



**WILDFIRE:  
The Life and Works of Edmonia Lewis**

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- Harry Henderson and Albert Henderson, *The Indomitable Spirit of Edmonia Lewis: A Narrative Biography* (Henderson & Henderson, 2021)
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- Charlotte Streifer Rubinstein, *American Women Sculptors: A History of Women Working in Three Dimensions* (G. K. Hall, 1990)

## NAMES, TERMS, & CONCEPTS

East Greenbush, NY  
 Ojibwe/Chippewa  
 Samuel Lewis  
 Oberlin College  
 life (drawing) classes  
 John Mercer Langston  
 William Lloyd Garrison  
 Edward Augustus Brackett  
 Col. Robert Gould Shaw  
 “the white, marmorean flock”  
 Neoclassical art  
 copying classical art (ancient and/or Renaissance)  
 The Grand Tour  
 patrons  
 Charlotte Cushman  
 Harriet Hosmer  
 Emma Stebbins  
 freestanding vs. relief sculpture  
 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow  
 “The Song of Hiawatha” (1855)  
 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition (1876)  
 Marilyn Richardson  
 Kristen Pai Buick  
 Bobbie (Roberta) Reno

## PRINCIPAL ARTWORKS DISCUSSED (in the order in which they were presented)

[unless otherwise indicated, all are by Edmonia Lewis]

*Bust of Abraham Lincoln*, 1871 (Sam José [California] Public Library)  
*Bust of Col. Robert Gould Shaw*, 1864 (Museum of African-American History, Boston)  
 Hiram Powers, *The Greek Slave*, 1847 (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC)  
*Moses (after Michelangelo)*, 1875 (Smithsonian American Art Museum, Wash., DC)  
*Bust of Anna Quincy Waterston*, c.1866 (Smithsonian American Art Museum)  
*Awake*, 1872 (University of California, San Diego)  
*Night*, 1870 (Baltimore Museum of Art, MD)  
*Poor Cupid*, 1876 (Smithsonian American Art Museum)  
*Bust of Christ*, 1870 (Mount Stuart [stately home], Bute, Scotland)  
*Hagar*, 1875 (Smithsonian American Art Museum)  
*Forever Free*, 1867 (Howard University Art Gallery, Washington, DC)  
*The Old Arrow-Maker and His Daughter*, 1867 (Smithsonian American Art Museum)  
*The Marriage of Hiawatha*, 1871 (Stark Museum of Art, Orange, TX)  
*The Death of Cleopatra*, 1876 (Smithsonian American Art Museum)

## BASIC CHRONOLOGY

1844—Edmonia Lewis (“Wildfire”) was born in East Greenbush, NY. Her father was from the West Indies and her mother (partly?) from the Ojibwe/Chippewa tribe. The young family moved, several times, when their children were young. Lewis’s parents died when she was 5 (or 9), so she lived with her maternal aunts.

1852, her older brother, Samuel, moved to California to join the Gold Rush.

1859, she enrolled at Oberlin College, after spending several years at an abolitionist Baptist school in New York state.

1862, Lewis was accused of poisoning two of her female housemates. She was kidnapped and severely beaten by local vigilantes. Ultimately, she was acquitted of the charge but was not allowed to graduate from Oberlin.

1864, Lewis moved to Boston, where she was mentored by sculptor Edward Augustus Brackett; this was her first experience modeling with clay (vs. drawing).

1865, with money earned from selling copies of her bust of Col. Shaw, Lewis moved to Rome, Italy. There, she began carving marble, finding patrons, and fell in with the so-called “white, marmorean flock” of expatriate American female Neoclassical sculptors. In Rome Lewis made her most-important works, and achieved international success.

1896, Lewis moved to Paris.

1901, she settled in London.

1907, Lewis died, in London, of Bright’s disease. She was 63.

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