In 1898 Parrish had begun a relationship with Century Magazine illustrating stories and articles. His bride Lydia posed for the figure of the Virgin and Child in the Edna Proctor Clark story "Christmas Eve". She also posed for the July 1900 short story by Annie E. Tynan, "The Story of Anne Powell", and for the figure of the milkmaid in the illustrations for John Milton's "L'Allegro". The three paintings for the Milton poem Milkmaid, Poet's Dream and Sheep and Shepherds drew recognition and praise for the author from no less than the founder of the Cornish Colony, American sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848-1907), who wrote to Parrish:

Dear Parrish,

The three drawings for Milton’s "Allegro" you have done for the Century are superb and I want to tell you they impressed me! They are big and on looking at them I felt that choking sensation that we have only in the presence of the really swell thing... The Shepherds on the Hill, the Poet in the Valley, and the Blithesome Maid, are among the most beautiful things I have ever seen. To whom do they belong? Could I buy one of them? If so, I want to do so right away, quick, before some other feller gets his hands on them. [11]

Parrish, who had gone to recover from the tuberculosis in the warm desert air of Arizona, responded from a spa in Castle Creek, Hot Springs:

My dear Saint Gaudens,

I have nothing I value so much as that letter of yours. If I owned the drawings you should have them all, and your letter would pay for them many times over. As it is, I think the Century Co. still owns them so I might ask them .... [Century returned the paintings to the artist. Later on they were sold to Gertrude Vanderbilt, Whitney’s sister in law]. This will reach you after Christmas, we are sitting out of doors under the trees here, fountains playing nearby and birds singing... It is hard to image that it is Christmas. We wish you both a very merry one, and the best of wishes. There isn’t any man rich enough to buy that letter.

Sincerely, Maxfield Parrish[12]

Parrish's winter in Arizona in 1901 offered the opportunity to illustrate for Century a series of articles on the Southwest that were to be written by Ray Stannard Baker in 1902. Lydia had followed her husband into the desert. While the couple researched sites to illustrate, she gamely rode horses and mules. She camped and cooked in the desert by their fireside. She became a crack shot with a pistol and her husband teased her, calling her "a regular Annie Oakley".

A work from that series, Night in the Desert, is one of the best depictions of the artist's midnight blue tones. The contrast of the firelight against the brilliant desert night of Sedona captures the magic of being close to the fire surrounded everywhere by brilliant starlight. The artist identified the site in the back of the painting as Hot Springs, Yavapai County, Arizona. He produced a total of twenty works for this series, including one that he titled The Grand Canyon of the Colorado. In 1950 Parrish produced a magnificent landscape that he called Arizona based on his memories and photos of that early trip to the spectacular landscape around Sedona and Phoenix.

The period between 1901 and 1904 was probably the happiest for the young couple. In 1903 Parrish accepted a commission to illustrate Edith Wharton's book Italian Villas and Their Gardens. This necessitated that he travel to Italy to photograph and then paint the different villas that Wharton would be discussing in her book. One of the villas Parrish photographed and painted there will be examined later in this catalogue in the section on Parrish and photography. The trip gave the couple a chance to be together in Europe, almost making up for the honeymoon they had missed at the time of their wedding. This idyllic time produced their first child, Dillwyn, who was born in December 1904.

That year was a productive and successful one for the artist. Parrish started to expand his studio, and it eventually became a fifteen-room house that included one of the most complete machine shops in the area. Here the artist could
create props for his paintings such as the elaborate castle for *Dinkey Bird* and the architectural columns that he used in several paintings throughout the years, from *Vigil at Arms* to *Daybreak*.

In 1904 Parrish received another important book commission from Scribner to illustrate Eugene Field's famous children's book *Poems of Childhood*. Parrish's previous success in creating paintings that took into consideration the child's imagination and point of view served him in good stead in the creation of these illustrations. The publishers selected *The Dinkey Bird* in 1905 to be published as an eleven- by sixteen-inch reproduction. It became a very popular item and was instrumental in convincing the artist that his images held a large fascination for the general public. Other popular illustrations of that time for covers or frontispieces, commissioned in rapid succession by Scribner, were *The Grape Gatherer*, an October 1904 cover that was the last painting for which Lydia Parrish posed; the hauntingly beautiful *Vigil at Arms*, December 1904 frontispiece; and *Potpourri*, August 1905.

Apart from *Century*, *Harper's* and Scribner, prestigious magazines such as *Ladies' Home Journal* published Parrish's images. To generate publicity for their 250th anniversary, the magazine sponsored a contest for a cover design that brought a generous prize of $1,000 for the winner. Six prominent artists were invited to compete, including Parrish, Jesse Wilcox Smith and Harrison Fisher. Although there were no restrictions when it came to subject matter, the cover had to be capable of being reproduced in only two colors. Parrish's submission of *Air Castles* won the competition. According to Erwin Flack's *Identification and Price Guide of Maxfield Parrish Prints*, *Ladies Home Journal* also published the cover as a fairly large art print measuring twenty-nine by twenty inches in September 1904.[13]

The year 1905 was to become a major turning point in the artist's personal life. Up to this time, Lydia Parrish had been an equal partner with her husband, entertaining friends and prospective clients, running the household, occasionally posing for paintings, managing the money and directing some of the household help that had finally come to assist her after the birth of Dillwyn, their first child. Other than writing in her diaries, Lydia was finding less and less time to devote to her art work and her writing. She also evidently did not want to compete with Parrish in his search of commissions or in establishing his work. Following the recommendation of Stephen Parrish, the young couple hired a local sixteen year old by the name of Susan Lewin to assist Lydia with the baby and help prepare meals in the kitchen with Lydia's cook, the indomitable Hattie Read.

Unable to pose for her husband any longer and expecting their second child, Lydia suggested that perhaps Susan could take up some of her modeling responsibilities. The first painting for which the impressionable sixteen-year-old woman posed was titled by Parrish *Land of Make-Believe*. With this work, Susan entered the artist's life; she was destined to remain in it for almost fifty years.[14]

Saint-Gaudens had become seriously ill with cancer. Lydia and Maxfield Parrish had offered him the use of Lydia’s nurse, Miss Clancy, who had come to help Lydia in the birth of their second child, which was due in August. In the letter offering the use of their nurse, Parrish mused that he was busy painting a large mural and enclosed a little drawing showing a miniature artist on a ladder painting a monumental canvas. He added that he had seen in the market bronze miniatures of the round bas-relief of the Robert Louis Stevenson plaque for his nearly completed music room at The Oaks. He joked that the heroic-sized Sherman sculpture that the sculptor was finishing might be just four inches too large to fit in his entire music room, but that the Stevenson plaque would be just right. Parrish noted in the letter that he had not been able to get over the hankering to own the Stevenson "for years and years" and asked if it might be possible to buy the larger piece. [15]

At first Saint-Gaudens declined the offer to take over the services of Nurse Clancy. The Parrishes insisted, and the very ill artist (who was to die the next year) gratefully accepted, saying in a letter written in stylized formal language that he titled "Epistle to the Painter Maxfield Parrish":

... and Lo and Behold, the slinger of mud (sculptor) discovered again what he already knew, that a certain lady and gentlemen and their little child that liveth in the house which stands under the great oaks on the hill were THREE PEACHES ... and he was much embarrassed and knew not what to say unto the PEACHES (being a man who had little knowledge, in fact a damn fool) except that he thought that they were very swell peaches and that he hoped that they would bring forth many PEACHES like unto themselves and make glad the people that dwelleth in the hills and vales of Cornish and Plainfield for many generations.[16]

Shortly after the birth of the Parrishes' second child, Max Jr. (who was named after his father), a gift of the Stevenson plaque arrived at The Oaks prompting Parrish to reply in a handwritten note:

My dear Saint-Gaudens,

It is hard to believe I really have the Stevenson here in my own house: I go in and look at it every little while to make
absolutely sure, and it has just the same magic in it for me that it had when I first saw it years ago in Philadelphia. The only change that I can see is the inscription you put upon it from you to me: really that is splendid, and I cannot begin to tell you how I value that part of it. I wish I knew how to repay you: I've thought of the two babies, but mothers are so selfish. Well -- we will see about that. This is about the biggest thing that ever happened to me, and I thank you with all my heart.

Maxfield Parrish [17]