thomasville, Georgia. They were met by Vicco and Margaret von Stralendorff, an attractive young couple whose only care seemed to be Vicco's troubling illness. The Stralendorffs lived in a large, beautiful home, comfortably furnished with objects from around the world. They were in love, happy and well-respected by Thomasville society as European "royalty."

Although Elisabet and Edmund were entertained by Thomasville society as guests of the Stralendorffs, neither seemed very impressed with the other. This changed, at least on the part of Thomasville residents, who soon developed considerable interest in the three newcomers. To them, Dr. Montgomery, in demeanor and dress, was obviously a gentleman, and sensible, plainly dressed Crescentia Simath was some kind of companion or servant. But what to make of "Miss Ney" as she asked to be addressed? Her unconventional dress and even more unconventional behavior, her "unladylike" interest in every detail of the "log castle" they were building on the edge of town as their home, were major topics of interest. Even more intriguing was the relationship between Dr. Montgomery and Miss Ney and the soon obvious fact that she was expecting a child.

Nevertheless, the three seemed to take little notice of what others thought of them. Elisabet was busy building her castle of pine logs with the bark left on and hiring help to put in a crop, confident in her freedom as an individual in America "to live unhampered according to [her] own nature." Edmund, engaged in his scientific research, was increasingly involved in taking care of Vicco, whose



tuberculosis was worsening in the humid Georgia climate. And Cenci was taking care of the other three, their first child, Arthur, having been born in the early summer.

During their two-year stay in Thomasville, the situation seemed to worsen continually. The Stralendorffs returned to Germany, Vicco to die there within a short time. Elisabet was unable to make a profit on the farm, and Cenci contracted malaria. Edmund and Elisabet took extended trips to the North and Midwest, looking for possible places to move. However, none suited them since Edmund's lung condition, a result of tuberculosis contracted during his medical studies as a resident during surgery, required a milder climate. Their second child, Lorne Ney Montgomery, was born during their travels, in Red Wing, Minnesota. Elisabet, with characteristic determination, decided to go on her own to explore the possibilities of finding a home in Texas.

LIENDO PLANTATION 1873 - 1891

When Elisabet traveled to Texas from Georgia in 1873 looking for a new home, she joined a wave of people seeking, like herself, to start a new life. Ney traveled alone, first by train to New Orleans, then, by steamer to Galveston where she contacted the German Consul, Julius Runge, for help in locating a suitable place for her family to live.

Ney was taken first to the historic Liendo Plantation with 1100 acres of rolling Texas prairie and oak forests near the town of Hempstead, "Six-Shooter Junction," Texas. When Ney first saw the historic Greek-Revival house, then partially in ruins, she was immediately entranced. The story is told that she stepped out onto the second floor balcony, flung open her arms and cried, "Here will I live. And here will I die!" A couple of weeks later, on March 4, 1873, her family arrived. Edmund Montgomery signed the papers that made Elisabet and Edmund the owners of Liendo Plantation.



For more than twenty years, Ney and Montgomery struggled to realize at Liendo that "idyllic life amidst woods and prairie surrounded by the unspoiled beauties of nature . . . [away] from the bustle of crowded cities and the ceremoniousness of high life" in Europe they had sought in their emigration to America. Liendo was certainly isolated and idyllic in its natural beauty, and life was simple. However, for Ney, particularly, life was also hard. Running a plantation was difficult for Ney, who required "no sullen faces" from her help. Various efforts of Ney's to grow cotton, raise cattle, operate a dairy farm, while buying more land resulted in continued financial losses.

However, Ney's most important – and most challenging – task was to realize her cherished dreams of raising her children close to nature, nurtured by the arts and science, away from the temptations and influence of contemporary society as she had read in Rousseau. Ney had willingly given up a career as a famous sculptor for the "more important art of molding flesh and blood." Her hopes and ambitions were high in the expectations that her two boys would prove true to their namesake, Arthur Schopenhauer, and ancestors, Marshal Ney and Edmund's relative, the Scottish nobleman Marquis of Lorne, son-in-law to Queen Victoria.

This was, tragically, not to be. Arthur died of diphtheria shortly after Elisabet and Edmund's arrival at Liendo, nearly shattering their hopes of an ideal existence. And then, about the age of six, Lorne, formerly a docile, loving child, began to rebel against his mother's over-protection and his isolation from other children. It gradually became clear that Lorne was neither the obedient child nor the lofty soul of his mother's aspirations. The growing conflict between the strong-willed mother and the strong-willed son forced Dr. Montgomery out of his isolated study to assume responsibility for Lorne's education and their son's growing number of escapades. Ney and Lorne were never completely reconciled. Although Ney kept Lorne's portrait near her until the end of her life, she would not acknowledge that it was her son, titling it instead "A Young Violinist."

However, there were periods when life at Liendo approached the ideal and Elisabet could continue to free Edmund from responsibilities and provide him time to pursue his study and writing which she considered very important. Dora Gray Mueller, an Englishwoman who had spent time at Liendo as Lorne's tutor, writes revealingly about life on the plantation:

Dr. Montgomery was a refined, educated gentleman and Miss Ney a gentlewoman. Their home life was perfect harmony. Dr. had his breakfast in his room and we never met till the evening meal which was prepared and served by Miss Cenci. Miss Ney attended to the affairs of the plantation, going on horseback, and Miss Cenci taking care of the house.

By 1891, Liendo had become for Elisabet, completely isolated from the world of the arts, intellectual stimulation or creative expression, a "lovely cursed retreat." For Edmund, on the other hand, immersed in his writings which were bringing him increasing professional attention and honor, Liendo was the answer to his expressed desire "to live in the open, quietly, peacefully, with a few congenial and loving companions." It seemed inevitable that their lives would diverge again as it had in their early life: Elisabet to Austin to pursue her idealistic dreams in the world of "great persons;" Edmund continuing his research and writing on the secluded plantation under the care of the devoted Cenci.

FORMOSA, AUSTIN, TEXAS

1892 - 1907

As with many things in Elisabet Ney's life, forging a rich, creative and humanitarian life for the remaining fifteen years of her life in Austin, was not accomplished without a struggle. There was, first, a financial struggle. At one point, Ney entered a notice in the paper:

To my creditors: - Please don't bother to send me any bills. I have no money. – Elisabet Ney, Sculptor.

It was not until the Texas Legislature appropriated \$32,000 for Ney to execute her portraits of Stephen F. Austin, Sam Houston and Albert Sidney Johnston memorials in marble that her financial situation stabilized...

Ney's first task on arriving in Austin in 1892 was to purchase four and a half acres of rolling prairie, wildflowers and post oaks along Waller Creek on the northeast edge of the developing suburb of Hyde Park just north of Austin. On this land, the Ney left in its natural state, she built a small classically-styled studio reminiscent of a Greek temple embodying her romantic ideals and her neo-classical training. She also built a barn for her beloved horse, and living quarters for her servants, first Ben, then Horace. She named her studio *Formosa* (Portuguese for "beautiful") after the studio her husband had created for her on the occasion of their marriage on the tropical



island of Madeira in 1863. Ten years later, Ney added a romantic tower study for Edmund and expanded working and living space. Built of native limestone, the studio gave the appearance of a small castle surrounded by native prairie, wildflowers and post oaks with a running creek and nearby lake. The creation of *Formosa* bears the imprint of Ney's conscious effort to create personal surroundings that combined a deep personal love of nature and a long held conviction of the power of art to enrich life and uplift the soul.

Although Elisabet Ney personally had the reserve and formality of a European lady, according to Bride Neill Taylor, her most intimate friends found her "totally human, impulsive, recklessly frank and independent . . . full of open delight." Many friends were drawn to the delightful and interesting "Miss Ney" and Ney's *Formosa* soon became the site of creative impulses of a different, but no less important nature: those that arise out of the meetings of minds and shared aspirations. Those meetings have been described by Bride Neill Taylor:

In the little drawing room of the studio a sort of salon established itself, where visitors were sure to meet the most cultivated, the most interesting, the most distinguished men and women of whom the little capitol city could boast . . . The little salon in Hyde Park became the natural gathering place of such men and women as were capable of foreseeing a new Texas.

Of their conversations, Bride writes:

The conversation played back and forth between the artist and her guests on the subjects dealing mostly with the larger aspects of life, which gave to many a listener a broadening of intellectual vision, a human livening up of already acquired knowledge, which otherwise, had lain dormant within as dead and dried up book-lore.

It is not surprising, and quite interesting, to find Elisabet Ney's Formosa described as a "salon" in 1892 Austin where "saloon" was one of Austin's most widely known attributes! And yet, Taylor's account of the meetings at Formosa very aptly describes the salons of Elisabet Ney's earlier life in Berlin and Munich. One might say, Elisabet Ney, among her many contributions, introduced the first European "salon" to Austin in 1892!

According to Taylor, as the years passed, the studio became noted as "the chief social center of culture in the city" and a welcome there an honor eagerly coveted. Most were friends who had shared in the struggle "to bring a sense of beauty into the crude bareness of Texas life."

Here, at *Formosa*, from 1892 until her death in 1907, Ney's life seemed to come full circle. Ney was finally able to practice her art and live according to her deeply held ideals which had been honed and tested in a remarkably rich, varied and, at times, intense life.

Formosa remains today a tribute, both to Elisabet Ney's art, and to her art of living. At her death, the *Austin Daily Statesman* wrote, after summarizing her many accomplishments:

"She had so many friends. It was the woman, quite as much as the artist, that enamored herself to hundreds of warm friends and admirers."

a eulogy Elisabet Ney would have welcomed.

ELISABET NEY'S LEGACY

Elisabet Ney's legacy is best expressed personally in this letter written by her "best friend," Dr. Edmund Montgomery, to Miss Ney's cousin in Germany on the occasion of Elisabet's death.

Liendo, Hempstead, Texas

My dear Frau Lueder:

Since I have not slept for three nights, and after having devoted a month entirely to the cares of day and night nursing, I can scarcely find the strength to convey to you the very sad message, which will bring sorrow to you and your family, that our faithful and dearly beloved Elisabet has passed away of her heart trouble, the end coming

Formosa Interior, c.



1907

rather suddenly. In spite of critical symptoms - greatly swollen legs and shortness of breath – she believed that she would soon recover. Only minutes before her death she was cheerfully conversing with a dear friend. She had very little pain, and during her last days she was completely free of pain.

She had gained wide respect and love among the people of Austin such as scarcely enjoyed by any other local citizen. Indeed, this admiration extended over all of Texas – a much larger state than the whole of Germany. The school children are being taught in their history classes how grateful the state is to her for the immortal contributions she made in the field of art. She was presented with a certificate of honorary membership in the Daughters of the Republic of Texas. Her studio was a shrine to which people from all parts of Texas came to admire her works of art, but mostly her last grandiose, magnificently designed masterpiece, *Lady Macbeth as a sleep-walker*, artistically executed in the most beautiful marble which she had personally selected in Italy. She had hoped to sell this work of art in the near future, and if this plan succeeded, we had decided to pay off the debts on her family estate. Now, the masterpiece remains in the studio waiting for this wish to come true. Should I be able to conclude the sale, then I will faithfully carry out this plan. She was deeply devoted to you and your family and loved all of you dearly.

Some thirty years ago, we together planted with our own hands some very young live oaks, which now have grown into a grove of stately evergreen trees. We resolved to use this grove as our last resting place. Therefore, I had her dear body embalmed and brought her with a few of the numerous floral tributes, to be buried early this morning. For fifty-four years, we have shared life's joys and sorrows in a most closely knit union. During this entire period, not a single week passed, when we were not together without a letter reporting the day-to-day events. The last letter from your mother, whom Elisabet deeply loved, gave her so much happiness and inspiration.

The last fourteen years in Austin were years of brilliant achievement for her. She greatly enjoyed her accomplishments and the general recognition they brought her. Worries about the plantation prevented me from being near her. Frequent meetings, here and in Austin, made the separation more bearable and brought us a few days of happiness. Many of her friends want to persuade me to move to Austin to live in her art-dedicated studio home. This will scarcely be possible for me, since my presence at the plantation is after all necessary. Our faithful housekeeper, now seventy-three years old, who emigrated with us from Europe, resides with me. We are alone in the many rooms. Soon the two of us, to whom my dearly beloved wife had given so much joy through her love, shall be resting there beside her. Through the mutual love for our Elisabet I feel very close and devoted to you and your loved ones.

In deepest sorrow

After Elisabet Ney's death in 1907, Formosa became important not only because it was treasured as a memento of Elisabet Ney. Formosa had been created by Ney and was filled with her works, including those, gathered from Europe. It was also treasured for the memories of shared times and inspiring conversations. At her death, the Austin Daily Statesman wrote, after summarizing Ney's many accomplishments,

“She had so many friends. It was the woman, quite as much as the artist, that enamored herself to hundreds of warm friends and admirers.”

One of Ney’s dearest friends, Ella Dancy Dibrell managed to buy Formosa from Dr. Montgomery and in 1911, together with 119 other friends and admirers of Elisabet Ney, formed the Elisabet Ney Museum and the Texas Fine Arts Association; their mission was to preserve Elisabet Ney’s Formosa and to carry on her legacy. Over the years, Formosa has remained a treasured memento of Elisabet Ney and through generosity and care it has remained generally as it was at her death although the years have changed the landscape.

Elisabet Ney’s legacy has been increasingly recognized and honored through the years. Today, Formosa is registered on the National Register of Historic Places. It is also a local and state landmark, venerated as Ney’s former studio, the first art museum in Texas. The National Trust for Historic Preservation selected Formosa to be one of the members of its Historic Artists’ Homes and Studios program together with the former studios of more contemporary artists including Jackson Pollock, Winslow Homer and Georgia O’Keefe. In 2003, the Elisabet Ney Museum became an Official Project of the Save America’s Treasures program of the Office of the United States President. Over two thousand schoolchildren visit the Elisabet Ney Museum each year as part of their third-grade studies of “Miss Ney.” The years have, indeed, been kind to “Miss Ney,” and her legacy continues to grow both nationally and internationally.